

Salvation—Adoption (1st)

(The study for today is concerning the doctrine of adoption unto salvation. In this podcast we see that many theologians are at odds with the Scriptures as to the origin of adoption.)

In the previous podcasts we studied somewhat the doctrine of election unto salvation. Now we direct your attention to the subject of adoption. It is sad that we hear so little about this doctrine in the pulpit or see in the writings of men. When the subject is addressed it is often presented as being something God does for the believer at faith. However, when we look at this subject as it is addressed in the Holy Scriptures we see that it, like election, has its origin in eternity before the foundation of the world. The Greek word for adoption is *υιοθεσία* and it is only found five times in the New Testament. The meaning is *the placing of a son*. It was often used when a person did not have an heir to carry on his estate and the person would adopt a son to continue his family lineage. Of the five times this word is used, only four times does it refer to the salvation of God. In Romans 9:4, Paul uses the word to describe Israel as a nation under the Old Testament economy where God “adopted,” as it were, Abraham and his descendents to form the nation of Israel. It says, “Who are Israelites; to whom *pertaineth* the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises.” While various types and figures regarding Israel could be used to describe and to teach many lessons about adoption unto salvation, the other four verses should be sufficient to show that adoption, like all other doctrines related to salvation, is a sovereign act of God that originated in Him before creation.

Ephesians 1:5 says, “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” Obviously, this declares that adoption is directly connected to the doctrine of election because those that were predestinated unto the adoption of children were the ones chosen in Christ Jesus as mentioned in verse four.

As we said before, too often adoption is taught as something that takes place when a person exercises faith. Francis Turretin said that adoption is “a judicial act of God, by which from his mere mercy, he adopts through faith in Christ, those whom he elected to salvation from eternity, into his family and bestow upon them the name and right of sons as to inheritance.” *Theological Institutes* (Selections), as published in 1980 by the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, Page 534. Prior to this, Turretin said that adoption is the other part of justification. Page 533. While there is a legal aspect to adoption, I believe it is confusing to equate adoption to justification. Justification (of which we plan to discuss in future podcasts.) is a judicial term whereby one is legally declared not guilty before the law. Justification is the opposite of condemnation. When a person is either justified or condemned in a court of law, the pronouncement of guilt or innocence does not make the person to be such; it only declares him to be what he is—either not guilty or guilty. While Turretin’s definition of adoption identifies those adopted as those elected to salvation as clearly stated in Ephesians, I find it interesting that in the entire article on adoption he referenced all other four verses containing the word but never referenced Ephesians 1:5.

Though it is true that those adopted into the family of God will come to faith and will receive the blessings of it at that time, this is not the origin or beginning of adoption. As when a couple (or a person) enters the orphanage and selects a child for adoption, often the recipient (or child) has no idea what is happening nor does he consciously “accept” the adopting parent or parents. Once the legal process is completed the child is a member of the family and takes on the family name. Likewise, when God elected a portion of the human race to be His family they were then predestinated unto adoption. The process was started; adoption was certain and as sure as all the purposes of God.

It seems that many confuse the legal act of becoming a child into a family and that of engendering a child into the family. While it is true that regarding the salvation of God that the adopted child will receive the “Spirit of adoption” (of which we will discuss later), the child must first be adopted and not become adopted at the reception of the Spirit. As the Scriptures declare in Galatians chapter four, it because one is already a son that he receives the “Spirit of his Son” or the “Spirit of adoption.” This must be clarified or one identifies adoption as something that initially takes place at faith. In fact, A. A. Hodge combines these two and their accomplishment at faith. Listen to the following:

It appears, however, to us that the words “Adoption” and “Sonship,” as used in Scripture, express more than a change of relation, and that they are more adequately conceived of as expressing a complex view, including the change of nature together with the change of relation, and setting forth the new creature in his new relations.

The instant a sinner is united to Christ in the exercise of faith, there is accomplished in him simultaneously and inseparable, 1st, a total change of relation to God, and to the law as a covenant; and, 2d, a change of *inward condition or nature*. *Outlines of Theology*, page 516.

Though Hodge does later say that regeneration precedes faith, in the quote given he affirms that “a change of *inward condition or nature*” takes place at faith and this is the origin of adoption. It cannot be both ways. Also in the quote given above, Hodge says that adoption expresses “more than a change of relation,” but that it includes a “change of nature ... with the change of relation.” Obviously, when a child is adopted in nature there is not a “change of nature” of the child; there is only a change of relationship according to law. (Allow me to add at this point that the change in relationship is so strong legally that while a parent made disinherit a natural off-spring, he cannot disinherit an adopted child. Adoption is more legally binding than a natural relationship.)

Many references can be supplied to show that many equate adoption to justification. However, I will quote from a couple of others to show this. R. L Dabney said, “Adoption cannot be said to be a different act or grace from justification. Turretin devotes only a brief separate discussion to it, and introduces it in the thesis in which he proves that justification is both pardon and acceptance. Owen [i.e. John Owen—JKB] says that adoption is but a presentation of the blessings bestowed in justification in new phrases and relations. ... The chief doctrinal importance of this idea then is, that we have here, the strongest proof of the correctness of our definition of justification, and of the imputed righteousness upon which it is based, in the fact that it is both a pardon and an adoption.” *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, page 627. Though it is true that pardon, justification, acceptance, and other benefits of salvation are in conjunction with adoption, they are not the same. Even if one asserts that each is simply a different facet of the diamond of salvation, it must be understood that it is still a separate and independent feature. Since Dabney also referenced John Dick’s *Lectures on Theology*, I will supply some quotes from him.

Speaking of adoption, Dick wrote, “At the same time, it appears to me to be virtually the same with justification, and to differ from it merely in the new view which it gives of the relation of believers to God, and in the peculiar form in which it exhibits the blessings to which they are entitled. As it implies a change of state, it must be the same; for this change can take place but once; and whether we say that a sinner passes from a state of guilt and condemnation into a state of favour with God, or that he is translated from the family of Satan into the family of heaven, we express the same fact, and only diversify the terms. He who is justified is adopted, and he who is adopted is justified.” *Ibid*, page 391. You will notice in Dick’s assessment that he is expressing the experimental application of adoption to the believer and bypassing the fact that the predestination of some unto adoption before the world as stated in Ephesians 1:5 was before one was in “a state of guilt and

condemnation.” Like Turretin, Hodge, Dabney, Owen, and many others, Dick ignores the origin of adoption and begins with the application of adoption to those adopted.

After giving some history of different ways in which adoption was transacted with the Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, and other nations, Dick says, “Adoption, according to the scriptural sense of the term, is an act of God, by which he pronounces sinful men to be his sons, admits them into his family, and gives them a right to the privileges of his children.” *Ibid*, page 392. I might add that Dick goes on to give many good benefits in the application of adoption to the people of God, but our primary focus here is that this is not the origin of adoption. Adoption originated in the mind and purpose of God before the foundation of the world.

Nevertheless, our time is up for today. The Lord willing we will continue the origin of adoption in our next podcast. Farewell.