

The Larger Catechism

Question 74

74. Q. What is adoption?

A. Adoption is an act of the free grace of God,[307] in and for his only Son Jesus Christ,[308] whereby all those that are justified are received into the number of his children,[309] have his name put upon them,[310] the Spirit of his Son given to them,[311] are under his fatherly care and dispensations,[312] admitted to all the liberties and privileges of the sons of God, made heirs of all the promises, and fellow-heirs with Christ in glory.[313]

Scriptural Defense and Commentary

[307] **1 John 3:1.** Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. [308] **Ephesians 1:5.** Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will. **Galatians 4:4-5.** But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. [309] **John 1:12.** But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. [310] **2 Corinthians 6:18.** And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. **Revelation 3:12.** Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. [311] **Galatians 4:6.** And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. [312] **Psalm 103:13.** Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. **Proverbs 14:26.** In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge. **Matthew 6:32.** (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. [313] **Hebrews 6:12.** That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. **Romans 8:17.** And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

Introduction

1. Adoption in Reformed Theology¹

Many theologians have written on the doctrine of adoption in the last fifty years. The most popular and influential is J. I. Packer who argued that adoption “has been little regarded in Christian history.” He noted that R. S. Candlish (*The Fatherhood of God*) and R. A. Webb (*The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption*) gave attention to this doctrine in the nineteenth century but apart from them, he concluded that nothing else has been written since the Reformation.² He suggested that the Puritans were deficient in this area. Against this, Joel Beeke shows convincingly that the Puritans wrote extensively on this.³ Many have noted that our Confession and Catechisms were the first to include a separate chapter and questions on this doctrine (WCF XII; LC #74; SC #34). Francis Beattie was surprised that so few Presbyterian theologians treated this doctrine separately: “In view of this fact it seems a little strange that some of our leading theologians should give no distinct place to adoption in their systems, and many of them devote

¹ The title seems a bit pretentious since we will only highlight a few historical points. It is at best a super mini micro small overview and abridged!

² J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 207. He should have mentioned Crawford, Lidgett, and Girardeau.

³ Joel R. Beeke, *Heirs with Christ: The Puritans on Adoption* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 1ff., esp. pp. 10-14.

but little attention to it.”⁴ R. A. Webb complained that Charles Hodge was silent on this topic and that Breckenridge and Shedd also said nothing on this.⁵

Theologians now recognize that this doctrine must be given a separate treatment. It used to be viewed as a second element of justification. For example, John Dick, though giving a whole lecture on the doctrine, stated that the doctrine of adoption “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...”⁶ Dabney says the same (following Turretin and Owen), “Adoption cannot be said to be a different act or grace from justification.”⁷ This way of treating adoption has pretty much vanished in the latter twentieth century.⁸ This doctrine is distinct from justification and regeneration. As Ferguson says, “Undoubtedly the New Testament never separates justification and adoption, but neither does it confuse them.”⁹ It does not confuse the two but it also assumes it. In fact, Beattie says that adoption assumes “election, effectual calling, regeneration, faith, and justification.”¹⁰

2. Adoption and Sonship¹¹

Contemporary believers have probed this doctrine and attempted to draw out some of its practical benefits. Though many have sung its praises, this movement has garnered criticisms as well. I am talking about Jack Miller’s *Sonship* courses (which are very popular in our present geographical surroundings). Without going into this too deeply, I want to make one observation. Though the emphasis is on *Sonship* is wonderful, we must realize that the doctrine of adoption is one of the several benefits that flow from our union with Christ (LC #69). One is always in danger of imbalance when he or she clings to only one doctrine. Perhaps the revised courses have improved on some of the things raised by their critics but it is far better to embrace the whole counsel of God instead of using one doctrine as a prism to the whole Christian life.

3. Its Necessity

⁴ Francis R. Beattie, *The Presbyterian Standard* (1894; reprint, Greenville, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, 1997), 212.

⁵ R. A. Webb, *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 17. Webb is actually incorrect about Breckenridge. Breckenridge gives a full chapter to this doctrine, see his *The Knowledge of God, Subjectively Considered: Being the Second Part of Theology Considered as a Science of Positive Truth, Both Inductive and Deductive* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1859), 178ff. (Ch. X: Adoption: Its Grounds, Nature, and Fruits). Surprisingly, the earlier twentieth-century Baptist theologian gives a chapter to this doctrine as well. See Edgar Young Mullins, *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression* (Philadelphia; Boston; St. Louis; Los Angeles; Chicago; New York; Toronto: Roger Williams Press, 1917), 401ff.

⁶ John Dick, *Lectures on Theology* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1850), 2:224.

⁷ Robert L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (1871; repr., Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 627. Regarding Turretin and Peter Martyr, Bavinck says, “Sometimes the adoption as children was mentioned as the second part of justification [e.g. Turretin] but others, such as Peter Martyr, preferred to consider this a fruit of justification.” See Herman Bavinck, John Bolt and John Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 4: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 224.

⁸ The little book by Beeke (*Heirs with Christ*) gives a very helpful and up to date bibliography on this doctrine.

⁹ Sinclair Ferguson, *Know Your Christian Life* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 82.

¹⁰ Beattie, *The Presbyterian Standard*, 214.

¹¹ On this, see Chad Van Dixhoorn’s “The Sonship Program for Revival: A Summary and Critique,” *WTJ* 61:2 (Fall 1999): 227ff.

Frame states, “Adoption is God’s remedy for our second great need. Justification meets our need for a new legal status. Adoption meets our need for a new family.”¹² This may be a fair and accurate statement but we need to consider this carefully. Our need does not determine the remedy but rather the remedy from God reveals our need. Adoption corresponds to that but we must be careful at this point. Adoption is necessary not because we deserve it or have an inherent right to it — in that sense, it is not a need. However, given our spiritually bankrupt condition, to be in God’s family would be a gift of amazing grace.

Some assume we are all children of God. Adoption is not really needed because God cannot adopt his own children.¹³ — we simply need to recognize we have a heavenly father who loves us and we merely need to turn to him. John Bickford Heard said that “all men are originally, and by their very birth into the world, and as beings breathing thoughtful breath, entitled to look and address God as Abba, Father... Every day we meet with men living below their privileges, heirs but outcasts, and we only pity them the more when we contrast what they are with what they ought to be.”¹⁴ This is a grievous and sad error. Without some divine act, we are alienated from God and are not his children. We can only become His children through His free act of grace.

A more popular contemporary expression exists in the 21st century. Oprah Winfrey’s magazine encourages people to see children “as children of God, as Christs, or Buddhas.”¹⁵ Mormons believe that we are all children of God.¹⁶ All these things may “feel” good but it is not the biblical truth. We either have God as our heavenly Father by His sovereign grace (of regeneration and adoption) or have the devil as our father (cf. Jn. 8:44; Eph. 2:1ff.).

Adoption is an Act of God’s Free Grace for Christ’s Sake

What then is adoption? The answer states that “**adoption is an act of the free grace of God, in and for his only Son Jesus Christ.**” Adoption is nothing we could have expected. The verb “act” is important in this answer. “You will observe that adoption is called *an act*, because it is perfected at once. As soon as a believer is vitally united by faith to Christ, the head of God’s family, and the elder brother of every saint, he is from that moment, an adopted child of God.”¹⁷ It is not a process but the immediate act of God’s grace. This transition from family (of Satan) to family (of God) is instantaneous. It is a supernatural work of God’s free grace and in a moment the sinner believes, he becomes a child of God!

¹² John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2006), 205-206.

¹³ Cf. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 515. Albrecht Ritschl did not teach universal fatherhood of God though he is often viewed as one who taught it, see James Orr, *The Ritschlian Theology and the Evangelical Faith* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897), 221 fn; 226. I’m having some difficulty pinning down proponents who taught this. One author who maintained it called it “New Theology” and he happily dispensed with Candlish’s view of God’s Fatherhood (Old Theology), see John Bickford Heard, *Old and New Theology: A Constructive Critique* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1885), 82ff. This book assumes the existence of this new teaching but is not its source.

¹⁴ Heard, *Old and New Theology*, 84.

¹⁵ <http://www.oprah.com/relationships/Show-Empathy-Emotional-Intimacy>

¹⁶ <http://mormonwoman.org/2011/05/15/mormons-believe-we-are-all-children-of-god/>

¹⁷ Ashbel Green, *Lectures on the Shorter Catechism*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work, 1841), 1:404.

Though adoption is connected with justification, it is distinct from it (as we already noted). God could have pardoned us and simply left us as justified creatures. Joel Beeke carefully delineates the difference: “Justification involves a *legal* relationship; adoption, a *personal* relationship.”¹⁸ Similarly, Thomas Watson said, “[I]t is a mercy to redeem a slave, but is more to adopt them.”¹⁹ So the distinct act of adoption is a superb additional blessing flowing to us on account of our union with Christ. The apostle John exclaims, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (1Jn. 3:1). Notice John’s statement. It is a wonder that we should be *called* the children of God; that is in fact a wonderful blessing but lest we conclude they are only words, John says “and so we are” (καὶ ἐσμὲν). John’s astonishment indicates the wonder of this blessing. It is indeed an act of the free grace of God — He didn’t have to do it. Thomas Watson summarizes this point quite well: “Adoption is a mercy spun out of the bowels of free grace; all by nature are strangers, therefore have no right to sonship, only God is pleased to adopt one, and not another, to make one a vessel of glory, another a vessel of wrath. The adopted heir may cry out, ‘Lord, how is it, that thou wilt show thyself to me, and not unto the world.’”²⁰

This free grace of God flows to us **“in and for his only Son Jesus Christ.”** We have already touched on this point in LC #39 but a few other points should be added. We read in Eph. 1:5 that God predestined us “for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ” (εἰς υἰοθεσίαν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). That was God’s purpose in Christ, to adopt us. Redemption enabled adoption (Gal. 4:4-5).²¹ Paul mentions “adoption” in Eph. 1:5 (a Graeco-Roman term that enabled the childless patron or a patron endeared with someone not his child to inherit the privileges of his new father). We are redeemed to inherit (Eph. 1:7) and adoption enables us to inherit all things in Christ. Notice how Paul argues this point in Rom. 8:17, “if children, then heirs— heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...” Calvin explains this well in his commentary, “It is for children that inheritance is appointed: since God then has adopted us as his children, he has at the same time ordained an inheritance for us.”

Now coming back to the point, our adoption comes to us **“in and for his only Son Jesus Christ.”** The inheritance we jointly receive with the Lord comes to us because we are united to Him. There is no adoption without Christ; it is a redemptive mercy conferred upon us. No one is a child of God except in his union with Christ (“in”) and he is God’s child on account of Christ (“for”— “Behold, I and the children God has given me.” Heb. 2:13; cf. Is. 8:18). That is why John 1:12, 13 states it this way, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right (ἐξουσίαν) to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Faith in Christ, relationship with Him through faith automatically translates us into the status of sonship — they have a right or authority to their sonship in Christ. Leon Morris says, “John does not say that they achieve or attain or merit membership in God’s family, as though they make their own way in. He says that they are given the right. The right is God’s gift. Receiving this gift, they ‘become’ members of the family. They

¹⁸ Beeke, *Heirs with Christ*, 31.

¹⁹ Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 162.

²⁰ Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 161.

²¹ We dealt with the historical biblical theological flow of this doctrine from Gal. 4:5 in our study of the LC #39.

were outside the family; they did not belong. Now they have been given the right to become members; they do belong.”²²

Before moving on to the next clause in the LC, we must consider the significance of what we just noted. There is no sonship, no adoption without Christ. A person must receive Christ, consciously and surely. He may not remember when he did (as a covenant child) but he personally believes and receives Christ offered to him in the gospel. How do you know whether you are a child of God? Have you believed in Christ? What does it mean to believe in Him? It is to place your personal *faith* in Him and to *follow* Him. Faith assumes a responsive life. One’s sense of belonging to God as His child is directly and intimately related to one’s own faith in Christ. The “right” to be a child of God, this privilege and gift, comes to you as you believe in Christ. It is not from natural birth because “flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” (Jn. 3:6). When the Bible says “not of blood” it means not of natural descent (heritage, race, etc.); “nor of the will of the flesh” means not of human decision; “nor of the will of man (ἀνθρώπου)” means that it is not dependent upon the husband’s decision. To be a child of God is a gift. It comes through faith in Christ — “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (Gal. 3:26). And this birth comes from God (“but of God”). Are you “born of God” (Jn. 1:13 TNIV) or “born of the Spirit” (Jn. 3:8)?

Received into the Number

Only the justified are adopted. Notice how this is phrased, “**whereby all those that are justified...**” As we noted above, adoption comes through Christ and Christ is ours through faith. In believing in him, we are justified. In the order of our salvation (logically considered), adoption springs from justification. The two are related but are also distinct. Ferguson said, “In human terms it is quite possible to imagine a man being justified without the remotest thought of his being adopted.”²³ Yet in Christianity, that is not the case. Believing in Christ entitles [gives the right to] the sinner to become a child of God. Pardoned justified *sinner*s become pardoned justified *sons of God*.

The first element of adoption needs some explanation: “**whereby all those that are justified are received into the number of his children...**” The idea of being received into the number of his children is not commonly used. The WCF says something similar when it says “taken into the number” (12.1) while the SC #34 has, “whereby we are received into the number.” This phrase simply means each believer becomes one of the many children of God. The number of God’s elect is finite (“their number are certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished” [WCF 3.4]) and consequently, the number of God’s children is also certain and definite. God, as it were, is the ultimate family planner. He planned the “number of his children” and he knows exactly how many He will have and who they are. To be received into this number means we fit into His eternal family plan. Remember, God “predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ...” (Eph. 1:5) and “The Lord knows those who are his” (2Tim. 2:19).

²² Leon Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 12. Sometimes the word is translated as “power.” The word *dunamis* (power) is not used (cf. C. K. Barrett) in John; one is not enabled to become a child of God by some invested power within him (Calvin addresses the RC view that seems to appeal to Jn. 1:12 to prove human merit and power).

²³ Cited in Beeke, *Heirs with Christ*, 32.

His Name and Spirit

To be received into the number means that the children of God “**have his name put upon them, the Spirit of his Son given to them...**” We are legally His children; we have His name. “And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” (2Cor. 6:18) As He calls us His sons and daughters, we are also promised that He “will write upon [us] the name of my God” (Rev. 3:12). But we His people are already called by His name as God refers to His people as “my people who are called by my name” (2Chron. 7:14). What does this mean? God is legally our Father and we are members of His glorious household. “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...” (Eph. 2:19) In this verse, Paul mentions two privileges, we are citizens in God’s kingdom and family members in His household. “In Christ Gentiles are not only fellow-citizens with Jewish believers under God’s rule; they are also children together in God’s own family.”²⁴ A believer may not *feel* himself to be a child of God yet the translation from being a child of Satan to being a child of God is binding and permanent. The name is on him. Fisher offers a helpful illustration: “as the wife’s name is sunk unto her husband’s, so the former name of the adopted is sunk unto Christ’s new name, Rev. iii. 12, ‘I will write upon him my new name.’”²⁵ God is our Father and we His children; His name is upon us forever!

The latter phrase “**the Spirit of his Son given to them**” adds a very necessary dimension to the nature of our adoption. The new name, the new family status, is legal, external, and permanent. But God did not stop there. The Spirit of God’s Son is given to us who enables us to cry Abba, Father. Because we are indeed God’s children by adoption, God gives us the Spirit (“And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” Gal. 4:6). The logic here is unmistakable. Because we are indeed God’s sons, Paul says, God therefore sends the Spirit into our hearts. The German liberal commentator actually explains this verse very well. “God bestows on us not only the status of sons [through the sending of his Son] but also the character and knowledge of sons [through the sending of the Spirit]. And he bestows on us the character and knowledge of sons because we are already in the status of sons.”²⁶ That is, the Holy Spirit who comes to us through the mediation of Christ enables us to respond as genuine sons. Notice how the verse states that the Spirit is sent into our hearts (εἰς τὰς καρδίας ἡμῶν).

It is not uncommon to meet adopted children who don’t feel like they are part of the family or that their adoptive parents are really their own. The new parents may bend over backwards to reach out to their adopted son but they cannot put a filial spirit into him. That he feels himself to be a part of their family or that at his gut level he is indeed their beloved son are dispositions the parents cannot impart. Yet this sad dilemma will not occur for genuine believers. The Holy Spirit actually enables us to instinctively (and therefore ‘naturally’) cry out to God as our heavenly father. That instinct, that filial disposition, that family feeling, etc. come out of us because of the Holy Spirit. We have received “the Spirit of adoption as sons” (Rom. 8:15). Therefore the legal

²⁴ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (PNTC; Accordance electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 211-212.

²⁵ James Fisher, *The Assembly’s Shorter Catechism Explained, By Way of Question and Answer. In Two Parts.* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, nd), 168.

²⁶ H. Schlier, *Galater*, 197 cited in F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: a Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Accordance electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 198.

status of adoption with God's name upon us includes the Holy Spirit who enables us to look to our heavenly father. A child of God is not "trained" by man to call upon God; he is enabled by the Holy Spirit to cry out to His heavenly father.

Under the Father's Care

The privileges of being adopted include God's fatherly care: **"are under his fatherly care and dispensations."** The verses used to support this phrase are interesting. Our heavenly Father's pity or compassion from Ps. 103:13 is mentioned ("As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.") along with the privilege of being able to take refuge in Him in Prov. 14:26 ("In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge."). The great promise of Mt. 6:32 that our heavenly Father is well aware of our needs is also mentioned ("For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.").

All these privileges are wonderful as well as comforting. God cares for us; He is concerned and is compassionate towards us. Good fathers feel the pain of their sons and daughters; their compassion or pity go out towards their children. If they can wisely relieve their children in their distress, they would. Yet, their compassion is not matched by their power. They may weep on account of their son's struggle but is powerless to do anything about it. Our heavenly fatherly is not so limited. If he does not relieve, it is not because he does not care or that he is unable to take care of the problem. Our father has wisely chosen not to intervene though his bowels of compassion are moved. Furthermore, we are reminded that because He cares for us, we can take refuge in Him (Prov. 14:26). We can be safe in Him because of He is a strong tower. Like an earthly father, he cares for us. Yet, he cares for us far better than we deserve.

Most of the writers who explain the Catechisms and Confession mention God's fatherly discipline (Ridgeley, Beattie, Fisher, Green, etc.). The LC states that we are under God's **dispensations**. This means we are under our heavenly father's government, his order, control, oversight, etc. It would include chastening as our Confession states. The WCF states that we are "pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by him, as by a father..." (12.1). Though the verses cited for the LC do not list Heb. 12:6 like the WCF, yet the truth of the point can easily be seen. We are under our father's care and government; we are under his special dealings with us as our father which would at times include discipline. Whatever we need, we will receive from our Father, even discipline because He loves us: "For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives" (Heb. 12:6). We are illegitimate children and not sons if we are not disciplined by Him (Heb. 12:8). What the divines seem to be teaching is that we are under the father's care and that includes whatever we might need (both positive and negative [though they are ultimately all positive]) as his children. Ridgeley summarized it this way:

As God's children are prone to backslide from him, and so have need of restoring grace, he will recover and humble them, and thereby prevent their total apostasy. This he sometimes does by afflictions, which the apostle calls fatherly chastisements, and which he reckons not only consistent with his love, but evidences of it. 'Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth;' and 'if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.' The apostle speaks here, of afflictions, not as considered absolutely in themselves, but as proceeding from the love of God, as designed to do them

good, and as adapted to the present state, in which they are training up for the glorious inheritance reserved for them in heaven, and need some trying dispensations which may put them in mind of that state of perfect blessedness which is laid up for them. These afflictions are rendered subservient to their present and future advantage. In the present life, they ‘bring forth the peaceful fruits of righteousness’ to them; and when they are in the end perfectly freed from them, they will tend to enhance their joy and praise.²⁷

The difficulties in life come to us “under his fatherly...dispensations.” They are not to crush us but to correct us; they are not given to destroy us but to demonstrate his love to us as His children. “Thus, many of the ills of this life may turn out to be blessings in disguise, while the chastisement itself is a proof of the love of God, and of their adoption into his family.”²⁸ Because we are His children, our heavenly Father brings difficulties into our lives: “It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons.” (Heb. 12:7)

Liberties and Privileges

The last thing listed in the answer is that we are **“admitted to all the liberties and privileges of the sons of God, made heirs of all the promises, and fellow-heirs with Christ in glory.”**

Rather than listing everything that could pertain to our adoption, the divines simply summarize the point as being admitted to all the **liberties and privileges**. Part of that liberty of course is that as children, we are free from the law (as a means of salvation and from its condemning power). Paul says, “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” (Gal. 5:1) The privileges include access to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16), we have “access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph. 2:18). Paul’s statement reveals so much. It is not just that we have access to God per se (that we have in Christ) but we have access to the *Father* — that is the language of sonship, adoption, and God’s fatherhood.

The privilege underscored in the LC is our inheritance. We are exhorted to persevere “through faith and patience” to “inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:12). The great privilege of sonship is that we will inherit all that God has promised to us in Christ. We cited this before but it is a helpful reminder: “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” (Rom. 8:17) The divines used this verse to come up with “and fellow-heirs with Christ in glory.”

Conclusion

1. Calvin said, “For until men recognize that they owe everything to God, that they are nourished by his fatherly care, that he is the Author of their every good, that they should seek nothing beyond him— they will never yield him willing service.” (*Institutes*, 1.1.1, p. 41) This is the essence of piety. Are you convinced of God’s fatherly care? Do you believe you are actually nourished by his fatherly care? If not, you will never yield him willing service.
2. One of the implications of adoption is as our Confession teaches that when we are chastised, we are “never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption; and inherit the promises, as heirs of everlasting salvation.” God will never disown his children. May we find encouragement in this!
3. Earthly fathers can and will fail us but our heavenly Father will not. To know the love of the Father is to look at the cross, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while

²⁷ Thomas Ridgley, *A Body of Divinity, Volume 2* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1855), 136.

²⁸ Beattie, *The Presbyterian Standards*, 215-6.

we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:8, NASB)

INCOMPLETE...

Addendum

Candlish and Crawford apparently debated the nature of sonship in the Garden of Eden. Was Adam a son in the garden?

Regeneration and Adoption

John Murray wrote, “Regeneration is the prerequisite of adoption. It is the same Holy Spirit who regenerates who is also sent into the hearts of the adopted, crying Abba Father. But adoption itself is not simply regeneration, nor is it the Spirit of adoption — the one is prerequisite, the other is consequent.”²⁹

R. A. Webb gives a whole chapter to this issue.

See Beeke’s chapter on this.

External & Federal vs. Internal & Real

Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*

Roger Drake (in *Puritan Sermons*)

“*External and federal*, (Exod. 4:22; Rom. 9:4,) by virtue of external profession and church-membership. (Gen. 6:1. Compare Job 1:6.) By “sons of God,” in this last place, may be understood either professors or the angels. This sonship may be lost; as is evident by the Jews, who are now cut off. (Rom. 9:7, 8; 11:15, 19, 20, 23, 31.) Yet so high is this privilege, that, in comparison of such adopted children, persons without the pale are called “dogs.” (Matt. 15:26.)”³⁰

PCA BCO on “federally holy.”

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²⁹ John Murray, *Redemption — Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 133-134.

³⁰ James Nichols, *Puritan Sermons, Volume 5* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, Publishers, 1981), 329-30. The sermon is entitled, “The Believer’s Dignity and Duty Laid Open...”