

Session 11. Adoption as sons of God

Introduction and recap

Bible-reading and opening prayer – **Galatians 4:3-7**.

Today carrying on with our series entitled “God’s Great Salvation.” Before we begin today’s topic here’s a couple of words by way of introduction and recap.

A reminder of our method:

We’re doing systematic theology – grouping together the Bible’s teaching on a range of big topics. We’re not doing expository preaching (which is what we normally do) – listening to what God has to teach us from one single passage of the Bible.

Why is systematics important? Firstly, it’s unavoidable. We all have a theology. The only question is this: is it true. Secondly, learning systematic is something we all should do, because it will help us gain clarity and depth in our understanding of the gospel. Thirdly, good systematics is like a *Defence against the Dark Arts* – a guard against heresy – and so is important for leaders in God’s church.

A reminder of our topics so far:

1. God’s wrath at our sin
2. Jesus’ incarnation and obedient life
3. Jesus’ death upon the Cross
4. Jesus’ resurrection, ascension and heavenly rule
5. Our union with Christ
6. Predestination
7. Irresistable grace and effectual calling
8. Regeneration, repentance and faith
9. Justification: the imputation of Christ’s righteousness
10. Justification: by faith, and not by good works
11. Adoption
12. Perseverance: once saved always saved?
13. Glorification: what will the new creation be like?
14. Assurance of salvation: how do I know I’m really saved?
15. Assurance of salvation: what do I do if I’m not sure?
16. Q&A.

We thought about our need of salvation – totally depraved and facing the holy wrath of God. Then we thought about redemption accomplished – the finished and sufficient work of Christ in his life, death and resurrection. Then we started thinking about redemption applied – how it is that God joins us in union to Jesus and takes the work of Christ and makes it effective in our lives.

We saw that God’s plan to save us started in eternity past – he chooses his people. He works sovereignly to call people out of darkness and to himself. He makes people new creatures and enables them to repent and believe. Simultaneously he clothes us with the righteousness of Christ – he justifies us.

But here’s our question this morning: why does God do all that? Of course, he does it for his own glory. But why does he want to do us this extraordinary good which we don’t deserve? Why does he predestine, call, justify?

Our topic today is the answer: he does this work so that we may become children of God and draw near to him as our heavenly Father. God the Son accomplishes the work of salvation so that we become sons of God in Him. This is the highest point of our salvation. I hope and have prayed that we will find joy and assurance in God's word to us this morning.

1. We are not by nature children of God

Look at these verses...

Ephesians 2:1-3 – “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience - ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

John 8:44 - “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires...”

1 Cor 1:9 - “God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.”

Human beings are not naturally children of God. You sometimes hear folk talking as if God is the Father of the whole of humanity: “you’re *child of God*, just because you were *created by God*.” And they may go on to say (or imply) that you don’t need to believe in Jesus – because you’re already a child of God.

That’s simply false. We are naturally “children of wrath” – or “objects of wrath.” Our relationship to God is not naturally a family relationship, it is a wrathful relationship.

Who is our spiritual Father? Until the Lord adopts us, we are children of Satan. I wonder: do we believe that’s true of all unbelievers? That they’re children of Satan?

So if we’re to join God’s family, it will only be as adopted children.

2. God’s aim is to bring us to the Father

The Bible says our greatest blessing is ADOPTING us into God’s family. The chief benefit of God and the Gospel is bring God’s people into rel with God *as their Father*.

(a) Definition of Adoption

Quick definition of adoption which we’ll explain: “God takes the justified person, & makes them one of his children with all the privileges of sons.”

Let’s see that in the Scriptures: First thing we need to know is that...

(b) By grace, God adopts us as sons

Listen to *Ephesians 1:5* – “In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace...”

- Notice: adoption is a work of grace – it is the free gift of God, undeserved, unearned.
- Notice: it is the work of God – it is the purpose of his will. We don’t adopt ourselves.

Listen to *John 1:12-13* – “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

The point: the blessings only come through connection to the Son. We are Sons only because we are united to THE SON. God treats us as Sons because we are in THE SON.

(c) Father, Son and Spirit all work for our adoption

Turn to Galatians 4:3-7...

Galatians 4:3-7 "In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."

So how does God adopt us?

- The *Father* sends the Son (v4) and the Spirit (v6).
- The *Son* dies, redeeming his people, and giving us His status as a Son. (v5)
- The *Spirit* comes to dwell in the God's sons, so that we might have the Jesus-imprinted Spirit living in us. (v6)

(d) As a result we can have access to the Father

Listen to the word of God: *Ephesians 2:18* – "For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father."¹

People who were children of wrath, children of Satan, now have access as sons to God the Father. The holy Father – blazingly pure and righteous – can receive sinners into his presence. How extraordinary is that!

So, what do we do with this? We **praise the Lord for our adoption!**

Do you realize: If you trust in Jesus, gentlemen, you are a Son of God. If you trust in Jesus, ladies, you too are... a Son of God.

Ladies, that's not an offensive thing to say – and here's why. Who is THE Son of God? – it's Jesus. In Galatians 4 Paul is saying that when you become a Christian, you're related to God the Father on the same level as Jesus. Not as a natural son, not as a divine son. As an adopted human son, but as a son nonetheless, as Jesus is a son.

We're not adopted as distant cousin who's not really part of the family and just gets given a £5 book token every Xmas. Not as a Great Aunt Matilda who doesn't really quite fit into the family gatherings. You're a son – a son of God – like Jesus.

Most summers I go to Llandudno in North Wales. Not something I'd necessarily choose to do. On one excursion a few years ago I overheard something. Voices were coming from the top of some flats I was walking past – it was a hot day so the window was open. And a man – probably in his 20s – was screaming at his little daughter. Over and over again he just screamed "Get out of here." And down on the street you could hear her tears.

I don't know what she'd done to make him so angry – maybe nothing. But some of us think God is like that Father. When our sins reach a certain quantity – he snaps – and just kicks us out of the family.

Listen up: Our heavenly Father loves his children with an everlasting love. He never rejects his children, no matter what they do. If you're a child of God now, you can be confident there's a room in his family home – heaven – that's got your name on the door. He's chosen to bring you into his family. You're an adopted son.

¹ Notice how this reflects the doctrine of the Trinity (who God is affects what he does): firstly, this reflects the shape of the Trinity – i.e. the threeness. The priority of the Father is seen in that the greatest height of salvation is *knowing* God as Father. Secondly, we see that adoption is the united ambition of the Trinity – i.e. reflecting the oneness.

Listen to Jesus' words: "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." (John 20:17). Listen to God's word in Hebrews: Jesus is not ashamed to call us his brothers. (Heb 2:11).

Here's how some great Xn men summarised the truth of adoption:

Westminster Confession of Faith - XII

All those that are justified, God vouchsafeth, in and for His only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption:(1) by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God;(2) have His name put upon them,(3) receive the Spirit of adoption;(4) have access to the throne of grace with boldness;(5) are enabled to cry, Abba, Father;(6) are pitied,(7) protected,(8) provided for,(9) and chastened by Him as by a Father;(10) yet never cast off,(11) but sealed to the day of redemption,(12) and inherit the promises,(13) as heirs of everlasting salvation.(14)

(1)Eph. 1:5; Gal. 4:4,5. (2)Rom. 8:17; John 1:12. (3)Jer. 14:9; 2 Cor. 6:18; Rev. 3:12. (4)Rom. 8:15. (5)Eph. 3:12; Rom. 5:2. (6)Gal. 4:6. (7)Ps. 103:13. (8)Prov. 14:26. (9)Matt. 6:30,32; 1 Pet. 5:7. (10)Heb. 12:6. (11)Lam. 3:31. (12)Eph. 4:30. (13)Heb. 6:12. (14)1 Pet. 1:3,4; Heb. 1:14.

Why don't we pause for a moment. Let's have a minute of silence. Why not thank God silently that you're his child. Why don't a few of us give thanks out loud.

Link:

The boys in the Westminster Assembly list lots of blessings that come with adoption as a Son of the Father. We're going to think about just one: "access to the throne of grace with boldness." That simply means prayer.

3. The chief blessing of sons is praying to the Father

The way we enjoy our access to the Father is by prayer. But how do we do that?

Listen to **Galatians 4:4-6** again: "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

Here's a little lesson in how God's children are to address Him in prayer. Paul teaches us that we pray to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit:

(a) To the Father... (verse 6)

We are sons – so in prayer we talk to God as "Father". That's the way we're to address God when we pray.

We're NOT primarily to pray to the Son or Holy Spirit. Neither form of prayer is sinful – both Son and Spirit and consubstantial with the Father, to be worshipped and gloried.

But Scripture only records seven instances of prayer to the Son and none to the Spirit. And here's the reason why. We are adopted children, and we express our adoption when we pray.

Notice that when the Spirit helps us pray he helps us cry out to the Father. He is the Spirit of adoption. The Spirit loves it when we pray to the Father. He causes us to pray to Him.

And remember the Lord's prayer (Luke 11:1-4). The disciples say "teach us to pray". And Jesus says, "When you pray, say, "Father, hallowed by your name."

That means, by the way, that we want to teach our children to pray "Our Father" – not just "Dear God" or "Dear Jesus."

When by faith and by the power of the Spirit we utter those words "Heavenly Father," we are being enabled to do something extraordinary. It's as if we are throwing open the door of the heavenly throne room. We're coming before Almighty God – with both humility, but also with the joyful confidence that a child has when he comes up to a loving Father and say "Daddy, help me."

(b) Through the Son... (verse 5)

It is what the Son has done that makes prayer to our holy Father possible. He redeemed us that we might receive adoption as sons. We see that in v5.

Or check out Hebrews 10:19-22, "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water".

We have no innate right to demand God's attention – to have entry to the holy places of God. But we can enter confidently – that word "confidence" [parresia] literally means "free-speaking".

How can we be confident? Because of the blood of Jesus, that opened up access to the presence of God.

Therefore, v22, "let us draw near with a true heart." In the OT small and weak people "drew near" to great kings in order to ask things of them. Our holy Father is our king. And as we pray, we draw near to him. Because of what Jesus has done!

So – Hebrews 4:16 – "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

That's why, when we pray, it's good to finish our prayers by saying "through Jesus Christ our Lord." They're not magic words. But they acknowledge before God that Christ's work is the only reason we can come to throne of grace.

(c) In the Holy Spirit... (verse 6)

Gal 4:6 – "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Within us, God the Holy Spirit cries and causes us to cry out to God "Abba, Father."

Do you know how Jesus talked to God? He called him "Abba, Father" [his prayer in Gethsemane] – words of closeness and love. Now this is amazing: by the Spirit WE cry, "Abba Father". We can talk to God the Father in the same way Jesus did. How? Because the Spirit of Jesus is within us. Is that not amazing!!!

Lastly, turn up Romans 8:15-17, "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,¹⁷ and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him".

We have the Spirit of adoption as sons. By the Spirit we cry "Abba, Father". When our instinct is to cry out to God as Father, that shows we're sons of God, indwelt by the Spirit.

Notice the context here: it's one of suffering. Do you see that in v17 – "provided we suffer." Notice that in v18 – "the sufferings of the present time." There's great encouragement here: when in the midst of struggles and suffering, do you cry out in anguish to your heavenly Father? There is a sign that the Spirit dwells in you and you are praying in the Spirit, through the Son, to your Father.

Questions for reflection:

1. Think about your confidence that God hears your prayers. When you have doubts about this, do you think mainly about...
 - a. what a good and faithful praying person you are, or
 - b. how faithful and acceptable to God Jesus was on our behalf?
2. Read Hebrews 4:16, 7:25, 10:19-22. What encouragements are here to draw near to God in prayer?
3. Ask God for grace and mercy such as you need it right now.

Hymn:

1 ARISE, my soul, arise, Shake off thy guilty fears;
The bleeding sacrifice On my behalf appears;
Before the throne thy Surety stands;
My name is written on his hands.

2 He ever lives above, For me to intercede,
His all-redeeming love, His precious blood, to plead:
His blood atoned for all our race,
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.

3 Five bleeding wounds he bears, Received on Calvary;
They pour effectual prayers, They strongly speak for me:
"Forgive him, O forgive," they cry;
"Nor let that ransomed sinner die!"

4 The Father hears him pray, His dear Anointed One;
He cannot turn away The presence of his Son:
His Spirit answers to the blood,
And tells me I am born of God.

5 My God is reconciled, His pardoning voice I hear,
He owns me for his child, I can no longer fear,
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And, Father, Abba, Father, cry!
(Charles Wesley)

Book recommendation:

J.I. Packer on adoption in "Knowing God."