

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 74

Halifax, 22 March 2009

Q. 74 What is adoption?

A. **Adoption is an act of the free grace of God, in and for His only Son Jesus Christ, whereby all those that are justified are received into the number of His children, have His name put upon them, the Spirit of His Son given to them, are under His fatherly care and dispensations, 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.**

Introduction:

In question 69, we began looking at the wonderful communion in grace we have with Jesus Christ in this life...

- Through faith, we are given a whole array of benefits—benefits that are so wonderful that they never would have even entered our imagination!
 - Benefits that were purchased for us by the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

- Over the last four weeks, we have been looking at the first of these great benefits...
 - A benefit that is foundational to all the rest—justification!
 - I showed you that God has provided a way to justify sinners without any injustice!
 - He has made a way to declare that we are righteous even though we are not righteous.
 - And that is by imputing to us the righteousness of His Son,
 - who for us and for our salvation was crucified to pay the penalty of our sin,
 - and who fulfilled for us in His obedience all that was required for eternal life.
 - God fully accepts as righteous all those who believe on the Lord Jesus.
 - There is no more condemnation for them.
 - They have fulfilled all that God requires through Jesus Christ.
 - This is the benefit called **justification**.

The second benefit is the one we take up today.

- It is called **adoption**.

You all know what adoption is...

- It is when a parent takes a child who is not his own as his own.
 - And truly that child becomes a member of the family and a full heir of his adopted father.
 - He is given all the rights and privileges of a biological son and even takes his adopted father's name.
 - He is loved as a child, provided for as child, and obtains the inheritance of a child.
 - And what an inheritance it is—an inheritance shared with Jesus in glory!
 - And in the case of God's adoption, he is even given the Spirit of God's Son so that he is able to become like his Father—
 - not only through discipline and training, but also through the powerful transformation wrought by the Spirit.

This is how it is with God's adoption of all those who are effectually called through Jesus Christ.

Turn to 1 John 3:1-3.

Hear now as I read to you from God's word:

- **1 John 3:1-3: Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.**

I. Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God!

- Consider how great this love is!
 - A. Consider first of all how great it is because of who it is that has adopted us!
 - 1. It is God the Creator, Jehovah, the self-existing one!
 - He has adopted us even though there is such a great distance between us and Him.
 - He is the glorious, eternal, unchangeable Creator of all things visible and invisible.
 - We are only creatures.
 - 2. It would be a great thing for a noble king to adopt a pauper—to take him as his son...

- The greatness of the distance magnifies the love of the act...
 - But how much greater is the distance between us and God!
 - We are not even of the same race—it is like us adopting worms...
 - not simply to be pets, but as our children and heirs!
3. On top of this, consider that God did not need sons because He already had a son of His own whom He delights in...
- He is altogether complete and sufficient in Himself,
 - Yet,
 - **Col 1:13: “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,”**

TRANS> His love is magnified in adoption because of who He is.

B. Next, consider how His love is magnified in adopting us because of who **we** are.

1. We are His former servants who rebelled against Him!
 - a. We were created as servants under a covenant of works.
 - It was a very high privilege to be God’s servant...
 - He provided for us everything we could ever want—
 - companionship, food, safety, love.
 - He gave us a noble task and the strength to do it—
 - to fill the earth and subdue it for His glory.
 - and above all to glorify Him as our creator, made in His image.
 - He gave us the promise of eternal life if we would but continue in His service.
 - This was signified in the garden by the tree of life.
 - b. What base ingratitude that we did not continue in His service when He had so richly blessed us to be His servants!
 - The rightful punishment for us was eternal death in Hell.
 - God could have justly left us all to perish under His wrath and curse.
2. But we have seen in previous lessons that He did not leave us there...
 - a. Even while we were enemies, Christ came and died for us to redeem us from the curse of the Law.

- All your sins are pardoned and you are made righteous in Him if you belong to Christ by faith.
- b. This would be enough in itself, but that God should take his formerly rebellious servants and make them sons is the marvel of all marvels!
- He redeemed us with a view to making us not just servants, but sons!
 - **Gal. 4:4-5: “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”**
 - He raised us above the status that even Adam was given at creation.
- c. It is one thing for a king to take a pauper from his kingdom and make him his son,
- but to take his enemy who rebelled against him and rejected his rule as a son is an even greater marvel!
3. And add to all this that He did not only take us when we were enemies, but also when we were defiled and loathsome in His eyes.
- **Ezekiel 16:6-8: “And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ Yes, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ 7 I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful. *Your* breasts were formed, your hair grew, but you *were* naked and bare. 8 When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time *was* the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine,” says the Lord GOD.**
- a. Until we see God, I don’t think we will ever be able to comprehend how reprehensible we must have been to God when He took us in...
- We were deformed and polluted by sin, a most loathsome sight to Him...
 - and yet, He took us under His wings, into His very own house to sit in His arms.
- b. Consider how by taking us into His family, He (in a certain sense) ruined His own reputation...
- I don’t mean that He really did because we have seen how He remained perfectly just in justifying us...
 - When everything is understood in the judgement, His reputation will be exalted and glorious in the eyes of all...
 - Yet, we see how all the shame of us fell upon Christ when He was mocked and scoffed at on the cross...

- He despised the shame, yet He bore it for our sake in order that He might adopt us...
 - What great love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God!
4. And consider further that He did not take just one or two of these loathsome, rebellious servants as sons, but **many** of them!
- Hebrews 2:10 says:
 - **For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.**
 - It would have been a great thing if He had taken only one person to redeem—
 - It would have been unfathomable that He should do so...
 - but He has promised to bless all the families of the earth in Christ and to bring many sons to glory!
 - Mary and I know a family that has adopted six children and we marvel at their love...
 - But just look at all the children that God has adopted!
 - What manner of love is this!

TRANS> So you see that His love is magnified in adopting us not only because of who He is, but also because of who we are...

- C. And now I want you to consider how great His love that He should adopt us when the price was so high!
1. If you know anyone that is adopting children, you know that it is a very costly endeavour.
 - Not only is there the expense of providing for the children, but there is also the expense of the adoption process itself.
 2. God adopted us even though it cost Him the life of His own son...
 - a. Psalm 49 says,
 - **Ps 49:6-8 Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches, none *of them* can by any means redeem *his* brother, nor give to God a ransom for him—for the redemption of their souls *is* costly,**
 - b. Whatever wealth human beings may possess, it is not enough if all added together to redeem us from our sins.
 - Yet, in spite of the great cost,

- God redeemed us with the precious blood of Christ, the only thing that could pay the price.
 - **1 Peter 1:18-19: knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.**
- It was because God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

TRANS> Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God!

II. What wonderful privileges belong to you as God's own child!

- 1 John 3:1 goes on to explain that the world does not know us anymore—
 - Everything has changed if you have become a part of the family of God!
 - Things are so different for you that your old family no longer recognises you.
 - It says,
 - **1 John 3:1-2: “Therefore the world does not know us because it did not know Him. Beloved, now are we the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be...”**
 - There are many great blessings that are still to come in the future that we have not seen...
 - But already, the change is so great and so radical that the world does not know us—
 - **“Now (not in the future) are we the children of God.”**
- What are the privileges that set us apart from others?

A. First and foremost, there is **security**.

1. The great difference between a servant and a son is that the son is secure.
 - a. You see, a servant is always on probation—he is in the house to work for his master...
 - but if he doesn't measure up, he will be kicked out of the house...
 - But the son is the heir and he abides in the house forever.
 - He is truly free—
 - His relationship is not earned, but freely given to him.
 - b. Jesus said,

- **John 8:34-36: Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.**
 - Christian, you are not on trial anymore, you are a member of the family!
2. And the Spirit of God assures you of this security...
- **Romans 8:15-16: For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,**
 - As a son, you will be called upon to suffer many things in this world...
 - Romans 8 goes on to talk about that...
 - But your assurance is that nothing can separate you from God's love,
 - and that all these things work together for good to those who love God and are the called according to His purpose.
 - It is not the Father's rejection you experience as a son when you suffer...
 - It is His discipline that is designed for your good according to His wise and loving purpose...
 - which purpose is that you might be conformed to the image of His Son.

TRANS> The second privilege of a child of God flows from this...

B. The second privilege is that God is training you to be what He wants His son to be...

1. Sometimes, a parent may adopt a child that comes from a very bad home...
 - That parent has to train up the child in the ways of his new family...
 - ways of goodness and love and peace.
2. You are a member of God's own household...
 - He will train you in His ways.
 - He will give you the finest education in the universe!
 - He will teach you what pleases Him, and what pleases Him is lovely.
 - When He is finished with you, you will look like Him!
3. That is the good that He is disciplining you into as His son:
 - a. Romans 8:28-29 say so:
 - **And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.**

- All that discipline is to teach you to love God like Jesus did, and to love your brothers and sisters even like Jesus did.
 - When God is finished with you, you will be just like Jesus (conformed to the image of the Son that God already has).
- b. Drastic changes have already taken place in you...
- so much so, that as we saw in our text in 1 John, the world no longer knows you.
 - Peter puts it like this:
 - **1 Peter 4:3-4: For we *have spent* enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with *them* in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of *you*.**
 - As God’s son, you are operating on a totally different wave length—
 - you are running on a different track and going down a different path!
 - You no longer belong to the world.

TRANS> And although you are no longer known to the world, you are known to the family of God.

C. This is the third privilege—that you have many new brothers and sisters in God’s family.

1. Jesus shows that the unity we have within the family of God transcends the unity we have with our brothers and sisters according to the flesh:
 - a. Jesus brought out the reality of this new family in Mark 3 when His mother and His brothers came looking for Him:
 - **Mark 3:32-35: And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, “Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You.” But He answered them, saying, “Who is My mother, or My brothers?” And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.”**
 - b. This is the new adopted family that we are part of—Christ is our brother, and that makes us brothers and sisters to all others who believe in Him!
 - We are a part of the family of God.
 - It doesn’t mean that your earthly family ties are *necessarily* broken,
 - but sometimes it does mean that—
 - and it certainly means that your new family is the more significant one.

- You will live in this new family forever.
2. Galatians 4 talks about how you are brought into this new family with all these other brothers and sisters.
- a. Gal 3:26-29 says:
- **For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**
 - In Jesus Christ, all racial distinctions and social distinctions and gender distinctions are broken down—
 - We all belong equally to the one family of Abraham, the father of those who have saving faith and who inherit the promises of God.
 - We are brought into the family of God and are the true Israel of God.
- b. Those who are not of the family (not of faith) do not know us, but persecute us.
- There are those in God's house as servants—that is, those who do not have saving faith but are members of the church on earth...
 - They are born according to the flesh, and they persecute the true sons:
 - Gal 4:28-29 says so:
 - **“Now we, brethren, as Isaac *was*, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him *who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.*”**
- c. Yet, in our new family, we are all growing together into a holy temple of the Lord.
- It is a great privilege to be part of the family of God...
 - To have one another's love and support and care and encouragement.

TRANS> So we have seen three great privileges so far—

- security, family likeness, family unity...
- and now we come to the fourth...

D. The fourth privilege is that we have free and familiar access to God.

1. Galatians 4:6 declares that:

- **“because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba Father.’”**

- a. “Abba” is like our word “Daddy.”
 - The Spirit gives us confidence to approach God on familiar terms as a loving Father.
 - We do not approach God with vain repetitions the way Jesus speaks about in Matthew 6:8.
 - Those who do not know God as Father use vain repetitions because they feel they must to gain His ear...
 - And the truth is that they do not gain His ear this way or in any other until they come to Jesus Christ.

- b. But those who believe have the testimony of God’s Spirit that they are His children...
 - They have seen what God has done to save them in Jesus Christ, and they have great confidence in the sufficiency of this salvation...
 - And they have confidence in the love of their heavenly Father who has taken such measures to save them.
 - When this is your confidence, you approach God as a loving Father,
 - a Father who has already anticipated your needs and is just waiting for you to come and ask!

- c. It is a great privilege to have access to the God who controls the whole universe, and to have the confidence that when you come to Him,
 - He hears you and will answer every request with perfect wisdom and perfect love!

TRANS> This is the fourth privilege of adoption.

- There is security, there is family likeness, there is family unity, there is access to the Father...
- And now we come to the fifth and last of the privileges that I shall mention today...

E. The privilege of inheritance.

1. Romans 8:17 makes a very amazing statement indeed—
 - a. It says that if we are the children of God, then we are joint-heirs with Jesus!
 - **Rom 8:17: and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ**
 - b. This is staggering!

- 1) It means that we actually have the same inheritance as Jesus Christ!
 - He is our elder brother, and is given leadership and a double portion, but we are partakers of the same glorious inheritance as joint-heirs with Him!
 - 2) It means that we are brought into the same relationship with the Father that Jesus has had with the Father for all eternity.
 - This is too wonderful to express or fathom!
 - As John says, “It does not yet appear what we shall be!”
 - We cannot grasp the splendour of it all!
2. Jesus gives us some indication of it in His great high priestly prayer recorded for us in John 17:
- In John 17:22-24 Jesus speaks about drawing us into the eternal circle of love that exists between Him and His Father!
- a. Listen carefully to what He says:
 - **John 17:22 “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.”**
 - b. He is asking the Father to show us how great the eternal love is that the Father has for His Son...
 - Something He wants us to see fully when we get to heaven...
 - But not only does He want us to see that love between Him and His Father...
 - He also says to the Father concerning us (and this is what is so staggering),
 - “You have loved them **as you have loved Me!**”
 - That same eternal love the Father has for the Son, that love that is so glorious that Jesus longs for us to see it—is the same love that the Father now has for us!
 - We are also His sons!
 - c. This is your eternal inheritance—to be loved by God the Father with the same love that He has for His Son Jesus!

- This is just plain glorious!
- We will spend eternity beholding our glorious God and being filled with all the fullness His sacred presence will provide!
- Remember Psalm 16?
 - **You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**
- This is not just for Jesus—it is for us also!

TRANS> 1 John 3:1-3: Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

III. The application is given right in the text...

- **Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.**
- A. If you have the security I have spoken about as a son who will remain in the house forever—
- Then purify your faith!
 - Learn to live in this trust!
 - Do not doubt God that you are fully accepted,
 - do not seek acceptance in another house.
 - Oh no, don't go sniffing around in the garbage cans of this world like a dog without a home.
 - Settle in your house with peace and assurance.
- B. And if God has begun to give you that family likeness that sets you apart from the world—
- Then delight in your purification from sin and defilement!
 - You are God's son and you will be with Him forever!
 - He is making you beautiful, renewing you in His image—
 - do not resist Him, but welcome the change!
 - Rejoice in your trials, knowing that they are His loving discipline, designed with perfect wisdom to make you complete.
 - **2 Cor 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.**

C. And since God has given you brothers and sisters...

- Should you not purify your love for them?
- If Christ has loved them enough to die for them as He died for you, should you love them less than He does?
 - You will be spending all eternity with them...they are your brothers and sisters.
 - It is time to lay down your life for them.
 - This is what your Father is teaching you to do.
 - **John 13:34-35: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”**

D. And since you have access to your heavenly Father....

1. Should you not purify your worship and your prayer life?
 - Should you not come into His presence often to worship and give thanks to His name for all that He has done...
 - **Heb 4:16: Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**
2. And should you hesitate to make your requests known to Him when His Spirit assures you that His ear is open to your cry?
 - When He has told you that He will withhold no good thing from you if you will but ask?
 - “We have not because we ask not.”

E. And since you have this marvellous inheritance—

- even to be loved by the father for eternity as Christ is loved by Him...
 - should you not purify your hope?
- Is it not fitting for you to prepare for the day when you will be brought to glory?
 - Should you be consumed by the cares of this world and its riches when you have so great a Father?
 - Should you care what other people think of you if you have His love?

1 John 3:1-3: Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.