

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

SOTERIOLOGY

The Doctrine of Salvation

By Grace Alone, Through Faith Alone, In Christ Alone, To the Glory of God Alone

UNIT 7: ADOPTION — SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF THE LIVING GOD

The Highest Privilege of the Gospel

Lesson 21

Adoption

The Privilege Greater Than Justification

From Slaves to Sons — The Highest Privilege of the Gospel

“See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are”

Key Texts: Galatians 4:4–7; Romans 8:14–17, 23; Ephesians 1:5; 1 John 3:1–2; John 1:12; 1 Peter 1:3–5

“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”

Galatians 4:4–6, NASB 1995

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Introduction

Unit 6 established, with systematic precision and pastoral urgency, the doctrine of justification, the forensic declaration by which the divine Judge pronounces the believing sinner righteous in His sight, on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ, received through faith alone, grounded in grace alone. That verdict is the most important legal reality in the universe, and the peace it produces in the conscience of the one who has genuinely received it is the most transformative single experience available in the Christian life. But justification, for all its magnificence, does not tell the whole story of what God has done for the believing sinner. It addresses the sinner as a defendant in the divine courtroom; it speaks to the question of legal standing. What it does not tell us, what requires the distinct and additional category of adoption, is that the same God who declared the sinner righteous in the courtroom also took her home.

J.I. Packer, in his classic work *Knowing God*, makes one of the most theologically provocative claims in the whole of evangelical literature: “Adoption is the highest privilege that the gospel offers: higher even than justification.” The claim is startling, particularly coming so soon after five lessons establishing justification as the article by which the church stands or falls. But Packer’s point is not that adoption replaces or exceeds justification in importance; it is that adoption adds to justification a dimension of relational warmth, family membership, and personal intimacy with God that the forensic category of justification alone cannot capture. Justification removes our guilt; adoption gives us a family. Justification answers the question of legal standing; adoption answers the question of relational belonging. The justified sinner knows she is acquitted; the adopted child knows she is loved.

Adoption (Greek: *huiothesia*, the placing as a son) is the gracious act of God by which those who were by nature children of wrath, members of the rebel humanity standing under the condemnation of the divine law, are received into the family of God, granted the full legal status of sons and daughters with all attendant relational privileges and covenantal obligations, and made heirs of the divine inheritance alongside the eternal Son through whom and with whom the adoption is received. The doctrine of adoption is not merely the relational sequel to justification; it is the specific, named, doctrinally defined reality by which the Christian’s fundamental identity is established: not merely an acquitted defendant but a beloved child; not merely freed from the punishment due to rebellion but welcomed into the household of the King against whom the rebellion was committed.

This lesson will proceed through seven major sections: adoption defined in its theological precision; the Roman legal background that illuminates the New Testament’s adoption language; Packer’s claim and the relationship between adoption and justification; the foundational texts of adoption (Galatians 4:4–7 and Romans 8:14–17); the privileges of adoption; the distinction between adoption and regeneration; and the pastoral warmth that the doctrine of adoption communicates about the specific character of the relationship between the believer and God. Throughout, the governing conviction is that the doctrine of adoption is not a secondary theological decoration applied to the gospel after its essential content has been secured, but one of the most practically transforming and most personally freeing truths the gospel contains.

I. Adoption Defined

The Grace That Transforms Legal Standing into Family Membership

A. Definition and Scope

Adoption (huiothesia) is the gracious, sovereign, irreversible act of God by which those who were by nature members of the rebel humanity standing under divine condemnation are received into the household of God as sons and daughters, granted the full relational and legal status of natural-born children, and made co-heirs with the eternal Son of every blessing of the divine inheritance. The definition contains several elements that deserve careful attention and that together establish the precise character of the doctrine.

“Gracious”: adoption is pure gift, in the same sense that justification is pure gift. The children of wrath have nothing to commend them to the divine favor that would make their reception into the divine family a natural or appropriate response on God’s part. The adoption is entirely motivated by the free, sovereign, self-motivated love of the Father, the same love that John 3:16 names as the source of the giving of the Son and that 1 John 4:10 identifies as the initiative that precedes and produces all human love toward God. “Sovereign”: the adoption is not a response to the child’s spiritual improvement or religious achievement; it is the sovereign decision of the Father to receive those He has chosen into His family, independent of any quality in the recipients that might make them suitable adoptees. “Irreversible”: the adoption, once accomplished by the Spirit’s work and received through faith, is as permanent as the new birth that produces it and the justification that accompanies it. A child of God does not cease to be a child of God by reason of disobedience, spiritual failure, or seasons of rebellion; the family membership established by the divine act of adoption is as permanent as the act itself.

“Those who were by nature children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3, NASB 1995): adoption presupposes the condition from which it delivers. Before the adoption, the adopted children were not the biological children of God in the unique sense in which the eternal Son is the Son, they were members of the fallen humanity, born under the Adamic curse, by nature oriented toward sin and toward the world’s rejection of the Father’s authority. The adoption is the divinely accomplished transformation of their status from rebels and enemies to children and heirs, a transformation as radical as the justification that accompanies it and as costly as the redemption that makes it possible.

Ephesians 1:5 provides the most explicit statement of the predestinarian ground of adoption: “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will” (NASB 1995). The adoption was predestined, decided before the foundation of the world, in the eternal counsel of the God who planned it, “according to the kind intention of His will.” The Greek *euodokia* (kind intention, good pleasure, freely chosen delight) is the specific language for the divine motivation of the predestined adoption: not a cosmic necessity or a legal obligation, but the free, delighted, entirely voluntary choice of the Father to welcome into His family those whom His kind intention has appointed to receive that welcome.

B. Children of God in the Unique and Non-Unique Senses

The New Testament uses the language of divine sonship and divine fatherhood in several distinct senses that must be carefully distinguished to avoid the confusion that an undifferentiated use of the language produces. There is

the unique, eternal, ontological sonship of the second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God in the absolute, incomparable, irreducible sense in which only the eternal Son is the Son, sharing the divine nature with the Father and the Spirit in the undivided unity of the one God. This sonship is the Son's by eternal generation from the Father; it is not communicated or shared with any creature; and it is the infinite distance from which the adoption of the believer must be measured.

There is then the universal human relationship to God as Creator and Sustainer, the sense in which God is the "Father of spirits" (Hebrews 12:9) and Paul can cite the Stoic poet's claim that "we are His offspring" (Acts 17:28) in his Areopagus address. This is the creational fatherhood of the God who made all human beings in His image and sustains their existence by His providential care, a fatherhood real in the sense of ontological dependence and the bestowal of natural life, but not the fatherhood of the saving relationship that adoption establishes. Finally, there is the specific, salvific, Spirit-wrought fatherhood-and-sonship of the adopting grace, the divine act by which specific individuals, born naturally into the rebel humanity, are received into the divine family as sons and daughters of the living God through the redemption of the Son and the Spirit's applying work. This is the adoption that this lesson addresses, and it is the most personal, most intimate, most relationally transformative of the three relationships.

II. The Roman Legal Background

What Adoption Meant in the World of the New Testament

A. *Roman Adoption and Its Legal Consequences*

The word *huiothesia* that Paul uses for adoption in Galatians 4:5, Romans 8:15, 8:23, 9:4, and Ephesians 1:5 is a term with specific legal content drawn from the Roman law of the first century, and understanding that legal content illuminates the theological richness of Paul's adoption language with considerable precision. Roman law recognized adoption as a formal legal process by which a person who was not born into a family could be transferred into that family with full legal standing as a natural-born son or daughter. The adoption was not a second-class relationship; it created legal bonds as strong as those of natural birth, with all the attendant rights and responsibilities of natural family membership.

Under Roman adoption law, an adopted son received several specific legal benefits that the New Testament's adoption language reflects. First, the adopted son received a new name, the name of the adopting family, which replaced his former name and identified him with his new family rather than his old one. The adopted son's former family identity was legally dissolved and replaced by the new family identity. Second, the adopted son received full inheritance rights equal to those of natural-born sons: he was a legitimate heir of the adopting father's estate, with the same legal claim to the inheritance as any natural child. Third, the adopted son came under the authority and protection of his new father (the *patria potestas*, the father's legal power over his household), which meant both the obligation of filial obedience and the security of the father's legal protection. Fourth, and most significantly, the adopted son's former debts were legally canceled at the moment of adoption: he entered his new family with a clean legal slate, the debts of his former life discharged, as if the old person had legally ceased to exist.

The parallels to the theological content of Christian adoption are transparent. The new name: the adopted child of God receives the name “Child of God,” which replaces the former identity of “child of wrath” and “enemy of God” with the new, Spirit-attested identity that defines the believer’s fundamental self-understanding from the moment of adoption onward. The inheritance rights: the adopted child is “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17), with the same claim to the divine inheritance as the eternal Son through whom and with whom the adoption has been received. The patria potestas: the adopted child comes under the authority and protection of the heavenly Father, both the obligation of filial love and obedience and the security of the Father’s invincible keeping power (“No one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand,” John 10:29, NASB 1995). And the cancellation of former debts: the justification that accompanies the adoption has canceled the certificate of debt that stood against the adopted child, so that she enters the divine family with the clean legal slate of the fully justified sinner.

B. The Contrast with Slavery

Paul’s most extended treatment of adoption uses the slave/son contrast as the organizing structure, and the contrast is one of the most pastorally illuminating in the entire New Testament. In Galatians 4:1–7, Paul develops the image of the heir who, while under age, is in the condition of a slave, not legally, but practically: “As long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father” (vv. 1–2, NASB 1995). The pre-adoption condition of the heirs of the divine promise was the condition of the slave, under the law’s guardianship, bound by the law’s demands, unable to enter into the freedom of the inheritance that the law’s own promises anticipated. The adoption changes everything: through the redemption of the Son, the former slaves enter the full freedom of the heirs.

The pastoral force of the slave/son contrast is directed at the specific temptation of the Galatians (and of every subsequent generation of believers) to retreat from the freedom of the adopted child back into the bondage of the law’s slave economy. Galatians 4:7’s declaration, “Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God” (NASB 1995), is addressed to those who are in danger of forgetting what the adoption has made them and returning to the performance-based, law-driven, slave-minded approach to the relationship with God that the adoption was specifically designed to end. The slave approaches the master with the anxiety of the unworthy; the son approaches the Father with the confidence of the beloved. The slave performs for approval; the son serves from love. The slave fears punishment; the son receives discipline. The contrast is not merely rhetorical; it is the description of two fundamentally different ways of living in relation to God, and the doctrine of adoption is the specific theological truth that establishes which of the two is appropriate for those who are in Christ.

III. Packer’s Claim and the Relationship Between Adoption and Justification

The Highest Privilege of the Gospel

A. Why Adoption Is the Highest Privilege

J.I. Packer's claim that adoption is "the highest privilege that the gospel offers: higher even than justification" requires careful unpacking, because it is easily misunderstood in either of two directions. On the one hand, it might seem to diminish justification, to suggest that the forensic declaration of righteousness is somehow less important than the relational reality of family membership. On the other hand, it might seem to be saying that justification is merely a preliminary step on the way to the more important reality of adoption. Neither reading is Packer's intent, and both would be theologically mistaken.

Packer's point is more precise and more pastorally illuminating than either misreading suggests. Justification and adoption are inseparable in the experience of the believing sinner: no one is adopted without being justified, and no one is justified without being adopted. They occur together as components of the single, comprehensive saving act by which the rebel sinner is received into God's favor and God's family simultaneously. But they address different dimensions of the sinner's need and produce different dimensions of the gospel's benefit. Justification addresses the legal dimension: the sinner's guilt before the divine tribunal, the condemnation of the violated law, the need for the declaration of righteousness that frees the condemned person from the just penalty. Adoption addresses the relational dimension: the sinner's alienation from the family of God, the estrangement from the Father that the rebellion of sin has created, the need for the welcome into the divine household that transforms the exile into a child.

Packer's claim that adoption is "higher" than justification is the claim that the relational dimension of the gospel exceeds the legal dimension in the intimacy of its content. Justification gives the sinner a right standing before the divine Judge; adoption gives the sinner a place in the divine family. Justification answers the legal question ("Am I condemned?") with the most liberating possible answer ("No, you are righteous in God's sight"); adoption answers the relational question ("Do I belong?") with the most personally transforming possible answer ("Yes, you are God's beloved child.") The legal question is more basic in the sense that it must be answered before the relational question can be addressed; but the relational question is more intimate in the sense that it reaches deeper into the core of personal identity and produces the specific, warm, family-belonging dimension of Christian experience that justification alone cannot provide.

The practical pastoral significance of Packer's claim is this: many Christians live primarily in the legal dimension of the gospel, grateful for the acquittal, resting in the justified standing, finding their primary identity in the verdict of the divine Judge. But they miss the relational dimension, the adoption that makes God not merely their Judge (whose verdict is favorable) but their Father (whose love is personal, intimate, and irreversible). The person who has grasped only the justification knows she is not condemned; the person who has grasped both justification and adoption knows she is not condemned and that she is loved, welcomed, and permanently at home in the household of the King. The addition of the adoption category to the justified standing does not change the legal reality; it transforms the relational experience of living in that reality from the quiet relief of the acquitted defendant to the joyful security of the beloved child.

B. Adoption and Regeneration Distinguished

The outline specifically calls for the distinction between adoption and regeneration, and it is an important one for theological clarity. Regeneration, as Lessons 11 and 12 established, is the instantaneous, monergistic act of the Holy Spirit by which He imparts new spiritual life to the dead sinner, transforming the nature from its deep center outward, implanting new desires, new understanding, new affections, and a new will. Regeneration changes the believer's nature: she becomes a new creature, with the new heart that the Spirit has implanted. Adoption

changes the believer's legal standing in relation to the divine family: she becomes a child of God, with all the relational privileges and covenantal obligations that family membership entails.

The two are inseparably connected, no one is adopted without being regenerate, and the adopted child's new nature as a regenerate person is precisely the nature that makes her able to receive and express the filial relationship of adoption, but they are analytically distinct. Regeneration is the inner transformation; adoption is the external legal/relational change in standing. Regeneration produces the new heart that can cry "Abba, Father"; adoption establishes the relationship in which that cry is addressed to the One who is genuinely the believer's Father. Regeneration makes the believer a new creature; adoption makes the new creature a member of the divine family. First John 3:1–2 holds both together with characteristic Johannine economy: "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are." The "called" is the adoption (the name, the status, the relational standing); the "such we are" is the regenerative reality that the adoption names (the genuine ontological transformation that makes the name true).

IV. The Foundational Texts of Adoption

Galatians 4:4–7 and Romans 8:14–17

A. *Galatians 4:4–7: The Trinitarian Architecture of Adoption*

Galatians 4:4–7 is the New Testament's most structurally complete account of the adoption, presenting its Trinitarian architecture with remarkable compression: "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God" (NASB 1995). The passage accomplishes an extraordinary amount of theological work in four verses, and each element deserves sustained attention.

"When the fullness of the time came": the adoption was accomplished at a specific, divinely appointed moment in history, not improvised in response to the human situation but enacted at the precise moment ordained in the eternal counsel of the Triune God. The fullness of time establishes that the adoption is the fulfillment of a purpose that has been moving toward this moment since before the foundation of the world. "God sent forth His Son": the Father's initiative. The adoption originates in the sovereign, loving, self-motivated act of the Father who sends the Son. The adoption is not the Son's independent decision to help the rebel humanity; it is the Father's commissioned sending of the Son for the specific purpose of making the adoption possible. "Born of a woman, born under the Law": the Son's genuine entrance into the condition of those to be adopted, sharing the human condition, including the condition of those under the law's demands and the law's curse.

"So that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons": the double purpose of the Son's sending, redemption (the purchase of freedom from the law's bondage) and adoption (the reception of the full status of sons). The redemption is the necessary precondition of the adoption: the slaves under the law must be purchased from that bondage before they can enter the freedom of the heirs. The adoption is the goal toward which the redemption is the means: the Father sent the Son not merely to liberate captives but to welcome liberated captives as sons. "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our

hearts, crying ‘Abba! Father!’”: the Spirit’s sending follows from and attests the adoption. The adopted child’s filial relationship with the Father is mediated and maintained by the Spirit, the Spirit of the Son, whose own filial relationship with the Father is the eternal archetype of the adopted child’s derived filial relationship.

The specific character of the Spirit’s work in the adopted child is described with remarkable intimacy: He is “crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” within the believer’s heart. The Spirit of adoption does not merely inform the adopted child that she has been adopted; He produces within her the spontaneous, Spirit-generated, relational cry that expresses the intimacy of the new relationship from the inside. “Abba” is the Aramaic term for father, the most intimate form of address available within the familial vocabulary of first-century Judaism, corresponding roughly to what English-speaking children mean when they call their father “Dad” or “Papa”: the language of familial intimacy, of the child who knows herself to be personally loved and personally known, rather than the formal address of a subject to a sovereign. The Spirit produces this cry in the heart of every adopted child, not as an occasional emotional experience available to the spiritually advanced but as the natural, consistent, Spirit-given expression of the relationship that the adoption has established.

B. Romans 8:14–17: The Spirit of Adoption and the Co-Heirship with Christ

Romans 8:14–17 provides the Pauline complement to Galatians 4:4–7, with particular emphasis on the Spirit’s role as both the evidence and the mediating agent of the adoption, and on the staggering co-inheritance with Christ that the adoption entails: “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him” (NASB 1995).

The opening verse, “all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God”, establishes the Spirit’s leading as the evidence and expression of the sonship. The Spirit’s leading is not the external constraint of a taskmaster imposing requirements on a reluctant will; it is the internal, desire-directing, Godward orientation that characterizes the life of the adopted child who has the Spirit of the Son within her. Being led by the Spirit is the natural expression of the life of the one who has received the Spirit of adoption: the Spirit leads where the Father’s will points, and the adopted child’s new nature, produced by the Spirit’s regenerating work, gladly follows where the Spirit leads.

The contrast between the spirit of slavery and the Spirit of adoption (v. 15) is the pastoral heart of the passage. The spirit of slavery leads to fear, the servile fear of the one who approaches the Master with the anxiety of the one whose acceptance depends on the quality of her performance, who never knows whether she has done enough, and who dreads the moment when the performance will be found insufficient. The Spirit of adoption produces the cry of “Abba, Father!”, the confident, intimate, filially secure address of the child who approaches the Father not with the dread of the unworthy but with the open trust of the loved. The contrast is not between two different emotional states that the Christian can alternate between depending on spiritual maturity; it is between two fundamentally different orientations to the divine relationship, one of which the gospel has permanently replaced with the other.

Romans 8:16–17 closes the passage with the most staggering claim of the entire adoption discourse: “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow

heirs with Christ.” The Spirit’s testimony is the internal, experiential assurance of the adopted standing, the specific, personal, Spirit-wrought awareness that the relational status the doctrine describes is genuinely and personally the believer’s own. And the inheritance that the co-heirship with Christ entails is the most expansive possible description of what the adoption provides: “heirs of God”, the heirs of the One who owns everything, whose inheritance is the entirety of the new creation, whose estate is the fullness of the divine glory in the consummated kingdom. “Fellow heirs with Christ”, sharing in the same inheritance as the eternal Son, not as a secondary or lesser beneficiary but as a co-heir with the One who is the appointed heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2).

V. The Privileges of Adoption

Access, Discipline, Provision, and the Eternal Inheritance

A. Access to the Father

The first and most immediately experienced privilege of adoption is the specific, personal access to the Father that the new filial relationship provides. This is the privilege that the whole of the Sermon on the Mount’s teaching on prayer presupposes: the Jesus who teaches “Our Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 6:9, NASB 1995) is not using a pious religious formula for addressing the divine; He is giving His adopted brothers and sisters the specific address of their shared Father, establishing that the relationship through which the prayer is made is not that of a subject to a sovereign but of a child to a parent who knows the child’s specific needs and delights to meet them. The prayer that the adopted child offers is not the petition of the suppliant who hopes for a favorable hearing from a distant authority; it is the natural, everyday conversation of the child who lives in the Father’s household and addresses the Father as the most familiar and most trusted person in her life.

Hebrews 4:16’s invitation, “Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (NASB 1995), expresses this privilege in its fullest form. The confidence of the approach is not self-generated boldness; it is the specific, adoption-grounded, Spirit-attested confidence of the child who knows she is welcome before the throne of her Father. The throne is described as “the throne of grace”, not the throne of judgment (which the justified sinner need not fear, because justification has already dealt with the guilty verdict) but the throne from which the Father distributes the grace and mercy that His children need in their daily pilgrimage. The access is permanent, unrestricted, and available in every “time of need”, which is to say, at every moment of the adopted child’s life.

B. The Discipline of a Father

The second privilege of adoption is one that does not feel like a privilege in the moment of its receipt but is recognized as the most loving of all the Father’s dealings with His children over the longer course of the Christian life: the discipline of the Father. Hebrews 12:5–11 provides the New Testament’s most extended treatment of the Father’s discipline as a specific expression of the filial relationship: “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov’d by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives” (vv. 5–6, NASB 1995, citing Proverbs 3:11–12).

The pastoral significance of the Father’s discipline for the doctrine of adoption lies in the specific contrast it establishes between two kinds of punitive experience: the punishment of the judge and the discipline of the

father. The punishment of the judge is retributive, it is the just exaction of the penalty that the offender's transgression has earned, administered without any necessary concern for the offender's future well-being or moral development. The discipline of the father is formative, it is the loving correction of a parent who desires the child's moral growth and spiritual maturity, who withholds no suffering that serves that purpose, but whose every act of discipline is motivated by love rather than by the satisfaction of retributive justice. The adopted child who is experiencing painful providential circumstances has not been abandoned by her Father; she has been taken in hand by the Father who disciplines every son and daughter He receives, because He loves them too much to leave them as they are.

Hebrews 12:10–11 states the purpose of the Father's discipline with the most explicit clarity: "For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (NASB 1995). The goal of the Father's discipline is the sharing of the divine holiness, the progressive conformity of the adopted child to the character of the Father whose family she has joined. The pain of the discipline is real and is not minimized ("seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful"); but the purpose of the discipline transforms its character from the retributive suffering of the condemned to the formative suffering of the beloved, who is being trained for an inheritance whose character requires the holiness that the discipline is producing.

C. Provision and the Eternal Inheritance

The third privilege of adoption is the Father's provision for the adopted child's daily needs, the specific, personal, Father-to-child provision that Jesus describes in Matthew 7:7–11: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" (NASB 1995). The *a fortiori* argument is from the lesser to the greater: if even imperfect human fathers know how to provide for their children's genuine needs, how much more will the perfect, omnipotent, infinitely loving heavenly Father provide for the needs of His adopted children?

The fourth and final privilege of adoption is the eternal inheritance, the co-heirship with Christ in the fullness of the divine glory that is the eschatological destination of every adopted child. Romans 8:17 names this inheritance as the heirship of God and the co-heirship with Christ; 1 Peter 1:3–4 describes it as "an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (NASB 1995). The inheritance is as permanent as the adoption that entitles the child to receive it: it does not spoil with time (imperishable), is not contaminated by the sin that marked the life of the pilgrim who is inheriting it (undefiled), and does not diminish as the ages progress toward the consummation (will not fade away). The adopted child who is suffering in the present age, who is enduring the Father's discipline, the world's opposition, and the flesh's persistent rebellion, is doing so as an heir: the inheritance is reserved, the inheritance is certain, and the inheritance awaiting her is infinitely greater than everything she is currently enduring.

VI. John 1:12 and 1 John 3:1–2

The Most Astonishing Titles in the Gospel

A. *John 1:12, The Right to Become Children of God*

John 1:12–13 provides the most concise statement of the legal and divine character of the adoption in the Gospel of John: “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (NASB 1995). The verse holds together the two dimensions of the adopted child’s new standing that must always be held together: the legal dimension (the right to become children of God, a right given, not earned, not assumed, but legally granted by the One who has the authority to grant it) and the regenerative dimension (the new birth that is the subjective and experiential correlate of the legal adoption, produced by God alone rather than by any human initiative).

The “right to become children of God” (Greek: *exousia*, authority, right, legal standing) is the specific language of legally-conferred status: the adoption gives the believing sinner the legal authority to be called a child of God, the standing that makes the title genuinely hers rather than a pious aspiration. And the title itself, “children of God”, is the most intimate and most comprehensive description of the adopted sinner’s new identity available in the New Testament’s vocabulary. Not “servants of God” (which is real but describes a functional relationship), not “followers of God” (which is real but describes a directional orientation), but “children of God”, members of the divine family, objects of the Father’s specific, personal, parental love, bearers of the family name.

B. *1 John 3:1–2, See What Great Love*

First John 3:1–2 is the New Testament’s most doxological statement of the doctrine of adoption, and it is addressed not to the theologian’s analytical mind but to the believer’s astonished heart: “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is” (NASB 1995). The opening imperative, “See how great a love”, is the invitation to the aesthetic experience of the doctrine: not merely to understand it correctly but to see it, to be struck by it, to receive with appropriate astonishment the specific content of the divine love that it describes.

The specific content of the love that John invites us to see is this: that the God of infinite holiness and majesty, before whom the highest angels veil their faces, has bestowed upon formerly rebellious sinners the most intimate title available in the entire vocabulary of personal relationship: “children of God.” Not “subjects of the divine kingdom” (though that is true), not “recipients of the divine mercy” (though that is also true), but “children of God”, the specific relational title that describes the most intimate, most personally invested, most irreversible bond that human experience knows. And John’s parenthetical emphasis, “and such we are”, presses the reality of the title against any tendency to dismiss it as a pious metaphor: this is not a way of speaking about the divine relationship; it is a description of the actual relational reality. We are, genuinely and presently, children of God.

The verse then moves to the eschatological horizon that this lesson introduced in its treatment of the adoption’s not-yet dimension: “it has not appeared as yet what we will be.” The adoption has been received; the present status is real; and there is a future dimension of the adopted sonship that exceeds everything the present age can

reveal. The consummation of the adoption, the full, unmediated, face-to-face vision of the Father, will bring with it the completion of the conformity to Christ's image that the adoption has begun: "we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is." The adopted child's present status is real and certain; her future status is the glorification of what the present status has already made her. The adoption is not a preliminary arrangement pending a higher relationship; it is the relationship whose fullness will be experienced when the veil between the Father and His children has been finally and permanently removed.

VII. The Pastoral Warmth of Adoption

God Is Your Father and You Are His Beloved Child

A. The Relational Character of the Gospel's Highest Privilege

The pastoral warmth that the doctrine of adoption communicates reaches dimensions of the Christian life that the forensic category of justification alone cannot access. Justification answers the legal question; adoption answers the relational question. The legal question, "Am I condemned?", finds its answer in the justified standing and the no-condemnation of Romans 8:1. The relational question, "Does God love me personally? Does He know my name? Am I merely one of millions of acquitted defendants, or am I a specific, individually known, personally loved member of the divine family?", finds its answer in the adoption. The doctrine of adoption is the specific theological truth that transforms the Christian's understanding of God from the Judge whose verdict is favorable to the Father whose love is personal, specific, and inexhaustibly warm.

The New Testament's teaching on prayer is the most practical expression of this pastoral warmth. The Lord's Prayer begins with the most astonishing two-word address available in human language: "Our Father." Not "Our Judge" (though He is), not "Our King" (though He is), not "Our Sovereign" (though He is), but "Our Father", the specific, intimate, family-establishing address that Jesus gives to His adopted brothers and sisters as the natural beginning of every prayer. The adoption that makes this address possible is not a theological abstraction; it is the specific, Spirit-attested, legally established reality that turns every moment of prayer into a family conversation rather than a formal religious petition.

The Father whom the adopted child addresses in prayer is not a generic divine parent or a philosophical Absolute toward which prayerful aspirations are directed; He is the specific God who "numbers the hairs of your head" (Matthew 10:30), who "knows what you need before you ask Him" (Matthew 6:8, NASB 1995), who "collects your tears in His bottle" (Psalm 56:8, paraphrase), who "is close to the brokenhearted" (Psalm 34:18, NASB 1995), and who will "never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5, NASB 1995). These are not attributes of a distant divine sovereign; they are the characteristics of the Father who knows each adopted child by name, loves each adopted child with a specific, personal, inexhaustible love, and who cannot be distracted from His care for each one by the multiplicity of His other concerns, because the One who numbers the hairs of the head is the One who holds the universe in the palm of His hand and manages both without effort.

B. The Eschatological Adoption and Its Present Implications

Romans 8:23 introduces a striking eschatological dimension of the adoption that distinguishes it from justification in its temporal character: "And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we

ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (NASB 1995). The “waiting eagerly for our adoption” is the eschatological not-yet dimension of a status that is already real in the present: the adoption has been received in the Spirit’s present witness (Romans 8:15–16), but it has not yet been fully expressed in the bodily dimension. The redemption of the body, the resurrection of the physical person in glorified form, is the eschatological completion of the adoption: the full, bodily, publicly visible expression of the filial relationship that is presently real in the Spirit but not yet complete in the physical person.

Justification, as an accomplished forensic verdict, has no such eschatological not-yet dimension: the verdict was pronounced once and stands permanently in the present. Adoption, as a relational reality with a bodily dimension, is already real but not yet complete: the Spirit attests it now; the resurrection will consummate it. This eschatological character of the adoption gives the Christian life its specific forward-looking, groaning-and-hoping character: we groan, because the adoption’s full bodily expression has not yet arrived; we hope, because the Spirit’s present witness guarantees that it will. The groaning and the hoping together are the appropriate posture of those who are already children of God in the Spirit’s attestation and not yet children of God in the resurrection’s consummation.

The pastoral bottom line of the doctrine of adoption is this: if you are in Christ, God is not merely your Judge who has pronounced a favorable verdict over you. He is your Father. The verdict was His judicial act; the fatherhood is His personal relationship with you. The verdict answered your legal problem; the fatherhood is your eternal home. The verdict was pronounced once in the past and stands irrevocably; the fatherhood is present, ongoing, intimate, and growing toward the fullness of the face-to-face vision of the consummation. God knows your name. God counts your tears. God disciplines you because He loves you, provides for you because you are His, and is preparing an inheritance for you that is imperishable, undefiled, and will not fade away. You are not merely acquitted; you are adopted. You are not merely free from condemnation; you are the child of the King. And that is the highest privilege the gospel offers.

“See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”

1 John 3:1–2, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Adoption	The gracious, sovereign, irreversible act of God by which those who were by nature children of wrath are received into the household of God as sons and daughters, granted the full legal and relational status of natural-born children, and made co-heirs with the eternal Son of the divine inheritance. Adoption is distinct from but inseparable from justification (which establishes the legal standing before the divine tribunal) and regeneration (which transforms the inner nature). Adoption establishes the relational dimension: it answers not the legal question of condemnation but the personal question of belonging. Grounded in Galatians 4:4–7; Romans 8:14–17, 23; Ephesians 1:5; 1 John 3:1–2; John 1:12.
Huiiothesia	Greek: “placing as a son,” translated “adoption” or “adoption as sons.” Used by Paul in Galatians 4:5; Romans 8:15, 23; 9:4; and Ephesians 1:5 to describe the gracious act by which believers receive the legal and relational status of sons and daughters in the divine family. The word draws on the legal content of Roman adoption (in which an adopted son received full legal standing as a natural-born son, a new name, inheritance rights, and the cancellation of former debts) and applies that legal content to the spiritual reality of the believer’s reception into the family of God through the redemption of Christ and the Spirit’s applying work.
Abba	Aramaic: “father,” in its most intimate and familial form, the address of a child to a parent characterized by intimacy, trust, and warm personal relationship. Used in the New Testament in two contexts: Jesus’ own prayer in Gethsemane (Mark 14:36, the only instance of Jesus’ direct address to the Father in Aramaic) and the Spirit-produced cry of the adopted child’s heart (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). The Spirit of adoption produces the Abba cry within the heart of every adopted child, attesting the filial relationship and expressing the intimate, personal, family-based character of the prayer that the adoption makes possible. The Abba cry is not the learned address of the religion student but the spontaneous, Spirit-generated expression of the relationship that the adoption has established.
Spirit of Adoption	Paul’s description in Romans 8:15 of the Holy Spirit in His specific ministry to the adopted child of God: “You have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’” Contrasted with the spirit of slavery leading to fear: the spirit of slavery is the disposition appropriate to the slave who approaches the master with the anxiety of the unworthy, while the Spirit of adoption is the divine Person who produces within the adopted child the intimate, family-secured, fear-dispelling cry of filial address to the Father. The Spirit of adoption is the same Spirit as the Spirit of Christ (Galatians 4:6) and the Spirit of the Son, the One whose own eternal filial relationship with the Father is the eternal archetype of the adopted child’s derived relationship.
Patria Potestas	Latin: “authority of the father.” The legal power of the Roman father (paterfamilias) over his household, including his children by birth and adoption. Under the patria potestas, the father had authority over the conduct of his children and the obligation to provide for and protect them. In the theological application of the Roman adoption analogy, the patria potestas illuminates the two-sided character of the adopted child’s relationship to the heavenly Father: the obligation of filial love and obedience (the child comes under the Father’s authority) and the security of the Father’s protection (the child comes under the Father’s care). The discipline of Hebrews 12:5–11 and the protection of John 10:29 both express dimensions of the heavenly Father’s patria potestas over His adopted children.
Co-Heirs with Christ	The staggering claim of Romans 8:17 that the adopted children of God are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ”, sharing in the same inheritance as the eternal Son, who is described in Hebrews 1:2 as “the heir of all things.” The co-heirship establishes that the adopted child’s inheritance is not a secondhand or derivative share of the divine estate but the full participation in the eternal Son’s own inheritance, given by the same Father to both the

	eternal Son and the adopted children. The inheritance is described in 1 Peter 1:4 as “imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven.” The co-heirship is received jointly with the condition of co-suffering (Romans 8:17: “if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him”).
Euodokia	Greek: “kind intention,” “good pleasure,” “freely-chosen delight.” Used in Ephesians 1:5 (“according to the kind intention of His will”) to describe the specific motivation of the Father’s predestination of the adoption. The euodokia establishes that the adoption was not the result of a divine obligation, a cosmic necessity, or a response to any quality in those adopted, but the sovereign, voluntary, freely delighted choice of the Father to welcome into His family those whom His kind intention appointed to receive that welcome. The euodokia is the Trinitarian name for the uncaused love that is the ultimate source of the entire economy of adoption and salvation.
Children of Wrath	Paul’s description in Ephesians 2:3 of the pre-adoption condition of those who are now the adopted children of God: “we... were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.” The phrase establishes the radical character of the adoption by naming the condition from which it delivers: not merely the condition of the morally imperfect who need some improvement but the condition of the rebels under divine condemnation, members of the fallen humanity that stands under the wrath of the holy God against sin. The adoption is therefore not the recognition of latent divine sonship in those who were already partially God’s children; it is the transfer from the rebel family to the divine family, from the condition of wrath to the condition of love, accomplished entirely by the sovereign grace of the adopting Father.
Discipline (Paideia)	The Greek word for the formative training and correction that the Father administers to His adopted children, described in Hebrews 12:5–11 as the expression of His parental love: “those whom the Lord loves He disciplines” (v. 6). Distinguished from retributive punishment (the just exaction of the penalty the offender’s transgression has earned, which the atonement has fully discharged): the Father’s discipline is formative rather than retributive, motivated by love for the child’s moral growth and spiritual maturity rather than by the satisfaction of justice. The goal of the discipline is the sharing of the divine holiness (v. 10) and the peaceful fruit of righteousness (v. 11). The adopted child who is suffering painful providential circumstances is being trained by a Father who loves her too much to leave her as she is.
Not-Yet of Adoption	The eschatological dimension of adoption described in Romans 8:23: “waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.” The adoption is already real in the Spirit’s present witness (the Abba cry, the Spirit’s testimony with our spirit) but not yet fully expressed in the bodily dimension. The redemption of the body, the resurrection of the physical person in glorified form, is the eschatological completion of the adoption, the full public expression of the filial relationship that is presently real in the Spirit. This eschatological not-yet of adoption distinguishes it from justification (which has no not-yet dimension: the verdict was pronounced once and stands permanently) and gives the Christian life its specific groaning-and-hoping character (Romans 8:23–25).

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that our fundamental identity before God is not “justified defendant” but “beloved child.” The justified standing is real and foundational; but the adoption that accompanies the justification is the relational reality that defines who we are to God and who God is to us in the most personal possible terms. The God who declared us righteous in the courtroom is the same God who took us home, and “home” is not a metaphor but the most specific, most personally grounded description of what the adoption establishes: a family membership, a Father-child relationship, a place at the table of the divine household, and an inheritance reserved in heaven. We must believe this with the full, specific, personally received conviction that John’s “such we are” demands: we are, genuinely and presently, children of God.

We must believe that the Spirit of adoption who produces the Abba cry in the heart of every adopted child is doing so not as an occasional emotional experience available to the spiritually advanced but as the natural, consistent, Spirit-given expression of the relationship that the adoption has established. The Abba cry is not the achievement of a certain level of spiritual maturity; it is the birthright of every adopted child who has received the Spirit of the Son. This means that the most spiritually immature, most theologically unsophisticated, most emotionally uncertain believer who has genuinely received Christ has the same right to address the divine Father as “Abba” as the most advanced saint in the most mature congregation. The Spirit of adoption does not make distinctions on the basis of spiritual performance; He attests the relationship that the adoption has established, and the relationship does not fluctuate with the quality of the adopted child’s performance.

We must believe that the Abba cry in prayer is the most authentic thing we will ever say, the specific address that most accurately names who God is to us and who we are to God. The whole of the Christian life, from prayer to obedience to suffering to service to worship, is properly understood as the life of the adopted child in the Father’s household, not the anxious performance of the slave who must earn the master’s approval, not the formal religious service of the subject who owes tribute to the sovereign, but the free, grateful, love-motivated, family-grounded life of the child who lives in the Father’s house, eats at the Father’s table, and participates in the Father’s mission because she loves the Father and knows herself to be loved by Him.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

The emotional register that the doctrine of adoption should produce is the specific, astonished, joyful warmth that John’s “See how great a love!” invites. Not the quiet satisfaction of a legal problem solved (which is the emotional register of justification received), but the specific wonder of a person who has just understood that the God of the universe is her Father, that the infinite, holy, all-knowing, all-powerful Creator and Sustainer of all things knows her by name, loves her with a love that preceded her existence and will outlast the present age, and has prepared a place for her in the divine household that is imperishable, undefiled, and will not fade away. The appropriate response to this understanding is not a mild theological satisfaction but the specific, named, personally-received astonishment that John describes: “See how great a love!”

Desire the transformation of your prayer life that the doctrine of adoption makes possible and appropriate. Prayer addressed to “Our Father” is different in its character, its confidence, and its intimacy from every other form of religious petition, not because it is less formal (though it may be), but because the relationship it expresses is the

most intimate possible relationship between a creature and the Creator. Desire to pray as the adopted child you are: with the confidence of the welcomed, the intimacy of the beloved, and the security of the one whose Father “knows what you need before you ask Him.” Let the Abba cry be not merely a liturgical formula but the genuine, Spirit-attested, personally experienced expression of the relationship that the adoption has established.

Desire the pastoral capacity to communicate the doctrine of adoption with the warmth it deserves and the precision it requires. The person in your pastoral care who relates to God primarily through fear, whose approach to prayer is dominated by the dread of the unworthy, whose experience of suffering is interpreted as divine punishment rather than paternal discipline, and who cannot receive the biblical language of the Father’s love as personally addressed to herself, needs from you the specific, theologically grounded, personally directed declaration of the adoption. Not merely the assurance of the justified standing (which she may already know), but the specific relational warmth of the adoption: God is your Father, and you are His beloved child. His discipline is not punishment; it is love. His silence in your suffering is not abandonment; He is doing something in you that only the formative pain of the beloved can accomplish.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Read Galatians 4:1–7 carefully as the most complete single passage on the doctrine of adoption in the New Testament, noting the following elements: the condition of slavery that precedes the adoption (vv. 1–3), the Trinitarian structure of the adoption event (the Father sends the Son, v. 4; the Father sends the Spirit, v. 6), the double purpose of the Son’s sending (redemption and adoption, v. 5), the Spirit’s role in the adopted child’s experience (the Abba cry, v. 6), and the pastoral conclusion (no longer a slave but a son, v. 7). Ask: which element of this passage is most personally significant for your own experience of the Christian life? And which element does your own spiritual practice most inconsistently express?
- Read Romans 8:14–17 alongside Galatians 4:4–7 as the two complementary accounts of the adoption. Note the specific contrast between the spirit of slavery and the Spirit of adoption in Romans 8:15, and identify the specific ways in which the spirit of slavery manifests itself in your own spiritual experience (the approach to prayer as the performance of a religious duty, the interpretation of suffering as punishment, the assessment of the divine relationship as conditional on the quality of spiritual performance). Then receive Romans 8:15b–16 as the specific correction: you have received the Spirit of adoption, and He produces within you the cry that most accurately names your actual relationship with God. The cry is “Abba, Father”, not “Divine Master” or “Judge of All the Earth” but “Dad.”
- Write a letter to God from the perspective of the adopted child you are, not a formal prayer but a genuinely personal, filially intimate letter that uses the relationship that the adoption establishes as the ground of the approach. Address the Father by name as Father. Tell Him what the adoption means to you in the most personally specific terms you can find. Name the specific privileges of adoption, the access, the discipline, the provision, the inheritance, and receive each one as genuinely and personally yours. Note the specific ways in which you have been living more as a slave (performance-based, fear-driven, uncertain of welcome) than as a son or daughter (love-based, secure, confident of access). Then bring the specific areas of slave-mindedness to the Father, asking for the Spirit of adoption to deepen the Abba cry in your heart until the son’s approach consistently displaces the slave’s dread.
- Read 1 John 3:1–2 daily for one week as the astonishing declaration it is, not as familiar biblical text to be processed but as the word that John intended to be received with the specific astonishment of “See how great a love!” Each day, meditate on a different dimension of the declaration: Day 1 (“See how great a love the Father has bestowed”, the source of the love and its greatness), Day 2 (“that we would be called children

of God”, the specific title and what it means), Day 3 (“and such we are”, the present reality of the status), Day 4 (“Now we are children of God”, the present tense of the adoption), Day 5 (“it has not appeared yet what we will be”, the not-yet of the consummation), Days 6–7 (“we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is”, the eschatological completion). Report to your study group what you have discovered in the week of sustained meditation.

- Identify one or two people in your pastoral care who most clearly manifest the spirit of slavery rather than the Spirit of adoption in their spiritual lives, whose approach to God is most dominated by fear, performance anxiety, or the uncertainty of welcome. Prepare a specific, adoption-grounded pastoral conversation for each person: not a lecture on the doctrine of adoption but the specific, warmly directed, personally applied declaration of the relational reality that the adoption establishes. What specific text would you use? What specific aspects of the adoption would most directly address their specific form of the spirit of slavery? And what specific pastoral question would you ask to help them identify, in their own experience, the specific ways in which the Spirit of adoption is already producing the Abba cry that they may not yet recognize as such?

Key Texts: *Galatians 4:4–7; Romans 8:14–17, 23; Ephesians 1:5; 1 John 3:1–2; John 1:12–13; 1 Peter 1:3–5; Hebrews 12:5–11; 4:16; John 10:29; Matthew 6:9; 7:7–11*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- The lesson opens with J.I. Packer’s claim that “adoption is the highest privilege that the gospel offers: higher even than justification.” Before engaging the lesson’s development of this claim, what is your initial response to it? Does it seem like an overstatement, given the preceding unit’s strong emphasis on justification as the article by which the church stands or falls? And what is the difference between the question that justification answers (“Am I condemned?”) and the question that adoption answers (“Do I belong?”)? Which of these two questions is more urgent in your own spiritual life at this moment?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Galatians 4:1–7. In verses 1–2, what is the analogy Paul uses for the pre-adoption condition, and what is its specific content (what does the child-as-slave not yet have, and what constraint is she under)? In verse 4, what two qualities of the Son’s entrance into the human condition are named (“born of a...”, “born under the...”), and why are these qualities significant for the adoption? In verse 5, what is the double purpose of the Son’s sending (“so that He might... that we might...”) In verse 6, what is the ground of the Spirit’s sending (“Because you are...”) and what does the Spirit produce within the adopted child’s heart? And in verse 7, what is the specific pastoral conclusion Paul draws?
- Read Romans 8:14–17. In verse 14, what is the description of those who are sons of God (“all who are...”) In verse 15, what contrast does Paul draw between two spirits, and what does each spirit produce? What is the specific address that the Spirit of adoption produces (“by which we cry out,...”) In verse 16, how does the Spirit’s testimony relate to our own spirit’s testimony (“The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit...”, is the Spirit testifying instead of our spirit, or alongside it)? In verse 17, what are the two dimensions of the co-inheritance (“heirs of... and fellow heirs with...”), and what condition does Paul append to the co-glorification (“if indeed we...”)?
- Read 1 John 3:1–2. What is the imperative that opens verse 1 (“See...”, what does it communicate about the appropriate response to the declaration that follows)? What is the specific claim about the title “children of God” (is it merely a way of speaking about believers, or something more than that)? What is the parenthetical John adds in verse 1b (“and such...”), and why does it matter that he adds it? In verse 2, what is the temporal structure of the adoption (“now we are...”; “it has not yet appeared...”; “when He appears...”) And what is the mechanism of the eschatological transformation (“because we will see Him...”)?
- Read Ephesians 1:3–6. In verse 4, what is the temporal scope of the election that grounds the adoption (“chosen... before...”) In verse 5, what specific word describes God’s motivation for predestining the adoption (“according to the kind intention of...”) In verse 6, what is the ultimate purpose of the adoption (“to the praise of...”) And how does the phrase “adoption as sons through Jesus Christ” establish the specific instrument through which the adoption is received?
- Read Hebrews 12:5–11. In verses 5–6, what two wrong responses to the Lord’s discipline does the author warn against (“Do not regard lightly... nor faint...”) In verse 6, what is the stated relationship between the Lord’s love and His discipline (“those whom the Lord loves He...”) In verse 8, what does the absence of discipline imply about the person’s relationship to God (“If you are without discipline... then you are...”) In verse 10, what is the contrast between human fathers’ discipline and the Father’s discipline (the purpose of

each)? And in verse 11, what does the author acknowledge about the experience of discipline and what does he claim about its fruit?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson presents Packer's claim that adoption is "higher" than justification as the claim that the relational dimension of the gospel exceeds the legal dimension in the intimacy of its content. Evaluate this claim. Does the New Testament give any indication of an ordering of priority between justification and adoption? Are there senses in which justification might be considered the more fundamental of the two (logically, since the justification is the necessary precondition of the adoption)? And how does the lesson's account of the different questions that justification and adoption address (the legal question vs. the relational question) help to clarify what Packer means and does not mean by "higher"?
- The lesson distinguishes adoption from regeneration: regeneration changes the nature (we become new creatures), while adoption changes the legal standing (we become God's children and heirs). Evaluate the precision of this distinction. Is the adoption a change of legal standing alone, or does it also involve a relational and experiential transformation (the Abba cry, the Spirit's witness) that goes beyond a mere legal status change? And how does the fact that adoption and regeneration are inseparable in experience while distinguishable in nature illuminate the comprehensive character of what God does for the sinner who receives the gospel?
- The lesson presents the Roman adoption law as an illuminating background for Paul's *huiothesia* language. Evaluate the adequacy of this background. What specific dimensions of the Roman adoption law are genuinely illuminating for the theological content of the adoption (the legal standing, the name, the inheritance, the cancellation of debts)? Are there specific dimensions of the divine adoption that the Roman law analogy does not capture or that it might even distort (for example, the Spirit's role, the ontological transformation of regeneration, or the eschatological not-yet)? How should the Roman legal background be used and not used in the exegesis of the adoption texts?
- The lesson presents the slave/son contrast of Galatians 4 as the description of two fundamentally different ways of relating to God, one of which the gospel has permanently replaced with the other. But many genuine believers clearly experience both, the freedom of the son and the anxiety of the slave coexist in the same person across the same spiritual life. How does the lesson account for this coexistence? Is the experience of the spirit of slavery evidence that the adoption has not been genuinely received, or is it a failure to receive what has genuinely been received? And what specific pastoral or practical remedy does the doctrine of adoption offer for the persistent experience of the spirit of slavery in the life of a genuinely adopted child?
- Romans 8:23's description of believers as "waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" appears to present the adoption as something still future, while Romans 8:15–16 presents it as a present reality. How do these two presentations coexist? What is the present dimension of the adoption, and what is the not-yet dimension? And how does the temporal structure of adoption, already real in the Spirit's witness, not yet complete in the body's redemption, illuminate the broader already/not-yet character of New Testament eschatology and the specific groaning-and-hoping posture of the Christian life?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson argues that many Christians live primarily in the legal dimension of the gospel (the justified standing) without adequately inhabiting the relational dimension (the adopted child's relationship with the Father). Does this describe your own experience? What specific aspects of your spiritual life most clearly reflect the security and intimacy of the adopted child's relationship with the Father? And what specific

aspects most clearly reflect the anxiety, the performance-orientation, and the uncertain-welcome posture of the spirit of slavery? What specific changes in daily practice, in prayer, in how you interpret suffering, in how you approach God in moments of failure, would most accurately reflect the truth of the adoption?

- The lesson describes the Father's discipline as a privilege of adoption: the painful providential circumstances of the Christian life are the formative acts of a Father who loves too much to leave His children as they are. Is this how you actually interpret the painful circumstances of your own life? Or do you more consistently interpret them through the lens of divine punishment (the retributive logic that the lesson says belongs to the justified's legal relationship, not to the adopted child's filial relationship)? What specific discipline has the Father administered in your life that you can now, with the perspective of time, identify as the formative love of Hebrews 12:10–11, the discipline that yielded the peaceful fruit of righteousness?
- The lesson closes with the declaration that God is not merely the believer's Judge (whose verdict is favorable) but her Father (whose love is personal, specific, and inexhaustibly warm). Do you actually relate to God more as Judge or more as Father? What specific theological misunderstandings, past experiences, or emotional patterns produce the distortion in either direction? And how would a more consistently adoption-shaped understanding of the divine relationship change the specific character of your prayer, your obedience, your interpretation of suffering, and your sense of belonging in the divine family?
- The lesson notes that Romans 8:23's "waiting eagerly for our adoption" gives the Christian life a specific groaning-and-hoping character. How does the eschatological not-yet of the adoption, the groaning for the redemption of the body that will complete the adoption in its bodily dimension, shape your experience of the present age? Does the forward-looking, inheritance-oriented character of the adopted child's eschatological posture affect how you hold the present sufferings and the present frustrations of the life not yet glorified? And how does the adoption's already/not-yet structure provide a more complete account of the Christian life's character than either the triumphalist account (already everything) or the defeatist account (not yet anything)?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson's prayer time by reading 1 John 3:1–2 aloud, as slowly and as deliberately as you can, allowing every phrase to press upon you with the weight of its specific content. "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us." Pause. Look at it. This is not the merely adequate love of a generous sovereign; it is the great love of the Father who chose to welcome rebels into His household as beloved children. "That we would be called children of God." The title. The name. The specific, relational, family-membership reality. "And such we are." Now. Present tense. Not aspirationally, not metaphorically, not contingently, such we are. "Beloved, now we are children of God." The pastoral address ("Beloved") is the adoption's vocabulary: you are beloved because you are a child of the Beloved's Father. Let the slow reading be the beginning of the prayer.

Pray the Lord's Prayer in full as the adopted child's family prayer, not as a liturgical formula but as the specific, relational, adoption-expressing address that Jesus gave to His adopted brothers and sisters as the natural beginning of every approach to the Father. Pause at each phrase and receive it as the child's address, not the subject's petition. "Our Father": receive the name. This is who He is to you, specifically, personally, adoptively, Father. "Who is in heaven": the Father is the King, but the King is your Father. "Hallowed be Your name": the child who loves the Father desires the Father's honor as the expression of the relationship, not merely as the religious duty of the subject. "Your kingdom come": the adopted child's desire for the Father's purposes to be fulfilled. "Give us this day our daily bread": the child's natural dependence on the Father's provision. "Forgive us our debts": the adopted child's honest acknowledgment of the ongoing need for the Father's grace. Let the Lord's Prayer be the prayer of the adopted child throughout.

Pray with specific thanksgiving for the four privileges of adoption that the lesson has identified. For the access: thank the Father that the throne you are addressing is the throne of grace, not the throne of judgment, that you can draw near at any moment, in any condition, with any need, because the blood of Jesus has permanently opened the way and the great high priest is permanently interceding. For the discipline: thank the Father for the specific painful providences of your life that the lesson's account of the Father's formative discipline has now given you eyes to receive as love rather than punishment. Name them. Offer thanks for them. Ask for the eyes to see the peaceful fruit of righteousness that Hebrews 12:11 promises. For the provision: thank the Father for the specific gifts He has given to the needs you have brought to Him, receiving Matthew 7:7–11's promise as the personal guarantee of the One who knows what you need before you ask. For the inheritance: receive 1 Peter 1:3–5's description of the reserved, imperishable, undefiled, unfading inheritance as the specific destination toward which the Father's whole providential management of your life is moving you.

Pray for those in your congregation who are most clearly living under the spirit of slavery rather than the Spirit of adoption, whose relationship to God is most dominated by fear, uncertainty, and the performance-based anxiety that the slave's economy generates. Ask the Spirit of adoption to do in their hearts what only the Spirit can do: to produce the Abba cry that displaces the slave's dread, to bear witness with their spirit that they are children of God, and to deepen the experiential reality of the filial relationship that the adoption has established. Ask for the specific pastoral wisdom and the specific pastoral warmth to be the instrument of the Spirit's work in their lives, to give the specific, adoption-grounded, relational word that helps them receive what the Spirit is already attesting.

Close with a doxological reading of Galatians 4:6–7 as the corporate declaration of the adopted community's identity and freedom: "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God." Let the "Abba! Father!" be the literal address, spoken aloud, as the Spirit produces it, in the voices of those who have received the Spirit of adoption and know themselves to be the children of the God who sent His Son so that they might receive the adoption. This is the highest privilege of the gospel. This is the relational home of the justified sinner. This is what the Triune God has done, from eternity to time, to make the rebel creature a beloved child. Abba. Father.

"Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God."

Galatians 4:6–7, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Galatians 4:4–7; Romans 8:14–17, 23; Ephesians 1:5; 1 John 3:1–2; John 1:12–13; 1 Peter 1:3–5; Hebrews 12:5–11; 4:16; Matthew 6:9–13; 7:7–11

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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