

Our Adoption

Romans 8:15

We turn today to what is in many ways the high point of Romans 8, because we are touching on the heights of the Christian's salvation.

Were you made simply a student of God, a servant of God, a living member of God's eternal world and a pardoned subject of his kingdom; or even an eternal and abiding friend of God in Christ – you still would not be his child, his son or daughter.

Today set before you is this best of all jewels of the Lord's salvation in Rom. 8.15 – the infrequently used word adoption, “to set as a son”.

In *Knowing God*, JI Packer says adoption “is the HIGHEST privilege the gospel offers; higher even than justification.”

“This is the apex of grace and privilege” – John Murray

And Thomas Watson remarks that Gospel Adoption is “a greater mercy than Adam had in paradise!”

You have what even Adam did not have!

Three points, easily followed, are before us today:

What adoption is and is not. What adoption does and does not. And how adoption should and should not affect us.

What is adoption? To be adopted is the whole package of being transferred into a new family; the act of parents, and in ancient times, the father in particular, receiving a son to be fully a member of his family, with all the rights and privileges that come with that transfer.

The Westminster Confession includes these parts about it, in chapter 12:

All those that are justified, God makes partakers of the grace of adoption: by which we are taken into the number, enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God; have His name put upon them, receive the Spirit of adoption; have access to the throne of grace with boldness; are enabled to cry, Abba, Father; are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by Him as by a Father; and are heirs of everlasting salvation.

So I want you to briefly see what adoption is not – because the church has run into problems here.

1. Adoption is not justification. Both justification and adoption have legal qualities about them, what is outside of us, if you will. But we are in different places – justification is in the courtroom dealing with the guilt of sin – we are criminals; but adoption is in the household dealing with the alienation of sin. The Reformed have had a problem with this, and some have just tucked adoption into justification. But not all. Why is this significant? Because it is one thing for the governor to pardon a criminal on death row; and quite another for him to adopt that criminal and bring him into his house as his child and heir!
2. Then secondly, adoption is not regeneration. The new life in new hearts Jesus gives by his new Spirit, is a child-like heart. You are remade in the image of your God and Father. This is a begetting, a being born with a family nature and resemblance. But the *nature* of a son is clearly different than the *privileges* of a son; one is a subjective state, the other is an objective one. We need both of

these. If I am not truly adopted, it does not matter how much I feel I am a child of God. But John tells us that as many as receive Jesus, that is, believe on his name, to them he gave the right, the authority, to be called the children of God. God gives you his name, seats you in his house, sets you apart to this greatest love and privilege – even above that of angels! T. Watson wrote: “God has made his children, by adoption, nearer to himself than the angels. The angels are friends of Christ; believers are his members.”

So as we wrap up this first point, see adoption as the chief jewel with all the other riches of Christ for you.

How glorious is the eternal life you have in knowing the true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

How fearfully and wonderfully recreated you are by your new birth! God has summoned you out of the tomb of death in your sins, and you rise with Jesus alive forevermore!

How blessed to reconciled, having all your sins pardoned, first to last, never to be brought up against you. You are perfectly righteous, as though you have never sinned, for the sake of Christ’s cross and perfect obedience.

How blessed in that you are holy, you are sanctified, set apart for Him, and moved unfailingly to persevere in faith and holiness!

But above them all – God has not only given you His name of Father, but he has taken your name and called you, child, my baby, my dear one!

And it is this that drives us into the arms of our next point. How do we then live as these adopted souls?

What adoption does and does not do follows what adoption is and is not. It does bring the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry, Abba, Father; it does not bring a spirit of slavery again to fear.

The Holy Spirit who has brought you life and sets you to fighting against the flesh He indwells you and leads you. He is yours in such a way that you no longer act as a slave or servant; but as a son or daughter, a child of God.

You can feel this picture, can't you? Here it is, 'dinner time', and all the children come to the table. And here is this once-slave seated at the right hand of the father! As was the case in the Roman world, slaves were adopted and set over the natural children! As this adopted son looks around the table, the eyes of the natural sons and daughters shoot back at him. But his father's gaze fills him with confidence.

It is privilege versus being set apart and aside. It is acceptance versus rejection, freedom over bondage, confidence swallowing up fear, sonship casts off the slave. The church is made up of all brothers and sisters accepting one another because of the Father, because of the Son, because of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit you received does not lead you into slavery again; no, the Spirit you received in your adoption, by him you cry, "Abba, Father."

Listen to the parallel in Gal. 4.4-7:

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. (Gal 4:4-7)

Paul uses the slave model freely in his writings, to illustrate both good and bad things.

In Romans 6, he said you are slaves to righteousness; you have been bought with a price as a slave and brought into his service. We are, from that angle, very much slaves to God.

You should know slavery was a big part of the Roman Empire. But Paul taught that every Christian freeman was a slave to the Lord, and every Christian slave was the Lord's freedman.

But here a "slave mindset" is out of step with the Spirit. You know, it is not easy to shake off a slave outlook. You don't go from being in bonds to living free overnight. But here, the fear of a slave or servant does not fit with the rights and privileges of a child of God seated in Christ. You are free, if you are saved by Christ, no matter how you feel.

Here is the Lord preparing heaven for us, with our names there, and a place all our own. And the Lord prepares us for heaven, with his name put on us here, and our being fitted for that place above.

Remember how natural for the prodigal son to say to his father, please accept me as your servant – I have blown it! Please just let me live

with them, ok? I cannot bear your disappointment and shaming you! But the Father says, ‘What disappointment? What frown? What shame? There is no wrath in me, my child!’ How different is God than many of our fathers!

This is where the Spirit familiarizes us to the Father’s acceptance and delight.

It is not the Spirit who adopts, but the Father. It is not the Spirit who reclaims but the Son, who being your elder brother bought you with a price, and brought you to His God and your God – His Father and your Father! But it is the Spirit, received at conversion, who stamps on your heart this most basic cry, this prayer, this tie with God as your Father.

Notice that word *Abba* – the Aramaic word for father. These are the first words of a little child. Paul preserves this foreign language to his Roman audience. Why?

Not, as some have said, to show the gospel is for tongue and tribe. It certainly is. Rather, it is the intimacy involved in union with God our Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit.

This is the name Jesus used in his lowest and greatest weakness, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Mark 14. It is what every little child in Palestine would speak as his first words – equivalent to our “Da” or “Dada” or “Papa”. This is “Father! Dear Father!”

The Holy Spirit develops a childlike tenderness in every regenerate heart; this is the new heart which trusts and loves God as Father, as opposed to the heart of stone which only dreads God and puts up with him!

Luther has nailed it: “This is but a little word and yet it comprehends all things. The mouth speaks not, but the affection of the heart speaks after this manner. Though I be oppressed with anguish and terror on every side, and seem to be forsaken and utterly cast away from Your presence, yet I am your child, and you are my Father for Christ’s sake. I am beloved because of the Beloved. This little word, Father, conceived effectually in the heart, passes all eloquence... (In Bruce, p. 168)

Havner has beautifully commented: “I am a pilgrim and a stranger on the earth, but I am not an orphan.”

It strikes me that the opposite is also true: ‘Because I’m not an orphan but adopted and have His Spirit in me, I am therefore a pilgrim and a stranger on the earth.’”

Let this suffice then for our second point – what adoption does and does not do – and close now with our third point: how should adoption affect or move us, and how should it not.

First, looking backwards, adoption and the sense of these privileges should move us – not to *independence* from the Lord but to dependence upon him for all godliness and righteous living.

Such intimacy, such grace, such commitment on the Father’s part to us, should not lead to greater looseness in living (which, truly, it can); we abuse love daily.

But the answer is not less love from God, but greater appreciation of His so great love in adoption.

He has chosen you to this; Ephesians 1 - He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, (Eph 1:5)

God the Father is uniquely your Father.

Singular love should bring forth singular living for Him. He has loved you so fully, adopting you, giving you this new relationship, through his Son, whom He has not spared.

Second, such privilege as adoption should lead to greater assurances in being his children and to stand set in awe of His love to us. The bells of 1 John 3.1 should be ringing in our hearts every day. We should be crying out to the Lord to more and more acclimate ourselves to our Father; to be conformed to his Son; to be filled with his Spirit.

But such rich privilege should not puff us up in such a way as to be above facing afflictions, trials, suffering for his sake. As good as this is, we must not then think we are too good or special to ever suffer. Hebrews 12 speaks about the love that leads to chastening.

Lastly, let this confidence, this freedom, this fearlessness move you to lean into eternity. You are *heirs* of God, *joint heirs* with Jesus – all things are yours, but you are not yet in possession of all things. There is an already/not yet to adoption, especially regarding our bodies, as we will see later in verse 23.

But heaven is begun, at least in the taste, here below. We should rightly long for the full feast above.

This is what adoption is, does and effects – own it with all your hearts and lives. This is your new identity – your white stone with your name

on it which only the Lord knows! May this fill not only our minds and lives, but our church! We are a family of God! Do visitors see that in us – not merely the natural ties that we have in this church, but the supernatural ones? Do they see us loving one another, preferring one another, and serving one another?

And what a part does this play in our evangelism! We are inviting people to become part of God's forever family! Not merely joining us, but joining with Him! So many have broken or harmful families – we are intended to have solid families. When God finds an orphan in the OT, he sets them in a family. What a warm message this is! Salvation, the gospel, the grace of the Lord Jesus, brings people **HOME**! Amen?