

CHAPTER III

OF ADOPTION

THE other part of justification is *adoption*, or the bestowal of a right to eternal life, which flows from the imputation of Christ's righteousness, for "he was made under the law, to redeem us, that we might receive the adoption of sons," i.e. have a title to life, for "if children, then heirs," ([Gal. 4:4, 5](#); [Rom. 8:17](#).) The word *adoption* is sometimes taken for the external receiving of men into covenant with God, as was the case with the Jews, ([Rom. 9:4](#).) Hence the Israelites are called the "sons of God," and the "first-born," ([Deut. 32:19, 20](#); [Exod. 4:22](#).) Sometimes the word is taken for the experience and liberty of adoption, such as belongs to believers under the New Testament, who, having become as it were adult, and no longer children, are said to have received the spirit of adoption. Sometimes it is taken for the full manifestation of adoption, which shall take place in the future resurrection ([Rom. 8:23](#).) It is also taken for that act of God, by which, of his mere grace, through faith in Christ, he admits the elect into his family, and bestows on them the name and privilege of sons, for the obtaining of the eternal inheritance.

Now adoption, as the word is used in law, is a lawful act, in imitation of nature, instituted for the comfort of those who have no children of their own. The ceremony of adoption took place among the Romans in this form. The father and the person to be adopted presented themselves to the prætor, and then the former said to the latter, *Wilt thou become my son?* to which he replied, *I will*. In many respects *divine and human* adoption resemble each other; for both are acts of free favour—in both a stranger is admitted into

the family—in both the name of the family is given, and also a title to the inheritance—both are the consequence of two acts, of which in divine adoption, one is the act of God’s will, the other of our own; for God says in the gospel, “Wilt thou be my son?” and by faith we each answer, “I will.” There is, however, a very great difference between human and divine adoption; the former was instituted to console the childless, and to supply the deficiency of nature; the latter takes place for our comfort, not for that of God, who had a Son, even his well-beloved—the former leads to the possession of the property of the deceased father; the latter to a share in the happiness of the Father everlasting—the one can bestow the name and titles, but not the disposition and qualities of sons; in the other, the adopting Lord changes the heart. Lastly, the one supposes its objects to be good, and does not make them so; the other does not suppose, but makes its objects good.

By this adoption we have God as our Father, and we are his children; not indeed by nature, as Christ was; nor as the angels, who are called the sons of God, because God created them, and stamped upon them the image of his holiness, and for other reasons; ([Job. 1:6](#); [38:7](#);) nor as Adam, who is also called the son of God, ([Luke 3:38](#),) though this passage may be explained otherwise; but we are called the sons of God by grace, and because we have received from him a new nature. The dignity of this sonship appears from the dignity of Him who adopts—from the divine nature of which the adopted partake—from their spiritual union, and marriage with Christ—from the inheritance promised to them. By this adoption, also, we have free access to God and the knowledge of his mysteries, and are assured of his protection, care, and love. We have also a title to the blessings of grace and glory, and to the inheritance of heaven, which is

purchased by the blood of Christ. At the same time we engage to pay unto God filial reverence, love, and obedience.

This privilege is common to all the faithful; still, under the Old Testament, “believers being under tutors and governors,” though children, “differed nothing from servants,” (Gal. 4:1, 2,) nor did they enjoy the full exercise of their privilege, being in “the spirit of bondage.” Whereas believers under the New Testament, being as it were adult, and in possession of their freedom, are admitted through Christ into the audience-chamber of their Father, and in “the spirit of adoption” are enabled to “cry, Abba, Father.” Upon this word *Abba*, we may remark, what learned men observe, that the word *Abi* signifies a natural father, but at the same time an adopted or civil father, an elder, a master, a magistrate; but the word *Abba* signifies nothing but a natural father. Among the Jews none but a freeman was allowed to address any one by the title of *Abba*. This word descended to the Greeks; hence, in Callimachus, Diana calls Jupiter ἄππα, and Ausonius uses the verb *abare* for ἀδελφίζειν, i.e. to address any one kindly and familiarly, as a brother.

CHAPTER IV