



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume V
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Sonship

by – C. R. Stam (1909-2003)

"Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory ..." (Romans 9:4).

"Having predestinated us into the adoption of children ..." (Ephesians 1:5).

Both these statements were penned by Paul the apostle, who, indeed, is the only New Testament writer to employ the word here translated *adoption*.

At first sight the apostle seems to contradict himself, for after stating specifically, in his letter to the Romans, that the adoption and the glory pertain to Israel, he writes to Gentiles, in his Ephesian letter, saying that God has "*predestinated us unto the adoption of children.*"

In order to arrive at a solution to this problem we must first determine the meaning of the New Testament word *adoption*.

PLACING AS SONS

In looking this word up in a Bible Dictionary, some time ago, we were disappointed to find the following definition:

"Adoption is an act by which a person takes a stranger into his family, acknowledges him as his child, and constitutes him heir of his estate. ... In the New Testament, adoption denotes the act of God's free grace ... by which, on being justified through faith, we are received into the family of God, and made heirs of the inheritance of heaven."

That this is the present popular usage of our English word *adoption* no one will deny, but that is *not* the meaning of the Greek word rendered "*adoption*" in the *Authorized Version*, is clear from its usage in the New Testament.

Perhaps no passage of Scripture will shed so much light on the meaning of the original word as Galatians 4:1-7.

*"Now I say, that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. **Even so** we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But 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. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God, through Christ."*

According to this passage, "*adoption*" is simply *the placing as a son* – that is, a *grown-up son*.

(see SONSHIP, page 1491)

Dear Full-Grown Sons.

In this issue we will be taking a closer look at the important subject of “adoption.” The truth contained in this doctrine is that we are not just the “children of God,” blessed enough as that is; we are more than that – we’re the “sons of God.”

As members of Christ’s body we have been placed into full, adult sonship. We are not minor¹ “children,” we have the divine position of full-grown sons.² This is the position of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. This is the glorious principle known as “adoption.”

This wonderful reality is often missed because of the more modern usage of the word “adoption.” We think of taking someone from outside the family and making them a member. This is not the Scriptural concept; instead it is that of placement of one into a full-adult sonship position.

The word translated as “adoption” is the Greek word *hiothesia*. This is *Strong’s Greek Lexicon* #5206 meaning the “placing as a son”, i.e., “sonship,” or son-placing.

It is defined by A.E. Knoch as,

“Sonship, literally son-placing, the station in life accorded a son ...”³

(see **EDITORIAL**, page 1496)

1. The word “minor” is defined as “while in a state of infancy; one who has not attained the age of a major.” The word “minor” is in contrast with the word “major.” “Major” is defined as “one who has attained his full age, and has acquired all his civil rights; one who is no longer a minor; an adult.” This is a concept known as “majority” – “The state or condition of a person who has arrived at full age. He is then said to be a major, in opposition to minor, which is his condition during infancy.” (Definitions are from *Bouvier’s Law Dictionary*, 1856 Edition).
2. “In the Scriptures those who are too young to have a voice in affairs, who need a guardian, are minors ... The *Authorized Version* renders this “babe,” “child,” and “childish,” ... It is in contrast to the wise and intelligent ... mature man (I Corinthians 13:10, 11) ... In Israel a male was mature physically when he arrived at the age of twenty (Leviticus 27:3, 5). Then he was drafted into the host, or army, and was liable to military service, being considered a mature member of the nation ...” A.E. Knoch (1874-1965), *Babe, Child, Sonship, and Firstborn*.
3. A.E. Knoch (1874-1965), *Babe, Child, Sonship, and Firstborn*.

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This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God’s abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God’s purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the “preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from the law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12)
- the distinct ministry of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with ...
 - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6)
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4)

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This publication is not connected with any “church,” “denomination,” “movement,” “organization,” “mission,” “creed,” “meeting,” “school,” “conference” or “fellowship.”

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SONSHIP (continued from page 1489)

This is the definition of the word *uiothesia* (adoption) as given by Young, Robinson and others, while Thayer, referring to that adoption for which believers still wait, calls it, “the consummate condition of the sons of God, which will render it evident that they are the sons of God.”

The adoption of children as we speak of it today generally refers to the taking in and bringing up of other people’s children. This is not so of the Bible word *uiothesia*, for according to Galatians 4:1-7 this *placing as sons* affected those *already* children. This is not to imply, of course, that a stranger could not also be taken in and given a place as a grown son; but the point is that Bible “*adoption*” does not refer to mere acceptance into the family, but to a *declaration of full sonship*, with all its rights and privileges.

In the life of the Hebrew boy there came a time, appointed by the father, when “*adoption*” proceedings took place and the boy was *declared* to be the [adult] son and heir of the father.

Before that time he had been a “son,” indeed, but “*under tutors and governors.*” He had been told what he must and must not do, what he may and may not do. In this he differed nothing from a servant, but finally the “*time appointed*” arrives. He is a *grown* son now. It is assumed that he will no longer need overseers to keep him in check. There will be natural understanding and cooperation between father and son. And so the “*adoption*” proceedings take place – a declaration that the son now enters into all the rights and privileges of *full sonship*.

Such is the meaning of the word *adoption* as it is used in the writings of Paul.

ISRAEL AND THE ADOPTION

In Exodus 4:22 we find the striking statement,

“And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, **Israel is my son, even my firstborn.**”

This does not signify that Israel was a full grown son while in Egypt. It was in Egypt that the nation had been born and by now it had scarcely begun to walk.

Hosea 11:1 says,

“*when Israel was a **child**, then I loved him, and called My son out of Egypt.*”

Jeremiah 31:32 speaks of

“*the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.*”

So far were they from their time of “*adoption*” that it was only *after* God had taken them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt that He first gave them the law. They had not by any means come to the place where God could make a declaration of full sonship. Instead He had to give them the ten commandments, and a thousand other commandments beside. They had to be told “*Thou shalt*” and “*Thou shalt not.*” Though “*heir of the world*” (Romans 4:13), God’s son, Israel, was placed “*under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the Father.*”

Note carefully the phrase, “*the time appointed of the Father.*”

Israel, left to himself, would never have reached the place of “*adoption.*” He would never have attained to the place of full sonship, the place where he could be trusted to work in harmony with the Father. Often as we read about him in the Old Testament we find him described by such words as “*rebellious,*” “*perverse*” and “*stiffnecked.*”

By the time John the Baptist, the King’s herald, had appeared, Israel had gotten farther from that place instead of nearer, for John’s message was one of repentance. He said,

“*Now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire*” (Matthew 3:10).

Even all of John's warnings and pleadings had brought Israel morally no nearer to the place of "adoption," for the story ends with the reformer's head brought as a present to the daughter of a wicked woman with whom Herod, then king of the Jews, was living in adultery, while the Lord Jesus had to take up where John had left off, crying to Israel to repent.

Thank God, however, that "adoption" does not depend primarily upon the son's attainments, but on the father's will. It takes place at "the time appointed of the father," and it is heartening here to see the Father take the first steps.

Israel would never have grown up or come to the place of adoption,

*"but when the fulness 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" (Galatians 4:4-5).*

The apostle speaks historically, of course, and it is not difficult to understand why "we," not "they," have received the adoption, when we consider what happened after the resurrection.

In the early chapters of the book of Acts we find Peter offering to Israel "the adoption, and the glory." All the blessings of Israel's exaltation in the Millennium are bound up in the phrase "the times of refreshing."

*"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when **the times of refreshing** shall come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you" (Acts 3:19-20).*

As we know, the people of Israel refused both the Messiah and the glories He had purchased for them. He had come to redeem them that were under the law that they might "receive the adoption of sons," but they did not feel that they needed to be redeemed. He had come to "save His people

from their sins" (Matthew 1:21), but they wanted to be saved from their troubles instead of from their sins.

"Being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness," they refused to "submit themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:3).

*"What then? **Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for**" (Romans 11:7).*

Israel had become a rebellious son and even to this day remains out of God's favor. As we see the nation groping about in darkness we recall the word of God by Hosea the prophet:

*"Then said God, Call his name Loammi; for **ye are not my people, and I will not be your God**" (Hosea 1:9).*

This is what Paul calls the "fall," the "casting away," the "diminishing" of them. Thank God, this condition is only temporary! Israel will yet learn the lesson, for Hosea goes on to say,

*"Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there shall it be said unto them, **ye are the sons of the living God**" (Hosea 1:10).*

THE LORD JESUS AND THE ADOPTION

When John the Baptist went to preach in the wilderness, we read,

*"Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, **and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins**" (Matthew 3:5-6).*

John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for

the remission of sins. Nothing could be clearer than that. There was nothing *non-essential* or of *secondary importance* about it. It lay at the very heart of his message and ministry. Those who doubt this should consider carefully and prayerfully Mark 1:4.

“John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.”

But what is this?

“Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him” (Matthew 3:13).

Little wonder that John *“forbad Him.”* He had no sins to confess. Why should He be *“numbered with the transgressors”* (Isaiah 53:12; Mark 15:28)?

Little wonder that God broke through the heavens after that baptism to say,

“This is My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

Surely our blessed Lord need not wait for any *“adoption”* proceedings to be recognized as the Son of God! Surely He could be trusted to work in harmony with the Father! Surely it would be no risk on the part of the Father to exalt Him immediately to the position of *full Sonship* with its rights and privileges!

True, but our blessed Lord had come to *redeem others* from bondage so that *they*, by His merits, might be given the place of sonship. This is why Galatians 4:4 says,

*“When the fulness 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.**”*

Yes, He too – for the sake of others – was placed *“under tutors and governors until the time*

appointed of the Father.” He had to be placed in the position of a child, of a servant – in the position of obedience – **“made under the law.”**

“Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered” (Hebrews 5:8).

He assumed the place of subjection to learn obedience. While on earth He was God’s beloved Son, to be sure; but the declaration of full Sonship could not yet be made. The *“adoption”* proceedings could not yet take place.

It is in the second Psalm, however, that we read these significant words:

“I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto Me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten Thee” (Psalm 2:7).

Should the reader ask *“What day?”* or *“When was our Lord declared to be the Son of God?”* he will find the answer in Acts 13:33.

*“God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that **he raised up Jesus again;** as it is also written in the second Psalm, Thou art My Son, **this day** have I begotten Thee.”*

So it was at the resurrection that the *“decree”* was made and Christ was *“declared”* to be the Son of God, *“begotten”* in the larger sense of the word. This agrees with what we find in the first chapter of Romans, where Paul speaks of the good news of God,

*“Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and **declared to be the Son of God with power,** according to the spirit of holiness, **by the resurrection from the dead”** (Romans 1:4).*

The adoption proceedings over, He ascended *“far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion”* to sit at the right hand of God – the

place of favor and privilege and honor.

OUR ADOPTION IN CHRIST

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: Having predestinated us unto **the** adoption of children by Jesus **Christ** to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved”* (Ephesians 1: 3-6).

What a revelation!

Blessed now with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies! and let us not forget that the Ephesian letter was distinctly addressed to Gentiles (3:1). How is it that we, poor, have thus been given free access to all the riches of the Father?

Was it according to our works, or character, or devotion? No, it was *“according to the good pleasure of His will,”* – *“according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world.”*

It was His own gracious plan to *make us “holy and without blame before Him; **in love having predestinated us unto the adoption of children.**”*

Nevertheless, *how* could He make us *“holy and without blame before Him,”* and give us the place of *“adoption?”*

There is only one answer – *“**by Jesus Christ,**”* and it is eternally *“**to the praise of the glory of His grace**”* that *“**He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.**”*

Now it is true that those referred to here as having been *“adopted”* were, indeed, strangers and aliens; but a careful examination of the passage

will clearly reveal that again more than present-day adoption is meant.

According to this passage we have not merely been saved, but *accepted* as *full-grown sons* in Christ, the beloved Son, and given a place at the Father’s right hand with free access to all the Father’s riches in the heavenlies!

That we could not have *attained* to *full sonship* any more than Israel is clear. Indeed, it was when we came to a realization of our unworthiness and trusted in Christ, God’s perfect Son, that He *gave* us this exalted position.

Thus, *as far as our position is concerned,* there is no period of preparation or discipline. God does not first place us *“under tutors and governors”* until we have shown that we are worthy of a position of *full sonship*.

No, Israel has already demonstrated how futile it is for the sons of Adam to *try*. Now God is demonstrating His perfect satisfaction *“in Christ.”*

Under the dispensation of law God demonstrated the insufficiency of man. Today, under the dispensation of grace He is demonstrating the all-sufficiency of Christ.

But let us not proceed further with this thought until we have first seen that our *“adoption,”* like Christ’s, is bound up with resurrection. Indeed, it is bound up with *His* resurrection.

To see exactly what has taken place we need but turn to the second chapter of Ephesians, where in verses 3 and 4 we are found, to begin with, as *“children of disobedience”* and *“children of wrath.”*

“But God, Who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace are ye saved) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-6).

What infinite grace! How far above the law He places us; and that immediately, without any period of probation!

ENJOYING SONSHIP

This is the *position* God has given us “*in Christ,*” but like salvation itself, the *realization* of it is progressive. However, the realization too is associated with resurrection.

How do we *enjoy* sonship now? By *resurrection*, for the 11th verse of of Romans says,

“But if the spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Romans 8:11).

How do we *enjoy* sonship now? By *resurrection*. The next verse goes on to say,

“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.”

In other words, the Spirit of Him that raised up Christ from the dead will quicken our mortal bodies to help us to live the *resurrection life* – to “*walk in newness of life*” (Romans 6:4). This is what Paul meant when he exclaimed, “*that I might know Him, and the power of His resurrection.*”

Some day we shall come into the *full* enjoyment of our position! Who knows how soon!

As yet, we

“... which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23).

Nonetheless, the blessed day will come! Again, it will be a time of resurrection!

“... the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible

must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (I Corinthians 15:52-53).

BACK TO ISRAEL

“Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory ...” (Romans 9:4).

“For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (Romans 11:25-26).

Finally Israel too, will come into the place of “*adoption.*” And once more it will be a resurrection.

“For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead!” (Romans 11:15).

Then shall the world know that Israel, so long hated and despised, is God’s son.

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you” (Zechariah 8:23).

Then shall Israel know that the position of sonship, with all its privilege and glory, can only be obtained through the very One who was “*wounded in the house of His friends*” – *the house of Israel* – and before the Millennium is over millions more will have learned that lesson, for God will yet keep His covenant with Abraham.

“That in blessing I will bless thee, and in

*multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy Seed shall possess the gate of His enemies; **and in thy Seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed**; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Genesis 22:17-18).*

Even creation will feel the results:

“Because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of god” (Romans 8:21).

THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL

Thank God that He has already

*“... made known **unto us** the mystery of His will ... that in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together*

EDITORIAL (continued from page 1490)
Regarding this C.I. Scofield says,

Adoption is the act of God whereby children of God redeemed by Christ are made adult sons, whose full manifestations as such awaits the resurrection.⁴

Of course the world does not yet know who we are. Our sonship has been completely hidden from them at this time; but one day we will be made manifest. In the resurrection God will reveal to all of creation who are His sons. This will be our glorious coronation day.

*“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the **manifestation**⁵ of the sons of God” (Romans 8:19).*

Until our manifestation as “*the sons of God*,” the rest of God’s creation doesn’t know who we are. As we walk through our life, the circumstances will not reflect our true identity. In fact, we are not exempt

4. C.I. Scofield, *The Scofield Bible Correspondence Course* (1907), Vol. III, page 412.

5. *Strong’s Greek Lexicon* #602 “apokalupsis” – defined as “disclosure” and translated elsewhere in the *King James Version* as – “*appearing*” and “*revelation*.”

in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him.” (Ephesians 1:9-10).

Thus we, as His heavenly people, and Israel and the Gentile nations on earth, will come into the full enjoyment of “*adoption*.” Our place, however, will be higher and closer than theirs, for we are the

“... members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones” (Ephesians 5:25).

Is this because we have trusted Him during this age of His rejection? Even so, it is all by His fathomless, wonderful grace.



from all the apparent vanities of this “*darkland*.” We’ll have our share of the “*darkside*,” suffering, pain, discouragement, difficulties, weariness, pressure and the like; but we are not defined by their details. Although we’re beckoned to the contrary on every side, we have a higher life – the “*highlife*” from above, from the “*lightland*” – the “*lightside*” of divine life. We are called to walk in this radiant light as our Father’s full-grown, adult sons.

As we go through the various details of our earthly lives, let’s not forget who we really are. Let us remember our divine calling and position as God’s full-grown sons. Let us live in His divine calling and position as our day-by-day, moment-by-moment focus, for that is **real** life.

Until next week,

In the Love of Christ, I am your fellow,



Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.