

“This book is a gem: a precious mind-clearing,  
heartwarming achievement.” **J. I. PACKER**

**SONS**  
*in the*  
**SON**

*The RICHES and REACH*  
*of ADOPTION in CHRIST*

**DAVID B. GARNER**

Foreword by Sinclair B. Ferguson

“Dr. Garner’s *Sons in the Son* is a fascinating read on the traditionally minimized doctrine of the believer’s adoption in Christ. One does not need to agree with Garner at every point to recommend this profoundly theological and practical work. In terms of exegetical, biblical, systematic, historical, and experiential theology, *Sons in the Son* is a ground-breaking book that thoroughly mines the field of adoption from Scripture itself all the way to twenty-first-century treatments of the subject. All future work on this subject, which is so precious to the minds and hearts of Christians, should reckon with this masterful treatment.”

—**Joel R. Beeke**, President, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids

“David Garner’s *Sons in the Son* is to the theology of adoption what John Murray’s *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* is to an explanation of Christ’s work for us and in us. After having immersed myself in the theology of adoption for a decade, I’m convinced that Garner’s book will be considered a theological classic of the Christian faith just as Murray’s is today. My hope (and full expectation) is that *Sons in the Son* will be widely read by scholars and pastors for the great good of the church. Garner has served the church exceedingly well with this book. To say I absolutely loved it would be an understatement.”

—**Dan Cruver**, President, Together for Adoption; editor/co-author, *Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father*

“*Sons in the Son* serves the church well by showing that nothing is more ultimate, nothing more at stake in the salvation of God’s elect, not only for them but for Christ himself, than their adoption (Rom. 8:29). Garner explores this key, often insufficiently valued doctrine in its full scope and in considerable depth—in a way that stimulates readers to a fresh appreciation of adoption with its important implications for life in union with Christ. I commend this book most highly.”

—**Richard B. Gaffin Jr.**, Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Emeritus, Westminster Theological Seminary

“J. I. Packer and John Murray have told us that adoption is the apex of the Christian’s privilege. All Reformed pastors agree that to pray ‘Our Father’ is holy delight. Yet what is adoption’s place in the *ordo salutis*? Many students ask why we speak of justification and sanctification, but say little about adoption. With impressive scope and careful attention to exegetical detail, Professor David Garner explores adoption as the master benefit of faith union with the exalted Christ. To be a believing son of God is to be one with the eternal, now ‘adopted’ Son.

“Without reducing the importance of application, Garner patiently roots the *ordo salutis* in Jesus’ once-for-all history. The eternal Son took on flesh, met the double demand of the broken covenant of works, was himself made ‘Son of God in power’ by his resurrection (Rom. 1:4), and gave his Spirit to the church. What Christ attained—adoption as Son—is what he confers by his Spirit on the church. This is the full flowering of the covenant.

“Unfortunately, the word adopted will not be easy to grasp as describing the resurrected Christ. It has too many associations with heresies old and new. But Garner’s Nicene orthodoxy is impeccable. This book develops yet another important way in which Scripture proclaims that the acts of the triune God in redemptive history, ‘for us and for our salvation,’ express what is blessedly true of him eternally.

“Dr. Garner’s book may well reset the Reformed church’s thinking about the relationship of its doctrine of salvation and its doctrine of Christ. Garner firmly challenges the shortchangers: salvation cannot be reduced to justification, nor to sanctification, nor to ecclesiology. Instead, all these cohere in Christ himself. David has given a gift to the church, both for its doctrine and for its piety. It is a pleasure to recommend it.”

—**Howard Griffith**, Academic Dean and Associate Professor  
of Systematic Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary,  
Washington, DC

“Reading *Sons in the Son* is like putting on a new set of glasses that enable the reader to see the glistening beauty of God’s grace of adoption throughout the entirety of his salvation plan. Garner clearly and convincingly traces the adoption of God anchored in his loving purposes from eternity past, enacted through the adoption of Israel,

assured by the ascension of Jesus as the adopted Son of God in power, and anticipated by all sons who are joined to the Son. This book both challenged my mind and melted my heart.”

—**Nancy Guthrie**, Bible teacher and author of the *Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament* series

“*Sons in the Son* is a scholarly, faithful exposition of the doctrine of adoption that demonstrates adoption’s crucial character in the drama of redemption. It’s a valuable resource for any Christian wanting to exult in God’s purpose in making us sons and daughters and joint heirs with Christ.”

—**Russell Moore**, President, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, Southern Baptist Convention

“The jazzy-looking, though admirably apt, title of Dr. Garner’s treatise proclaims him to be following, indeed reinstating, John Calvin’s exact insight into Paul’s account of adoption as a central category in both Trinitarian Christology and covenantal soteriology. This is something that post-Puritan Reformed teaching for three centuries, strangely, has not always made fully clear, and it is high time that the record be set straight. Though at times heavy sledding (after all, a doctoral thesis went into its making), this book is a gem: a precious mind-clearing, heartwarming achievement that I cannot commend too highly.”

—**James I. Packer**, Board of Governors Professor of Theology, Regent College

“In this volume, Dave Garner has gathered up with biblical fidelity and captivating clarity the glorious doctrine of adoption, affirming both the privileges of believers as ‘sons of God’ in Christ and the experiential blessings enjoyed by the sealing presence and power of the Spirit of adoption—a must read.”

—**Harry L. Reeder**, Pastor/Teacher, Briarwood Presbyterian Church, Birmingham

“The Scripture’s teaching about adoption has enjoyed a renaissance in recent evangelical reflection. Long overdue is a work that not only

synthesizes and analyzes recent studies of adoption but also exhaustively surveys the relevant biblical, theological, and historical materials. David B. Garner's *Sons in the Son* is just such a work. Far from merely restating what others have said about adoption, *Sons in the Son* sends readers back to the sources to think about the doctrine in fresh and challenging ways. Garner has performed a great service to the Reformed church; I expect that *Sons in the Son* will quickly establish itself as the standard treatment of adoption for years to come."

—**Guy Prentiss Waters**, James M. Baird Jr. Professor of New Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi

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DAVID B. GARNER



P U B L I S H I N G

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To Minda with joy



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## FOREWORD

Sixty years ago, Dr. David Garner’s predecessor at Westminster Seminary, Professor John Murray, published his small but widely influential book *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*.<sup>1</sup> It included a brief chapter entitled simply “Adoption.” He probably had little idea—and indeed, it has been relatively rarely recognized—that those few pages would mark the beginning of a new epoch for this doctrine. For a variety of reasons, it had been almost entirely absent from the way in which twentieth-century evangelical Christians thought about their salvation. Regeneration, justification, and sanctification took central place. By contrast, John Murray stressed that adoption is “the apex of grace and privilege.”

The intervening decades have seen a small bookcase of publications on the theme of divine adoption and sonship. Some have been scholarly works dealing with the biblical background and including detailed technical exegetical studies of the relevant New Testament passages; others have been more pastoral, focusing on the privileges of believers’ adoption into God’s family and being able to call him “*Abba*, Father.” As a direct result, many Christians have discovered a new freedom, joy, and security in Christ.

It is very fitting, therefore, that one of Professor Murray’s successors at Westminster Seminary gives us this new and multidimensional treatment of this theme. In these pages Professor Garner lives up to his name, for he has garnered many of the best fruits of the church’s meditation and exposition of this great theme.

1. John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955).

But more than that, Dr. Garner presents the biblical teaching on divine adoption in the spirit of Scripture and standing on the shoulders of the Reformed fathers of the church who have best expounded it. Here, then, a line of thought that was almost ubiquitous in Calvin, and first given confessional status in the Westminster Confession of Faith, but that has often been marginalized in both theology and pastoral ministry, is brought to an abundant harvest. And in keeping with his Reformed forebears, Dr. Garner weaves together exegetical, redemptive-historical, systematic-theological, and pastoral-theological concerns so that his exposition possesses a multivalent character that will serve scholars, students, and pastors equally well.

Two qualities in this book underscore its value.

The first is that many readers attracted to these pages because of their focus on adoption may to their surprise discover that they are receiving a much broader theological education. But of course! For if, after all, adoption turns out to be the “apex of grace and privilege,” then, pyramidlike, it is undergirded and sustained by the entire structure of biblical theology. Like a good steward, as David Garner takes us deeper into the theme of adoption, en route he brings out many good things old and new from the biblical larder. In this sense, *Sons in the Son* provides even more than its title might at first seem to promise.

The second is that while characterized by wide-ranging and objective scholarship, Dr. Garner’s writing overflows with a faith-fueled pastoral passion. Clearly for him the importance of careful exposition is its life-changing subjective appropriation. As “Rabbi” Duncan said of Jonathan Edwards, here doctrine is all application and application is all doctrine. This approach wonderfully enhances these pages. It will also help some readers who might fear that they will be in above their heads with the weight of scholarship represented in these pages by many informative footnotes. For this is scholarship with a high cash value for both the church and the individual. Like James Denney (but with a more resilient commitment to biblical teaching), David Garner is interested in theology that can be preached, and at the same time he believes that all truly biblical theology can be. This is immediately evident in the title he has chosen: adoptive sonship is ours only *in the Son*. Adoption is not treated here as an abstract

doctrine but as a personal reality. The flow of all redemptive history, exegesis, biblical theology, and pastoral application always derives from and leads to Jesus Christ. We have no sonship without him or apart from our union with him.

We all need books that instruct us, cause us to meditate more deeply, and lead to the transformation of our lives into the likeness of Christ through the renewing of our minds. *Sons in the Son* belongs to this category. I am reminded of a sentence from my far-off days when young Scottish teenagers were expected to memorize parts of the elegant essay of Francis Bacon (1561–1626) *Of Studies*: “Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention.”<sup>2</sup> David Garner’s *Sons in the Son* fits into this last category. Read “with diligence and attention,” and this work will enhance your understanding of and appreciation for the riches of God’s grace in our adoption as sons in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Sinclair B. Ferguson  
Professor of Systematic Theology  
Redeemer Seminary

2. Francis Bacon, “Essays of Francis Bacon,” <http://www.authorama.com/essays-of-francis-bacon-50.html> (accessed July 4, 2016).

## PREFACE

In the late 1990s, I literally stumbled on Douglas Kelly’s “Adoption: An Underdeveloped Heritage of the Westminster Standards.”<sup>1</sup> Having previously read with no minuscule appreciation the salient content of chapter 12 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, I agonized over Kelly’s assertion that “Reformed Christians have failed to work through the doctrine of Adoption.”<sup>2</sup> This claim triggered further investigation, and the more I read, the more convinced I became that, if anything, Kelly had understated the scope of the neglect.

The failure to advance and celebrate adoption was—and *is*, in fact—not the sole province of the Reformed. Yet because of the adoption-rich theology of Calvin and the pastorally vibrant statements in the Westminster Standards, one could surely affirm a higher degree of accountability for those whose confessional standards are Westminsterian. But more important than the “Who’s to blame?” question is “Who will correct the problem?” Never swaying from my own personal sense of responsibility, I simply could not leave the matter alone. That I am confessionally Reformed in the Westminster tradition certainly escalated the sense of responsibility. That I am a redeemed son of God and student of his Word left no option.

Captivated by its peculiar Pauline use, I pored through the Greek text, the church fathers and the Reformers, volumes of Reformed, liberal, and evangelical systematic theologies, historical and contemporary commentaries, and the writings of the Westminster divines. I soaked in

1. Douglas F. Kelly, “Adoption: An Underdeveloped Heritage of the Westminster Standards,” *Reformed Theological Review* 52, 3 (1993): 110–20.

2. *Ibid.*, 111.

biblical theology, from Irenæus to Calvin, and from Geerhardus Vos to Richard Gaffin. I then worked through key Pauline studies, historical and contemporary. At the end of it all, I found myself compelled by a thesis, which was distilled in my Ph.D. dissertation in 2002, entitled “Adoption in Christ.”<sup>3</sup> The dissertation probed the scope of adoption and its relationship to union with Christ, but urged others to answer pressing questions that remained.

More than a decade passed, and a number of works on adoption surfaced in both academic and popular writing. Much in these writings contributed usefully, and while some interacted directly with my thesis (e.g., Trevor Burke,<sup>4</sup> Joel Beeke<sup>5</sup>), the systematic theological questions that my own dissertation asked remained *unanswered*. For the sake of Christ and his church and in view of the treasures housed in adoption, I could not leave these questions as moot. They simply matter too much.

With explicit focus on the essential interrelationship between Christology, pneumatology, and soteriology, *Sons in the Son* extends, refines, clarifies, and solidifies my original thesis on adoption and union with Christ. It builds on the earlier exegetical work, engages more recent contributions about adoption, more fully probes the doctrine’s biblico-theological character, and then specifically advances the systematic theological implications for this sweet, filial grace.

Many years in the making, *Sons in the Son* offers a fresh look at the rich and far-reaching doctrine of adoption. The title of the book and an oft-repeated phrase in it, *sons in the Son* serves as theological shorthand to capture the vital relationship that the redeemed share with the resurrected Son of God. By virtue of Spirit-wrought union, the redeemed truly are sons of God only *in* and *through* the beloved Son, in whom the Father finds perfect pleasure. In other words, adoption draws on the Redeemer-Son himself, whose own life-giving

3. David B. Garner, “Adoption in Christ” (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 2002).

4. Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, NSBT 22 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

5. Joel R. Beeke, *Heirs with Christ: The Puritans on Adoption* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008).



resurrection as *Son of God in power* demarcates our adoption as sons of God. How that is so is simply breathtaking and worship-generating, if not paradigm-shifting.

*Soli Patri Gloria. Soli Filio Gloria. Soli Spiritui Gloria.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Two figures deserve first mention in this book. Dr. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. has made particular impact; his peerless scholarship has shaped every facet of my theology, preaching, teaching, and writing. His corresponding piety, churchmanship, and missionary zeal have sculpted my own evangelical, ecclesial, and spiritual commitments. This volume self-consciously trails Dr. Gaffin's (and therefore Geerhardus Vos's) penetrating biblical and systematic theology. Continuing the Vos-Gaffin course, this book blazes new trails concerning the filially framed contours of Christology, pneumatology, and soteriology.

The second figure is Dr. Sinclair B. Ferguson. Several years ago he enthusiastically encouraged my pursuit of the theology of adoption in Christ. His interest in my early research and writing ignited a fire in my soul, fueling a fifteen-year study of this filial grace. In addition to this particular inspiration, Dr. Ferguson's studies in Calvin's theology, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and the theology and history of the Westminster Standards have electrified my thinking.

I am most grateful for the exegetical rigor, theological competency, pedagogical skill, and pastoral graces that distinguish these two men. In whatever ways this book proves useful, it does so in their debt, as the fruit of their contagious compulsion to probe and to articulate God's Word faithfully to *and* for Christ's church. At the same time, I issue this customary, nearly compulsory, caveat with full sincerity: this work is mine, and any blame for its blunders belongs on my shoulders. Neither these men nor any others can be held responsible for any of this project's weaknesses or lacunae.

Though I (obviously) have never met Geerhardus Vos, Herman Ridderbos, or John Calvin, their respective theological projects have rewarded me richly and influenced me roundly. Their pens have formed and fed my relentless compulsion to contemplate the lush, mutually informing disciplines of biblical and systematic theology. As they have shaped my theology of the sons in the Son, I count them as genuine brothers in the Son. I only wish I could thank them personally and, though unable to do so now, could not with integrity release this book without their mention. Calvin's handling of adoption, in particular, resides squarely behind this project. Compelled as an adopted son of God himself, Calvin soaked in the far-reaching scope of this gospel privilege; adoption's permeating and parameterizing function played like a rapturous concerto in his soul. In poring over Calvin's "gospel of adoption,"<sup>1</sup> I have found this same filial symphony playing in my own heart so as to resonate onto each page.

In the writing of this manuscript, special thanks go to Bob LaRocca, Dr. Dwight Singer, Dr. Robert Berman, Dr. Carlton Wynne, Dr. Gabriel Fluhrer, and Jared Oliphint. Their hours of input and feedback have supplied needed suggestions and corrections along the way. Thanks to P&R Publishing, to its president, Bryce Craig, and to John J. Hughes for proofing, promoting, and publishing *Sons in the Son*. Sincere thanks to Karen Magnuson for her remarkable copy-editing work; her hawklike skill in spotting and correcting even the tiniest of errors exceeds that of anyone I know. Chase Daws took on the arduous task of perfecting the index of subjects and names, and I greatly appreciate his carefulness and diligence. I remain very grateful for P&R's value to the church in its publication of biblically rigorous, confessionally loyal, and churchly edifying theology.

Finally, my own family's encouragement sustained this work to the end. Though at times they might have genuinely believed no end would come, let it be noted that this book is bound with a back cover. The *not yet* has indeed become the *already*. No quantity of thanks could adequately convey the depth of my gratitude to my wife and children.

1. Brian A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 89.

## INTRODUCTION

When hearing the word *adoption*, most envision a once-orphaned child now legally joined to a new set of parents. A previously forlorn soul flees a loveless past and enters the permanent embrace of a welcoming family. For the child, life changes dramatically, with changes only slightly less marked for the parents and for the siblings. With legal status now wholly changed, the child takes on a new name, a new identity, and a new address, along with a new set of formal and formative relationships. The legal change effects relational changes. Adoption intercepts the probable destiny of heartache, and exchanges almost certain tragedy for rewarding care and provision. Virtually nothing remains the same for the adopter and the adoptee.

Adoption starts with the parents. A dream conceived turns to conversation and prayer, which in turn give birth to the pursuit of a particular child. Legal, administrative, logistical, and financial processes ensue, and after navigating the often-complex and costly journey, the parents receive the child legally as their own. For the child, newfound stability trounces previous insecurity, settled wonderment replaces sad wandering, and cruelty gives way to compassion. Narratives of this sort drip with altruism if not romance, compel us with their merciful transformations, and offer enthralling narratives to counter the harshness of our world.

With such emotive appeal, the parallels between divine and human adoption seem ready-made, supplying a cache of cognitive capital for appreciating the gospel's redemptive familial conceptions. But the leap from human perception to theological insight easily misrepresents the truth. This distortion happens in at least two ways. First, although some adoptions feature joy and success, not all human

adoptions flourish. Onerous problems, including keen mental and emotional traumas, plague many families—both for the adopted children and for their adopting parents. These all-too-common darker sides to human adoption, some of which last a lifetime, can get lost in the sentiment of noble narratives. Just ask myriads of adopting families. Human adoption experiences do not produce the gripping theological analogies quite as neatly as they might first seem to do.

But a second and even more foundational problem persists—not arising from any negative underbelly of human adoption experiences, but from the theological method that moves *from* common social conceptions *to* theological ones. Unscrupulous simplicity combined with bottom-up extrapolation is the mother of illegitimate theologizing, and a theology of adoption shaped by social-to-theological inference writhes in methodological error. Concepts of biblical adoption birthed largely out of contemporary practices or out of compelling altruistic analogies may brush with points of biblical insight, but at best suffer from truncated theological expression and at worst distort the theological riches of the believers' adoption in Christ.<sup>1</sup> The radical distinctions between divine adoption of sinners and human conventions—both in this age and in ancient society—must receive rigorous assessment according to careful hermeneutical and theological analysis.

In short, unlike human convention, divine adoption is mediatorial and redemptive—it comes through the divine Son, Jesus the Messiah. Divine adoption does not proceed from dissatisfaction in God, in which he pursues a family because he is incomplete or longs for something he lacks. Divine adoption moves from heaven to earth by sovereign grace, and transforms the children of wrath into the glorious and radiant possession of the heavenly Father. Divine filial grace is effectual in a way that human initiatives, however blessed they might be, can never attain. Divine adoption never disappoints. The children of the heavenly Father persevere by his grace, and none is lost by the sway of self-centeredness, dissatisfaction, rejection, or discontent. United to the perfect Son of God by faith, the children

1. An example of this approach is Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, *The Spirit of Adoption: At Home in God's Family* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

of God will know no ultimate eschatological distress! As the apostle Paul affirms, drawing from several Old Testament texts:

For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

“I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,  
and I will be their God,  
and they shall be my people.  
Therefore go out from their midst,  
and be separate from them, says the Lord,  
and touch no unclean thing;  
then I will welcome you,  
and I will be a father to you,  
and you shall be sons and daughters to me,  
says the Lord Almighty.” (2 Cor. 6:16b–18)

Divine pursuit and presence are stark and stunning. By *grace*, the Creator of all becomes the Father of his elect, transforming spiritual orphans and rebels into his blessed and holy children. The intimacy and efficacy of such redemptive grace simply stagger, making any rags-to-riches story of a human orphan rescued by altruistic parents pale in significance.

Notably, the nature of divine adoptive grace exceeds the human plane not only in degree, but also in scope. Human adoption is marvelous, but its customary strictures do not shape gospel adoption. To be specific, forensic and relational categories plainly do not exhaust biblical adoption. The power of the heavenly Father among his people changes their stubborn filial hearts even as it reverses their guilty filial state. Adopted sons of God enter radically different conditions *and* possess radically different constitutions. Because it breathes with spiritual vitality beyond a single soteriological aspect (the forensic), biblical adoption suffocates if relegated to legal categories.

To be clear, important similarities exist between biblical adoption and human adoption,<sup>2</sup> but the theological parallels move from heaven

2. The parallels, in fact, may be richer than what appears from the bottom up. Dan Cruver

to earth rather than from earth to heaven. The gospel may compel human adoption and *should* compel various acts of gospel mercy. But divine adoption, a blessing in a category all its own, as accomplished by the death and resurrection of the beloved Son of God, outshines and outwarms all human rescue efforts. When God takes those who are not his people and makes them his people, when the Almighty makes those who are not his children his sons and daughters, the benefits consume, overwhelm, and transform. Those once-spiritual orphans become the favored ones of the Almighty, objects of divine affection, recipients of privilege and security, and benefactors of new hearts and resurrected bodies! All these blessings come in and through the beloved Son in whom the Father is well pleased.

There is a yet even more stunning feature to Pauline adoption. In his commentary on Romans, German Reformer Philipp Melancthon insisted that *adoption* differentiates the redeemed from the Redeemer. “The fact that he calls them adopted sons distinguishes the other saints from Christ, and this distinction must be held fast in order that we may know that Christ is the Son of God by nature, both equal with the Father and of the same essence, as it is written: ‘We beheld his glory, like the glory of the only-begotten of the Father. . . .’ [John 1:14] But the saints are sons by adoption, because they have been received of Christ, and have been given the gifts of Christ, namely the Spirit, and new life, wisdom and righteousness, etc.”<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, Melancthon is spot-on. Christ’s sonship is eternal and inimitable. That Christ is eternal Son made flesh is assumed and proclaimed in Pauline

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helpfully probes the theology of adoption by distinguishing *vertical adoption* (divine adoption) from *horizontal adoption* (human adoption). Driving toward faithful gospel response, Cruver insists that we think about human adoption *by* divine adoption, rather than in reverse. This orientation shapes life mission according to divine grace in God’s self-disclosure and redemption. “I believe that a biblical understanding of God’s fatherhood will cause us to be better able to look outside ourselves in service to others.” Dan Cruver, ed., *Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living through the Rediscovery of Abba Father* (Adelphi, MD: Cruciform, 2011), 7, 18.

3. Philipp Melancthon, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992), 174–75. Much more recently, Todd Billings makes a similar point. Though Billings commendably appreciates the vast scope of adoption for Paul, he makes adoption a point of distinction between the Redeemer and the redeemed. Jesus is “the only ‘natural’ child of God . . . . All the rest of us need to be adopted.” J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 24.

theology. But adoption moves in a different orbit than Melancthon assumes. For Paul, adoption concerns human sonship in its mature and resurrected state—that of Christ Jesus first and then that of those united to him by Spirit-wrought faith.

The believers' adoption, as we will see, does not serve to distinguish redemptive sonship from that belonging to the Redeemer, the Son of God, but quite contrarily (and astoundingly!) celebrates the filial realities fully *shared* by and with Christ Jesus. Believers, united to Christ in his resurrection, enjoy the full bounty of benefits, the panoply of spiritual blessings attained by their Elder Brother. The motivation to preserve the uniqueness of the sonship of Jesus Christ is biblical and noble. He is the divine Son eternally, and this sonship remains unique to him. He alone is the Mediator, whose identity, nature, and work distinguish him from all other humanity. But we must not allow this proper impetus to exalt the Son of God to receive improper application, and thereby compromise the way in which believers are understood as sons and daughters of God—adoption “*in and for . . . Jesus Christ,*” as WCF 12 puts it. What Christ attains in his exalted state of sonship comes to the redeemed in full. Adoption, in its Pauline usage, establishes and accentuates the filial character of Spirit-wrought faith union—the historical, theological, and familial solidarity of the redeemed with their Redeemer. Adoption, then, does not serve to *differentiate* believers from Christ; rather, it serves to *expose* the crowded graces of our salvation, secured in our union with the resurrected, exalted, perfected, and *adopted* Son of God! The believers' redemptive adoption comes by the *adoption of the Redeemer*. His adoption is our adoption, his holy sonship our holy sonship.

With such solidarity of the sons of God with the Son of God in view, this book comes as a plea—a plea to reassess the theological meaning, place, and function of biblical adoption; a plea for a method that moves from divine revelation to theological reflection, rather than from social and cultural reconstruction to theological conclusion; and simultaneously a plea to reexamine key biblical texts within their historical and cultural context. At the end of it all, it comes with a prevailing plea to appreciate the munificent theological reaches of this filial conception. Biblical and theological care is in order, and an



exploration of this doctrine requires attention to etymology, exegesis, biblical theology, and systematic theology. As will become clear, according to divine Word and deed, adoption cloaks the gospel in filial array, and weds the doctrine of Christ (Christology) and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology) to generate the doctrine of salvation (soteriology). Spirit-wrought filial solidarity—the gracious placement of the redeemed sons in the Son of God by adoption—actually *structures* biblical soteriology for the apostle Paul.

In one way, the following argument urges renewed reflection on the biblical concept of *adoption*, because theological forces of various sorts have historically squeezed this doctrine from its theological prominence, shrunk it from its expansive theological scope, and thereby relegated it to a subsidiary theological classification rather than giving it the prominence it deserves. Freeing adoption from forensic-only strictures and affirming its legal *and* transformative filial features are not simple tasks, but for the sake of biblical fidelity and theological integrity of the sons in the Son, such articulation is essential. This book seeks, in part, to dismantle the misallocation, misappropriation, and misunderstanding of theological adoption. That is its deconstructive task.

More fundamentally, it seeks to construct a biblically faithful theology of adoption in Christ, one that appreciates the full spectrum of filial grace embraced by this eschatologically, and therefore existentially, vivid soteriological term. The case argued here offers nothing overtly novel, and to be sure, novelty is not the goal. Rather, the subsequent examination flows in direct continuity and sympathy with historic Reformed Christology and soteriology, and simply seeks to express with fresh clarity how the essential interrelationship between the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the redemption of sinners wholly informs adoption.

A final word here expresses the prayerful goal of this work. WLC question 113 asks, “What is required in the third commandment?” The answer: “The third commandment requires, that the name of God, his titles, attributes, ordinances, the word, sacraments, prayer, oaths, vows, lots, his works, and whatsoever else there is whereby he makes himself known, be holily and reverently used in thought, meditation,

word, and writing; by an holy profession, and answerable conversation, to the glory of God, and the good of ourselves, and others.”

As I reflect on Scripture concerning the doctrine of adoption, I pray that this writing treats the name of God, his titles, his attributes, and his Word in a holy and reverent fashion, with the filial fidelity incumbent on one adopted in Christ Jesus. To that doxological end, I, an adopted son in the Son, turn to an examination of adoption in Paul and his theology.



## ABBREVIATIONS

AnBib	Analecta Biblica
<i>ANF</i>	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
FV	Federal Vision
<i>IBS</i>	<i>Irish Biblical Studies</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
KJV	King James Version
MNTC	Moffatt New Testament Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NPP	New Perspective(s) on Paul
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology

NTC	New Testament Commentary
<i>RExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>SBET</i>	<i>Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology</i>
SP	Sacra Pagina
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary
<i>VE</i>	<i>Vox Evangelica</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
WLC	Westminster Larger Catechism
WSC	Westminster Shorter Catechism
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ZEC	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament

PART I

ADOPTION: HERMENEUTICS,  
HISTORY, AND ETYMOLOGY



# 1

## ADOPTION: SCOPE AND POINT OF ENTRY

### **Important Principles for Interpreting *Huiiothesia* (“Adoption”)**

Cursory enquiry of *huiiothesia* (“adoption”)<sup>1</sup> in the New Testament might lead one to downplay its theological significance. Only five times does the term *huiiothesia* appear, always in the Pauline corpus, ostensibly defending a cursory treatment based on its infrequency and Pauline exclusivity. If adoption is so important, why does the term *huiiothesia* draw so little ink? As more careful analysis of the term in its particular usage reveals, simplistic conclusions do not satisfy. Quantitative analysis of vocabulary serves as no adequate determiner, because the word *huiiothesia* widely embraces multiple theological foci and vast pastoral treasure. Before giving attention to the sweeping manner in which Paul employs *huiiothesia*, critical hermeneutical principles concerning the theological weight of biblical terms warrant mention.

Before we defend or deny a word’s importance on the basis of its etymology and regularity, other biblical, contextual, and theological criteria must take precedence. Scholars across the hermeneutical and theological spectrum discern methodological problems with noncontextual word studies.<sup>2</sup> Even one whose Christology suffers

1. Throughout this volume I will use transliteration of Greek terms. The term *huiiothesia* is typically translated “adoption” or “adoption as sons” (see, e.g., the five instances of *huiiothesia* in the ESV, NIV, and NASB). The only exceptions to the use of transliteration are selected quotations and any lexical references.

2. Faulty assumptions about words, including overtechnicalizing, root fallacy errors, and



from damaging, unorthodox formulations, James Dunn, astutely warns of faulty conclusions stemming from the rarity with which Jesus is called God's Son in the Pauline Epistles (only seventeen times). Such infrequency renders feeble rationale for determining theological inconsequentiality: "word counts are an uncertain basis on which to build . . . a conclusion."<sup>3</sup> As Dunn asserts, the weight of a theological concept cannot be determined by mere quantitative analysis. Such a simplistic approach would suffer from the word-concept fallacy and ignore the more important questions of *how* a word is employed and of *how* a concept can explicitly and implicitly shape an entire paradigm.<sup>4</sup>

Vulnerability surfaces here for two types of interpretive error. On the one hand, there is risk in overlooking key contextual and exegetical considerations because a particular term appears rarely. In this way, brute quantitative analysis can invalidly curtail emphasis on important theological themes. On the other hand, there is a risk of importing foreign concepts into Scripture because one can presume on a particular theme, make interpretive decisions out of an imposed thesis, and force conclusions into a word, a biblical text, or even the canon of Scripture as a whole. Desire for new insight and the temptation to promote hobbyhorses can cloud interpretive judgment. Avoiding errors in either direction mandates exegetical and biblico-theological care, including the upholding of the interpretive interdependence of Old and New Testaments, particularly in their organic, covenantal structure. WCF 1.9 offers considerable wisdom with its pithy hermeneutical parameters: "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the

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quantitative analysis, can lead to faulty theological conclusions. See D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 27–64. Cf. Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

3. James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 37.

4. A related application of this principle is the *hapax legomenon*, a word used only once in the New Testament. The selection of an unusual term can actually indicate a *critical* theological concept, such as *theopneustos* in 2 Timothy 3:16. See Edwin A. Blum, "The Apostles' View of Scripture," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 44–48.

true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.” Shared intertestamental theological themes evidence the Spirit’s consistent voice in Scripture, and the church’s understanding of them. Such themes, it is important to affirm, originate by “good and necessary consequence” (WCF 1.6) and not just by explicit statement.

Sometimes a theme functions so predominantly, its explicit statement is unnecessary, and even tautologous. The covenants and their formative structure in Scripture offer a prime example. In fact, because of their permeating presence, the historical, hermeneutical, and theological significance of the biblical covenants renders an essential guide to the interpreter.<sup>5</sup> By the manner in which it recognizes and appropriates the historic covenants (e.g., Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic) and then integrates these covenants into a single covenant of grace (Gal. 3–4), the Pauline corpus substantiates this conclusion. For the apostle Paul, the biblical covenants frame biblical revelation in the Old and New Testaments, providing the structure of biblical history and theology, including Christology and soteriology.

The two-Adam covenantal paradigm organizes Paul’s entire understanding of history (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:45–49; cf. Rom. 8:18–39),

5. This conclusion, of course, does not receive unqualified acceptance in biblical and theological studies. In keeping with historic Reformed theology, however, I believe that covenant, in its permeating and paradigmatic functions, remains at the core of biblical revelation. This conviction renders an interpretive grid that shapes the entirety of this volume. Though the term *covenant* is not always used, the contents and the theme of covenant actually serve as the architectonic principle of Scripture, providing coherence to the pretemporal, prelapsarian, postlapsarian, and consummate eschatological contexts. For discussion of the Reformed doctrine of covenants, see, for example, Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992–94), 1:574–89, 2:169–269; R. L. Dabney, *Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Presbyterian Publishing, 1878; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), 292–305, 429–99; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 2:117–22, 354–77; Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 301–19, 371–447; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 211–18, 262–301; Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin’s Role in the Development of Covenant Theology*, ed. Richard A. Muller, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980).

from creation through redemption unto consummation.<sup>6</sup> In short, the first Adam upon obedience to the covenant of works was to enter “life”—that is, a new quality of life, one of confirmed righteousness and divine blessing.<sup>7</sup> Failing to obey and forfeiting these covenantal blessings, the first Adam established the historical and theological necessity for the covenantal ministry of the last Adam. Accordingly, Christ’s redemptive work as last Adam was exhaustively covenantal, and by faithful covenant-keeping and by enduring the covenantal curse as the chief Sin-Bearer, Christ inherited those promised eschatological blessings. The covenant Head, he secured eschatological life for all those whom he represents.<sup>8</sup> Further, the new covenant, though named explicitly by Paul only in 1 Corinthians 11:25 and 2 Corinthians 3:6, features prominently for the apostle,<sup>9</sup> and the epochal/theological transition from the old covenant to the new covenant entirely frames his theology and that of the entire New Testament. Paul’s attention to the historic covenants in the life of ancient Israel and the realization of the new covenant in Christ exposes his covenant-hermeneutical

6. Recognizing biblical revelation as covenantal, the authors (divines) of the WCF structure the theology of the document around the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. See WCF 7. Westminster’s theology rides on the “architectonic principle” of the covenant. Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work*, vol. 6 of *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 56.

7. Though the term *berith* (“covenant”) does not first appear until Genesis 6:18, the covenant concept undergirds the Pauline biblico-theological story line from Genesis 1 and 2. Concerning the absence of the word *covenant* in the Adam and Eve narrative, Beale contends, “The argument that the word ‘covenant’ is not used in Gen. 2–3 does not provide proof that there is no covenant relationship, just as Adam and Eve’s marriage relationship is not termed a ‘covenant’ in Gen. 2:21–24 but expresses covenantal concept and, in fact, is identified as a covenant elsewhere.” G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 42. Cf. Grant Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 103–10, 127.

8. Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 918; see also *ibid.*, 174. Cf. Noel Weeks, *Admonition and Curse: The Ancient Near Eastern Treaty/Covenant Form as a Problem in Inter-Cultural Relationships* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 8. Even John Murray’s much-debated “Adamic administration” operates according to the *themes* of covenant, though he ardently (though unnecessarily) resists the employment of the term *covenant* in a pre-Noahic context. See John Murray, *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976–82), 2:47–59.

9. See Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard DeWitt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 335; Macaskill, *Union with Christ*, 227–28.

orientation. Faithful hermeneutics must always appreciate this intertestamental continuity and interpretive reciprocity.<sup>10</sup>

In Romans 9:1–5, Paul explicitly draws out this Old to New Testament covenantal development as it is integrated by the rarely appearing word *huiiothesia*.<sup>11</sup> Seeing the gospel of the New Testament drawing on the Christ-centeredness of the Old Testament (Rom. 1:1–7; Gal. 3:8; cf. John 5:39–47), Paul understands the Old Testament itself to anticipate the coming New Testament, new covenant revelation; in turn, the New Testament draws on and fulfills the Old Testament, the old covenant(s).<sup>12</sup> As will grow increasingly clear from the coming treatment of Romans 9:1–5 (in chapter 6), Christ secures the benefits of redemption for those whom he represents, including the benefit of adoption, which is listed first in this Pauline summary of God’s covenantal faithfulness to his people. Old Testament adoption anticipates the coming New Testament adoption, and the New Testament fluidly draws on and fulfills its old covenant form. Old Testament events and theology, then, *are* the context for Pauline and New Testament theology: “Paul’s letters have their origin, their integral place and their intended function within the organically unfolding history of revelation.”<sup>13</sup> Methodological marginalization of this organic intertestamental and covenantal structure will ensure theological misunderstanding, and will effectively compromise any proper appreciation for the origin, scope, and meaning of *huiiothesia* in Pauline thought.

Exegetical and theological care is indeed in order. Paul’s permeating familial and filio-Christological focus combined with his variegated yet sweeping use of *huiiothesia* begs for penetrating consideration of its meaning. Short on recurrence, *huiiothesia* is long on import. Adoption appeals to grand biblico-theological and covenantal themes, making

10. For study on the biblical concept of *covenant* in its hermeneutical and theological import, see, for example, Geerhardus Vos, “The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 234–67.

11. More on Pauline covenant theology follows in chapters 7 and 8.

12. See, e.g., G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

13. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 10.

its theological function noteworthy, even paradigmatic.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, as will be surveyed in the following chapters, *huiiothesia* shoulders substantial theological weight, since it supports the filially framed resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:3–4) as the basis for the whole range of gospel graces bestowed on those united to him. The term *huiiothesia* embodies a covenantal, Christological, pneumatological, and soteriological construction for the apostle Paul, countering the temptation to underestimate the term’s value; its infrequent appearance ought not to eclipse its theological reaches or its pastoral riches. Richard Sibbes most appropriately exclaims, “*All things* are ours by virtue of adoption, because we are Christ’s and Christ is God’s. There is a world of riches in this, to be sons of God.”<sup>15</sup>

Sibbes considers adoption here in terms of its pastoral value, and rightly so. But the primary concern in this study is to probe the bottomless theological gold mine from which these pastoral marvels draw. To change the metaphor slightly, adoption’s subterranean roots take us beneath redemption applied to the accomplishment of redemption itself in Jesus Christ, who is adoption’s “cause and root.”<sup>16</sup> For the redeemed sons of God, adoption’s comprehensive benefits come by participation in the resurrection/adoption of Christ, and no other way. Only with a full appreciation of the Christological and covenantal contours of biblical revelation, and in particular the mutually informing role they play in *huiiothesia*, will we begin to apprehend the world of riches embedded in this Pauline theme.

### Approaches to the Study of *Huiiothesia*

The study of *huiiothesia* offers a variety of launching points. We could commence by examining familial terms and themes of the New Testament or in Pauline theology particularly, and move then

14. Though beyond the scope of exhaustive study in this volume, other Pauline familial terms, such as *sons*, *daughters*, *children*, and *inheritance*, share theologically vital real estate with adoption.

15. Richard Sibbes, *Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, 7 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983), 4:502 (emphasis in original).

16. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, n.d.; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 138.

to consider *huiiothesia* within that litany of familial terms.<sup>17</sup> Since the concern here is *huiiothesia* itself, however, it is more appropriate to commence where the term itself appears. The scarce occurrences of *huiiothesia* limit the options for an entry point into this exegetical and theological analysis, and it might seem imprudent to demand one text as the only legitimate option. Yet in view of the multidimensional way in which *huiiothesia* functions in the Pauline corpus, and in particular the vast theological horizon entailed by the term, the chosen pathway of study does both expose theological commitments and reflect a theological method. Therefore, to make explicit my operating presuppositions and theological method, I list the five passages here within their immediate contexts, provide an introductory analysis of the texts, and then suggest the rationale for the particular launching point in this study of *huiiothesia*. An exclusively Pauline term in the New Testament, *huiiothesia* appears only five times: Romans 8:15; 8:23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5; and Ephesians 1:5.

### *The Epistle to the Romans*

Romans 8:15–17:

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.

Arriving at a culminating point in Romans, the eschatological implications of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection come squarely into focus. In this first use of *huiiothesia* in Romans, Paul draws on the redemptive-historical contrast to deliver a soteriological point. Believers in Christ Jesus have received the Spirit of adoption—whose outpouring certifies and seals consummate filial grace. Recipients of the Holy Spirit,

17. See, e.g., Trevor J. Burke, *Family Matters: A Socio-Historical Study of Kinship Metaphors in 1 Thessalonians*, Journal of the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 247 (London: T&T Clark International, 2003).

adopted children traverse the Christ-blazed pathway from suffering unto glory, and the outpoured Spirit of adoption enables them to echo Jesus' own Gethsemane outcry to his Father. The Spirit-uniting of the sons of God with the Son of God resounds with filial grace: in this eschatologically inaugurated age, adopted sons and daughters enjoy the same love and fellowship with the Father as does their Elder Brother (Rom. 8:1–39).

Romans 8:22–23:

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.

Building these resplendent filial themes and then drawing them to an eschatological climax, the apostle Paul in this particular section of Romans 8 affirms that the recipients of the Spirit of adoption—those who have the “firstfruits of the Spirit”—will enjoy full filial transformation in this Spirit at their resurrection (Rom. 8:18–21), when they conform perfectly to the image of the Son par excellence (v. 29). For Paul, the Spirit of Christ renders final and realized adoption certain, but adoption's consummation awaits resurrection on the final day (v. 23). In fact, this eschatological manifestation of the sons makes adoption and resurrection more than concurrent. The theologically sated terms actually serve in an interdependent, mutually informing manner, making adoption and resurrection inseparable features within Pauline soteriology. Resurrection grace is filial grace. Adoption is resurrection.

Romans 9:3–5:

For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

Having described in Romans 8 the Spirit-wrought adoption through Jesus Christ in its inaugurated and consummate manifestations, in chapter 9 the apostle Paul addresses the question of God's covenant faithfulness. How is it that God can remain faithful to his old covenant promises and the gospel come to the Jews and *Gentiles*? The answer? The very adoption that Paul has described in this new covenant reality relies on its historico-genetic ancestry in the old covenant adoption of Israel. Typological adoption in the Old Testament is of one substance with the eschatological adoption rendered by Jesus Christ himself. That is, Old Testament adoption finds its eschatological fulfillment in the resurrected Son of God, in whose resurrection the typological filial promises come to fruition.

God's provision of filial grace to Jews and Gentiles by faith manifestly draws the nascent adoption of Israel to its intended denouement. Despite the contentions of some first-century Jews, adoption in Christ Jesus, then, does not evidence God's abandonment of his promises, but precisely the opposite. God's covenant and adoptive promises attain their fulfillment for believing Jews and Gentiles in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. God is faithful to his covenant promises, and adoption in Christ evidences this faithfulness.

### *Romans as an Entry Point into the Study of Adoption*

The eschatological thrust of adoption in Romans 8 and 9 protrudes prominently, and does so in a manner consistent with the primacy of covenant eschatology in biblical revelation. Pithily capturing eschatology's thematic hegemony in biblical revelation, Geerhardus Vos writes:

There is an absolute end posited for the universe before and apart from sin. The universe, as created, was only a beginning, the meaning of which was not perpetuation, but attainment. The principle of God's relation to the world from the outset was a principle of action or eventuation. The goal was not comparative (i.e., evolution); it was superlative (i.e., the final goal).<sup>18</sup>

18. Geerhardus Vos, *The Eschatology of the Old Testament*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr.



Working according to sovereign plan, eschatology governs the very contours of universal history broadly and redemptive history more particularly. Eschatology is not just final reality but, more properly, ultimate reality—a reality anticipated in creation and, in the wake of the sin of the first Adam, delayed for generations, and then inaugurated in the last Adam, and brought to consummation in him at the parousia.<sup>19</sup>

Because of its theological and historical role, divinely determined eschatology precedes and wholly informs the substance of soteriology.<sup>20</sup> Only by appreciating this foundational and informing role of eschatology will soteriology be properly understood. Put a bit more simply, God's ultimate purpose to secure holy children unto himself does not get thwarted by the entrance of sin. Instead, because of his sovereign and infinitely kind intention, God secures his final purpose to claim a people for himself despite sin and its consequences. God's purposes for history overwhelm even his archenemies: Satan, sin, and death. These purposes to overwhelm his enemies and to create a holy family come about through the completed work of his Son, Jesus Christ.

As will become clearer in what follows, all redemptive benefits (justification, sanctification, etc.) therefore possess realized (*already*) and unrealized (*not yet*) dimensions. Furthermore, since the final (parousia) character of soteriology is in organic continuity with its inaugurated character, explicit consummative soteriology fully informs each stage of its redemptive-historical realization and, perhaps most strikingly, its pretemporal ordination. Vos insists that “the shaping of soteriology by eschatology is not so much in the terminology; it proceeds from the actual realities themselves and the language simply is adjusted to that.”<sup>21</sup> This permeating eschatology shapes adoption.

In fact, taking the comprehensively significant nature of adoption's climactic moment in bodily resurrection and the theologically

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(Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 73.

19. “The ultimate is in a very important sense the normative, that to which every preceding stage will have to conform itself to prove the genuineness of its Christian character.” Gerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1930), 42.

20. Vos, *Eschatology of the Old Testament*, 73–75.

21. *Ibid.*, 46.

important way in which consummate eschatology determines the present experience of adoptive sonship, the eschatological thrust of Romans 8:15 and 23 could well serve as a proper starting point for investigating *huiiothesia* in Paul. But since two of the five occurrences of *huiiothesia* appear in Romans 8 and since the third occurrence of *huiiothesia* in Romans 9 invokes a robust covenant and Israel-as-son typology, it seems less than optimal to make either Romans 8:15 or 23 the entry point for a study of adoption. Such an approach could risk illegitimately extricating adoption from its thematic development in Romans itself and the Pauline corpus as a whole, thereby robbing the term of its fullest meaning.

With his eye squarely on redemptive history, James I. Cook suggests Romans 9:4 as “the logical place to begin an exegetical inquiry into the . . . content of the Pauline notion of adoption.”<sup>22</sup> Here Paul employs the adoption motif for describing the distinct privileges of Israel in the old covenant, and thereby sees the old covenant as the historical/theological basis for understanding *huiiothesia* realized in Christ. At the core of Paul’s argument in Romans 9 is that Israel’s *huiiothesia* anticipates the coming *huiiothesia* realized in Christ, wherein filial grace increases expansively and intensively from old covenant shadow unto new covenant fullness.

Moreover, it is of no little consequence that Paul places Israel’s adoption first in his list of spiritual blessings on the Old Testament people of God (Rom. 9:4), underscoring its foundational redemptive-historical significance for his people.<sup>23</sup> Cook summarizes, “We may say, then, that the concept of adoption in the theology of Paul belongs to the history of salvation, inaugurated at the naming of Israel as God’s son, and continued and perfected in the adoption of men

22. James I. Cook, “The Conception of Adoption in the Theology of Paul,” in *Saved by Hope: Essays in Honor of Richard C. Oudersluys*, ed. James I. Cook (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 137. Others take the same approach. Cf. Matthew Vellanickal, *The Divine Sonship of Christians in the Johannine Writings*, AnBib: Investigationes Scientifcae in Res Biblicas 72 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1977), 69–87; Martin W. Schoenberg, “*Huiiothesia*: The Word and the Institution,” *Scripture* 15 (1963): 122–23; Allen Mawhinney, “*Yiothesia* in the Pauline Epistles: Its Background, Use, and Implications” (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, Waco, TX, 1982), 134–210.

23. Cook, “Conception of Adoption,” 138.

and women into the family of God through the work of Christ and the Spirit.”<sup>24</sup>

Cook’s point merits attention. Surely proper investigation of adoption’s theology entails this Christologically and eschatologically rich typology within Paul’s theology. But Cook fails to consider the even fuller filial context for adoption not only in the Pauline corpus, but even in Romans itself. The creation-to-consummation argument in Romans 8 and the two-Adam paradigm in Romans 5 bear on the *huiiothesian*<sup>25</sup> concept. In other words, as a more expansive consideration discloses, Paul’s theological perspective on adoption derives not first from Israel’s redemptively rich sonship, but rather from the covenantal sonship of Adam himself. In Pauline theological construction, Adam anticipates a filial state of glory beyond his provisional Edenic context, and the eschatological filial (adoptive) realization secured by Christ Jesus corresponds to and completes this final state of sonship anticipated by Adam. Accordingly, though still oriented here to the creation-to-consummation construct expressed in Romans 8:18–30, because of the concern to address the Jew/Gentile question, Paul selects the Israel-to-Christ epochal transition in Romans 9, rather than the broader landscape of redemptive history from first Adam to last.

Making Romans 9 the launching point for adoption would force a regressive thematic analysis, considering Israel’s sonship in advance of or even to the exclusion of Adam’s. On the basis of the flow of Pauline thought in this epistle to the Romans,<sup>26</sup> such a decision seems difficult to justify. Moreover, with the more expansive redemptive-historical and Christological contours entailed by adoption in its other appearances, the approach could isolate adoption from its fuller biblical and Christological scope. And since Pauline soteriology rests squarely on the person and work of Jesus Christ, the most dominantly Christological *huiiothesian* passage warrants serious consideration as an entry point for its study.

24. *Ibid.*, 142.

25. For the sake of efficiency, style, and grammatical evenness, at various points in this volume I will use *huiiothesian* as an adjective. This is not to be confused with a Greek transliteration of the accusative singular form of *huiiothesia*.

26. Including Romans 1–2, creation; Romans 5, Adam and Christ; Romans 8, creation (Adam) to consummation (Christ); Romans 9:1–5, Israel to Christ.

*The Epistle to the Galatians*

Galatians 4:4–7:

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.

Having summarized the dramatic redemptive-historical script at the hand of the God who established his covenant with Abraham and Moses (Gal. 3–4), the apostle Paul centers the grand climax of redemptive history on God’s sending his Son. Here the apostle gives *huiiothesia* remarkable redemptive profile with equally remarkable brevity. The goal of God’s sending his Son is expressed in two contiguous purpose clauses, with the second clause drawing out the final purpose of the first. In short, in the sent Son of God, redemption attains its goal in *adoption*.

With pregnant redemptive-historical focus, the apostle Paul locates the provision of Christ Jesus in the unfolding purposes of God as the singular means of redemption for those shut up in sin. The divinely designated purpose of God’s sending his own Son was to adopt those “imprisoned . . . under sin” (Gal. 3:22), “held captive under the law” (3:23), and “enslaved to the elementary principles of the world” (4:3). Those whom God the Son delivers in his redemptive work, he *makes sons* so that they share in the eschatological privileges he personally secured. Tersely yet grandly, the apostle profiles redemption’s filial finality. As the sons of God in the Son of God, believers possess the Spirit of the Son and enter the Son’s full inheritance. The same God who sent his Son also sent into the hearts of believers the Spirit of his Son. This Spirit’s outpouring marks the climax of redemptive history and applies the soteric, familial benefits for those redeemed by divine grace.

With the scope of redemptive history in view, Galatians 4 envisions the promised redemption realized in the Son of God sent by the heavenly Father. Galatians 4 expresses adoption as the culmination of that divine sending of the Son who faithfully carried out his

incarnate, filial duty. Redemptive-historical and existential features of adoption converge in this Pauline text, which displays the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in their mutually informing roles of planning, securing, and affirming adoption. The sons of God echo the Son of God when the Spirit within them declares, “Abba, Father.” The verbal reverberation manifests the spiritual identity. Adoption arrives in and through the Son of God.

### *Galatians as an Entry Point into the Study of Adoption*

Galatians not only chronologically precedes the other Pauline Epistles containing the term *huiiothesia*,<sup>27</sup> but also marks the place where adoption’s Christological center becomes most perspicuous redemptive-historically, and thereby could surely render the most fitting launching point for exegetical and theological investigation. The development of redemptive history in Galatians 3 and 4 puts on display the grand analytical, soteriological, and eschatological scope that Paul has in view; the *historia salutis* (“history of redemption”) wholly structures his outlook. The Father sent the Son to accomplish adoption in his own redemptive work, and poured out the Spirit of Christ on the redeemed sons. This outpouring attests to the Christ-centered, filially charged, corroborative, and applying ministry of his Holy Spirit. Adoption is exhaustively Christological, pneumatological, redemptive, and eschatological.

Yet Galatians’ consideration of adoption operates in a still broader theological context, where Christ’s redemptive accomplishment as Son of God occurs as a fulfillment of divine pretemporal purpose, the antecedent to the epochally determinative Spirit-wrought realization of adoptive promise (Rom. 8:15–17, 23). Galatians 4:4 actually identifies the extraterrestrial and divine context for the accomplishment and application of adoption: from heaven “*God sent* forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law” (Gal. 4:4b–5), marking a protological backdrop to the redemptive-historical concerns of Galatians. In the Pauline framework,

27. Cf. Russell Radoicich, “‘Adoption’ in the Pauline Epistles” (unpublished paper, St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, Crestwood, NY, 1999), 26.

the redemptive-historical depends on the protological: without divine pretemporal purpose, there is no divine temporal fulfillment. Thus, since the fulfillment and realization of adoption in the argument of Galatians presuppose the *prior* purpose of God, investigation of adoption better commences from its antecedent (protological) launching point. This implicit archetypal orientation in Galatians becomes explicit in the opening doxology of the Pauline epistle to the Ephesians.

### *The Epistle to the Ephesians*

Ephesians 1:3–6:

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 as sons 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.

This opening passage to the church in Ephesus begins with an extended hymn of praise (Eph. 1:3–14), which situates the ontological and motivational basis of Christ's redemptive work in eternity past. Adoption appears here in a position of soteriological prominence, manifesting the express filial purpose of divine predestination through Jesus Christ the beloved Son. The theological doxology celebrates adoption, a purposed blessing given to those predestined "through Jesus Christ," the Son whom God the Father has declared as the "Beloved."

The appearance of *huiiothesia* here draws us behind redemptive history into eternal and pretemporal mystery. Here in the opening of Ephesians, the apostle Paul transports his readers into the invisible and humanly inaccessible recesses of intra-Trinitarian counsel, where God determined and commenced the gracious plan of redemption. In the loving wisdom of this intra-Trinitarian counsel we find *huiiothesia*, the realization of which eventuates *in* human history precisely because it lies divinely predetermined *before* human history. Put otherwise, redemptive adoption takes place in history because God intended

divine adoption before creation. Adoption begins in heaven before it comes to us on earth.

### *Ephesians as an Entry Point into the Study of Adoption*

In his revealed yet impenetrable plan, the triune God determined to exercise his grace through the Son of God for the sons of God. The adoptive grace typified (Rom. 9:5; cf. Ex. 4:22–23), attained (Gal. 4:1–6), appropriated (Rom. 8:15–17), and consummated (Rom. 8:23) is the adoptive grace predestined by the triune God (Eph. 1:3–6). Without this pretemporal context, there would be no temporal and eschatological realization of adoption. For the sake of grasping the redemptive and eschatological substance in its fullest contours, it seems most appropriate to begin with the revealed mind and purposes of the Father, Son, and Spirit in eternity past, for it is there and then that adoption truly begins.<sup>28</sup> The divinely gracious placement of the sons in the Son draws from eternity past, finds its historico-theological traction in the work of the Son of God in history, and by the Spirit of the risen Christ delivers the filially rich and comprehensively transforming eschatological promises of God upon his people, his children—his redeemed sons and daughters.

## **The Selected Approach**

Pauline adoption has in its purview creation and redemption, encompassing pretemporality/protology (Eph. 1) and consummate eschatology (Rom. 8:22–23) and, within that massive framework, bonding covenant and typology (Rom. 9:4), Christology and soteriology

28. I should make brief mention here of the philosophical complications concerning time and eternity. Despite the mystery involved, Scripture does not make divine transcendence a barrier to divine immanence and participation in chronology: “there is a point, therefore—call it ‘before the foundation of the world’—when God determines to condescend and to create.” K. Scott Oliphint, *God with Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 105. Whatever consternation is created by our attempts to grasp the time/eternity relationship, we must accept that time language for eternity is itself biblical. As Oliphint puts it, “We should remember that ‘time language’ with respect to eternity is not only necessary for us as creatures; it is the language that God himself uses in Holy Scripture to indicate things that take place in eternity. See John 17:24; Eph. 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20; Rev. 13:8.” *Ibid.*, 105n42.

(Gal. 4:4–5), and pneumatology and eschatology (Rom. 8:15–17). Though the term itself appears so infrequently, *huiiothesia* and its familiarly rich concepts expose a critical Pauline theological substructure, in which *huiiothesia* serves as a metaconcept for expressing the contours of the gospel. Securing a family of adopted children occupied the mind of God since before the world's origins, and comes to pass on the stage of history according to divine timing and effectuation. God purposed adoption, God accomplished adoption, and God applies adoption. With this filial grace drawing from divine counsel, its faithful exploration must always acknowledge its heavenly source.

With a view to these vital theological connections between redemption purposed, redemption accomplished, and redemption applied and to the parameterizing function of adoption in Christ in drawing these features together, I commence the theological exposition of the *huiiothesian* texts with Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, move to Galatians, and complete it with the threefold appearance of the term in Romans. Before we get to this essential theological exposition, the following two chapters set the stage for doing so by summarizing the historical and etymological matters associated with *huiiothesia*.



**R**ARELY ADDRESSED THROUGHOUT CHURCH HISTORY, the doctrine of adoption has seen fresh attention in recent years. Although valuable, contemporary studies have focused primarily on etymological, cultural, and pastoral considerations, giving little to no attention to vital systematic theological concerns.

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