

ADOPTION

By

Elder J. D. Shain

INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet on the subject of Adoption is printed in the style of its author. Therefore, some may find that while reading this work they will have to concentrate a little more than usual. Yet in doing so, the blessing will be theirs.

Elder J. D. Shain (March 8, 1889 - March 6, 1971) was a minister of God a little over 57 years. For 52 years, he pastored Salem Primitive Baptist Church at Madisonville, Kentucky. At one time during his ministry at Madisonville, God blessed with a season of revival. I remember hearing Brother Shain relate about a time when he preached in the town's movie theatre, and the place was packed and people standing outside. And on another occasion when he was preaching at a place, the house was full and people were standing at the open windows listening to the gospel of the Son of God.

Another interesting vignette in the life of Brother Shain is that he knew A. W. Pink. When Pink was living in Mortons Gap, Kentucky, about eight miles from Madisonville, Brother Shain did some printing for a while and during this time he printed some of Brother Pink's writings for him.

Elder Shain was the Postmaster for 20 years in Madisonville, and served Hopkins County as Judge for two terms. At the time of his death he was in his ninth year as City Judge for the town of Madisonville. Therefore, the reader can understand why this pamphlet has a legal disposition.

If the work had been produced in any other form, it would not have been Brother Shain. The paper was left in the present order so that "by it he being dead yet speaketh."

Jimmy Barber
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ADOPTION

ADOPTION is an essential and fundamental Bible doctrine. It indicates one of the first and specific acts of God in laying the foundation for the salvation of His chosen people, which was by His grace, through the Lord Jesus Christ, to the everlasting glory of the Father, Son and Blessed Spirit. It is the one act of the Father that brings into display His foreknowledge of His people; their election in Christ; His predestinating them, (marking them out as sons) to the image of His Son; the justification of them from all their sins; the calling, preserving and final glorification of each and all of them before Him in love.

The very fact that the word occurs only five times in the New Testament does not lessen its importance, nor rob it of its indispensable position in the theme of salvation by grace. It is beyond question, to my mind, that the legal phase of adoption must be effected and made sure before Christ Jesus could die a vicarious death for and effectually redeem His people by His substitutionary death. He could not die a vicarious death in general. Nor could all the heavenly spiritual blessings bequeathed to them in adoption ever have reached them.

ADOPTION is a truth of the Bible that has been greatly neglected by ministers of all faiths. It would be interesting to find out why. Let me suggest why: The Arminian clergy, by this I mean those who preach a system of works for salvation, cannot afford to give strict attention to it. Adoption is so obviously by grace that it proves conflicting in any system of salvation by works that any or all men could devise. Therefore, they leave it entirely out of their preaching. And may I further suggest why the ministers who believe and advocate the doctrine of grace mention it so rarely. They seem to have no clear concept as to its position, or significance in the economy of grace. Some hold that adoption comes with, or is accompanied with regeneration; while others hold that it is manifested only in the resurrection. Then some hold that adoption applies to the body only; that while the soul of man is born again in regeneration and takes on a spiritual change, the body remains natural, but is admitted into the service of God by virtue of adoption. I must confess that I am reluctant to differ with the men who have, and do, hold these positions. Many of them were, and are, men of great piety, ability and certainly of unquestioned devotion to the cause of grace. But, as they differ so widely on the real and proper application of the term, I can come to but one conclusion, and that is there was and is a lack of proper understanding of the term among them. In my opinion, none of the aforementioned positions are correct in the light of the Scriptures. While it may sound presumptuous for me to say so, I think these varied opinions have grown and continue to grow out of a failure to recognize the fundamental element of adoption in the theme of grace, and hence, the failure to ascertain its real nature and meaning in common scriptural usage.

Let us now consult literary authorities as to its nature and meaning. The *American College Dictionary* defines it thus: “To choose for, or take to one’s self by selection or assent.” 2. “To take another’s child as one’s own, by a specific legal act of law.” Liddell & Scott’s *Greek-English Lexicon* defines the Greek word translated “adoption” as “To make a child an heir, or son, by selection and will, who was not so by birth.” Brown’s *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* defines it as follows—“A child is, in this act, taken by a man from a family not his own; introduced into his own family; regarded as his own child; and entitled to all the privileges and blessings belonging to the relation.” And Mr. Brown further states, “To adopt children in this manner, has, it is well known, been a custom generally prevailing among the Egyptians, Jews, Romans and all ancient nations; and it has continued as a legal custom in all civilized Christian nations as well. We will select one of the above definitions (though all are good) as one that more fully expresses the nature and processes followed in adoption. We refer to the one given by the *American College Dictionary* (definition No. 2) as follows: “To take another’s child as one’s own, by a specific legal act of law.”

Let us now note the order in which adoption is effected. 1st, there must be a decision or purpose to have an heir or heirs to one’s estate. In Eph. 1;11, this is clearly expressed. “Being predestinated according to the PURPOSE of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.” 2nd. The choice or selection of those who are to be heirs. Eph. 1:4, “According as He hath chosen us in Him.” 3rd. The estate described which the heirs are to inherit. Eph. 1:3, “Who hath blessed us with ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS in heavenly places in Christ.” 4th. A court, or tribunal of law, of competent jurisdiction to confirm and publish the Decree of adoption, naming the Adopter, the heir or heirs, and describing the legacy they are to inherit. Read Eph. 1:5, “*Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.*” Here the fourth item is certainly fulfilled. While God certainly is the Sovereign of all worlds and chief administrator in His boundless realm, He is also the righteous JUDGE of the same dominion. There are elements in the processes of adoption in which God could, and did, act sovereignly, such as choosing those whom He would make heirs, and designing the blessings He would treasure in Christ for them. But when it comes to the matter of making one legal heir who is not so by birth, it is no more the act of a Sovereign, but of a judge. The Sovereign may select the heirs and design the estate, but it requires the authority of a tribunal of law to make an alien an heir to an estate to which he was not so entitled by birth. This very process was effected in the above passage—“*Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children.*” Here is the judicial decree that made them adopted heirs according to the good pleasure of His will. In other words, the judicial decree was issued in accord with His *sovereign will* in choosing them in Christ and treasuring all their Spiritual Estate in Him.

In the above mentioned passages the processes of adoption are presented in bold

relief—First, God willed and purposed to have a numberless host as His heirs in glory. Second, He selected, or chose that numberless Host in His Son Jesus Christ. Third, He designed, and in purpose, treasured the whole of their estate of Spiritual blessings in Christ. In each and all of these acts God was sovereign, that is, he was not bound by moral or divine obligations to do any of them, nor was He influenced or swayed by anything, good or bad, foreseen in those He chose for adoption. The cause was entirely within Himself, to the praise of the glory of His grace in His Son, who is the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person. And as the righteous and Supreme Judge in the very realm in which He is the unchallenged Sovereign, He sits on His dazzling throne amidst the seraphs, angels and archangels, in holy consort of the Eternal Three; Father, Son and Blessed Spirit, and decrees, predestinates that those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life, whose names are written in the palm of His hands, those who are marked out, whose bounds and limits are set, whose designs and dimensions are prescribed, these He declares, by the impeccable holiness of His throne, shall be His heirs by adoption by Jesus Christ from henceforth till they shall be made vital heirs by the new birth and brought into vital relationship with Him and bear His image and likeness, and finally be taken home to that holy estate to which they had first by adoption been made heirs. So, here it is in one unalterable, irrevocable, indestructable and all-inclusive document defined in Scripture as the "Everlasting Covenant." It is ordered in all things and sure. It must not, it cannot fail.

Up to this time we have been considering the LEGAL PHASE of the doctrine of adoption. Up to now, it has been God's Foreknowledge, His eternal purpose to adopt, His choice of those to be adopted and His predestinating them to sons by adoption. The whole proceeding is complete in every detail. So let us now follow through the glorious unfolding of the doctrine as revealed in Scriptures of the New Testament.

But before we take up the consideration of the other passages in the New Testament bearing on the subject, we will emphasize two points that are necessary to the proper understanding of the subject. These two points are—The nature of adoption, and the proceedings necessary to accomplish or complete it. First, the nature of adoption is to take a child that is not a child by birth, and by an act in law, make it a legal heir. Please remember this: only legal relations are established by adoptions; never vital or blood relation. So, in adoption, only title to and right of an estate is conveyed. It cannot convey a fitness or a likeness of nature. It makes one an heir to a home, but does not prepare one for the society or life of the home. The principle of adoption was practiced on a national scale by the government of Israel. They admitted Gentiles to come under the Government of Israel as adopted sons. The adopted Gentiles could enjoy most of the blessings and privileges of the National Israelites but adoption could not make the Alien Gentiles so admitted, natural or national Jews. It could not remove the alien blood in the adopted Gentiles and give them the royal blood of the seed of Abraham. From these facts, it must be

clear to the reader that adoption constitutes only legal relationship and does not convey a likeness of nature. You could adopt a Negro child, but you could not make it white; you could adopt a Chinese child, but you could not put Anglo-Saxon life in its bloodstream.

So much for the nature of adoption, and we pass on to consider the proceedings necessary to accomplish or complete it. As before pointed out, there must be, first, the decision or purpose to adopt an heir; second, to select or choose the heir; third, to define and pledge estate to the heir; fourth, apply to a court of law to validate your acts and intentions on behalf of the heir by the decree of adoption. Fifth, we come now to the last and final steps in completing the process of adoption, and that is to gather all the heirs from every clime, country, tribe and nation and conduct them safely to that heavenly Home which they have inherited. But, before we begin to trace these steps as defined in the Scriptures, we feel that in order to make the grace of adoption shine with greater luster, to show it as indispensable in the scheme of God's gracious design to eternally rescue His fallen and ruined people, that we should point out the incredible and incomprehensible obstacles and difficulties that must be removed or overcome before the heirs can be admitted to that home of eternal joys. First, all the adopted heirs are, in prospect, mere creatures and in open rebellion against their Creator. They are in the wilds of sinful lusts and degradation. They are the willing slaves of Satan, alienated from God by wicked works and opposed to every right way. They are, by their corrupted nature and sinful doings, obnoxious to all holiness, and a stench in the nostrils of the infinitely holy Deity. They are eternally condemned by the holy law of God by reason of their nature and works, and are under its awful curse; for "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." They are natural, carnal, flesh and blood, and flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. They are condemned to die under the curse of the law and have nothing with which to purchase their liberty. Their hearts are wicked, filthy, filled with hatred to God, and despise the very mercies by which they live every day. They are without power or will to change their hateful disposition and attitude toward God. It should not be difficult to see at a glance what a colossal task it would be to restore these rebellious creatures to the favor and good will of their offended Creator. It is no wonder our Lord said, "With men, this is impossible." We certainly should rejoice that our Lord said in this same connection—"But with God, *all things* are possible." We now return to the Fifth item covering the final steps in adoption as mentioned above, and will follow the Scriptural order as outlined. First, the heirs were estranged from God and must be restored to His favor. So Christ *did* reconcile us to God in His death on the cross. Second, the heirs were under bondage to the law and its curse. So they were redeemed to God from under the curse of the law by Christ being made a curse for them and dying in their room and stead; shedding His own blood in their behalf. Third, the heirs were guilty and utterly corrupt, so that there was nothing in them or

in their thoughts, acts or intentions that was not obnoxious to, and in violation of, the Moral Law under which they were accountable to God. So, they were wholly justified from all these horrible conditions by the blood of Christ which removed all their guilt and filth in the eyes of the law. They now stand exempted from punishment by the law, Christ having suffered the penalty for them. While ALL the heirs are, within themselves, in their nature and position, estranged from God, under bondage to the law and its curse, condemned in their guilt and corruption, dead in trespasses and sins, *yet*, in Jesus Christ they stand before God and in the eyes of the law clear and complete from all these destructive forces. God the Father looks upon them through the sufferings and righteousness of His beloved Son and sees only the perfections of His Son in them. So through the work of the Son and Elder Brother, Jesus Christ in His life and death removes every barrier that by the righteous law of God challenges the right of the heirs to possess their heavenly estate. The work of the Father and Son thus far being accomplished, let us hear from them if it will be completed. The Father hath said, "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David." (Christ) His seed (adopted heirs) shall endure forever, and His throne before me. Ps. 89. "I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh." Ezek. 11:19. "For I will take you from among the heathen and gather you out of all countries and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you." Ezek. 36. The Son says, "I came that they might have life." "All the Father giveth me shall come unto me; and he that cometh I will in no wise cast out." "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I MUST bring." "The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." These are the adopted heirs that will hear and live. So the Father and Son have each testified that the work of giving life, cleansing, sanctifying and calling must go forward to reach each and every heir by adoption, making them to be living, vital, quickened heirs, by being born again into the family of God. Then they will know that God has ever been their Father by adoption; and that He is now their Father by the new birth, wherein they have received His Spirit and been made partakers of His divine nature, whereby they cry ABBA FATHER.

Now please turn to Galatians 4:1-6. There Paul reminds us that a child, though an heir, does not possess his inheritance, but is under governors and tutors until the time appointed by the father. Even so we, when we were children (children by adoption) were in bondage under the elements of the world: Here Paul likens our state as adopted sons as being unregenerate and still under bondage of sin in nature, to the underage child that is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. So, just as the natural father appointed a time to liberate his heir from the limitations of childhood, the Father of heavenly adoption has appointed a day when

He will release His adopted children from the rudiments of the world by regeneration, the New Birth, or being quickened and made a new creature in Christ. To argue that adoption comes in or with the new birth is to press a point that has no example in human or divine affairs. What good could accrue to one by adoption that is already a child or heir by birth? Where is there a law, human or divine, that provides for a parent to adopt his own child? There is none. Now to answer the last, and I think the final question on this point, we will consider the 5th verse in this chapter, which reads—“To redeem them that were under law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” With a casual reading of this passage, one might be inclined to understand that this is the point where the sons were adopted. But a careful look will convince us that this could not be the case. The verse does not read, “That we might be adopted as sons,” but that “we might receive the adoption of sons.” Adopted is a verb, which expresses action, state or being. Adoption is a noun, and is the name of a thing or an object. And here they received a thing, and that thing was adoption. So adoption existed before this point, even before the world was. And so the 6th verse reads—“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” So because ye are sons by adoption, God sends the Spirit of Jesus Christ into your hearts, making you vital, living, born-again sons. And now you are not only sons by adoption, but you are sons by birth and brought into vital relationship with God. And now you gladly, humbly and joyfully call Him, “OUR FATHER.” So as the adopting father, who adopts an heir that abides in a place distant from where he intends the heir to live, sends a son or servant to see that the new heir reaches his home in safety; even so, God the Father sends His only Son from the heavenly world into this sin-blighted and ruined world to gather His adopted children from all walks and conditions of life, from nations and climes. First He redeems them, then He quickens them into eternal life, changing their wicked and hateful hearts into hearts that love Him and cry out for Him; turning their ways from the downward path of destruction to start on their journey home. Can you not in your imagery see them as they start on this heavenly journey, some as mere children from the playground, some from the dark alleys of hopeless despair, some from the grog-shops and houses of infamy and shame, some from the leper colony, some from the prison-house? Yes, I can even see a poor blind man groping in physical darkness, but lighted inside with a torch of light that will never be extinguished. He is on his way home calling out, “O, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!” The cripple at the gate, the daughter of Abraham who is bound in fetters by Satan is released from her fetters and joins the chorus of heavenly praise. Yes, I can see the proud Pharisee bow his arrogant and defiant head to this Lord of Lords and say in humble and plaintive tones—“Lord, who art thou,” and “What wilt thou have me do?” We could go on and on in our imagery until this apparent trickle of human misery at the beginning swells into a countless throng, pressing onward and upward in their journey home. And the beauty of this is, not a one will fall by the wayside

and be left to perish. Every adopted son must appear in the Holy City of the New Jerusalem; because He who started them on this journey will never quit their side. And so, we now come to the last text to be considered in this article.

In Romans 8:23 we read these heavenly words—“Even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” If we should contend that we are adopted in regeneration, we would also have to, by the same rule, contend that we are adopted in the resurrection of our bodies. But as in Galatians, the noun form is used as it is in Romans. In this text Paul points out the glorious end of adoption, which is the resurrection and glorification of our bodies. Then shall we appear before Him, holy and without blame before Him in love. Here, the Lord that has brought His adopted brethren from the deepest depths of degradation, shame, and ruin will present them to the Father in spotless purity, clothed in celestial apparel of fine needlework and wrought gold, which is His perfect righteousness. And here they will out-shine all suns and be sublimely fitted for the royal society of the Courts of their King. Thus in the jubileance of eternal victory of their Lord and King over death, the grave, and the awful plague of sin, they will join that song of triumph—“Thou was slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.”

So adoption, like election and predestination in the primary sense was before time began. While election, predestination and adoption did not affect the heirs when the Lord acted in these matters, these acts did PROVIDE for the heirs in the ages to come when they would receive the things provided. The things provided and described as “All spiritual Blessings in heavenly places,” and are particularly mentioned as redemption, reconciliation, justification and the new birth or regeneration, sanctification, faith, repentance, love, hope, peace, joy, preservation, resurrection and finally, glorification. All these things are made sure and secure in the covenant of mercy.

In the first chapter of Ephesians Paul defines the eternal phase of adoption. In the fourth chapter of Galatians he defines the time phase when we as the heirs begin to experience the glorious riches of it. When the Spirit of adoption comes to us, we begin to know and feel that the Lord hath provided sweet and precious things for us here, and hereafter. In the eighth chapter of Romans, Paul points out the final and last phase of adoption. If possible, this is the sweetest of all. At the last great day, our poor weak, worn-out and worm-eaten bodies at His command will arise, bone to bone, limb to limb, and in flawless perfection and eternal beauty will do honor and praise to Him who through love unbounded, suffering, tears and death has brought us safely Home.

We preach much about election and predestination, and we rarely mention adoption; yet we preach adoption every time we preach election and predestination. Many people object to election and predestination when preached, but never raise an eyebrow when we preach adoption. And yet, we cannot preach the truth of adoption

without preaching election and predestination. So brethren, speak more about the truth of adoption and you will have God's children rejoicing in all of them.