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The doctrine of Adoption and its specific relevance for pastoral counseling in the area of substance addiction.

Inherent in the doctrine of Adoption is the believer's identity in Christ. Subsequent to calling, regeneration, faith/repentance, and justification, adoption by God into the family of God takes place in the life of the new believer. With Adoption come divine rights and privileges awarded to the believer. Such "sonship" involves the impartation of unconditional gifts from God and is an act of free grace bestowed by God. The realization of *whose* we are rather than what we are is what represents the great freedom that can be experienced by each believer. It is in this new identity that those caught in the spiritual bondage of substance addiction can enjoy freedom from it.

When a spiritual counselor, whether pastoral or otherwise, seeks to help someone caught in addiction, the results are often discouraging. Of paramount cause for this is syncretism. Counselors in the church are generally not well trained for substance addiction. Not knowing where to turn or what else to do, they often engage secular 12-step, disease concept theories of addiction in their counseling, or refer their client to a program practicing this recovery philosophy. The problem that this poses for the believer is that there is an attempt to blend two different forms of belief. This is syncretism.

At the heart of syncretism in this regard rests a conflict with the believer's status as adopted child of God and the identity given by the secular recovery industry. The

secular recovery industry tells those addicted that they are addicts¹ and always will be. Nothing can change this status. In fact, they espouse that failure to retain this understanding of their addicted status will most certainly result in continuing addiction, or if presently not using the substance, relapse. In other words, the recovery industry's paradigm of the addict's identity is tantamount to bondage. Hence, a believer seeking ever so desperately to be free from addiction is taught that he never can be.

Contrast this with the biblical doctrine of Adoption. God has actually predestined all the elect to the high privilege of becoming a part of His family (Eph. 1:5). Adoption is a manifestation of the depth of love the Father has for His children (1 Jn. 3:1). By Adoption, believers not only enjoy the temporal blessings that accompany sonship, but also eschatological blessings as heirs to God and co-heirs with Jesus (Rom. 8:17). Perhaps most importantly in the context presently under discussion, Adoption involves the price paid to free believers from enslavement to sin (1 Cor. 7:23, Rom. 8:15).

Knowing *whose* we are is of great comfort. The believer's adoption succeeds great works of grace that have rescued him from a dark domain and literally transferred him to the kingdom of God's Son (Col. 1:13). Failure to recognize this phenomenal truth is to be vulnerable to demonic deception. If God's child doesn't comprehend the beauty that Adoption comprises, he may come under the mistaken impression that he is still enslaved to habitual sin. But he has been set free from sin's controlling power (Rom. 6:7) and now the Spirit of God is attesting and proving his sonship within (Rom 8:16). Here we find an example of how knowing the truth makes one free.

¹ This term is intended hereafter to include alcoholics

Following is a summary of what the doctrine of Adoption means in the everyday life of every believer²:

He is Accepted

He is God's child and Christ's friend. He has been bought with a price and now belongs to God. He is united with the Lord and one spirit with Him. He is member of Christ's body and has been adopted as God's child. He has direct access to God, has been redeemed and forgiven of all sin, and is complete in Christ. Thus, he is accepted.

He is Significant

He is now salt and light, a branch of the true vine, a channel of His life. He has been chosen by God and is now a personal witness of Him. His body is God's workmanship and temple. He is seated with Christ in the heavenly realm and God's coworker on earth. He may approach God with freedom and confidence, knowing He can do all things through Christ. So, he is significant.

He is Secure

He is free forever from condemnation and assured that all things work together for his good. He cannot be separated from the love of God and has been established, sealed, and anointed by God. He can be confident that the good work God has begun in him will be perfected. He is a citizen of heaven and the evil one cannot touch him. He has not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind. And he can find grace and mercy to help in times of need. Therefore, he is secure.

Absent adoption as God's child, none of the above applies as a present experience in the life of an individual. Understanding the doctrine of Adoption holds forth the

² Adapted from Dr. Neil Anderson's summaries of Christian identity.

prospect for the believer to realize purpose, meaning, and fulfillment in life. But there is also a future aspect of Adoption. Someday, every child of God will live in a redeemed body forever free from the potentially debilitating oppression of sin and the ultimate prospect of death (Rom. 8:23). However complete in status this adoption may be, it has yet to be finally made real in the deliverance of the creation itself from bondage (Rom. 8:21ff).⁴ This ought to be a source of hope when offered to those suffering in the spiritual bondage of addiction.

Addiction is a spiritual bondage within which habitual sin takes place. It is spiritual because of sin. It is bondage because of its enslaving nature. The 12-step, disease concept model of recovery is necessarily inadequate because it imposes a status on the individual that is antithetical to the status received from God in adoption as His child. The hope of God's adopted child is the promise of sanctification, or Christlikeness. Abstention is not the goal in breaking free and remaining free from addiction. Christlikeness is the goal; it puts the believer in consonance with God's overarching plan for his life (Rom. 8:29, 1 Thes. 4:3). Among the rights and privileges freely bestowed on the believer in Adoption is the opportunity to act on freedom. Herein lies the occasion for the believer to engage in deeds of righteousness that result in Christlikeness (Rom 6:19). The more like Christ we are, the greater power of temptation and sin we have. Hence, the sanctification of the believer is assured through the active inclusion of sacrificial service to others, and it is made possible through Adoption.

³Wood, D. R. W., & I. H. Marshall. *New Bible Dictionary*. 3rd ed. / . Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996. Page 16.

To help the Christian struggling in the spiritual bondage of addiction, the first step is to guide them in an understanding of why their identity in Christ constitutes the biblical doctrine of Adoption. Reassure them with an explication of who they are in Christ as established in the Scriptures. Institute a systematic memorization plan with them on key Christian identity verses.

Secondly, comfort them with the truth about the breadth and depth of God's love revealed in His adoption of them, for the present as well as the future. They need to know that they are no longer enslaved, but are part of a new family, with a new Father, who has freed them and made them His own. Encourage them by explaining the nature and extent of the rights and privileges God has freely given them, all at no cost and with no compulsory behavioral requirement for receiving them. And lead them into the purpose for which they were created and saved, a life of fruitful service to others resulting in the glorification of God (Jn. 15).

Adoption is the evidence of the profundity of how much we mean in the heart of the God of the universe. God hasn't overlooked addiction (φαρμακεία⁵, Gal. 5:20). The biblical provisions for addiction are sufficient. And our identity in Christ by way of our adoption as his sons and daughters is the truth that makes us free.

⁵ Pharmakeia, usually translated either sorcery or witchcraft.