

## *From Your Pastor*

# *A Study of the Shorter Catechism: Adoption*

### Question 34: What is adoption?

**Answer: Adoption is an act of God's free grace,(1) whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.(2) (1)1 John 3:1 (2)John 1:12; Rom. 8:17**

God legally declares believers righteous before Him in justification, but also (very importantly!) legally adopts us into His family, giving us His name, granting us privileges of being His children, and granting us a rich and eternal inheritance in Him, and with Him. We could imagine a judge that would pardon our crimes or sins against the law, but would not necessarily embrace us and receive us into his family. *God has pardoned our sins, and received us as sons!!* At the Biggs' home, we think of the distinction between the legal work that had to be accomplished to adopt our dear daughters from China and Ethiopia, and the actual "Gotcha Day" when we received them as our own daughters, and they officially and legally had a right to all the privileges of being in our family (humble as that may be!). While both justification and adoption are legal acts, justification emphasizes the work that had to be legally accomplished by Christ to achieve adoption; adoption emphasizes "*Gotcha Day*" with our Great God and Savior! At our home, we're prone to say when reciting this catechism question: "*Adoption is an act of God's free "Gotcha" grace*" (but you don't have to say it this way!).

Our adoption is because of the Father's love from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4-6); it is because of the Son's redemptive work in willingly coming as our big brother to redeem us and to obtain for us the Spirit of Sonship (Gal. 4:4-7), and it is the Spirit's work to seal and further reveal this reality to our hearts (Rom. 8:15-16, 26; cf. Eph. 3:16-19). Our adoption changes our relationship to God so that He is no longer merely our Creator, and because of the fall, He is no longer our Judge, but He is now our Heavenly Father, and we cry out: "*Abba, Father*" (Rom. 8:15). In Christ, believers are now the very heirs of God, and like Jesus Christ, the Father's dearly and beloved children. "*What manner of love has God the Father bestowed upon us that we are called the children of God, and that is what we are!*" (1 Jo. 3:1-2). We now have a big brother, the Lord Jesus, who gave Himself for our redemption so that we could take on a family resemblance (Heb. 2:11-18). What joy should characterize us as God's children, because one day we will be like Him fully (1 Jo. 3:2-3; Rom. 8:23).

Note that in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* adoption like justification is described as an "*act of God's free grace*" impressing upon us that it is once and for all, whereas sanctification is a "*work of God's free grace*" that continues throughout the Christian life. We should never separate justification and sanctification, though we should make the proper distinctions between the "act" and "work" of God's free grace (act is final, work is continuing). The same is true with adoption. In light of our adoption, though we formerly walked as those who loved the world, with the desires of the flesh, the eyes, and the pride of life (1 Jo. 2:15-17), we no longer love the world in this way because the world is passing away and we desire to do the will of our Heavenly Father (1 Jo. 2:17). In fact, because of God's once for all "act" and as a privilege of being children of God, we as heirs with Christ and now begin to take upon a family resemblance, knowing that one day we shall be fully like Him as part of God's ongoing "work" of sanctification in believers (1 Jo. 3:2-3; Phil. 1:6; cf. Titus 2:11-14).

As adopted sons in Christ we know that we possess the encouraging word of our Heavenly Father through our labors: "*Well done my good and faithful servant*" (cf. Heb. 6:10-12). We know that we have in our union with Christ the Father's blessed affirmation saying: "*This is my Beloved...with whom I am well pleased.*" This should change how we view ourselves, and make us as believers—and children of God—to want to live faithfully pleasing God as our kind king and father (2 Cor. 5:9). We are part of a new family in Christ and as the Lord Jesus taught, we are to love one another as Christ has loved us (John 15:9-16). In fact, as the Father has loved Christ, so Christ has loved His own in this same way and this is the motivation for doing His commandments with eager joy (John 15:12ff). Love will characterize the children of God as we love one another (1 Jo. 4:7-21). *We love because He first loved us* (1 Jo. 4:19). Let us rejoice, and live as God's beloved children!

**Prayer:** "Abba, Father" I am grateful to pray with my elder brother, the Lord Jesus, "Our Father in Heaven". Thank you for your grace and rich mercies in adopting me as your own. You have received me in Christ, and this is my great joy and hope!

In Christ's love,  
Pastor Biggs

*"O Father...Remove the fuel of my sin, and may I prize the gain of a little holiness as overbalancing all my losses...The more my heart is broken for sin, the more I pray it may be far more broken."*

– "Union with Christ" (Valley of Vision)