

## Family Religion: Adoption in the Reformation Tradition An Essential Element of the Gospel Message

By C. N. Willborn

The doctrine of Adoption, or sonship, is a grand doctrine. The ministers of the Westminster Assembly were of this opinion, and set forth an entire chapter headed, “Of Adoption.” Yet too often theologians have neglected or obscured the doctrine. Even revered theologians in the Reformed tradition, such as John Dick, Charles Hodge, Robert L. Dabney, and Louis Berkhof, did not offer much discussion on the subject. Instead, they were prone to follow Francis Turretin in treating sonship as a positive or favorable element of justification, rather than as a distinct doctrine. Following this precedent, many pastors in the modern day have grossly neglected preaching this wonderful doctrine. With this historical reality in mind, Chad Van Dixhoorn has aptly commented, adoption is “the Cinderella of Christian theology and has only recently been recognized as the royal topic that it really is.”<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding, through the history of the church, men committed to the Scriptures have taught faithfully on this topic. Let us briefly explore this doctrine through such teachings in the Calvinian tradition.

JOHN CALVIN

As is often the case, we find ourselves drawn first toward John Calvin (1509–64). As we consider Calvin, we are

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1. Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2014), 171.

2. Robert Alexander Webb, *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1947), 17. Emphasis added.

3. *Institutes of Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), 2.205.

somewhat dismayed when R. A. Webb says: “Calvin . . . makes *no allusion whatever* to adoption.”<sup>2</sup> It can only be assumed (hoped) that he meant by this that there was no chapter or section or paragraph denominated “adoption.” Otherwise, the claim has no warrant. For indeed Calvin’s *Institutes* are strewn through with the adoptive or filial motif.

We begin our look at Calvin by noting that there is probably little else in Calvin that evokes as much debate and disapproval in the world, and, sadly, in the church, as the doctrine of predestination. He was certainly not unaware of this, for he wrote: “I admit that profane men lay hold of the subject of predestination to carp, or cavil, or snarl, or scoff. . . . A rebellious spirit will display itself no less insolently when it hears that there are three persons in the divine essence, than when it hears that God when he created man foresaw everything that was to happen to him.”<sup>3</sup> Yet, I submit to you that were men to understand adoption, the matter of predestination would become a far more wonderful doctrine and less hated. How can I say this? Because adoption and predestination are masterfully related in the Scriptures. Take for instance the Apostle Paul’s opening words in the letter to the Ephesians—“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,” (Eph. 1:3–5). He predestined us for adoption, and this was a loving act of God! Would anyone dare argue that adoption is a loving and generous act? I think not. Yet, Paul would have us understand that adoption flows from *predestination*.

In Calvin’s discussion “Of the Eternal Election, By Which God has Predestinated Some to Salvation, and

Others to Destruction,” he speaks of adoption repeatedly. A few examples include:

- “The predestination by which God *adopts* some to the hope of life, and adjures others to eternal death, no man who would be thought pious ventures simply to deny.” (III.xxi.5; emphasis mine unless otherwise noted).
- “Thus in the *adoption* of the family of Abraham, God gave them a liberal display of favour which he has denied to others; but in the members of Christ there is a far more excellent display of grace, because those ingrafted into him as their head never fail to obtain salvation.” (III.xxi.7).
- “In short, that common *adoption* of the seed of Abraham was a kind of visible image of a greater benefit which God deigned to bestow on some out of many.” (III.xxi. 7).
- “Let believers, then, give full effect to this reason—viz. that we were in Christ *adopted* unto the heavenly inheritance, because in ourselves we were incapable of such excellence.” (III.xxii.1).

These quotes will suffice to show how Calvin responded to critics of predestination. He used those passages that dealt with God’s eternal dealings with mankind and took the alleged cold edge off the doctrine by referring over and over again to adoption. In so doing he drew attention to the relational aspect of God’s dealing with man. It is hard to think in cold, hard, arbitrary terms when one is thinking of family matters and especially the adoption of a child who is undeservedly loved and accepted.

It is vitally important to recognize that adoption is not only that to which the elect are predestined, but that adoption is based upon Christ’s natural (and eternal) sonship. Calvin insists that “this ought to be unwaveringly maintained: to neither angels nor men was God ever Father, except with regard to his only-begotten Son; and men, especially, hateful to God because of their iniquity, become God’s sons by free adoption because Christ is the Son of God by nature.” Calvin establishes this in his commentary on Isaiah 63:17—“He calls God a Father in the name of the Church; for all cannot call him thus, but it is the peculiar privilege of the Church to address him by a father’s name. Hence it ought to be inferred that Christ, as the first-born, or rather the only begotten Son of God, always governed his Church; for in no other way than through him can God be called Father.” This is important to our discussion for two reasons. First, it reminds us that our adoption is based upon the status of our Lord as eternal Son

of God. Second, adoption is something we share with Old Testament saints as a restorative work; restoring us to the relation Adam had with God upon his creation. Indeed, Calvin argued that Adam’s filial relation was based on the eternal sonship of Christ: “I will again briefly repeat and add the same thing concerning the human race. Since angels as well as men were at first created on the condition that God should be the common Father of both; if it is true, as Paul says, that Christ always was the head, ‘the first-born of every creature—that in all things he might have the preeminence’ (Col. I. 15, 18), I think I may legitimately infer, that he existed as the Son of God before the creation of the world” (1.420). Here Calvin plainly teaches that Adam and angels were constituted so that “God should be the common Father of both.” There was a filial relation between Adam and God and that was based upon the eternal sonship of Christ. Even though there was a natural filial relation *in Adam* from the beginning, Calvin explains that we no longer recognize God as Father due to the fall. We could go further and say that we are no longer rightful sons due to our having broken covenant with God *in Adam*. “For although God is still pleased in many ways to manifest his paternal favor towards us,” writes Calvin, “we cannot, from a mere survey of the world, infer that he is a Father” (1.292). Mankind is a son by nature, but, with the fallen nature, mankind is alienated and groaning for filial affection.<sup>4</sup> As that affection was lost *in Adam*, so it is recovered *in Christ*.

The Westminster Confession states in chapter 12 that our adoption is from the Father “in and for his only Son.” This we have seen emphasized by Calvin. It is no surprise, then, that Calvin draws our attention to the wonderful privileges and benefits we have in Christ. This he does in relation to the Lord’s Supper. “After God has once received us into his family,” explains Calvin, “it is not that he may regard us in the light of servants, but of sons, performing the part of a kind and anxious parent, and providing for our maintenance, during the whole course of our lives.” We are given confidence to look forward to the inheritance that is ours in Christ Jesus. “Hence it follows,” writes Calvin, “that we can confidently assure ourselves, that eternal life, of which

4. This is probably a good place to remind the reader that Adam was indeed created *simul filius et servus*. With the fall the filial relation was broken and man fell into slavery to sin. Thus, fallen man knows not the filial love and inheritance of the Father, nor does he know the benevolent concern of the Sovereign Master. Therefore, mankind yearns for filial and benevolent benefits. For this argument see Thomas J. Crawford, *The Fatherhood of God* (1866) and John L. Girardeau, “The Doctrine of Adoption,” in *Discussions of Theological Questions* (1905). Hereafter Girardeau, “Adoption.”

he himself is the heir, is ours, and that the kingdom of heaven, into which he has entered, can no more be taken from us than from him.” Notice that this confidence is based on a present relationship. Where *justification primarily harkens us back* to what Christ has done to remedy our fallenness, *adoption primarily looks forward* to what *is* ours in Christ Jesus now and in the future (2.558).

The confidence to live as heirs, indeed, joint-heirs with Christ, the confidence to look forward instead of backwards, is secured by Christ and made ours through what Calvin calls “the wondrous exchange made with his boundless goodness.” He explains the “wondrous exchange” as follows:

Having become with us the Son of Man, he has made us with himself sons of God. By his own descent to the earth he has prepared our ascent to heaven. Having received our mortality, he has bestowed on us his immortality. Having undertaken our weakness, he has made us strong in his strength. Having submitted to our poverty, he has transferred to us his riches. Having taken upon himself the burden of unrighteousness with which we were oppressed, he has clothed us with his righteousness (2.558).

What better context could there be for Calvin to remind us of our filial benefits than in that of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper? The mealtime is one of family gathering. So it is with the table of our Lord: the children are called to come and dine with the Father in honor of the Son through the efforts of the Holy Spirit. As with the Lord’s Supper, the family meal is a time of reflection, conversation, and, above all, nourishment. We receive what we need and, often, what we enjoy. We look forward to the delicious food set before us.

One last mention will have to do for Calvin. There are those who would deny the free, declarative justification of sinners. As one might expect, Calvin gives them a sound thumping and, in so doing, once again makes sonship or adoption a point of the discussion: “Hence, so soon as you are ingrafted into Christ by faith, you are made a *son of God*, an heir of heaven, a partaker of righteousness, a possessor of life, and (the better to manifest the false tenets of these men) you have not obtained an opportunity of meriting, but all the merits of Christ, since they are communicated to you” (2.95).

5. John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 2.228, 233.

6. Brian A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 89.

This seems to be an appropriate and opportune time to draw a practical point of theology. While adoption into the household of faith is an act of God that needs distinguishing from regeneration, and while it is based upon the reconciliation conferred in justification, it is *not* a subsequent reality in the Christian life. Adoption is *not* a subsequent act on the time-space continuum. It is *not* a second or third blessing of some sort. It is grounded upon the calling of the Father and His declarative acquittal of a sinner, but it follows simultaneously so that we might well say—*simul justus et adoptivus*.

*Simul justus et adoptivus* is important so as to keep adoption in the gospel picture, but also in its proper place within the overall picture. What is meant by this? When we preach the gospel it must include our adoption. When one thinks of it, why do we not? What greater “good news” than deliverance from the family of Satan into the family of God? This is why Professor John Murray referred to adoption as “the apex of redemptive grace.”<sup>5</sup> Again, I would add, unless we maintain the objective reality of this doctrine it can all too easily be reduced to a subjective sentimentality that is no gospel at all, but rather a psychology for the gospel anemic. We have seen that filial language permeates Calvin’s *Institutes*. This is true to the point that we may well describe Calvin’s gospel as “quite simply, the good news of adoption.”<sup>6</sup>

Let’s have Calvin provide a summary of this high doctrine from his commentary on Isaiah 64:8:

Adoption alone could encourage [the Israelites] to cherish favorable hopes, that they might not cease to rely on their Father, though overwhelmed by the load of afflictions. And this order should be carefully observed; for, in order that we may be truly humbled in our hearts, we need to be cast down, and laid low, and almost crushed. But when despair seizes us, we must lay hold on this altar of consolation, that, “since God has been pleased to elect us to be his children, we ought to expect salvation from him, even when matters are at the worst.” Thus, with a view to the gracious covenant, the Israelites affirm that they are the children of God, in order that they may experience his fatherly kindness, and that his promise may not be made void.

#### WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY

In 1642 the English Parliament called together a collection of ecclesiastical savants in order to produce a body of religious material that would provide a unifying base

for the churches of England. Initially this work centered on a revision of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. Some ten weeks of work had passed when the Solemn League and Covenant was signed committing the Assembly to a new endeavor which would result in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechism, and other ecclesiastical documents. This body of material would (theoretically) supplant the Scots Confession of 1560, Thirty-Nine Articles (1563, 1571), and the Irish Articles (1615).

As one would expect, the aforementioned creedal documents were not out of mind as the Assembly worked toward a unifying document. This is evident throughout the document.<sup>7</sup> When we come, however, to our present topic—Adoption—we find the Westminster document breaking new ground, at least confessionally. Chad Van Dixhoorn confirms our thoughts when he writes, “The most noteworthy fact about this chapter on adoption is that there is a chapter at all.”<sup>8</sup>

How did the Assembly come to produce a separate chapter for this grand doctrine? When there is no precedent for doing so in Calvin, in the Scots Confession, in the Irish Articles, or the Thirty-nine Articles, why did they “suddenly” decide it needed attention all its own? The reality is that we cannot say for certain. Conclusive evidence does not exist.<sup>9</sup> All we know for certain is that the Assembly committed justification, adoption, and sanctification to the hands of “Committee three” on July 16, 1645. Then on July 23, 1646 the work on justification and adoption was presented for debate and approved (apparently without controversy) by the body.<sup>10</sup>

This chapter is significant, first, in its very existence and, second, for its placement between justification and sanctification. Third, “Of Adoption” reminds believers of their legal status in relation to the family. We are by virtue of the Father’s adoptive act, “taken into the number.” Finally, the chapter is vital to a correct view of the Christian life by showing how adoption establishes our relation to the Son and our inheritance so we may “enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God” (Westminster Confession of Faith 12).<sup>11</sup>

True, the chapter is brief. One could desire a more complete treatment of the doctrine. Candlish’s lament over the neglect of the doctrine could probably extend to the work begun by the Assembly on this vital doctrine. Yet it proved to be seminal for the contribution of John L. Girardeau in the nineteenth century as well as John Murray and J. I. Packer in the twentieth century. One can speak with a degree of certainty when saying that the Confession will also prove to be integral to any further development of the doctrine both

by virtue of its strengths and its weaknesses (not to be read “errors”). For now it will suffice to say that we have seen its importance both in breaking from “confessional tradition” and in bringing the doctrine out from under the shadow of justification.<sup>12</sup>

JAMES BUCHANAN

One prominent theologian to illumine the doctrine was Professor James Buchanan (1804–70) of the Free Church of Scotland and New College, Edinburgh. In his ever-relevant volume entitled *The Doctrine of Justification* (1867), Buchanan makes some important statements concerning adoption. We might even consider them strange given the neglect that has characterized other writings of the same period. But it is especially significant that Buchanan draws attention to adoption in the context of justification and carefully distinguishes the two doctrines—justification and adoption. Buchanan writes: “[Adoption] is radically distinct from [pardon and acceptance], as being founded on a nearer, more tender, and more endearing relation,—that between a Father and his Son. . . The privilege of adoption presupposes pardon and acceptance [i.e., justification], but is higher than either. . . [Adoption] is a higher privilege

7. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1919), 1.761. Professor Schaff, for example, points out the use of the Irish Articles in formulating the Westminster Confession of Faith.

8. Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith*, 171.

9. One could speculate that the Assembly took their clue from Bishop Ussher’s *Irish Articles*. There one reads in relation to predestination (Article 15) that those predestined to life are “justified freely; they be made sons of God by adoption. . . .” Again, in Article 89, “Of Baptism,” we read that baptism seals “unto us our new birth (and consequently our justification, adoption, and sanctification).” With these leads and the precedent of Ames’s *Marrow of Theology*, one might surmise the origin of the Assembly’s Chapter 12 “Of Adoption.”

10. *Minutes of the Westminster Assembly (1642–47)*, ed. Alex Mitchell and John Struthers (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1874), 114, 259. Interestingly when the work was presented to the Assembly for debate, it is recorded as “Of Justification and Adoption” as though it were one chapter. Perhaps this was a simple truncation on the part of the reporter. On the other hand, the committee may have presented it as one chapter and the Assembly divided it for publication. Since there appears no record of substantial debate one is inclined to the former explanation—that is, short hand on the part of the reporter. Cf. Van Dixhoorn, *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly 1643–1652*, 5 vols. (OUP, 2012), 3.635, 4.214.

11. For an excellent recent treatment on adoption and our relation to the Son, see David B. Garner, *Sons in the Son: The Riches and Reach of Adoption in Christ* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2016).

12. Justification had dominated the attention of Reformation theology for so long that almost all other doctrines had been neglected. Due to the controversy that continued in relation to justification, it is easy to see how adoption could be lost.

than that of justification, as being founded on a closer and more endearing relation.”<sup>13</sup>

From this quote, one can see that Buchanan might well agree with Professor Murray that adoption is “the apex of redemptive grace.” J. I. Packer certainly draws upon Professor Buchanan when he says, “Adoption . . . is the highest privilege that the gospel offers.”<sup>14</sup> Adoption is based upon the declaration of a Father rather than a Judge—granted the two are one, yet the paternal relation is one of the home where justification is one of court.

Buchanan further maintains, with both the proponents and opponents of maintaining adoption as a distinct *locus* of theology, that both justification and adoption are declarative acts of God the Father. He insists that they be considered separately (while maintaining their inseparability) so as “to complete the view of our Christian privileges, and to enhance our enjoyment of them.” It is “necessary, also, to explain how the sins of believers are not visited with penal inflictions properly so called, but are nevertheless treated in the way of fatherly chastisement.” Moreover, the distinction is needed in order to show that “the kingdom of heaven hereafter will not be bestowed as wages for work done, but as an ‘inheritance,’ freely bestowed on those, and those only, who are ‘joint-heirs with Christ’” (Packer, 263–264).

#### JOHN L. GIRARDEAU

John L. Girardeau (1825–98) was one of those notable South Carolinians of the nineteenth century who was renowned both as a pastor and a scholar. After more than a quarter century of ministry to slaves, free blacks, and whites in the low country of South Carolina, Girardeau was the choice to fill the chair of theology that had been held by such as James Henley Thornwell at the Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina. For the next twenty years Girardeau influenced the church through his classroom prowess and publications. Included in his writings was a small, but potent treatment of adoption that eventually appeared in his *Discussions of Theological Questions*. In that discourse, he takes up an historical overview, which includes a helpful evaluation of the

13. James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867), 262, 263. It is interesting that these lectures constitute the second series of the “Cunningham Lectures.” In the first “Cunningham Lectures,” R. S. Candlish produced *The Fatherhood of God*. Buchanan is here careful to set the correlative of Fatherhood, adoption, apart from justification and so not to neglect the doctrine by allowing it to be swallowed up by justification.

14. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1973), 186.

exchange between two notable Scots theologians, James Smith Candlish and Thomas Jackson Crawford. In the second part of Girardeau’s treatise, he takes up Adoption, not as history, but as doctrine for the church. We will consider a sampling of his offerings.

First, concerning the grounds of our sonship, we find our dignity as sons grounded in the eternal purpose of God the Father. (Eph. 1:4,5; Rom. 8:29) We next find our dignity in our union with God the Son, “*naturally*, by virtue of his incarnation, and his consequent community of nature with the elect. Gal. iv. 4–7.” Third, our union with the Son “*spiritually* and vitally,” is a ground for our adoption. “This is accomplished, first, on God’s part, by regeneration, and, secondly, on man’s part, by faith.” Finally, the Father’s conferral of the rights and dignity of sons is grounded on our union with Christ *federally*. Girardeau explains. “This involves the imputation by God the Father of Christ’s vicarious righteousness to his people; and this again implies the imputation to them of his filial obedience, which is the special and immediate ground of their adoption, in contradistinction to the imputation of his obedience as subject, the special and immediate ground of their justification” (Girardeau, “Adoption,” 488).

Moving on, Girardeau reminds us of the rights involved in adoption. The rights of adopted sons are as follows: heirship (Rom. 8:17) and inheritance. Now it is important to note, as does Girardeau, that our inheritance is to be understood or viewed in a threefold manner. It is ours *de jure* based upon the finished work of Christ. It is partially ours now *de facto*. It will be ours completely when our pilgrimage is finished and we enter our eternal rest.

For lack of space and time, allow me to summarize our inheritance in the words of Girardeau. What is our inheritance? “Home! All that is wrapped up in that sweet, transcendent word, heightened, sanctified, glorified, and projected everlastingly; our Father’s house, because Jesus’ Father’s house, with all it includes, of fellowship with God the Trinity, with holy angels, with glorified saints, with elect relatives, brethren and friends. Ineffable communion!” (Girardeau, 492).

Perhaps it will be helpful to close our brief comments on “rights” with four present privileges of adopted sons, as noted by Girardeau. Our privileges include: “The free spirit of filial obedience, leading to boldness of access to God, and liberty of communion with him as children” [Eph. 3:12; Heb. 4:16; 10:19; 1 John 4:17]. Next, “[l]iberty to offer imperfect, though sincere, obedience, and to hope for its acceptance” [1 John 5:2–4]. Another privilege is “[t]he wholesome, loving, saving discipline of

children in God's family" [Heb. 12:5–11]. Finally, "[t]he enjoyment of all conceivable good in God as the portion of the soul" [Eph. 1:18; 3:8; Heb. 11:26; James 2:5] (Girardeau, 493–494).

JAMES I. PACKER

Finally, let us conclude with one twentieth century contributor. J. I. Packer's *Knowing God* has exercised great influence since its appearance in 1973. It is significant for several reasons, but perhaps none more than his inclusion of a chapter on our adoption as sons and daughters of God. He establishes the import of this doctrine immediately by defining a Christian as "one who has God as his Father." According to Packer, this is "the richest answer" one can give to the question, "What is a Christian?" In the New Testament "'Father' has now become His covenant name—for the covenant which binds Him to His people now stands revealed as a family covenant."<sup>15</sup>

Another contribution too easily overlooked in Packer is that of the adopted one's relation to Law. He develops this relation in the context of "gospel holiness," which he defines as Puritan shorthand for faithful Christian living. "Gospel holiness" is meant to distinguish the believer from those who think legalistically about holiness. Failure to distinguish properly and biblically between justification and adoption will eventuate in a confusion over the Christian's relation to the law.

There have always been those who, wishing to deny the Law as a means toward justification have erred toward antinomianism. "Grace, grace, grace," is their cry. But, as Packer skillfully points out, this is to confuse the relationship of the Law to the justification of sinners with that of the Law to adopted sons.

[W]hile it is certainly true that justification frees one forever from the need to keep the law, or try to, *as the means of earning life*, it is equally true that adoption lays on one the abiding obligation to keep the law, *as the means of pleasing one's newfound Father*. Law-keeping is the family likeness of God's children; Jesus fulfilled all righteousness, and God calls us to do likewise. Adoption puts law-keeping on a new footing; as children of God, we acknowledge the law's authority as a rule for our lives, because we know that this is what our Father wants (Packer, 223).

Words from the Apostles John and Paul will vindicate Packer against any opponents. Our Lord said: "If you love me, you will keep My commandments" (John

14:15).<sup>16</sup> "He who does not love me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me," (John 14:24). "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him," (1 John 2:3, 4). "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome," (1 John 5:3). Finally, Paul would vindicate the joyful relation of sons to the Law when he says: "Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. . . For we know that the law is spiritual," (Rom 7:12, 14). Likewise the Apostle John tells the church, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome," (1 John 5:3).

As Packer reminds us, "'Be holy, for I am holy' [Lev. 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7; 1 Pet. 1:16] is our Father's word to us, and it is no part of justifying faith to lose sight of the fact that God, the King, wants his royal children to live lives worthy of their paternity and position" (Packer, 223). As justified sinners we are adopted as sons; as adopted sons we are called to holy living which necessarily involves the Law as the rule of life, as the revealed expression of God's holiness.

In the midst of our living out this holy, and just, and good, and spiritual rule of life, we fail, we break covenant; in a word, we sin. At such times, we are called upon to repent of our lawlessness—"sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). Therefore, the failure to relate properly to the Law will result in one's failure properly to understand and relate to sin. One can have no proper view of sin without understanding one's relationship to the Law. It necessarily follows that a low view of Law results in an improper view of repentance—for repentance relates to sin (lawlessness). The adopted son can only relate properly to his Father—in a life of holiness—when the Law is integral to his life as a son.

Packer's contribution is enormous, especially in reminding us of the proper relation of justification and adoption, and the Law to each. With Murray, Packer would agree to the assertion that adoption is the "apex of redemptive grace." With Buchanan, he agrees that adoption is a higher, indeed, "the highest privilege that the

15. Packer, 180, 183. It is perhaps at this point that Packer deserves the most attention, especially for all future consideration and development of the doctrine—that is, the covenantal relation of the Father and His family. Far too often sonship/adoption is thought of singularly in individualistic terms. As one reads the Bible, it would appear that this is not primarily how it ought to be thought of.

16. All Scripture quotations are from the NKJV unless noted otherwise.

gospel offers.” He would plead to maintain the biblical distinctions between justification and adoption (as well as adoption and sanctification). Without so doing there can only be confusion about one’s covenantal standing with one’s heavenly Father.

#### CONCLUSION

In the course of our survey we have seen the importance and even centrality of adoption to the gospel message. Calvin appealed to this doctrine (not justification) to blunt the allegedly cold edge of predestination and to instruct concerning the Lord’s Supper. “He does not treat sonship as a separate *locus* of theology,” writes Sinclair Ferguson, “precisely because it is a concept which undergirds everything he writes.”<sup>17</sup> We have seen the groundbreaking work of the Westminster Assembly as they set the doctrine apart from justification and sanctification under its own chapter head. We have seen the doctrine exhumed from beneath the massive body of Turretin’s theology, where it had been subsumed in justification. Those nineteenth century theologians deserve our recognition and our further study. We have made honorable mention of Murray and Packer as they have distinguished it in their twentieth century writings. Furthermore, we are hopeful this brief study will encourage readers to consider a most notable recent treatment by David B. Garner, *Sons in the Son*.

Adoption is important to a proper theology of salvation. Adoption is *not regeneration*—it is a new name, not a new nature.<sup>18</sup> Adoption is *not justification*—for while both are forensic, adoption confirms one in one’s familial relationship to God. It is *not sanctification*—the one (adoption) is objective in its relation to redemptive grace while the other (sanctification) is subjective in that relation. Teaching a proper view of adoption, or sonship, is necessitated on these grounds alone. Anything less is to communicate mixed messages to God’s children.

17. Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Children of the Living God* (Colorado Springs: Nav-Press, 1987), 82.

18. Thomas Boston, *Complete Works of Thomas Boston*, 12 vols. (1853; repr., Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, Publishers, 1980), 1.616. Boston provides yet another splendid treatment of adoption which falls in the tradition of Calvin, Ames, Westminster, et al.

19. Tim Trumper, *The Reformed Faith Today and the Good News of Gospel* (Greenville, SC: Second Presbyterian Church, 2000), sound cassette. See also Tim J. R. Trumper, “Adoption: The Forgotten Doctrine of Westminster Soteriology,” in *Reformed Theology in Contemporary Perspective*, ed. Lynn Quigley (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2006), 87–123.

20. Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Nashville: The Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 759–61.

Adoption is also important, practically speaking, for several reasons. Without the Biblical view as set forth and distinguished above, one cannot properly appreciate the gospel. Therefore, our knowledge of God is faulty and our Christian life is anemic, in that we do not know how to relate to God. Our motivation to obey is askew, and repentance is wrongly directed. We will be prone to live as licentious subjects, not as holy sons motivated by our desire to please our Father. Our appreciation of the covenant is not full, approaching it more like the old covenant than the new covenant. Our understanding of communion, both with God and our spiritual siblings, is truncated and individualistic, rather than corporate—we fail to see that we have been placed in the family or clan of God. Without a correct view of adoption, our eschatology suffers. Only through understanding adoption properly, can we see what we already have and what awaits us—the already and the not yet exemplified in our soteriology.

Tim Trumper, who in recent times has studied this doctrine more than many, summarizes the doctrine in a manner most suitable for a conclusion when he says: Adoption is the climax of predestination (Eph. 1:5); adoption is the climax of federal theology (Rom. 9:4); adoption is the climax of soteriology (Gal. 4:4,5); adoption is the climax of Pneumatology (Rom. 8:15,16); adoption is the climax of ecclesiology (Eph. 2:19); adoption is the climax of eschatology (Rom. 8:23).<sup>19</sup>

To frame the doctrine in more biblical theological terminology, consider:

- The predestination of believers to adoption reveals to us the love of the Father from all eternity for those covenantally related to His Son, (Ephesians 1:4–5).
- Christ’s objective work raised adopted sons above the tutelary status of the Mosaic era to mature status, (Galatians 4:4–6).
- The Holy Spirit is given to provide the subjective assurance and reality [the immediate testimony of the Spirit with our spirit] and to enable sons to cry “Abba, Father.” So, a way of life in this world for citizens of heaven is provided, (Rom. 8:15,16).
- There is the promise of future benefits provided for the children of God beyond the temporal realm. Glory becomes the hope of the believer, (Rom. 8:23).<sup>20</sup>

*Continued on Page 253.*

**Editorial. Continued from Page 2.**

Glasgow cathedral Kirk. For *In Translatione*, we continue our custom of presenting short to medium length first time translations into English of material of interest to Confessional Presbyterians. This year's entry is a translation by David C. Noe of two important letters which John Calvin wrote to the ministers of the Reformed church in Montbéliard. The church there was facing the forced imposition of Lutheran worship practices by the civil authorities, including the reinstatement of a number of the old holy days of the church calendar which that church had rejected at its founding. A helpful background introduction covering Calvin's view of such observances is provided by Chris Coldwell.

Worship is the most important thing a Christian does. If the Reformation was only about reforming our doctrine of justification—as absolutely important as that is—then the Reformation would only have been a whiff rather than a raging firestorm that spread through Europe and beyond, changing the world forever. But Dr. Old has taught us that real and abiding significance of the Reformation takes place in our worship services. In a day and age of fog machines, praise bands and offertory ballet performances, that is no insignificant thing. For these reasons the editors of *The Confessional Presbyterian* journal are happy to present this issue in honor of 500 years of being Reformed according to the Scriptures.

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**Calvin the Pastor. Continued from Page 49.**

to shepherding the flock. Pastors are not CEOs, they are under shepherds in the flock of Christ. Like Christ himself, every pastor should be able to say, 'I know my own (sheep) and my own know me' (John 10:14). Our Lord Jesus Christ knows his sheep 'by name' (John 10:3) and no less should the under shepherds he has appointed know the sheep he has committed to their care.

Calvin's example also speaks to the church's theological teachers. Is it possible for men who have never been proven pastor-teachers to help teach and mold men preparing for the gospel ministry? Calvin and his fellow Reformers were pastor-theologians. They ministered week by week in the churches committed to their care. Their theology was formed from the word of God and forged in the pastoral crucible of the church. This is why, if I can speak for myself, I would not have pastoral theology as a separate theological locus in a Seminary. Every subject, OT, NT, biblical languages, systematic and biblical theology and church history, should be taught pastorally, by proven pastors. I have little doubt these last few words will generate a measure of discussion and debate! ■

**Less Outward Glory. Continued from Page 128.**

## KREEFT'S CHALLENGE AND CONCLUSION

Much more needs to be examined, including the rest of Calvin's writings on worship, an examination of more passages from his commentaries, and a more thorough examination of the entirety of the *Institutes* on the topic of worship. We have learned, though, that throughout his writings he makes clear that he believed the reformation of worship in the church to be essential. He found this on the basis of Scripture as well as looking back on the early church. One could say that no stone was left unturned as the Reformers sought to bring all things under the authority of God's Word. However, what do we make of Kreeft's challenge? Is it the case that, exegesis and history notwithstanding, the Reformers missed something? Do the transcendentals go together such that something cannot possibly be truly beautiful and false? Can something have the appearance of beauty but, at the same time, be evil?

What Kreeft seems to overlook is the fact that there is a clear Scriptural example where the good and the true are separated from the beautiful. Satan provides us with the answer to Kreeft's challenge. This is not overstating the case. To the contrary, Scripture presents him as one who was the most beautiful of God's creation, a guardian cherub (Ezekiel 28:12–18). Paul speaks of Satan as one who can even now disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). Far from necessitating that the good, true, and beautiful always go together, the person of Satan shows that something can be presented as beautiful—exceedingly so—and yet be full of evil and lack all truth. Indeed, Scripture and history prove to us that the mind of man is always looking for ways to add to the commands of God. This is why worship must always be reformed, according to Scripture. ■

**Family Religion: Adoption in the Reformation Tradition An Essential Element of the Gospel Message. Continued from Page 166.**

While we are still servant-subjects in the kingdom of God, we are even more sons of "our Father in heaven." It is fitting then to close with these words from John L. Girardeau: "The servant, with hat in hand, stands at a respectful distance awaiting the orders of his master; the child of God, as Luther has graphically suggested, rushes into the presence of his Father, leaps into his lap, and nestles in his bosom" (Girardeau, "Adoption," 493). Soli Deo Gloria!

## SUGGESTED READINGS

Thomas Boston. *The Complete Works of the Late Reverend*