

## Adoption

### *A Theological Discussion*

(From John Girardeau's "The Doctrine of Adoption", Discussions of Theological Questions)

It has not been made the subject of much controversy, nor has it received the didactic exposition which has been devoted to most of the other topics included in the theology of redemption. Its importance has been to a large extent overlooked, its place in a distinct and independent treatment of the covenant of grace has been refused, while leading theologians have differed in regard to its nature and office.

John Girardeau, *Discussions*, p.429

#### I. It's Nature:

Although adoption is related to the doctrines of regeneration and justification, it has a distinctive and peculiar value of its own as distinguished from regeneration and justification.

##### 1. In its relation to regeneration:

a. Adoption is in one sense by regeneration. We are "re-begotten" (made) children of God.

b. Distinguished in "order of salvation" from regeneration

1) Regeneration precedes adoption and is in order to it.

But as many as received him, to them gave he the privilege to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name: which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (Jn.1:12)

2) Regeneration precedes faith and faith precedes adoption

For you are all the children of god by faith in Christ Jesus. Gal.3:26

c. Regeneration is not conditioned upon faith,, adoption is.

d. Regeneration is a creative act, adoption is an legal act.

We are authorized to become children of God...

The former effects our nature, the latter our relations.

e. Regeneration adapts us to our place in God's family, adoption formally introduces us into it. By the one we have tempers of children, by the other their rights.

f. Regeneration *makes us* God's children; adoption recognizes and treats us as his children and invests us with all the rights, privileges and immunities of his children.

Otherwise our "rights" would be contingent upon our "tempers".

##### 3. Adoption in relation to justification and distinguished from justification.

a. Both are legal acts exerted by God's legal authority

b. In justification, the legal relation is of servant to Lord, in adoption it is of child to parent.

Justification: God as judge and ruler

Adoption: Paternal relation

It is our relations which are altered in each case, but the sort of relation in one is different from that in the other-- as the relation of servant and the relation of child. It is one thing to be approved by a governor, another to be loved by a father. (p.486)

c. Both presuppose regeneration, justification introduces believer into kingdom society or polity, adoption legally and formally introduces the regenerated sinner into the society of God's family.

d. A subject of moral government is not an heir per se. Heirship supposes another relation, that of a child. Therefore, justification doesn't entitle to an inheritance, adoption does. It is grace upon grace.

##### 4. Adoption is a translation from the family of Satan into the family of God.

"A change which is distinguished from that of regeneration in that it is legal, formally authoritative and irreversible." Girardeau  
**John 8:41-44**

## II. The Grounds of Adoption:

1. The eternal purpose of God the Father: Those adopted by the Father are predestined through Jesus Christ according to God's good pleasure.

**Eph. 1:5**, Having predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

**Rom. 8:29**, For whom he did foreknow, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brethren.

2. Union with the Son of God, naturally, by virtue of his incarnation and his consequent community of nature with the elect. (Christ the brother of the elect by his incarnation)

**Gal. 4:4** But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

**Hebr. 2:11** For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, "I will proclaim thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee."

3. Union with the Son of God spiritually and vitally through regeneration leading unto faith.

**Jn. 1:12**

4. Union with the Son of God federally as he is the covenant head and representative of the elect.

**Rom. 5:2** Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. (vs. 18 depicting Christ representational role as second adam)

## III. The Rights Involved in Adoption:

Divided into two classes, general (heirship) and special (immunities and privileges)

### A. Heirship:

*It is all that can be conceived or believed as embraced in the paternal favor and love of God.*

HOME! All that is wrapped up in that sweet, transcendent word, heightened, sanctified, glorified and projected everlastingly; our Father's house, because Jesus' Father's house with all it includes of fellowship with God the Trinity, with holy angels, with glorified saints, with elect relatives, brethren and friends. Ineffable communion! And to this will be added it to it aught can be added, all outward circumstances of glory which can be collected by an Almighty Father around the brethren of his Son."

1. Here: Present benefits amidst the trials of life

2. Hereafter: at the resurrection of the dead.

### B. Immunities:

1. From an slavish temper of obedience

2. From bondage to human authority when exercised contrary to or apart from the word of God.

3. From bondage to the OC law

**Col. 2:16** Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. 17 These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

4. From bondage to the moral law as a standard of justification.

### C. Privileges

**Rom. 8:14** For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. **15** For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" **16** it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, **17** and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

**1John 3:1** See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

1. Privileged access as children vs. respectful distance of servant

"The free spirit of filial obedience, leading to boldness of access to God. ...The servant, with hat in hand, stands at a respectful distance awaiting the orders of his master; the child of God, as Luther has graphically suggested, rushes into the presence of his Father, leaps into his lap, and nestles in his bosom." (p. 493).

2. . Offering imperfect, though sincere obedience to God, with hope of its acceptance

3. "The wholesome, loving, saving discipline of children in God's family"

Hebr. 12:5 And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons?-- "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by him. **6** For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." **7** It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? **8** If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

IV. Duties of Adoption: (all taken from Girardeau; organized a little differently)

A. To render honor and obedience to God as a Father.

B. To render filial affections and feelings:

1. Filial love

2. Filial trust

3. "Submission to, and acquiescence in, his parental will and government" ( p. 494)

4. Filial hope

C. To imitate him as a Father "even as our Father in heaven is perfect," "for then you will be children of your Father in heaven," "imitators of God as dear children"

**Matt. 5:48** You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

**Phil. 2:15** that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

**Eph. 5:1** Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

**Rom. 8:29** For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren.

D. "To render to the Lord Jesus the utmost honor, love, gratitude and obedience, as our Brother through whom alone we are related to God as a Father.

E. To seek and receive the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of adoption, bearing witness with our spirits that we are children of God.

F. To love all God's people, and treat them as our dear brethren. "It should be a maxim with us, that whenever we perceive in others the lineaments, however faint and disfigured with error or weakness, of our Father's children, they shall surely experience the embrace of a brother's arms" ( p. 495).

Calvin (Institutes, Book iv, 17.40) says that during communion, each individual should consider "whether, after his (Christ's) example, he is prepared to give himself to his brethren, and to hold

himself in common with those with whom he has Christ in common; whether, as he himself is regarded by Christ, he in his turn regards all his brethren as members of his body, or, like his members, desires to cherish, defend, and assist them".

**1Ths. 4:9** But concerning love of the brethren you have no need to have any one write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another;

**1Pet. 1:22** Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart.

**1Pet. 3:8** Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind.

**1John 3:14** We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.

**1John 3:16** By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

G. To separate ourselves from the world, so far as it is out of sympathy with God our Father.

H. "Ever to aspire with longing towards heaven--our Father's house, the family gathering place, our glorious and everlasting home." ( p. 495).

**Col. 3:1** If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

**Hebr. 11:13** These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

#### IV. Adoption vs. Sonship

##### Big picture themes

- We are dependent on God alone for all things, not ourselves
- The biggest glory of the Christian life is the fact that the Father sees us as his sons and daughters
- The biggest risk to the Christian life is that we veer away to act like orphans, not sons and daughters
- "Take heart! You are far worse than you think...but the gospel is far better than you can ever imagine!"
- Graduate quoted in the workbook "Before *Sonship*, we thought we had to have our acts together ... What a relief to know that God meets us where we need him."

Orphan

Lacks vital daily intimacy  
father

Lives on a succeed/fail basis

Is not easily teachable

Tends toward "I can do it myself" self reliance

God's love

Critical spirit. Doesn't feel accepted thus non accepting  
Something to prove, concerned about building record.

Sons/Daughters

Has growing assurance that God is my loving

Learning to live in daily, partnership with God

Has confidence/trust to be submissive

Able to take risk and even fail in assurance of

Encourages, edifies—feels accepted thus accepts  
Secure in Christ's record, serves in thankfulness

V. Scripture:

Eph. 1:5 He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

Rom. 8:29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

John 1:12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.

2Cor. 6:18 "and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

Matt. 6:9 "Pray then like this: Our Father"

Ps. 103:13 As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear him.

Prov. 14:26 In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge.

Matt. 6:30 "But if God so clothes the grass of the field will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? 6:32 and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

Hebr. 12:6 For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.

Rom. 8:17 and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Eph. 2:18 for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Rom. 8:15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, "Abba! Father!"

Hebr. 12:28 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe;

Hebr. 13:15 Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Eph. 1:5 He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

Matt. 6:30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith?

Matt. 6:32 For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

Rom. 8:17 and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Hebr. 2:17 Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people.