

**Theology for Life**  
**Faith Presbyterian Church**  
Lesson 20: Adoption

**Last time:** Justification is God's verdict based on Christ's righteousness. God legally counts our sin onto Christ and Christ's righteousness onto us.

**Heidelberg Catechism #26**

**Q. What do you believe when you say, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth"?**

A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who out of nothing created heaven and earth  
and everything in them,  
who still upholds and rules them  
by his eternal counsel and providence,  
is my God and Father  
because of Christ the Son.  
I trust God so much that I do not doubt  
he will provide  
whatever I need for body and soul,  
and will turn to my good  
whatever adversity he sends upon me in this sad world.  
God is able to do this because he is almighty God and desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.

What stands out to you about this Q&A?

**Adoption**

WCF 12.1. *All those that are justified, God vouchsafeth, in and for his only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption, by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God, have his name put upon them, receive the Spirit of adoption, have access to the throne of grace with boldness, are enabled to cry, Abba, Father, are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by him, as by a father: yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption; and inherit the promises, as heirs of everlasting salvation.*

*"Our sonship to God is the apex of creation and the goal of redemption."* Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*," Sinclair Ferguson

**Change in Our Status**

*"Adoption is, like justification, a judicial act. In other words, it is the bestowal of a status, or standing, not the generating within us of a new nature or character."* John Murray

**Change in Our Nature**

*"There are two ways whereby we may become members of a human family—we may be born into it or we may be adopted into it. The former is by natural generation, the latter is by legal act. It may be that the Scripture represents us as entering into the family of God by both—by generation and by adoption...When God adopts men and women into his family he insures that not only may they have the rights and privileges of his sons and daughters but also the nature or disposition consonant with such a status. This he does by regeneration—he renews them after his image in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness."* Murray

#### **Romans 8:12-17**

*[12] So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. [13] For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. [14] For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. [15] For you **did not receive the spirit of slavery** to fall back into fear, but you have **received the Spirit of adoption** as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" [16] The Spirit himself **bears witness** with our spirit that we are children of God, [17] and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

#### **Galatians 4:1-7**

*[4:1] I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, [2] but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. [3] In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. [4] But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, [5] to **redeem** those who were under the law, so that we might **receive adoption as sons**. [6] And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" [7] So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.*

What kind of obstacles prevent you from believing in a greater way that you are a child of God?

*"Adoption, like justification, is simultaneously legal and relational, as is the obverse: alienation and condemnation. Adoption is not a goal held out to children who successfully imitate their parents; nor is it the result of an infusion of familial characteristics or genes. Rather, it is a change in legal status that issues in a relationship that is gradually reflected in the child's identity, characteristics, and actions. From the courtroom, with the legal status and inheritance unalterably established, the child moves into the security of a growing and thriving future."* Michael Horton

#### **What happens to us when we believe our justification but not our adoption?**

*"Although your greatest difficulty in the Christian life is believing that the Father loves you, you commit your greatest sin by not believing that he really does love you."* Neil Williams

When we deny our adoption, we become spiritual orphans. An orphan does not trust that God love him and believes he has to look out for himself. An orphan will become self-righteous because he cannot trust that God will give him an unearned righteousness.

*"I did not realize that the confidence I had always had about my life was not faith, as I had assumed, but a reliance on my own competency, be it real or imagined. When my competency was called into question by my failures in life's momentous events, like my father's death and my daughter's wedding, my confidence—and the world it supported—began to crumble...Our confidence in ourselves is shaken*

*by life changes; we fight back. We increase our demands upon our own “strengths,” be they inner qualities, outer achievements, or other people. But only emptiness follows. Like an orphan we cry, ‘I am abandoned’.”* Rose Marie Miller

Spiritual orphans will become victims

*“Spiritual orphans see themselves as humble sufferers in their emotional pain. But in fact they are simply closed off people who are too proud and fearful (the two are closely related) to admit failure, imperfections, and sins, and acknowledge their complete dependence on God.”* Miller

### **Miller Summarizes the Orphan Mentality**

- Life consciously or unconsciously is centered on **personal autonomy** and moral will power, with grace understood as God’s **maintaining your own strength**—not as his transforming power.
- Faith is defined as trying harder to do and be better, with a view to establishing a good record leading to self-justification.
- Obedience is related to **external, visible duties**, with attitudes and deeper motivation virtually ignored.
- “What people think” is represented as the real moral standard, based upon visible success and failure.
- An *I-am-a-victim* attitude is supported by coping strategies, wall building, blame shifting gossiping, and defending.
- All this is accompanied by *intense* feelings of aloneness, believing that no one understands and that one is trapped by circumstances.

**Key Question:** *How would my life and actions be different if I believed in a greater way that I am a child of God, that I am righteous, beloved, accepted, and forgiven?*

### **Characteristics of a son or daughter (from Miller)**

1. Increasing assurance of God as Father through knowledge of the doctrine of the Cross
2. Building a partnership with God, relying on the Spirit for a willing and obedient life
3. Forgiving instead of judging and condemning, putting off defensiveness, and learning to listen
4. Relying on the Holy Spirit to use the tongue for praise and not complaint or gossiping
5. Seeing by faith God’s sovereign plan over one’s life as wise and good—a plan not to be feared
6. Learning to pray; recognizing that we have no resources, and claiming the promises of God
7. Relying on the Holy Spirit in going quickly to Christ with sins, burdens, and needs, seeking daily forgiveness and cleansing

### **Connecting the Dots: Where Theology meets Life**

*Summary:* By adopting us, God covers our shame and gives us a new identity. One of the great struggles of the Christian life is grasping the full significance of being a son or daughter of God.