

Adoption #1: An Introduction

Adoption

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Bible Text: 1 John 3:1-3
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The following sermon was delivered on Sunday morning, October 28, 2007 at Trinity Baptist Church in Montville, NJ.

I would ask you to turn with me to 1 John. John's first letter, chapter 3 as I read in your hearing just the first three verses. 1 John 3:1-3.

1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this cause the world does not know us, because it knew him not. 2 Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. 3 And every one that has this hope set on him continually purifies himself, even as he is pure.

Now, those of you sitting here this morning who have been nurtured under the ministry coming from this pulpit for any length of time have been frequently reminded of this basic fact of biblical teaching and it is this: if we are true Christians vitally joined to Jesus Christ by a living faith and by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, knowing who we are in Christ and understanding what we possess in Christ is foundational to living a life well pleasing to Christ. You and I if we are to live the Christian life as it is set before us in the Scriptures, it is essential that we know who we are in Christ and understand what we possess in Christ.

Now, in seeking to set forth one of the most amazing realities of who we are in Christ and what we possess in Christ, I preached to you 25 messages on that gracious provision of God's saving grace called justification and I would like to believe and I hope it's not a preacher's dream, I would like to believe that many of you can truthfully testify that a clearer and more biblically grounded understanding of who you are and what you are in the light of God's gracious work of justification has already resulted in discernible measures of greater joy, greater stability and greater confidence in your walk with God as well as more confidence as you face the ultimate reality of your own death and going to judgment without fear. And furthermore, I would like to think that the result of those 25

studies is that it has fueled your zeal to share with others so great a salvation as is set before the vilest of sinners when God offers in Christ the blessing of justification.

Today, we begin a series of studies on another wonderful provision of God's saving grace in Christ, a provision which raises us even higher in privilege than does our justification, a provision of God's saving grace which God intends should shape the contours and determine the climate of our entire relationship with himself, not only in this life but throughout the ages of eternity. And what is such a provision, you may be asking? Well, I answer: it is that act of God by which because of the work of Christ on our behalf we are constituted the sons and the daughters of the living God and given the right to address this God as our Father. That act of God which makes this all possible is called in Scripture adoption or the placing of men and women as his sons and his daughters. If ever it is true that the works of the Lord are great, sought out of all those that have pleasure in them, Psalm 111:2, it should be true of us as the people of God in contemplating the nature of this provision of God's saving grace in Christ. A focused consideration of this truth of adoption brought the Apostle John into nothing less than a state of holy reverie and disciplined ecstasy when he wrote, "Behold," a simple, terse imperative. "Stand back. Look with me in amazement. Behold what manner, what kind of love God has bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God." His amazement is not precipitated by the truth of God's provision of justification, but by his marvelous provision of adoption.

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are." More terse in the original, "and we are." It's not just God holding out a title that exceeds reality, John says, it is a title; it is a description that accords with reality and we are. And I trust that as a result of our meditations upon this amazing provision of God's saving grace, notice I did not say, our consideration of this doctrine. I am deliberately refusing to call these things doctrines and though it means a few more words every time, I am doing it deliberately and once and a while "doctrine" comes out of my pen and it gets whited out, not deleted, I still use my pen, my Parker pen given to me some 25 years ago to write out my sermons. And I refuse to have the word "doctrine" only because too often we think of these things, "Oh doctrine, that's the dry, dusty stuff," but if you're a Christian, you cannot hear the words "marvelous provision of God's salvation in Christ" without your heart being warmed within you and saying, "O God, your works are indeed great and I want to seek them out because I do have pleasure in them."

When anyone is brought into a family in our experience, they're brought into that family one of two ways: they are either birthed into that family as a result of the union of the mother and father, or they are brought in by a legal transaction called adoption and likewise, when we turn to the word of God, we find a similar emphasis set before us and our focus is going to be upon that being brought into God's family by this legal transaction called in the Bible adoption. Now, what I propose to do in this initial message on adoption is three things. They will be disproportionate in length. Heading 1 will take up the bulk of our time and it's this: I want to identify and explain three crucial distinctions concerning adoption as a provision of God's saving grace in Christ, and then

a very few minutes on headings 2 and 3. 2. I want to issue a necessary word of pastoral caution as we study this wonderful provision of God's saving grace in Christ and then, thirdly, I want to give a brief word of Gospel entreaty. So gird up the loins of your mind with me as, first of all and primarily in the time allotted, I seek with you to identify and to explain three crucial distinctions concerning adoption as a provision of God's saving grace in Christ.

Here's the first: adoption is a blessing of God's salvation in Christ distinct from but never separated from justification. Adoption is a blessing of God's salvation in Christ distinct from but never separated from justification. I trust that many of you could now clearly state what justification is and that which constitutes that blessing of God's saving grace. It is that act of God's free grace unto sinners in which he does two wonderful things: he pardons all of our sins past, present and future in terms of their liability to legal punishment. He does not pardon and forgive our ongoing sins within the family of God until we confess them but in terms of our sins past, present and future, ever causing us to behold into the court of God's judgment and legally punished for them. Justification settles the matter of our legal liability to punishment for sin. He pardons all of our sins and, secondly, he accepts and accounts us as righteous in his sight. He credits to us the perfect law-keeping of Jesus as well as the substitutionary curse bearing of Jesus. One is a negation, pardon; the other is a conferral.

Now, when some theologians and writers on this subject have treated the subject of justification, they have taken that second aspect of God crediting to us the perfect righteousness of Christ thereby accepting and receiving us as righteous and they have taught that that basically is all adoption is, that adoption is basically another way of expressing this second aspect of justification, God's acceptance and receiving of us as righteous. However, although justification and adoption are both legal acts of God and relate to declarations that God makes concerning us which are external to us, they are not identical. There is a family of words in the Bible to describe God's work of adopting us into his family, a family of words entirely different from the words that have to do with justification. Furthermore, when we open up our Bibles, we find that adoption is treated as a matter of its own right and therefore while we rejoice that we are brought into God's favor in our justification as one man has said very helpfully, in justification we are brought into present acceptance by God as the world's Judge, in justification we are brought into present acceptance by God as the world's Judge, however, in adoption we are brought into permanent intimacy with God as our heavenly Father. J. I. Packer who wrote those words says, "To be right with God the Judge is a great thing but to be loved by God and cared for by God the Father is even a greater thing."

Imagine a man who has been a guilty felon and he has been justly and righteously pardoned in the court of law so that when he walks down the street and he happens to see the judge pass by, he has no fear that he's going to be apprehended and dragged before the judge and from the judge's mouth hear words of condemnation. It's a wonderful thing to him to be able to walk by the judge and say with a smile on his face and no fear in his heart, "Good morning, judge." That's one thing, but to be able to take his arm and lock it into the judge's arm and say, "Hi, dad. I didn't know you were going this way. I'd like to

walk home with you together." Ah, that's something different. It's one thing no longer to be fearful of the judge, it's another thing to have a relationship with the judge of the intimacy of a father and a son. And so it is as we embark upon this study of adoption, it is necessary that you and I understand that it is a blessing of God's salvation in Christ distinct from, although never separated from, justification.

Listen to J. I. Packer's words from his book, his classic book, "Knowing God," on this very thing. Our first point about adoption is that it

"is the highest privilege that the Gospel offers, higher even than justification. This may cause the raising of eyebrows for justification is the gift of God on which, since Luther, evangelicals have laid the greatest stress and we are accustomed to say almost without thinking that free justification is God's supreme blessing to sinners. Nonetheless, careful thought will show the truth of the statement we have just made that adoption is the highest privilege that the Gospel offers; that justification by which we mean God's forgiveness of the past together with his acceptance for the future—is the primary and fundamental blessing of the Gospel is not in question. Justification is the primary blessing, because it meets our primary spiritual need. We all stand by nature under God's judgment; his law condemns us; guilt gnaws at us, making us restless, miserable, and in our lucid moments afraid; we have no peace in ourselves because we have no peace with our Maker. So we need the forgiveness of our sins, and assurance of a restored relationship with God, more than we need anything else in the world; and this the Gospel offers us before it offers us anything else.

"But this is not to say that justification is the highest blessing, it is the primary but not the highest. Adoption is higher, because of the richer relationship with God that it involves. Some textbooks on Christian doctrine," and then he names one, "Berkhof's, for instance, treat adoption as a mere subsection of justification, but this is inadequate. The two ideas are distinct, and adoption is the more exalted. Justification is a forensic idea, conceived in terms of law, and viewing God as judge. In justification, God declares of penitent believers that they are not, and never will be, liable to the death that their sins deserve, because Jesus Christ, their substitute and sacrifice, tasted death in their place on the cross.

"This free gift of acquittal and peace, won for us at the cost of Calvary, is wonderful enough, in all conscience but justification does not in itself imply any intimate or deep relationship with God the judge. In idea, at any rate, you could have the reality of justification without any close fellowship with God resulting. But contrast this, now, with adoption. Adoption is a family idea, conceived in terms of love, and viewing God as

father. In adoption, God takes us into his family and fellowship and establishes us as his children and his heirs."

Thus far, Dr. Packer, they are different though inseparable and God never, never adopts a sinner whom he has not justified and God never justifies a sinner whom he does not likewise adopt into his family. And I was tempted to add another word in that heading: adoption is a blessing of God's salvation in Christ distinct from, higher than but never separated from, justification and perhaps hearing myself preach, I should have added it.

Now then, we have a second introductory but necessary issue to address and it's this: adoption is a blessing of God's salvation in Christ distinct but never separated from regeneration. Adoption is a blessing of God's salvation in Christ distinct but never separated from regeneration. According to the Scriptures, all Christians are brought into God's family and can claim God as their Father along two lines. I alluded to this earlier: they are born into God's family, they are born again into his family, they are regenerated; and they are adopted into his family and these are distinct though never separate in Christian experience. In the act of adopting us into his family, God puts us in the legal standing of his sons and his daughters.

Look with me at the familiar text in the first chapter of John's Gospel, John 1:11. Speaking of our Lord, "He came to his own, and they that were his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he the right," he gave authority, "to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name." Here the act of adoption into God's family becomes a legal right to all who embrace the Lord Jesus Christ. But in the work of regeneration or new birth, God is not giving us the right or title to sonship, but he is giving us the nature, the disposition and the character of his sons and his daughters. In one, he's giving the right and title to be placed as son or daughter, but in the other, he is giving the nature, the disposition and the character of his sons and daughters and you see this clearly established again and again in the book of 1 John.

Let's just look at two specimen passages, 1 John 2:29, "If you know that he is righteous, you know that every one that does righteousness is begotten of him." In other words, in the new birth God is imparting the nature and the disposition and the character of his sons and daughters, the family likeness of the Father himself which is righteousness. Thence John can say in chapter 3, verses 9 and 10, "Whoever is begotten of God does not make a practice of sin," I render it that way because of the tense of the verb, "because his seed," the principle of divine life, "implanted in him," notice, not the status given to him external to him but the seed, the principle of divine life implanted in him, "and he cannot make a practice of sin," why? "Because he is begotten of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, neither he that does not love his brother."

So we see that these things are distinct. He gives the right to become the children of God but in that very passage in John 1, John goes on to say in verse 13, describing those who having received the Lord Jesus and having been given thereby the right to become the children of God, John goes on to say that they are also born of God, verse 13, "who were

born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." So here John brings the two aspects into this closest and inseparable relationship: adoption into God's family, legal right and title being birthed into God's family; the impartation of the very nature, disposition and character of the family of God. So they are distinct but they are inseparable. God's work in making us sons and daughters by the new work is his gracious, powerful, transforming work in us and it is a massive and vital truth but that's not our focus, our focus is what God does when he takes alienated sons and daughters fallen in Adam and he constitutes them his sons and his daughters by grace on the basis of the work of our Lord Jesus. It is a legal declaration external to us just as justification. The Shorter Catechism asks the question: what is adoption? And it answers: 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.

Now, there's a third crucial distinction that I need to set before you. We've seen adoption is a blessing of God's salvation in Christ distinct but never separated from justification; adoption is a blessing of God's saving grace in Christ distinct but never separate from regeneration; now here's the third distinction: the fatherhood of God resulting from our adoption into the family of God is distinct from the other fatherhoods of God mentioned in the Bible. When we start reading our Bibles, we find a number of fatherhoods in which God says, "I am relating to this person or to these people as a Father." And we might be tempted to say, "Well, that means they are adopted in the sense that we are studying this great provision of God's salvation," but that's not so. Fatherhood by God is a nuanced reality in the Bible and if we do not grasp this distinction, we will not be sure-footed in reading our Bibles. There are many references to God that speak of him as Father, but not in the same sense in which he becomes our Father by adoption in Christ under the new covenant.

So I want to spend just a few minutes with you tracing out these categories of the different fatherhoods of God and here I have been greatly helped by Professor Murray in his collected works, volume 2, pages 223-225, and I'm giving you distilled Professor Murray with more popular vocabulary than Professor Murray uses. First of all, there is the intertrinitarian fatherhood of God. Within the very being of God in the mystery of the one-in-three and the three-in-one is an eternal and unchanging fatherhood between what we call the first person and the second person of the Godhead. Jesus always was, is, and ever shall be the only begotten Son, never a time when he was not the eternal Son of the eternal Father.

Now, the minute we begin to think in those categories, our minds are stretched and then they go from being stretched to feeling paralyzed, but Jesus as we now know him, the eternal Word, was always in relationship to the Father, he was the Son, eternally the Son of the eternal Father, and the highest and most elevated privileges of adoptive sonship that we experience never impinge upon or merge into the utterly transcendent and unique sonship of the second person of the Godhead. While Scripture teaches aspects of our Lord's sonship with respect to his work of redemption, you have such language, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee," that has to do with his position of exaltation in his own life history as the incarnate Lord of glory, but that is not saying he was not the Son

until he was raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father. There are passages where these various nuances are found, however, the fatherhood of God is essential to the very being of God as is the sonship of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So you have intertrinitarian fatherhood of God, secondly, you have the creative fatherhood of God. Adam is called "son of God." He is called "son of God." Furthermore, we read in such passages as Acts 17:28-29, "we are the offspring of God." Hebrews 12:9, God is designated as "the Father of spirits." However, there is no basis in these texts for the so-called universal fatherhood of God doctrine made popular by the liberal theologians of the early 20th century and is now an integral part of pop theology. Everybody talks about, "Well, we need to love everybody. We're all children of God." That's nonsense. We are all the creation of God, yes, and in that sense God is our Father, but not in the sense in which that terminology is used so flippantly and carelessly as though we all stand in this intimate filial relationship to God when the Bible says by nature we are the children of the devil, when the Scripture tells us that our spiritual father is not God our Creator but the devil himself.

So we have the creative fatherhood of God, the intertrinitarian fatherhood of God with respect to the Son, and then when we pick up our Bibles, especially the Old Testament and a couple of verses in the New Testament, we find what we could call the theocratic fatherhood of God, that is, God's unique relationship to the nation of Israel as Father and as son. In Romans 9:4 where the apostle is speaking of blessings given to the Jews, he said, "who are Israelites; whose is the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants," and the term used there for adoption, *huiothesia*, is the very term that is most prominent in describing our adoption in Christ under the new covenant but in some sense, that nation was God's son. Professor Murray lists 10+ texts which clearly teach that Israel as a nation was called God's son and God designates himself as Israel's Father. One specimen text, Exodus 4:22-23, "And you shall say unto Pharaoh," speaking to Moses, God speaking to Moses, "Thus says the Lord, Israel is my son, my first-born: and I have said unto you, Let my son go, that he may serve me; and you have refused to let him go: behold, I will slay your son, your first-born." So God refers to Israel as his son, that's theocratic fatherhood. That does not assure the salvation of those within that fatherhood, in fact, the Scriptures tell us that for the vast majority of those who constituted God's sons, they were not his spiritual children; they are not all Israel who are of Israel. The mark of that whole nation was hardness and stubbornness of heart.

But then we come to what is the focus of our study, that is, the individual redemptive fatherhood of God under the blessings of the new covenant held out to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is new covenant, individual, redemptive fatherhood through union with Jesus Christ. Galatians 3 addresses this fatherhood in the most explicit terms. Galatians 3:26, "For you are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus." This is the adoptive privilege that will be the focus of our study. Paul goes on to address it in chapter 4, verse 4, "when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God sent

forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So you are no longer a bondservant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God."

Now, dear people, I hope you don't weary when I lay out this kind of heavily didactic material. It's vital. If we are to think biblically in order to lay hold of who we are and what we possess in Christ in order that we may live as we ought, it's vital that those of us who stand before you labor to work through these matters and then pass on to you as clearly and simply and logically as we have powers to do the fruit of our labor. And so I trust you now have these categories in your mind, that coming to this study these crucial distinctions must be laid up in our understanding and they will constitute the framework within which I will attempt to teach this wonderful privilege of God's saving grace. Distinction 1: that this adoption is distinct but never separated from justification. This adoption is distinct but never separated from regeneration. The fatherhood of God resulting from this adoption is distinct from the other fatherhoods mentioned in the Bible: the intertrinitarian fatherhood between the Father and the son; and then there is the fatherhood of creation; there is the theocratic fatherhood; and then there is the fatherhood of God. Wonderful relationships sustained by God to those who come into saving union with his Son.

Now then, I want to give a brief but necessary word of pastoral caution as we study this wonderful provision of salvation in Jesus Christ called adoption. Now, my word of loving pastoral caution as we begin this study is this: while assimilating and I labored on what word to use but that's the word I want, while assimilating, not just while hearing and just learning but assimilating, taking it into mind and heart and life, while assimilating the profound realities of this highest provision of salvation in Christ, don't permit these soul ravishing truths to swallow up or displace or lead to a depreciation of other vital truths concerning your relationship to God in Jesus Christ, and I couldn't reduce my caution any more than that. I'll go back over it again and then I'll exegete it. While assimilating the profound realities of this highest provision of salvation in Christ, don't permit these soul ravishing truths to swallow up or displace or lead to a depreciation of other vital truths concerning your relationship to God in Jesus Christ.

Now, why do I give that word of loving pastoral caution? For this simple reason: before the fall of man, everything God revealed to Adam was incorporated into a system of thought that was perfectly balanced. When God made additional revelation to Adam, there was no imbalance of judgment or prejudice of spirit that caused him to take that revelation and shove out a previous one, or allowed him to see it in a distorted kind of a caricature form; there was total mental/spiritual balance in the judgment of Adam. And one of the effects of the fall is that we've all gone into a condition of mental imbalance and even though God brings us the spiritual sanity in our regeneration and when we are recreated in Christ, yet we are recreated unto knowledge and one of the things we wrestle with because of our remaining sin and its effects upon our noggins is that we will grasp a truth but we'll grasp it in an imbalanced way or in a caricature form and we will allow that truth to displace other vital truths or we will say, "In the light of this, I don't need that truth anymore." Don't do that, please, with this precious, wonderful provision of God's grace called adoption. You see, what has happened and even in our day, there are

movements, there's one movement that names itself – I'm trying to think exactly the name, but it focuses exclusively on the doctrine of adoption and it makes adoption the total regulating perspective of every facet of the Christian life and people become distorted in their lives and imbalanced. I'm pleading with you not to allow that to happen.

Let me get specific in a couple of areas. 1. Don't allow the wonder of what it means to be God's son, God's daughter, and God helping me, I want to open up those passages in the course of this study that set before us some of the most soul ravishing realities of who and what we are in Christ and the implications of it. I'm pleading with you not to allow those things to displace the ongoing necessity of relating to God your Father in terms of Christ's present mediation on your behalf. What do I mean? I'll just quote a couple of passages. "My little children," 1 John 2:1, "these things I write unto you that you may not sin. But if any man sin," God is your daddy, don't take it seriously, just snuggle up to him and say, "Daddy, I'm sorry," and all is well. That is not what John says. John says, "if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father." We are his children. He's our Father. We have sinned against our Father. We need not fear we're going to be hauled back into the court of judgment and punishment, but John does not say the fact that he's our Father cancels out the need for us to focus our minds on the fact that Jesus Christ at the right hand of the Father is our Advocate who pleads our cause on the basis of his once-for-all sacrifice. He is propitiation for our sins. Or Romans 8, "who is he that condemns?" Paul answers by saying none condemns because the Judge is now our Father, he says, "who is he that condemns? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that is risen from the dead, who is also at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us."

Do you see now why I make this plea? We must not allow the wonder and the glory of knowing God as our Father, relating to him as our Father in any way to replace the fact that we still have a Mediator and an Intercessor of whom the writer to Hebrews speaks in chapter 7, verse 25, when he says, "he is able to save to the uttermost." Why? "Seeing he ever lives to make intercession for us." What God reveals about his heart, his disposition, his provisions toward us as our Father is not meant to displace where Christ is in the ongoing experience of the child of God or the necessity to deal honestly and straightforwardly with our sins.

Another area. People say, "Well, if he's no longer my Judge but he's my Father, then every sense of any foreboding, any sense of sobriety in the light of the last day blown out the window." Well, not according to Peter. Listen to Peter in 1 Peter 1:17, "if you call on him as Father, who without respect of persons judges according to each man's work, pass the time of your sojourning," with lightness and flippancy and unmingled joy because God is your daddy. No. No. "If you call on him as Father, who without respect of persons judges, pass the time of your sojourning in fear." Well, wait a minute, he's my daddy. I'm not supposed to be afraid of my daddy. Ah, but your Father is your Judge and there are times in the working out of the Christian life when we need to focus our attention on the fact that, "My Father is my Judge. I must not be careless. I must walk seriously, circumspectly. I must incorporate into my view of the Christian life this is not a game. We're not just on a ball. This is serious stuff."

But when I begin to think of all of the pressures and all the responsibilities and all of my failures and I would be crippled with a sense of discouragement and despondency, I need to remember the Judge is my Father. Other times, I need to remember the Father is my Judge. Do you see how Peter brings the two together? Neither one pushes out the other and that's all I'm pleading for. Because we'll be concentrating on the juicy stuff of what it is to have God as our Father, I'm pleading with you as a pastor, not to allow these profound realities of this highest provision of salvation in Christ, not to swallow up or to displace or lead to a depreciation of other truths vital to your relationship to God in Jesus Christ.

The other thing I was talking about...it's called...there's a whole seminar that people have and it's called the sonship movement and there are people deeply concerned that it is creating a distorted view of the Christian life because it is taking sonship and fatherhood and making it the all absorbing orbit of all thinking about the Christian life.

But then there's a third area in which I want to demonstrate why I give this. I've heard people say times without number, "God is now our Father. We are not to think of ourselves as slaves." Is that so? If that's so, you'd better go back and tell Paul his theology is bad because when he writes two of his epistles, he identifies himself as a bond slave of Jesus Christ. Romans 1:1, "Paul," a *doulos*, "a bond slave of Jesus Christ." Well, didn't he know about his liberty as a son? Yeah, he teaches us about it in Romans 8. In Paul's mind, there was no contradiction between viewing himself on the one hand as the willing joyful bond slave of Christ; the property of his Savior who bought him with his own blood; the Savior who was his Master; who called the shots and gave the directions in every facet of his life. For Paul, bond slave was not a terrible word but it didn't fill up all the nuances of his relationship to God, there were some nuances that could only be filled up with, "God is my Father and I am his son and I am his adopted child." You see, you can't squeeze the whole of the glory of our relationship to God in Christ into one figure. Don't do it! You do it to your peril. You do it to the crippling of your soul.

So later on in chapter 6 when he is describing what happens in conversion, if you're not a bond slave of Christ, you ain't saved. That's what he says. Verse 15 of chapter 6, "What then? shall we sin, because we are not under law, but under grace? God forbid. Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves as bond slaves to obedience, his servants you are whom you obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But thanks be to God, that, whereas you were the bond slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto you were delivered; and being made free from sin, you became the bond slaves of righteousness." If you're not a slave to righteousness, you've never been converted. If you just flirt with righteousness and once in a while, "Hey, Righteousness, what would you like me to do? What's the path of righteousness here or there but in this area, no, I'm not going to worry about it." No. No, the slave has no will of his own. He presents himself before his Master. His life is just executing the will of his Master and if righteousness is not your master, you've never been converted and then it's not abstract righteousness, verse 22, "But now being made free from sin and become bond slaves to God." Well, is he my Father or is he my slave master? Blessed be God, he's both. He's my Master.

"Jesus, Master, whose I am,
Purchased Thine alone to be,
By Thy blood, O spotless Lamb,
Shed so willingly for me,
Let my heart be all Thine own."

I'm a slave. I'm a son. And in some circumstances, I need to focus my mind upon my position as a son, as a daughter, and the Scriptures that surround that relationship and I need to bleed them to death, as it were, for the benefit of my own soul. And there are other situations where I need to think of myself as the bond slave, purchased by blood and not my own, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6. "What? Do you not know you are not your own; you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body which is his."

You see, that's why I give this pastoral exhortation. I've been around the block long enough, I've read enough of church history, I've just plowed through a 300 page book focusing on Baptist history in England through a period of time and this exhortation was so desperately needed. You had one group that reacted against a certain teaching and then they ended up in an equal and opposite error on the other end of the spectrum of that teaching. Then you had another group that they reacted against that and it's pathetic. It's pathetic and it can happen here while I'm preaching on adoption. You can turn the choices food of God into poison when you use any truth to cancel, to negate, to push aside another complementary truth.

So please hear my loving pastoral exhortation while assimilating the profound realities of this highest provision of salvation in Christ. Don't permit these soul ravishing truths to swallow up or displace or lead to a depreciation of other vital truths concerning your relationship to God in Jesus Christ. And then for just three minutes, having set before you the three vital distinctions, this brief but necessary word of pastoral exhortation, I want to give a final word of Gospel entreaty. I have repeatedly used these words throughout the message this morning, this is a provision of God's salvation in Christ, and I have done that deliberately as I have already indicated because I don't want us to think of the doctrine of adoption as some abstract intellectual concept. It is something that has come out of the fullness of God's love. "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called," designated, identified as "children of God; and we are." Marvelous provision of God's grace in Christ.

And I have not only called it a provision of salvation but a provision of salvation in Christ because all of the facets and all of the dimensions and all of the provisions of saving mercy God has stored up in his Son and the way we come to possess them is to get into Christ. That's why the Scripture says, "God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly in Christ," and why the Scripture says, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation." We must be in Christ and the only way to get into Christ is to believe upon him and to believe upon him means that I come to the end of myself for justification, for settling the accounts in the courtroom of heaven. I must have dealings

with the Christ who died for sinners, the Christ who lived that life of suffering obedience in the room instead of sinners and I must have that fabric of his righteousness must be that which clothes me or I can only, if I'm thinking rationally, conceive of God as an angry Judge. I must have dealings with Christ and when I turn from every single hope of saving myself and cast myself upon Christ alone as he is offered in the Gospel, God promises that in Christ I am justified, yes, and in Christ I am at the same time adopted into the family of God.

And it would be wonderful if there are some of you sitting here today who are not in Christ by a penitent faith, by running away from all confidence in yourself and running into Christ as he is offered in the Gospel, it would be a wonderful thing if when we come, God willing, to the next study next Lord's day, for you it will be opening up the treasures of what you receive today as you embrace the Lord Jesus for John said, "As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become the children of God, even to them that believe on his name."

Let's pray.

Our Father, how we thank you that we have your word as a lamp to our feet and a light to our pathway. And we thank you that your word reveals this amazing, this astounding provision of your saving grace in Jesus Christ. And we pray that you would dispose our minds and hearts with fresh hunger and thirst that we may know what you have lavished upon us. May we not be indifferent to that which cost you and your Son so dearly but may we be those who seek out your works, having pleasure therein. For those, our Father, who are yet children of the devil, who in their unbelief and impenitence have cut themselves off from this wonderful provision, have dealings with them and graciously and lovingly draw them to yourself, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.