

BIBLE TRUTHS EXPLAINED

What the Bible Teaches About

ADOPTION

Revised Edition, 2026

GORDON LYONS

ESV Edition

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Bavinck, Herman	<i>Reformed Dogmatics</i> , Baker Academic, Logos Bible Software.
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Gaebelein, Frank E & various contributing authors	<i>Various Volumes</i> , The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Frank E. Gaebelein, (General Editor): Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House.
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Hodge, Charles	<i>Systematic Theology</i> , Vols. 1-3; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977 reprint. Also, Logos Bible Software.
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I must acknowledge a genuine debt of gratitude to the work of Dr. Charles Hodge. The writings of this theologian from a previous generation have helped considerably in preparing this work. On a number of occasions—as will be seen when reading these studies—I have cited or alluded to Dr. Hodge's remarks in his three-volume *Systematic Theology*. These references have been acknowledged in the footnotes to the study text.

Adoption

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PART 1

Synopsis: Adoption

Adoption is the placing of a justified sinner into the family of God, and affording to the adoptee all the rights and privileges of sonship. These rights and privileges include full acceptance into covenant relationship with God, together with all its duties and responsibilities, and the full entitlement to the promised inheritance in glory. As the special object of his or her heavenly Father's love, each adopted child becomes subject to the Father's care, preservation, and discipline. Every adopted child becomes a real and permanent member of God's family, and he can never lose his rights and privileges of sonship and inheritance. Only those whom God has called, regenerated and justified can be placed into God's family. God affords to no others the rights or privileges of adoption, nor does he entitle any others to call themselves the children of God.

Note 1: Adoption is by God's Grace

Adoption is a gift of God's sovereign grace. God bestows this gift upon all those whom he has chosen in Christ Jesus from before the creation of the world to inherit the kingdom that he has prepared for them. The Son of God has gone to prepare a place in glory for each and every heir of salvation. To these, and to these alone, is given the right to be called the children of God.

Scripture References (ESV)

Adoption is by God's Grace

Romans 8:14-15

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons ¹ of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! ² Father!"

Ephesians 1:4-5

⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

¹ *sons*: That is, sons, daughters, or children [of God]. (Also, in v.15). Where the verse or passage is referring to God's redeemed children, the term, 'sons' should be understood as meaning 'sons' and/or 'daughters' of God—unless the immediate context requires the translation, 'sons' (only).

² *Abba*: Aramaic for 'Father'.

1 John 3:1

¹ See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Note 2: The Indwelling Holy Spirit is Proof of Adoption

Possession of the indwelling Holy Spirit, together with holiness of life, is proof of adoption. Those only can claim the rights and privileges of adoption or sonship whom the Holy Spirit has graciously and effectually called. Those only can call themselves God's children whom the Spirit is teaching and sanctifying. Those only can say they belong to God's family who have within their lives the pledge and seal of adoption, which is the Holy Spirit of God. Without the indwelling Spirit of holiness, no-one can legitimately claim to be a child of God. (Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14)

Scripture References (ESV)

The Indwelling Holy Spirit is Proof of Adoption

Romans 8:9

⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh ³ but in the Spirit, ⁴ if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22

²¹ And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²² and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

Ephesians 1:13-14

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

³ [not in the] flesh: Romans 8:9; Greek, σὰρξ **sarx**, That is, You are 'not controlled by your old unregenerate life' or 'by your sinful nature.' ('the flesh').

⁴ [but in the] Spirit: Romans 8:9; Greek, πνεῦμα **pneuma**, That is, Your life is 'now controlled by the indwelling Holy Spirit of God'.

Note 3: Duties and Responsibilities of Adoption

Adoption fully and completely places each son or daughter permanently into God's family. This new standing or relationship brings with it all the duties and responsibilities that we, as God's children, owe to our heavenly Father. These duties and responsibilities include:

- a) separation from the sinful things of the world, and of the mind;
- b) wholehearted love, reverence, trust and obedience toward God as our heavenly Father;
- c) complete and unreserved submission to God's will in all things; and
- d) the desire to honour our heavenly Father in everything we think, say, and do.

Scripture References (ESV)*Duties and Responsibilities of Adoption***Malachi 1:6**

⁶ "A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honour? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, 'How have we despised your name?'

2 Corinthians 6:17-18

¹⁷ Therefore go out from their midst,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch no unclean thing;
then I will welcome you, {*Isaiah 52:11; Ezek. 20:34,41*}

¹⁸ and I will be a father to you,
and you shall be sons and daughters to me,
says the Lord Almighty." {*2 Samuel 7:14; 7:8*}

2 Corinthians 7:1

¹ Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body ⁵ and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

Ephesians 5:1

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. (See vv.2-5)

⁵ body: [2 Corinthians 7:1](#) Greek *flesh*. (ESV footnote)

Ephesians 5:6-8

⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them; ⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. (See vv.9-10)

Ephesians 5:11

¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. (See vv.12-14)

Note 4: Adopted Children are Heirs of Glory

Each adoptee is made a child of God and an heir of glory. He or she is a joint heir to the Father's inheritance, together with God's only Son. Every child of God shares in the promise of blessings to come, provided they also share in suffering for the sake of Christ. This is another of the responsibilities each child of God must assume as a full member of God's family. (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:26,29; 4:4-7)

Scripture References (ESV)

Adopted Children are Heirs of Glory

Romans 8:17

¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Galatians 3:26

²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

Galatians 3:29

²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Galatians 4:4-7

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So

you are no longer a slave,⁶ but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Note 4: Nature of Inheritance Not Yet Fully Revealed

The exact nature of the promised inheritance of the children of God has still to be fully made known. The promise is secure to all the seed. However, the Lord will not fully reveal to us the glories that await us until the day that he calls us into his presence. There, in our Father's house, we will inherit our share in the reward that he has prepared for all his children. On that day, however, there will be no more sin, sorrow, suffering, pain or death. All these things will have passed away. Then, we will be free to enjoy all the glories of fellowship with a Father who loves us with an everlasting love. We will share true fellowship with his Son who died for us, and who rose triumphantly to secure our justification, sanctification and glorification. (Rom. 8:18-25; 1 Pet. 1:4-9; 1 John 3:2-3)

Scripture References (ESV)

Nature of Inheritance Not Yet Fully Revealed

Romans 8:18-19

¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. (See v.20)

Romans 8:21

²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (See vv.22-25)

1 Peter 1:3-5

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 John 3:2-3

²Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

⁶ slave: Galatians 4:7; Greek, δοῦλος **doulos**, A person who is in bondage or slavery to another. In this case, it means a person who was in bondage or slavery to sin (before being redeemed/ransomed by Christ).

Related Bible Truths

Inseparably linked to the doctrine of adoption are the doctrines of predestination, regeneration, justification, and sanctification. All those whom God has chosen from eternity, and given to his Son, are effectually called by the Holy Spirit to repentance and faith in Christ. All whom the Spirit thus calls, God regenerates, justifies, and adopts into his family as children and heirs.

This great privilege pertains only to the elect. In setting his eternal love upon them from before the creation of the world, God determined that they—and they alone—should become his sons and daughters by the grace of adoption. Everyone whom God thus adopts, the Spirit of grace and of glory seals and sanctifies.⁷

Summary below

⁷ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Predestination; Regeneration; Justification; Sanctification*.

Part 1 Summary

BTE11 Summary — Adoption (ESV Edition)

Part 1: Adoption

Definition

Adoption is the act of God whereby He places a justified sinner into His family as His child, granting that person all the rights, privileges, responsibilities, and inheritance of sonship. Through adoption, believers enter a permanent covenant relationship with God, enjoy His fatherly love and care, and become heirs together with Christ of the glory to come.

Key Truths

1. **Adoption is God's gracious act** — believers become God's children solely through His grace.
2. **Adoption follows salvation** — only those who have been effectually called, regenerated, and justified are adopted into God's family.
3. **Adoption grants full membership in God's family** — believers are accepted as sons and daughters of God.
4. **Adopted children receive all the privileges of sonship** — they enjoy God's love, care, protection, and fellowship.
5. **Adopted children receive an inheritance** — believers are heirs of God's kingdom and glory.
6. **Adoption is rooted in God's eternal purpose** — believers were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.
7. **The Holy Spirit confirms adoption** — His indwelling presence is the evidence and seal of belonging to God.
8. **The Spirit enables believers to call God "Father"** — adoption creates a personal relationship with God.
9. **Without the Holy Spirit there is no adoption** — only those indwelt by the Spirit truly belong to God.
10. **Adoption brings responsibilities as well as privileges** — believers are called to honour and obey their heavenly Father.

11. **God's children are called to holiness** — adoption requires separation from sin and dedication to God.
12. **Adopted children are heirs with Christ** — they share in the blessings secured by God's Son.
13. **Suffering may accompany sonship** — believers share in Christ's sufferings on the path to glory.
14. **The full inheritance is yet to be revealed** — the glory awaiting God's children surpasses present understanding.
15. **Adoption is permanent** — God's children can never lose their status as members of His family.
16. **The Holy Spirit guarantees the future inheritance** — He is God's pledge that believers will receive all He has promised.

Biblical Foundations

Adoption is by God's Grace

4. **Romans 8:14-15** — believers receive the Spirit of adoption and cry, "Abba! Father!"
5. **Ephesians 1:4-5** — God predestined His people for adoption through Jesus Christ.
6. **1 John 3:1** — believers are called the children of God because of the Father's love.

The Indwelling Holy Spirit is Proof of Adoption

7. **Romans 8:9** — those who have the Spirit belong to Christ.
8. **2 Corinthians 1:21-22** — God seals believers with His Spirit as a guarantee.
9. **Ephesians 1:13-14** — the Holy Spirit is the pledge of the believer's inheritance.

Duties and Responsibilities of Adoption

7. **Malachi 1:6** — children should honour their Father.
8. **2 Corinthians 6:17-18** — God's children are called to holiness and separation from uncleanness.
9. **2 Corinthians 7:1** — believers should pursue holiness in the fear of God.
10. **Ephesians 5:1** — believers are to imitate God as beloved children.
11. **Ephesians 5:6-11** — God's children must walk as children of light.

Adopted Children are Heirs of Glory

- 12. **Romans 8:17** — believers are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.
- 13. **Galatians 3:26** — believers are God's children through faith in Christ.
- 14. **Galatians 3:29** — believers are heirs according to God's promise.
- 15. **Galatians 4:4-7** — redeemed sinners receive adoption and become heirs through God.

Future Inheritance

- 16. **Romans 8:18-21** — future glory far exceeds present suffering.
- 17. **1 Peter 1:3-5** — believers possess an imperishable inheritance kept in heaven.
- 18. **1 John 3:2-3** — God's children will one day be like Christ and see Him as He is.

 Practical Implications

- 1. **Rejoice in your relationship with God** — believers are loved as His children.
- 2. **Approach God confidently as Father** — adoption grants intimate access to Him.
- 3. **Seek assurance in the Holy Spirit's presence** — He confirms that believers belong to God.
- 4. **Live as a member of God's family** — sonship should shape attitudes, conduct, and priorities.
- 5. **Pursue holiness and separation from sin** — adopted children should reflect their Father's character.
- 6. **Honour and obey God wholeheartedly** — adoption brings both privileges and responsibilities.
- 7. **Endure suffering with hope** — present trials are part of the path to future glory.
- 8. **Look forward to the promised inheritance** — God's children have a secure and eternal future.
- 9. **Find comfort in God's permanent commitment** — He will never abandon, disown, or forsake His children.

 Summary Sentence

Adoption is God's gracious act of placing regenerated and justified believers into His family as His beloved children, granting them the full privileges of sonship, the indwelling

Spirit as a seal of their inheritance, the responsibility of holy living, and the certain hope of sharing forever in the glory of Christ.

PART 2

Doctrine of Adoption: The Sonship of Christ, and of Believers

In relation to God the Father, a marked distinction exists between the essential and eternal sonship of Christ and the gracious sonship of believers—a sonship that the Father bestows upon them by adoption.

We may express this distinction as follows:

1. The Lord Jesus Christ is God's eternal and only begotten Son **by nature**.
2. The believer is God's adopted son or daughter **by grace**.

It is important to remember this distinction.

Meaning of the Word, 'Father'

In modern secular thought, people sometimes limit the term *father* to physical or biological fatherhood. This word, however, has a much more comprehensive meaning. Primarily, the word *father* (noun) means 'one who nourishes, sustains, and preserves'. It refers not only to physical paternity, but also to the responsibilities of caring for children and providing for them on a day to day basis.

This is the usage of antiquity, and this is the sense in which God, in his Word, frequently uses this term. This is the sense in which we use the word when we speak of "*our Father in heaven*". Again, this is the sense in which we use the word when we speak of a human father who undertakes the responsibility of nourishing, sustaining, and preserving the children God has given him. This applies irrespective of whether God has entrusted these children to this father (and mother) through natural procreation, or whether the parent(s) has adopted them, or otherwise assumed responsibility for them by becoming their guardian or protector.

The secondary meaning of the word *father* (verb) is to beget. However, a man who begets children, and then fails to nourish, sustain, and preserve them, is not properly a father at all—in the fullest sense of the word. The biological fathering of children can never be detached from the moral and spiritual obligations and responsibilities of fatherhood (or parenthood in general). A man is truly a father when he cares for his children—morally, spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Similarly, a woman demonstrates her true motherhood (as well as her womanhood) when she loves and cherishes the children whom God has given her or has entrusted to her care, and when she protects them with the whole of her being.

Meaning of the Word, 'Adopt'

In the Bible, *to adopt* means *to place as a son*. It is to take a sinner whom the Spirit of God has effectually called, regenerated and justified, and to afford that newly-born-again person the position of a son of God. What is true of an adopted son is equally true of an adopted daughter. God affords her the position of his very own loved child, and daughter of God.

Regeneration must precede adoption. Regeneration is the gracious creation of a *new nature* or a *new heart*: a person is born again (i.e. born from above). Adoption is the gracious bestowal of a *new position* or a *new relationship*: God places that person into his family as a child and an heir.

Instead of being a child of the devil, and an object of God's righteous wrath, the redeemed sinner now stands in relation to God as his own son or daughter by adoption. In Christ Jesus, he or she is now a child of God's infinite and everlasting love.

To those whom God has chosen and called as his own, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 43:1-4

¹ But now thus says the LORD,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
³ For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.
I give Egypt as your ransom,
Cush and Seba in exchange for you.
⁴ Because you are precious in my eyes,
and honoured, and I love you,
I give men in return for you,
peoples in exchange for your life.

Isaiah 43:5-7

⁵ Fear not, for I am with you;
I will bring your offspring from the east,
and from the west I will gather you.
⁶ I will say to the north, Give up,
and to the south, Do not withhold;
bring my sons from afar
and my daughters from the end of the earth,
⁷ everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made."
(Cf. v.7 with Rom. 9:23-24; Eph. 1:5-6,11-12)

Summary below

Part 2 Summary

BTE11 Summary — Adoption (ESV Edition)

Part 2: The Sonship of Christ and of Believers

Definition

Adoption is God's gracious act of placing regenerated and justified believers into His family as His sons and daughters. **Unlike Christ, who is God's eternal Son by nature, believers become God's children by grace through adoption.** Adoption grants a new relationship with God, a new standing in His family, and a secure inheritance as heirs of His kingdom.

Key Truths

1. **Christ's sonship and believers' sonship are distinct** — Christ is God's Son by nature; believers are God's children by adoption.
 2. **Jesus is the eternal and only begotten Son of God** — His sonship is essential and unique.
 3. **Believers become children of God by grace** — adoption is a gift, not a natural right.
 4. **Biblical fatherhood includes care and preservation** — a father nourishes, sustains, protects, and provides for his children.
 5. **God perfectly fulfills the role of Father** — He lovingly cares for and preserves His children.
 6. **Adoption means "placing as a son"** — God grants believers the position and privileges of His children.
 7. **Both men and women receive full adoption** — all believers become sons and daughters of God with equal standing before Him.
 8. **Regeneration must precede adoption** — a new nature is given before a new family position is bestowed.
 9. **Regeneration changes a person's nature** — the Holy Spirit gives a new heart through the new birth.
 10. **Adoption changes a person's relationship** — believers are brought into God's family as His children and heirs.
 11. **Adopted believers are no longer under God's wrath** — they are received into His love and favour.
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12. **God's adopted children belong to Him permanently** — He claims them as His own possession.
 13. **God's children are precious and loved by Him** — His covenant love rests upon those He has redeemed.
 14. **God gathers His children from every place** — His family includes all whom He calls and redeems.
 15. **Adoption ultimately serves God's glory** — God's children are called and redeemed for His praise.
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Biblical Foundations

The Sonship of Christ and Believers

1. **Ephesians 1:5 (theme continued from Part 1)** — believers are adopted through Jesus Christ.
2. **Romans 8:15 (theme continued from Part 1)** — believers receive the Spirit of adoption.

God's Fatherly Love and Ownership

3. **Isaiah 43:1** — God redeems His people and calls them by name.
4. **Isaiah 43:2** — God promises His continual presence and protection.
5. **Isaiah 43:3-4** — God's people are precious, honoured, and loved in His sight.
6. **Isaiah 43:5-6** — God gathers His sons and daughters from every people and nation.
7. **Isaiah 43:7** — God's people are created and called for His glory.

Related Adoption Themes

8. **Romans 9:23-24 (referenced)** — God calls people as recipients of His mercy and glory.
 9. **Ephesians 1:5-6, 11-12 (referenced)** — adoption and inheritance are according to God's eternal purpose.
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Practical Implications

1. **Rejoice in your adoption** — believers are loved members of God's family.
 2. **Recognize the uniqueness of Christ** — He is God's Son by nature, while believers are sons and daughters by grace.
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3. **Find security in God's fatherly care** — He nourishes, sustains, protects, and preserves His children.
 4. **Remember your new identity** — believers are no longer enemies of God but beloved children.
 5. **Live as members of God's household** — adoption calls believers to reflect their Father's character.
 6. **Rest in God's love** — His children are precious and honoured in His sight.
 7. **Trust God's promises during trials** — He remains with His children through every difficulty.
 8. **Glorify God in daily life** — adoption exists for the praise of His grace and glory.
 9. **Look forward to your inheritance** — God's children are heirs of eternal blessings.
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Summary Sentence

Adoption is God's gracious act of placing regenerated and justified sinners into His family as beloved sons and daughters, granting them a new relationship with Him as Father, a secure place in His household, and an eternal inheritance, while Christ alone remains the eternal Son of God by nature.

PART 3

Outline of Adoption

We may outline the principal points included in the doctrine of adoption as follows:

1. Proof of Adoption

God acknowledges every regenerated and adopted child to be his own son or daughter. This is attested to, and verified, by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. Whoever has the Spirit of God, is a child of God. Just as a legally ratified certificate of adoption is the indisputable testimony and proof of adoption in the civil realm, so the indwelling Holy Spirit is the indisputable testimony and proof of adoption by God.

Romans 8:14-16

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, (See vv.8-13)

2 Corinthians 1:21-22

²¹ And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²² and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. (See vv.19-20)

Ephesians 1:11-14

¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (See vv.4-10)

2. Children of God

God brings every regenerated and adopted child into the full relationship of his own son or daughter; i.e. he calls them the children of God. The Scriptures clearly attest to this fact. God's Word frequently encourages and exhorts believers to call upon God as their Father. The Bible also assures believers

repeatedly that—as those whom the Father has called and redeemed—they are the children, sons, or people of God. As such, they are the objects of God’s never-ending love, mercy, and compassion.

Matthew 6:6

⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
(See v.5)

Matthew 6:7-8

⁷ “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Matthew 6:9

⁹ Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
(See vv.10-13)

Matthew 6:14-15

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (See vv.16-18)

Matthew 6:26

²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (See vv.24-30)

Matthew 6:31-34

³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

³⁴ “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

2 Corinthians 6:17-18

¹⁷ Therefore go out from their midst,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch no unclean thing;
then I will welcome you, {*Isaiah 52:11; Ezek. 20:34,41*}
¹⁸ and I will be a father to you,
and you shall be sons and daughters to me,
says the Lord Almighty." {*2 Samuel 7:14; 7:8; Jer. 31:1,9*}
(See 2 Cor. 6:14-16)

1 John 3:1-2

¹ See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (See v.3)

3. Rights, Privileges and Responsibilities

God affords to every regenerated and adopted child all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities that pertain to the children of God. This includes all the promised blessings of the covenant relationship in their everyday lives. It includes all the duties required of God's children as they seek to honour their heavenly Father. It includes all the responsibilities incumbent upon those who are members of God's household, and whom the Father expects to honour his name by speech, life, and conduct. It includes the full rights of inheritance as joint heirs with God's only begotten and well beloved Son—provided we also share in suffering for Christ.

Deuteronomy 10:12

¹² "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, (See vv.13-18)

Deuteronomy 10:20-21

²⁰ You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear. ²¹ He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen. (See v.22)

Deuteronomy 26:16-19

¹⁶ “This day the Lord your God commands you to do these statutes and rules. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul. ¹⁷ You have declared today that the Lord is your God, and that you will walk in his ways, and keep his statutes and his commandments and his rules, and will obey his voice. ¹⁸ And the Lord has declared today that you are a people for his treasured possession, as he has promised you, and that you are to keep all his commandments, ¹⁹ and that he will set you in praise and in fame and in honour high above all nations that he has made, and that you shall be a people holy to the Lord your God, as he promised.” (See vv.1-15)

Romans 8:16-17

¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (See vv.18-25)

4. Training Through Discipline

Every adopted child of God receives discipline in various ways and in differing degrees. This is to confirm them in their status as true children of God, and to train each child diligently in all the ways of the Lord. This is particularly true in relation to holiness (without which no-one will see the Lord). God disciplines us for our good, that he may train us to become holy in all manner of life. Ultimately, this means that—one day—he will fit us to share in his heavenly and eternal glory.

Deuteronomy 8:5

⁵ Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. (See vv.1-20)

Job 5:17-18

¹⁷ “Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves;
therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty.
¹⁸ For he wounds, but he binds up;
he shatters, but his hands heal. (See vv.19-21)

Hebrews 12:4-6

⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.

⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.”

{*Prov. 3:11,12*} (See Heb. 12:1-3)

Hebrews 12:7-10

⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. (See vv.11-13)

Hebrews 12:14

¹⁴ Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. (See vv.15-17)

On the following pages, we will consider in more detail the principal points mentioned above. Firstly however, in the next Part of this study, we will look at the nature of adoption.

Summary below

Part 3 Summary

BTE11 Summary — Adoption (ESV Edition)

Part 3: Outline of Adoption

Definition

Adoption is God's gracious act of bringing regenerated and justified believers into His family as His sons and daughters, granting them full acceptance, inheritance rights, family privileges, and the responsibilities of living as His children. The indwelling Holy Spirit confirms their adoption, and God's loving discipline trains them in holiness until they inherit their eternal glory.

Key Truths

1. **The Holy Spirit is the proof of adoption** — His indwelling presence testifies that believers belong to God.
 2. **The Spirit bears witness to believers' sonship** — He assures them that they are children of God.
 3. **The Holy Spirit is the seal and guarantee of the inheritance** — He confirms God's promises and future blessings.
 4. **Adopted believers are truly God's children** — they enjoy a real and personal relationship with their heavenly Father.
 5. **Believers are encouraged to call God their Father** — adoption grants intimate access to Him.
 6. **God lovingly provides for His children** — He knows their needs and cares for them continually.
 7. **Adoption places believers within God's household** — they become members of His covenant family.
 8. **Adoption bestows rights, privileges, and responsibilities** — believers receive blessings while being called to obedience.
 9. **God's children are to fear, love, serve, and obey Him** — faithful devotion is expected of members of His family.
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10. **Adopted children are heirs with Christ** — they share in the inheritance and glory secured by God's Son.
 11. **Suffering may accompany sonship** — believers share in Christ's sufferings before sharing fully in His glory.
 12. **God disciplines all His children** — discipline is evidence of genuine sonship.
 13. **Divine discipline is motivated by love** — God trains His children for their spiritual good.
 14. **God's discipline promotes holiness** — He prepares His children to share His holy character.
 15. **Holiness is essential for God's children** — the family likeness must increasingly appear in their lives.
 16. **Adoption leads ultimately to eternal glory** — God's children are being prepared for their heavenly inheritance.
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Biblical Foundations

Proof of Adoption

1. **Romans 8:14-16** — the Spirit bears witness that believers are children of God.
2. **2 Corinthians 1:21-22** — God seals believers with His Spirit as a guarantee.
3. **Ephesians 1:11-14** — the Holy Spirit guarantees the inheritance of God's people.

Children of God

4. **Matthew 6:6** — believers pray to their Father in heaven.
5. **Matthew 6:7-9** — Jesus teaches His followers to address God as Father.
6. **Matthew 6:14-15** — God's children are called to practice forgiveness.
7. **Matthew 6:26** — the heavenly Father cares for His children.
8. **Matthew 6:31-34** — believers are to trust their Father's provision.
9. **2 Corinthians 6:17-18** — God receives believers as His sons and daughters.
10. **1 John 3:1-2** — believers are truly the children of God.

Rights, Privileges, and Responsibilities

11. **Deuteronomy 10:12** — God's people are called to love and serve Him wholeheartedly.
12. **Deuteronomy 10:20-21** — believers must fear, cling to, and worship God.
13. **Deuteronomy 26:16-19** — God's people are His treasured possession and are called to obedience.
14. **Romans 8:16-17** — God's children are heirs and fellow heirs with Christ.

Training Through Discipline

15. **Deuteronomy 8:5** — God disciplines His people as a father disciplines his son.
16. **Job 5:17-18** — God's discipline is a blessing designed for healing and restoration.
17. **Hebrews 12:4-6** — the Lord disciplines those whom He loves.
18. **Hebrews 12:7-10** — discipline proves legitimate sonship and promotes holiness.
19. **Hebrews 12:14** — holiness is necessary for seeing the Lord.

 Practical Implications

1. **Seek assurance in the Holy Spirit's presence** — He confirms your adoption into God's family.
2. **Approach God confidently as your Father** — adoption provides intimate access to Him.
3. **Trust God's fatherly care** — He knows your needs and faithfully provides.
4. **Live worthy of your family identity** — God's children should reflect His character.
5. **Serve and obey God wholeheartedly** — adoption includes responsibilities as well as privileges.
6. **Value your heavenly inheritance** — believers are heirs of eternal glory.
7. **Endure suffering with hope** — present trials are part of God's preparation for future glory.
8. **Accept God's discipline humbly** — it is evidence of His love and commitment to your growth.
9. **Pursue holiness diligently** — God disciplines His children so they may share His holiness.

10. **Look forward to eternal glory** — adoption finds its fullest expression in the inheritance to come.
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 Summary Sentence

Adoption brings regenerated believers into God's family as His beloved children, confirmed by the indwelling Holy Spirit, blessed with the privileges of sonship and inheritance, trained through loving discipline, and prepared through holiness for the eternal glory that awaits them as fellow heirs with Christ.

PART 4

Adoption Involves Deliberate Choice

It is inherent in the nature of the case that adoption usually involves the deliberate choice or selection of the person adopted. In practice, there may be some exceptions to this rule—insofar as it concerns legal adoption. For instance, people may adopt a child—not so much out of deliberate choice—as out of a sense of duty and responsibility, which they are prepared to assume on behalf of someone else. For example, a relative may be prepared to adopt a child belonging to another member of their family. They may do this to relieve the natural parent(s) of a responsibility that they are unable or unwilling to assume.

However, situations of this nature do not arise with God. Every adoption by God is a planned adoption. It is the result of a deliberate purpose in the mind and will of God to choose that particular person for himself. God made this choice from before the foundation of the world, and therefore long before the conception or birth of the person selected for adoption. There are no ‘necessary’ or ‘expedient’ adoptions with God. God chooses each person individually—not because of anything commendable or worthy in him or her—but because of his gracious and merciful purposes toward them. Each one is special to him and loved by him; and, in Christ Jesus, God sets each one apart for himself.

Adoption is Not Based on Worth

God predestines a person for adoption from before the creation of the world.

As the Scripture says:

Ephesians 1:4-5

⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, (See v.6)

Adoption, therefore, is not based on anything meritorious done by the person. From eternity, God has already chosen that person for himself—before the person has been able to do anything good or bad. (Cf. Rom. 9:11-16.) Again, adoption is not based on anything of worth that the Lord foresees or foreknows that that person will accomplish. Adoption is entirely of grace, and it has its foundation in the immutable and sovereign purposes of God in redemption.

Similarly, when God’s Spirit calls a person to faith in Christ, and when God adopts that person as his own, it is not because that person is more righteous and more deserving than others. In the sight of God, no-one is righteous. No-one deserves God’s love. Everyone is unrighteous, and deserves only the wrath of God as the due punishment for their sin. However, in his grace and mercy, God determines to redeem such as these.

To this end, therefore, God sets his eternal love upon every sinner whom he has chosen. By the work of the Holy Spirit in effectual calling, God draws these sinners to repentance and faith in Christ. He

regenerates and justifies them, and he adopts them into his own family as children and heirs—purely by his own sovereign grace and mercy.

Regarding the fact that God’s choice in election is based on his eternal love, the Scripture says:

Deuteronomy 7:7-8

⁷ It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸ but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (See vv.3-11)

God’s Sovereign Choice

Adoption, therefore, is not founded on a person’s inherent worth or desert. It is founded in the sovereignty of God, and in God’s boundless love, mercy and grace toward individual members of fallen mankind. Adoption is part of God’s plan of redemption for all his elect people, and is according to his immutable purposes that he decreed in Christ Jesus from before the beginning of time. Thus, God’s Word says:

Ephesians 1:4-5

⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, (See v.6)

Ephesians 1:10-12

¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. (See vv.7-9; cf. v.10 with Col. 1:20; cf. v.11b with Isa. 46:10-11)

Though a person is not worthy of redemption, yet God will redeem him because he will show mercy to whom he will. Though a person is not worthy of adoption, yet God will adopt him because he loves him with an everlasting and measureless love. All this, however, is entirely a matter of God’s grace. It owes nothing to the person to whom God shows that grace. As with every other aspect of our salvation, adoption is a free and unmerited gift.⁸

⁸ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Sovereignty of God; Predestination*.

Concerning the fact that God shows mercy to whom he will, the Scripture says:

Romans 9:15-18

¹⁵ For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” {*Exodus 33:19*} ¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” {*Exodus 9:16*} ¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. (See vv.6-24)

Precious in the Sight of God

Adoption is entirely of God’s grace, and owes nothing to the character—or to the desires or efforts—of the person adopted. Even so, it remains true that every person whom God calls to himself in Christ Jesus is precious in his sight, and of inestimable value. This value derives from the intrinsic worth of God’s one and only Son who died to be that person’s Saviour. It derives, too, from the fact that God has imputed Christ’s perfect righteousness to that person’s account.

God loves each adopted child because he sees in each child the image of his own dear Son. This image—the image of God in the likeness of Christ—is not yet fully or perfectly formed in the believer’s life. By the work of the Holy Spirit, however, each child of God is being transformed gradually into the likeness of God’s Son, in true righteousness, holiness and knowledge. (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10.) This work of grace in the believer’s heart and life represents the ongoing, lifelong process of sanctification: a process that the Lord will finally complete in glory.⁹

Children of God

All those whom God has called into the fellowship of his Son, and to personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, are the children of God. They are children born of the Holy Spirit, and therefore born of God. Thus, the Scripture says:

John 1:11-13

¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (See vv.6-14)

Everyone, therefore, who by faith receives the Lord Jesus Christ, is received by God, and is placed as a son or daughter into his family. Each child of God has been born spiritually (born again, from above) into God’s family. He or she has been born of God.

⁹ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Sanctification*.

Such is the expression of God's love for us in Christ Jesus. It is an unrelenting love—a love that knows no bounds, and that will know no end. Such is the measure of the affection that our heavenly Father has for us, that he should call us his children. Thus, the apostle John declares:

1 John 3:1

¹ See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Again, John assures us:

1 John 3:2

² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (See v.3)

Such is the glorious prospect of all those who are the children of God by new spiritual birth and by adoption.

Summary below

Part 4 Summary

BTE11 Summary — Adoption (ESV Edition)

Part 4: Adoption Involves Deliberate Choice

Definition

Adoption is **God's sovereign and gracious act of deliberately choosing** redeemed sinners and placing them into His family as His children. This choice was made in Christ before the foundation of the world and is based entirely on God's love, mercy, and eternal purpose, not on any merit, worthiness, or foreseen goodness in those adopted.

Key Truths

1. **Adoption involves God's deliberate choice** — every adoption is the result of God's eternal purpose and will.
2. **God's adoption is planned from eternity** — His choice of His children was made before the foundation of the world.
3. **Adoption is not based on human worth** — no sinner possesses merit deserving God's favour.
4. **God's choice is rooted in grace and love** — adoption arises from His mercy rather than human achievement.
5. **God adopts individuals personally** — each believer is specially chosen and loved by God.
6. **Adoption is connected to predestination** — God predestined His people to become His children through Christ.
7. **Salvation is entirely God's work** — He effectually calls, regenerates, justifies, and adopts His people.
8. **God's love is the basis of redemption** — He redeems sinners because He sets His love upon them.
9. **God's mercy is sovereign** — He shows mercy according to His own gracious purpose.
10. **Adopted children are precious to God** — they are loved because they belong to Christ.

11. **Believers are accepted through Christ's righteousness** — God sees them clothed in the righteousness of His Son.
 12. **God is transforming His children into Christ's image** — sanctification progressively conforms believers to their Saviour.
 13. **Regeneration and adoption are closely linked** — those born of God become members of His family.
 14. **Faith in Christ identifies God's children** — those who receive Christ are granted the right to become God's children.
 15. **The Father's love is immeasurable and everlasting** — adoption flows from His eternal affection for His people.
 16. **Adoption points to future glory** — God's children will ultimately be conformed perfectly to Christ.
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Biblical Foundations

Adoption Is Not Based on Worth

1. **Ephesians 1:4-5** — God chose and predestined His people for adoption before creation.
2. **Romans 9:11-16 (referenced)** — God's purpose in election is based on His calling and mercy, not human works.
3. **Deuteronomy 7:7-8** — God set His love upon His people because of His love and covenant faithfulness, not their greatness.

God's Sovereign Choice

4. **Ephesians 1:10-12** — God's redemptive plan operates according to His sovereign will.
5. **Romans 9:15-18** — God shows mercy according to His own gracious purpose.

Precious in the Sight of God

6. **Ephesians 4:24** — believers are being renewed in righteousness and holiness.
7. **Colossians 3:10** — believers are being renewed in the image of their Creator.

Children of God

8. **John 1:11-13** — those who receive Christ become children of God by new birth.
 9. **1 John 3:1** — God's love is revealed in calling believers His children.
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10. **1 John 3:2** — believers will one day be like Christ when they see Him as He is.
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Practical Implications

1. **Give God all the glory for adoption** — it originates entirely in His grace and love.
 2. **Reject pride and self-righteousness** — adoption is not earned through merit or achievement.
 3. **Rest in God's eternal purpose** — believers were chosen and loved before the world's foundation.
 4. **Find assurance in God's love** — His adoption of His children is intentional and permanent.
 5. **Receive your identity as God's child** — believers belong to Him by grace.
 6. **Trust God's mercy rather than your worthiness** — salvation depends on His compassion, not human deserving.
 7. **Pursue Christlikeness** — the Father is transforming His children into the image of His Son.
 8. **Live with gratitude and humility** — adoption is an undeserved privilege.
 9. **Look forward to future glory** — God's work of adoption will culminate in complete conformity to Christ.
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Summary Sentence

Adoption is God's sovereign and gracious choice, made before the foundation of the world, to place redeemed sinners into His family as beloved children, not because of their worth or merit but because of His eternal love and mercy, transforming them into the likeness of Christ and securing for them an everlasting inheritance in glory.

PART 5

Evidence of Adoption

When a child (or adult) is legally adopted into a family, that person is furnished with an official document known as a *Certificate of Adoption*. This document shows clearly to whom the adopted person now belongs, and to whom he or she can rightfully refer as their own father and mother. The certificate of adoption bears the official signatures and seal of the court of law that sanctioned his adoption, ratified it, and declared it legally binding. For the rest of their life, that person is able to refer to their adoption certificate as proof—if any were needed—that they are the son or daughter and heir of their adoptive parents.

In a similar way, God provides all his adopted children with evidence of their adoption into his family. Documentary evidence is provided by the testimony of the Bible, which declares that every redeemed and regenerated sinner is a child of God. This written evidence is valid and authoritative, because it is the testimony or word of the living God.

Thus, God's Word says:

John 1:12-13

¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Galatians 4:4-7

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (See vv.1-3)

1 John 3:1-3

¹ See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

1 John 5:1

¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. (See vv.2-5)

1 John 5:19

¹⁹ We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. (See v.18)

Besides the written testimony provided by God's infallible Word, the Father confirms and authenticates every believer's adoption by identifying and sealing him with the indwelling Holy Spirit. Everyone who possesses the Spirit of God belongs to God; and those who belong to God are loved by the Father and the Son.

Concerning these things, God's Word says:

John 14:15-18

¹⁵ "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you for ever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

¹⁸ "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (See vv.19-21)

John 14:23

²³ Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. (See vv.22-24)

2 Corinthians 1:21-22

²¹ And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²² and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

Ephesians 1:12-14

¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy

Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (See vv.4-11)

God's Children are Governed by The Spirit

We have said that the indwelling Holy Spirit is the evidence that we belong to God. However, if we claim to possess the Spirit of God, then the Spirit of God must govern or control every aspect of our lives. In other words, we must not only be *indwelt* by the Spirit, but we must also *walk* or *live* by the Spirit. We must follow after the mind and will of the Spirit of holiness, and not after the desires of the old sinful nature which is still within us.

Holiness in our lives is the hallmark of adoption. It is the outward evidence of the Spirit's sanctifying work within the believer. Thus, the Scripture says:

Romans 8:14

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

This is how we know that we are the adopted children of God. We must be led by God's Spirit—and God's Spirit is holy. We must follow God's way and will for our lives, and we must bring forth ever-increasing amounts of spiritual fruit, to the glory of God. Thus, to his disciples, the Lord Jesus said:

John 15:16

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. (See vv.1-15; cf. Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Col. 1:6)

What is true in relation to Jesus' apostles, is true also in relation to all those who would believe on Christ through the apostles' preaching and teaching: preaching and teaching that is found now in the Word of God.

Concerning the necessity of being led by the Spirit, the Scripture says:

Galatians 5:16-18

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (See vv.1-15)

Galatians 5:19-21

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, ¹⁰ drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I

¹⁰ [Galatians 5:21](#) Some manuscripts add *murder*. (ESV footnote)

warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:22-23

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:24

²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Galatians 5:25-26

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Like Father, Like Son

There is a common maxim that says *like father, like son*. Often, the reference carries derogatory or deprecatory overtones. However, we acknowledge that our heavenly Father is always righteous, just, holy, and true. We also acknowledge that the characteristics of our Father in heaven include love, mercy, kindness and compassion. Therefore, by God's grace and the Spirit's power, his redeemed and holy children must endeavour to pattern their character after that likeness. Those who are not being made like him in character and conduct are demonstrating that they are not the adopted children of God.

Summary below

Part 5 Summary

BTE11 Summary — Adoption (ESV Edition)

Part 5: Evidence of Adoption

Definition

Evidence of Adoption consists of both the objective testimony of God's Word and the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. God confirms that believers are His adopted children through Scripture, the indwelling Spirit, and the transforming fruit of a Spirit-governed life. Those who belong to God are sealed by the Spirit, led by the Spirit, and increasingly display the character of their heavenly Father.

Key Truths

1. **God provides evidence of adoption** — believers are not left uncertain regarding their standing as God's children.
 2. **The Bible is the written testimony of adoption** — Scripture declares that those who believe in Christ are children of God.
 3. **The Holy Spirit is the inward witness of adoption** — His presence confirms that believers belong to God.
 4. **The Holy Spirit seals God's children** — He acts as God's mark of ownership and guarantee of inheritance.
 5. **Believers are no longer slaves of sin** — adoption brings the privileges of sonship and heirship.
 6. **God's adopted children may call Him Father** — adoption creates an intimate relationship with God.
 7. **The Father, Son, and Spirit dwell with believers** — God's presence accompanies His children.
 8. **The indwelling Spirit must govern the believer's life** — true adoption is evidenced by Spirit-led living.
 9. **Holiness is a hallmark of adoption** — God's children increasingly reflect His character.
 10. **Being led by the Spirit identifies God's children** — those governed by the Spirit demonstrate genuine sonship.
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11. **Spiritual fruit confirms God's work within** — regeneration and adoption produce visible transformation.
 12. **The works of the flesh are inconsistent with Spirit-led living** — believers must reject sinful patterns.
 13. **The fruit of the Spirit characterizes God's family** — love, joy, peace, and other graces reveal His work.
 14. **Believers are called to bear lasting fruit** — Christ appoints His followers to productive spiritual lives.
 15. **Children resemble their Father** — adopted believers increasingly reflect God's righteousness, love, and holiness.
 16. **Character transformation is evidence of genuine adoption** — those who belong to God become more like Him.
-

Biblical Foundations

Written Evidence of Adoption

1. **John 1:12-13** — those who receive Christ become children of God.
2. **Galatians 4:4-7** — redeemed believers receive adoption and become heirs through God.
3. **1 John 3:1-3** — believers are God's children now and await future glorification.
4. **1 John 5:1** — everyone who believes in Christ has been born of God.
5. **1 John 5:19** — believers belong to God while the world remains under the evil one.

The Holy Spirit as Evidence of Adoption

6. **John 14:15-18** — Christ gives the Spirit and does not leave His people as orphans.
7. **John 14:23** — God dwells with those who love and obey Christ.
8. **2 Corinthians 1:21-22** — the Spirit is God's seal and guarantee.
9. **Ephesians 1:12-14** — believers are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

God's Children Are Governed by the Spirit

10. **Romans 8:14** — those led by the Spirit are sons of God.
 11. **John 15:16** — believers are chosen to bear abiding fruit.
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12. **Galatians 5:16-18** — believers are called to walk by the Spirit.
 13. **Galatians 5:19-21** — the works of the flesh are condemned.
 14. **Galatians 5:22-23** — the fruit of the Spirit evidences God's work.
 15. **Galatians 5:24-26** — those who belong to Christ live and walk by the Spirit.
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Practical Implications

1. **Find assurance in God's Word** — Scripture clearly declares who God's children are.
 2. **Look for the Spirit's witness in your life** — His presence confirms adoption.
 3. **Live as one who belongs to God** — sonship carries both privilege and responsibility.
 4. **Pursue holiness diligently** — holy living reflects your heavenly Father.
 5. **Walk by the Spirit daily** — spiritual growth depends upon His leading.
 6. **Bear spiritual fruit consistently** — fruitfulness is evidence of genuine adoption.
 7. **Reject the works of the flesh** — adopted children should not live according to sinful desires.
 8. **Cultivate Christlike character** — God's children should resemble their Father.
 9. **Rest in your secure inheritance** — the Spirit guarantees the fulfillment of God's promises.
 10. **Rejoice that you are not an orphan** — God has brought His children into His family forever.
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Summary Sentence

God confirms the adoption of His children through the testimony of His Word, the indwelling witness of the Holy Spirit, and the visible fruit of a Spirit-led life, so that believers increasingly reflect the holiness, love, and character of their heavenly Father while enjoying the assurance of belonging to Him forever.

PART 6

Privileges of Adoption

In ordinary legal adoption, the degree of privilege afforded to the adopted child may vary from one country to another or from one state or province to another. In many countries, an adopted child receives exactly the same rights and privileges as a natural-born child. This includes his full share in the rights of inheritance. In some countries, however, an adopted child may not receive the same standing in law as a natural-born child. In consequence, he may find himself at some disadvantage—especially concerning the rights and privileges of inheritance.

This kind of situation, however, does not arise when God adopts a repentant and believing sinner into his family. As a redeemed child of God, that person receives the full rights and benefits of sonship. There is no question about his status as a son of God, or about his rights of inheritance. Every adopted son or daughter of God becomes a joint heir with Christ, and will share in the same inheritance with the Son of God. Thus, God's Word says:

Romans 8:15-18

¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (See vv.19-23)

Galatians 4:4-7

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (See vv.1-3)

Responsibilities of Adoption

As a full member of the family of God, each child of God assumes all the responsibilities incumbent upon him. He has duties to perform, and this involves getting to know his Father's will for his life, and being obedient to his heavenly Father's purposes.

Children, however, can only get to know what is required of them if they receive appropriate instruction from their parents. They can begin to fulfil their filial duties toward their parents only when they know what these duties entail. A child, therefore, has to learn about these duties from his or her

parents. In the same way, every child of God has to learn God's will and ways from his or her heavenly Father.

In regard to everything concerning faith and practice, God reveals his will and ways for his children in the Bible. There is no other source of such information. It is, therefore, our responsibility as children of God to learn everything about what the Bible teaches, and to apply these teachings to our lives. It is our responsibility also, to teach what we have learned to our children—and to teach them diligently; thus bringing them up in the discipline and instruction (KJV, nurture and admonition) of the Lord.

To this end, God's Word says:

Ephesians 6:4

⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (See vv.1-3)

Again, as the children of God, we must not only believe on Christ, but also suffer for his sake. God calls upon each of his children to bear reproach for the name of Christ. This, too, is our responsibility as the adopted and true children of God. Thus, the Scripture says:

Philippians 1:29-30

²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. (See vv.27-28)

Similarly, the apostle Peter says:

1 Peter 3:13-17

¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, {*Isaiah 8:12*} ¹⁵ but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. (See vv.8-12)

Children of Light

The apostle John refers to God as a God of love, and as a God of light. Thus, the Scripture says:

1 John 4:8

⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. (See vv.9-11,16)

1 John 1:5

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. (See vv.6-7)

Concerning God, the apostle Paul says:

1 Timothy 6:16

¹⁶who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen. (See vv.13-15)

When we say that God is light, we mean that he is transcendently pure and holy. The Lord God Almighty sets himself apart totally from sin in any shape or form. When, therefore, we speak of the children of God as being the children of light, we are referring to the fact that God has adopted us into his family so that he might train us in holiness and purity of life.

Before God made us his own children, our sins and evil deeds alienated us from him and from his love and fellowship. Then, we were children of darkness—for we could not see, nor could we comprehend, the Light of the world. Nor did we wish the light of God's Word to expose our sinful deeds.

Now, however, this light has illumined our souls and brought forgiveness for all our sins. By his sovereign grace, God has delivered us from the kingdom of darkness, and has translated into the kingdom of light—the kingdom of his own dear Son. We are now, therefore, children of light; i.e. children of righteousness, holiness, and truth.

Walking in the Light

Concerning our responsibilities as children of light, God's Word says:

Ephesians 5:1-2

¹Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ²And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (See vv.3-5)

Ephesians 5:8-10

⁸for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. (See vv.6-7)

Those who claim to be God's children must endeavour to walk as Jesus walked. As the Scripture says:

1 John 2:6

⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

Those who do not depart from the deliberate and constant practice of iniquity to walk with Christ, do not belong to Christ. Thus, it is written:

2 Timothy 2:19

¹⁹ But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his", {*Num. 16:5*} and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." (Cf. *Nahum 1:7*)

Thus, the Scripture also says:

Ephesians 5:11-13

¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, (See vv.14-17)

As far as it lies within us, we must endeavour to conform our whole manner of life to the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Light of the world. No sin—no evil—can dwell in the presence of light. Rather, it is exposed and expelled by the light. As the Holy Spirit sanctifies us, he will bring to light anything in our life that is dishonouring to our Father in heaven. It is our responsibility to forsake that which dishonours God, and to honour him with all our heart and soul.

Thus, God's Word says:

Malachi 1:6a

^{6a} "A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honour? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you... (See vv.6b-14)

Summary below

Part 6 Summary

BTE11 Summary — Adoption (ESV Edition)

Part 6: Privileges and Responsibilities of Adoption

Definition

Adoption grants believers **full membership in God's family**, including all the rights, privileges, and inheritance of sonship. At the same time, adoption brings responsibilities. God's children are called to learn and obey their Father's will, walk in holiness, suffer faithfully for Christ when necessary, and live as children of light who reflect their Father's character.

Key Truths

1. **God grants adopted children full sonship** — believers receive all the rights and privileges of God's family.
 2. **No adopted child is disadvantaged in God's family** — every believer enjoys complete acceptance and inheritance rights.
 3. **Believers are joint-heirs with Christ** — they share in the inheritance secured by God's Son.
 4. **The Spirit confirms both sonship and inheritance** — He assures believers that they belong to God.
 5. **Adoption brings responsibilities as well as privileges** — God's children must learn and obey their Father's will.
 6. **The Bible is God's instruction manual for His children** — it reveals His will in all matters of faith and practice.
 7. **Parents are responsible to teach God's truth** — Christian families should raise children in the Lord's instruction.
 8. **God's children are called to suffer for Christ if necessary** — faithful discipleship may involve reproach and persecution.
 9. **Suffering for righteousness is honourable** — believers should remain faithful even when opposed.
 10. **God is both love and light** — His children are called to reflect these divine qualities.
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11. **Believers have been transferred from darkness to light** — adoption includes a new spiritual identity and way of life.
 12. **Children of God are children of light** — they are called to righteousness, holiness, and truth.
 13. **God's children must imitate their Father** — their character should increasingly resemble His.
 14. **Walking in the light produces spiritual fruit** — goodness, righteousness, and truth mark a transformed life.
 15. **True believers depart from deliberate sin** — adoption results in a growing rejection of iniquity.
 16. **The Holy Spirit exposes and removes sin** — sanctification progressively conforms believers to Christ.
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Biblical Foundations

Privileges of Adoption

1. **Romans 8:15-18** — believers receive the Spirit of adoption and become heirs with Christ.
2. **Galatians 4:4-7** — redeemed believers are sons and heirs through God.

Responsibilities of Adoption

3. **Ephesians 6:4** — parents are to raise their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
4. **Philippians 1:29-30** — believers are granted not only faith in Christ but also suffering for His sake.
5. **1 Peter 3:13-17** — suffering for righteousness is blessed and honours Christ.

Children of Light

6. **1 John 4:8** — God is love.
7. **1 John 1:5** — God is light and contains no darkness.
8. **1 Timothy 6:16** — God dwells in unapproachable light.

Walking in the Light

9. **Ephesians 5:1-2** — believers are to imitate God and walk in love.
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10. **Ephesians 5:8-10** — God's children must walk as children of light.
 11. **1 John 2:6** — those who abide in Christ should walk as He walked.
 12. **2 Timothy 2:19** — everyone who belongs to Christ must depart from iniquity.
 13. **Ephesians 5:11-13** — believers are to reject and expose the works of darkness.
 14. **Malachi 1:6** — children should honour their Father.
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Practical Implications

1. **Rejoice in your full acceptance by God** — adoption grants complete membership in His family.
 2. **Live as an heir of heaven** — remember the inheritance awaiting God's children.
 3. **Study Scripture diligently** — God's children must learn their Father's will.
 4. **Teach biblical truth to the next generation** — Christian parents have a sacred responsibility.
 5. **Be willing to suffer for Christ** — faithfulness may involve hardship and opposition.
 6. **Walk as a child of light** — pursue goodness, righteousness, and truth.
 7. **Reject the works of darkness** — believers should separate themselves from sinful practices.
 8. **Imitate God's character** — love, holiness, mercy, and truth should increasingly define your life.
 9. **Allow the Holy Spirit to expose sin** — embrace His sanctifying work.
 10. **Honour your heavenly Father daily** — adoption calls for a life of reverence, obedience, and worship.
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Summary Sentence

Adoption grants believers the full privileges of sonship and inheritance as fellow heirs with Christ, while calling them to live as children of light who learn and obey their Father's will, endure suffering faithfully, reject darkness, pursue holiness, and increasingly reflect the love, purity, and character of God.

PART 7

Loving Discipline (1)

A Father Corrects Disobedience and Rebellion

Sometimes, children can prove obstinate and stubborn, or wayward and rebellious. They may resent giving up those things of which their parents disapprove.

Frequently, however, a child wilfully refuses to heed the lesser warnings and correction given by his parents, and persists instead in his disobedience and rebellion. In such cases, the child's parents may at length be compelled to exercise a more severe form of discipline. Such discipline can, at times, prove very painful—not only to the child, but also to the parents. The application of discipline, however, is part of the parent's duty and responsibility to nourish, sustain, and preserve their children. God holds Christian parents responsible for raising their children in the discipline and instruction (or nurture and admonition) of the Lord.

So it is with our Father in heaven. When we, as his children, will not yield to our Father's will, or when we refuse to obey the teaching of his Word, our heavenly Father may discipline us for our own good.

This is the topic we will be considering shortly. Before doing so, however—and to avoid any possible misunderstanding regarding what the Bible means by 'discipline'—we will consider firstly the meaning and scope of the word *discipline*. Then, secondly, we will summarise the various forms of discipline that the Lord may apply to the lives of his adopted children.

Meaning of the Word, 'Discipline'

Very often, people assume that discipline is equivalent to punishment. This, however, is a misleading and very inadequate description of discipline. The Bible does not confine discipline to chastisement or punishment alone. It has a much wider scope, and much greater application.

In Greek, the word translated *discipline* (σωφρονισμός, *sophronismos*) literally means *saving (or preserving) the mind*; i.e. by calling a person to soundness of mind, or to the exercise of self-control. In Latin, however, the word that is translated *discipline* is *discere*, meaning *to learn*. This, in turn, is similar to the Greek word, μανθάνω, *manthano*, also meaning *to learn*. Thus, a person who is learning (by a process of education), is a person who is being 'disciplined'. This is why the Lord's followers were called 'disciples'. The word *disciple* (Greek, μαθητής, *mathetes*, a learner) is directly related to the word *discipline*.

The Lord's disciples were students or learners. They were not being punished! They were being trained. As they listened to the words of the Lord Jesus, they were learning about spiritual truths and learning to apply these truths to their own personal lives. Later, when the Lord told his followers to *make disciples* (Greek, μαθητεύω, *matheteuo*, lit., *make a disciple*) of all nations, he was commanding his disciples to *instruct* all nations about God's way of salvation. Again, the Lord was telling his followers to provide these new converts with sound *teaching* in the basics of the faith.

In the Bible, therefore, to discipline someone means to instruct, to teach, or to train that person. It also means to learn by receiving such instruction, teaching, or training from others. This covers a wide range of teaching or training which does not include any punitive element.

There are, however, some forms of discipline that *do* include a punitive element. We must not overlook these forms of discipline; nor must we minimise their importance and value. To simplify the wide range covered by this term, we will summarise some aspects of Biblical discipline on the pages below.

Different Forms of Discipline

For easier reference, we have sub-divided the different forms of discipline into two categories: non-punitive, and punitive discipline. In practice, there may be some degree of interaction or overlapping between these two categories. We should note that the following examples of discipline represent only a small number of possible cases or scenarios. There are some forms of discipline that have not been included below.

Non-Punitive Discipline

1. *Instruction and Training*

Discipline involves *instruction* and *training*. We are being disciplined when we are being instructed from the Word of God, or when that Word is being explained and applied to us. Similarly, we are being disciplined when someone shows us a particular verse or passage of God's Word that, we are forced to acknowledge, has a valid application to some aspect of our lives. Again, when the Holy Spirit brings us under conviction of sin, we are being disciplined by the Lord. Finally, a child is being disciplined by its parents when it is being instructed and trained diligently in all the ways of the Lord.

Scripture References (ESV) *Instruction and Training*

Proverbs 22:6

⁶ Train up a child in the way he should go;
even when he is old he will not depart from it.

2 Timothy 2:24-26

²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. (See v.23)

2 Timothy 3:14-17

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. (See vv.12-13)

2. Exhortation and Command

Discipline involves *exhortation* and *command*. As part of the teaching we receive from the Word of God, we constantly are exhorted to follow certain courses of action—such as purity of conduct, and holiness of life. Similarly, God's Word commands us not only forsake every sinful thought, word and deed, but also every kind of evil (including sinful attitudes and dispositions). That Word also commands us to resist or flee from every form of temptation: temptation from the world; temptation from the flesh (the corrupt or sinful nature); and temptation from the devil. These *exhortations* to holiness of life and conduct, and the *commands* to forsake evil, are different forms of discipline. They both involve instruction and training that is designed to result in obedience to, or compliance with, God's will in our lives. The summary code of moral and spiritual discipline finds expression in the Ten Commandments. (Exod. chapter 20; Deut. chapter 5)

Scripture References (ESV) Exhortation and Command

2 Corinthians 7:1

¹ Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body ¹¹ and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (See 2 Cor. 6:14-18)

1 Thessalonians 5:22

²² Abstain from every form of evil.

James 4:7

⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (See vv.8-10; cf. Eph. 4:27; 6:11)

¹¹ body: [2 Corinthians 7:1](#) Greek *flesh*. (ESV footnote)

1 Peter 5:8-9

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. (See vv.10-11)

3. **Admonition and Correction**

Discipline involves *admonition* and *correction*. In his Word, God admonishes or warns us against pursuing wrong courses of action, or against indulging the desires of the ‘flesh’ or sinful nature. Attitudes and practices of this nature are inconsistent with our adoption as children of God and children of light. If, however, we fail to heed God’s warnings, he will apply some form of correction to our lives, to bring us to repentance. This form of discipline is designed to be reformatory, so that we will acknowledge our sin and guilt; forsake that sin—seeking our heavenly Father’s forgiveness—and pursue God’s will for our lives. It is God’s will that we should be sanctified. It is God’s will also that we should serve and honour him in all that we do.

Scripture References (ESV)	<i>Admonition and Correction</i>
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Psalms 119:67

⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted I went astray,
but now I keep your word.

Psalms 119:71

⁷¹ It is good for me that I was afflicted,
that I might learn your statutes.

1 Thessalonians 4:2-8

² For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ⁷ For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. ⁸ Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

2 Timothy 4:1-2

¹I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ²preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. (See vv.3-4)

The foregoing examples illustrate non-punitive discipline. In Part 8, we will consider some examples of punitive discipline.

Summary below

Part 7 Summary

BTE11 Summary — Adoption (ESV Edition)

Part 7: Loving Discipline (1)

Definition

Loving Discipline is the Father's training, instruction, correction, and guidance of His adopted children. Biblical discipline is much broader than punishment. It includes teaching, exhortation, warning, correction, and spiritual training designed to produce holiness, obedience, wisdom, and Christlike character in the lives of God's children.

Key Truths

1. **God disciplines His children because He loves them** — discipline is an expression of fatherly care, not rejection.
 2. **Discipline is broader than punishment** — it includes teaching, instruction, training, correction, and guidance.
 3. **The goal of discipline is spiritual growth** — God trains His children in holiness and obedience.
 4. **Discipleship and discipline are closely connected** — disciples are learners who are being trained by God.
 5. **God uses His Word as a primary means of discipline** — Scripture teaches, reproves, corrects, and trains believers.
 6. **Parents are called to discipline their children** — Christian parents should train their children in God's ways.
 7. **Instruction and training are forms of discipline** — believers grow through learning and applying God's truth.
 8. **The Holy Spirit disciplines through conviction** — He exposes sin and brings believers to repentance.
 9. **Biblical exhortations are a form of discipline** — God's commands direct believers toward holiness.
 10. **God calls His children to resist evil** — believers are exhorted to reject sin and resist or flee from temptation.
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11. **Spiritual discipline requires self-control** — God's training cultivates soundness of mind and obedience.
 12. **Warning is a form of discipline** — God admonishes His children before more severe correction becomes necessary.
 13. **Correction is designed to restore** — God's purpose is repentance, renewal, and sanctification.
 14. **Affliction can be instructive** — God may use difficulties to teach His children obedience.
 15. **God's discipline aims at holiness** — He trains His people to honour Him in every area of life.
 16. **Discipline is ultimately redemptive and reformative** — it seeks the believer's spiritual welfare, not merely punishment.
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Biblical Foundations

Instruction and Training

1. **Proverbs 22:6** — children are to be trained in the way they should go.
2. **2 Timothy 2:24-26** — gentle teaching and correction can lead people to repentance.
3. **2 Timothy 3:14-17** — Scripture is profitable for teaching, correction, and training in righteousness.

Exhortation and Command

4. **2 Corinthians 7:1** — believers are called to pursue holiness.
5. **1 Thessalonians 5:22** — Christians must abstain from every form of evil.
6. **James 4:7** — believers are called to submit to God and resist the devil.
7. **1 Peter 5:8-9** — Christians must remain vigilant and resist Satan.

Admonition and Correction

8. **Psalms 119:67** — affliction helped the psalmist return to God's Word.
 9. **Psalms 119:71** — suffering taught obedience to God's statutes.
 10. **1 Thessalonians 4:2-8** — God calls His people to holiness and purity.
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11. **2 Timothy 4:1-2** — God's servants are to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with patience in teaching.
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Practical Implications

1. **Welcome God's instruction** — His discipline is evidence of His fatherly care.
 2. **View discipline as training, not merely punishment** — God is shaping His children for holiness.
 3. **Study and apply Scripture regularly** — God's Word is His primary tool for spiritual growth.
 4. **Respond quickly to conviction of sin** — repentance prevents greater correction.
 5. **Take God's commands seriously** — obedience is part of spiritual maturity.
 6. **Resist temptation actively** — discipline includes learning to oppose evil.
 7. **Accept godly correction humbly** — warnings and rebukes are intended for spiritual good.
 8. **Learn from trials and afflictions** — God often uses difficulties as instruments of instruction.
 9. **Pursue holiness intentionally** — discipline has the goal of Christlike living.
 10. **Train others faithfully** — parents, pastors, and mature believers share responsibility in spiritual instruction.
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Summary Sentence

Loving discipline is God's fatherly work of instructing, training, exhorting, warning, and correcting His adopted children through His Word and Spirit so that they may grow in wisdom, repentance, obedience, and holiness, increasingly reflecting the character of Christ.

PART 8

Loving Discipline (2)

Punitive Discipline

4. Chastisement or Punishment

Discipline involves *chastisement* or *punishment*. If we fail to heed the lesser warnings of God, and if we persist in indulging the desires of the sinful nature—or in disobeying God in any other way—then, eventually, God will apply a more severe form of discipline. This form of discipline is intended to be punitive and painful. Our loving heavenly Father inflicts this punishment upon us, to bring us to our senses. God designs such punishment to make us acknowledge, confess, and utterly forsake our disobedient and sinful behaviour. He also intends it to be the means of restoring us to his fellowship and favour. The actual form of punishment may be varied (see below); but it is analogous to the use of the rod as a punitive discipline for a rebellious and wayward child.

Scripture References (ESV) *Chastisement or Punishment*

2 Samuel 7:14-15

¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. (See vv.12-17)

1 Corinthians 11:31-32

³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. (See vv.27-34)

Hebrews 12:5-6

⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.

⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.”
{*Job 5:17; Prov. 3:11,12*} (See Heb. 12:1-4)

Hebrews 12:7-8

⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Hebrews 12:9-11

⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (See vv.12-14)

5. Loss of Blessing

Discipline may involve *loss of blessing*. This form of discipline can include loss of temporal blessings such as health, strength, abilities, employment, possessions, or any or material blessings. This may be accompanied by loss of spiritual blessings. This could include loss of close fellowship with God; loss of interest in spiritual things; loss of desires after holiness and growth in grace, or loss of any other kindred blessings. Again, loss of blessings may be extended nation-wide; e.g. when, in his providence, God withdraws the blessings of nature, and brings drought, famine, or plague to a land. Similarly, if a nation repeatedly sins against God, God may eventually withdraw that nation's peace and security. He may then inflict upon it a judicial punishment such as war, or some other large-scale devastation or disaster.

Scripture References (ESV) *Loss of Blessing*

2 Chronicles 7:13-14

¹³ When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, ¹⁴ if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (See vv.12-16)

Psalms 38:1-9

- ¹ O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger,
nor discipline me in your wrath!
- ² For your arrows have sunk into me,
and your hand has come down on me.
- ³ There is no soundness in my flesh
because of your indignation;
there is no health in my bones
because of my sin.
- ⁴ For my iniquities have gone over my head;
like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.
- ⁵ My wounds stink and fester
because of my foolishness,
- ⁶ I am utterly bowed down and prostrate;
all the day I go about mourning.
- ⁷ For my sides are filled with burning,
and there is no soundness in my flesh.
- ⁸ I am feeble and crushed;
I groan because of the tumult of my heart.
- ⁹ O Lord, all my longing is before you;
my sighing is not hidden from you.
(See vv.10-22; cf. Ps. 32:1-5)

Psalms 118:18

- ¹⁸ The LORD has disciplined me severely,
but he has not given me over to death.

6. Illness or Disease

Discipline may involve *illness* or *disease*. Certain forms of illness or disease are brought upon ourselves by our sinful manner of life. The Lord may permit this to happen in order to discipline us more severely, and to warn us of graver consequences if we do not repent and seek his forgiveness. This form of discipline is not always recognised as such—but the Lord certainly uses it to chastise his wayward children. However, we must not suppose for a moment that all forms of illness and disease are punitive. All forms of ill health stem directly from the effects of the Fall and from God's judgment upon mankind and upon the earth. However, we must emphasise that God does not intend every form of illness to be a punishment for specific sin in our lives. On the contrary, the Lord sometimes permits illness to be the means of bringing us closer to himself and to lead us toward greater blessings in our lives.

Scripture References (ESV)

Illness or Disease

Psalms 106:28-29

²⁸ Then they yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor,
and ate sacrifices offered to the dead;
²⁹ they provoked the LORD to anger with their deeds,
and a plague broke out among them.
(See vv.30-31; cf. Num. 25:1-9)

Psalms 107:17-20

¹⁷ Some were fools through their sinful ways,
and because of their iniquities suffered affliction;
¹⁸ they loathed any kind of food,
and they drew near to the gates of death.
¹⁹ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.
²⁰ He sent out his word and healed them,
and delivered them from their destruction.
(See vv.21-22)

1 Corinthians 11:29-30a

²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement on himself. ^{30a} That is why many of you are weak and ill...

7. Physical Death

Discipline may involve *physical death*. Sometimes, we may sin wilfully and persistently against the Lord, stubbornly refusing to heed his corrective instructions and flagrantly disregarding the warnings contained in his Word. On such occasions, the Lord may apply the ultimate form of discipline to his disobedient and wayward child. The Lord may eventually withdraw that person's life to prevent him from committing further and greater sin and rebellion, and to preserve his soul for eternity. This happened with Israel when the entire nation, aged 20 years and over (excepting Joshua and Caleb alone), perished in the desert because of their repeated unfaithfulness and wilful disobedience to God's express commands. This happened also in the Corinthian church when some of the Lord's people, who had despised the sacred nature of the Lord's Supper, suffered the punishment of death for their sin. All these things were written down in the Word of God as an example and warning to us.

Scripture References (ESV)

Physical Death

Numbers 14:26-34

²⁶ And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, ²⁷ “How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me? I have heard the grumblings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against me. ²⁸ Say to them, ‘As I live, declares the LORD, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: ²⁹ your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upwards, who have grumbled against me, ³⁰ not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. ³¹ But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected. ³² But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. ³³ And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness for forty years and shall suffer for your faithlessness, until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness. ³⁴ According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, a year for each day, you shall bear your iniquity for forty years, and you shall know my displeasure.’ (See vv.1-45)

Acts 5:1-5

¹ But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ² and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³ But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.” ⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. (See vv.6-11)

1 Corinthians 11:27-32

²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are

disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. (See vv.17-26)

Summary below

Part 8 Summary

BTE11 Summary — Adoption (ESV Edition)

Part 8: Loving Discipline (2)

Definition

Loving Discipline includes God's corrective and sometimes painful dealings with His adopted children when they persist in sin and refuse lesser warnings. Unlike condemnation, divine discipline is an expression of fatherly love designed to restore fellowship, produce holiness, prevent greater sin, and preserve God's children for eternal glory.

Key Truths

1. **God's discipline may include chastisement or punishment** — severe correction can follow persistent disobedience.
 2. **Divine chastisement is motivated by love** — God disciplines His children because they belong to Him.
 3. **Punitive discipline seeks restoration, not condemnation** — God's purpose is repentance and renewed fellowship.
 4. **The severity of discipline may increase if warnings are ignored** — persistent rebellion can invite stronger correction.
 5. **God's discipline distinguishes believers from the world** — His children are corrected rather than abandoned.
 6. **Discipline is painful but beneficial** — it produces righteousness and holiness in those who are trained by it.
 7. **Loss of blessing can be a form of discipline** — God may withdraw temporal or spiritual comforts to awaken His children.
 8. **National judgment can also function as discipline** — God may discipline communities or nations through providential means.
 9. **Illness or disease may at times be disciplinary** — God can use physical affliction to correct and restore.
 10. **Not all suffering or illness is punishment for specific sin** — God may use suffering for growth, testing, and blessing.
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11. **Affliction can lead to repentance and renewed dependence on God** — hardship often teaches spiritual lessons.
 12. **Self-examination can prevent further discipline** — believers are called to judge themselves honestly before God.
 13. **Physical death can be God's ultimate disciplinary action** — in exceptional cases, God may remove a believer from earthly life to prevent further sin.
 14. **Divine discipline never destroys God's covenant love** — correction does not remove sonship.
 15. **God disciplines His children to share in His holiness** — holiness remains the ultimate goal of discipline.
 16. **All discipline points toward eternal preservation** — God corrects His people so they will not be condemned with the world.
-

Biblical Foundations

Chastisement or Punishment

1. **2 Samuel 7:14-15** — God disciplines His children while maintaining His steadfast love.
2. **1 Corinthians 11:31-32** — the Lord disciplines believers so they will not be condemned with the world.
3. **Hebrews 12:5-6** — the Lord disciplines those whom He loves.
4. **Hebrews 12:7-8** — discipline is evidence of genuine sonship.
5. **Hebrews 12:9-11** — God's discipline produces holiness and the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Loss of Blessing

6. **2 Chronicles 7:13-14** — repentance leads to restoration after divine judgment.
7. **Psalms 38:1-9** — David describes the heavy burden of God's corrective hand.
8. **Psalms 118:18** — the Lord disciplines severely but preserves life.

Illness or Disease

9. **Psalms 106:28-29** — sin provoked divine judgment through plague.
 10. **Psalms 107:17-20** — affliction resulting from sinful ways led people to cry out to God.
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11. **1 Corinthians 11:29-30** — some suffered weakness and sickness because of sin related to the Lord's Supper.

Physical Death

12. **Numbers 14:26-34** — Israel's unbelief resulted in judgment in the wilderness.
13. **Acts 5:1-5** — Ananias died following deliberate deception before God.
14. **1 Corinthians 11:27-32** — some believers died under divine discipline concerning the Lord's Supper.
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Practical Implications

1. **Take God's warnings seriously** — ignoring correction may lead to more severe discipline.
 2. **Examine yourself regularly** — honest self-judgment helps prevent deeper correction.
 3. **Respond quickly to conviction of sin** — repentance restores fellowship with God.
 4. **Trust God's love even in discipline** — correction is an expression of fatherly care.
 5. **Learn from affliction** — God often teaches valuable spiritual lessons through hardship.
 6. **Do not assume all suffering is punishment** — some trials are intended for growth and blessing.
 7. **Pursue holiness diligently** — discipline aims to produce Christlike character.
 8. **Value God's preserving grace** — His correction protects believers from greater spiritual harm.
 9. **Remember that discipline differs from condemnation** — God's children are corrected, not rejected.
 10. **Seek restoration rather than resistance** — discipline achieves its purpose when it leads to repentance and obedience.
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Summary Sentence

God lovingly disciplines His adopted children through chastisement, loss of blessing, affliction, and, in exceptional cases, even physical death, not to condemn them but to correct, restore, preserve, and train them in holiness so that they may share in His righteousness and eternal glory.

Part 9 follows below

PART 9

Degrees of Discipline

Although it is only a suggestion based on the foregoing remarks, we might represent the different forms of discipline as an ascending scale. We may summarise this scale as follows:

Degrees of Non-Punitive Discipline

1. Instruction and Training

Instruction and training includes all forms of spiritual teaching or education. This form of discipline may be applied from a child's early years onward. It may be effected by parents in the home, by Sunday School and Bible Class teachers and by pastors and other leaders of the church. Parents, however, remain primarily responsible for this form of discipline. God will hold parents accountable to him for the diligence they have shown—or have failed to show—in teaching their children. Similarly, God will hold parents primarily responsible for bringing up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

2. Exhortation and Command

Exhortation and command includes all forms of encouragement in the faith, together with instruction in the necessity of obeying God's Word, and of obeying every Biblical doctrine and principle. Regular exhortation and encouragement is particularly necessary lest a child becomes disheartened and discouraged by an excessive application of corrective discipline. Whatever form it may take, we must always apply or administer discipline in love. We must aim to instil hope in the child—never despair.

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3. Admonition and Correction

To admonish is to warn (e.g., of the consequences of pursuing a wrong course of action). To correct is to show where or why something is wrong, and to indicate clearly the right way or the right course of action. This includes the necessity of heeding the express warnings contained in the Word of God. It includes the necessity of showing why certain (perhaps generally accepted) courses of action are wrong, and of indicating clearly from the Word of God the right course of action.

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Degrees of Punitive Discipline**4. Chastisement or Punishment**

This is a punitive discipline that includes all forms of chastening designed to effect repentance and correction. This form of discipline extends—if necessary—to the use of the rod; i.e. corporal punishment or another form of discipline that equates with corporal punishment. To neglect this form of discipline when it is rightly due is to disobey the express teaching of God's Word. Such punishments, however, must always be measured and rooted in love and concern for the individual. It must *never* be applied out of malice, caprice, or uncontrolled or unjustified anger. We should be aware, however, that on many occasions, the Lord uses the word 'rod' and its associated phrases in an analogical sense. (This will be explained further on the pages that follow.)

5. Loss of Blessing

This is a punitive discipline—possibly used in conjunction with #4 above—which is designed to lead to confession and forsaking of sin, and reconciliation with our Father in heaven. Our heavenly Father provides us with every good and perfect gift, and we must be careful to acknowledge these gifts as coming to us from his hands; i.e. by his grace or providence. At times, God may suspend or withdraw one or more of the blessings that he has bestowed upon us. If this happens, then we must consider the possibility that the loss of such blessings may have occurred because of some unconfessed sin in our lives for which our Father in heaven is disciplining us. The kind of blessings God may suspend or withdraw includes such things as health, strength, abilities, employment, wealth or possessions; or any spiritual blessings like inward peace, contentment or tranquillity.

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6. Illness or Disease

When applied as a punishment, this is a punitive discipline with similar design to #5 above. We must observe, however, that many forms of illness or disease are not intended to be punitive (although they are related to the judgment inflicted upon all mankind, and upon the earth, at the Fall). However, there are other forms of illness that *are* intended to be punitive. These are the illnesses or diseases that would not have occurred had our sinful life-style or conduct not contributed toward their onset.

7. Physical Death

Physical death (the death of the body) is the ultimate form of punitive discipline that God sometimes inflicts upon his people. He does this to effect temporal judgment and punishment, thus saving those people from eternal judgment. Those who wilfully and continually treat the teachings of God's Word with contempt, or who repeatedly despise the lesser judgments of God, leave themselves open to this kind of discipline. Similarly, those who profane that which is holy by their sinful manner of life or conduct, also make themselves liable to this kind of punishment. Under circumstances such as these, loss of life ensures the preservation of a believer's soul.

The chief end of all forms of discipline is holiness of life and conduct. Because of its importance—especially in relation to parents and their children—we have taken time to consider in some detail the various forms of discipline. Now however, we will consider how God applies such discipline to his own adopted children.

Summary below

Part 9 Summary

BTE11 Summary — Adoption (ESV Edition)

Part 9: Degrees of Discipline

Definition

Degrees of Discipline describe the various ways God trains, corrects, and restores His adopted children. Biblical discipline ranges from non-punitive instruction and exhortation to more severe forms of corrective discipline. In every case, God's purpose is not destruction but holiness, repentance, obedience, and spiritual maturity.

Key Truths

1. **God's discipline operates in different degrees** — correction may range from gentle instruction to severe chastening.
 2. **Discipline normally begins with teaching and guidance** — God first instructs His children through His Word and servants.
 3. **Parents bear primary responsibility for disciplining children** — they are accountable to train their children in God's ways.
 4. **Encouragement is part of discipline** — exhortation strengthens believers toward faithfulness and obedience.
 5. **Discipline must be administered in love** — its purpose is to produce hope and growth, not despair.
 6. **Warnings are an important form of discipline** — God cautions His children about the consequences of sinful choices.
 7. **Correction identifies error and points to truth** — discipline seeks restoration to God's will.
 8. **Chastisement may become necessary when warnings are ignored** — persistent disobedience can result in stronger correction.
 9. **Punitive discipline must always be motivated by love** — whether human or divine, correction should never arise from cruelty or uncontrolled anger.
 10. **Loss of blessing can be a form of discipline** — temporal or spiritual blessings may be withdrawn to bring repentance.
 11. **Unconfessed sin may contribute to disciplined loss** — believers should examine themselves when experiencing spiritual decline.
 12. **Certain illnesses may function as discipline** — in some instances, consequences arise from sinful choices.
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13. **Not all illness is punitive** — many forms of suffering are related to living in a fallen world rather than specific sins.
 14. **Physical death may be the most severe form of discipline** — God may remove a persistently rebellious believer to preserve the soul.
 15. **God's discipline always serves a redemptive purpose** — even severe correction aims at spiritual preservation.
 16. **The ultimate goal of discipline is holiness** — God disciplines His children so they grow in righteousness and obedience.
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Biblical Foundations

Instruction and Training

1. **Proverbs 22:6** — children are to be trained in the way they should go.
2. **Ephesians 6:4 (theme continued)** — parents are responsible for raising children in the Lord's instruction.

Exhortation and Command

3. **2 Corinthians 7:1** — believers are urged to pursue holiness.
4. **1 Thessalonians 5:22** — Christians are commanded to avoid every form of evil.
5. **James 4:7** — believers must submit to God and resist the devil.
6. **1 Peter 5:8-9** — Christians are called to remain vigilant and steadfast in faith.

Admonition and Correction

7. **Psalms 119:67** — affliction helped bring the psalmist back to obedience.
8. **Psalms 119:71** — suffering taught God's statutes.
9. **1 Thessalonians 4:2-8** — God calls His people to holiness and purity.
10. **2 Timothy 4:1-2** — God's Word is to be used for reproof, rebuke, and exhortation.

Chastisement and Punitive Discipline

11. **Hebrews 12:5-11 (theme continued)** — God's discipline yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.
12. **1 Corinthians 11:31-32 (theme continued)** — discipline prevents believers from being condemned with the world.

Loss of Blessing, Illness, and Death

13. **2 Chronicles 7:13-14** — repentance restores blessing.
 14. **Psalms 118:18** — the Lord disciplines but preserves.
 15. **Psalms 107:17-20** — affliction led people to seek God.
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16. **1 Corinthians 11:29-30** — weakness and sickness came upon some because of sin.
 17. **Numbers 14:26-34** — Israel suffered severe discipline for persistent unbelief.
 18. **Acts 5:1-5** — Ananias experienced immediate judgment for deliberate deception.
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Practical Implications

1. **Receive instruction willingly** — God's discipline often begins with teaching rather than punishment.
 2. **Respond to warnings early** — repentance can prevent more severe correction.
 3. **Encourage others in love** — exhortation is an important part of spiritual growth.
 4. **Accept correction humbly** — God's discipline is designed for your good.
 5. **Examine your life honestly** — unconfessed sin can disrupt fellowship and blessing.
 6. **Do not despise God's chastening** — it is evidence of His fatherly care.
 7. **Avoid interpreting all suffering as punishment** — God may use hardship for many purposes.
 8. **Pursue holiness continuously** — this is the ultimate aim of divine discipline.
 9. **Teach and discipline children faithfully** — parents have a God-given responsibility to train them.
 10. **Rest in God's love even during correction** — every form of discipline is intended to preserve and mature His children.
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Summary Sentence

God disciplines His adopted children through varying degrees of instruction, exhortation, warning, correction, chastisement, loss of blessing, affliction, and, in rare cases, even physical death, always with the purpose of producing repentance, preserving their souls, and leading them into greater holiness and obedience.

PART 10

Filial Duties

As those who are the true children of God, we receive all the rights and privileges of sonship or adoption. However, each child of God must be prepared to assume all his or her filial duties and responsibilities. Filial duties and responsibilities are those duties and responsibilities that a child owes to his parents. These are summarised in the fifth commandment by the expression:

Exodus 20:12

¹² “Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. (Cf. Deut. 5:16)

And in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, by the injunction:

Ephesians 6:1-3

¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² “Honour your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³ “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” {Deut. 5:16} (See Eph. 6:4)

Again, in Paul’s letter to the Colossians, it is written:

Colossians 3:20

²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. (See v.21)

Regarding the children of God, filial duties are the duties that we—as God’s children—owe to our heavenly Father. These duties include love, reverence, respect, trust, humility, honour and obedience. If, however, we fail in our duties and responsibilities to our heavenly Father, then God may discipline us for our own good. In this case, God may apply either a non-punitive or a punitive discipline to our lives.

In practice, God may apply discipline to his children by means of human agency, or by changing circumstances in our lives or work from favourable to unfavourable. Alternatively, the Lord may remove certain blessings or benefits from us, or he may bring us into particularly difficult and trying situations.

In each of these examples, God acts on our lives through his works of providence. The examples cited represent just a few of the ways in which our heavenly Father might discipline us to correct some sinful tendency, course of action or attitude of mind. The Lord applies these corrective measures to our lives to produce greater obedience to his will, and to promote increasing holiness of life and conduct.

Fatherly Discipline

As a Father—a Father who faithfully nourishes, sustains, and preserves his children—God has promised to provide for, uphold, and protect us. In addition, he has promised to bless us in all our ways. This, of course, is a conditional promise. It is suspended upon our attitude to our heavenly Father's will, and upon our wholehearted and willing obedience to God and to his Word—in everything. If, however, we fail to honour God as our Father, or if we neglect to obey or apply his Word to our lives, then we must expect God to discipline us.

Although sometimes painful, God disciplines us out of his never-ending love and compassion for us, so that he may purge out of our lives anything that displeases or dishonours him. It is also God's purpose in chastening us to mould our character and conduct in line with his goal for us. This goal is ever-increasing holiness of life, and purity of thought and behaviour.

God's discipline is founded in his eternal love and mercy for each of his adopted children. Concerning this fatherly discipline, the Scripture says:

Deuteronomy 8:5

⁵ Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. (See vv.1-6)

God does not discipline us merely for the sake of inflicting pain, grief or sorrow. Rather, out of his deep love for us, he disciplines us painfully only when we will not respond to other methods of correction. Discipline is the proof that we belong to God, and are loved by him. Thus, God's Word says:

Hebrews 12:5-6

⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.

⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives."

{*Prov. 3:11,12*} (See Heb. 12:7-14)

A child who is not disciplined, is a child who is not loved.

Even more to the point, a child whom God does not discipline in love, is a child who does not belong to God. In one way or another, God disciplines every child whom he receives and adopts as his own. Thus, to the church at Laodicea, the Lord said:

Revelation 3:19-22

¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. ²¹ The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" (See vv.14-18)

Summary below

Part 10 Summary

BTE11 Summary — Adoption (ESV Edition)

Part 10: Filial Duties and Fatherly Discipline

Definition

Filial Duties are the obligations that adopted children of God owe to their heavenly Father. These duties include love, reverence, trust, honour, humility, and obedience. Because believers are full members of God's family, they are called to live in a manner that honours their Father. When God's children neglect these responsibilities, the Father lovingly disciplines them to restore obedience, holiness, and fellowship.

Key Truths

1. **Adoption includes responsibilities as well as privileges** — God's children must fulfill their duties toward their heavenly Father.
2. **Filial duties include love, trust, reverence, respect, and obedience** — these characterize a faithful child of God.
3. **The Fifth Commandment illustrates filial responsibility** — honouring parents reflects the broader principle of honouring God.
4. **Obedience pleases the Lord** — God's children are expected to submit willingly to His will.
5. **God reveals His will through His Word** — believers learn their Father's desires from Scripture.
6. **God may discipline disobedient children** — correction is intended for their spiritual good.
7. **God often disciplines through providence** — circumstances, hardships, and losses may serve as corrective measures.
8. **The purpose of discipline is increased obedience** — God seeks to bring His children into closer conformity to His will.
9. **Fatherly discipline is rooted in love** — God corrects because He cares for His children.
10. **Discipline is designed to produce holiness** — God's goal is purity of life and conduct.
11. **God does not discipline merely to inflict pain** — correction serves a redemptive and restorative purpose.

12. **More severe discipline often follows ignored warnings** — God may intensify correction when lesser measures are rejected.
 13. **Discipline is evidence of sonship** — all genuine children of God experience the Father's correction.
 14. **Undisciplined individuals may not belong to God** — discipline confirms God's fatherly relationship with His people.
 15. **Repentance is a proper response to discipline** — God's correction calls His children back to fellowship and obedience.
 16. **Faithful children are promised future glory** — those who persevere and overcome will reign with Christ.
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Biblical Foundations

Filial Duties

1. **Exodus 20:12** — God's people are commanded to honour father and mother.
2. **Ephesians 6:1-3** — children are to obey and honour their parents.
3. **Colossians 3:20** — obedience pleases the Lord.

Fatherly Discipline

4. **Deuteronomy 8:5** — God disciplines His people as a father disciplines his son.
5. **Hebrews 12:5-6** — the Lord disciplines those whom He loves.
6. **Hebrews 12:7-14** (referenced) — discipline proves sonship and produces holiness.
7. **Proverbs 3:11-12** (quoted in Hebrews 12) — believers are not to despise the Lord's discipline.

Repentance and Restoration

8. **Revelation 3:19-22** — Christ reproves and disciplines those He loves, calling them to repentance and perseverance.
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Practical Implications

1. **Honour God as your heavenly Father** — adoption calls for reverence and obedience.
 2. **Study Scripture diligently** — God's Word reveals the duties of His children.
 3. **Accept God's discipline humbly** — correction is evidence of His love and care.
 4. **Respond quickly to conviction of sin** — repentance restores fellowship with God.
 5. **Trust God's providence during trials** — He may be using circumstances for spiritual growth.
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6. **Pursue holiness intentionally** — this is the Father's goal for His children.
 7. **Do not resent divine correction** — God's discipline is designed for your good.
 8. **Examine your life regularly** — disobedience should be confessed and forsaken.
 9. **Persevere faithfully under discipline** — God is preparing His children for greater glory.
 10. **Take comfort in God's fatherly love** — every act of correction is rooted in His desire to preserve and bless His children.
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Summary Sentence

As adopted children of God, believers are called to honour, trust, love, and obey their heavenly Father, and when they fail in these duties, God lovingly disciplines them through His providence and correction in order to restore fellowship, promote holiness, and prepare them for eternal glory with Christ.

PART 11

Punitive Discipline is Not Harmful

It is a great mistake, and contrary to the teaching of the Bible, to imagine that the *correct* use of punitive discipline may be harmful. We can cause no greater harm to a child than by failing to discipline that child when this is justified and necessary. However, whatever form of discipline we may apply, we must always apply it in love and compassion—*never* in malice, caprice, or uncontrolled anger. Thus, concerning one who belonged to God (Solomon), the LORD says:

2 Samuel 7:14-15a

¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but my steadfast love will not depart from him... (See vv.12-17)

We must be careful to observe that—on many occasions when the LORD speaks of the ‘rod’ as a means of discipline, he is using the expression metaphorically or figuratively—not literally.

Concerning David and his descendants, God says:

Psalms 89:27-29

²⁷ And I will make him the firstborn,
the highest of the kings of the earth.
²⁸ My steadfast love I will keep for him for ever,
and my covenant will stand firm for him.
²⁹ I will establish his offspring for ever
and his throne as the days of the heavens.
(See vv.20-26)

Psalms 89:30-33

³⁰ If his children forsake my law
and do not walk according to my rules,
³¹ if they violate my statutes
and do not keep my commandments,
³² then I will punish their transgression with the rod
and their iniquity with stripes,
³³ but I will not remove from him my steadfast love
or be false to my faithfulness. (See vv.34-37)

2 Samuel 7:14

¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men,

If he or she sins persistently and wilfully against him, God will apply punitive discipline to his son or daughter.

To *punish...with the rod of men* is to punish by means of some human agency. For example, for their persistent sin and rebellion, God's people were eventually taken captive into Babylon, where they remained in exile for almost 70 years. The godless Babylonian nation became the 'rod' of God's anger. Yet—exceedingly painful as this rod proved to be—God applied it to his people only out of his intense love for them. Thus, through Jeremiah the prophet, God says:

Jeremiah 30:10-11

¹⁰ "Then fear not, O Jacob my servant, declares the LORD,
nor be dismayed, O Israel;
for behold, I will save you from far away,
and your offspring from the land of their captivity.
Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease,
and none shall make him afraid.
¹¹ For I am with you to save you,
declares the LORD;
I will make a full end of all the nations
among whom I scattered you,
but of you I will not make a full end.
I will discipline you in just measure,
and I will by no means leave you unpunished.
(See vv.1-9)

Jeremiah 30:14-15

¹⁴ All your lovers have forgotten you;
they care nothing for you;
for I have dealt you the blow of an enemy,
the punishment of a merciless foe,
because your guilt is great,
because your sins are flagrant.
¹⁵ Why do you cry out over your hurt?
Your pain is incurable.
Because your guilt is great,
because your sins are flagrant,
I have done these things to you.
(See vv.12-13)

Jeremiah 30:16-17a

¹⁶ Therefore all who devour you shall be devoured,
and all your foes, every one of them, shall go into captivity;
those who plunder you shall be plundered,
and all who prey on you I will make a prey.
^{17a} For I will restore health to you,
and your wounds I will heal,
declares the LORD... (See vv.17b-24; see esp. v.22)

As can be seen from the above example, it is possible to understand the 'rod'¹² of discipline in a metaphorical sense. In such cases, the punishment may be understood to be some kind of discipline that is analogous to corporal punishment, and which has the same kind of effect; i.e. it is very painful.

Thus, God's Word says:

Proverbs 3:11-12

¹¹ My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline
or be weary of his reproof,
¹² for the LORD reproves him whom he loves,
as a father the son in whom he delights. (See vv.5-10)

Proverbs 13:24

²⁴ Whoever spares the rod hates his son,
but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.

Proverbs 19:18

¹⁸ Discipline your son, for there is hope;
do not set your heart on putting him to death.

Proverbs 22:15

¹⁵ Folly is bound up in the heart of a child,
but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.

¹² *rod*: Hebrew, *šēḇeṭ* — literally a staff, stick, club, or sceptre.

The Hebrew term can be interpreted in a literal or symbolic manner. The rod is a symbol of authority that may be exercised physically, as in strictly controlled corporal punishment. Alternatively, this authority can be applied in a non-physical way, where correction is achieved through love-based discipline that takes a different form but is just as effective as a literal rod. To summarise, the enforcement method should be firm but fair, rigorous but reasonable, and administered with sincere affection and concern, never from spite, unjustified rage, or a lack of self-control.

Proverbs 23:13-14

¹³ Do not withhold discipline from a child;
if you strike him with a rod, he will not die.

¹⁴ If you strike him with the rod,
you will save his soul from Sheol.

Proverbs 29:15

¹⁵ The rod and reproof give wisdom,
but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

Proverbs 29:17

¹⁷ Discipline your son, and he will give you rest;
he will give delight to your heart.

God is Treating us as Sons

Let us remember the purpose of discipline:

Hebrews 12:4-8

⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproofed by him.

⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.” {Prov. 3:11,12}

⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. (See vv.1-3)

Hebrews 12:9-11

⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than

pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (See vv.12-14)

Although, at times, God will punish—sometimes severely—yet he will never take away his love or his mercy from his own children. Discipline—even punitive discipline—is the proof that we are God’s legitimately adopted children. As such, our Father in heaven will never disown or disinherit us: for, in Christ Jesus, we are forever precious in the sight of God.

Early Church Understanding of ‘The Rod’

How did Christians in the early church interpret or understand ‘the rod of discipline’?

In the early church, the rod itself was understood as being a literal rod, staff or sceptre. However, the church fathers and other Christian leaders usually understood the expression as a metaphor for corrective discipline. This discipline could take various forms and could be applied in various ways that did not involve actual corporal punishment. Yet, the alternative form of discipline applied in love would have had the same effect and outcome as actual corporal punishment.

Early church writers ¹³ viewed the rod as a literal image with a figurative and spiritual application.

The rod is the symbol of loving, corrective discipline—whether parental, pastoral, or divine.

Summary below

¹³ Early church writers: e.g. Chrysostom, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Ambrose, Basil.

Part 11 Summary

BTE11 Summary — Adoption (ESV Edition)

Part 11: Punitive Discipline Is Not Harmful

Definition

Punitive Discipline is God's loving and corrective chastisement of His adopted children when they persist in sin and refuse lesser forms of instruction or correction. Far from being harmful, properly administered discipline is an expression of God's covenant love, designed to restore obedience, promote holiness, and preserve His children from greater spiritual harm.

Key Truths

1. **Proper discipline is beneficial, not harmful** — failure to discipline when necessary is more damaging than loving correction.
2. **All discipline must be administered in love** — neither God nor faithful parents discipline out of malice, revenge, or uncontrolled anger.
3. **God's discipline never removes His love** — correction and steadfast love coexist in God's dealings with His children.
4. **The "rod" often functions symbolically in Scripture** — it frequently represents corrective authority and painful discipline rather than a literal instrument.
5. **God may use human agents as instruments of discipline** — He can work through circumstances, people, or nations to correct His children.
6. **Divine discipline is measured and just** — God never disciplines excessively or unfairly.
7. **Discipline aims at restoration** — God's purpose is repentance, reconciliation, and spiritual renewal.
8. **Persistent sin invites stronger correction** — continued rebellion may result in painful consequences.
9. **God preserves His children even while disciplining them** — correction never means rejection or abandonment.
10. **The absence of discipline is not a blessing** — discipline is evidence of legitimate sonship.
11. **God disciplines those in whom He delights** — correction flows from fatherly affection and commitment.

12. **Discipline is intended to drive out folly and promote wisdom** — corrective measures are designed to shape character.
 13. **The goal of discipline is holiness** — God's children are trained to share in His righteousness.
 14. **Discipline produces spiritual fruit** — it yields righteousness in those who respond properly.
 15. **Believers remain secure under discipline** — God will never disown or disinherit His adopted children.
 16. **God's children remain precious to Him** — even severe correction demonstrates His ongoing covenant love.
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Biblical Foundations

God's Loving Discipline

1. **2 Samuel 7:14-15** — God disciplines His children but does not remove His steadfast love.
2. **Psalms 89:27-33** — God punishes disobedience while maintaining covenant faithfulness.
3. **Jeremiah 30:10-11** — God disciplines His people in just measure and preserves them.
4. **Jeremiah 30:14-17** — God uses painful correction but promises restoration and healing.

The Rod of Discipline

5. **Proverbs 3:11-12** — God's discipline is proof of His love.
6. **Proverbs 13:24** — loving discipline demonstrates genuine care.
7. **Proverbs 19:18** — discipline provides hope and protection.
8. **Proverbs 22:15** — discipline removes folly.
9. **Proverbs 23:13-14** — discipline is intended to preserve and protect.
10. **Proverbs 29:15** — correction imparts wisdom.
11. **Proverbs 29:17** — disciplined children bring delight.

God Is Treating Us as Sons

12. **Hebrews 12:4-8** — discipline proves genuine sonship.
 13. **Hebrews 12:9-11** — God's discipline trains His children in holiness and righteousness.
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 Practical Implications

1. **Do not resent God's discipline** — correction is evidence of His love and care.
 2. **Receive discipline with humility** — God's purpose is always your spiritual good.
 3. **Respond quickly to correction** — repentance prevents deeper consequences.
 4. **Trust God's faithfulness during painful seasons** — His love remains constant even in discipline.
 5. **View discipline as training rather than rejection** — God is shaping character, not abandoning His children.
 6. **Learn from difficult circumstances** — God may use trials as instruments of correction.
 7. **Practice loving discipline in family life** — correction should always be governed by wisdom, love, and self-control.
 8. **Pursue holiness earnestly** — this is the ultimate goal of God's discipline.
 9. **Take comfort in your secure adoption** — discipline never cancels God's covenant commitment.
 10. **Remember that righteousness is the intended outcome** — discipline is designed to produce lasting spiritual fruit.
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 Summary Sentence

God's punitive discipline is not harmful but loving and restorative, for He corrects His adopted children in measured and faithful ways, using even painful circumstances to bring repentance, produce holiness, preserve them from greater harm, and yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness while never withdrawing His steadfast love.

Final Summary of entire study follows below

Final Summary

Adoption

1. Purpose of the Doctrine

The doctrine of **adoption** reveals the believer's new relationship with God as His child, showing the privilege, dignity, and security that accompany salvation. It explains how God not only justifies sinners but brings them into His family with full rights and blessings.

2. Key Biblical Foundations

Scripture teaches that believers are adopted as God's children through Christ (John 1:12; Gal. 4:4–7). The Spirit confirms this new relationship by enabling believers to cry, “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15–16). Adoption grants access to God, the indwelling Spirit, and the promise of future inheritance (Rom. 8:17). These passages establish adoption as a gracious act of God that transforms the believer's status and privileges.

3. How the Parts Fit Together

The study begins by defining adoption as God's legal act of receiving believers into His family. It then explains the distinction between justification and adoption, showing that justification changes our standing, while adoption changes our relationship. Further Parts explore the privileges of sonship — access to God, the Spirit's witness, and the promise of inheritance. The final sections show how adoption shapes the believer's identity, obedience, and hope. Together these Parts form a coherent doctrinal flow: God receives, God assures, God indwells, and God promises future glory.

4. Doctrinal Conclusion

Adoption is **God's gracious act of making believers His children**, granting them full rights, acceptance, and inheritance in Christ. It is rooted in God's love, secured by Christ's redemption, and confirmed by the Spirit's witness. Adoption is not partial or probationary; it is complete, permanent, and overflowing with privilege. As God's children, believers enjoy intimate access to Him and the certainty of future glory.

5. Practical Implications

This doctrine strengthens assurance, since believers relate to God as Father rather than Judge. It deepens prayer, encouraging confident access to God's presence. It shapes discipleship, motivating obedience as the grateful response of children to their Father. And it fuels hope, reminding believers that they are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, destined for the glory He has promised.

END

