

The Reign of Grace

Chapter 7

By [Abraham Booth](#)

Those whom God has justified, and admitted into a state of reconciliation with himself, he has also adopted for his children. Hence their interest in all the blessings of grace, and in the unknown riches of glory, depends not merely on the favour of friendship, though that be of the noblest kind; but also upon an indisputable right of inheritance, which right they have in virtue of adoption.

The word *Adoption*, signifies that act by which a person takes the child of another, not related to him, into the place, and entitles him to the privileges of his own son. In the Grecian and Roman states, it was customary for a man of wealth, in default of issue from his own body, to make choice of some person upon whom he put his name; requiring him to relinquish his own family never to return to it again, and publicly proclaimed him his heir. The person thus adopted was legally entitled to the inheritance, upon the decease of his adopter; and though previously void of all claim to such a benefit, or any expectation of it, was invested with the same privileges, as if he had been born an heir to his benefactor.*

* Mr. Venn's Complete Duty of Man, p. 470, 471. edit. 2d

That spiritual and divine adoption about which we treat, is, *God's gracious admission of strangers and aliens into the state, relation, and enjoyment of all the privileges of children, through Jesus Christ*: according to that glorious promise of the new covenant, *I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty*. Reconciliation, justification, and adoption, may be thus distinguished. In *reconciliation*, God is considered as the injured party, and the sinner as an enemy to him. In *justification*, our Maker sustains the character of supreme Judge, and man is considered as a criminal standing before his tribunal. In *adoption*, Jehovah appears as the fountain of honour, and the apostate sons of Adam as aliens from him, as belonging to the family of Satan, and as denominated *children of wrath*. In reconciliation, we are made *friends*; in justification, we are pronounced righteous; and in adoption, we are constituted *heirs* of the eternal inheritance.

That believers are the children of God, the Scriptures expressly declare. They may be so called, as they are begotten and born from above; as they stand in a conjugal relation to Christ; and as they are adopted into the heavenly family.

These different ways in which the Scripture speaks of their filial relation to God, are intended to aid our feeble conceptions when we think upon the grand, ineffable blessing; one mode of expression, supplying, in Some degree, the ideas that are wanting in another. To express the original of spiritual life, and the restoration of the Divine image, we are said to be *born* of God. To set forth, in the liveliest manner, our most intimate union with the Son of the Highest, we are said to be *married* to Christ. And, that we might not forget our natural state of alienation from God, and to intimate our title to the heavenly patrimony, we are said to be adopted by Him. The condition therefore of all believers is most noble and excellent. Their heavenly birth, their Divine Husband, and their everlasting inheritance, loudly proclaim it. The beloved apostle, amazed at the love of God manifested in the privilege of adoption, could not forbear exclaiming with astonishment and rapture, *Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called THE SONS OF GOD!* Here grace reigns. The vessels of mercy were predestinated to the enjoyment of this honour and happiness before the world began. The great Lord of all chose them for himself, chose them for his children, that they might be *heirs of God, and joint heirs of Christ*. This he did, not because of any worthiness in them, but of his own sovereign will. As it is written, *Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace. According to the good pleasure of his will;* this is the eternal source of the heavenly blessing. *By Jesus Christ;* this is the way of its communication to sinners. *To the praise of his glorious grace;* this is the end of bestowing it.

The persons adopted are sinners of Adam's race; who, considered in their natural state, are estranged from God, and guilty before him, under sentence of death, and obnoxious to ruin. Their translation therefore out of this deplorable condition, into a state and relation so glorious, is an instance of reigning grace. That the children of wrath should become the inheritors of glory, and the slaves of Satan be acknowledged as the sons of Jehovah; that the enemies of God should be adopted into his family, and have an indefeasible right to all the privileges of his children, are astonishing to the last degree. Our character and state, by nature, are the most indigent, wretched, and abominable; such as render us fit for nothing, after this life, but to dwell with damned spirits and accursed fiends, in the abodes of darkness and of despair. But, by the privilege of adoption, we are invested with such a character, and are brought into such a state, as render us fit to associate with saints in light, with angels in glory. What but omnipotent, reigning grace, could be sufficient to effect so noble, so astonishing, so divine a change?

If we take a cursory view of those invaluable privileges which, in virtue of adoption, the saints possess, and of which they are heirs, our ideas of the superlative blessing will be still heightened. They have the most honourable *character*; for they are called, not merely the servants, or the friends, but the sons of God. This dignified character is unalterable; for the Lord himself declares,

that it is *an everlasting name that shall not be cut off*. (Isa. lxii. 2; and lvi. 5) If David so highly esteemed the character of son-in-law to an earthly king; (I Sam. xviii. 23) how much more should believers esteem that sublime title, *the sons of God*; of Him who is King of kings, and Lord of lords ! They are also called *kings* and *priests*; besides which august and venerable titles, they are distinguished from the world by a rich variety of others, that are obvious to every intelligent reader of the sacred writings. The dignity of their *relation* is immensely great. For, being the children of God, Jehovah himself is their father, and Christ acknowledges them for his brethren. Nor do they stand in relation to Jesus merely as brethren; they are also his bride. Than their conjugal relation to him, nothing can be conceived more honourable, or more beneficial. For *he is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely*. When David, though not yet in possession of the crown, sent his men to Abigail to take her to wife, that discreet widow *bowed herself to the earth*, and said, *Behold, let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my Lord*. Now, may not the believer, for infinitely greater reasons, with gratitude and astonishment adore that beneficent hand which broke off his yoke of basest vassalage, and joined him to David's Antitype, the heavenly Bridegroom: joined him in a marriage-covenant that shall never be broken, in a union that shall never be dissolved?

Believers, being the children of God, are the objects of his paternal affection and unremitting care. As a father, he guides them by his counsel and guards them by his power. Their disobedience he visits with a rod of correction; and in their distresses he feels for them with bowels of paternal compassion. In the whole of his dealings with them he manifests his love, and causes all things to work together for their good. Yes, they are the darlings of Providence, and the charge of angels. Those ministering spirits, who are active as flame, and swift as thought, encamp around them; and, in ways unknown to mortals, subserve the designs of grace in promoting their best interests.

Nothing can exceed the riches and excellency of that *inheritance* to which they have a right, in virtue of their adoption; that eternal inheritance which is bequeathed to them by an inviolable testament. This testament, recorded in the sacred writings, was confirmed by the death of Christ. Their inheritance includes all the blessings of grace here, and the full fruition of glory hereafter. Though, as to temporal things, they be frequently indigent, and much afflicted; yet the blessings of common providence are dispensed to them in such measures as paternal wisdom sees best for their spiritual welfare, and the glory of God. For *godliness hath the promise of the life that now is*, as well as *of that which is to come*; and *their heavenly Father knoweth that they have need* of his providential favours, while they continue in the present state. So that whether they be things temporal, spiritual, or eternal; whether they be things present or things to come, all are theirs. According to that admirable text, *All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; ALL are yours*. But, which is yet more emphatical, and the highest that words can express, the utmost our ideas can reach; the Divine Spirit declares

that they are HEIRS or GOD, and JOINT-HEIRS of CHRIST.*

* Rom. viii. 17. So it is literally; and so MONTANUS, BEZA, CAS TALIO, and many others, render the passage.

Each, therefore, has a right to say, "Jehovah himself is my reward, my portion, and my inheritance." Yea, such is the mutual property which God and his people have in each other, that the inheritance is reciprocal between them. *For the portion of Jacob is the Former of all things, and Israel is the rod of his inheritance, the Lord of hosts is his name.* All the awful, the amiable, the adorable attributes of Deity, will appear glorious in the children of God, and be enjoyed by them to their everlasting honour and unutterable bliss. What can the heart of man desire more? Or, what good thing will God withhold from them for whom he gave his Son, to whom he gives himself?

In testimony to this their sublime relation, and as an earnest of their future inheritance, they receive the *Spirit of adoption*; by whom they cry, with appropriation and confidence, *Abba, Father*. The spirit of adoption, as opposed to the spirit of bondage, is the spirit of light and of liberty, of consolation and of joy. He glorifies Christ in the believer's view, and sheds Divine love abroad in his heart. He brings the promises to his remembrance, and enables him to plead them at the throne of grace. He elevates the affections to heavenly things, and seals him, as an heir of the kingdom, to the day of redemption. Such are the privileges of God's adopted sons, in the vouchsafement of which grace reigns.

What a mercy might we esteem it, not to be confounded before the God of heaven! What a favour to obtain the least indulgent regard from the King eternal! What an honour to be admitted into his family, to occupy the place and to bear the character of his meanest servant! But, to be his adopted children, who is the Fountain of all bliss; and his espoused bride, who is the Sovereign of all worlds; to have him for our everlasting Father, who is the former of all things; and him for our Husband, who is the object of angelic worship; are blessings divinely rich indeed! That sinful mortals, who may justly say to corruption, *Thou art our father*; and to the worm, *Thou art our sister*, should be permitted to say to the infinite God, "Thou art our portion: All that thou hast and all that thou art are ours, to render us completely happy and eternally blessed; is an astonishing, delightful, transporting thought! These are blessings, than which none greater can be conceived; none more glorious can be enjoyed.

Let the grandees of the earth, and the sons of the mighty, boast of their high birth and large revenues; their pompous titles and splendid retinues; their delicate fare and costly array; still the poorest peasant that believes in Christ is incomparably superior to them all. What though they shine in silk and embroidery, or glitter in gold and jewels; though their names be adorned with the highest epithets that men can bestow, while a profusion of worldly riches is poured into their lap; yet they must soon *lie down in the dust*, on a level with the meanest of mortals. The *worms shall quickly cover them*, and their *memory shall rot*. But your name, O

weakest of Christians! your new name is everlasting. However neglected or despised among men, it shall stand forever fair in the book of life. Though you are not distinguished as a person of eminence, while you proceed on your pilgrimage, and receive not the acclamations of the people, but walk in the vale of life; yet you are high in the estimation of Heaven, nor destitute of the sublimest honours. Your praise is not of men, but of God. He knows the way that you take, and commands the angels to consider you as the object of their regard. Though you cannot boast of illustrious ancestors, or of noble blood; yet, being born from above, the blood-royal of heaven runs in your veins. Though not a favourite of your temporal sovereign; yet, like a prince, you have power with the God of Israel. Though ever so poor as to this world, the unsearchable riches of Christ are all your own. Though you have not a numerous train of attendants, and though your mansion be a cobwebbed cot-tape; yet the holy angels are your guard and minister to your good; while the God of glory not only condescends to come under your lowly roof, but even to dwell with you. Yours is the honourable character; yours is the happy state. This is felicity which all the wealth of the Indies cannot procure. This is honour, which all the crowned heads in the world cannot confer. The Lord of hosts hath purposed to stain the pride of all other glory, but this honour shall never be laid in the dust.*

* M'Ewen's Essays, vol. ii. p. 309-312

What a shade it casts on every secular distinction, when forced to feel how very fleeting it is! How encouraging to reflect on the durable and exalted happiness of the sons of God! Christianity! it is thine to ennoble the human mind and to make it really great. Grace! it is thine to raise the poor from the dunghill, and the needy out of the dust. Thine it is, to number them among the princes of heaven, and to seat them on thrones of glory.

And now, reader, what is your character? You, very probably, call yourself a Christian. If so in reality, you are a child of God, and an adopted heir of immortal glory.

Do you know then by experience, what are the privileges attendant on such a state, and connected with such a character? If not, you bear the name in vain. So far from being a Christian, you are — how shall I speak it? will you believe it? can pride forgive it? — you are an enemy to God and a child of the devil. For these two characters, *the children of God*, and *the seed of the serpent*, include all mankind. Consider, then, where to class yourself, and what is your proper name.

Are you a believer? a child of God by adoption, and an heir of eternal riches? Be careful to act agreeably to your high character and exalted privileges. Let the children of this world satisfy their little minds, and be captivated by the low enjoyments and perishing vanities of the present state; but you should disdain to act upon their principles, or to be governed by their maxims. The riches of the world, which engross the cares of the covetous; its honours, that are so earnestly pursued by the ambitious; and its various pleasures, in which the sensualist

delights, you should be far from desiring. Why should you be discontented at the want of that which, though enjoyed in all its fulness, could not make you happy? equally far should you be from performing religious duties on the same principles and with the same views, as the legal moralist and selfish Pharisee; which generally are, either the applause of men, or their own acceptance with God. *That* is the most abominable hypocrisy in the sight of Him who searches the heart, and stands abhorred by every generous mind; *this* is a criminal usurpation of the office of Christ, and the highest dishonour to his undertaking. For it proceeds on a supposition, that the work of the Lord is either not perfect in itself, or not free for the sinner. The former basely reflects on his power, or faithfulness, and the latter on his grace: both which are equally far from honouring the adored Redeemer under his cheering and sacred character, Jesus. The children of light should act from the most generous motives and for the sublimest end. Love to their heavenly Father, and gratitude to the bleeding Saviour, should ever be the fruitful source of their obedience; and the glory of God, the exalted end.

Are you an heir of the kingdom? You should be careful to preserve a steady conduct in the church of God, and in the world. Not only to be zealous for your Father's honour, as we vulgarly say, by fits and starts; but maintain an uniform behaviour through the whole of your conduct. Endeavour to make it appear that you are a diligent servant, as well as a dignified son of God. Your practice should be, as much as possible, agreeable to your holy profession, and your glorious hope. Remember, that as your gracious Father and loving Husband, your glorious relatives and bright inheritance, are all in heaven; there also should be your heart, and your conversation. For though you are an heir of a kingdom, it is not *of this world*: and though you are *in*, you are not of the world. Nor will you have any reason to be surprised, or ashamed, if the world should hate you. *Whatsoever things are true; whatsoever things are honest, grave, or venerable; whatsoever things are pure; whatsoever things are lovely; whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise,* the children of God undoubtedly ought, above all others, to *think on these things*. For no man can free himself from the odious charge of being a dishonour to Christ, and a reproach to his Christian profession, if he live under the dominion of sin, and be a servant of Satan. Such a person, whatever speculative knowledge he may have of the doctrine of grace, or whatever his professions of love to it may be, is destitute of the faith of the gospel, and an enemy to the cross of Christ; is a stumbling block in the way of young converts; and, leaving the world in this condition, will feel severer vengeance, will fall under double damnation to all eternity.

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