



Ordo Salutis (Order of Salvation)

Lesson 5: Adoption

Key Verse: Ephesians 1:5–6

“He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”

Introduction

The blessings of God are incomprehensible. God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). He regenerated us, giving us the new spiritual birth (John 3:3–8). As a result of regeneration, we experienced conversion in which we were given the gifts of repentance (2 Tim. 2:25) and faith (Eph. 2:8). Through faith we have been justified (Rom. 3:28)—being forgiven of our sins and having the righteousness of Christ imputed to our account (2 Cor. 5:21). While it may seem impossible to improve upon these great blessings, in the application of redemption, the blessings of God continue through adoption where God makes us members of His family.

The Definition of Adoption

Before adoption, each child of God was a spiritual orphan under the oppression of sin and Satan. Ephesians 2:3 says we “were by nature children of wrath.” In reference to our sonship, we were “sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2). Jesus even tells us in John 8:44 that before salvation we were children of the devil who did the desires of our father.

Adoption is *an act of God whereby He makes us members of His family*.¹ In adoption, God legally places regenerated and justified sinners into His family, so that they become sons and daughters of God and thus enjoy all the rights and privileges of one who is a member of God’s eternal family.² Just as a child who is adopted gets adopted into a family who is eager to love them, provide protection for them, instruct them, and give them the hope of a future, this is an analogy for God’s fatherly love for His own children. John mentions at the beginning of his gospel that all who “received Him, to them He gave the right to become *children of God*” (John 1:12). Paul also tells of the fact that all believers in Christ are children of God by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” (Rom. 8:15). This means that all those who have been adopted by God are in one family—all sons and daughters of God.

Key Verses:

1. 1 John 3:8–10. What does John say about children of the devil? _____
2. Romans 8:14. Who are the sons of God? _____
3. Galatians 3:23–26. How did we become sons of God? _____
4. Galatians 4:4–6. How do we know we are sons of God? _____

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 736.

² John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, gen. eds. *Biblical Doctrines: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 625.

The Uniqueness of Adoption

One might confuse regeneration with adoption since in regeneration the believer is “born again.” However, as Wayne Grudem says, “The New Testament never connects adoption with regeneration.”³ There are distinctions between regeneration and adoption. In what ways is regeneration different from adoption?

- First, regeneration is a work of the Spirit; adoption is an act of the Father.
- Second, regeneration is a transformative work in the heart that transforms the believer’s nature; adoption is a declarative, legal act in which God gives to those who are in Christ “the right to become children of God.”
- Third, regeneration is mediated by the Word of God; adoption is obtained through faith in Christ.

Key Verses:

1. John 3:5–6 and Ephesians 1:5. Regeneration is a work of _____. Adoption is an act of _____.
2. 2 Corinthians 5:17 and John 1:12. Regeneration transforms the believer’s _____. Adoption _____ the believer the right to become a child of God.
3. 1 Peter 1:23 and Galatians 3:26. Regeneration is mediated by _____. Adoption is obtained through _____.

Adoption is also at times confused with being another aspect of justification since it is “through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26). However, adoption and justification are not the same thing. Justification has to do with our standing before God. But adoption has to do with our *relationship* with God as our Father, and in adoption we are given blessings that we will know for all eternity.⁴

Key Verses:

1. Romans 4:2–3. What did Abraham receive in justification? _____
2. Galatians 4:6. What can we call God through adoption? _____

The Privileges of Adoption

Adoption is a special privilege that is given only to those who have been saved by God. It is possible that God could have creatures who are spiritually alive and yet are not members of His family and do not share in the privileges of family members. For example, angels fall into this category. Although angels are referred to as “sons of God” in Job 1:6, this is apparently a reference to the status of sonship that comes by the fact that God created them. It does not indicate that angels (especially fallen angels) share in any of the family privileges that we receive as God’s children.⁵ Therefore, adoption is a special privilege that is only given to those of us who have been saved by God.

A second privilege is that we are able to speak to God and relate to Him as a good and loving Father. Our relationship with God is one of a child-father relationship. We call God “Our Father” when we come to Him in prayer (Matt. 6:9). We also call God “Abba! Father!” (Rom. 8:15). We are only able to

³ Grudem, 738.

⁴ Ibid, 739.

⁵ Ibid, (footnote 3).

do this because of His Spirit who dwells in us. God makes certain His children know they are His children through His Spirit dwelling in our hearts. Our spirit then recognizes that we are always privileged to come before God as our beloved Father. As our Father, God also disciplines us as His children when we walk in disobedience. He does it for our good so that we might grow in holiness (Heb. 12:10).

A third privilege in adoption is the relationship we have as brothers and sisters in Christ. The New Testament refers to Christians as “brothers” and “sisters” in Christ (1 Cor. 1:10; 1 Cor. 7:15). Ephesians 2:19 says, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s *household*.” God’s household is not referring to a building, but to God’s family. Because we are God’s children, our relationship with one another is far deeper and more intimate than even angels have with each other because we are *members of one family*.⁶ Paul tells Timothy how he is to relate to the members of the church at Ephesus. In 1 Timothy 5:1–2 he says, “Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a *father*, to the younger men as *brothers*, the older women as *mothers*, and the younger women as *sisters*, in all purity.” As adopted children of God we are all spiritually brothers and sisters in God’s family and as His children we are to imitate Him (Eph 5:1).

Key Verses:

1. Matthew 6:9. How are we to address God in prayer? _____
2. Romans 8:16–17. As children of God, what are we? _____
3. Hebrews 12:5–10. Who does the Father discipline? _____
4. Romans 16:1. How does Paul identify Phoebe? _____
5. Ephesians 5:1. What are we to do as God’s children? _____

Application

1. How does the doctrine of adoption encourage you?
2. How do you view fellow believers in the church?
3. In what ways are you living to imitate your Father?

⁶ Ibid, 741.