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THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD:
HOW MINISTRY LEADERS DESCRIBE
THE IMPLICATIONS OF
THE DOCTRINE OF ADOPTION ON THE
SOCIAL DOMAIN OF THE PERSONHOOD

By

DREW T. LINTS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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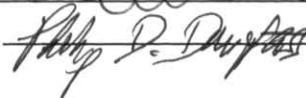
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how ministry leaders describe the implications that the doctrine of adoption has on the social domain of the Christian's personhood. It is apparent that a growth of appreciation of and maturity in the doctrine of adoption is of critical importance as ministry leaders disciple their fellow brothers and sisters. This study utilized a qualitative design, using semi-structured interviews with ministry leaders in the Presbyterian Church in America. The review of literature and analysis of the seven interviews focused on four key areas that make up the social domain of the personhood: relationship with God, relationship with self, relationship with others, and relationship with the physical world.

Regarding the believer's relationship with God, the study revealed that the doctrine of adoption has significant implications on this relational sphere. These include a transformed understanding of God's love, repentance, obedience, sanctification, and discipline.

Regarding the believer's relationship with self, the study showed that the doctrine of adoption has significant implications on this relational sphere as well. These include a renewed comprehension of the source of one's worth, the transformation of one's motivation to holiness and belonging

Regarding the believer's relationship with others, the study indicated that the doctrine of adoption has significant implications on this relational sphere. These include a fresh recognition of one's belonging within the family of God, an unconditional love for others, peace and contentment within community, safety in transparency with others, and compassion for the lost.

Regarding the believer's relationship with the physical world, the study revealed that the doctrine of adoption also has significant implications on this relational sphere. These include a transformed understanding of the believer's role within the world, God's redemptive plan and heart towards the broken world,

This study concluded that God's fatherly love towards his children, represented in the doctrine of adoption has profound implications on the social domain of the Christian's personhood. The study also concluded that growth in the doctrine of adoption meets some of the deepest longings within the hearts of God's people.

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Scripture taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Text edition: 2011.

Chapter One

Introduction to the Study

One result of the fall is that there is a break within part of the social domain of the personhood of all human beings. Created to live in harmonious and loving relationships with God, self, others, and creation, people find themselves unable to attain or experience these foundational aspects of God's intention for them. They are unable to experience absolute joy and contentment in the midst of this brokenness. They are spiritual slaves and orphans in the truest sense of the word: without love, hope, or peace. Their relationship with God the Father has been severed, their relationship with self has taken on a mutinous form of self-love or self-idolatry, and their relationships with others and the physical world merely exist to pay homage to the aforementioned self.

The result is that the social domain itself has taken on a broken form. Therefore, humanity daily experiences brokenness whose fracture reaches to humanity's very core. The divinely intended state of living within relationship is the very thing that has been heinously altered.

The great news is that, according to scripture, God is a "Father of the fatherless."¹ This adoption theme is essentially the gospel message. As Dan Cruver wrote in *Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father*, "Through adoption God graciously brings us to participate in the reciprocal

¹ Psalm 68:5.

love that ever flows between the Father and his Son. Not only is this the very heart of adoption; it is the very heart of the gospel.”² The gospel, above all else, indicates that the social domain of the personhood, the very purpose of humankind and the source of human identity, has been redeemed by the love of the Father and the blood of Christ. Thus, the doctrine of adoption lies at the very heart of the gospel.

The metaphor of adoption is appropriate in that all humans have an inclination as to what fatherhood should be. All fathers fall short in their role as parents to their children and fail in their various responsibilities. Yet people all know what fatherhood means. They have a deep sense of longing for this relationship and for what they know fatherhood should be. Arguably, the fatherhood of God and the doctrine of adoption are at the core of what is evidently missing in the relationships between children and their earthly fathers. One could appropriately argue that earthly fathers are but shadows of the perfect Heavenly Father.

In the midst of sin and brokenness, God has ordained to adopt some people to be his children. These elect few have been given life abundantly as heirs of the kingdom, united with Christ. Though believers have been adopted, they often live as slaves and orphans in the palace. They live under the law, trying to earn the favor of God the Father. They never fully accept their place at the banquet table with the King. As Rose Marie Miller stated in her book *From Fear to Freedom: Living as Sons & Daughters of God*, “Spiritual orphans [...] are simply closed off people who are too proud and fearful to admit failure, imperfections, and sins, and acknowledge their

² Dan Cruver, “Adoption and the Trinity,” in *Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father*, ed. Dan Cruver (Adelphi, MD: Cruciform Press), 27.

complete dependence on God.”³ The practical implications of freeing the Christian who experiences life as an orphan are the concern of this research.

Problem Statement

Unlike many other problems that demand research and appropriate solutions, the topic at hand is one that has understandably, yet unacceptably, flown below the radar of the western church. This is because it is comprised of the arena of life within which Christians, in particular those who are more academically inclined, have grown increasingly uncomfortable. This is unacceptable because it is the key to freedom and the apex of Christianity. In his book *Children of the Living God*, Sinclair Ferguson explains, “[Adoption] lies at the heart of understanding the whole of the Christian life and all of the diverse elements in our daily experience.”⁴ He continues, “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.”⁵

Although the Christian faith has as its foundation a story rather than a system, a family rather than an individual, a God of three persons rather than of one, the western reformed church has generally fallen into a state of apathy towards relationship in favor of the safety that logical and systematic understanding affords. In particular, this more acceptable form of faith, which may be better described as reason, has robbed the Christian of experiencing the relational aspect of Christianity that the gospel freely offers.

³ Rose M. Miller, *From Fear to Freedom: Living as Sons & Daughters of God* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1994), Loc. 375, Kindle.

⁴ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Children of the Living God* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 2.

⁵ Ibid., 5.

In an effort to retain truth, believers have perhaps thrown the baby out with the bath water. After all, so much of the Christian faith is unexplainable. One may say that the loftier the truth, the less able one is to understand it, even to the point that it may seem to make absolutely no sense whatsoever, though it be completely true. The fact that God chose to forgive sinners and give them a place at the banquet, even as beloved sons, is beyond human reason. Although absolutely true, it seems to make absolutely no sense, nor does it need to. Though there is some comfort in accepting the mysteries as such, at the end of the day, it makes no sense that God would treat fallen humans in this manner. The love of God is the scandal of the gospel. On the other hand, the love of God makes aligns everything into perfect harmony. Thus, the audacity of the gospel turns the wisdom of man into utter foolishness. As Cruver, et al. notes, “God’s original intention for humanity [...] was that we were to be his beloved sons, his cherished children.”⁶ If this is true, a fresh look at the Christianity through the lens of the doctrine of adoption is required.

Humanity was created for a relationship that is reminiscent of a father and son. One might argue that a greater scandal than the gospel has occurred in the church – that of robbing the gospel of its most magnificent and mysterious jewel: the doctrine of adoption. Brennan Manning and Sue Garmon explain in their book *Souvenirs of Solitude* that, “Failure to recognize the value of mere being with God, as the Beloved, without doing anything, is to gouge the heart out of Christianity.”⁷ This

⁶ Dan Cruver, “Adoption and the Incarnation,” in *Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father*, ed. Dan Cruver (Adelphi, MD: Cruciform Press, 2011), 41.

⁷ Brennan Manning, *Souvenirs of Solitude: Finding Rest in Abba’s Embrace* (Denville, NJ: Dimension Bks., 2009), Loc. 61, Kindle.

scandal may be understandable due to the current cultural context, but to perpetuate this scandal is unacceptable due to the Father's intent for his children.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore how ministry leaders describe the implications that the doctrine of adoption has on the social domain of the Christian's personhood.

Primary Research Questions

With the emphasis on the social domain of personhood, the research questions that guided this study focus on the four areas that make up the social domain of personhood.

- 1) Relationship with God
 - a) What are the implications of the doctrine of adoption on how Christians experience relationship with God?
 - b) How would you contrast this area of the social domain of the personhood in someone who has a mature appreciation of their own adoption with the Christian living under a slave/orphan mentality?
- 2) Relationship with Self
 - a) What are the implications of the doctrine of adoption on how the Christian experiences relationship with self?
 - b) How would you contrast this area of the social domain of the personhood in someone who has a mature appreciation of their own adoption with the Christian living under a slave/orphan mentality?
- 3) Relationship with Others

- a) What are the implications of the doctrine of adoption on how the Christian experiences relationship with others?
 - b) How would you contrast this area of the social domain of the personhood in someone who has a mature appreciation of their own adoption with the Christian living under a slave/orphan mentality?
- 4) Relationship with the Physical World
- a) What are the implications of the doctrine of adoption on how the Christian experiences relationship with the physical world?
 - b) How would you contrast this area of the social domain of the personhood in someone who has a mature appreciation of their own adoption with the Christian living under a slave/orphan mentality?

Significance of the Study

To be a child of the King, adopted in love into the family of God, unconditionally cared for by the ultimate Father, an heir of the kingdom with all the rights and privileges therein, and yet to live and experience life as a slave and orphan is one of the greatest travesties imaginable. Unfortunately, this seems to be the overwhelming experience of Christians. Robert Peterson explains in his book *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children*, the “church’s teachers and theologians have devoted little attention to the Bible’s teaching on adoption.”⁸ Many, although adopted by God, experience life as slaves and orphans, who have yet to experience the fullness of what it means to be a child of God.

⁸ Robert Peterson, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 6.

All Christians will benefit from this study since they are all adopted, yet were once slaves and orphans. To be freed from the slavery of sin and brokenness, to practically experience the fullness of life within the doctrine of adoption, is the greatest joy beyond comprehension. This joy is freely given to all Christians, yet is often overlooked. The research of this study will contrast the social domain of the believer's personhood of the slave and orphan-Christian with that of the adopted-Christian. This will help ministry leaders gauge the practical implications of their teaching and emphasis upon the doctrine of adoption.

Definition of Terms

Doctrine of Adoption - This doctrine invokes a metaphor to describe the Christian's relational standing and belonging before God. The beloved of God are those who were once, "slaves of sin,"⁹ and "far off,"¹⁰ and have now been freed of bondage into a relationship, even "home"¹¹ with the Father. The Apostle Paul's use of the term "adoption" sheds light on a familial God who as father occupies center stage in his family.¹² As a result, the doctrine of adoption describes the Christian's relationship with Yahweh as one much like that of a son to a father rather than of a subject to a master. In future references to this doctrine, the term adoption will apply to this meaning. Any reference to earthly adoption will be indicated as such.

⁹ Romans 6:20.

¹⁰ Ephesians 2:13; 17.

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 5:1, 8.

¹² Trevor Burke, *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 73.

Earthly Adoption - This is “adoption” as it is understood in human terms. It is the act of a human parent bringing an orphaned human child into their home and caring for it as if it were their own natural born child.

Fatherhood - This defines God’s relational standing with regard to the believer in Christ. It is borrowed from the earthly father-son relationship. Yahweh, as he describes himself in relationship to his people, will be the benchmark for defining healthy fatherhood.

Sonship - This defines the believer’s relational standing before God. It is borrowed from the earthly father-son relationship.

Personhood - This refers to what it means to be created in God’s image. For this study, the researcher is concerned in particular with the believer’s personhood. Thus, it is the essence, being, and existential experience of the believer.

Social Domain - This is the element of the personhood that constitutes the relational sphere. Within this study, the researcher will primarily look at the four basic areas that constitute the social domain. These four are relationships with: God, self, others and the physical created world.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore how ministry leaders describe the implications that the doctrine of adoption has on the social domain of the Christian's personhood. In order to intelligently examine the desired data, a few areas of literature will now be examined. First, the researcher will present the scriptural basis for the Christian doctrine of adoption, focusing on how scripture develops this doctrine over the course of time within the metanarrative. This will primarily include literature that expounds upon each of the biblical texts at hand. The researcher will further present literature that focuses on the themes developed within scripture that are most relevant to the research questions. Those themes include the areas of belonging for the child of God, identity for the child of God, unity within the family of God, freedom for the child of God, and the future hope of the child of God.

Biblical/Historical Development Within the Metanarrative

A simple glance through the pages of a concordance, referencing "adoption," one may mistakenly conclude that the concept of adoption is a uniquely New Testament, and particularly Pauline, phenomenon. Upon closer examination, the literature reveals that Yahweh has invariably been developing the concept of the doctrine of adoption throughout the metanarrative of scripture. The Pauline metaphor of adoption actually finds its roots within the very history of the Israelite people and their covenantal relationship with Yahweh. The plot of the metanarrative of scripture

can be described simply as God transforming alienated humans without belonging into beings who belong with him in familial relationship and within his kingdom. Terms that reference God as Father and his people as his children are found at monumental points within the flow of the biblical narrative. Some authors have gone so far as to say that the overarching flow of scripture ought to be viewed through the lens of God's adoptive purposes. For instance, Trevor Burke, professor of Bible at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois, claims that the concept of adoption or sonship, "functions as an *inclusio* or as bookends to the whole of the biblical canon. The narrative of Scripture is, in one sense, a story of sonship."¹³ Thus, an appreciation of how the doctrine of adoption is developed within scripture over the course of time will be the thrust of the following section.

Old Testament

An outline of what has been termed "Moses' Dying Song"¹⁴ will be utilized for the Old Testament portion of this study. Within this song, Moses sets forth the history of Israel into four periods: the birth and rise of Israel, the rebellion of Israel, the exile of Israel and the restoration of Israel. It is noteworthy that, even though references to God as the Father to his people are relatively few, each instance arises at critical moments in the metanarrative, strongly correlating to the aforementioned outline of Moses' Dying Song.

¹³ Trevor Burke, *The Message of Sonship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 22.

¹⁴ Deut. 32.

The Birth and Rise of Israel

Exodus 4:22-23

God initiates a covenantal relationship with the patriarch Abraham,¹⁵ promising to provide blessing upon blessing. God promises Abraham that his offspring will become a great nation, that his name will be made great, and that he will be a blessing to all the families of the earth. There is also a promise of land for his offspring. Within these promised blessings there are also references to a future enslavement under the nation of Egypt. God declares that Abraham's offspring will be "afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve and afterward they shall come out with great possessions."¹⁶

As the narrative continues, everything promised comes to fruition. The nation of Israel is enslaved by the Egyptians for four hundred years. God is moved to act as he sees their affliction¹⁷ and hears their groaning.¹⁸ He reveals himself to Moses, unfolding his plan to rescue the Israelite people. For the first time, God describes to a watching world how his relationship with the people of Israel is to be understood: "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.'"¹⁹

¹⁵ Gen. 12:1-4; 15:1-19.

¹⁶ Gen. 15:13-14.

¹⁷ Exod. 3:7.

¹⁸ Exod. 6:5.

¹⁹ Exod. 4:22-23.

The literature challenges any possibility that this familial relationship of Father to son be relegated to simply that of Creator to created. When expressed in terms of creator to created the title “Elohim” is used. On the other hand, when “Jehovah” is used, as is the case here, a distinct concept of filial relationship is in view. Carl F. Keil, former professor of Old and New Testament exegesis at the University of Tartu in Dorpat, Estonia, argues that the relationship of God as Creator to man as created “is never referred to in the Old Testament as that of a Father to a son; to say nothing of the fact that the creator of man is *Elohim*, and not *Jehovah*.”²⁰ When the title Jehovah is used, the filial relationship of God to his people appears to be the thrust of his intention. With similar emphasis, Robert Peterson, professor of systematic theology at Covenant Theological Seminary in Saint Louis, Missouri argues that, “When God does call himself ‘Father’ in the Old Testament, the term almost always refers to him as Savior rather than Creator.”²¹ This certainly seems to be the case for this passage in Exodus.

Burke proposes, “This event was essentially a titanic tussle between two main protagonists which centered primarily on the notion of ‘sonship.’”²² At a point in history that is the quintessential event in their understanding of God, Yahweh describes the nation of Israel as his firstborn son and contrasts it to that of Pharaoh’s firstborn son. Taken to its logical conclusion, God thus declares that Israel is a part of his royal lineage in much the same way that Pharaoh’s firstborn son is a part of his.

²⁰ Carl F. Keil, *The Pentateuch*, Commentary on the Old Testament (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), 297.

²¹ Robert Peterson, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 16.

²² Trevor Burke, *The Message of Sonship*, 38.

Contrasting Exodus 4:22 with Deuteronomy 7:7-8, it is apparent that “the nation’s filial relationship is solely and directly a result of the divine initiative.”²³ They were not his natural born children, for they, like all the rest of the world, had been estranged from God in the fall. God chose Israel to be his son, “not because you were more in number than any other people [...] but it is because the Lord loves you.”²⁴ Though Israel was not of divine stature or descent, God chose to set his love upon them. As such, even though the term “adoption” is not used in any original Hebrew or subsequent Greek translations of the Old Testament, it is nonetheless conceptually present in the way God defines his relationship with Israel in this critical moment in the biblical narrative.

Deuteronomy 1:30-31

As God rescues Israel from slavery, the pronouncement that they are to hear is not only that Yahweh is the one and only God, but also that Israel is his son whom he will protect. The late Peter Craigie, former vice-president of academics at the University of Calgary in Alberta, Canada, states that after their deliverance, Moses uses very descriptive imagery, “on the protective care of a fatherly God.”²⁵ Though the Israelites have been rescued from Egypt, they find themselves wandering in the wilderness at the brink of another breaking point. Again, God tends to their every need. Sensing their need for encouragement, Moses attempts to inspire them with the same fatherly imagery of Yahweh and his filial care of Israel. “The Lord your God

²³ Ibid., 40.

²⁴ Deut. 7:7.

²⁵ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 103.

who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness, where you have seen how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place.”²⁶ Thus, the fatherhood of God plays out in the traumatic events of their captivity and slavery. In addition to God rescuing them from slavery in Egypt, he has taken care of them as a Father carries his son throughout their nomadic wandering in the wilderness. God is not merely a rescuer; he continues to play the role of Father, tending to the needs of his child in the aftermath of their rescue.

Additionally, this passage speaks to the concept of belonging. Burke emphasizes God’s desire for Israel to, “continually reflect on *whose they were and the one to whom they now belong* [emphasis not mine].”²⁷ As an adoptive child rescued from squalor into a family of means must learn to exist in his new state of belonging, so must Israel come to grips with the fact that their enslavement to the Egyptians is now completely behind them and that they have received the comfort of belonging in relationship with God as their Father.

Deuteronomy 8:5

As this relationally driven narrative continues, God describes himself also as one who disciplines Israel as a father does a son.

And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes

²⁶ Deut. 1:30-31.

²⁷ Trevor Burke, *The Message of Sonship*, 55.

from the mouth of the Lord. Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you.²⁸

God's care, described in Deuteronomy 1:30-31, is here complimented with the element of God's discipline, as they are both related to Israel's time in the wilderness. God did indeed care for them through their time of wandering in the wilderness, but God also had a particular purpose for those forty years. He did not merely intend to bring them through it unscathed. This time had a purpose for them within the metanarrative, "to be a time of testing and discipline, [providing] strength of will and character [and] not the strength of self-sufficiency, but the strength that comes from a knowledge of the living God."²⁹ Thus, just as scripture describes discipline as an essential element of fathering a child,³⁰ so too God is portrayed as the one who disciplines Israel.

Social Context within the Promised Land

Aside from a few references of God as a Father to his people within the Psalms³¹ and Proverbs,³² there are few direct statements of God as Father to Israel within the scriptures for a significant period of time. However, considering the social context of Israel within the Promised Land, the Israelite people were not ignorant to the reality of their status as God's children. Take for instance, many of the most common names. They were declarations of Yahweh as Father. Christopher Wright,

²⁸ Deut. 8:2-5.

²⁹ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 185.

³⁰ Prov. 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13; 29:17; Eph. 6:4.

³¹ Ps. 68:5; 103:13.

³² Prov. 3:11-12.

former principal of All Nations Christian College in Ware, England, points out that, “in Hebrew, the word for father is *ab*. ‘My father’ is *abi*. So when *ab* or *abi* is put together with *el* or one of the abbreviations of Yahweh, then the name becomes a statement about God as Father.”³³ Some examples of this from scripture are Joab³⁴ which is translated “Yahweh is Father” and Abijah,³⁵ which means “Yahweh is my Father.” Thus, in a culture where parentage rather than individual accomplishment defines the individual,³⁶ to be named “Yahweh is my Father,” is a critically important statement, and not only by the individual holding the title but also by the parents who gave the name. In essence, these parents were declaring that it was more important that their child be known as belonging to Yahweh than to them.

The Rebellion of Israel

Hosea 11:1-4

As Israel grew and as time passed, their loyalties drifted away from God to the point that Derek Kidner, former warden of Tyndale House in Cambridge, England, describes them as children who, “are like strangers in [their] own house and are fast destroying themselves.”³⁷ They were described as shameful,³⁸ whores,³⁹ faithless,⁴⁰

³³ Christopher Wright, *Knowing God the Father Through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic Press, 2007), 24.

³⁴ 2 Sam. 8:16.

³⁵ 2 Chron. 29:1.

³⁶ Cf. Trevor Burke, *The Message of Sonship*, 213.

³⁷ Derek Kidner, *The Message of Hosea: Love to the Loveless*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 11.

³⁸ Hosea 4:18; 9:10.

³⁹ Hosea 2:2-5; 4:12-15; 5:4; 6:10; 9:1.

⁴⁰ Hosea 4:1; 5:7; 6:7.

murderers,⁴¹ and adulterers.⁴² Israel had already received numerous warnings from a number of prophets. Judah and Israel had split by this time, and two prophets were sent to speak to each concerning the consequences of their actions. Hosea was sent to the northern kingdom while Isaiah was sent to the southern kingdom. Each of them depicted God as a Father to Israel, intending to correct his wayward son.

The following passages in Hosea come on the heels of what has been described as something akin to a legal trial. David Hubbard, former president of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, states that within this trial, “Yahweh is both the prosecutor and judge; Israel is the defendant; and an unnamed audience, perhaps Hosea, seems to serve as witness and jury.”⁴³ Hosea then shares the heart of the accuser. He is depicted as their Father.

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them.⁴⁴

Hosea points his audience to the defining moment in Israel’s history when God rescued the nation out of slavery, calling Israel his firstborn son. Yet, according to Carl F. Keil, “the people repaid the Lord, for all the proofs of his love, with nothing but ingratitude and unfaithfulness; so that it would have merited utter destruction

⁴¹ Hosea 4:2; 6:9.

⁴² Hosea 4:2; 7:4.

⁴³ David A. Hubbard, *Hosea: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 185.

⁴⁴ Hosea 11:1-4.

from off the earth.”⁴⁵ Even though they have continually turned away, Yahweh persists in his fatherly love towards them. Thomas McComiskey, former professor of Old Testament exegesis and Biblical theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, states that God is described as one who leads Israel, “with cords suitable for humans, not beasts; the bonds were bonds of love, not cruel, painful strictures.”⁴⁶ Although they were difficult and stubborn, God led his people with what he describes as fatherly affection.

Hosea 11:9-10

Hosea then brings the focus toward the fact that God will unswervingly continue to be their Father and will bring them back to himself. God declares, “I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. They shall go after the Lord; he will roar like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west.”⁴⁷ Israel is to hear that although Yahweh has brought charges against them in court, he does not come merely as the Judge to bring judgment, but also, and more importantly, as their Father to bring correction. Additionally, God shares that he does not intend to turn his back on them forever. The very opposite is being stated.

The imagery of a father with an infant⁴⁸ followed by these pronouncements of future

⁴⁵ Carl F. Keil, *Minor Prophets*, Commentary on the Old Testament (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), 89.

⁴⁶ Thomas McComiskey, *An Exegetical & Expository Commentary: The Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992), 185.

⁴⁷ Hosea 11:9-10.

⁴⁸ Hosea 11:1-4.

care is intended for Israel's comfort. They are meant to remind Israel that God will continue his paternal care for them.

The Exile of Israel

Isaiah 1:2-4

Soon after Hosea brings God's charges to the northern kingdom, God sends Isaiah to the southern kingdom of Judah. In similar fashion, Isaiah brings charges against Judah for their rebellion against God. There is also a similar legal tone in the following passage. Alec Motyer, former principal of Trinity College, Bristol, actually pictures Isaiah here as setting his analysis, "of the contemporary scene as if in a law court."⁴⁹ There is a judge (the Lord), a defendant (Judah), and witnesses (the heavens and earth):

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged.⁵⁰

Again, God's children are contrasted with beasts of burden, with an emphasis on the weight of Israel's rebellion. John Calvin, the sixteenth century Protestant Reformer, expresses that the Israelites are, "worse than dumb animals that have no reason or understanding but who are at least capable of being taught."⁵¹ The literature focuses on this as the foundational emphasis at hand. Even though they are recipients of

⁴⁹ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 43.

⁵⁰ Isa. 1:2-4.

⁵¹ John Calvin, *Isaiah*, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 16.

God's fatherly care, they have repeatedly forsaken him, responding worse than the most stubborn of all livestock. Isaiah even goes so far as to say that they have become "offspring of evildoers,"⁵² in essence declaring that they prefer their alien status. As a result, they have become "estranged."⁵³

Interestingly, the opening words are almost identical to "Moses' Dying Song" in Deuteronomy 32, and serve as a reminder to Israel of all that Moses had spoken concerning their story. At any moment, Israel could determine where they were in the metanarrative by referencing this song. It speaks to their birth and rise, their rebellion and, apparently, an exilic period still to come. There is also a future hope, and the promise of restoration following the covenant curses. Thus, although Isaiah levies tremendous charges and will soon declare painful recompense, by alluding to "Moses' Dying Song," God reminds Israel of the plan he has for his children. In his book *Knowing God the Father Through the Old Testament*, Christopher Wright comments, "You can break a covenant, but you can't stop being a son of your father. Likewise, though Israel knew the shattering reality of a broken covenant as they languished in exile, they could still turn to God in hope."⁵⁴ By referencing Moses' song at the outset, one cannot help but be reminded that there is a bigger story at play and this is not the end of God's son, Israel.

⁵² Isa. 1:4.

⁵³ Isa. 1:4.

⁵⁴ Christopher Wright, *Knowing God the Father Through the Old Testament*, 84.

The Restoration of Israel

Jeremiah 31:9, 20

Over the course of the following decades, all of the woes that have been prophesied by Hosea have come to pass for the northern kingdom of Israel, and the same can be said for those of Isaiah within the time period of Jeremiah's ministry. Terror and fear now grip the heart of Israel. The people of Judah fear they have come to complete ruin. In what C. Hassell Bullock, professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, entitles the "Book of Consolation,"⁵⁵ Jeremiah 30-31 promises a coming day when God will restore Israel and bring them home to himself forever. God's fatherly affection towards Israel is found in the following passage:

With weeping they shall come, and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble, for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. [...] Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, declares the Lord.⁵⁶

The reference to weeping assuredly means true repentance since they are accompanied by pleas for mercy. They have become sorrowful for their sins and not merely for their fate. Philip Ryken, president of Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, states, "This is a prayer of a wayward son on his homeward journey."⁵⁷ Notice also that the Father, "will lead them back,"⁵⁸ a striking similarity to Jesus'

⁵⁵ C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1986), 201.

⁵⁶ Jer. 31:9, 20.

⁵⁷ Philip G. Ryken, *Jeremiah & Lamentations: From Sorrow to Hope*, Preaching the Word (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 2005), 458.

⁵⁸ Jer. 31:9.

parable of the prodigal son.⁵⁹ Within this parable, as the son repents in his heart and begins his journey back to his father, “while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.”⁶⁰ God is here showing that he is still their loving Father and that he has not forgotten them. Jesus’ parable is a reference to this point in the biblical narrative.

Additionally, their discipline is the result of God’s intense love for them rather than his disregard of them. Since Jeremiah was appointed as a “prophet to the nations,”⁶¹ this was both a proclamation to Israel as well as to the nations. As such, his fatherly actions and words are meant to be seen and heard by the entire world. Thus, God has a kingdom focus which moves beyond the boundaries of the Promised Land and beyond the lineage of the Israelite people.

New Testament

Biblical / Historical Development Within the Gospel of John

Within the subsequent New Testament texts, the focus will remain the same. Since the aim of this study is relationally oriented, the researcher will delve into the following texts accordingly. Although each text is rich in depth, only those elements dealing with the historical development of the doctrine of adoption will be presented. Thus, in many cases the context will be of critical importance, while much of the content in the passages may not be completely exhausted.

⁵⁹ Luke 15:11-32.

⁶⁰ Luke 15:20.

⁶¹ Jer. 1:5.

John 1:11-13

Within what has been described by commentators as the “prologue” of John’s gospel, God explains his aim in Jesus for his people. It is noteworthy that the wording is clothed in “sonship” language. In the following text, John speaks directly to the prophecies of God’s mercy towards his children and his gathering of them to himself as a father calls to his children. “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”⁶²

Similar to the charge brought in Isaiah 1:3, John brings a charge to the people of Israel. In like fashion, John decries the actions of the Jewish leaders who have rejected the one who is the centerpiece of the metanarrative of scripture. Like Isaiah, John inserts sonship as God’s goal of redemption in Jesus, yet the aim in John has a grander scope in mind. John Calvin argues that the “universal ‘all’ implies an antithesis,”⁶³ for there is a contrast between “his own people” and to “all who did receive him.” Juxtaposed to the general idea of privilege held by the Israelites resulting from their biological lineage to Abraham, God reveals that his true children are not the result of human procreation. D. A. Carson, research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, states, “‘Natural descent’...avails nothing - which means that heritage and race, even the

⁶² John 1:11-13.

⁶³ John Calvin, *John*, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 22.

Jewish race, are irrelevant to spiritual rebirth.”⁶⁴ While Israel may boast in being children of Abraham, John testifies that all those who believe in Jesus have been given the honor of calling themselves children of God. Thus, Jeremiah’s words as “prophet to the nations,” find fruition. The good news of sonship has broken out of the boundaries of the Promised Land and the lineage of the Israelite people. John proclaims good news to the nations of the world.

John 3:1-7

The roots of the above concept are found in the words of Jesus a few chapters later and many years earlier. In this passage, Nicodemus enters into a discussion with Jesus. According to Burke, Nicodemus is, “a member of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, the highest body in charge of Jewish affairs.”⁶⁵ William Hendriksen, former professor of New Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, writes that, as a Pharisee, Nicodemus held firmly to “one basic and very tragic error: *they externalized religion*. Outward conformity to the law was far too often considered by them to be *the* [emphasis not mine] goal of one’s existence.”⁶⁶ The people of John’s day would have been well aware of this Pharisaic view of Nicodemus. Within this context, the aim of Jesus’ response is better understood.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to him,

⁶⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 126.

⁶⁵ Trevor Burke, *The Message of Sonship*, 131.

⁶⁶ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John, Volume One: Two Volumes Complete in One*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953), 131.

“How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”⁶⁷

D. A. Carson makes the point that the “predominant religious thought in Jesus’ day affirmed that all Jews would be admitted to the kingdom apart from those guilty of deliberate apostasy or extraordinary wickedness.”⁶⁸ In line with the earlier passage in John, Jesus attacks this widely held belief. Jesus’ goal is a monumental shift in understanding. If a man like Nicodemus, with his lineage, position, authority, and outward adherence to the law “cannot enter the promised kingdom by virtue of his standing and works, what hope is there for anyone who seeks salvation along such lines?”⁶⁹ This emphasis would not have been lost on John’s audience, as many were Hellenistic Jews and proselytes of a similar persuasion.

The critical concern is that the Spirit of God alone is the one who initiates this birth. The belief that the biological offspring of Abraham are necessarily the children of God is sharply rejected as false doctrine. As such, prophecies concerning God and his son, Israel, are also in view. There is a clear connection between Jesus’ words and the scriptures which spoke of how God gave them birth, how he protected, disciplined, provided for them, and one day would give them new birth. Nicodemus did not appreciate the depth of Jesus’ words as Jesus’ response indicates. “Do not marvel,”⁷⁰ he says, rebuking him.

⁶⁷ John 3:1-7.

⁶⁸ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 189.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁷⁰ John 3:7.

These verses also raise a question regarding the relationship between regeneration and adoption. The researcher will present the literature concerning soteriology and the *ordo salutis* in a subsequent section of the literature review.

John 8:38-42

Throughout his ministry, to the dismay of the Pharisees, Jesus continually referred to God as his Father.⁷¹ Angered by such a statement, they began plotting to kill Jesus. The concept of lineage once again surfaces in a discourse between Jesus and the Pharisees.

They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are doing what your father did.” They said to him, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father - even God.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me.”⁷²

Jesus intends to shift the scope away from biological and onto spiritual parentage.

While the Pharisees claim Abraham as their father, Jesus' words reveal the heart of the matter. If one were to strip the irony from Jesus' comments, a basic statement concerning the spiritual lineage of these Pharisees would result. Since these men are not doing the works of Abraham, they are not really Abraham's children.⁷³ Thus, they are the offspring of another father. Andreas Kostenberger, professor of New

Testament and Greek and director of Ph.D./Th.M. studies at Southeastern Baptist

Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, claims “The Jews take Jesus' apparent

⁷¹ Matt. 7:21; 10:32-33; 11:27; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10-14; 20:23; 25:34; 26:53; Luke 10:22; 22:29; 24:49; John 5:17; 6:32; 6:40; 8:19; 8:38-59; 10:18; 10:27-42; 14:6-7, 20-24; 15:1-27.

⁷² John 8:38-42.

⁷³ This “like father, like son” logic is further developed in John's first epistle.

denial of their descent from Abraham as an attack on their loyalty to God.”⁷⁴ It is noteworthy that, although the Pharisees have been infuriated by Jesus’ claim that God is his Father, in their grasp for the upper hand the Pharisees claim God as their Father as well. Hendriksen ponders that they may have been referencing Malachi 2:10, intending “Father” only to describe God merely as their creator.⁷⁵ Regardless of the intentions of the use of “Father,” Jesus explains that the fruit of their lives reveal they are children of the devil.

John 20:17

After his death, Jesus appears before his own tomb to a weeping Mary Magdelene. Not recognizing him, she carries on a brief conversation with him, inquiring as to whether he knew where Jesus’ body had been taken. The following interaction takes place when she realizes she is speaking to Jesus. “Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”’”⁷⁶ Responding to Mary, Jesus shares the first fruit of one of the requests of his high priestly prayer.⁷⁷ He prayed that they would be united together.

Herman Ridderbos, former professor of New Testament studies at the Theological School of the Reformed Churches in Kampen, The Netherlands, claims that this is when his disciples are first ushered, “into the fellowship that unites Jesus

⁷⁴ Andreas Kostenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 265.

⁷⁵ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John, Volume Two: Two Volumes Complete in One*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953), 56.

⁷⁶ John 20:17.

⁷⁷ John 17:20-24.

and the Father.”⁷⁸ They were already prepared to call upon God as their Father. Jesus taught this to them in the Lord’s Prayer.⁷⁹ At this moment though, the work that is the basis for adoption had been accomplished by Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. The relationship has become intimate for them too. Jesus’ comparative choice of words in this passage indicates that their relationship with God is now, in a certain sense, on the same spectrum as Jesus’. John Calvin explains that “Christ’s God is also their God and Christ’s ‘Father’ is their ‘Father.’”⁸⁰ This blessing was, at the very least, intended to give them encouragement at Jesus’ departure.

Father/Son Within the Pauline Epistles

1 Thessalonians 5:4-6

The book of 1 Thessalonians may be the first time chronologically that Paul calls the Christian a child of God. In addition to this passage, Paul utilizes familial terms throughout his letter to the Thessalonians. For instance: God is called “Father,”⁸¹ and fellow Christians are titled “brothers.”⁸² The following passage comes on the tail of Paul’s pronouncement of judgment to those who live in darkness. Paul transitions to the believers with a contrasting explanation of what they will experience on the day of the Lord. “But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of

⁷⁸ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 640.

⁷⁹ Matt. 6:9; Luke 11:2-4.

⁸⁰ John Calvin, *John*, 450.

⁸¹ 1 Thess. 1:1, 3; 3:11, 13.

⁸² 1 Thess. 1:4; 2:1, 9, 14, 17; 3:7; 4:1; 4:10, 13; 5:1, 4, 12, 14, 25, 26, 27.

the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.”⁸³

The Lord’s return will not be a surprise for the believer. It will not be a day of sudden destruction. The “children of light” are to be sober-minded and to expect it. Taking a closer look at the Greek text, “sons of light” and “sons of day” are given fuller meaning. Trevor Burke explains that since these phrases are both in the adjectival genitive form and, “mean ‘sons *characterized* [emphasis not mine] by light’ where the focus is on these Thessalonians as God’s children to behave and conduct themselves in a way that is in keeping with members of the family of God.”⁸⁴ Culturally, sons and daughters in this time period were expected to live and act in a manner that gave honor to the family name. Paul references these familial expectations and applies them to the children of God. Gordon Fee, professor emeritus of New Testament studies at Regent College, Vancouver, appropriately links the “children of the day” to the “day of the Lord.”⁸⁵ This being the case, the Christian is beseeched to live a life that is characterized by a hope for that day. Thus, Paul explains that the children of God are to be prepared for and anxiously awaiting the return of Jesus. To them, it is a blessed hope.

Galatians 4:4-9

In chronological order, the following passage, written to Gentile believers in Galatia, is thought to be the first explicit biblical account of the metaphor of adoption.

⁸³ 1 Thess. 5:4-6.

⁸⁴ Trevor J. Burke, *The Message of Sonship*, 186.

⁸⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 193.

The basic intent of Paul's letter was to guard the church from "agitators"⁸⁶ who were preaching a false gospel, adding to the finished work of Jesus. The intent of this particular passage was to encourage the church to recognize their "adoption as sons," rather than reverting back to their former way of life, which Paul describes as slavery.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?⁸⁷

Rather than speaking only to Gentiles or Jews, Douglas J. Moo, professor of New Testament at Wheaton College Graduate School in Wheaton, Illinois representing the view of the bulk of interpreters, holds that "these phrases denote all believers (e.g., Burton 1921: 219-20; Bruce 1982b: 197; Martyn 1997: 390; Byrne 1979: 182; J. Scott 1992: 173-74)."⁸⁸ It is noteworthy that Paul utilizes this metaphor elsewhere in his writings, focusing on Jews on one occasion,⁸⁹ on Gentiles at another,⁹⁰ and then a combination of both.⁹¹ Paul viewed the Jew and the Gentile alike as being estranged from God. Therefore, the metaphor of adoption can be said to equally apply to descendants of either background.

⁸⁶ Gal. 1:7.

⁸⁷ Gal. 4:4-9.

⁸⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 267.

⁸⁹ Rom. 9:4.

⁹⁰ Gal. 4:4-9.

⁹¹ Rom. 8:12-23.

Paul uses a chiasmic structure in the first two verses to help the reader understand the interchange that takes place between Christ and the believer. In its simplest form: A) God sent his Son, B) born under the law, B1) to redeem those under the law, A1) that they might receive adoption as sons. A supernatural transformation happens within the Christian's heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. The child of God is transformed into one who naturally cries out to God in the same way that a child cries out to his father. The child of God now knows that his Father is the only one who can meet his every need.

Paul uses the term "adoption" in order to additionally explain the new status of the child of God. F. F. Bruce, former professor of Biblical criticism and exegesis at the University of Manchester in Manchester, England, is a particular help to the twenty-first century reader as he assists in contextualizing the nuance of this metaphor. "In Paul's day [...] successive Roman emperors adopted men not related to them by blood with the intention that they should succeed them in the principate."⁹² Since it was an important part of securing the lineage of a ruler, the recipients of this illustrative analogy would necessarily recognize the honor and dignity bestowed upon them in their adoption as children of God. Contrasted with their former state of slavery, it is clear that a double blessing is received. One blessing is that of being rescued from slavery and another is that of becoming recipients of sonship within the most significant family that ever was.

It must also be noted that Paul is not giving male preferential treatment in his reference to "sons" alone. He is assuring that all of God's children, male and female,

⁹² Frederick F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 197.

receive the full blessings that were granted only to sons at the time. Ryken explains that, “In the ancient world, a father’s inheritance was only for his sons. By calling his children sons, therefore, God guaranteed that all his sons and daughters would be included in his will and testament.”⁹³ Thus, whether male or female, all those who receive adoption will receive the rights and privileges of a true son.

It is important to notice that this transformation in understanding has not completely occurred experientially for the Galatians. As it stands, the Galatian Christians, in their desire and perhaps in their practice, have turned once again to that which once enslaved them, namely the law. In essence, this plays itself out in their desire to accomplish their own salvation through circumcision and, most likely, in other areas of Christian experience. In essence, it is described that to turn back to the law or to add anything to the finished work of Christ is to experience life as a slave.

Romans 8:14-23

Within the heart of what Gordon D. Fee describes as, “the most influential book in Christian history, perhaps in the history of Western civilization,”⁹⁴ there lies one of the clearest explanations of the doctrine of adoption. Hendriksen writes that Paul’s main focus within his letter to the Roman believers was to give a clear presentation of the gospel, “that for every sinner, whether Jew or Gentile, there is salvation full and free through faith in Christ, apart from law works.”⁹⁵ Unlike his

⁹³ Philip G. Ryken, *Galatians*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 2005), 163.

⁹⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 317.

⁹⁵ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 29.

letter to the Galatians, which is a passionate defense of the gospel against agitators, Paul's letter to the Romans is much more calm and systematic.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.⁹⁶

Paul lays out many important elements of what adoption actually is. First, he mentions that the "Spirit" is the effectual cause of the Christian's adoption. Those who are led by the Spirit are those who can be sure of their adoption. Moo writes, "The result of this Spirit-dominated existence is being 'sons of God'; the one necessarily includes the other."⁹⁷ Continuing the flow of thought, Thomas Schreiner, professor of New Testament interpretation at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, states, "The Spirit that has been given to believers is a Spirit that liberates from the power of sin, and thus a new obedience is generated in the heart of believers."⁹⁸ The Christian is urged to perceive God as a Father who

⁹⁶ Romans 8:14-23.

⁹⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 499.

⁹⁸ Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 424.

offers freedom and protection rather than chains and retribution. Charles Hodge, former principal of Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey, explains, “The Holy Spirit, whom you have received, does not produce a slavish and anxious state of mind, such as those experience who are under the law, but he produces the filial feelings of affection, reverence, and confidence and enables us, out of the fulness of our hearts, to call God our Father.”⁹⁹ Many Christians, although legally freed to live unto God as their Father, experience life as slaves, thinking God is a task-master whose treatment of them is more akin to a slave owner. Paul urges the Christian to live according to the truth of this spirit of sonship rather than that of slavery. Paul then explains that the Spirit is the one who gives certainty to the truth of the believer’s sonship. R.C. Sproul, founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries in Sanford, Florida, expounds, “Our assurance is certainly not based on a careful analysis of our behavior. Our final assurance comes from the testimony of God the Holy Spirit, who bears witness with and through our spirits that we are children of God.”¹⁰⁰

Paul explains that the children of God have a future hope. Though this future hope is a sure and wonderful thing, Paul wastes no time in getting to the qualifier, which is that of suffering with Christ. Trevor Burke explains, “The way to the Son’s likeness and glory is via suffering and treading a similar path to the one Christ trod. The family marks of adopted sons [include] suffering in the present life with the

⁹⁹ Charles Hodge, *Romans*, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 241-242.

¹⁰⁰ R. C. Sproul, *Romans*, St. Andrews Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1009), 264.

prospect of glory to come.”¹⁰¹ Paul then describes this future hope (as an adopted son) as glory, which is to be revealed outwardly and inwardly. “The alternation between present and future adoption is best accounted for by Pauline eschatology in which the age to come has been inaugurated but not yet consummated.”¹⁰² Paul explains that the creation will receive the “freedom of glory.” All of creation has been forced to live within the rule of death and decay. The future glory will completely free creation from this bondage. Paul continues, though, by explaining that the children of God will also be revealed in glory - in other words, in the life to come. Thus, what it means to be an adopted child of God has yet to be fully seen or experienced.

Ephesians 1:3-6

The next time that Paul uses the metaphor of adoption is in the opening verses of his letter to the Ephesian church. Notice that this passage continues as one elongated sentence. John Stott, former rector of All Souls Church, London, describes the entire paragraph within which it is found as a “paeon of praise, a doxology, or indeed a ‘eulogy.’”¹⁰³ F.F. Bruce describes these opening verses as a *berakhah*.¹⁰⁴ “In a typical OT *berakhah* the name of God is followed by the relative pronoun and an

¹⁰¹ Trevor Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 148.

¹⁰² Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, 425.

¹⁰³ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 32.

¹⁰⁴ Examples: Gen. 14:20; 24:27; 1 Sam. 25:32; 2 Sam. 18:28; 1 Kings 1:48; 8:15; 8:56; 2 Chron. 2:12; Ps. 66:20; 68:19; 72:18.

adjective clause, setting forth the reasons for which God is to be blessed.”¹⁰⁵ It is within this context of adoration that the metaphor of adoption is found once more.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.¹⁰⁶

Each of the elements is related to the others. Speaking mainly to adoption, the origination of blessing is found in Jesus Christ. God alone is to be praised in the Christian’s adoption, for it is initiated and completed by him. His choosing is described as occurring before the creation of the world. Thus, Paul plainly reserves all credit for God alone.

Paul again speaks of a future glory that the child of God may anticipate. Again, there is a double blessing. “The heavenly places”¹⁰⁷ speak of a future realm in which the Christian will live, while “holy and blameless”¹⁰⁸ references a future glory within their being. Thus, there is an outward and inward future hope of glory.

The predestining will of God in the Christian’s adoption is experienced “in Christ”¹⁰⁹ and then is described as being accomplished “through Christ.”¹¹⁰ Paul is quite careful to retain Jesus Christ as the basis for the Christian’s understanding of

¹⁰⁵ Frederick F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 252.

¹⁰⁶ Eph. 1:3-6.

¹⁰⁷ Eph. 1:3.

¹⁰⁸ Eph. 1:4.

¹⁰⁹ Eph. 1:3.

¹¹⁰ Eph. 1:4.

their adoption. It is not through a man's own works or attractiveness that adoption is given, but rather as the result of Christ's work and attractiveness. "The expression 'in the Beloved' continues the notion that all of God's blessings come to us 'in Christ' (vv.3, 4; cf. 5). 'Beloved' marks out Christ as the supreme object of the Father's love."¹¹¹ United with him, the Christian, too, is to understand that they are given the title, "Beloved."

Father/Son Within Epistle of Unknown Authorship

Hebrews 12:5-11

Although the date and authorship of the book of Hebrews is unknown, it is generally held that the author is a second-generation believer.¹¹² Also, it seems to date somewhere in the late first century, after A.D. 50 and probably before 70, since there is no indication from within the letter of the destruction of the Jewish temple. The intent of the author was to encourage its readers from abandoning the gospel and one another. It is within this context that the father and son analogy is found.

And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "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? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but

¹¹¹ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 104.

¹¹² Heb. 2:3.

later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.¹¹³

The author's aim is to give relational and historical context to their suffering. Additionally, they are encouraged to view the work of God in their lives through the lens of their relationship with God as his children. By referencing Proverbs,¹¹⁴ the recipients are to recognize that the concept of God's discipline is a consistent element of God's care throughout the metanarrative. Frederick Bruce states that a "father would spend much care and patience on the upbringing of a true born son whom he hoped to make a worthy heir."¹¹⁵ They must not allow themselves to see God's actions as punitive. The punishment of their sin has been placed upon Christ at his death. The character in which God now acts towards them is that of a father instead of a judge.

William Lane, former dean of the School of Religion at Seattle Pacific University in Seattle, Washington, explains, "Discipline is education by correction. It is always a reflection of one's education, initially in the home."¹¹⁶ The author of Hebrews continues to describe discipline as a necessary result of God's fatherly love. Discipline should be viewed as proof of God's love towards his children. Peter O'Brien, senior research fellow in New Testament at Moore Theological College in Newtown, Australia, states that since God "is a loving Father who desires the best for

¹¹³ Heb. 12:5-11.

¹¹⁴ Prov. 3:11-12; 13:24.

¹¹⁵ Frederick. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 343.

¹¹⁶ William L. Lane, *Hebrews: A Call to Commitment* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1985), 162.

his people, his discipline is evidence of his love for and commitment to them.”¹¹⁷

Simon J. Kistemaker, professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida, explains this concept well in that, “Adversities are aids to bring us into a closer fellowship with God.”¹¹⁸ Thus, the author’s aim is to persuade these discouraged believers to consider their hardship as an act of God’s love rather than of his neglect or anger. As such, they are also to hold to a future hope, namely that God is refining them in righteousness.

Father/Son Within the Johannine Epistles

1 John 2:29-3:3

The Apostle John continues to use the imagery of father and son in his first epistle. It is noteworthy that in his encouragement to believers and defense of the gospel, he repeatedly describes the believer’s standing in new relationship with God as analogous to that of father and son. In each reference, there is found what could be called a “like father, like son” analysis in determining the true identity of an individual. Similar to how a child takes on the character and mannerisms of his father, so too the children of God take on the traits of their Father. Before the New Covenant, this “like father, like son” logic takes on the focus of things a son ought to do legally,¹¹⁹ while within the New Covenant it takes on the added tone of things a son

¹¹⁷ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 464.

¹¹⁸ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1984), 374.

¹¹⁹ Deut. 8:5; 14:1; Isa. 1:2-4; Hos. 11:1-4.

naturally does.¹²⁰ In each case there is a slightly distinct focus of this expression. The first reference lays the foundation of the “like father, like son” concept.

If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.¹²¹

Since God is righteous, those who are “born of him”¹²² will necessarily “practice righteousness.”¹²³ Robert W. Yarbrough, associate professor of New Testament and department chair at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, states that, “He is righteous and his followers know it, and they can therefore reasonably be expected to conduct themselves in keeping with his identity.”¹²⁴ Being born of God determines a new nature.¹²⁵ The character is thus transformed into the likeness of the Father. John then pauses to wonder at the great love of God towards his children. He gives credit to this great love as the cause of their being called “children of God.”¹²⁶

John then explains that the one born of God should expect to be treated by others, in so far as they take on the qualities and traits of their father, as Jesus was

¹²⁰ Gal. 4:4-9; Eph. 1:3-6; Rom. 8:12-23.

¹²¹ 1 John 2:29-3:3.

¹²² 1 John 2:29.

¹²³ 1 John 2:29.

¹²⁴ Robert W. Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 170.

¹²⁵ See also 2 Cor. 5:17.

¹²⁶ 1 John 3:1.

treated.¹²⁷ John then urges his audience to recognize that a future hope and glory awaits them beyond what can presently be seen. Their current existence is not where they should focus or place their trust. Instead John encourages them to look forward to what God has in store for them.

They are also encouraged to remain faithful to their local church, the family of God. Along with righteousness, the most glaring trait of God that is described is his love. As such, love is necessarily a central trait within the character of the Christian.

1 John 3:8-10

John then takes the “like father, like son” analogy into the realm of sin and righteousness. He takes this same logic and applies it to those who are children of the devil.

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.¹²⁸

Robert Peterson notes, “The apostle John divides humanity into two groups, the children of God and the children of the devil.”¹²⁹ Perhaps the Apostle John’s comments are rooted in the words of Jesus in John 8:44, “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires.”¹³⁰ In any event, John explains that those who make a practice of sinning are of the devil. This statement has complicated

¹²⁷ See especially John 1:10.

¹²⁸ 1 John 3:8-10.

¹²⁹ Robert Peterson, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children*, 33.

¹³⁰ John 8:44.

things for many scholars and laymen alike, for it is clear that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”¹³¹ One commentator responds to this dilemma through the assistance of the grammar and context used by John. David Allen, professor of preaching and dean of the school of theology at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, writes, “Notice how many times phrases such as ‘practice of sinning,’ ‘keep on sinning,’ and ‘practice righteousness’ occur here. The use of ‘practice’ and ‘keep on’ in the ESV translators clearly renders the present tense aspect in these verbs.”¹³² For the Christian, righteousness is to be understood as the general way of things, while sin is the exception. For the Christian, sin is present, but it is not normative. Notice again that “righteousness” is brought into direct relationship with “love.” This time “love” is not generic but given the specificity of “love for his brother.” As a result, the children of God are given direction in their “love.” They are called to love their fellow believers. They are called to love those who are their brothers.

1 John 4:7

John repeatedly relays Jesus’ command to love one another.¹³³ In the following text, he unites this command with the “like father, like son” analogy. In this instance, there is a positive leaning on this analogy. In other words, these are the types of things a father does, and those who are born of him will do them as well.

¹³¹ Rom. 3:23.

¹³² David Allen, *1-3 John: Fellowship in God’s Family*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2013), 146.

¹³³ John 13:34-35; 15:12-17; 1 John 3:11; 3:23; 4:11-12; 2 John 1:5.

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.”¹³⁴

It is clear from John’s use of the term “beloved” that the fellow children of God are the intended recipients of each of their love. The children of God are to love the children of God. John is modeling the command to love the brothers. The result for those who have been born of God is that they love each other and are committed to one another. I. Howard Marshall, professor of New Testament exegesis at the University of Aberdeen in Aberdeen, Scotland, teaches, “If love belongs to the divine sphere, it follows that anybody who shows love must belong to that sphere.”¹³⁵ The one born of God has a special purpose placed upon his life, within the lives of his fellow believers. They are his brothers in Christ and are to be loved by him.

1 John 4:19-5:4

In many ways, this final passage in 1 John summarizes the main concepts of the previous texts while developing the foundational understanding that faith in Christ plays throughout. As it pertains to the following text, Yarbrough explains, “The key to Christian identity, John has been insisting, is love. The road to love, he will now affirm, is paved with faith.”¹³⁶ The main ideas that John has developed are righteousness, forsaking the practice of wickedness, a future hope, and a commitment to love the brothers in Christ. All of these can be summarized within the all-encompassing theme of love.

¹³⁴ 1 John 4:7.

¹³⁵ I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 211.

¹³⁶ Robert W. Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, 269.

We love because he first loved us. [...] Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith.¹³⁷

John's declaration is a universal one of natural cause and effect. Yarbrough teaches, "What John wishes to stress is that to believe is to have been acted upon in a dynamic, transformative way by God."¹³⁸ Within Johannine theology, faith is the natural and necessary result of rebirth, not the cause of it. John continues to describe the results of being born of God. They include a love of the Father, a love for his children and obedience to his commands. He also claims that a love for God encompasses a love for his children and obedience to his commands. The child of God cannot have any one of the three without the others. The juxtaposition of love of God and obedience to his commandments finds its origin throughout the Old Testament¹³⁹ and is developed by John elsewhere.¹⁴⁰

John concludes his explanation by stressing that believers are given freedom in their rebirth rather than a heavy burden. The gift of God is not one of burden, but one of victory and freedom from slavery. To be born of God is to receive redemption from the broken state of the world. The brokenness in which believers once lived is no longer the overwhelming victor in their lives. The children of God are no longer overcome by the world, but overcome the world and have a calling upon their lives to

¹³⁷ 1 John 4:19-5:4.

¹³⁸ Robert W. Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, 269.

¹³⁹ Deut. 5:10; 6:2,5; 7:9; 10:12; 11:1; 11:13; 11:22; Josh. 22:5; 23:6, 11; Neh. 1:5; Dan. 9:4.

¹⁴⁰ John 14:15; 14:21; 15:10; 1 John 2:3-4; 3:24; 2 John 1:6.

play a proactive role in partnering with God in this redemption victory. John clearly states that believers do this through their faith, which has been shown to be the result of their rebirth and the estuary for the character traits and “mannerisms” that they inherit as God’s children, which has been listed above and can be summarized in love.

Father/Son Within the Revelation of John

Revelation 21:3-7

The next time John returns to the fatherhood of God is within the concluding paragraphs of the book of Revelation. Within this text there is imagery depicting the future hope of the child of God. John paints a picture of God as a Father who will intimately care for his children and rescue them from their pain.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.”¹⁴¹

The shadow of this future promise of God dwelling with his people is found in the tabernacle of the Old Testament.¹⁴² John brings the fulfillment of this promise to light. There will come a day when God will be fully-present in complete and absolute relationship with his children, just as he promised in the Old Testament. There, God

¹⁴¹ Rev. 21:3-7.

¹⁴² Exod. 29:45.

spoke of making his dwelling among them¹⁴³ and of him being God to his people and his people being his.¹⁴⁴ William Barclay, former professor of divinity and biblical criticism at the University of Glasgow in Glasgow, Scotland, writes, “The highest promise of all is intimate fellowship with God, in which we can say: ‘I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine’ (Song of Solomon 6:3)”¹⁴⁵ Unlike what was the case with the tabernacle, John has God’s very presence in view. His near presence is emphatic as it is expressed in three separate ways within verse three.

John builds upon God’s presence by introducing God’s absolute care. Leon Morris, former principal of Ridley College in Saint Catharines, Ontario, expresses that “none less than God will be the consoler of his people.”¹⁴⁶ God knows that his children are in distress from the outstanding brokenness remaining in this world. John’s revelation proclaims an overarching theme within the biblical narrative in which God’s actions and words are aimed always at comforting his children. It is also noteworthy that this is the first time that God speaks in the book of Revelation and therefore should be viewed as extremely important. Just as a father is present with his children, God is present. He is pictured as comforting his children by declaring that he is “making all things new.”¹⁴⁷ Those who long for redemption will find their

¹⁴³ Lev. 26:11-12; Ezek. 37:27.

¹⁴⁴ Exod. 6:7; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:1, 33; 32:38; Ezek. 11:20; 36:28; 37:23; 37:27; Zech. 8:8; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8:10.

¹⁴⁵ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John: Volume Two*, The Daily Study Bible Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976), 229.

¹⁴⁶ Leon Morris, *Revelation*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 238.

¹⁴⁷ Rev. 21:5.

deepest longing filled. The “spring of the water of life”¹⁴⁸ is a reference again to their intimate belonging in relationship with God. His declaration of being the “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end,”¹⁴⁹ refers to him as more than merely the starting point and the ending point in time. More than this, he is the source and the goal of all things. The children of God will have their longing filled in relationship with God, who has made himself their Father.

Extra-Biblical Literature

The remaining areas of literature explore the five most notable emphases within scripture as they are presented in relationship with the doctrine of adoption. These five areas of literature focus on belonging of the children of God, new identity of the children of God, unity within the family of God, freedom of the children of God, and future hope for the children of God. Perhaps a broad brush-stroke of the developing landscape of this doctrine within the twentieth and twenty-first centuries would give context to the task at hand. A strong case has been made that relatively little attention was given to the doctrine of adoption prior to the twentieth century. J.I. Packer, former professor of systematic and historical theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, who declares that the doctrine of adoption is, “the climax of the Bible,”¹⁵⁰ only devotes one chapter to the topic. Packer contends, “It is a strange fact that the truth of adoption has been little regarded in Christian history.”¹⁵¹ It should be noted that J.I. Packer’s affinity for the doctrine of adoption

¹⁴⁸ Rev. 21:6.

¹⁴⁹ See also Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12; Rev. 1:8; 1:17; 4:8; 22:13.

¹⁵⁰ James I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 202.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 228.

was much the result of a series of sermons on 1 John given by Martyn Lloyd-Jones at the Westminster Chapel in the early twentieth century.¹⁵² Martyn Lloyd-Jones' theology was greatly impacted by the teaching of the Puritans. Thus, even if published work on the subject is presently scarce, the historical emphasis is undoubtedly present. Additionally, Joel Beeke, president and professor of systematic theology and homiletics at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, makes a solid case on behalf of the Puritans that the doctrine of adoption was indeed a stable element within their writing and teachings.¹⁵³

Packer's single chapter seems to be a watershed moment. A steady stream of development and focus soon came upon the doctrine of adoption and has only continued to grow. Brennan Manning's *The Wisdom of Accepted Tenderness: Going Deeper into the Abba Experience* appeared in the late 1970s, followed by Sinclair Ferguson's *Children of the Living God* and a number of exhaustive PhD theses¹⁵⁴ focusing specifically on Paul's metaphor are published in the 1980s. Then, in the 1990s, Jack Miller's *Sonship discipleship curriculum* and what has been titled the "Sonship Movement" became increasingly popular and a topic of much debate.¹⁵⁵ Noteworthy among the books published in the 1990s are Rose Marie Miller's *From*

¹⁵² Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in Christ: Studies in 1 John* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002).

¹⁵³ Joel Beeke, *Heirs with Christ: The Puritans on Adoption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008).

¹⁵⁴ Allen Mawhinney, "Huiiothesia in the Pauline Epistles: Its Background, Use and Implications" (Ph. D diss., Baylor University, 1982), and Wanamaker, *The Son and the sons of God: A Study in the Elements of Paul's Christological and Soteriological Thought* (PhD thesis, University of Durham, 1980).

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Jay Adams, *Biblical Sonship: An Evaluation of the Sonship Discipleship Course* (Woodruff, SC: Timeless Texts, 1999).

Fear to Freedom: Living as Sons & Daughters of God, as well as Henri Nouwen's *The Return of the Prodigal Son: a Meditation on Fathers, Brothers, and Sons*.

After the turn of the twenty-first century, the list of works on the subject matter grew quickly. Within the first decade, Robert Peterson, Tim Keller, Christopher Wright, Jack Frost, and Trevor Burke all produced noteworthy research on the doctrine of adoption. The list has continued to swell in the current decade with Trevor Burke, John Piper, Dan Cruver, and many others adding to the list.

Belonging for the Children of God

The Estranged Brought Near

The story of the Bible begins simply in a garden,¹⁵⁶ or a home where Adam and Eve enjoyed belonging within intimate relationship with God within an intimate setting. They belonged there with God, for that was the reason why they were created. Soon after the opening of the story, Adam and Eve lose their relational belonging with God and their place in his creation as a result of their own actions.¹⁵⁷ Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, associate professor of pastoral theology and Christian formation at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Illinois, explains that their, “intimate relationship is broken [...] and humanity is orphaned into the world. This severing of the first and most intimate of all relationships results in such wounding that the loss permeates all of life.”¹⁵⁸ Ever since that moment, humanity has, in essence, become an orphan and slave in every sense of the word. Its people

¹⁵⁶ Gen. 1-2.

¹⁵⁷ Gen. 3.

¹⁵⁸ Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, *The Spirit of Adoption: At Home in God's Family* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 93.

have become fatherless and homeless. They have become estranged in every way. In his book *Sons and Daughters: Spiritual Orphans Finding Our Way Home*, Brady Boyd, senior pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado, describes the pain of this loss, “If you were to put your ear to the ground of modern culture today, you would hear the agonized cries of an orphan heart: Doesn’t anybody notice me? See me? Value me? Want me? Is there anywhere for me to belong?”¹⁵⁹ Therefore, if there is one thing that the literature emphasizes most, it is that humanity has a deep longing to belong.

The orphan heart has grown accustomed to estrangement. The orphan’s norm is a life void of love, protection, and care. Within the context of the fallen world, the orphan is alone and yearns for what has been lost. The gospel fulfills this longing, specifically within the doctrine of adoption. The apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians that, “In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”¹⁶⁰ Thus, humanity finds belonging and is brought into an intimate relationship with God the Father through the doctrine of adoption. The doctrine of adoption is the answer to the most fundamental desires of humanity.

Belonging Within God’s Love

The great French prose artist, Blaise Pascal states that, “there was once in man a true happiness of which there now remain to him on the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings [but the] infinite abyss can only

¹⁵⁹ Brady Boyd, *Sons and Daughters: Spiritual Orphans Finding Our Way Home* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2012), 27.

¹⁶⁰ Eph. 2:13.

be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself.”¹⁶¹ Since his writing, this concept was simply described as a God-shaped vacuum in the hearts of all men. The spiritual orphan must cope with this vacuum in a pursuit to fill the void. The orphan grows accustomed to a warped understanding of love from the world. Henri Nouwen, former professor at University of Notre Dame, Yale Divinity School and Harvard Divinity School, explains the affects this has on humanity, “The world’s love is and always will be conditional. As long as I keep looking for my true self in the world of conditional love, I will remain ‘hooked’ to the world - trying, failing, and trying again. It is a world that fosters addictions because what it offers cannot satisfy the deepest craving of my heart.”¹⁶² Thus, there is nothing that can fill the longing to belong other than receiving what has been lost – namely, relationship within the unconditional love of God.

Belonging, for the estranged orphan, is one of the results of salvation. In his book *Fields of the Fatherless*, Tom Davis, president of Children’s HopeChest in Colorado Springs, Colorado, notes that there is an “‘orphan spirit’ inside each of us that tells us we’re alone, unworthy, or unloved [and] is healed by the presence of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁶³ In other words, at the core of all human longings is the desire to belong in loving relationship with God. Davis explains that the “greatest need each of us has [is] to know our true Father. Knowing Him brings definition, fulfillment, and

¹⁶¹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensees* (New York, NY: Penguin Classics, 1995), 45.

¹⁶² Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Meditation on Fathers, Brothers, and Sons* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 42.

¹⁶³ Tom Davis, *Fields of the Fatherless: Discover the Joy of Compassionate Living* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008), 80.

completion to our lives.”¹⁶⁴ In short, the purpose of humanity is enjoyed within relationship with God.

For an orphan, salvation may make conceptual sense, but the relational reality of God’s unmerited love is much more difficult to grasp. The truth is that in adoption God calls the one who was an outsider, “beloved children.”¹⁶⁵ Brady Boyd says, “Most people I meet who are plagued by an orphan spirit believe that Jesus Christ can save them; they just can’t seem to fathom how he enjoys them too.”¹⁶⁶ Since love has always been conditioned upon merit for an orphan, the free gift of God’s love is almost unthinkable. Robert Peterson shares a friend’s explanation of the wonder of adoption in the following illustration.

It reminds me of grade school, when we would choose sides to play games. Often, I was picked toward the end because I wasn’t good at sports. I have a vivid memory of once being one of the very first drafts. I still remember the feelings of being somewhere that I didn’t deserve to be. In the case of the playground, it was ignorance on the chooser’s part. With God, he knows full well whom he is choosing, yet he chose me anyway.¹⁶⁷

Thus, the literature shows that the orphan-slave becomes part of a family and is no longer estranged from God and others. In his chapter *Adoption: The Heart of the Gospel*, John Piper, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, expounds on the implications of God’s love to the estranged. In being brought near, “God does not leave us as aliens when he adopts us. He does not leave us without feelings of acceptance and love. Rather, he pours his Spirit into our hearts to give us

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 125.

¹⁶⁵ Eph. 5:1.

¹⁶⁶ Brady Boyd, *Sons and Daughters: Spiritual Orphans Finding Our Way Home*, 30.

¹⁶⁷ Robert Peterson, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children*, 48.

the experience of being embraced in the family.”¹⁶⁸ The Christian is united within the family of God. More specifically, believers are brought near to Christ (the older brother) and to one another (the church).

Soteriology/Ordo Salutis

Over the years, the doctrine of adoption and its relationship with the ordo salutis¹⁶⁹ has been a point of difference of opinion for the literature. Allen Mawhinney, associate professor of New Testament and academic dean at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida, synthesizes the literature and their differences in the following sequences.¹⁷⁰

Murray - Regeneration, Faith, Justification, Adoption, Sanctification, Glorification¹⁷¹

Berkhof - Regeneration, Faith, Justification/Adoption, Sanctification, Glorification¹⁷²

Kuyper - Regeneration/Adoption, Faith, Justification, Sanctification, Glorification

Buswell - Regeneration, Faith, Justification, Sanctification, Adoption/Glorification¹⁷³

Allen Mawhinney continues, “These are not, however the only possibilities.

[Exegetically as well as] the Pauline use of the metaphor make possible another

¹⁶⁸ John Piper, “Adoption: The Heart of the Gospel,” in *Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father*, ed. Dan Cruver (Adelphi, MD: Cruciform Press, 2011), 99.

¹⁶⁹ Latin - Order of Salvation.

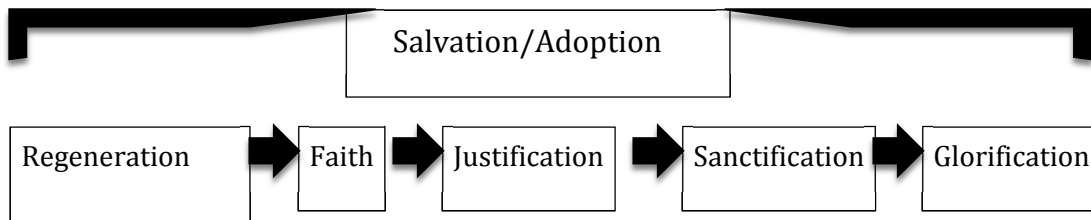
¹⁷⁰ Cf. Allen Mawhinney, “Huiiothesia in the Pauline Epistles: Its Background, Use and Implications” (Ph. D diss., Baylor University, 1982), 250.

¹⁷¹ Cf. John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955), 79-182.

¹⁷² Cf. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 415-554.

¹⁷³ Cf. James Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion: Volume Two: Soteriology and Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Crossway Books, 2000), 168-213.

understanding of these relationships. This option may be graphically represented in this fashion.”¹⁷⁴



The doctrine of adoption is developed within this view as the overarching theme of salvation. Its thrust is seen throughout each phase of salvation. Another opinion is expressed by Robert Peterson, who explains that there are many ways that God reveals salvation within scripture, adoption being one of these many descriptions. He shares, “Adoption is another way of talking about salvation, this time using a family image.”¹⁷⁵ He develops this idea by contrasting the pictures of salvation with the needs that each image meets. Adoption is thus explained as another way of looking at salvation through the lens of familial need for relationship with God as Father. Joel Beeke, on the other hand, separates the stages and places adoption within them. He comes to this conclusion by contrasting his understanding of adoption with that of regeneration. He argues that adoption is a separate stage from regeneration. For Beeke, “Adoption deals with our status. [...] Regeneration, then,

¹⁷⁴ Allen Mawhinney, “Huiiothesia in the Pauline Epistles: Its Background, Use and Implications,” 250.

¹⁷⁵ Robert Peterson, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children*, 28-29.

deals with our nature.”¹⁷⁶ Thus, there have been and continue to be many differing opinions as to the doctrine of adoption’s relationship to the *ordo-salutis*.

New Identity for the Children of God

Another important element that the literature develops is that of identity. In her book *How to Really Love God as Your Father: Growing Your Most Important Relationship*, Deborah Newman explains, “The most remarkable result of coming to know God as ‘Abba-Daddy’ in my life is that I have begun to grasp who I really am.”¹⁷⁷ The literature often shows that a dramatic transformation occurs within the very essence of a person during their adoption. More than simply stating a change in status, adoption encompasses a change in all aspects of the person, including their understanding of themselves and their place and purpose in the world. Trevor Burke gives helpful insight to this concept of new identity by contextualizing the concept within the timeframe of Paul’s use of the metaphor.

One’s identity in antiquity as inextricably linked to one’s parents in general and the father in particular: “what you had done” (i.e. achieved honour) was less important in the ancient world than “the one to whom you belong” (i.e., ascribed honour) and there is no greater honour than being a child of God in this most honorable of all households. [...] Thus, if you are a Christian, your identity is not a plumber, bricklayer, nurse, clerk or doctor (that’s what you do), but is first and foremost a child of God, namely who you are.¹⁷⁸

The emphasis of identity is placed upon parentage rather than accomplishment. The literature delves deeply into this concept, linking one’s

¹⁷⁶ Joel Beeke, “Transforming Power and Comfort: The Puritans on Adoption,” in *The Faith Once Delivered: Essays in Honor of Dr. Wayne R. Spear*, ed. Anthony T. Selvaggio (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 70.

¹⁷⁷ Deborah Newman, *How to Really Love God as Your Father: Growing Your Most Important Relationship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 18.

¹⁷⁸ Trevor Burke, *The Message of Sonship*, 213.

emphasis on accomplishment to an orphan spirit and an emphasis on spiritual parentage to the spirit of adoption. In his book *Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father*, Dan Cruver, director of Together for Adoption, writes, “If I am not careful, I can find my primary identity in who I am (my roles) and in what I do (my responsibilities) [...] As a Christian, my primary sense of identity, my controlling sense of identity, is to be found in who Jesus is and who I am in relationship to him.”¹⁷⁹ Similarly, Sinclair Ferguson, professor of systematic theology at Redeemer Seminary in Dallas, Texas, writes, “Our self-image, if it is to be biblical, will begin just here. God is my Father (the Christian’s self-image always begins with the knowledge of God and who he is!)”¹⁸⁰ Thus, the literature claims that one of God’s intentions in adoption is a reworking of his children’s sense of identity. It is to be determined by whose they are rather than what they do.

The literature also indicates that although an identity transformation is immediate and final, the experience and appreciation of it may be gradual and ongoing. Peter Widdicombe, associate professor in the department of religious studies at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, writes that, “We come to know God as Father through a step-by-step progression to the status of adopted sons and thus to a share in the eternal relationship of the Father and the Son.”¹⁸¹ This step-by-step process is regularly described as occurring at the behest of God the Father and through the ongoing working of the Holy Spirit within the life of the believer. Along

¹⁷⁹ Dan Cruver, “Adoption and Our Union With Christ,” in *Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father*, ed. Dan Cruver (Adelphi, MD: Cruciform Press, 2011), 49.

¹⁸⁰ Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*. (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 2.

¹⁸¹ Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 93.

these lines, Robert Peterson explains, “The Spirit assures all Christians deep within their hearts that God loves them. He intimately fits his witness to their individual personalities, life stories, circumstances, etc., that God is their Father and they are his children.”¹⁸² Thus the literature states that the Spirit affords actual events and an assurance deep within the heart that one’s adoption is true.

Jack Frost gives especially insightful points concerning experiencing the transition from orphan to adopted son. In his book, *Spiritual Slavery to Spiritual Sonship: Your Destiny Awaits*, he describes many of the effects of adoption on an individual. He contrasts before and after images that are helpful to the Christian in self-diagnoses as it pertains to step-by-step process. For instance:

Orphans generally possess a low self-image and an attitude of self-rejection, which results from comparing themselves to others and feeling that they come out on the short end of the stick. Others seem more blessed. Others seem more loved. Others seem to get all the breaks. Sons feel positive and affirmed because they know how valuable and precious they are to their Father. No matter what they do or how many times they mess up, they know that Father loves them anyway.¹⁸³

Thus, he claims that the orphan spirit is characterized by self-pity and selfish ambition. The orphan desires to attain what others seem to have. On the other hand, the child of God is one whose identity is defined by what God says and feels about them, not by how they speak and feel about themselves.

¹⁸² Robert Peterson, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children*, 136.

¹⁸³ Jack Frost, *Spiritual Slavery to Spiritual Sonship: Your Destiny Awaits You* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2006), 124.

Unity Within the Family of God

Unity With Christ by the Work of the Holy Spirit

Although literature which focuses on the doctrine of adoption does delve into union with Christ, one must look elsewhere to find a truly exhaustive study on the topic. What can be stated, though, is that the literature states that adoption is the result of union with Christ and that this union is solely a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. The literature especially points to John 3:1-7, Galatians 4:4-9, and Romans 8:14-23 to show the Holy Spirit's role in the initiating work of adoption. Peterson shows the persuasive number of times Paul uses the prepositional phrases, "in Christ" or "in him," as well as the numerous times that, "Paul affixes a preposition meaning 'with' to verbs that describe Christ's redemptive deeds."¹⁸⁴ Examples of this can be found throughout Paul's letters.¹⁸⁵ Thus, the child of God is described as being united to Christ in a very mysterious yet real manner.

Additionally, before these passages were even written by Paul, Jesus prayed to his Father regarding the believer's unity with him and with one another in the high priestly prayer "The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."¹⁸⁶ Thus, it was the prayer of Jesus that his disciples would be united with him, and therefore united with the Father and one another.

¹⁸⁴ Robert Peterson, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children*, 65.

¹⁸⁵ Rom. 6:4, 8; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 2:20; 3:1, 3.

¹⁸⁶ John 17:22-23.

Robert Peterson takes the subject a step farther when he states, “The eternal Son’s adoption as the incarnate Son becomes ours when the Holy Spirit joins us to Christ. All of the blessings of salvation, including adoption, are ours when the Spirit unites us to Christ, the Son of God and our Brother.”¹⁸⁷ This unity with Christ therefore is the cause for adoption and each blessing that comes with it. Along with an intimate belonging within relationship with the Father, and a redefined understanding of self-identity and self-worth, the children of God find that they are united to each other.

Unity Within the Church

Along with the scripture texts that have been reviewed already, there are numerous passages that speak to the adoptive blessing of the unity of God’s children.¹⁸⁸ The literature describes that unity is a central purpose of God for his family. Evert Blekkink, former professor emeritus of the Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, simply states, “Life in the Father’s House is one of fellowship.”¹⁸⁹ As God’s child, Christians are brought near to him and to one another. The first necessarily includes the second. Trevor Burke expounds on this concept in his book entitled *The Message of Sonship*: “The theme of sonship has important ecclesial ramifications because there is no such thing as isolated children or

¹⁸⁷ Robert Peterson, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children*, 68.

¹⁸⁸ Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Gal. 3:28.

¹⁸⁹ Evert Blekkink, *The Fatherhood of God, Considered From Six Inter-Related Standpoints* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1942), 116.

independent offspring in God's household. We belong to each other because we first belong to God through Christ."¹⁹⁰

The literature also shows that God intends the unity of fellowship for the good of his children. The members of the family of God are able to exist as such only as they are unified with the rest of the family. In his book *Child of a King: What Joining God's Family Really Means*, Mark Johnston, pastor of Grove Chapel, London, shares a helpful illustration:

If you take a single piece of coal out of a brightly burning fire and place it on the hearth by itself, it is not long before it starts to grow cold and becomes but a dully glowing ember on the hearth, devoid of warmth and usefulness. Take a Christian out of regular fellowship with other Christians and it is not long before his spiritual vitality and usefulness are virtually extinct. Quite simply, we need each other.¹⁹¹

Since humanity is meant to be in relationship with one another in the family of God, to escape from the community of believers is to reject the very foundation of the familial relationship with the Father. To do this is to return to an orphan mentality of estrangement.

One area that the literature often touches on is that of forgiveness. In order to be united in love, the children of God must often walk through the challenging act of forgiving others. Rose Marie Miller, consultant to World Harvest Mission in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, gives an especially helpful explanation in her book, *From Fear to Freedom: Living as Sons and Daughter of God*:

The normal Christian life is the life of grace expressing itself in forgiveness. Even when our practice is subnormal, we must never accept an unforgiving

¹⁹⁰ Trevor Burke, *The Message of Sonship*, 32.

¹⁹¹ Mark Johnston, *Child of a King: What Joining God's Family Really Means* (Fearn, Scotland, UK: Christian Focus, 1997), 152.

lifestyle as normal. The Father wishes for us to see the beauty of a life of forgiveness - of being forgiven by the Father and of ongoing forgiveness of others.¹⁹²

Through forgiveness, the children of God express love for one another in a manner that is reminiscent of God's acts of love towards them.¹⁹³ In essence, Henri Nouwen explains, "Just as the Father gives his very self to his children, so must I give my very self to my brothers and sisters."¹⁹⁴ In forgiveness, Christians sacrifice themselves for the sake of others because of the unconditional love that overflows from the Father, into and through him, into the other. Thomas Merton, a former Roman Catholic monk of the Abbey of Gethsemani near Bardstown, Kentucky, and author of over sixty books, explains this process well, "I must be moved not only by human sympathy but by that divine sympathy which is revealed to us in Jesus and which enriches our own lives by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our hearts."¹⁹⁵ Therefore, an individual's unity with Jesus resulting from his sacrifice causes sacrifice of self for the sake of unity with others. In this, the Spirit continues to unite the body of believers in forgiveness.

In addition to believers' need for one another, the literature shows that the world needs to see the unity of God's family. Jesus instructed his disciples of its importance, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."¹⁹⁶ Thus he states that the unity between believers is also a blessing

¹⁹² Rose M. Miller, *From Fear to Freedom: Living as Sons and Daughters of God* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 1994), 84.

¹⁹³ 1 John 4:19-21.

¹⁹⁴ Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Meditation on Fathers, Brothers, and Sons*, 131.

¹⁹⁵ Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2002), 7.

¹⁹⁶ John 13:35.

to the watching world. Trevor Burke explains, “If we were to truly grasp the importance of loving God as our Father as well as loving one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, what a powerful signal this would send to an unbelieving world.”¹⁹⁷ Thus, the literature proposes that the unity of the children of God is for their own good, and it becomes a message of hope to a hurting and broken world in need of restoration.

Freedom for the Children of God

Freedom From Fear and Slavery

Paul explains that the spirit of adoption is one of freedom and hope rather than slavery and fear.¹⁹⁸ Much of the literature develops the shift that occurs in the heart of an individual as they move from a heart of slavery and fear to that of adoption as sons. Examples include works by Jack Frost,¹⁹⁹ Rose Miller,²⁰⁰ and Timothy Keller²⁰¹ who have all written extensively on this concept. In his book *Spiritual Slavery to Spiritual Sonship: Your Destiny Awaits You*, Jack Frost, founder of Shiloh Place Ministries in North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, creates a helpful contrast:

We either live our life as if we have a home, or we live our life as if we don’t have a home. We either live our life feeling safe, secure and at rest in Father’s heart, experiencing His love and giving it away, or we live our life with apprehension and uncertainty, struggling constantly with the fear of trusting,

¹⁹⁷ Trevor Burke, *The Message of Sonship*, 222.

¹⁹⁸ Rom. 8:15.

¹⁹⁹ Jack Frost, *Spiritual Slavery to Spiritual Sonship: Your Destiny Awaits You*.

²⁰⁰ Rose M. Miller, *From Fear to Freedom: Living as Sons and Daughters of God* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 1994).

²⁰¹ Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (New York: Penguin Group, 2008).

the fear of rejection, and the fear of opening up our heart to love—the three fears common to all people.²⁰²

Regarding slavery, Rose Miller explains, “To choose to follow your own will rather than God’s is a terrible freedom which is really slavery to your own desires.”²⁰³ Thus, the literature defines individuals who are estranged from God as people who are slaves to themselves. Personal pursuits and accomplishments, in light of the doctrine of adoption, are viewed by the literature as a distortion of one’s belonging and purpose. Self-fulfilling pursuits and accomplishments are the result of an estranged individual who, like a true orphan, has had to take care of themselves. For instance, in his book *Fathered by God: Learning What Your Dad Could Never Teach You*, John Eldredge describes this type of individual as a “self-made man.” He explains that the term “...is usually spoken with a sense of admiration, but really it should be said in the same tones we might use of the dearly departed, or of a man who recently lost an arm - with sadness and regret. What the term really means is ‘an orphaned man who figured out how to master some part of life on his own.’”²⁰⁴

In addition, the literature describes personal pursuits and accomplishments as tools that are used by the orphan spirit as a mask to hide the true self from others and even deceive themselves. The orphan spirit’s identity is found in what they do rather than whose they really are. World Harvest Mission’s *Sonships* small group

²⁰² Jack Frost, *Spiritual Slavery to Spiritual Sonship: Your Destiny Awaits You*, 23.

²⁰³ Rose M. Miller, *From Fear to Freedom: Living as Sons & Daughters of God*, Rose M. Miller, (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 1994) Loc. 1827-1828, Kindle.

²⁰⁴ John Eldredge, *Fathered by God: Learning What Your Dad Could Never Teach You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2009), 9.

curriculum²⁰⁵ develops this concept at length. It explains that the orphan spirit even looks at God's law as an opportunity to prove oneself worthy. "We abuse law by turning it into our gospel, by making law our good news instead of what Christ has done for us."²⁰⁶ The individual is freed from the fear and slavery of caring for oneself by placing trust in the finished work of Christ. As a result, the child of God finds freedom and hope in a dependence upon unity with Christ. Tim Keller states, "It is only when you see the desire to be your own Savior and Lord - lying beneath both your sins and your moral goodness - that you are on the verge of understanding the gospel and becoming a Christian indeed. When you realize that the antidote to being bad is not just being good, you are on the brink."²⁰⁷ Thus, unity with Christ, rather than hoping in one's self, is the answer to fear and slavery. In his book *The Father You've Always Wanted: How God Heals Your Father Wounds*, Ed McGlasson, founding pastor of Stadium Vineyard in Anaheim, California, says, "When our identity comes from God, we are set free from the limitations of performing for earthbound crowds. When we lay aside the desire to make a name for ourselves, we start to trust the Father to name us, which sets us free to spend our lives loving the Father we have always wanted."²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Jack Miller, *Sonship* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2002); Robert H. Thune and Will Walker, *The Gospel-Centered Life* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2011); and *The Gospel-Centered Community* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2013); World Harvest Mission, *Gospel: Growth*; *Gospel: Identity*; and *Gospel: Love* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2012).

²⁰⁶ Jack Miller, *Sonship* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2002), 57.

²⁰⁷ Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith*, 78.

²⁰⁸ Ed McGlasson, *The Father You've Always Wanted: How God Heals Your Father Wounds* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 145.

Scotty Smith, founding pastor of Christ Community Church in Franklin, Tennessee and adjunct professor at Covenant Theological Seminary in Saint Louis, Missouri, describes how the transition from the spirit of slavery to the spirit of adoption impacts the way people view God. He claims, “As we grow in grace, we emotionally transition from fearing God as a judge to surrendering to him as a loving Father.”²⁰⁹ Since God is the perfect Father, his children receive freedom within their relationship with God as their Father. Henri Nouwen explains, “The Father dresses his son with the signs of freedom, the freedom of the children of God. He does not want any of them to be hired servants or slaves.”²¹⁰ The literature continues beyond the thing from which the believer is freed. It also takes great care in expounding upon what the child of God has been freed to accomplish.

Freedom to Be Like the Father in Character & Mission

In the realm of earthly families, Mark Johnston claims, “It is quite simply the desire of a child to be like his or her father. In our natural homes, where fathers have been what they ought to have been, the children have grown up wanting to emulate their father.”²¹¹ In similar fashion, having God as Father leads an individual to aspire to be like him. One area of liberty that the literature focuses on is the freedom to be like the Father in character. In his book titled *Children of the Living God*, Sinclair Ferguson says, “If we wish to understand what man was intended to be, we need to think of him as a son of God. If, in turn, we ask what it means to be a son of God, the

²⁰⁹ Scotty Smith, “The Freedom of Adoption,” in *Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father*, ed. Dan Cruver (Adelphi, MD: Cruciform Press, 2011), 74.

²¹⁰ Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Meditation on Fathers, Brothers, and Sons*, 111-112.

²¹¹ Mark G. Johnston, *Child of a King: What Joining God’s Family Really Means*, 138.

answer must be found in terms of being God's image and likeness."²¹² Scripture repeatedly expresses God's desire for his people to be like him in holiness. Leviticus alone has the following statement five times, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."²¹³ Also, in the 1 John passages described earlier, each describe how God's children are to be like him.²¹⁴ One passage in particular is quite clear about God's intention to transform his people into his likeness in holiness: "No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God."²¹⁵

Commenting on these passages, Trevor Burke states, "Just as children share certain characteristics or features of their biological parents so it is in the spiritual realm; the reason for this John tells us is that believers have been born of God."²¹⁶ Sherrie Eldridge, a noted author on adoption, claims that for every adopted child, there are "biological differences in every adoptee that need to be acknowledged."²¹⁷ This is not quite the case for the adopted child of God. Unlike physical adoption, the child of God is being transformed into the "likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."²¹⁸ The future hope of a complete transformation is a certainty for the child of God.

²¹² Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*, 6-7.

²¹³ Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7, 26; 1 Pet. 1:16.

²¹⁴ 1 John 2:29-3:3; 3:8-10; 4:7.

²¹⁵ 1 John 3:9.

²¹⁶ Trevor Burke, *The Message of Sonship*, 208-209.

²¹⁷ Sherrie Eldridge, *Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew* (McHenry, IL: Delta, 1999), 146.

²¹⁸ Eph. 4:22.

Another area of liberty that much of the literature focuses on is that of the freedom to be like the Father in mission. The expression of God's love is also found in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Thus, to be like the Father in action is to be like the son in mission. Willem Visser 't Hooft, the first secretary general of the World Council of Churches, states, "To Jesus, sonship meant not power but obedience and his life among men was an overwhelming demonstration of freely accepted humiliation."²¹⁹ Thus, to take on the mission of the Father is to be relieved of one's own selfish pursuits and passions, as Jesus was in his united mission with the Father. It is one of servitude to the Father rather than the self. Deborah Newman shares, "One way you can spot someone who knows they are a dearly loved child of God is whether they do the same things God does. When you feel dearly loved by God, you want to be like him!"²²⁰ Thus, the literature claims that when one appreciates God's care for his children, it necessarily leads to a similarity to him in passion and action. Jack Frost contrasts the actions of the orphan with that of a son:

Orphans are fired by spiritual ambition. [...] With sons there is no proving, no striving after position, power, or prestige. Instead, they are content simply to experience daily their Father's unconditional love and acceptance and then be sent as a representative of His love to family and others. Intimacy precedes fruitfulness.²²¹

The children of God become more interested in intimacy with the Father than in personal pursuits and accomplishments. As this happens, the fruit of their lives necessarily show this change. Referencing this transformation in his book *God*

²¹⁹ W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *The Fatherhood of God in an Age of Emancipation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 124.

²²⁰ Deborah Newman, *How to Really Love God as Your Father: Growing Your Most Important Relationship*, 122.

²²¹ Jack Frost, *Spiritual Slavery to Spiritual Sonship: Your Destiny Awaits You*, 129.

Distorted: How Your Earthly Father Affects Your Perception of God and Why It Matters, John Bishop explains, “Sons and daughters see God as a loving Father and live according to His law as a response of love.”²²² In like fashion, Henri Nouwen explains, “The challenge now, yes the call, is to become the Father myself [...] The closer I come to home the clearer becomes the realization that there is a call beyond the call to return. It is the call to become the Father who welcomes home and calls for celebration.”²²³ Thus, becoming like the Father is to be unconditional with one’s love and a heart that welcomes others into belonging through the message of the gospel.

Future Hope for the Children of God

Suffering/Discipline Leading to Holiness

In his letter to the Romans, Paul states that suffering is a sign that an individual has been adopted by God.²²⁴ In keeping with this thought, a number of authors take great care in their encouragement along the same lines. Trevor Burke,²²⁵ Charles Wanamaker,²²⁶ Allen Mawhinney,²²⁷ and James Scott²²⁸ each take time to focus on the issue of suffering. The child of God is to envision suffering as a certain sign of new identity and belonging. Scripture develops a sense of the present comfort

²²² John Bishop, *God Distorted: How Your Earthly Father Affects Your Perception of God and Why it Matters* (Colorado Springs: CO: Multnomah Books, 2013), 145.

²²³ Henri Nouwen. *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Meditation on Fathers, Brothers, and Sons*, 119.

²²⁴ Rom. 8:17-18

²²⁵ Trevor Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*.

²²⁶ Charles Wanamaker, “*The Son and the sons of God: A Study in the Elements of Paul’s Christological and Soteriological Thought*” (PhD thesis, University of Durham, 1980).

²²⁷ Allen Mawhinney, “Huiiothesia in the Pauline Epistles: Its Background, Use and Implications.”

²²⁸ James Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of [huiiothesia (romanized form)] in the Pauline Corpus* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 244-259.

of God and a future hope for the believer within the areas of persecution,²²⁹ affliction,²³⁰ and suffering.²³¹ Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians, “It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.”

Along the same lines, Trevor Burke writes, “Certainly, the nature of suffering for those who belong to the household of faith may differ, but whatever one’s background, no-one is exempt.”²³² Thus, suffering, in whatever form it may take, is a certainty for the child of God. The literature explains that suffering is a sign of one’s belonging within the family of God. The orphan heart, on the other hand, sees hardship and difficulty as a sign of hopelessness and estrangement. Rose Miller describes this contrast well, “Confidence in ourselves is shaken by life changes; we fight back. We increase our demands upon our ‘strengths,’ be they inner qualities, outer achievements, or other people. But only emptiness follows. Like orphans we cry, ‘I am abandoned.’ when in fact God’s grace is pursuing us ever more intensely.”²³³ It is helpful that the believer understand this temptation of thought. In his chapter entitled *The Good News of Adoption*, Richard D. Phillips, senior minister of Second Presbyterian Church in Greenville, South Carolina, advises, “More than anything else, God wants holiness from us, but we generally prefer happiness. We want the good, but God wants glory in our lives. The good news is that we have a

²²⁹ Cf. Matt. 5:10-12; John 15:18-20; 2 Tim. 3:12.

²³⁰ Cf. Rom. 5:3-5; 2 Thess. 1:5; 1 Cor. 1:3-6; 2 Cor. 4:17-18.

²³¹ Cf. Rom. 5:3-5; 8:16-18; 2 Cor. 1:5-6.

²³² Trevor Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, 182.

²³³ Rose M. Miller, *From Fear to Freedom: Living as Sons and Daughters of God*, 17.

Father who loves us enough to bring us better things than we want for ourselves.”²³⁴

So the literature emphasizes that discipline is not at first viewed as desirable, but as growth in grace occurs, it can be recognized as God’s loving care.

As the children of God grow in their appreciation of the nature of God’s eternal love, suffering takes on a new light. Burke shares, “When suffering is understood from the divine perspective as something permitted by God, then it is not as proof of his rejection but rather as a sign of his affection and warm embrace.”²³⁵ Though suffering may seem pointless to the believer, it always has a heavenly purpose for the good of God’s children.²³⁶ Scripture regularly describes God’s discipline of his children as a blessing and encourages them to recognize it as such.²³⁷ In his book *Souvenirs of Solitude: Finding Rest in Abba’s Embrace*, Brennan Manning describes the concept succinctly, “What he does not protect us from, He will perfect us through.”²³⁸ Similarly, in his book *Children of the Living God*, Sinclair Ferguson explains, “Being disciplined is a mark of legitimacy. It evidences that our father cares for us.”²³⁹ In addition, there is also a future hope for the child of God.

The Father will surely one day comfort the child who is in pain. Referencing Psalm 30:5, which teaches, “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the

²³⁴ Richard D. Phillips, “The Good News of Adoption,” in *Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father*, ed. Dan Cruver (Adelphi, MD: Cruciform Press, 2011), 63.

²³⁵ Trevor Burke, *The Message of Sonship*, 203.

²³⁶ Rom. 8:28.

²³⁷ Deut. 8:5; Job 5:17; Ps. 94:10; Prov. 3:11-12; 12:1; Heb. 12:5-11; Rev. 3:19.

²³⁸ Brennan Manning, *Souvenirs of Solitude: Finding Rest in Abba’s Embrace* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1979), 80.

²³⁹ Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*, 105.

morning,” Mark Johnston, in his book, *Child of a King*, says, “The child of God can look forward with hope and confidence to the dawn of God’s new day in God’s perfect world.”²⁴⁰ Similarly, Robert Peterson makes a simple plea in his book, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Adopted Children*, “May God teach us to look upward and forward to our final adoption and then to bring that perspective—and all the gratitude and grace that flows from it—to our struggles. That is one purpose of the doctrine of adoption.”²⁴¹ Thus, the literature encourages its readers to view their present struggles and pain through the lens of a promised future filled with hope.

Future Hope of Glory

This future hope is a certainty for both the present epoch as well as within the eschaton to come. Scripture is quite clear that God makes plans and sees them through.²⁴² Placing God’s fatherhood in correlation with this truth, Richard Phillips comments, “In eternity past, before the worlds were born, God knew his children and named them and poured out his love for them and planned all of what he would do in and through them before they even existed.”²⁴³ Thus, much of the literature develops the idea that God has designed every moment within the lives of his children, and has done so with their good in mind. Because this is an area of doubt and anxiety, Christopher Wright encourages, “Knowing God means trusting God’s sovereign

²⁴⁰ Mark G. Johnston, *Child of a King: What Joining God’s Family Really Means*, 170.

²⁴¹ Robert Peterson, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children*, 166.

²⁴² Cf. Jer. 29:11; Job 42:2; Ps. 139:15-16; Prov. 16:9; Matt. 6:25-34; Eph. 2:10.

²⁴³ Richard D. Phillips, “The Good News of Adoption,” in *Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father*, 66.

judgment. It does not mean knowing all the answers to the ambiguities of history, or owning the whole script in advance.”²⁴⁴ In addition to the future events yet to occur within this present epoch, the literature delves into the biblical concept that God has called his adopted children “heirs” and has designed an existence in eternity for those who are his children.²⁴⁵

Although scripture is riddled with references to the future hope of God’s people, a few important texts specifically mention this eschatological hope in direct correlation with the concept of sonship.²⁴⁶ Trevor Burke,²⁴⁷ Sinclair Ferguson,²⁴⁸ Mark Stibbe²⁴⁹ and Joel Beeke²⁵⁰ each touch on the subject of the future hope given to God’s children. In his book titled *Children of the Living God*, Sinclair Ferguson relates the future hope of the child of God to 1 John 3:2 and Romans 8:29. His main thrust is to develop the concept of the glorification that will transpire within the child of God at the eschaton. Similarly, Trevor Burke explains, “Believers await the consummation of adoption, the very climax of redemption, when through the Holy Spirit they are transformed and physically resurrected as sons.”²⁵¹ He continues by using these verses as support to reject the notion of annihilation. Thus, he argues that

²⁴⁴ Christopher Wright, *Knowing God the Father Through the Old Testament*, 215.

²⁴⁵ Rom. 8: 14-17; Gal. 3:26-4:7.

²⁴⁶ Rom. 8; Galatians 3-4; 1 John 3:2.

²⁴⁷ Cf. Trevor Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, 187-193, and *The Message of Sonship*, 224-230.

²⁴⁸ Cf. Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*, 119-127.

²⁴⁹ Cf. Mark Stibbe, *The Father You’ve Been Waiting For: Portrait of a Perfect Dad* (Crownhill, Milton Keynes, England: Authentic Media Limited, 2005), 151-167.

²⁵⁰ Cf. Joel Beeke, *Heirs with Christ: The Puritans on Adoption*, 70-73.

²⁵¹ Trevor Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, 190.

the future hope is holistic in scope, that this glorification will be of the whole person, which entails no need to separate the body from the spirit.

In keeping with this thought, Robert Peterson goes a step farther by defining what he believes is the inheritance of those who have been adopted by God. He utilizes Romans 8 to show that the, “final dimension of our sonship will mean liberation for the creation itself.”²⁵² He also explains, “by virtue of our union with the Son of God, his inheritance is ours! Because everything belongs to Christ, his inheritance is the whole world!”²⁵³ Thus, in addition to this physical inheritance, the literature explains that the climax of the doctrine of adoption within eschatology is the fulfilled longing of humanity to find belonging within relationship with the Father. The future hope for the children of God is the consummation of this relational longing. John Bishop, referencing this longing, perhaps states it best when he says that one day God will usher his children into the embrace they have always longed for, saying, “Welcome home - the sweet words every orphan longs to hear.”²⁵⁴

²⁵² Robert Peterson, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Adopted Children*, 165.

²⁵³ Ibid., 161.

²⁵⁴ John Bishop, *God Distorted: How Your Earthly Father Affects Your Perception of God and Why it Matters*, 150.

Chapter Three

Project Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore how ministry leaders describe the implications that the doctrine of adoption has on the social domain of the Christian's personhood. In order to intelligently examine the desired data, a few areas of literature were examined. First, the researcher presented the scriptural basis for the Christian doctrine of adoption, focusing on how scripture develops the doctrine of adoption over the course of the metanarrative. This primarily included literature that expounds upon each of the biblical texts at hand. Since the aim of this study was relationally oriented, the researcher further presented literature that focuses on the most important experiential elements that are developed within scripture. These included the areas of belonging for the child of God, identity for the child of God, unity within the family of God, freedom for the child of God, and the future hope of the child of God.

Research Questions

With the emphasis on the social domain of personhood, the research questions that guided this study focus on the four areas that make up the social domain of personhood.

5) Relationship with God

- a) What are the implications of the doctrine of adoption on how Christians experience relationship with God

- b) How would you contrast this area of the social domain of the personhood in someone who has a mature appreciation of their own adoption with the Christian living under a slave/orphan mentality?
- 6) Relationship with Self
- a) What are the implications of the doctrine of adoption on how the Christian experiences relationship with self?
 - b) How would you contrast this area of the social domain of the personhood in someone who has a mature appreciation of their own adoption with the Christian living under a slave/orphan mentality?
- 7) Relationship with Others
- a) What are the implications of the doctrine of adoption on how the Christian experiences relationship with others?
 - b) How would you contrast this area of the social domain of the personhood in someone who has a mature appreciation of their own adoption with the Christian living under a slave/orphan mentality?
- 8) Relationship with the Physical World
- a) What are the implications of the doctrine of adoption on how the Christian experiences relationship with the physical world?
 - b) How would you contrast this area of the social domain of the personhood in someone who has a mature appreciation of their own adoption with the Christian living under a slave/orphan mentality?

This study of the literature has shown that the doctrine of adoption ought to have a significant impact on the children of God. In order to better understand the implications of this doctrine on the social domain of the personhood, a qualitative study was utilized.

Design of the Study

A qualitative study was conducted to address the research problem. According to Professor Sharan B. Merriam, author of *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, “Anchored in real-life situations, [there is a] rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers’ experiences. These insights can be construed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research.”²⁵⁵ This approach guided the research of this particular field of study.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews in an effort to “understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible.”²⁵⁶ This study fell under the scope of qualitative research. Merriam describes the qualitative approach as having five basic characteristics. First, all qualitative research studies are “interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world.”²⁵⁷ Second, “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through this human

²⁵⁵ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers. 1998), 51.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., Loc. 142-143, Kindle.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., Loc. 149-151, Kindle.

instrument, the researcher rather than through some inanimate inventory, questionnaire, or computer.”²⁵⁸ Third, qualitative research “usually involves fieldwork.”²⁵⁹ Fourth, qualitative research “primarily employs an inductive research strategy.”²⁶⁰ Fifth, “The product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive,”²⁶¹ or has “‘thick’ description of the phenomenon under study. Thick description is a term from anthropology and means the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated.”²⁶² The opportunity to utilize each of these elements was of benefit to the researcher’s ability to explore the subject matter to a greater depth than would have been possible by other techniques or approaches.

Participant Sample Selection

For this study, the researcher interviewed seven Christian ministry leaders who have a firm understanding of the reformed doctrine of adoption and have led others in their academic and practical understanding of this doctrine. The focus of this study was to better understand the implications of the doctrine of adoption upon the social domain of the personhood within a reformed theological context in order to assist pastors who serve in that setting to better care for their congregations. These individuals have been changed by an awareness of the doctrine of adoption to such an extent that they have given a significant portion of their own professional lives to assisting others gain a greater understanding of it. These individuals have experienced

²⁵⁸ Ibid., Loc. 161, Kindle.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., Loc. 163, Kindle.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., Loc. 166, Kindle.

²⁶¹ Ibid., Loc. 171, Kindle.

²⁶² Ibid., Loc. 443-34, Kindle.

the impact of the doctrine of adoption in their own lives and have led others to growth in this area as well. They have had first-hand experience regarding the pertinent issues, and thus have offered rich data that was of benefit to the study. Some have published significant work explicitly covering the doctrine of adoption, thus indicating that they have spent a great deal of academic focus on the subject. Other sources of input were leaders within ministries whose philosophies are to develop the doctrine of adoption in the lives and minds of believers, having a wealth of experience in the practical implications of the doctrine of adoption, which they are able to impart into the lives of people to whom they have ministered. The researcher also interviewed those who have taught this doctrine to congregations because they offer a depth of knowledge to the subject matter that might otherwise be difficult to communicate.

Since the aim of this study was to explore the impact that occurs within the social domain of the personhood resulting from an increased understanding and experience of the doctrine of adoption, the research targeted those individuals who have been impacted by the doctrine of adoption in a deep way, and have witnessed others' experience of it as well. These individuals have the capacity of not only noting the transformation within their own lives, but they have had considerable experience teaching, coaching, and training believers in the practical theology of the doctrine of adoption.

Each participant has a vested interest in the church universal growing in its understanding of this doctrine, as well as an interest in the resulting fruit. Each has exercised a leadership role regarding the development of this doctrine over a period

of at least five years within the church body in varying contexts. These workers have personally experienced benefits as a result of this doctrine and have a burden for developing it in their ministries.

Data Collection

This study utilized semi-structured interviews as the primary tool for data gathering. The interview process is necessary since, “we cannot observe [the target] behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary [since] we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate.”²⁶³ The open-ended nature of the interview questions and overall structure contributed to the free flow of discussion, empowering the researcher to explore complex issues in depth. Merriam describes presuppositions for this format by saying, “Less structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways. Your questions thus need to be more open-ended.”²⁶⁴ She adds, “This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic.”²⁶⁵ The semi-structured method allowed the researcher to discover common themes, patterns, concerns, and contrasting views of the respondents.

A pilot test of the interview protocol was performed to evaluate the questions for clarity and usefulness in eliciting relevant data. Initial interview protocol categories were produced from the literature, but they were also developed as the data was received throughout the interview process.

²⁶³ Ibid., Loc. 939-40, Kindle.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., Loc. 949, Kindle.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., Loc. 953, Kindle.

Interview Protocol

Below is a draft of the questions for the interview protocol. These questions were used as a helpful guide. While the interview process was semi-structured and, to a certain extent, relaxed, this guide moved the discussion along rather than restricting the discourse. The interviewer shifted with the flow of the discussion as needed.

1. What are the top three to five reasons that are you passionate about the doctrine of adoption?
2. Tell me about the transformation that occurred in your relationships as a result of the doctrine of adoption – with God, with self, with others, and with the physical world.
3. Compare all that you have said thus far with what the Christian life would be like minus the doctrine of adoption.
4. In what ways have you lived as a Christian-orphan?
5. In what ways have you seen yourself continuing to live as a Christian-orphan?
6. Tell me about the transformation that occurs in other people's relationships as a result of the doctrine of adoption – with God, with self, with others, and with the physical world.
7. What happens when you preach the doctrine of adoption to yourself?
8. How far into the Christian's personhood and experience of relationships does this doctrine reach?

Data Analysis Procedures

Each of the interviews lasted approximately one hour and was recorded to preserve the data for later transcription, which was then utilized for cross-referencing, analysis and comparison. The researcher synthesized the data utilizing the constant comparative method. As Merriam describes, “The constant comparative method [of data analysis] involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences.”²⁶⁶ This method assisted in forming, coding, and categorizing the data. The process of data synthesis occurred parallel in sequence to the interviews, allowing for increased awareness of what the data revealed.

Researcher Position

The stance of the researcher was that of an insider-outsider in at least three ways. First, the researcher has experienced a transformation within the social domain of his personhood resulting from a practical and theological development in the doctrine of adoption. Second, the researcher is a ministry leader who has adopted a mission that is similar to that of the participants. Third, the researcher is a member of the same denomination as the majority of the participants. Though these are sources of potential bias, they also afford the researcher the background and practical knowledge necessary to explore the data to a depth otherwise unlikely to be attained.

Study Limitations

Due to limited resources and time, seven ministry leaders were interviewed for this study. The participants were limited to those with a doctrinally reformed background. They were all of the male gender, which will limit the study due to the

²⁶⁶ Ibid., Loc. 295, Kindle.

absence of the female perspective on the topic being studied. In addition, the respondents were all leaders in their respective churches; thus, they all generally share a similar piece of the professional sphere. Universally generalizing the conclusions of this research may give a disparity of results in particular situations. The interview analysis is not necessarily universally applicable to all times and situations. Readers are encouraged to consider their own context and circumstances, both past and present, in any such application and assessment of the findings of this research.

Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how ministry leaders describe the implications of the doctrine of adoption on the social domain of the Christian's personhood. Since the goal of this study was to better understand "how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world,"²⁶⁷ a qualitative research approach was taken. Four research questions guided the study:

1) Relationship with God

- a. What are the implications of the doctrine of adoption on how Christians experience relationship with God?
- b. How would you contrast this area of the social domain of the personhood in someone who has a mature appreciation of their own adoption with the Christian living under a slave/orphan mentality?

2) Relationship with Self

- a. What are the implications of the doctrine of adoption on how the Christian experiences relationship with self?
- b. How would you contrast this area of the social domain of the personhood in someone who has a mature appreciation of their own adoption with the Christian living under a slave/orphan mentality?

3) Relationship with Others

²⁶⁷ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers. 1998), 13.

- a. What are the implications of the doctrine of adoption on how the Christian experiences relationship with others?
 - b. How would you contrast this area of the social domain of the personhood in someone who has a mature appreciation of their own adoption with the Christian living under a slave/orphan mentality?
- 4) Relationship with the Physical World
- a. What are the implications of the doctrine of adoption on how the Christian experiences relationship with the physical world?
 - b. How would you contrast this area of the social domain of the personhood in someone who has a mature appreciation of their own adoption with the Christian living under a slave/orphan mentality?

The research consisted of interviews with seven Christian ministry leaders who have led others in their academic and practical understanding as well as development within the area of the doctrine of adoption. This chapter will introduce the participants of the study, present a summary of the research data, and identify any recurring themes and insights that relate to the aforementioned goals of this study.

Description of Participants

The names of each participant have been modified to guard their identities though a brief description of their ministry background is provided in order to give context to the data that each provided. In addition, a summary of pertinent information regarding their discipleship training of others, especially within the area of the doctrine of adoption, has been provided. It should also be noted that the researcher has made necessary grammatical corrections to the quotes that follow,

while being cautious to retain the original intent of the participants' dialogue. Seven ministry leaders participated in this research, all of whom currently serve as ruling or teaching elders in a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America.

Participant #1 - Abe

Abe is a sixty-five-year-old staff member of one of the United States' major collegiate ministries, serving there for more than forty years. After leading a successful university ministry for more than ten years, Abe was promoted to be state director and then an area director of a large portion of the United States. He was then promoted to serve as part of their ministry's national leadership team and is now the chief of staff and vice president of the organization. Abe described a difficult time in his life when his focus was shifted to a dependency upon his heavenly Father rather than upon himself. Since then, his ministry and discipleship of others has been rooted in a deep appreciation of the doctrine of adoption.

Participant #2 - Bernard

Bernard is a fifty-five year old founding and senior pastor of a suburban congregation located in a relatively affluent neighborhood within a significant city in the southern region of the United States. Having planted this church more than twenty years ago, it has become a church of more than one thousand members. Over the years, the doctrine of adoption has been a foundational element of his preaching and teaching. Bernard earned his Doctor of Ministry degree, focusing his research on the practice of discipleship.

Participant #3 - Clifford

Clifford is a fifty-five-year-old senior pastor of a suburban congregation located in a relatively affluent neighborhood within a significant city in the northeastern region of the United States. He had a short stint as a youth pastor before successfully planting a church and then taking on the position of senior pastor at a thriving church of more than one thousand members. Over the years, he has grown increasingly passionate about helping mature Christians in their understanding of God's fatherly care for them and their identity as adopted children of God. These themes are regularly part of Clifford's writing and preaching ministry.

Participant #4 - Daniel

Daniel is a fifty-five-year-old associate pastor of a suburban congregation located in a middle-class neighborhood within a significant city in the southeastern region of the United States. Although he has served as the senior pastor at a number of churches, he has found his best fit is focusing his efforts on discipleship and shepherding the congregation within a supporting role. Having attended a Sonship conference a number of years ago, his appreciation of the doctrine of adoption has become an increasingly important element in his discipleship of others. It has had a significant impact on how he discipled those who attend the church in which he serves.

Participant #5 - Eric

Eric is a forty-five-year-old area director of a national ministry that focuses its efforts on discipling believers in the doctrine of adoption. Before holding his current position, Eric was unsuccessful in his efforts to complete a PhD, which the Lord used

to bring him deeper in need of the Father's care. During this difficult time, he attended a Sonship conference and experienced a renewal of heart and a passion for the Father's love. He now focuses his time and effort growing awareness and developing the church's understanding and appreciation of the doctrine of adoption.

Participant #6 - Frank

Frank is the sixty-five-year-old founding pastor of a suburban congregation located in an upper-middle class neighborhood within a significant city in the southern region of the United States. He served as the senior pastor there for more than twenty-five years and has seen the church grow to more than one thousand members. Frank's mentor was the late Jack Miller, who was the president and founder of World Harvest Mission and the author of the Sonship discipleship curriculum. Frank has preached extensively and published work on the doctrine of adoption. His passion for this doctrine shows in how he discipled those under his care.

Participant #7 - Garvis

Garvis is a forty-five-year-old senior pastor of a small town congregation with strong historical roots within the southern region of the United States. Before holding his current position, he served as an associate professor at an established and well-known seminary. His appreciation of the doctrine of adoption, especially as it relates to church history and its impact upon the local church, is evident in his preaching and discipleship of others. Garvis claims that the book that he uses most in his discipleship of others is Rose Marie Miller's *From Fear to Freedom: Living as Sons and Daughters of God*.

Introduction to the Implications of the Doctrine of Adoption

While the researcher was interested in the relational implications of the doctrine of adoption, the remarks made by the participants indicated that their own personal growth and development was intimately connected, for better or worse, to their own personal history within relationships. In other words, their previous relational experiences presented both support of and challenges to their own maturation process as it relates to the doctrine of adoption. For instance, Daniel's childhood relationship with his father hindered how he viewed God as a young Christian. He shared a story of how he had severe acne as a child, and his father seemed to show a disappointment and almost disgust in his appearance. Daniel's father regularly inspected his face and scrubbed it with soap and water. He indicated that his relational experiences deeply impacted how he believed that God viewed and related with him. As he matured in the doctrine of adoption, he explained that a transformation occurred: "I can take my dad's failures and spin them around and say that the Bible teaches a very different kind of father in God [...] My Father in heaven is totally different. He doesn't grab my face and look at it and wonder what is wrong with me. In fact, he smiles at me. He hugs me. He kisses my face." Daniel's relational experiences became a filter through which he viewed God. As he matured in the truths and promises that are presented in scripture, especially as they speak to the doctrine of adoption, his understanding of his relationship with God was transformed.

Conversely, Clifford shared aspects of his relationship with his father that helped him correctly view God as a caring and loving Father. These elements of relational support and obstacles were presented in every interview. This interplay

between the Christian's relational experience with his or her human father and their relationship with God the Father seemed to indicate that though the doctrine of adoption is a set of conceptual truths, it is much more than that. It is practically impossible to disconnect this doctrine from the experiences of life. Human relationships impact relationship with God the Father and vice versa. Though rooted within scripture, the doctrine of adoption blossoms within the social domain of the personhood.

Participants further clarified that it is important that their own personal life experiences not be the final determining factor for their perception of the doctrine of adoption. For example, Bernard stated that his own passion for the doctrine of adoption is the result of "God's excitement for it and he tells me about it in his word. Although God uses relationships and life experiences to develop me, everything must be filtered and grounded upon the truths of scripture." Thus, Bernard shared that all life experiences should be interpreted and understood through the corrective lens of scripture. It is important to note that every participant started their interview out by explaining how this phenomenon of relational interplay presented itself in their life's story while being careful to filter their experiences with scripture.

Research Area #1: Relationship with God

God's Love – From Conditional to Unconditional

For all seven of the participants, the doctrine of adoption transformed their view of their relationship with God from being conditional to unconditional. They all doubted God's love for them before they came alive to the doctrine of adoption. Garvis explained, "Without the doctrine of adoption, I was not certain that God really

loved me. I did not feel like God had any desire to deal with me like a son.” In addition to doubt, each of the participants felt an unhealthy fear as a foundational element of their relationship with God. Abe explained, “People who do not experientially grasp the fatherhood of God still fear him.” This fear was described by all of them as a result of their assumption that God’s relationship with them was conditioned upon their performance. Maturing in the doctrine of adoption flipped this conditional view of God’s relationship with them upside down.

Six of the interviewees vividly described how their view of God shifted from seeing him as a Judge to seeing him as a Father. For instance, Garvis, who gave credit to John Calvin, claimed, “We do not have God as our Judge. We have God as our Father.” Simply put, the participants defined a judge as someone who makes a verdict or determination of another person’s worth based on their performance. Abe further proposed that a judge is someone who gives condemnation, which he defined as “giving an identity based on behavior.” He also explained that this presents God as “fickle rather than consistent and faithful.”

On the other hand, a father was described as someone who unreservedly and unconditionally gives love to his children. In relationship to believers, God was described as a Father rather than a Judge. All seven of the participants spent a significant amount of time richly expressing what this meant to them personally. Clifford explained, “In the moment of my sin, I have a Father who does not treat me as my sins deserve. God is a Father who forgives. I feel the pain of my sin but contrast that with a Father who adores me and delights over me in singing.” Daniel referenced Zephaniah 3:17, stating, “The doctrine of adoption brings a sense of God’s

fatherly delight in me. ‘He dances over me with joy and rejoices over me with singing.’²⁶⁸ That is something that I desperately need to remind myself of.” To this concept, Eric summarized J.I. Packer: “God the Father has the same joy and affection for you as he has for Jesus.” Four of the participants made almost the exact same statement, which they further attributed to John 17:23-24. Abe, in particular, gave rich description as he contemplated God’s great love for him: “God loves me just as much as he loves Jesus. He is crazy about me. He is ecstatic. He is nuts about me. He is head over heels in love with me. I do not have to walk on eggshells I do not have to walk in fear. I can approach God with boldness and confidence.”

Thus, as the children of God consider the love that God the Father has for them, theology flows out of the conceptual realm and penetrates the entire relational being of the believer. The countenance of each of the men lit up as they considered God’s fatherly love and care for them. They also spoke with great passion as they moved into the practical implications of this great love that they are recipients of.

Repentance – Hiding Sin to Open Humility

Since orphans and slaves view relationship with God in a conditional paradigm, sin and failure are much more difficult to face. Therefore, it is natural for them to hide their sin from others and even from themselves. Barnard said, “If I do not understand the doctrine of adoption, I believe that God turns his back on me or distances himself from me if I sin. Therefore, I am going to be slow to admit sin.” From the vantage point of orphans and slaves, sins and failures are liabilities that hold

²⁶⁸ Zeph. 3:17.

the perceived power to break one's standing before God. As a result, it becomes easier to lie to themselves and others concerning their performance.

In the doctrine of adoption, the children of God learn that they can fearlessly address their weaknesses, knowing that God does not conditionally treat them according to their performance. Abe said, "Because of the cross, I now have his unconditional love and relationship. This means that I can now walk in humility. I no longer have to hide. I can tell God the truth because I know that he is not going to condemn me." There is a freedom to walk openly and in humility without fear before God. All seven of the participants stressed this point with a great deal of passion and emphasis. For instance, Daniel shared,

Since I do not have to perform to attain God's love, I can know that as soon as I have sinned, God is still smiling. I can go to him in all honesty and just let him know. I can tell him all about it and not be afraid that he will turn his back on me. In that split second after I have sinned, I can look at God's face and feel his smile. He is not mad at me. The doctrine of adoption allows me to repent quickly because I know that I am secure.

To be sure, God is never pleased by sin, but their emphasis is that sin has been completely defeated in Christ.

God's children should recognize that their sin does not have the power to snatch them out of his loving arms. Thus, the believer is free to be open and quickly repent rather than remain in hiding. Garvis explained his thoughts within the contrasting viewpoints of orphan and slave versus adopted child: "Without the doctrine of adoption, repentance is mostly about escaping a problem. In the doctrine of adoption, repentance is not only about dealing with problems. It is also about coming closer to the Father in relationship." Thus, with a proper understanding of one's adoptive status, repentance is not merely about escaping the penalty of sin but

about growing more deeply in dependence upon the Father's love. It is about being drawn into relationship through a continued dependence upon the finished work of Jesus Christ. Thus, repentance is the result of the love of the Father and the transformed heart of the believer that continually recognizes that he alone can meet their deepest need. Clifford said, "When I am convicted of sin, it is not out of the terror of hell. The sweet song of redemption that my Father sings over me convicts me. It breaks my heart in this horribly beautiful way. It reduces me and lifts me up at the same time to what I was always meant to be. I am a son who has a Father who delights in him."

In other words, repentance is the outflowing of renewed dependence upon the love of the Father. Within the context of the unconditional relationship between Father and son, dependence is beautiful and wonderful. God desires that his children become completely honest and open about their need of him. Eric shared that his adoptive status as a child of God "makes dependence seem attractive and desirable. Instead of being the last resort, it becomes the first resort. It becomes about resting in someone else's arms who loves you and longs to carry you." Thus, repentance is a necessary response to the doctrine of adoption. It is a returning once again to the relationship that alone can fulfill.

A few of the participants discussed what many believers experience in the aftermath of sin. Many described it as a separation from God. They also explained that this perceived separation is the false and delusional result of the orphan and slave mentality. For instance, Daniel said, "There are times when I feel a gulf and distance from God, but it is always self-imposed. I know that God is not sick of me. I will

sometimes believe there is a distance because of shame, but I know that he does not feel that way towards me.” Thus, in the aftermath of sin, the challenge is to believe that what God has said about his heart towards his children is always true. A lack of faith rather than a lack of performance is the root of any perceived separation from the Father.

Motivation for Obedience – Self-Focus and Self-Dependence to Others-Focus and Faith in God

All seven of the participants described the unhealthy fear of God as a condemning judge mentioned above as the motivating factor for obedience in the lives of those who live as orphans and slaves. For instance, Abe shared, “People who do not experientially grasp God as their Father, still fear God as their Judge. As a result, the orphan’s motivation for obedience is fear and thus is really an act of self-protection because they do not want to experience God’s judgment.” When this is the motivation for obedience, a relational disconnect occurs. In essence, there is a foundational misappropriation of the basis for relationship with God. For instance, Frank shared, “Trying to win the approval of God through personal effort is like a child who makes an ashtray for a father who does not smoke.” Although perfect performance is what the child offers, relational dependence is that which is desired. This concept is covered in greater detail in the following section on sanctification.

In contrast, the one liberated by the doctrine of adoption does not obey out of an unhealthy fear of retribution but by the unconditional love of the Father. Frank explained, “Instead of relating with God out of a fear of being seen, you have the freedom of knowing that God does see you and he is delighted in you.” All seven of the participants pinpointed this process of being seen and accepted by God as central

to Christian obedience. Rather than straining through performance to attain God's acceptance, the child of God's task is faith. Abe explained, "To grow as a child of God, we do not apply our willpower to try and change. We apply our willpower to trust that what God has said is true." In like manner, Eric shared, "There is a present reality to our brokenness. We see our sin clearly and we feel the effects and pain of it each day. It is so much easier to have that become our identity and the lens through which we see ourselves. To move to an identity that is defined by the Father's love is an act of the Holy Spirit and takes nothing less than faith."

Thus, an appreciation of the doctrine of adoption occurs as a result of the Holy Spirit. Walking in their adoption is an act of faith, since God's children see so much evidence that they are still orphans and slaves. For this reason, it was explained by Abe: "we walk by faith and not by sight."²⁶⁹ The participants all explained that this type of faith is the motivating factor behind holiness and is what produces a new kind of energy in the life of the believer. Bernard presented,

God tells the Jewish people in the book of John that the work of God is that they must believe.²⁷⁰ We also see this pattern in Numbers 21.²⁷¹ Faith produces power. That power produces change. That change enables effort. Notice though that it is not an effort to gain acceptance but an effort that results from acceptance. This is what produces a whole new energy.

Thus, energy and motivation to obey becomes rooted in God's unconditional love rather than the fear of his condemnation. In other words, acceptance moves the heart and actions of God's children.

²⁶⁹ 2 Cor. 5:7.

²⁷⁰ John 6:29.

²⁷¹ God charged the people of Israel to look in faith upon the bronze serpent on a pole, which represented God's covenant faithfulness to his people.

Goal of Sanctification – Less Dependence to More Dependence

Four of the ministry leaders shared that God's target for maturity in his children encompasses much more than perfectly meeting the demands of the law. Two of them explained that God's purpose in discipline is not simply that his children are perfected according to the law but that they become more and more dependent on him as their Father. For instance, Frank explains the circumstances of the Father's clearest discipline in his life:

It was through a near burnout experience. I was basically working for thirteen years on adrenaline when the Father brought me to the end of myself and led me to cry, "Uncle," that I might cry, "Abba." God brings his sons and daughters to the point of hard providence. Maybe he provides experiences of suffering, loss or pain. These experiences are the environments where we begin to see our frailty and our absolute need of God the Father.

More bluntly, Clifford simply stated, "God did not save me to make me perfect. He saved me to make me his." He clarified that although God will make his children perfect, his goal encompasses much more. If the aim of sanctification were merely to make believers perfect, maturity would necessarily entail a decreased need of Jesus and dependence upon the Father. In the doctrine of adoption, God's children recognize this cannot be true. Each of the participants shared how dependence becomes an increasingly integral part of the Christian's life as they come to recognize God's fatherly affection towards them.

Along these lines, Eric shared, "When I remind myself of the Father's love, it makes dependence seem attractive and desirable, instead of a default when I do not have any other options. It becomes resting in someone else's arms who will carry you." Thus, as the believer grows in their appreciation of the doctrine of adoption, dependence upon the Father becomes the first resort rather than the last. Referencing

Romans 13 and Matthew 7, Abe shared that “dependence upon the fatherly love of God produces a life of love in the child of God and the law is fulfilled in love.” Thus, sanctification is more about relational dependence upon God the Father than upon solitary self-reliance in meeting the demands of the law.

Discipline – Punitive Retribution to Loving Transformation

Five of the participants discussed the transforming power of God in his loving acts of discipline towards his children. For the present purposes, God’s discipline may include hard circumstances and difficult situations. Four of them used the word “punishment” as a description for how orphans and slaves view God’s discipline. Since slaves view relationship with God as conditioned upon their performance, it is natural that discipline be viewed as retribution for failure. On the other hand, when the believer more fully grasps the doctrine of adoption, God’s tough love is better understood as a component of his care, designed for their growth and maturity in the gospel. For instance, Bernard explained,

The doctrine of adoption is not just about God’s unconditional love. It is also about his transforming power. Adoption changes how I look at his discipline. Rather than trying to live a good life to avoid the Father’s discipline, I see it through the filter of his care for me. The Father does not just discipline rebellious kids. He disciplines those who are doing well. You cannot avoid discipline. It is a part of God’s fatherly love for his children.

Three of the ministry leaders used the illustration of a coach with an athlete. The idea is that God has the fatherly intention, similar to that of a coach, of developing and maturing his children. For instance, Daniel shared, “The doctrine of adoption means that God really does want me to grow. He will allow and even design hard providences and circumstances. As a Father, he wants me to grow up and become a man. He wants me to be seasoned.” Rather than viewing this type of love as

retribution, the children of God are to view these events through the doctrine of adoption and recognize that his acts towards them are always for their good. Eric stated,

In the midst of trials and difficulty I know that God's heart towards me is always good. I know that I have a Father who loves me and is paying attention to my needs. Although I do not always feel like that is true, it is an exercise in faith. I must go to the cross. It is there that I find unequivocal, historical and objective proof that he really does.

Thus, the child of God never has to guess the demeanor of God as he disciplines them. He is a good Father who does not condemn, but is always orchestrating the events of their lives for their growth and good. Garvis explains, "If I am God's son, and he is my Father and he is in charge and will do all things well, I do not have to overreact to circumstances. I can sit back and trust him." Thus, the children of God are afforded the peace of knowing that God always has their good in mind.

Relating with God – Impersonal Conceptual Imbalance to Wholistic Balance

Five of the participants contrasted the conceptual and relational elements of Christian theology, especially as they pertain to God's heart towards his children. They each developed in their own way the concept that God is not a set of impersonal truth statements merely to be comprehended and understood. Unquestionably, he is truth and speaks truth throughout scripture, but he is also personal in the revelation of himself. God was described as one who longs for familial and filial relationship with his children. In other words, rather than merely a giver of truth, God is also a Father who loves and longs to be loved. For instance, Bernard shared that "God is not a brain on a stick that merely wants to be understood. He is a Father who longs to be loved." Abe explained this concept in connection with the scriptures, "When coming to his

word, our focus should never be to simply find truth. Our focus should be on the God who speaks the truth. I do not want to trust principles or verses. I do not want to trust statements. I want to trust in the God who gives them.” Thus, the canon of scripture is not merely to be used as a tool to gain knowledge, though it obviously affords this and should be mined for all it has to offer. The Bible ought to be viewed more fully by the children of God as a means by which they might come into close relational contact with the Father who loves them. It is the mode given to the children of God by which they might come to know their Father, not simply know about him. Problems arise when truth is targeted and the relationship is forsaken. A balance is required.

All of Christian experience is shaped by this transformational appreciation of God’s longing for personal relationship with his children. Balanced by the doctrine of adoption, Christian theology ought to transform the whole person, including both the cerebral and relational experiences of God’s children. Clifford described, “[t]he doctrine of adoption makes Christianity personal. It takes Christianity out of the realm of a chapter in John Murray or a chapter in Romans.” To be clear, Clifford shared a deep appreciation for these texts. His emphasis was not to downplay them but to show how they come alive in the lives of those who deeply appreciate the doctrine of adoption. Thus, the individual’s entire Christian experience is transformed.

On the other hand, Frank took this concept into the communal realm and drew out some important implications: “If we do not get the doctrine of adoption as part of the whole gospel, we are going to miss the deeply personal, corporate and attritional

theology that is needed in our culture and church.” Thus, not only does this doctrine impact the individual’s relationship with the Father, but the entire church body is transformed as well. He was also quick to point out that a discrepancy between declared doctrine and practice can often creep in. Speaking of a lifeless theology, he explained, “We begin to lose touch when we keep the lyric but forget the music. You can become known as the grace church but then realize that you are talking about it a lot more than you are experiencing it.” Thus, the doctrine of adoption must be more than a conceptual truth. It must be understood as a life-changing and experientially-transforming gift in the life of the believer. It transforms relationship with God, which in turn transforms every other relational sphere of the personhood.

Research Area #2: Relationship with Self

Independent and Disconnected to Dependent and Interwoven

Although none of the participants made a clear statement concerning this concept, there was a definite contrast in the descriptions used for the relationships of those with an orphan mentality and those with a matured appreciation of their adoption, which showed that all of the relational spheres of the personhood shift from independence and disconnectedness to dependence and interconnectedness. In other words, an individual with an orphan mentality can compartmentalize each sphere and even each relationship within each sphere as distinctly independent of all others. The reason seemed to be that each relationship was viewed as a simple transaction within a sort of bartering system whose end was the benefit or detriment of the self.

As each conversation shifted to descriptions of those with a greater confidence in their sonship, it became more difficult to distinguish between each relational

sphere and the interaction between them. Interplay between all of the relational spheres necessarily resulted from an individual coming alive to the doctrine of adoption. The relational spheres of these individuals seem to be ultimately dependent upon their relationship with God. As God's children increasingly recognize their adoption, all other relationships are transformed. Although relationship with God is unconditional, the basis for health within all of the other spheres seems to be conditioned upon rightly grasping relationship with God the Father as a result of the doctrine of adoption. Thus, as believers mature in the doctrine of adoption, the relational spheres within the social domain of the personhood become increasingly interdependent and connected rather than independent and disconnected.

Relationships - Conditional to Unconditional

The area where the above concept became most clearly apparent was within the sphere of relationship with self. The participants shared that before the children of God are confident in his fatherly and unconditional care, they can only view themselves on the basis of their performance. Four of the participants described this interplay. Daniel explained the way he viewed and related with himself before he came to a realization of God's fatherly love: "Before the doctrine of adoption, it felt like God found me unacceptable. I would beat myself up over my performance. I used a pass or fail criteria to determine my worth." Thus, the orphan and slave mentality lends itself to a relationship with self that is conditioned upon performance.

On the other hand, the participants explained that the doctrine of adoption was the key that frees the children of God to base their self-worth on God's unconditional love rather than their own inability to perform. Additionally, other people's

condemnation with regard to performance does not have the power to determine worth. For instance, Eric explained, “My identity is not what I have done. It is not based on who I think I am or what other people say or believe about me. My identity is defined by whose I am.” With this perspective, God’s children can have peace.

Additionally, God’s children do not need to strive to accomplish the next big challenge that will define their value. Along these lines, Garvis explained, “Instead of always looking for the next big challenge to prove myself, I can increasingly become confident in my acceptance and in the fact that I do not have to prove anything. I do not have to be busy. I can be at rest.” Thus, neither past performances nor hopes for future successes have the power to determine how God’s children view themselves. In addition, Frank explained that events, some being the result of the sins of others, should not define them either, “The doctrine of adoption frees us to approach each element of our own stories and recognize that we are not defined by them.” As a result, God’s children can view themselves and their own story without shame, knowing that their worth is not defined by what they have done, what has happened to them or by what others have done to them.

Source and Type of Energy – Fear to Freedom

The interviews often shifted to questions and concerns that people would raise while being taught the doctrine of adoption. One response to this teaching would be to question the motivation for holiness. If God loves his children unconditionally and worth is found within that relationship rather than in accomplishment, what reason remains for holiness? Though this question was briefly touched upon earlier in the sphere of relationship with God, there still remains an inner motivation for holiness

and maturity within relationship with self. The unconditional love of God does not lead to a licentious view of the life of holiness. Rightly understood, it leads to just the opposite. Garvis explains this quite well: “The freedom that comes out of living as a son is actually fueled from holiness rather than a cutting away of holiness.” Thus, the holy love of God transforms the heart and repositions its power source. Rather than fear of condemnation and retribution, there is renewed and fresh energy whose wellspring is the transforming love of God.

Four of the participants claimed that the amount of energy does not change. What changes is the source and type of energy. Frank explained this idea in terms of the big picture: “To come alive to the doctrine of adoption does not mean that I am going to work less hard. It means that I have a different motivation and a different means. The way I view every day is that I am a character in and a carrier of God’s story.” In similar fashion, Bernard explained further how this motivation for godliness takes shape and the kind of energy that results:

The energy of someone living out of the gospel and their adoption is completely different than the energy coming from someone who is insecure in the gospel and the Father’s love. The energy of those who are insecure is self-focused. [...] It can be frightening and negative to others. The energy of people who are secure in their adoption is just as powerful, but it is a positive energy. It is passionate and winsome. It is attractive and wooing to others.

Thus, the life-giving presence of the gospel in the life of God’s children is also a wellspring of positive and life-giving energy to the surrounding world. Eric explained what happened to him personally as he began to grasp the Father’s love: “I became a different man. I started preaching a different way. I started feeling a security that I had not felt before.” In keeping with this perspective, the Christian disciplines begin to take on a renewed purpose in the life of the child of God. Frank shared, “I

increasingly look at the Christian disciplines as a means of grace rather than a means of righteousness.” Since the children of God find their righteousness in God’s fatherly love and the finished work of Christ, there is no need to strive to attain what has already been freely given. The Christian disciplines become a means by which they are daily renewed and come alive to the Father’s faithfulness to and love for them.

Along the same lines, Frank was careful to stipulate that God’s children cannot necessarily determine their adoptive status by the quality and amount of their energy at any given moment. Their energy can be a helpful diagnostic tool though, to help indicate whether or not they are experiencing the Christian life as orphans and slaves or as sons. He elaborated, “I am not going to measure my sonship by how many cartwheels for Christ I am doing, but if there are no cartwheels, I have to ask myself why this is not deeply impacting my heart in a way that brings peace and joy.” Therefore, if there is a lack of peace in the energy of God’s children, one must ask if the lack of motivation is rooted in an absence of faith in God’s unconditional fatherly love for them.

Research Area #3: Relationship with Others

Belonging – Estranged to Placed Within a Family

Clearly, adoption is a familial term. There is more to being adopted than being cared for by God the Father. The rest of God’s family is also an integral part of living as an adopted child of God. Three of the participants explored this reality of being brought into a family. Bernard shared the obvious implications of being called God’s children: “If we are all adopted, then we are, therefore, all in God’s family. And if we are all in God’s family then we are to relate to each other as brothers and sisters.” In

addition to this reality, there is a mysterious depth to the bond that God's children share. Daniel explained how the doctrine of adoption enriched his appreciation of his brothers and sisters:

Adoption means that they are also sons and daughters of God. They are my brothers and sisters in the truest sense of the word, even more than my own earthly brothers and sisters are. I respect them because of adoption. I learn from them because of adoption. It really elevates people in our eyes when we see that they are adopted, too.

Thus, there is a genuine familial care for one another within God's family that occurs as a result of maturity in the doctrine of adoption. The children of God begin to fill an important role in their relationship to one another. Additionally, the child of God recognizes that Christian brothers and sisters play an important role in his or her life. Frank explained, "When I come alive to the Father's love, I realize that part of my healing is in community." Part of what it means to be made whole in our adoption is to be placed within a family, to care for that family and be cared for by them.

Love – Conditional to Unconditional

All seven of the participants explored the contrast between how God's children relate with others before and after coming alive to God's fatherly and adoptive love. Bernard explained that those with an orphan and slave mentality look to other people to fill a deep relational void in their hearts. Thus, others are used to meet a need. He clarified, "When I do not understand my status as a child of God, I look to others to answer the following questions: 'Am I enough?' and 'Am I approved?' On the other hand, if I am secure in the Father's love for me, I am freed to love others without needing anything from people and relationships." In the doctrine of adoption, God's children are made whole by the fatherly care of God alone.

Without it, fulfillment is still on the horizon, yet to be attained. Thus, there is a continual struggle within relationship with others for affection and satisfaction.

In addition, Eric explained that other people are also used for how they can benefit the orphan in other pursuits for fulfillment: “Without the doctrine of adoption all relationships are conditional. Their actions change how you relate to them because you really want them to fulfill a need for you.” Thus, when God’s love is viewed as conditional, love for others becomes conditional as well. The condition that is placed on others is based upon a need that is felt to be unmet in the gospel and is viewed as a possibility elsewhere. An effort could be made to meet this felt need through personal and/or business goals, relational connectedness, material pursuits, etc. As a result, love of self remains the basis for the expressed love for others. Clifford explained this phenomenon: “Without the doctrine of adoption, I treat others like slaves rather than sons. Relationship with others is conditional. Forgiveness is conditional. I judge and condemn according to performance.” Thus, orphans and slaves treat others within the same paradigm in which they believe God treats them. A few natural results flow out of this paradigm.

Daniel emphasized conflict as characteristic of living with an orphan and slave mentality: “Without adoption, like Paul says in Galatians, we bite and devour each other. We expect things out of each other. We lay the law on people. We judge them. We expect them to serve us.” Since those who are lost also live out of an orphan mentality, there is often conflict between these individuals because the needs of self outweigh those of others. Thus, when two or more parties engage in an interaction that is not beneficial for both, conflict will most often be the result.

All this begins to change when one's adoptive status before God is recognized. The doctrine of adoption deeply impacts how God's children relate with others. Abe, Bernard and Frank were each quick to reference the greatest commandment to "love the Lord your God [...] and love your neighbor as yourself."²⁷² Bernard claimed, "If we are adopted into God's family by virtue of union with Christ and God's love and relational posture toward us does not change, then that becomes the standard for relationship with each other." In addition to this idea, Abe also referenced 1 John 3:23, suggesting, "The command to love God is inseparable from the command to love one another. Whatever is true vertically is also true horizontally, and vice versa." Thus, an absence of love for either one is a clear sign of an absence of love for the other. Thus, to love God must necessarily include love for his children.

Though agreeing with this sentiment, Frank went a step further in stating that God's children love because he first loved them.²⁷³ It should be noted that he emphasized the word "result" when he said. "The result of the Father's love is summed up in the great commandment to love God and others. We love others because Jesus loves us." It is this natural result that is the transformation that occurs in the life of the God's children. It is not merely a command that is to be obeyed begrudgingly. It was explained to be the effectual result of God's fatherly love within the hearts of those who are his children. Eric illustrated this concept within human terms: "Something happens when someone loves you unconditionally and is

²⁷² Mat. 22:37-39; Mar. 12:30; Luk. 10:27.

²⁷³ 1 John 4:19.

committed to your transformation, betterment and good. You do not have to try very hard to love. Love results from that.” When the doctrine of adoption takes hold in the life of a believer, compassion and empathy for others naturally result.

God’s love enables and empowers his children to love others without expectations of anything in return. Eric explained how he views this aspect of the transformation: “Rather than placing demands on people, and having high expectations, I begin to see things through the love of the Father.” Similarly, Frank shared that other people become personal beings rather than objects to be utilized for personal gain: “The more I linger before the beauty and the love of Jesus, the less irritated I get with other people. I see people less as trees and more as people.” There is a softening towards others that occurs.

Garvis explained how this type of transformational love breaks down all types of social confines within the church: “I am freed to engage with people who are very different from myself in terms of race, class and social status. I can recognize that we are all children of the same heavenly Father. I view them as brothers and sisters in a very real way.” In summary, the doctrine of adoption softens the hearts of God’s children so that they increasingly love others, as God the Father has loved them – even those who are drastically different from them.

Performance and Competition to Peace and Contentment

A central theme of relating with others is the source of worth for the individual. The doctrine of adoption redirects the source of worth onto the adoptive relationship with God the Father. All of the participants shared this sentiment. Frank said, “When I am alive to the doctrine of adoption, I am not looking at others to give

me what the Father's love alone can give." A major result of maturing in the doctrine of adoption is that relationships become decreasingly competitive and increasingly self-sacrificial. Although all of the participants shared their thoughts on the role performance played in relationship with others, five of them explored how competitive performance was transformed.

The basic purpose that competition plays is that an inner sense of worth can be found in performing better than other individuals. Additionally, when others perform better, envy is produced in the orphan and slave's heart.

The motivation for success in the orphan's heart is self-justification. Daniel explained, "Without adoption, we use each other to gain our own sense of justification." Daniel suggested that competition never produces love for others, but rather self-love and, more often than not, self-loathing: "Before the doctrine of adoption, I was all bent out of shape trying to perform in all of my tasks. How people responded to the quality of my work controlled me." Notice, too, that he looked for how people responded to the quality of his work, not to the quality of his person. Thus, it was stated that performance never produces genuine love because it is not the person that is loved but rather their performance. Abe shared his thoughts on performance and receiving love, "People who perform to receive love cannot ever be loved. The love that is given by others is directed at the performance rather than the performer. People who perform in order to receive love will only receive the satisfaction of their performance being loved. They will always be unloved."

As mentioned earlier, the doctrine of adoption ushers in the unconditional and relational love of the Father God for his children. It is free, and it frees them from the

fear of poor performance or competition with others. When relating with others, the adopted child of God need not be threatened by other people's performance because that is not what determines their standing before God. Garvis explained, "If I am God's son, I do not have to dominate what is going on because I know I am loved. I do not have to earn anything. I can let others get the praise. I get to praise the work of others publicly. In doing so, I am reminded that I do not need the praise." Similarly, Daniel shared, "It frees me from comparing myself to others. With adoption, I can really celebrate their giftedness. God delights in them just as he delights in me, so I can learn from them and celebrate them without my sense of worth being threatened." Therefore, adoption frees God's children to truly celebrate each other rather than feel threatened by others. He also claimed, "Adoption gives me a huge sense of security to be able to applaud others when they do well." He also gave a warning that could be very helpful in self-diagnosing the grip of an orphan and slave mentality in one's own heart. "If I am pleased when others fail, it indicates something is seriously wrong in my heart. It means that I am not secure in the Father's love." Thus, the children of God have a lessened desire to compete with others in an effort to gain self-worth as they come alive to the Father's love.

Not only do God's children live without the need to compete with others, they provide an atmosphere where others do not feel the need to compete either. Garvis stated, "My relationships with others become a safe place for them to achieve without feeling like they need to perform for me. They can simply achieve for the joy of it all." This resulting freedom and fuel that leads to a productive and God-glorifying life is especially important for those who lead others and long for them to experience the

freedom of God's adoptive love. Eric shared his thoughts on this concept in reference to working with others on a team: "Working with people stops being about getting people to compromise. It becomes about working together to get in line with God's plans." Thus, God's children are less interested in meeting their own needs and more eager to get in tune with the heart and desires of God. In so doing, they point others in that direction as well.

Transparency and Accountability – Unsafe to Safe

Another result of finding identity and worth in God's unconditional love rather than in relationship with other people is that defenses are lowered and transparency and authenticity becomes easier. Since God's children do not need to compete for position and standing, they are free to be open about their inability and need for God's fatherly love. An orphan does not feel the freedom to be transparent. Frank claimed, "In friendships, each of us strikes a pose. We are all posers. Coming alive to the Father's love helps us be more alert to the fact that we give certain people power over our hearts that they do not deserve." Abe explained this behavior as "putting on a mask." Those with an orphan and slave mentality fear that other people have the capacity to define their worth.

Additionally, Garvis explained that the opposite is also true. Within the doctrine of adoption, God's children recognize that this authority should not be given to fellow human beings. Orphans and slaves often have the mistaken belief that they have the same authority to give and withhold worth from others. Garvis added that "[w]ithout the doctrine of adoption, weaknesses are liabilities. Other people's weaknesses are incomprehensible for us. We want to simply ask them why they are

such jerks.” On the other hand, while those confident in their adoption are not necessarily comfortable with weakness, they do not see their failings as a threat to their relational standing before God or other people. Thus, transparency is the result. All seven of the participants spoke of increased transparency within God’s family as his children grow in their appreciation of the doctrine of adoption.

Bernard explained the interplay between authenticity between God and his children and the result it has on God’s children with one another: “If we understand adoption well, it reminds us that we can be quick to repent. We can be quick to be real and authentic with God. Therefore, that same transparency ought to be present in my relationships with others.” Garvis had similar sentiments: “As we grow in the doctrine of adoption, we are freed to be real with other people about our sins, struggles, feelings, emotions, etc.” Those who are mature in their adoption recognize that other people do not wield the power to place judgment on their worth. With an already attained worth freely given by God the Father, Clifford explained what type of posture he increasingly embodies: “I do not need to defend myself. I am far worse than whatever anyone is saying about me. The fatherhood of God enables me to see myself as I actually am and to be amazed with the fact that he loves me completely and unconditionally.” Once again, relationship with the Father impacts all other relational spheres within the social domain of the personhood.

Bernard shared how this impacts the corporate family of God: “In gospel churches there is going to be a lot more transparency. A gospel church that emphasizes adoption is going to be a safe place to be broken.” Therefore, the children of God do not have to hide their brokenness and need of the gospel. They become

transparent before one another. It becomes a place that is integral in developing the adopted mindset toward one another. Daniel briefly explained how the church fulfills this role: “Repentance is not an entirely private thing. God uses the community of brothers to welcome me back.” Thus, the children of God play a significant role in restoring relationship between one another and are used by God to restore relationship between God and self.

Eric shared that the individual who is alive to God’s fatherly love has a role to play in the maturation process of the community: “Honesty and vulnerability concerning my weaknesses and struggles allow others to brush up against the intimate relationship between the Father and myself.” Thus, when a child of God is free to be vulnerable and transparent before a watching world, the gospel message of freedom is on display. Frank explained this concept quite well: “It’s the difference between preaching at people and preaching to myself and letting other people overhear the conversation.” Thus, there is a resulting transformation that occurs in how one views relationship with the lost.

The Lost - Enemies to Orphans

Perhaps the most profound impact that the doctrine of adoption has on God’s children is with their relationships with the lost. Five of the participants explained that there is a softening that occurs in the heart of God’s children towards unbelievers. Those who appreciate their adoption connect themselves with the plight of the lost, save for the Father’s gracious love towards them. Those with an orphan and slave mentality are simply not able to be quite as sympathetic. They have a difficult time understanding God’s heart of compassion towards them and thus, compassion for

other people is a hard proposition. Additionally, since their love is conditional, there is little reason to have meaningful and compassionate relationships with unbelievers because they have little to offer in return. Clifford explains why this is the case: “Without the doctrine of adoption, my faith is about me. As a result, I have nothing to share with others.” The participants often raised the concept of the lost being viewed as enemies. The orphan and slave mentality view the lost simply as incompetent at best and enemies at worst. Unfortunately, this leads to the misrepresentation of God’s character and heart to unbelievers. Thus, Garvis shared that the orphan and slave mentality has a damaging impact on the lost: “Someone who has a poor understanding of the doctrine of adoption can adversely affect the way others view God.” When the world sees the children of God living like orphans and slaves, it wrongly assumes that God is a judge and a slave driver rather than a loving Father who frees his children.

All of this changes when God’s children begin to deeply appreciate the doctrine of adoption. Clifford claimed, “[t]he world is no less broken or no more broken than I am. The difference is Jesus. It is not that I have lived a more moral life. We have nothing on the world except that we belong to Jesus.” Seeing people who are living like orphans and slaves produces compassion in the hearts of God’s children. They become quick to empathize with their plight for it would be theirs apart from their adoption. Daniel shared his thoughts on the matter: “Adoption changes the way you look at the lost, because they are really orphans rather than enemies [...] I see eyes that are bereft of love. They don’t have a relationship with a

Father who cares for them. It gives us a compassionate heart and a longing for the lost to experience the Father's love."

Perhaps Clifford's illustrative explanation was the most memorable. He shared a story about his relationship with his dad while he was in college. Every week his dad would send him a lengthy hand-written letter concerning such things as trivial events of the week as well as his heartfelt expressions of love for his son. At the same time, Clifford observed the estranged relationship between his roommate and his roommate's father. As Clifford contemplated the love his own father had showered upon him, he could not help but desire to have his roommate experience the same kind of relationship. The idea came to him to ask his father to write his roommate a letter instead of him that week. In short, the letter from Clifford's father to his roommate was a highlight of his year. He then went on to share that if we truly know the Father's love for us, we will see orphans wherever we look and long for them to experience the same relationship. He explained, "We long for other orphans to experience our home and the love of our Father." In similar fashion, Eric explained that those who have come alive to their adoption in Christ view the lost in a very different way: "Those people are not the enemy. They are not the opposing team. Those are people who are getting left out of the best party. Why wouldn't you want them to have everything that you have, or everything that you can experience? 'I have a dad who loves me and he will love you too.'" Thus, it becomes natural for God's children to long for the lost to know God's fatherly love and to welcome them in to the Father's house whenever possible and by any means necessary.

The adopted children of God are more able to see below the surface to the root of people's brokenness. They are keenly aware that the deepest longing of every human is to find belonging and to find relational restoration with the God who loves them. As a result, those who are confident in their adoption make every effort to soothe that need in their relationships with the lost. Eric explains, "As I mature in the doctrine of adoption, I increasingly treat others as God treats me because I know that they are in need of the same gospel that I need in the same way that I need it." With hearts of compassion, God's children are less likely to condemn the lost, because of the lack of condemnation that they have received from God. They also take every opportunity to offer hope and healing within an atmosphere of relational love. Daniel shared, "Not only are they unholy, they are lonely. They long for the most important relationship there can be. The doctrine of adoption releases us from judging them and condemning them. They are trying to overcome their shame. They are trying to feel better about themselves. Above all, they are looking for love."

As has been presented earlier, God is not merely truth. He is relational in his essence. The participants described that God longs to be known and loved, not merely understood. In reference to the lost, those who are alive to their adoption are less likely to simplify their faith into a logical or philosophical system and more likely to see the deeper need of relationship and God's longing for relationship with them. Eric shared, "When you get your adoption, evangelism is no longer about a set of truth propositions that are argued over. You begin to see people and say, 'They are not my enemy. They are not the opposing team.' You begin to say to yourself, 'I have a Dad who loves me and He longs to love them too'." The adopted children of God are not

merely concerned with winning arguments. They are concerned with unveiling the Father's love. As Frank explained earlier, it becomes about "preaching to myself and letting other people overhear the conversation." God's children recognize their own need to be daily renewed and continually transformed by his love. Therefore, as described earlier, they are quick to repent to God and others. Frank shared his thoughts on this concept: "You are going to be less angry with people who are not on board with the gospel. You become more concerned with your own idol structures, illusions and fears. Ultimately, my calling is to repent, not expose the Pharisees. The fact is that I am a Pharisee, too." God's adopted children invite people into the gospel message of hope for sinners in the process of daily walking out the gospel message before others in their own weakness and expressed need of the gospel. Eric shared the transformed focus in evangelism for God's children: "It turns into living a life of repentance before God and others so that they brush up against the gospel story in your life. It is not the power of your hand holding onto God's that sustains you. It is God's hand holding yours that sustains you." Those who are mature in their adoption increasingly present this gospel message in word and deed before a world that cannot fix itself. Clifford shared, "When I most clearly understand the gospel, its not so much about fixing others as it is about being the one broken and poured out. We become living sacraments to the world before us." Along the same lines, Frank claimed, "At the end of the day, you are not responsible for what takes place in other people's hearts. But you need to ask yourself if you are creating an environment where it is more likely that people will hear the lyrics, music and dance of the gospel." Thus, God's children do have a part to play in his redemptive plan, but the

motivation and approach is transformed by the relational centrality of God's fatherly love.

Research Area #4: Relationship with the Physical World

It should be noted that although some important themes resulted within this area of the interviews, this portion was generally much shorter. It seemed as though many of the participants had not spent as much time considering the implications of the doctrine of adoption on relationship with the physical world.

Conditional to Unconditional

Similar to the other relational spheres, God's children experience a shift within their relationship with the physical world as they more deeply grasp the doctrine of adoption. In an effort to meet their deepest needs of belonging and fulfillment, the orphan and slave mentality will relate with the physical world for its utility to meet their own needs. Appreciation of the world and relationship with it is conditioned upon how it may benefit the self. On the other hand, recognizing that their Father is the ruler of creation places a dignified role within it upon the life of his children.

Three of the participants quoted Maltbie Babcock's famous hymn title, "This Is My Father's World." However, all of the participants recognized there are significant implications to this truth. The first that is worth noting is that the created world speaks to the quality and character of the one who calls himself "Father." Daniel explained, "I see God's handiwork in the world and I see God as a Father there." As God's children connect the reality of his fatherly heart towards them and the beauty of the created world, there is an enjoyment of God that is intended. It was

explained by three of the participants that the Father's heart longs for his children to enjoy what he has made. Eric said, "He wants to enjoy the things that he has made with us. It is like a father unveiling his handiwork to his son. Creation becomes a gift that is shared and enjoyed together rather than a resource." Thus, the physical world is to be enjoyed within relationship with the Father. There is also beauty to be found throughout the physical world and it is good for God's children to appreciate it and give glory to the one who made it. Clifford shared, "The doctrine of adoption allows me to see the world as something God created to be beautiful. I can live redemptively in the world, which means that I can love beauty and embrace diversity." Though it is also important to recognize what Daniel explained: "The world is not to be worshipped, but we are to see its beauty, enjoy it as a gift but also tell others about the one who made it and gifted it to his children." The world is not to be worshipped because it has been created to give glory to God. Daniel stated, "The Psalms are full of exaltation of God through nature over and over again."

Purpose Within God's World

In addition, God's children are to treat his creation with honor. Eric explained, "God wants us to enjoy the things that he has made but we ought to appreciate and respect them as well. We become good stewards of our Father's things." This element of stewardship was discussed by five of the participants. Although God's children recognize the gift of creation, they increasingly understand they have a role to play in relationship with it as stewards for the sake of his kingdom. For this reason, the relationship with the physical world and one's work within it is important. When speaking to this, Garvis stated, "Your work is meaningful to the Father." The pursuits

of God's children in the world are also driven more by the excitement of working with the Father than a fear of failing the Father. Frank shared, "We partner with God in his work but we must remember our place in it. We need to always remember the paradox. The more I am convinced of the Father's love, the more I realize that even though he could do his work without me, I am moved to praise him because he chose to do it with me. He delights to do it with me."

Thus, his heart is always bent towards relationship with his children even as they engage with creation. Thus, the world becomes less frightening. Eric shared, "Life becomes playing with house money. It is not big and risky and scary. You are not doing it for yourself. You don't have to be driven by fear. It frees you up to enjoy your pursuits and go for them wholeheartedly." God's children can do their best without fear of failure or rejection. The pursuit becomes enjoyable at its very core as God's children learn to play with him rather than perform for him.

Gospel – Saving Souls to Creation Redemption

The participants all explained that this world is not a time and place where God's children save as many souls on their race to a celestial home. Along these lines, Bernard said, "The kingdom of God is not merely about the salvation of souls, although it is certainly not less than that. It's certainly much more than that. The doctrine of adoption shows God's children that they have a larger calling in the physical world in which they have been placed. Frank explained,

The Father created a garden paradise that we are called to live in. He is restoring this very world to be our eternal abode. The theology of adoption is not just about an inner renewal. It is an explosion in terms of helping me be someone far more concerned with seeing how central a theology of hope and life is in the new heaven and the new earth. It is central to the fatherhood of God.

The world is not a holding cell that will one day be annihilated but is rather a broken world that longs to be made right again. Thus, God's children are to recognize a much grander design to their purpose and relationship with the world in which they live.

Abe said, "It is in an in-between place, too. It will one day be set free from its bondage." Thus, there is a redemptive purpose that God's children fulfill as they are in relationship with him and live out that relationship in this world. Thus, while those with an orphan and slave mentality may view the physical world as a hopelessly broken place where they do not belong, those with a heart transformed by the doctrine of adoption recognize that the world is their Father's and he longs to redeem it.

Two of the participants described this contrast. For instance, Daniel simply explained that within the heart of an orphan and slave "there is an incorrect sacred/secular distinction that many people make that is not right." On the other hand, those with a deep appreciation of their adoptive standing before God look at their Father's world with awe and reverence. Clifford shared that a son will look at the grandeur of the world and be able to say, "'Hey, that's really beautiful.' And not have to qualify it." Since it is a world that the Father is committed to, as his children, created in his image, there is the natural appreciation of its beauty and a desire to join in that work. Bernard stated, "If I have a high view of adoption, I have a high view of this world as my Father's world. Therefore, I recognize that as an adopted son, I am called in my particular areas of passion and vocation to be involved in the renewing of all things." Thus, the world is a place where the children of God can increasingly envision the redemption of all things and be used by their Father towards that end.

Summary of Findings

The research participants summarily and individually established that when God's children deeply grasp the doctrine of adoption, it significantly impacts the social domain of their personhood. They each presented a range of descriptive contrasts between individuals living with an orphan and slave mentality and those who are confident and mature in their adoptive status before God. They each shared thoughts regarding their own experiences of relational transformation and the transformation of those they have led. These shared thoughts provided an abundance of beneficial insights into the implications of the doctrine of adoption on the social domain of the personhood. The provided data was then presented according to common themes. This information will help ministry leaders diagnose themselves and their congregations, resulting in an appropriate level of emphasis regarding the doctrine of adoption within their teaching and discipleship ministry. The next chapter will compare and contrast the research findings from the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and the interview data presented in Chapter Four. Finally, the conclusions presented in Chapter Five will be used to provide "best practice" recommendations to ministry leaders regarding discipleship and the doctrine of adoption.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how ministry leaders describe the implications that the doctrine of adoption has on the social domain of the Christian's personhood. The research questions that guided this study focused on the four areas that make up the social domain of personhood.

- 5) Relationship with God
 - a. What are the implications of the doctrine of adoption on how Christians experience relationship with God?
 - b. How would you contrast this area of the social domain of the personhood in someone who has a mature appreciation of their own adoption with the Christian living under a slave/orphan mentality?
- 6) Relationship with Self
 - a. What are the implications of the doctrine of adoption on how the Christian experiences relationship with self?
 - b. How would you contrast this area of the social domain of the personhood in someone who has a mature appreciation of their own adoption with the Christian living under a slave/orphan mentality?
- 7) Relationship with Others

- a. What are the implications of the doctrine of adoption on how the Christian experiences relationship with others?
 - b. How would you contrast this area of the social domain of the personhood in someone who has a mature appreciation of their own adoption with the Christian living under a slave/orphan mentality?
- 8) Relationship with the Physical World
- a. What are the implications of the doctrine of adoption on how the Christian experiences relationship with the physical world?
 - b. How would you contrast this area of the social domain of the personhood in someone who has a mature appreciation of their own adoption with the Christian living under a slave/orphan mentality?

In order to answer these questions, a few areas of literature were reviewed in chapter two. First, the researcher presented the scriptural basis for the Christian doctrine of adoption, focusing on how scripture develops the doctrine of adoption over the course of time within the metanarrative. This primarily included literature that expounds upon each of the biblical texts at hand. The researcher further presented literature dealing with the themes that are developed within scripture and are most relevant to the research questions. Those themes included: belonging for the children of God, identity for the children of God, unity within the family of God, freedom for the children of God, and the future hope for the child of God.

Additionally, seven Christian ministry leaders who have led others in their academic and practical understanding of the doctrine of adoption were interviewed.

This process provided an abundance of beneficial data and insights into the implications of the doctrine of adoption on the social domain of the personhood. The data gleaned from these interviews were then carefully sifted in order to present the findings according to general themes in chapter four. In this chapter, the researcher will present a synthesis of the findings from chapter two and chapter four by comparing and contrasting the findings that were given in each in order to present the conclusions of this research. Finally, conclusions will be presented which will then be used to provide practical recommendations to ministry leaders as well as possible areas of further research regarding the doctrine of adoption and the social domain of the personhood.

Summary of Findings

Since the doctrine of adoption finds its roots in scripture, the biblical-theological area of the literature review shed light on the areas of literature that would prove beneficial and worthy of further exploration. Those remaining areas of literature that were focused on were themes that were established in the biblical-theological review that most directly related to the research questions at hand. These themes were concerned with the implications of the doctrine of adoption on the child of God's sense of belonging, identity, unity, freedom and future hope. In reference to those resulting areas, many of the authors reviewed spent a great deal of emphasis on the implications they observed in the lives of those they have ministered to while others emphasized more conceptual outworking of the doctrine of adoption as it is revealed in scripture.

All of the participants clearly support the essential importance and inerrancy of scripture, returning regularly to ground their statements in scripture texts. On the other hand, since the aim of this research was to explore the implications of those conceptual truths, the participants were forced to rely heavily on what they have experienced and observed rather than simply upon what they have read and been taught. Thus, the findings of this study will present that some aspects of the social domain of the person have been significantly impacted by the doctrine of adoption, as demonstrated by strong, first-hand observation in ministry. On the other hand, there are also aspects of the social domain of the personhood that have relatively little extra-biblical literary and ministerial emphasis.

Similarities

For the most part, the concepts and implications that were uncovered in the literature review and interviews were similar in nature. As mentioned above, the most significant areas of insight gleaned by this research were in the areas of practical implications of the doctrine of adoption on the social domain of the personhood. The interviewers, in particular, gave rich insight from their experiences in ministry concerning the implications of the doctrine of adoption on the social domain of the personhood.

The first area of similarity was within that of scriptural dependence. All of the literature reviewed and each of the ministry leaders who were consulted agreed that scripture is the foundation for the doctrine of adoption and regularly quoted texts in order to ground their thoughts in the soil of scripture. Barnard even went so far as to begin his interview by stating that he is excited about the doctrine of adoption only

to the extent that “God is [excited] for it [...] Although God uses relationships and life experiences to develop me, everything must be filtered and grounded upon the truths of scripture.” Thus, scripture was explained to be the lens through which experience should be understood rather than the other way around.

Additionally, though the believer’s status is absolutely and completely changed at the moment of conversion, the literature and ministry leaders described an ongoing maturation process in which God’s children increasingly realize their new status. Therefore, even though every believer is fully adopted as a child of God, they will practically grow into their experience of their blessed new status and identity. For instance, this is plainly in view as the apostle Paul urges the Galatian church to embrace their adoption as sons rather than revert back to slavery in Galatians 4:4-9. Thus, though the legality of the believer’s adoption is complete, the realization of it continually develops until the eschaton. One might say that this increasingly fuller realization is how to best define sanctification, which would necessarily encompass all aspects of the personhood.

Both the literature and ministry leaders placed a great deal of emphasis on how the doctrine of adoption renews the believer’s sense of belonging, which, in turn, increasingly transforms every relational sphere. They both expressed that before adoption, fallen man is a slave to sin and estranged from the Father. Additionally, at the core of every human’s pursuit is this longing to belong and can only find its fulfillment in the adoptive relationship with Father God. For instance, John Piper explains, “God does not leave us as aliens when he adopts us. He does not leave us without feelings of acceptance and love. Rather, he pours his Spirit into our hearts to

give us the experience of being embraced in the family.”²⁷⁴ It is this experience that is the estuary for all of the following implications on the social domain of the personhood.

The literature and the respondents also agreed that the doctrine of adoption, when most fully grasped, impacts the believer’s sense of identity, which, in turn, transforms all aspects of the social domain of the personhood. For instance, Trevor Burke explains, “If you are a Christian, your identity is not a plumber, bricklayer, nurse or doctor (that’s what you do), but is first and foremost a child of God, namely who you are.”²⁷⁵ Thus, when the identity of God’s children is rooted in their adoption, their performance has less power to determine their worth. Thus, relationship with the Father is central in determining worth. This perspective results in the capacity to truly love God, self, others and the world rather than perform for them.

The literature and interviews also shared the perspective that the doctrine of adoption brings God’s children into a mysterious union with one another. Scripture is quite clear that loving God and loving his children are inextricably connected.²⁷⁶ Referencing a passage in 1 John, Abe claims that, “The command to love God is inseparable from the command to love one another. Whatever is true vertically is also true horizontally, and vice versa.” Thus, to be adopted by God necessarily leads to a genuine love for his children, who are the believer’s true brothers and sisters.

²⁷⁴ John Piper, “Adoption: The Heart of the Gospel,” in *Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father*, ed. Dan Cruver (Adelphia, MD: Cruciform Press, 2001), 99.

²⁷⁵ Trevor Burke, *The Message of Sonship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 213.

²⁷⁶ 1 John 3:23.

Both the literature and the participants agreed that maturing in the doctrine of adoption produces freedom in the life of God's children. They have become, and are realizing more and more, a life that is free of an orphan mentality and a slave mentality. The orphan mentality²⁷⁷ can be described as self-care, or the hopeless pursuit to find satisfaction and fulfillment in anything other than within the unconditional loving relationship with Father God. The slave mentality²⁷⁸ can be described as the hopeless pursuit to meet the perceived expectations of those who judge, namely: self, others and God, rather than realizing the unconditional loving relationship with Father God. Speaking to these concepts, Jack Frost explains,

We either live our life as if we have a home, or we live our life as if we don't have a home. We either live our life feeling safe, secure and at rest in [the] Father's heart, experiencing His love and giving it away, or we live our life with apprehension and uncertainty, struggling constantly with the fear of trusting, the fear of rejection, and the fear of opening up our heart to love—the three fears common to all people.²⁷⁹

Thus, there is a resulting freedom that is experienced as a result of growth in the doctrine of adoption. It was within this area that the participants had a great deal of rich practical data to share, which will be extrapolated within the concluding remarks below.

Finally, the literature and the participating ministry leaders agreed that the future hope of God's children that is presented in the doctrine of adoption places significant implications on the social domain of their personhood. Since their future is guaranteed by the relationship that is theirs with the Father as a result of their union

²⁷⁷ Psalm 68:5; John 14:18.

²⁷⁸ Gal. 4:4-9; Rom. 8:14-23.

²⁷⁹ Jack Frost, *Spiritual Slavery to Spiritual Sonship: Your Destiny Awaits You* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2006), 23.

with Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, fear loosens its grip. Rather than striving to be rid of condemnation and find fulfillment, those are both present realities that are a guaranteed future reality within the doctrine of adoption. Their future is sure. Trevor Burke explains, “Believers await the consummation of adoption, the very climax of redemption, when through the Holy Spirit they are transformed and physically resurrected as sons.”²⁸⁰ As a result, God’s children are freed to become a redemptive presence in relationship with God, self, others and the physical world.

Differences

While this researcher did not recognize any outright incongruities between the literature and the interviews, there did seem to be differences in emphasis. To be precise, there were areas that were emphasized within the literature reviewed, especially within scripture, which was not as well developed in the responses of the participating ministry leaders. The first difference that the researcher noticed was the problem that the doctrine of adoption meets for the believer. While the participants had a plethora of rich data to share on the orphan mentality, there seemed to be less development with regard to the slave mentality. While scripture does indicate the past status of the believer as that of an orphan too,²⁸¹ it should be noted that the apostle Paul only attacks the slave mentality.²⁸² It would seem that Paul suggests a specific problem-set that is unique to the slave mentality that is absent in the orphan

²⁸⁰ Trevor Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 190.

²⁸¹ Psalm 68:5; John 14:18.

²⁸² Gal. 4:4-9; Rom. 8:14-23.

mentality. In short, the orphan mentality deals with an inability to be satisfied and fulfilled outside of relationship with the Father while the slave mentality focuses on overcoming an inability to meet the perceived expectations of the Father. Although there is overlap, the use of “slave” suggests a specific set of problems not implied by the term “orphan.” The interview participants seemed to draw practical conclusions based on a higher level of emphasis on the orphan mentality than on that of the slave mentality. This being the case, there seems to be a realm of practical knowledge that is largely undeveloped for ministry leaders.

Additionally, the researcher observed that the implications of the doctrine of adoption on the believer’s relationship with the physical world was not quite as developed as it was in the literature. Many of the interviewers simply stated that they had not really thought about the concept much before they simply began to work things out in real time in the midst of the interview. Although the responses were valuable, much more could be developed with regard to how the believer views and interacts with the creation that the Father has blessed his children with. For instance, uncovering motivations behind how God’s children take advantage of the blessing of their Father’s creation for either their own good or the Father’s kingdom would be hugely beneficial.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore how ministry leaders describe the implications that the doctrine of adoption has on the social domain of the Christian’s personhood. In short, how are relationships affected by a deeper understanding of God’s fatherly care for his children? In general, what resulted was compellingly rich

data that showed that the entire personhood is transformed by the doctrine of adoption. As it pertains to the social domain, maturing in the doctrine of adoption profoundly impacts every aspect of every single relational sphere. Every one of the participants agreed that as God's children come alive to their adopted status and relationship as children of Father God, everything about everything is transformed. For instance, when asked how far do the implications of the doctrine of adoption reach, Bernard claims, "[T]here is no place that it does not reach. It changes everything. It is all pervasive." Similarly, Garvis responded, "It reaches all the way through. It is the fundamental identity issue. It is probably the least teased-out part of theology in our circles yet is should be the most fundamental." There was hardly an issue in which they all shared the same type of response with equally strong emphasis. Dealing with the social domain, a few of the most important aspects of relationship renewal will be presented within these concluding remarks.

The participating ministry leaders shared that as they discipled others and led them in their maturity in their adopted status as children of God, a sense of freedom seemed to be what was most observable. As believers increasingly realized the truths that were earlier stated, this element of practical freedom resulted in transformed relationships. As Clifford shared, "God did not save me to make me perfect. He saved me to make me his." He goes on to explain that in doing so, he is changed by the transformative love of God, resulting in a holiness that is pleasantly and increasingly dependent upon the Father. Thus, since God's love is found to be unconditional, perfect performance is not the precursor to acceptance. Acceptance is the free gift of

God the Father. Therefore, his fatherly love is free to be enjoyed as a present reality and the effectual cause for holiness in the lives of his children.

Since God's children recognize that they are loved by the Father because of his quality rather than their own, transparency before and dependence upon the Father who is willing and able to provide restoration is a welcome relief rather than a scary proposition. Along these lines, Eric claimed that his adoptive status as a child of God "makes dependence seem attractive and desirable. Instead of being the last resort, it becomes the first resort." Repentance becomes the way of life so as to more fully realize the sustaining love of God the Father. Thus, growth for the Christian is not better performance but rather more fully being filled by the love of the Father and realizing that this alone sustains and propels them on to be who they already are in Christ. As this truth is more fully realized, God's children become individuals who altruistically long to be like their Father, and love the things that their Father loves. This becomes the fuel for holiness and love for fellow brothers and sisters.

Another element that was uncovered was that of the beauty of relationship with God in his discipline. Since God's heart towards his children is always good, his actions and plans for their lives are always intended for their good, which, at its core, is the believer's maturity and a deeper dependence upon him. Thus, God is described as the father who disciplines his children in love.²⁸³ His purposes are not retributive. What Frank shares within his personal illustration of God's fatherly discipline is helpful: "The Father brought me to the end of myself and led me to cry, 'Uncle,' that I might cry, 'Abba.' God brings his sons and daughters to the point of hard

²⁸³ Deut. 8:5; Heb 12:5-11.

providences [so that] we begin to see our frailty and our absolute need of God the Father.” Thus, like a coach who is working his athlete towards the goal, God the Father often ordains difficulty and hardship in order to build up his children, and this is always accomplished with a heart of love. As Peter O’Brien shares, “[H]is discipline is evidence of his love for and commitment to them.”²⁸⁴ Thus, there is hope for those that God disciplines, for it reveals his love.

Additionally, as fulfillment is found in relationship with the Father, all other relationships are transformed as well. Since the believer’s identity is determined by whose they are rather than what they accomplish, performance and competition have less power. As a result, failure cannot strip believers of their identity, which then allows them the freedom to be transparent before each other. They become people who are increasingly quick to repent to God and one another. Transparency about one’s need and brokenness is no longer scary. It becomes an opportunity for the self and the watching world to see through them to the one who alone deserves glory. Thus, God’s children become increasingly quick to repent to their brothers and sisters, knowing that their authentic portrayal of need is a presentation of the gospel before both self and others. In so doing, since performance does not make them the recipient of adoration, God’s children allow themselves to be loved by one another.

The motivation for God’s children towards maturity in holiness is also renewed. They each generally agreed that the believer no longer relates with God as judge but as Father. Although God is the judge, the relationship he now has with his children is characterized by his fatherly care for them. Those who view God as a

²⁸⁴ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 464.

judge who brings condemnation are naturally motivated by a fear of retribution. Abe explained that this is not actually love for God at all but merely “self-protection.” On the other hand, Charles Hodge explains, “The Holy Spirit, whom you have received, does not produce a slavish and anxious state of mind, such as those experience who are under the law, but he produces the filial feelings of affection, reverence, and confidence and enables us, out of the fullness of our hearts, to call God our Father.”²⁸⁵ Thus, when God’s children recognize his fatherly love for them, they begin to realize their new status of belonging with him. This realization transforms their sense of identity, which is now determined by whom they belong to rather than what they have accomplished. The next result in the series of dominos is that motivation to holiness is renewed. It is no longer rooted in a striving to attain God’s acceptance. It becomes the joyful aspiration to be like the Father who already does accept them. John developed this concept in his first epistle in what was described as a “like Father, like son” analogy. Yarbrough explains, “The key to Christian identity, John has been insisting, is love. The road to love, he [affirms] is paved with faith.”²⁸⁶ Thus, the motivation that undergirds sanctification becomes relationally-driven by faith and love rather than task-driven by insecurity and fear.

Additionally, the way one loves self and others is transformed from condition to unconditional. Rather than accepting self and others on the basis of some standard of performance, God’s children, as they become alive to their adoptive status, place less and less expectations on those who are the recipients of their loves. As Eric

²⁸⁵ Charles Hodge, *Romans*, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 241-242.

²⁸⁶ Robert W. Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 269.

explained, “Without the doctrine of adoption all relationships are conditional. Their actions change how you relate to them because you really want them to fulfill a need for you.” Thus, love is only self-care for those who are immature in their appreciation of the doctrine of adoption. On the other hand, those who are gripped by the Father’s love are freed by the overflow of his love to share that same type of relationship with others. As Frank shared, “The more I linger before the beauty and the love of Jesus, the less irritated I get with other people. I see people less as trees and more as people.” God’s love is the effectual cause of love for his children, both for God, self, others and his creation. As John states in his first epistle, “We love because he first loved us.”²⁸⁷ Relationships become outward rather than inward-focused. The unconditional love of the Father frees the believer to an ever-increasing capacity of love for others.

Finally, as was mentioned in chapter four, perhaps the most profound impact that the doctrine of adoption has on God’s children is within their relationships with the lost. Without the doctrine of adoption, the believer has difficulty understanding God’s heart of compassion for the lost. Since relationship without the doctrine of adoption is conditional, there is little reason to engage with unbelievers. On the other hand, those who fully recognize that they were once both orphans and slaves and yet have been brought near into the most intimate of relationships with the one who is most glorious, they are quick to have compassion on the lost. They see the plight of the spiritual slave and orphan as their own, save for the grace of God. They long for them to be received into the Father’s embrace. As Clifford claimed, “The world is no

²⁸⁷ 1 John 4:19.

less broken or no more broken than I am. The difference is Jesus. It is not that I have lived a more moral life. We have nothing on the world except that we belong to Jesus.” As a result, the adopted children of God do not see the lost as their enemies. Certainly, they are enemies just as God’s children once were. The defining characteristic of the lost is more appropriately that of an orphan and slave. When God’s children see orphans and slaves as the heart of the Father sees them, they simply long for them to be freed and find belonging within the embrace of the Father.

Recommendations for Practice

After giving significant consideration to the responses of each of the participants and to stories they shared, it is this researcher’s recommendation that all ministry leaders who are tasked with discipling the children of God, must make the doctrine of adoption a foundational truth from which to build any system of growth development. Diagnosing growth opportunities with regard to the doctrine of adoption would allow wonderful insight in the discipleship of the believer. How individuals view their relationship with Father God, self, others and the physical world would definitely be helpful in this ongoing evaluative process. This diagnostic would include many of the contrasts that were developed within the synthesis of the interview data in chapter four. For instance, a diagnostic tool would determine whether the individual feels God’s love is conditional or unconditional, whether repentance is avoided or embraced, whether motivation for obedience is the result of the felt intimation of God as judge or the intimation of God as Father, whether the goal of sanctification is to become perfect and to need the Father less or to be drawn into and realize fully the need that is met by one’s relationship with the Father.

Further questions would necessarily include those that cover all of the areas of the social domain of the personhood. Such a tool could be utilized to determine aspects of the believer's maturity and provide opportunities for further reflection and encouragement found in the appropriate scripture texts that have been covered in the first section of the literature review in chapter two.

Another area of practice is within that of the spiritual disciplines. If maturity entails better realization of the relationship status that has already been provided with the Father by unity with Christ, the goal of spiritual disciplines is more than simply growing in perfection and holiness. Spiritual disciplines take on the deeper element of relational intimacy and absolute dependence upon the ever loving care of the Father. This being the case, the believer's identity is less determined by the performance quality of the spiritual disciplines and more determined by the relational intimacy with the Father that those spiritual disciplines enable. Thus, the spiritual disciplines take on a renewed impetus and results, which are founded upon the longings of the Father to bring his children deeper in relationship with him and one another.

Additionally, it became apparent that maturity in the doctrine of adoption is determined only by the will of God the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the main task of ministry leaders is not a set of tasks that results in the growth of those they disciple. The main focus of ministry leaders is dependence upon the Father that is visibly observable and thoughtfully interpreted for those who are being disciplined. Thus, the spiritual disciplines that cause them to more fully realize their own relationship with the Father are of dire importance. Prayer, scripture reading and worship are examples of these spiritual disciplines. As Abe explained,

“To grow as a child of God, we do not apply our willpower to try and change. We apply our willpower to trust that what God has said is true.” The same can be said with regard to the impossible task of discipling others in the doctrine of adoption. Ministry leaders who do this will inevitably be people who are living portraits of the Father’s love to them and through them. Along these lines, Eric claimed, “It’s the difference between preaching at people and preaching to myself and letting other people overhear the conversation.” As stated earlier, such transparency allows others to see, through God’s children, the Father who loves his beloved.

Recommendations for Further Research

Having concluded this study, the researcher certainly sees opportunity for further studies that would benefit the body of Christ. First, as mentioned above, greater emphasis was placed on the orphan mentality than upon that of the slave mentality. It would be wonderful to intentionally research this other sphere for the purpose of both academic growth and practical understanding.

Second, although all of the pastors briefly touched on the aspect of relationship with the physical world, it did not seem to be as well-developed in their thought process. To determine further the implications of the doctrine of adoption on the believer’s relationship and interactions with the physical world would undoubtedly provide opportunity to better understand and implement the creation mandate and better reflect the Father in the world.

Third, while this study focused on the implications of the doctrine of adoption, further research could be done to determine the best strategic process for discipling God’s children in their growth in this area. It would be a significantly beneficial study

to determine what sorts of activities and events in the life of the believer seem to best cultivate fertile soil for their maturation process in this area.

Fourth, further research on the systematic truths and practical implications of the believer's unity with Christ is recommended. All aspects of this study assumed the truth that God's children are united to Christ. It would significantly profit the church to uncover what unity with Christ means, what it implies, and how it impacts the believer both in the present context and the one that is to come.

Fifth, though unintentional, this study uncovered data that indicated that there is a connection between the family history and interactions, especially between the individual and his or her father, and experiencing the practical implications of the doctrine of adoption. Specifically, how do earthly fathers' relationship with their children impact the youngsters in their capacity to view and interact with God as their Father. Some of the literature and all of the interviewees indicated that there is a correlation that deserves further research.

Sixth, this researcher recommends a comparison and contrast between the believer's growth in his adoptive status and that of earthly adopted children. A study that includes both the orphan and the slave would be recommended. Paul's physical illustration of the common earthly event of adoption seems to have much more in common with the spiritual truth that it targets. The struggles that earthly adopted children experience seem to be similar to struggles that God's children work through as they grow in their realization of their own adoption. This researcher originally planned on including this data within this study but reconsidered after concluding that its scope deserved its own research study.

Finally, although this research focused in on the social domain of the personhood, a study on each of the other domains would be hugely beneficial. The social sciences tend to divide into five domains: physical, cognitive, social, moral and affective. A focused study on how the doctrine of adoption impacts each of these domains would result in a multi-faceted comprehension on the implications of the doctrine of adoption on the whole person.

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