

Seth Mick, Mike Barker, Gary Ricucci Week 1 | Adoption: What’s the Big Deal?

I. Introductory remarks:

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are!” (1 John 3:1).

Main Point: Because of his great love, God himself has adopted us as sons through Christ, so we could enjoy all the privileges of relationship with him as his very children, and experience the highest blessings in his very own family.

“Adoption is an act of God’s free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.” - Westminster Catechism 1646

3 categories:

- The Grace of God in Adoption
- The privileges or blessings of adoption
- Received into the number: Life in God’s family

Course objectives:

1. To strengthen our understanding of the gospel, for the purpose of knowing and relating to God as our personal Father.
2. To know more accurately how the biblical narrative unfolds in regards to God’s revelation of himself.
3. To understand the New Testament’s benefits that are tied to being adopted in Christ.
4. To know how the doctrine of adoption changes our everyday life as a church in relation to God and one another.

II. Historical Survey

Irenaeus (130 AD) saw adoption as the preferred “motif” to describe the blessings of redemption. There were others who emphasized the Fatherhood of God seen in adoption in the 3rd and 4th century, but the doctrine of adoption didn’t get primary air time for the next thousand years, all the way up until the reformation.¹ In the 16th century, particularly Calvin is said to have seen the adoption of believers to be at

¹ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 21.

the heart of Christianity.² Yet, since Calvin, there has not been proper weight given to this doctrine, especially today, even in the Christian circles that we could largely identify with as a church.

“You sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one’s holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all.

For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. ‘Father’ is the Christian name for God. Our understanding of Christianity cannot be better than our grasp of adoption.”³

III. Old and New Testament

1. Aren’t we all Children of God?

“But to all who did receive [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” - John 1:12-13

“Sonship to God, then is a gift of grace. It is not a natural but an *adoptive* sonship, and so the New Testament explicitly pictures it.”⁴

2. God’s revelation of himself in the Old Testament

There are over 200 references to God as our Father in the New Testament.⁵

“Though Yahweh was his covenant name, it spoke to Israel of what their God was *in himself* rather than of what he would be *in relation* to them. It was the official name of Israel’s King, and there was something of regal reserve about it. It was an *enigmatic name*, a name calculated to awaken humility and awe before the *mystery* of the Divine being rather than anything else.”⁶ (*Emphasis mine*).

3. Further Revelation in the New Testament

² Ibid, 23.

³ Packer, *Knowing God*, 201.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*, xi.

⁶ Packer, *Knowing God*, 202.

4. The Fatherhood of God is the Climax of the Bible

We are now commanded to come boldly to God (Hebrews 10:19-22). We are commanded to approach God with freedom and confidence (Ephesians 3:12). We now have access to the Father (Eph. 2:18). We are told in Hebrews 4:16 to “draw near with confidence.”

IV. The Highest privilege of our Salvation

Justification: the act of God declaring us not guilty, and also declaring us completely righteous in Christ.

Packer therefore calls justification the fundamental and primary blessing of the gospel.⁷

Adoption: The Highest blessing

“Closeness, affection and generosity are at the heart of the relationship.”⁸

V. Application

1. Don’t move on

“The knowledge that the father has bestowed his love on us, so that we are called children of God—and in fact are his children (1 John 3:1-2), will, over time, prove to be the solvent in which our fears, mistrust, and suspicion of God—as well as our sense of distance from him—will eventually dissolve. Then we will enter into a richer experience of confidence and assurance as the children of our father in heaven.”⁹

2. Earthly Fathers

3. Identity

⁷ Packer, *Knowing God*, 206.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*, 14.