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

A Christian is one who has been justified by Christ dying on the cross for their sin. Justification—by which we mean God’s forgiveness of our sinful past together with His acceptance for the future—is the primary and fundamental blessing of salvation because it meets our primary spiritual need. We all stand by nature under God’s judgment; so we need the forgiveness of our sins and assurance of a restored relationship with God more than we need anything else in the world; and this the gospel offers us before it offers us anything else.

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

The Father’s Love

Take a moment to imagine God the Father thinking about you. What do you assume God feels when you come to His mind?

Many assume God feels disappointment or frustration, while others assume nothing specific at all. Regardless of what you might think, the reality is that when God thinks of you, a smile comes to His face, love swells in His heart as He takes great delight in you! (Zeph 3:17) Our Father God longs for you. God knows you are a sinner, but He sees you through the eyes of love and your sins do not reduce His love for you. What a difference it makes when you realize that God delights in you!

A great illustration of this love of God is floating in water. The key to floating is not skill, but laying back and letting go of our instinct to thrash about. It is only when we let go and put our full weight on the water that we discover that we are supported. We are surrounded by the river of our Father’s love, and we float without having to do anything because we are supported and carried by His love!

The roots and foundations of our Christian lives are in this love of God (Eph 3:17). The fact that you are deeply and extravagantly loved by the Father is the core of your identity and the foundation of Christian spirituality.

The Benefits of Being a Child of God

To those who are Christ’s, the holy God is a loving Father: they belong to his family and may approach Him without fear and always be sure of His fatherly concern and care. This is the heart of the New
Testament message. There are endless blessings we receive as the children of God, but here are just a few:

1. Intimacy

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

There is a great difference between a servant and a friend, and also between that of a servant and a son. Jesus says that a closer and dearer intimacy than that of a master and servant exists between Him and his people: “Henceforth I call you not servants: for the servant knows not what his Lord does: but I have called you friends” (John 15:15). Then, still an even closer and dearer relation exists due to adoption; for “you are no more a servant, but a son, and an heir of God through Christ” (Gal 4:7).

Think about the way you know a close friend. You would probably agree that there is a huge difference between knowing things about this person and knowing him or her. A relationship involves more than knowledge; it involves the heart. As a child of God, we not only know about God, but we can know Him and directly experience Him. We were not brought into existence simply for service, but for an intimate relationship with our Father. Despite our sinful rebellion, we are able to experience this intimacy once more with our Father each and every day. There is no doubt that our families of origin impact how we relate to God as Father, but God graciously works to restore and grow our intimacy with Him for as long as we live. This intimacy is at the core of our deepest human fulfillment.

2. Hope

The doctrine of adoption teaches us to think of our hope not as possibility or as a likelihood, but as a guaranteed certainty, because it is a promised inheritance. The reason for adopting in the first-century world was specifically to have an heir to whom one could bequeath one’s goods. So, too, God’s adoption of us makes us His heirs, and so guarantees to us, as our right (we might say), the inheritance that he has in store for us.

Have you ever pondered your inheritance as a child of God? God is one of glorious riches and abundant blessings, and Scripture tells us that we are co-heirs with Christ, which means that we must have something unfathomably incredible in store for us! We have “an inheritance that can never perish, soil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4), which guarantees us of a future filled with joy, restoration, and love, where there will be no more death or darkness. Therefore, no matter what we face in our life on earth, we can look forward to our inheritance in heaven with hope and thus know that we are safe.

3. Reborn Identity

The message of adoption is this: Do I, as a Christian, understand myself? Do I know my own real identity? My own real destiny? I am a child of God. Though we were once dead in our sin, being a child of God is a right we get in Christ (John 1:12) and we are given a reborn identity as children of God! You are no longer defined by your own success, accomplishments, relationships, or appearances, no longer identified by the brokenness or sin in your life, and no longer viewed by our Father as anything but His
beloved. Nothing that has happened or will happen to you can ever add to, take away from, or change this reality.

With our reborn identity, we now share in what is Christ's. And what may that be? At Jesus' baptism, God the Father pronounces over Him, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17). Father God declares His relationship with Jesus, affirms his commitment to Jesus, and speaks His approval over Jesus, all before Jesus performed a single miracle or saved one soul. As we are in Christ, this is the blessing that is now proclaimed over us and is now our identity! We inherit this affirmation of God's Fatherhood, love, and acceptance from above — before we are recognized, before we make the grade, or before we even get out of bed. As His child, this is what God proclaims over you today!

**So What is Salvation to Us?**

We are justified through Jesus Christ. We enter into an intimate relationship with the living God, are assured an inheritance greater than anything we could imagine, and receive a new and sure identity. With absolute confidence, we can know that we are deeply loved by God and are His children, and it is this conviction that is the foundation of all we are. I am a child of God. God is my Father; heaven is my home; every day is one day nearer. My Savior is my brother; every Christian is my brother too. Say it over and over to yourself first thing in the morning, last thing at night, as you wait for the bus, any time when your mind is free, and ask that you may be enabled to live as one who knows it is as utterly and completely true. This is the Christian's secret of a Christian and God-honoring life. May this secret become fully yours and fully mine.

**Relevant Scriptures**

Galatians 4:7 "So you are no longer a slave, but God's child…"
Ephesians 3:16-19 "... and I pray that you, being rooted and established in love"
Romans 8:17 "Now if we are children, then we are heirs…"
1 John 3:1-2 "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called…"
Matthew 3:13-17 "...This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

**Questions for Discussion**

- What do you assume God feels when you come to mind?
- How does thinking of God as Father and us as His children change your perspective on Christianity?
- Which benefit of adoption through Christ impacts you the most?
- Is there a benefit that you have not accepted yet as part of your adoption into the family of God?
- How will this idea of family and adoption change your relationship with God and the way you live?