

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

therefore, the study of the life, the writings and the character of a man of such apostolic zeal and fervour we feel we must fully re-echo the valedictory words of one of his friends on reading his Memoir. "Farewell, dear saint! Thy memory is fragrant upon earth. Thy works will perpetuate thy fame; thy spirit is retired to those that are perfect: I follow, though sinning, tired and sighing. One motive more I have to quicken me in my way, that I may meet the loving, holy, happy Henry there."

C. SYDNEY CARTER.

STUDIES IN TEXTS.

Suggestions for Sermons from Current Literature.

BY THE REV. HARRINGTON C. LEES, M.A.

VIII. THE FAMILY OF GOD.

Texts.—"A spirit which gives you the status of sons." "If we are His children, it must follow that we are His heirs." "We thus receive at His hands the charter of our sonship." (Rom. viii. 15, 17; Gal. iv. 5, A. S. Way.)

[Book of the Month: McNEILE'S ST. PAUL¹=M. Other reffs. *Hastings' Dictionaries of Bible, and Apostolic Church* = HDB., DAC. Deissmann's *Bible Studies* = D. Ramsay's *Galatians* = RG. Ramsay's *Teaching of St. Paul* = RTP. *Historical Sidelights* = HS. Denney's "Romans" in *Expos. Greek Test.* = EGT. David Smith's *St. Paul* = DS.]

Our position as children of God is full of spiritual suggestiveness, and offers a very wide field for illustration as well as doctrine. St. Paul speaks of it as a spiritual begetting, (Gal. iv. 28) or regeneration, (Titus. iii. 5) or resurrection, (Eph. ii. 1) or adoption.

"This special term occurs in five places in the Epistles of St. Paul (Gal. iv. 5; Rom. viii. 15, 23; ix. 4; Eph. i. 5). It seems to express a distinct and definite idea in that apostle's mind; and since adoption was, in Roman law, a technical term for an act that had specific legal and social effects, there is much probability that he had some reference to that in his use of the word" (HDB. I. 40).

¹ *St. Paul: His Life, Letters, and Christian Doctrine*, by A. H. McNeile, D.D., Regius Professor in the University of Dublin; pub. by Cambridge University Press, 10s.; a concise, conservative, scholarly book, packed almost too tightly for the general reader: it is full of learning, judiciously arranged, and a mine of orderly information on facts and doctrines.

M. has an interesting note on the word *huiiothesia*, adoption, which he renders " ' a making or constituting sons.' If it is translated ' adoption ' it must be remembered that the word meant in Roman law a much more complete and irrevocable membership of the family than it means with us. But even so, it can in human life be only a legal fiction, whereas St. Paul is thinking of a spiritual sonship which is *real*, produced by a real, living union with the Father. In the ideal future this union will be revealed in its perfection " (M. 276).

The word opens up rich avenues of vision and thought, for, as Deissmann says of the papyri which deal with adoption, " the frequency with which these formulæ occur permits of an inference as to the frequency of adoptions, and lets us understand that Paul was availing himself of a generally intelligible figure when he utilized the term *huiiothesia* in the language of religion " (D. 239).

Romans and Greeks adopted. Jews never did. So it is specially interesting as being entirely un-Jewish. " From every point of view the thought in Gal. iii. 7 is abhorrent to Hebrew feeling " (RG. 342). Yet St. Paul insists on its force not only as bearing upon primary Jewish privilege among the alien children of this world, who needed to be restored, after fall, to God, but also as bearing upon subsequent Gentile admission afterwards to the Church of God. It emphasizes the grace of God, it minimizes our rights as men. " The world serves to distinguish those who are made sons by an act of grace from the only-begotten Son of God. But the act of grace is not one which makes only an outward difference in our position ; it is accomplished in the giving of a spirit which creates in us a new nature " (EGT. II. 648). " He claimed us for His own long ago, to give us the charter of sonship to Himself, won through our Messiah " (Eph. i. 5, Way).

I. WE HAVE HERE A PRIVILEGE OF RELATIONSHIP.

DS. holds that *huiiothesia* is " not the introduction of aliens into God's family, but the reinstatement of sons in their birthright. So Gal. iv. 5 would mean ' recover our lost sonship.' " This is, I imagine, really foreign to St. Paul's metaphor. We shall treat adoption therefore as meaning admission rather than re-admission. And first St. Paul applies it to the original Jewish status. " The Jews are the sons of Israel : theirs was the sonship of God " (Rom.

ix. 4, Way). "Somewhat emphatically he applies it to the Jews in Romans ix. 4" (DAC. I. 42). "The sonship of Israel is described as 'adoption.' It is noteworthy that the adoption is *before* the Incarnation" (DAC. I. 42). Yet it must be noted with Lightfoot that "Before Christ's coming men were *potentially* sons (Gal. iv. 1-6), though actually they were only slaves" (DAC. I. 42). As Dean Armitage Robinson says: "Sonship in the completest sense could not be proclaimed before the manifestation of the divine Son in the flesh" (DAC. I. 42).

Then the privilege becomes world-wide in its promise and extent, "that we might thus receive at His hands the charter of our sonship. And to prove that you are really His sons, God sent forth from Himself the Spirit of His own Son to pass into our hearts, there crying 'my own dear Father'" (Gal. iv. 6. Way). "We must not lower the meaning of adoption, in his mind, to the conferring of the full privileges of sons on those who are children by birth. It is, as the whole context shows, a position bestowed by a disposition or covenant of God, and through a redemption by Christ" (HDB. I. 41). "This covenant of promise (Rom. iv. 13) had reference to a 'seed' which has proved to consist not of Abraham's physical, but his spiritual descendants in Christ, i.e. those who share his faith and obtain his righteousness promised to them and won for them by Christ" (M. 297). There is a striking illustration of all that this privilege may mean in the history of the Indians of North America. "Sometimes a captive was saved, to be adopted in place of a warrior who had fallen . . . the allegiance and, as it were, the identity of the captive . . . became changed. His . . . children and the wife . . . left at home are to be blotted from his memory; he is to be the departed chieftain resuscitated . . . to cherish those whom he cherished; to hate those whom he hated . . . the foreigner thus adopted is esteemed to stand in the same relation of consanguinity" (HS. p. 7). There is just one caution worth making. This is illustration, and not always dogma, whether in American or Roman contexts.

"If one should start from this idea of the inheritance of the Gentiles through 'adoption' and argue that, because the sinner is adopted as a son of God, therefore everything that can be predicated about a legal process of adoption among men can be predicated about the bringing of sinners into the inheritance of God,

one would be led into endless blunders" (RTP. 204). So Dr. Candlish writes: "No doubt this legal analogy may be pressed too far; and St. Paul plainly indicates that what he means is really something far deeper; for it is founded upon a spiritual union to God's Son, which is described as 'putting on Christ'" (HBD. I. 41). Nevertheless, the severance from the past is as suggestive as the union for the future.

II. WE HAVE ALSO A PROMISE OF INHERITANCE.

"We have not only the status, but the heart of sons" (EGT. II. 648). "You have accepted a spirit which gives you the status of sons . . . if we are His children, it must follow that we are His heirs" (Rom. viii. 15, 17, Way). "In English law a person is not legally 'heir' till the death of the testator who has made him so. In Roman law his legal position during the testator's life was much more secure. This made it possible for St. Paul to use the word to describe the relationship of Christians to God Who does not die. He was also accustomed to it from its use in the Old Testament for the possession of the promised land by Israel" (M. 277).

"St. Paul meant by adoption a blessing distinct from our having peace with God and access into His favour, which he describes in Rom. v. 1 as the positive fruits of our justification. These blessings, indeed, cannot be separated in reality; they are only different aspects of the one great gift of life in Christ; but in order to understand clearly the evangelical doctrine of the New Testament, it is necessary to look at them separately" (HDB. I. 41). Our inheritance is one in which we can now participate. It makes us worthy of our associations. "He has made us fit to have a share in the inheritance of His consecrated ones who walk in light" (Col. i. 12, Way). "The status of sons, in the rapture of which we cry, 'My Father, my own dear Father'" (Rom. viii. 15, Way). "Both in law and in common language *pater* in Rome had a very much wider sense than 'father' in English: the *pater* is the chief, the lord, the master, the leader. Vergil's Æneas is the *pater* of all his followers. A man may be described as the *pater* of all to whom his qualifications constitute him guide and leader and protector" (RG. 343). Our inheritance is not only love, but present life and victorious power. "The context in these passages (cf. Gal. iv. 6;

Rom. viii. 15) shows that the Spirit leads us to the Father by making us realize our sonship ; He teaches us how to pray, and puts into our mouths the words ' Abba, Father ' " (DAC. I. 42).

III. WE HAVE THE PROSPECT OF TRANSFORMATION.

" Adoption is spoken of in Romans viii. 23 as something in the future. It is the redemption of our body, and we are still waiting for it ; it can be completely attained only at the general resurrection " (DAC. I. 42). " We are sighing while we strain our gaze afar to descry that ransom of our mortal frame, the sealing of us as His sons " (Rom. viii. 23, Way). " St. Paul was able to look forward to the final consummation, when all mankind, with the redemption of their bodies, would be fully revealed as sons of the new spiritual family, or sons of God ; and with them, and dependent upon them, the whole creation which at present groans and travails in the pain of bringing to birth a perfected world " (M. 289).

SHORT BOOK NOTICES.

THE CHRIST OF THE FUTURE : a Criticism and a Forecast. By the Rev. A. J. C. Allen, M.A., Vicar of Great and Rector of Little Chesterford, Essex. London : *Robt. Scott.* 2s. net.

This is a timely and trenchant defence of apostolic doctrine concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, in face of the " liberal " tendencies of the day ; with a capital foreword by the Bishop of Chelmsford. It should find its way into the hands of theological students and the junior clergy.

THE COMING CATHOLICISM. By six Anglican Priests. London : *Robt. Scott.* 2s. 6d. net.

The Introduction deals with the three main features of religious thought of to-day, and the following subjects are handled—" The Renewing of Catholicism," the Rev. N. E. Egerton Swann ; " The Sacramental Principle," by the Rev. S. Proudfoot ; " The Moral Independence of the Church," the Rev. G. Milburn ; " Authority," the Rev. A. J. E. Rawlinson ; " Christian Unity," the Rev. Harold Anson ; " The Church and Women," the Rev. Harold Buxton.

THE HIDDEN SANCTUARY, a book of Devotional Studies. By the Rev. Jesse Breet. London : *Longmans, Green & Co.* 5s. net.

The author endeavours to trace the progress of the soul in grace and love, and has gathered from out the Church's treasury some of the truths of the spiritual life. There are four sections : i. The Approach ; ii. The First Court—The Court of Sacrifice ; iii. The Second Court—The Court of Prayer ; iv. The Third Court—The Court of Union. Though many readers will not agree with much that is in this book, they will find in it that which will stir to greater earnestness.