



Salvation: Children of God

Excerpts from *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer

What is a Christian? The question can be answered in many ways, but the richest answer I know is that a Christian is one who has God as Father. [...]

A Christian is one who has been justified by Christ dying on the cross for their sin. That **justification**—by which we mean God’s forgiveness of the past together with his acceptance for the future—is the primary and fundamental blessing of salvation, because it meets our primary spiritual need. We all stand by nature under God’s judgment; his law condemns us; guilt gnaws at us, making us restless, miserable, and in our lucid moments afraid; we have no peace in ourselves because we have no peace with our Maker. So we need the forgiveness of our sins, and assurance of a restored relationship with God, more than we need anything else in the world; and this the gospel offers us before it offers us anything else.

*As wonderful as justification is, God doesn’t stop there, but he **adopts** us as his **children**!* Sonship to God is not a universal status into which everyone enters by natural birth, but a supernatural gift which one receives through receiving Jesus. “No one comes to the Father”—in other words, is acknowledged by God as a son—“except through me” (John 14:6). Sonship to God, then, is a gift of grace. It is not a natural but an adoptive sonship. [...]

To those who are Christ’s, the holy God is a loving Father; they belong to his family; they may approach him without fear and always be sure of his fatherly concern and care. This is the heart of the New Testament message. [...]

Benefit One: Intimacy

This heart of the New Testament, **adoption**, is a family idea, conceived in terms of love, and viewing God as Father. In adoption, God takes us into his family and fellowship—he establishes us as his children and heirs. Closeness, affection and generosity are at the heart of this relationship. To be right with God the Judge is a great thing, *but to be loved and cared for by the Father is greater.* [...]

There is a manifest difference between a servant and a friend—and also between that of a servant and a son....A closer and dearer intimacy than that of a master and servant is said to exist between Christ and his people. “Henceforth I call you not servants: for the servant knows not what his Lord does: but I have called you friends.” (John 15:15); and still closer and dearer relation is said to exist in consequence of adoption; for “you are no more a servant, but a son, and an heir of God through Christ” (Galatians 4:7). Intimacy: a great benefit of our adoption through salvation.

Benefit Two: Hope

The doctrine of adoption teaches us to think of our hope not as possibility nor yet as a likelihood, but as a guaranteed certainty, because it is a *promised inheritance*. The reason for adopting, in the first-century world, was specifically to have an heir to whom one could bequeath one’s goods. So, too, God’s adoption of us makes us his heirs, and so guarantees to us, as our right (we might say), the inheritance that he has in store for us. [...]



Benefit Three: Reborn Identity

The message of adoption is this: Do I, as a Christian, understand myself? Do I know my own real identity? My own real destiny? *I am a child of God. God is my Father; heaven is my home; every day is one day nearer. My Savior is my brother; every Christian is my brother too.* Say it over and over to yourself first thing in the morning, last thing at night, as you wait for the bus, any time when your mind is free, and ask that you may be enabled to live as one who knows it is all utterly and completely true. This is the Christian's secret of a *Christian* life, and of a *God-honoring* life, and these are the aspects of the situation that really matter. May this secret become fully yours and fully mine.

So, what is salvation to us? We are justified through Jesus Christ. We enter into a relationship with the living God through the atonement made for our sins by Jesus. We are able to enter into an intimate relationship with a loving perfect Father, and are assured an inheritance greater than anything we could imagine.

Relevant Scriptures

Galatians 4:7

Ephesians 2:8-9

1 Peter 2:24-25

1 John 3:1-2

Matthew 5-7

Questions for Discussion

- How does thinking of God as Father and us as His children change your perspective on Christianity?
- Which benefit of adoption through Christ impacts you the most?
- Is there a benefit that you have not accepted yet as part of your adoption into the family of God?
- How will this idea of family and adoption change your relationship with God?

