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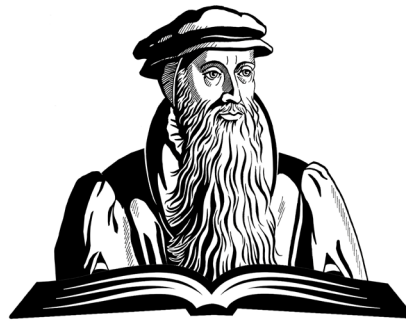
VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #25

Adoption

Catechism Question 34



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

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Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Lecture #25

Adoption

Question 34: *What is adoption?*

Answer: *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.*

In our previous lesson, we looked at one of the great blessings of salvation—justification. When God justifies a sinner, he forgives all of his sin, and accepts that sinner as righteous in his sight. You'll remember, of course, that he doesn't do this because of a change done in the sinner, but rather it is because of the righteousness of Christ which is imputed to that sinner and received by faith alone. This of course is a great blessing, and it is a great comfort to all who have trusted in Christ. But it is not all that is bound up in Christ and in salvation by Christ. Today we get to look at another great blessing of salvation, and it's called adoption.

You may already be familiar with the idea of adoption. This is because there's a sad reality in our world that some children, indeed many children, lose their parents. There are many ways that this happens, but in the end, the child is left an orphan, and as an orphan, is without many of the comforts that come because of having a loving mother and father, and a comfortable home and support. Different countries have their own ways of helping orphans, and their goal is to help the orphan receive that care which is needed. Most countries have developed ways to help orphans find new parents. And when a family takes in such a child into their own home, and gives them the care, and gives them all of the oversight of their own home, they "adopt" that child into their family. And this means that the orphan is no longer an orphan, but now is a member of a family.

Well today we get to look at the Biblical teaching on adoption. But we're not looking at the adoption of children into earthly families. Rather, we're looking at what the Bible teaches about God adopting his people into his everlasting family. So this brings us to the Question for our lesson, Question #34: "What is adoption?" The Answer: "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." Well, each of these words is clear, so we'll move right into our lesson. And for this lesson, we'll look at three main points. First, The Absence of Adoption; second, The Blessings of Adoption; and third, The Cause of Adoption.

So first then, The Absence of Adoption. If something isn't present, it's absent. And so when we're talking about the Absence of Adoption, we're talking about what's going on when one is not received into God's family. Well, we've already noted that orphans in this life face a very sad and difficult reality. Now, if we're not orphans ourselves, it's impossible for us to know just how many

struggles such children face in these circumstances.

But there is something worse than being an orphan in this world among mere men. It is to belong to a wicked and cruel family in this world. It is a cruel reality, and it saddens us to realize this, that some parents abuse their children. Of course, there's need for loving, and firm, and faithful discipline and correction. The Bible teaches this with great clarity. However, there is a great difference between Biblical discipline and sinful abuse. It is a great sin for parents to abuse their children. And so, whereas we think of an orphan without parents, and yet hopefully under the care and provision of some who are helping them, we can think of how much worse it is for a child with parents, whose parents abuse them. It's hard to say what is worse.

But another thing most wicked as well is that there are those in this world who actually steal children. This is known as kidnapping. There are very sad stories of this happening. The child is taken from his family and is often abused by an evil person or a group of people. These are heavy, weighty things. I certainly do not mean to scare you by these things, but as we'll see, it helps us to see something about ourselves as sinners.

As sinners, we do not belong to God's family. Although he made us, and sustains us, and gives us all the good things we enjoy—from the sunshine, to the rain falling upon the field, to the food that we eat—all of these things are generously given by God to us. And yet, there is a spiritual breakdown, and the breakdown is in us. And this is known as sin. There is what is most grievous and wicked about this sin. By sin, we run away from God into the abusive oversight of Satan. Understand this. In Adam's sin, and by our own sins, we've turned from God. We have renounced his care, his love, his authority. We've turned to a wicked abuser, and we have come under that wicked one's care, if we can call it that, his oversight, and of course, most abusive. Satan only desires our destruction, and we've sided with him. The beginning of this was in Adam. Adam had been given all that he needed, but he turned from it and from God, listened to the word of Satan, and sinned against God. And this is what we continue to do, and would continue to do apart from God's grace.

Notice how the Bible mentions this in Ephesians 2, verses 1 through 3. This passage has come up quite a few times in our lessons, but it's tremendously important for our understanding of what we are apart from God's grace. Paul writes, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." This is, of course, a tremendously sad reality and accurate description of what every one of us is apart from God's saving grace in Christ. It's true of everyone who is without Christ. They are without grace, they are without Christ, and they are dead in sins, as Paul says. They're following the way of the world, and this way is the way that is directed by Satan. They're fulfilling their wicked lusts, and they are under God's wrath.

This is true of all men who are not believing in Jesus Christ. Jesus had strong and yet faithful words against the unbelieving Jews, the covenant people of God. Though they were in covenant with God, there were those who were unbelievers in that covenant. They remained in the state of death and rebellion. Notice Christ's words to such unbelieving ones, in John 8, and verse 44. It's Jesus who says, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for his a liar, and the father of it." This is bad news

indeed. Christ said, “Ye are of your father the devil.” How desperately then we need the grace of God to deliver us from so horrible a state. But, as we’ll see, there is good news. As with every part of the ultimate good news, the gospel, this comes to us by grace through Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that sinners who trust in Christ are not only forgiven their sins, they’re not only accepted as righteous in God’s sight—all of this, of course tremendously excellent—there is an additional blessing known as ‘adoption’.

So now let’s look at those blessings. For the second main point, The Blessings of Adoption. When one believes upon Christ by God’s grace, that person is adopted into God’s family. This is what the Catechism means when it says, “we are received into the number of the sons of God.” In our next main point, we’ll look at what causes adoption—how it happens. But for this point, let’s look at two great blessings that come to one who is adopted.

The first of these great blessings is that we are made, counted, and rightfully considered sons and daughters of God. We are adopted into his family. Notice this truth from the Bible. In John’s Gospel, we read about the blessings that come to those who trust in Jesus Christ. In particular, John identifies “adoption.” Notice John chapter 1, verse 12: “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” When he writes, “to them gave he power to become the sons of God,” he’s using this word which means he gave them authority, or the right to be God’s children. They did not have that right before. But by God’s grace, he gave them that right, so that they are now rightfully, or perhaps we could say it this way—lawfully, legally reckoned as God’s children. You could think of it this way, by way of adoption. An adopted child is not a member of that family by birth—naturally; they are a member of that family by law—legally. There was a bringing in of that child. And this is what God is saying about all who believe upon Christ. They once were not part of his family, and by his grace, he gave them the authority, the right, and he receives them into his family.

This is something that John says we should wonder at. In 1 John 3, and verse 1, he says, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” John is saying that this should overwhelm us. “Behold”—look at this! We who were once rebels and under God’s wrath have been taken into God’s family, where his love is displayed, where he is fully and constantly caring for us in love, grace, and mercy. Truly this is a blessing.

But with this being brought into his family comes the second of these great blessings, that as children, we are given the right to all the privileges that belong to the children of God. Notice the Catechism: “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.” These privileges include his loving care, his provision for our earthly needs, because of his love for us, his provision for our spiritual needs. He protects us from Satan. He protects us from temptation. He protects us from the world. He gives us assurance of his love. He gives us strength unto greater holiness. He gives us more, and more, and more than we have time and space, as it were, to discuss. There are many such privileges. You can see a glimpse of these privileges in Christ’s teaching on prayer. He was teaching his disciples to pray, he said, in Matthew 7, verse 11, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” He’s making this point by comparison. You all are sinful, and you still struggle with sin, and yet you know how to give good gifts to your children. How much more does your Father in heaven, who is nothing but good, who is pure and holy, know how to and will give good things to his children as they ask him?

And thus, one aspect of these privileges is the assurance that God cares for us and provides

for us all that we need. What a privilege indeed to know that the Maker of heaven and earth is our Father in heaven, by grace, who loves us, and as it were, opens all of his privileges to us through Christ. Notice the wonder of such a truth, as Paul writes of it, in Romans 8, verses 16 and 17. He says, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” An “heir” is a child that has a right to the possessions—the lands, the money, the general estate of his parents. In short, an heir has a right to everything that his father has and gives.

This is somewhat easy for us to understand regarding Christ, because Christ, of course, is the eternal Son of God. Moreover, as the appointed Mediator in his incarnate ministry, he obeyed his Father perfectly. He proved himself worthy of so great an inheritance. But notice what Paul says. He says, believers are children of God. We’ve already seen this in this lesson. We are adopted into his family, but he opens this up for our understanding. Notice that he says, “If children, then heirs; heirs of God.” This should strike us as astounding! Believers have been brought into God’s family. Remember the rebel who had abandoned, and refused, and rejected God, is now being brought into that family to receive the riches of his grace. I encourage you, in your own time, to look up the story of the prodigal son, and you’ll get a glimpse of this beautiful truth. Oh, but Paul says that believers are “joint-heirs with Christ.” Well this is merely too much for us. If it were not the Bible telling us this, we would be those who would say, “This is too much. Who of us could ever think that we should be considered joint-heirs with Christ?” But praise God, it is his Word. God tells the believer that he, the believer is united to Christ, and in Christ, and by Christ, and for Christ’s sake, he now has a right to all the privileges of God’s inheritance. Indeed, he tells the believer that he or she is reckoned joint-heirs with Christ himself.

How is it that all of this comes to pass? We’ll look at that now in our third point, The Cause of Adoption. The Catechism rightly states that “adoption is an act of God’s free grace.” There are many things that are bound up with this statement, so we’ll look at just a few of them. Ultimately, as our Catechism indicates, adoption is by God’s *free* grace. It is not something that we qualify ourselves for. We don’t go about and earn God’s favor. It’s not by our perfect obedience, but we should be clear, it’s not by our imperfect obedience that we’re brought into God’s family. It’s not because of desires that we have. It’s not because of the intention of our heart. We don’t make promises to God that we’ll, in the future, be very good and faithful. We don’t bargain with God. We don’t enter into this great privilege by our works. Why?—because, to go back several lessons, adoption is one of those benefits that come to us because of the covenant of grace. It’s not by our works. Instead, it’s by God’s free grace. We saw this earlier when we mentioned 1 John 3, verse 1: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.” Notice it is the display of his love freely bestowed upon us. No one has the ability to purchase or earn so great a privilege and blessing. God instead has magnified his mercy. He’s made it appear with this wondrous truth, in giving so great a privilege to us freely, by his grace alone.

Notice as well, that it is an act of God’s free grace. Once it is done, it stands forever. It’s not something that one grows in, or gradually becomes a child of God. Instead, as John wrote, it is bestowed upon us, that is, it is given, it’s credited to us. It is a great privilege that receive.

At one moment, the sinner is not in God’s family. But by God’s grace, at the next moment, he is. Well, someone says, “What is it that makes the difference?” Well, we’ve seen it’s by God’s grace. Adoption is one of those great and gracious blessings that is given to us as soon as we believe upon Christ. So as soon as the sinner trusts in Christ, two main things happen. First, he is justified.

We considered this, of course, in our previous lesson. That is, the sinner is pardoned and counted righteous for Jesus' sake. But the second blessing that comes upon faith, as we embrace Christ, is that at the same time he is justified, the sinner is adopted. Now our own minds have to perceive of this in some sort of order—first justified, then adopted. This is because, of course, before we could enter into God's family, you have to be pardoned and righteous, and so, of course, that makes sense. God pardons and declares us righteous, then receives us into his family. However, we should not think that there is any delay between our justification and our adoption. As soon as the believer trusts in Christ, he is both justified and adopted. There's no space, there's no lag between these two most beautiful and blessed truths.

Let's remember that such faith is faith trusting in Christ. It's not just that by which we say we know that Jesus is the Savior, "I know that he would save me." But rather, it's that faith whereby we receive and rest upon Christ alone as he is freely offered to us in the gospel. Once one trusts Christ Jesus, this merely unthinkable blessing is given to us—we are adopted into his family. It is by God's free grace, through faith in Christ that one is adopted. All of the praise then to God, for he is the ultimate cause of our adoption.

Well, as we close, if you are trusting in Christ, you have this reason to rejoice now and always. It may be true that you have many difficulties right now, and maybe for many years to come. There may be many trials you have faced, and are facing, and will face. However, you have such a blessing right now that is greater than all of your trials. You are a child of God, and you have access to his gracious, loving, and fatherly care. Oh, take advantage of it! Give thanks to God for it! And ask him, as it were, to make you realize this privilege moreover. Someone may say, "I don't feel these privileges." This is a sad experience in many Christians' lives. I imagine that a rich man at times may not feel that he's rich. However, we should remember something—feelings do not change facts. Now of course, feelings should flow from the truth. But there are some times when our feelings are not following what is true. If you are trusting Christ, then you are God's child by grace. You have been adopted, and you do have a right to all the privileges that belong to the sons of God. So what should you do? Well, search the Scriptures. Discover what these great privileges are which belong to you. Look for them, write them down, memorize them, repeat them, and in addition, pray. Ask your loving Father to give you the gracious privilege of enjoying these great blessings. He is good. He will do it, for he is your Father.

Well, do you refuse Christ? Are you one who, though you acknowledge these things are true perhaps, you might go to church, and so on, but you refuse Christ. Oh, consider your loss! You remain under the bondage of sin. You remain under the guidance of Satan. You remain, as it were, under the wrath of God. You may have many earthly privileges, but you do not have one spiritual treasure as your own. And so, by refusing Christ, you not only dishonor God, but you injure yourself and your everlasting future. Oh, hear the Word of the Lord Jesus Christ, in John 8, verses 34 to 36: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Oh, shall you be delivered from your rebellion? Shall you be received into God's family? If ever you shall, it will be by God's grace through Christ. Then cry out to him! Cry out to the eternal Son of God, that he would save you and, by grace, bring you into God's family and there enjoy all of these blessings, by faith now in this world, and in sight in the glory to come, when it is that Christ returns.