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SONS OF GOD: THE NEW COVENANT REALITY OF
ADOPTION IN CHRIST

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SONS OF GOD: THE NEW COVENANT REALITY OF
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For the glory of God

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE.....	V
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. COVENANT THEOLOGY	5
Continuation Model of Covenant Theology	6
3. THE NEWNESS OF THE NEW COVENANT	11
The Covenant of Grace.....	11
Adoption in the Old Testament.....	22
Adoption in the New Testament	30
Adoption through Mediation	34
4. THE TRINITY AND ADOPTION	37
The Eternal Father Revealed by the Sendings.....	40
The Sendings and Adoption.....	42
Praying to the Father, through the Son, in The Holy Spirit.....	46
The Lord’s Prayer	51
Conclusion	55
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	57

PREFACE

There have been many people who have sharpened my thoughts in the process of this thesis. Chief among them is Dr. Stephen Wellum who offered support, challenge, and clarification in our meetings together as I thought through these matters. Where there is clarity, it is due to Dr. Wellum who stands as God's instrument as the means by which it came. I am thankful for all the professors I have had in this process and for the institution that has brought them together, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Aside from these influences, two others have stood as conversation partners who often would bear with me in love (Eph 4:2) as I expressed my thoughts verbally.

Michael Carlino has often been my first line of defense against either being unclear or taking an argument too far. The conversations we have had on this topic and others have served me as a Christian and deepened my love for our Lord.

Finally, my wife, my good thing (Prov 18:22), Brianna, has patiently listened to my thoughts on the matter and afforded me time to read and write. Without her love and care in this process, none of these words would have ever made it to the page. I am thankful for the blessing of God in my wife.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

J. I. Packer, in his classic work *Knowing God*, reveals the importance of the doctrine of adoption when he says, “if you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father.” His contention is that “everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the old, everything that is distinctly Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. ‘Father’ is the Christian name for God.”¹ The reality of Packer’s words has brought about the exploration at hand into what took place to enable Christians to call God Father. The Fatherhood of God is no small matter in the life of a Christian who has “received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Rom 8:15).²

The ability to relate to God as Father comes as part of the benefits of the new covenant. In the words of 1 John 3:1, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” This glorious reality deserves much attention and is summarized in different phrases throughout Scripture such as adoption, sonship, or adoption as sons.³ In order for this reality to take place, the true

¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1973) 182.

² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

³ For a full treatment on the translational differences of “sonship” and “adoption as sons,” see

Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, must be sent to accomplish salvation. The sending of the Son and the Spirit make the reality of adoption possible because the Lord Jesus Christ is the true Son who enables Christians to enter into the family of God. This provides to Christians all the benefits and privileges of the true Son such as the ability to call God Father (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15).

Addressing the first person of the Trinity in prayer as Father is not something that is seen in the Old Testament. Joachim Jeremias notes, “We can say quite definitely that there is no analogy at all in the whole literature of Jewish prayer for God being addressed as Abba.”⁴ This personal and intimate title of address comes only after the Son is sent to complete the work of salvation and the Spirit sent to apply this work to Christians. This new covenant way of addressing and relating to God is foreshadowed in the Old Testament but is not fully experienced under the old covenant. As such, this paper will argue that adoption is corporate under the old covenant and is not made individual until the Son and Spirit are sent by the Father to bring about the promised redemption.

The focus of this study will deal with the redemptive historical significance of

James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation Into the Background of *Yiothesia* in the Pauline Corpus* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1992). Scott argues in the introduction that the proper term is adoption as sons as this allows the legal consequences to be fully shown. He states that adoption is “the means by which believers enter into divine sonship” (xiv). This paper draws from this conclusion and will not repeat the arguments Scott uses to arrive at this conclusion. The discussion will focus primarily on how two different systems (Covenant Theology and Progressive Covenantalism) differ in whether or not Old Testament saints experienced adoption as sons in the same way New Testament saints do. Further, adoption as sons and sonship will be the preferred terms. Gregg Allison and Andreas Köstenberger helpfully note in Gregg Allison and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2020), 276 of this, “The language of “sonship” is important in terms of a canonical and covenantal reading of Scripture. While to contemporary sensibilities the gender-specific term “sonship” may seem sexist or exclusionary, its rich canonical and covenantal context (1) underscores its importance in terms of the inheritance of divine blessings and (2) indicates that both male and female believers are included in the inheritance. That is, as Scripture unfolds canonically and its covenants develop progressively, the theme of sonship progresses exponentially.”

⁴ Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (Naperville, IL: S.C.M. Press, 1967), 57.

the Lord Jesus Christ in his role as the Son of God and the significance of the new covenant made in his blood. By the Lord Jesus, the true Son of the Father, who assumes our humanity and achieves our redemption, Christians are adopted as sons and gain the rights and privileges by faith to become part of God's family; this is the reality of adoption. Adoption, in this manner, was not granted to Old Testament saints even though they were in the community of Israel. Old Testament saints experienced corporate adoption whereas New Testament saints experience corporate adoption as the church as well as adoption as individuals. The change that takes place comes by virtue of the new covenant and is truly a new experience. The covenantal unfolding of Scripture is crucial to understand properly when considering adoption and all it means for the Christian.

To argue this point, covenant theology will be presented as the conclusions drawn by covenant theology do not allow for this distinction to be clearly seen. That is to say, the continuity of the covenant of grace that is stressed in covenant theology does not allow for the newness of the new covenant to be fully grasped. Adoption as sons is a new covenant reality that is not fully experienced by Old Testament saints as the old covenant merely foreshadowed what was to come in Christ as the mediator of a new covenant. In the new covenant, unlike the old, all who are in the community are redeemed, know God, have their sins forgiven, and are adopted as sons. This reality was not experienced in the old covenant, given its mixed nature, but it was foreshadowed and anticipated. To show this, chapter two will define the covenantal structure of covenant theology so that in chapter three evaluation of its claims considering the newness of the new covenant can be presented. Chapter three will focus on critique of covenant theology and argue that the new covenant is truly *new*. Covenant theology's position that the covenant of grace in the

New Testament is a republication of the covenant made in Genesis 3:15 does not account properly for the newness of the new covenant. Adoption as sons foreshadowed in the old covenant will be shown to reach its ultimate fulfillment in Christ, the mediator of this new covenant. Finally, chapter four will apply this to the benefits Christians gain from being adopted, namely the ability to cry out to God as Father. Adoption requires the triune work of the Father, Son, and Spirit in their roles as such. The sending of the Son and the Spirit will be shown to be the way adoption is brought about such that Christians are brought into the family of God by the true Son of God, the Lord Jesus, and enabled to cry out to God as Father through the person and work of God the Son.

CHAPTER 2

COVENANT THEOLOGY

Covenant theology is a system of biblical and theological interpretation that stresses continuity from the Old Testament to the New Testament as it sees one covenant of grace established in Genesis 3:15 that culminates in Christ. The continuity that exists is held up and supported by the biblical concept of covenant such that even in variety and diversity (i.e. time, genre, and authors), God acts toward his people within the same framework and deals with them according to, as the name suggests, covenants.¹ Michael Horton helpfully shows how the themes of Scripture are united when he says,

What unites them is not itself a central dogma but an architectonic structure, a matrix of beams and pillars that hold together the structure of biblical faith and practice. That particular architectural structure that we believe the Scriptures themselves to yield is the covenant. It is not simply the concept of the covenant, but the concrete existence of God's covenantal dealings in our history that provides the context within which we recognize the unity of Scripture amid its remarkable variety.²

This is a crucial step for covenant theology and has far reaching implications for the discussion of doctrine downstream from this understanding of the covenants. Covenant theology aims to read all of Scripture considering the covenantal structure rooted in one covenant of grace under the old and new covenants to allow for more continuity than

¹ Michael S. Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 13.

² Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, 13.

discontinuity.

Two points are crucial to the system of covenant theology: first, there are three covenants which R. Scott Clark defines as follows:

(1) the pretemporal covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*) between the Father and the Son, (2) a historical covenant of works between God and Adam as the federal head of humanity (*foedus operum*), and (3) a covenant of grace with the elect, in Christ, administered through a series of covenants from Adam to Christ.³

Second, a tripartite division of the law into moral, civil, and ceremonial. Agreement on these two stipulations is what unites proponents under the umbrella of covenant theology.⁴ These two broad stipulations are laid out in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* which is seen as the confessional document for covenant theology.⁵ While there are a number of variances within covenant theology, the continuation model will serve as the main conversation partner in this paper.

Continuation Model of Covenant Theology

Michael Horton defines the three covenants as “the covenant of redemption (an eternal pact between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), the covenant of creation (made with humanity in Adam), and the covenant of grace (made with believers and their

³ R. Scott Clark, “Christ and Covenant: Federal Theology in Orthodoxy.” In *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, ed. Herman Selderhuis (Boston: Brill, 2013) 403-28.

⁴ There is much agreement within covenant theology but also much disagreement. Most Covenant Theology proponents hold to three covenants, the disagreement comes in naming the three covenants. The focus of this paper will not be evaluating the similarities and differences but rather showing how the doctrine of adoption is affected by the covenantal structure of covenant theology. For an evaluation of different understandings within covenant theology, see Michael S. Horton, “Which Covenant Theology?” in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California*, ed. R. Scott Clark (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007).197-227.

⁵ Guy P. Waters, Nicholas J. Reid, and John R. Muether, *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 12.

children in Christ).”⁶ It must be noted at this point that Horton uses terminology not found in the Westminster Confession of Faith. Instead of using the common designation “covenant of works,”⁷ Horton opts for the terminology of the “covenant of creation.” Horton’s argument for his choice draws a further distinction within covenant theology that moves in the right direction but still leaves questions that must be addressed.⁸

The use of the “covenant of creation” rather than the “covenant of works” allows Horton⁹ to break from what he sees as a precommitment of the framers of covenant theology to a firm law-gospel distinction that arises from the tripartite division of the law.¹⁰ If one makes a sharp distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, there is a denial that the law given by God is an act of grace. This leads Horton and others to prefer covenant of creation because all of God’s action towards humanity is that of grace, or at least divine favor and goodness. Thus, using covenant of creation allows for a broader understanding of all that takes place in the garden between God and Adam and all of humanity in Adam. While this is a minor departure from the historical understanding, it is a distinction that is a good progression of thought. Horton desires that systematic theology would “catch up” with biblical

⁶ Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, 92.

⁷ “Of God’s Covenant with Man,” in *The Westminster Confession of Faith 1646* (A Puritan’s Mind, 2021), chap 7, <https://www.apuritansmind.com/westminster-standards/>

⁸ Covenant theology as a system, in my Baptist reading of Scripture, leaves too many unanswered questions. I have chosen to interact with Horton because of his argument for covenant of creation over covenant of works.

⁹ G. K. Beale also seems to prefer covenant of creation over covenant of works for similar reasons. Horton is more clear on the distinction and reasons, but Beale could also be cited under this model of covenant theology as seen in G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 42,174, 651-65.

¹⁰ Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, 101.

studies in recognizing the strength that comes in referring to the covenant of creation over the covenant of works.¹¹ It is to this end that Horton says elsewhere that “we need to go beyond the Reformation, but *through* it”¹² so as not to say the Reformation is over but that there are still conclusions to be drawn.

Covenant theology’s commitment to a tripartite division and all that comes by limiting the covenant made with Adam to a covenant of works has far reaching implications on the covenant of grace. Chief among them is the question of who can rightly be considered in the covenant of grace? In answering this question, one must consider how membership in the covenant is attained based on when the covenant is administered. As Horton notes, covenant theology sees the members of the covenant of grace as “believers and their children.”¹³ One of the problems that exists in covenant theology is using the theological category of the “covenant of grace” and then subsuming all the biblical covenants under that larger category. This leads them to view the new covenant as another covenant under the larger rubric of “the covenant of grace” and not as *the* covenant that all the previous biblical covenants are pointing forward to and reach their fulfillment. Adherents proposit that Genesis 3:15 is the inauguration of “the one covenant of grace” and that it is readministered under a number of Old Testament covenants (e.g. Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic/old, Davidic covenants) while maintaining the new covenant is simply the final administration of “the covenant of grace.” As seen in

¹¹ Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, 113.

¹² Michael Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 8.

¹³ Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, 92.

Clark's statement above, the covenant of grace is administered in a series of covenants from Adam to Christ. Ultimately, this allows for continuity as the one covenant of grace carries from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Herman Bavinck states,

So when the fullness of time had come and Christ had completed his work on earth, the covenant of grace moved into a higher dispensation. Believers in Israel indeed knew that the Sinaitic dispensation was merely temporary and therefore anticipated the day of the new covenant with longing. And Jesus with the apostles who read the Old Testament in that way saw in it the same covenant of grace with the same benefits that now became fully manifest. The Old and the New Testaments are in essence one covenant (Luke 1:68–79; Acts 2:39; 3:25).¹⁴

The Westminster Confession clarifies that there are not many covenants of grace, but one that is differently administered through the law and the gospel such that “there are not therefore two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations.”¹⁵ Put simply, according to covenant theology, the Old and New Testaments are, per Bavinck, “different dispensations of the same covenant of grace.”¹⁶

Membership in the covenant of grace. As the name “continuation model” suggests, the church is the continuation of Israel, given that these two corporate entities are simply different administrations of the same covenant of grace. This understanding allows for the transference of the sign of the covenant—circumcision in Israel, baptism in the church—to be applied to believers and their offspring thus marking the members of the covenant community. Membership in the covenant, then, can be both physical/natural and spiritual in covenant theology. The continuation model of covenant theology finds

¹⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Vol. 3: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, (Baker Books, 2006), 357.

¹⁵ “Of God’s Covenant with Man,” chap. 7.

¹⁶ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:357.

the basis for this in both the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants (Gen 12-15; Ex 19-24) as the physical sign of circumcision given to Abraham continues with the covenant of grace allowing for the church to be the continuation of Israel. Since the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants are different administrations of the same covenant of grace, membership in the new covenant is both physical/natural and spiritual—for believers and their offspring. Given this view, covenant theologians argue that receiving the covenant sign of circumcision in the old or baptism in the new does not necessarily mean that one is spiritually in the covenant since one can be physically *in* the covenant community but *not* spiritually *of* the covenant community due to unbelief. In Michael Horton’s words,

Not everyone in the covenant of grace is elect: the Israel below is a larger class than the Israel above. Some Israelites heard the gospel in the wilderness and responded in faith, while others did not—and the writer to the Hebrews uses this as a warning also to the New Testament heirs of the same covenant of grace (Heb. 4:1–11).¹⁷

Horton sees what is true in the Abrahamic and Mosaic/old covenants—membership as spiritual and physical—and applies it wholesale to the covenant of grace and therefore membership in the new covenant. This is only possible by viewing the new covenant as simply part of the one covenant of grace from Genesis 3:15 on, and thus the nature and structure of the covenant communities remain the same over time.

In this chapter, covenant theology has been briefly presented in how it views the continuity of the one covenant of grace from the Old Testament to the New Testament. It was shown how this effects membership in the covenant of grace and how membership is attained. In what follows, this presentation will serve as the basis for interaction to show the weaknesses of this understanding as well as a better way forward.

¹⁷ Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, 214.

CHAPTER 3

THE NEWNESS OF THE NEW COVENANT

In the previous chapter, the distinctives of covenant theology were discussed to gain a better understanding of the system. The desire that exists in covenant theology for understanding the progress of covenants is to be commended, however, not everything in the view is to be accepted. In what follows, I will present a different understanding of the covenants that departs with some of the conclusions of covenant theology. The aim of this chapter is to show that the new covenant is, in fact, a *new* covenant that all the previous covenants have been leading to, and thus the covenant community, namely, the church, is not exactly the same as the previous covenant community of Israel. There is in fact one covenant of grace, or better, one plan of God, but the covenant of grace is not ratified until the work of Christ is accomplished.

The One Plan of God

Covenant theology argues for one covenant of grace from Genesis 3:15 on. When considering membership in the new covenant, then, what was true of the Abrahamic covenant is transferred to the new covenant because of the one covenant of grace. This means that membership in the new covenant is both physical/natural and spiritual: physical/natural by baptism and spiritual by conversion. If the new covenant is *new*, however, this cannot be the case. The prophets look forward to this new covenant in such a way that it cannot be simply renewed or readministered; it must be a *new*

covenant. Jason DeRouchie helpfully walks through the Abrahamic covenant arguing that the conclusion of covenant theology does not properly account for Scriptures' teaching on this newness of the new covenant.¹ DeRouchie shows how the prophesy of Isaiah relates to the Abrahamic covenant and looks toward the new covenant specifically related to timing of the covenants and membership in the new covenant.

Spiritual membership in the new covenant. Covenant theology argues that membership in the new covenant is both physical/natural and spiritual. According to the conclusions drawn by the system of covenant theology, one covenant of grace with many administrations demands this. DeRouchie pushes back on this claim and argues that “Isaiah would not affirm the view of covenant theologians that an infant’s birth into a family with at least one believing parent grants the child full membership in the new covenant.”²

DeRouchie rightly sees the new covenant as *new* instead of as a renewal because the covenant of grace is made in Christ’s blood (Mat 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; cf. 1 Cor 11:25). Each covenant comes with its own sign and ceremony but is a part of the one plan of God. This means the covenants are connected in God’s plan of redemption without being a renewal; each covenant must be taken on its own terms. The book of Hebrews argues this way in presenting Jesus as superior to the covenant heads

¹ Jason Derouchie, “Father of a Multitude of Nations: new covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 34–38. Without rehearsing again what DeRouchie puts forward, his helpful conclusion reveals the weaknesses and inconsistencies of covenant theology by examining the text of Scripture to show that membership in the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants is not the same as membership in the new covenant. The covenants with Abraham and Moses are not to be seen as different administrations of the covenant of grace but rather as their own redemptive-historical covenants.

² Derouchie, “Father of a Multitude of Nations,” 23.

that have come before him, specifically in chapters 6-8. Jesus does not renew the old covenant, he establishes the new covenant as the forerunner who has gone behind the curtain (6:19-20), the forever priest (7:3, 17, 21) who is the guarantor of a better covenant (7:22) who finds fault with the first covenant (7:7-8) and makes the first one obsolete in making a new covenant (7:13). This allows for promise and fulfillment as the old gives way to the new and each covenant culminates in Christ. Were one to read the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants as renewals of the covenant of grace from Genesis 3:15 per covenant theology, Isaiah would agree with what covenant theology puts forth in how one understands the covenantal structure of the Bible. However, when the prophets look forward to the new covenant, they look back to the promises made while looking forward to their fulfillment in Christ. Reading the covenantal unfolding as promise and fulfillment instead of renewal is more in line with how the author of Hebrews argues for the superiority of the new covenant. Doing so connects the covenants but also allows them to find their fulfillment in Christ. This is because, as Gentry and Wellum show,

As one biblical covenant leads to the next, revealing who the triune, covenant God is and his plan for his creation, ultimately all of the covenants find their fulfillment, terminus, and *telos* in the new covenant (see Jer. 31:29-34; cf. Luke 22:20; 2 Corinthians 3; Hebrews 8, 10). It is the new covenant which all of the previous covenants anticipate and typify, and it is in this way that the new covenant *supersedes* all the previous covenants. When the new covenant arrives, we are no longer under the previous covenants in exactly the same way that the people of God were in the past. We are now in Christ and under his covenant headship and all that it entails for our lives as Christians.³

Christ mediates this new covenant and by so doing fulfills what the old covenant anticipated and pointed forward to.

³ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 645.

DeRouchie helpfully adds to the discussion at an important for ecclesiology when he writes, “In contrast to the previous covenants, the ‘seed’ of the new covenant are *not* physically born into covenant membership.”⁴ Isaiah 54:1 starts a multi-chapter exploration of the covenant of peace that shall not be removed (Isa 54:10). According to Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, this terminology is one of four ways in which the Old Testament refers to the new covenant.⁵ This being the case, when Isaiah says in 54:1, “‘Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married,’ says the Lord,” it must be read looking backward and looking forward.

Jesse Scheumann looks backward placing Isaiah 54:1 in Genesis 11:30 and forward by showing how this fits in the new covenant. Scheumann contrasts Sarah, who was barren, giving birth as part of the promise made to Abraham in the Abrahamic covenant to the barren woman of Isaiah 54:1 not giving birth and yet having more offspring than Sarah (Isa 54:1) as part of the new covenant.⁶ This shows that membership in the new covenant is not based on physical birth but requires being spiritually reborn and adopted. In one, there is physical birth that brings the seed into the community. In the other, there is no physical birth and yet there is still seed that are brought into the

⁴ Derouchie, “Father of a Multitude of Nations,” 22. The second point is in regard to soteriology and is not germane to the argument at hand.

⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 434. (1) Everlasting covenant, (2) Covenant of peace, (3) Promise of a new heart and a new spirit, (4) new covenant.

⁶ Jesse Scheumann, “*A Biblical Theology of Birth Pain and The Hope Of The Messiah*” (ThM Thesis, Bethlehem College and Seminary) 2014, 57.

community. Scheumann and DeRouchie agree that this is prophesying that the new covenant membership will be based on spiritual adoption instead of physical birth. “Seed” in reference to Sarah is physical/natural, but “seed” in reference to the barren one is spiritual. Isaiah is prophetically looking forward to what is to come in the new covenant by looking backward at what has already taken place in the Abrahamic covenant showing that a greater reality was yet to be realized. This shows a covenantal unfolding that relies on each covenant being its own covenant taken on its own terms such that they are not simply renewals. Reading the Bible in this way allows each covenant to speak in its own context while prophetically pointing forward to what is yet to come in the new covenant. Most importantly, then, the new covenant can indeed be a *new* covenant.

Seeing the Abrahamic covenant as one of many administrations, like in covenant theology, brings over from a previous administration how one gains access to the covenant community when the final administration takes place in the New Testament. If there are many administrations, it allows for either physical genealogical or spiritual means of entrance because this is what took place in the Abrahamic covenant. However, Isaiah’s contrast that is picked up in the New Testament shows this not to be the case. Rather, as DeRouchie rightly draws out, “The physical genealogical principle so evident in the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants does *not* continue once the Abrahamic covenant reaches its fulfillment in the new, for membership is now conditioned by *spiritual* rebirth, generated through the sacrificial death of the servant king ([Isa] 53:10).”⁷ Entrance to the

⁷ Derouchie, “Father of a Multitude of Nations,” 22-3.

new covenant community should be seen in spiritual terms as this is what Isaiah prophecies. Covenant theology's claim that there are many administrations of the one covenant of grace is in contradiction to this and it unnecessarily brings the physical entrance of the Abrahamic covenant into the new covenant based on its renewal model.

In the continuation model of covenant theology, the church is a continuation of Israel because of the continuity of the covenant of grace. The church is seen as true Israel⁸ causing Benjamin Gladd to say, further, that the "Old Testament—its laws, institutions, patterns, and so on—point to Christ (Luke 24:27)." For Gladd, though, this pointing does not mean the Old Testament is "fully fulfilled in Jesus." Gladd rightly notes that "Paul argues in Galatians that the law should not regulate the life of new covenant believers the same way it did for the Israelites under the old covenant." However, his conclusion is that the church is no longer required, like Israel, to keep the "civil and cultic portions of the Mosaic Law."⁹

Claiming that Jesus does not fully fulfill the Old Testament laws, institutions, and patterns puts on full display the conflation of the covenant of grace with the new covenant. What is missed in this understanding is fulfillment: the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants have been fulfilled with the dawning of the new covenant. By this fulfillment, the new covenant community is made up of those spiritually regenerated and adopted only, not merely by being the offspring of believing parents. Fulfillment can be clearly seen in the differences in the Old Testament people of Israel and the New Testament

⁸ Benjamin L. Gladd, "Covenant in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship" in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Waters, Reid, and Muether, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 912.

⁹ Gladd, "Covenant in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship," 912-13.

church and the contrast therein. The entrance into and makeup of Israel is categorically different than that of the church. There were many who were physically in the covenant community Israel by circumcision who were not members spiritually by faith. For instance, whole first generation died in the wilderness (Numbers 14:32) without receiving the promise. Their unbelief showed they were never delivered out of their sin. This is not the case in the church. The church is the redeemed people of God and none who are members of the new covenant will die in their sins (Rom 8:1).

This shift shows the difference from the old covenant to the new covenant. Those in the old covenant were a “mixed” community, namely constituted by believers and unbelievers. The conclusion of covenant theology is right in this regard, but it cannot be brought into the new covenant. The church is not a mixed community. Where there were those who were members of the old covenant that died in their sin, this is not the case in the new covenant. Contrary to the continuation model, this means that the true Israel must be the Lord Jesus who is the fulfillment of Israel as everything finds its *telos* in him. Brent Parker helpfully concludes that the New Testament

presents Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel and all the [Old Testament] covenant mediators, for he ushers in the promise to Israel (restoration and return from exile, the land, etc.), embodies their identity, and completes Israel’s role, calling, and vocation. All the institutions (the sacrificial system, tabernacle, temple, Sabbath, feasts, the law), identity markers (e.g. circumcision, offices (prophet, priest, king), and key events (e.g. the exodus) of Israel find their culmination in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.¹⁰

Jesus, not the church, is the true Israel as he fulfills the prophecies and hopes of the nation and brings to completion all previous covenants in the new covenant made in his

¹⁰ Brent E. Parker, “The Israel-Christ-Church Relationship” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* ed Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 45.

blood.

The new covenant. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul shows the old covenant is fulfilled in its entirety as the new covenant is even more glorious than the old covenant (8-10). Jason C. Meyer lays out a convincing argument in *Progressive Covenantalism* showing that the new covenant is more glorious than the old covenant such that the new covenant supersedes the old. Meyer notes, “In terms of attitude, those committed to continuity are quick to affirm the glorious nature of the Mosaic covenant but slower to stress the eclipse of the old covenant because of the greater glory of the new covenant.”¹¹ Covenant theology rightly sees the glory of the old covenant but is prevented from seeing this glory as temporary or lesser than the glory of the new covenant, but this is the point Paul makes in 2 Corinthians 3.

First, Paul compares the glory of the old covenant ministry, that of Moses, to the glory of the new covenant ministry, his own, in verses 7-11. Paul’s focus is on glory throughout these verses as seen by the fact that glory “appears eight times in 3:7–11 and three times in 3:18.”¹² Paul’s purpose in speaking of glory is to compare the glory of the old covenant with the glory of the new. Paul notes that the old covenant is externally written, that is carved on stone (7), and because of this, the letter kills, condemns, and is unable to bring life (6). This is the weakness of the old covenant, namely, that it is

¹¹ Jason Meyer, “The Mosaic Law, Theological Systems, and the Glory of Christ” in, *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* ed Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 80.

¹² David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary, Vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999).

merely¹³ written on stone and is thus unable to give life.¹⁴ The contrast of the new covenant is that it comes with a glory that is permanent (11) as it is written on hearts and is therefore greater than what came before.

The greater, permanent glory does not mean the old covenant had no glory as Paul affirms the glory of the old covenant multiple times (twice in both 7 and 8 as well as once in 9, 10, and 11). Paul is using glory in a lesser to greater argument¹⁵ to show that the greater replaces the lesser. David Garland notes of this argument,

He adopts a commonly used logical argument, from the lesser case to the greater, to make his point. If splendor attended a ministry that was chiseled in stone, temporary, and resulted in condemnation, how much more must glory attend the ministry of the Spirit, which is inscribed on hearts, is abiding, and leads to acquittal.¹⁶

The old covenant, the ministry of condemnation, had glory but the new covenant, the ministry of righteousness, far exceeds this glory (9) such that when the new covenant is ratified, it replaces the glory of the old covenant with a greater and more enduring glory (11). Paul argues that the old covenant is replaced and therefore done away with because what the old covenant was pointing to all along has finally come. In this, Paul has no category for any of the old covenant glory remaining or passing from one covenant to the next. Commenting on this passage, Paul Barnett brings clarity:

¹³ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 131. Hays draws out the contrast Paul makes of the old to the new: the old is *only* written while the new is written and Spirit empowered.

¹⁴ Mark A. Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2014).

¹⁵ Meyer, "The Mosaic Law, Theological Systems, and the Glory of Christ," 80.

¹⁶ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary, Vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999).

Why is the glory associated with Moses not now glorious? It is because of the “surpassing glory,” that is, the glory seen by Paul on the face of Jesus (4:6), the glory of the new covenant, associated as it is with “the Spirit” and “righteousness” (vv. 8, 9) and expressed in the gospel (4:4). The latter out glorified the former, thus deglorifying it. The brightness and permanence of the one has outpaled the other, so that whatever glory it had is, in effect, no more.¹⁷

The glory associated with the new covenant is so great that the old covenant “pales in comparison”¹⁸ and fades away. In this way, there is discontinuity that covenant theology does not account for.

The author of Hebrews argues similarly in the eighth chapter. Instead of focusing on glory, he shows how the new covenant is superior to the old covenant in that there is full forgiveness of sin, something that the old covenant did not offer. The flow of argument draws from Jeremiah 31 to show how forgiveness of sin and knowledge of God comes in the new covenant in a new and better way. The author of Hebrews leans heavily on Old Testament prophecy as well as the sacrificial system to make his point (1-6) that the old covenant was designed to be temporary and would be replaced by the new covenant (7). The author of Hebrews notes specifically that the covenant that Christ mediates is more excellent and has better promises than what the old covenant promised (6). If the old covenant had indeed been faultless, the new covenant would have been unnecessary (7). The new covenant is superior because of its covenant head, the Lord Jesus, who can offer himself as a sinless sacrifice to fully and finally pay the penalty for sin, something the covenant heads in the Old Testament could not do. But Jesus is the one to whom they were pointing and now that he has come in accordance with the one plan of

¹⁷ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 187.

¹⁸ Meyer, “The Mosaic Law, Theological Systems, and the Glory of Christ,” 80.

God that has unfolded from the old covenant to the new covenant, “the first one is obsolete” (Heb 8:13). What exactly was the problem with the old covenant? The author of Hebrews shows the problem by quoting Jeremiah 31 to show that the old covenant could not fully and finally forgive sin, but the new covenant can. Surely, this does not mean the old covenant was not good and instituted by God, but it shows it was temporary and pointed to a greater reality that would be realized in the Lord Jesus.

In contrast to covenant theology, the author of Hebrews seems to conclude that the old covenant in its entirety is done away with. In verse 13, the point is clearly stated: “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” The first one, that is the old covenant, is obsolete. The new covenant is superior and brings the forgiveness that the old covenant pointed towards but did not deliver fully and finally. Hebrews makes no distinction of part of the covenant remaining as it simply says the first one is obsolete. What was promised by prophecy arrives in Christ, the mediator who enacts a new covenant to do away with the old.

The discussion above focused on the anticipation of the new covenant and what it offers that is better than the old covenant. Covenant theology sees more continuity than discontinuity, but Scripture presents a different understanding and both continuity and discontinuity must be accounted for. In what follows, the continuity and discontinuity will be applied to the doctrine of adoption specifically to show the fuller experience of those in the new covenant, namely, being brought into the redeemed family of God by adoption. This fuller experience is possible only because the one plan of God culminates in Christ. This allows the old covenant community to remain a mixed community while

pointing forward to the change that will be brought about in the new covenant. The new covenant community is a regenerate, redeemed, community in contrast to the mixed community of Israel under the old covenant. Through the work of Christ and the application of the Spirit, sins are forgiven fully and finally.

Adoption in the Old Testament

Within the storyline of Scripture, the concept of God being a Father to his people is not only a new covenant reality. The new covenant reality is the ability to *relate* to God as Father, that is, to cry out to him as Abba, Father (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). However, the Old Testament sees the Fatherhood of God only in types and shadows, which is to say that the new covenant reality is the fulfillment and deeper experience of the earlier promise. Herman Bavinck notes,

Already in the Old Testament God is called the Father of his people and Israel his Son. But in the New Testament this fatherhood and sonship acquires a much deeper meaning. God is now the Father of believers, not in a theocratic but in an ethical sense; and believers are his children, born of him, and therefore by faith in Christ obtain the power to become his children (John 1:12) until one day, when they see him as he is, they will be perfected as his children (1 John 3:2).¹⁹

The earlier promise is seen primarily in two ways: God adopting Israel as his son and God adopting the king of Israel as his son. Adoption, in this regard, is to be understood as “the legal establishment of a kinship relationship between two people that is recognized as being equivalent to one based on physical descent.”²⁰ These two practices of adoption will be taken in turn. Secondly, in the new covenant, all who are in Christ, the fulfillment

¹⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Vol. 4: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation* (Baker Books, 2008), 360.

²⁰ Brian S. Rosner et al., eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity Diversity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 376.

of Israel, are in the new covenant. Paul says in Romans 9:6, “not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” to contrast the old covenant with the new covenant. There were those in the old covenant who were so non-salvifically as they were still in Adam. The prophets look forward to the new covenant to show the promise of a better covenant in which all are in salvifically as their sins are fully and finally forgiven. This will be explored further below.

Israel adopted. Exodus 6:7-8 shows in what way God acts towards Israel because of his promise to Abraham when it says, “I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.” This formula, “you shall be my people, and I shall be your God” is reiterated multiple times throughout Israel’s history showing their status as well as how they are expected to live.²¹ Baruch Halpern simply calls this “the formula of adoption.”²² By this formula, adoption is to be understood specifically seeing Israel corporately adopted as God’s son.²³ God acts toward Israel as Father (Yhwh) toward a son, and in this, the sonship is directed to the nation, to the corporate people as God adopts them as sons at

²¹ This formula appears many times as both a promise and a warning in such passages like: Exod 4:22, 29:45, Lev 26:12; Duet 29:13; 2 Sam 7:24; 1 Chr 17:22; Jer 7:23, 11:4, 30:22; Ezek 36:28; Hos 1:9, 11:1.

²² Baruch Halpern, *The Constitution of the Monarchy in Israel* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 32 n. 116.

²³ James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation Into the Background of Yiothesia in the Pauline Corpus* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 100.

the Exodus.²⁴ It is important to note this adoption is more corporate than individual; the *nation* is adopted. By so doing, God is promising to act towards his chosen people, the nation of Israel, as its Father including providential care and discipline.

David adopted. Second Samuel 7:14 (cf. 1 Chr 28:6, Ps 2:7) looks forward to the fulfillment in Christ when it says, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.” Nathan is delivering to David these prophetic words that speak of David’s offspring, Solomon. This verse in its wider context shows that “God’s relationship to the king was understood in terms of adoption.”²⁵ The conclusion drawn from this passage by James Scott is simply that “2 Samuel 7:14 refers to the divine adoption of the king.”²⁶ In this, the king is adopted as a son for the benefit of the people over which the king rules such that he mediates God’s providential care and discipline to the nation. Stephen Wellum draws this out by saying:

Within the covenant with Israel, God covenants with King David and his sons by making two main promises: to relate to the Davidic kings as a father to a son (2 Sam. 7:14; 1 Chron. 17:13; cf Psalm 2; 89:26-27) and to establish David’s house forever (2 Sam. 7:12-16; 1Chron. 17:11-14). The sonship that was applied to the nation of Israel (Ex. 4:22; cf. Hos. 11:1) is now applied to David and his sons. As an individual, the Davidic king takes on the representative role of Israel as a nation. The king of Israel becomes the administrator and mediator of God’s covenant with Israel, thus representing God’s rule to the people and representing the people as a whole to God (2 Sam. 7:22-24). And this representative role of the Davidic king takes on significant implications for the coming of God’s kingdom when God himself promises, “your house and your kingdom shall be made forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever” (v. 16).²⁷

²⁴ Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God*, 160.

²⁵ Rosner et al, *The New Dictionary*, 376.

²⁶ Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God*, 149.

²⁷ Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ*, Foundations of

In other words, it is the king who mediates sonship to the nation. Kevin Vanhoozer notes “If Israel was God’s son, the king was the personification of loyal and obedient sonship, the realization of God’s intent for humanity.”²⁸ Though neither the nation of Israel nor David nor his offspring acts in perfect obedience, God keeps his promise to his son, and this faithfulness is ultimately seen in the sending of his eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ who does act in perfect obedience and mediates a deeper experience of sonship. These Old Testament examples of adoption point to what is to come in the New Testament and the dawning of the new covenant in a fuller way.

The Father-Son relationship. As noted above, God being a Father to his people exists in the Old Testament but not in the same way as the New Testament. The Father-Son relationship can be traced through all of Scripture but culminates in the revelation of the Lord Jesus when he is sent to take on flesh. At his baptism, this relationship is clearly seen when the Father speaks saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Mat 3:17). While the relationship is unique due to the consubstantiality of the Son, God in relationship as a Father to a son is not. Scripture unfolds this theme progressively as the canonical unfolding develops showing different ways in which the Father-Son relationship is foreshadowed.

First, Adam, created in God’s image, is presented as son (Gen 1:26-28; Luke 3:38) and looks forward to the need for a divine Son. Adam is meant to live as a reflection of God in the world, follow his commands, and “enjoy the privileges of the

Evangelical Theology Series. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 101.

²⁸ Kevin Vanhoozer, “Redemption Accomplished” in *The Oxford Handbook of Reformed Theology*, ed. by Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2020), 480.

covenant of creation.”²⁹ The first Adam does not fulfill what is required of him thus pointing to the need for a last Adam who will perfectly fulfill the covenant obligations. Glimpses of this Father-son relationship are seen as the canon unfolds in those who walk in faithfulness, albeit imperfect, with God. God makes a covenant with Noah (Gen 8:20-9:17) who is presented as another Adam. In this presentation, Noah, too falls short and the need for a last Adam remains.

Scripture progresses to Abraham (Abram) who is to be the “father of a multitude of nations” (Gen 17:4) to show what the Father-Son relationship is to be. God’s covenant with Abraham (Gen 15, 17) brings hope that another Adam is here, but he too is unable to fulfill the covenant obligations perfectly and we are left to hope for another. This hope is kindled in his offspring, the nation of Israel that is presented as the “firstborn son” in Exodus 4:22 showing the nation to be a corporate, new Adam. Israel quickly shows it is unable to perfectly obey and therefore the covenant obligations cannot be fulfilled by the nation. This moves the hope to David who is to represent the nation to God as David is pictured, again, as a new Adam. In the Davidic king, God acts toward his people as a Father. This, ultimately, points forward to Jesus who is in the line of David and is the last Adam God’s people have been waiting for. Allison and Köstenberger are helpful here:

Israel is the “firstborn son” of God (Exod 4:22), followed by those identified with David: King David himself; David’s sons as kings, beginning with Solomon; and the eternal Davidic king, Jesus Christ (2 Samuel 7; Psalm 2). Like Adam before them, Israel and “David” are to reflect and represent God as his sons in old-covenant and Davidic-covenant relationship with him. Sonship, therefore, is the

²⁹ Gregg Allison and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2020), 276.

status of divine favor, bestowing a rich inheritance of covenantal blessing and privilege.³⁰

Only in the last Adam, the Lord Jesus, can the Father-Son relationship be fulfilled, and its benefits passed on.

Allison and Köstenberger continue, “The promise of divine favor” is given “to all who follow Jesus Christ.” He alone fulfills the covenant obligations so that all “members of the new covenant. . . receive its blessings and are one in sharing in its privileges (Gal 3:26-28).” This blessing is given through the fulfillment of the sonship that has already been presented. The Lord Jesus stands as the “eternal Son, the everlasting Son of the Father” and is the last Adam. He alone brings about this fulfillment in his incarnation as he takes on “the fullness of human nature” so that “through his life, sufferings, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension God the Son incarnate rescues sinful people so they ‘might receive adoption as sons.’ Such sonship language relates Christians to the archetypal Son.” This brings about the fulfillment of the sonship seen in Adam, Israel, David, and so on as “the eternal Son, who became the incarnate Son, stands in covenantal relationship with human sons whom he has redeemed. Redemption comes about through the work of the Spirit, who applies the work of the Son to those sons.” The covenantal privilege of crying out to God as Father (Gal 4:6) comes through the covenant Lord allowing Christians to stand in a “new covenant relationship with God the Father through God the Son by God the Holy Spirit.”³¹ God the Son incarnate, in his redemptive work as the new covenant head, is the true Son and the human Son who redeems his people and gives them the status he has by nature: sons.

³⁰ Allison and Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit*, 276.

³¹ Allison and Köstenberger, 276–77.

Prophecies fulfilled. Jeremiah prophesies of the new covenant in 31:31-34 showing clearly what will be new. It will not be like the covenant God made with his people when he brought them out of Egypt (32). The contrast is clear in that the new covenant will be written on hearts, not on stone (33). This is a crucial distinction regarding what was discussed above from 2 Corinthians 3. Jeremiah is looking forward to what Paul writes about, namely the overshadowing, or out-glorying, of the old covenant by the new. This new covenant is not like the old that was only written on stone (cf. 2 Cor 3:7-11) but it is written on the heart by the Spirit as Paul shows in 2 Corinthians 3:7, 17-18.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 provides two final new aspects of the new covenant that show the Christian experience is different in the new covenant than under the old. Jeremiah notes that in the new covenant, everyone will know the LORD (34). As Gentry and Wellum draw out, what Jeremiah is getting at is that

Under the new covenant, *all* will know the Lord, not in a mediate but in an immediate fashion, and *all* will have the law written on their hearts and will experience the full forgiveness of sin. In fact, it is these last two aspects of the new covenant which highlight the incredible change that is anticipated and that is now a reality in the church. . . Instead of the people being a “mixed” entity, now the entire community will. . . be a regenerate people.³²

This is an important distinction to make between the covenants and would lead one to agree with covenant theology when they say, as Horton above, that not everyone in the old covenant was elect. There are those in the old covenant community who are not elect even if they are experiencing the benefits of the covenant community.

However, the understanding diverges when covenant theology applies this to

³² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 649.

the church in the new covenant as the new covenant is not to be seen as a renewal but a new covenant that retains the same structure and nature and is the fulfillment of the old covenant. Jeremiah makes the case that all in the new covenant know the LORD which is different than the old covenant as he looks forward to the fuller experience yet to come in the covenant with the new and better covenant head, the Lord Jesus. Taken together with the final point Jeremiah makes in v. 34, that the sins of those in the new covenant are remembered no more, shows the stark contrast of the old and new covenants. The new covenant community is made up of those who know the LORD and whose sins are forgiven. The old covenant did not offer complete forgiveness of sin, but the new and better covenant does.

This relates to adoption in that only in the new covenant are individuals adopted. In his commentary on Ephesians, Harold Hoehner draws out the connection clearly when he says,

There is no indication of a legal code for adoption when Israel received the law. . . . Nonetheless, there was the concept that every firstborn Israelite belonged to God (Num 3:11-13) and also the idea that the nation Israel was considered the firstborn of God, with God as their father (Exod 4:22; Jer 31:9). In this sense Paul saw Israel as the adopted son (Rom 9:4). However, nowhere does the OT speak of Israelites being adopted into a different family or into God's family as other Pauline references portray. In conclusion, the institution of adoption of individuals into a family is not portrayed in the OT.³³

In the new covenant, in a different and new way than the old, individuals are adopted by God and enabled to know God as *their* Father. Christians are brought into the family of God as a benefit of the new covenant.

³³ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 195.

The old covenant did not have this experience and the language used by Jeremiah shows how there is a deeper reality yet to come. Trevor Burke explores this relationship at length and shows the difference in experience between the old and new covenants. Going further than Hoehner, Burke notes, “What is more, when the Old Testament authors speak of Israel’s relationship to God as son, they prefer to couch this relationship in redemptive (Isa. 63:16) and elective (Deut. 7:7) terms rather than in terms of adoption.”³⁴ Those in the old covenant were not adopted as sons, this was only to come in the new covenant when all in the covenant community would know the LORD and would have their sins forgiven (Jer 31:34).

Adoption in the New Testament

Paul is no stranger to the benefits made available to Christians because of being brought into the family of God. Having experienced this for himself, he writes about the realities in multiple places. The first place of exploration of what benefits come from having been adopted by God will be Galatians 4:4-7. This passage speaks to the Son being sent and the purpose for which he is sent. Verse four makes clear this reality by saying, “God sent forth his Son...so that we might receive adoption as sons.” Though the pronoun is ambiguous, the usage of both “God” and “his” refer to the person of the Father.³⁵ In the following verses, both the Son and Spirit are named as those who make it

³⁴ Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 85.

³⁵ For a nearly exhaustive exegetical treatment of these ambiguous pronouns, see Ryan L. Rippee, *That God May Be All in All: A Paterology Demonstrating That the Father Is the Initiator of All Divine Activity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2018). In this, Rippee helpfully shows how to read these kinds of texts to see which person is to be understood when pronouns are used.

possible to call God Father. Jesus is sent for the express purpose—through the redeeming of those under the law (5)—of bringing into the family as sons those who were formerly slaves (7). Joachim Jeremias says of this that calling God Father “is beyond all human capabilities, and is only possible within the new relationship with God given by the Son.”³⁶ True sons of Abraham are no longer those who can trace their physical descent back to the patriarch, but rather those who are in (united to) the one who is the seed of Abraham. Burke notes that “Paul...presents a Christocentric and Christological reinterpretation of the Abrahamic covenant and uses the patriarch to redefine the meaning of kinship.”³⁷ The benefit of sonship is the ability to call God Father.

In Romans 8:15, Paul is drawing the same conclusion from Galatians 4:4-7. He contrasts being in the flesh with being in the Spirit to show the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God in the life of a believer. This, as Jim Hamilton argues, is a benefit of being in Christ: the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit.³⁸ As Paul shows, it is by the Spirit of Christ that Christ is in Christians (9-10). This leads to the ability to kill sin and looks forward to the resurrection that Jesus has already experienced (11). Because of this, Paul calls Christians to live according to the Spirit, not the flesh. This is evidence of sonship and is the point that Paul is driving home: if the Spirit is in you by faith, you are in Christ as a son and have the ability to call out to God as Father! Being in Christ gives the Christian the ability to, as Letham draws out, “share by God’s grace his own natural

³⁶ Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 65.

³⁷ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 154.

³⁸ James M. Hamilton Jr, *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, New American Commentaries Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: B&H Academic), 122.

relation to the Father.”³⁹ This is what Herman Ridderbos calls the “new relationship to God” that is “more comprehensive” in that it is based on the “work of reconciliation accomplished by God Himself” and is “its realization” that comes by adoption.⁴⁰ Again, the benefit of sonship is the ability to call God Father.

Discontinuity. This new covenant reality serves as a marker of discontinuity from the old covenant to the new covenant. The Law was given externally and did not bring adherents into the family of God whereas the Spirit is given internally and adopts into God’s family all who are indwelt. This is a crucial distinction and break from covenant theology as it has implications for who is in the covenant community. No longer is the covenant community meant to be a mixed community as it was in the old covenant; the new covenant community is made up only of those who, by the Spirit, have been brought into the family of God.⁴¹ This is the point Paul makes in Romans 7:6 when he says, “But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.”

Herman Ridderbos, holding to covenant theology, rightly shows the redemptive historical shift that takes place because of the work of Christ when he says, “Sonship is therefore a gift of the great time of redemption that has dawned with Christ.

³⁹ Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, rev. and exp. ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2019), 28.

⁴⁰ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 378.

⁴¹ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 185; Mehrdad Fatehi, *The Spirit’s Relation to the Risen Lord in Paul: An Examination of Its Christological Implications* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 234. Both make the same point that the age of the Law comes to an end with the age of the Spirit. This means that serving God is now done by the Spirit instead of by the Law and is discontinuity that is to be marked.

It is the fulfillment of the promise that was given of old to the true people of God (Rom. 9: 26; 2 Cor. 6: 18).⁴² This can be seen by simply noting how often God is referred to as Father as revelation progresses. In the Old Testament, God is Father 14 times according to Joachim Jeremias.⁴³ He notes as well that Jesus calls God Father 170 times: four times in Mark, 15 in Luke, 42 in Matthew, and 109 in John!⁴⁴ That Jesus so frequently calls God Father shows what is natural to him and what is to be given to Christians.

In Ephesians, the reality of sonship and the fulfillment of the promise is seen through the presentation of God as Father. According to Hoehner, of the 40 total references to God as Father in Paul, eight of them come in Ephesians⁴⁵ (1:2, 3, 17; 2:18; 3:14–15; 4:6; 5:20; 6:23) and this is more than any other single letter. Paul presents Jesus as the fulfillment of the promise seen in the old covenant and the means of the deeper experience of all the old covenant pointed to. The new covenant that is ratified by the blood of the Son (Mat 26:28; Luke 22:20) brings about this fulfillment within a structure that accounts for both discontinuity and continuity. In this, the relationship of God to his people culminates as Christians become sons of the Father. Kevin Vanhoozer rightly accounts for how this is brought about and its end when he says,

In establishing a new covenant in his blood, Jesus Christ the covenant mediator makes satisfaction for sin, conquers death and the devil, and restores right (familial) relations between God and his image-bearers. The company of the redeemed—the new covenant community; children of God (1 John 3:1–2)—enjoy that most intimate of personal unions: the marriage communion of at-one-ment that befits his

⁴² Ridderbos, *Paul*, 377.

⁴³ Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 95.

⁴⁴ Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 29.

⁴⁵ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 107.

bride, the church. Christ accomplished redemption. ‘So they are no longer two, but one’ (Mark 10:8).⁴⁶

The reality Paul stresses as seen in his calling God Father comes by way of the new covenant affected by the true Son, the Lord Jesus.

Adoption through Mediation

When the Old Testament passages cited above are picked up by the New Testament authors, they are used to make a connection to the benefit that comes to Christians by virtue of being united to Christ, the true Son. As was the case in the Old Testament, adoption comes about through the means of a mediator. Whether it is the nation as a whole that is adopted or the king for the benefit of the nation, God acts toward Israel as a son. This mediated adoption points to what is to come in Christ in the new covenant. Being that Jesus is the true Son of the Father, when someone is grafted into Christ, they receive the benefits of his sonship. By the Son, the Father is not only revealed as he truly is—Father—but is known as Father. This leads Emery to say:

It is through his paternity with respect to Jesus that the Father exercises his paternity in favor of humankind and of other creatures. We discover here the specific aspect of Christian faith concerning the paternity of God. This means that the revelation of the Father finds its foundation in the person of Jesus and that it is concentrated in the person of Jesus, the Son, to such a degree that to speak of the Father is to speak of his Son Jesus. The paternity of God is manifested in the person of Jesus as Son. Thus, in the name *Father*, it is the relation of the Father towards Jesus that is primary.⁴⁷

Because of the true Son, Christians become sons.

⁴⁶ Kevin Vanhoozer, “Redemption Accomplished” in *The Oxford Handbook of Reformed Theology* ed. by Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, (Oxford University Press, 2020), 496.

⁴⁷ Gilles Emery, *The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God*, trans. Matthew Levering (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 23–24.

The sending of the Son and the Spirit allow for this relationship to reach its pinnacle. By virtue of being in the Son by the Spirit, a Christian has the Father as *their* Father. Jesus mediates this relationship (Heb 10-12), and by this mediation, Christians, individually, are treated as sons and gain the ability to cry out to their Father. God's providential care and discipline rest on the Christian because of the work of Christ (Heb 12:3-11) the true Son by whom Christians are made sons. Crucial to this reality is that Jesus takes to himself flesh. Hebrews 2:5-15 shows the importance of Jesus being of the same flesh as those he came to make sons. The author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 22 to show that Jesus willingly calls those who have been adopted brothers (Heb 2:12). It is by this brotherhood that Christians share in what belongs to Jesus. In chapter 5, then, the author of Hebrews shows how the incarnation is crucial to Jesus' role as priest. Hebrews 5:1 shows how Jesus is chosen from among men to act on behalf of men. Because Jesus took on flesh and is not ashamed to call Christians brothers, in his role as priest, he is able to act as the mediator who brings about forgiveness as a representative from among those whom he is representing.

In this chapter, the reality of being adopted into the family of God was shown to rely on the sending of the Son and the Spirit. The true Son, Jesus, is sent so that by faith Christians are adopted as sons (Gal 4:3-6). The Spirit applies this sonship to the Christian such that crying out to the Father is possible (Gal 4:5). Being that the Lord Jesus took on flesh, he can represent those who he is like in this manner. Redemption is a work of the triune God that finds great significance in the working of the Son and the Spirit in time. In what follows, the trinitarian realities will be further explored in light of the above understanding of adoption. The work of the triune God specifically in the

sending of the Son and the Spirit will be considered to show how it is that Christians are enabled to cry out to God as Father.

CHAPTER 4

THE TRINITY AND ADOPTION

In the previous chapters, covenant theology has been presented to critique one of the ways of understanding the covenantal unfolding of Scripture. This critique led to presenting a different way forward that better accounts for the newness of the new covenant. In what follows, further steps will be taken in the areas of trinity and Christology. In the new covenant, the divine Son does the work required to make Christians adopted sons. What was foreshadowed and corporate in the old covenant comes to fruition in the sending of the Son and the Spirit who bring about and apply the work of redemption.

In Scripture, the revelation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is progressive, or disclosed over time. From the Old Testament and moving to the New Testament, each person is seen more clearly as the canon unfolds. Herman Bavinck notes “there is a gradual unfolding of the fullness which from the beginning was in *Elohim*, and this fullness has become most gloriously manifest in God’s Trinitarian name.”¹ In this, neither the Son nor the Spirit came into being when they were revealed in time. Rather, in time what always was is seen by “progressive revelation.” Stephen Wellum, noting that God uses human authors to write this revelation in time such that the later authors build on the

¹ Herman Bavinck, *Doctrine Of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 110.

earlier authors says, “his revelation has progressively unfolded to us step-by-step over time along with redemptive history.”² Revelation is made up of events taking place in time, they do not come all at once but progressively—so it is with the revelation of the three persons of the Trinity.

The Old Testament comes first in redemptive history and has a major focus on the unity, or oneness, of God as seen in Deuteronomy 6:4-5: “the LORD our God is one.” As Robert Letham argues, there is a “gradually developing revelation of God in the Old Testament, reaching its climax in his incarnate revelation in Jesus Christ.”³ That being the case, in redemptive history in the unfolding of the covenants, there are two events that show to be true in time what has been true from eternity: the sending of the Son in the incarnation and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Divine missions,⁴ as they are called, can be seen many places in Scripture. In these divine actions, God reveals himself in such a way that gives deeper understanding of who he has always been. The divine missions are to be understood as “visible enactments of eternal processions.”⁵ Each of these visible enactments, as it were, reveal that the Son and the Spirit are sent *by* someone. The Son and the Spirit are sent but not of their own accord: the Son is sent by

² Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 153.

³Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* rev. and exp. ed (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2019), 43.

⁴ I have chosen to start with missions and work to processions because it is by the missions that processions are revealed. Much more could be said on the matter, but it has already been discussed at length by many. For a treatment that does justice to the matter, and from which I am indebted, see Fred Sanders, *The Triune God*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, New Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 93-38. Here, he interacts with Augustine and Aquinas and ultimately sides with the missions-to-processions paradigm.

⁵ Fred Sanders, *The Triune God*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, New Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 93. Here, Sanders is summarizing Augustine on the matter.

the Father, and the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son. The sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit will be considered first in how these events reveal the Father more fully followed by a discussion of the benefits made available by these events.

The eternal Son seen in time. The second person of the Trinity, God the Son, is sent by the Father (John 6:29),⁶ in part, to reveal the Father. As Ryan Rippee says, “The sendings of the Son and Spirit in redemptive history were intended to give greater knowledge of the Father.”⁷ That there is a Son implies there is a Father. The Son is sent by the Father in the flesh as the Son takes to himself a new manner of presence in the world (Phil 2:8) for the purpose of accomplishing salvation (John 3:16). In this, the Son comes into the world at a point in time and is seen visibly where he already was invisibly. The eternal Son did not come into existence at the incarnation but took to himself flesh (John 1:14). The mission of the Son shows in time the procession of the Son from eternity. Augustine notes that “the Son was sent to be visible by the invisible Father together⁸ with the invisible Son.”⁹ In this way, the temporal, visible mission of the Son reveals the eternal, invisible procession of the Son. What is eternally true is revealed in

⁶ There are many verses that could be cited here, such as: John 5:36-38; 38-39, 44, 57; 7:17-18, 28-29, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29; 12:44-45, 49; 14:24; Rom 8:3-4, Gal 4:4-5, 1 John 4:9-10, 14, 1 Tim 1:15.

⁷ Ryan L. Rippee, *That God May Be All in All: A Paterology Demonstrating That the Father Is the Initiator of All Divine Activity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2018), 48.

⁸ There is much debate over what Augustine means here. This is not the place to solve the issue, but for an in depth discussion, see Rippee, *That God May Be All in All*, 119, and Stephen J. Wellum, “Irenic and Unpersuasive,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood & Womanhood* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 37-47. Both authors agree that, as Wellum notes, neither Augustine nor Scripture teach that the Son sends himself (46). What is likely, in this quote, is that Augustine is drawing out the agreeableness of the Son to be sent, as in, John 5:19, “For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.” The Father and Son can act together while not endangering the Father’s role of initiating, as will be discussed below.

⁹ Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle OSA, trans. Edmund Hill OP, 2nd ed. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), II.2.9.

time.

The eternal Spirit seen in time. The same is true for the Spirit. Petrus Van Mastricht brings clarity on the matter by saying the Spirit “is said to be sent by the Son as well as by the Father (Luke 24:49; John 15:26; 16:17), and moreover, in the name of the Son (John 14:26), just as in turn the Son sends the Holy Spirit from the Father (John 15:26), and thus he is understood to proceed from both in a similar way.”¹⁰ The Spirit is sent by the Son and the Father together for the purpose of bearing witness to the Son (John 15:26-27). The mission of the Spirit differs in form than that of the Son, however, because the Son took on physical form (flesh) and the Spirit did not. As Augustine says, “Yet we cannot say of the Holy Spirit that he is God and dove... as we say of the Son that he is God and man.”¹¹ The Spirit’s sending is seen at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) and he is sent to apply to believers what was accomplished in the sending of the Son, that is, salvation.

The Eternal Father Revealed by the Sendings

As the Son and the Spirit are sent, a crucial distinction about the Father is important to note: the Father is not sent. Augustine says simply that “the Father is from no one.”¹² As unsent, it shows the Father to be the source of deity. In explaining this, Augustine develops what could be considered a rule of interpretation that guides

¹⁰ Petrus Van Mastricht, *Theoretical and Practical Theology: Faith in the Triune God*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 583.

¹¹ Augustine, *The Trinity*, II.2.11. It is noted that the Spirit does descend as a dove at Pentecost, however, as Augustine notes, there is no hypostatic union like in the incarnation. That is, the dove does not remain.

¹² Augustine, *The Trinity*, IV, 5.29.

Trinitarian understanding of divine mission. He says, “Thus it is clear that the Son has another from whom he is and whose Son he is, while the Father does not have a Son from whom he is, but only whose Father he is. Every son gets being what he is from his father, and is his father’s son; while no father gets being what he is from his son, though he is his son’s father.”¹³ This is an important point from Augustine as he is setting the foundation for mission, namely, if something is sent, it is sent *from* something else. In this, the Son and the Spirit are from the Father, but the Father, in being unsent, is from no one.

In distinguishing the persons of the Trinity, there is not division in the divine nature, but only distinction by the persons’ relations to each other. There is differentiation in that the Father is unbegotten, the Son begotten, and the Spirit proceeding. Petrus van Mastricht states this by calling it “the order of subsisting, in which the Father is the first person, since he subsists entirely from himself; the Son the second, inasmuch as he descended from the Father; the Holy Spirit the third, as he proceeds from two.”¹⁴ This order, or *taxis*, reveals that there is distinction between the divine persons but no division among them since they are consubstantial in the same undivided divine nature. Gilles Emery notes, “The Father and the Son are one in all things except what concerns personal properties: the Son is all that the Father is, except that he is not the Father and without principle.”¹⁵ Geerhardus Vos states it this way:

Although these three persons possess one and the same divine substance, Scripture nevertheless teaches us that, concerning their personal existence, the Father is the

¹³ Augustine, *The Trinity*, II, 1.2.

¹⁴ Mastricht, *Theoretical and Practical Theology*, 504-5.

¹⁵ Gilles Emery, *The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God*, trans. Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 126.

first, the Son the second, and the Holy Spirit the third, that the Son is of the Father, the Spirit of the Father and the Son. Further, their workings outwardly reflect this order of personal existence, since the Father works through the Son, and the Father and Son work through the Spirit. There is, therefore, subordination as to personal manner of existence and manner of working, but no subordination regarding possession of the one divine substance.¹⁶

Vos states clearly that even among the distinction that leads to an ordering of persons there is an indissoluble unity that is to be respected in the Triune God.

The persons, then, are revealed by how they are seen working in time. Van Mastricht continues by saying that “the Father works from himself, through the Son and the Holy Spirit; the Son from the Father, through the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son, through himself.”¹⁷ The second person of the Trinity is known as Son intentionally. Were the Son not sent, the Father would not be known as Father though he would still be Father. As such, the Son reveals the Father, the one from whom he proceeds. Thus, the mission of the Son reveals there is a sender, or, one from whom the Son is sent. This being sent indicates what is unique about the Father, namely, that he sends but is not sent.

The Sendings and Adoption

Understanding the Trinity in this way is an important step in understanding adoption. The Father must send the Son to accomplish the work of salvation. The Lord Jesus obeys and fulfills the law and stands in as a perfect substitute to be the sacrifice for sin. This work is necessary in the work of adoption as the true Son is the one who makes

¹⁶ Geerhardus J. Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics: Theology Proper*, trans. Richard B. Gaffin Jr, reprint edition, vol. 1, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 67-68.

¹⁷ Mastricht, *Theoretical and Practical Theolog*, 505.

Christians adopted sons. The sending of the Spirit is necessary, too. The Spirit must be sent by the Father and the Son together so that the work of the Lord Jesus can be applied to Christians. It is by the Spirit that Christians are grafted into Christ and empowered to live like Christ. Thus, the necessity of the Son and Spirit being sent in the fullness time (Gal 4:4-7).

The sending of the Son in the flesh is what brings about the adoption as sons as seen clearly in Galatians 4:4-7. Paul writes, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” This passage clearly teaches that the Father sent the Son to bring about adoption by the Spirit. This is a trinitarian reality based in what is true in eternity—Jesus is eternally Son— and comes to fruition in time when Christians are brought into this relationship by faith. The Lord Jesus is sent as the true Son to make Christians sons by faith as he pays the sin debt to redeem those who were not sons to make them sons (cf. Rom 9:25-26). Trevor Burke notes

Jesus as the eternal Son of God is uniquely equipped to exercise a salvific role as the only one through whom people can become God’s children by adoption (Gal. 4:4–5). His deity, a characteristic not shared with any other except the Father and the Holy Spirit, immediately sets him and his sonship apart from the believer’s sonship by adoption.¹⁸

Having always been the Son, Jesus is able to bring into sonship those who are redeemed. When this is true of a person, the ability to call God Father as Jesus does belongs to them

¹⁸ Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 132.

as a new reality and blessing of the new covenant.

The conclusions that can be drawn from this are twofold. First, the names of the persons of the Trinity are not arbitrary. Herman Bavinck notes, “Hence, the names which we use in mentioning and addressing God are not arbitrary: they are not the mere inventions of our mind. Rather, it is God himself who in nature and in grace reveals himself consciously and freely, who gives us the right to name him on the ground of his revelation.”¹⁹ The name Father denotes who the first person is as well as the role he plays as such. Gregory of Nazianzus, shows this by saying: “Father is the name of the relation in which the Father is to the Son or the Son to the Father... [T]he titles themselves make known a genuine and suitable thing. Even here they indicate the identity of nature of the one begotten to that which he begot.”²⁰ As Van Mastricht says, “it cannot be that the names of God would not lead us to a knowledge of him.”²¹ The first person of the Trinity is deliberately Father and is known as such by those in Christ.

Second, this is a new covenant reality. That God is known by his people as Father comes as a benefit of the new covenant. In order for Christians to be adopted into the family of God, the true Son must be sent, as Thomas Smail notes, as “Christ is not only the means of our adoption, he is the definition of all that sonship means.”²² This gives Christians the lens through which to view the relationship they have to the Father in

¹⁹ Bavinck, *Doctrine Of God*, 86.

²⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, “Third Theological Oration Concerning the Son,” trans. William C. Rusch, in *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1980), 113.

²¹ Mastricht, *Theoretical and Practical Theology*.97.

²² Thomas Allan Smail, *The Forgotten Father* (Eugene, OR: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), 144.

the new covenant. As Burke notes, “In brief, sonship is Pauline-speak to describe Christ; adoption is Pauline-speak to describe Christians.”²³ Only in the new covenant can this reality be grasped as the Son is sent in the flesh to do the work of instituting the new covenant. Burke continues, “In sum, the goal of God’s unique Son coming into the world was to secure the believer’s adoption.”²⁴

As shown above, its order is that, as Rippee notes, “The Father has planned it, he has sent the Son to procure it, and he has poured out the Spirit as the pledge and seal that he will make all things new.”²⁵ The only way one obtains this adoption is by faith. As Petrus Van Mastricht notes,

Moreover, let us obtain this adoption: (1) by faith in the natural Son of God (John 1:12), by which we will be united with him, and, once united, will with him obtain the same God and Father (John 20:17). (2) Through the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of adoption, whom the Father sends so that we may obtain adoption (Gal 4:5-6).²⁶

Emery concludes that “the three persons accomplish together, in a single action, the adoption of the children of God.”²⁷ The Father sends forth his Son and gives the Spirit so that Christians receive adoption as sons. Herman Ridderbos notes as well that “This is also evident from the fact that the sonship of believers is related in particular to the work of the Holy Spirit. There is in the Pauline pronouncements a peculiar relationship of

²³ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 85, 132.

²⁴ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 148.

²⁵ Rippee, *That God May Be All in All*, 201.

²⁶ Mastricht, *Theoretical and Practical Theology*, 537.

²⁷ Emery, *The Trinity*, 167.

reciprocity between the adoption of sons and the gift of the Spirit."²⁸ Again, Ridderbos brings clarity:

The sonship of believers is furthermore closely bound up with the fact that Christ is the Son of God. When God reveals his Son, the adoption of sons also takes effect (Gal. 4: 4), and it is the Spirit of God's Son whom God has sent forth into our hearts, who cries: "Abba, Father!" (v. 6). It is sonship "in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3: 26), that is to say, it is given with him in his advent; as the eschatological Bringer of salvation, he is the one in whom, for those who are included in him, this new redemptive state has been given.²⁹

The benefits of the new covenant come only once the one who will enact the new covenant is sent to make adoption possible as a benefit of the new covenant.

Praying to the Father, through the Son, in The Holy Spirit

The arguments from above have far reaching conclusions, all of which cannot be enumerated here.³⁰ That there is order between the persons within the Trinity is not to be neglected, especially when it comes to relating to God. Prayer is one of the ways Christians are to keep this order in mind. If this order is intentional, as shown above, the practice of prayer should reflect that order. To show prayer in light of this intentional order, first, the Lord's Prayer will be shown to be the model for normal Christian prayer. Then, other New Testament passages will be evaluated to show the normal approach should be to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit as this respects the trinitarian

²⁸ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 378.

²⁹ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 377.

³⁰ Surely, there are far reaching impacts from this line of argumentation such as how it affects our worship and writing of worship music. To whom should we address our worship normally? All of what could be affected cannot be discussed here as the argument is narrowed specifically to how this affects how Christians pray.

order and reflects the biblical pattern of prayer.

Having shown the importance of the names of the persons of the Trinity as well as the order that exists among the persons, the argument now turns to show how this should be respected in prayer. The normal pattern of prayer for the Christian should be to the Father, in the name of the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. It has been necessary to lay a solid foundation to get to this point because prayer is meant to be thoroughly Trinitarian. In agreement with Bruce Ware, a “radical” suggestion will be made. Ware says, “May I suggest something both clear and radical? If Jesus taught us to pray to the Father, then we ought to do this... Perhaps we do not think about prayer as we should because we do not understand the doctrine of the Trinity. As Jesus taught us, we should pray to the Father through the Son.”³¹ Each person has a role in prayer, and that is to be respected by those who pray. The roles of the three persons will be considered in order.

The Father has already been shown to be the initiator above. This is crucial to understand why Jesus teaches his disciples to pray to the Father. Jesus plays the roles of mediator and priest, and his teaching on prayer reflects this. Jesus intercedes on behalf of Christians to the Father, meaning, the only access anyone has to the Father comes through the Son. Emery says it this way, “There is no access to the person of the Father outside the relation that he has eternally with his Son that, in the Spirit, he causes to overflow into the just who live by his grace.”³² In order to approach the Father at all, Christians need the Son.

³¹ Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 2005, 21.

³² Emery, *The Trinity*, 119.

This means, then, that in addressing the Father *through* the Son, the Father is recognized as the principle *of* the Son. Emery explains that the order of the Trinity is expressed in the Lord's Prayer as it

refers to the distinct person of the Father insofar as he is the principle of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. What we ask for in the "Our Father" is procured by the Father *through* the Son and *in* the Holy Spirit, by virtue of one operation common to the three persons (an operation which the Son and the Holy Spirit receive from the Father). Thus, the "Our Father" is addressed to the distinct person of the Father, insofar as the Father is the principle of the Son and of the Holy Spirit with whom he is God and through whom he procures for us the goods of life.³³

Addressing the Father in prayer rightly recognizes him to be the initiator who will work through the Son and the Spirit. That the Father is uniquely unshared and is therefore the source of trinitarian action leads to the conclusion, in line with Scriptural teaching, that prayer should normally be addressed to the Father.

The Lord Jesus Christ plays the role of mediator in prayer. This is clearly seen in Scripture in Romans 8:34, "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." The intercession of Jesus goes hand in hand with his work as mediator as seen in 1 Timothy 2:5, "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus..." This passage uses an ambiguous pronoun that is, again, referring to the Father. What Paul is teaching, then, is that Jesus is the one by whom we have access to the Father. Bruce Ware is helpful here when he says, "Jesus Christ is the mediator. He is the one through whom we address the Father. He is the one

³³ Emery, *The Trinity*, 118.

who brings us access to the Father.”³⁴ The Son gives the ability to be sons to Christians, and with that comes all the privileges of Jesus the Son, namely, access to the Father. Emery says, “When this trinitarian relation of paternity is extended to us by the dynamism of the gifts of grace that unite us to the Father through the Son in the Spirit, the relation of the Father to his eternal Son remains in the foreground.”³⁵

That Christians are united to Christ brings about the glorious reality of adoption and should be at the forefront of the mind in prayer. Emery continues, “Prayer is addressed distinctly to the person of the Father, meaning by this his relation to the Son and, through the Son and in the Spirit, the relation by which his children are united to him.”³⁶ Without having been adopted, no Christian could call God Father. But, as seen in the Lord’s Prayer, Christians are taught by Jesus to refer to God as Father! The reality of adoption is expressed in that simple address made possible by the true Son in the Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian reality is most clearly and faithfully expressed in prayer when Christians call out to and address God as Father. Calvin notes that when we are led by Jesus as our mediator and intercessor to cry out to God as Father, Christians can do so boldly and with no fear of being cast out or ignored.³⁷ This is the access Christians have to the Father!

This access is made possible through the Spirit of adoption (Rom 8:15) as he

³⁴ Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 21.

³⁵ Emery, *The Trinity*, 118-9.

³⁶ Emery, *The Trinity*, 119.

³⁷ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* ed. Robert White (East Peoria, IL: Banner of Truth, 2014), 527.

indwells Christians. This means, then, as Michael Horton draws out, that “it is the Spirit who enables us to cry to the Father in the Son. Apart from this work, we could not pray as Jesus taught us, ‘Our Father.’”³⁸ The indwelling presence of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is a new covenant reality that brings to fulfillment the expectation of the Old Testament (Joel 2:28-29). In this, the Spirit takes up residence, as it were, in Christians and is the agent by which Christians are united to Christ. By this indwelling, Christians are brought into the relational unity that exists within the Trinity as seen in John 17:20-23. By the Spirit, Christians are brought into the relationship with each person of the Triune God. Rippee helpfully states, “Thus, the Father gives the Christian a new status as his child, ushering them by the Spirit into a new relationship with Christ.”³⁹

Christians should go boldly to the Father (Heb 4:16) by the Spirit in the Son. John Calvin explains what this looks like in his discussion of the Lord’s Prayer and is worth quoting at length:

In the first place, at the beginning of this prayer, it is clear as has previously been said that we must present and direct all our prayers to God in the name of Jesus Christ, for none can be acceptable to him in any other name. When we call God our Father we address him in Christ’s name, since we cannot call him Father – and to claim to be his children would be arrogant and rash – if we had not been made children of his grace through our Lord Jesus Christ. For Christ, being God’s true, natural and very own Son, has been given by him to us as a brother, so that what by nature is his may be ours as a gift and adoption, if with assured faith we accept so great a favour. As John says, “To all who believe in his only Son, God the Father has given the great distinction and privilege of becoming children of God” (John 1:12).

Hence, he is called our Father, and he would have us call him so, for he delivers us from all mistrust by great sweetness which that name conveys. No greater feeling of love can be found anywhere than in the love of a Father. Thus there is no surer

³⁸ Michael S. Horton, *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit: God’s Perfecting Presence in Creation, Redemption, and Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 208.

³⁹ Rippee, *That God May Be All in All*, 146.

proof by which he could attest his boundless love for us than in allowing us to be known as his children...And in order to give us greater assurance that, if we are Christians, he is such a Father to us, he wishes us not only call him 'Father' but expressly to call him 'ours.'⁴⁰

Christians have God as Father because he made it such by Christ through the Holy Spirit.

This order is intentional and can be respected in prayer.

To respect this trinitarian order, Christians should address their prayers normally, as Jesus teaches, to the Father. Jesus has enabled this reality, and as Sanders asks, "Why would you want to deviate from the clear biblical pattern?"⁴¹ Not only is this what Scripture teaches, but it respects the roles of each person of the Trinity. If the Father is the initiator, as shown above, Christian prayer should be directed to him who will work through the Son by the Spirit to answer. Christians are brought into this reality through adoption and gain the privilege of making requests known to God (Phil 4:6).

The Lord's Prayer

Respecting the order in prayer allows the individual adoption that comes in the new covenant to be put on display. Jesus teaches his disciples to pray in a way that did not happen before he was sent. Joachim Jeremias showed above that prayer in the Old Testament was never addressed to the Father⁴² and further that

in the Lord's Prayer Jesus authorizes his disciples to repeat the word *abba* after him. He gives them a share in his sonship and empowers them, as his disciples, to speak with their heavenly Father in just such a familiar, trusting way as a child would with

⁴⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 542-3.

⁴¹ Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 331.

⁴² Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (Naperville, IL: S.C.M. Press, 1967), 23.

his father.⁴³

The Lord Jesus gives to Christians his very own status of son by adoption. Having been made a son by virtue of the better covenant head, Christian prayer is to be informed as seen in the teaching of Jesus in the Lord's Prayer.

In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (Matt 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-5)⁴⁴ "The Lord's Prayer" is seen. Here Jesus is teaching his disciples to pray at their request. In both accounts, that God is known as Father is shown outside of the instruction of prayer, too. Matthew starts with this and Luke illustrates it after the teaching on prayer. In Matthew, Jesus calls the Father *your* Father three times (twice in verse 6, once in verse 8) before he instructs the disciples to address the Father as *our* Father in verse 9 (and three more times after the instruction of prayer, once in verse 14 and twice in verse 18). Luke uses an illustration of a father giving gifts (verse 11) to make the point that their heavenly Father will give the Spirit⁴⁵ to those who ask. It is only through the eternal Son by the Spirit that Christians know the first person of the Trinity as Father, as seen in Jesus referencing the Father as both "your" and "our" Father. The teaching of Jesus in the Lord's Prayer is intentional. Just as the names of the persons are not arbitrary, addressing the person of the Father in prayer by his name is deliberate. This allows for both unity and distinction within the Trinity to be upheld.

In John 10:30, Jesus speaks and says, "I and the Father are one." This shows

⁴³ Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 97.

⁴⁴ These two accounts differ slightly but teach the same thing, namely, that Christians pray to the Father. Jesus instructs, according to both accounts, that the proper person to address in prayer is the Father.

⁴⁵ Herein each person of the Trinity is shown in the practice of prayer.

the unity the Father and the Son share. And yet, there is distinction among the persons. A passage that clearly shows both the unity and the distinction is the Great Commission. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” All three persons are named showing the distinction, but unity is seen in the fact that name is singular. There is one God who exists in three persons. Jesus teaches that Christians are to pray in a way that recognizes the trinitarian nature of God. As Rippee notes, “For prayer, this means through Christ and with Christ, in the power of the Spirit, the children of God confidently address him as Father (Matt 6:9-13).”⁴⁶ The prayer Jesus teaches his disciples to pray does just that.

In the New Testament, there are a limited number of examples of the Son being addressed in prayer.⁴⁷ Notwithstanding, the normal pattern of prayer should be to the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit.⁴⁸ That examples exist otherwise do not disprove this, but rather show the equal divinity of each person of the Trinity and that Christians are in relationship with each person. Fred Sanders says it this way, “There is no good biblical case to be made against praying to the Son or the Spirit, no matter how strong the case for praying to the Father is.”⁴⁹ His point is well taken in that the *normal* pattern should address the Father. It is not wrong to do otherwise as each person is truly God.

⁴⁶ Rippee, *That God May Be All in All*, 198.

⁴⁷ The New Testament has no examples of the Holy Spirit being addressed in prayer.

⁴⁸ There are three main passages in which this seems to be the case: Acts 7:59-60, 2 Cor 12:8-10, and Rev 22:20. Others could include: 1 Cor 16:22; 1 Thess 3:11-12; Acts 9:14, 21; 22:16.

⁴⁹ Sanders, *The Deep Things of God*, 331.

However, it is most faithful to the explicit instruction of Scripture to address the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit.

Seeing warrant for addressing the Holy Spirit in prayer, Gregg Allison notes that

we may pray to the Holy Spirit. Because he is God and engages in appropriated works (inseparably with the Father and the Son), we may direct specific prayers for his particular attention. This is not different from prayer involving the other two persons. For example, following the way Jesus taught us to pray, we may address “Our Father,” i.e., the First Person. Specifically, we may address our prayers to the Father through the Son “in Jesus’s name.” Also, we may at times choose to address the Spirit directly in prayer as the Third Person of the triune Godhead: “Spirit, help me speak the gospel clearly to my neighbor”; “Spirit, transform me into the image of Christ.” On balance, it would probably be most appropriate to address our prayers primarily to the Father through Jesus while occasionally choosing to pray directly to the Spirit.⁵⁰

One must agree with Allison that the Holy Spirit engages in appropriated works and affirm the doctrine of inseparable operations, however, Scripture’s silence and his concession to the normal pattern of prayer make a better case. Further, if the trinitarian grammar laid out above holds true, our requests should be made to the Father as the initiator of divine activity. To use Allison’s example, the biblical pattern would request of the Father the filling of the Spirit, “Father, fill me with your Spirit so that I can share the gospel with my neighbor.” This seems to be what Paul does in Ephesians 1:15-23 (similarly, Col 1:3-9; Phil 1:3-11) as he prays that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ would give the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to this church. For this reason, Christians should address the Father, though the Son, by the Spirit in prayer.

⁵⁰ Allison and Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit*, 348.

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that Christians acquire a deeper experience of the Fatherhood of God than what was true of Old Testament saints. This argument was advanced by surveying covenant theology to show in the following sections that the newness of the new covenant is what brings about this deeper experience. In the old covenant, though God is called Father and Israel his son, in the new covenant, this takes on much deeper meaning. God is now the Father of Christians not merely corporately but individually. Covenant theology sees too much continuity regarding the covenant of grace for this conclusion to be given its proper weight. The old covenant people of God, Israel, was a mixed community whereas the new covenant people of God, the church, is not. The prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah show this to be the expectation of the new covenant where all will know God and be forgiven of their sin. In covenant theology, the new covenant is seen as a republication of the covenant of grace from Genesis 3:15. This covenant then carries through the Old Testament and is readministered in the covenants that follow. The continuity allows for baptism to be brought over into the new covenant as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant sign of circumcision. The distinctive of the Abrahamic covenant, spiritual and physical membership, comes into the new covenant in this way. However, this renewal model does not allow the new covenant to be entirely new. The covenant of grace is established only after the Son is sent to accomplish the work of salvation. The Lord Jesus establishes the new covenant in his blood and its benefits are applied by the Spirit to bring Christians into the family of God in a new way. Membership in the covenant of grace was shown to be spiritual, not spiritual and physical as the new covenant is not a republication of the covenant of grace from Genesis 3:15 as purported by covenant theology. Then, this paradigm was applied to the prayer life of a

Christian. Having been adopted, Christians gain access to the Father by the Son in the Spirit. This is the privilege gained by Christians as members of the covenant of grace. This order is to be respected and the ordinary way of addressing God in prayer should reflect the adopting work of God in Christ. Therefore, Christians should be quick to cry out to God as their Father and take hold of the new covenant blessing of having by adoption what is natural to the Lord Jesus Christ: sonship.

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ABSTRACT

SONS OF GOD: THE NEW COVENANT REALITY OF ADOPTION IN CHRIST

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Adoption as sons is a new covenant reality that is not fully experienced by Old Testament saints as it is merely foreshadowing what is to come in Christ as the mediator of a new covenant. Covenant theology is evaluated, and a different way forward is presented to show what Old Testament Saints experienced under the old covenant and how it points to the fulfillment in Christ. With this fulfillment, Christians gain the privileges of the true Son, the Lord Jesus, and are adopted as sons enabling them to cry out to the Father as such in a way no one under the old covenant could as the fullness of this reality was yet to come.

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