



Scripture Reading: 1 John Ch3:1

"The Family of God."

If there is one doctrine or aspect of Christian teaching that is conspicuous by its absence in preaching, it must be the doctrine of adoption. By adoption I mean that divinely revealed truth that teaches the believer that he or she has not only by grace been Justified and saved, but brought into a living organic relationship that is marked by fellowship with God, with His Son and with one another. This theme was particularly dear to the hearts of the English and American Puritans, who saw this truth as one that touched on every area of life. In the writings of the Apostles particularly John and Paul this teaching was very much at the heart of their preaching, that men are justified by an act of grace, but one of the benefits of that Justification is our placement within the family of God. John in fact commences his epistle with this very theme, (v3) "*And truly our fellowship is with the father, and with His son Jesus Christ.*" John begins with a presupposition that those to whom he writes are already justified and in a position whereby fellowship with Christ and God is possible...he doesn't mention salvation/justification, but treats that which is a benefit of justification - I.e. a familial relationship with God. John continues to develop this thought of fellowship with God right up until Ch3v1 where we have the words, "*Behold what manner of love the father hath bestowed on us that we should be called the sons of God.*" The word 'sons' could be rendered 'children' it carries with it a legal entitlement, it marks out the position and status of those brought out of the world. John writes of these things because of the immense practical application that it affords to the Christian. One of the primary reasons for writing of these things is v4 "*That your joy might be full.*" The fruit of understanding our adoption among other things will inevitably be joy.

1) The Foundation of our Sonship.

The initial cause of our being brought into the family of God and becoming sons of God is not to be found within ourselves, but is secured in the Love of God. The apostle John says, "*Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be the sons of God.*" It is God's Love that initiated this relationship, there was nothing in us or about us that moved God to save and adopt us, nothing that would even move the heart of God to Love us. Being called to the family of God is something that can only be attributed to the sovereign Grace of God. Paul in Eph Ch1v4&5, that it is "*According as he hath chosen us in him...having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ.*" adoption is gracious act of God. Turn to Deut Ch7v6, "*I have not set my love upon you because...*"

God is said to bestow upon sinners love, sinners do not merit God's love, God bestows it upon whom He will, Ch4v10, "*Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us...*", Ch5v19, "*we love him, because he first loved us.*" this bestowal of love has a purpose. The word 'that' can be read 'in order that' (read the verse that way), "*What love God hath bestowed upon us 'in order that' we should be named the Children of God.*" In becoming Son's of God, God has actually bestowed His nature on us, as 'God is essentially love' 1 John Ch4v8. Without the Love of God bestowed to us and placed in us, we cannot be a son of God. This is seen in the natural realm... The natural son born into the family has the nature and likeness of his father...yet the adopted son has not that likeness or nature. In the spiritual sense we by nature are the children of the devil, we are not naturally born as children of God, we do not have God's likeness or nature...What is it that changes that? What is it that makes us compatible with God? It is God bestowing His love upon us...The Love of God is especially seen in the Spirits work within us, What does Paul say in Romans Ch5v5, "*The Love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost...*" It is the same word (to gush, pour forth), "*an abundant effusion.*" It is by the Holy Ghost implanting the love of God in the hearts of sinners that we receive a new nature, a new will, new affections new desires. Regeneration (spoken of as *a work of the Spirit of God which has its root in the love of God*) is bestowed upon us 'in order that' we should be called the sons of God. We are transferred from our natural family into the holy household of God. Being a son of God presupposes the Love of God bestowed and revealed in us. In other words entrance into the family of God only comes by regeneration - but that anyone is regenerated remains encased in the love of God. The love of God in adoption stands out as something altogether marvellous when we see it as something that we did not want, we are rebels (it is not that we were orphans and fatherless with nobody wanting us, we loved our father the devil), yet God transformed our thinking and brought us to our senses.

Having understood the foundation of our sonship we want to consider:

2) The Privileges of Our Sonship.

Being part of the family of God affords certain privileges or benefits to those who are denominated the Son's of God. God endowed upon us blessings and benefits. Mention a few.

a) A New Name. When the Father adopts a renewed sinner into His family, God gives that man/woman a new name and the old name is forever laid aside. We are no longer called the children of the devil, but the 'Sons and daughters' of God. Like the woman on her marriage day she takes her husband's name. The change of name signifying a change in her status in her relationship...a union with her husband. Only the bride of Christ receives this name - Son of God. I now belong to Christ, His name is my name - Son of God. Rev 2v17, 3v12. What a name. Parents know what kind of deliberation goes into choosing a name for a new born child...here is a name that no parent can bestow upon a child, only God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Adoption transforms our relationship to God.

b) Loved By the Father as Christ is Loved. Adoption results in identification with Christ - Ch4v17, "*As he is so are we in this present world.*" Romans Ch8v17, "*...we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.*" That means that all the Father's feelings of Love and satisfaction towards Christ are the very same towards I, and unchangeable so. Even when we forget our father, and feel that He is disappointed with us, let us remember that that cannot be so, because as Sons we are joint heirs with Christ and loved as such.

c) Access to God. Ch5v14-15. Because God is our father and we are His sons we have access to Him at anytime. When we were

regenerated, we were given the spirit of adoption whereby we can cry 'Abba Father.' in our sinful condition we did not have that right or privilege, access to God remains only the possession of the Child of God. As we approach God through prayer His fellowship with us is characterised by His love and by patience. As a father I take great delight in my children coming and wanting to talk to me. There are those times that I am not ready to talk, it's been a long day, they come with armfuls of books, lets read and commune father. Very often I don't exercise the love and patience that my heavenly father does towards me. God delights (loves) to have his children come and commune with him in prayer.

Also we can become so busy so taken up with ourselves so as to neglect this privilege of access. Very often we take it for granted. Familiarity with God ought not to lead to the place whereby we become us accustomed to our access to God
"No more veil God bids me enter. By the new and living way. Not in trembling hope I venture. Boldly I His call obey...Oh the welcome I have found there, God in all His love made known. Oh the glories that surround there. Those accepted in His Son."

3) The Responsibilities of our Sonship. (Here the practicalities of our adoption are seen to flow forth).

Not only does adoption transform our relationship to God but to one another. The familial relationship into which the sinner is brought imposes upon him new responsibilities 3-fold.

i) To ourselves. The responsibilities relating to ourselves are several, these are especially developed in the writings of Paul. Ephesians Ch4:1 "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" - The earlier chapters Paul established the believers position as being adopted into the family of God, he now says, 'Therefore walk in a fashion that was becoming or suitable to a member of the household of God.' There were certain expectations that were required of the Ephesians because of their familial position. They obviously had forgotten this, and Paul reminds them, (v17), 'walk not as other Gentiles walk' (v22), 'put off the old conversation' (v25), 'put away lying, anger, stealing' give no place to the devil, Ch5v1 'but be ye followers of God as dear children, and walk in love' Why put these things away? (v8), 'For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.' How we act reflects our sonship, Our behaviour reflects back upon our Father (The Child a representative). Matt Ch5v16, "Let your light so shine before men...that you Father may be Glorified." Test of our sonship v10-12 - does my life expose the darkness around me? That is why we are hated (Cain and Abel).

How does a minister (how do we) deal with sin, not by scolding, by bringing our hearts and minds back to our position in the family of God.

ii) To Others. Our adoption furnishes us with responsibilities towards our Brethren. The Son's of God are all one in God's Family, united by Faith to Christ and one another. That unity is to be expressed by our love for one another. In 1John Ch2v9-11 John presents our treatment of other Christians as a further test of our being a true Son of God, "He that saith he is in the light is in darkness even until now." The word 'hateh' means to detest, lovelessness to withdraw/withhold love from that brother. Puritan John Cotton, "To hate a brother, is to still abide in a state of damnation and in a state of darkness." This was a great problem among the Ephesians, Christians criticising fellow Christians Ch4v25, "Speak every man truth with his neighbour for we are members one of the other." And as for criticism let it not be once named among the saints Paul says.

How do we remove a critical spirit from among the Lord's people? By using the same method as Paul and John - reminding believers of the oneness of the family of God, and their duty to maintain that unity. Criticism of the family of God is exceedingly offensive to Christ (The Husband and wife e.g.).

It is according to the doctrine of adoption that we deal with our differences and problems, we go to that brother/sister and conscious that we both are members of the one family, 'my brother I have not viewed you in a way that I ought to have, forgive me and let us put things right.' If the love of God be in us then ought not our hearts as John Murray put it, "suffused in the love of God" for one another.

iii) To God. This will be seen in A Conscious loving obedience to God's Commands. John Ch14:15, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." 1John Ch5v3, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." 1 John 3v24, "And He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in Him...and hereby we know that He abideth in us."

How grieving it is to a father to see his children disobeying his word, yet how satisfying for a Father to see a son lovingly fulfil His fathers commands (I know of a preacher who on an overseas visit, was accepting hospitality at two different homes - at both homes he observed how the children obeyed their parents - their was a distinction, - in one under threat of punishment, in the other out of Love). How glorifying to God that we as His children, graciously brought into his family render a loving obedience to Him.

Unsaved who are fatherless, you need to plead your fatherless condition, you need to consider the wretched case of the family to which you belong (Satan's family). He is a terrible father, he hates your soul even now in your sinful condition as you bear the image of God, his evil heart is moved only to bring about your damnation.

John Newton summed it all up as he thought on what he once had been but now through grace was.

See! the streams of living waters, Springing from eternal love; Well supply thy sons and daughters, And all my fear of want remove:	Passing is the worldling's pleasure, All his boasted pomp and show; Solid joys and lasting treasure None but <u>Zion's children</u> know	Savior, if of Zion's city, I through grace a member am, Let the world deride or pity, I will glory in Thy Name.
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"God has made his children, by adoption nearer to himself than the angels. The angels are the friends of Christ; believers are His members." ...Thomas Watson...