

Chapter XII.

Of Adoption

All those that are justified, God vouchsafeth, in and for his only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption: by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God; have his name put upon them; receive the Spirit of adoption; have access to the throne of grace with boldness; are enabled to cry, Abba, Father; are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by his as by a father; yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption, and inherit the promises, as heirs of everlasting salvation.

Exposition

All men are the children of God in respect of their creation; for "we are all his offspring." "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?"—Mal. ii. 10. The members of the visible Church are the children of God in respect of an external federal relation. They are the visible family of God on earth, and enjoy peculiar privileges. At a very early period, the professors of the true religion were denominated "the sons of God."—Gen. vi. 2. God having chosen Israel for his peculiar people, and conferred upon them many privileges which he did not vouchsafe to other nations, and the knowledge and worship of the true God being maintained amongst them, while all other nations were sunk in ignorance and idolatry, they were called "the sons of God." The Lord commanded Pharaoh to be told concerning Israel, "He is my son, even my firstborn."—Exod. iv. 22. This is a great blessing; but many who enjoy it are not really the children of God, and shall at last be cast out into utter darkness.—John viii. 44; Matt. viii. 12. In a far higher sense are all those that are justified the children of God. They are made partakers of the grace of adoption. Among men, adoption signifies that act by which a person takes the child of another into the place, and entitles him to the privileges, of his own son. Spiritual adoption is that act by which God receives sinners into his family, and gives them a right to all the privileges of his children. Sinners are naturally "the children of the devil," aliens to the family of God, and heirs of wrath; by adoption they are translated out of the family of Satan into the family of Heaven, and thus admitted to fellowship with Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, as their elder brother, with all the holy angels, and with all the saints—both those on earth and those in heaven. Thus far there is a resemblance between civil and spiritual adoption, but there are also important points in which they differ. Men adopt a stranger to supply a defect, but God had no such inducement to adopt any of the children of Adam; for he is infinitely blessed in himself, and he had "a well-beloved Son," who was the object of his ineffable delight. Men usually adopt only one to be their son and heir, but God receives an innumerable

multitude into his family, and "brings many sons to glory." Men are always influenced by some real or supposed excellence in the person to whom they show this kindness; but those whom God adopts are altogether destitute of any good qualifications to recommend them to his favour.

Adoption, being a change of state, is completed at once, and is equally the privilege of all that truly believe in Christ.—Gal. iii. 26, 28. Some of the children of God may excel others in gifts and gracious qualities; but the filial relation to God is the same in all. This high privilege entirely flows from the free and sovereign grace of God. In the bestowment of this blessing there is a display of love and grace which surpasses expression, and calls forth the admiration of all who are partakers of it. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God?"—1 John iii. 1. But divine grace could only be dispensed to the guilty in a way consistent with the claims of justice, and the honour of the law. Had God received such rebels into his favour and family without demanding a satisfaction for their offences, this would have sullied the glory of his perfections, and dishonoured the law which they had violated. This privilege, therefore, is bestowed on the ground of the obedience and satisfaction of Christ, as the meritorious cause thereof. "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."—Gal. iv. 4, 5. How amazing the condescension and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who endured the curse of the law, that the forfeiture of our sonship might be reversed! As he procured this privilege for us by an invaluable price, so it is only when we are united to him by faith that we become actually interested in it. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."—John i. 12.

We shall now take a cursory view of the inestimable privileges of the children of God.

1. They obtain a new name. A stranger taken into the family of another, received the name of the adopter, and those whom God adopts "are called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord hath named," even by the honourable and endearing name of "the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty."—Isa. lxii. 2; 2 Cor. vi. 18.

2. They receive the spirit of adoption. Rom. viii. 15; Gal. iv. 6. The Spirit implants in them the dispositions of children, and transforms them into the image of God's dear Son—he witnesses with their spirits that they are the sons of God—he seals them to the day of redemption, and is the earnest of their inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession.—Rom. viii. 16; Eph. i. 13, 14.

3. They have access to the throne of grace with boldness. God allows his children to draw near to him with freedom, to pour out their hearts before him, to make all their requests known to him; and they may cherish this confidence, that if they ask anything according to his will, he heareth them.—1 John v. 14.

4. They are the objects of God's fatherly sympathy and pity. He knows their frame, and remembers that they are but dust; and when he sees it necessary to correct them, he feels for them with the bowels of parental compassion.—Ps. ciii. 13.

5. They enjoy the protection of their heavenly Father. Numerous are their spiritual enemies, and manifold the dangers to which they are exposed; but he who neither slumbers nor sleeps, watches over them with unwearied care. He gives his angels charge concerning them, who encamp around them, and, in ways unknown to us, perform many kind offices for them.—Ps. xxxiv. 7; Heb. i. 14.

6. They are provided for by their heavenly Father. He knows they need his providential favours in this world, and these he does not withhold.—Matt. vi. 30 32; Ps. xxxiv. 9,10. For their souls he has made suitable provision in his Word, and he communicates to them supplies of grace according to their diversified circumstances.—Phil. iv. 19.

7. Paternal correction is not withheld when necessary.—Heb. xii. 6. This, indeed, they are apt to regard as a punishment rather than a privilege; but it is the fruit of paternal love, it is intended for their profit, and is promised as a blessing.—Ps. lxxxix. 30-34. These corrections, though not for the present joyous, but grievous, promote their spiritual advantage; and many of God's children have acknowledged, from their happy experience, that it was good for them to be afflicted.—Ps. xciv. 12; cxix. 67, 71; Job v. 17.

8. Unfailing establishment in their state of sonship, and in all the privileges connected with that state. As their heavenly Father will never cast them off, so he secures that they shall not totally and finally depart from him.—Jer. xxxii. 40.

9. They are heirs of all the promises. These are exceeding great and precious; they are adapted to every condition in which the children of God can be placed; and faithful is He who hath promised.—Heb. vi. 12, 17.

10. They are heirs of a rich and glorious inheritance, which is reserved for them in heaven.—1 Pet. i. 4. They are said to be "heirs of salvation."—Heb. i. 14; "heirs of the grace of life,"—1 Pet. iii. 7; "heirs of the kingdom,"—James ii. 5; and "heirs of God."—Rom. viii. 17.

How dignified are all true believers! What character so honourable as that of the sons of God! True, the dignity to which they are advanced is not conspicuous to the world, nor always discerned by themselves; but the day of the revelation of Jesus Christ will be the day of "the manifestation of the sons of God." Then will Christ acknowledge them as his brethren before the assembled world, and put them in full possession of that inheritance which he has gone to prepare for them. Let them, therefore, look for his glorious appearing; and, in the meantime, let them act in accordance with their high character and their exalted prospects—walking as the sons of God, harmless and without rebuke, and shining as lights in the world.