

**Lesson Three**  
**Adoption: Grace Upon Grace**  
**TRUTH**

OWEN: When we were missionaries in the Philippines a friend from my hometown came to adopt a boy from an orphanage in the southern part of the Philippines. I remember thinking of the incredible significance of his adoption. Owen was an orphan; he most likely came from extreme poverty and from a Muslim background. Two loving parents who had financial means, stability and a strong Christian home, adopted him. The contrast and change for Owen was obvious. He received a new name and a new hope.

How much more is the change for those who are adopted by God the Father? Adoption in the Greek and Roman context involved a change of name, and the transfer of all rights and responsibilities to that of a son or daughter. "Adoption is an act of God's grace distinct from and additional to the other acts of grace involved in the application of redemption. By adoption the redeemed become sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty; they are introduced into and given the privileges of God's family" (John Murray. *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 132.)

One way to describe this distinction follows: In regeneration God gives us new spiritual life within. In justification God gives us right legal standing before him. **But in adoption** God makes us members of his family. Therefore, the biblical teaching on adoption focuses much more on the personal relationship that salvation gives us with God and with his people (Wayne Grudem. *Systematic Theology*, 736). Adoption is grace upon grace.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, Question 24, beautifully summarizes the grace of adoption.

All those that are justified, God secured, 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, having His name put upon them, receive the spirit of adoption, have access to the throne of grace with boldness, are enabled to cry, Abba, Father, are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by Him as by a Father; yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption, and inherit the promises as heirs of everlasting salvation.

R.C. Sproul expands on this doctrine in *Truths We Confess*. He states,

"Christ is God's single heir by nature. He is the Father's Son. We who are adopted become heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ, and ours is the most valuable and rich inheritance that anybody can have. The inheritance is given by God the Father to his Son, and everything Christ possess is given to us, as his adopted brothers and sisters, including the gift of eternal life" (R. C. Sproul. *Truths We Confess*, Volume 2, 68).

## **The Spirit of Adoption**

We are given the promise of *sonship*. In John 1:12 the promise is given: “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” This promise is sealed by the gift of the Holy Spirit to all believers. “Those adopted into God’s family are given the spirit of adoption whereby they are able to recognize their Sonship and exercise the privileges which go with it” (Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 136).

Romans 8:15-16 states, “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” The Holy Spirit seals our adoption with God the Father. The Greek word *huiothesia* has the idea of installing or placing as a son.

In Romans 8:16 and Galatians 4:6 we see it is the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba Father.’

“Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father’” (Galatians 4:6). “This astonishing use of child-language (Father—Daddy) is so remarkable that it has sometimes obscured the force of Paul’s teaching; for the verb he uses, ‘cry’ (*krazein*), is powerfully onomatopoeic and indicates the presence of intense feeling” (Sinclair Ferguson. *The Holy Spirit*, 183).

The Spirit makes our adoption known to us, seals it in our hearts and calls out on our behalf. In adoption, God becomes our Father of His people by the act of adoption. “It is specifically God the Father who is the agent of this act of grace” (Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 136). It is by grace that we are regenerated, justified, saved and adopted. In all these acts of grace is God’s motivation—the motivation of love.

## **Motivation of Adoption**

Paul highlights adoption as an act of God. This act flows from His extravagant love! The reason for adoption is found in Ephesians 1:4b-6. “In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”

The Apostle John rejoices in God’s love. “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him” (1 John 3:1). We are adopted and made God’s children because of His love and grace.

## **Led by the Spirit (*Sonship now*)**

One of the benefits of becoming sons and daughters of God is the assurance of salvation and a new relationship with God, which is a family relationship. Another is the leading of the Spirit in our lives. Paul states in Romans 8:14-15, “...because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of Sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”

Being led by the Spirit is a product of our adoption for the present. James Boice explains this doctrine. “Because our change of status has been accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who lives within every genuine Christian, being a Christian also means that we will be led by that same Spirit. Or, as I have said in different words, it means that we will be growing in holiness increasingly. Our minds are set on what the Holy Spirit desires and about how our having an obligation to live according to the Spirit rather than according to the sinful nature” (James Montgomery Boice. *Romans, Volume 2*, 833, 834). How does the Holy Spirit lead us in increasing sanctification? His does this through the understanding and the application of the Word of God in our minds and lives. Through the Spirit God directs us according to His will, according to His good purpose (Philippians 2:12-13). John Murray says it well, “The activity of the believer is the evidence of the Spirit’s activity, and the activity of the Spirit is the cause of the believer’s activity” (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 295). As we respond to the Spirit’s leading it too is an evidence of our adoption and salvation.

### **Heirs of God (Future Grace)**

As we live this life under the leading of the Spirit we also have a future hope, that as children of God and heirs with God and co-heirs with Christ. “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Romans 8:17). This is a present and certain hope of an inheritance to come. Some children might look forward to an inheritance that might come their way, but we have an inheritance from God the Father that is certain and sure.

What does this inheritance consist of? Certainly we have the promise of eternal life. “For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant” (Hebrews 9:15). Our inheritance is one that can never perish, spoil or fade. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials” (1 Peter 1:3-6).

Since we are co-heirs with Christ, His rule will be our rule and His Kingdom our kingdom (2 Timothy 2:12). The last of lesser items is to be made into the likeness of Christ. For each of us who are led by the Spirit, this is a burning and longing of the new man against the flesh. This future hope should motivate us to live pure lives. “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).

Another privilege given to God 's children is access to Him. We can approach God the Father with boldness. "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

Prayer is one of the greatest privileges we have as the children of God. Have you noticed how many times Jesus refers to God as 'your Father'? His is a new relationship given to those who are the sons and daughters of God and co-heirs with Christ. As Jesus prayed to God as His Father, so He teaches us to pray in the same manner. This would have been a radical thought.

To a Jewish mind a prayer addressing God as daddy would not only have been improper, it would have been irreverent to the highest degree. Yet this is what Jesus said, and this quite naturally stuck in the minds of the disciples. It is something quite new and unique when Jesus instructed his disciples to call God daddy (Boice. *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 447).

## EQUIP

### **Are you living as an orphan or as a Son/daughter?**

In spite of all the verses and promises presented in this lesson, many Christians are living as though they are orphans instead of as son and daughters. In the eve of His death, Jesus said,

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:16-18).

Jesus has given each and every Christian the Holy Spirit—the Counselor, the Spirit of truth. The Spirit that calls out ‘Abba Father.’ The following exercise has challenged and encouraged many to live as sons and daughters, instead of as orphans.

### **Complete this Orphans vs. Sons/Daughters Exercise**

Read through each description from left to right, noting the differences. Under Orphan, check the box if you see that tendency in yourself. Underline the words or phrases that most apply. (Perhaps only part of it will be true for you). Under Son/Daughter, check the boxes that describe where you most want to grow this year. Also underline key words or phrases.

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| <b>The ORPHAN</b>  | <b>VS.</b> | <b>The SON/DAUGHTER</b>   |
|--|------------|---|
| “I will not leave you as orphans...”<br>Sonship and<br>John 14:18  |            | “...but he has given us the Spirit of<br>by Him we cry, ‘Abba Father.’”<br>Romans 8:15                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feels alone; lacks a vital daily intimacy<br>really with God; ‘a vacuum of self concern.’ |            | <input type="checkbox"/> Has a growing assurance that ‘God is<br>my loving Heavenly Father.’            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anxious over ‘felt needs’: friends,<br>money, etc.  |            | <input type="checkbox"/> Trusts the Father and has a growing<br>confidence in His loving care.          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lives on a successful/fail basis; needs<br>to look good/performance oriented.             |            | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning to live in daily self-conscious<br>partnership with God; not fearful. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feels condemned, guilty, and unworthy<br>accepted before God and others.                  |            | <input type="checkbox"/> Feels loved, forgiven, and totally<br>because of Christ’s merit really clothes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Has a little faith/a lot of fear, little<br>sovereign plan ability to really trust God.   |            | <input type="checkbox"/> A daily working trust in God’s<br>for his/her life —God is good.               |

[ ] Labors under a sense of unlimited to my obligation; tries harder to please God.

[ ] Rebellious; resists authority; not easily has a soft teachable; heart is not very soft.

[ ] Is defensive; can't listen well, bristles at the charge of being self-righteous. perfection.

[ ] Needs to be right, safe, secure; his/her unwilling to fail or tolerate criticism.

[ ] SELF-confident, or lacking confidence Discouraged, and defeated.

[ ] Tends toward 'I can do it;' strong gives willed; driven.

[ ] Tries harder; self-effort; relies on Holy his/her gifts to get ministry done.

[ ] Tends to be ungrateful, complaining; tongue bitter, critical spirit. Tears down others.

[ ] Tends to point out what is wrong; often instead to dissatisfied about something.

[ ] Gossips (confessing other people's sins); to needs to criticize others to feel secure.

[ ] Tends to compare himself/herself with others—leading either to pride or depression.

[ ] Feels powerless to defeat the flesh; has seeing no real 'heart victory' over pet sins —has lost more and more victory over the

[ ] Is relatively prayerless; prayer is the 'last confined resort.' Prays often in public, seldom in private.

[ ] The Bible's promises of spiritual power and joy mock him/her.

[ ] Boasts; points out his/her own the accomplishments for fear that someone might overlook them.

[ ] Prayer is the first resort: Like talking Daddy.

[ ] Has the strength to be submissive; (broken and contrite) heart.

[ ] Is open to criticism since he/she is consciously stands in Christ's

[ ] Is able to take risks—even fail; since righteousness is in Christ, he/she needs no record to boast in, protect or defend.

[ ] Is CHRIST-confident and encouraged because of the Spirit's working in him/her.

[ ] 'I can do all things through Christ who me strength.'

[ ] Is trusting less in self and more in the Spirit (with daily reliance).

[ ] Relies on the Holy Spirit to guide the For use in praise, edification, thanksgiving and encouragement.

[ ] Not blind to wrong, but chooses focus on what is good and lovely.

[ ] Is able to freely confess his/her faults Others, prefers to major on their strengths; doesn't always have to be right.

[ ] Stands confidently in Christ, self-worth comes from Jesus' blood and righteousness.

[ ] As he/she rests in Christ, he/she is his/her sense of being a 'big sinner.' she sees himself/herself as a 'big flesh —yet he/sinner.'

[ ] Prayer is a vital part of the day, not loves to talk to the Father.

[ ] God's promises of power and joy are beginning to describe him/her.

[ ] Finds that Jesus is more and more subject of his/her conversations; he/she boasts in his/her weaknesses.

Concerned about building 'a record' 'record' so of deeds that needs noticing and defending.

Christ's righteousness is his/her he/she stands complete in Him.

Wishes people would see things his/her way. Needs to be in control of situations and others.

Is becoming Christ-controlled; ministers in and the power of the Holy Spirit, not in the strength of his/her 'redeemed flesh.'

Looks for satisfaction in positions, truly possessions or pacifiers (idols). Something other than Jesus makes him/her feel worthy, worthwhile, justified.

Christ is his/her meat and drink; God satisfies his/her soul!

Lacks passion to share the gospel (since his/her Christian life is not really news); by a sense of obligation and duty.

Has a desire to see the lost come to know Jesus the way he/she does, good shares the gospel with others.

Review the results of the Orphan vs. Son/Daughter Exercise. Answer the following questions. In what areas am I living as an orphan?

How would living as a son or daughter counter these tendencies? Be specific in how you will change your perspective.

What is the condition to the promise of adoption?

What implications does adoption have in our Christian lives?

What is God's motivation behind the act of adoption?

What are the privileges of being adopted as sons and daughters and co-heirs with Christ?

How should adoption impact your prayer life?

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He instructed them to begin the prayer with “Our Father in heaven” (Matthew 6:9). Pray through the Lord’s Prayer and then remark on the differences that truly understanding adoption makes in praying this prayer.

How would living as a son or daughter counter these tendencies? Be specific in how you will change your perspective.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

In what ways do you struggle with truly believing the doctrine of adoption?

And yet we struggle to be led by the Spirit. What gets in the way of us following the Holy Spirit?

In what areas am I living as an orphan? How will you live as a Son/daughter in order to counter act these areas?

## MISSION

How does the truth of the doctrine of “adoption” change how you pray for non-believers?

Who are the three people (non-church, non-believers) you are praying for?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Steps I have taken or will take to connect with them:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

## **SUPPLICATION**

Spend time praising God for being adopted through faith in Christ.

Pray for your lost neighbors, friends, and family.

Pray for Village Seven to be effective in the mission God has given it.

What needs do you have that your group can be praying for?

What's one area of godliness that you can pray for each other about?