

# SOTERIOLOGY: The Glorious Doctrine of God's Great Salvation

## Lesson 8: Adoption

*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. (1 John 3:1a)*

### I. What do we mean by "Adoption"?

**Adoption** is the gracious act of God wherein He makes justified sinners His beloved children. The Westminster Confession says to be adopted is to receive God's name and to have access to God's throne, His pity, His protection, His provision, His discipline, and His promise to never abandon us.

#### The Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 33:

*Q. 33. Why is Christ called the only begotten Son of God, since we are also the children of God?*

*A. 33. Because Christ alone is the eternal and natural Son of God; but we are children adopted of God, by grace, for his sake.*

Adoption is rooted in God's eternal \_\_\_\_\_ and inexhaustible \_\_\_\_\_. Before mountains rose, rivers ran, or birds flew, God "predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:5). His desire to place sinners in His family through the work of His Son precedes even the work of \_\_\_\_\_. We can only marvel at the kindness of God who would not call us *merely* His friends (James 2:23; see Isa. 41:8) but also His own sons and daughters.

And adoption goes above and beyond \_\_\_\_\_.

Thomas Schreiner:

*"Justification and adoption are both pictures of salvation taken from the courtroom. Justification is in the Criminal Division. Adoption is in the family court. Both are by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Justification is God's declaring believers righteous by imputing Christ's righteousness to them, while adoption is the Father's welcoming believers into his family as his beloved children."*

In justification, God \_\_\_\_\_ sinners of all the charges against them. Indeed, he goes further still and \_\_\_\_\_ that in Christ their righteousness meets the highest possible standards. They are as righteous as Christ himself (2 Corinthians 5:21).

In a typical human system of justice, the accused would then simply be free to go, and both he and the judge hope they will never see each other again. But the divine judge not only acquits. He invites the sinner home — and not just for an evening. He adopts us as his own forever, tells us we are to call him "\_\_\_\_\_, " and pronounces us lawful heirs to all he is and to all that he has.

The beauty and implications of adoption are well-captured in the words of Robert Webb:

*"When we approach Him in the intensity of worship, we gather up all the sweetness involved in Fatherhood and all the tenderness wrapped up in sonship; when calamities overcome us and troubles come in like a flood, we lift up our cry and stretch out our arms to God as a compassionate Father; when the angel of death climbs in at the window of our homes and bears away the objects of our love, we find our dearest solace in reflecting upon the fatherly heart of God; when we look across the swelling flood, it is our Father's House on the light-covered hills beyond the stars which cheers us amid the crumbling of the earthly tabernacle."*

## II. Adoption in the Old Testament

### Adam and Eve

Being created in the image of God, Adam and Eve were God's children, enjoying close fellowship with their heavenly Father daily in the garden of Eden. Yet with their fall, the image of God in them was marred and their relationship as children of God was lost. They became outcasts from the garden, alienated from the presence of God, children of His wrath. This is the condition into which all human beings are now born: aliens and strangers with respect to God.

*2 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—  
<sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Eph. 2:1-3)*

### Israel

Whereas Adam was God's son by virtue of creation, Israel became God's son through adoption. This metaphor for the relationship between God and His people highlights clearly the element of grace in their relationship. There was nothing in Israel by nature that would have drawn God to her (Deut. 7:7). In fact, on the contrary, the prophet Ezekiel pictures Israel at this point in her history as a helpless baby, covered in blood and abandoned by her natural parents, yet chosen by God and brought into His family (Ezek. 16:6). Nor did she earn God's favor through her subsequent behavior, for the history of her relationship with Him was one of continual unfaithfulness and prostitution (Ezek. 16:15–52). Yet though she constantly spurned and abandoned Him, God still would not abandon her; her election as His adopted child was irrevocable (Rom. 11:29).

Remember when Moses returned to Egypt and commanded Pharaoh to allow Israel freedom to worship the Lord in the wilderness? The special place Israel occupied with reference to God was clear. God designates Israel as his son, his first born. And do you remember the penalty if Pharaoh refused to accede to the Lord's command? The Lord would slay his first born, as he in fact does on the night of the first Passover. (Exodus 4:22-23)

In Jeremiah chapter 3 the prophet calls Israel to repentance, to turn away from their sin and idolatry, and return to the Lord. The Lord reminds His people of their defection by emphasizing that he is their Father.

*<sup>4</sup> Have you not just now called to me, 'My father ...?'*

*<sup>14</sup> Return, O faithless children, declares the Lord ...*

*<sup>19</sup> "I said, How I would set you among my sons, and give you a pleasant land, a heritage most beautiful of all nations. And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me."*

*<sup>22</sup> "Return, O faithless sons; I will heal your faithlessness."*

In Isaiah 43, God speaks of the future hope of Israel as he brings them out of exile from Babylon:

*<sup>6</sup> I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, <sup>7</sup> everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."*

### The Davidic King

Israel is God's son, But the Lord also designates the Davidic king as his son. We see this when the Lord makes a covenant with David, a covenant that promises that David's dynasty will never end.

*<sup>14</sup> I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, <sup>15</sup> but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. <sup>16</sup> And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever. (2 Sam 7:14-16)*

The author of Psalm 89 reflects on the same promise. The Davidic king recognizes his dependence upon and relationship to God: *<sup>26</sup> He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'*

Since the king is God's son and the Lord is his father, He is assured that the great promises made in the covenant will be fulfilled.

### **III. Adoption in the New Testament**

**All \_\_\_\_\_ become God's adopted children.**

As John puts it: "To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). Our adoption as sons of God thus comes through union with Christ and cannot be experienced apart from it. In Christ, and in Him alone, we receive the adoption that gives us an undeserved share in the promises that were made to Him and the privileges that He has earned as God's Son (Gal. 3:29). Indeed, the reason that Christ came to this earth was so that He might give us adoption as God's sons (Gal. 4:5).

**Godly \_\_\_\_\_ is the evidence of adoption.**

Those who are adopted as God's children show their children of God by the way they live.

*<sup>9</sup> "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." (Matt. 5:9)*

*<sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" (Rom 8:14-15)*

*<sup>5</sup> Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. (Eph. 5:1)*

### **IV. Adoption - A Theological Summary**

**Our Need: In a word – \_\_\_\_\_.**

We need adoption because, due to the fall in our own sins, we are enslaved to sin.

*<sup>3</sup> In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.*

*<sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. <sup>6</sup> And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (Gal. 4:3-7)*

Adoption is God's gracious application of the salvation accomplished by Christ, in which God frees slaves to sin and welcomes them into his own family as sons and daughters.

**The means: \_\_\_\_\_**

Just like justification, adoption is by \_\_\_\_\_ through faith in Christ. Adoption is all of grace, for as slaves of sin and self. We could never redeem ourselves.

<sup>7</sup>Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, <sup>8</sup>for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, <sup>9</sup>that he should live on forever and never see the pit. (Psalm 49:7-9)

<sup>26</sup>... in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. (Gal. 3:26)

### **The Basis: The Person and Work of \_\_\_\_\_**

God did not simply pronounce slaves to sin as his beloved children. Redemption was necessary from their state of bondage, and for that redemption the death of Jesus was necessary. Thus, \_\_\_\_\_ are not "God's children" in the same sense. Only the redeemed are the \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ.

### **The Source: God's \_\_\_\_\_**

The means of adoption is faith in Jesus Christ. But faith is not its ultimate source. The ultimate source of people becoming God's children is his love.

<sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup>even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup>he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (Eph. 1:3-6)

All of this accords with the purpose of His \_\_\_\_\_ and redounds to the praise of His glorious \_\_\_\_\_.

<sup>11</sup>In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup>so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup>In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup>who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Eph. 1:11-14)

Our inheritance follows God's plan to save us. The great and ultimate purpose of his love for us is to make us His children.

*"If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament New, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. 'Father' is the Christian name for God."*

- J. I. Packer

## **V. The Blessings of Adoption**

We belong to God and are part of His \_\_\_\_\_. (Gal. 4:4-5)

We have deep \_\_\_\_\_ of our salvation via "the Spirit of sonship". (Rom. 8:15)

We have an unmistakably defining family \_\_\_\_\_. (Rom 8:14)

We have the active, loving, purposeful \_\_\_\_\_ of God. (Heb.12:6-7, 9-10)

We have an everlasting, unfading, unspoilable \_\_\_\_\_. (Rom 8:17)

*Next week: Sanctification*