

ADOPTION.

Adoption

Adoption is the term occasionally used to signify the Divine declaratory act by which those who are accepted in

Christ are reinstated in the privileges of forfeited sonship for the sake of the Incarnate Son. It is used also of the state to which these privileges belong.

The Term. I. The term is used only by St. Paul. It was perhaps taken into the Christian vocabulary from the Roman law. Cum in alienam familiam inque liberorum locum extranei sumuntur, aut per prætorem fit, aut per populum. Quod per prætorem fit ADOPTIO dicitur; quod per populum ARROGATIO. If the new son was received from under the authority of his natural parent the act was Adoption; if one who was his own master was adopted it was Arrogation. The Greek term, υιοθεσία, is explained by Hesychius: οὐ φύσει ἀλλὰ θέσει. St. Paul uses it with three applications. First, of the Israelites, *to whom pertaineth the adoption*, that is, the special election among the nations. Secondly, of *the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus: that we might receive the adoption of sons* unto which we were *predestinated*. Finally, of the full manifestation of the children of God in their perfect investiture with all their privileges: *waiting for the adoption*. This corresponds with the final *regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory*: a remarkable instance of the true relation between the terms regeneration and adoption. Both are used of the final restitution of all things, and both regard that restitution as being chiefly the restoration of man to his original and lost estate.

The Thing II. As to the thing signified it may be regarded first as the act of God, and then as conferred on man: the Divine declaration and its human result.

Act of God. 1. Adoption is connected with the Triune God. (1.) It is the Father who adopts into His own household: *of Whom the whole family—all paternity or race relation—in heaven and earth is named*. (2.) But it has special reference to the Son: it is in union with Him, the Son, that we become sons; we are adopted into the house by Christ, the *Son over His own house*, who imparts to us as His brethren a share in His own prerogative: *if the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed*. (3.) It is declared and attested by the Holy Ghost: *the Spirit of adoption*. It is administered to faith, as the common faith which saves but as having

in this case its specific object: the promise, that is, of the higher covenant, *I will be a Father unto you*. Not that the penitent sinner in coming to God regards every special blessing he needs as the object of trust. His faith is but one, and directed to one object; nor does he at the first make any distinction; afterwards, however, when he comes to understand his privileges, he learns to direct his confidence towards God under several aspects. And this, that He is a Father, is one that can never be forgotten. The seal of this faith is the testimony of the Spirit who *beareth witness with our spirit*—not to our spirit, but with it and through it—that *we are the children of God*. 2 Cor. vi. 18.

2. As received by man, adoption defines the peculiarity of the filial relation as a sonship restored in respect to its privileges. Received by man. More than Creation.

(1.) It is not the sonship of creation which is signified. The angels are the sons of God; as also those who bear authority among men: *I have said, ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High*. The human race in its origin received this designation: *Adam, which was the son of God*. Hence the prodigal son is still a son. Even after the moral image departed the natural image remained; the original prerogative can never be entirely taken away. *For this my son was dead and is alive again*: language put into the lips of an earthly father, but most assuredly only as the human echo of a Divine feeling. Job i. 6. Ps. lxxxii. 6. Luke iii. 38.

(2.) Nor is it the sonship of likeness: in the Hebrew idiom we read of the *children of light* and *children of this world*, and of the wicked our Lord said with that meaning only: *ye are of your father, the devil*. In the sense of conformity with His will, and followers of His example, Christ exhorts us to walk worthy of our filial relation: *that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven*. And we are predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son. The relation of sons, however, precedes the conformity. Luke xv. 24. Not Likeness. Luke xvi. 8. John viii. 44. Matt. v. 45. Rom. viii. 29.

(3.) But it is the restoration of prodigals to the household of God, and may be regarded in two lights: first, being a simple reinstatement in the original position of children of the creating Father; and, secondly, it is altogether a new endowment, being an investiture with the special prerogatives of brethren of Jesus, *the Firstborn among many brethren*. This distinction, however, is not often to be observed. The new relation of sonship by adoption Rom. viii. 29.

has indeed revealed more fully the primary and inextinguishable Fatherhood of God, but that is scarcely remembered by reason of the new glory of His Fatherhood in Christ.