

The Position of the Christian Life - You in Christ

Some people think that the best way to learn how to swim is by simply jumping into the water. Throw the person in, and it's sink or swim. Supposedly, out of sheer desperation, the gasping and spluttering person will swim so not to drown. That may be true, but there's a difference between staying afloat and swimming well. It's one thing to keep your head above the water so you don't breathe it in, and try to make your way to shore; it's another to swim for enjoyment. If you want to swim for enjoyment, if you want to swim well, the best approach is to take lessons, not to try to learn while you're in the act of drowning.

Many people seemingly learn the Christian life the way half-drowning people learn swimming. They are simply thrown into it, and desperately begin trying all kinds of methods and strokes to stay afloat - prayer, church, reading the Bible, obeying, stopping certain things, evangelising become combined in a kind of Christian doggie-paddle, as the struggling saint tries to stay afloat in his Christian life. And he may do so, but like the emergency swimmer, he may never learn to live the Christian life well. He may never learn to enjoy the Christian life. The best way to do this, is to learn what the Christian life actually is.

We're attempting to describe and explain it in this series. We began with the priority of the Christian life – loving God ultimately. We talked about the process of the Christian life - *how* we come to love Him that way. We saw we must know God by living in His presence in a life of faith. But then we took a few steps to the side, and began asking, what enables us to live continually in a holy God's presence? By what provision or permission can a Christian continually commune with God? That's where we find ourselves now – considering the position of Christian life. Last week we considered how our position in Christ is distinct from our practice. Though our practice ought to flow out of our position, our practice never changes our position. Our position in Christ is entirely an act of God's grace. We also considered several important reasons for, and results of, understanding our position in Christ.

Today we want to consider what it means to be 'in Christ'. Perhaps no two words have been as full of meaning as these two words - in Christ. To be placed in Christ is to be fully identified with the person and work of Christ. What is true of Him becomes true of you. To understand how expansive that is, consider two Scriptures:

Ephesians 1:3 ³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,*

In Christ, every spiritual blessing comes to the believer.

2 Corinthians 1:20 ²⁰ *For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.*

In Christ, every promise of God is affirmative toward those in Christ. Consider that if someone in Christ has every spiritual blessing coming to him, and every promise meant for him to be fulfilled, to be in Christ is simply the highest privilege in the world. With that kind of good news, we can understand why being in Christ is fundamental to the process of the Christian life. No one could remain in God's presence if he believed God secretly rejected him, despised him, or cast him out. The only way you can stay in the holy and convicting presence of God is if you are by faith remembering your position in Christ. You must continually believe the truth of what it is to be *in Christ* by grace.

To be *in Christ* means three profoundly comforting truths are true of you:

First, you are accepted by God in Christ.

Ephesians 1:6 ⁶ *to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved*

The word “accepted” sounds neutral in our modern English. Closer to the biblical idea is the word ‘pleasing’. God makes us pleasing to Himself in Christ. God accepts you, not reluctantly, not begrudgingly, and not unwillingly. Whomever God accepts, He accepts as the father in Christ’s parable accepted his prodigal son, with arms open. When God accepts you, it is because in Christ, you have become greatly pleasing to Him.

What did God say of His Son at Christ’s baptism and at His transfiguration? A voice from heaven said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” When a believer is in Christ, he is hidden in the One that the Father delights in.

This means several things:

It means God’s anger towards you has been propitiated.

1 John 2:2 ² *And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.*

God’s demands for your sin to be properly dealt with; for you to face what is due to you, have been satisfied by Christ. If you are in Christ, you are no longer an object of God’s wrath. His fury at your sin was poured out on Christ. We are accepted in Christ.

That means secondly, that all your sins have been forgiven.

Colossians 2:13-14 ¹³ *And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,* ¹⁴ *having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.*

Colossians 1:14 ¹⁴ *in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*

(See also Eph 1:7; 1 Cor 6:11)

According to Paul, God has forgiven us all our trespasses. When Jesus died on the cross, He either died for all your sins, or for none of them. He could not die for your sins up to the day of your profession of faith. He either made a full payment, or none at all. But in fact, on the cross, Christ said, “It is finished”. He had paid in full. God could not be propitiated towards us if there were sins not paid for. To be in Christ means I have been completely forgiven. I am accepted by God because all my sins have been paid for. This doesn’t mean we don’t confess sins after salvation. But we confess them to restore the communion that is disturbed by our disobedience. We don’t confess to manually apply Christ’s blood to our life again and again. We have been forgiven our entire sin debt; our whole judicial penalty has been paid by Christ. We are accepted in Christ.

This means something else. To be in Christ means I have been justified and declared righteous.

Romans 5:1 *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

2 Corinthians 5:21 ²¹ *For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

Because God's justice is satisfied in Christ, God can forgive us in Christ. Because He forgives us in Christ, He counts our sin to be on Christ on the cross where He punished it, and He counts Christ's righteousness as true of us. He declares us not guilty of our sin, and declares us clothed with Christ's righteousness. We are accepted in Christ.

If your sin debt is paid, and you are declared righteous, then this means you have been reconciled to God. God's anger is turned away; the offending debt is paid for; your rags are replaced with Christ's righteousness; God's face is turned towards you.

Romans 5:10 ¹⁰ *For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (See also Col 1:21, 2 Cor 5:18)*

To be forgiven, justified, and reconciled, means God can lawfully and joyfully gift you with eternal life and make you His child. Notice the order in Colossians 2:13 – we are first forgiven, and then regenerated.

Colossians 2:13 ¹³ *And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,*

John 1:12 ¹² *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:*

If you are considered to be God's child, then you are accepted by God. This means something else:

Ephesians 2:4-5 ⁴ *But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,* ⁵ *even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),*

God loves us in Christ. He chose to love us in Christ before the foundation of the world. He put on Christ's lenses and looked at us before we existed, and through those lenses of grace, He loved us. He loves us still in Christ – with an everlasting, undying, unflagging love (Jer 31:3). We are accepted by God in Christ.

Amazingly, when God regenerates us, He does not only grant us new life. He does something more.

Ephesians 1:5 ⁵ *having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,*

See also Romans 8:15, 23

To be adopted is different from being born again. To be adopted into God's family is where God grants you all the privileges of a natural-born child. In a Roman household, adoption was when a child entered into a place of receiving all the privileges of the father's name and inheritance. To be in Christ is to be granted Christ Himself as your inheritance (Eph 1:10). This again means that we are accepted by God in Christ.

So close is the relationship that John 15:15 says that Christ calls us His friends. As the church we are the bride of Christ, and considered Christ's body (1 Cor 12:27, Eph 5:30).

What all of this means is that someone who has been forgiven, justified, reconciled, regenerated, loved, and adopted is deeply pleasing to God. Such a person has continual direct access to God. Why? Is it because such a person is so good in himself? No. It is because of grace. Being in Christ is what makes us pleasing to God and allows us to live in His presence.

Ephesians 3:12 ¹² *in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.*

Hebrews 4:16 ¹⁶ *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

To know this is how we are viewed by God, breeds love, gratitude and a willingness to approach God. When we are sure that it is Christ and His merits that have made us acceptable to God, we will not rollercoaster in and out of God's presence – but be willing to approach and remain.

The term 'in Christ' does not only describe how God views us, it also describes how God keeps us. In other words, not only are we accepted by God in Christ, but **secondly, we are secure in Christ.** To be in Christ is to be as secure as Christ is. As certain as Christ's position is before the Father, and as certain as Christ's position in heaven is, so is a Christian's position, because he or she is in Christ.

Consider what this security means:

Romans 8:1 *Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*

There is no possibility of your being condemned, if you are in Christ. Christ has already been condemned for you on the cross. Christ has already been made a curse for you on the cross. A sin will not be punished twice by a just God. If God has counted your sins to be on Christ, then no condemnation remains on you. You are secure in Christ.

Furthermore, Paul is at pains in Romans 8 to point out that nothing, nothing in the form of accusations, persecutions, tribulations or any other thing in all creation can remove us from Christ.

Romans 8:31-39 ³¹ *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* ³² *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?* ³³ *Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.* ³⁴ *Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.* ³⁵ *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?* ³⁶ *As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."* ³⁷ *Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.* ³⁸ *For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,* ³⁹ *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.*

There is no possibility of your being separated from a loving, favourable relationship with God. Jesus put it like this in John 10:

John 10:27-29 ²⁷ *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.* ²⁸ *"And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.* ²⁹ *"My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.*

Not only can we never be separated from this place of security in Christ, God Himself pledges never to forsake the relationship.

Hebrews 13:5 ⁵ *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

All of this comes to us because we are in Christ. We are secure in Christ. We are also secure when we consider that being in Christ means we have eternal life already.

1 John 5:12-13 ¹² *He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.*
¹³ *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life,*

Now if it were possible for us to have life and then lose it, such life would certainly not be eternal in quality. It would be temporary – a life that began and died within us. But to be in Christ, to have the Son, is to have eternal life right now. We are secure in Christ. No condemnation by God, no separation from God, no desertion by God, and no cessation of eternal life.

But how do I know something won't happen to mess it all up? Well, Paul already told us that no things to come can separate us from the love of God, but he makes it even clearer in some other places.

In Philippians 1:6, we see God's commitment to us in Christ:

Philippians 1:6 ⁶ *being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;*

And in Jude 24-25, we read this:

Jude 1:24 *Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,*

God has promised to complete His work in you till the day of Christ. To be in Christ is to be a recipient of God's gracious work till you are in glory. God in fact gives us a guarantee of this by the indwelling Holy Spirit:

He says in **2 Corinthians 1:21-22** ²¹ *Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God,* ²² *who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.*

Ephesians 4:30 ³⁰ *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

God lets us know that He is planning on remaining with us and working in us till the day of Christ by allowing the unchanging Holy Spirit to take up permanent residence within us. And as we read - He will never leave nor forsake us.

As if this were not enough, God makes it clear that we are already citizens of heaven and seated with Christ.

Ephesians 2:6 ⁶ *and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ*

Jesus,

Philippians 3:20 ²⁰ *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,*

It would be impossible to call someone seated in the heavenlies a current citizen of heaven if his position were severely in doubt, or if his position were unknown until the very end. But to be in Christ is to be secure. So much so, that Peter puts it this way:

1 Peter 1:4-5 ⁴ *to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,* ⁵ *who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*

I have an inheritance reserved for me that is kept by God's power. Glory, for the person in Christ, is guaranteed:

1 Peter 5:10 ¹⁰ *But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.*

Romans 8:30 ³⁰ *Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.*

2 Corinthians 4:17 ¹⁷ *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,*

Glory is so guaranteed that Paul says that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called. If we will be conformed to the image of Christ, then all things do ultimately work towards the good.

No condemnation by God; no separation from God; no desertion by God; and no cessation of eternal life, no cessation of God's work in us; a guarantee of glory given by the presence of the Holy Spirit, in being called citizens of heaven and seated with Christ. We are secure in Christ.

In any relationship, security produces a desire to please, not appease God. Our service is free and motivated by love, not fear. Once again, a sense of security strengthens our desire to remain in God's presence.

Hebrews 10:17-22 ¹⁷ *then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."* ¹⁸ *Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.* ¹⁹ *Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,* ²⁰ *by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,* ²¹ *and having a High Priest over the house of God,* ²² *let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

We are still to consider how being in Christ means we are completed in Him, and then to consider what it means that Christ is in us. That we will consider next week, as we continue to examine the position of the Christian life.