

What does 'adoption' mean in the NT?

When we are born again we become sons of God (Gal 3:26; Heb 2:10). As a result of new life we have a new relationship with God, that of sons - actual children of God (Phil 2:15; 1 Jn 3:1-2). Because we are in Christ the Firstborn, we are also sons of God in Christ. Thus sonship speaks of organic relationship, sonship results from life; those who are led by the Spirit are God's sons (Rm 8:14).

Adoption, on the other hand, is not about the natural relationship of a son; if we are already sons in Christ then we do not need to be adopted in the English sense of the word. Adoption has to do with inheritance and is relative to the ancient Roman meaning of the term (there was no adoption in Jewish law and the mention of the word by Paul was only in letters to Gentile churches). In Rome a son was like a slave with no authority until he came of age and reached his adoption and took authority with the civil status and responsibilities of his father, becoming one with him. There are five places where adoption is mentioned: Rm 8:15, 8:23 (the fulness of adoption at the end), 9:4 (regarding the privileges of Israel), Gal 4:5 and Eph 1:5. Rm 8:14-16 contains all three terms, sons, adoption and children. The Greek word for adoption means literally, 'the placing or setting of someone in the position of a son'.

In scripture there are three applications of the word adoption: 1) **NATURAL ADOPTION**, as when Moses was adopted by Pharaoh (Ex 2:10; Heb 11:24 the three occasions of adoption -Moses, Esther, Genubath - were all outside Israel). 2) **NATIONAL ADOPTION**, as when God adopted Israel (Ex 4:22; Deut 7:16, Hos 11:1; Rm 9:4). 3) **SPIRITUAL ADOPTION**, when God brings men into the name, place and privileges of a son. Not just bringing them into his family, or making them partakers of filial blessings, but giving them the inheritance of the firstborn; it is making them heirs with Christ and this results from justification, which changes their status. Sonship results from the organic change made by regeneration and eternal life in Christ; adoption results from the changes that occur in justification and sharing the righteousness of Christ. Because we are given eternal life we are loved by God as sons; because we are justified we are made heirs. Sonship has to do with a love relationship; adoption has to do with the legal declaration of status.

God does not simply accept us informally as sons, he does not superficially place his love upon us; but as a result of justification he makes a formal, legal declaration in heaven that we are now his heirs in Christ; sons with an inheritance. Adoption is the opposite of the bondage than natural man is in because of sin.

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Understanding Ministries

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