Systematic Theology: Soteriology

Week 6: What does our adoption mean to us?

## Introduction to the series

* When you hear the word *soteriology*, what does mean to you?
* Some think of high theology, stuffy rooms, and old men arguing over large oak tables.
* Others think…I have no idea what that word means…and I probably don’t care even if I did.
* Hopefully you land somewhere between these two descriptions.
* Simply put, soteriology is the study of salvation or the study of the doctrine of salvation.
* In other words, it is the study of what one group of people believe about salvation. That group can be anything from a church to a political party. For our purposes, we are going to study what the Bible says.
* It is important to have a full and broad understanding of what the Bible says about our salvation so that we know that we are saved and so that we know what comes with our salvation.
* There are many different ideas and teachings about salvation, and it is our responsibility to make sure that we know what God has ordained and expects from His creation.
* Here is schedule for the upcoming lessons:
	+ 09/08: Introduction
	+ 09/15: What is the atonement, both declarative and practical?
	+ 09/22: What does effectual calling, saving faith and repentance mean?
	+ 09/29: Missionary Share: Tim George from Mozambique
	+ 10/06: What is justification or what does it mean to be justified?
	+ **10/13: What does it mean to be adopted by God?**
	+ 10/20: What is progressive sanctification and how does it operate in my daily Christian life?
	+ 10/27: Missionary Share: Jeff Street from Canada
	+ 11/03: What does the perseverance of the saints mean for me today and for eternity?

## introduction

* The doctrine of adoption is indeed integral to the gospel. But in recent years, theological discussion has perhaps been more focused on justification than adoption. And many lay Christians have never considered the rich implications of their adoption.[[1]](#footnote-2)
	+ It is not justification…which deals with our need for forgiveness and reconciliation with God…it is a legal change whereby the sinner is declared righteous. However, in adoption the sinner is brought into God’s family. Clearly, adoption could not happen without justification…but adoption is fuller and richer in that God is not seen as a judge but as a father. “Though both justification and adoption are forensic concepts…their practical outworkings differ substantially. Justification in abstraction from adoption leaves us with a rather bare, legal concept – though, of course, the privilege of having our sins forgiven and being made acceptable to God must never be underestimated. But adoption enlarges our understanding of what it means to be acceptable to God…We are acceptable as sons of God who have the privilege of calling God our Father and bear the responsibility of serving Him as His children.”[[2]](#footnote-3)
* Adoption is an act of God’s grace distinct from and additional to the other acts of grace involved in the application of redemption. Too frequently it has been regarded as simply an aspect of justification or as another way of starting the privilege conferred by regeneration. It is much more than either or both of these acts of grace.[[3]](#footnote-4)
	+ It is not regeneration…this is clear because regeneration and adoption deal with two different problems Regeneration deals with our nature…which, prior to Christ, is sinful, depraved, and dead spiritually Adoption deals with our status…which, prior to Christ, is one of alienation and condemnation as a result of being children of wrath and of the devil “Adoption gives us the privilege of sons, regeneration the nature of sons.” “God has done what no human father and mother can do when they adopt a child – change the personality and the nature of the child they have adopted so that it is like theirs. But God, in regeneration, has allowed His born-again children to become partakes of His own loving, holy nature as their Father in heaven.”[[4]](#footnote-5)
* Adoption is also not sanctification. Adoption is where we are in the family of God. It is our status as one of God’s children.
	+ As we will see next week, sanctification is an ongoing process where the child of God (the adopted one), works out what has already been worked in them.
* While it is admittedly hard to separate out all the parts of the order of salvation, I believe that adoption should (and does) stand on its own merit.
* While justification declares that one is now righteous before God and regeneration means that our hearts have been revived or made alive to the things of God.
	+ If those things are true, then the fact that we are adopted is equally true.
	+ In other words, since we have been declared just and have been regenerated, we can confidently know that we have been placed in the family of God.
	+ This is the prerequisite to entering into the family of God.
* It is not until we have an understanding of our adoption by God that we can fully realize, in real time, our current and future standing in His kingdom.
* While it may seem impossible to improve on such gifts as regeneration, conversion, union, and justification, the Word of God speaks of yet another spiritual blessing in the application of redemption: the Father’s adoption of believers as his children[[5]](#footnote-6)

## what does adoption mean?[[6]](#footnote-7)

* The word adoption in the New Testament means “placing as a son” and describes the rights and privileges as well as the new position of the believer in Christ.
* In adoption the believer is released from slavery into freedom and maturity in Christ.
* God took children who were not his children and made them his own and treated them as if they were his children.
* In short, God adopted all those who would believe in him and treated them as if they were his natural sons and daughters.
* The word is taken from Roman custom where, in a legal ceremony, the adopted son was given all the rights of a natural-born son.
* Adoption was not common in Jewish culture…although there are some OT examples of it (Moses by Pharoah …Mephibosheth the crippled son of Jonathan adopted by David).
* Adoption was common in the Roman Empire…adopted sons were often chosen to deliberately by his adoptive father to perpetuate his name and inherit his estate.
* In that sense, the adopted son was in no way inferior to a son born in the ordinary way…in fact, in many cases the adopted son sometimes had a greater prestige and privilege than the natural children.
* Under Roman rule, if a father was disappointed in his natural son’s skill or character, he would search diligently for a boy available for adoption who demonstrated the qualities he desired.
* If the boy proved himself worthy, the father would take the necessary legal steps for adoption • Adopted sons enjoyed the same privileges as natural born sons….and at death of the father, the adopted son would often inherit the estate.
* In this rite, four things happened:
	+ The adopted person lost all rights in his old family and gained all the rights of a fully legitimate son in his new family.
	+ He became heir to his new father’s estate.
	+ The old life of the adopted person was completely wiped out. For instance, legally all debts were cancelled; they were wiped out as if they had never been.
	+ By the law, the adopted person was literally and absolutely the son of his new father.

## what does the bible say about our adoption and new status?

* Adoption, as the term implies, is an act of transfer from an alien family into the family of God himself. This is surely the apex of grace and privilege.[[7]](#footnote-8)
* **Romans 8:14-17** “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, ***these are sons of God***. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, ***but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons*** by which we cry out, "Abba! ***Father***!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that ***we are children of God***, and ***if children, heirs also***, ***heirs of God*** and ***fellow heirs with Christ***, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.”
* The language that Paul uses gives us an idea of what our new status is before God. All of the words that Paul uses gives us a clear indication that we are truly in a new family, the family of God.
	+ Sons of God…children of God…God is our Father
		- This is how a father lovingly interacts with his children. They know who they are before Him and He knows who they are in the family.
		- God requests of us that we would come to Him as our Father.
	+ Received a spirit of adoption
		- Not only does the Spirit adopt us into God’s family but He testifies and bears witness through our own spirit that we do belong to God.
	+ We are heirs of God *and* fellow heirs with Christ.
		- God must not be a stranger to you. I think your life right now should be devoted to knowing him and loving him so that when you get your inheritance, it won’t be something strange — namely, him. He should be our chief desire now and our chief treasure then.[[8]](#footnote-9)
		- To be an heir of Christ is to get all that He got. We get the new body (Rom 8:23), the new place to dwell that is not made with hands (Heb 9:11), we have all this and so much more which awaits us because of our new status as children of God (1 Pet 1:4-5).

### Our Adoption Was Part of God’s Original and Good Plan.

* **Ephesians 1:5** “***He predestined us to adoption as sons*** through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will…”
* Before you were ever born, before you could do anything good or bad, God choose you to adoption as His son through Christ.
* We can only call God our Father because of what Christ did on our behalf.
	+ Is God the father of all men? Absolutely…but can all men call God Father, absolutely not. Only those who have been predestined to adoption through Christ have that right to do it.
* The term “adoption” may smack somewhat of artificiality in our ears; but in the first century A.D. ***an adopted son was a son deliberately chosen by his adoptive father*** to perpetuate his name and inherit his estate; he was no whit inferior in status to a son born in the ordinary course of nature and might well enjoy the father’s affection more fully and reproduce the father’s character more worthily.[[9]](#footnote-10)
* It is important to remember, adoption is totally and fully up to the parents. The **child has no choice** who is going to adopt them.
* In our world, parents go into an adoptive relationship by choosing either an unborn child or a child which has been born and needs a home.
* In adopting, the adoptive parents show a comprehensive and undeniable love towards the child/children which they are adopting.
* In many cases, before the child has done anything good or bad (as they are too young), they are chosen out to go home with their new, loving family.
* We should see this picture with all that it has to offer. God wants us to know about His eternal love towards us by adopting us before the foundations of the world.

### Our Adoption Puts Us into the Family of God Here and Now.

* But this grace-saturated reckoning with our sin and sinfulness does not expend the gospel. Christ’s propitiatory work on our behalf surges with exceedingly greater blessing—the glories and riches of *adoption*. As Scripture affirms, forgiven sinners do not enter Christ’s kingdom as mere paupers. We become royal sons, members of the family of God, siblings of the King of kings—brothers of whom he is not ashamed (Heb. 2:11).[[10]](#footnote-11)
* **John 1:12** “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name…”
	+ This is contrasting with **verse 11** “He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.”
* We are children of God because we received Christ. As we received Christ, this means that we were born again and thus born into a new family…the family of God.
* In other words, how can you know if you are in the family of God? Have you received Christ and all that He has said?
	+ Both the ability to receive Christ and be placed in God’s family is a gift from God.
* **Galatians 3:25-26** “But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. ***For you are all sons of God*** ***through faith in Christ Jesus***.”
	+ Under the Old Testament, the saints were not considered sons of God. They did not have that type of relationship with God.
		- The doctrine of adoption is built both on the Son’s relationship to the Father within the Godhead and on the promise of the everlasting inheritance in the covenant of grace. In redemptive history, there were allusions to the doctrine of sonship from Adam to Israel and from Israel to Christ. In the New Testament, the adoption of believers is rooted in Jesus’ eternal relation to His Father and in His redeeming work as the last Adam.[[11]](#footnote-12)
	+ It is not until the New Covenant and the blood of Christ that we are able to come to God as His children (not *like* but truly as…).
	+ “The people of God are the sons of God the Father and he sustains to them this highest and most intimate of Relationships.”[[12]](#footnote-13)
* **1 John 3:1** “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, ***that we would be called children of God***; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.”
	+ To be a child of God is directly related with the love of our heavenly Father has for us.
	+ It is out of His love for us that He has adopted us and brought us into His family and has given us the privilege to call Him our Father.
	+ How many times does God show is love towards us for our immediate surety that He has done all that He can for us so that we should then have confidence that we are in His family?

## blessings and benefits of our adoption

* If we are now adopted by God and in His family, we can surely ask *what are our real time, current benefits of being in God’s family?*
* When you repent of your sin and put your faith in Christ for the forgiveness of your sin, you are now known as a child of God.

### It Gives us a Heavenly Picture Where Our Earthly One May Have Failed

* For those who grew up in homes with abusive and/or absent fathers, for those who have never known the pure love of a father for his own children, you can know this from your heavenly Father.
* God’s love as a Father far surpasses anything an earthly father can give to his children.
* If you struggle with knowing how a father should or could have loved you as his child, then know what it means to have your heavenly Father’s love lavished upon you.
* **Psalm 103:13** “Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.”
* **Revelation 3:19** “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent…”
* We must not see the discipline of the Father as punitive, as if just for the sake of punishing us for what we have done wrong.
	+ His discipline has a restorative end in mind. That you are not just getting disciplined but that it would lead to you coming back to where you are supposed to be in a relationship with Him.
* “What is a Christian? The question can be answered in many ways, but the richest answer I know is that a Christian is one who has God as Father.” “To know the omnipotent, infinite, incomprehensible Creator and Judge as Father is a gift of grace, not a right of birth.”[[13]](#footnote-14)

### We now have the Holy Spirit

* **Romans 8:14-16** “For all who are being **led** by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of **slavery** leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "**Abba! Father**!" The **Spirit Himself** testifies with our spirit that we are children of God…”
* We are led by the Spirit in our life…we can know what God desires and since we have the Spirit, we are able to do what He has commanded us to do.
* We are no longer slaves to sin…while we are still under the presence of sin and temptation is always lurking at the door, we can now say no to that.
* We can cry out to God as our Father…in our deepest angst and most desperate state, we can come to God, not as a legal father or judge, but as a loving Father who desires His children to seek Him.
* We have the internal witness of the Spirit…to bear witness about something means to demonstrate that it is true, which is exactly what the Spirit does with the Gospel for us. The Spirit testifies to our inner man that we are God’s children by convincing us of the truth of the Gospel…the presence of genuine faith in your life is the result of the inner testimony of the Spirit.[[14]](#footnote-15)

### Expected prayer to the Father

* **Hebrews 4:16** “Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”
* If you are not a child of God, you are not able to draw near to God. You have no confidence that He is going to hear you.
* When we are in need of God’s mercy and grace, we are directed to go to His throne to find it.

### Knowing that God did not have to do it.

* God did not have to adopt us to save us. It was out of His love towards us that He planned this out.
* We do not have to wonder about God’s intentions for us, He has given us so much.
1. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/adopted-by-the-living-god/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <https://www.mbcmi.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/12-Adoption.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. <https://www.mbcmi.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/12-Adoption.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. MacArthur and Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 624. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. <https://www.mbcmi.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/12-Adoption.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. John Murray, 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/a-spectacular-and-scary-promise-fellow-heirs-with-christ-if-we-suffer> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. F.F. Bruce in R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. <https://www.mbcmi.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/12-Adoption.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. <https://www.ligonier.org/guides/adoption> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Murray, 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. <https://www.mbcmi.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/12-Adoption.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. <https://expositors.org/inner-testimony-of-the-spirit/> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)