

Breakout Session I

The Theological History of Adoption

Synopsis: Not for the first time in church history, the endeavor is under way to recover the doctrine of adoption. Whereas previous attempts ended up faltering, in part for want of awareness of the extent of **the neglect of adoption**, the current interest in its recovery already has the benefit of a detailed understanding of its theological history. This has been gleaned from **the creeds, confessions, and writings of the church**, and brings to light some fascinating trends and facts. These not only demonstrate the reality of the neglect of adoption, they go some way to explain it, and point in the process to the significance benefits accruing to the faith and practice of the church from the recovery of adoption.

Introduction:¹

1. The History of Adoption: *The high watermarks—*

A. In the Early Church:

B. In the Dark Age:

C. In the Reformation:²

¹ “The evangelical doctrine of Adoption—succinctly described as “an act of God’s free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges, of the sons of God”—has received but slender treatment at the hands of theologians. It has been handled with a meagreness entirely out of proportion to its intrinsic importance, and with a subordination which allows it only a parenthetical place in the system of evangelical truth” (Robert Alexander Webb, *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption* [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1947], 17).

² “The Reformers had enough to do”, Robert Candlish explains, to vindicate “the article of a standing or falling church”—justification by faith alone; to recover it out of the chaos of Popish error and superstition; and to reassert it in its right connection with the Doctrine of the Absolute Divine Sovereignty which Augustine had so well established. Their hands were full.” (*The Fatherhood of God: Being the First Course of the Cunningham Lectures*, 5th ed., [Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1869], 192; cf. 240–47).

“Why has the subject of Adoption—so rich and fertile in fine thought and feeling, so susceptible also of beautiful theological treatment—been so little investigated and illustrated? It belongs to the category of relative grace, and forms the sweet complement and sparkling crown of Justification by faith. On Justification by faith we have abundant and most precious authorship; for around that doctrine and privilege the great battle of controversy has raged. But the conquerors seem to have paused, exhausted or contented

D. In post-Reformation Europe:³

E. In English Puritanism:⁴

with the victory” (Hugh Martin, *Christ’s Presence in Gospel History*. 2nd ed. [Edinburgh: John Maclaren, 1865], 80fn.).

Salvation, J. Scott Lidgett perceives, “is not conceived by Luther prevailingly under the form of realised and completed sonship, but as redemption, forgiveness, acceptance, confidence, and freedom, especially this last . . . Luther speaks much here of the gift of the Spirit, of faith, of redemption, of freedom from the law of sin and death, of being heirs of God. All these blessings cluster for him around the gift of the Spirit of adoption. He speaks of the filial cry of believers, but he gives no exposition of the meaning of sonship, as the form, above all others, which the Christian life assumes. The freedom, confidence, and sense of heirship, which are so vital to Luther’s experience and so closely consequent on sonship, engage his attention, rather than the nature of the relationship, which is their source” (J. Scott Lidgett, *The Fatherhood of God* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902], 251–52).

“There has sometimes been a tendency in Protestant theology, especially in the Lutheran Church, to lean too heavily on the doctrine of justification. This is understandable in view of the decisive importance of the doctrine at the Reformation. But the fullness of the gospel is too rich to be compressed into the framework of this doctrine alone. For when God extends his grace to us in Jesus Christ, he not only releases us from our guilt, he also receives us into his family; and the one thing cannot be separated from the other without the risk of serious misunderstanding. The doctrine of adoption is sufficiently important to merit treatment alongside the doctrine of justification” (George S. Hendry, *The Westminster Confession for Today: A Contemporary Interpretation*. The Library of History and Doctrine [London: SCM Ltd., 1960], 141).

³ “The majority of Reformed teachers followed their great textbook [Turretin] master in this sad omission, thus removing much of the central Biblical picture of family relationship from the theological curriculum. None can doubt that this narrowing down of the crucial relationship of redeemed humans to the Holy God into only forensic terms (crucial as the forensic element is to the Gospel) impacted the preaching of their students into a more legal, and less familial direction” (Douglas F. Kelly, “Adoption: An Undeveloped Heritage of the Westminster Standards,” *Reformed Theological Review* (Australia) 50 (Sept.–Dec. 1993), 112).

⁴ “All those that are justified God vouchsafeth, in and for his only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the 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 promises, as heirs of eternal salvation.” (WCF 12)

Adoption is an act of God’s free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God. (SC 34)

“Adoption is an act of the free grace of God, in and for his only Son Jesus Christ, whereby all those that are justified are received into the number of his children, have his name put upon them, the Spirit of his Son given to them, are under his fatherly care and dispensations, admitted to all the liberties and privileges of the sons of God, made heirs of all the promises, and fellow-heirs with Christ in glory.” (LC 74)

F. In the eighteenth century:⁵

G. In the nineteenth-century:⁶

⁵ “A real Methodist is one of those whom God hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour; wherefore, they, who be endued with so excellent a benefit of God, are called according to God’s purpose by His Spirit working in due season; they, through grace, obey the calling; they be justified freely; and made the sons of God by adoption; they are conformed to the image of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ; they walk religiously in good works; and at length, by God’s mercy, they attain everlasting felicity” (George Whitefield [1714–70], cited by Eifion Evans, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales* [Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985], 366). Howell Harris’ record of his conversion: “June 18th. 1735, being in secret prayer, I felt suddenly my heart melting within me like wax before the fire with love to God my Saviour; and also felt not only love, peace, etc., but longing to be dissolved, and to be with Christ. Then was a cry in my inmost soul, which I was totally unacquainted with before, Abba, Father! Abba, Father! I could not help calling God my Father; I knew that I was His child, and that He loved me and heard me. (Cited by Evans, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales*, 53). George Whitefield’s testimony illustrates the same: “About the end of the seventh week, after having undergone innumerable buffetings of Satan, and many months’ inexpressible trials, by night and day, under the spirit of bondage; God was pleased at length to remove the heavy load — to enable me to lay hold of His dear Son by a living faith, and, by giving me the spirit of adoption, to seal me, as I humbly hope, even to the day of everlasting adoption. But oh, with what joy — joy unspeakable, even joy that was full of and big with glory, was my soul filled when the weight of sin went off, and an abiding sense of the pardoning love of God, and a full assurance of faith broke in upon my disconsolate soul. At first my joys were like a spring tide; and, as it were, overflowed the banks. So when I would, I could not avoid singing psalms almost aloud; afterwards they became more settled, and blessed be God, saving a few casual intervals, have abode and increased in my soul ever since.” (Cited by John Stoughton in *History of England from the Opening of the Long Parliament to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1881], 6:125–26).

⁶ “Those whom God justifies, he adopts through Jesus Christ to himself, receives them as his children, and gives them the liberty and privileges of children. He calls them by his name, sends forth the spirit of adoption into their hearts, and gives them liberty to come boldly unto the throne of grace, and strength to cry, Abba, Father. He pities them, provides for them, teaches them, protects them, and when necessary, chastises them as their Father; but he will not cast them out: he seals them unto the day of redemption. They are children and also heirs” (Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Confession of Faith [1823; Engl. 1827], ch. 25, “Of Adoption”).

“We believe that those who receive Christ by faith are united to Him, so that they are partakers in his life, and receive His fullness; and that they are adopted into the family of God, are made heirs with Christ, and have His Spirit abiding in them, the witness to their sonship, and the earnest of their inheritance” (Articles of the Presbyterian Synod of England [1890], Art. 14).

H. In the present:⁷

⁷ “We believe that God, on the sole ground of the perfect obedience and sacrifice of Christ, pardons those who by faith receive Him as their Saviour and Lord, accepts them as righteous, and bestows upon them the adoption of sons, with a right to all the privileges therein implied, including a conscious assurance of their sonship” (The Basis of Union of the United Church of Canada [1925], Art. 11 “Of justification and Sonship”).

“The benefit of the forgiveness of sins is so great and so prominent in Scripture that it sometimes seems to be all there is to justification. Linked with it, however, is another benefit that is equally rich and glorious and that, though it cannot be separated from forgiveness, is nevertheless distinct from it. It is the attribution of the right to eternal life, or adoption as children, which Paul mentions immediately after redemption from the law (Gal. 4:5 [et al.]).” (Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:226; cf. 494).

“A renewal in danger of being dominated by the desire of Christians to have their felt spiritual, emotional, or physical needs satisfied, or by the pursuit of charismatic power, needs to be converted from its own self-concern to a new obedience to the universal purpose and will of the Father. The renewal will find an expanding significance and life, not within its own internal evolution, but only as it seeks to see what the Father is doing” (Thomas A. Smail, *The Forgotten Father*, reprint ed. [London *et al.*: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990], 16–17).

“ . . . for some inexplicable reason it [adoption] is a doctrine about which we rarely hear. How often have you heard addresses or sermons on it? Why is it that, even as evangelical people, we neglect, and indeed seem to be unaware of, some of these most comforting and encouraging doctrines which are to be found in the Scriptures?” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible*. Vol. 2, *God The Holy Spirit* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997], 179).

“We believe:

- The doctrine of adoption has been widely neglected within the church historically;
- It remains neglected within much of the evangelical church today;
- A proper theological grounding of horizontal adoption *within* vertical adoption has profound implications for our understanding of both aspects, and therefore;
- To the extent we can recapture theological balance regarding adoption, the Church will be transformed and our witness to the world will be radically redefined” (Dan Cruver in *Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living through the Rediscovery of Abba Father*, edited by Dan Cruver (Adelphi, MD: Cruciform Press, 2011)).

2. The Neglect of Adoption

A. Churchwide Reasons:

I. The neglect of soteriology:

II. The preoccupation with other doctrines:

B. Reformed Reasons:

I. Methodological arrangements:⁸

II. Theological approaches:

C. Reactionary Reasons:

I. The example of John Wesley:

II. The example of Thomas Erskine:⁹

III. The example of N. T. Wright:

⁸ “Perhaps more than any other influence, the impact of biblical theology on systematic theology has demanded a reorientation of soteriology towards the concept of sonship. The doctrine may therefore be on the verge of a long-awaited reinstatement to the position it occupied in Calvin’s thought, one which pervades the whole ethos of the Christian life” (Ferguson, “The Reformed Doctrine of Sonship,” in *Pulpit and People: Essays in Honour of William Still on his 75th Birthday* [Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1986], 84).

⁹ “If all men are already, as men, God’s children, and have always been so, it needs no adoption to make them so; if universal Fatherhood is a fact, and not a fiction, and by consequence if there be universal Sonship naturally belonging to all men, there is and there can be, so far as we can understand it, no such thing as Adoption. Adoption is, per se, a denial of such universality” (James Matthew, “The Doctrine of Sonship and the Sonship of Believers,” [*The Theological Review and the Free Church College Quarterly* 2 (1886), 25]. .

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Conclusion

Breakout Session II

The Strategic Significance of Adoption

Synopsis: While the biblical teaching on adoption is inherently important, it is also strategically so. Stated alternatively, the recovery of adoption not only promises the filling of a lacuna in the field of theology, it offers to break the impasse of a number of present day debates. The session explains this in regard to one major example, namely **the debate over the new perspective on Paul**, and demonstrates in particular how a biblically sensitive understanding of adoption can mediate effectively the recent exchange between **Dr. John Piper** and **Prof. N. T. Wright**. In making the case, Dr. Trumper builds on his own interaction with the new perspective on Paul dating back to 2002, utilizing in the process insights by Prof. Kevin Vanhoozer from the 2010 Wheaton Theology Conference.

Introduction: The recovery of adoption, understood with biblical sensitivity, not only enriches Christian theology in general (and Reformed theology in particular), enhancing our devotion and motivation for piety, and broadening mission, it helps us defend the biblical credentials of the Reformed faith and to cut through a number of present debates. Speaking personally, I've tried to show this in four fields:

1. *Historical Theology*:¹⁰

2. *Biblical Theology*:¹¹

3. *Practical Theology*:¹²

4. *Elenctic Theology*:¹³

¹⁰ See "An Historical Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition." Ph.D. Diss., University of Edinburgh, 2001.

¹¹ See "Covenant theology and constructive Calvinism," (a review of Jeong Koo Jeon, *Covenant Theology: John Murray's and Meredith Kline's Response to the Historical Development of Federal Theology in Reformed Thought* [1999]), *Westminster Theological Journal* 63 (2002).

¹² *When History Teaches Us Nothing: The Recent Reformed Sonship Debate in Context* (Wipf and Stock, 2008).

¹³ "The Theological History of Adoption. II: A Rationale," *SBET* 20:2 (2002), 195–201.

Context: In introducing the claim that adoption is strategically significant for understanding the debate over the new perspective (NPP), note the history and basis of the claim—

1. The history of the claim:

2. The basis of the claim:

A. John Piper's neglect of adoption

B. N. T. Wright's Neglect of adoption

1. The Backdrop of the Debate:

A. Imbalance in the relationship between BT and ST:

B. Imbalance in the relationship between the divineness and humanness of Scripture:

C. Imbalance in the relationship between the juridical and relational:

D. Imbalance in the relationship between the personal and the communal:

2. The Analysis of the Debate

A. The Validity of Wright's Protest

(i) Biblical theology

(ii) Humanness of Scripture

(iii) Tone of the gospel

(iv) Scope of the gospel

B. The Invalidity of Wright's Solution

(i) The inadequacies of Wright's exegesis

(ii) The inadequacies of Wright's Doctrine

(a) The conflation of covenant and law court imagery

(b) The conflation of justification and adoption

(iii) The inadequacies of Wright's polemic

3. The Resolution of the Debate: The recovery of adoption offers the debate 5 advantages—

A. The balancing of biblical and systematic concerns

B. The balancing of redemptive and relational concerns

C. The balancing of individual and communal concerns

D. The balancing of immediate and eternal concerns

E. The balancing of spiritual and bodily concerns

Conclusion

A Classic Version of the Doctrine of Justification Westminster Confession of Faith, Ch. 11 “Of Justification”

I. Those whom God effectually calleth he also freely justifieth, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous: not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone: not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience, to them as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith: which faith they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God.

II. Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.

III. Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, in as much as he was given by the Father for them, and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead, and both freely, not for anything in them, their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

IV. God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect; and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit doth in due time actually apply Christ unto them.

V. God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified: and although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may by their sins fall under God's fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of his countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.

VI. The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament.¹⁴

¹⁴ Westminster LC: Q. 70. What is justification?

A. Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in his sight; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone.

Q. 71. How is justification an act of God's free grace?

A. Although Christ, by his obedience and death, did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice in the behalf of them that are justified, yet in as much as God accepteth the satisfaction from a surety, which he might have demanded of them, and did provide this surety, his own only Son, imputing his righteousness to them, and requiring nothing of them for their justification but faith, which also is his gift, their justification is to them of free grace.

Q. 72. What is justifying faith?

A. Justifying faith is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and word of God, whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assenteth to the truth of the promise of the gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ and his righteousness, therein held forth, for pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation.

Q. 73. How doth faith justify a sinner in the sight of God?

A. Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it, nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his justification; but only as it is an instrument by which he receiveth and applieth Christ and his righteousness.

Westminster SC: Q. 33. What is justification?

A. Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Breakout Session III The Pastoral Application of Adoption

Synopsis: Working from a **summary of the salient biblical features of adoption**—chiefly Paul’s exclusive, metaphorical, Trinitarian, redemptive-historical, and eschatological use of *huiiothesia*—attention is given to the rich array of its spiritual and practical applications. Many of these spiritual applications are not new, having been worked out in the sixteenth-century by **John Calvin, the theologian *par excellence* of adoption.** Nevertheless, fresh expression is given to them in light of the present, to which are added up-to-date practical applications for personal, communal, and pastoral use today.

Introduction:

Certain basic buildings blocks are needed to apply adoption accurately; namely, an appreciation of:

1. The exclusive character of Paul’s adoption model:

2. The clear redemptive-historical contours of Paul’s adoption model:

3. The specific context from which pastoral application arises in a biblically sensitive understanding of adoption: Three features of this context—

(i) The development of the church

(ii) The liberation of the church

(iii) The international make-up of the church

1. The Pastoral Application of Adoption in the Heart:

Six areas in which adoption is personally applicable—

A. In Christian liberty:

B. In prayer:

C. In Assurance:

D. In providence:

E. In obedience:

F. In the inheritance:

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2. The Pastoral Application of Adoption in the Church: Three important areas—

A. The unity of the church:

B. The role of the church:

C. The provisions of the church:

3. The Pastoral Application of Adoption in Mission:

A. Direct Mission:

B. Indirect Mission:

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Conclusion

Personal Bibliography

For reasons of practicality the bibliography is curtailed to the pieces I have published, but in these pieces is found the sources quoted in the session, and many others besides.

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