

# **John L. Girardeau's Doctrine of Adoption:**

## **A Systematic and Biblical Defense**

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# I. Introduction

“It [adoption] has not been made the subject of much controversy, nor has it received the didactic exposition which has been devoted to most of the other topics included in the theology of redemption. Its importance has been to a large extent overlooked...”<sup>1</sup>

John L. Girardeau’s discussion of the doctrine of Adoption is perhaps the most significant contribution to the subject since the debate in 1864 between the two Scotsmen, Dr. Robert Candlish and Dr. Thomas Crawford, over the Fatherhood of God. Girardeau gave the discussion an American presence by continuing and clarifying it for Presbyterians in the South. The intricacy and length of his arguments on such an important topic should alone have been sufficient for his views to receive widespread attention.

However, Girardeau’s view has been overlooked for a variety of factors. The first is that his chapter “The Doctrine of Adoption” was not published separately but in a volume with some of his other collected writings. The second, and perhaps the most significant, is that the chapter is a compendium of five essays which were written at various times, for different occasions, and different purposes. The material has little or no introduction, is unsystematic, sometimes repetitive, and long. For modern readers his 19<sup>th</sup> century style is hard to read, his arguments are not easy to grasp, he assumes a lot of previous theological knowledge, and it may not be obvious why his splitting of hairs is important or practical. The third reason that his discussion has not been popularly received is that his view was in some ways among the minority. Thornwell held to the opposite view and his widespread influence as a professor at Columbia Theological

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<sup>1</sup> John L. Girardeau, ed., George Blackburn, *Discussions of Theological Discussions* (reprint, Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1886; Richmond: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1905), 428-429. John Kennedy, a late 1800’s Scotsman wrote in a similar vein. Speaking of the line of reformed theologians, he says, “their successors have hitherto added but little to their labors in this department of theology; and notwithstanding a recent discussion, by learned Doctors, of this subject, a clear definition of adoption, and a just description of its effects, on the relation between believers and God, are still wanting.” John Kennedy, *Man’s Relations to God* (1869; reprint, The James Begg Society, 1998), 78.

Seminary had gone before Girardeau. Dabney at Union Theological Seminary was in agreement with Thornwell, as well as Hodge at Princeton in the North. A fourth contributing factor was the growing popularity of the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God and the Universal Brotherhood of Man in the liberal churches. This made it much more difficult to persuade Calvinists towards a view that was being abused by theological liberals.

Girardeau's contribution, however, is magnificent. Girardeau's contribution to the doctrine of Adoption will be presented concisely, clearly, and in a systematic fashion. His view will be defended from his contemporaries' objections and shown to be the teaching of scripture.

## **II. The Doctrine of Adoption**

### **A. Adoption is distinct from Regeneration**

Many of the objections brought on by the opponents of Girardeau implicitly confuse Adoption and Regeneration. Girardeau gives seven reasons to keep these two doctrines clearly distinct.<sup>2</sup> (1) In the Ordo Salutis Regeneration is the condition of faith while faith is the condition of Adoption. John 1:12,13 shows this relationship:

“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

This shows that all who received him by faith were first born of God (regenerated). To those who received him by faith he gave “exousia”, that is, the authority or right, to become the sons of

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<sup>2</sup> A.A. Hodge blurs the distinction: “It appears, however, to us that the words ‘Adoption’ and ‘Sonship,’ as used in scripture, express more than a change of relation, and that they are more adequately conceived of as expressing a complex view, including the change of nature together with the change of relation, and setting forth the new creature in his new relations... Justification is wholly forensic, and concerns only relations, immunities and rights. Regeneration and sanctification are wholly spiritual and moral, and concern only inherent qualities and states. Adoption comprehends the complex condition of the believer as at once the subject of both.” A.A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (1860; reprint, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991) 516.

God. In the case of regeneration dynamic power is exerted while in adoption legal authority is granted. Gal. 3:26 likewise shows that faith is the condition of adoption, “Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”

Reasons two through six, though very similar, are technically distinct as they touch upon different aspects of the two doctrines. (2) Regeneration is a creative act, adoption is not. By Adoption an already created child of God is authorized to take his place in God’s family. (3) Regeneration is a physical act which affects the person’s nature whereas Adoption is a legal act which affects the person’s relations. (4) Regeneration is a real translation from Satan’s family into God’s family whereas Adoption is a formal translation from Satan’s family to God’s. (5) Regeneration adapts the person to his place in God’s family by giving the tempers of a child whereas Adoption formally introduces the person by right. (6) Regeneration makes a person God’s child whereas Adoption recognizes and treats him as a child. The last reason is significantly different from the preceding ones: (7) Regeneration does not confirm a person with an indefeasible right as a child or to the inheritance of God, whereas the status of heir as conferred by Adoption is uncontingent and absolute.

## **Objection**

In response to the last distinction given, it is objected that there is no reason for a father to adopt a person that is already his child.<sup>3</sup> Girardeau’s response is three-fold. First, this is in fact what happens with believers. The *Ordo Salutis* is such that God’s elect are made children, being given spiritual birth through regeneration, and as such they are adopted into God’s family.

Regeneration is not only the condition of Justification, but also of Adoption, for it “restores to

<sup>3</sup> With respect to the case of Adam, Kennedy writes, “If being like his Maker made man a son of God, then ipso facto regeneration restores him to that relation. If so, there is no place at all for an act of adoption on the part of God the Father.” Kennedy, *Man’s Relations*, 22.

the sinner the temper of obedience as a subject of law as well as the disposition of a child.”<sup>4</sup>

“God only adopts into his family those to whom he has previously imparted the nature and the disposition of children.”<sup>5</sup> Girardeau further clarifies the organic relation between Regeneration and Adoption:

“The adoptive may actually secure greater honor and privilege, and in that sense may be conceived as the greater, but the very notion of it springs from the natural. Indeed, it would seem impossible to conceive the adoptive without the previous conception of the natural”

Secondly, the distinction can be more adequately seen in considering the case of a child regenerate from birth. On the objector’s view the child would already be a possessor of the confirmation won for them by Christ as their federal head and representative. However, a distinction must be made parallel to the case of justification. A regenerate child is still required, and granted, to exercise conscious faith as he is reared. Upon this he receives actual justification. Before this the child partook of virtual Justification, being representatively justified in Christ as his federal head. So it is with Adoption. The regenerate child of God partakes of virtual Adoption insofar as his federal head is concerned, but is still required to exercise conscious faith in order to receive actual Adoption. It is true that regeneration itself manifests union with God and is a guarantee of eternal life, but God has thought it wise to confirm this union with Adoption.

The third reason why it is necessary that created children of God need to be further adopted is that even when translated out of the family of Satan believers still bare the marks of their old relation in a remnant of sinful tendencies. Girardeau writes, “It would be difficult for us, conscious as we are of continued sinfulness and pollution, to believe ourselves entitled to the immunities and privileges of God’s children, were we not assured by him of our adoption into his family.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Girardeau, *Discussions*, 483.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 455.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 479.

## B. Adoption is distinct from Justification

The hinge of Girardeau's view lies in making clear the distinction between adoption and justification.<sup>7</sup> He gives four reasons to justify the necessity of this. (1) Justification treats the person as a subject, whereas Adoption treats the person as a child. These are qualitatively different relations. One can exist without the other. (2) Justification confirms the person in God's rectoral regard as a ruler and judge, whereas Adoption confirms the person in God's paternal regard as a Father. (3) Justification legally brings the person into the kingdom, or polity, of God, giving him the rights of a righteous man. Adoption legally brings the person into the family of God, giving him the rights of a child. (4) Justification gives the person the title to the rewards of moral government, whereas Adoption gives the person the title to the inheritance of sons. A subject of moral government is not necessarily an heir. Adoption offers much richer blessings than Justification as can be seen in the difference between a righteous servant and a favored son in a father's household. This is illustrated in Gal. 4:1-7:

“Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed by the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fulness of time was come God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Turretin makes Adoption the positive side of Justification, “The other part of justification is adoption or the bestowal of a right to life...” Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1994) 2:666. Thus Adoption is a part of Justification, “...justification is a benefit by which God (being reconciled to us in Christ) absolves us from the guilt of sins and gives us a right to life, it follows that adoption is included in justification itself as a part which, with the remission of sins, constitutes the whole of this benefit.” Ibid., 2:668. Dabney thinks similarly: “Adoption cannot be said to be a different act or grace from justification... Owen says that adoption is but a presentation of the blessings bestowed in justification in new phases and relations. And this is evidently correct... we have here the strongest proof of the correctness of our definition of justification... in the fact that it is both a pardon and an adoption.” Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (1871; reprint, Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002) 627. Thornwell is in the same agreement of thought, “Adoption is grounded in justification.” Thornwell, *Collected Writings* (1901; reprint, Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2004) 1:267. Interestingly the Kennedy agrees with Girardeau on the separation of the different doctrines, though he takes the opposite view of the Fatherhood of God. Kennedy, *Man's Relations*, 78.

## Objections

Two objections are given to this, the second following upon the first. (1) It is said that the moral government of a servant is incompatible with the moral discipline of a child with respect to the same person. (2) This would imply a two-fold obedience of Christ, one as a servant to ground Justification and one as a son to ground Adoption.

A consideration of the status of believers as both sons and servants should be a sufficient answer to the first objection. Jesus said to his disciples, “Henceforth I call you not servants... but I have called you friends...” (John 15:15) Yet their friendship did not absolve or diminish their duty as servants. The apostles refer to themselves as servants, “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ,” (1 Pet. 1:1) and again, “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ...” (Rom. 1:1) While all believers are sons, they still retain their relation as servants as well: “Who then is that faithful and wise servant whom his Lord when he cometh shall find doing?” (Matt 14:45); “Well done good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” (Matt 25:21); “But now being made free from sin and become the servants to God.” (Rom. 6:22); “He that is called being free is Christ’s servant.” (1 Cor. 7:22); “As free, and not using your liberty as a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.” (1 Pet. 2:16); “To show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass.” (Rev. 22:6); “Hath avenged the blood of his servants.” (Rev. 19:2); “There shall be no more curse, and his servants shall serve him.” (Rev. 22:3) The servant-hood of believers is not swallowed up in their sonship either in this age or in the age to come.

Since the relations of sonship and servant-hood are compatible, they must be species of the genus of moral government. That is, moral government can be distinguished into

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<sup>8</sup> Another important distinction which Girardeau does not pick up on is that a believer is justified by God, but adopted by the first person of the Trinity. A.A. Hodge recognizes this, “By it [adoption] God the Father is made our Father.” Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, 519. John Murray seems to be the first to deal with this question directly, giving arguments that the fatherhood in Adoption is not of the whole Godhead, but only of God the Father. See Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955) 134-140.



disciplinary and retributive aspects respectively. Both of these relations may be simultaneous in one person. Girardeau gives a helpful illustration:

“Let us suppose that a king appoints his son to discharge some official service. The son could not plead his filial relation as inconsistent with the duty thus assigned him by his father. For the appointment would be made by the father not as father, but as sovereign; and the general obligation arising from the relation of the son as subject would underlie and enforce his specific duty to perform the official service supposed to be assigned him.”<sup>9</sup>

Concerning the distinction and overlap of these two relations, Girardeau gives another helpful comment: “But all the adopted children of God are subjects of Christ’s kingdom... God’s family is precisely Christ’s kingdom.”<sup>10</sup> This is fleshed out by Girardeau more fully:

“Through Christ they are introduced into the favor of God as ruler, and at the same into the regard of God as Father. To the rectoral government of God they stand related through Christ as priest and king; to the Fatherly rule of God they stand related through Christ as their brother. As subjects of Christ they are the accepted subjects of God; as the brethren of Christ they are the accepted children of God. The family of God then, is coincident with the kingdom of Christ.”<sup>11</sup>

As has been hinted at, not only are these two relations compatible in believers, but they are ultimately grounded in God. God is both Ruler and Father. The same person has two simultaneous relations to his people. Thus it is seen that moral government and moral discipline are not exclusive of each other.

The second objection is that distinguishing between Adoption and Justification makes Christ’s obedience two-fold, one grounding Adoption and the other grounding Justification, is not necessary. Let it be admitted at the outset that Christ was both servant and Son. As servant, under the retributive moral government of God, he “redeemed us from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for us.” (Gal. 3:3) He was also a subject of moral discipline, for “we have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all

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<sup>9</sup> Girardeau, *Discussions*, 447.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 448.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 449.

points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” (Heb. 4:15) His discipline was not corrective as their was no sin in him, but perfective:

“Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of salvation unto all them that obey him.”<sup>12</sup>

Here again are the relations of moral government and moral discipline in the same individual. The two relations also encompass each individual act of the person. They are not exclusive. All of Christ’s actions have two aspects, that of a servant and that of a son. This is possible because there is one law for both servants and sons, not two. The moral law of the Judge is the same as the moral law of the Father. Two obediences are not required, rather, Christ’s one imputed righteousness is sufficient as the grounds for both Adoption and Justification. Girardeau concludes,

“I can see no reason, therefore, for receding from the position, that the obedience of Christ as the mediatorial servant of the Father, a subject under moral law, grounded the Justification of his people as subjects of law, and that his obedience as a Son grounded their Adoption as children in God’s house. The one entitles them to bow before God’s throne, the other to sit at God’s table.”<sup>13</sup>

### **III. Man’s Natural Relation to God**

#### **A. Textual Arguments**

There are three main passages in scripture that speak to the natural relation of man to God concerning sonship: (1) The genealogy of Christ in Luke 3, (2) The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15, and (3) Paul’s speech to the Greeks in Acts 17. In Luke’s genealogy Adam is called “the son of God.”<sup>14</sup> While the words “son of” are not directly in the Greek, the phrase is a

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<sup>12</sup> Heb. 5:7-9

<sup>13</sup> Girardeau, *Discussions*, 483.

<sup>14</sup> Luke 3:38

genitive of relationship which supplies that meaning. This is fitting with the context in that Adam was the son of God in the same way that “Jacob was the son of Isaac, which was the son of Abraham.”<sup>15</sup>

In the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 17<sup>16</sup> it is noteworthy that the prodigal was a son before he left his father’s house.<sup>17</sup> The passage is clear that he did not lose his sonship when he voluntarily disinherited himself and lived in rebellion against his father.<sup>18</sup> “When he came to himself, he said... I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.”<sup>19</sup> Notably, his rebellion was aggravated by his sonship and consisted of sinning against the filial relation that continued to exist between them. The father receives the prodigal as a son (not as if he had become a servant) back into his home. Despite the prodigal’s moral corruption and guilt, the father makes the profound exclamation that “For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”<sup>20</sup>

In Acts 17, Paul addresses the pagans of Athens in the genus of humanity as being “the offspring of God.”<sup>21</sup> The context of this statement points back a few verses to Paul’s previous declaration that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth.”<sup>22</sup> If this idea does not directly reference Adam, it does implicitly speak of man’s nature by creation. Creation, and the principles inferred from it, constitute the framework of Paul’s argument.

## Objections

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<sup>15</sup> Luke 3:34

<sup>16</sup> Luke 15:11-32

<sup>17</sup> see Luke 15:11,13

<sup>18</sup> Luke 15:13,30

<sup>19</sup> Luke 15:17,18

<sup>20</sup> Luke 15:24

<sup>21</sup> Acts 17:28,29

<sup>22</sup> Acts 17:27

These passages are not without their divergent interpretations. It is argued that in Luke 3 the phrase concerning Adam does not connote sonship but simply that Adam “came from” God. This is defended in that the genealogy does not concern a filial relation but merely a natural begetting of descent.<sup>23</sup> The complaint is made in the parable of the prodigal son that the language is being pressed too hard. The filial relation of the son and father are necessary for the human analogy but are circumstantial in relation to the teaching of the story.<sup>24</sup> It is also noteworthy that the audience of the Pharisees, publicans and sinners were all Jews, being part of the external covenant, and are not in the same relation to the Father as the gentiles that were outside of the covenants. Concerning Acts 17, the significant phrase in Paul’s speech to the gentiles is from one of their own poets. Some would interpret this premise in Paul’s argument to be *ad hominem*, without weight of its own.<sup>25</sup> The other option is to take the phrase “the offspring of God” in the same sense as Luke 3, that of natural production.

The passages under question clearly allow for flexibility of interpretation. Due to this, Girardeau concerns himself with the systematic theological aspects of the two views and remarks that “those who desire to examine the exegetical argument are referred to the works of Dr. Candlish and Dr. Crawford.”<sup>26</sup> Girardeau claims that “until recent times the consensus of commentators and theologians has, with but few exceptions, been in favor of the doctrine that man was by nature, in some sense, a son of God,” and hence the burden of proof is upon the other side. Their view can only be established, not by showing that it is possible or that it is a legitimate interpretation, but only by “considerations of the most convincing character.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See Kennedy, *Man’s Relations*, 19.

<sup>24</sup> See *Ibid.*, 24 and 19-20 where Kennedy plays down the analogy between human parents and divine Fatherhood.

<sup>25</sup> This argument is weak as it is not the Biblical practice to quote false concepts from heathen literature as purely *ad hominem* arguments, but rather to sanction the right ideas that their philosophers said.

<sup>26</sup> Girardeau, *Discussions*, 430.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 430.

## B. The Case of Adam

The case of Adam's relation to God is especially significant as it is the chief example of man's nature by creation and his original standing before God. The view espoused by Candlish, Dabney and Thornwell is that Adam was created as a servant.<sup>28</sup> Only upon completion of the covenant of works would he be justified, and hence adopted, as adoption is (on their view) the positive aspect of justification. As Adam did not obtain the promised reward of Justification, and hence sonship, all of his depraved descendants remain servants and can only be recognized as sons of God upon union with Christ.

There is, however, a *prima facie* reason to believe that Adam was the son of God by creation. "It would seem that the condition to which we are restored by regeneration or new creation is one which man had, in a certain degree, previously held, and which he had lost."<sup>29</sup> This is not adduced purely from the form of the greek word, but from the concept of the original generation and creation of man. "If the new creation restores us to sonship, why could not the first creation have instituted sonship?"<sup>30</sup>

Part of the difficulty of the issue revolves around a misunderstanding of precisely how Adam was a son of God by creation and the limits and obligations of this relation. Girardeau contends that Adam was created with the nature of a son, having the dispositions of a son and affections toward God as a father. Adam was "under a discipline which was intended to perfect him in the discharge of filial obedience to the law as the rule of God's fatherly government."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Dabney only mentions this in passing. The one line he gives to it considers the covenant of works, saying, "a reward for the probationary obedience was promised... and this was an adoption of life, transferring man from the position of a servant to that of a son..." Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 302. Thornwell says concerning man that God "might have forever retained him in the attitude of a servant, yet... it was always God's purpose to turn the servant into a son." He deals with the issue at much more length. See Thornwell, *Collected Writings*, 1:264ff.

<sup>29</sup> Girardeau, *Discussions*, 431.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 446. Kennedy's response to this argument is that one should expect Christ's redemption to be much greater than a simple return to the original created state of man. In this he is correct, but only because he confuses the natural filial relation with adoption. See Kennedy, *Man's Relations*, 22-23.

<sup>31</sup> Girardeau, *Discussions*, 440. Thornwell has an insufficient view of moral discipline, describing it only in relation to sinful creatures, whereas it can encompass innocent and righteous creatures as well (e.g. Christ). This is

This original standing was contingent upon his obedience, not yet being legally confirmed through Adoption. This left space for Adam to fall. Upon obedience to the covenant of works Adam would be confirmed as a son and inherit an indefectible standing as a son before God. This is easiest to understand in parallel to Adam's simultaneous contingent standing as a servant, being liable to fall, and consequent legal justification upon obedience to the covenant. Adam's descendants, being fallen and corrupt, lost all *spiritual* and *legal* affinity with the Father, but are still recognized as children of God by *nature*, though they are in and of themselves irreparably depraved.

## 1. Objections

Objections to the view that Adam was a son of God can be categorized into three main headings: (1) If Adam was a son by creation then he would not be able to fall, (2) Moral discipline is inconsistent with penal retribution, and (3) Sonship cannot exist outside of union with Christ.

The first objection that “the standing of a son in his father’s favor is uncontingent, that he could never lapse finally from his father’s regards and be by him condemned,”<sup>32</sup> is based upon a misunderstanding between the distinction of sonship and adoption. The objector’s principle is

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one source of confusion which leads him to object to Girardeau’s view. Thornwell says, “Moral government must be carefully distinguished from moral discipline. The only discipline which the Law recognizes is the discipline of growth... a process of education, by which habits of holiness are formed and propensities to evil eradicated, belongs to an economy under which sin can be pardoned, and imperfect and sincere efforts to obey accepted as perfect obedience to the law.” Thornwell, *Collected Writings*, 1:262.

<sup>32</sup> Girardeau, *Discussions*, 454. Kennedy writes, “Can we conceive of a father not bound, by having or assuming the position defined by that name, to do his utmost for the security or welfare of his child? Can we conceive of a fatherly love not disposing him, in whose heart it is, to do what he can to secure his child from death and damage?... I cannot conceive of “the Lord Almighty” as Father (2 Cor. 6:18), without regarding it as utterly impossible that His child can die.” Kennedy, *Man’s Relations*, 20-21.

valid in so far as it applies to *adopted* children of God, however it is not true of a son by nature who has not been adopted.<sup>33</sup> Girardeau explains:

“It does not follow from the mere existence of the filial relation, that it implies indefectible obedience, or confirmed favor with God. Contingency may characterize the obedience of a son, as well as that of a servant, unless he has been confirmed in standing by a federal act.”<sup>34</sup>

Girardeau correctly remarks that, “the whole difficulty arises from Dr. Candlish’s limitation of the idea of sonship to adoption.”<sup>35</sup> Girardeau clarifies the distinction: “Adoption formalizes the previous real relation of sonship. It recognizes it, imposes upon it new sanctions, invests it with new rights, and fences it with guarantees of security.”<sup>36</sup>

The second objection that moral discipline is contrary to penal retribution has been partly answered already in distinguishing between the doctrines of Adoption and Justification. However, the issue comes into its most difficult form in the case of Adam. Dr. Candlish holds that “in the case of filial disobedience the only punishment that could be inflicted would be fatherly discipline, and as that is not destructive, the co-existence of it with retributive punishment is impossible.”

Dr. Candlish again attributes what is only true for the legal confirmation of adoption to the natural filial relation. If the son’s standing is contingent, as Adam’s was, then the result of filial disobedience would be permanent. The father’s discipline in such a case would be retributive and not restorative. The implication of Dr. Candlish’s view is that “Adam must have been dealt with either as a guilty subject or an undutiful son.”<sup>37</sup> Girardeau asks,

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<sup>33</sup> Kennedy confuses this distinction, thinking that being created a son gives a person the rights of sonship perpetually (Adoption): “Man, if a child, because created, must be so in all conditions for ever.” *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>34</sup> Girardeau, *Discussions*, 453-454.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 460. That Adam was adopted by creation is the view of Romanists. Because Candlish confuses Girardeau’s view with the Romanist view, it leads him to make the charge that “the popish dogma [of the *donum superadditum*] lies rather on the side of those who advocate an original sonship, if they allow it to have been compromised or forfeited by the fall.” *Ibid.*, 458. This, of course, is a misunderstanding and is not Girardeau’s position.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 461.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 457.

“Why may he not have been dealt with as guilty both of filial and servile disobedience? And why may not his disobedience as a son have aggravated his disobedience as a subject?”<sup>38</sup>

The difficult issue is harmonized in understanding that the act of disobedience is from a person who is both subject and son. Hence the transgression is one of both the filial and servile relations. The punishment would be both filial and rectoral as it comes from one who is both father and lord. Failing the condition of his good standing in the Father’s house, Adam’s punishment was to be disinherited, cast out, and excommunicated. The punishment, being federal, does not allow for restoration.

Dr. Candlish, in response to this line of thinking, says that sin is only possible in the case of a subject of law. If filial sin were committed by Adam, Dr. Candlish contends, no atonement has ever been made for it. Yet, it is strange to think that disobedience to one’s father would not be sin, as if no law (namely the fifth commandment) exists between a father and a son.

Girardeau gives a general definition of law as a “rule expressing to an inferior the will of his superior.”<sup>39</sup> He further explains:

“A father may command as well as a ruler or magistrate. If the father has the right to command, the son is under obligation to obey. If he disobeys he transgresses law. Now it is conceivable that the rights of magistrate and father may unite in the same person, and it is conceivable, also, that the same material act may be commanded by that person both as magistrate and as father. In that case disobedience is a transgression both of rectoral and parental law.”<sup>40</sup>

As filial disobedience incurs the guiltiness of sin as the transgression of the law nothing but a redemptive satisfaction can save the offending son from an everlasting doom. If no atonement can be made for filial sins then it is hard to understand how Christian believers who commit filial sins can be forgiven. If believers are forgiven, then Christ as the Son has made atonement for filial sins. There is no reason then to think that Christ has not made satisfaction

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. This principle is seen clearly in that Christian believers’ sonship aggravates their disobedience as servants.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 462.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.



for the filial aspect of Adam and his posterity's original sin. After all, as Girardeau asks, "Was not Christ a Son as well as a servant in offering atonement?"<sup>41</sup>

The third objection is that man cannot come into filial relationship with God apart from union to Christ and a participation by adoption of his sonship. This objection is misconstrued, however, because believers do not and cannot participate in Christ's only begotten, eternal sonship, which is peculiar to himself alone. The sonship that creatures have is not grounded in Christ's unique relation to the Father.<sup>42</sup> This is demonstrated in that angels are called the 'sons of God,' though they are not in union with Christ nor in a federal covenant. If the objectors' contention were correct then their own view would be destroyed as they admit that Adam would have become a son if he had kept the covenant of works, though he would not have been in union with Christ.

## 2. Girardeau's Objections

Girardeau has two primary arguments which show that Candlish's objections are inconsistent with his own view. First, it is Candlish's contention that Adoption presupposes a transfer of relations from a being a servant to being a son, and hence Adam could not have been a son before he was adopted. However this would destroy Candlish's own view, as once Adam would have been adopted as a son for completing the covenant of works, he would cease to have been a servant and under God's rectoral government. This also implies that believers who were once servants, but are now adopted as sons, are no longer servants. This would make justification impossible, for only servants are capable of being justified.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 464.

<sup>42</sup> It is important to understand Christ's sonship in relation to his two natures. Girardeau disagrees with Crawford's view that Christ was possessed of a two-fold sonship seeing that he was both divine and human. Christ's sonship is one as he is one person. This sonship has two aspects as Christ has two natures. John Kennedy, though he takes the opposite view of Girardeau on the fatherhood of God, is careful to distinguish that believer's share in Christ's sonship insofar as his human nature goes, but not in those relations peculiar to his divine nature. See Girardeau, *Discussions*, 488, and Kennedy, *Man's Relations*, 81.

Second, if Candlish's position holds, then Adam would have been adopted as a servant, not as a son. That is, Adam would still have the nature of a servant, be legally treated as if he were a son, and yet have no nature, temper, or qualities of a son. It may be replied that God would have created Adam to have the nature of a son upon his Adoption. If this is the case, however, then the opponents cannot object, as they strongly do, to Adam's being created a son.

### C. Adam's Descendants

After all of these considerations the question remains as to whether Adam and his posterity lost their sonship in his fall. Is it possible for sinners under the wrath of God to be sons? Jesus told the Pharisees, "Ye are of your father the devil."<sup>43</sup> Paul denounced Elymas the sorcerer as a "child of the devil,"<sup>44</sup> and John declares that, "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil."<sup>45</sup> The sonship of man, while being greatly marred, has not been completely removed however. There are two aspects which have changed. *Legally* man's disobedience has disinherited him. Being excommunicated (which is a filial relation, not rectoral), man has legally inherited wrath. *Spiritually* he has lost his holy nature and no longer reflects the moral uprightness of his Father. He is spiritually a child of the devil. However, "man never was produced, created, by disobedience or the devil, as he was produced, created, by God."<sup>46</sup> Man's *natural* sonship by creation cannot be changed by apostasy. Girardeau explains:

"The natural relation is one which once constituted can never be destroyed... the relation which a son sustains to his human father, as a natural fact, can, from the nature of the case, never be changed. The son may be disinherited, disowned, cast out, in consequence of his bad conduct, but to a disgraceful end he will continue to be his father's son. Somebody's child he must be; he is not

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<sup>43</sup> John 8:44

<sup>44</sup> Acts 13:10

<sup>45</sup> 1 John 3:10

<sup>46</sup> Girardeau, *Discussions*, 432.

the child of nobody. In this purely natural sense, the sinner is a son of God. Even the heathen are his offspring, as the apostle Paul acknowledges in his sermon on Mars Hill. Sinners and devils are sons in revolt—sons disinherited, excommunicated, reprobated, but still sons, under the indestructible obligation of nature to render filial obedience to God. A subject does not cease to be a subject of his monarch because he rebels. While going to execution for treason he is a subject still, under obligation to render obedience to his sovereign. So it is with a son.”<sup>47</sup>

Girardeau gives as an illustration Hagar, who, being “a runaway servant, was divinely commanded to return to her duty. She was Sarah’s servant still. So with Onesimus.”<sup>48</sup> So it was with Absalom who rebelled as a servant and flagrantly violated his father’s rule as a son. Yet David, despite Absalom’s provocative crimes, lamented the death of his son. Girardeau adds, “the young man died a rebellious subject and a disobedient son. The natural relation in which he was born was indestructible, and aggravated his crime and doom.”<sup>49</sup>

## 1. Objections

John Kennedy presents two objections. The first is the question of how is it possible for God to do anything but love his sons? Kennedy writes, “What kind of mind must that be, which can endure the idea of the divine Father contemplating so many of His children, in the midst of all the eternal woe, into which sin has plunged them!”<sup>50</sup> He further explains:

“But if there is such a relation, between God and His fallen creatures, as between a father and his son, it seems utterly inconsistent, with all that condition’s God’s place in that relation, to make no provision for the recovery of all His children.”<sup>51</sup>

Let it be understood clearly that in Girardeau’s view God’s relation to his depraved children is one of unmitigated anger, not of love. Kennedy assumes that the relation of father

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 431-432.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 470.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 471.

<sup>50</sup> Kennedy, *Man’s Relations*, 21

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 25.

implies always holding his sons in good pleasure. This is not so. The father can equally hold his sons in confirmed displeasure. Again, the distinction between the natural, spiritual, and legal aspects of sonship need to be recognized.<sup>52</sup>

The former misunderstanding leads to the second objection. Stated succinctly, “it is extremely difficult to believe in a Fatherhood constituted by creation, and a salvation originating in sovereign grace.”<sup>53</sup> Kennedy tries to show that a universal Fatherhood of God would imply that the only outlet for the necessary love of God for his sons would be in provision for salvation. Thus salvation would not stem from God as Lord, but God as Creator and Father.<sup>54</sup> This would result in a form of general atonement. Kennedy writes,

“The doctrine of the universal fatherhood of God cannot fitly or safely get a place in Calvinism... If salvation flow from the fatherly love of God to any, it must flow to all... salvation would be accounted for as something necessary in vindication of God’s name, as the Father of His creatures.”<sup>55</sup>

This, of course, is a misunderstanding of Girardeau’s view, and is not a necessary implication of God’s Fatherhood. Salvation cannot stem from God as Father precisely because man is in a state of permanent excommunication and wrath with respect to his natural Father.

Girardeau would fully agree with Kennedy when he says that,

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<sup>52</sup> Strangely enough Kennedy seems to largely agree with these distinctions: “There [in Luke 3 and Acts 17] God is shown in relation of a parent to the offspring... But his relation as parent is not identical with his relation as father to his child. The one is natural, the other is moral; the one must necessarily precede the other; the one is shared in common with the brutes, the other is peculiar to moral agents; the one is determined by the law which regulates the propagation of the species, the other by the moral law of righteousness.” Kennedy, *Man’s Relations*, 19.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>54</sup> This, unfortunately, has in fact been the position of some Calvinists, being driven to it by the inferences that Kennedy explicates. Crawford writes, “May we not reasonably conclude that God, having brought such creatures into being, ‘will not forsake the work of His own hands?’ Having so far acted towards them as a father, in giving them existence, and imparting to them His own likeness, we cannot suppose that He will thereafter leave them orphans. The same love which originally moved Him to the creation of them, will move Him still to watch over them with parental care, and to provide them with parental kindness and liberality...” He further writes, “the mediatorial work of Christ,” “proceeded from the unspeakable warmth and tenderness of His fatherly love.” Again, “the humiliation and sufferings of Jesus Christ were intended to manifest the fatherly love of God.” Kennedy, *Man’s Relations*, 25-26. One should make the distinction that general benevolence can and does flow from the Fatherhood of the Godhead, not for anything in the creature, but from His own sovereign goodness. In redemption God the Father (the 1<sup>st</sup> person) elects his vessels of mercy. What needs to be guarded against is that salvation was in no way bound upon God in his original relations to man by creation, and is in fact an act of His sovereign free will.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

“God saves sinners, not because he was the Father of any or of all; but because as the great ‘I am,’ He will have mercy on whom He will. Salvation flows to men not necessarily out of the divine nature, nor as a natural result of previous divine procedure, nor as a fitting expression of fatherly affection, but from the good pleasure of the Sovereign Lord of all; because He loves, not because He is love; because He is the Lord and has willed to love, and not because He is a Father and is bound to love.”<sup>56</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

It has been shown that the objections presented against Girardeau’s view of Adoption have either been misunderstandings, false inferences, overlook careful distinctions, or destroy the opposite view as well. Girardeau’s view remains rigorously solid and is the best explanation of the varying scriptural texts and principles that relate to the doctrine of Adoption. A few remaining quotes from Girardeau will convince the reader of the important and practical implications of the doctrine of Adoption:

“One may be an accepted and honored subject of a king, but he is not therefore entitled to all the privileges of his monarch’s household.”<sup>57</sup>

“It is one thing to be approved by a governor, another to be loved by a father.”<sup>58</sup>

“The servant, with hat in hand, stands at a respectful distance awaiting the orders of his master; the child of God, as Luther has graphically suggested, rushes into the presence of his Father, leaps into his lap, and nestles in his bosom.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>57</sup> Girardeau, *Discussions*, 4843-484.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 486.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 493.

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