



# 8

## Children of God

### Key Theme

- God works in believers to accomplish His purposes.

### Key Passages

- Romans 8:9–17; Ephesians 1:3–14; 1 Peter 1:1–9

### Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe the new relationship between believers and God.
- Describe the benefits of being adopted by God.



## Lesson Overview



### Come On In

Write on the board, “What benefits are there in adoption?”

Students will complete the Memory Verse Review Sheet. If time allows, have them recite the verse together.



### Studying God's Word

When people receive Jesus as their Savior they become children of God. God is their Father, Jesus is their brother, and other believers are their brothers and sisters. This special relationship with God also comes with a promised inheritance in heaven. Being adopted into God's family is an amazing gift!

Study the Prepare to Share section.

Go Before the Throne.



### Activity: In Christ

Students will take time to highlight the important theme of being in Christ from Ephesians 1:3–14.

Student Guides

Pencils/highlighters

In Christ Answer Key from the Resource DVD-ROM



# Prepare to Share

## SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages listed above with this background.

Sinners are not saved by works of righteousness (Titus 3:5). They are not justified by works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:16). The Bible tells us that it is by grace that we have been saved through faith. This grace is a free gift from God. It was God's plan that none would be saved by any works of righteousness, so no man could boast of his accomplishments (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Sinners who are saved by God's grace are not only forgiven, redeemed, and granted eternal life, but they are also adopted into God's family! The Bible tells us that all who receive Him—those who believe in His name—are given the right to become children of God (John 1:12). All true believers are led by the Spirit of God and are sons of God. They have received the Spirit of adoption and can now call God, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:14–15). Just like salvation, this adoption is completely of God. No one deserves it, nor could anyone achieve it. It is God, through His mercy and love, who allows this privilege to sinners. It is unlikely that anyone in this life will thoroughly grasp the significance of this truth—that God has granted such love to sinners that we should be called His children (1 John 3:1)!

But what does all of this mean to those who are saved? It means we can know and trust God—the Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe—as a good and loving Father. The Bible tells us that even as a father pities his own children the Lord will pity those who fear Him (Psalm 103:13). We can know that He will give good gifts to those who ask Him, even more than an earthly father who gives good gifts to his children (Matthew 7:11).

Because God receives ALL believers into His family as adopted children, we know that our relationship with other Christians will change—they are brothers and sisters in Christ. Other believers—whether they are next door or across the globe—are now part of our family.

We are all children of God and no longer slaves but sons and heirs of God (Galatians 4:7). We are heirs and co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). But what are we heirs of? In Christ, we have all been born again into an inheritance through His Resurrection. This inheritance promised to the children of God is incorruptible and will not decay like everything else on earth. It is an inheritance that is undefiled and perfect. It is unstained and free from all evil, unlike the things of the world. And this is an inheritance that will not fade away but will maintain all of its beauty and grandeur and promise—so unlike the things of the world that fade, weaken, decline, and depreciate. This

promised eternal inheritance is being reserved and kept in heaven for all believers (1 Peter 1:4).

This is the hope into which we are saved. As believers, we are eagerly waiting for the culmination of our inheritance, which includes the completion of our adoption and the redemption of our body. Through faith we wait, hoping for what we cannot see but believing and eagerly waiting for it with perseverance (Romans 8:23–25).

What a blessed thought to meditate on. We who are in Christ can come to God and cry, "Abba, Father!" The love that God has for us is everlasting and unquenchable. It led the Apostle Paul to proclaim,

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38–39).

## HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

In his epistles, the Apostle Paul uses the picture of adoption as a metaphor for God's redemptive work in His chosen ones. Paul makes reference to the Roman law and culture of his day in which slaves had an inferior standing, sons had an honored standing, and adoption had a redemptive purpose. The better we understand the Roman adoption practices of the first century, the better we'll understand the ramifications of this wonderful doctrine for those of us who believe.

Roman adoption was a very serious matter because of what is called the *patria potestas* ("the possession of the father"). The *patria potestas* was the father's power over his family; and this power included absolute disposal and control over his children. Paul alludes to this absolute power of the father in Galatians chapter 4 where he says, "Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave" (Galatians 4:1). In the early days of Rome the father's power actually included power over life and death. If a deformed child were born, for example, it was to be killed immediately. The *patria potestas* meant that in the case of divorce, custody of the children would always go to the father. Because of this absolute right of possession, adoption into another family was a very difficult and serious process.

To be legally adopted, a person had to pass from one *patria potestas* to another. For this transfer to happen in the Roman culture, two things had to be accomplished. Both of these were done in the presence of seven wit-

nesses so that the validity of the adoption could be defended beyond reasonable doubt.

1. The first step was a symbolic sale. According to Roman law, a father forfeited his potestas if he sold his son three times. For this reason, a legal ceremony took place in which the father sold his son three times and then the son would pass completely to the possession of the adopter.
2. The “sale” of the son was followed by a legal ceremony. The adopting father went to a Roman magistrate in order to legally transfer the adopted son into his possession. When this process was completed, the adoption was complete.

It was common to adopt a freeman or a relative into a family. The adoption of a slave, however, was much less common. In the case of a master with no heir, a favored slave might be adopted for the purpose of having a legal heir to inherit the estate. In ancient times, a slave was never permitted to use the term *Abba* (father) or *Imma* (mother) when addressing the master or mistress of the house. But after the adoption, the slave-turned-son was considered a full son and was entitled to use these familial terms. The adopted son was now a co-heir with any natural-born sons. In fact, the adopted son became a member of the family just as if he had been born of the father.

The effect of adoption was fourfold for the adoptee: a change of family, a change of name, a change of home, and new responsibilities and privileges. In the same way, all who are adopted by God are made part of His family, bear His name, have heaven now as home, and have a new set of obligations and privileges as God’s children.

Bearing all these facts in mind, we can better understand the magnitude of Paul’s words as he wrote to the Roman Christians:

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs (Romans 8:15–17a).

As the seven witnesses could witness to the fact of an adoption, so the joint witness of the Holy Spirit and the spirit of believers witness to the same glorious fact—we are sons of God through faith in Christ.

What, then, should our response be as we realize we have been adopted as sons of God? First of all, God’s amazing grace toward us should produce overflowing praise. We are no longer slaves to sin and under the power of the evil one. Rather, we are sons of God, and “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the king-

dom of the Son of His love” (Colossians 1:13). Our adoption gives us security as God’s child—no one can snatch us out of the Father’s hand (John 10:29). Through the Spirit we have intimate communication with God, characteristic of a father-son relationship.

While God loves us, sustains us, and cares for us as our Father, we also have responsibilities to Him and to our new family. As God’s children, we are to walk in obedience and holiness.

As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.” And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:14–19).

Furthermore, as believers who have been adopted into God’s family, we are called to now show love, respect, and honor—brotherly love—to our brothers and sisters in Christ (Romans 12:10).

Just as an adoptee under Roman law was now a permanent member of that family, so we who are believers will always be sons and daughters of the King. We can be confident of the full, immutable claim God has placed on us as His children. For believers, this becomes our status and our identity. Surely now, how we live should honor the one who paid so great a cost to adopt us into His family.



## BEFORE THE THRONE

Abba, Father, praise your almighty name! It is a very precious gift that sinners can be called children of God. Those who believe and trust in Jesus are chosen and adopted and loved by you—the Creator of the universe. We become co-heirs with Christ and are blessed with an eternal inheritance. Father, grant us wisdom and understanding as we study these truths. Lift the veil so my students would realize their own sinfulness and desire forgiveness, salvation, and adoption into the family of God.

## Review

Our lesson today continues to look at some of the important aspects found in the epistles of living life as a Christian. Last week we talked about the relationship between faith and works, noting that the Bible teaches clearly that we are saved by grace to do the good works that God has prepared for us to do. While our works do not earn our salvation, they are a clear sign of faith being worked out through obedience to God's commands.

- ? **Who can describe our salvation in terms of the five solas we mentioned last week?** *When we speak of salvation as described in the Bible alone (sola scriptura), we say that salvation is by grace alone (sola gratia) through faith alone (sola fide) in Christ alone (solus Christus) to the glory of God alone (soli Deo gloria).*

We know that we are saved from sin and the wrath of God by grace alone through faith. We are called to a life of good works that make that salvation evident in our lives.

Today, we are going to focus our time on understanding the amazing benefits that we have as children of God. We have talked before about the idea of being a child of God. In our culture, many believe that everyone is a child of God. But is that really true? That is one of the questions we are going to focus on today, as well as some of the pictures the epistles give us of the benefits of being a child of God.



- Write on the board, "What benefits are there in adoption?"

**Romans 8:1–17**



## Studying God's Word

### READ THE WORD

Let's read Romans 8:1–17 together to try and understand who the children of God really are. The previous context of chapters 6 and 7 in Romans has Paul distinguishing between the slavery and death that came through the Law and the freedom and life that is found in Christ—that salvation is by grace alone. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

### EXAMINE THE WORD

#### Observe the Text

- ? **Who is the author of this epistle?** *Paul is identified in 1:1 as the author. While Tertius was the scribe in Corinth, Paul is the author (16:21–24).*
- ? **Who was the letter written to?** *1:7 identifies the audience as those in Rome who were beloved of God and called to be saints.*
- ? **Who is no longer under condemnation?** *Those who are in Christ Jesus.*
- ? **How should we understand the phrase "who are in Christ Jesus"?** *This is referring to believers in Christ, having been united to Christ at salvation.*

- ? **What characterizes those who are in Christ?** *They do not live in a manner that follows the flesh (fleshly lusts), but in a way that follows the Holy Spirit.*
- ? **Which law was Paul referring to as the “law of sin and death”?** *He is referring to the laws prescribed in the Old Testament, especially the Mosaic Law.*
- ? **Why was that Law powerless?** *Since men in the flesh cannot obey the Law, the Law cannot save anyone. Our own efforts to obey cannot produce righteousness.*
- ? **How was the Law fulfilled?** *God sent Jesus in the likeness of sinful flesh to fulfill the Law.*
- ? **How did Jesus fulfill the Law for us?** *The phrase “in us” and “in Christ” are reminders of the believer’s union with Christ in salvation. Our sin was placed upon Christ on the Cross, and His righteousness was given to us in having perfectly obeyed the Law.*
- ? **What idea is repeated in verses 4–5?** *The idea of walking in the flesh and walking in the Spirit is repeated. This idea carries through this passage in many places, distinguishing the life of those in Christ and those of the world.*
- ? **What synonym for flesh is used in verse 6?** *Carnal.*
- ? **What is the result of being carnally minded?** *Death.*
- ? **What is the result of being spiritually minded?** *Life and peace with God.*
- ? **What is the relationship between God and those who are carnally minded?** *The carnally minded are at war (enmity) with God as they rebel against His Law.*
- ? **What two things are the carnally minded not able to do?** *They cannot obey the Law of God nor please God.*
- ? **How did Paul clearly distinguish between the saved and unsaved in verse 9?** *He clearly told them that all who had the Spirit of God dwelling in them truly belonged to Christ.*
- ? **What miracle was attributed to the Spirit in verse 11?** *The Resurrection of Jesus was accomplished by the Spirit.*
- ? **What connection did Paul make between the Holy Spirit raising Christ and His presence in believers?** *The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work inside believers to empower them to live a life of obedience. There is also a hint of the future resurrection from the dead at a later point, especially in light of 8:18–24.*
- ? **How did Paul call the Roman believers to live in light of the power of the Holy Spirit?** *He told them to work with the power of the Holy Spirit to put to death the deeds of the body (the sins of the flesh).*
- ? **What characterizes those who are sons of God?** *They are led by the Spirit of God.*
- ? **What does this imply about those who are not led by the Spirit?** *They are not sons of God.*
- ? **How is the Spirit described in verse 15?** *He is the Spirit of adoption.*

➤ This explains the active obedience of Jesus to obey the Law on our behalf.

➤ **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.



► Some have taught here that Paul's use of the Aramaic word Abba is equivalent to "Daddy." There is no historical support for this claim as Abba is simply the normal word for "father."

- ? **What does the recognition of God's Spirit of adoption produce in believers?** *They see God as their Father and call out to Him as such. This indicates an intimate connection that replaces the enmity described in verse 7.*
- ? **How does the Spirit affirm this truth of adoption?** *He bears witness with our own spirits that we are children of God.*
- ? **What logical chain relating to adoption is described in verses 16–17?** *If we have been adopted, then we are children of God; if children, then heirs; if heirs, then joint heirs with Christ of the future glory with Him.*
- ? **What does Paul acknowledge as part of our inheritance with Christ in verse 17?** *Just as Christ suffered, we will suffer as children of God. The rest of chapter 8 relates this suffering to the corruption from the Fall and the hope of restoration, ultimately leading to our glorification to be like Christ.*
- ? **In what ways is the Holy Spirit described in this passage?** *The Spirit of life (v. 2); the Spirit of God (vv. 9, 11, 14); the Spirit of Christ (v. 10); the Spirit of adoption (v. 15).*
- ? **How would you summarize what this passage teaches about the change in our relationship to God as we are adopted into His family?** *Having once been at enmity with God and walking according to the desires of our flesh, we have been adopted into God's family through the work of Jesus and can now walk in the power of the Holy Spirit in a way that is pleasing to Him. We are now children of God with a full inheritance.*

### Discover the Truth

What a glorious passage! Enemies of God have been reconciled through Christ's obedience and righteousness, being adopted into God's family. Adoption is an amazing aspect of our union with Christ. There are some very helpful historical connections that relate to adoption in the culture which Paul was writing. For example, a son who was adopted into a Roman family could now receive the inheritance and be recognized as a son of his adopted father. So, adoption was a vibrant word picture for those receiving these words from Paul. I would encourage you to read more about the details of Roman adoption in the background section in your Student Guide.

- ? **What does the idea of being adopted into God's family show us about God's attributes?** *His sovereignty as He chooses to adopt; His mercy in showing kindness to His enemies; His love in wanting what is best for His children. Discuss other ideas.*

As we think about the idea of adoption, we must naturally conclude that there are those who are outside of God's family and are not children of God. In fact, in the opening of John's Gospel he tells us who can be called children of God: "But as many as received [Christ], to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12–13). And with our adoption as sons and daughters of the Creator God of the universe comes great benefits.



SOVEREIGN

MERCIFUL

LOVE



# In Christ

## MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- In Christ Answer Key
- Pencils/highlighters

## INSTRUCTIONS

*You may want to have some highlighters or colored pencils available for the students to use.*

Our activity is going to make a connection between the two texts we are examining today. This connection involves our adoption and the inheritance (or benefits) that come with that adoption. If you are fine with highlighting and marking in your Bibles, I would encourage you to do so during this activity. If not, the text of Ephesians 1:3–14 is included in your Student Guide in the In Christ activity.

Read through Ephesians 1:3–14 and highlight all of the phrases that speak about our union with Christ using the phrase “in Christ” or similar phrases. Then there are a couple of questions we will discuss. *Students may miss some of the phrases using pronouns like “in Him.”*

## CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

*Use the In Christ Answer Key to discuss which key phrases they highlighted, and discuss the answers to the questions.*

When God adopts us into His family (which happened in God’s mind before time), we are sealed with the Holy Spirit and promised an inheritance. That inheritance is available to us now, but it will not be fully realized until we are perfectly united with Christ in eternity. So, let’s look at that inheritance and the benefits of adoption as Peter described them in his first epistle.



## READ THE WORD

Look at 1 Peter 1:1–9 with me as we try to understand more about our benefits in Christ. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

1 Peter 1:1–9

## EXAMINE THE WORD

### Observe the Text

- ? **Who is the author of this epistle?** *The Apostle Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.*
- ? **Who is being addressed in this epistle?** *The audience is described as those who are elected by God the Father and saved through the blood of Jesus Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit. By extension, much of the letter could be seen as addressing all Christians throughout time.*
- ? **Who does Peter bless?** *God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
- ? **What have we been begotten to?** *A living hope.*
- ? **What does “begotten us again” refer to?** *This is another way to say “born again” and describes our new birth in Christ as Jesus talked about in John 3.*

➤ The address in this epistle has a clear Trinitarian description.

- ? **How is the living hope secured for us?** *Through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*
- ? **How have we been given this living hope?** *It has been given to us by the abundant mercy of God.*
- ? **What other term is used for the future hope in verse 4?** *It is called an inheritance.*
- ? **How is the inheritance described?** *Incorruptible (not subject to decay), undefiled (not stained by evil in any way), does not fade away (unlike a flower that may wither over time), and reserved in heaven (guaranteed).*
- ? **What is Peter stressing in this passage?** *He is stressing the eternal nature of our heavenly inheritance.*
- ? **How would this heavenly inheritance compare to an earthly inheritance?** *An earthly inheritance is prone to decay as money or assets depreciate or may be stolen, but the heavenly inheritance has none of those elements.*
- ? **Who does the verb “kept” refer to?** *Those who are in Christ as described in the previous verses.*
- ? **How are believers kept?** *By the power of God through faith.*
- ? **What are they kept for?** *For salvation and the previously mentioned inheritance.*
- ? **When will this salvation and inheritance be fulfilled?** *While we have the benefits of the inheritance and salvation now, the fullness will only be realized in heaven (in the last time).*
- ? **What is the basis for rejoicing in verse 6?** *The realization of salvation and the heavenly inheritance.*
- ? **What could limit this rejoicing?** *The various trials that the believers face while here on the earth.*
- ? **What is the goal of these trials?** *That the genuineness of the faith of believers would be tested.*
- ? **What analogy does Peter use to describe the testing of faith?** *He refers to the testing of gold, which is heated to remove any impurities. This idea is common to the Old Testament; affliction is described as purifying God’s people.*
- ? **What is the purpose of this testing?** *To offer praise, honor, and glory to God.*
- ? **When will this be accomplished?** *The phrase “at the revelation of Jesus Christ” refers to His Second Coming and relates back to “the last time” in verse 5.*
- ? **How does Psalm 66:8–12 relate to this idea of refinement?** *God is to be praised for His faithfulness in keeping His people even in the midst of trials that He has brought, resulting in rich fulfillment.*
- ? **Moving back to 1 Peter, what aspect of faith is highlighted in verse 8?** *Peter is pointing out their faith in Jesus and His work even though they have not physically seen Him. This is related to Jesus’s comment to Thomas in John 20:29 about believing without seeing bringing blessing, and to the teaching in 1 John 4.*

## Psalm 66:8–12

- ? What attitude does Peter identify with believers in verse 8? *Rejoicing with inexpressible joy and full of glory in light of their salvation.*
- ? What is the end (goal) of faith? *The salvation of our souls.*
- ? What does Ephesians 1:11–14 add to our understanding of this passage? *Paul affirms Peter's notion of an inheritance that has been given to those whom God predestined to receive. The inheritance results in the praise of God's glory and is sealed with the Holy Spirit to be revealed in the redemption of all things.*

## Discover the Truth

Having been adopted by God, we are heirs of a rich inheritance. The benefits of that inheritance should lead us to offer praise to God as we rejoice in what He has done for us in Christ. And He has not left us alone, but has given the Holy Spirit as an absolute guarantee of our inheritance. While we experience many of the benefits of our adoption today, we ultimately look forward to experiencing the fullness of that inheritance in the future when Christ returns and brings about the consummation of all things.



## Applying God's Word

### WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

To be sure, we have only scratched the surface of what it means to be adopted by God. We were once His enemies, but now He calls us children and grants us an inheritance with His Son. Knowing that He has freely chosen to save us because of His good pleasure and not of our own merit should cause us to fall to our knees in thanksgiving. We will surely face various trials in this life, but knowing that God intends to use those trials to refine us into the image of Christ should cause us to rejoice in the midst of our trials.

As children of God, we have access to the Creator of the universe. We can boldly approach His throne and ask Him for the things that we need, trusting He will not give us a stone when we ask for bread. And the inheritance that we have is kept for us by His power and with the seal of His Spirit living inside of us. Since our salvation is of God, it will not be corroded or corrupted in any way. We can look around this room and consider one another brothers and sisters in Christ and work together to remind each other of our position and inheritance in Christ. And we can work to call others to the family, imploring them to be reconciled to God and enjoy the benefits He offers to His children. Let us work together to those ends until we experience the fullness of our salvation at the return of Christ.

## GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? **How could you use the common belief that everyone is a child of God to share the gospel with someone?** *If you were to hear someone using that phrase, you could use that as an opportunity to ask them what they mean by that and if they think that they are a child of God. This could lead into a discussion of the biblical passages that could be used to help them understand that their condition as a son or daughter of Adam is one of enmity with God but that He has offered adoption into His family for all who will repent and trust in Christ.*
- ? **In many cases, Christians forget about the significant role of the Holy Spirit in their daily lives. The passages we have looked at today shine a spotlight on His work in our daily walk. What can we do to remember the important role of God the Holy Spirit in living as a child of God the Father?** *As the Romans 8 passage explains, it is cooperation with the Holy Spirit that allows us to walk in obedience and fight against sin. It is by the leading of the Holy Spirit that we know we are children of God. It would be helpful to ask the Spirit, during prayer, to guide us in truth and to help us as we seek to obey.*
- ? **How does your understanding of adoption in a human family help you to understand your adoption into God's family?** *Discuss the analogous elements of being adopted into a family and being adopted into God's family. Several of these connections can be found in the Historical Background section.*
- ? **While we should be very aware of the benefits that we have as adopted sons and daughters of the King, what is the danger of using these benefits in evangelizing unbelievers?** *Many people have fallen into the trap of teaching about the benefits of salvation while avoiding the importance of recognizing and repenting of sin in one's life. The false gospel of prosperity focuses on what God will give you as His child and promotes the gifts rather than the Giver of those gifts as the ultimate prize to be sought after. We need to balance the benefits of salvation and adoption with the cost of being a disciple and carrying our cross to follow Jesus. Jesus made this point in Luke 14:25–33 where He used the illustration of counting the cost before building a tower or going to war.*
- ? **How can you use the truths about the benefits of our adoption in Christ to offer encouragement to another believer?** *Discuss various answers, encouraging the students to put into practice what they are learning and using it to both disciple others and evangelize the lost.*



### MEMORY VERSE

**1 Thessalonians 5:16–18** Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.



### GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for adopting us in Christ and sealing us with His Spirit.
- Praise God for His mercy in adopting those who were His enemies.
- Ask God for a deeper understanding of the riches of the inheritance we have in Christ Jesus.