

The Doctrines of Salvation: Adoption

from *Great Doctrines of the Bible* by William Evans

ADOPTION.

Regeneration begins the new life in the soul; justification deals with the new attitude of God towards that soul, or perhaps better, of that soul towards God; adoption admits man into the family of God with filial joy. Regeneration has to do with our change in nature; justification, with our change in standing; sanctification, with our change in character; adoption, with our change in position. In regeneration the believer becomes a child of God (John 1:12, 13); in adoption, the believer, already a child, receives a place as an adult son; thus the child becomes a son, the minor becomes an adult (Gal. 4:1-7).

I. THE MEANING OF ADOPTION.

Adoption means *the placing of a son*. It is a legal metaphor as regeneration is a physical one. It is a Roman word, for adoption was hardly, if at all, known among the Jews. It means the taking by one man of the son of another to be his son, so that that son has the same position and all the advantages of a son by birth. The word is Pauline, not Johannine. The word is never once used of Christ. It is used of the believer when the question of rights, privileges, and heirship are involved. It is peculiarly a Pauline word (Gal. 4:5; Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Eph. 1:5). John uses the word "children," not "sons," because he is always speaking of sonship from the standpoint of nature, growth, and likeness (cf. 1 John 3:1, R.V.).

Exodus 2:10 and Heb. 11:24, furnish two splendid illustrations of the Scriptural sense and use of adoption.

II. THE TIME WHEN ADOPTION TAKES PLACE.

1. IN A CERTAIN SENSE IT IS ETERNAL IN ITS NATURE.

Eph. 1:4, 5—Before the foundation of the world we were predestinated unto the adoption of children. We need to distinguish between the foreordaining to adoption, and the actual act of adoption which took place when we believed in Christ. Just as the incarnation was foreordained, and yet took place in time; and just as the Lamb was slain from before the foundation of the world, and yet actually only on Calvary. Why then mention this eternal aspect of adoption? To exclude works and to show that our salvation had its origin solely in

the grace of God (Rom. 9:11; 11:5, 6). Just as if we should adopt a child it would be a wholly gracious act on our part.

2. IT TAKES PLACE THE MOMENT ONE BELIEVES IN JESUS CHRIST.

1 John 3:2—"Beloved, now are we the sons of God." Gal. 3:26—"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." See also John 1:12. Sonship is now the present possession of the believer. Strange as it may be, inconceivable as it may seem, it is nevertheless true. The world may not think so (v. 1), but God says so, and the Christian believing it, exclaims, "I'm the child of a King." Formerly we were slaves; now we are sons.

3. OUR SONSHIP WILL BE COMPLETED AT THE RESURRECTION AND COMING AGAIN OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Rom. 8:23—"Waiting for the adoption, to-wit, the redemption, of the body." Here in this world we are *incognito*; we are not recognized as sons of God. But some day we shall throw off this disguise (2 Cor. 5:10). It doth not appear, it hath not yet appeared what we shall be; the revelation of the sons of God is reserved for a future day. See also 1 John 3:1-3.

III. THE BLESSINGS OF ADOPTION.

The blessings of adoption are too numerous to mention save in the briefest way. Some of them are as follows:

Objects of God's peculiar love (John 17:23), and His fatherly care (Luke 12:27-33).

We have the family name (1 John 3:1; Eph. 3:14, 15), the family likeness (Rom. 8:29); family love (John 13:35; 1 John 3:14); a filial spirit (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6); a family service (John 14:23, 24; 15:8).

We receive fatherly chastisement (Heb. 12:5-11); fatherly comfort (Isa. 66:13; 2 Cor. 1:4), and an inheritance (1 Pet. 1:3-5; Rom. 8:17).

IV. SOME EVIDENCES OF SONSHIP.

Those who are adopted into God's family are:

Led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:18).

Have a childlike confidence in God (Gal. 4:5, 6).

Have liberty of access (Eph. 3:12).

Have love for the brethren (1 John 2:9-11; 5:1).

Are obedient (1 John 5:1-3).

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