

Of Man's Adoption

Gal 4:1-7 & WCF 12.1

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 29 September 2019, 16:30
(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)¹

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

You would have heard of the ten steps in the order our salvation!

Do you remember them?

Here they are (Let's see if I can list them without looking at my text):

1. Election
2. Gospel Call
3. Regeneration
4. Conversion: (Repentance & Faith)
5. Justification
- 6. Adoption**
7. Sanctification
8. Perseverance
9. Death
10. Glorification.²

Did you notice *adoption* in this list? It's number six!

Do you & I really understand the blessing of our adoption by our Heavenly Father?

I guess we would have understood it even better if you & I were orphans in this life, and then were adopted by a rich, yet exceptionally caring, married couple.

Imagine you were an orphan at the time of the Industrial Revolution³ in England when "chronic hunger and malnutrition were the norm for the majority of the population..."⁴

¹ In writing this sermon, I am greatly indebted to my two main sources whose guidance I appreciate: 1) Van Dixhoorn, Chad. 2014. *Confessing the Faith: a reader's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Carlisle, PA : The Banner of Truth Trust. 484p.

2) Sproul, R.C. 2006. *The truth we confess*. (In: Sproul, R.C. ed. *Truths we confess: a layman's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith – in three volumes*. Vol. 2: *Salvation and the Christian Life* (Chapters 9-22 of the Confession) Phillipsburg, NJ : P&R Publishing. 279p.).

Many words & phrases I have written, I have gladly borrowed with great thankfulness from this source.

² For this version of the *Ordo Salutis*, cf. GRUDEM, W. 2000. *Systematic Theology: an introduction to Biblical doctrine*. Grand Rapids, MI : Zondervan

³ "The Industrial Revolution, now also known as the First Industrial Revolution, was the transition to new manufacturing processes in Europe and the United States, in the period from about 1760 to sometime between 1820 and 1840. This transition included going from hand production methods to machines, new chemical manufacturing and iron production processes, the increasing use of steam power and water power, the development of machine tools and the rise of the mechanized factory system. The Industrial Revolution also led to an unprecedented rise in the rate of population growth" (Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Revolution)

⁴ "Chronic hunger and malnutrition were the norm for the majority of the population of the world including Britain and France, until the late 19th century. Until about 1750, in large part due to malnutrition, life expectancy in France was about 35 years and about 40 years in Britain. The United States population of the time was adequately fed, much taller on average and had life expectancy of 45–50 years although U.S. life expectancy declined by a few years by the mid 19th century. Food consumption per capita also declined during

For some or other reason you were fatherless, but suddenly also motherless, because your mother died at your birth! Now, you're already an eight-year old, and life is cruelly tough!

Do you know what lifestyle you would in all likelihood have faced?

If no kind married couple came to adopt you, and no orphanage knew about you, then, just to be able to have something to eat (have a place to sleep, and stay warm in winter), you could in all likelihood have been forced into child labour. However, if you were not that fortunate, you might well have been recruited by some or other thief to assist him in his criminal activities of burglary, stealing and pick-pocketing!⁵ Either way, due to lack of money and time, you would have no school education. So, your future would have been exceedingly bleak!

But, then, imagine one day a very kind married couple – a couple of high social standing – came and decided to legally adopt you! For the first time in your life you sleep in a proper bed, have healthy meals, a regular bath, clean clothing, and a school education! Besides all of these, in the *last will* (testament) of your adopted parents, you are now also listed as an heir; yes, to inherit a portion of their estate one day when they have died!

What a change!

What a blessing!

What an answer to all your prayers!

Well, may I remind you that, because of our first parents' sin against God Almighty, you & I were spiritually and morally set up for disaster! We were without God in this world!⁶ But look! God's Word tells us that our adoption has always been a part of God's plan. In fact, as Paul says in our NT passage (Gal 4:4-5), "God sent forth His Son" so that those who "were under the law... might receive the adoption of sons!"⁷

What grace!

Yes, grace which comes to us by the voluntary and self-sacrificial mediation of our "older brother" Jesus Christ!

You see, it was *the good pleasure* of God's eternal will⁸ that our Saviour *should bring many sons (and daughters) to glory!*⁹

And so, in greatest love & grace, God adopted you & me as His sons and daughters!

What are the blessings of this adoption?

Well, I will explain these by way of four points.

Here's the first one...

Adoption is Unique

an episode known as the Antebellum Puzzle"

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Revolution#Social_effects).

⁵ This painful reality has been poignantly depicted by Charles Dickens in his novel entitled, "Oliver Twist," or "The Parish Boy's Progress."

⁶ Cf. Eph 2:11-12, ***Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)—¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world*** (Emphasis mine).

⁷ Gal 4:4-5, ***But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.***

⁸ Cf. Eph 1:4-6, ***In love⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves*** (Emphasis mine).

⁹ Cf. Heb 2:10, ***In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering*** (Emphasis mine).

My brother & sister, imagine the Bible never mentioned our adoption! Yes, imagine the Bible never spoke how God planned to *adopt* us as His very own children, but only how He *justified* us and how He *sanctified* us!

It would be like you & me coming only out of a courtroom where the judge has declared us guiltfree! Then, following from the courtroom where we were justified, we walked to the doctor's rooms where he healed us – yes, made our bodies spotlessly healthy!

Indeed, if we were only justified and sanctified by God, it would be like we have been given the pass by the judge and a clean bill of health by the doctor! But then – what then? Whereto would we go from there?

Yes, if the Bible didn't say anything about God adopting us, it would almost have felt as if, after justifying us and sanctifying us, God still kept us at a distance!

But no! Everyone who is in Christ is like someone who has not just been passed successfully by the judge and the doctor, but is also welcomed into a warm family by a caring and loving Father!

So, let me ask you, “Can anything be better than being a child of God – a son or daughter who enjoys all the freedom and privileges of God's own family!?”

You ask, “What freedom?”

Well, the freedom to address the Almighty Creator-God as our *Father*.

What *freedom*!!

You ask, “What *privilege*?”

Well, the privilege to have brothers & sisters even in overseas places. And not just *that*, but also the privilege of being joint heirs with God's own Son!

Yes, remember Rm 8:17, *Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*¹⁰

I want to come back to the freedom you & I have to address God as “Father.” Did you know that up until the tenth century, among the many names the Jews were taught to use when they were addressing God in prayer, the name “Father” was noticeably absent!?¹¹

It was unthinkable in Judaism that anyone would have the audacity to address God by such a familiar name!¹²

But look! In the New Testament, nearly every prayer of our Lord Jesus (our older Brother) starts with “Father.”

No wonder the Jews got angry with Him!

But Christ went even further! You see, not only did He *Himself* address God as “Father;” no, He also taught His disciples (who were mere human beings like you & I) to pray, “Our Father...”¹³

Indeed, our Lord Jesus alone had the right to address God in such language of filial affection, but then He instructed His followers to do the same!

And now?

Well, now we take it for granted that God is our Father! Yes, it has become so commonplace that, when we address God as “Father” in our prayers, it's almost as if we do not even *think* anymore at what cost we are allowed such intimate relationship with God!

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ro 8:17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹¹ This is the finding of the German scholar Joachim Jeremias who studied the concept of fatherhood in Judaism (for which cf. Jeremias apud Sproul, *ibid*:69). Also cf. e.g. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Names_of_God_in_Judaism

¹² My adaptation of the well-said words of Sproul (*ibid*:69)

¹³ Cf. Mt 6:9

But I love the words of Jn 1:12, *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*¹⁴

Well, so far regarding point 1: “Adoption is Unique.”
Here is point 2...

Bearing Our Father's Name

You know what?

When we first took our dog to the vet, I had to fill out the usual forms.

So, I had to write our dog's name – i.e. *Fritz!*

Then, in a separate box, I had to write my first and last name. So, I wrote *Pieter van Huyssteen*.

Then, would you believe it!? One year later, when we got a follow-up reminder in the mail, the letter was addressed to *Fritz van Huyssteen!!*

What? A dog bearing *my* last name!?

Of course, I had mixed feelings, because, on the one hand, I love our dog. But, on the other hand, he still remains a dog!

You see, I would much rather have given my last name to a child – yes, a small human being whom I adopted – than to a dog – even a dog as lovely as our Fritz!

My brother & sister (and dear children), have you ever thought more deeply what it means that you & I are allowed to be called by God's Name – we, not dogs (no, even worse than that), for we are sinners who have hurt our Creator!

Hear what words Jeremiah once used when God's people were suffering a severe drought: “**You are among us, O Lord, and we bear your name;**¹⁵ **do not forsake us!**”¹⁶

Yes, even foreign nations knew the Israelites were people of *Yahweh!*¹⁷

And remember what the Apostle Paul tells the Ephesians, “**For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named...**” (Eph 3:14-15).¹⁸

Of course, Acts 11:26 also tells us that it was *at Antioch that the disciples were first called after their Lord Jesus Christ – i.e. “Christians.”*¹⁹

And our New-Testament passage tells us that even Christians as backsliding as the Galatians were enabled by the Holy Spirit to cry out in childlike trust, “**Abba,**” which, in our language, means “Father.” Yes, this is how Paul instructs them in Gal 4:6, **And**

¹⁴ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Jn 1:12–13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (Emphasis mine).

¹⁵ Literally: “...and Your Name is called over/upon us...” (וְשֵׁם־יְהוָה עָלֵינוּ נִקְרָא)

¹⁶ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Je 14:9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (Emphasis mine).

¹⁷ Cf. e.g. Josh 2:10 for Rahab who knew that the Israelites were people of Yahweh: **For we have heard how the LORD (Yahweh) dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction** (Emphasis mine).

¹⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Eph 3:14–15). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹⁹ Acts 11:25-26 (especially v.26) **Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So, for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch** (Emphasis mine).

because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”²⁰

So, why can we call God, “Father”?

Well, because the Father’s very own Son earned for us that privilege. It’s like it was through our son, Johan, marrying Xiaocun,²¹ that she now has the privilege of calling me and Annette “Dad” and “Mum” (and we have the joy of calling her “Daughter”).

Well, so far re point 2: “Bearing our Father’s Name.”

Here is point 3...

Chastisement²²

My brother & sister, nobody likes to be chastised (or disciplined).

However, what does God’s Word tell us?

It is precisely those whom God *loves* that He disciplines! Yes, it is those whom God has accepted as sons and daughters whom He wisely chastises!²³

You see, the author of Hebrews makes a good point when he says, “***If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.***”²⁴

So, how do we gauge our Father’s heart when we hear that He *disciplines* those whom He *loves*?

Well, that He is never vengeful or vindictive! He is not like a sinful angry human being who likes to give tit for tat!

No, when our Heavenly Father disciplines/chastises us (His beloved adopted children), He does so in *holy* & controlled anger; or, as RC Sproul says, “Those who are in Christ never have to fear the punitive wrath of God. That has been taken care for us by Christ on the cross. However, we still face the corrective wrath of God when He chastens us.”²⁵

How do human beings discipline their children?

Well, blessed are those children whose parents discipline them never in heated vengeful anger!

My cousin, Theo, knew that already when he was little!

You see, when Theo was about seven years old, his mother told him to take his pillow, duvet and blanket outside to air them! What did his mother notice a few minutes later?

Well, there was her beloved seven-year old boy in the backyard, holding up his pillow with his one hand, and, with a stick in the other hand, he was beating the daylight out of his pillow. And this was what he was shouting out with every blow that fell on that

²⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ga 4:6). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles (Emphasis mine).

²¹ This Chinese name is to be pronounced like the English words “Shout – Soon.”

²² Pronunciation: [ˈtʃæstəɪzmənt]

²³ Cf. Heb 12:5-7 “***My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.***” ***It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?***

²⁴ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Heb 12:8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

²⁵ Sproul (ibid:73).

pillow: “I smack you not because I hate you, but because I love you...; I smack you not because I hate you, but because I love you!”

His mother’s reaction?

Well she smiled from ear to ear realising that, finally, her son has gotten the message!

And my mother had the same slogan!

Now, please don’t think that smacking was the only method of discipline our parents employed in the 1950’s to 1970’s. It’s just that smacking is, for obvious reasons, the one most clear in my memory!

But of this I can assure you: we grew up under *loving discipline* and *disciplining love*, for (contrary to modern beliefs) even if/when our backsides got warmed for us, we never had any doubt at all that mum & dad loved us to bits!

So, whose disciplining action stands the best chance to be well received? A loving mother’s & a loving father’s!

Thus, do you think my parents got pleasure out of warming our backsides?

Not at all!

And, thankfully, they didn’t have to do that all the time. But they knew before God that, at times, they had to do it even if it drove mum to tears! So, after she had disciplined us in that manner, she would never ever just let us go outside again before we had “cooled off,” had given her a kiss and – most important of all – have *prayed* with her that God, too, would forgive us!

Well, I like the way Chad van Dixhoorn says it: Sometimes you & I as God’s children “...may need severe mercy to bring us back to that straight and narrow road our Father has prepared for us.” “But God’s discipline is always a mercy – by no means does it indicate that He has deserted us.”²⁶

My brother & sister, having said all of that, this sermon point needs a qualifier, for it would be incomplete if I did not remind you of what the Bible also teaches, i.e. that not every hardship you & I experience is necessarily God disciplining us for a *specific sin we have committed*. Remember in this regard what God allowed for Job;²⁷ and what He allowed for Lazarus;²⁸ and what He allowed for the man who was born blind!²⁹

²⁶ Van Dixhoorn (ibid:174)

²⁷ Cf. Job 1:8-12 ***Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”***

⁹ ***“Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. ¹⁰ “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. ¹¹ But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.”***

¹² ***The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.”***

²⁸ Cf. Jn 11:41-42, 45, ***So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” ... Therefore, many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.***

²⁹ Cf. Jn 9:1-3, ***As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”***

Let me also remind you of the words of Jeremiah after God's people had suffered severe affliction (in Lamentations 3:31-33), *For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.*³⁰

Why does God discipline his beloved children when they sin?

Well, because He has the day of redemption in mind! And He wants to bring us safely there!

Look, is this not why Eph 4:30 says about the Spirit of adoption, "*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*"³¹

So, God's merciful disciplining of us is to steer us, His adopted children, to our eternal "*inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for us!*"³²

Well, here is the last small point...

Family with Siblings

My brother & sister, while we live our lives on earth, the One who is most important in all our relationships – the One who deserves our only worship, is our Father in heaven, through His Son and the powerful working of His Holy Spirit!

Then, your & my second-most important relationship is with our Father's other children – our fellow brothers & sisters in Jesus Christ!

And so, we are God's family – one family, with one older Brother and one Spirit of adoption!

What does that say?

*Well, does it not say that Christian brothers & sisters should do all that they can to foster & cherish love & unity in this family?*³³

Do you know what? It is possible to be an only child of your mother & father, and still be a very happy and well-balanced person. But blessed is he/she who grew up with brothers & sisters in a loving & caring large family.

I grew up in a family of five children – five children born within six years! And, whilst at primary school, we had our more-than occasional fights! Yet, most of the time, we were the greatest friends – and even more so when we reached high school and university!

What a blessing to belong to a cosy, loving family "nest!"

Here's a final thought...

You see, Heb 1:14 tells us that *all angels are ministering spirits who serve those who will inherit salvation!*³⁴

Well, if this is the case, how much more should you & I serve the same family ourselves! Why?

³⁰ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (La 3:31–33). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³¹ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Eph 4:30). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³² Cf. 1 Pt 1:3-5 (especially v.4), *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time* (Emphasis mine).

³³ My adaptation of the words of Van Dixhoorn (ibid:174).

³⁴ Heb 1:14, *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?*

Well, as a means to express our greatest thanks to our Heavenly Father!
And I thank Him for the great measure to which this brotherly & sisterly love in action is
already happening among us as Wainui church family!
Surely, *how great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called
children of God! And that is what we are!*³⁵

AMEN (2691 words excluding footnotes)

³⁵ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (1 Jn 3:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.