

The Position of the Christian Life – 3

We are living in the age of self-esteem. Pick up the average self-help book, look at educational curricula around the world, turn on the average radio talk show and you will hear people speaking about the importance of self-esteem, as if it is unquestionable orthodoxy. Everyone is supposed to believe in himself, love herself, enhance herself and celebrate himself. Very few stop to ask what happens when that self-esteem gets out of control, and starts to trample on other's self-esteem, nor do many have a way of knowing when self-esteem has reached a supposedly healthy maximum.

In truth, the Bible does not tell us to celebrate ourselves. Instead, it assumes that we have a natural love for ourselves, which we are not told to grow and deliberately strengthen. Instead, we are told to keep it in check, because when fed it becomes a monster. The Bible directs us upward and outward, not inward.

Having said all that, the Bible does have something to say about how we should view ourselves. We cannot help thinking of ourselves in relation to God, other people, and the world in general, and when we do so, we need to think rightly about ourselves. We've been considering this idea under the heading of the position of the Christian life. The position of the Christian life is crucial to the priority of the Christian life and the process of the Christian life. The priority of the Christian life is to love God ultimately, so as to glorify Him, and the process of the Christian life is knowing God by living in His presence.

Last week, we considered two aspects of being in Christ. A believer who is in Christ is accepted by God in Christ. A believer who is in Christ is secure in Christ. To be accepted by God, and to be secure in that relationship is crucial for remaining in God's presence. You will only want to remain before a holy God who convicts you of your sin if you understand that positionally you are fully accepted, and positionally you are completely secure. Today we go on to consider the third deeply comforting truth about being in Christ which strengthens our faith to live in God's presence.

Once we are in Christ, we are completed in Christ.

Colossians 2:9-10 ⁹ *For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;* ¹⁰ *and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.*

God does more than pardon us and guarantee our status before Him. He also privileges us immensely. He completes us. If you are in Christ – you are complete in Christ. What does this mean?

Completion means there is nothing lacking. Remember this has to do with one's position. Consider several titles that the Bible gives to Christians which suggest positional completion.

We are called saints in Scriptures 1 Cor. 1:2, Ephesians 1:1, Philippians 1:1. A saint is not a dead Christian who achieved sinlessness perfection in this life. A saint is every regenerated believer. Positionally, every believer is a saint – a called-out one, a set-apart one, a sanctified one. Positionally, a Christian is set apart from sin by the atonement of Christ and the work of the Spirit. That's why **1 Corinthians 6:11** says:

¹¹ *And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*

This is a completed act. It does not mean Christians ever reach sinless perfection. After all, Paul was writing to the Corinthian church, an imperfect, immature church if there ever was one. It simply

means that positionally, we are set apart entirely for God, completed in Christ.

Second, we are said to be dead with Christ and alive to His resurrection and righteousness. We are positionally as dead to sin as Christ is, and positionally as alive to the Father and righteousness as Christ is.

Second, we are called new creations in 2 Corinthians 5:17. While we know that practically we are still putting off the old man and putting on the new, positionally this verse tells us that if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold all things have become new. Consider the language here:

*In **Revelation 21:1** we read: Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.*

Then a few verses later:

***Revelation 21:5** ⁵ Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."*

As God will make a brand new creation, complete in every way, so the Christian is considered in Christ to be completed, perfected.

The same chapter, 2 Corinthians 5 gives us another title for Christians – ambassadors for Christ. When we are in Christ, we become His appointed representatives, considered in heaven's eyes to be positionally fit to represent the perfect one. Not just anyone can be the ambassador of a country. To be ambassadors of Christ mean that in Christ we have been completed and qualified to represent Him. John 15:5 calls us branches of Christ Himself. An organic link exists between us and Christ, meaning that we are positionally complete in Him.

Not only are these our titles, but for God has given us promises for life that show we are complete in Christ.

2 Corinthians 9:8 teaches us that we have grace for every need.

***2 Corinthians 9:8** ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.*

Furthermore, in Christ, all our genuine needs are met.

***Philippians 4:19** ¹⁹ And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

Our completion means we do not have to strive to compete with others, or to work on what the world calls 'self-esteem'. We can instead rest in the enormously privileged state we are in by His grace.

Once again, so much of the secret of the Christian life is to become what you are. Believe by faith the position you have by grace, and lovingly obey.

'In Christ' means we are accepted by God, in Christ, secure in Christ and completed by Christ. If you believe that this is true of you in Christ, how will it influence your desire to remain in His

presence and know Him?

One of the greatest threats to your communion with God is feelings of misplaced guilt. Misplaced guilt can cripple your walk with God. What do we mean by 'misplaced guilt'?

Second Corinthians 7:10 teaches two kinds of sorrow over sin.

2 Corinthians 7:10 ¹⁰ *For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.*

There is a kind of guilt that is good. The kind of regret and sorrow over sin which drives us to Christ to find mercy, grace and forgiveness is helpful. This is the conviction we have already spoken about when we studied the process of the Christian life. The Holy Spirit makes us more aware of His holiness and of our sin, and leads us to confess and forsake the sin. This leads to cleansing, both of our consciences and of our lives, which leads to more conformity to Christ and more communion with God. This is the right kind of guilt because it keeps the cycle of knowing God going, and in fact, deepening. It is 'regret not to be regretted'.

The other kind of guilt produces death. This kind of guilt is harmful. This kind of guilt condemns us without driving us to Christ. Instead, it drives us away from Christ to try to cover our own sins with excuses, comparisons or distractions. We feel dirty and unwilling to come to the only One who can clean us. It often causes us to indulge further in sin, since we feel defiled already and try to 'acclimatise' our conscience to the sin in question.

This kind of guilt is really unbelief in the power of the gospel. It is unbelief because Christ has borne our guilt, and to feel condemned when Christ was condemned for us is unbelief.

If we understand our position in Christ, how should we respond to guilt? Understanding our position helps us to respond correctly to the Spirit's conviction, while avoiding the trap of misplaced guilt. We remember the reality of sin and estrangement from God, but then we remember our justification in Christ and our access in Him. Instead of wallowing deeper in sin, we remember that we are positionally pleasing to God, secure in God and completed in God, so we come to God, openly confess and forsake, trusting in His ongoing cleansing. Instead of breaking the cycle of communion, it helps it to grow ever closer. This was the attitude of Micah in fighting against guilt:

Micah 7:8-9 ⁸ *Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I will arise; When I sit in darkness, The LORD will be a light to me. ⁹ I will bear the indignation of the LORD, Because I have sinned against Him, Until He pleads my case And executes justice for me. He will bring me forth to the light; I will see His righteousness.*

Our position in the Christian life is summed up in the phrase in Christ. But there is a mirror side to this truth. Many times Jesus spoke of how His disciples were in Him, and He was in them to emphasise the dual nature of this position.

John 6:56 ⁵⁶ *"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.*

John 14:20 ²⁰ *"At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.*

John 15:4-5 ⁴ *"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵ "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.*

John 17:21-23 ²¹ *"that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²² "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: ²³ "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.*

You cannot have the one without the other. We are not only in Christ, but Christ Himself is in us. *You in Christ* represents your position with respect to Christ; *Christ in you* represents His position with respect to you. What does this mean?

1 John 3:24 tells us how Christ is in us:

1 John 3:24 ²⁴ *Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.*

Though Christ is ascended to Heaven, He dwells in us by His Holy Spirit who takes up residence within us.

1 Corinthians 6:19 ¹⁹ *Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?*

The reason His life can take up residence within us is because the old life that was hostile to Him has been put to death.

Galatians 2:20 ²⁰ *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

This kind of special indwelling is a privilege which New Testament believers enjoy. Jesus said to His disciples in John 14:17 that the Spirit who was with them would be in them. This indwelling is a special gift to New Testament believers. And it is a gift to every New Testament believer. You cannot be in Christ, without Christ being in you.

Romans 8:9-10 *But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ¹⁰ And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*

Every believer is so indwelt. No one is saved who has not received the Spirit. Conversely, if you are saved – you have received the Spirit. It is a biblical contradiction to speak of receiving Christ, but not His Spirit. By implication – the Father also dwells within us.

John 14:23 ²³ *Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.*

Now consider for a moment: what did it mean in the Old Testament when God chose to reveal His presence somewhere?

Exodus 29:43-46 ⁴³ *"And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory. ⁴⁴ "So I will consecrate the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. I will also consecrate both Aaron and his sons to minister to Me as priests. ⁴⁵ "I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their*

God. ⁴⁶ *"And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am the LORD their God."*

1 Kings 9:3 ³ *And the LORD said to him: "I have heard your prayer and your supplication that you have made before Me; I have consecrated this house which you have built to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually."*

God's presence somewhere shows that He is pleased to be there. Yes, it is true that God is present at all places, but He also chooses to manifest His presence in particular places and ways to show His approval and pleasure. Now, if a Christian is a temple for God Himself to dwell in; if Christians together make up a holy temple for God to dwell in (Ep 2:22, 1 Cor 3:16, 6:17-20), then this is a sign and seal of God's fully identifying us with Christ. By taking up residence within us, He proves and seals that identification. Full identification (being present in us) means that God has shown His pleasure in us because we are 'in Christ'.

2 Corinthians 6:16 ¹⁶ *And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."*

Christ in us is more than a sign and seal that we are in Christ. It also means two other privileges are ours:

First, continual intimate fellowship is possible.

Revelation 3:20 ²⁰ *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."*

Ephesians 3:17 ¹⁷ *that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love*

In Ephesians 3:17, Paul is addressing believers, and yet he says that if believers are strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man, that Christ will dwell in their hearts by faith. This refers not to the ongoing indwelling, but to a deeper experience of His presence within us. Because Christ is in us, when we are walking with Him, communing, confessing and conforming to His will, then that cycle of communion only grows.

James 4:8 ⁸ *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*

His presence within makes open and intimate communion with Him possible at all times.

Second, it also means that God works from within us to do His will

Philippians 2:12-13 ¹² *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

We now have a continual, inward prompting to desire to please God, as well as supernatural empowerment to do so. The Spirit within us interpenetrates our spirit, communicating the desires of God to our heart, prompting us and inclining us towards Himself.

1 Corinthians 2:9-12 *But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart*

of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." ¹⁰ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. ¹¹ For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

Christ in us. What a privilege! God does not merely clean us up and then quarantine us. No, He does the most loving thing possible. Once we are justified, that is, accepted, secured and completed in Christ, He comes to dwell within us, signifying His pleasure with us in Christ. We become a temple where we can worship Him at any time; where He reveals Himself and His mind to us at any time.

You in Christ, and Christ in you - this is how we can live in God's presence. This is how we can grow in a cycle of knowing Him – when we understand how the gospel has made it possible. Before we return to considering how we are to live in God's presence, we want to round off some thoughts on our position in Christ. Are we really secure? Can we not fall away from Christ? We'll consider this next week.