

*By  
His  
Doing*

**What does it mean to be  
'In Christ' ?**

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# Joined to the Son

*“By His doing you are in Christ Jesus . . .” 1 Corinthians 1:30*

I want to speak plainly about a vital truth that has transformed my life. When I first saw this truth, I was working in an evangelistic team in India and had been through several months when I was crying out to God for more reality in my relationship with him. It had seemed to me in those months of darkness that all the other Christians around me (or at least most of them) were enjoying the reality that I was hungry for, so when light eventually dawned I thought I was simply catching up with what everyone else was already enjoying.

The years since then have shown me that I was mistaken. It seems that the majority of us have just not seen the simple truth that, when God says that he has placed us **in Christ**, it means that our life has been joined to Jesus. As we begin to see and believe this, a whole new light shines in and transforms what it means to live as a Christian.

I soon started to discover that the books of the New Testament, and especially Paul’s letters, are **full** of references to the fact that we are ‘in Christ’, and the results that flow from that simple fact.

Perhaps the biggest difference for me has been the growing realisation that I am included; there is nothing to strive for, no test I need to pass in order to gain the Father’s acceptance. Yes, of course I already knew about the love of God and had begun to experience it as I had responded to the message and put my trust in Jesus for forgiveness and a new life. But now it is as if it is all settled and secure.

I am not saying that I never have ‘wobbles’, when I feel uncertain and perhaps insecure. But even then it is normally not long before that glorious realisation floods back in, the quiet reassurance of the Father that **he has placed me in his Son, the Lord Jesus.**

We may need some more evidence to be convinced, so let’s explore just a few of the passages that spell out the facts . . .

**1 Corinthians 1:30** Different translations say *“By His doing . . .”*, *“Of Him . . .”* or *“Because of Him . . .”* The original Greek says *“Out from Him . . .”* In other words, God himself is the origin, the source of the fact that we are in Christ. Not my emotions, not events and circumstances, not success or failure, not the strength of my faith – especially not that, fortunately!

**Romans 6:3-11** *“Baptised into Christ Jesus . . . buried with Him . . . united with Him . . . dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”* Read the whole passage!

**2 Corinthians 1:20 & 21** “For as many as are the promises of God, **in Him** they are yes . . . Now He who establishes us with you **in Christ** and anointed us is God, . . . “

**2 Corinthians 5:17** “Therefore if anyone is **in Christ**, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

**Galatians 3:27** “For all of you who were baptised **into Christ** have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

**Galatians 3:28** “. . . all one **in Christ Jesus**.”

**Ephesians 1:1,3,4,7,13** “. . . faithful **in Christ Jesus** . . . every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places **in Christ** . . . He chose us **in Him** before the foundation of the world . . . **In Him** we have redemption through His blood . . . **In Him**, you also, after listening to the message of truth . . . you were sealed **in Him** with the Holy Spirit of promise . . .” Ephesians has so many more references to our being in Christ that you will just have to read through the whole letter!

**Colossians 1:14** “. . . **in whom** we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

**Colossians 2:6,10** “Therefore as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk **in Him** . . . and **in Him** you have been made complete.”

I could go on and on. Even just the simple way in which Paul starts several of his letters, writing “to the church of . . . **in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ** . . .”

But perhaps the most telling example is the Lord Jesus himself in **John 15:1-11**, where he speaks to his disciples in the upper room (after Judas has left to betray him) and says how he is the vine and they/we are branches in that vine, and tells those who follow him to ‘abide’ (= stay, dwell, make their home) in him. That instruction would be meaningless if we were not already **in him!**

Please read **John 15:1-11** again.

You may also like to read a letter that James Hudson Taylor wrote to his sister in October 1869, about his struggles with this passage and the eventual breakthrough that he experienced. (Hudson Taylor was a pioneering missionary, taking the gospel to the interior of China. He founded the China Inland Mission, later known as the Overseas Missionary Fellowship.) The letter is contained in his biography (by Dr & Mrs Howard Taylor) and is also available under the title [The Exchanged Life](#).<sup>1</sup> One sentence which ‘jumps out’ of this letter is this: “All the time I felt assured that there was in Christ all I needed, but the practical question was how to get it *out*.”

<sup>1</sup> Available from <http://www.justonecandle.uk/PDFs/ExchangedLife.pdf>

If, like Hudson Taylor and like me, you are already a Christian but have felt that deep frustration, perhaps even desperation, longing for more reality in your relationship with the Father – through his Son – then I pray that you will take this simple truth to heart: your loving Father God has **already** joined your life to the life of his Son.

In my months of desperation, there was at least one caring Christian brother who took me to one side and shared ***Ephesians 1:3*** with me, hoping to help me out of my difficulty: “*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 . . .*” The intention was really good but it only deepened my despair, because, as far as I could see, I didn’t have those blessings, so he evidently had NOT blessed me with them. When, later, I began to see that the same Father who had given those blessings had also placed me in Christ, then – but only then – I was able to take hold of what he had given.

There are, of course, many Christian books on many aspects of the Christian life but there seem to be very few which clearly show this basic truth. One that has helped me many times is *The Normal Christian Life* by Watchman Nee. If you want to explore and discover more, then I thoroughly recommend it.

I have borrowed one of Watchman Nee’s illustrations many times, because it is simple and graphically expresses the reality that we have been joined to Jesus :–

I take a piece of paper and place it in a book. Then I post the book to another town. What happens to the piece of paper? It also goes to the town. If I put the book on my bookshelf, or even if I leave it somewhere by mistake, whatever happens to the book also happens to the piece of paper; it shares the same destiny. Your Father has placed you in his Son so that you share the same destiny with him.

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When we begin to see that we have been placed **in** Christ, that our lives have been joined to his life, being a Christian starts to take on a new dimension – a whole series of new dimensions, in fact! We could spend a very long time trying to list them all, and even longer working them out in practice – the rest of our lives! Here is just one way that our eyes may be opened :–

Most Christian fellowships regularly take the bread and wine together. It is a good and valuable thing to do and, after all, it is one thing that the Lord Jesus has specifically told us to do when we meet together. But do you sometimes find yourself asking questions: ‘What am I really doing this for?’ ‘Am I just following a routine?’ ‘How meaningful is this to me right now?’

We know that we are doing it in remembrance of him but sometimes that remembering seems a little tired, perhaps even contrived or artificial. Perhaps we try to revive our appreciation by attempting to picture the horrors of the crucifixion, hoping to stir up our feelings as we contemplate the depths of God's love for us.

But this is more than a mere remembrance; it is an active participation! When Paul writes *"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."* (**1 Corinthians 11:26**), what does he mean? How can our 'remembering' become a 'proclamation'?

A clue lies in the previous chapter. In **1 Corinthians 10:16**, Paul writes *"Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?"* That word 'sharing' is the same word translated 'fellowship' and could just as well be 'participation'. So, when we eat the bread and drink the wine, we are making a statement that we share in the death of Jesus. "By his broken body, my old life is dead and gone; by his blood poured out, the price for my sins, failures and shortcomings has been paid in full. These blessings are mine as I stand in Him." Some statement! Yes, a proclamation indeed!

When we are baptised, we are saying something very similar: "My old life is dead and buried; I have been raised to new life in Christ."

Both of these are strong declarations that we are **in Christ**, because none of the benefits of his death and resurrection are available to us until we put our trust into him.

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In Christ? Yes, by his grace, and heir to all the promises of God! Completely 'arrived' and with it all worked out in practice in every part of my life? Not by a long way! But we have the perfect guide to lead us into all the truth, as Jesus said he would (**John 16:12-15**).

*"Now we have received,  
not the spirit of the world,  
but the Spirit who is from God,  
so that we may know the things freely given to us by God . . ."*

**1 Corinthians 2:12**

Dave Taylor    October 2018

# Set Free !

*“But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’*

*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law;  
but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

**(1 Corinthians 15:54-57)**

Right at the end of his well-known chapter about resurrection – both the historic resurrection of the Lord Jesus and our own future resurrection – Paul takes two Old Testament passages and brings them together.

The second part (quoted from **Hosea 13:14**) was originally spoken in judgment over the Jewish tribe of Ephraim, because of their idolatry and rejection of the LORD God. The next line in the same passage says *“Compassion will be hidden from My sight.”* Grim and full of despair, not at all the sort of passage that you would expect Paul to quote when talking of the victory of resurrection!

But he turns it around by quoting from **Isaiah 25:8** first: *“He will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, and He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken.”* Even the most desolating judgment is swallowed up by the overwhelming victory of resurrection and in fact even the words of judgment themselves are turned around to emphasise the completeness of that victory. If he had written ‘Hallelujah!’ after *“. . . where is your sting?”* It would have fitted in perfectly. (See **Revelation 7:17 & 21:4** for more of the fulfilment!)

And then Paul moves the scene, from the glorious future to the present tense! *“but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Not ‘will give’ or even ‘has given’ (though both are true!), But ‘gives’; now, in our lives as we live them today.

Why does he say *“but thanks be to God . . .”*? Because he has just written about two things that look like the very opposite of victory: death and sin!

We all know that death comes to each one of us; the promise of resurrection gives us confidence to look beyond it. But sin, says Paul, is death’s ‘sting’, the deadly wound that brings the poison of death into our human lives today. It was the same back in **Genesis 2:17** *“. . . for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”* Death is the certain result of sin. James says the same in his letter: *“But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”* (**James 1:14-15**) Just a couple of words to clarify here: 1) ‘lust’ doesn’t just mean sexual desire but setting your heart on something and 2) ‘accomplished’ means ‘full-grown’ or ‘completely reached its goal’. Sin is certainly deadly.

It is worth taking a moment to consider what God means by ‘sin’. It is a word that has long religious roots and it is not much used in everyday life today. If asked, most people – if they even agreed that it had any meaning these days – would probably say that they think it means sexual immorality, as in the phrase ‘living in sin’. In fact, its meaning is much simpler. The New Testament Greek word is borrowed from archery and means ‘missing the mark’. The Old Testament Hebrew word also has its roots in ‘missing’. If we needed to translate it today, we might easily say ‘failing to meet a standard’ or just simply ‘failure’. We might not like to think that we sin, but none of us can escape the fact that we often fail!

OK, so what Paul seems to be saying is that our everyday failures are the 'sting' of death affecting our lives now. But then he says a surprising thing: **the power of sin is the law.**

What can he mean? That laws (and particularly, perhaps, the laws that God gave in the Old Testament) are the power of sin – ?? Surely they are good things, showing us how we need to live, what to do and what to avoid doing; how can they represent 'the power of sin' ?

Fortunately, Paul explains very frankly from his own painful experience in **Romans 7**. He had been raised in the Jewish sect of the Pharisees (**Acts 26:4-5**), who took every commandment of the Jewish Law very literally and very seriously, so he would have been trained in every little detail from an early age.

But listen as he tells us his experience of trying to follow the Law . . .

*“What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said ‘You shall not covet.’ But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from law sin is dead. I was once alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.”* (**Romans 7:7-11**) He goes on in the following verses to describe the misery of wanting to follow the law but finding himself unable to do so, culminating in his cry from the heart: *“Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from this body of death?”* (**v.24**)

Have you ever felt the same way? Wanting to follow every commandment that the Lord has given us but finding that you just can't do it? Feeling increasingly condemned by failure that is only further highlighted by a growing awareness of God's will?

Sadly, much of what passes for Christianity is structured around rules and regulations, external standards, traditions and expectations. We are made to feel bad about ourselves because we fail to meet those standards. And not just the standards that other people have made for us; quite often we get into the most condemnation because we do not match up to the standards that we set for ourselves. The more rules we try to follow, the more we are conscious of the effects of sin in our lives.

Yes, Paul was right, the law gives power to sin. Leverage, we might say these days.

How can we find our way out of this? IS there a way out?

Yes, there is! Paul found it and passed it on to us in the early verses of **Romans 7**. The verses we have just been looking at describe what he went through before he found the answer. That is underlined by the triumphant 'Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!' In **v.25** and then the opening verses of **ch.8**.

In **Romans 6**, Paul writes at length about the fact that those who have put their trust in Jesus have had their lives joined to his. He says how our old life *“was crucified with Him . . . so that we would no longer be slaves to sin”* (**v.6**). He refers to the graphic demonstration that we make when we are baptised, portraying our old life being 'buried' as we go down into the water and our re-emergence from the water as a picture of resurrection to new life. It all hinges on the fact that our Father God has placed us in his Son (**1 Corinthians 1:30**) and so, just as he died, we died with him. Just as he was raised from the dead, so too we can experience the present-day 'resurrection' of the new life of the Holy Spirit in us. Yes, there is a physical resurrection to come, but Paul writes about a spiritual resurrection **now**.

But what has this to do with our obvious failure to live up to all those standards, rules and expectations? How does being 'joined to the Son' make any difference to that?

In **Romans 7:1-3**, he uses the picture of marriage. If a man and woman are married, they are bound to each other as long as they both live but, if one dies, the other is free to marry anyone else. Then, in **v.4**, he says we are in the same position.

Before we came to Christ, we were ‘married’ to the law, obliged to try to meet all those seemingly impossible standards. But now, because we have been joined to his death so that our old life is gone, we are also dead to the law! Those external standards have no more grip on us. Instead of ‘trying to please God’ by keeping all God’s laws (and all the other ones we have made for ourselves!), Paul says clearly *“Therefore, my brothers, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, **in order that we might bear fruit for God.** For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, (‘dead to that which held us captive’ - RSV) so that we serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.” (Romans 7: 4-6)*

I love the way he (perhaps unconsciously) switches from ‘you’ to ‘we’ as he writes! What he is writing to the believers in Rome is the essence of how he lives himself. This former Pharisee, steeped in the Jewish Law from birth, declares that he has now been set free from it by being joined to the death of the Lord Jesus. He is also freed from the condemnation of repeated failure, as he writes in **Romans 8:1-2**: *“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.”*

If we read on the next few verses in **ch.8**, we shall see how (again) he enlarges on what he has just written. He contrasts two ways of living:

1) ‘according to the flesh’ – in other words, the ordinary natural way of following human desires – which includes trying to please God by subjecting ourselves to his laws. As he writes in **v.6-8**, *“For the mind that is set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”* The verses we read earlier describe Paul’s own bitter experience of exerting all his energy to follow all God’s laws but failing miserably. He knows what he is writing about!

2) ‘according to the Spirit’ – living from the life of the Holy Spirit within us. *“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” (v.11)* This is all part of being ‘in Christ’, part of our amazing inheritance in him. Not something that we need to work hard to achieve, but a gift from our Father, for us to receive from him with thanks.

Yes, we need to follow up what he has done by taking hold of it, ‘abiding’ – making our home – in Jesus and what he has done for us, as Paul writes in the next verses: *“So then, brothers, we are under obligation (literally ‘in debt’) , not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – for if you live according to the flesh you are going to die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” (v.12-13)* The key here is ‘by the Spirit’. He is not talking about us making tremendous human efforts to discipline ourselves to conform to God’s standards – quite the opposite! As the Holy Spirit leads us, he shows us more aspects of our lives, perhaps components of our personality, that belong to the old life and so need to be consigned to death, making them dead because they are already included in the death of Jesus.

The tendency to try to earn God's approval by attempting to keep the law is not some new idea – far from it! It was the main problem that Paul aimed to tackle when he wrote to the churches in Galatia in about AD 56, and one of the dangers about which he warned the church in Colossae a few years later.

In **Colossians 2:20-23**, Paul challenges what we might call 'religious behaviour': *"If you have died with Christ to the elementary principle of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourselves to decrees, such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!' (Which all refer to things destined to perish with use) – in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made (or 'would-be') religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence."*

Just a few verses earlier, he wrote *"When you were dead in your transgressions . . . He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."* (**Colossians 2:13-14**)

In **Galatians 3:23-4:7**, Paul paints a simple picture of the role of laws (especially the Old Testament Law) in our lives. Apparently, he wrote this letter from Ephesus, and I like to think that maybe one morning, he was up on the flat roof of the house where he was staying and could see the 'school run' taking place in the streets below him, which gave him an illustration to share in his letter to the Galatian churches.

Each wealthy man who had a son would make sure that his heir was properly trained by assigning a trusted slave to look after him. This slave would know exactly how his master wanted his son to behave and would accompany him everywhere, especially to school, where the slave would sit at the back of the class and try to ensure that the boy learned his lessons well.

A day would come, though, when the father considered that his boy was sufficiently mature and trained and so he would hold an 'adoption' ceremony – really more of a 'coming of age' –, when the son and heir would become the 'junior master' in the household and take his share of the rights and responsibilities of his father's business. The word translated 'adoption' literally means 'placing as son'.

Although he had always been the son and heir, while he had been a child he was under the rule of this slave/tutor, right up until the day that his father 'adopted' him. Now he was no longer under the slave but was a free, adult man.

That's like us, says Paul. Before we came to faith in Christ, we were under laws, rules and regulations. But now *"when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God."* (**Galatians 4:4-7**)

Wow! What a picture! That's us, set free from legalism and from trying to live up to expectations and brought into the glorious freedom of the heirs of God! Another amazing part of our inheritance because our Father has joined us to his Son!

# The Double Cure

***“ . . . be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power”***

Every Christian believer knows about sin. It's a word that we tend to use quite a lot, in spite of the fact that the 'world outside' doesn't use it. Except perhaps in the phrase 'living in sin' and then normally in mockery of the out-of-date idea that there is anything wrong with unmarried couples living together.

But for Christians it tends to be a jargon word, essential because it is right at the heart of our spiritual experience. For most of us, our earliest encounters with the good news of Jesus have had a lot to do with our sense of guilt and a need for forgiveness, then finding that real forgiveness and beginning to experience more of the power of the living God in our lives.

But still the word remains a difficult one to communicate. So much hangs on that initial experience of forgiveness! It is very difficult to communicate the love of God to people who do not acknowledge fixed standards of right and wrong and therefore have very little sense of guilt about wrongdoing of any sort. Most people are more concerned not to hurt anyone else than they are about breaking any moral code, whether religious or not.

Over the years, I have picked up a little understanding of Greek, the language in which the New Testament was originally written and the common language of the Roman Empire. Especially as most of them came from 'Galilee of the Gentiles', Jesus and the Twelve would have been fluent in Greek as well as Aramaic (the current language of the Jews at the time) and some of them would also have understood ancient Hebrew, the language of most of the Old Testament. Looking at some of the Greek words used in the New Testament can often be quite useful . . .

. . . like the word that is translated 'sin' in our Bibles. It comes directly from archery and is the word used for missing the target, not getting a bulls-eye. Just imagine for a moment that we didn't have the word 'sin' – how would we translate that word from the Greek? Perhaps the closest we could get would be 'failure' – does that surprise us?

When we begin to see that the Lord Jesus paid the price for our **failures** and died so that we might be set free from **failure**, the whole picture starts to change. We move out of religious words and into real practical daily experience. Perhaps our friends will also begin to understand in a new way the relevance of the message which we have been trying to share with them?

Apart from anything else, perhaps we may be a bit surprised to think that **failure** is such a serious problem. Maybe we have seen that we have received forgiveness for the bad things we have done, but is failure really that bad? Do we really need forgiveness for our failures?

Think of that familiar verse: *“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)*. Isn't that all about failure? Failure to meet God's standards, failure to meet the standards and expectations of other people – and our own expectations of ourselves!

Let's substitute 'failure' for 'sin' in another well-known passage:

*“If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all **failure**. If we say that we have no*

**failure**, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our **failures**, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our **failures** and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not **failed**, we make him a liar and his word is not in us.” (1 John 1:7-10)

“Well”, you might say, “it was bad enough that I needed forgiveness for the wrong things I have done. Now you have added all my failures, I feel really bad about it!”

Actually, the situation is the exact opposite! If Jesus only paid the price for the bad things that I have done, then I am left feeling guilty about all my failures and there is no remedy except either trying to make up for them or trying to forget them – or both! But, if “*the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all failure*”, then we have a remedy and can experience God’s forgiveness – for our failures!

Many of us struggle with a low self-image, and that often has much to do with how we see ourselves failing over and over again. We compare ourselves with others, with God’s standards and our own expectations of ourselves – and the comparison is not good! We find it hard (maybe almost impossible) to see how anyone could possibly love us, especially not a righteous God. Maybe we try hard not to fail but find that we trip up repeatedly, perhaps on the same issue time after time.

So, now we have the first part of the answer: **Forgiveness for failure**. There is only one condition attached to that forgiveness, according to that passage in John’s first letter . . .

**Confession!** It sounds religious, doesn’t it? It isn’t! The Greek word means ‘to say the same thing’. Think of an example. We have failed in some way or perhaps done something which we know was wrong, so we feel bad about it. The inner voice of the Holy Spirit is telling us that we have ‘missed the target’. If we argue with that conviction and try to pretend that everything is OK, it doesn’t get any better, does it? The Lord is saying to us “You have gone wrong” and we are trying to convince him (and ourselves!) that there isn’t a problem. Result: a sense of guilt and we don’t seem to be able to get through to God in prayer. The Bible seems to have become a closed book; we get little or nothing from reading it.

What has gone wrong? The Lord is saying something to us and we are disagreeing with him. He says we have gone wrong, we say it’s all OK. If we go on like that, our situation can become spiritually dangerous. The Bible calls it ‘hardening our hearts’ and the result is that eventually we can become unresponsive to the Holy Spirit.

Fortunately, the solution is simple: we just need to agree with what the Lord is saying to us! If that inner voice of the Holy Spirit tells us that we have gone wrong, we can ‘say the same thing’ (= ‘confess’) and the result is forgiveness! Instantly! Burden gone, cloud lifted, guilt removed, fellowship with God restored! “. . . and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin (= failure)”.

But what about the ongoing problem? The release of forgiveness is great and gloriously liberating, but are we stuck with just going round and round on a cycle of failure – confession – forgiveness – and failure again?

There is a second part to the answer, and it is all to do with the fact that we are **in Christ**. **1 Corinthians 1:30** tells us that it is our Father God who has joined us to his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. In **Romans 6**, Paul applies that truth to the whole problem of recurring failure.

Yes, we experience the grace of God when we are forgiven and it is great. So, Paul asks, should we just go on failing so that there is lots more of God’s grace flowing? No, there is

another solution, he says: We were joined to the death of Jesus, our old life is over, we died to sin/failure and were joined to the resurrection life of Jesus. So we are set free from 'slavery to sin' – that never-ending cycle of failure – and can live lives that are pleasing to God. Amazing!

And, if (when?) we fail again, our Father's forgiveness is still there as soon as we acknowledge our failure. But we are no longer trapped and enslaved by sin and failure. As a friend of mine has neatly put it: Now, it is not impossible for me to sin but it is possible for me not to sin.

There is not enough space here to follow this up with the full attention which it deserves but the New Testament (and especially Paul's letters) are full of the fact that we are **in Christ**, that our old life is over and gone and that we have a new 'resurrection' life. Here are a few more passages to get you started:–

**Romans 6**, especially verses **3-4, 11, 15-16**.

**I Corinthians 15:21** "I die daily."

**Galatians 2:20** "it is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me."

**Galatians 6:14** "But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

**Colossians 3:3** "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

**1 Peter 2:24** "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness."

This truth is right at the heart of spiritual maturity. If you read right through Paul's letter to the **Colossians**, you will see his passion for believers to move on to more maturity, and how deeply that spiritual growth is connected with our 'taking on board' the fact that we have been joined to the Lord Jesus.

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Although we have been looking a little at what Paul wrote, Jesus himself taught his disciples about this. Amazingly, before he was crucified, he told them about the need for anyone who wants to follow him to 'deny himself and take up his cross.' The cross at that time was hated and feared as the barbaric form of execution used by the Romans. It was very definitely NOT a religious symbol!

This was as if Jesus had talked about taking up your hangman's noose or your electric chair! Luke even quotes Jesus as saying 'take up your cross **daily**!' He was effectively telling anyone who wanted to follow him that their life would be forfeit every day. See **Matthew 16:24-26, Mark 8:34-36, Luke 9:23-25**.

But this is far from negative! Jesus (echoed by Paul later) says that the one who loses his life (literally, 'soul') for his sake will find it and save it, in contrast to someone who tries to hang onto his own life/soul, who will lose it. The cost seems high but the rewards are higher!

Our 'soul' is not just some ethereal part of us that continues after death. It is our personality, our mind, our will and emotions – the things that make us the people that we are. Our character, our humanity, our individuality. All parts of us that are dear to us and define us. And Jesus says that we need to be prepared to see that all go for him. But then he tells us that, if we do, we shall really save it all – and more besides!

We need to note what the Lord Jesus says in all these passages: this is necessary for **anyone who wants to follow him**. Not just for special people in some sort of specially important Christian work. All of us who want to follow him, whoever we are, whatever job we do, young, old, whatever education or training we may or may not have had.

\* \* \* \* \*

In January 1956, five young men went to a remote part of the Amazonian jungle to try to contact a tribe who had never heard of Jesus. The tribe had a reputation as bloodthirsty killers, but the five felt that the Lord was calling them to take the good news to them. They made what seemed like friendly contact but then were all killed the next day. They had given their lives for no apparent result, but later contact with the tribe eventually saw many of them come to a real faith in the Lord Jesus.

Seven years earlier Jim Elliot, one of the five, had been reading those words of Jesus and summed them up like this: **“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”** Yes, Jim died in January 1956 but back in 1949 he had already seen that following Jesus is truly an exchanged life. Yes, there is a cost, but the benefits far outweigh it, both now and in eternity. He expressed it in this poem, written a year earlier – at the age of 21!

*What is this, Lord Jesus, that Thou shouldst make an end  
Of all that I possess, and give Thyself to me?  
So that there is nothing now to call my own  
Save Thee; Thyself alone my Treasure.  
Taking all, Thou givest full measure of Thyself  
With all things else eternal –  
Things unlike the mouldy pelf by earth possessed.  
But as to Life and godliness, all things are mine,  
And in God's garments dressed I am;  
With Thee, an heir to riches in the spheres divine.  
Strange, I say, that suffering loss,  
I have so gained everything in getting  
Me a friend who bore a Cross.*

Jim Elliot, 9<sup>th</sup> October 1948 (see \* below)

\* \* \* \* \*

Yes, it is ‘by his doing’ that we are joined to his Son the Lord Jesus, but none of this happens automatically. We need to respond and, as we do, we will find the results.

If we want to step out of the seemingly endless cycle of sin/failure into the release of a life that pleases our Father, then we need to know and take hold of the fact that he has already joined us to the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus – and count on it! (**Romans 6:11**)

As we start to embrace the fact that following Jesus means daily denying ourselves and taking hold of this death, we will find the true fulfilment that he promised.

Dave Taylor April 2019

(\* You can read more about the 5 martyrs of Ecuador in *Through Gates of Splendour (1956)* and about Jim Elliot’s life in *Shadow of the Almighty (1958)*. Both by Elisabeth Elliot, Jim’s widow.)

# Sharing the Life of God

In these times together, we have been looking at what it means to be **in Christ**. The New Testament describes this as the very basic foundation of our new life in Jesus but it seems that many – perhaps most – of us have missed out for far too long. So I make no apology for homing in on Biblical truth. Truth is exciting and liberating. As the Lord Jesus himself said “You will know the truth and the truth will make you free.” (**John 8:32**)

Our spiritual experience and growth often follow precisely from our appreciation of what has been called ‘the finished work of Christ’ – his shed blood, his broken body, his burial, resurrection and ascension. These are historical facts, but their effectiveness in our lives depends on our response to them.

Many people that we meet know that Jesus died and rose again, but do not derive any benefit from those facts. They cannot say ‘he died for me’ because they have not seen that they have been included. The main problem is not usually a lack of belief; much more often a lack of a sense of need. Once we realise that we have a need, and then discover that our need has been met in Jesus, our chief concern is not a lack of belief. More likely to be a reluctance to commit ourselves!

Yes, as we have begun to see, there is much more to the good news of Jesus than the vital starting point of forgiveness. Probably most of us start there, finding the answer to our sense of failure in the love of a God who has spared no expense to reconcile us to himself . . .

. . . but then we discover that there is more to following the Lord Jesus than forgiveness. He wants to change our lives – to transform us to be the people that we were always supposed to be – and, to do that, he needs to make an end of our old life and start us off on a new life. *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”* (**2 Corinthians 5:17**)

And so we have begun to discover that our experience follows his ‘finished work’. We need forgiveness: His blood was shed – and we experience God’s forgiveness. We need release from the slavery of sin and failure: His body was broken – and we experience the breaking of the power of sin and failure in our lives. As we see this and want to ‘cement’ our commitment, we ask for baptism, a graphic portrayal of our own death and resurrection, following his death and resurrection.

But what about that resurrection? Are we experiencing it? Is it possible? And surely we can’t share the experience of his ascension, can we?

\* \* \* \* \*

During all of his ministry and especially towards the end of it, the Lord Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit, often slightly cryptically, so the disciples might not have realised exactly what he meant. There is little doubt that they understood a lot better after Pentecost! AND went on learning after that! Let’s look at what he said and, as we do, we shall see that there are two distinct aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit.

But before we get into those, it is important to know that **the Holy Spirit is a Person**. Not a thing, not some sort of benign influence, but God himself, in person. Our lack of appreciation of this fact is betrayed by the times we refer to him as ‘it’. How would you feel if I referred to your closest friend or partner as ‘it’ – ? May our eyes be opened to see that the Holy Spirit really is a person!

Jesus was clear about this. It was right at the heart of what he told the eleven in the upper room, the evening before his arrest. Perhaps we can understand better than they will have done at the time . . .

*“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, that he may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see him or know him, but you know him because he abides with you and **will be in you**.” (John 14:16-17)* What a staggering promise! They will know him because he already lives with them – Jesus himself – and will be in them.

*“But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you . . . But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own initiative, but whatever he hears, he will speak; and he will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify me, for he will take of mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are mine; therefore I said that he takes of mine and will disclose it to you. (John 16:7,13-15)*

Paul is in no doubt, either: *“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, mirroring the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:17-18)* By the work of the Holy Spirit, we are being changed into the image of the Lord Jesus. How significant that he refers to the Holy Spirit as ‘the Spirit of the Lord’ ! (See also **Acts 5:9, 8:39**)

\* \* \* \* \*

Jesus spells out clearly that the Holy Spirit could not be sent until he had gone away and, writing his account of Jesus’ life years later, John adds his comment from his own experience in **John 7:39**: *“ . . . for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”*

Peter on the day of Pentecost makes the same connection: *“Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured forth this which you both see and hear . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified.” (Acts 2:33,36)* The arrival of the poured-out Holy Spirit **proved** that Jesus had been exalted at the Father’s right hand.

So why is this important for us here and now?

We have seen that our forgiveness, the end of our old life and our release from slavery to sin, failure and legalism follow directly from the death of the Lord Jesus. When we take the bread and wine we are ‘proclaiming the Lord’s death’ by asserting our identification with it. (**1 Corinthians 11:26, 10:16**)

Our Father has joined us to the life of his Son (**1 Corinthians 1:30**), and this goes further than we may have realised. We are not only joined to his death, but also to his resurrection and glorification. The results for us are intimately linked with our experience of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

We have already read that the Lord Jesus promised the disciples that *“he (the Holy Spirit) will be in you” (John 14:17)*, but then he also gives them another promise in **Acts 1:8** : *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you”*. Two quite distinct promises, two distinct aspects of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives, which reflect the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Let’s look at the ‘resurrection’ aspect first . . .

In **Romans 6**, Paul is writing about the fact that our old life is dead and gone:– *“ . . . or do you not know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? Therefore we were buried with him through baptism in to death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” (v.3-4)* Here is a promise of sharing in Jesus’ resurrection, not just after our physical death, raised from death when he returns, but **here and now** ! Baptism is a picture of death to the old life and it is also a picture

of resurrection to the new life. Read the whole passage, **v. 1-14**. Paul is very clearly writing about us knowing the power of Jesus' resurrection in our lives **now**.

We have already looked at parts of **Romans 8** together, especially when we saw that, by our inclusion in the death of Jesus, we are dead to the slavery of sin and failure and no longer bound by religious legalism. Those are the negative but necessary aspects of our being joined to Jesus, but the positive side is even better!

Paul writes it, but we have probably all experienced it: *"those who are in the flesh cannot please God."* (**v.8**). By 'in the flesh', he means just living a natural human life and most of us have tried to do all sorts of things to please God, doing our best to do the right things in the right ways and hoping that they might perhaps please him. But, in the end, we have to face the fact that, however hard we try, we cannot reach his standards. We fail – again!

But, says Paul, that is the negative side – our total inability to please God by our own efforts. The amazing positive comes in the next verses:

*"However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead through sin, yet the spirit is alive through righteousness. But if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."* (**Romans 8:9-11**) Once again the link with Jesus' resurrection and the almost unbelievable statement that the Holy Spirit – God himself – makes his home in us! Have we allowed ourselves to become accustomed to this amazing fact? By his Holy Spirit living in us, we actually have a share in the life of God himself.

There is only one life that can possibly please God, and that is the life of his Son. Can we see this marvel of grace, that we have been made partakers of his life, his nature, his inheritance? Simply on the basis that 'by his doing' we are in Christ. **1 Corinthians 1:30 – again!**

Once again, we find our need met by what he has already done. We need a life that pleases God: Jesus has been raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit – and he has made us sharers in that resurrection and partakers of his nature!

So, the Holy Spirit living in us is a result of us being joined to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that we have in us that same resurrection power, the life that truly pleases the Father. This is the true meaning of being 'born again' – a new life has taken root inside us!

Briefly, let's go back to **John 3**, where Jesus is talking with Nicodemus. *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."* (**v.5-6**)

Peter picks up the same theme in **1 Peter 1:3-4**: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy has caused us to be born again (literally 're-fathered us') into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, into an inheritance, imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in the heavens for you."*

And again in **2 Peter 1:3-4**: *"His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and excellence. For by these he has granted to us his precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust."*

Peter is describing what God has done and also the process by which our lives are progressively changed **from the inside**. All that we need for 'life and godliness' is already made over to us by his divine power but the way that we experience it is through really getting to know the Lord

Jesus. He has given us promises (yes, they really are 'precious and magnificent'!) and as we take hold of those promises, we become sharers in the life and nature of the living God – WOW!

With this sort of process actually going on inside us by the Spirit of God, there is absolutely no need for us to try to please God. Does that sound wrong? How could we please him anyway? Only by allowing the implanted life of the Son of God to increase in us and bear its fruit!

Back to **John 15:1-11** again! *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit from itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”*

Time after time in his letters to the churches, Paul emphasises the need for them (us!) to know more of what God has done for us in Jesus, but he knows that this does not come by just learning facts and filling our heads with them. He prays for them that they will know by revelation, in other words by the Holy Spirit opening up their eyes to see more and more . . .

*“. . . making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your heart being enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of his calling, what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power towards us who believe.”* (**Ephesians 1:16-19**) See also **Colossians chapters 2 & 3**.

This process is continuous and ongoing, but it has an end in view. Here's the process: *“now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, mirroring the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”* (**2 Corinthians 3:17-18**)

And here is the end in view: *“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when he appears, we will be like him, because we will see him just as he is.”* (**1 John 3:2**) I like that word 'because'! We will become like Jesus when he returns, as the result of seeing him just as he is. In the meanwhile, as we gradually see more and more of him and what he has already accomplished for us, we are gradually being changed to be more like him.

So, once again, our ongoing spiritual development results from what Jesus has already done, and the route is our own response to the ongoing opening of our eyes to more and more. Once again, our need has already been met in the provision of our Father:

*“By his doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption . . .”* (**1 Corinthians 1:30**)

Paul was on the same course of development. He still had his 'L plates' on, even at the end of his life:

*“Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”* (**Philippians 3:12**. Read the whole passage, **v.7-14**)

\* \* \* \* \*

If we have begun to see the reality of the fact that our life has been joined to the life of Jesus and that, through the resurrection of Jesus, the Holy Spirit now lives in us, then we need to respond as Paul did, by 'laying hold' of the revelation that we have received. The word means 'fully take to yourself', a very active sort of 'receiving'.

# The Spirit Poured Out

We have been exploring together a little of what it means that our lives are joined to the Lord Jesus, discovering more of the implications of that wonderful statement that *“By His doing you are in Christ Jesus . . .”* (**1 Corinthians 1:30**)

We have seen that our forgiveness is based on the power of the blood of Jesus paying the death penalty for our wrongdoing and failure.

We have seen that our release from the slavery to failure springs from the **fact** that we have been included in his death. We are dead to sin, dead to the captivity of religious rules and dead to trying to please God by our own efforts.

We have seen that the only sort of life that really **can** please God is the life of his own Son, and that this new life is what he has given us by the Holy Spirit making his home inside us. As a result, we can share in the power of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, not just in the future but right now.

So we have ‘followed’ Jesus in two aspects of his death – his shed blood and his broken body. We have ‘followed’ him also in his resurrection from the dead.

If we have seen the truth of this, that our old life is dead and gone and that we have been brought into new life, we have probably asked to be baptised as a clear statement of where we stand.

But Jesus did not stop at his resurrection! About six weeks later, he left his disciples in the most amazing way – he went up into the air and disappeared into a cloud! As he had already told his disciples, he needed to leave them so that the Father could send the Holy Spirit.

About ten days later, at the time of the Jewish feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit arrived! Peter told the crowd in Jerusalem that this arrival of the Holy Spirit showed that Jesus really had been exalted at the right hand of the Father, that *“God has made him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified.”* (**Acts 2:36**)

Can we also share in **this** aspect of the ‘finished work of Christ’ – ?

Clearly, Peter’s answer to this question was **“Yes!”** When the people responded to this information, he told them that there were two things for them to do and that there would be two results.

They needed to repent and each of them be baptised in the name of Jesus the Messiah and the results would be that they would experience forgiveness for their misdeeds and failures and would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (**Acts 2:37-39**)

There are two words here which are often misunderstood, or at least not fully understood; ‘repent’ and ‘receive’. Both are strong and deeply meaningful words.

To ‘repent’ means to have a complete change of mind, a radical rethink, so that our way of thinking is completely different to what it has been. This goes much deeper than ‘saying sorry’, though obviously it is important that we acknowledge what we have done wrong. ‘Confession’ literally means ‘saying the same thing’ – in other words, that we agree with the verdict that we have done wrong. ‘Repentance’ means that we change our attitude towards wrongdoing, towards God, towards the direction of our lives, towards pretty much everything! A radical word indeed!

There are apparently three different Greek words that can be translated ‘receive’. One is fairly passive, meaning to have something offered to you; one is to take hold of something; one is to seize or remove something. Our English word ‘receive’ tends to be more like the first one, something that happens to us rather than something that we do.

But the word that Peter uses here is the second one, which is the commonest word translated ‘receive’ in the New Testament. He was telling the people in Jerusalem that, if they had a radical rethink of their attitude towards God and the Lord Jesus Christ and were baptised, they would experience God’s forgiveness and they too would take hold of the gift of the Holy Spirit, just as the disciples had done.

In practice, we know that receiving something is not the same as being given it, though often they happen at the same time. But not always! If you send me a gift, then you have selected it and put it in the post, or perhaps given it to me yourself. If it gets lost in the post, or if I simply don't open the parcel, have I received your gift? You have probably paid for it and then given it but, until I open the parcel and take hold – take possession – of the gift which you have kindly given me, I have not properly received it.

Peter said that there were two things that the people needed to do and that there would be two results. *“Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” (Acts 2:38,39)* Just in case we were in any doubt, he reassures us that this gift is for everyone whom God calls to himself.

So why do many of us not know this ‘pouring out’ of the Holy Spirit in our own experience? Watchman Nee, commenting on this same passage in **Acts 2:38-39**, gives a lovely simple picture which you may find helpful . . .

“Here then are two divinely appointed conditions of forgiveness – repentance and faith publicly expressed. Have you repented? Have you testified publicly to your union with your Lord? Then have you received remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost? You say that you have only received the first gift, not the second. But, my friend, God offered you two things if you fulfilled two conditions! Why have you only taken one? What are you doing about the second?

“Suppose I went into a bookshop, selected a two-volume book, priced at ten shillings, and, having put down a ten-shilling note, walked out of the shop, carelessly leaving one volume on the counter. When I reached home and discovered the oversight, what do you think I should do? I should go straight back to the shop to get the forgotten book, but I would not dream of paying anything for it. I should simply remind the shopkeeper that both volumes were duly paid for, and ask him if he would kindly let me have the second one; and without any further payment I should march happily out of the shop with my possession under my arm. Would you not do the same under the same circumstances?

“But you *are* under the same circumstances . . .” *(The Normal Christian Life, ch.8)*

The gift of the Holy Spirit poured out upon us is part of our birthright, part of our inheritance because we are **in Christ!**

\* \* \* \* \*

In very simple terms, let us review the ‘headlines’ of our birthright, what we have by being in Christ, and the basis on which each one is given . . .

- 1) Forgiveness of sin and failure in our lives. Based on the fact that the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ was shed for us. (See **Romans 5:9, 1 John 1:7, Revelation 7:14, Revelation 12:11, Hebrews 9:14, Revelation 1:5, 1 Peter 1:18-19, Ephesians 1:7-8, Romans 3:24.**)
- 2) Freedom from the power of sin, failure and law. Based on the fact that his body was broken for us. (See **Hebrews 2:14-15, 2 Corinthians 5:14-17, Galatians 2:19-20, Romans 6:6 & 11, Colossians 2:20-23, Romans 7:4 & 6, Colossians 3:3, 1 Peter 2:24.**)
- 3) A new life that is pleasing to God, with the Holy Spirit making his home in us and with direct access to the Father. Based on the fact of Jesus’ resurrection. (See **Romans 6:5 & 11, Romans 8:2, Galatians 3:26-28, Romans 8:11, Ephesians 2:18, 2 Corinthians 3:18.**)
- 4) The Holy Spirit poured out on us in power. Based on the fact of Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father. (See **John 7:39, John 16:7, Acts 2:33, Romans 8:16, Romans 8:26, 1 Corinthians 12:4, 1 Corinthians 2:12, 1 Peter 1:12.**)

We will do well to remind ourselves that these are historical facts! Once again, we can see that our Father deals with us according to our needs, and that these are met by what he has provided for us in Christ.

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So what **needs** do we have which are met by the Holy Spirit being poured out on us? Some of these verses above will give us some clues:

**Romans 8:16** *“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.”* Sometimes we doubt whether we really are Christians, don’t we? The Holy Spirit confirms it to us.

**Romans 8:26** *“In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”* How many of us have NOT been here? Sometimes we just run out of words, maybe because the situation is too awful, or sometimes because it is too wonderful!

**1 Corinthians 2:12** *“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.”* One of the verses that I come back to again and again. Read the whole section, **v. 6-16**. The Holy Spirit is the one who first opens up our awareness to what God has given us in Christ, and continues to do so. As Jesus himself said, *“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own initiative, but whatever he hears, he will speak; and he will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify me, for he will take of mine and will disclose it to you.”* (**John 16:13-14**)

These are needs which we all have from time to time, but there is another vital aspect which often gets overlooked, concerning what some old speakers used to call ‘power for service’. In other words, someone who is engaged in serving the Lord by witnessing or public speaking. If you have ever done any of that, you will know the sense of weakness, almost helplessness, as you face what seems like an impossible task. We may be surprised that Paul faced exactly the same feeling . . .

*“ . . . we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a death, and will deliver, he on whom we have set our hope”* (**2 Corinthians 1:8-10**)

*“He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”* (**2 Corinthians 12:9-10**)

But this idea of ‘power for service’, although it is definitely true and necessary, is much more limited than the Lord has in mind for **all of us**. The majority of Christian believers will NOT find ourselves in situations like Paul, where we are called upon to speak publicly for Jesus, but that power is still available and necessary for us to experience and exercise.

There is a clue in one of the verses we have looked at already: **1 Corinthians 2:12** *“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.”*

In the Old Testament, we can see a whole class of people running like a thread through the history of God’s dealing with the Jews – the prophets. Their task was not mainly to predict the future (although that was sometimes included) but, first and foremost, to declare what the LORD was saying to his people in the current situation. As Elijah used to say, “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand . . .” If anyone listened to them (which did not always happen!), then that person would benefit from the ‘word of the LORD’, their life would be enhanced. See a lovely example in **1 Chronicles 17**, where King David and Nathan the prophet interact. A positive example of Elijah in **1 Kings 17**, less positive for King Ahab with Elijah in **1 Kings 18** and with Micaiah in **1 Kings 22 & 2 Chronicles 18**.

One of Joel’s (future!) prophecies that Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost was that *“ ‘it shall be in the last days’, God says, ‘that I will pour forth of my Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of my Spirit and they shall prophesy.’ ”* (**Acts 2:17-18, Joel 2:28-29**)

Although there was no obvious evidence of prophecy on the day of Pentecost, that was the day on which prophecy was opened up to all – young, old, male, female – in line with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on ‘all mankind’. What had been reserved for a special select few through Jewish history was now to be spread to all who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ – the church!

Along with all the other spiritual gifts that Paul lists in **1 Corinthians 12** and talks about in **1 Corinthians 14**, prophecy has to do with the intervention of the almighty God into the affairs of humankind. Maybe we have seen, or heard of, some evidence of God at work through miraculous healings or answers to prayer. Cases of ‘thus says the Lord’ with a very practical result!

And then Paul lists the other gifts which are much more obviously ways in which the ‘word of the Lord’ is conveyed to his people. This time, the channel of communication is not restricted to just one or two special people in a nation, but to all of us.

There is not time or space here to go into much detail about these gifts, but it is important that we do not fall into either of two very common traps:

The first trap is to say that spiritual gifts are not for us today. There is (or used to be) a common view that spiritual gifts became obsolete once we had the written New Testament. Because all God’s will had been revealed in the Bible, there was no more need for him to communicate directly with his people. Unfortunately for this theory, an honest study of the Bible itself gives absolutely no basis for it. Also, if we will take a closer view of real church history (not just the history of man-made organisations and denominations), we can see that spiritual gifts have continued to be in evidence more or less continuously since the first century AD. (See *The Pilgrim Church* by E.H.Broadbent and *The Torch of the Testimony* by J.W.Kennedy)

The second trap is to make so much of spiritual gifts that they become almost the total focus of church life and meetings. We have probably seen or heard about this approach and have rightly shied away from it. Particularly ‘speaking in tongues’ has been a really contentious subject. If we look at Paul’s comments about tongues, we can see that he values them, in their place, but that prophecy is much more valuable for the church as a whole.

And that is the key to the purpose behind all the gifts of the Spirit which are part of our inheritance of ‘the Holy Spirit poured out’. *“Let all things be done for edification”* says Paul (**1 Corinthians 14:26**), and that word ‘edification’ is not some dry and dusty academic word! It means simply ‘building the house’.

What house? *“And coming to him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up (same word – ‘edified’) as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”* (**1 Peter 2:4-5**)

So, this aspect of our inheritance of being in Christ gives us the means to be part of the process that our Father is committed to fulfilling, to prepare a Bride for his Son. Having the Holy Spirit poured out upon us equips us to be fully functioning members of the Body of Christ, making ‘our’ contribution to the growth and developing maturity of the church – WOW!

“ . . . we are no longer to be children,  
tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine,  
by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;  
but speaking the truth in love,  
we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,  
from whom the whole body,  
being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies,  
according to the proper working of each individual part,  
causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”  
**(Ephesians 4:14-16)**

# Active Abiding

Are we up to date with Jesus? No, I'm not asking "Is the Christian message up to date? Is the gospel relevant today?" Hopefully, we know the answer to that!

But are we personally up to date with what the Lord Jesus has done for us? Over the last five sessions together, we have been looking at 'the finished work of Christ' and how our own experience is intimately linked with what the Lord Jesus accomplished in his death, burial, resurrection and ascension. The burning question for each of us is this: Are we learning to live in the good of what he has done for us?

No, I am not asking whether we have got it all sewn up, whether we have 'arrived' and are now continually and continuously living a life of constant and close walking with the Lord, with no failures and no 'gaps' in our experience! It is now more than 50 years since I began to see the truth of being '**in Christ**' and I know that I still fail and need to go on growing and learning. As a friend said several years ago: "There is always MORE !"

But the question remains: Are we learning? Have we set out on that exciting journey of discovery of what it means to be **in Christ** ?

Or does it all look like so much theory, just a nice collection of information that is not really much use to us in our practical daily lives?

Or are we somewhere in between those places? Not really experiencing much of the reality of being in Christ, but not writing it off either? Perhaps wanting to move into a new dimension of Christian living but not really knowing how to get started? Maybe, if the truth be known, deeply hungry for spiritual reality and a meaningful 'walk with God', something that seems very desirable but somehow out of reach?

Several times, I have recommended the book *The Normal Christian Life* by Watchman Nee. When I first saw that title, I was a bit put off. I thought "this book must be about living an **ordinary** Christian life". Even as a young teenage believer, I didn't want to live a Christian life that was just ordinary – somehow, I knew there must be more! I had mixed up 'normal' with 'ordinary'! If you have read the book, you will know that what the author describes as 'normal' is far from ordinary.

Are you prepared to settle for an 'ordinary' Christian life, just the same as it has always been, the same old routines, same old failures, same old emptiness? Or have you glimpsed what the Lord has in store for **all of us** ?

If so, are you asking the next important question: **How?**

How can I experience God's forgiveness?

How can I experience at least **some** level of victory in the face of temptation?

How can I escape from religious legalism?

How can I start to live a life that really pleases God?

How can I know the power of the Holy Spirit in my life?

Have we spent time in prayer asking God to give us some or all of these things?

Or have we begun to see that **he has already given us all that we need in the Lord Jesus – ?**

“. . . by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption . . .” **1 Corinthians 1:30**

“God makes it quite clear in his Word that he has only one answer to every human need – his Son, Jesus Christ . . . It will help us greatly, and save us from much confusion, if we keep constantly before us this fact, that God will answer all our questions in one way and one way only, namely, by showing us more of his Son.” Watchman Nee in *The Normal Christian Life*, chapter 1.

Do we find ourselves in the same position as Hudson Taylor, writing to his sister in 1869: “All the time I felt assured that there was in Christ all I needed, but the practical question was how to get it *out*.” – ?

Last time, we looked at the question of giving and receiving. There is a difference between being given something and receiving it. I gave Mike an envelope with a £10 note in it. The envelope was given to him and it had his name on it, but it was only when he opened it that he actually **received** what I had

**already given** to him. The £10 note was already his, but he didn't know it. Once he saw that it was his, he had no difficulty in receiving it and making use of it!

We applied that to the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out on all believers, but it applies to all the aspects of our inheritance in Jesus. Once we see that it is ours, that our heavenly Father has already given it to us by virtue of the fact that he has placed us in his Son, taking hold of it (whatever the particular issue) is the obvious thing that we do.

F.B. Meyer, a well-known preacher and teacher from the late 1800s and early 1900s, used to say "Do not pray so much, but take." In other words, God has already given us what we need in Jesus, so we don't need to keep asking him to give us what he has already given!

The Lord Jesus told his disciples *"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."* (**John 15:4-5**)

'Abide' means 'stay' and the Greek word has the same breadth of meaning as our English word. It can mean 'don't move' – like commanding a dog to 'stay!' It can mean 'remain' or 'endure' – a sense of being unchanged. It can also mean 'live here', as it does when we invite a friend to come and stay with us, and in fact this is probably the commonest way that this word is used in the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke & John as they tell the history of Jesus' life and ministry.

With that in mind, what Jesus says in **John 14:10** will have been an eye-opener for his disciples, and particularly for Philip, who had just asked Jesus to reveal the Father to them: *"Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own initiative, but the Father abiding in me does his works."* Jesus was saying that his life was joined with the life of God the Father and that it was the Father working in him who performed the miracles and gave Jesus the words to speak.

Just a little later, in the same long conversation between the 'Last Supper' Passover feast and his arrest in Gethsemane, Jesus tells his followers to abide in him, and he in them (**John 15:4-5**). The same words, with the same meaning as when he was talking about his intimate relationship with his Father! He tells us to have the same relationship with him that he has with the Father – Wow!

And a few minutes after that, when his friend John overhears Jesus talking with his Father, he hears him say *"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in me through their word; that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me."* (**John 17:20-21**) The word translated 'even as' means 'in exactly the same way'. So it's not just Jesus and his Father, not just the eleven disciples, but **all of us who believe in him**. Wow again!

So then, **how** can we abide in the Lord Jesus? Perhaps, more realistically, **how can we start learning to abide in him?**

'Abide' means 'stay'; we know that. Jesus is telling us to stay in him. You can't stay somewhere unless you are already there. So he is talking to those who are already in him.

Is that us? How did we get there? Two parts of the answer to that: 1) We believed, we trusted 'into' him. The Greek word for believing **in** Jesus is usually the word for 'into' or 'onto'. A sense of movement or at least a change of position. 2) God the Father has placed us in Christ. We keep coming back to **1 Corinthians 1:30**! It is our Father who has placed us in Christ!

Think back to Mike, the envelope and the £10 note. Once he saw what was in the envelope, Mike had no problem taking hold of it. He knew it was for him because his name was on the envelope and, as soon as he saw it, he knew he could make good use of a £10 note !!!

If I had told Mike what was in the envelope before I gave it to him, he would certainly have opened it just as fast, so that he could get hold of that £10 note.

We have been looking at a number of basic things that we have been given because we are **in Christ**. If you know that you have put your trust in the Lord Jesus, it's like having your name on the envelope. Just in case you are in any doubt, **1 Corinthians 1:30** underlines it for you: *"by His doing you are in*

*Christ Jesus*” or, as the NIV has it, *“It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus”*. You are in Christ, so all the contents of the ‘envelope’ are yours – take hold of them! See **Ephesians 1:3** if you don’t believe me!

I expect that Mike’s £10 was spent quite quickly, but imagine what it would have been like if he had found £10,000 in that envelope. I think he would probably have taken time to discover and decide how he would spend it. Or . . .

. . . if, instead of money, inside the envelope had been the title deeds of a magnificent house, showing that it belonged to him, with all its spacious rooms, land and facilities. That would certainly take time to explore! Discovering every little detail would just go on adding to the enjoyment of receiving the gift in the first place. In fact, after a few years of living in the house, he would probably realise that he had not really fully understood this inheritance at first, but more time and more exploring were making it more and more precious to him.

Which brings us back to **abiding** – staying, dwelling, making our home in Christ. If we live somewhere, even just for a short visit, we normally like to find out all that is available to us in this place and then, having found out, we want to make use of it. For example, if you rent a holiday cottage and find that it has its own swimming pool, you won’t hesitate to make use of it, will you? It’s yours for the week, it’s included, it’s yours – of course you will!

So, have you begun to realise that you are in Christ? Have you begun to see some of the things that are yours in him? Have you started to take hold of them, to make use of them? Have you realised that the questions we looked at earlier have all been answered in Jesus?

**How can I experience God’s forgiveness?** Not just once, but over and over again as I realise my failure and confess it, I find that Jesus shed his blood for me and I am forgiven.

**How can I experience at least some level of victory in the face of temptation?** God tells me that, because I am in Christ, my old life is dead and I don’t **need** to go on failing; I can hide in Jesus’ death.

**How can I escape from religious legalism?** Because I am included in Jesus’ death, I am dead to law. I am not subject to religious laws and expectations, even the ones I have manufactured for myself!

**How can I start to live a life that really pleases God?** My old life has no hope of pleasing God, however hard I try, but I have been given a new life by the Holy Spirit living inside me – sharing in the resurrection life of Jesus – and that life is definitely pleasing to God!

**How can I know the power of the Holy Spirit in my life?** The Holy Spirit has been poured out on the Church **because** Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. I am joined to him and this also is part of my inheritance, including spiritual gifts and especially the way that the Holy Spirit reveals more of Jesus to me. Yes, this is definitely something for US, not just for ME !

*“Abide in me, and I in you”* says the Lord Jesus. Your life is joined to his, just like his life is joined to the Father’s. The Holy Spirit has begun to show you your inheritance, the things that are yours because you are in him. Take hold of them!

There is so much! If we had been given that enormous house, we might not find everything that was in it – even after years of living in it – if we didn’t have some help from someone who already knew it from top to bottom . . .

. . . and that is one of the things that the Holy Spirit specialises in doing!

Jesus said: *“but when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth . . .”* (**John 16:13**) A guide is someone who comes with you, shows you the way and all the features of the place that you are exploring.

Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth: *“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.”* (**1 Corinthians 2:12**)

. . . and to those in Ephesus: *“For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the*

glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.” (**Ephesians 1:15-19**) Paul was praying that they would see, and go on seeing, more and more of their inheritance.

\* \* \* \* \*

Years ago, when I first began to see clearly that God had placed me in Christ, I had just come through a long period of spiritual hunger, so I knew that there were many things that I had needed. I began to find that my needs were met in him, and so it was natural to say ‘thank you’ to my Father again and again for his provision. And so I found myself ‘taking my stand’ on what I was discovering that he had given me in Christ, taking hold of forgiveness when I needed it, taking hold of being dead to sin, failure and legalism, embracing the resurrection life of Jesus in me because I was joined to his resurrection as well as to his death and rejoicing in the fact that the Holy Spirit was poured out on me because I was joined to the One who was seated at his right hand. I started thanking Father on a daily basis for the fact that he had placed me in his Son, with the solid foundations of the ‘finished work of Christ’ – his shed blood, his broken body, his burial, his resurrection and his ascension and glorification – and the practical implications in my life.

I was starting to learn to abide. To take hold of what is mine in Jesus, to rely on the Holy Spirit to guide me into more truth that I had not seen before.

‘Abiding’ had always seemed so passive before, but now I began to see that it was a command that the Lord Jesus gave us so that we would really receive (= take hold of) more and more of the riches that are ours in him.

By the grace of God, all these years later I am still learning more of what it means to make my home in him.

*“What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits toward me?*

*I shall lift up the cup of salvation  
and call upon the name of the LORD.”*

**(Psalm 116:13-14)**

\* \* \* \* \*

Over these six sessions, we have looked at some of the basics of what is ours in Jesus. For me, these subjects seem like foundations, essential for every believer in their own personal spiritual growth towards maturity and effectiveness, but they really are **basics** and there is more and more for us to ‘discover’ by the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

And as we grow individually, we will begin to see that God’s purposes reach far beyond his dealings with us on a personal, one-to-one basis. Yes, we have been individually joined to Jesus, but joined for a purpose, to be part of his grand plan, part of the company of the ‘called-out ones’ who will ultimately share in ‘the kingdom of God and of his Christ’ and in the meanwhile be effective for him on this earth in our own generation.

*“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in me through their word; that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me. The glory which you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as we are one; I in them and you in me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that you sent me, and loved them, even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, be with me where I am, so that they may see my glory which you have given me, for you loved me before the foundation of the world.”* Part of Jesus’ prayer for the Church, **John 17**.

*“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32)*

*“So if the Son will make you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36)*

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