

# GOD'S ADOPTION:

a missing piece of modern Christianity.

- Dave Crandall



Imagine a cake sitting on a counter. It looks super appealing with its decorative icing and fancy plating. It's really beautiful. But when you put a forkful in your mouth you find that the baker forgot to add sugar to the mix. Everything else is there... but it tastes terrible because it is missing an essential ingredient.

**Something is missing.** When we survey what is called Christianity in America, it seems like, in many cases, something really important is missing. There is at least one ingredient that is absent. This omission has some very serious negative consequences. Having a form of godliness, many modern versions lack the true power and beauty of Christianity.

One of the missing elements of modern Christianity is the truth of God's Adoption. In his book *Children of the Living God*, Sinclair Ferguson sums up the importance of adoption by boldly saying "the notion that we are children of God, his own sons and daughters, lies at the heart of all Christian theology and is the mainspring of all Christian living." Does the idea of God's adoption warrant such a huge claim? Let's look it.

## 1. Definition: What is it?

God's adoption is an undeserved, unearned gift of grace that is paired with complete forgiveness and acceptance because of Jesus' life and death on our behalf. Through faith in Jesus, we have

- a right to all the privileges of a child of God.
- the Spirit of God,
- his name put upon us,
- a place in the family of God, and
- a unique role in the kingdom work.

We are relationally reconciled to God by Jesus and now are under his fatherly care.

Imagine it. You're standing in the courtroom of Heaven. When the divine Judge's gavel falls, He boldly declares that you are forgiven and right in the eyes of God (justified)... but that is not all. God then legally, relationally, and spiritually adopts you as His child. God's perfect justification leads to perfect adoption.

*"Adoption is a grace beyond and above justification. In justification, God acquits sinners of all the charges against them. Indeed, he goes further still and declares that in Christ their righteousness meets the highest possible standards. They are as righteous as Christ himself (2 Corinthians 5:21). There is not a stain on their characters.*

*At this point, in normal human systems of justice, the accused is then simply free to go, and both he and the judge hope they will never see each other again. But the divine judge not only acquits, He invites the sinner home — and not just for an evening. He adopts us as his own forever, tells us we are to call him "Father," and pronounces us lawful heirs to all he is and to all that he has."* Donald Macleod - [Adoption: A New Father and A New Heart](#)

### In this article...

1. Definition and Description of Divine Adoption
2. Privileges of Adoption
3. Blessings of Adoption
4. Heart Problems soothed by God's Adoption
5. Activity: Helping a friend with God's Adoption
6. Next Steps

*"If you want to determine how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father... Our understanding of Christianity cannot be better than our grasp of adoption." - J.I. Packer*

In 1 John 3:10, John reminds us that everyone has a spiritual father - either the devil or God. There are no other options. All people are born under the "dominion of darkness" (Col 1:13) because of the sin of our father Adam, and therefore are "children of wrath" (Eph 2:1-3). Every day since our birth we've lived independent, selfish, distorted, and rebellious lives. Our thoughts, desires, words, and actions have either violated God's clear instructions or ignored them (Rom 1:20-21). But by God's saving grace, those who believe are forgiven, reconciled, and adopted as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ (Eph 1:5)!

***Can you believe this? Has God adopted you?***

Adoption is illustrated by the story of Moses. Moses, a Hebrew baby, born as a slave under the sentence of death, is brought into the royal family by a princess, and adopted as her son. Moses grew up with all the rights and privileges of a child of Pharaoh.

The same is true for believers in relation to God by the work of Jesus. He rescues us. He is committed to us. He has given us his name. He has made us his heirs, and solemnly pledged that, as our heavenly Father, he will provide for us an abundant life (Eph 1:3; Phil 4:19).

*"You are made a prince! You are adopted into the royal family! You are now as much the son of God, as you are the son of your own father." Spurgeon*

**\* Why Sons? Isn't that sexist?** The apostle Paul was living in a culture where daughters were second-class citizens. When Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, said that we are all sons in Christ, he was declaring that there are no second-class citizens in God's family. Your adoption assures that you are loved exactly like Christ is loved. Because of your union with Jesus - The Privileged Son, you are honored like he is honored. Every Christian is equally loved, honored, blessed —irrespective of gender, nationality, or background.

## The Gospel: Three Gifts of God's Grace

- Jesus died the perfect death to pay the penalty your sins deserved
- Jesus lived a perfect life and credits his record to you. In Christ, you are acceptable, adopted, adored.
- Jesus gives you the Holy Spirit who produces spiritual life in you. You have hope for personal growth.

## STOP and PONDER

Based on what you've read so far, how would you define and describe the doctrine of divine adoption?

In what ways is God's adoption similar to our human version?

How is it different?

What role does Jesus play in Christian adoption?



## 2. Privileges of Adoption

In his acclaimed book *Knowing God*, the eminent Anglican theologian J.I. Packer states that God's adoption "is the highest privilege that the gospel offers." Wayne Grudem reminds us "Because believers are considered children of God, we experience many of the benefits of adoption now." Sadly, many who claim to be Christians do not enjoy these benefits as fully as they could. So what are the practical here-and-now benefits of divine adoption? Let's look at a brief list of the privileges that flow from God's adoption.

### A new relationship with God

Everyone has a relationship with God - either a creation of God who is guilty before him and under his judgment, or a forgiven, loved child of God because of the work of Jesus. Better than being a creature or a servant, being called a “son” is the richest relationship a person can have with God. *“To those who are Christ’s, the holy God is a loving Father; they belong to His family; they may approach him without fear, and always be sure of His fatherly concern and care. This is the heart of the New Testament message.”* J.I. Packer - Knowing God



### A new family

Using the words *brothers, sisters, and father*, the apostle Paul describes the church as a family of people who are not biologically related - a community of believers in Christ (Rom 8:15–21; Gal 4:4–6). God is father. True Christians are your siblings. You belong at the King’s table with the King’s family (2 Sam 9).

### A new identity and a new name

Your name - who you are and whose you are - impacts your self-image and your opportunities. If you had the name of a millionaire or a senator, you would be given special consideration. On the other hand, if you carried the name of a known criminal, your opportunities might be limited.

The Good News of God’s grace is that you, separated from God by your nature and lifestyle, have now been graciously given a new name! You bear the name of God himself! You are a Prince or Princess in the Kingdom of God! Your Father delights over you with singing (Zeph 3:17)! (Yes, God sings about you!)

### A new heart

Divine adoption gives us spiritual life. The Spirit of God is recreating the character, values, and mind of Jesus in us! We will progressively share the family traits.

### New prayers

As God’s children we have access to God in ways a servant does not. He invites you to tell him about your desires and needs. Spurgeon reminds us *“Do you come as a subject, or a servant? If you do, you have no right to come; but, if you come as a son, come and welcome.”*

### God’s Compassion

While God is good and kind to all the creatures He created, special affection and care is given to His children. He sits by your bedside. He sympathizes when you are tempted. His heart feels your sighs, groans, and cries. Your Father knows you inside and out. His compassion produces powerful and active love for you.

### God’s Provision

If God provides richly for the flowers and birds, how much more will He provide for you his dearly loved child? Listen to Jesus’ words *“What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”* Luke 11:11–13. If you are in Christ then God your Father has given you every spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3) and will provide for you.

Jesus said *“Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”* And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. Mark 10:14–16.



**What are the traits of the little children Jesus loved? Whiny. Trusting. Needy. Immature. etc**  
**Will you come to the Lord like a little child?**

*"What is a Christian? The question can be answered in many ways, but the richest answer I know is that a Christian is one who has God for his Father." - J. I. Packer [Knowing God](#)*

### God's protection

Even sinful fathers seek to protect their children. Rarely will a father sit idly while a child is attacked. God is a shield, fortress, and defender for his children.

### God's education

As children of the King, you are given the best education. Not only are you given a book of Truth and Wisdom, but the Holy Spirit teaches and tutors you. Usually God's nurture is gentle, but at times it includes the rod of discipline. Unlike punishment, discipline seeks to bless and train the child.

### THE POINT:

The list of privileges and blessings granted to those adopted by God is very long - too long to cover in an article like this. [Please don't miss the point: God is the source of all good things.](#) If you have placed your faith in Jesus as your mediator and substitute, then you have been forgiven, justified, reconciled, and adopted. God is now your Abba-Father (Da-da, PaPa). As your loving Father, He delights to give these gifts to you in perfect measure. He does not withhold anything that is needed, helpful, or good from his kids.

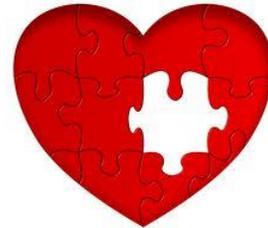
*Cannot it be said that every person is a child of God, Christian or not?*

*"Emphatically no! The idea that all men are children of God is not found in the Bible anywhere... Sonship to God is a gift of grace. It is not natural, but an adoptive sonship."*

- J. I. Packer

### Do you long for a perfect Father?

It seems that there is a significant longing in every human heart for a "good parent." Some of us long for the really great parents we had as kids... Others long for the parent we wished we had... in either case, we all ache for a perfect parent.



Like all our deepest longings, God offers to abundantly satisfy our hunger for a perfect Father. He instructs us to call him Father when we pray. Tell God about your longing for a perfect parent and accept Him as your Heavenly Father.

**An offer.** We've been helping people enjoy the blessings of God's adoption for 25 years. Let us help you take your next steps. Call or text 615-596-8303. Or email [dcrandall7@gmail.com](mailto:dcrandall7@gmail.com)

### ***But is all of this Biblical?***

*To all who did receive him (Jesus), who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - John 1:12.*

*In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith... - Galatians 3:26.*

*When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son ... so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. - Galatians 4:4-7.*

*Be imitators of God, as beloved children. - Ephesians 5:1.*

*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are! - 1 John 3:1*

*As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. - Psalm 103:13*

# A D O P T I O N

## 3. The Blessings of Divine Adoption

*“to all who did receive him, who believed in his name,  
he gave the right to become children of God...”* John 1:12

A full appreciation of the doctrine of God’s adoption in Christ gives us the following practical blessings...

- **Intimacy with God** – We are invited to call Him *Abba Father (Da-da, PaPa)*. A missing piece of much of modern Christianity is a daily interactive relationship with God as Heavenly Father.
- **New Identity** – Who are you? Answer: Because of Jesus you are a Son, Daughter, Prince, Heir, Beloved.
- **Humility** – Since adoption is an undeserved gift, we are humbled. We can live every day singing the song of salvation. Though privileged, our position as little children is very humbling.
- **Gratitude** – Since adoption is an unearned gift, we are profoundly thankful.
- **Affirmation** – God says to you *“I know you. I love you. I like you.”* Because of your union with Jesus, you can hear the Father say *“This is my Son with whom I am well pleased.”*
- **Security** – God’s adoption cannot be broken or revoked. You can’t sin your way out of God’s legal adoption. Your adoption started in the mind and heart of God. He will not change. Nothing can separate you.
- **Confidence** – As dearly loved children, we enjoy and rest in the fact that our Father is working constantly for our good. He protects. He provides.
- **Transformation** – When orphans are adopted, they gradually take on the traits, values, and culture of their new family. By the Spirit’s transforming work in us and our interactive relationship with God, we progressively grow to be more like our Father and Big Brother Jesus.
- **Family** – Our adoption engrafts us into the family of God. We now have brothers and sisters in Christ.
- **Discipline** - As our Father, God is committed to teaching and training his children in godliness. Most often this is the gentle tutoring of the Holy Spirit. At times it includes God’s rod of discipline. Without wrath or anger, God disciplines out of love.
- **Solidarity** – When we see the sins of others, rather than being offended, we remember that we too were separated, orphans, and lost. With compassion and understanding, we can tell of God’s gift of adoption and invite people to accept it for themselves.
- **Mission** – Each adopted child is given a unique role in the Father’s family business of spreading grace, love, and truth. We are co-workers and co-missioned in the growing Kingdom of God.

## 4. Heart problems soothed by Divine Adoption

**Loneliness:** *I am alone in this world. I have no-one on my side.*

God is my ever-present, attentive Father. He is with me at all times and is working all things for my good. Psalm 27:10; Isaiah 41:10; John 14:18



**Identity:** *I don't know who I am or where I fit in.*

I am a child of the King of kings. I belong to him and in his family. I am also a significant part of His family business. 1 John 3:1; 1 Cor 12

**Fear:** *If my sin is exposed, I will lose everything.*

Divine adoption is a permanent, legal act of God's will. He will not change his mind. We are now perfectly forgiven and free to confess and repent without fear. Luke 12:32; Rom 8:15; Ps 118:6

**Independence:** *If anything good is going to happen for me, I must make it happen.*

My Father is working out a plan of blessing for me. He is working all things for my good. I can rest in His sovereign, wise, and loving plan. I can rely on prayer and His guidance. John 15:4-5; Gal 5:25

**Protection:** *If I don't protect myself, no one will.*

In the face of trials and attack, I am confident that my father is protecting my heart and soul from harm. Deut 31:6, 8; 2 Thess 3:3; 1 Peter 5:7

**Love:** *I am unloved. I must hide the real me and create masks so others will love and accept me.*

My Father created, loves, and delights in me. His love is enough. I do not have to hide or pretend. My Father is the Judge and King and He declares me righteous and acceptable. Ps 130:13; Zeph 3:17

*I must brag / exaggerate. My reputation will help me advance in this world.*

My Father is the Holy, Holy, Holy Judge and He has declared that I am righteous. No other opinion matters. Because of Jesus' life and death, I don't have to pretend that I've got it together anymore. Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:10-11

**Burn out:** *I am constantly working to please God and others.*

Set free from a life graded by external performance, a child rests in God's acceptance provided by the life and death of Jesus. Matt 11:28-30; Rom 3:20-21; Jer 31:25

**Anxiety** over felt needs (Money, health, etc.)

I have a growing trust that My Heavenly Father provides, therefore I am set free from worry. Matt 6:25-33; Luke 11:5-13; Rom 8:32

**Ungrateful & Bitter:** *Suffers from grumbling, pessimism and "victim-mentality"*

I celebrate my Father's generous blessing. With humility I adore and thank God! Eph 1:3; 5:20; 1 Thess 5:18; James 1:17; 1 John 3:1

**Envy:** *Suffers from comparisons*

I celebrate that my Father crafted me according to His perfect wisdom. I am fearfully and wonderfully made with unique gifts and callings. Ps 139:13-15; Zeph 3:14-17; Eph 2:10

**Control:** *I must be in control.*

I am a humble small child of God. While doing my best, I can rely on my Father's word and trust that He is wisely advancing my life and His kingdom. Psalm 25:9; Prov 3:5-6; Jeremiah 29:11; Rom 8:14

**Hopeless:** *I am unable to change my bad habits.*

While frustrated by sin, I have hope that my Father is progressively making me like Jesus and has a good future securely planned for me. Phil 2:12-13; Titus 2:11-12

In his memoir *A Long Journey Home* (the movie version is entitled *Lion*) Saroo Brierley portrays his childhood in a rural village in India. As a small child fighting severe poverty, he and his older brother would scrounge for money and food in order to provide for their impoverished mother and siblings. Occasionally their scavenging would take them to other towns via trains. One day in 1986, five-year old Saroo fell asleep inside an empty train while waiting for his brother to return. When he awoke, he was hundreds of miles away from home headed for Calcutta.

Saroo spent several traumatizing weeks as a homeless and alone child surviving on the streets of Calcutta before eventually being placed in an orphanage.

In time, a loving couple from Australia inexplicably adopted Saroo. Imagine the young orphan's emotions when he flies to Australia, rides in a car, and is shown his own carpeted and furnished room in a large house. He poignantly describes opening the refrigerator for the first time and being shocked by the cold air and the abundance of food.



- How would his adoption change Saroo's inner life (emotions, identity, hope, worldview)?
- How would his external life (behaviors, opportunities, etc.) change because of his adoption by a loving middle-class family in a suburb?

## 5. Activity: Helping a friend with adoption

Like all of the Bible's teachings, God's adoption is an extremely practical truth with a wide variety of applications to real-life situations. Take a moment to explore the various ways you could use the idea of God's adoption to comfort and help a struggling friend. This activity is best done in discussion with a friend.



**How can the idea of God's gracious gift of adoption and sonship help someone who struggles with...**

- Worry?
- Control issues?
- Personal insecurity?
- Fear that God is mad because he/she does not obey enough?
- Envy of others?
- Hopelessness?
- Addictions?

## 6. Next Steps:

I hope you now appreciate how the often-overlooked teaching of God's adoption lies at the center of a truly biblical Christian worldview and lifestyle. Ferguson was correct; God's adoption *"lies at the heart of all Christian theology and is the mainspring of all Christian living."*

It is not enough to only contemplate truths, one must also apply it. After exploring God's gift of adoption, how will you respond? **What are your next steps?** Here are a few suggestions.



### 1. Explore the precious truth of God's adoption.

- Re-read and ponder the Bible verses.
- Read some additional articles or books.
- Ponder this teaching and its practical implications.
- Discuss this material with a friend.

This doctrine will become more meaningful for you as you explore it.

## 2. Confess the various ways you live like a spiritual orphan - denying God's gift of sonship.

- With normal everyday words, talk to God about how your orphan-mentality and orphan-lifestyle harms you and offends Him.

## 3. Go home! Confident in the relationship established by Jesus' sacrifice and obedience on your behalf, turn to God and joyfully accept his gift of adoption. His kindness should woo you into his loving arms.

- Thank Him for erasing the consequences of your offenses!
- Thank Him for his gift of righteousness!
- Acknowledge and accept His gift of adoption.
- Draw a line in the sand and decide to never go back to living like an orphan.

## 4. Adjust your worldview.

Adjust your thoughts and convictions about God, Christianity, and daily life so they are all in sync with the core doctrine of Divine Adoption.

## 5. Seek to live each day as a beloved child of God.

- Spend time each day listening to your Father's loving words to you by reading the Bible.
- Talk with your Father throughout the day.
- Think frequently about the traits of your Heavenly Father.
- Cultivate the inner life of an adopted child of God!
- Let these emotions and desires fuel a renewed lifestyle of obedience!
- Face difficult situations with the assurance that your Father is watching, protecting, providing for you.
- Find a good, Bible-believing church family and make some new friends.

## Discussion Questions:



- ▶ In his book *Children of the Living God*, Sinclair Ferguson states "the notion that we are children of God, his own sons and daughters, lies at the heart of all Christian theology, and is the mainspring of all Christian living."
  - In what ways is this a true statement?
  - How is this different than other religions?
- ▶ Look again at the list of blessings of Divine Adoption. For which of these are you most thankful? In which would you most like to grow?
- ▶ Which heart problem causes you the most stress? How does the gift of Sonship offer you practical help with this problem?
- ▶ Are there any changes to your life that you believe God wants you to make in response to this material? What are they? How will you make them? (Pick two practical life adjustments that will cause you to become a better child of God.)

## Let's Keep Walking...

None of us are experts in this material. We all have room to grow in our understanding and application of God's Adoption. We'd love to walk alongside you as you take your next steps exploring this great blessing. Contact me and let's keep walking!

## The Spirit of an Orphan

## The Spirit of Sonship

See God as Master.	<b>Image of God</b>	See God as a loving Father.
Independent, self-reliant.	<b>Dependency</b>	Interdependent, acknowledges need.
Insecure, lack peace.	<b>Security</b>	Rest and peace.
Strive for the praise, approval and acceptance of man.	<b>Need for approval</b>	Totally accepted in God's love and justified by grace.
A need for personal achievement as you seek to impress God and others, or no motivation to serve at all.	<b>Motive for service</b>	Service that is motivated by a deep gratitude for being unconditionally loved and accepted by God.
Duty and earning God's favour, or no motivation at all.	<b>Motive behind Christian disciplines</b>	Pleasure and delight.
"Must" be holy to have God's favour, thus increasing a sense of shame and guilt.	<b>Motive for purity</b>	"Want to" be holy; do not want anything to hinder intimate relationship with God.
Self-rejection from comparing yourself to others.	<b>Self-image</b>	Positive and affirmed because you know you have such value to God.
Seek comfort in counterfeit affections: addictions, compulsions, escapism, busyness, hyper-religious activity.	<b>Source of comfort</b>	Seek times of quietness and solitude to rest in the Father's presence and love.
Competition, rivalry and jealousy towards others' success and position.	<b>Peer relationships</b>	Humility and unity as you value others and are able to rejoice in their blessings and success.
Accusation and exposure in order to make yourself look good by making others look bad.	<b>Handling others' faults</b>	Love covers as you seek to restore others in a spirit of love and gentleness.
See authority as a source of pain; distrustful toward them and lack a heart attitude of submission.	<b>View of authority</b>	Respectful, honouring; you see them as ministers of God for good in your life.
Difficulty receiving admonition; you must be right so you easily get your feelings hurt and close your spirit to discipline.	<b>View of admonition</b>	See the receiving of admonition as a blessing and need in your life so that your faults and weaknesses are exposed and put to death.
Guarded and conditional; based upon others' performance as you seek to get your own needs met.	<b>Expression of love</b>	Open, patient and affectionate as you lay your life and agendas down in order to meet the needs of others.
Conditional and distant.	<b>Sense of God's presence</b>	Close and intimate.
Fight for what you can get!	<b>Future</b>	Sonship releases your inheritance!

### ***More on the topic:***

- Children of the Living God - Sinclair Ferguson
- Adopted by God - Robert A. Peterson
- From Fear to Freedom - Rose Marie Miller
- Knowing God (Chapter 19) - J. I. Packer
- Search *Monergism.com* for articles, sites, and sermons on the topic of adoption.

### ***Our Father in Heaven...***

Apart from Christ, we cannot speak of God as our Father, only as our creator and judge. As our creator and judge, God remains distant, even threatening to us because of our sins. There is no intimacy with God, and we dare not even approach Him. Once we are justified, because Christ's perfect and faultless righteousness has been reckoned to us through faith, God is no longer our judge. He is now "our Father." This comes about because God has already placed Christ under His judgment (the cross) so that we need never fear His wrath. Christ has borne that wrath in His own flesh. He was judged for us and in our place. Apart from the cross, God is our judge. Under the cross, He is our Father.

But the only way we, as sinners, can become the adopted sons and daughters of God is because of Christ. His death for our sins and His perfect righteousness grants us a right-standing before God. And once that right-standing has been granted, the door to heaven is wide open, 24/7. And as God's adopted sons and daughters, all we need to do is enter His presence and ask Him for whatever we need, knowing that He hears us and answers us because of Jesus and according to His will. After all, we are His children and He is our heavenly Father.

- Kim Riddlebarger

### **Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)**

#### **Chapter 12 - Adoption**

God guarantees the adoption of all those who are justified in and for the sake of his only son, Jesus Christ. Those adopted enjoy the liberties and privileges of God's children, have his name put on them, receive the Spirit of adoption, have access to the throne of grace with boldness, and are enabled to cry, Abba, Father. They are pitied, protected, provided for, and disciplined by him as a father. They are never cast off, however, and are sealed until the day of redemption and inherit the promises as heirs of everlasting salvation.

#### **Larger Catechism Q. 74. What is adoption?**

A. Adoption is an act of the free grace of God, in and for his only Son Jesus Christ, whereby all those that are justified are received into the number of his children, have his name put upon them, the Spirit of his Son given to them, are under his fatherly care and dispensations, admitted to all the liberties and privileges of the sons of God, made heirs of all the promises, and fellow-heirs with Christ in glory.

#### **Shorter Catechism Q. 34 - What is adoption?**

A. 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.