

S E R M O N CXXVIII.

QUESTION XXXIV.

WHAT is Adoption ?



A N S W E R.

ADOPTION is an Act of GOD's Free Grace, whereby we are received into the Number, and have a right to all the Privileges of the Sons of GOD.

WE now proceed to the *Second* Benefit which derives from Christ to his Called in this Life, *Adoption*, a most Glorious Privilege, the thoughts whereof is enough to put us into raptures of Admiration, 1 Joh. 3. 1. *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.* Before I come to a particular discourse of the Nature of it, there are *two* Doubts briefly to be solved, viz. 1. *Whether Justification and Adoption, are two distinct Privileges ?* 2. *Whether Adoption doth in order of Nature follow after, and presuppose Justification ?* To both whereof I answer in the *Affirmative*, and shall endeavour briefly to vindicate each assertion.

1. *JUSTIFICATION and Adoption are two distinct Privileges, and accordingly ought to be*

handed apart, in the Doctrines of Divinity. Doubtless all the precious Benefits purchased for us by Christ, & conferred upon us by his Spirit in application, are worthy of our particular Contemplation, and to be meditated on apart, by all those that are so highly favoured, as to be made partakers in them. There are that refer Adoption to Justification, and because there are two parts in that, viz. *The Pardon of our Sins, and the Accepting of us as Righteous,* to which latter there belongs an adjudging of us to have a title to all the good that was laid up in the promise made to perfect Obedience, which they reckon to be the privileges of Adoption, and therefore refer it thereunto; and the rather, because the *Apostle* in the reciting the order of our Salvation, mentions it not distinctly, but connecteth Justification and Glorification, Rom. 8. 30. *Whom he justified, them he also glorified.* But it is not for nothing that the Gospel takes distinct notice of these two, and puts special remarks on this of Adoption; as might be plentifully instanced, see, Rom. 8. 14, &c. Eph. 1. 5. & elsewhere. And a man may be justified, and yet not adopted, I mean, in the nature of the thing itself, for in the Application of the new Covenant these are inseparable; and though these do both belong to the relative change, yet the relations made by them are very different. It is one thing

to be adjudged Righteous, and another to be put among Children: One thing to have God accept us as a Judge, another to do so as a Father. And though in both a title to the Inheritance is declared for us, yet it is upon different grounds; and the more claims may be made, the fuller is the evidence. If *Adam* had persisted in his Integrity, he had enjoyed this title in way of Justification, but not of Adoption; for it has its rooting in the first Covenant, whereas this, entirely belongs to, and hath its rise from the new Covenant. Besides, there are the Privileges that come by Adoption which are not depending on Justification; for doubtless, the state of God's Children under the new Covenant, is better than that of *Adam* and his Posterity, would have been under the first, had he kept his uprightness. And as Adoption is not named, *Rom. 8. 120.* so neither is Sanctification, which yet is a distinct Benefit; and as this is included in that of Glorification, so that in Justification by a frequent Scripture *Synecdoche*.

2. **ADOPTION** *both in order of Nature follow after, and presuppose Justification.* It is not a matter worthy of hot debate, in what order we put these two Benefits, provided we allow them their distinctness; and yet it is of advantage, to be rightly informed in this, and to help to guard us against errors, that are obtruded more easily upon us, when we have a confused or disturbed method of our Principles, not agreeable to the *form of sound words*. That these Benefits are together in time, is certain, they come in upon, and with effectual Vocation; in the same instant that the man is justified, he is adopted. But yet, there is a Precedency in the nature of the thing, and there are some that give this to Adoption; but surely, as it is something more to be adopted, than merely to be justified; so it is requisite that the Sinner be reconciled in order to his being adopted. Adoption in reasons presuppoeth Reconciliation, whereas Reconciliation cannot presuppose Adoption. We cannot with reason think that God will take a person for a Son and an Heir, and yet hold him under a sentence of Condemnation, though it is easy enough to suppose Him to be reconciled to one, though He doth not give Him this dignity. Besides, the first Privilege in order of nature, following on Faith, is Justification, by which justifying Faith we are introduced into this Privilege of Adoption, *Joh. 1. 12.* It now follows, that we look into, and take some account of this wonderful Benefit. And here we may first consider the Name, and then the Thing.

1. **THE Name** put upon this Privilege, *viz. Adoption*; the Greek word used for it in the New Testament signifies, the putting of one for a Child, i. e. the giving of him the Honour and Prerogative, that belongs by right to a Son, and Heir. This word Translators render, by that of Adoption; and the word is not proper, but analogical and allusive. The Spirit of God making use of the civil custom a-

mong men, in adopting strangers to bear their names, and inherit after them, to set forth this dignity by; though the similitude doth abundantly fall short, and is incomparably exceeded by the thing it is used to represent. When God useth any earthly similitudes, to express any Spiritual thing by, it is in condescendency to our Infirmitie, and to accommodate it to our manner of understanding. But yet it always supposeth that there is some analogy in it, else it were in vain proposed to us, under such a Notion, and instead of helping, it would but confound our apprehension of the thing. But yet, because such resemblances do not fully express what they are used for; we are not to tarry at them, and restrain the conception of the thing to them, but endeavour to use them as helps to our Faith, in soaring higher in our Contemplation thereof. Accordingly, the agreements and the differences between Humane and Divine Adoption, are well to be observed by us. Here,

1. **THE things wherein they agree are, whatsoever is essential to an Humane Adoption.** For from thence it is, that the term is borrowed. Now, a man is then said to adopt a person, when he doth freely chuse and constitute a stranger, to be his Heir. The thing intended to be conferred by the Adopter, on the adopted, is *Heirship*; he hath a Name, Honour, and Estate of Inheritance at his dispose, which he is willing to convey to another, in doing whereof he puts the title and privilege of a Son upon him. The Subject of this is a stranger, i. e. one whom he was not obliged by any bond of nature to bestow such a favour upon; for, if he were his own Son, the name, title, and heirship, would not derive to him, by right of Adoption; but of Nature. The way in which this is introduced, is upon free choice of the person; he was at his full liberty, he might have past by this Person, and put in another, without wrong or injustice done him, it was his own meer motion, and the reason of it was with himself. The act itself is in the constituting the Person to have a sure right to this Heirship. And this is usually done by a Will or Testament, signed, sealed, & attested. Now in all these respects, the resemblance holds, as will appear in laying open the Description given.

2. **THE Differences** between these are manifold. The most observable whereof are these,

1. **IN the grounds or reasons of their adopting.** Men indeed act their liberty in chusing the Persons, yet there is a sort of necessity constraining them to the Thing itself, and that is double, neither of which can be said of God.

(1.) **MEN must die and leave their Estates behind them, and their name would be forgotten; if they had no Heir to succeed them.** *Psal. 49. 10.* For he seeth that wise men die, likewise the fool, and the brutish person perish; and leave their wealth to others. They therefore take this

this way to perpetuate their memory after they are gone. But God lives forever, and his memorial is to all generations.

2. *MEN many times fail of Heirs of their own Bodies, and so must take in a stranger if they will have one.* True, Histories give us the account, of some that have assumed a stranger into Co-heirship with their own Sons, which more nearly resembles this, Rom. 8. 17. *If children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joynt-heirs with Christ.* But usually it is for want of a lineal descent, hence that, Gen. 15. 3. *And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and lo, one born in my house is mine heir.* Whereas God hath an only begotten Son, who ever pleased him, and on whom he hath conferred the heirship, Heb. 1. 2. And we are adopted in and with him.

2. *AMONG men, the adopted must wait for the death of the Adopter, in order to his inheriting.* It comes by succession; the one must go off the stage, to make way for the others entrance, and taking possession: whereas in this, there is no succession. God lives, and though Christ died to purchase the inheritance for us, yet he is alive, and lives forever; and we live, and have a joynt participation; with him; hence that, Joh. 14. 19. *Because I live, ye shall live also.*

3. *MEN may change their minds while they live, and put one out, and take another in if they please.* So, that as long as they live, the adopted hath no assurance, but is at uncertainty, and may on the least disgust be discarded. Men may make new Testaments, and the last Will must stand. But God's Adoption is immutable, if once he puts any into the number of his Children, they shall abide so forever. We read, Rom. 11. 29. *For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.* And this is one of those Gifts; for, although it passeth in Time, yet it was purchased in the days of Eternity, Eph. 1. 5.

4. *THEY differ in the impulsive Cause that moves them to chuse this rather than another.* For, though men do act spontaneously, and without compulsion; yet, they see something in the person to chuse, which is the motive, and determines them, either nearness of kindred, or winning natural endowments, or vertuous inclinations, which make them hope they will be a credit to them; and many times, their finding their expectations frustrate in their life time, is the reason why they alter their Wills; whereas God saw no difference, between those whom he purposed to adopt, and others, and when he comes actually to apply the Adoption to them, there is nothing in them at all to commend them to him more than others; He doth not find, but makes the difference there is between his adopted Children and others Eph. 2. 2, 3. Tit. 3. 3. Hence,

5. *THEY differ in the manner of the introduction of the adopted into Heirship.* Men indeed act their own prudence in their choice,

and presume they take such persons as will prove themselves worthy; but they take them as they are, and must run the risque of it. They may wish, but they cannot infuse good qualities into them; whereas God, in order to the adopting of any, doth regenerate them; so that he makes way to this relative change, by working a real one in them. And here, that we may be distinct in our conceptions of the Adoption under consideration; we must observe, that there are two ways in which we are said in the Gospel, to become the Children of God, viz. By Regeneration and Adoption, and we must beware that we do not confound these, and make them one. The change which is wrought in a Sinner, in Conversion or Effectual Vocation, is in Scripture called the *New Birth*, and those that are so converted are said to be *born of God*, because, as the work hath a resemblance to a natural Birth, so the Spirit of God is the author of it, and the end of it is, that we may live as Children, to the Glory of God. And, because God will have no adopted Children, but such as shall thus live to his Glory. He therefore makes ways to their Adoption by their Regeneration, hence that, Gal. 3. 26. *For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.* And it is on believing that this Privilege is bestowed upon them, Joh. 1. 12. *But as many as believed on him, to them gave he power to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name.* And indeed, all the new Covenant Benefits come to the people of God upon their being so called: Both their Justification, Adoption and the rest, as hath formerly been observed. Our business therefore at present, is not with regeneration, by which it is introduced, but the Adoption it self, which is brought in upon it.

LET us proceed to the consideration of it, as it is laid open before us, in the Description given of it; in which, as in the former, we are to observe the *general* and the *special* nature of it.

1. *THE general nature of it is, It is an act of God's Free Grace,* and herein it agrees with Justification, which also hath the same general nature assigned to it.

1. *It is an Act.* What is intended in this, and how it differs from that which we call a *Work*, hath been already taken an account of under the head of Justification, which amount in sum to thus much, viz. that the change produced by it being relative, it doth not work any alteration in his nature, but only applies to him a new state, which is done by an act of favour; and hence it is not Regeneration though it accompany it, because in that there is a change in the nature, according to, 2Cor. 5. 17. *Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new Creature; old things are past away, behold, all things are become new.* As also because it is past at once, and perfected in an instant; whereas a *Work* is supposed to be succedaneous. There are no degrees

gress in Adoption. A Believer is as much a Child of God, in the first instant of his being made so, as ever; nor are they in Heaven more so, than those on Earth, 1 Joh. 3. 2. It is true, there are the degrees of the manifestation of it, and that both to themselves and to others; they may now doubt about it; but ere long it shall be put quite beyond Question; the World do not at present know them, but they shall appear shortly like themselves, 1 Joh. 3. 2. Hence we read of *the manifestation of the sons of God*, Rom. 8. 19. And this is intended by the Adoption spoken of, ver. 23. viz. the bringing them to possess the Inheritance, which they are adopted to. Hence also there are steps and degrees of their enjoying the privilege of Adoption. They have all now only in Hope, but ere long they shall have it in full possession. They now only receive *the first fruits and earnest of the Inheritance*, at Death their Souls go to seize it, and Soul and Body after the Resurrection. But these things though they are consequent upon it, yet do not properly belong to the nature of Adoption, but refer to Glorification, and may be there spoken of. Adoption as it is an *Act*, is done by God, though it terminates on the person adopted. And here it may be inquired, *Whether it be an immanent and eternal or transient and temporary Act?* For both of these Acts are attributed to God, in our manner of conception. To this it may be replied, that the Foundation for this was laid in the Eternal Decree of God which is an immanent Act; in that he appointed us to be made partakers of this Privilege, and it was there secured, so that it cannot fail, Eph. 1. 5. *Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.* And indeed, all the good that we partake of in Time, had its beginning there. This Privilege also was intended for in the Covenant of Redemption, and accordingly purchased for us by Christ, and so it flows down to us, through his merit, according to the promise of the Father, Gal. 4. 5. *To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.* But the Adoption itself, by which we are put among Children, and made actual Heirs of God, is a transient temporary Act, and is applied upon our believing in Christ. Before this time we were aliens, enemies, in the same state with the rest of the rubbish of Mankind. Hence we read, *Eph. 2. 3. ver. 12, 13.* We are therefore acquainted with a temporary putting men among Children, and the way how it is brought about.

2. *IT is an Act of God's Free Grace*, i. e. it hath no dependance on any thing in the Creature, to move God to it, but flows from his mere good pleasure. We have before observed, how Justification is so, all which might be applied hither, and argue as strongly and sufficiently for this. And indeed, if it were *Free Grace* to justify us, who were

in our natural estate under Condemnation, how much more then must it be, to adopt such Creatures as Children, which is an higher Honour put upon them, and a more eminent Privilege. But, besides that, there may be something more particularly noted here respecting the Grace of God, shining out in our Adoption. We observed, that the Grace appearing in Justification, is God's pardoning and pronouncing us righteous, without any merit of ours, yea, when we deserved the contrary. Now there may be this peculiar remark, made on our Adoption, that God doth it without any loveliness or desirableness in us, but the contrary unloveliness, and odiousness that was upon us. It is true, in as much as these Benefits accompany Conversion, that as God together with justifying us, puts an Evangelical Righteousness and Holiness into us, and doth not leave us under the reigning power of our lusts, so together with adopting us, he puts a beauty & a loveliness upon us, adorning us with his Image and Grace; which Christ declareth how much he is taken with, *Can. 4. 4.* But this doth not obscure, but enhance this Grace of his; in as much as he doth it, and it flows from the same love wherewith he adopts us. This is excellently set forth, in allegorical expressions, *Ezek. 16. begin.* Here then let us observe,

1. *THAT God is an holy God, and loves Holiness, and hates Iniquity.* This therefore is one peculiar display which he makes of his Holiness, as we are told, *Hab. 1. 13.* And no wonder, since his Holiness is bound for his Glory, and will advance it in all his Works, and there is nothing that sets itself directly in opposition to his Glory but Sin, and that doth, *Rom. 3. 33. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*

2. *THAT we in our natural state, are under the most horrible Deformity and Pollution; and thereby are justly odious to an holy God.* Sin is called the *abominable thing* &c. *Jer. 44. 4.* And the Sinner by it, renders himself *vile*, *1 Sam. 2. 13.* And Sin is in Scripture compared to the most filthy and loathsome things; and this is the natural state of all, set forth by the sad condition of an *exposed Infant*, *Ezek. 16. begin.* We are born in the Image of fallen *Adam*, and God cannot but despise this Image, wherever he sees it.

3. *WHEN God comes to pick us out of the World, and make us his Children, he finds us thus defiled and loathsome.* We were not only so before in our birth, but he found us so, and saw us so, in the very instant when he past the word on us, by which we were regenerated, *Ezek. 16. 5.* Whatsoever is done preparatorily to make us sensible of our Misery, yet it abides upon us, and is not removed till he comes by his Spirit, to produce it in us, in our Conversion, in which is our first passage from Death to Life.

4. *THAT in and with His renewing us he Adopts us.* There is indeed an order of nature

to be observed in these things, else we shall not know the true reference of one to the other. But there is no instant of *Time* that passeth between them; Adoption is inseparable from Regeneration; we observed therefore, that this relation is introduced upon our believing, from, Gal. 3. 26. *For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*

5. *HENCE, together with this he puts his own Comeliness upon us, to make us lovely.* In Conversion, there is a renovation, there is a beauty and amiableness which God will bestow upon his Children: They shall have the Image and likeness of their Father upon them, and be no longer like other men. Hence we are excited to holiness from the consideration of this relation, 1 Pet. 1. 15, 16. *But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy.* And God doth it, by adorning them with the Graces of his Spirit. Hence that, *Ezek. 16. 9, 14.*

6. *HENCE he doth not Adopt us, because we were lovely, but that we might be so.* This Benefit, in the conferring it on us, had no respect to any antecedent desirableness in us, for there was none, but to one that was to follow it, which we were to receive by the indwelling of the Spirit in us, who is given with it, and is for that reason called the *Spirit of Adoption*, in, *Rom. 8. 15.* God saw as much beauty in others as in us, and that was none at all. And hence, that yet he should adopt us, is a demonstration of his unconceivable Grace.

LET then the thoughts of this wonderful Privilege, and the joynt consideration of our own vileness when God came to bring us into a participation in it, fill us with Soul-abasing thoughts, and transport our hearts with inexpressible Admiration, at the incomparable Love of God herein manifested to us, & help us to commiserate, and make patheticall commentaries on that transporting passage of the Apostle, 1 Joh. 3. 1. *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the Sons of God.*

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SERMON CXXIX.

2. **I**T follows that we consider of the *Special Nature* of this Benefit, in which we shall have a further display of the wonderfully *Free Grace of God* eminently appearing in it. For the clearing of this there are *three Things* that lie before us to be inquired into. 1. *The State* that we are admitted into by *Adoption*, viz. *of the Children of God.* 2. *The Way* in which we are admitted into this State, *we are received into the Number.* 3. *The Glorious Advantage* that accrues to us by it, *we have a Right to all the Privileges of such.* These things may be briefly laid open before us.