

In Christ

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But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God -- and righteousness and sanctification and redemption -- that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."
(1 Cor 1:30-31)

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The Importance of Understanding Our Union With Christ

That we are *in Christ* is a vital yet neglected doctrine. On it hang many issues which govern our day to day experience of the Christian life. It also determines our approach to many doctrines like: the kingdom of God, the use of the gifts of the Spirit, healing, sanctification, rewards, church participation, submission and a host of others. It is such an important concept that Paul directly refers to it over 200 times in his letters, usually in the form of the phrase *in Christ* or *in Him*. This phrase is the most common one in the New Testament but, despite this, there is a mystery involved in understanding it (Eph 3:4; Col 1:26-27 etc.), a mystery which many fail to fathom because they do not study God's word. It requires no initiation or mystical experience to grasp this, it simply needs determination to understand Biblical teaching under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

An understanding of this crucial teaching shows how essential it is to have a foundation of sound theology in our lives if we are to do well in serving God. True doctrine is the only sure basis for establishing ethics. What use is it if someone serves God sincerely, zealously, powerfully and sacrificially all their lives, only to find at the judgment seat of Christ that they had seriously misunderstood what God desired, and are then told by God that their service was wasted. I have known older servants of the Lord go through an experience like this towards the end of their lives, but still had a little time to restore the years that the locust had eaten. Love is not enough. Love must *'abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent and may be pure and blameless.'* (Phil 1:9-10).

We must learn what God requires of us and how we please him. One of the keys in pleasing God is to understand that he focuses his entire purpose upon Christ and nothing else.

*Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might **gather together in one all things in Christ**, both which are in heaven and which are on earth -- in Him.*
(Eph 1:9-10)

*To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the **unsearchable riches of Christ**, and to make all see what is the **fellowship of the***

mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph 3:8-11)

These verses are arresting. God's consummate purpose is to sum up all things in Christ; conversely anything outside of Christ has no place in God's plan at all. God's purpose in focusing upon Christ culminates in: *'that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.'* (1 Pt 4:11).

Can any subject be more worthy of study than our place in Christ?

The current times are full of fads in the church where people focus upon one thing then another, for blessing. Some concentrate upon mystical experiences, signs and wonders, expressions of power, kingdom theology. Others condemn such things as false, but then focus upon: Israel, a supposed Jewish Root to Christian knowledge, the law (Torah), Jewish feasts and cultural items; some have wandered into the occult Jewish cabbalah or intense legalism and even circumcision. Then others condemn all this as nonsense and concentrate upon cold dogma, church traditions that have no Biblical base, formal liturgies or just meetings. A wrong focus can be tested by asking the question, 'If the way I conduct my Christian life was terminated tomorrow [meetings were stopped, interest in Jewish things cancelled, traditions destroyed etc.] would my enjoyment of God be affected in any way? Some believers are forced to confront this when persecution removes their places of worship, friends, videos, tapes, Bibles, books, leaders and so on. Usually, we see a purification of service to God resulting. The biggest expansion of the church was when it was persecuted in the first 300 years of its life. If one centres on Christ alone, if he is the root of your walk with God and not some *thing*, then you can be stripped of everything but it will not cause a deterioration of fellowship with God in any way.

An Example of Scripture's Emphasis on Being in Christ

To see how Paul focuses upon Christ in just one letter, let's survey Ephesians.

'In Christ'

Saints are faithful to God: in Christ 1:1.

The saints blessing is only: in Christ 1:3.

Adoption to the Father is by Christ (i.e. because we are in Christ) 1:5.

All things are to be gathered up: in Christ 1:10.

Saints are to live to the praise of the glory of Christ 1:12.

The power of God's working in the Gospel for us is done: in Christ 1:20.

We are made alive: in Christ 2:5.

We are raised up: in Christ 2:6.

God's grace and kindness for us is: in Christ 2:7.

We are created for good works: in Christ 2:10.

Nearness to God is: in Christ 2:13.

Being part of God's temple is being built on Christ 2:20.

God's promise of the Gospel is: in Christ 3:6.

God's riches are: in Christ 3:8.

God's purposes in creation was: in Christ 3:9.

God's eternal purpose is centred and accomplished: in Christ 3:11.

The church is the body of Christ 4:12.

Maturity is the fulness of Christ 4:13.

God's forgiveness is: in Christ 4:32.

The kingdom is in Christ 5:5.

Enlightenment is in Christ 5:14.

We give thanks to God in the name of Christ 5:20.

The church is subject to Christ 5:24.

Earthly obedience is performed as unto Christ 6:5.

'In Jesus' (apart from the word 'Christ')

Christianity is faith in Jesus 1:15.

The truth is in Jesus 4:21.

'In Him'

We are chosen: in Him 1:4.

We are without blame before Him 1:4.

We have redemption: in Him 1:7.

In the fulness of times, the purpose of God is gathered: in Him 1:10.

We have obtained an inheritance: in Him 1:11.

Salvation is trusting: in Him 1:13.

Wisdom and knowledge of God comes from revelation of knowledge in Him 1:17.

The church is the fulness of Him 1:23.

Our peace is in Him 2:14.

Jews and Gentiles become one new man in Him 2:15.

Access to God is through Him (i.e. because we are in Him we can approach God) 2:18.

Confidence of access to God is through faith in Him 3:12.

It is he who can do above all we ask or think (our prayers are answered in Him) 3:20.

Maturity is growing up into Him 4:15.

Truth is being taught by Him 4:21.

This sort of exercise could easily be multiplied. For Paul, the summation of everything in the Christian life is found in Christ. There is nothing in salvation which does not come from him. Salvation is being a new creature in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). All the blessings of that salvation are found by being in Christ. This is why the fruit of the Spirit are actually expressions of the life and character of Christ developed in us by his Spirit.

This means that seeking anything spiritual outside of Christ is 'strange fire'. Our lives are to be completely focused on Christ.

God's Eternal Purpose - The Scope of this Inclusion in Christ

Eternity Past

Salvation is not a package of blessings, purchased by Christ, which the believer learns to receive one by one. It is not a bag of Christmas presents waiting to be opened, gift by gift. Neither is it like dining in a select club, where entrance is by 'being washed in the blood', and where one can sample different wines and meals as they are made available. Salvation is not a mystical experience where one gradually ascends rungs of the spiritual ladder, getting ever closer to God. As usual, God's plan is the reverse of the world's ideas.

Salvation is about being joined to God's son, and every blessing at God's disposal has already been given to Him, the faithful High Priest of our redemption, the first and the last, the captain or pioneer of our salvation. Every aspect of our redemption involves Christ's attainment of something

which believers then apprehend as a result of being in Christ. He attained, we apprehend through faith that it is ours in him. The whole package is fully in Christ; but as we go on, we learn more and more what Christ has gained for us and what is ours in him. Salvation is thus more about a relationship with God in Christ than a progression of experiences.

Election is *in Christ*

*According as he hath chosen us **in him** before the foundation of the world.* (Eph 1:4)

*But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory **by (in) Christ Jesus**.* (1 Pt 5:10, 'by' = 'in' Greek.)

Being chosen by God is dependent upon being found in Christ. Election is not so much about God picking a group of people and blessing them; Christ is the chosen man and his people are placed into him so that they are dealt with according to the merit of Christ. Our inclusion in Christ was decided before time began or the world was made. Thus there is only one thing which occupies God's interest in this world, that is Christ, and whatever is found in him. Christ is the ark which saves people from this world, those in him are what God is absorbed with. Because God loves his son, he loves those in his son; his wrath abides on those outside the ark (Jn 3:36). These matters were settled in eternity when God chose / selected those who would be the bride of Christ (1 Pt 5:2), according to his good pleasure (Eph 1:9).

The Gospel Age

Sin dealt with by a change of life, being placed into Christ

*Know ye not, that so many of us as were **baptised into Jesus Christ** were **baptised into his death**? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so **we also should walk in newness of life**.* (Rm 6:3-4)

*For ye are dead, and **your life is hid with Christ in God ... Christ, who is our life**.* (Col 3:3-4)

*when we were dead in sins, [God] hath **quickened us together with Christ**, (by grace ye are saved; And hath **raised us up together**.* (Eph 2:5-6)

In the present time, God actually rescues his people, forgiving their sins and dealing with their sinful nature, by co-crucifying them with Christ (Rm 6:6; Gal 2:20). As a substitute, Christ dies for our sins, pays the penalty of God's

wrath and enables us to be justified, made righteous and adopted into God's family. As a representative, the believer dies with Christ, is raised with him and becomes a new creature. The substitutionary death of Christ deals with our sin, the representative death deals with us, our nature. The Christian is thus dead in Christ, which removes sin, (Rm 6:3; 2 Cor 5:14) and made alive in Christ, which gives righteousness (Rm 6:4; Eph 2:5; Col 2:12). This means that the believer is made a new creature (2 Cor 5:17), purchased by the blood of Christ, who lives in the life of Christ (Col 3:3; 1 Cor 6:19-20). During our earthly pilgrimage this position is maintained by faith (Rm 1:17) as the consummation of the change cannot occur until the body is also changed at the second coming of Christ (1 Cor 15:52; 1 Jn 3:2).¹

The Christian life, at the moment, is thus lived on the basis that we have died with Christ, our sin and old Adamic nature has now been legally declared dead in heaven; and also that we now live in the new resurrection life of Christ, raised with him (see later). This truth has to be lived in faith, since we are so conscious of our old life remaining, just as the Israelites, despite being in the promised land of blessing, were continually troubled by Canaanite and Amalekite tribes.

The church's current position - fellowship together in Christ

*In whom all the building **fitly framed together** groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are **buildded together** for an **habitation of God** through the Spirit. (Eph 2:21-22)*

*being **knit together in love**, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ. (Col 2:2)*

*be **perfectly joined together** in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Cor 1:10)*

*we **should live together with him**. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another. (1 Thess 5:10-11)*

¹ Genesis and Exodus are full of typical pictures of this: the Red Sea = substitutionary death, the Jordan = representative death, the land = fulness of life. The lives of the patriarchs also reveal much in typical teaching on this subject, e.g. Abraham could not progress in the life of the Spirit until he was separated from his father (not called out, 'the old nature') and Lot (not called out, 'natural religion'). Abraham's temptations parallel ours: Egypt is the realm of the senses, Canaanites are false, demonic religion with signs, Hagar/Ishmael = the religious expediency of fleshly effort.

*We then, as **workers together with him.** (2 Cor 6:1)*

These verses need little commentary. The position of the church is to represent the life of Christ since it is composed of people who are in him individually; together they must represent him corporately. Unity is not something to be strived for, neither is it something which is for the benefit of, or for a witness to men. It is a present truth in the Spirit of Christ and should be true in practice in order to show the reality of our present position. The church is in Christ, if so then it should work together, as one mind. Unity has nothing to do with organisation, agreements, combined activity and so on - it exists in Christ now.

So, because Christians are those in Christ, the Christian life incorporates close association with all those who are also in Christ. The principle of this new, heavenly life unites all those who are believers. Together they express the fulness of Christ's character. No one person can hope to provide a complete testimony to Jesus, it requires the whole body, where all the members co-operate together (1 Cor 12) to manifest a clear witness to the Lord.

Entrance for us in heaven - in Christ

*And hath **raised us up together**, and made us **sit together** in heavenly places **in Christ Jesus** (Eph 2:6)*

The unity of Christ and the believer is so vital that the Christian's true position is said to be seated with Christ in heaven. He does not belong to this earth, which follows the god of this world who works through sin. Activities of the believer should, therefore, represent the truth that he is in Christ (see later). The Christian, as a new creature, is also a heavenly being. His Father is God, his saviour is Christ and his supporter is the Holy Spirit. He no longer belongs to the earth, but is the possession of Him who purchased him with His precious blood. We are citizens of a heavenly kingdom who should be learning to love this world less and less.

Eternity Future

Raptured and glorified in Christ, God dwells with man as his son

*We which are alive and remain shall be **caught up together** with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we **ever be with the Lord.** (1 Thess 4:17)*

*And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and **joint-heirs with Christ**; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also **glorified together.** (Rm 8:17)*

*And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and **he will dwell with them**, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. ... and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. (Rev 21:3, 7)*

The consummation of God's purpose is to have a multitude of son's, of whom Christ is the firstborn (Rm 8:29; Col 1:18; Heb 12:23). God thus has a physical race of people who love him and have been born in the righteousness of Christ with no possibility of failure, as there was in Eden. The glorified church will be the final place where God dwells with man. Since the elect are then physically glorified people, with a new type of human body, possessors of a fully consummated salvation, God's relationship with them is as with Christ - mature sons. But this does not mean that they become gods in their own right. Christ's deity is a personal attribute that is not shared as part of salvation.

So, we see that every aspect of redemption according to God's eternal purpose is administered through uniting his elect (chosen) people with Christ. All these things take place because the believer is in Christ and for no other reason.

The Christian Life

Living a new life

An analogy

Having seen something of God's great plan, we need to understand how this applies to our working out its principles in our daily walk. First, a Biblical illustration might help. Christ explained to his disciples that bearing fruit was like being a branch of a vine. God does what pruning is necessary and the branch is aware that it can do nothing on its own. It allows the vine to produce the nutritious sap and channels it to the fruit. Jesus is the vine and the branch's job is to abide in him (Jn 15:4). The job of the branch is to 'concentrate' on abiding, being in the vine; it does not struggle to produce its own fruit. *'He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing'* (Jn 15:5). This simple picture explains what it means to be in Christ. The focus is upon being, abiding, in the vine, not doing something of itself to produce fruit. The effort of the Christian is not to act independently to secure fruit/blessing, but to understand what being joined to Christ means and to let him operate in his life, as he wants and when he wants. Constant submission to Christ's lordship and growing in the knowledge of God through Christ are vital.

Put off the old nature

Paul gives these truths an ethical dimension by using terms like: the new man (in Christ's likeness), the fulness of the Spirit (of Christ), the death of the old man (nature). These are all results of being placed into Christ:

*Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you **put on the new man** which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, putting away lying ... (Eph 4:22-25)*

*Do not lie to one another, since you have **put off the old man** with his deeds, and have **put on the new man** who is renewed in knowledge according to the **image of Him** who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew ... but **Christ is all and in all**. (Col 3:9-11)*

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have **crucified the flesh** with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also **walk in the Spirit**. (Gal 5:22-25)*

'Living in the new man', 'walking in the Spirit', being 'in Christ' and 'abiding in the vine' are all synonymous terms. The various statements are used in order to give more opportunity for believers to get the point one way or another: namely, born again people are new creatures who have to live a new heavenly life. These texts show that living the Christian life is not a human activity. Human activity is where the old man, declared dead by God, strives to be holy and spiritual.

What was initiated sovereignly by God must be continued by God until it is completed by God. I cannot live righteously, I cannot be holy - but I can trust God who has given me faith; and I can work with God, who wills and works within me (Phil 2:12-13); I can follow the Lord as he leads me; I can give the Holy Spirit complete freedom in my life; I can wrestle with the might and armour which God supplies. As a result, the outcome of this activity (not passivity) is the fruit of the Spirit, not the fruit of the believer (Eph 2:10). This fruit is the character of Christ. For instance, the fruit of righteousness is not my efforts of obedience resulting from a clean slate after being justified; holiness is by Christ, a result of his activity in me by his Spirit.

*... being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are **by Jesus Christ**, to the glory and praise of God. (Phil 1:11).*

Put on the new nature

As we put on the new man, as we walk in the Spirit, as we obey a renewed mind, we allow Christ to live in our lives. If we are in Christ, if we are a new creature in Him, if God has brought in a new order of humanity, of which Christ is the firstborn and the pattern, then this life must be lived by His Spirit, not human effort or fleshly cleverness. If we trust in our own strength, if we are satisfied with our cleverness or vigour - we only walk according to the nature of Adam. Christ must live his life through us. This is what Paul meant when he stated that *'for me to live is Christ'*.

*My earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also **Christ will be magnified in my body**, whether by life or by death. For to me, **to live is Christ**, and to die is gain. (Phil 1:20-21).*

This is why God puts us into so many experiences where we cannot continue, where we become desperate and confused, where we cry out for help. The lives of the psalmists are so helpful here because we see the struggle of soul and hear the heart's cry for God's help so vividly. This is the bringing to nothing of the old life and the need for grace to bring in something new.

Let us try and grasp the importance of what Paul is saying. A famous Christian devotional book, by Thomas à Kempis, is called *The Imitation of Christ* which encourages believers to try to follow Christ's example of life. This is entirely wrong and is the opposite of what Paul is saying here. Imitating Christ is the old nature striving to be holy. Paul does not want an imitation of Christ in his life, he wants Christ himself to be seen in his life by the power of the Holy Spirit. The whole point of life for Paul is that Christ is 'magnified' (literally, 'to make great', metaphorically 'to make conspicuous') in his body, that Christ is, sort of, incarnated in his life. This is not an obscure interpretation of one verse, Paul taught this over and over again.

Death and resurrection

*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. (Gal 2:20)*

The Christian life involves a death and a resurrection. The old Adamic life is given the sentence of death and the believer is united with Christ so that, as a new creature, he lives by virtue of Christ's power, grace and righteousness. The 'I' that no longer lives is the old nature, the Adamic life with no spiritual value. The Christian life is that same personality (we never lose our essential

character), but energised by the Spirit of Christ so that we have different aspirations, different motivations, different values, different objectives. There is a deep rooted new reality in this life, not a superficial, legalistic observance of rules. Living this way requires faith; which presupposes knowledge of this mystery.

*If then you were **raised with Christ**, seek those things which are above, **where Christ** is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind above, not on things on the earth. For **you died**, and **your life is hidden with Christ in God**. When **Christ who is our life** appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. (Col 3:1-4)*

'Hidden' literally means: 'to escape notice, concealed, secret'; it escapes the notice of people looking at us that we are hidden in Christ, part of Christ; it sometime escapes us too. Christ is now our life, we live according to his motivations and goals, not ours. Because we have died and then been raised with Christ, we are now part of Christ and an essential part of the glory. Heaven is our real home. This is why Paul states in Romans 8:30 that we were glorified (past tense). [How often we fail to read scripture carefully enough.] This is why the Christian life is a pilgrimage we are *tabernacling* (camping, passing through) here on the earth, heading to a city which has foundations.

*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus **Christ**. (Phil 3:20).*

This has enormous ramifications for our activity on earth which we cannot fully go in to here (see later). We are not here to build anything. Our objectives here are temporary only. Even the church work is not ours; Christ builds his church not us. [Oh what stress and worry would be removed from leaders if they believed this and acted upon it!] Those that are dominated by doing a great thing for God, building a great work for God, establishing the kingdom on earth for God have got it all wrong (Jn 6:26-27). Everything here is to be shortly burned up. God is focused upon the new earth where heaven and earth are together (2 Pt 3:10-13), not on this earth. Whoever coined the phrase: 'Too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use' got it completely wrong. Soporific apathy is folly, but God can only work with those whose minds are set on '*the above*'. Concentration on heaven is a command. True heavenly mindedness is the foundation of godly living.

Question: does this encourage mysticism and passivity?

It can lead to this mistake if wrongly applied, as some have in the past. Some felt that, since the Christian life was to be lived by faith, they should do nothing and just trust that everything would be given on a plate. Many became apathetic claiming that they were holy because of this stance, when

there was nothing happening at all. Holiness is a positive not a negative thing. They 'let go' control of their lives but became victims of inactivity, credulity and dishonesty. Sins were excused since they 'trusted' in Christ's righteousness, failing to obey the command to repent of wrong doing (1 Jn 1). Just as legalism is wrong at one extreme, passivity is equally wrong at the other.

Firstly, we should note that the key teacher of this doctrine is the apostle Paul, who was probably the hardest worker of all the apostles. The idea that he could teach something that led to passivity, and opting out of strenuous working for Christ, is mistaken. Secondly, Paul could talk about wrestling and striving in his inner life. Maintaining a faithful walk was no bed of roses. Thirdly, we have an enemy whose sole task is to get us off the ground of faith in Christ's work. If he can do that, it matters nothing what apparent success there is to our Christian effort (only what is in Christ will survive judgment). The church is full of the works of man, what it is short of is people who live by faith in the Son of God, filled with the Spirit.

The main effort, wrestling, is against the enemy and our flesh (Canaanites and Amalekites). Paul's struggle was not to strive to be holy, to obey God, to cope with a temper; his struggle was to stay on the ground of faith when his flesh worked against him ('the good that I want to do I don't do' etc. Rm 7); and the Devil who tempted and accused him whom he had to resist. Resisting Satan is not a passive occupation. Resisting temptation is not an easy job. We are to rest in Christ, stay close to God and trust in the Holy Spirit's operation in our lives. That is where our efforts should lie; not in trying to be better, struggling with sin, hoping for a change of heart, wishing for a blessing, trying to believe for a gift from heaven. We must put the focus upon Christ. There will be resistance to us doing that. That is where the struggle lies. Failures must be dealt with; sin must be recognised and properly put away by repentance and confession. Errors must be compensated. Forgiveness from others must be sought when appropriate. Passive mystics avoid these things.

An example may help here; let us consider a bad temper. All agree, I hope, that this is a sinful disposition. The first act is to consider it thus and not excuse it as weakness. It is sin, it must go. It is not part of Christ's life and, therefore, must not be part of mine. The way of the flesh is to pray for help to restrain fits of temper, then as one's blood begins to boil, strive and struggle to restrain the outburst. As it gets worse, I pray even harder for God to strengthen my efforts. The inward battle has already been lost, anger is present in my thoughts, the focus is now on physical restraint. The trial becomes too great and the outburst of anger erupts. This is not Biblical activity. The sin had already occurred when anger flowered in the heart.

The proper way forward is to recognise that I cannot cope with this problem at all in my life; this stance is critical to what follows. My strength of character cannot rise to this level of Christ's nature. I confess this to God, I accept my inability and ask God to work out the fruit of Christ's life in me when the next situation arises. Soon enough I feel the potential stirrings of indignation. I immediately go to God, recognising that I am a new creature in Christ that possesses heavenly patience and, realising my human inability, ask Jesus to express his patience in me, empowering me with his Spirit, trusting in his word which promises '*grace to help in time of need*'. Suddenly I am aware of a peace guarding my soul after making my request (Phil 4:6-7). Thoughts of trying to restrain temper do not arise as one is aware of the peace of God. The focus has changed from fighting an enemy, to grace in Christ. The threatened outburst does not erupt, the feelings to shout did not even get past the starting gate.

This is not passivity, even though it is based upon faith. It includes: preparation, faith, claiming Biblical promises, prayer and an active stance in the inner man. It is not easy and it is not a letting go in the sense of abandoning control of one's life, but it is an abandonment of fleshly striving.

It is time believers stopped condoning small sins in their lives and concentrated upon allowing Christ to work in them. We are not progressing if we don't steal or kill yet gossiping controls us. We are a slave to a sin which is mentioned in the same breath as murder in 1 Pt 4:15. Mystics ignore their failings as they focus upon a subjective approach to religion, convincing themselves that they are holy because of their groovy experiences. True believers never cease to realise that they are sinners dependent upon the grace which is available in Christ. It was late in his life when Paul declared that he was the chief of sinners (1 Tim 1:15).

God's goal for us here

We are to work as God directs, but we are not to be focused upon achievements in the world. Certainly, one aspect of that work is witnessing to Christ, sharing the Gospel with others. But the main objective is something else.

Firstly, our calling or vocation is centred in Christ:

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil 3:14).

The goal (the 'mark' was the target aimed at by archers) is a high calling (i.e. we were called to one side by God for this purpose) and it involves being in Christ Jesus. God's goal for us is based upon being in Christ.

Secondly, because this calling is above human ability, we can only achieve God's purpose as we obey him in Christ. If we understand this activity and believe that God will supply our needs, we will operate in the fulness of Christ:

*I can do all things **through Christ** who strengthens me. (Phil 4:13).*

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds **through Christ** Jesus. (Phil 4:6-7).*

*... and you are complete [fulfilled, replete, abounding, liberally supplied, carried through to the end, brought to realisation, accomplished] **in Him** (Col 2:10).*

God grants us whatever we need to comply with his objective through Christ. Since the goal is to be fully living in Christ, all of Christ's riches and resources are made available to us, whether our need is wisdom or strength or anything else.

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

*... attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, **In whom** are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Col 2:2-3)*

'Attaining' = to run together with, flowing together with, it also means knowledge or understanding. 'Treasure' = *thesauros*, a storage place of precious things, a casket for valuables. God wants us to understand this mystery of unity with Christ so that all the treasures which are hidden in Christ may be ours as we flow together with him. Anything we need is in Christ, not in our efforts, our abilities, our strength, our ideas, our strategies, our plans, our capabilities. Often God uses the weak people, the ignoble, the spurned (1 Cor 1:20-29). When he uses strong, gifted people, he weakens them through suffering (2 Cor 12:9). Whenever a gifted, charismatic, strong, loveable, organised, methodical, wise man takes hold of the church with innovative great ideas - run. God leads strong men through crises and hopelessness (2 Cor 1:8-11) so that they only operate in Christ. The best man is nothing but rebellious dust to God. All man's acts of righteousness are as filthy rags to him. This is why we must die to them. The smallest act, genuinely done in the Spirit of Christ, is more powerful than the greatest achievement of natural man.

Living in Christ

So, the energy, grace, gifts, qualities and motivation to complete God's plan are given to us in Christ as we live in him. But what is this plan? It is a living testimony, a people who manifest Christ by the Spirit to the universe. Christians are not to imitate Christ but rather they must walk in Him - the way they live must be his living through them - at every level.

*As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so **walk in Him**, rooted and built up in Him. (Col 2:6-7).*

This means a continual change in our lives, a process of sanctification which makes us actually more like Christ. It is not that we learn to hold our temper, restrain our swearing, act more patiently; no, we are to learn how to die to even the strengths in our lives so that we trust in God to work in us in area after area. Sanctification is really a process of transfiguration into Christ's image by the Spirit.

*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed [transfigured] **into the same image** [likeness] from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Cor 3:18).*

The aim is perfection, full maturity; but this will not be attained in this life since the old nature cannot be removed until we are transformed at Christ's coming in the clouds.

*The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may **present every man perfect in Christ Jesus**. (Col 1:26-28)*

As we put on more and more of Christ, we are an aroma, a perfume of him to those around us (2 Cor 2:14-16). Our lives bear the fragrance of a heavenly life. God is pleased at the testimony which the saints bear to Christ. We become a letter, an expression of the mind of Christ as the Holy Spirit deals with us in one after another aspect of our character.

*You are **an epistle of Christ**, ministered by us, written not with ink but **by the Spirit of the living God**, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. (2 Cor 3:3).*

Corporate testimony of the new life

When the church as a unit lives this way, the corporate life of Christ is seen in power, power expressed in the way we see it modelled by Jesus - through obedience, suffering, humility, testimony and glory. The early church lived this way and turned the known world upside down in decades with no: methodology, hype, money, influence, organisation, big meetings, transport, PA systems, tapes, videos and so on.

The full expression of God's testimony is going to be a world full of believers who, in every respect, perfectly manifest the glory of God through Christ. God's plan will have been completed - to have a people who dwell with him who fully express his invisible nature and character. This is glory - heaven on earth. But all this occurs after the day of judgment. Yet even now, there is a mighty witness to God through the church, but it is mainly to spiritual beings looking on invisibly:

*Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed **in Christ Jesus our Lord.** (Eph 3:9-11).*

God's unsearchable riches are found in Christ. Those riches are given to the church which is able to manifest those riches of character, grace and power by being united with Christ and manifesting them in lives by the power of the Spirit. As this occurs corporately, God achieves a powerful testimony to his character and purpose in redemption.

Jesus is made to be everything in us and for us in order that: the plan is God's, the work is God's, and the outcome is God's. All the glory goes to the Lord and on the day of judgment we will confess that to be true.

*But of Him **you are in Christ Jesus**, who became for us wisdom from God -- and righteousness and sanctification and redemption -- that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him **glory in the LORD.**" (1 Cor 1:30-31)*

The Underlying Key

At this point I will gather up and amplify some aspects of what we have seen implied in the previous scriptures.

The power of his resurrection

8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ

9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

*11 if, by any means, **I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.***

12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,

14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

15 Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

(Phil 3:8-15).

20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ,

21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. (Phil 4:20-21)

This is a critical passage to understand correctly, and one missed by most commentators. Paul is writing towards the end of his life and is in prison, having had time to reflect upon matters instead of travelling for the Gospel. What he writes is considered and profound. We know, from other letters that Paul is certain about his salvation, he has no doubt that even a crown is waiting for him for his labours. Verse 11 cannot mean that Paul is wistfully hoping that he may possibly be saved and resurrected at the end. He also has mentioned resurrection in the previous verse as relating to the present life of the believer, and writes that he is seeking to attain this resurrection now if possible, not after death. What does he mean?

In verse 11 we see a unique word for 'resurrection'; this is the Greek word *exanastasis*, which is the normal word plus the prefix, *ex* (out of'). It means, therefore, the 'out resurrection' (or 'resurrection out of'), and is only used here in the New Testament. What Paul is saying is that he counts everything as loss, all his natural experience, strength and knowledge - especially his

Judaistic training (v5-7), in order to gain Christ in a special way, special because he already has Christ in his life. This gaining of Christ includes living in a practical righteousness which is from Christ and which is experienced by faith (v9).

Then he wants to know now the power of Christ's resurrection in his life (v10), which incorporates a life of suffering to weaken the old nature, by conforming it to death. As the death of Christ puts off the old man, so the new man can arise in resurrection. The fulness of this experience is a complete resurrection of the life of Christ out of one's own life so that Christ is fully and perfectly manifested, out-resurrected from Paul's body (v11). In other words, a perfect revelation of all the fruit of the Spirit (Christ's character) in his personality, i.e. *Christ living in and through me*. Paul then explains that this level of perfection has not been experienced in his life [neither will it ever be other than temporary in human existence on this earth v13), but that was his goal (v12, 14)] since it was also Christ's reason for apprehending him in the first place (as we have seen, and which will be fully experienced when we have a new body v 20-21). Paul then explains that this teaching is for the mature to understand correctly (v15), and to bear in mind as they walk in Christ.

Living in Christ requires resurrection power, nothing less. This is why Paul prayed for the Ephesians to know this power in Eph 1 (written from prison at the same time). Resurrection power has nothing to do with working miracles or healing, it is given for us to live holy lives in submission to God and walk as Christ walked: *Christ in you the hope of glory*. Intimations of this were given by Christ in his earthly ministry when he said things like: his saints were to be like salt affecting a meal, like light shining from a hill, like fire from heaven lighting the earth. Christians are to have an inner power because they are in Christ; and heaven, the power from the throne, touches what they touch. Christians alive to this truth, bring the very presence of Christ into the world where they operate. This is the testimony of the early church. This power in the lives of insignificant individuals could even affect the huge audiences of the Roman amphitheatres when they saw the courage and character, even of young children, as they faced horrendous tortures and death. Sometimes the crowds would cry for mercy or a quick despatch, overwhelmed by their constancy which was above natural ability.

Is not this what we pray for in the misunderstood Lord's Prayer - that the will of God may be done **on earth as it is in heaven?** Not done to the best of our ability or capacity, but done just as it is close to the throne.

The work of the cross

All of this presupposes the work of the cross in an individual's life. It is the

cross which sets aside the old life and brings in the new man; without a deep work in this area we will never see a resurrection of Christ out of our lives in any measure. Our lives, like a grain of wheat planted in a tomb of dark soil, must be taken into the death of the cross in area after area. This means that even our strengths must go into darkness, weakness, hopelessness and death, before we know resurrection. This is why we suffer so much as the Holy Spirit deals with all the areas of our lives.

This discipline is nothing to do with resolving the sin problem, that is elementary, we are talking about moving on in the Christian life to manifesting Christ. This requires not just sin, but even our strong, sincere, 'good', fleshly points to die. Anything which is a source of human strength in the things of God must be given to the cross so that they can be regained in newness of life. It does not mean the elimination of personality, it means that the man is bridled, humbled and made meek. What was a positive, useful, strength before, will still seem to be a feature of character later, but having been given to death and resurrection, it is now under the control of God.

Moses is a great example here. Trained by the greatest wise men in the world in the court of Egypt, he would have been as confident, strong, able, dignified, articulate and powerful as any royal; but God could not use these strengths. Moses had to suffer in a hidden, desolate wilderness for 40 years for all these strengths to be knocked out of him. Only when he felt he could not even speak properly, could he achieve God's purpose - he had become the meekest (most bridled) man in all the earth. Paul had a similar wilderness experience in Arabia before he could serve God. Why, because their strength now rested in Christ not themselves.

Let me give a personal example to illustrate this, something I rarely choose to do. I am a musician. Before I was converted to Christ my music was effectively my whole life and my reason for living. It had been directed into various pursuits but it virtually controlled me. My songs were almost like a musical journal of my life and innermost thoughts. When I was saved, and understood about giving everything up to God's control, there came a point when I realised I had to die to my music. It wasn't sinful, it had been used in God's service but it almost had a life of its own. The time came when I laid my music down, in specific dealings with God, and left this talent in God's hands. Effectively it was given as a burnt offering to God if you like. I fully expected never to play again, so serious was I about it. I wanted nothing to get in the way of my relationship with God. Many tears were involved, but I was resolved.

Time passed until God made it clear to me that I could take up music again, I was able to play and compose, but everything was different. It no longer

controlled me and I could take it up or put it down. There was no ambition to 'make it' in the music business, or even the Christian scene (despite many people pushing me to go that way, 'It will be of great service to God', they said - how many immature converts in the music scene have been destroyed by that lie). Music is something I enjoy, it is often used in God's service, it is a tool I can adapt to various purposes, I entertain people in certain circumstances, or I can use it to generate finance if required; but it is God's tool, not my tool which I try to use for God - and that's the difference. It's not the crucial thing in my life, but it is a component of my personality which God has first call upon. There have been times when I played very little, because God had other plans for my time; and times when I played more frequently, often providing helpful therapy under stress. Now all our talents, strengths, weaknesses, gifts, foibles etc. need to go, like this, into death; and it may be that some do not rise up again. I know some artists and musicians that did not feel free to pick their gift up again after dealing with God - but they found release, freedom and a ministry.

The death of the cross is first required before a resurrection can be experienced. The cross is the basis of all genuine spiritual activity. No matter how powerful, effective, winsome, laudable, sincere, organised, 'spiritual', religious, wholesome, or charismatic a ministry may be - if it is not rooted in the cross, it has no value and no spiritual good will come of it because it will not be done in Christ. To be Christ's activity in a person, the cross must have first removed the human strength of it. A person who knows the work of the cross, will also discern what ministry is truly effective in others. One aspect of the cross in a life will be a vision for the body, recognising the corporate requirement to the testimony of God.

There is a false idea about ministry; it is that God gifts and calls a person, say to be a preacher, who then utilises that gift as they see fit, to God's glory. Their calling authenticates their ministry. This is wrong because it has not gone to the cross. We cannot minister as we please, even if we are genuinely gifted. The church is riddled with the ideas of man, and look where we are today. Calling does not mean that we can command the blessing. Saul was called (outwardly), and even prophesied, but shipwrecked his life and shattered the people of God.

Jesus' example must be our experience. Despite his calling, gifting and even being the Son of God, Jesus' ministry was effective because he only did what his Father did, and said what his Father said. The words and works came from God, not from himself.

*Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, **the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do;***

for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. "For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does. (Jn 5:19-20)

"I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me. (Jn 5:30)

*"For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. "And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, **whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.**" (Jn 12:49-50)
[There are many more examples.]*

This is an example of a branch abiding in the vine; knowledge of the Father's desires will not come if we are not abiding in Christ. If this was true for Jesus' ministry, how much more so for us. We can only minister in Christ, therefore, we have to die to our ideas and strategies, even if we are truly gifted and called (what's worse is when people serve who have no gift or calling). This is as true for effective prayer, or any Christian service.

Take some campaigns of recent years as an example of this principle. Despite the huge amounts of money expended for advertising, the organising, the corporate activities, the self sacrificing schemes at a local level, the exhortations from the pulpit, the badgering in the Christian press, the printed T shirts, the worked up enthusiasm, the leaflets and flyers posted through letterboxes and so on - the net result - virtually nothing in statistical terms. However, the church was left weary, bemused, dejected, some were in debt, some left churches - is this a work of God? Did the organisers hear from God (they were all nationally famous leaders)? Does God's word encourage this sort of activity? Many believers avoided this, as with other previous unbiblical, organised evangelistic hypes. No matter how much effort is expended, nothing is achieved if it is not in Christ. To be in Christ, one must first have died to all human, fleshly means of achievement.

Unless the LORD builds the house, They labour in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain. (Ps 127:1)

It is wrong to stir up people's emotions to generate interest in a work. Choice must be judged in the Spirit to see if it is of Christ, not our subjective emotions. In this choosing, the Bible is our definitive, objective guide to what pleases God. The church is meant to be 100% effective because it only does what it has heard God telling it to do. It only prays what the Holy Spirit inspires and only serves after abiding in Christ; then God has fruit to his

glory. How much current activity would be filtered out if this was done? The early church knew the difference between what the Spirit said and what the flesh subjectively demanded: Peter preached as he was full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:8), the church spoke boldly being filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31), early ministers had to be full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3), natural religion (Judaism) is said to always resist the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51), missionary itineraries were determined by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:4, 16:6), church decisions were made by all the people who knew what '*seemed good to the Holy Spirit*' (Acts 15:28) and church leaders were determined by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28).

It is now widely accepted that the Christian church is in serious trouble as it loses its doctrinal base, its Biblical foundation, and crumbles in a flurry of emotionalism and activity. Yet there has never been a time in history where there has been more 'teaching' available in: conferences, tapes, books, videos, sermons, conventions, Bible Weeks, TV programmes, radio stations, international ministries, Bible translations and so on. All this has done us no good - because so much is not based in Christ. The church is in worse condition now than it was in the 1600's. The first century church did not even have a New Testament, few would have had any scriptures, travel was long and arduous, not to mention dangerous, persecution was rife - but they acted in the Spirit and evangelised the known world within fifty years. The fire of God will test what is of Christ and what is fleshy building of wood, hay and stubble. How will our work stand up? Work done sincerely *for* God will not survive; only work done *by* God will stand the fire. No flesh will glory in his presence (1 Cor 1:29).

The Diversity

The vitally important doctrines of Rm 6 enshrining the believer's identification with Christ, or Col 2 explaining our completeness in Christ, or Eph 3 explaining the eternal purpose of God in Christ are not the only theological edges to this subject. Redemption is in Christ, righteousness is in Christ, faith is in Christ, as is: peace, love, hope, wisdom, power, authority, glory and so on. These all have grand implications for our sanctification; but the phrase has very practical effects too. If we need peace - we need Christ. If we need wisdom, we need Christ. If we are to do a work, we need the faith of Christ. Our faith, peace and wisdom will always break down when we most need it. To complete the work, to have eternal significance, it must be done in Christ.

This is especially true in corporate matters. Paul admonishing the Corinthians wrote about speaking before God *in Christ* when he addressed them (2 Cor 12:19). Paul's apostolic ministry, even when acting in discipline, was done in

the authority of Christ. It was as if it were Christ chastising them, for their good, as children. The work of the ministry has to be in Christ, not the whim of man, however sincere, or the church will be badly served. Even Paul's suffering was the suffering of Christ, for the church, being completed (Col 1:24).

Church = Christ in the body

The doctrine of unity in Christ is very closely connected to the Bible's teaching about the church, which after all, is called *the body of Christ*. That God gives the body a high priority is shown in Eph 1:22-23 where Paul states that '*Christ is head over all things - **for the church which is his body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all***'. Jesus is controlling everything that goes on in the world: all the natural disasters, all the political upheavals, all the persecutions, all the sadness and all the joy - for the church. Satan is not in control, Jesus is; and he is in control for you to come into the fulness of life in the body! This is the priority God gives the *ekklesia*. Why does Paul call the *ekklesia* the body? Because Christ is the head, and as the elect saints live in Christ, they become the expression of the head just as the members of a body express the desires of the brain in a person. Together, we manifest Christ if we live in him.

Being in the church is a huge responsibility because there we *together* are in Christ. Everything must be done according to His Spirit or we work against his purpose in disobedience. This means that every decision of the elders has an eternal significance for which they will have to give an account to God. How urgent that we together should be in Christ i.e. in the Spirit of Christ. This means that mere human decisions made for expediency, pragmatism, financial gain, kudos, popularity, men fearing, or to generate numbers is evil. We cannot be corporately in Christ and act like we are in the world.

It also means that contributions made in the meeting have to be in Christ, i.e. truly prompted by the Spirit. Church is not an automatic free for all. There is no human liberty, only freedom in the Spirit. He has the liberty to direct contributions, not our whim. It is equally appalling for one man to dominate the proceedings totally - choosing all the hymns, praying all the prayers, giving all the notices, preaching all the sermons and shaking all the hands at the end. This is a travesty. Church is where we assemble together in Christ, minister under the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit and share in mutual edification - one person shares his gift in Christ, then another and so on. All done decently and in order. The gifted teacher still teaches, but does not dominate.

Koinonia is the essence of church life - where what is of Christ in one is shared with another. '*To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the*

common good.' (I Cor 12:7). Church is the highest expression of being in Christ and the place where God receives testimony.

The Falseness of Thinking of Blessing in Impersonal Terms

Modern Evangelicals tend to disassociate blessing and grace from Christ. The focus of attention is placed upon the required grace as an independent item from Christ. The Puritans, for instance, focused upon Christ as the means of the Christian's blessing. Happiness necessitated growing in closeness to Him and all that was necessary would be made available for God's work in our lives. Today, we are exhorted to seek this and that item to be dropped out of heaven into our lap. This not only disassociates Christ, the giver of grace, but also our responsibility, righteous living, living carefully by faith and so on. All the modern believer needs is faith to rip what he wants out of heaven, he does not need to live in daily obedience to Christ and trust him for all his needs.

Surely this is misrepresentation, you claim? Well here is a quote from a well known Christian leader and conference speaker at the major Evangelical gathering in the UK.

The kingdom of God is up there in heaven and by faith we reach our hands through because we are heavenly people and earthly people; we reach our hands through into the heavenlies and we grasp hold of the kingdom of God and we pull it down. We pull healing down and we pull grace and mercy down and we pull judgment down. And the trouble is then the church starts getting weak and ... it goes back into heaven again and we have periods where its almost as if there's no manifestation of the Kingdom. What God wants is for a people everywhere ... to be reaching up, by faith, to the throne of God and bringing his kingdom down. And ultimately there's gonna be a church that reaches up by faith and carries on pulling down and pulling down until the kingdom actually comes and is here and stays forever. We've got to get more of the kingdom down here than is up there so that the kingdom comes to earth ... I believe that's what God is after. I tend to believe that the Holy Spirit comes and drops gifts of healing for

*you to pass on to other people.*²

There is so much wrong teaching in this short quote that it staggers me, but this is the essence of many modern Christians' belief, especially Charismatic church-goers. Firstly it elevates the place of man in the economy of God's working way above Biblical limits. God dispenses grace, the Spirit dispenses gifts; man has no ability or strength to grab them out of heaven. No man can reach into heaven and take anything. God is sovereign in the execution of his purposes on the earth, whether it is healing or anything else. Such errors are close to blasphemy and certainly diminish God's authority. To take grace, mercy and judgment out of God's hands and make them dependent upon man's faith to grasp them is an insult to God's character.

Secondly, it generates an assessment of the effectiveness of God's kingdom upon what can be seen, felt and touched - the kingdom is here when there is healing and power but not when these things are absent. This turns Biblical doctrine on its head. God's kingdom is not of this world and is not to be judged by sight. It is the rule of peace and righteousness on the earth because it is the reigning of Christ in men's hearts. It has nothing to do with what is visible. Often detrimental things are evidences of the kingdom growing on the earth, like the persecution and suffering of the church. To say that the kingdom goes back into heaven when the church is weak is too facile to be believed.

The idea that a time comes when the kingdom remains on the earth because the church is powerful is: triumphalist, dominionist, post millennialism gone mad. This ignores Biblical statements about a growing apostasy in the church, tribulation in the world and the great delusion upon many, even the elect. But enough of this, what I want to concentrate on is how these ideas percolate into the concept of blessing and gifts are things to be pulled out of heaven like a Christmas present. Grace is divorced from growing into Christ and becomes something which drops out of heaven in a parcel if you pray in faith for whatever you want. God becomes some sort of heavenly vending machine who gives you whatever you want, if you tender the correct coin - human faith.

This teaching completely misses the point altogether. Gifts and graces are not separate items waiting in heaven to be released. All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Eph 1:3), nothing comes to us outside of Him. God's grace is centred in a person, and that person is given to us and we are united with him. Our job is not to gain stronger faith to grab things out of heaven, but to

² John Noble, Spring Harvest 1991, *Op. Seminar L1, Week Two, Special Interest - With Clinic: Healing*, Tape BP85

grow in the knowledge and love of the Son of God. Paul's urgent prayer for the beloved Ephesians, written towards the end of his life, was that they should: grow in wisdom and a revelation of the knowledge of Jesus (Eph 1:17); have their eyes enlightened to know the hope in Christ (v18); know the riches of the inheritance in Christ (v19); and to know the greatness of the power of Christ in us (v19). In other words, to know what it means to be in Christ who is the fount of all grace. God's grace is based upon a relationship, not man's faith.

The Christian's Position - Beloved of God because he is in Christ

We must be very careful to think in New Covenant terms because the old has been abrogated by the cross. Yet many Christians think in Old Covenant terms regarding their Christian lives. For instance, the idea of seeking God as an important activity to be promoted. Where this is used as an encouragement to pray we would have no quibble, but it usually gives an impression that relating with God is an external activity that involves effort and striving and may be unsuccessful. Fasting is another exercise promoted to urge closeness to God by self discipline and even physical self mortification. The more one fasts, the more spiritual one will be and the more likely God will hear you and answer prayer. This is all Old Covenant stuff. What about music in worship, where is that encouraged in the New Testament? What about the ideas of physical activity being a part of motivation to, or resultant, in corporate worship (dancing, falling, trembling, shaking, gyrating, waving arms etc.)?

All these things actually divert us from understanding that we are in Christ, seated with Him in heavenly places and as close to God as a son can be. This is where faith comes in. It is so much easier to walk by sight. You can measure your activity in fasting or seeking and then feel satisfied that God should now answer you.

Let's take a different tack. When you sin, what is needed? You are justified by faith so legally you have full pardon and an entrance into heaven, indeed Hebrews says you come boldly as a result of the blood of Christ which answers for sin. But you have offended your heavenly Father and disobeyed his commands. To change the relationship from disobedient son to obedient child, you confess your sin, repent of the action and ask forgiveness, thankful

for the blood of Christ which cleanses all sins. So, one can instantaneously repent and be back in full relationship with God your Father (if it's genuine repentance). Yet how many Christians feel that they have to wait until they feel better about it. In reality this means that they have slightly forgotten the full effects of the sin. The bigger the sin, the longer the wait before they put things right with God - time wasted. Some people do this for weeks on end. What is going on here? We wait until we feel that some penance has occurred. We need to suffer a bit. This is a work of the flesh.

Now blessing is often treated in the same way. Only after some prolonged human activity do we feel justified in claiming some blessing from God - so we fast, seek, strive, pray, sacrifice, give money etc. This is a work of the flesh too. Blessing resides in Christ and only in Christ. If we want a certain blessing, it is in Christ and God has promised to give us all we need, in Him. The man of faith just deals with it as a part of his daily walk with God. That means that his prayers can focus upon thankfulness and intercession instead of his own needs.

Let us quickly look at the specific items mentioned. Believers are never told to seek God in the NT letters. The word 'seek', and its cognates, are here used of unbelievers seeking God, or of human activities, but also seeking: a continuing city, a homeland, peace or the things above in Christ for Christians. We do not seek for God because he has found us and made us his own. The command appears in the Psalms because it was relevant under the Old Covenant economy, believers then did not have the Holy Spirit indwelling them. Seeking God and fasting were valid methods to ascertain God's mind, just like casting lots was. But this has changed for New Covenant people. How can we seek after God when we are in Christ and Christ is God? We need to apprehend what is in Christ, not seek after God. This was the essence of Paul's prayer in Ephesians, that believers would know the fulness being in Christ and the greatness of his power in us (Eph 1:16ff). His other prayer asks that we apprehend Christ in his fulness (Eph 3:14ff). Similar things could be said about the current fascination with angels. Why would we need angelic ministry if God lives inside us in the person of Christ by His Spirit? Angelic ministry was necessary in the Old Testament because saints then did not know the indwelling Spirit. Today they serve those who are elect but not yet saved (Heb 1:14), and eagerly watch the purposes of God being worked out in the church (Eph 3:10). Appearances early on in Acts again refer to the time of transition.

Nowhere in the New Testament are we commanded to fast. The examples of the apostles fasting in Acts must be seen in the background of the time of transition from Judaism to Christianity. Paul also circumcised a colleague, should we do that? The early church in Acts had no elders, should we copy

that? The early church only ate kosher food should we copy that? The idea that we can improve our spirituality by hurting ourselves goes against the truth of being in Christ. We can't better that. The full inheritance is in him, that is why we have every spiritual blessing in Christ in the heavenly places. Why can fasting improve on that? Faith in what God has already done is what counts, not faith in my fasting. Apart from that, even in the Old Covenant (Isa 58), fasting was related to doing good to the poor and needy rather than legalistic abstinence.

The same is true about music and physical activity in worship. Before the law was given, worship had more to do with bowing and an inner attitude than the worship system later established and now cancelled. Music and physical activity is part of the time of law and as such is now abrogated. This is why there is no mention of either in NT church services. Why? because worship is in Christ. It is something we do when our hearts commune with the Spirit within us and we offer ourselves sacrificially to God (Rm 12:1-3). It is done by faith in the Spirit. It is only the flesh which needs external stimulation to an emotional response. This is the essence of occult worship activity, soulish/fleshly stirrings to generate emotional responses and an altered state of consciousness.³

What is the point of all this? We are beloved of God because we are in Christ. Because he is a son, and we are united in Him, we are sons of God. The ministry of the Spirit is focused upon us understanding this:

*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 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 -- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.** (Rm 8:14-17)*

The corollary of this is that we are also co-heirs with Christ. His unsearchable riches are the inheritance of the righteous man of Old Covenant promises. Jesus inherited all of them, all God's promises find their yes in him. If we are in Him, we do not need anything else. What we need is to understand the mystery of being *in Christ* and have faith in all that this means for us now.

³ Though this is true, in modern times when people have lost the art of corporate communal singing without accompaniment, it seems necessary to offer some simple musical backing to assist the congregation in singing praise. This should be simple, not loud enough to drown singing and done with reverence. Drums (closely associated with pagan worship and which stir up inappropriate rhythmic bodily responses) should not be involved.

A Life Lived From Above

Certain texts regarding our Christian experience are little discussed because they seem enigmatic and esoteric. Passages like:

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

*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.* (Eph 1:3)

*... raised us up together, and **made us sit together in the heavenly places** in Christ Jesus.* (Eph 2:6)

*Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the **heavenly** calling.* (Heb 3:1)

*But **you have come** to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the **heavenly** Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven.* (Heb 12:22-23)

Just as we have known the death of the cross, and should know the power of His resurrection, we must also realise that our real location is heaven. Yes I know this sounds strange, but these texts are either true or false. Either God made us sit in heaven with Christ or he did not. This is another aspect of the believers life which must be lived by faith. We are told that we are justified and righteous but we know we sin. We are told we are cleansed by the blood of Christ but we have never seen it. We are told Satan is defeated but we see his power tempting and afflicting us. We are told that the kingdom is amongst us but we do not see it operating fully. We are told to wrestle with things we can't see, and to listen to God whom we can't hear (audibly). We could go on.

We labour with this sort of truth just as the disciples struggled to believe what Jesus said:

*"If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you **heavenly** things?"* (Jn 3:12)

It is a leap of faith too far for most of us; and yet it is crucial to maintaining victory.

Again, Abraham pictured this for us. He was never satisfied with becoming a rich pastoral landowner and head of a prosperous tribe, able even to wage war successfully. We are told that, all along, he looked for a heavenly city which had foundations. He was on a pilgrimage to a better land, a spiritual land, where God dwelt. He lived on earth but sought an eternal home, living before the cross. We, on the other hand, have been affected by the cross and

resurrection, and have been placed in heaven legally, but are required to live out our days on earth. Since we have died and our lives are hid with Christ in God, our real home is with him in heaven (later to be transferred to a renewed earth). Only the dead part of our lives belongs to the earth, which in this form has no future, it will be burned up *'with a sizzling, crackling roar'* (as one person translates 2 Pt 3:10).

It is important to see this. Christians should have a loose hold on this life, because it has no lasting value to them. This even includes our children. If God calls them into a service, which we as parents are unprepared for, our job is to let them go. C.T. Studd had a problem with this as his mother did not want him to be a missionary. We are much more likely to live godly lives if we act as if our home is by God's side. We will also deal more authoritatively with the enemy if we are aware of our authority in Christ.

The reason we have a place in heaven now is because we are in Christ, and heaven is where his throne is. Our spirits have already been glorified (just as our souls are being sanctified now and our bodies will be transformed in the future). This is where the new man resides, this is where we commune with God, this is where we intuitively hear from God.⁴ This part of our being, since it is spiritual, is not restricted to space and resides in heaven as well as in our lives. Just as Jesus lives in us as well as in heaven.

The practical side of this is that all we do must come from God out of heaven if it is to be of eternal value. The plans of people to 'get into' Christian service, or to 'take up a work for God' or to 'assume responsibility for a church' and suchlike, betray ignorance of this concept. We cannot determine, from below as it were, to take on a spiritual calling with earthly resources. The result of this (seen on all hands today) is works of the flesh, propped up by: money, effort, badgered support, human ideas, organisation, systems, dominating personalities and so on.

Again Moses provides an illustration. Despite his heavenly calling, he needed to learn that it required a heavenly based fulfilment. His efforts to deal with Egypt in the flesh resulted in his fleeing Egypt altogether. The vision required a heavenly instrument. Moses had to die to himself, know the resurrection power of God and be sent from heaven to Pharaoh. Thus Jesus said what he

⁴ Some might think that my repeated reference to hearing from God is slightly mystical and too subjective; but this is how we originally were regenerated and knew Christ as Saviour. In John 6: 44-45 it says that those who come to Christ are those who heard and learned of the Father. We need to continue hearing just as we did when God spoke to us as babes through the Gospel. In our cleverness we rely on our own ideas rather than stop and listen.

heard his Father say in heaven and did what he saw his Father doing in heaven. We need to be an ascended, heavenly people.

Through ascension, we have power in prayer, and are able to defeat spiritual enemies. We beseech God, from close to his side, praying the prayers he prompts in us, and from a position of authority, as sons of God, we declare God's judgment (e.g. Acts 13:10-11, Lk 10:19). The sovereignty of God thus works through those in heavenly fellowship with Him. Only by being heavenly minded can we have the mind of Christ and exercise sound judgment (1 Cor 2:16). As we hold fast to the head of the church in heaven (Col 2:19), we will be nourished and fortified.

This all requires faith, faith which is being led upward, letting go of what is earthly and seen, but holding on to what is invisible (Heb 11:1). As we progress in the obedience of faith, our capacity for apprehending the heavenly - the spiritual and eternal - is magnified. Salvation in Christ incorporates heavenly glory (2 Tim 2:10; 2 Cor 4:17). True Christianity is a place where the heavens are open.

An Encouragement

Even a superficial examination of past genuine moves of God, whether it be pioneer missionaries, preachers, church groups or social movements, shows that what God initiates with a specific word and a demonstration of his grace, sooner or later seems to hit very real problems. The work appears to go right into death. Take William Carey's struggles for seven years without a convert and then the destruction of all his translation efforts, for instance; or the trials and ailments of Martin Luther, the rejection and sicknesses of Calvin, the hardships of Hudson Taylor and Adoniram Judson, or the weak constitutions of David Brainerd and Murray M'Cheyne. The ministry which God most uses seems to be that which God blesses with suffering.

This should not really surprise us as it is a sound New Testament principle. Over and over again, suffering is testified to be a means of growth, blessing, power and ministry, if embraced with faith and thanksgiving: '*all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer*', 2 Tim 3:12. (See also: Acts 9:16, 14:22; Rm 8:17; 2 Cor 1:5-10; Phil 1:29-30; 1 Thess 3:4 etc.) In fact there is no teaching that Christians will be materially prosperous and little about healing.⁵ This also was exemplified in history; the strongest move of God in

⁵ More information on this can be found in my paper, *The Suffering of Christ and the Believer*.

the church (in the first century) was the time when believers had the least material goods and social power and also knew the greatest suffering. All this only follows the example of Jesus himself who grew up in a poor family, had nowhere to lay his head and was cut off at the height of his influence.

Why is this? It is to take God's servants into the death of Christ in order to release them into a new life in the power of His resurrection. Believers need tough dealings to make them cease trusting in their powers, affliction does this. The principle even holds true in grasping truth. We gain a revelation of some deep doctrine and seek to live in the good of it. It empowers us as we joyfully apply it to our lives. We become known for sharing the importance of that truth. Then, all of a sudden, we seem to die because of that truth. Our experience seems to be a contradiction of that truth and it seems that we could never preach it again, if we could struggle to believe it at all. But after a while, God touches us afresh and that hard won truth becomes a renewed emphasis in our ministry, but now it has a power, authority and clarity that it never had before. One can teach almost conversationally about it without preparation, because it has become ingrained in our lives. We begin to live that truth. This is when the truth takes hold of others we share it with. The truth, having died in us, is now resurrected in power in our ministry.

The same often applies to relationships. A friendship joined together by God suddenly is put under the most severe strain. It appears that the communion is broken for good. Faithfulness to God has led to an irreparable rift. But as one holds on, willing to suffer loss for the cause of truth, a sovereign act of God resurrects the whole relationship, but places it upon a different and revitalised ground. It has filtered away some of the human elements and changed them for godly ones.

The importance of resurrection power is that it is above death, it contains eternal significance, no matter what the human appearance may be. William Carey is unknown to secular history, but the importance of his long labours are truly of eternal proportions. Resurrection power enables us to live in Christ and work, as he worked, to God's glory. To live Christ's life, we must die to our own. Our difficulties thus drive us to live by the grace of God, to realise our weakness and sinfulness. God's way is always going to be: *'My power is made perfect in weakness'* (2 Cor 12:9). What is God's power in us, it is the power of Christ's resurrection, not our sanctified strength or wisdom (Eph 1:19-20). The more spiritually successful a person is, the more that person realises that he can do nothing on his own and needs God to work in him to achieve anything (Phil 2:12-13).

So, be encouraged in your trials, God is working in you to bring in more resurrection life. There is a purpose in your apparent weakening and

hopelessness, It is that God may work more effectively through you. As you become more dependent, you enable more of Christ to be seen in you. A people who have taken up their cross and died to themselves are a people who have defeated the inner working of Satan, the Lord of death, in their lives. Their dying has destroyed the power of death in their inner being and brought them into a growing experience of the risen life of Christ. Human strength, wisdom, efficiency, or intelligence is not of great use to God on its own. It does not guarantee spiritual power. Christians who are not naturally wise, strong or intelligent are not impaired for spiritual effectiveness. The criterion that counts is living in Christ, empowered by his resurrection life. Do not decry your weaknesses but trust God. Many of his servants were rejected by human institutions for ministry as being unqualified (e.g. David Livingstone, Gladys Aylward) but went on to serve God by faith, achieving great things. David cannot fight Goliath in Saul's armour (the old nature), but in the power of a resurrected life lived by faith, Goliath is doomed by the actions of a young unarmed man.

Let's all cease to concentrate on lesser, external things, no matter how 'spiritual' they claim to be, and focus upon Christ, our great redeemer and wonderful saviour, through whom we truly worship God, our heavenly Father.

Appendix One

A Catechism showing the Biblical Importance of being *in Christ*.

How are Christians told to live?

They are told that: '*The just shall live by **faith***', (Rm 1:17).

'What is faith?

'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen', (Heb 11:1). Faith is, therefore, a conviction about invisible, spiritual things which brings the reality of that unseen thing into living experience.

So, what is a key principle of Christian living?

The Christian lives by believing in things that he cannot see.

What are these things?

These things are many: being washed in the blood of Christ, being given Christ's righteousness, being delivered from the kingdom of the enemy, being guaranteed a place in heaven, being elected by God from eternity, being raised with Christ into heavenly places etc.

What is the most important of these invisible things for our daily walk?

What scripture considers is the most important for our daily experience is the one which is mentioned the most.

What is the phrase mentioned most often regarding our walk?

The most mentioned invisible attribute of believers is that they are in Christ.

Proposition 1

The Christian must, therefore, live daily by believing that he is living in Christ.

What does this mean?

It does not simply mean that a believer is a Christian. It means that a believer is born anew, one who has died with Christ to sin and to himself, that he has been buried with Christ, raised and ascended with Christ into heaven so that he is now seen by God as seated with Christ (Eph 2:6). The believer is now a new creature (2 Cor 5:17), i.e. he is not of human (Adamic) stock anymore; he is part of a new humanity in Christ. His body, however, is still physical and human, until the second coming when Christ will transform it into a perfect spiritual vessel.

How does the believer live in the good of this?

Firstly by reading the scriptural teaching on the subject and meditating upon it carefully. Secondly, by believing that it is true for him. Thirdly by seeking grace and power from the Holy Spirit. Fourthly, by acting upon the doctrine in obedience.

What results arise from acting as scripture describes?

- The believer will give a very high priority to this truth since the New Testament deems it important by using the phrase *'in Christ'* (or relative phrases) over 200 times.
- The believer will not trust in himself but look to Christ. He will take up his cross, which speaks of the death of his own life, deny himself and seek to live in Christ.
- The believer will focus upon heavenly truths (Col 3:1-3) as a basis for practical living.
- The believer will not seek to live the Christian life in his own strength but trust in God's grace in Christ. He will seek to live in the power of Christ's

resurrection.

- The believer will not seek to promote his own ideas and then seek God's blessing upon them but will rather seek to hear from God.
- The believer will develop his own relationship with Christ by the Holy Spirit.
- The believer will not seek isolated blessings from heaven, but understand that all his needs are met in Christ and that he needs to appropriate more of him.
- The goal of the believer will be to see Christ fully manifested in his life in word and deed.
- The believer will seek to apply these truths corporately with other believers.

Appendix Two

The Manifest Sons of God Heresy

It might be necessary for some who have heard of this aberration to say a few words. This crazy teaching grew out of the Latter Rain Movement in American Pentecostal circles in the late 1940's. It was originally connected with the wild ideas of Franklin Hall and was popularised by the healing evangelist, William Branham. This man was not only condemned as a heretic by Pentecostals themselves, but he also practised occultic healing techniques.⁶ After Branham, several men took up his ideas and pushed them even further, adding even more exotic teachings from Franklin Hall. The Manifest Sons of God movement diversified and gradually went underground in the 1950's because it was so way out, even for Pentecostals. In recent years, however, the specific teachings have been resurrected by people like Paul Cain and Earl Paulk among others, and the Charismatic Movement has become immersed in it's ideas.

Some, who know something of these doctrines might see some superficial resemblances with this heresy and what I am teaching here. There is no link whatsoever. It is simply unfortunate that the Manifest Sons teaching uses some similar statements.

Essentially, its teachers state that as the end approaches, God will raise up a mighty army of people who will be perfected into the manifest sons of Romans 8. These people will be immortal, able to fly, invulnerable to bullets, able to walk through walls and other nonsense. Some refer to this under the guise of Joel's Army. or the New Breed. A group of mighty apostles will

⁶ For more information, see my forthcoming book: *The Origins of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*.

emerge in this larger group and will eventually rule the world. All of this takes place under a great outpouring of the Spirit in revival fire. These sons actually become Christ on the earth as a corporate man so that Christ is no longer personally necessary to God's plan for the earth. And so it goes on. Any simple Bible student can see this for the arrant nonsense that it is, and yet many Evangelicals are following it.

What I am teaching here has nothing in common with this heresy, apart from the use of some Biblical terminology which these heretics have hijacked and transformed.

A number of pamphlets, booklets and articles can be obtained from the same author at the address supplied earlier. Please write for a catalogue. Speaking engagements are undertaken as time constraints and other commitments allow.