

Adoption

The word “adoption” is used exclusively by the Apostle Paul in the New Testament. It is a word taken from the Roman legal system, *hiouthesia*, which means “to place a son.” Note the following definition:

Adoption is the legal act of God whereby he makes us a full member of his family, erases our past life, and makes us a full co-heir of all he has with Christ.

This definition may be understood by examining the Roman concept of adoption. According to Roman law, a father had total control over the lives of his entire family. This was called *pater potestis* or the “power of the father.” In exercising this authority, a father may find that all of his own sons were unacceptable as his heirs. In that case, the father would be able to “adopt” a son which would take precedence over his own sons in regard to the inheritance, or make the adopted son a co-heir with his own sons. Therefore we see that the word “adoption” is not the taking of some waif off of the street, but a careful selecting and choosing of someone to be the inheritor of an estate. Once such a son was found, the following conditions applied to his adoption:

- 1) All of his past debts were canceled. His past life was erased to the extent that it appeared as if he had just been born.
- 2) Depending on the choice of the father, he would be made the sole heir of the estate, or a co-heir of the estate.
- 3) He would be given a new name and made a full member of the family with all of its privileges and responsibilities.
- 4) The contract was witnessed by seven men to insure that no later dispute would arise regarding the adoption. As we can see, this is a beautiful picture of what God has done for us. He has adopted us into his family, canceled our past debt of sin, and made us an eternal co-heir with Christ. The Holy Spirit is our witness.

The Theology of Adoption

The theology of adoption is found in three major passages in the New Testament, Romans 8:1-23, Galatians 4:1-7, and Ephesians 1:3-6. In each of these passages, we see a particular aspect of adoption as it relates to God's plan of salvation in our lives.

1. Election to Adoption

Ephesians 1:4-5 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love
Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

In this passage we see adoption as it relates to our election in God. We were chosen in eternity past and predestined to become children of God. This is a great passage on eternal security as well. If we have been chosen by God, we were chosen to go the entire distance from salvation to ultimate adoption. See also Romans 8:29-30.

2. Redeemed to Adoption

Galatians 4:4-7 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 the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

In this passage we see adoption as it relates to our redemption. Before we could be adopted, we had to be redeemed. This cancels our past life of sin and gives us the promise of future adoption. We must note at this point, that we have not received ultimate adoption yet, this waits for a future fulfillment. However, we have received the full promise of adoption and the assurance of God's Spirit that we are his children.

3. Sanctified to Adoption

Romans 8:12-17 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the body ye shall live. 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 might be also glorified together.

In this passage, we see adoption as it relates to our sanctification. If we have been truly redeemed and born again, we will show that by our progressive sanctification in this life. Note again, that although we have been adopted by God, we have not received the full privileges that adoption gives us. We see this in the next passage.

4. Adopted to Glorification

Romans 8:23 And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our bodies.

This passage tells us when our adoption will be realized in its fullest sense, at the resurrection of our bodies. Although we have received the Spirit of adoption, and although the Spirit assures us that we are adopted, we cannot experience that adoption until our resurrection. At that point, the end of our salvation will be realized, that of glorification, and we will experience the full joy and privilege as adopted sons of God's family.

Adoption and Salvation

Adoption can be pictured in the time-line of our salvation as follows:

Eternity Past	Elected to adoption
Time of salvation	Redeemed and adopted by God
Present	Progressive Sanctification, our responsibility of adoption
Resurrection	Full realization of our adoption
Glorification	Ultimate realization of our adoption

The responsibilities of adoption:

Our progressive sanctification as we mortify the deed of the body. Romans 8:13

Our allowing God to lead us by his Spirit. Romans 8:14

Our suffering with God. Romans 8:17

The privileges of adoption:

Power to overcome the flesh. Romans 8:12-13

Release from bondage. Romans 8:15

Leading by the Spirit. Romans 8:14

Assurance of the Spirit. Romans 8:16

Full heirs with Christ. Romans 8:17

Ultimate glorification with Christ. Romans 8:17

Resurrection of our bodies. Romans 8:23