

# Salvation: Children of God

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

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

[...]

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

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

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

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

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

What fuels this intimacy, this closeness available to Christ? God’s love for us. The New Testament gives us two yardsticks for measuring God’s love. The first is the Cross (see Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:8-10); the second is the gift of sonship.

What does that mean for you and I? Well, when you realize that God has taken you from the gutter, so to speak, and made you a son in his own house—you, a miraculously pardoned offender, guilty, ungrateful, defiant, perverse as you were—then your sense of God’s “love beyond degree” is more than words can express. God adopts because he chooses to. He had no duty to do so. He need not have done anything about our sins except punish us as we deserved.

But he loved us; so he redeemed us, forgave us, took us as his sons and daughters and gave himself to us as our Father.

What if God had not chosen to show us his great love? Not only would we be left where we were, and not have the intimacy with God we do have, but we would not have the great inheritance that comes with being a child of God. Being an heir, a co-heir with Christ (Romans 8:17), means that we share in the glory of Christ. Because of God graciously adopting us into his family through the work of Christ, we have a glorious inheritance that awaits us in the future (Ephesians 1:18).

We can have confidence in this, in our salvation: confidence in the truth of God's promise of pardon and life to believing sinners, and in its application to oneself as a believer. "Faith" declared Luther, "is a living deliberate confidence in the grace of God, so certain that for it one could die a thousand deaths and such confidence makes us joyous, intrepid, and cheerful towards God."

The good news: all of this extends to God's adopted children. In, through and under Jesus Christ their Lord, they are ruled, loved, accompanied with and honored by their heavenly Father. As Jesus obeyed God, so must they. As God loved his only begotten Son, so he loves his adopted sons. Adoption is the highest privilege that the gospel offers, higher even than justification.

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

### Relevant Scriptures

Galatians 4:7	<i>So you are no longer a slave, but God's child...</i>
Ephesians 2:8-9	<i>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith...</i>
1 Peter 2:24-25	<i>"He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross...</i>

### Questions for Discussion

- How does thinking of God as Father and us as his children change your perspective on Christianity?
- Which benefit of our salvation through Christ impacts you the most?
- If you haven't already, are you ready to step in to the gift of salvation by accepting God's love and grace?
- If you are already in relationship with God, how have you taken advantage of the relationship available to you with the living God?

### Recommended Reading

*Knowing God* by J. I. Packer  
*What's So Amazing About Grace?* by Philip Yancey  
*That Incredible Christian* by A.W. Tozer  
*True Spirituality* by Francis Schaeffer  
*Basic Christianity* by John Stott