

ADOPTED BY GOD THE FATHER

(SUNDAY, JANUARY 10, 2016)

Scripture Reading: Ps. 125; Romans 8:12-30

INTRODUCTION

In our overview of the Westminster Confession of Faith, we have given attention to God's sovereign and gracious work of salvation.

In eternity God determined to foreknow and predestine some unto eternal salvation.

In time, God provided true atonement and the only basis for salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Through the powerful and effective working of the Holy Spirit, all those elected unto salvation are brought from spiritual death unto spiritual life.

This we call regeneration.

It is only through regeneration that someone can believe and trust in Jesus Christ for salvation.

When a sinner comes truly to saving faith, he is justified.

Justification does not represent an internal change, but rather a change in our standing before a holy and just God.

Regeneration and justification are amazing to consider.

And yet these blessings do not represent the highest gifts and graces that God gives.

There is still more!

What is even greater is the grace of adoption.

Adoption is the high point of God's gracious work of salvation in our lives in **terms of our earthly relationship with God.**

There is still more to come in our glorification. Indeed we see from Romans 8 that with our present blessing of adoption, there is still more to come.

The Puritan William Perkins stated, "At earthly preferments men will stand amazed; but seldome shall you finde a man that is ravished with joy in this, that he is the childe of God."

Now thankfully your salvation does not rest on your ability to write a theological paper on all the details of God's grace in our lives.

We do need to give more attention to what Scripture teaches and accordingly what the Holy Spirit testifies to us.

Grow in your joy and knowledge that you are a child of God.

We will focus our attention on God's grace of adoption in two main ways.

First, we will consider more its meaning and where it is taught in the Scriptures.

Second, we will focus on the blessings and benefits God promises to us in His great work of adoption.

1. THE DOCTRINE OF ADOPTION IN THE NT

The doctrine of adoption is generally not often emphasized as it should be, but this has not always been the case.

The Westminster Confession of Faith was the first confession to have a separate chapter on this precious doctrine.¹

Some of the Puritans especially gave great attention to this important work of God.

Some here in this congregation know the reality of being physically adopted into a new family.

What a great blessing adoption can bring for a child who is brought in a new and loving family.

But to our regret when we hear the word adoption, we probably most likely think of earthly adoption rather than having our attention first directed to the adoption that God the Father accomplishes through the working of His Son and applied through the working of the Holy Spirit to all of God's elect.

Part of the reason for our neglect of this precious doctrine, is that the word adoption is used only 5x in the NT and all by Apostle Paul.

In Romans 9:4, Paul speaks of Israel's adoption.

The word adoption is not used in the OT, but the basis for adoption is found in the OT.

Moses in Ex. 4:22-23 was called by God to say to Pharaoh,

Ex. 4:22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD: 'Israel is **My son**, My firstborn. **23** So I say to you, let **My son** go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn.' ' ' "

In 1 Chronicles 22, David shared with Solomon the words that the LORD gave to him concerning Solomon.

1Chr. 22:10 He shall build a house for My name, and he shall be **My son**, and I *will be* his Father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.'

¹ Joel R. Beeke, *Heirs with Christ: The Puritans on Adoption*, 9.

Paul takes what is some of the most rich and tender language in the OT and applies it to all those who are now in Christ and are now led by the Spirit of God – these are the sons of God.

The other four uses of the word adoption are found in Romans 8, Galatians 4, and Ephesians 1.

Rom. 8:15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of **adoption** by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.”

Eph. 1:5 having predestined us to **adoption** as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

However, we should not think this is the only place where Scripture speaks of adoption.

The other key phrase that is connected with adoption is the expression – children of God.

Listen to four passages which use this important phrase.

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become **children of God**, to those who believe in His name:

John 11:52 and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the **children of God** who were scattered abroad.

Rom. 8:16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are **children of God**, **17** and if **children**, then heirs—heirs **of God** and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

1John 3:1 Behold what manner **of** love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called **children of God!** Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.
2 Beloved, now we are **children of God**; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

G. I. Williamson notes that it is very common today for especially religious leaders to say that God is the Father of all men.

Is this true?

It is not that we are seeking to be angry, close-minded Christians, who think we are superior, but it is not the case that all men can call themselves children of God.

Yes, God is the creator of all.

He is just to all.

He gives underserved blessings to all.

But God is not the Father of all men and women as defined by Scripture.²

We say this out of love for the truth and love for those still lost and under God's wrath.

1John 3:10 In this the **children of God** and the **children of** the devil are manifest:
Whoever does not practice righteousness is not **of God**, nor *is* he who does not love his brother.

Joel Beeke describes God's work of adoption.

If in adoption we were to receive only the privilege and status of being God's children, something would still be missing. The adopted child retains the nature of his biological parents; he does not assume the nature of the adoptive parents. God, in His amazing grace, not only gives us the status and privileges of being His children by adoption, He also gives us the Spirit of sonship as a witness to our adoption, which abides within us by Spirit-worked regeneration. The Holy Spirit implants a new nature within us.³

This is again why we speak of adoption as the high point of our earthly relationship with God by His grace.

We live in an age that is very much over-marketed and over-hyped.

This is not hard to see.

People make way too much about all sorts of things – food, entertainment, sports, electronic gadgets and the like.

However, as Christians we frequently undervalue the priceless blessings that we enjoy in Christ!

We cannot make too much of adoption!

Let us now consider some of the blessings that God by His grace alone gives to us in terms of adoption.

2. THE BLESSINGS AND BENEFITS GOD PROMISES TO US IN HIS GREAT WORK OF ADOPTION.

I want us to consider the blessings and benefits of our adoption in three categories. This is not meant to be exhaustive.

1. Who are we?
2. What privileges and duties do we have now?
3. What is still to come?

Who are we?

² Williamson, 111-112.

³ Beeke, 26.

We have already answered this question in part.

In adoption, we are given the legal right and privilege to be called the children of God.

As Beeke pointed out, we also share in the nature of God as His children. This is truly amazing.

Listen to a few passages that emphasize who we are by God's grace of adoption.

John 1:13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

2Pet. 1:4 by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust.

The phrase, "partakers of the divine nature" is a challenging phrase.

We understand what this means in terms of our adoption.

Through God's Work in your life through faith, you are now a child of God. Christ now lives in you, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

For this reason you now have real fellowship with the Triune God. God is near to His people. He is always present with you. This is the basis for your fellowship and I think at least in part what Peter is talking about when he says that we become partakers of the divine nature.

Paul also in Romans 8:29 **says that we have been predestined by God to be conformed to the image of His Son.**

And so another aspect of being a partaker of the divine nature means that we share in some of the characteristics of God as we are conformed to the image of His Son.

Listen to another amazing passage that speaks of the glory of God's work in our lives.

2Cor. 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the **glory of the Lord**, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

What privileges and duties do we have?

A summary answer to this question is: we have the privilege and duty now of calling on God our Father without any fear and living truly as His children.

Let us look again at Romans 8:15.

Rom. 8:15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

In verse 15 there is a contrast between the spirit of bondage again to fear with the Holy Spirit called the Spirit of adoption where instead of fear we now call out with confidence to God the Father using the same expression as Jesus did in the Garden.

There are different understandings of what the spirit of bondage means.

The easiest way of understanding its meaning might be that Paul is saying that the Holy Spirit does not bring bondage and fear but rather assurance to call out to God.⁴

The word Abba means father in Aramaic. The word Father at the end of verse 15 is not simply a translation of the word Abba. Rather these two names – one Aramaic and one Greek were used together in worship.

Some have understood Abba to basically mean something like daddy. This is probably not the best way of understanding the meaning of this term.

What is much more important is to see this is how our Lord called on the Father in the time of greatest testing before going to the cross.

Mark 14:36 And He said, “Abba, Father, all things *are* possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You *will*.”

It is important to state, our sonship, the privilege we have as the sons and daughters of God, is not identical to that of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the eternally begotten Son of the Father. He is equal with the Father in power and glory!⁵

Our sonship is because of His great work.

This does not minimize the wonder of our adoption but strengthens it.

It is not based on what you have done, but on what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for you.

The great duty and privilege of prayer rests in God’s grace in adoption.

Adoption also reminds us of our duties to other children of God.

I realize this is pretty basic teaching, but it is good to consider the foundation of love that we are called to have for other believers.

In adoption we have a new vertical relationship with God. We also have new horizontal relationships with one another.⁶

⁴ Moo, 500.

⁵ Williamson, 112.

⁶ Frame, 978.

I believe we can say that although the Apostle John did not use the word adoption in his writings, he certainly had this beautiful doctrine in mind as he wrote.

1John 3:10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor *is* he who does not love his brother.

1John 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

The profound duty we have to others, especially other believers, we can say is based on God's adoption.

Would you dare treat another child of God in a hateful or spiteful way?

I am sure all of us would say, we would protect our children from whatever harm someone else might try to do.

We would use extreme force and even give our own life if necessary.

How foolish we are if we do not treat other believers as children of God.

1Pet. 1:22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,

You can understand how Scripture speaks so very seriously of the duties we have toward one another and why we need to put aside all malice, hypocrisy, envy, and evil speaking.

What is still to come?

Look also at Romans 8:17.

Rom. 8:17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

In verse 17 we see two themes in Paul's writings that come from the very teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. The first theme is present and future blessings. The second theme is how the Christian must suffer with Christ.

I think for many of us it can be difficult to give due attention to future blessings because we enjoy so many present, earthly blessings.

It is not that we don't face any trouble or difficulty, but especially if you are not suffering from a life threatening or debilitating disease we can easily say, I have everything I need.

Verse 17 is a very important verse for those who are tempted to look to this world as their greatest source of happiness or blessing.

Yes, we enjoy many present blessings – both spiritual and physical – **but the greatest blessings are still to come.** If you are a child of God, then you are an heir of God.

What does it mean to be an heir of God? I don't think it means that you will inherit God or that you are His inheritance. The best understanding is that you will receive one day the inheritance that God has in store for you.⁷

Imagine being one of the three children of Bill and Melinda Gates. They have pledged to give away at least half of a fortune of some \$80 billion dollars, but that still leaves a few dollars to pass down to their children and others.

Do you think their children are worried about their future financial well-being?

But what is this in comparison to knowing that you are an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ?

Hebrews 1:2 declares that Christ is the ultimate heir.

He has been appointed heir of all things. Everything in heaven and earth is His rightful possession. He has been given this inheritance as the only begotten Son of God.

Our inheritance comes because we have been adopted by God the Father.

What beautiful language – **we are joint heirs now with Christ.**

With this beautiful language comes the call to suffering.

If indeed we suffer with Him. Suffering is not what makes you a child of God and a joint heir with Christ.

Suffering with Jesus Christ is the proof that you are a true child of God. Suffering with Christ is also as Jesus teaches you in Matthew 5 a true blessing.

I think for most of us our current suffering for Christ is rather limited.

But do not despise this present suffering.

Let us look carefully at how we respond to those who mock us for our testimony.

How are we presently dealing with the difficulties that come for being a joint heir with Jesus Christ?

And accompanying our present sufferings with Christ is again the focus on being glorified together with Him.

The best, my friends, is still to come!

May this always be your focus!

Grow in your joy and knowledge that you are a child of God.

⁷ Moo, 505. He calls this a genitive of source or subjective genitive.

Prayer

Hymn 720

Benediction – Hebrews 13:20-21

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.