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*John Gill's*

**A BODY OF DOCTRINAL DIVINITY**

**Book 6—Chapter 9**

**OF ADOPTION**

Some think that adoption is a part and branch of justification, and included in it; since that part of justification which lies in the imputation of the righteousness of Christ entitles to eternal life, hence called, "the justification of life", as adoption does; so that the children of God may be said to have a twofold title to eternal life; the one by the free grace of God making them sons, which entitles them to it; the other by justification in a legal way, and confirms the former, and opens a way for it; or that it may appear to be founded on justice as well as grace: the learned Dr. Ames seems to have a respect to both these. And such that are justified by the grace of God, through the righteousness of Christ, are "heirs" of it, as adopted ones be; "if children, then heirs" (Rom. 5:18; Titus 3:7; Rom. 8:17). Some consider adoption as the effect of justification; and Junius calls it, "via adoptionis", the way to adoption: it is certain, they have a close connection with each other, and agree in their author, causes, and objects; the "white stone" of absolution, or justification, and the "new name" of adoption, go together in the gift of Christ to the overcomer (Rev. 2:17). Though I am of opinion they are distinct blessings of grace, and so to be considered: adoption is a distinct thing from either justification or pardon. A subject may be acquitted by his sovereign from charges laid against him; and a criminal, convicted and condemned, may be pardoned, yet does not become his son; if adopted, and taken into his family, it must be by a distinct and fresh act of royal favour.

I have treated already, see on Adoption in 853, of adoption as an immanent act of the divine will, which was in God from eternity; hence the elect of God were not only predestinated to the adoption of children, to the blessing itself, openly and actually to enjoy it in time, and to the inheritance adopted to; but this blessing itself

was provided and bestowed in the everlasting covenant of grace, in which the elect of God had not only the promise of this relation, but were in it given to Christ under this relation and character (Eph 1:5; 2 Cor. 6:18; Heb. 2:13), hence they are spoken of as the children of God and Christ, previous to the incarnation of Christ, and to his sufferings and death; as well as to the mission of the Spirit into their hearts, as the Spirit of regeneration and adoption (Heb. 2:14; John 11:52; Gal. 4:6). I shall therefore now consider it as openly bestowed upon believing in Christ, and as manifested, applied, and evidenced by the Spirit of God. And,

I. Shall consider, in what sense believers are the sons of God; which is by adoption, and the nature of that: they are not the sons of God in so high a sense as Christ is, who is God's own Son, his proper Son, his only begotten Son; which cannot be said either of angels or men; for as "to which of the angels", so to which of the sons of men "said God at any time, Thou art son, this day have I begotten thee?" Nor in the sense that their fellow creatures are, whether angels or men, who are the sons of God by creation, as the former, so the latter; for they are all "his offspring": nor in the sense that magistrates be, who are so by office, and, on that account, called "the children of the most High", being his representatives: nor as professors of religion, who are called the sons of God, in distinction from the children of men; but by adoption; hence we read of the adoption of children, these are predestinated unto, and which they receive, through redemption by Christ, and of which the Spirit of God is the witness; hence called the Spirit of "adoption": and even the inheritance to which they are entitled, bears the name of "adoption" (Eph. 1:5; Gal. 4:5; Rom. 8:15, 23). There is a civil and a religious adoption. A civil adoption, and which obtained among all nations; among the Egyptians, so Moses was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter; and among the Hebrews, so Esther by Mordecai; and it obtained much among the Romans, to which, as used by them, the allusion is in the New Testament, in a religious sense; it is sometimes used of the whole people of the Jews, to whom belonged "the adoption" (Rom. 9:4) and at other times, of some special and particular persons, both among Jews and Gentiles; for of the former all were "not the children of God"; and of the latter, if they were believers in Christ, they were Abraham's spiritual seed, "and heirs according to the promise", (Rom. 9:7, 8; Gal. 3:26, 29). Between civil and spiritual adoption, in some things there is an agreement, and in some things a difference.

First, In some things they agree.

1. In the name and thing,  $\nu\iota\theta\epsilon\sigma\iota\alpha$ , a putting among the children; so spiritual adoption is called (Jer 3:19), or putting, or taking, one for a son, who was not so by nature and birth; which is the case of adoption by special grace; it is of such who are, "by nature, children of wrath", and "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel"; and taking these from the family of the world, to which they originally belonged, into the family of God, and household of faith (Eph. 2:3, 12, 19).

2. As civil adoption is of one to an inheritance who has no legal right to it; so is special and spiritual adoption. None, in a civil sense, are adopted, but to an

inheritance of which they are made heirs; and so such who are adopted in sense are adopted to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and eternal; and as the one are adopted to an inheritance they had no natural right unto, nor any legal claim upon; so the other are such who have sinned, and come short of the eternal inheritance, and can make no legal pretension to it by works of the law, (Rom. 4:14; Gal. 3:18).

3. Civil adoption is the voluntary act of the adopter. Among the Romans, when a man adopted one for his son, they both appeared before a proper magistrate, and the adopter declared his will and pleasure to adopt the person presented, he consenting to it. Special and spiritual adoption is an act of the sovereign goodwill and pleasure of God, who has predestinated his to the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ, to himself, according to the "good pleasure of his will"; it is a pure act of his grace to make them his sons and heirs, and to give them the kingdom, the inheritance, even eternal life, which is the free gift of God, through Christ (Eph. 1:5; Luke 12:32; Rom. 6:23).

4. In civil adoption the adopted took and bore the name of the adopter: so the adopted sons of God have a new name, which the mouth of the Lord their God names, a new, famous, and excellent name, which no man knoweth, saving he that receives it; a name better than that of sons and daughters of the greatest earthly potentate; a name by which they are called the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty (Isa. 62:2; 56:5; Rev. 2:17; 1 John 3:1).

5. Such who are adopted in a civil sense are taken into the family of the adopter, and make a part of it; and stand in the relation, not of servants, but sons; so those who are adopted of God, are taken into that family, which is named of him in heaven and in earth, and are of his household; in which they are not as servants, nor merely as friends, but as the children of God and household of faith (Eph. 3:15, 19; John 15:15, 16; Gal. 3:26; 6:10).

6. Persons adopted in a civil sense, as they are considered as children, they are provided for as such: provision is made for their education, their food, their clothing, their protection, and attendance, and for an inheritance and portion for them: all the children of God, his adopted ones, they are taught of God, by his Spirit, his ministers, his word and ordinances; they are trained up in the school of the church, and under the ministry of the word, and are instructed by the preaching of the gospel, and by precepts, promises, and providences; as for food, they are continually supplied with what is suitable for them, the sincere milk of the word for babes, and meat for strong men; they are fed with hidden manna, with marrow and fatness, with the finest of the wheat, with the richest dainties of the gospel feast: as for their clothing, it is change of raiment, clothing of wrought gold, raiment of needlework, a robe of righteousness, and garments of salvation; fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of the saints: for their protection, they have angels to wait upon them and guard them, who encamp about them, to preserve them from their enemies, and have the care and charge of them, to keep them in their ways; yea, they are kept by the Lord himself, as the apple of his eye, being his dear sons

**and pleasant children: and the inheritance he has prepared for them, of which they are heirs, is among the saints in light; is incorruptible, undefiled, never fading, and eternal, and is even a kingdom and glory.**

**7. Such as are adopted by men, come under the power, and are at the command of the adopter, and are under obligation to perform all the duties of a son to a parent; as to honour, reverence, and obey, and be subject to his will in all things. All which are due from the adopted sons of God, to him, their heavenly Father; honour is what God claims as his due from his children; "a son honoureth his father; if I then be a father, where is mine honour?" (Mal, 1:60, obedience to all his commands highly becomes, and is obligatory on them; they ought to be obedient children, and imitate God in all his immutable perfections, particularly in holiness, benevolence, kindness, and goodness; and even should be subject to his corrections and chastisements, which are not merely for his pleasure, but for their profit and good (1 Pet. 1:14-16; Eph. 5:1; Matthew 5:45, 48; Luke 6:35, 36; Heb. 12:9, 10).**

**Secondly, In some things civil and spiritual adoption differ.**

**1. Civil adoption could not be done without the consent of the adopted, his will was necessary to it. Among the Romans the adopter, and the person to be adopted, came before a proper magistrate, and in his presence the adopter asked the person to be adopted, whether he was willing to be his son; and he answered, I am willing; and so the thing was agreed and finished. But in spiritual adoption, though the believer, when he comes to be acquainted with the privilege of adoption he is favored with, and is highly delighted and pleased with it, and admires and adores the grace that has brought him into the relation; yet his will and consent were not necessary to the constitution of the act of adoption; it may be said of that as of every other blessing of grace, that "it is not of him that willeth"; such was the grace of God that he did not wait for the will of the creature to complete this act, but previous to it put him among the children; and such is his sovereign power, that he had an uncontrollable right to take whom he would, and make his sons and daughters; and such the influence and efficacy of his grace, as to make them willing in the day of his power to acknowledge the relation with the greatest wonder and thankfulness, and to behave according to it.**

**2. Civil adoption was allowed of, and provided for the relief and comfort of such who had no children, and to supply that defect in nature; but in spiritual adoption this reason does not appear: God did not adopt any of the sons of men for want of a son and heir; he had one, and in a higher class of sonship than creatures can be; more excellent and divine, and suitable to the divine nature; his own proper Son, begotten of him, was as one brought up with him, and his daily delight; the dear Son of his love, in whom he was well pleased; and who always did the things that were pleasing to him, and who inherited all his perfections and glory.**

**3. In civil adoption there are generally some causes and reasons in the adopted which influence and move the adopter to take the step he does. There are two**

instances of adoption in scripture, the one of Moses, the other of Esther; in both there were some things that wrought upon the adopters to do what they did. Moses was a goodly child, exceeding fair, and lovely to look upon, which, with other things, moved the daughter of Pharaoh to take him up out of the water, to take care of him, and adopt him for her son; Esther was also a fair and beautiful maid, and besides was related to Mordecai, which were the reasons why he took her to be his daughter: but in divine adoption, there is nothing in the adopted that could move the adopter to bestow such a favour; no worth nor worthiness, no love nor loveliness, nothing attracting in them; children of wrath by nature, as others; transgressors from the womb, and rebels against God. There were so many objections to their adoption, and so many arguments against it, and none for it in themselves, that the Lord is represented as making a difficulty of it, and saying, "How shall I put them among the children?" (Jer. 3:19), such blackamoors and Ethiopians as these are? so abominable and so disobedient, enemies in their minds by wicked works, hateful and hating one another?

4. In civil adoption, the adopter, though he takes one into his family, and makes him his son and heir, and gives him the name and title of a son, and a right to an inheritance designed for him; he cannot give him the nature of a son, nor qualifications fitting him for the use and enjoyment of the estate he is adopted to; he cannot give him a suitable disposition and temper of mind, nor communicate goodness, wisdom, and prudence for the management of it; he may turn out a fool, or a prodigal: but the divine adopter makes his sons partakers of the divine nature, and makes them meet for the inheritance with the saints in light.

5. Persons adopted in a civil sense cannot enjoy the inheritance while the adoptive father is living, not till after his death: but in spiritual adoption the adopted enjoy the inheritance, though their father is the everlasting and ever living God; and Christ, the firstborn, lives for ever, with whom they are joint heirs.

6. In some cases civil adoption might be made null and void; as among the Romans, when against the right of the pontifex, and without the decree of the college; but spiritual adoption is never made void on any account.

There is a difference also between adoption and regeneration, though, divines usually confound these two together. They both have the same author; the same God and Father adopts and regenerates; they flow from the same love and grace; and the same persons that are adopted are regenerated; and they are adopted and begotten again unto the same inheritance: but adoption is before regeneration; the one is an act of God's will in eternity, the other is an act and work of his grace in time; the one is the cause, the other the effect; men are not adopted because regenerated, which would seem unnecessary; but they are regenerated because adopted; "because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts"; to regenerate, to sanctify, and testify their adoption (Gal. 4:6), regeneration is the fruit and effect of adoption, and the evidence of it (John 1:12, 13), adoption gives the

name of sons, and a title to the inheritance; and regeneration gives the nature of sons, and a meetness for the inheritance.

## **II. The causes of adoption.**

First, The efficient cause, God; none can adopt any into the family of God but God himself; none can put any among the children of God but he himself; none but he can do it, who says, "I will be his God, and he shall be my Son" (Rev. 21:7). God, Father, Son, and Spirit, are concerned in the affair of adoption.

1. God the Father; "What manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us"; the Father of Christ, the one God and Father of us all; "that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:2). The God and Father of Christ, who blessed and chose his people in him, he predestinated them to the adoption of children by him; both to the grace of adoption, and to the inheritance they are adopted to, and obtain in Christ, in virtue thereof (Eph. 1:3-5, 11), he also predestinated them "to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren"; he set him up as the pattern of their sonship, that as he partook of their nature, they should be partakers of the divine nature; and that as he was a Son and Heir of all things, they should be likewise; and which will more manifestly be seen when they shall appear to be what they are, as sons, and be like unto him (Rom. 8:29; 1 John 3:2). Besides, God the Father has not only determined upon their adoption, and all things relative to it; but he has provided this blessing in covenant for them, and secured it there; this is one of the "all things" in which "it is ordered" and sure; it is one of the spiritual blessings of the covenant, which he has blessed his people with in Christ; which covenant runs thus; "I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:18), yea, the act of adoption itself, or putting among the children, is his act; for though he says, "How shall I put thee among the children?" there being no difference between them and others by nature, they are as bad and as black as others; yet he did do it.

2. The Son of God has a concern in adoption; and there are several connections and relations he stands in to his people, which serve greatly to illustrate and confirm it. There is an union between them, a very near and mysterious one (1 John 17:21), and from this union flow all the blessings of grace to the saints; they are first of God in Christ, and then he is everything to them, and they have everything through him to make them comfortable and happy; and particularly, he and they being one, his God is their God, and his Father is their Father; he is a Son, and they are sons; he is an heir, and they are joint heirs with him. There is a marriage relation between Christ and his people; he has betrothed them to himself in righteousness, and that for ever; he is their husband, and they are his spouse and bride; and as when a man marries a king's daughter, he is his son-in-law, as David was to Saul; so one that marries a king's son becomes his daughter: and thus the church being married to Christ, the Son of God, becomes the King's daughter (Ps. 45:13), through the incarnation of Christ, he not only became the "*Goel*", the near kinsman, but even a brother to those whose flesh and blood he partook of; and because he and they are

"of one", of one and the same nature, "he is not ashamed to call them brethren"; and if his brethren, then, as he is the Son of God, they must be sons of God too: and through the redemption wrought out by him, they come "to receive the adoption" of children, the blessing before prepared for them, in the purpose and covenant of God; yea, the actual donation of the blessing of adoption is bestowed by Christ; for "as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God" (John 1:12). It is "the Son who makes free"; that is, by making them children; for the children only are free; not servants (John 8:36).

3. The Spirit of God has also a concern in adoption; he is the author of regeneration; which, though it is not adoption, it is the evidence of it; the sons of God are described as "born of God" (John 1:13) and this spiritual birth, which makes men appear to be the sons of God, is owing to the Spirit of God; for "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit", that is, of the grace of the Spirit, comparable to water, "he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). It is by faith in Christ that men receive the adoption of children; hence believers are said to be "the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus"; this receives and claims the privilege and blessing; which faith is of the operation of the Spirit of God, who is therefore called "the Spirit of faith" (Gal. 3:26; 2 Cor 4:13). Moreover, it is the Spirit who witnesses the truth of adoption; he bears witness to the spirits of believers that they are the children of God; they receiving him as the Spirit of adoption, who is sent into their hearts for that purpose; "for because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15, 16; Gal. 4:6), to all which may be added, that the several operations of the Spirit on the souls of men, such as his leadings and teachings, confirm unto them the truth of their sonship; "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14), who are led out of themselves, and off of themselves, to Christ and his righteousness; who are led into all truth as it is in Jesus, and to the fulness of Christ; and who are led through him, the Mediator, by the Spirit, unto God, as their Father; and which Spirit is given, and abides, as an earnest in their hearts; even "the earnest of the inheritance" they are adopted to, "until the redemption of the purchased possession" (2 Cor. 5:5; Eph 1:14).

Secondly, The moving cause of adoption, is the love, grace, free favour, and goodwill of God. There was nothing in the creature that could move him to it; no agreeable disposition in them, no amiableness in their persons, nor anything engaging in their conduct and behavior; but all the reverse, as before observed: wherefore, considering these things, the apostle breaks forth in this pathetic expression, "What manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1), in which he points out the source and spring of this blessing of grace, the amazing love of God.

III. The objects of adoption. And they are such who are the objects of the love of God; for since adoption flows from the love of God, such who are the children of God must be interested in it; and they are "dear children", strongly interested in his affections, like Ephraim, dear sons and pleasant children, whom God loves dearly,

and loves with a love of complacency and delight; they are the chosen of God; for such that are chosen of God in Christ, they are predestinated to the adoption of children by him; hence sons before calling. They are also redeemed from among men, out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation, being the children of God scattered abroad, Christ came to gather together; and who, through redemption by him, receive the adoption of children, previously provided for them; though, in their natural state, they are rebellious children, children that are corrupt, and that are corrupters; children of wrath by nature, as others, and in no wise better than others; but are only openly and manifestly the children of God, when they commence believers in Christ: till then they cannot be called the children of God by themselves, or by others; till then they have no claim to the blessing, nor have they the power, the privilege, the dignity, and honour, to become the sons of God. These are the characters of the adopted ones, both secretly and openly.

#### IV. The nature and excellency of this privilege.

1. It is an act of surprising and distinguishing grace; it is an act of God's free grace to predestinate to the adoption of children; it is part of the grace of the covenant, and of the grace given in Christ before the world began; it is owing to the grace of God that Christ was sent to redeem any of the sons of men, that they might receive the adoption of children: it is an instance of grace in God to send his Spirit to manifest it, and bear witness of it; and everyone that has seen his own sinfulness and vileness by nature, must say, that if he is a child of God, it is by the grace of God: and it is an act of marvelous grace (1 John 3:1), considering all things; and it will appear so, when the adopter and the adopted are put in a contrast; the adopter is the King of kings and Lord of lords, the most high God; hence these his children are called, "the children of the Highest"; and they are, by nature, in the lowest and meanest circumstances that can be imagined; lost and undone, poor and miserable, beggars and bankrupts, the foolish things of this world, and things that are not; and yet such God is pleased to adopt and take into his family: and it is an act of distinguishing grace, both with respect to angels and men; for they are men, the posterity of fallen Adam, that become the sons of God; and not angels, who are ministering spirits, or servants, but not sons; and of men, not all, only some, are the children of God; who are distinguished from the world who are not so, and who know not them that are the children of God (1 John 3:1).

2. It is a blessing of grace, which exceeds other blessings; as redemption, pardon, justification, and sanctification; a man may be redeemed out of a state of slavery by a king's ransom, may be pardoned by his prince, though he has been a rebel and traitor to him, and may be acquitted from high crimes laid to his charge, and yet not be a king's son; if adopted, and taken into his family, it must be by another and distinct act of royal favour and it is more to be a son than to be a saint, as Zanchy [3] observes; who thinks, that to be predestinated to the adoption of children is something over and above, and what exceeds being chosen to be holy, and without blame: to which may be added, that angels are saints, or holy ones, even perfectly

holy; "he came with ten thousands of his saints" (Deut. 33:2), but they are not sons, at least in the sense that some of the sons of men are.

3. It is a blessing of grace, which makes men exceeding honorable. David observed, that it was "no light thing to be a king's son-in-law"; it certainly cannot be, to be a son of the King of kings; the name of a son of God is a new name, a renowned and excellent one; a name which no man knows the grandeur and dignity of but he that receives it; it makes a man more honorable than Adam was in his state of honour, and than the angels are in their high estate in heaven; since, though these are sons, yet only by creation, not by adoption, as saints are.

4. It brings men into the highest connections, alliances, relations, and offices; such are not only the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty; but they are the brethren of Christ, the Son of God, are fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; yea, they become kings and priests unto God.

5. The inheritance they are adopted to exceeds all others: it is a most comprehensive one, it includes all things; "he that overcometh shall inherit all things"; the ground and foundation of which, lies in the relation between God and such persons, as follows; "and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (Rev. 21:7), all things are theirs, civil, ecclesiastic, spiritual, and eternal; they are heirs of the grace of life, and possess the blessings of it; and they are heirs of everlasting salvation, and shall certainly enjoy it (1 Cor. 3:22, 23; 1 Pet. 3:7; Heb. 1:14), yea, they are heirs "of God" himself; he is their portion, and their exceeding great reward, both in this life and that to come; they, in some sort or other, enjoy the benefit of all the perfections of God, and of his purposes, promises, and providences; the heavenly state, particularly, is their inheritance, which is sometimes called "glory, substance", and the "inheritance of the saints in light" (Prov. 3:35; 8:21; Col. 1:12), and has such epithets given it, as show it to be superior to all other inheritances (1 Pet. 1:4).

6. All other inheritances are subject to corruption, and have pollution written upon them, are fading things, and liable to be lost, and often are; but this is an incorruptible crown, a crown of glory, that fadeth not away; a crown of righteousness laid up in heaven, in the covenant of grace, and in the hands of Christ, the Surety of it; and who is the saints feoffee in trust, and so it is sure to all the seed.

7. Adoption is a blessing and privilege that always continues. The love of God, which is the source of it, always remains; predestination, which gives birth to it, is the purpose of God, that stands sure, which is never revoked nor repented of; and therefore adoption is one of those gifts of grace of his which are without repentance; the covenant of grace, in which it is secured, is sure, can never be broken, nor will ever be removed: union with Christ is indissoluble, the bond of which is everlasting love; the marriage knot can never be untied; saints are members of his body, and one spirit with him; and the relation between them as husband and wife, as children and brethren, will ever remain. The Spirit, as a spirit of adoption, abides for ever; and he is the never failing earnest of the heavenly inheritance, and by whom the

**saints are sealed up to the day of redemption: the children of God may be corrected for their faults, and chastised by their heavenly Father; but never turned out of doors, nor disinherited, much less disowned, which is impossible; the son abides in the house for ever; and such that are sons are never more servants; once a child of God and always so (John 8:35; Gal. 4:7), such who are the sons of God may judge themselves unworthy of the relation, as the prodigal did; and who proposed within himself to desire his father to make him one of his hired servants; but he was not suffered to ask it, because it was what could not be done (Luke 15:19, 21), yea, they may conclude they are not the sons of God; because they may imagine their spots are not the spots of God's children, and yet they are in such a relation in which they shall always continue.**

#### **V. The effects of adoption.**

**1. A share in the pity, compassion, and care of God, their heavenly Father; who, as a father pities his children, so he pities them that fear him, and reverence him as their Father; in all their afflictions he is afflicted, and sympathizes with them, and delivers them out of all their troubles; when they are in want of whatsoever kind, and particularly of food, he supplies them, and for which they are encouraged to ask it of him, as children of their parents; so our Lord reasons, "If a son", &c. (Luke 11:11-13).**

**2. Access to God with boldness; they can come to him as children to a father, use freedom with him, tell him all their complaints and wants, and come boldly to the throne of grace, and ask grace and mercy to help them in their times of need.**

**3. Conformity to the image of Christ, the firstborn among many brethren; which is begun in this life, and will be perfected in that to come; when the sons of God shall be like him, and see him as he is.**

**4. The Spirit of adoption, given to testify their sonship to them; for "because they are sons, God sends forth the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6).**

**5. Heirship; for "if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17), heirs of the grace of life, heirs of a kingdom, of an inheritance most glorious, to which they are entitled, and for which they are made meet by the grace of God.**