



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 176

Adoption – Though adoption logically follows regeneration and justification, being closely and inseparably connected to these, nevertheless it is distinct from these, conveying additional and distinctive privileges to the elect. Regeneration is the act of God whereby the spiritually dead is made spiritually alive; and justification is the act of God whereby the redeemed, the one who responds in faith and repentance, is legally declared righteous before God; but adoption is the gracious act of God whereby the justified person becomes the child of God, a member of God’s family.

Neither regeneration nor justification conveys such a marvelous idea of being adopted. Adoption is about entering into a very intimate and loving relationship with God as His children; it is a tremendously gracious gift which God has bestowed upon us, for He was under no obligation to do so, and could have regenerated us and justified us without ever adopting us as His children (Matthew 5:48; John 1:12; Ephesians 5:1; Philippians 2:15; Hebrews 12:5-11; WCF 12:1).

Originates in the decree of God – As with all acts of God, the origin of adoption is the eternal decree of God; His eternal decision to love and redeem His people (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:3-6; 1 John 3:1).

Grounded in the work of Christ – The Confession states that all those who are justified in Christ “God vouchsafeth . . . to make partakers of the grace of adoption.” To vouchsafe means to bestow or to grant, pointing to the fact that we do not deserve nor earn this adoption, but that it is a gracious gift of God. Like justification, the meritorious basis of our adoption is wholly the work of Christ (Galatians 4:4-5).

In Christ – Though God is the Creator and Sustainer of all, He is not the Redeemer of all. He is only the Father of those He has saved through His Son, who are thus brothers and sisters with one another. This includes believers in the New as well as the Old Testament (Romans 9:7-8; Galatians 3:29; Hebrews 2:16; 1 Peter 3:5-6). The Bible classifies all human beings as either the children of God or the children of the devil (John 8:42, 44; Ephesians 2:1; 5:6; 1 John 3:10). The privilege of adoption is only reserved for those who are in Christ (Matthew 6:9); while the wrath of God is reserved for those who are not in Christ (John 3:36). The idea of the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man are unbiblical and are to be rejected, for they diminish the person and work of Christ, presenting Him as only a moral example to be imitated, annulling the gospel, and thus giving people a false confidence.

Not natural but supernatural – Only Jesus Christ is the Son of God by nature. He is the unique Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, enjoying a unique and exclusive relationship with God the Father, the first person of the Trinity, from all eternity. Not even the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is the Son in this sense. We on the other hand, who at one time were strangers, belonging to an alien family (Ephesians 2:12), have now been adopted into the family of God, not naturally but supernaturally (Ephesians 2:13, 19). Though we received our sonship in time, Christ’s Sonship is eternal; and though we are joint heirs with and by the merit of Christ, we do not and will not share in Christ’s eternal and unique Sonship. Jesus Christ is the only-begotten of the Father, which is distinct from adoption.

For Christ – All those who are saved are love gifts which the Father in eternity past decided to give His Son, and the Son in eternity past was pleased to receive (John 17:6; Hebrews 2:10-13). This was not just an idea which God had for which its realization would have been contingent upon the free will of man. Christ’s life and death was not for a potential redemption, but for an actual redemption. He did not die potentially for everyone; rather, He died actually for particular people (Matthew 1:21; John 6:37, 39, 44; 17:9), according to God’s absolute and immutable decree. What a great privilege that God in eternity past decreed to give us as a love gift to His Son, and the Son was pleased to accept and sacrifice Himself to redeem us, and thus we are accepted into God’s family, where He is our Father and we His children.