

# In Christ?

**"Are you in Christ?"** A very direct and personal question! I do not need to know your answer, but you certainly do.

**"What does it mean to be in Christ?"** It may sound a little strange to talk about being in Christ. We might be more ready to say, "I *believe* in the Lord Jesus Christ" or "I want to be a *follower* of Jesus", but how can we possibly be in him?

It may surprise us to know that the phrase 'in Christ' is the most common description of a Christian in the New Testament. Terms like 'believers', 'saints', 'brothers', 'sisters', 'disciples' and 'Christians' are used, but much less than the simple description 'in Christ'. Just a quick look at **Romans 16:3-16** shows us that 'in Christ' was Paul's simple way of describing anyone who was a believer. They could be well-known, like Prisca and Aquila, who had been very effective in helping to spread the gospel in different ways (**v.3**), or anonymous members of someone's family (**v.11**). When Paul wants to say that two of his relations had been Christians longer than he had, he says that they were 'in Christ before me' (**v.7**). Nothing special, then - the normal description of a believer.

But is it just words, or is there more to it? Is there a real meaning to talking about being in Christ? If we claim to be in Christ, are we showing off, boasting of our spirituality?

Writing to the believers in Corinth, Paul tells them in **1 Corinthians 1:30** that it is by God's own doing (literally, 'of him') that they are in Christ, and the verses just before make it clear that there is no question of boasting. After all, if God has done it, we did not achieve anything. We cannot even claim special treatment because we were specially worthy - read **verses 26-31** !

**Colossians 1:9-14** says something parallel. Paul starts off by telling them how he prays for their spiritual growth, and then mentions 'the inheritance of the saints in light' - enough to make him underline the fact that the Father has rescued us and transferred us out of the authority of darkness and into the kingdom of light, the kingdom of his beloved Son, Jesus, "in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

But if it is God who does all this, placing us in Christ and transferring us into his kingdom, what is there for us to do? Do we have no choice in the matter, and just have to wait and see whether we are one of the 'favoured ones' whom God will choose to include in his kingdom?

As in many rescue situations, God rescues those who are willing to be rescued. The man in the open sea who is picked up by a rescue helicopter has to allow himself to be placed in the harness and hoisted up. There is no way that he can claim to have rescued himself, but it is still true that he would not have been rescued if he had not been prepared to entrust himself to the harness and the skill of the crew.

It is much the same with us. In no way can we claim that our faith performs the rescue, but it is true that God's grace will be ineffective in our lives if we are not prepared to entrust ourselves to it. ***Ephesians 2:8-9*** shows the relationship: **by** grace, **through** faith. Like the rescued man, we cannot claim any credit (no boasting - **v.9**) because it is God who has done it. But he needs our willingness to trust him; he will not force us to be rescued!

In the Greek language in which the New Testament was originally written, it speaks of 'trusting into' the Lord Jesus Christ, or into his name. (***John 1:12***, for example - there are many more.) There is a sense of movement, a change of place, which our words 'believing in' or 'having faith in' do not seem to convey. Once someone has 'trusted into' Christ, they have changed positions; they are now 'in Christ'. There is no room here for the sort of 'faith' which 'believes' but stands on the sidelines.

When new believers were baptised, they were baptised 'into' the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although the Greek also uses words meaning 'in' and 'onto', by far the commonest use is of being baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, for example in ***Matthew 28:19***. Taking the step of baptism is a clear **movement** into the name of Jesus, identifying with him in his death and resurrection.

When the volcanic island of Tristan da Cunha started to erupt, ships were sent to rescue the islanders. They could have stood on the jetty and said, "We believe in the ships; we are sure that they are safe and can rescue us from the volcano." But that would not achieve any rescue. They need to 'trust into' the ships. Only in that way would they be safe, in the ships and out of reach of the volcano's devastation.

So, the big question is, "**Am I in Christ?**" If you have to ask, the strong possibility is that you are not. Most of the islanders would know if they had escaped onto one of the waiting ships! But, just in case there is any doubt, here are some useful indications:-

**Something new has started.** There are changes when we have 'trusted into' the Lord Jesus Christ. Old things get left behind and new things begin. **2 Corinthians 5:17** expresses it well. There is a new creation, like starting all over again. Jesus describes the process as 'new birth' (**John 3**). Some people say "I can be a Christian without being born again", but Paul makes it very clear. If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation! You may not use the expression 'born again', but if you are in Christ, there is no escaping the fact that a new creation has taken place! The logical conclusion is that if there is no new creation, that person is not in Christ.

On the other hand, if there has been this new start, it doesn't mean that we are perfect! Rather, the process has started and we are being changed. See **2 Corinthians 3:17-18**.

**A growing confidence** that I really am safe, that my life is not hopeless. Anyone who has been rescued from disaster often has a time when all they can think is, "Am I really safe?", but after a while they settle down to an appreciation both of what they have been rescued from and what they have been brought into. They start becoming accustomed to their new surroundings and begin to explore, finding fresh aspects to their life. It is the same with us 'trusting into' Christ. After the first few days, when we can hardly believe what has happened to us, we begin to discover more of what it means and find out that there is a whole lot more to being in Christ than simply being rescued!

One of the most obvious results of this confidence is that we stop trying to do things to improve our standing with God. If we are in Christ, then our life is '*hidden with Christ in God*' (**Colossians 3:3**) and the Father is more than pleased with his Son, the Lord Jesus. Nothing I can do can improve that standing!

**Freedom.** When we know that it is **done**, that God has placed us in his Son, with all the rich inheritance that brings, we stop tying ourselves down to religious rules. Our old life has gone (the Bible says it is dead!), so these rules mean nothing, even if they look good. See **Colossians 2:20-23**.

There is so much more, but at the start it is important that we simply look at the basic question: Am I in Christ? I make no apology for the fact that this message is spiritual and not 'practical'. One of the clear messages of the New Testament is that spiritual change brings about practical change, not the other way round (**John 6:63**).

Once we have begun to see that our Father really has placed us in Christ, we start on **an ongoing voyage of discovery!** One of the Holy Spirit's jobs is to guide us into all truth by showing us what belongs to Jesus (**John 16:12-15**), and if we have started to see that our life has been joined to the life of Jesus, we find that we go on being shown more things that are ours because they are his! As we see them, we can take hold of them.

Peter says that God 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."* (**2 Peter 1:3**) This is the Holy Spirit "leading into all truth", enabling us to see more and more of what we have been given in the Lord Jesus.

Not much use, though, if all we do is collect a great encyclopaedia of knowledge about what our Father has given us. We need to go on as we started, by 'trusting into' what we are given.

For example, in **Romans 6:1-4**, Paul tells (or reminds!) the Roman believers that we have died to sin. Good and true information, but he goes on to say that they need to count on that fact, to reckon on it, to consider themselves to be *"dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus"*. That word 'count', 'reckon' or 'consider' is a word used in business accounting. Add up a column of figures and see what it comes to, then base your future activity on that information. That is how practical all this is.

As Peter says in **2 Peter 1:3-11**, the promises of God are the means by which we take hold of useful qualities in our lives, and so begin to become 'partakers of the divine nature' in our practical life. This makes sure that we are *"neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"*.

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