

OF ADOPTION.

JOHN i. 12. *To them gave he power to become the sons of God.*

HAVING spoken of the great points of faith and justification, the next is adoption.

1. The qualification of the persons. 'As many as received him.' Receiving is put for believing, as is clear by the last words, 'to them that believe in his name.'

2. The specification of the privilege; 'to them he gave power to become the sons of God.' The Greek word for power, *exusia*, signifies dignity and prerogative; he dignified them to become the sons of God.

Our sonship differs from Christ's sonship; Christ was the son of God by eternal generation, a son before time; but our sonship is, 1. By creation, Acts xvii. 28. 'We are his offspring.' This is no privilege; men may have God for their father by creation, yet have the devil for their father.

2. Our sonship is by adoption: so in the text, 'He gave them power to become the sons of God.' Adoption is twofold.

(1.) *External and federal*: so those who live in a visible church, and make a profession of God, are sons, Matth. viii. 12. 'The children of the kingdom shall be cast out.'

(2.) *Real and gracious*: so they are sons, who are God's favourites, and are heirs of glory. Before I proceed to the questions, I shall lay down three positions.

Position 1. Adoption takes in all nations: at first adoption was confined to the people of the Jews, they only were grafted into the true olive, and were dignified with glorious privileges, Rom. ix. 4. 'Who are Israelites: to whom pertaineth the adoption and the glory.' But now, in the time of the gospel, the charter is enlarged, and the believing Gentiles are within the line of communication, and have a right to the privileges of adoption as well as the Jews, Acts x. 35. 'in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.'

Position 2. Adoption takes in both sexes, females as well as males, 2 Cor. vi. 18. 'I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters.' I have read, in some countries, females are excluded from the supreme dignity: as by the Salique law in France, no woman can inherit a crown: but,

If we speak of spiritual privileges, females are as capable as males. Every gracious soul (of whatever sex) lays claim to adoption, and hath an interest in God as a father: 'ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.'

Position 3. Adoption is an act of pure grace. Eph. i. 5. 'Having predestinated us to the adoption of children, according to the good pleasure of his will.' Adoption is a mercy spun out of the bowels of free grace: all by nature are strangers, therefore have no right to sonship; only God is pleased to adopt one, and not another; to make one a vessel of glory, another a vessel of wrath. The adopted heir may cry out, 'Lord, how is it, that thou wilt shew thyself to me, and not unto the world?'

Q. What this filiation or adoption is?

Ans. Adoption is the taking a stranger into the relation of a son and heir: so Moses was the adopted son of king Pharaoh's daughter, Exod. ii. 10. And Esther was the adopted child of her uncle Mordecai, Esth. ii. 7. Thus God adopts us into the family of heaven; and God, in adopting us, doth two things:

1. He ennobles us with his name: he who is adopted, bears his name who adopts him, Rev. iii. 12. 'I will write on him the name of my God.'

2. God consecrates us with his Spirit: whom he adopts, he anoints; whom he makes sons, he makes saints. When a man adopts another for his son and heir, he may put his name upon him, but he cannot put his disposition into him; if he be a morose rugged nature, he cannot alter it; but whom God adopts he sanctifies: he doth not only give them a new name, but a new nature, 2 Pet. i. 4. God turns the wolf into a lamb; he makes the heart humble and gracious; he works such a change as if another soul did dwell in the same body.

Q. From what state doth God take us when he adopts us?

Ans. From a state of sin and misery. King Pharaoh's daughter took Moses out of the ark of bulrushes in the water, and adopted him for her son. God did not take us out of the water, but out of our blood, and adopted us, Ezek. xvi. God adopted us from slavery: it is a mercy to redeem a slave, but is it more to adopt him.

Q. To what God adopts us?

Ans. He adopts us to a state of excellency. It were much for God to take a clod of dust, and make it a star; it is more for God to take a piece of clay and sin, and adopt it for his heir.

1. God adopts us to a state of liberty. Adoption is a state of freedom; a slave being adopted, is made a freeman, Gal. iv. 7. 'Thou art no more a servant, but a son.'

Q. *How is an adopted Son free?*

Ans. (1.) Not to do what he lists: he is free from the dominion of sin, the tyranny of Satan, the curse of the law.

2. He is free in the manner of worship; he hath God's free Spirit, which makes him free and cheerful in the service of God; he is 'joyful in the house of prayer,' Isa. lvi. 7.

(2.) God adopts us to a state of dignity: God makes us heirs of promise; God installs us into honour, Isa. xliii. 4. 'Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable.' The adopted are God's treasure, Exod. xix. 5. His jewels, Mal. iii. 17. His first-born, Heb. xii. 23. They have angels for their life-guard, Heb. i. 14. They are of the blood-royal of heaven, 1 John iii. 9. The scripture hath set forth their spiritual heraldry; they have their escutcheon or coat-armour: sometimes they give the lion for their courage, Prov. xxviii. 1. Sometimes the dove for their meekness, Cant. ii. 14. Sometimes the eagle for their sublimeness, Isa. xi. 31. Thus you see their coat of arms displayed: but what is honour without inheritance? God adopts all his sons to an inheritance, Luke xii. 32. 'It is your Father's good pleasure to give you a kingdom.' It is no disparagement to be the sons of God. To reproach the saints, is as if Shimei had reproached David when he was going to be made king; adoption ends in coronation. The kingdom God gives his adopted sons and heirs, excels all earthly monarchies.

1. In riches, Rev. xxi. 21. The gates of pearl, and the streets of pure gold, and as it were transparent glass.

2. In tranquility. It is peaceable, the white lily of peace is the best flower in a prince's crown: *Pax una triumphis innumeris melior*. No divisions at home, or invasions abroad; no more the noise of the drum or cannon, but the voice of harpers harping, the hieroglyphic of peace, Rev. xiv. 2.

3. In stability. Other kingdoms are corruptible; though they have heads of gold, yet feet of clay: but this kingdom into which the saints are adopted, runs parallel with eternity: it is a kingdom that cannot be shaken, Heb. xii. 28. The heirs of heaven reign for ever and ever, Rev. xxii. 5.

Q. *What is the organical or instrumental cause of adoption?*

A. Faith interests us in the privilege of adoption, Gal. iii. 26. 'Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.' Before faith be wrought, we are spiritually illegitimate, we have no relation to God as a father: an unbeliever may call God judge, but not father; faith is the filiating grace, it confers upon us the title of sonship, and gives us right to inherit.

Q. *Why is faith the instrument of adoption, more than any other grace?*

Ans. 1. Faith is a quickening grace, it is the vital artery of the soul, Hab. ii. 4. 'The just shall live by faith.' Life makes us capable of adoption, dead children are never adopted.

2. Faith makes us Christ's brethren, and so God comes to be our father.

Use 1st, Branch 1. See the amazing love of God in making us his sons. Plato gave God thanks that he had made him a man, and not only a man but a philosopher: but it is infinitely more, that he should invest us with the prerogative of sons. It is love in God to feed us, but more to adopt us, 1 John iii. 1. 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!' It is an *ecce admirantis*, a behold of wonder.

The wonder of God's love in adopting us, will appear the more if we consider these six things.

1. That God should adopt us when he had a son of his own. Men adopt because they want children, and desire to have some to bear their name: but that God should adopt us when he had a son of his own, the Lord Jesus; here is the wonder of love. Christ is called 'God's dear son,' Col. i. 13. 'A son more worthy than the angels,' Heb. i. 4. 'Being made so much better than the angels.' Now, when God had a son of his own, such a son, here is the wonder of God's love in adopting us. We needed a Father, but he did not need sons.

2. Consider what we were before God did adopt us: we were very deformed; a man will scarce adopt him for his heir that is crooked and ill-favoured, but that hath some beauty. Mordecai adopted Esther, because she was fair. But we were in our blood, and then God adopted us, Ezek. xvi. 6. 'When I saw thee polluted in thy blood, it was the time of love.' God did not adopt us when we were bespangled with the jewels of holiness, and had the angels glory upon us; but when we were black as Ethiopians, diseased as lepers, then it was the time of love.

3. That God should be at so great expence in adopting us: when men adopt, they have only some deed sealed, and the thing is effected; but when God adopts, it puts him to a far greater expence, it sets his wisdom a-work to find out a way to adopt us; it was no easy thing to make the heirs of wrath, heirs of the promise. And when God had found out a way to adopt, it was no easy way; our adoption was purchased at a dear rate; when God was about to make us sons and heirs, he could not seal the deed but by the blood of his own Son. Here is the wonder of God's love in adopting us, that he should be at all this expence to bring this work about.

4. That God should adopt his enemies; if a man adopts

another for his heir, he will not adopt his mortal enemy ; but that God should adopt us, when we were not only strangers, but enemies, here is the wonder of love, for God to have pardoned his enemies, had been much ; but to adopt them for his heirs, this sets the angels in heaven a-wondering.

5. That God should take great numbers out of the devil's family, and adopt them into the family of heaven. Christ is said to bring many sons to glory, Heb. ii. 10. Men adopt usually but one heir, but God is resolved to increase his family, he brings many sons to glory. God's adopting millions, is the wonder of love. Had but one been adopted, all of us might have despaired ; but he brings many sons to glory, this opens a door of hope to us.

6. That God should confer so great honour upon us, in adopting us : David thought it no small honour that he should be a king's son-in-law, 1 Sam. xviii. 18. But what honour to be the sons of the high God ? And the more honour God hath put upon us in adopting us, the more he hath magnified his love towards us, What honour, that God hath made us so near in alliance to him, sons of God the Father, members of God the Son, temples of God the Holy Ghost ? that he hath made us as the angels, Matth. xxii. 30. nay, in some sense, superior to the angels : all proclaims the wonder of God's love in adopting us.

Branch 2. See the sad condition of such as live and die in unbelief ; they are not the sons of God : ' To as many as received him, he gave power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name.' No faith, no sonship ; unbelievers have no sign of sonship, they know not God ; all God's children know their Father, but the wicked do not know him, Jer. ix. 3. ' They proceed from evil to evil, and know not me, saith the Lord.' Unbelievers are ' dead in trespasses,' Eph. ii. 1. God hath no dead children ; and not being children, they have no right to inherit.

2d Use of trial. Try whether we are adopted. All the world is divided into these two ranks, either the sons of God, or the heirs of hell, John i. 12. ' To them he gave power to become the sons of God.' Let us put ourselves on a trial. It is no sign we are adopted sons, because we are sons of godly parents : the Jews boasted that they were of Abraham's seed, John viii. 33. they thought they must needs be good, because they came of such an holy line. But adoption doth not come by blood : we see many godly parents have wicked sons ; Abraham had an Ishmael ; Isaac an Esau. The corn that is sown pure, yet brings forth grain with an husk ? he who himself is holy, yet the child that springs from his loins is unholy. So that, as Hierom, *non nascimur filii* : we are not God's sons as we are

born of godly parents, but by adoption and grace. Well, then, let us try if we are the adopted sons and daughters of God.

First sign of adoption, *obedience*. A son obeys his father, Jer. xxxv. 5. 'I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites, pots full of wine, and cups, and said unto them, drink ye wine. But they said, we will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, ye shall drink no wine.' So, when God saith, drink not in sin's enchanted cup; an adopted child saith, my heavenly Father hath commanded me, I dare not drink. A gracious soul doth not only believe God's promise, but obey his command. And true child-like obedience must be regular, which implies three things:

1. It must be done by a right rule: obedience must have the word for its rule; *Lydius lapis*, Isa. viii. 20. 'To the law, to the testimony.' If our obedience be not according to the word, it is offering up strange fire; it is will-worship: and God will say, who hath required this at your hand? the apostle condemns worshipping of angels, which had a shew of humility. Col. ii. 18. The Jews might say, that they were loth to be so bold, as to go to God in their own persons; they would be more humble, and prostrate themselves before the angels, desiring them to be their mediators to God. Here was a shew of humility in their angel-worship; but it was abominable, because they had no word of God to warrant it: it was not obedience, but idolatry. Child-like obedience is that which is consonant to our Father's revealed will.

2. It must be done from a right principle, *i. e.* the noble principle of faith, Rom. xvi. 26. 'The obedience of faith'—*Quicquid decorum est ex fide proficissitur*, Aug. A crab-tree may bear fruit fair to the eye, but it is sour, because it doth not come from a good root. A moral person may give God outward obedience, and to the eyes of others it seems glorious; but his obedience is sour, because it comes not from that sweet and pleasant root of faith. A child of God gives him the obedience of faith, and that meliorates and sweetens his services, and makes them come off with a better relish, Heb. xi. 4. 'By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain.'

3. It must be done to a right end: *Finis specificat actionem*; the end of obedience is glorifying God. That which hath spoiled many glorious services, is, when the end hath been wrong, Mat. vi. 2. 'When thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet, as the hypocrites do, that they may have glory of men.' Good works should shine, but not blaze. 'If I give my body to be burnt, and have not charity, it profits me nothing,' 1 Cor. xiii. 3. The same I may say of a sincere aim: if I obey never so much, and have not a sincere aim, it profits

me nothing. True obedience looks at God in all, Phil. i. 20. 'That Christ may be magnified.' Though a child of God shoots short, yet he takes a right aim.

(2.) True child-like obedience is uniform: a child of God makes conscience of one command, as well as another: *Quicquid propter Deum fit, æqualiter fit*—All God's commands have the same stamp of divine authority upon them; and if I obey one precept because my heavenly Father commands me, then by the same rule I must obey all: as the blood runs through all the veins of the body, and the sun in the firmament runs through all the signs of the zodiac: so the true child-like obedience runs through the first and second table, Pſal. cxix. 6. 'When I have a respect unto all thy commandments.' To obey God in some things of religion, and not in others, shews an unsound heart; like Elau, who obeyed his father in bringing him venison, but not in a greater matter, viz. the choice of his wife. Child-like obedience moves towards every command of God, as the needle points that way which the loadstone draws. If God call to duties which are cross to flesh and blood, if we are children, we obey our Father.

Q. *But who can obey God in all things?*

A. An adopted heir of heaven, though he cannot obey every precept perfectly, yet he doth evangelically: 1. He approves of every command, Rom. vii. 16. 'I consent to the law, that it is good.' 2. A child of God delights in every command, Pſal. cxix. 97. 'O how love I thy precepts!' 3. His desire is to obey every command, Pſal. cxix. 5. 'O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!' 4. Wherein he comes short, he looks up to Christ's blood to make supply for his defects. This is evangelical obedience; which, though it be not to satisfaction, it is to acceptance.

(3.) True child-like obedience is constant, Pſal. cvi. 3. 'Blessed is he that doth righteousness at all times.' Child-like obedience is not like an high colour in a fit, which is soon over; but like a right sanguine complexion, it abides; it is like the fire on the altar which was kept always burning, Lev. vi. 13.

Second sign of adoption, to love to be in our Father's presence. The child who loves his Father, is never so well as when he is near his father. Are we children? we love the presence of God in his ordinances. In prayer we speak to God, in the preaching of his word he speaks to us: and how doth every child of God delight to hear his Father's voice? Pſal. lxxiii. 1, 2. 'My soul thirsteth for thee, to see thy glory so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.' Such as disregard ordinances, are not God's children, because they care not to be in God's presence: Gen. iv. 17. 'Cain went out from the presence of the Lord.' Not that he could go out of God's sight, but the meaning is,

“ Cain went out from the church and people of God, where the Lord gave visible tokens of his presence.”

Third sign of adoption, to have the conduct of God's Spirit, Rom. viii. 24. ‘ As many as are led by the Spirit of God, are the sons of God.’ It is not enough that the child have life, but it must be led every step by the nurse : so the adopted child must not only be born of God, but have the manuduction of the Spirit to lead him in a course of holiness, Hof. xi. 3. ‘ I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms.’ As Israel was led by the pillar of fire, so God's children are led by the conduct of his Spirit : the adopted ones need God's Spirit to lead them, they are apt to go wrong. The fleshly part inclines to sin ; the understanding and conscience are to guide the will, but the will is imperious and rebels ; therefore God's children need the Spirit to check corruption, and lead them in the right way. As wicked men are led by the evil spirit ; the spirit of Satan led Herod to incest, Ahab to murder, Judas to treason : so the good Spirit leads God's children into virtuous actions.

Obj. *But enthusiasts pretend to be led by the Spirit, when it is an ignis fatuus, a delusion.*

A. The Spirit's conduct is agreeable to the word ; enthusiasts leave the word, ‘ The word is truth,’ John xvi. 13. And, ‘ the Spirit guides in all truth,’ John xvi. 13. The word's teaching, and the Spirit's leading agree together.

Fourth sign, if we are adopted, we have an entire love to all God's children, 1 Peter ii. 17. ‘ Love the brotherhood.’ We bear affection to God's children, though they have some infirmities : there are the spots of God's children, Deut. xxxii. 5. But we must love the beautiful face of holiness, though it hath a scar in it. If we are adopted, we love the good we see in God's children, we admire their graces, we pass by their imprudencies : if we cannot love them, because they have some failings, how do we think God can love us ? can we plead exemption ? By these signs we may know our adoption.

Q. *What are the benefits which accrue to God's children :*

A. They have great immunities : King's children have great privileges and freedoms ; they do not pay custom, Matth. xvii. 6. God's children are privileged persons, they are privileged from the hurt of every thing, Luke x. 19. ‘ Nothing shall by any means hurt you.’ Hit you it may, not hurt you, Psalm xci. 10. ‘ There shall no evil befall thee.’ God saith not, No affliction shall befall his children, but, No evil ; the hurt and poison of it is taken away. Affliction to a wicked man hath evil in it, it is a *malum* worse ; it makes him curse and blaspheme, Rev. xvi. 9. ‘ Men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God.’ But no evil befalls a child of God,

he is bettered by affliction, Heb. xii. 10. The furnace make gold purer. Again, no evil befalls the adopted, because no condemnation. Rom. viii. 33. 'It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?' What a blessed privilege is this, to be freed from the sting of affliction, and the curse of the law? to be in such a condition, that nothing can hurt one? When the dragon hath poisoned the water, the unicorn with his horn doth extract and draw out the poison; so Jesus Christ hath drawn out the poison of every affliction, that it cannot prejudice the saints.

Second benefit, if we are adopted, then we have an interest in all the promises: the promises are children's bread: 'Believers are heirs of the promises,' Heb. vi. 17. The promises are sure: God's truth, which is the brightest pearl in his crown, is laid to pawn in a promise. The promises are suitable; like a physic-garden, there is no disease, but there is some herb in the physic-garden to cure it. In the dark of desertion, God hath promised to be a sun; in temptation, to tread down Satan, Rom. xvi. 20. Doth sin prevail? he hath promised to take away its kingly power, Rom. vi. 14. O the heavenly comforts which are distilled from the limbeck of the promises! But who hath a right to these? Believers only are heirs of the promise. There is never a promise in the Bible, but a believer may say, this is mine.

Use ult. Extol and magnify God's mercy, who hath adopted you into his family; who, of slaves, hath made you sons; of heirs of hell, heirs of the promise. Adoption is a free gift. He gave them power, or dignity, to become the sons of God. As a thread of silver runs through the whole piece of work, so free grace runs through this whole privilege of adoption. Adoption is a greater mercy than Adam had in paradise; he was a son by creation, but here is a further sonship by adoption. To make us thankful, consider, in civil adoption there is some worth and excellency in the person to be adopted; but there was no worth in us, neither beauty, nor parentage, nor virtue; nothing in us to move God to bestow the prerogative of sonship upon us. We have enough in us to move God to correct us, but nothing to move him to adopt us; therefore exalt free grace, begin the work of angels here; bless him with your praises, who hath blessed you in making you his sons and daughters.