

CONTINENTAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

**THE ADOPTION AS SONS AND DAUGHTERS INTO THE FATHERHOOD
OF GOD AS DESCRIBED IN THE PAULINE ADOPTION METAPHOR AND
ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR PASTORAL MINISTRY**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE THESIS COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF THEOLOGY**

**BY
WILLEM BIESHEUVEL**

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

15 FEBRUARY 2023

Declaration and Statements

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed W.J. Biesheuvel

Date 15-02-2023

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This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).

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Title of Thesis	<i>The adoption as sons and daughters into the Fatherhood of God as described in the Pauline adoption metaphor and its implications for pastoral ministry</i>

Summary:

This thesis contains a study on the Fatherhood of God by looking at the Pauline adoption metaphor. A study on the Fatherhood of God in the Old and New Testament will be done as well as a detailed exegesis of the Pauline adoption metaphor in Romans 8:14-17. We will look at the adoption metaphor within its Greco-Roman background and the legal practice of adoption as well as with its Old Testament background in the theme of sonship. After the exegesis and a description of Paul's theology of the adoption metaphor, we will look at the implications for the believer. The adoption of the believer into the Fatherhood of God contains principles and implications that are of great value for the believer and pastoral ministry. The implications of the adoption metaphor will be described in terms of identity related, spiritual, moral and ethical, and service related implications. The adoption metaphor contains principles and implications that can be related to emotional problems like anxiety, low self-worth, rejection, depression, and identity problems. The adoption metaphor contains implications for the identity and self-worth of the believer as well as implications for one's meaning in life and mental health. It also contains implications that can motivate and help believers overcome anxiety and bondages. The Father's love and acceptance speaks as nothing else to the core issue beneath our emotional struggles. A deeper relation with God as Father and a deeper understanding of the believer's identity can result in emotional healing and personal growth

Statement of Word Count

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FOREWORD

This Master thesis has been written for the completion of my study theology at Continental Theological Seminary in Brussel. With a grateful heart I look back at my study and time at Continental Theological Seminary. It has been a blessing to study at CTS and connect with fellow students and members of the faculty of CTS. In this foreword I would like to thank the faculty of CTS. I would like to thank my supervisor Ralf Lubs for his encouragement, his time and useful insights and advice. I also want to express thanks to my father Hans Biesheuvel who greatly helped me in proof reading and structuring my thesis. I also want to thank my dear wife Jedidja for standing behind me all the way, from the beginning of my study until this last completion with my thesis. Finally, I want to give thanks to God the Father, for granting me the possibility to have followed this study and the privilege to have studied this very interesting topic. It is my prayer that this research will be of use and a blessing to those who read it.

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INTRODUCTION

Within the letters of Paul, we find a special emphasis on the adoption of the believer as son or daughter into the Fatherhood of God.

In this thesis, I will explain that the Pauline adoption metaphor contains valuable principles and implications for the believer and pastoral ministry. The adoption of the believer into the Fatherhood of God instills a deep feeling of self-worth, a sense of belonging, identity, and confidence within the heart of the believer. The adoption into the Fatherhood of God empowers the believer to overcome fear and bondages. The adoption of the believer into the Fatherhood of God contains principles and implications that are helpful for emotional problems like anxiety, depression, and identity problems.

The first two chapters contain a description of the Fatherhood of God in the Old and the New Testament. Special emphasis is given to the theme of sonship within the Old Testament and the revelation of the Fatherhood of God through Jesus in the New Testament.

In Chapter three and four an exegesis is done on the Pauline adoption metaphor in Romans 8:14-17 and a description is given on the theology and usage of the adoption metaphor in Paul's writings.

Chapter five to seven contain principles and implications of the adoption metaphor for the believer as well as for pastoral ministry. The principles that come forth out of the adoption metaphor can be summarized in the following themes; being loved, belonging, overcoming fear and bondage, honouring God, and having a goal

and purpose in life. These principles can be translated in identity-related, spiritual, moral and ethical, and service-related implications that are relevant for believers as well as for pastoral ministry.

In the last chapter, a conclusion is drawn on the adoption metaphor and suggestions are given for important further research.

CHAPTER 1: FATHERHOOD OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In this first chapter, a description is given of the Fatherhood of God in the Old Testament. One of the ways in which the Fatherhood of God can be recognized in the Old Testament is through the usage of parental metaphors. Another way in which the Fatherhood of God in the Old Testament can be recognized is through the usage of Father-son or sonship language between God and His people. We will also describe the theme of sonship within the Old Testament and explain how the Fatherhood of God can be recognized through this theme.

The Fatherhood of God in the Old Testament

McCasland explains that the Old Testament writers in time came to think of God as Father of the Hebrew people, and so in a derived sense of individual Hebrews.¹

Father in Hebrew

The Hebrew word to describe God as a Father in the Old Testament is the word אב meaning *father*. The word אב refers to someone's physical male parent. Figuratively, the word אב is also used for a grandfather, a first ancestor (Gn.17:4), or a founder of a nation (Gn.17:5). The word אב is also used to describe God as Father, both for individuals as well as for Israel as a nation. The word אב is related to His role as Creator (Dt.32:6), Redeemer (Is.63:16), and Father (Jer 31:9). The word אב is also

¹ S.V. McCasland, "Abba, Father," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 72, no. 2 (1953): 83.

applied to a bringer up, a nourisher, a master or teacher. Furthermore, it is used to express intimate connection and relationship.²

Parental metaphors

Although not as frequently as in the New Testament, the word *father* is used by some Old Testament writers to refer to the God of Israel.³ One of the ways how we can see the Fatherhood of God in the Old Testament is through the use of parental metaphors. The description of God as Father in the Old Testament is related to God's love for Israel and God's responsibility to instruct, form, and guide the Israelites.⁴ Bowes explains that to view God as Father in the Old Testament was primarily related to His enduring relational commitment; to His role as Authority, Creator, Protector, Teacher, and Redeemer; to His qualities as trustworthy, patient, loving, concerned and merciful; and to Israel's responsibility and obligations to Him.⁵

These parental metaphors helped the Israelites to understand God in personal terms. Koesler notes, "God Himself employed this metaphor when He commanded Pharaoh to release the Israelites from their slavery. He described Israel as "My son" and "My firstborn son" (Exodus 4:22-23).⁶

Father carries His people

Koesler explains that the Father metaphor was used in the Old Testament to illustrate God's nurturing character. One of the things the Fatherhood of God in the Old

² W. Gesenius and S. Prideaux Tregelles, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*. (Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, 2003), 2.

³ J.M. Koessler, *God our Father* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 1999), 16.

⁴ W.B. Bowes, "The Fatherhood of God in Scripture: Theology, Gendered Language, Points of Reference, and Implications." *Puritan Reformed Journal* 12, no. 2 (2020): 22.

⁵ Bowes, "The Fatherhood of God in Scripture:" 22.

⁶ Koessler, *God our Father*, 17.

Testament contains is that God carries His children. God carries His people from the cradle to the grave and His people can trust Him for their future.⁷

Father disciplines His people

Another aspect of what the metaphor of the Fatherhood of God contains is that He disciplines His people. For example, in Deuteronomy 8:5 we see how God describes Himself as a man who disciplines his son. Besides the negative side of reproof and rebuking, the verb ‘discipline’ also has a positive side and describes the nurturing and affective aspects of the relationship. Burke notes on this, “God’s disciplinary actions were always carried out in love and were for the building and strengthening of the character of his son.”⁸ Wright explains that the word ‘discipline’ is very positive and does not simply mean punishment. Wright notes, “Rather it means the necessary strictness, constraints, limitations and rigor that are essential for any kind of effective learning.”⁹

Father has compassion for His people

A third aspect that can be seen in the Fatherhood of God in the Old Testament is that He has compassion for His people. Because of His compassion for His children, He Himself carries their sorrows and sins, He forgives and carries their shame. God understands our human limitations just like any good father understands his children’s vulnerability.¹⁰ Bowes explains that the Father imagery in the Old Testament is both compassionate and disciplinary. As an example, he takes Jeremiah

⁷ C.J.H Wright, *Knowing God the Father through the Old Testament* (Westmont, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2007), 25.

⁸ T.J. Burke, *The message of sonship* (Nottingham: Inter Varsity Press, 2011), 60

⁹ Wright, *Knowing God the Father*, 28.

¹⁰ Wright, *Knowing God the Father*, 31.

31 where God leads the people by the hand as a father would lead a child out of a dangerous situation.¹¹

Father adopts His people

A final aspect of what the Fatherhood of God contains is found in the relational aspect of adoption. Frymer-Kensky explains how the relationship between God and David is described through the metaphor of adoption to create understandable connotations of love, tolerance, forgiveness, accountability, and discipline.¹² In the Old Testament we find examples of adoption metaphors showing God's care for widows, orphans and the weak and vulnerable in human society (Psalm 68:6). Wright notes, "God, as Father, takes over where human fatherhood fails for one reason or another. God is the Father whose protection will never be withdrawn, whose commitment will outlast all earthly fatherhood."¹³

Considerations

Although God is known as Father in the Old Testament, the title Father is not often expressed in worship, and addressing God as 'my Father' is only found 3 times in the Old Testament. However, we recognize God as Father in His acts and the parental metaphors found in the Old Testament. Van Gemeren notes, "Yahweh is Father in his acts of electing, providing, redeeming, compassion, protecting his people, restoring broken relationships with Israel and special covenantal relationship with David and

¹¹ Bowes, "The Fatherhood of God in Scripture:" 22.

¹² T.S. Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 162.

¹³ Wright, *Knowing God the Father*, 39.

his descendants.”¹⁴ Wright explains that the Israelites were reticent with the concept of Yahweh as Father at one level (in worship), while quite free with it at another level (in personal names).¹⁵ The reason the Israelites were reticent to address God as Father in worship was to avoid similarity with mythological notions of divine parenthood that were common in surrounding religions.¹⁶ However, at the level of personal names we see how the view of God as Father lived among the people of Israel. The Hebrew word for father *ab* was often combined in a personal name with the Hebrew word for God *el*. The combination of these two words in a name becomes a statement about God as Father, or as “my Father”. The name Joab, for example, meant ‘Yahweh is my Father’ and the name Eliab means ‘My God is Father’.¹⁷ Wright notes, “So even if the term was not on the lips of Israelites in regular worship, it was on their lips in everyday speech as they used their own common names.”¹⁸

Sonship within the Old Testament

Another major aspect through which the Fatherhood of God in the Old Testament also can be seen is through the theme of sonship. On several places and occasions in the Old Testament, we find examples of sonship language between God’s people and Yahweh as Father. One of the ways the Fatherhood of God is recognized in the Old Testament is through the metaphorical use of sonship language between God as Father and his people as ‘children or sons’. Sonship is a dominant theme within

¹⁴ W.A. van Gemeren, “Abba in the Old Testament,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31, no. 4 (1988): 392.

¹⁵ Wright, *Knowing God the Father*, 15.

¹⁶ Wright, *Knowing God the Father*, 16.

¹⁷ Koessler, *God our Father*, 17.

¹⁸ Wright, *Knowing God the Father*, 16.

Scripture which starts in Genesis when Adam is identified as ‘son of God’ (Luke 3:38) and ends in Revelation where the people of God are described as His ‘son’ (Rev.21:7). Burke explains how the theme of sonship runs throughout the whole Scripture and follows an Adam-Israel-David-Christ-Christians trajectory.¹⁹

Adam as son of God

An often overlooked fact about Adam, the first man, is that he was called ‘son of God’ (Luke 3:38). Adam’s sonship has been usually understood solely in creaturely terms, a sonship which all people share by virtue of being born into the human race.²⁰ However, Burke argues that more is intended with the sonship of Adam in that Adam was made in the image of God. Ferguson notes on this “to be a son, in the language of Genesis was to be made in the image and likeness of one’s father.”²¹ We can see that sonship and likeness are tightly linked together. Within the sonship of Adam, we also see the importance of obedience to the Father. At the fall in Genesis 3, we see how Adam fails to live in obedience and how he loses his sonship relation with God. Christ on the contrary, as the Second Adam, lived in perfect obedience to His Father.

Israel as firstborn son of God

In Exod.4:22 we see the first description of Israel’s sonship to God where Israel is described as ‘Israel is My firstborn son’. A firstborn son enjoyed an elevated status within the household as a person of honor, which brought accompanying

¹⁹ Burke, *The message of sonship*, 23.

²⁰ Burke, *The message of sonship*, 23.

²¹ S.B. Ferguson, *Children of the Living God* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1989), 6.

responsibilities and privileges to ensure the family name was not brought into disrepute. A firstborn son was also consecrated to God and belonged to Him (Ex.13:2).

Firstborn son is delivered by God

Within the sonship of Israel, we can see how God delivers His Son Israel from the bondage of Egypt. Dunn explains that Israel's salvation is to be found in nothing in themselves and in nothing in what they were doing or could do as a slave people. But solely came from the grace of God.²² The sonship of Israel shows us that there is an inseparable link between sonship and salvation.²³ In Exodus 4:23 we see that Yahweh through Moses commands pharaoh to let His firstborn son Israel go. We see a Sovereign Father who intervenes on behalf of his son.

Firstborn son is called to serve

Bound up with the notion of the firstborn son (Ex.4:22) is the fact that a father has the right to expect that his firstborn son will work with him and for him, and eventually accept responsibility for the house and the fields or flocks, and if necessary responsibility for his father and mother and other family members who cannot look after themselves.²⁴ Perdue explains that the desired outcome of God's intervention and deliverance out of Egypt is that Israel serves Him. Israel is taken out of the slavery and control of the pharaoh by Yahweh and is established in a new household in which God is their Father.²⁵

²² J.D.G. Dunn, *New Testament Theology: An Introduction* (Louisville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 76.

²³ J.A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus* (Leicester: IVP, 2005), 91.

²⁴ J. Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology, vol.1, Israel's Gospel* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 320.

²⁵ L.G. Perdue et al, eds., *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 229.

There is a linkage between the theme of sonship and service. Israel, God's firstborn son, is also called His servant in Isaiah 41:8. Within the Bible we find examples of both Israel collectively as well as individuals called servant. In Gesenius' lexicon of the Old Testament, we can see that the Hebrew word for servant (עֶבְדֹּד) can refer to both individuals as well as groups of people. The word is often used in prayer and to describe one's relation to Yahweh. The word is used to describe servants/ministers of a king. In the psalms and the life of David, we can see how it is used to refer to worshippers of God. From a moral perspective, the word servant frequently refers to godly people. The word is also used to describe a minister or ambassador of God. Someone who is an intimate friend of God and, aided by the Spirit, is sent by God for accomplishing some service.²⁶ To conclude, we see that the Hebrew word for servant contains a lot of information about what it means to serve God as a firstborn son.

Firstborn son matures and is carried by God

After being delivered from Egypt, Israel as God's firstborn son needs to grow up and mature and is heading home to his inheritance, the promised land. Before entering the promised land Israel first wanders for 40 years in the desert. Deuteronomy 1:31 describes how God carried Israel in the desert, like a father carries his son. In the period in the desert, Israel needs to grow and mature in character before entering into his inheritance, the land of Canaan. God took care of Israel in the desert as a father takes care for his son. When Israel lacked the strength to go any further Yahweh picked up his son and carried him in his arms. "You saw how the Lord your God

²⁶ Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee lexicon*, 599.

carried you, as a father carries a son, all the way you went until you reached this place” (Deut. 1:31, NASB). The picture portrayed here of the Fatherhood of God is one of intimacy, constancy, and care. Burke notes, “God’s covenant loyalty, presence, and attentiveness to his fledging child Israel never failed nor was it ever in doubt.”²⁷

Firstborn son receives inheritance

The verse in Deuteronomy 1:31 also shows a relationship between sonship and inheritance. The “place” where Yahweh carries Israel to is the promised land, the land of Canaan. The expression “all the way” describes how God is patient and keeps His covenant and promise even in the face of the faithlessness of His son Israel.²⁸

Firstborn son called to live holy for God

In Deuteronomy 14:1-2 we see how sonship language is used to remind the Israelites of their filial status and responsibility to live as holy people who honor God. In this passage, Israel is described in the plural form of God’s children. Wright notes, “When the Israelites are described in the plural as God’s children the emphasis tends to be what is expected of children, namely, obedience and loyalty.”²⁹ Brueggemann explains that the word order in the original language underscores and accentuates the responsibility upon the sons and daughters of God, an accountability that ‘includes...rigorous expectations for conduct’.³⁰

²⁷ Burke, *The message of sonship*, 57.

²⁸ Burke, *The message of sonship*, 58.

²⁹ C.J.H. Wright, *Deuteronomy* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 185.

³⁰ W. Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 156.

Firstborn son returns from exile

Within the Old Testament, we see how the people of Israel eventually were sent into exile because of their disobedience and how they also returned to Yahweh. In Hosea 11:1-11 we find the homecoming of Israel as a son to Yahweh. In Hosea 11 we see how Israel, having been in exile, as a prodigal son is now ready to return home to Yahweh. The passage contains a description of the past (v.1-4), the present (v.5-9), and the future (v.10-11). In the first verses a description is given of God's love for His son, how God called His son and taught His son to walk, and how He healed His son.³¹ The description of how God healed His son could also refer to forgiveness and the restoration of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. If this is where the description of healing refers to it describes another necessary parental responsibility in this context, namely, forgiveness.³² However, the people of Israel responded by going astray from Him and not only they went away from Him but they also offered sacrifices to the Baals. As a result, Israel was sent into exile which describes their present situation.

In a way, Israel is going back to Egypt, but now under the rulership of Assyria. However, in Hosea, we see how God, like a parent, is deeply moved over His son Israel. Ferguson explains how the book of Hosea describes God's wounded majesty and wounded love for His child Israel.³³ Though the Israelites had repeatedly broken the covenant, the relationship of sonship, though twisted, had never been entirely broken.

In verses 10 and 11, we read how the period of discipline is coming to an end and how the people of Israel are coming back to Yahweh. The behavior of the nation

³¹ T.J. Burke, *The message of sonship*, 74.

³² J.A. Dearman, *The Book of Hosea* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 282.

³³ Ferguson, *Children of the living God*, 11-12.

is changed and Israel wishes to follow the Lord and come home.³⁴ Burke puts it nicely by writing “for the same language of sonship with which God had entered into covenant with the nation of Israel is brought into service again with a fresh enactment of grace as God calls his prodigal son back home.”³⁵

David as son of God

The sonship theme on an individual level can be found in king David and his dynastic promise in 2 Sam.7:11-16. Filially speaking, verse 14 is the ‘most significant’ verse. This is the first time the filial relationship with God is applied individually to David, as king. David, in his role as king represents his people, in some Jewish thought the Davidic king represents Israel, so what is true of him is true of the people.³⁶ This passage also shows how God will discipline his son (v.14) and how the son will be forever loved (v.15-16).

These verses describe how the Davidic covenant and the filial promise to David are unconditional and grounded in Yahweh’s covenantal *hesed* love.

In response to the dynastical promise, David honors God with reverence and praise and speaks of himself as a servant of God. And as a servant he wants more than anything for God to both establish the promise (2 Sam.7:25) and also bless his house (2 Sam.7:29).

³⁴ T.J. Burke, *The message of sonship* (Nottingham: Inter Varsity Press, 2011), 92

³⁵ T.J. Burke, *The message of sonship* (Nottingham: Inter Varsity Press, 2011), 95

³⁶ L.E. Keck, *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes, Volume 10*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 146

Conclusion

Within this chapter, we have seen how the Fatherhood of God can be seen within the Old Testament. Particularly noteworthy aspects are:

1. Father takes care of His people from start to finish.
2. Father disciplines and nurtures His people.
3. Father has compassion for His people.
4. Father adopts His people into His household.

Although God is rarely directly addressed as Father within the Old Testament, the above-described aspects and the parental metaphors give a convincing image of the Fatherhood of God.

Another way through which the Fatherhood of God can also be recognized is through the sonship theme in the Old Testament. Within the sonship theme, we can recognize what God as Father does for His people as well as what God as Father desires from His son. Within the sonship theme, we see that a firstborn son belongs to God and is created in the image of God. A firstborn son is called to serve and live a life of holiness. Finally, the Father desires that His son lives in obedience to Him and returns to Him when gone astray. God as Father delivers and saves His son through His sovereign hand and strength. Like a father, He carries his son when he is tired or weary and like a father, He nurtures and raises His son.

CHAPTER 2: FATHERHOOD OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament, we can see a continuation as well as a further revelation of the concept of the Fatherhood of God. We can see how God is addressed more frequently and more directly as Father in prayer and worship. Within the gospels, we see how Jesus addresses God with the intimate expression *Abba*. Through His life and His unique and glorious Father-Son relationship, Jesus brought a further revelation of the Fatherhood of God. Within the epistles, we see how the concept of the Fatherhood of God is further developed by Paul and others like James and the author of Hebrews.

The revelation of the Faterhood of God through Jesus

There is a tendency among some commentators to neglect the contribution Jesus made in revealing God as Father and a tendency among others to over-emphasize this and to argue for a distinction rather than a continuation of the Old Testament. Within the gospel of John, we can see that Jesus came to explain, to declare, or to unfold (*exēgeomai*) the Father. “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.” (John.1:18 NASB). Bowes explains that Jesus’s intention was not only to reveal God Himself, but something about God best encapsulated in the word “Father” both in divine nature and Person.³⁷ Koesler explains that Jesus was the embodied revelation of the Father. Koesler notes,

³⁷ Bowes, “The Fatherhood of God in Scripture:” 27.

“So much so, in fact, that He could say: “Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Joh. 14:9).³⁸

Increased frequency of addressing God as Father

One of the first things we can see when looking at the Fatherhood of God in the New Testament is an increase in the frequency of addressing God as Father. Within the gospel of John we find more than 100 occasions where Jesus speaks about God as His Father. Within almost every book of the New Testament God is referred to as Father.³⁹ The Greek words that Jesus used for Father are *Pater* and the Aramaic expression *Abba*. Most of the time God as Father in the New Testament is described with the Greek word *Pater*

Father as *Paterfamilias*

Within the New Testament we find 151 examples of the word *pater* to describe the Fatherhood of God.⁴⁰ McLaurin explains that the word *pater* refers to someone’s immediate father in a family relationship and in some cases to both parents (e.g., Heb 11:23). It can also refer to a common ancestor in the distant past like for example Abraham who was identified by Paul as the father of the Jews.⁴¹ Within the Greek world the word *pater* described the father of a family. The father of a family or *paterfamilias* in the Greek and Roman world had a supreme and absolute role within the family. Within the Graeco Roman ancient culture the *paterfamilias* exercised

³⁸ Koessler, *God our Father*, 19.

³⁹ Bowes, “The Fatherhood of God in Scripture:” 22.

⁴⁰ McCasland, “Abba, Father,” 83.

⁴¹ D. Mangum ed., *Lexham Theological Wordbook* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2014)

supreme control, authority, and power over his household.⁴² Thompson explains that culturally speaking in Jesus's time a father would have been understood as the head: the ancestor who gives life and inheritance, the one who loves and cares for his children, and the figure of authority, worthy of obedience and honor.⁴³

Father as expression of intimacy and respect: *Abba*

Another word to describe God as Father in the New Testament is the word *Abba*. The word *Abba* only occurs three times in the New Testament (Rom.8:15, Mark 14:36 and Galatians 4:6). Thayer explains that the Aramaic expression *Abba* came into 'New Testament Greek' through frequent use in prayer. Thayer notes, "it gradually acquired the nature of a most sacred proper name, to which the Greek-speaking Jews added the appellative from their own tongue."⁴⁴ In his article, McCasland explains that the word *Abba* means 'my father' and was a familiar word among Aramaic speaking Jews.⁴⁵ The term *Abba* has often been compared to the word 'Daddy'. However, James Barr and others, pointed out that it is probably better to understand it as an emphatic form that meant either "my father" or "the father".⁴⁶ Most likely the word was an expression of intimacy, used by children first as infants and later as children.⁴⁷ Burke explains that the term 'daddy' would be overly sentimental, especially when we look at Jesus' expression of *Abba* in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark.14:36). Burke notes, "Here the translation 'Daddy' would be overly sentimental, as it would fail to reflect

⁴² T.J. Burke, *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline metaphor* (Westmont, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2006), 88.

⁴³ M.M. Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 18.

⁴⁴ J. Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1889), 1

⁴⁵ McCasland, "Abba, Father," 83.

⁴⁶ Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 94.

⁴⁷ Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 94.

adequately the sense of reverence or respect and would not take into consideration the sense of occasion as the cross loomed before Jesus – a time when he needed to exercise trust in God as *Abba* as He had never done before.”⁴⁸ Witherington and Ice suggest that perhaps ‘dearest Father’ would be a good translation for the term *Abba*.⁴⁹ The word *Abba* was a familial term that was used within the context of an Aramaic household.

Considerations on *Abba* and revelation of the Fatherhood of God

There is discussion among scholars as to what extent the revelation of God as *Abba* is new in comparison with the Old Testament. Jeremias argues that Jesus came to reveal the Father in a new manner. Jeremias explains that *Abba* signifies the new manner by which one can now turn to God in prayer with simplicity, intimacy, and security.⁵⁰ Jeremias argues that the term *Abba* was new and that the Jews were not familiar to address God in prayer through this familial term. Jeremias notes, “It was a familial term that was too familiar a form of expression in speaking of or to a deity.”⁵¹ Therefore *Abba* was considered “disrespectful.”⁵² In conclusion, Jeremias argues that Palestinian Judaism showed a reluctance in using the term *Abba* as a form of address in prayers.

However, van Gemeren in response to Jeremias argues that Jesus’ teaching about the Father is not a completely new revelation but conforms to the OT. Van Gemeren argues that the contribution of Jesus does not lie in the newness of His

⁴⁸ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 88.

⁴⁹ B. Witherington and L.M. Ice, *The Shadow of the Almighty: Father, Son and Holy Spirit in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 25.

⁵⁰ J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 97.

⁵¹ Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 60.

⁵² Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 60.

revelation but in restoring and intensifying the view of God as *Abba*. Van Gemeren argues that Jesus' intensified the revelation of God as *Abba* through living among us and teaching us about the uniqueness and the glory of our relationship with our heavenly Father.⁵³

Koesler, argues that Jesus raised the Biblical concept of God as Father to an entirely new level by exhibiting an unparalleled degree of intimacy in His personal prayer life.⁵⁴ Koesler explains that when Jesus addressed God as Father, He did so using the term *Abba* (Mark 14:36). A term that was so intimate that it was normally used by members of one's immediate family. In particular, it was a familiar term used by children.⁵⁵ I would argue that the expression *Abba* introduced a new intimacy with God as Father which Jesus revealed through His unique Father-Son relationship. More than the term *Abba* itself it was through the unique and glorious relationship of Jesus with the Father that a further revelation on the Fatherhood was brought.

Continuation and further revelation of the Fatherhood of God

I would argue that the Fatherhood of God in the New Testament is both a continuation from the Old Testament as well as a further revelation of the Fatherhood of God. Within the Old Testament, the metaphor of human fatherhood is used frequently to describe the Fatherhood of God.

Besides the continuation, we also see a further revelation of God as Father through the Sonship and life of Jesus. Within the gospels, we can recognize this through the frequency in which Jesus speaks about His Father. Besides the increase in frequency, we can also recognize a new manner in addressing the Father, which can

⁵³ Gemeren, "Abba in the Old Testament," 397.

⁵⁴ Koessler, *God our Father*, 18.

⁵⁵ Koessler, *God our Father*, 18.

especially be recognized through the familiar and intimate expression of *Abba*. Not only did Jesus show His unique Son-Father relation to His disciples but he also brought them into this relationship with the Father. Through Jesus, the disciples could now turn to God in prayer with simplicity, intimacy and security.⁵⁶

The Fatherhood of God in the New Testament

Throughout the different books of the New Testament, several aspects of the Fatherhood of God can be found. Within the gospels, the Fatherhood of God can be seen through the life of Jesus. The Fatherhood of God can be seen in His teachings, His works, and His unique Son-Father relationship.

The Fatherhood of God within the gospels

Through the teachings of Jesus we see that the Father loves His children (Joh.3:16), provides for His children (Matt.6:25,26), and is deeply and intimately aware of their circumstances (Matt.10:29). We also see the willingness of God to respond as a Father to our prayers and petitions (Matt.7:9-11). Through His life and His works, Jesus demonstrated the above-described attributes of the Father. Through the healings of Jesus, the love and willingness of the Father is seen to respond to the petitions and needs of people. Through Jesus visiting Zacchaeus and the Samaritan woman we see how the Father is aware of the circumstances of people. Through the feeding of the five thousand, we see the provision of God as Father. Another important parental responsibility that can be seen through the life of Jesus is forgiveness. Through Jesus, we can see that God is a Father who is willing to forgive. Another aspect that can be

⁵⁶ Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 97.

seen through Jesus about the Father is His holiness. Jesus came to give His life as a sacrifice to provide the forgiveness which was necessary to restore the relationship between mankind and the Father. Besides the description of the Fatherhood of God in the gospels, we see how this theme is further developed and described within the epistles. Within the book of James we find a description of the Fatherhood of God in relation Him being the Creator and Defender to the poor and underprivileged.

Father as Creator and Defender for the poor and underprivileged

A first aspect that can be found in the book of James is the description of the Father as ‘the Father of lights’ (Jam.1:17). This refers to God as the Creator of the heavenly lights. Another aspect that can be seen in this verse is the Father’s capacity to give good gifts to mankind, also including the gift of ‘life’. Verses 17 and 18 do not only refer to life in general but also to God’s Fatherhood in Christ and to God’s begetting children in a spiritual sense.⁵⁷

What stands out, especially in the book of James is the relation between the Fatherhood language and the poor and underprivileged (Jam.1:27).⁵⁸ God is a Father in caring for widows and orphans. Within James 1:27 we can also recognize the Creatorship of God and His care for His creation, in this verse especially His care for orphans and widows. Another aspect of this verse is that the Father desires that His children live in holiness and in a manner that brings glory to Him.

In James 3:9 we recognize again the Creatorship of God the Father who created mankind in His likeness. Just like in James 1:27 we can recognize the aspect of God as a Father defending and protecting His created people.

⁵⁷ Y.L. Esther, “Father-God Language and Old Testament Allusions in James” *Tyndale Bulletin* 54, no.2 (2003): 41.

⁵⁸ Esther, “Father-God Language,” 52.

Within the book of James, we can see God's Creatorship of human beings in general and His Fatherhood in connection with redemption for believers in Christ. Noteworthy to mention is the fact that rather than promoting an overbearing patriarchy the Fatherhood language in James is used to uphold and defend the rights of the underprivileged.⁵⁹

A Father intimately involved in training and disciplining His Children

In the book of Hebrews, God is portrayed as powerful, intimately involved with his children, and generous. He is One who calls, One who listens, One who rewards, and One who disciplines.⁶⁰ Especially in Hebrews 12:4-17 we can see how God as a Father trains and disciplines His children and encourages them to endure in the midst of hardship and suffering. We see that the discipline of the Father comes out of love (Hebr.12:6) and is for the good (Hebr.12:10) of the believer. Burke explains that the good discipline of God must be understood as evidence of the Father's love for us as His children.⁶¹ There is some debate on how to interpret the Greek word for discipline *paideia* and whether it should be understood as punitive or non-punitive.

The semantic range of this word includes non punitive training and learning as well as punitive correction to disobedience. Croy argues in his book *Endurance in suffering* that the athletic imagery in Hebrews 12 and the Greco-Roman context confirms that mostly educational and moral education is in view.⁶² Especially with regards to suffering and trials this is an appropriate explanation of *paideia* which helps the believer to endure. However, I would not argue for the word *paideia* in Hebrews

⁵⁹ Esther, "Father-God Language," 52.

⁶⁰ A. Peeler, "The Ethos of God in Hebrews." *Perspectives in Religions Studies* 37, (2010): 51.

⁶¹ Burke, *The message of sonship*, 205.

⁶² N.C. Croy, *Endurance in suffering: Hebrews 12:1-13 in its rhetorical, religious, and philosophical context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 35-36.

12 to refer only to educational and moral education. I agree with Spellman that the concept of discipline can be employed as a means of correction for disobedience and also as a means of educational and moral training.⁶³

Father as Father of the family

Within the epistles of Paul we see how the Fatherhood of God is further described in its relation to the church as a household of God. The epistles of Paul have about forty references to God as Father, and these are to God as “the Father” rather than “my Father” and often occur in prayer texts.⁶⁴ Paul’s understanding of God as Father has a communal focus, he uses Fatherhood language to explain the idea that Christ-followers are in a familial relationship with God as the Father of that family.⁶⁵

Mengestu explains that Paul uses this Kinship language (father, brothers, sisters, household, children, sons and daughters) with the purpose to form the identity of the early Christians, both individually as well as their collective identity. Paul refers to God as the Father of Christ’s followers in all his letters. He refers to Christ’s followers as children of God and as siblings of each other. In doing so, Paul describes the emerging community of believers in terms of relationships that emphasize a sense of sharing. Distinctive about Paul’s usage of Fatherhood language is his theological concept of adoption as described in texts such as Galatians 4 and Romans 8.⁶⁶

⁶³ C. Spellman, “The Drama of Discipline: toward and intertextual profile of *paideia* in Hebrews 12” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59, no.3 (2016): 490.

⁶⁴ Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 118-120.

⁶⁵ A. Mengestu, *God as Father in Paul* (Eugene: Oregon, 2013), 163.

⁶⁶ J.S. Lidgett, *The Fatherhood of God in Christian Truth and Life* (London: T&T Clark, 1902), 19.

Comparison of the Fatherhood of God in the Old and New Testament

If we compare the Fatherhood of God in the New Testament with the Old Testament we can see a continuation and a further revelation of the Fatherhood of God. In comparison with the Old Testament, we can find a large number of direct references to God as Father within the New Testament.

A marking extension of the Fatherhood of God in the New Testament is the intimacy in which the Father is now revealed through the unique Sonship relation of Jesus. One of the ways this intimate relationship of Jesus with the Father can be seen is through His address of God as *Abba* Father (Mark 14:36). Bowes explains that Jesus generally did not refer to God “the Father” but as “my Father”.⁶⁷ When Jesus spoke about the Father to his disciples he referred to the Father as “your Father”.⁶⁸ Through Jesus the disciples could also receive this intimate relationship with the Father. Koesler notes, “The disciples’ relationship to Jesus not only enabled them to learn about the person of the Father, but ushered them into an intimate relationship with Him.”⁶⁹ Through the Holy Spirit the believer receives access to the knowledge and experience of God as Father. Through the Holy Spirit, the believer can now also experience an intimate relationship with the Father and address God as *Abba* Father.

⁶⁷ Bowes, “The Fatherhood of God,” 23.

⁶⁸ Bowes, “The Fatherhood of God,” 23.

⁶⁹ Koessler, *God our Father*, 19.

CHAPTER 3: EXEGESIS ADOPTION METAPHOR IN ROMANS 8:14-17

In this chapter, we will conduct an exegetical study on Romans 8:14-17. Before going into the exegesis of Romans 8:14-17 we will first give a general introduction on the letter to the Romans and the main idea of Romans chapter 8.

The letter to the Romans

The letter to the Romans is Paul's longest and most influential letter. The letter is an exposition of the gospel of Christ and is full of theological doctrine. The letter of the Romans can be seen as a theological treatise, a summary of Christian teaching and doctrine. Although the letter to the Romans contains many theological doctrine it is important to understand that the letter is situational and written for a number of reasons to the church in Rome.

Jews expelled from Rome

The Christian community in Rome probably originated from the event of Pentecost in 30/31 AD. Visitors from Rome, both Jews, and proselytes, took the gospel from Jerusalem back to Rome. The church existed of both Jewish and Roman believers, although, in time, the majority of the church members were probably gentile believers. When reading Romans, we get the impression that the church is

factionalized across ethnic lines.⁷⁰ Bird explains that the Roman church probably, in time, developed to a Gentile majority. One of the reasons for this development within the church in Rome is the emperorship of Claudius. In AD 49 Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because they were constantly rioting about a certain figure called “Chrestus”, the Latin expression for “Christ”. There is debate as to how many of the Jews were actually expelled from Rome. Keener explains that it is likely that a substantial number of Jewish Christians, and perhaps all their leaders, left Rome at this point.⁷¹ This expulsion in AD 49 and later the return of the Jews in AD 54, after the emperorship of Claudius, impacted the churches in Rome.

Most likely the letter to the churches in Rome has been written after the emperorship of Claudius in AD 54 and before Paul’s arrival in Rome in AD 59/60. The writing of Romans can be dated in AD 56/57 when Paul arrived in Greece (Acts 20:22).⁷²

Bringing unity among Jews and Gentiles

There are several reasons why Romans was written. One of the reasons is the multicultural context of Rome which provided a great opportunity for Paul to present the gospel of Christ and to show how it is valid both for Jews and Gentiles. Another important reason, on which many scholars agree, is to strengthen and unify the Gentile and Jewish believers. Thielman notes, “the letter is designed primarily to strengthen and unify Roman Christians in all their diversity.”⁷³ The expulsion and the

⁷⁰ M. Bird, *Romans*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 2016), Section: Romans 8:1-17, <https://www.perlego.com/book/560699/romans-pdf>.

⁷¹ G. Keener, *Romans*. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), Section: Romans 8, <https://www.perlego.com/book/879084/romans-pdf>.

⁷² F. Thielman, *Romans*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2018), Section: Romans 8, <https://www.perlego.com/book/581251/romans-pdf>.

⁷³ Thielman, *Romans*, Section: Romans 8, <https://www.perlego.com/book/581251/romans-pdf>.

return of Jewish Christians from and to Rome created internal tensions over the Jewish law and leadership over the churches in Rome.⁷⁴ Paul wrote Romans to address some important points to bring unity and to effect reconciliation between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Other reasons why Romans was written were to ask the Roman church to support Paul's mission to spread the gospel to Spain and to ask for practical support for the poverty-stricken Jewish Christians in need in Jerusalem.⁷⁵ The letter's central theme is the gospel that is the same for Jew and Gentile alike, a gospel emphasizing dependence on God's initiative rather than weak human power (1:16–17).⁷⁶

Spirit of adoption in Romans 8

Romans chapter 8 is part of a bigger section that starts in chapter 5 where Paul speaks about justification by faith and peace with God as a result. This section in Romans 8:1-17 is largely about the work of the Spirit in the lives of believers.⁷⁷ The word *pneuma* occurs 21 times in chapter 8. Moo explains that despite the prominence of the Holy Spirit, Romans 8 is not really *about* the Spirit but about what the Spirit *does*. Moo notes, "It is those blessings and privileges conferred on believers by the Spirit that are the theme of this chapter."⁷⁸ Moo explains that if we were to sum up these blessings in a single word it would be the word assurance. The gifts and blessings together assure Christians that their relationship with God is secure and settled. The result of faith in Christ is justification which confers blessings on the believer

⁷⁴ Bird, *Romans*, Section: Romans 8 :1-17, <https://www.perlego.com/book/560699/romans-pdf>.

⁷⁵ Bird, *Romans*, Section: Romans 8 :1-17, <https://www.perlego.com/book/560699/romans-pdf>.

⁷⁶ Keener, *Romans*, Section: Romans 8, <https://www.perlego.com/book/879084/romans-pdf>.

⁷⁷ Thielman, *Romans*. Section: Romans 8 :1-17, <https://www.perlego.com/book/581251/romans-pdf>.

⁷⁸ D. Moo, *Romans*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2009). Section: Romans 8 :14-17, <https://www.perlego.com/book/561327/romans-pdf>.

resulting in peace and assurance in the heart of the believer. One of these blessings is that the believers are adopted as dearly loved children into the Fatherhood of God. Moo explains that through the ‘Spirit of adoption’ God confers on us that status of God’s own dearly loved children and makes us aware of that status.⁷⁹

Textual explanation of Romans 8:14-17

In this section, we will conduct a critical exegesis on the adoption metaphor as described in Romans 8:14-17 and give a textual explanation on the text.

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, Abba! Father! The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. (Romans 8:14-17 NASB).

Led by the Spirit

In verse 14 we read that all who are led by the Spirit are sons of God. The word ‘for’ is used to explain why Christians are indebted to the Spirit. Bird explains that it is not merely gratitude; it is filial, as those who are led by the Spirit are declared as “children of God”.⁸⁰ The words ‘led by the Spirit’ is a compressed summary of

⁷⁹ Moo, *Romans*, Section: Romans 8:14-17, <https://www.perlego.com/book/561327/romans-pdf>.

⁸⁰ M. Bird, *Romans*, Section: Romans 8 :1-17 <https://www.perlego.com/book/560699/romans-pdf>.

everything Paul described in Romans 8:4-9. The “leading” (*agontai*) of the Spirit does not refer to guidance for everyday decisions in determining the will of God. It refers to being ‘controlled by’ or ‘determined by’ or ‘governed by’ the Spirit.⁸¹ The leading of the Spirit in this verse refers to the Spirit’s governing authority in one’s life that is manifested in human obedience. Burke explains that the leading Paul speaks about here has very clear and definite content. Burke notes, “It is connected intimately with the help the Spirit is said to give in verse 13, to ‘put to death the misdeeds of the body’.”⁸² The guidance of the Spirit brings a new attitude and opposition to sin. Verse 12 to 14 in this passage speaks of the ethical implications of adoption into sonship. Adoption to sonship brings a moral responsibility to conduct oneself as a member of God’s family.⁸³

Children and sons of the Father

The Greek word for ‘sons’ that is used here is *huios* which is best translated as ‘sons’. In verse 16 the writer switches to the word *teknon* which is best translated as ‘children’. *Huios* can also be translated as ‘child’ which would correctly capture the intention of Paul to include both men and women in purview of adoption. However, Johnson explains that translating *huios* as ‘child’ would lose a particular nuance associated with adoptive sonship in the ancient world. In the patriarchal world of the first century, an adopted son was associated with a certain status, honor, and inheritance that even biological children of the family might not share.⁸⁴ Furthermore,

⁸¹ T.R. Schreiner, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Romans* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 1998), 422.

⁸² Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 147.

⁸³ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 147.

⁸⁴ L.T. Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 132.

the source for the term *huios* should be located in the OT and other Jewish literature, for Israel is quite frequently identified in both the singular and the plural as God's son.⁸⁵ Lloyd Jones explains that many similarities can be seen between this passage and Galatians 4:1-7. In this passage, we see that the apostle describes that there is a difference between being a child and being a son. Lloyd Jones notes, "The difference is not one in relationship, but in our appreciation of our position."⁸⁶ Lloyd Jones goes on to explain further that a little child is not as much aware of what it means to be a child of the Father then as a grown-up adult person.⁸⁷ Lloyd Jones argues that it is very important for believers to realize that they are sons of God. Lloyd Jones notes, "If we regard salvation merely as a matter of forgiveness or of reconciliation or of justification, and stop at that, we should probably still have a more or less slavish spirit."⁸⁸

Redeemed from slavery and fear

In verse 15 we read that the believer has not received a spirit of slavery to fear again but a spirit of adoption as sons through which the believer cries *Abba* Father! Verse 15 centers on a contrast between two different spirits: "a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear" and "the Spirit of sonship." Commentators have suggested various identifications for this "spirit of fear" but Moo and others suggest this is a wrong take to understand this expression. Paul is using a rhetorical device to explain the nature of the Spirit we have received. He is saying, in effect, that the Spirit of God we have

⁸⁵ Schreiner, *Romans*, 423.

⁸⁶ D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *An exposition of Chapter 8:5-17: The Sons of God* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 155.

⁸⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *An exposition of Chapter 8:5-17*, 155.

⁸⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *An exposition of Chapter 8:5-17*, 156.

received is not a spirit of fear but the Spirit who makes us God's sons.⁸⁹ Others explain it as expressions of opposition between God and evil. Another possibility is to look at it as a contrast between the old dispensation, the Law (Rom.7), as one of fear and bondage, and the new era, characterized by the Holy Spirit and adoption.⁹⁰ Looking at the various views on the spirit of fear I agree with Moo that Paul is using this expression as a rhetorical device, as a contrast between the spirit of sonship and the spirit of fear. Paul is using this rhetorical device on more occasions, putting the negative first and the positive second (e.g. 1 Cor.2:12; 2 Tim.1:7).⁹¹ However, it goes further than only a rhetorical device in the sense that this transfer from a spirit of fear to a spirit of adoption has become reality in the life of believers. The spirit of fear refers to the previous state of the believer of bondage, worldliness, and fear and the spirit of adoption refers to redemption, sonship, power, and love.

Change of status by adoption

The word *huiithesia* that is used in this verse means 'to be adopted as a son'. Heim explains that with this adoption metaphor in verse 15 the believer's entrance into sonship is meant.⁹² Bird explains that the ultimate proof that believers are adopted into God's family is through the way they are led by the Spirit to address God as *Abba*. Dunn notes, "The believer's status has been changed not only from slave to freedman, but also from freedman to adopted son."⁹³ No longer are we in bondage to

⁸⁹ Moo, *Romans*, Section: Romans 8 :14-17, <https://www.perlego.com/book/561327/romans-pdf>.

⁹⁰ C.E.B. Cranfield, *Romans, Vol. 1* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 397.

⁹¹ F.F. Bruce, *Romans*, (Westmonst, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2015), Section: Life in the Spirit, Rom. 8:1-17, <https://www.perlego.com/book/1470521/romans-an-introduction-and-survey-pdf>.

⁹² E.M Heim, *Adoption in Galatians and Romans: Contemporary Metaphor Theories and Pauline Huiiothesia Methapors* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 2017), 220.

⁹³ J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans* (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 452.

or driven by sin, the flesh or Satan, but as God's sons and daughters by adoption we serve and are empowered by the energizing Spirit who lives within.⁹⁴

Speaking to God as Abba Father

Schreiner explains that the word 'cry out' denotes prayer in which believers acknowledge their adoptive status.⁹⁵ The use of the word *Abba* probably stems from Jesus Himself (Mark.14:36). Johnson explains that the word *Abba* is a "familial, familiar, and affectionate term suggesting great intimacy and trust."⁹⁶ In this verse Paul explains that the Spirit has been sent into the hearts of Christians, so they may address God in prayer like a child speaking to a loving father, and so that they would know as well that they are no longer slaves but sons, with all the rights and privileges of sons.⁹⁷

In the expression 'Spirit of adoption' in this verse, we see a relation between the adoption of the believer and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is responsible for leading God's sons and leads the adopted son to 'cry out', *Abba*, Father. There are several interpretations on how to understand the expression 'Spirit of adoption'. Some scholars argue that the Spirit affects adoption.⁹⁸ Others understand this expression to mean that the Spirit anticipates adoption, viewing adoption as an exclusive end-time event (Rom.8:23).⁹⁹ Still others understand this phrase to mean that the Spirit expresses adoption.¹⁰⁰ The above-described views will be discussed in detail within

⁹⁴ Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 141.

⁹⁵ Schreiner, *Romans*, 425.

⁹⁶ Johnson, *Reading Romans*, 134.

⁹⁷ Bird, *Romans*, Section: 8 :1-17, <https://www.perlego.com/book/560699/romans-pdf>.

⁹⁸ G.D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 566.

⁹⁹ C.K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: A.C. Black, 1991), 153.

¹⁰⁰ J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 295.

the next chapter in the section on ‘the Spirit and the adoption of the believer’. One thing that should especially be taken from the expression ‘Spirit of adoption’ is the inseparable and inextricable link between sonship and the Spirit. A link going this far that Paul describes in Romans 8:9 that if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

The personal character and nature of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit teaches the believer to address God with the familiar and intimate expression *Abba*. The explanation of the personal character and nature of the Spirit is one of Paul’s most important contributions to Christian thought and spirituality.¹⁰¹ Burke notes, “the Holy Spirit is not only God’s empowering presence but God’s personal presence at work in and through his adopted offspring.”¹⁰²

Honour as a free gift from the Father

Adoption by a *paterfamilias* brought honor to the adoptee. Honor and shame were ‘foundational social values’ upon which first century culture and society were built.¹⁰³ Compared to our individualized Western society the culture of the first century was far more group-oriented. Your identity and reputation were defined by ‘to whom you belong’¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, within the culture of the first century, a person was ascribed and given honor from his or her father. Believers who are adopted into the household of God are bestowed with honor as a free gift from the Father. Jewett notes about this

¹⁰¹ S.K. Soderlund and N.T. Wright, eds., *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 82-91.

¹⁰² Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 128.

¹⁰³ D.A. DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downer Grove: IVP, 2000), 23.

¹⁰⁴ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 153.

“His giving of his Spirit to his children is an honor bestowed upon them and not something that can be earned or boasted about.¹⁰⁵ Philip Esler explains that it is not possible to conceive of a family as honorable as the one to which Paul is reminding the Christ-followers of Rome they belong.¹⁰⁶ In verse 15 we see a comparison of the former shameful position of a ‘slave’ to the new position of the believer in Christ, an ‘adopted son or daughter of God the Father’. This is an enormous transition going from a position of shame to a position of honor. It is an honor freely given to the believer by the Father without effort on the part of the believer.

Unity and harmony between of Gentile and Jewish believers

The adoption metaphor also functions as a strategy to bring unity and harmony among the divided house churches of Gentile and Jewish believers in Rome. Burke explains that concord, unanimity, discord, and division are dishonoring the Father and the family of God.¹⁰⁷ Thompson notes, “The fact is that both Jews and Gentiles are adopted into God’s household and both are equally able to call upon him as Father.¹⁰⁸

The Spirit witnesses

In verse 16 we read how the Spirit witnesses to our spirit that we are children of God. It is helpful to understand the concept of ‘witnesses’ (*symmartyrei*) in this verse within the light of the adoption metaphor. The Spirit of God is sent into our hearts to let us know that we are his adopted sons and daughters. Especially, at moments when

¹⁰⁵ J.D.G. Dunn, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003), 91-105.

¹⁰⁶ P.F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul’s Letter* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2003), 249.

¹⁰⁷ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 167.

¹⁰⁸ Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 127.

doubts or condemnation creeps in, the Spirit witnesses to our spirit that we are children of God. Burke notes, “It is at such moments that the witness of the Spirit with our human spirit is both crucial and affirmative.”¹⁰⁹ This idea resonated within the minds of the Roman audience for they were familiar with the idea of adoption carried out in the presence of witnesses. Burke explains that a plurality of witnesses was required for the public verification of adoption under ancient Roman legal practice.¹¹⁰

Heirs of God: now and in the future

In verse 17 we read how the adopted children of God are also heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. The word *klēronomos* refers to the inheritance of the children of God, they are heirs of God and co-heirs of Christ. This word refers to someone who will inherit property, typically a firstborn son. Figuratively it can refer to those who share in the inheritance of Christ or are heirs to the promises of God.¹¹¹ In Messianic usage, it refers to one who receives his possession by right of sonship. It refers to those who as sons of God inherit the privileges of the Messianic Kingdom.¹¹² The word also refers to the future inheritance of the believer of rulership and government over the world (Rom.4:17).¹¹³ As well as with ‘adoption’ the concept of ‘inheritance’ also has a suitable background within Roman law. Within Roman law, the existence of heirs was not conditional on the death of their ancestor, for they had existence and status already by virtue of their relationship with him. Birth, not death constituted heirship.¹¹⁴ If one was a son or an adopted son in the Roman world one was most

¹⁰⁹ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 150.

¹¹⁰ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 151.

¹¹¹ Mangum ed., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*

¹¹² G. Abbott-Smith., *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1922), 249.

¹¹³ Thayer, *A Greek-English lexicon*, 349.

¹¹⁴ F. Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 110.

assuredly an heir as well. Lyall notes, “Whether children were natural children or adopted children was irrelevant; children of either source were heirs.”¹¹⁵

God will never change His word and His promises

Lloyd Jones explains that the inheritance of the believer is secure and safe with God. God will never change His word and His promises to His adopted children and no one can rob the inheritance of His children. The believer is made co-heir with Christ which makes our inheritance absolutely certain in every way. He has already received the inheritance, and we belong to Him and are joint-heirs with Him. Lloyd Jones notes, “We get all through Him. All the promises will be fulfilled to Him, and we are in Him, we are part of Him, we are joined to Him; and therefore they will of necessity come to us.”¹¹⁶ The heirs are given a foretaste, are allowed to taste the first fruits. In the present sons of God experience suffering consistent with the suffering and sonship of Christ. They have received the first fruits of the Spirit, the Spirit causes them to look forward with hope to the final adoption as sons, the redemption of their bodies.¹¹⁷

Sharing in His suffering and glorification

The verse goes on to describe that if the adopted children of God suffer with Him they will also be glorified with Him. In this verse, we read how adopted sons, who share in the sonship of Christ, also share in His sufferings. Burke notes, “Even though the Roman Christians are in possession of this most honorable status as adopted sons of

¹¹⁵ Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, 110.

¹¹⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *An exposition of Chapter 8:5-17*, 422.

¹¹⁷ Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 193.

God, they presently face hardship and opposition as they struggle on to glory.”¹¹⁸

Regarding to the suffering of the sons of God, Burke notes, “Just as suffering and sonship were inextricably linked during the historical career of Jesus, so suffering and sonship by adoption are also interwoven in the lives of Christians, even though the former is of an entirely different order and nature to the latter.”¹¹⁹

Home under construction

This verse also shows us that the gift of adoption is eschatological, in that it is partially present in the now and awaits the future completion at the consummation of time. Within Romans 8 we also see how the adoption metaphor is used both in the present (Rom.8:15) as well as a future anticipation (Rom.8:23). Believers have truly received adoption but await the consummation and completion of that adoption at the day of their redemption.¹²⁰ Colijn puts it nicely by writing “The adoption papers have already been signed and filed and the new relationship has already begun, but the child has not yet gone to live in their new home, which is still under construction.”¹²¹

Conclusion

This textual exegesis of Romans 8:14-17 gives us a further understanding of the meaning of the Pauline adoption metaphor in this passage. Noteworthy to mention is that Paul also uses his adoption metaphor to create unity between the Gentile and Jewish believers. Furthermore, we see how the concept of the adoption metaphor is

¹¹⁸ Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 174.

¹¹⁹ Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 148.

¹²⁰ Schreiner, *Romans*, 425.

¹²¹ B. Colijn, *Images of Salvation in the New Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010), 187.

strongly rooted within the Roman cultural context. The practice of adoption and the presence of witnesses to confirm the adoption are aspects that were rooted within the Roman legal background. Being adopted by a *paterfamilias* brought honor and prestige to the adoptee not previously enjoyed. Also the theme of inheritance is an aspect that is rooted within the Roman cultural context of the ancient world.

CHAPTER 4: THEOLOGY OF PAUL'S ADOPTION METAPHOR

In this chapter, we will describe Paul's theology of the adoption metaphor. First, we will consider the question of where the adoption metaphor originated and look at its background within the Roman culture and its Jewish background in the Old Testament. Then we will look at the roles of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the adoption of the believer. Next, we will explain how Paul has both men and women in view with his adoption metaphor. After that, we will look at Paul's usage of the adoption metaphor for both the Israelites (Rom.9:4) as well as for the believers in Rome (Rom.8:15) and his desire for Jews and Gentiles to live in unity in the Roman church. Finally, we will discuss the similarities and differences between the New Testament adoption metaphor and the Old Testament theme of sonship.

Context of the adoption metaphor

The expression *huiiothesia* comprises two Greek words: *huios*, 'son', and *thesis*, 'placing'. Therefore, the original meaning of the word is the process or act of being placed or 'adopted as son(s).¹²² Within the New Testament this word is only used by Paul and does not occur in other Jewish writings. The word only occurs five times and is found in three of his letters (Rom.8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal.4:5; Eph.1:5).

¹²² Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 22.

Adoption: a neglected soteriological expression

The word *huiiothesia* is used by Paul to describe the adoption metaphor of the believers into the Fatherhood of God. This Pauline expression has attracted less attention than other weighty biblical expressions like election, justification, redemption, and reconciliation. Burke explains that besides receiving lesser attention, the term ‘adoption’ has also often been misunderstood by systematicians and thought of as a synonym for or a part of justification.¹²³ Besides viewing adoption as a synonym or part of justification it has also been confused with regeneration as described by the apostle John (Joh.1:12). Burke explains that Paul and John use two very different metaphors to express ways by which the Christian becomes a member of God’s family. Burke argues that these two metaphors should be carefully distinguished and that the differences between these two expressions have not been appreciated.¹²⁴ The consequence of the above-described misunderstandings is that ‘adoption’ has been treated as a minor aspect of the way of salvation. Burke argues that adoption is an act of God’s grace different from, distinct from, and additional to justification.

However, in the last years there has been an increasing awareness and appreciation among systematicians and New Testament scholars that *huiiothesia* is another soteriological metaphorical expression for the apostle Paul.¹²⁵

The roots of the adoption metaphor

On the question of where the Pauline term *huiiothesia* originated is some debate. Some argue that it is solely rooted in the Old Testament and others argue for its origin in the

¹²³ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 26.

¹²⁴ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 27.

¹²⁵ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 38.

Greco-Roman culture of the ancient world. Burke argues that the term *huiiothesia* is a combination of Jewish, Roman, and Greek cultures. Rather than an “either-or” approach he argues for a position that finds the origin of this term both in the Old Testament as well as in the Greco-Roman culture of the ancient world. Heim agrees with this and explains that the Roman audience consisted of both Gentile and Jewish believers. Heim explains that the concept of adoption would have resonated with some with their Roman culture and laws and to others with the theme of ‘sonship’ as described in the Old Testament.¹²⁶

Adoption in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, there are no laws found that govern the practice of adoption. However, there are several examples that can be recognized as adoption. In the Old Testament, we see the concept of Israel as God’s adopted son, both on a national as well as on an individual level. We also find an example of adoption in king David as God’s adopted son (2 Sam.7:11-16). This throne oracle is regarded by Scott as a genuine case of divine adoption.¹²⁷ Although this is a genuine example of an adoption metaphor de Boer raised the question of whether we can equate kingship with adoption.¹²⁸ These Old Testament examples show that the concept of adoption can be recognized in several passages. However, the theme of adoption in the Old Testament should be rooted within the more prominent theme of ‘sonship’. Byrne for example, argues that since “adoption in the strict sense was not a Jewish custom, it may be best not to tie *huiiothesia* too narrowly to this meaning (adoption), but rather to see behind

¹²⁶ Heim, *Adoption in Galatians and Romans*, 203.

¹²⁷ J.M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God: An investigation into the Background of Huiiothesia in the Pauline Corpus* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Publishing, 1992), 268.

¹²⁸ P.A.H. de Boer, *Fatherhood and Motherhood in Israelite and Judean Piety* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 22.

the term, principally the long-standing biblical tradition of Israel (Israelites) as ‘son (sons) of God.’¹²⁹

Adoption in the Greco Roman culture

The concept of *huiiothesia* is strongly rooted in the Roman background and the dynamics of ancient Roman family life. Compared to a Greek background we see that a Roman background is a better source for the concept of *huiiothesia*. Burke notes “Roman law is more sharply defined and is a better source”.¹³⁰ The term *huiiothesia* was well known within the Roman world. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner notes, “Adoption was an accepted and high profile method of perpetuating a lineage, and Paul would have been keenly aware of the role of adoption in the Roman world at the time of his writings and missionary travels, and he used this widely understood cultural process to illustrate the formation of a spiritual family.”¹³¹ Burke brings up a number of strong reasons to see that the *huiiothesia* metaphor is rooted in the Roman culture of the ancient world. Firstly, he explains that Paul uses his *huiiothesia* metaphor only in letters to communities directly under the rule of Roman law.¹³² Secondly, he explains that Roman law was the law of Paul’s own citizenship and would have been the law governing the apostle’s family life, and in particular his relationship with his parents.¹³³ And lastly, adoption in its Roman form became more widespread even in other areas throughout the empire, particularly among Roman emperors. Burke notes, “Adoption was a means by which succession to power was

¹²⁹ B. Byrne, *Sons of God-seed of Abraham: A Study of the Idea of the Sonship of God of All Christians in Paul Against the Jewish Background* (Chicago, Illinois: Loyola Press, 1979), 157-158.

¹³⁰ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 60.

¹³¹ J. Stevenson-Moessner, *The Spirit of Adoption: At Home in God’s Family* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 111.

¹³² Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 62.

¹³³ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 62.

brought about; from the late first century to the middle of the second century AD and later, successive Roman emperors adopted men not related to them by blood with the intention that an adoptee should succeed the emperor in the principate.”¹³⁴

In conclusion, we can see that the Greco Roman practice of adoption can be seen as providing the vocabulary and idea for Paul’s adoption metaphor. At the same time, we also see the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish depiction of God’s people as sons/children of God as informing the Pauline use of the adoption metaphor. Rather than an either-or approach I would argue that Paul draws from both backgrounds, making it possible to let it resonate both with the Jewish as well as with the Gentile believers.

The impact of the adoption metaphor in the Roman background

The source of the adoption metaphor comes from the family in the ancient world and more specifically the father-to-adopted-son relation. This example is used as a metaphor to describe the Christian’s relation to God and the Christian family.¹³⁵

Adoption is a family term that in the ancient social world of Paul’s day denoted many things, but above everything else it signified the transfer of a son (usually an adult) as he is taken out of one family and placed in another with all its attending privileges and responsibilities.¹³⁶ This aspect of *transference* is nicely captured in the following definition of Francis Lyall. “The profound truth of Roman adoption was that the adoptee was taken out of his previous state and was placed in a new relationship of

¹³⁴ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 62.

¹³⁵ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 34.

¹³⁶ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 40.

son to his new father, his new *paterfamilias*. All his old debts were canceled, and in effect, the adoptee started a new life as part of his new family.”¹³⁷

Adoption Theology in the New Testament

The adoption of the believer is a Trinitarian action where God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work together to bring the believer into the household of God.¹³⁸ In this section we will discuss the role of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the process of the adoption of the believer into the Fatherhood of God.

The role of the Father in the adoption

The adoption of the believer into the Fatherhood of God begins with the Father. God the Father takes the initiative in sending His Son to bring salvation and adoption. Also in the Roman context of Paul’s day, the initiative for adoption came from the head of the household, the *paterfamilias*. Burke notes, “adoption for Paul is primarily and profoundly a paternal initiative.”¹³⁹ On the role of the Father in adoption John Murray explains that it is the Father who, by way of eminence, is the agent of adoption. He goes on to explain that within the Pauline epistles it is to the Father believers sustain the relation of sons by adoption and it is therefore the Father who adopts.¹⁴⁰ In conclusion, we can see that adoption is first and foremost about belonging to the Father.

¹³⁷ Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, 83.

¹³⁸ Burke, *The message of sonship*, 141.

¹³⁹ Burke, *The message of sonship*, 143.

¹⁴⁰ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 295.

The role of Jesus in the adoption

As described at the beginning of this section, adoption is a Trinitarian action. The Son has a fundamentally important role to play in our adoption as God's sons and daughters. Jesus is the perfect Son who is superior to all other sons before him (i.e. Adam, Israel, and David).¹⁴¹

Jesus came to be a sin offering for sinful man to become the means whereby we become God's children. God send His Son so that we might receive adoption. Paul ties the believer's adoption inextricably to the *person* and the *work* of Jesus Christ.¹⁴² In Ephesians 1:5 we can recognize this point where Paul describes that the adoption of the believer comes about *through* Jesus Christ.¹⁴³ In conclusion, we can see that Jesus is the *means* through which the believer is adopted into the Fatherhood of God. It is through the work of the Son that believers are now able to address God as *Abba*.

The role of the Spirit in the adoption

Within the Pauline adoption metaphor, we see how the Spirit is inseparably bound with *huiiothesia*. This can especially be seen in Romans 8:15 where we find the expression 'Spirit of adoption' (*pneuma huiiothesia*). There are different interpretations on how to understand the expression 'Spirit of adoption' and what the precise role of the Spirit is in adoption. Does the Spirit bring about the adoption of the believer? Or does the Spirit merely enable the believer to express or confirm an already existing filial relationship to God?¹⁴⁴ Some scholars argue that the Spirit of adoption is a reference to the Spirit as the agent of adoption, the Spirit affects

¹⁴¹ Burke, *The message of sonship*, 144.

¹⁴² Burke, *The message of sonship*, 145.

¹⁴³ Burke, *The message of sonship*, 145.

¹⁴⁴ Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 125.

adoption.¹⁴⁵ However, to say that the Spirit is the one who brings about the adoption would be contradictory to the role of the Father as the primary agent of adoption. Others understand this expression to mean that the Spirit anticipates adoption, viewing adoption as an exclusive end-time event (Rom.8:23).¹⁴⁶ There is certainly an anticipatory eschatological aspect of adoption but this view does not consider the ‘now’ and the ‘present’ aspects of adoption, as described in Rom.8:14-16. Still others understand this phrase to mean that the Spirit expresses adoption.¹⁴⁷ Longenecker explains that a better solution would be to look at the reciprocal or correlational relation between sonship and the reception of the Spirit.”¹⁴⁸ Cosgrove comments on this “Sonship and the reception of the Spirit of God are not regarded as separate in the mind of Paul but are instead inextricably linked: the Spirit comes with sonship.”¹⁴⁹

In conclusion, we can see that what should be taken from the expression ‘Spirit of adoption’ is the inseparable and inextricably relation between sonship and the Spirit. We see how the Spirit is an integral member of the divine family who plays a vital role in the believer’s adoption into God’s household. The Holy Spirit is God’s personal presence, witnessing to us, interceding for us, and assuring us of our identity as children of God. Just like it is inconceivable to think of the Spirit separated from God’s Son, so it is equally unimaginable to separate the Spirit from the believer’s adoption as son.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 566.

¹⁴⁶ Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 153.

¹⁴⁷ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 295.

¹⁴⁸ R.N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (Waco: Word, 1990), 174.

¹⁴⁹ C.H. Cosgrove, *The Cross and the Spirit: A Study in the Argument and Theology of Galatians* (Macon: Mercer, 1988), 52.

¹⁵⁰ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 151.

The adoption metaphor applies to men and women

Since adoption in its Roman legal context, strictly taken, was only applied to men¹⁵¹, an important question to ask is to whom the adoption applies and who is included when the expression ‘son’ (*huios*) is used within the New Testament. To answer this question it is first important to note that Paul uses *huios* and *teknon* interchangeably to describe the concept of ‘children of God’. The word *huios* refers to a son, or more broadly a male descendant. It can also refer to an adopted son (Acts 7:21). In a wider sense it is used to refer to a group of people e.g. the children of Israel or believers described as the sons of Abraham (Gal.3:7).¹⁵² The word *huios* also refers to those whom God loves as a Father, which can refer to both men and women.¹⁵³ The term *huios* is also used to refer to disciples who follow Gods commands (Matt.5:9).

The word *teknon* refers to a child or to children, either male or female. The word *teknon* can also refer to a son but more often it refers to a child. *Huios* can also be translated as ‘child’, either male or female. The word *huios* has a more mature connotation which refers to a more mature understanding of one’s role and identity as a son of God. Bird explains that Paul speaks inclusively about ‘those who are led by the Spirit’ are sons of God. Paul also switches from *huios* (son) in verse 14 to *teknon* (child) in verse 16. Both expressions refer to the adoption into the divine Fatherhood of God which includes both men and women. The inclusivity of both men and women in the expression of ‘sons of God’ is further established in Galatians 3:26-28 where Paul explains that through faith we are all sons of God. In Christ, there is no distinction between men and women, Jew or Greek, slave or free. The above-

¹⁵¹ Burke, *The message of sonship*, 10.

¹⁵² Mangum, *Lexham Theological Wordbook*.

¹⁵³ S.T. Bloomfield, *A Greek and English Lexicon to the New Testament* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1840), 448.

described arguments bring us to the conclusion that Paul has both women and men in purview with his adoption metaphor, as well as both Jew or Greek, slave or free.

The adoption metaphor for Jews and Gentiles

Another question that needs to be addressed is how Paul's use of the adoption metaphor regarding Israel should be understood. In Romans 9:4 we read that the 'adoption as sons' belongs to the Israelites, as well as other privileges like the covenants, the Law, the temple services and the promises. How should this verse be understood? Are the Israelites adopted as sons of God through natural birth? Or should they also be adopted through faith in the Son?

Unity between Jews and Gentiles

To discuss this question it is important to realize that Paul most likely had a certain goal in mind by specifically using the *huiiothesia* metaphor in Romans 9:4. Heim explains that the 'adoption of Israel as son' should be understood against the Jewish sonship tradition. The adoption of Israel should therefore be understood as Israel's covenant relationship with God. Furthermore, Paul also had a specific goal in mind with his usage of the adoption metaphor instead of sonship. One of its reasons for Paul to use the adoption metaphor in Romans 9:4 was to bring unity and a sameness of vision between the Jews and the Gentiles. One of Paul's main motives to write his letter to the Romans was to bring unity between the Jewish and Gentile believers.

Are Jews adopted as sons through natural birth?

To answer the question whether this use of the *huiiothesia* metaphor implies that Israelites are adopted as sons through natural birth it is important to understand Paul's use of the term 'Israel'. In verse 6 we read that Paul writes that not all are Israel who are descended from Israel. Stenschke explains that the Jewish believers constitute the spiritual remnant of Israel described in Romans 9-11.¹⁵⁴

From a soteriological viewpoint, both Jews as well as Gentiles, only receive salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. In Romans 3 the importance of faith in Christ, both for Jews as well as for Gentiles, is clearly described. If looking at adoption from a soteriological viewpoint, adoption does not come through natural birth but through faith in Jesus. Harris explains that the fact that the divine promises and blessings belong to the Jewish people does not mean that every Jew is saved.¹⁵⁵ In Romans 9:1-5 we also see a deep longing in Paul for his fellow Israelites to come to faith in the gospel of Christ. In Romans 10:14-15 when Paul writes 'How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed?' he speaks about unsaved national Israel.¹⁵⁶

Should Jews also be adopted through faith in the Son?

In Romans 9:4 Paul is describing 'adoption' as one of the divine promises given to the people of Israel. The divine promises given to the people of Israel are irrevocable (Rom.11:29). In this sense, the adoption, which can also be understood as Israel's covenant relationship with God, is irrevocable. Garland explains that the adoption spoken of in Romans 9:4 recalls God's choice of Israel out of all the peoples of the earth (Deut. 14:1-2) to enter a filial relationship with God as God's firstborn son

¹⁵⁴ C. Stenschke, "Jewish Believers in Paul's Letter to the Romans," *Neotestamentica* 52, no.1 (2018): 9.

¹⁵⁵ G.H. Harris, "And how shall they hear without a preacher? A Biblical theology of Romans 9-11." *The Master's Seminary Journal* 30, no. 2 (2019): 236.

¹⁵⁶ Harris, "And how shall they hear without a preacher?," 252.

(Exod. 4:22–23).¹⁵⁷ Israel has been granted the status of sons of God by virtue of God’s gracious election to be “his treasured possession.”¹⁵⁸ In conclusion, we see that there are no delimitations as to whom the adoption applies or as to whom the adoption belongs. So the adoption metaphor applies to Jews and to Gentiles. Within Romans 9–11 we see a deep longing in Paul for his fellow Jews to accept Christ as their Messiah.

In Romans 11:25–29 we see a description of God’s purpose for the restoration of Israel. In verse 25 we see how Paul describes the mystery of a partial hardening of Israel for the fullness of the Gentiles to come in. In Romans 11:26 we see how Paul writes that ‘all Israel will be saved’ and in verse 29 we read that the divine gifts and promises of God are irrevocable. Bruce explains that the word ‘mystery’ might refer to a revelation that Paul received from the Lord regarding the restoration of Israel.¹⁵⁹ On the one hand we see Paul’s deep longing for the Jews to accept the Messiah and at the other hand we see a description of God’s purposes for the gentiles through the partial hardening of Israel. In Romans 11:25–29 we see a description and a promise of the restoration of Israel. Without trying to construct to an argument on this, Bruce notes, “The new covenant will not be complete until it embraces the people of the old covenant.”¹⁶⁰

The adoption metaphor and Roman believers living together in unity

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Paul had a motive in mind when using the expression ‘adoption’ instead of ‘sonship’ in Romans 9:4. Heim explains that the

¹⁵⁷ D. Garland, *Romans* (Westmont, Illinois: IVP, 2021), Section: chapter 5, <https://www.perlego.com/book/2496732/romans-an-introduction-and-commentary-pdf>.

¹⁵⁸ E. Harrison, D. Hagner and R. Rapa *Romans, Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2017), Section: Rom.9:1–5, <https://www.perlego.com/book/558271/romans-galatians-pdf>.

¹⁵⁹ Bruce, *Romans*, Section: Rom.11:25–29, <https://www.perlego.com/book/1470521/romans-an-introduction-and-survey-pdf>.

¹⁶⁰ Bruce, *Romans*, Section: Rom.11:25–29, <https://www.perlego.com/book/1470521/romans-an-introduction-and-survey-pdf>.

expression ‘adoption’ instead of ‘sonship’ created the idea of the believers being co-participants together with Israel in the adoption to sonship.¹⁶¹ By using the *huiiothesia* metaphor for Israel in Romans 9 Paul is creating a connection between the believer’s relationship to God and the Israelites relationship to God. One of Paul’s goals with the letter to the Romans is to create unity among the Jewish and Gentile believers. By using the adoption metaphor in Romans 9 Paul achieves a sameness of vision that unites his audience together. Heim notes, “In Romans 9:4, Paul’s metaphor achieves a “sameness of vision” regarding Israel, ultimately uniting his audience together in their shared concern for Israel as God’s chosen people, and their brothers and sisters through adoption.”¹⁶² Burke adds on this that Paul also wants to avoid a triumphalist attitude by either party. Burke notes, “Gentile believers should not think that their adoption has nullified the original adoption of Israel, an adoption that is irrevocable.”¹⁶³ And Israel should also recognize that the Gentiles’ adoption is not inferior to theirs.¹⁶⁴ Atkins explains that Paul’s *huiiothesia* expression in Romans 8 and 9 unites the factionalized house churches by underscoring that both have a legitimate claim to belong in the one household of God.¹⁶⁵ Lewis explains that Paul in using his adoption metaphor wants to convince his audience that the Gentiles were newly and legitimately constituted among the people of God. With his adoption metaphor and other metaphors Paul claims to equal status of Gentile believers along with Jews in the family of God.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Heim, *Adoption in Galatians and Romans*, 320.

¹⁶² Heim, *Adoption in Galatians and Romans*, 320.

¹⁶³ J.P. Sampley ed., *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 65.

¹⁶⁴ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 171.

¹⁶⁵ R. Atkins, *Egalitarian Community: Ethnography and Exegesis* (Alabama: University of Alabama, 1991), 182.

¹⁶⁶ R.B. Lewis, *Paul’s ‘Spirit of Adoption’ in its Roman Imperial Context*. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 4.

Comparison of sonship and adoption as sons

In the description of Paul's theology and usage of the adoption metaphor we have seen that there is a strong linkage with the Old Testament theme of 'sonship'. In this section, we compare the theme of sonship with Paul's adoption metaphor and discuss the difference and similarities.

Belonging to God and the family of God

Since the adoption metaphor is partially rooted within the Old Testament theme of sonship a lot of similarities can be seen between these two concepts. Both in adoption and sonship, the theme of belonging to God and to the family of God can be seen. However, the relatedness within the family of God itself seems to be more emphasized in the New Testament adoption metaphor where believers are related to each other as siblings.

Inheritance

Also, the theme of inheritance can be seen both in the Old Testament theme of sonship as well as in the Pauline adoption metaphor. However, within the Old Testament concept of sonship, the inheritance is spoken of in spatial and territorial terms of the promised land, Canaan, for the people of Israel. The kind of inheritance Paul is referring to in his adoption metaphor are more relational and spiritual rather than spatial or territorial because they come about through union with God and with His Son, Christ.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Schreiner, *Romans*, 428.

Holiness for sons of God is more rooted in the Old Testament background. Both sonship in the Old Testament as well as adoption into sonship as described by Paul have implications for sons of God. Sons of God should be living in a way that honors the name and reputation of the father and the family. A difference would be that sonship, rooted in the Old Testament, has more emphasis on holiness for sons of God, than the adoption metaphor in its Roman legal context.

Adoption practice not found in the Old Testament

One of the differences between the Old Testament theme of sonship and the New Testament adoption metaphor is that adoption was not practiced in the Old Testament. There are no laws found for this practice and the word adoption also does not occur in the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible (LXX). When the nation of Israel is described as God's firstborn son the author is drawing from the field of biological or natural birth. This is in contrast with Paul's adoption term, which is a legal expression rooted in the Roman socio-legal context of the first century. Kaiser notes on this 'Israel was not a family in an adopted sense or a mere ethnic, political, or social unity. Rather, it was a family formed, saved, and guarded by God the 'Father' of this family.'¹⁶⁸

Divine birth better captured in the concept of sonship

A difference that follows from the above is that the divine birth of the believer is better captured in the concept of sonship than the legal concept of adoption. Within the New Testament believers are not adopted in their old creation but are regenerated by His divine life and made into His children and sons. However, the adoption

¹⁶⁸ W.C. Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 70-71.

metaphor should be seen in its Christological context through whom both adoption, as well as son-making, takes place. In 2 Cor 5:17 Paul describes this process by writing that everyone who is in Christ is a new creation. Smail confirms this and mentions both son-making as well as adoption as results of the work of the Son.¹⁶⁹

Process of the making of believers into mature sons of God

Furthermore, sonship also seems to capture the organic process of the making of believers into mature sons of God better than the judicial procedure of adoption.¹⁷⁰ The description of adoption in Romans 8 also depicts a process of growth into maturity as sons of God. In Romans 8:15 we see the present aspects of the adoption metaphor while Romans 8:23 describes the future aspects of the adoption metaphor. Byrne notes on this “This can be resolved by an understanding of a real but hidden status of adoption in the present, attested by the Spirit (Rom.8:15,16) and the public revelation of this status at the time when the believer will share the *bodily* resurrection of the Firstborn Son of God (Rom.8:29).¹⁷¹

Roman legal adoption practice only applied to men

A last difference is that strictly taken, the Roman adoption practice was only applied to men in the ancient Roman world. Sonship as described in the Old Testament is used mostly to refer to the whole people of Israel, including men and women, young and old. However, in the previous section we have explained how Paul clearly has both men and women in purview with his adoption metaphor.

¹⁶⁹ T.A. Smail, *The Forgotten Father: Rediscovering the Heart of the Christian Gospel* (London: Lodder & Stoughton, 1980), 146.

¹⁷⁰ R. Good, “Glossa Sonship or adoption as sons?” *Affirmation & Critique* 4, (2000): 39.

¹⁷¹ B.T. Byrne, “Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of *huiiothesia* in the Pauline corpus” *Journal of Theological Studies* 44, no.1 (1993): 293.

Drawing from both concepts

The above discussion on the similarities and differences of sonship and adoption as sons shows us that it is important to draw both from the Old Testament sonship theme as well as from the Roman legal adoption practice. Paul clearly has both concepts in mind in bringing across his message in Romans 8.

CHAPTER 5: PRINCIPLES FROM THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD AND THE PAULINE ADOPTION METAPHOR

In this chapter, we will describe 5 principles regarding the Fatherhood of God and the adoption metaphor that are relevant for believers today. These principles come forth out of the “Fatherhood of God” as well as the “Adoption metaphor” described in the previous chapters. In the concluding section of this chapter, we will discuss how the principles were relevant for the believers in Rome and how they are relevant for believers today.

1. Believers are loved and valued by God the Father and the family of God

Probably the greatest principle of the adoption metaphor is that the believer is loved and valued. The believer is loved and wanted by the Father and by the family of God. The fact that the believer is adopted into the household of God brings honor and value to the believer.

Being chosen and wanted

Within the ancient world adopted sons received the same affection from the *paterfamilias* as the natural children of the family. Within the Roman adoption practice the adoptee was chosen and wanted by the *paterfamilias*. Besides being chosen, wanted, and loved by the *paterfamilias* the adoptee also received love and acceptance from his siblings in the household.

Believers receive value and honour

Believers receive their value from God the Father and the family of God. Within the ancient world, honor was accorded to a son adopted into a new family. The fact that an adoptee was chosen by the *paterfamilias* brought immense prestige to the adoptee. Burke notes, “it brought esteem not previously enjoyed, because of the adoptee’s relationship with his new father and new family to which he had now come to belong.”¹⁷² Honour and shame were the two foundational social values within the first-century culture. Honor was the most cherished and also the most jealously guarded of all ancient social values in the Eastern Mediterranean culture. Spencer explains that the reason for this was that ‘one’s reputation defined the core of personal identity.’¹⁷³ Especially, one’s parents, the father in particular, were the figures from whom honor as a social value was seen to derive. Malina explains that it is not possible to conceive of a family as honorable as the one to which Paul is reminding the Christ-followers belong.¹⁷⁴

Believers are called to love one another

Darko explains that the adopted children of God ought to love one another. He explains that the loving relationship of siblings is rooted and modeled after their relationship with the Father. Darko notes, “The nature of love being called upon is also patterned after the sacrificial love of Christ; it is not a mere affection among siblings but virtue that is rooted in who they are as children of a loving Father.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 144.

¹⁷³ S.F. Spencer, *What Did Jesus Do? Gospel Profiles of Jesus Personal Conduct* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 19.

¹⁷⁴ B.J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 32.

¹⁷⁵ J.B. Tucker, ed., *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 342.

Believers are secure in their Father's care

The fact that an adopted son also received inheritance shows the Father's care for the adopted believer. Sons and daughters of God are heirs, co-heirs with Christ, and heirs of God. Believers can rest in the providence and care of their Father in the midst of every circumstance. Believers have hope and assurance regarding their future which is secure in the hands of God. A good understanding of being an heir can result in assurance and peace in the heart of the believer regarding to the present as well as the future.

If adopted then heir

If one was an adopted son in Roman law one was also an heir. Dixon explains that when an individual was adopted under Roman law, benefits belonged to the adoptee.¹⁷⁶ The adoptee inherited concrete goods such as houses, land, businesses, slaves, and other benefits. The future of the adoptee was secure and taken care of. The message this brings across for believers is that God takes care of His children, both in the present as well as in the future.

Relational and spiritual inheritance

The inheritance and the blessings Paul has in mind are more relational and spiritual than spatial or territorial since they come through union with God, and with His Son, Jesus Christ.¹⁷⁷ The inheritance Paul describes is also an eternal inheritance (Hebr.9:15), which is one of the privileges which comes to the believer as a result of their adoption into the family of God.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ S. Dixon, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 112.

¹⁷⁷ Schreiner, *Romans*, 428.

¹⁷⁸ Burke, *The message of sonship*, 149.

No absence of suffering

The fact that believers are heirs and are taken care of by the Father does not mean the absence of suffering (Rom.8:17). However, in the midst of every situation the Father will be present and will take care of His children, both now as well as for their future.

2. Believers belong to God and the family of God

Another profound principle that comes from the communal and identity-related implications of the adoption metaphor is that believers belong to God the Father and the family of God. Belonging is an important factor regarding the formation of one's identity.

Belonging and identity

Paul used kinship language to form the identity of the believers in Rome. Paul describes the believers as the family of God and relates the believers to each other as siblings. Especially in the first century, one's family was one of the most important factors in the formation of one's identity. Malina and Neyrey explain that to 'whom you belong' took precedence over 'who you are' individually in the first world century.¹⁷⁹ One's identity and honor were defined by the family to whom one belonged.

¹⁷⁹ B.J. Malina and J.M. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox 1996), 153.

Reflection on belonging and self understanding

Believers can find their identity by reflecting on their belonging to God the Father and their belonging to the family of God. The reflection of the believer on his belonging to God the Father contributes to the self-understanding of the believer, both individually as well as collectively.¹⁸⁰

Belonging and living together in peace and unity

To experience a strong sense of belonging within the community believers need to live together in peace and unity. Within the context of Paul's letter to the church in Rome, we see how he used the adoption metaphor as a means to promote unity among the Jewish and Gentile believers. Both Jews and Gentiles believers were adopted into the household of God. Paul used the adoption metaphor to promote unity and belonging among the Jewish and Gentile believers within the church in Rome.

The Spirit confirms the belonging and identity of the believer

Another aspect that can be seen is the fact that the adoptee was defended and assured in his position and identity by witnesses. The Roman practice of adoption was carried out in the presence of witnesses. Sherwin-White explains that several witnesses were required in order to verify that adoption had taken place within the ancient Roman legal practice.¹⁸¹ The witness of the Spirit helps believers to be assured of their identity as children of God. Especially, at moments when doubts or condemnation creeps in, the Spirit witnesses with the spirit of believers that they are children of God. Burke notes, "It is at such moments that the witness of the Spirit with our human

¹⁸⁰ Mengestu, *God as Father*, 16.

¹⁸¹ A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 149.

spirit is both crucial and affirmative.¹⁸² Burke explains that the role of the Spirit in sonship is to bring an appreciation and understanding of our new filial disposition. The witness of the Spirit helps believers to overcome fear of condemnation, guilt, or doubts regarding one's identity.

3. Believers are empowered to overcome fear and bondage

Another principle is that believers are empowered by the Spirit to overcome fear and bondage.

The Holy Spirit is God's honorable approval for the believer

The Holy Spirit is the Father's honorable approval of the *huiiothesia* of the believer.

Jewett notes about this "His giving of his Spirit to his children is an honor bestowed upon them and not something that can be earned or boasted about."¹⁸³ Besides receiving honor from the Father the believer also receives honor from the members of the family of God. One of the ethical implications of believers is to be devoted to one another in love and to give preference to one another in honor (Rom.12:10). The honor a believer receives from the Father and the family of God can result in a healthy self-worth.

Empowered by the Spirit

Paul describes the Spirit in very intimate and personal ways. The Spirit is not only described in terms of God's empowering presence but also in terms of personal

¹⁸² Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 150.

¹⁸³ Dunn, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, 91-105.

agency¹⁸⁴ and God's personal presence.¹⁸⁵ The personal agency and presence of God will empower believers to overcome fears, bondages, and slavery to sin. The empowerment of the Spirit is very important for the believer to be delivered from bondage and slavery. The Old Testament theme of sonship also brings this across in Israel's deliverance from their slavery in Egypt. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt was brought about by the grace and sovereignty of God and was not to be found what the people of Israel would or could do.¹⁸⁶

4. Believers are empowered to honour God

Believers are not only empowered by the Spirit to overcome fear and bondage. They are empowered and called to give honor to God

Motivation for authentically holy living

The realization of being a son or daughter of God instills a strong motivation to break free from fears, bondage, and slavery to sin. Packer explains that our adoptive relationship with God as Father motivates for authentically holy living.¹⁸⁷ This process of growth takes place through the believer's personal responsibility to make the right moral choices as well as through the divine help and energy given by the Spirit to act accordingly.

¹⁸⁴ J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (London: T&T Clark, 1998), 438.

¹⁸⁵ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 566.

¹⁸⁶ Dunn, *New Testament Theology*, 76.

¹⁸⁷ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988), 247-248.

A new life

Within the ancient world, the adoption meant that a son left his old life and started a new life within his new family. Lyall explains this nicely by writing, “The profound truth of Roman adoption was that the adoptee was taken out of his previous state and was placed in a new relationship of son to his new father. All his old debts were canceled, and in effect, the adoptee started a new life as part of his new family.”¹⁸⁸ Longenecker adds on this by explaining that also all the old relationships and obligations of the son were cancelled.¹⁸⁹ Coming from the context of the Old Testament theme of sonship this also motivated the believers in Rome to live a life that is holy and pleasing to God. The believer can leave things that have created guilt, pain, or bondage in the past and can start a new life and progressively grow into the image of the Son (Rom.8:29) through the help of the Spirit.

5. Believers have a goal and a purpose

A principle is that believers have a goal and a purpose because they are called to service. The Father gives responsibility to His sons and daughters. Believers are called to serve God and their brothers and sisters within the household of God. The Father gives responsibility, gifts, and talents to His children which can be used for service.

¹⁸⁸ Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, 83.

¹⁸⁹ R.N. Longenecker, “The metaphor of adoption in Pauls letters,” *The Covenant Quarterly* 72, no. 3 (2014): 72.

Responsibilities within the household of the family

In the ancient Roman world adopted sons received both privileges as well as responsibilities within the household of the family. God gives purpose and responsibility to his adopted sons and daughters within the household of God. Burke notes, “God the Father has a goal in view for his adopted sons and there is also an obligation upon the latter to honor the former by seeking to live in such a way as to attain that goal.”¹⁹⁰

Serving God and people

In the letter to the Romans, we see that the purpose of the believers in Rome was to devote themselves to service to God and one another. In Romans 12:6-8 Paul describes different gifts given to believers to serve others within the household of God. In Romans 12:9-21 we find other practical examples of service to God like contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality, and being devoted in love to one another.

Relevance of the principles for believers in Rome and for believers today

The above-described principles are as relevant for believers today as they were for believers in Rome in the ancient world. In this section, we will discuss some of the differences between the context of the church in Rome and the context of our churches today.

¹⁹⁰ Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 42.

The role of a *paterfamilias*

A difference can be seen in the adoption metaphor in the role of a *paterfamilias* in the ancient world and the role of a father in our days. The role of a *paterfamilias* was very absolute, exercising supreme control, authority, and power over his household. This differs from fatherhood in our days. However, the role and influence of a father are still very high and relevant. In relation to God as Father there is no difference to be seen, God bestows honor upon His children, both then and now.

Bringing unity among Jewish and Gentile believers

The unity that Paul wanted to bring between Jews and Gentiles through his adoption metaphor differs from the formation and backgrounds of people within our churches today. However, it is of equal importance, both the church in Rome, as well as our churches today are formed by believers from different ethnic, cultural, and familial backgrounds. Just like in the church in Rome God wants to bring equality and avoid a triumphalist attitude within the church.

Belonging and identity in the first century

Our Western society today is far more individualistic than the society in Rome in the first century. In the first century, one's identity was defined by the family to whom one belonged. However, this also differs highly across the globe in different cultures and countries and in general it still can be said that one's family and belonging is still one of the most important factors in the formation of one's identity.

The presence of witnesses at an adoption practice

The presence of witnesses at an adoption practice does not resonate as much as it would have with the Roman audience. However, today we are still familiar with the

concept and idea of witnesses e.g. at a wedding or in a court. In relation to the witness of the Spirit to the spirit of the believer, there is no difference to be seen between believers then and now.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that the Fatherhood of God and the adoption metaphor contain principles that are relevant for believers today. The principles can be summarized in the following themes; being loved, belonging, overcoming fear and bondage, honoring God, and having a goal and purpose in life. Believers are loved and valued by the Father and by the family of God. Believers are heirs and can be secure and confident in the Father's care for them. The believers can find their identity in their belonging to the Father and the family of God. Believers are also motivated by their new identity and empowered by the Spirit to overcome fear and bondage and live a life that honors God. Finally, God also gives responsibility to His sons and daughters. Believers have a goal and a purpose and are called to serve God and others within the household of God.

CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE BELIEVER

The principles of the Fatherhood of God and the adoption metaphor as described in the previous chapter have implications for the believer. The table below gives an overview of how the principles are related to different categories of implications. In this chapter, we will discuss the implications for the believer based on the different categories as described in the table below.

	Principles				
	Loved	Belong	Over come	Honour	Goal
Identity related implications					
Being loved and valued	x				
Receiving inheritance	x				
Belonging to the household of God		x			
Communal implications		x			
Spiritual implications					
Through the power of the Spirit putting to death the deeds of the body			x		
Deliverance from slavery and bondage			x		
Moral and ethical implications					
Living according to the Spirit				x	
Growing in holiness through the Spirit				x	
Walking in a manner that honours God				x	
Obedience to the Father				x	
Service related implications					
Dedicating our lives to God's					x

	Principles				
	Loved	Belong	Over come	Honour	Goal
Service					
Serving others within the body of Christ					x

Identity related implications

The principles that “Believers are loved by God the Father and the family of God” and “Believers belong to God and the family of God“ will have an impressive impact on the identity of the believers.

Being loved and valued

Believers are loved and valued by God the Father. Within the ancient world adopted sons received the same affection from the *paterfamilias* as the natural children of the family. Within the Roman adoption practice the adoptee was chosen and wanted by the *paterfamilias*. Besides being chosen, wanted, and loved by the *paterfamilias* the adoptee also received love and acceptance from his siblings in the household.

Receiving inheritance

Believers receive an inheritance. If one was an adopted son in Roman law one was also an heir. The adoptee inherited concrete goods such as houses, land, businesses, slaves, and other benefits. The inheritance and the blessings Paul has in mind for the believers are more relational and spiritual than spatial or territorial since they come through union with God, and with His Son, Jesus Christ.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 428.

Belonging to the household of God

Believers are adopted into the household of God and belong to God and to each other as siblings, as brothers and sisters. Trebilco explains that the Graeco Roman household (Greek, Roman, or Jew) served as the primary referent of individual identity and the locus for economic, spiritual, and personal development.¹⁹² Aasgaard explains that sibling relations were highly important in the ancient world and were linked to vital tasks within the family and shared responsibility, loyalty, positive emotions, diversity, tolerance, forgiveness, concern for honor, and harmony.¹⁹³ In ancient Mediterranean society kinship played a significant role in constructing self-understanding and understanding of others.¹⁹⁴

Meeks and some others have argued that Paul uses kinship language (brothers) as a unique identity marker to differentiate between the early Christians and outsiders.¹⁹⁵ Meeks explains that fictive kinship concepts were employed in the early Graeco-Roman world to foster a semblance of family ties and evoke a sense of belonging at the deepest level.¹⁹⁶

This implication of belonging to the family of God is also in line with the sonship theme within the Old Testament where God's people are also described as a community. Burke explains how God's people in the Old Testament are described as a family or a household of sons and daughters, in which Yahweh is the father *and*

¹⁹² P.R. Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 16.

¹⁹³ R. Aasgaard, "Role Ethics" in Paul: The significance of the Sibling Role for Paul's Ethical Thinking" *New Testament Studies* 48, no. 4 (2002), 520.

¹⁹⁴ Mengestu, *God as Father in Paul*, xix.

¹⁹⁵ W.A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 85.

¹⁹⁶ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 87.

mother.¹⁹⁷ Both the metaphor of adoption as well as of sonship are therefore important ways of helping us to think about community and one's identity.

Communal implications

The adoption metaphor of Paul also contains communal implications. Through the adoption metaphor, we see how Paul wishes that both Jewish and Gentile believers live together in peace and unity in the Roman church. Especially in Romans 9:4, we see how Paul uses the expression 'adoption' instead of 'sonship' to achieve unity and sameness of vision among his audience. Paul wanted to avoid a triumphalist attitude from each party and he wanted the Roman believers to focus on their belonging to the household of God. The implication that follows from this is that God wants His children to live together in peace and unity. Within the Pauline adoption metaphor, we see that Paul wants to create unity among the believers by making them aware of their belonging to the Father as well as to each other. Furthermore, we can see how Paul promotes this further by arguing that both Jews and Gentiles are equal and both are legitimately adopted into the Fatherhood of God.

Spiritual implications

Believers are empowered to overcome fear and bondage. Believers receive the Holy Spirit helping them to overcome the misdeeds of the body and to receive deliverance from slavery and bondage.

¹⁹⁷ Burke, *The message of sonship*, 20.

Through the power of the Spirit putting to death the deeds of the body
 In Romans 8:12 Paul writes that believers are no longer in debt to the flesh but they
 are in debt to the Spirit. God's adopted sons are to 'put to death' their sinful nature.
 The verb 'put to death' is written in the present continuous tense which shows that
 putting to death the sinful nature is a lifelong activity and not a once-and-for-all act.
 Burke notes, "Paul's intention is that adopted sons must demonstrate a certain
 ruthlessness towards all/any sin in their lives: they are to kill it off, starve it of its
 oxygen supply and not allow it any room to breathe."¹⁹⁸ Fee explains that the leading
 in Rom.8:14 can partly be understood against the Old Testament background that God
 leads His people into paths of righteousness for His name's sake.¹⁹⁹ Schreiner
 explains that the guidance were Paul speaks about in verse 14 refers to God's *known*
 and revealed will, which has a clear moral focus.²⁰⁰ Ferguson notes, "The leading of
 which Paul speaks has a very clear and definite content here. It is connected
 intimately with the help the Spirit is said to give in verse 13, to 'put to death the
 misdeeds of the body'. The guidance the Spirit provides is that of clear-cut opposition
 to sin. To claim to experience the ministry of the Spirit of adoption and yet to dally
 with sin is to be utterly deceived.

Deliverance from slavery and bondage

God delivers His people from slavery and bondage. The adopted sons of God have not
 received a spirit of slavery to fear again but have received a spirit of adoption by
 which they cry out Abba Father. Children of God are empowered by the Spirit to no
 longer live as slaves to fear and sin but as beloved sons and daughters of God the

¹⁹⁸ Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 144.

¹⁹⁹ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 563.

²⁰⁰ Schreiner, *Romans*, 422.

Father. This theme of deliverance is also in line with the Old Testament sonship theme where God delivers the people of Israel out of their slavery and bondage in Egypt. (Ex.3:10; Ex.4:23).

Moral and ethical implications

Believers are empowered by the Holy Spirit to give honor to God. Coming from a moral viewpoint, the adoption metaphor implies that sons of God are expected to live a life that is holy and pleasing to God. The adoption of sons into the Fatherhood of God brings along a moral and an ethical imperative.

Living according to the Spirit

To further establish the new identity of the believers Paul also uses opposite statements that differentiate living according to the flesh from living according to the Spirit. For example, walking according to the flesh is contrasted with walking according to the Spirit (Rom.8:4). Thinking according to the flesh is contrasted with thinking according to the Spirit (Rom.8:5-6). The Spirit also occupies an important place in the formation of the new identity of the Christ-followers. Mengestu notes, “The sharing of the Spirit is portrayed as an identifying element common to those who belong to God.”²⁰¹ The identity of the Christ followers is a community characterized by the life of the Spirit.

²⁰¹ Mengestu, *God as Father in Paul*, 194.

Growing in holiness through the Spirit

The Spirit of adoption is the same Person as the Spirit of Holiness of whom Paul had spoken earlier (Rom.1:4).²⁰² Packer explains that our adoptive relationship to God as Father should motivate for authentically holy living.²⁰³ Even more than the adoption metaphor in its Roman legal context, the Old Testament theme of sonship shows that one of the implications of sons of God is to live in holiness. In Deuteronomy 14:1-2 we see how sonship language is used to remind the Israelites of their filial status and responsibility to live as holy people who honor God.

Walking in a manner that honors God

The implications of adoption into sonship are related to the behavior of sons of God. Marshall explains that sons of God must behave in a manner worthy of their descent.²⁰⁴ Burke notes, “sons were expected to take their sense of identity from their father and to live in such a way as to honor him, in order not to bring his name or that of the household in disrepute.”²⁰⁵ Sons of God are to walk in a manner that upholds and honors the name and reputation of God as well as the members of His family. Brueggeman explains that sons and daughters carry a responsibility that includes rigorous expectations for conduct.²⁰⁶

²⁰² S.B. Ferguson, *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1981), 88.

²⁰³ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988), 247-248.

²⁰⁴ L.H. Marshall, *The Ethics of the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1960), 259.

²⁰⁵ Burke, *The message of sonship*, 27.

²⁰⁶ Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 156.

Obedience to the Father

One of the implications that follows from the adoption metaphor is obedience to the Father and His will. Jesus was led by the Spirit and lived in obedience to His Father. Through the work and power of the Spirit, the believer will be transformed into the image (eikon) of the Son. In his article, Burke notes, “If there is an allusion to the sonship of Jesus then the Christian’s sonship involves no less obedience than was demanded or required of Him.”²⁰⁷

Service related implications

Both from the adoption metaphor as well as from the sonship theme in the Old Testament we see a linkage between sonship and service. The New Testament counterpart for the Hebrew word for servant is the Greek word *pais*. This word can mean servant but also child or son and is used to describe Jesus’ relationship to the Father (Acts.3:13, 4:27). This word highlights the aspect of service in the life of Jesus.²⁰⁸ Just like the Hebrew counterpart the word *pais* can also refer to a minister, a devout worshipper or someone used by God to fulfill His purposes.²⁰⁹

Dedicating our lives to God’s service

The description in Romans 12 of dedicated service and presenting our bodies as living sacrifices as worship to God fits in with the description above of the Greek word *pais*. One of the implications of sonship is that sons of God are to dedicate their lives to God’s service. Peterson notes, “It is the life that seeks to serve him in the context of

²⁰⁷ T.J. Burke, “Adoption and the Spirit in Romans 8,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (1998):320.

²⁰⁸ Mangum ed., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Logos online.

²⁰⁹ Thayer, *A Greek-English lexicon*, 473.

every day relationships and responsibilities, in the power of his Holy Spirit.”²¹⁰ The motivation and ability to present oneself as a living sacrifice before God begins with being transformed by the renewal of the mind (Rom.12:2). The transformation of the mind makes it possible for the believer to discern God’s will and present oneself for daily obedience to the will of God.

Serving others within the body of Christ

A son of God is given gifts and responsibility and is expected to serve others with the gifts given to him. In Romans 12:6-8 Paul describes different gifts given to God’s adopted sons. God’s sons are expected to be devoted to God and to one another. Peterson notes, “Believers need to view themselves as members of the body of Christ, each with gifts and responsibilities to be exercised for the benefit of others (Rom.12:4-8).”²¹¹ Sons of God are to contribute to the needs of the saints and to practice hospitality. They are not to pay back evil for evil but are called to overcome evil with good. Sons of God are also called to love and honor one another (Rom.12:10). Darko explains that the adopted children of God ought to love one another. He explains that the loving relationship of siblings is rooted and modeled after their relationship with the Father. Darko notes, “The nature of love being called upon is also patterned after the sacrificial love of Christ; it is not a mere affection among siblings but virtue that is rooted in who they are as children of a loving father (God).”²¹² In verse 9-21 Paul highlights how love must find expression amongst Christians, in their relationship. Peterson explains that this love is the essential sign of the renewing of the mind and of the transforming presence of the Spirit of God.

²¹⁰ D. Peterson, “Worship and Ethics in Romans 12” *Tyndale Bulletin* 44, no. 2 (1993): 281.

²¹¹ Peterson, “Worship and Ethics in Romans 12,” 287.

²¹² Tucker, ed., *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity*, 342.

Peterson notes, “As believers have their minds renewed and learn to love one another within the Christian fellowship, they are equipped by God to serve him and please him in every sphere of life.”²¹³ One of the implications in the context of the Roman church was that the believers both Jews and Gentiles were called to serve one another within the household of God.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that the principles of the previous chapter can be translated into practical implications for the lives of believers. In this chapter, we have related the principles to identity-related, spiritual, moral, ethical, and service-related implications for the lives of believers. By relating the principles to these implications it becomes clear how profoundly the adoption metaphor can impact the identity of the believer. Another point, noteworthy to mention is how the adoption metaphor also brings communal implications like living together in peace in unity and dedicating oneself to serving others within the household of God.

²¹³ Peterson, “Worship and Ethics in Romans 12,” 281.

CHAPTER 7: PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE ADOPTION METAPHOR

The implications of the adoption metaphor described in the previous chapter are very relevant for pastoral ministry. The implications of the adoption metaphor are relevant for emotional problems like anxiety, depression, and identity problems. In this chapter, we will relate the implications of the adoption metaphor to the area of pastoral ministry.

1. Being loved and self worth

One of the most profound identity-related implications of the adoption metaphor is that the believer is loved and valued. Receiving love from the Father as well as from brothers and sisters in the household of God results in a healthy feeling of self-worth. Research has shown that when people are depressed, they have negative views about themselves. A healthy feeling of self-worth therefore also has a positive effect on mental issues like depression.

The emotive power of the concept of adoption

The concept of adoption contains a profound emotive power of being wanted, loved, and valued. McGrath gives a profound description of the emotive power of the adoption of believers into the Fatherhood of God. McGrath notes, "Adoption is about being wanted. It is about belonging. These are deeply emotive themes, which resonate with the cares and concerns of many in our increasingly fractured society. To be

adopted is to be invited into a loving and caring environment. It is about being welcomed, wanted and invited. Adoption celebrates the privilege of invitation, in which the outsider is welcomed into the fold of faith and love.”²¹⁴

The pastoral minister can help the believer to understand and experience the emotive power of what it means to be adopted into the Fatherhood of God.

Developing intimacy with God

To help believers grow in their experience of God’s love for them it is important for believers to grow in their relationship with God. In her book ‘into Abba’s arms’, Wilson speaks about the importance of practicing spiritual disciplines to live in the presence of God. Manning explains that the indispensable condition for developing and maintaining the awareness of our belovedness is time alone with God. In solitude, we discover that the truth of our belovedness is really true. Our identity rests in God’s relentless tenderness for us revealed in Jesus Christ.²¹⁵ Wilson explains that intimacy with God is the key to grow in one’s sense of belonging and belovedness. Wilson notes, “My growing sense of belonging and belovedness in Christ cannot be separated from my growing intimacy with the person and promises of Christ.”²¹⁶

The pastoral minister can help and encourage the believer to cultivate intimacy with God in order to grow in their experience of God’s love for them.

Developing a Biblical image of God as a loving Father

To develop a sense of secure belonging to God the believer must learn to relate to God as a loving Father. To help people to relate to God as their loving Father it is

²¹⁴ A. McGrath, *Knowing Christ* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2001), 144-145.

²¹⁵ B. Manning, *Abba’s Child* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 51.

²¹⁶ S.D. Wilson, *Into Abba’s Arms* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), 94.

important to realize that one's image of God as Father could be twisted or distorted. One's image of God is formed within one's family, within the church, and through other people and institutions. It is therefore important to help one to see God the Father through the face of Jesus instead of the face of whoever twisted His image. The pastoral minister can help the believer to develop a Biblical and healthy image of God.

Receiving love from others within the household of God

Another important aspect is to help believers to constructively relate to others within the household of God. An important aspect of this is also to take away hindrances that avoid one to relate with others. Hindrances can have a variety of reasons, e.g.; unforgiveness, fear, shame or prejudice.

It is important for the pastoral minister to help the believer overcome these hindrances to relate with others through which the believer can also receive love, value and acceptance.

2. The care of the Father and confidence

Another identity-related implication of the adoption metaphor is that the believers are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. The message this brings across is that the Father takes care of His children both now as well as in the future.

Research has shown that when people are depressed, they have negative views about themselves, the world and the future.²¹⁷ A good understanding of the care of the

²¹⁷ F. Watts, R. Nye, and S. Savage, *Psychology for Christian Ministry* (London: Routledge, 2002), 172.

Father for His children can therefore positively influence one's mental health. One of the main reasons for the occurrence of anxiety is a lack of trust and exaggerated estimations of the risk of something going wrong.²¹⁸

The care of the Father for His children instills a greater trust within the heart of the believer. A good understanding of the Father's care can result in a sense of security and confidence regarding the present and the future in the heart of the believer. To diminish mental and anxiety problems the pastoral minister can help the believer to develop a greater trust in the care of the Father for them.

3. Belonging and identity

Another profound implication of the adoption metaphor is the fact that the believer belongs to God the Father and the family of God. A clear sense of belonging is very important for the formation of one's identity and mental health.

People have been created for belonging

Therapist Wilson explains in her book 'into Abba's arms' that ever since the loss of relationship in Eden, we've been longing for belonging.²¹⁹ People have been created by God with a need for relationships and this need expresses itself in longing for belonging.²²⁰ In his article, Whitehead explains that we need one another, we need kinship, confidants, and connection for our mental and physical health.²²¹ A number of researches also found a positive correlation between one's sense of belonging and

²¹⁸ Watts, *Psychology for Christian Ministry*, 175.

²¹⁹ Wilson, *Into Abba's Arms*, 9.

²²⁰ Wilson, *Into Abba's Arms*, 21.

²²¹ J.C. Whitehead, "Ghosts and Guests: A Pastoral Theology of Belonging for Ministry with Persons with Mental Illness" *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 70, no.4 (2016): 258.

one's physical and mental health.²²² Half a century ago Maslow (1954) identified belonging as one of the most basic human needs.

Belonging grows in the context of relationship

Wilson explains that throughout life we need consistent, caring interactions with others to develop our senses of identity, to learn how to relate to others responsibly.²²³

Belonging must be experienced and grows in the context of relationship. It must be experienced through an intimate relationship with God and through relationships within the household of God. Wilson advice notes, "I believe that the presence of a trustworthy, caring person is the key to deep, life-transforming change."²²⁴

The pastoral minister can encourage the believer to build and develop trustworthy and caring relationships with others in the household of God.

Processing negative interactions

Having mentioned the positive correlation between a strong sense of belonging and one's mental and physical health, the opposite is also true. If people experience negative interaction with others within the community, it is important to be aware of the fact that this can negatively influence their emotional or physical health.

It is important for the pastoral minister to be aware of this and help the believer in solving or processing these negative interactions.

²²² K.M. Wulff, "Church-Based Social Ties, A Sense of Belonging in a Congregation, and Physical Health Status" *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 15, no.1 (2005): 73.

²²³ Wilson, *Into Abba's Arms*, 14.

²²⁴ Wilson, *Into Abba's Arms*, 29.

4. Serving and purpose in life

One of the implications of the adoption metaphor is that the believer is called to serve God and others. God wants to give responsibility to His sons and daughters. The believer is called to serve others in the church with the gifts and talents he or she has been given. This principle is relevant for pastoral ministry since a clear purpose and calling strongly contribute to one's sense of meaning in life.

Commitment to a meaningful goal

Argue, Roose and Greenway, define purpose as “a commitment to a meaningful goal that leads to behavior that works toward this goal.”²²⁵ Research has shown that religion is an important factor that positively contributes to giving purpose and meaning to one's life.

Discovering purpose and meaning in life

The church is an important place where people can find purpose and meaning in their life. Wulf explains that research has shown that being involved in and committed to personal relationships is the single most important source of meaning in life.²²⁶ Bronk explains that purposeful activities, reflection, discussion, fostering an entrepreneurial attitude, and social support are all factors that may positively influence a person's pursuits of various purposes.²²⁷ The church, therefore, is an important place to help people grow in discovering and working towards their purposes. Research has found that religion has positively impacted individuals with higher levels of social support,

²²⁵ S.C. Argue, C.W. Roose, and T.S. Greenway, “Identity, Belonging, and Purpose as Lenses for Empathizing with Adolescents” *The Journal of Youth Ministry* 18, no.1 (2020): 75.

²²⁶ Wulff, “Church-Based Social Ties,” 82.

²²⁷ K.C. Bronk, *Purpose in Life: A Critical Component of Optimal Youth Development* (New York: Springer, 2013).

purpose, and meaning in life.²²⁸ Religion helps people answer important questions such as why people exist, what is most important in life, why is there pain and suffering, and what to expect after death.²²⁹

The pastoral helper can help the believer to become aware of one's giftings and talents and can encourage the believer to use this in service to God and others.

5. Overcoming fear and slavery

One of the spiritual implications of the adoption metaphor is that the believer is empowered to overcome fear and slavery to sin. In his book 'orphans to heirs' Mark Stibbe explains that in the process from slavery to sonship two kinds of slavery can be seen. On the one hand, we can see slavery to sin in which a person becomes enticed and dragged away by a desire to sin. On the other hand, we can see slavery to law in which one has a dysfunctional view of God.²³⁰ Looking at God as a hard taskmaster instead of a loving Father.

Slavery to sin

The other aspect Stibbe describes is slavery to sin. One of the implications of the adoption metaphor is that the new identity of the believer motivates him or her for authentically holy living. Besides being motivated the believer is also empowered by the Spirit to 'put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit'. Berding explains that as

²²⁸ H. Zang et al, "Exploring Social Belonging and Meaning in Religious Groups" *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 47, no.1 (2019): 14.

²²⁹ D.R. van Tongeren et al, "Security versus growth: Existential tradeoffs of various religious perspectives." *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 8, (2016): 77.

²³⁰ M. Stibbe, *From Orphans to Heirs: Celebrating our Spiritual Adoption* (Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 1999), 109.

the believer daily walks in the Spirit, God will fill the believer in such a way that his or her desires to sin lessen.²³¹ Berding explains that when one is full of the Spirit the carving to sin lessens.²³² The pastoral minister can help and encourage the believer to learn to daily walk in the Spirit and develop intimacy with God.

Slavery to fear

Slavery to law and fear can be recognized through a performance oriented attitude, driven by one's own strength and a focus on religion rather than relationship.²³³ The life of a legal person is dominated by fear, fear of rejection by God, and rejection by others. To overcome this fear the believer needs to be set free through a revelation of the Fatherhood of God. The pastoral minister can also help and encourage the believer in developing a healthy and Biblical image of the Fatherhood of God. A good understanding and image of the Fatherhood of God can help the believer to find freedom from fear.

Conclusion

Relating the implications of the adoption metaphor to the area of pastoral ministry gives a further understanding of the impact of these implications on the lives of believers. The implications of the adoption metaphor can positively contribute to the self-worth and identity of the believer and can strengthen the believer with more confidence and trust in life. Another outcome of the implications of the adoption metaphor is that through service to God and others, the believer can find meaning and

²³¹ K. Berding, *Walking in the Spirit* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2011), 41.

²³² Berding, *Walking in the Spirit*, 41.

²³³ Stibbe, *From Orphans to Heirs*, 109.

purpose in life. Finally, a last implication is found in the motivation and empowerment of the believer to overcome fear and bondages.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In this study on the Fatherhood of God and the Pauline adoption metaphor, we have seen how the Fatherhood of God can be recognized both in the Old and the New Testament. We have also seen how the Fatherhood of God is revealed further through Jesus and His unique Son-Father relationship. Through Jesus, the believer can now also be adopted into the Fatherhood of God and address God with the filial and intimate expression of *Abba* Father. We have seen that the Pauline adoption metaphor in Romans 8:15-17 is rooted both in its Greco-Roman context and legal adoption practices as well as in the Old Testament theme of sonship.

The adoption of the believer into the Fatherhood of God contains principles and implications for believers that are highly relevant to pastoral ministry. The principles that come forth out of the adoption metaphor can be summarized in the following themes; being loved, belonging, overcoming anxiety and bondage, honoring God, and having a goal and purpose in life. These principles can be translated in identity-related, spiritual, moral, ethical, and service-related implications.

The implications of the Fatherhood of God and the adoption metaphor can positively contribute to one's self-worth, mental health, and meaning and purpose in life. Furthermore, it can result in a deep sense of security and trust in the heart of the believer and can empower the believer to overcome personal fears and bondages.

To further apply the implications of the adoption metaphor the pastoral minister can encourage the believer in cultivating intimacy with God, restoring one's image of God the Father, being involved in service to God and others, and learning

the believer how to be led and empowered by the Spirit to overcome fear and bondages.

In conclusion, we can see how the Father's love and acceptance speaks as nothing else to the core issue beneath our emotional struggles. A deeper relationship with God as Father and a deeper understanding of our identity as sons and daughters can result in emotional healing and personal growth.

Suggestions for further research

Because of the relevance of the described implications of the adoption metaphor for pastoral ministry, further research is needed for the practical application of these implications in pastoral ministry. Research is needed on which counseling methods and settings are suitable to bring across the implications of the adoption metaphor.

Further research is also needed for the ecclesial implications of the adoption metaphor. The implications of the adoption metaphor can be of great value for the manner in which we structure and shape our church today. The implications of the adoption metaphor can positively contribute to unity and peace among believers in the church. The church is also a very important place for people to experience a strong sense of belonging and for discovering their meaning and purpose in life.

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