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## THE POWER OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

RUSSELL CECIL.

"Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles; that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." 1 Pet. 2:12.

"For so is the will of God, that with well doing, ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." 1 Pet. 2:15.

"Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." 1 Pet. 5:3.

I wish to speak to you this morning, brethren, on The Power of Christian Character. Observe that I emphasize Christian. A good character, in the ordinary sense as understood by the world, is a valuable possession, the reputation for which at least all men appreciate and desire, but a Christian character is a rarer possession and is of priceless value to the Church and the world. This is the character which the Christian should cultivate by reason of his relation to Christ and under the tuition of the Word and Spirit of God. It is the result of the process of sanctification which begins with conversion and continues to the end, until the Christian is made like unto his Lord.

I have selected three passages suggesting different aspects of the subject, and indicating successive steps in the discussion. Taken together, I think you will see how they represent the tremendous significance and weight of Christian character in the work of the kingdom of God on earth. They are like splendid jewels strung upon a golden thread, the thread representing Christian character, and the jewels representing such special manifestations of it as are denoted in these three passages. The unity of the subject will appear as we proceed with the discussion.

## THE GRACE OF ADOPTION.

SAMUEL A. KING.

Adoption has been given a distinct place and a very specific definition in our Standards, as in the Confession, Chap. XII, the Larger Catechism, qu. 74, and the Shorter Catechism, qu. 34. In the Confession it is styled "the grace of adoption." The doctrines are treated in the order of Effectual Calling; Justification; Adoption; Sanctification—a chapter being given to each. In the Shorter Catechism, that matchless statement of systematic theology, we are taught that the "Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling;" and that "they that are effectually called do in this life partake of justification, adoption, sanctification and the several benefits which do accompany or flow from them."

In defining the major benefits the Shorter Catechism condenses the more detailed statements of the Confession and the Larger Catechism in the terse language of the ans. to qu. 34: "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."

In view of the place thus assigned to "the grace of adoption" in the Standards, it being given equal place with justification and sanctification, and of the fulness with which it is set forth as one of the benefits procured by the purchased redemption, it is a matter of surprise that such brief treatment has been given to it by our leading theological writers. Adoption has not "come to its own" in the teaching and discussion of our doctrines.

Dr. Charles Hodge, (Vol. III, pp. 164, 165) in the chapter on justification, writes of "adoption and heirship" in a paragraph of less than twenty-five lines.

Dr. Dabney, in the closing paragraph of his lecture on Justification, discusses Adoption in twenty-one lines, and refers, approvingly, to Dr. Dick's 73rd lecture.

Dr. A. A. Hodge, in his *Outlines*, gives to it a short chapter of three pages.

Dr. Dick discusses Justification in four lectures and gives one to Adoption. In his treatment of the subject he unfortunately favors the view that adoption is analagous to the Roman custom of taking a child of an alien family and giving it a legal status as a member of a family with which it had no connection by blood relationship. Dr. A. A. Hodge's treatment, while not entirely satisfactory, is, in the judgment of the present writer, better than that of either of the other writers named above.

Having noted the place of importance assigned to this doctrine in our Standards, and the scant treatment of it by theologians, let us consider the importance given to it in the Scriptures.

1st. It is spoken of as the end of Predestination; Eph. 1: 5: "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children." The original is *huiiothesian*, translated in the A. V. adoption of children, in the R. V. adoption as sons. *Huiiothesia*, (*huios*, son, and *thetos*, from *tiitheemi*, to place) means literally son-placing, allotting to one the place and privileges of a son. It will be shown later that the subject of this action is *placed* as a son because he *is a child* by birth.

2d. Adoption is the end of Redemption. Gal. 4: 4, 5, "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that (*iuu*) we might receive the adoption of sons." Then in verse 6, "Because ye are sons, (*huiioi*) God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."

A further study of Scripture will, it is believed, make it clear that those who are the objects of predestination and the subjects of redemption are "placed as sons" because they have become partakers of the divine nature, and are no longer aliens. In proof of this, see John 1: 12, 13: "As many as received him to them gave he power (*exousia*, the right or privilege) to become the sons of God; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

At this point it is proper to note the use of the words *huios* and *teknon*. The latter is employed by John, here and elsewhere.

*Huios* is repeatedly used by Paul, but he also uses the other word, as in Rom. 8:17: *tekna tou theou*, children of God. *Teknon*, (from *tikto*) implies generation—*teknon* is that which has been born or generated. *Huios*, while carrying the idea of descent, or filiation, includes also the idea of the relation and status of the offspring. This word is sometimes employed when origin by generation is clearly implied. In Luke's genealogy, Chap. 3, beginning at verse 23 the word rendered son is *huios*, and this is attached to every person in the long list—each one was the son of the preceding. While the Greek word for son occurs but once, in verse 23, beginning with Jesus, it is rightly supplied by the translators with each succeeding name in the ascending line. The summit is reached in Adam, who was the son of God—he was the immediate creation of God. In a higher sense Christ is the *huios*, the Son of God, being eternally begotten of the Father.

Returning to the word rendered "adoption of sons," literally son-placing, we may conclude that in the act of adoption, *subsequent* to the new birth, those who have been born of God are placed and privileged as sons of God. It appears evident that while John does not use the word *huiiothesia* in the passage quoted yet the meaning of the language is that the privilege bestowed on those who *had been* born of God is equivalent to the adoption of sons in Paul's epistles.

Let us carefully note the statement in the L.C., qu. 74: "Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby all those that are justified are received into the number of his children, have his name put upon them, the Spirit of his Son given to them, are under his fatherly care and dispensations, admitted to all the liberties and privileges of the sons of God, made heirs of all the promises, and fellow heirs with Christ in glory."

The Confession in Chap. XII, says that all those that are justified are made partakers of "the grace of adoption, by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the sons of God." There is then, as in the L. C., an enumeration of the lofty privileges bestowed in adoption. In looking over the wondrous inventory, one may well exclaim:

"O child of God! O glory's heir!  
A happy lot is thine."

It is manifest that our Standards, following the Scriptures, hold that adoption is a special "grace" bestowed by "an act of God" upon those who have been already justified, and who by this distinct, and in the order of thought and procedure, *subsequent* act, are received into the number of the sons of God.

None are justified except on the exercise of faith; only those receive Christ by faith who have been born of God; hence adoption is an act subsequent to the new birth and to justification, and conditioned by these. Only those are admitted to the new relation who have received the new nature which is imparted in regeneration.

From all this it appears that adoption is something different from and vastly greater than the transaction which may be called a "legal fiction," by which an alien is constituted for certain ends a member of a family with which he is not connected by any tie of birth or blood.

Furthermore, by Adoption believers become the sons of God in a *real* and no merely figurative sense. The terms children and sons are sometimes, in the Scriptures, used figuratively, as "of various forms of close union and relationship," e. g. "children of this world;" children of light;" sons of Belial;" "sons of perdition;" "children of the devil," etc. But "the adoption of sons" is not a mere figurative expression; it describes "an act of God's free grace" by which those who are effectually called and justified do really become the sons of God, and enter into a relation more tender and more lasting even than that which exists between us and the "fathers of our own flesh." And it may well be added here that the relation established by "the grace of adoption" is vastly different from and greater than that implied in the "universal fatherhood of God," of which so much is flippantly said and jauntily sung in our day.

One branch of this subject remains to be considered, namely: the place of Adoption in the Federal Theology. The framers of our Standards found in the Scriptures two great covenants, the first and second, or the Covenant of Works and the Cov-

enant of Grace. This last is a covenant of redemption as to its end or purpose, and of grace as to its origin and administration. There were two "public persons" or "federal heads"—Adam and Christ.

Detailed information regarding the first covenant is scant, but sufficient. Of the second much more is written. Our knowledge of the conditions under which the first head was placed on probation for himself and his race, and what would have been the result to him and to his children if he had stood the trial, is greatly enlarged by the fuller information as to the Covenant of Grace, its federal head, his testing by temptation, and the results achieved by him who at the conclusion of his last act of vicarious obedience, could proclaim, with the shout of a victor, "it is finished!"

It is reasonable to believe that the "benefits" procured by Christ's obedience, for the people "given to him to be his seed," would have been secured, in kind if not in degree, by the first federal head, for himself and his seed, if he had rendered perfect and personal obedience to the end of his probation.

Among these benefits we find justification and adoption closely related to each other in order of bestowment. It is not fanciful to believe that these were set before Adam as rewards of obedience which would have accrued to him and to those he represented, who were all of his descendents. In his case, justification would not have included the pardon of sins, for he would have been free from guilt, but it would have brought him into the estate of one who had stood trial and had rendered perfect obedience; and all who were "in him" would have stood with him, and his obedience would have been imputed to them.

By adoption he would not, as we conceive, have been elevated from the position of a servant to that of a son, as some writers of honored name and rank have held. But we may safely reckon that by an act of adoption—son-placing—he who was by origin a child of God would have been received into the number and endowed with the privileges of the tested and confirmed sons of God.

It is reasonable to assume that all of God's intelligent and

moral creatures have been placed on probation, and that obedience was the condition of being confirmed in holiness—that by keeping the commandments they would “enter into life” everlasting.”

There being no *race* of angels there could be no federal representation—no probation of many in the probation of a federal head. Each one must stand or fall for himself.

It is not proposed here to indulge in speculation or to venture on ground across which no beams of Scripture light will direct our course or regulate our thought. But where there are suggestions in the Word, may we not humbly follow in the direction in which they lead? We read of “holy angels” and of “elect angels.” May it not be that these are angels who have passed through their probation and having stood the test were confirmed in holiness and “placed as sons,” no longer minor children in the household of God? And may not these be the “sons of God” who “shouted for joy” when the universe came fresh from the creating hand of God, and amid the wonders that inspired their song they saw this world of ours “rounded into beauty, and hung amid the stars, as the home of God’s man-child.”

If the holy, elect angels, had become the established sons of God, as suggested above, and Adam, being confirmed in holiness, would have been by adoption received into their number and given a right to their liberties and privileges in the great family of God, he would have only secured for himself and his posterity a benefit that the second Adam has procured for all his spiritual seed. In that case glorification, probably with translation, would most likely have followed in the fulness of time.

Whatever may be thought of these suggestions as to the blessings enfolded in the promise of the first covenant, and as to what Adam might have secured by obedience, we have the “sure word” of Scripture as regards the benefits procured by Christ, and as to the manner in which we may become partakers of the purchased redemption. And we have the assurance of the believer’s “communion in grace and glory” with Christ, the second Adam, and that all who receive him by faith are, by the grace of adoption, “received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.”