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Adoption *and the*
family of God

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Meditation

This meditation by Herman Hoeksema first appeared in the June 1, 1944 issue of the *SB* in connection with Pentecost. It was reprinted 50 years later, in June of 1994. Now we publish it again, nearly 79 years later. HH was one of the first editors of the *SB*, pastor of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, and founding professor in the PRC Seminary.

Spirit of sonship

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

Romans 8:15, 16

Blessed Spirit!

It is through Him, the Paraklete, the Comforter, whom the Lord had promised to send from the Father, and whom He poured forth into His church on the day of the firstfruits, that we become heirs and partakers of all the blessings of salvation!

He it is that imparts unto us the fullness of Christ and all His benefits!

Apart from Him we are children of wrath, and lie in the midst of death, incapable of laying hold on the Christ of God, the blessings of forgiveness, eternal righteousness, the adoption unto children, freedom from all condemnation, the everlasting love of God, eternal life, and glory. For how could we possibly reach out for the Christ and His fullness? He must come to us. And in the Spirit He returned! He was with us for a little while, in our death and in our misery. While He was with us still, He took all our sicknesses and pains upon Himself, assumed the full burden of all our sins and iniquities, and carried them all to the accursed tree, there to become obedient unto death, and to descend into lowest hell, that He might bring us to God. He is no more with us. For He was raised from the dead. And He is exalted into the highest glory, at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven, Lord of life and of death! Thither He must draw us. From thence He must reach out for us. For we cannot reach out for Him. And He did come, in the Spirit, to abide with us forever, and to impart unto us Himself in all the riches of His grace!

And so, through the Spirit He lives in us.

And through the same Spirit we live by His grace.

And living by His grace, we do mortify the deeds

of the body, realizing that we are debtors, not to the flesh to live after the flesh, but to the Spirit to live after Him.

And mortifying the deeds of the body, we know that we are the sons of God, children that are led by the Spirit of God in the way of His good commandments.

For the Spirit whom the church received on the glad day of Pentecost is the Spirit of the living Lord. And He is not a spirit of bondage again to fear, but He is the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!

And thus, Spirit controlled, and Spirit led, we receive the testimony through that same Spirit that we are the sons of God!

Blessed Spirit of the Lord!

Abba, Father!

In this outcry of faith, of love, of hope and longing, the church that is led by the Spirit expresses spontaneously her assurance of sonship. In it they give testimony of their being conscious that they are the children of God.

Abba, Pater!

In the original there is a repetition of the same word, first in the Chaldean, then in the Greek, both words meaning simply "Father." The double phrase was probably a standing expression that had gradually been adopted in that form by the early church. In the New Testament we find that it is used by our Lord in the hour of His great agony in Gethsemane; in the sixth verse of Galatians 4, where it is said that God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, and that it is He that cries, Abba, Father; and here in the fifteenth verse of Romans 8, where believers are said to make this outcry under the impulse of the Spirit of adoption. Perhaps it was the fact that the Lord expressed Himself with this phrase in the hour of His suffering, coupled with the circumstance that the early church consisted of converts from Jews and Gentiles, that led to its adoption as a standing expression, perhaps even as a liturgical formula used by the church.

Abba, Father!

It is the strong and clear expression of our sonship in

relation to God, both in virtue of His gracious adoption, and by reason of our being born of Him.

For we are, first of all, children by adoption. By nature we are not children of God but children of wrath. Because of our sin we are born as exiles from God's home, wandering about in darkness and under condemnation. We have no right to be called God's sons, no right to dwell in His house; no right to the enjoyment of His blessed favor and of the pleasures that are at His right hand for evermore. But in pure grace He adopted us, bestowed on us the legal right to be called His sons, to be the objects of His love and favor, to dwell in His fellowship, and to become heirs of the eternal inheritance in His heavenly tabernacle. He forgives all our transgressions, and clothes us with an eternal righteousness through Jesus Christ our Lord, all of pure grace, without any merit on our part.

And the consciousness of this adoption as children of God, of our full redemption, of the forgiveness of sins, of our perfect righteousness before God, of His free and sovereign everlasting love to us we express in this outcry: Abba, Father!

But there is more.

For it is not only by adoption that we become children of God. In fact, it would be impossible to lay hold on this blessed adoption, or even to long for it and to rejoice in its possession and assurance, if God did not also bestow upon us and work within us the wonder of grace whereby we are born of Him, His image is restored within us, and we become sons of God in spiritual reality. But He realizes the adoption in our hearts by making us partakers of His nature. By nature we are not only devoid of the right to be called children of God and to dwell in His house, but we are also enemies of God, minding the things of the flesh, loving the darkness rather than the light. We care not to dwell in God's house. Far from Him we wander and seek the evil foolishly. But He reaches out into our hearts, removes the darkness, roots out the enmity, enlightens the mind, changes the refractory will, instills into our hearts a new life, the life of the risen Lord, assures us of His love, and causes us to love Him, to love His precepts, to love the brethren, to long for His fellowship, and to seek to be pleasing to Him.

And it is also the consciousness of this real, spiritual sonship, of this love to God and to one another, of this longing for His favor and fellowship, that is expressed in the cry: Abba, Father!

We cry!

It is a matter of fact!

The apostle does not speak here of a possibility. He does not state a general doctrine: believers cry, Abba,

Father! He does not put it in the form of an admonition or exhortation. The matter is definite and personal: we, the apostles, all believers, the whole church of Christ in the world, cry, Abba, Father!

Is it true?

Dare we follow the apostle and adopt his bold statement in application to ourselves?

O, let us not forget, as we try to answer this question, that it is a cry that leaves our lips, that is pressed from our hearts, when we say, Abba, Father!

And to be sure, this means that the testimony concerning our sonship is expressed with fervency. It is strong, powerful, clear. But it also implies that it is made from the depths, by those who, while they are conscious of their nearness to God, are yet far off at the same time; as those who, while they are assured of their sonship, yet look upon that sonship as something that must still be realized, and the realization of which seems to lie in the distant future; or as those who, while they are sons, yet are not sons; who, while they are righteous, yet are full of sin; who, while they live, yet lie in the midst of death; who, while they are heirs of all things, are in possession of nothing. From the depths, out of the midst of death, believers raise their cry: Abba, Father!

It is an outcry of the assurance of our adoption, and of the consciousness of our being children of God, but then, it is still a cry!

A groan of hope!

A cry of longing for the perfect day!

For as yet we have but a small beginning of the new obedience!

Yet, the beginning is a principle.

And by virtue of that principle we do sing with the psalmist: "As the hart panteth after waterbrooks, so longs our soul for Thee!"

For Thee, the living God!

Abba, Father!

Blessed Spirit of adoption!

For through Him alone may we carry this assurance of our sonship in our hearts.

It is not we that of ourselves cry, Abba, Father!

How could we? Or what comfort and blessedness would there be in this outcry of assurance and longing were it of ourselves? Are we, perhaps, not deceiving ourselves in so crying to God? Will He hear us and receive us, and will He respond to our outcry? Do we, perhaps, too audaciously appropriate to ourselves what does not belong to us? Are we claiming a right which God does not seal?

Only when the outcry is divinely wrought, only when

it is but the expression of what God Himself impels us to cry, can there be the true assurance of sonship in our hearts when we cry, Abba, Father!

And so it is.

For we have received the Spirit!

And the Spirit we have received is the real Author of this outcry, not we ourselves. He it is that always cries, Abba, Father! He does so as the Spirit of the Son in the adorable and blessed Trinity. For in that Spirit the Father eternally faces the Son saying: My beloved Son; and the Son is eternally facing the Father, saying: Abba, Father. He does so as the Spirit of Christ in Christ Himself. For it is in that Spirit that He cried to the Father in the days of His flesh and humiliation; and it is in that same Spirit that the Holy Child Jesus, now in the state of His exceeding glory, constantly turns to His God, crying, Abba, Father! It is in that same Spirit, the Spirit of God as the Spirit of Christ poured forth into the church, that believers in this world lift up their hearts to the God of their salvation in Christ Jesus their Lord, crying, Abba, Father!

For He is the Spirit of adoption!

He is not a spirit of bondage again to fear.

Such a spirit controls those that are outside of the sphere and influence of this Spirit. It is the spirit of the sinner that, instead of being filled with the true reverence of love that acknowledges that God is God and that causes us to prostrate ourselves before Him in true humility, proudly brings to Him the sacrifices of the wicked, claiming the right to be accepted of God on the basis of his own goodness, his religiousness, his own works, and thus becoming abominable in the sight of the Most High, and receiving the testimony of his condemnation and rejection in his conscience.

That is the spirit of bondage that would work for God as a wage earner, being a stranger to the freedom of sons.

And that is the spirit that always fills with a slavish fear those who are possessed by it; for they never receive the assurance of forgiveness and righteousness, essential to all confidence and joy.

But such is not the Spirit we have received.

He is the Spirit of adoption, and, therefore, the Spirit of true and perfect liberty, the Spirit of forgiveness and righteousness, the Spirit of the love of God, in which there is neither bondage nor fear.

He is the Spirit of adoption in the sense that He serves the cause of our adoption, so that He realizes our adoption unto children of God unto us, and causes us to possess it, and to be assured of it, and to rejoice in it, and to live in the consciousness and confidence and

joy that we are the sons of God. We can speak of our adoption from before the foundation of the world. For God adopted us to be His sons in His everlasting good pleasure, when He chose us in Christ. We can speak of the objective realization of our adoption through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, for He was delivered for our transgressions, and raised for our justification. The eternal adoption of all the elect was objectively realized when Christ died for our sins, and when God raised Him from the dead. And we may speak of our adoption through faith before our own consciousness when we prostrate ourselves in dust and ashes before the face of God with the prayer of the publican in our hearts and upon our lips, and receive the testimony that our sins are forgiven and that we are clothed with everlasting righteousness; that God loved us and gave His Son for us; and that He raised Him from the dead unto our personal justification.

It is in the last sense that the Spirit of Christ poured out into the church is the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!

He it is that brings us to a true knowledge and consciousness of our sin and guilt before the face of God.

He it is that ingrafts us into Christ, and makes us partakers of His death and resurrection.

He it is that pours out the love of God into our hearts.

He bestows upon us all the benefits of Christ.

He makes us children of God!

Blessed gift of the Spirit!

Sons of God!

Blessed assurance!

Blessed, because the assurance is not of us, but is the response to the testimony of the same Spirit of adoption, witnessing with our spirit that we are the children of God!

For the Spirit abides with us. And dwelling within us, He testifies constantly with our spirit concerning our sonship in relation to God. Not, indeed, as if there were two independent testimonies, ours and His, coinciding with each other, but so that the Spirit of adoption, through the Word of Christ in the Scriptures, works within us the personal assurance of our adoption and sonship, and thus becomes the ground of the witness of our own spirit!

Thus we are assured of our sonship by God's own testimony!

And we have confidence to cry: Abba, Father!

Editor's note

A special issue on adoption!

We are excited for you to receive the *Standard Bearer's* special spring issue on adoption—both human adoption of children and God's adoption of us, His children, and their relationship. The meditation is from Herman Hoeksema on Romans 8, written in 1944. The editorial gives some history of the practice of human adoption in Dutch Reformed churches: a debate whether adopted children may be baptized before they make confession of faith, whether adoption itself is permissible, and what is the covenant theology behind the debate. Prof. R. Cammenga and Rev. S. Key tackle the beautiful doctrine of God's adoption of His children. Rev. J. Holstege treats adoption on the human level. Derek and Megan VanOverloop—adoptive parents—spell

out carefully their perspective on the parallels between God's adoption of us and our adoption of children. Prof. B. Huizinga accepted the assignment to interview various families regarding their experience either as adoptive parents or adopted children. How thankful we may be for their perspectives, both realistic and at the same time very positive.

A few of the writers have personal experience with human adoption and their writing will make that clear. We trust all the writers have written with the experience of God's adoption of them, marvelous and eternal reality.

God bless your reading.

—BLG



Editorial

Prof. Barrett Gritters, professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of Hudsonville PRC

The history of adoption in Reformed churches

(The olden days were not always golden)

Christians may be very thankful that the church's views on adoption today are not what they were only few generations ago. Today, adoption is common, familiar, expected, celebrated, and a cause for great rejoicing. There are domestic adoptions, foreign adoptions, and adoptions by families of relatives. A congregation without children by adoption is rare. Let's praise God for His gift of adopted children!

A little history of the olden days

This blessed attitude did not always exist among us. Only 50 years ago, even if adoptions were not unknown then, a special issue of a Reformed magazine celebrating the reality and blessing of adoption—justifying and explaining adoption as other writers are doing in this issue—would have been unthinkable. Since I grew up

in California with two adopted cousins, I was not a little shocked shortly after I moved to Michigan in the 1970s and heard at a Sunday morning coffee discussion some older men argue vehemently against adoption. “Adopted children are not covenant children,” was the heart of their position, a view made more troubling by other offensive comments. “Natural born children are given to families by an act of God,” they said, “but adopted children come by a decision of the parents.”

Thankfully rare today, the views expressed by these men reflected old views that were somewhat common in Reformed churches then and rooted back in opinions as far back as the Synod of Dordt some 400 years earlier.

In the PRCA's mother church, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), debate about adoption, especially about the baptism of adopted children *whose birth parents were not known*, began in the late 1800s and

came to a head in 1908 when synod appointed a study committee to report at the next synod in 1910.¹ To be studied was the question “on what grounds foundlings adopted by believers may be baptized.” The Dutch for *foundlings* was *vondelingen*; as was the case with many adopted children, they had been abandoned by parents and *found* by others. For unexpressed reasons, Synod 1910 did not act on the lengthy advice, which left local consistories to make their own decisions. Thus the matter rested for twenty years. In 1930 the question was raised again, at which time synod gave approval for the baptism of adopted children. Three heavyweights registered their negative vote against this decision, an act usually indicating a commitment to protest, which some did. But when Synod 1936 considered the protests, it decided that there was not sufficient reason to retract the decisions of 1930. Reformed theologians in the Netherlands like H. Bouwman, the Dutch church government expert, agreed with the protestants.

Included in their arguments was appeal to the Synod of Dordt, which had also faced the question in connection with Dutch foreign mission work in India and Southeast Asia in the 1600s. Children of “natives” were brought into families of Christian missionaries or settlers, sometimes as slaves but sometimes as members of their families. “May such children be baptized?” was one of the many questions the Great Synod faced before they confronted the Arminians:

Concerning children of pagans which, because of their youth, or because they cannot understand the language (of the Dutch in East Indian homes), have not been able to receive instruction from the Christians, although they may have been incorporated into the homes of Christians by adoption, it was also judged by majority vote that these should not be baptized before they have come to such years that they can be instructed in the first principles of the Christian Religion according to the measure of their understanding, and after such has also taken place.²

There is question whether Dordt was referring to children who had not yet been *legally* adopted and therefore could easily have been removed from the Christian homes, or perhaps were old enough that they needed to be baptized by way of confession of faith.

1 The *Acts of Synod* of the CRC dating back to 1857 may be found online at <https://libguides.calvin.edu/crc/synod-acts-and-agendas>; or, search “CRC Acts Hekman Library”; all the Dutch has been translated into English.

2 *The Church Order Commentary* on Article 56 (3rd ed., Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2021), 362. The quotation of Dordt is their translation of the Dutch.

But VanDellen and Monsma, the Christian Reformed Church Order commentators, conclude: “To be sure, the Synod of Dort declared itself against the Baptism of adopted children of non-Christian origin.”³

In 1951 the PRCA faced the question of adoption by way of a concrete case. An unwed mother had placed her child for adoption and her consistory approved the action. Members protested this consistorial approval and used arguments similar to the CRC’s. But unlike the CRC, these asserted that it was wrong both to give a child to be adopted and wrong, therefore, also to *adopt*. The protests went all the way to synod. Acknowledging the magnitude of the subject, the PRC synod also appointed a study committee to report at the following synod. After lengthy discussion of the report, Synod 1952 decided two things: First, in normal circumstances it is wrong to place your child for adoption. Second, in some cases, it is understandable that a child might be placed in another home where sound Christian care could be given. Therefore, each case must be judged by the parents and if necessary by the assemblies, according to scriptural principles. Implied in this decision is the right and propriety to adopt children.

Whether such adopted children should be *baptized* was assumed. So when Synod 1959 faced the question of “when?” and answered, “When their legal adoption shall have been made final,” the official pro-adoption stance of the PRCA was clarified. It is proper to adopt children and to give them the sign of the covenant as covenant children. Adopted children are as truly *covenant* children as biological children. For this position, we praise and thank God.

A little doctrine (of the olden days)

At issue in most of the discussions was the doctrine of the covenant and the inclusion of children in the covenant. Specifically, are adopted children to be considered *covenant* children?

In their commentary on the Reformed Church Order, Van Dellen and Monsma gave their judgment about adopted children: those adopted children of *believing* parentage may be baptized in their infancy; but those whose parentage is not known or known to be pagan may not be baptized (that is, until later when they make confession of faith). The former children are to be considered covenant children, the latter not.

Surprising as this view may be to us, it was not uncommon. In fact, it was the reasoning of some at the Synod of Dordt. Disappointingly, it appears even in the early history of the PRCA. Rev. George Ophoff is al-

3 VanDellen and Monsma, 362.

leged to have said, “they may be [baptized] if the parents were believers, otherwise not.”⁴ Why? Presumably because only those children could be considered covenant children in whose generations was found Christianity. When Herman Hoeksema was presented with this question in the *Standard Bearer* in 1950, he wrote that his own consistory had approved such baptisms, although not always unanimously, and that he himself would approve such. But his first line of reasoning is telling:

My opinion is as follows: 1. That a child is adopted from a nominally Christian community most probably is guarantee that in the recent past it belonged to the generations of the people of God. It is true that those generations were cut off, and that, as a general rule, the branches cut off are not grafted in again. But exceptions to this rule are not excluded.⁵

It appears that Hoeksema was arguing the case for baptizing an adopted child only *if we are relatively confident that it belonged to the generations of the people of God*. Such were covenant children; others were not.

When VanDellen and Monsma argued their case in their *Church Order Commentary*, their argument was simple, if not simplistic: 1) *Baptism is administered to covenant children.* 2) *Adopted children of pagan (or unknown) background are not covenant children.* 3) *Therefore, adopted children of pagan (or unknown) origin may not be baptized.* Of course, how could anyone permit baptism of children who were not ‘covenant children’?

Therefore, one’s view on the baptism of adopted children depends, they contended, on one’s view of the covenant. If the covenant is “only” a promise of salvation to all who would believe someday, one would likely permit baptism. That view they reject. But if the covenant is a real bond between God and His people in Christ (VanDellen and Monsma’s view), only biological children of believers may be baptized. Why? Because only with them we may be confident God has established a real bond.

The error in VanDellen and Monsma’s view is the contention that baptism is for those with whom we are

sure God has established a real bond and relationship. If we cannot be confident of this, we must not baptize them. This is the old view of presumptive regeneration. According to this view, even though we know some of our children are not God’s elect, we *presume* them to be so and baptize them based on that presumption. And about which children can we presume this? Only *natural-born*, that is, biological children:

Upon what basis does the meaningful assumption referred to above rest? Upon the assurances of God regarding the (natural) children of believers. It cannot be assumed that children of pagans and non-Christians are (federally, representatively, covenantally) in Christ until they by their confession and walk of life manifest themselves as Christians.⁶

Baptism of children, however, is not based on our assumption of their actually being *in Christ*, but on God’s command to baptize the children of believers; *and both natural-born children and adopted children are the children of believers*. Adopted children are the legal, real, rightful, true, legitimate, genuine, children of believers.

For this reason—so the proper argumentation goes—God commanded Abraham to give the sign of the covenant to his household, not only to his biological children but to all who were *his*, including servants young and old. “... he that is born in thy house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy

seed.” For emphasis, God repeated, “He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised” (Gen. 17:10-13).

God has given us an example to follow from His own family life. He has one child brought forth from His own being: the only begotten Son of God, our Lord Jesus. All His other children are adopted by grace. And we are of all different kinds: Jew and Gentile, red and brown, black and white. Our adopted children are also truly His beloved children, purchased with the blood and death of His only begotten Son.

In the goodness of God, the church has matured in her thinking about many things. We may thank Him for this development also.

⁴ G. VandenBerg, “The Baptism of Adopted Children,” *Standard Bearer*, v. 37, no. 10 (Feb. 15, 1961), 236. VandenBerg gives no citation for his quotation of Ophoff.

⁵ H. Hoeksema, “Baptism of Adopted Children,” *Standard Bearer*, v. 26, no. 11 (March 1, 1950), 250.

⁶ VanDellen and Monsma, 364.



Prof. Ronald Cammenga, rector and professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of Southwest PRC in Wyoming, Michigan

Adopted as children and heirs

We are the children of God. This is our distinction! This is the great honor that has been bestowed on us! “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). This is the reality that must frame our understanding of the Christian life. As children of God, we must live for the praise of our heavenly Father. It is serious enough that a son brings shame on his earthly parents. How much more serious that we bring reproach on our heavenly Father by what we do or say. Being God’s children is also our comfort. Nothing can be against us because the God from whom all things come is our Father. He loves us and there is nothing that can separate us from His love or cause His love towards us to turn cold.

We are all the children of God *by adoption*. None of us is naturally a child of God. By nature we are children of wrath, children of our father the Devil, as Jesus teaches in John 8:44: “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.” If there ever was a father who abused and exploited his children, the Devil is that father. But by adoption, God has delivered us from that abusive relationship and made us His own dear children.

Adoption: The witness of the Reformed creeds

The Three Forms of Unity only mention the truth of adoption here and there, without any extended development of the doctrine. In Q&A 33, the Heidelberg Catechism contrasts Christ’s sonship as the only begotten Son of God and the sonship of believers: “Christ alone is the eternal and natural Son of God,” whereas “we are children *adopted* of God, by grace, for His sake.” In Q&A 120, in which the Catechism is explaining the address of the Lord’s Prayer, “Our Father,” we are taught that “God is *become* our Father in Christ.” If God “becomes” our Father, we are not the natural children of God, but His adopted children.

There are two references in the Form of Baptism to adoption (we regard our liturgical forms as “minor confessions”). These references are quite striking since, for the most part, the Form of Baptism is read at the time

when baptism is administered to the biological children of believers. The first reference to adoption is early in the Form when it is explaining why we are baptized in the name of the triune God. When we are baptized in the name of God the Father, “God the Father witnesseth and sealeth unto us, that He doth make an eternal covenant of grace with us, and *adopts us for His children and heirs*, and therefore will provide us with every good thing, and avert all evil or turn it to our profit.” The title of this article on adoption is taken from this statement in the Form of Baptism.

There is a second reference to adoption in the “Prayer of Thanksgiving” at the end of the Baptism Form. In prayer, we “thank and praise” God that He has “adopted us to be [His] children, and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy baptism.” In baptism, God seals and confirms our adoption.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 12 is entitled “Of Adoption.” There is only one paragraph in the article, but it is an important paragraph that touches on significant aspects of the glorious truth of adoption.

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 promise, as heirs of everlasting salvation.

How comforting is the truth of adoption! We have a heavenly Father who “pities, protects, provides for, and chastens” us who are His adopted children. No matter what the circumstances of our lives, our Father loves us and cares for us!

Adoption: The testimony of sacred Scripture

Scripture speaks frequently of adoption. In the Old

Testament, the truth of adoption is not so often referred to as it is implied. The Old Testament does give us an outstanding example of adoption in Moses' adoption by the daughter of Pharaoh. As the adopted son of the Egyptian princess, Moses was taken into the family of Pharaoh, lived in Pharaoh's court, was educated with the members of Pharaoh's household, and may even have been a contender for the Egyptian throne—something possibly included in “the treasures of Egypt” referred to in Hebrews 11:26.

Although adoption is not explicitly referred to, time and again the nation of Israel is referred to as the “children of God” and the “son of God.” This designation implies adoption and the love of God in choosing the Israelites to be His children, as indicated in Deuteronomy 7:7-8: “The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any other people; for ye were the fewest of all people; but because the Lord loved you, and because the Lord would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers.” Referring to Old Testament Israel, Paul says in Romans 9:4 that to them “pertain[ed] the adoption, and the glory, and the covenant.”

It is the apostle Paul who more than anyone else speaks of adoption. In Ephesians 1:5, the apostle dovetails predestination and adoption: “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” The purpose of our election is that we should be God's adopted sons and daughters. In Galatians 4:4-5, he connects adoption to the redeeming work of Christ: “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” The apostle goes on in the very next verses to relate the work of the Holy Spirit to adoption: “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” In Romans 8—the great chapter on the Holy Spirit—the Spirit is called “the Spirit of adoption,” who has delivered us from “the spirit of bondage” (v. 15).

Adoption: A legal or forensic concept

Adoption, like justification, is a legal or forensic concept. The Greek word used in the New Testament Scriptures underscores this reality of adoption. The word is made up of two words: the noun for “son” and the verb that means “to set, to place.” In adoption, one is not born a son, but is set or placed as a son. Although not a son, he is made to be a son legally.

At the same court hearing at which the verdict of God the Judge declares us righteous, He also declares

us to be His own adopted children. Children who are adopted cannot point to a birth certificate to prove that they are the children of their parents. Rather, they point to their adoption papers, ratified in a court of law and signed by the presiding judge in order to prove that they are the children of their parents. Although their adopted child has not been born to them, adoptive parents have legally become the father and the mother of that child.

And our spiritual adoption papers are signed in blood. The blood is the blood of God's only begotten Son, His own dear Son. For, you see, none of us is by nature a son of God and none of us deserves to be a son of God. Jesus' death on the cross was the death of our elder Brother, who gave Himself for us, His adopted brothers and sisters. The apostle teaches in Galatians 4:4-5, as we have seen, that God sent His Son “to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

That they are adopted children does not mean that they are children of a lesser status in their family. Because they are adopted does not mean that they are inferior to and have fewer rights than biologically born children. Like God, some earthly parents have an adopted child or children, while at the same time having one or more biological children. From time to time it happens that after they have adopted, parents altogether unexpectedly conceive. From a legal standpoint, their adopted children are no less their children than their birth children. Hopefully, the parents love and show their love equally to their children, whether adopted or biological. In both cases, they share fully the rights and responsibilities as children of their parents. And hopefully, whether adopted or biological, the children love and honor their parents equally.

One aspect of the equal status that biological children and adoptive children enjoy is that both are the heirs of their parents. All other things being equal, children by adoption share the inheritance equally with those who may be the biological children of their parents. In Galatians 4, after the apostle has spoken of Christ's purpose to redeem those who were under the law, “that we might receive the adoption of sons” (v. 5), and has referred to God's sending forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts so that we cry, “Abba, Father” (v. 6), he adds in verse 7, “Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, *then an heir of God* through Christ.” The inheritance that we will one day possess is the riches of salvation in everlasting life and glory in the presence of our Father, in His house of many mansions (John 14:2-3).

Adoption: The bridge to sanctification

Although strictly speaking adoption is a legal concept, at the same time it serves as the bridge between the doctrines of justification and sanctification. In the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, adoption is treated between justification and sanctification. This does justice to its close relationship with justification, but it also does justice to the close relation between adoption and sanctification.

This close relationship is due to the fact that God does with His adopted children what no human adoptive parents can do. God works by His Spirit to transform His adopted children into His own image. Earthly adoptive parents cannot do this. They can and must do many things, but one thing that they cannot do is impart their natures to their adopted children. This can be one of the challenges of adoption. Adopted children partake of the natures of their biological parents, even though they may never know them. That can from time to time raise a number of difficulties in the adoption experience. But divine adoption is different; divine adoption is transformative. By the Holy Spirit we are actually begotten again—begotten of God. For this reason, the apostle John frequently refers to us as “born of God,” as in I John 5:1, “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” (See also I John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:4, 18.)

As those who have been reborn by the Spirit of God, we bear the image of our heavenly Father. As those who bear the likeness of their heavenly Father, we live as His children in the world. This is precisely the application that the apostle John makes in I John 2:29: “If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that everyone that doeth righteousness is born of him.” And in I John 3:10, he contrasts the “children of God” to the “children of the devil” in this way, that “whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God.” As children who love their father and mother delight in obeying their parents, so the children of God delight in pleasing their heavenly Father.

Adoption: Underscoring the grace of God

Several marvelous truths are underscored by the biblical truth of adoption.

First of all, adoption underscores the truth of God’s covenant. By adoption, we are taken up into God’s family. The purpose of adoption is that we who were by nature God’s enemies and who deserve to be the objects

of His wrath are made the objects of His love and favor. Now the fellowship forfeited in Adam when our first parents were driven from God’s presence in Eden is restored. Through adoption, we are brought again into living communion with our beloved Father.

Adoption also highlights that the salvation of the children of God is due to the sovereign will of God. That, too, is pictured in earthly adoption. It is not the will of the child that determines that he will be adopted or that determines who will be his adoptive parents. But what stands behind earthly adoption is the will and decision of the parents to adopt. No childless couple is obligated to adopt. It is simply their decision to adopt, their decision

even determining whether they will adopt a boy or a girl, and in many instances choosing from various profiles whom they will adopt. What is true naturally is also true spiritually. The will of God determines that He will adopt and whom He will adopt as His sons and His daughters. In John 1:13, the apostle speaks of the adopted children of God

as they “which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of [the will of] God.”

But especially does adoption underscore the grace of God in salvation. Adoptive parents freely determine to share their love and their home with the child whom they adopt. Freely they commit themselves to care for, provide for, protect, rear, and above all love their adopted child. So it is the grace of God that moves Him to adopt, and to adopt whom He does—only the grace of God. Adoption exalts God’s grace in salvation.

What exalts this grace of God even more is that those whom God adopts deserve the opposite. They deserve wrath and judgment, but instead God opens up His heart and His home to His adopted children. From being the slaves of the Devil, they are not only delivered from Satan’s bondage, but they are elevated to the status of sons and daughters of God. It would be similar to earthly parents adopting the young man who yesterday assaulted and robbed them, and whom today they found wallowing in his own vomit as he lay in the gutter in a drunken stupor. To open up their home to such a person, clean him up, give him a new change of clothes and a bedroom of his own, seat him at their table in order to join them in feasting on God’s bountiful provision—that is grace.

And that is a picture of God’s adoption of you and of me. It is a picture of amazing grace!

As those who have been reborn by the Spirit of God, we bear the image of our heavenly Father. As those who bear the likeness of their heavenly Father, we live as His children in the world.



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Safe with our adoptive Father

When we speak about the theological concept of adoption, we do well to remember that adoption is about the reconciliation of rebellious and estranged children. To understand this is important to our confidence in our Father's commitment to our safety. We were named God's children from eternity by His eternal and unchangeable decree of election in Christ (Eph. 1:4-5). But in Adam we who had the perfect place in Father's fellowship forsook Him. Adoption is about God taking into the fellowship of His covenant life those who had rebelled against Him and who had left Him to make their home with the Devil. We not only had run away from home, but we also had entirely lost our way to our return. Adoption, therefore, is the demonstration of God's faithfulness in bringing to realization His covenant with us, a covenant that is not only unconditional but in which God embraces us with an unbreakable embrace. Adoption is the result of His coming to save us.

As rebellious and estranged children, we were held in what I will refer to as an orphanage. It was a miserable place called *The Law*. There are orphanages run by Christians that truly make a home for the children in their care and that provide loving care for the children. But *The Law* was a most unpleasant orphanage. In that orphanage we who had run away from home were held in bondage. We could not do anything right there. We always came under the thunder of condemnation. "By the works of the law there shall no flesh be justified" (Gal. 2:16) was the voice we heard constantly under the roof of *The Law*. We lived in bondage from which we could not free ourselves. Nor could anyone else free us. Not only that, but having made ourselves filthy with sin, there was nothing in us that would give anyone the desire to adopt us. Anyone, taking one look at us and understanding what we are like, would immediately turn away in disgust. Again, it was not that we were placed in that position by circumstances outside our control. It is not that God had forsaken us. We put ourselves in that position!

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us" (Eph. 2:4) would give us a new

life, life in the fellowship of His love and in safety. God, who has "predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself" (Eph. 1:5), would reconcile to Himself those who had been estranged from Him. He would do so *by Jesus Christ*. I John 4:9 puts it this way: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." The Father's gift was to send His Son "to redeem them that were under the law" (Gal. 4:5). He could not redeem those who were under the law unless He Himself came under the law. He entered our "orphanage" where He heard the thunder of God's curse. He heard it while bearing our guilt that He had taken upon Himself. God laid on His only begotten Son the iniquity of us all (Is. 53:6). And in perfect obedience to His heavenly Father, our Lord Jesus Christ freed us from the curse of the law.

Christ redeemed us "that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:5). In redeeming us, Christ not only purchased our adoption, but sealed it with His own blood. Our adoption papers were signed as it were with indelible ink. Moreover Christ, by right, entered to call His own by name and to lead them out (John 10:3). He goes before us and we follow Him, for we know His voice (John 10:4). He gave us the right to all the blessings of Father's house and made us co-heirs of all that He possesses. The essence of that inheritance is that we might know God and enjoy His blessed fellowship forevermore.

Because we are now His children, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:5; Rom. 8:15). The Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, is the One who cries eternally, "Abba, Father." In the love of His heart He draws near to His Father. When God sends forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, He works in us that very same testimony, bringing to expression the knowledge of faith that we are sons and daughters of the living God! So Scripture speaks of the Spirit also as *the Spirit of adoption*. "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). When the Spirit of the

Son makes His dwelling place in our hearts, He works as the Spirit of adoption, ministering to us and applying to us the wonder of what it means that we are children of God by adoption, taken into the fellowship of His life and love. He gives us to hear and to know the wonder of what God has done in and through Jesus Christ in securing our place in His family.

The truth of our spiritual adoption is absolutely amazing. There is no gift more profound than our being taken into the family of God, the fellowship of His triune life and love. That is true not only considering the profound price of Christ's precious blood. But it is also true when we consider that the Spirit of adoption realizes *in us* that profound wonder that we are the children of God. He does that by the wonder of regeneration. We are born again, conformed to the image of God's dear Son. The Spirit of adoption gives us the gift of faith—not only the essence of faith, that bond established at regeneration, uniting us with Christ. But He works in us the activity of faith, by which we know Christ as our own and are assured of our adoption in Him who died for us. Making us conscious partakers of that wonder of our adoption, He realizes that adoption in our hearts, so that we begin to live as children of our heavenly Father. He does that by sanctifying us, instructing us as children of God, leading us, protecting and defending us, and guiding us all along the way to our heavenly home. All this He does as the Spirit of adoption, sent by Christ into our hearts.

Think about that profound gift! Your value before God is not found in what you have done or what you might be able to accomplish. Your value certainly is not in what others think of you. Your value is found in your relationship with the living God for Christ's sake. You are children of God, members of His family, partakers of His covenant life! No one can take that from you! You have *received* that Spirit of adoption. The Bible is consistent in emphasizing the *gift* and the *Giver*. You and I are assured, therefore, of the safety found with Him who adopted us to be His children.

How important it is for us to understand that!

You understand that the Holy Spirit cannot lead us to God without giving us the deep sense of that from which we have been delivered. Adoption presupposes that we cannot overlook our past. It is not necessary that every person who is adopted by human parents seeks to know all the details of his or her roots. My son-in-law who was adopted, for example, has no interest in going back to the country of his roots and trying to find out who his parents were and the circumstances behind his spending the first four or five years of his life in an orphanage. He has no desire to introduce into his

life the misery and sorrow that pre-dated his being taken in by adoptive parents with the loving care and joy that followed. Some might want to do that, but that is not necessary for all. But one thing that he cannot overlook is the fact of his adoption. Adoption is to be taken out of a bad or difficult situation. And when we talk about our spiritual adoption, we talk about being taken out of the bondage of sin and death, misery and sorrow.

There is for us a sense of fear when the Spirit reveals to us our sin and death. You cannot stand before the majesty of God without a sense of fear, knowing very well your own filthiness and sin. But that too is only by the Spirit's work, convicting us of our own sinfulness and unworthiness to be called children of God. The Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth must produce in us this knowledge of our own inability, our helplessness, to do anything to contribute to our salvation. The Spirit convicts us of our need for Christ, through whom alone our adoption is effected.

And so, among the privileges that come with being children of God is that we are no longer under a spirit of bondage. The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. What is the testimony that He bears? It is His witness to us of our election in Christ Jesus, of our redemption by Christ Jesus, of the truth that the righteousness of Christ is ours, and that we are God's children for Christ's sake. He gives us this testimony by the faith that He works in us and by which we rely entirely upon Jesus Christ, convinced that His blood alone is sufficient to cleanse us from all our sin and that He alone is powerful to have reconciled us unto God. The Spirit testifies to us as the Comforter, who assures us of our Savior's presence and our Father's love. He gives us to know by faith that our Savior walks with us, and that our heavenly Father embraces us even in the most painful difficulties of this earthly sojourn.

In that new relationship we *live*. We live in Father's house. The Spirit of adoption confirms to us our relationship with the Father, so that we serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, expressing our thankfulness for the life He has given us in the fellowship of His own family. The service He requires of us is a reasonable service (Rom. 12:1). A child of God lives out of love, not as a slave. We delight to do His will, knowing that His will is best for us and that all that He does and has done for us is expressive of His great love for us.

Our soul is satisfied in Father's house. There is safety there. There is no possibility of our being sent back to the orphanage called *The Law*, or the bondage of sin and death. There is no possibility of being robbed of our inheritance. As adopted children of the living God,

we are heirs in Christ Jesus of that “inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (I Pet. 1:4-5).

We know that our failures do not cost us His love. He will not cast us off. After all, the certainty of the inheritance rests upon Him who has promised it, the unchangeably faithful covenant God. That must be our comfort, too, because on the way to that inheritance we must bear much suffering and many assaults by the Evil One.

The suffering serves God’s purpose in leading us to glory. The suffering we face in this earthly sojourn must be understood as unfolding God’s promise. To be joint-heirs with Christ is to be one with Him. That applies to suffering as well as to the glory. As the apostle wrote in II Corinthians 1:5, “For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.”

But we must also face the assaults of the Evil One. He would constantly attempt to twist our perspective, to corrupt our thinking, to have us question the faithfulness of our Father. Satan would point us to our past sins, our present failures, and would attempt to persuade us that it is impossible that the One we claim as our Father could love us. But our heavenly Father—yes, our adoptive Father—holds us in His everlasting arms. He reminds us by His gospel that the covenant He has established with us is unbreakable because it depends upon Him. The life into which He has taken us in Christ Jesus is life everlasting! We confess, “What his soul desireth, even that he doeth. For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me; and many such things are with him” (Job. 23:13b-14). The Spirit of adoption testifies of this and assures us of the glory that awaits us.

Rejoice in the Spirit’s witness, and live in the knowledge of the safety of your spiritual adoption!



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The believer’s heart for the fatherless

We were cruising down the interstate on a Spring break getaway for two. Our little one-year-old boy was safely in the care of grandma. There was nothing but the open road, and time to talk.

I was looking out the window as my wife began, carefully, to bring up an idea that had been germinating in her mind for some time. Though we recently experienced the joys and fatigue of being first-time parents, this new chapter in our lives did not arrive without a struggle. We had been married for four years, three of which included navigating the maze of emotions and complications known as infertility. Even after the arrival of our firstborn, we were not under the impression there would be many children to follow him. “So... have you ever thought about adoption?”

I stayed mostly quiet. Of course, I had thought about it, but always as something that other people did. I was aware for some time already that the idea of adoption was inching its way into her heart. But I was holding

on to something. I was certain that if we were patient, another pregnancy would come along.

But it did not.

And step-by-step, the Lord slowly made it clear that it would not.

Such were the circumstances of life the Lord used to break down the mental defenses I had built up against adoption. Around the same time, I was recommended by a confidant and friend to read a book I have since recommended to others.¹ It was the right book for me to read at the right time. Not only did it offer me the chance to see what adoption might look like through the personal stories and anecdotes of the author, but it also helped me to connect adoption more clearly to the gospel. As a pastor in training, this was the key that won me over. Adoption was not just a solution to the heartache we experienced because of infertility.

¹ Russell Moore, *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families & Churches*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

Adoption was not just a way to “grow our family” or to ensure our son had the benefit of a sibling(s). Adoption was about the family of God first of all. It was about the calling of Christians to care for the fatherless.

A warrant, a calling, not an obligation

The burden of this article is to make the case that adoption as a human practice is necessary. I hope to present good biblical and theological reasons for the practice of adoption among believers.

By making such a case, I may lead the reader to believe adoption is necessary for everyone. New parents may get the idea they ought to adopt instead of having children the ordinary way. Couples who struggle with infertility may come away feeling guilty if adoption is a path they never pursued. I want to assure the reader: *this article does not intend to say everyone must adopt*. Though all believers ought to have a heart for the fatherless, not all believers are obligated to become fathers of the fatherless. Adoption is not an obligation.

It is better to speak of adoption as *warranted*. Against those who say adoption is an unnatural attempt to play God, the gospel makes clear there is nothing more natural than for those who have been adopted into God’s family to adopt children of their own. The believer is free to behave the way God behaves, to display the mercy and grace that God displays.

And then we would speak of adoption as a *calling*. I do not mean to be mysterious here. I do not mean to suggest that those who are interested in adoption must wait to hear a mystical voice to tell them what to do. That is why I told the personal story above. In my own case, adoption was not only *not* on my radar, but I had built up a mental wall against it. Then the Lord changed my perspective through a combination of life circumstances, a careful suggestion from my wife, and a good book. Adoption became a calling that my wife and I were free to pursue in the liberty we enjoy as sons and daughters of God.

Circumstances may be different for you. Struggles with infertility are not the litmus test for prospective adoptive parents. Adoption is not a solution to the ache for a child. Understand, adopting a child is not like going on a stroll through the park on a spring day. It comes with all the challenges of parenting, along with some added complications. If you feel called to pursue this path, I strongly encourage you to do a lot of reading, a lot of praying, and to have more than one conversation with parents who have adopted and children who have been adopted.

There is a real need for adoption, and adoption is a beautiful way to form a family, but it does require

a certain level of determination and courage. It is a calling.

“...but we are children through adoption.”

Readers of the *Standard Bearer* are aware of the parallels the Bible makes between human relationships and the covenant of grace. Marriage is not only a life-long bond of one man and one woman that can be separated by no one but God (Mark 10:9). Marriage is also a mysterious representation of the kind of unconditional love and intimacy that exists between the glorified Christ and His bride the church (Eph. 5:32). We get this exactly in reverse if we say God’s covenant is *like* our human marriages. The truth is, our human marriages are *like* God’s covenant. Human marriage arises necessarily from the truth that God is a God who marries His bride.

There are more than two biblical parallels to the covenant, but there are two main ones. Besides marriage, the other significant parallel is that of a Father with his children. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, this is what He told them to say: “Our Father which art in heaven...” (Matt. 6:9). As the address beginning our prayers, this is a phrase intended to shape our relationship with God from beginning to end. He is our Father and we are His children. How this has come to be is the big question the gospel answers, and the answer the gospel gives has everything to do with adoption. Before the foundation of the world, God “predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:5). Then, in the fullness of time, God sent His Son under the law “to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:5). The amazing privilege of belonging to Jesus Christ through His blood and Spirit is to be privileged with the title of sons and daughters of the Most High. Though a clear distinction exists between the eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ and our sonship through adoption (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 13), the glorious truth nevertheless remains—“thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Gal. 4:7).

Now, we are familiar with the implications Christ’s marriage to His church has for the marriages of believers. Just as the Lord promises never to discontinue His relationship with His bride, so we are not to assume the right to discontinue our marriages to our spouses. Just as the Lord seeks out His bride and loves her sacrificially, so husbands must lay down their lives for the wellbeing of their wives (Eph. 5:25). Just as the church lives willingly under the headship of the Lord, so wives must yield themselves to the guidance of their husbands (Eph.

5:24). God's covenantal marriage with His people gives shape to our marriages as believers.

The same is true of the relationship of fathers and their children. "Like as a (human) father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him" (Ps. 103:13). Just as the Lord takes knowledge of our weakness and frailty, so earthly fathers are not to be overbearing or to provoke their children to wrath (Eph. 6:4). Just as the Lord does not hesitate to run into the fire and the waters to save His children (Is. 43:2), so earthly fathers are to display a protective love for their children.

Just as the Lord shows His grace and mercy by adopting those who are not His children as His own children, so there ought to be believers who parallel this mercy and grace of God. The God we believe and serve is a God who sanctions adoption by His own divine act. He is the God who says to those who are "not my people" that they are "the children of the living God" (Rom. 9:26). Believing in this adopting God shapes the Christian's heart after a certain mold, and it is the mold of compassion for the fatherless.

I understand the reasons that prevented believers in the past from embracing adoption as explained elsewhere in this issue. I understand the fear and reluctance to pursue adoption, having experienced it personally. But I also say about all that, what a travesty! What a loss for the church of the past that the dots were not always connected! Adoption is a practice arising straight out of the character and work of the covenant God. That gives adoption legitimacy, even necessity, in the Christian church.

Helps the fatherless...

There is an important sense in which adoption differs from marriage in the parallel it draws from the covenant, however. Marriage is a creation ordinance (Gen. 2:24). It was established by God in the serenity of paradise before the corrupting influence of sin entered through the Fall. Though marriage was affected by the Fall, its existence is not a by-product of the Fall. Marriage arises out of the wholeness and goodness of creation in its innocent beginning.

The same cannot be said for adoption. Adoption would not exist before the fall into sin. Adoption would not exist in paradise any more than redemption from sin or the cross or justification. Adoption assumes the breakdown of something that was designed to be whole and put together. Adoption stands against a backdrop of heartache, loss, disappointment, trouble, and yes, sin.

That heartache and loss is not only in the soul of the child who does not know the mother in whose womb

he was conceived. It is also a loss for that mother, and that father. You can hardly imagine Jochebed weaving an ark of reeds for her little boy without tears dripping from her eyes. And every mother will understand what moved Hannah to make that little coat when she visited the tabernacle once a year. Not every mother "gives up" her child for adoption due to irresponsibility or lack of love. Given the circumstances, it may be the most responsible and loving thing to do. It may be a sacrifice made in the interest of doing what is best in a situation where there are no good options.

Yet there will always be an ache in the soul of the child who does not live in the home of the mother who birthed him and the father who begat him.

Orphan

It is a word that summons a range of emotions—from rage to sympathy to fear—in those of us who have always known the stability of a family. But what emotion is in the heart of the little child who has to figure out how to survive on his own? The experience of every orphan is different, but here's a little peak into what it can be:

Of all the disturbing aspects of the orphanage in which we found our boys, one stands out above all the others in its horror: it was quiet. The place was filled with an eerie silence, quieter than the Library of Congress, despite the fact that there were cribs full of babies in every room. If you listened intently enough, you could hear the sound of gentle rocking—as babies rocked themselves back and forth in their beds. They didn't cry because no one responded to their cries. So they stopped. That's dehumanizing in its horror.²

There are all kinds of things that go into the right practice of religion. There is a Christian life that involves reading your Bible and going to church. There are good works that are defined by the law of God. James could have compiled a long list to show us what it means to be doers as well as hearers of the world. Instead, he chose to highlight two things. Keep yourself unspotted from the world, and visit the widows and the fatherless in their affliction (James 1:27). *Visit them*. That means more than sitting down for coffee and cookies. It means taking knowledge and showing mercy. It means doing what God does when He visits His people in their distress and relieves them of their affliction.

Visit the fatherless. Take knowledge of the orphans in their distress. In a fallen world where marriages and families sometimes break in pieces, visiting may mean being a father to a child who does not have one. In a

² Moore, *Adopted for Life*, 47.

world where orphans are sometimes left in their cribs with no one to answer when they cry in the dark, perhaps that means being the one who comes. We are called to strive for the ideals in our marriages and families. We are called to be loving husbands and virtuous wives. We are called to care for our children like olive plants around our tables (Ps. 128:3). But we also need to reckon with the fact that we live in a fallen world where the ideal is not always possible. And in that world, showing grace and mercy means doing what we can to bind up what is broken, to heal what is wounded.

No one ever said adoption was easy, or if they did, they did not know what they were talking about. Nothing in the Christian life is easy. What it usually involves is a cross and the self-denying will to bear it. But of course, as our Lord has shown, the way of the cross is the way to glory. For the believer who has a heart for the fatherless, the self-denial involved in adoption may be the way to provide a family for someone who has none. It may be the means the adopting God uses to draw a child of His love into the joys and privileges of His own covenant family.



Derek and Meghan VanOverloop are adoptive parents and members of Zion PRC in Jenison, Michigan

To choose to oneself

Adoption is no small thing to our God. His covenant family includes His *adopted* sons and daughters. In His divine plan, He enabled us to enjoy the beauty of adoption here on earth. We speak of our son Elijah's story, but we are keenly aware that God is the Author, bringing deep spiritual truths of adoption to light even through our earthly experience. God is the God of adoption. We were reminded of this in every signature, every transaction, every stamp, every hurdle, every triumph.

Our adoption journey began with the counsel of godly friends. God used experienced adoptive parents, Justin and Cathie Koole, to provide motivation to start the process; when it seemed to drag on, they were quick to lend encouragement of God's faithfulness. He used them mightily in our lives and it is impossible to separate our experience from their influence and guidance. They directed us to our agency, Lifeline Children's Services in Birmingham, Alabama, an agency that works faithfully in the adoption world and also in the lives of countless orphans globally. In July 2018 we attended the agency conference in Birmingham called, "Rooted in Love," based on Ephesians 3:17-18. The opening devotions directed us to our Lord's adoptive heart and this continues to be impactful in terms of Christ-centered, Scripture-driven devotions regarding adoption. From this we describe five parallels between physical, earthly adoption and the spiritual adoption of God's saving work, while also giving our personal perspective and experience.

Adoption is planned

Adopting a child comes through extensive, carefully laid plans. It is not a "fallback" or a means to simply build a family. Through much discussion and prayer, and by God clearly opening various doors, we were persuaded that He was calling us to adoption. That being said, the adoption plan had only just begun. It was difficult to grasp what was ahead and how we would manage hours upon hours of paperwork, reading, and online education. We were required to make a financial plan, a parenting plan, a discipline plan, and attachment plans. We had daily paperwork tasks, work plans at our jobs, and once we were matched, we had to make travel plans. Not following through with the plan meant agencies and governments (whether local, state, national, and in our case, international) saying no to you and your adoption.

Our adoption in Christ was also planned. We can carelessly throw the words "God's plan" around, not recognizing the depth of that phrase. When trials overwhelm us, this often is the first phrase that comes to mind, and it is the comfort many bring to us in our suffering. There is no fault in this, but the brevity of the phrase may cause us only briefly to consider what it means. Our plans are temporal, earthly. They last for a time and then they change or are completed. God's plans are eternal and sure. They do not change. Galatians 4:4-5 states, "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman,

made under the law, to redeem them that were under that law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” The “fullness of time” indicates that God had a plan, in a time frame, that would be fulfilled. Consider that amazing redemptive and loving plan beginning with Adam and then fulfilled in Christ. We talk of God’s will and God’s providence, His plan. That plan is our adoption!

Adoption is costly

We want to caution you in your immediate response to this point. We did not say adoption is expensive, although there are undoubtedly financial costs in order to submit and receive all the necessary paperwork to make an adoption legal. You are paying money for that legalization and for all the many services required to bring a child into your family, but that is not the only cost. The descriptive term “costly” figures in so much more than money or expense. The adopted child pays too—a cost that is emotional, physical, and psychological. The cost of adoption is high.

Being in the family of God by our adoption in Jesus Christ is also costly. The cost may be your reputation or denial due to your family name, “Christian.” The cost is the persecution of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and as Paul says in Philippians 3:8, we too may have to “count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus [our] Lord.” He goes on to say, “for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.”

Spiritual adoption cost God His Son because of our sin. It cost Christ His place in glory for a time, humbling Himself to an earthly birth in a cattle stall. The cost was His suffering at the hands of His enemies and certainly at the hands of Satan. His sin-free response ultimately cost Jesus Christ His life. The final cost of our sin and adoption was God’s wrath upon Him. Adoption is costly.

Adoption is legal

Through rolls of red tape, a child legally becomes the child of his or her adoptive parents. Domestic and international governments, state and federal courts, judges, legalizing stamps, signatures, and a mountain of paperwork confirm this legalization. For us, our home study agency, the state of Michigan, and the states of Illinois, Iowa, and California, our adoption agency, the state of Alabama where that agency resides, the government of the United States of America through the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), China’s Children’s Center for Welfare and Adoption,

Hohhot Welfare Institution, and the People’s Republic of China all needed to sign off on the legalization of our son’s adoption. And before we could go home, we had to appear before an American judge presiding at the Consulate in Guangzhou in order to process Elijah’s visa here to the U.S. The moment of touchdown on American soil, just a second of our entire adoption journey, meant our precious boy was legally an American citizen, protected by our family name, and by the government of the U.S.A. But even further, he was legally in the arms of a family who would teach him of his protecting heavenly Father.

The legality of our adoption in Christ is simply this: God’s justice and His law required payment, and that payment would be our eternal damnation. “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:4-7). Christ became the satisfaction for our sins. Legally, this needed to be dealt with before we could be called the sons and daughters of God. The ‘red tape’ of spiritual adoption was Christ’s blood.

Adoption creates heirs

Elijah carries our name because he is our son. Although we know what people mean when they ask if we have “children of our own,” it stings a bit. It is altogether ignorant to think that just because he does not share our DNA, he is not our own. Legally, he will inherit what we leave behind. No matter that earthly amount, he will have legal right to our estate because he is our child.

This treatment is not a departure from how God treats His adopted children. He treats us as His very own because we *are* His very own. Romans 8:14-17 reads, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” The assurance that these verses bring is astounding. First, we are reminded that God is our Father, and that He hears us. Second, it gives context to our suffering. We suffer with Christ, as family, for a purpose, because finally, our inheritance is eternal glory. We inherit eter-

nal life in the mansions being prepared for us. Christ told us this directly in John 14:2, “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.” We inherit eternal life in the presence of Christ, our Savior, and we inherit the gift of glorifying and praising our heavenly Father for all eternity too. That is our inheritance.

Adoption is a blessing

Finally, adoption is a blessing from so many perspectives. We love when people ask us how Elijah came into our family. It gives us the opportunity to recall the blessing that is Elijah and the God who made him ours. He is a special boy with personality and gifts. Music and love live in his heart, and the Lord lives there too. The blessing is realizing that for two and half years, on the other side of the world, God was watching over our son. Out of roughly 7.9 billion people on earth, and 1.4 billion people living in China, this one child would be ours. The story that details how Elijah came into our family is a story that only our sovereign and all-powerful God could write. It is a story of blessings innumerable.

God poured out His Spirit of love who gives us assurance of our place in His family. The love spilled upon us in our spiritual adoption is so sure that Scripture gives

us leave to speak to God as “Abba, Father.” This was Christ’s very own name for God the Father, and we too can use this deeply endearing terminology as we fold our hands in prayer and as we sing praises to Him. The blessing of adoption is that out of all of history, and out of the entire population of the world across that history, out of all the transgressors who have dwelled on earth, God made you His own. He planned for you. His only begotten Son died for you and paid the cost for your sin, making your adoption legal and binding. God is your Father and you are heir to eternity with Christ, and the great blessing of adoption is His wonderful love for you.

God is *the* God of adoption. We were chosen to be His, the action by which the word “adoption” comes—literally from the Latin meaning “to choose to oneself.” Adoption is no small thing to God. He created it and He determined to give His only begotten Son to bring us into His household. That is why the descriptive word “begotten” is so important to us personally when we speak of Christ as God’s Son. We too are God’s sons and daughters, though not *naturally* but *spiritually* begotten, created and adopted by Him. If we say Jesus Christ is God’s only Son, we are forgetting our sonship in the family of God. God desires us to see it this way, that we are His family. The wonder of this gift is almost unspeakable.



Prof. Brian Huizinga, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of Grandville PRC in Grandville, Michigan

Adoption interviews

In this two-part article you are privileged to hear directly from those who experience human adoption. In the first part, I ask questions of adoptive parents and they give answers. In the second part, I follow the same format with adoptees. For space constraints, I limit myself to three couples in part one, and two adoptees in part two, and not all of their responses are published. In one case, the adoptee in part two is the child of one couple in part one.

I aimed for a diverse pool of participants. The adoptive parents are varied in experience and include a younger couple, a middle-aged couple, and a couple

from among our seniors. One couple adopted domestically, the other two internationally. Two couples hail from our churches in Classis East, and one from Classis West. One couple adopted more than one child, the other two couples adopted a single child. Two couples have other biological children, one couple does not. Regarding the adoptees, both were adopted internationally, one being female, the other male.

For various reasons, which include the stated preference of some, I decided to keep all the responses anonymous. This will keep our focus on the instructive responses rather than the person(s). In the answers

you find below I will not identify the respondent, even according to the general descriptors provided above. I simply state the question, and then give some of the provided answers underneath. You will, however, learn the birth country of the two adoptees, and they are happy to have you know.

May God use these responses to enlighten us and deepen our understanding of human adoption. In adoption, as in all things, God is worthy of our unending doxologies as the One from whom all blessings flow. Jehovah only doeth wondrous works in glory that excel!

Questions for adoptive parents

1. What have been the blessings for you as adoptive parents (if that is too broad, then the *greatest* blessing)?

- C1 (Couple 1): The blessings are too many to count! Bringing our children to church for baptism, and watching them as they joined the other children of the church to sing their songs and recite their memory verses for the Sunday School program, attended our own Christian schools, made confession of faith, and married young people from our churches who share like faith. Now they live godly lives and bring up their own children (our grandchildren) in the fear of the Lord. All because God saw fit to give them to us! Also, if we go all the way back to the beginning, several decades ago, we thank God for a very encouraging minister. Through the whole process of adoption, he was very interested, stayed involved, and came with us to the adoption agency when it was time to take home our first child. He said, “This child was born for you. You did not conceive her, carry her, or give birth to her, but it is God’s plan for you that this child becomes yours. If you do not believe this in your hearts, then you may not take this child home with you.” We were parents!

- C2 (Couple 2): We adopted our daughter from overseas and raising her has had the same blessings and struggles as with our other children. She brings so much joy to our family in being our eldest child. We have told people in the past that our daughter did not grow in mom’s tummy, she grew inside her heart.

- C3 (Couple 3): The most obvious blessing to us is the fact that our adoption was the beginning of our

family. We thought we were unable to have biological children, and God led us to this path. We are ever grateful to Him for it. Being able to experience parenthood by this means is truly the greatest blessing for us, and the realization that you can love and cherish a child as your own without a blood connection is something so profound in and of itself.

2. What have been the challenges for you as adoptive parents (if that is too broad, then the *greatest* challenge)?

- C1: We have been very blessed, for there was never any resentment in our children in that they were adopted. Some adoptees may have mixed feelings about their adoption, but both our children are very delighted about their adoption and will gladly talk about it whenever the topic comes up. Their adoption was never a secret in our home; we talked about it freely. We are so thankful to God for their understanding of adoption and their love for us as parents. Thankfully, our children have not faced any unique challenges regarding adoption. They have never been treated any differently than any other children in our circles. They have always been accepted and loved.

- C3: The first and foremost challenge for us is that we cannot fully understand the loss that our adopted child has experienced in her life. The loss of one’s biological mother and/or father even at the moment of their birth is something most of us will never understand.

It is indeed a “primal wound.” Another challenge for us is that we also will never know our child’s full story, as she was adopted internationally. We will likely not be able to provide a full answer when she asks, “Why did my birth-mom not want me?” The final challenge is that our child’s skin color does not match that of her parents or of her biological sibling. She looks different, and often she says she “wants to match mom and dad.” That will never happen—a struggle that most fully biological families will not have to worry about.

3. What has the experience of being adoptive parents taught you about God?

- C1: We have a new appreciation for God’s sovereign plan and how He is pleased to work it out in our lives. We desired to have a large family with many children, but we struggled with infertility for many years.

The most obvious blessing to us is the fact that our adoption was the beginning of our family. We thought we were unable to have biological children, and God led us to this path. We are ever grateful to Him for it. Being able to experience parenthood by this means is truly the greatest blessing for us, and the realization that you can love and cherish a child as your own without a blood connection is something so profound in and of itself.

While I (says the wife) had great joy in watching other parents present their newborn infants for baptism, my arms ached. I knew your heart could ache, but I never knew your arms could ache. Mine did, as I saw other mothers holding their babies and I longed to hold a child of my own. We had our plan, but God's plan, as always, was much better. Through adoption, He gave us two precious children and lovingly provided just what we needed.

- C2: We see firsthand how adoption applies to us. We know firsthand how we can love someone that started as a stranger and looked nothing like us. Now in our family and in our church, most everyone looks at our daughter as *ours*. Growing up in our home, she has even taken some of our characteristics, and it would be impossible for us not to have her in our lives. That goes with the church as well; she fits and has a wonderful place. Also, we have learned how God makes all of us different. It was not difficult for us to adopt. It was something that was discussed and finalized in our minds and hearts quite early in our marriage. We know, however, that adoption is not something that everyone can do.

- C3: There is one application in the picture of adoption that really stood out to us. A big challenge for adoptive parents in adopting initially is establishing a bond with their adopted child. Sometimes, it is difficult for the adopted child to accept the love of their adoptive parents. After all, they were just ripped away from everything they ever knew and carried into a new world. However, we continue to love and nurture our child even if she denies us, similar to how we often (daily) reject our loving Father, but yet He continues to love us as His own adopted children.

4. What would you want any couple considering adoption to know about the process of adoption, or the life of adoptive parents?

- C1: These children are a special gift from God, just as any child is, whether adopted or biological. To the best of your ability instruct them and bring them up in the fear of the Lord, love them, and discipline them just as you would with any other child. All children can have problems, so do not have the attitude of some, that adopted children are expected to misbehave and will be more trouble than biological children. Do not be hesitant to discipline adopted children out of fear that they will not love you. That is not right. The Lord says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

- C2: Those who adopt should expect a bit of a critical eye from people. God does tend to save in the line of continued generations. People rightly have this in their minds, but sometimes it can produce a critical

eye toward adoption. However, as time goes on, we truly do not feel this as much.

5. What would you want all the members of the church to know about adoption?

- C3: Adoption is indeed a wonderful gift of God, and a picture of God's adoption of us to be His children. However, it is not all sunshine and rainbows, and we should be careful not to paint it through rose-tinted glasses. Also, we must be careful that we do not take the adoption picture too far and force parallels between our spiritual adoption and earthly adoption. Here are two examples:

When we put too much emphasis on the act of adopting by the parents, there is a danger in over celebrating them as a "savior." To the adoptive child who is nearby or listening to these praises (even in sermons), the adoptive parents appear to be their saviors who deserve nothing less than unconditional gratitude. Saying parents' adoption of their child is similar to God's adoption of us may not be wrong in and of itself, but adoptees may hear this and feel obliged to be grateful for their adoption no matter how they are really feeling about the trauma and loss they have endured.

I have also heard some compare spiritual adoption and earthly adoption in terms of the relationship out of which we have been adopted. It is true that when our heavenly Father adopted us, He delivered us from our wicked and tyrannical father Satan, but we must be careful when making a connection to human adoption so that we do not paint a negative image for an adoptee regarding their own birth family and even their culture (thinking about them as evil and as the devil).

Questions for adoptees

1. What is the greatest blessing for you as an adopted child?

- A1 (Adoptee 1): I do not know too much about my birth parents. What I do know is that the birth father was not in the picture, so had I not been adopted, it would have been just me and my birth mother. I do not believe that my birth mother was a believer of any kind, so I would have been living in a non-religious home with only one parent. God has blessed me with a loving, Christian family, who has taught me since I was very young about God's love and faithfulness that endures forever. I am forever grateful for them.

- A2 (Adoptee 2): I was brought into a Christian home at just under a year of age and my Christian parents raised me to the best of their ability. They provided food, water, shelter, Christian schools, and wanted me to grow and learn in a Christian environment. This has

been a blessing for me because if I were still in Russia, I do not know where I would be.

2. What is the greatest challenge for you as an adopted child?

- A1: I would not say that I face very many challenges that are different from those that biological children face. However, many people like to stereotype adopted children. Many adoptees have come out of broken homes with a damaged family situation, or have been in and out of foster care for several years. Some people like to assume that I have been under the same circumstances. For example, a couple of weeks ago I was at work and a customer asked me if I was Hawaiian. I said no, then explained that I am South Korean and was adopted into an American family. She then asked me what my story was, how many homes I had been in, and if I was content where I was. I told her that my adoptive family was my first and only family and, of course, I was content.

- A2: Here and there I try to imagine how my birth parents would have raised me, and what rules they would have had for me if they had not given me up for adoption. I have had trouble in the past with respecting and obeying my parents, and sometimes I wonder if it is because my parents right now are not my birth parents; but that is not an excuse.

3. What has the experience of adoption taught you about God?

- A1: Being adopted has taught me how great our God is. There are eight billion people in the world, and by His providence, I was brought to a Christian family who can help me grow in the grace and the knowledge of God. It is amazing to me how the same God who created the immense universe has eternally determined what will happen to every one of us.

- A2: That God works in different ways to gather His children together into His love before the end of time, and He does that for all His people in this world. I have much to be thankful for. My adoption shows me how God is a caring Father who looks out for His children. He could have left me in Russia with possibly nothing. Sometimes I need to remind myself and appreciate more my adoption. I need to continue to show love and support to my parents (in good times and bad

times) because they have done that to me since my adoption, and when they brought me home.

4. What would you want all the members of the church to know about adoption?

- A1: Adoption is so important! Many people are afraid of adopting a child because of the high cost, or the story about how one family's adoption was full of troubles. If you are considering adopting and are unsure, please reconsider, because God's children are from every nation, tribe, and tongue. Being adopted, I feel like I can tell a very deep story of God's goodness and redeeming love. Adoption is a powerful picture of God's continued work of setting the lonely in families (Ps. 68:6) and of bringing new life.

- A2: Adoption is one of the greatest blessings of this world, even though there are challenges. First, adopted children should have the same treatment as those who are not adopted. My friend (who was also adopted) and I occasionally felt like we were treated differently at school because of our adoption. Second, those who want to have children but cannot have their own biological children should consider adoption. I know it is a lot of effort, time, and money, but you have parents, family, friends, church members, and most

importantly, God who will help you. Adoption provides children with food, water, shelter, and most importantly, a Christian home. I want to get married and have kids, so I will definitely think about adoption.

5. Are you open to talking to others about your experiences in adoption? If so, what do you like to talk about, and what are questions you enjoy being asked?

- A1: Absolutely! I am open to talking to others about my experiences with adoption. I always enjoy it when people do not jump to conclusions and make it about something negative. I would not say that there is one thing specifically that I enjoy talking about, and I guess this is not exactly in relation to adoption, but I always enjoy talking about the culture and life in South Korea. I have not put very much effort into keeping up on the culture of South Korea, but it is a place that I would love to visit someday! I also love talking about how adoption shows God's love for His people, and how blessed we are to be able to adopt, both internationally and nationally.

Being adopted has taught me how great our God is. There are eight billion people in the world, and by His providence, I was brought to a Christian family who can help me grow in the grace and the knowledge of God. It is amazing to me how the same God who created the immense universe has eternally determined what will happen to every one of us.

John Calvin on adoption

Compiled by Prof. Ronald Cammenga

In explaining the reward of the saints as an inheritance, Calvin says, “First, let us be heartily convinced that the Kingdom of Heaven is not servants’ wages but sons’ inheritance, which only they who have been adopted as sons by the Lord shall enjoy, and that for no other reason than this adoption.” (*Institutes*, 3.1.2; 1:822)

Commenting on Colossians 1:12, “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light,” Calvin says: “But for what kindness does [the apostle] give thanks to God? For having made him and others meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints. For we are born children of wrath, exiles from God’s Kingdom. It is God’s adoption alone that makes us meet. Now, adoption depends on [God’s] free election.”

Explaining the opening address of the Lord’s Prayer, “Our Father,” Calvin says, “Who would not break forth into such rashness as to claim for himself the honor of a son of God unless we had been adopted as children of grace in Christ? He, while he is the true Son, has of himself been given us as a brother that what he has of his own by nature may become ours by the benefit of adoption.” (*Institutes*, 3.20.36; 2:899)

Concerning the word “church,” Calvin explains, “[B]y the term ‘church’ [Scripture] means that which is actually in God’s presence, into which no persons are received but those who are children of God by grace of adoption and true members of Christ by sanctification of the Holy Spirit.” (*Institutes*, 4.1.7; 2:1021)

In interpreting the expression in Romans 11:2, “God did not cast off his people,” Calvin teaches, “The effect, however, of His adoption is not found in all the children of the flesh, because His secret election precedes adoption.”

In commenting on the first part of Philippians 2:15, “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke,” Calvin says, “For God’s adoption of us ought to be a reason for a blameless life, that we may in some degree resemble our Father.”

Reflecting on I John 3:1, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God,” Calvin writes: “It was no common honour ... that the heavenly Father bestowed on us in adopting us as His children. This great favour should kindle in us a desire for purity, so that we may be conformed to Him. Nor can one who acknowledges himself to be one of God’s children fail to purify himself.”

Commenting on the next verse, I John 3:2, and the expression “we shall be like him,” Calvin says, “For the apostle wanted to show us briefly that the ultimate aim of our adoption is that what has, in order, come first to Christ, shall at last be completed in us.”

Explaining “the promise of reward” that God sets before His children, Calvin says, “But otherwise, just as estrangement from God is eternal death, so when man is received into grace by God to enjoy communion with him and be made one with him, he is transported from death to life—something done by the benefit of adoption alone.” (*Institutes*, 3.18.3; 1:824)

In a section in which he is setting forth Christ’s witness concerning election, Calvin says: “To sum up: by free adoption God makes those whom he wills to be his sons; the intrinsic cause of this is in himself, for he is content with his own secret good pleasure.” (*Institutes*, 3.22.7; 2:941)

In the first section in which he treats eternal election, Calvin writes, “We shall never be clearly persuaded, as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the wellspring of God’s free mercy until we come to know his eternal election, which illumines God’s grace by this contrast: that he does not indiscriminately adopt all unto the hope of salvation but gives to some what he denies to others.” (*Institutes*, 3.21.1; 2:921)

John the Baptist says in John 3:29 that “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom.” In the course of his explanation of these words, Calvin refers to “the holy bond of adoption by which [God] unites us with Himself.”

Announcements continued

Call to Synod

The PRCA Synod of 2022 appointed Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, Wyoming, Michigan the calling church for the 2023 Synod.

The Consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2023 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 13, 2023 at 8:00 a.m., in SW PRC.

The Pre-synodical service will be held on Monday evening, June 12, at 7:00 p.m. Rev. S. Key, president of the 2022 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the Consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Dirk Westra, email: dirkwestra89@gmail.com. Phone: 616-307-6096.

Consistory of
SW PRC
Dirk Westra, Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Council of Hudsonville PRC expresses our sympathy to fellow officebearer, elder Mr. Brad Brower and his wife Ruth, in the loss of their father **Mr. Nort Brower** at the age of 86. Sympathy is also expressed to his wife Jane Brower, children Vicki and Greg VanOverloop, and to his grandchildren and great grandchildren. May they find comfort in Psalter #31: "When I in righteousness at last Thy glorious face shall see, When all the weary night is past, and I awake with Thee to view the glories that abide, then, then I shall be satisfied."

Ed Hoekstra, Vice-president
Ralph VanderVeen, clerk

Wedding anniversary

With thankfulness to God, we offer love and congratulations to our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents, **Larry and Sandy Moerman**, on their 60th wedding anniversary on May 29, 2023. We thank God for His goodness to us in giving a godly example through the years of their marriage. May God bless them in their continued life together. "O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good for his mercy endureth forever" (Psalm 136:1).

David and Gwen Pryor
Josh and Kelsey Balkema
Colton, Hailey
Nathan Pryor
Caleb and Kimberly Pastoor
Mavis with baby due in August
Scott and Tracey Moerman
Emma, Claire, Evelyn, Nikolai
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Resolution of sympathy

The Consistory and congregation of Doon PRC express Christian sympathies to Bill DenBesten, Nancy Zeutenhorst, and Brian and Jillian Hilt and family in the death of their wife, mother, grandmother, **Jennie DenBesten**. May the family be comforted by the hope we have in Christ: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (II Corinthians 5:1).

Mike Mantel, Vice-president
Paul DeJong, Clerk

Reminder:

Remember that the *Standard Bearer* will be published only once a month during the months of June, July, and August.