

“Everybody Knows That !”

Seeing and Hearing

Underlying almost all of what we have been looking at in these articles has been the fact that each one of us who trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ has been joined to him. Every single ‘blessing’ that we have received is a direct result of that reality. And yet, somehow, we too easily content ourselves with a catalogue of blessings instead of grasping the fact that, as Paul puts it, “*by his doing you are in Christ Jesus*”. The Greek text of **1 Corinthians 1:30** actually says ‘out of him you are in Christ Jesus’. Our Father is the origin of our being in Jesus. We didn’t join ourselves to him, he did it. It is God himself who has placed us in his Son and it is only by being joined to him that we enter into any genuine **experience of truth**. We may not have ‘come that way’, may not have seen things that way round, but I am convinced that this is the foundation upon which our lives can continue to be transformed, both individually and in Church fellowship.

More than fifty-five years ago, I went through a period of deep searching. I had been a believer for more than ten years and was actively involved in evangelistic team work. An outward observer would probably have considered me to be a keen and active Christian. Well yes, I suppose I was, but nonetheless I was experiencing a deep and increasingly desperate hunger for more: more reality in my relationship with God, more experience of the Holy Spirit, more effectiveness in communicating with others.

I remember a conversation with another brother in which I expressed my desire to experience more of the power of the Holy Spirit working through me. I think he picked up my level of concern, bordering on distress, and tried to help by quoting what Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus: “*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*” (**Ephesians 1:3**). “You have all the spiritual blessings that there are”, he tried to tell me. My response was along the lines of “No I haven’t! It’s what I want but it’s just not happening in my life.” I can’t remember what he said to that.

As I looked around at the other believers in the evangelistic teams I was working in, it seemed to me that they probably **did** know the reality of what he was telling me. Evidently I was the one who was missing out. My hunger continued, gradually reaching desperation point. Maybe you know the feeling?

I suppose I could have simply given up my quest for more, either accepting that I wasn’t going to find the answers I was looking for or maybe starting to pretend that I **did**, after all, have all those blessings as part of my experience. But that didn’t seem to be an option; I had started on this road and just couldn’t leave it.

Suddenly and without warning, light dawned! Not through anything particularly new, but through Bible verses I had read many times before. I didn’t have any massive emotional experience, no ‘bolt from the blue’, just a quiet awareness of something I probably thought I already knew : I was **in Christ** !

Maybe that caring brother who had tried to help me **did** tell me that the blessings were all mine because I was in Christ, but it certainly hadn’t got through to me. Perhaps, if I had been honest enough to say to him “What do you mean, I’m in Christ ?”, he might have been able to show me the wonderful truth that dawned on me that evening, weeks later. But I suppose it would have been a step too far for me to admit that I didn’t really understand what it meant to be in Christ, too shameful an exposure of ignorance for someone who had been a Christian for more than ten years.

From my own viewpoint, my whole life changed fundamentally from that evening when light **did** begin to dawn. My conversion, 11 years earlier, had not made this much difference, though of course it had been an essential starting point. **Romans 6:5** was key. Somehow I had already ‘seen’ that I was included in Jesus’ death; now I began to see that I was also included in his resurrection and ascension – the Holy Spirit living **in** me and also poured out **upon** me – because I was joined to the One who now sat at the right hand of the Father. And God had done it himself, **he** had placed me in his Son (**1 Corinthians 1:30**). As I have said before, it wasn’t down to me – it never had been!

Looking back to that time, I sometimes wonder how much other people around me will have noticed. Did they see a dramatic change in this young man who had seemed to be on the verge of spiritual depression? I don't remember anyone making any comments, though I am sure that some of my closer team mates are bound to have picked up a substantial change in my attitude, perhaps seeing that a 'cloud' had lifted.

Personally, this was like a fresh start for me. I began to discover my inheritance! My New Testament was suddenly full of things that were mine because I was **in Christ** . . . prayer became meaningful; because I now knew that I was joined to the Lord Jesus, I found myself spontaneously speaking to God as my Father . . . the list went on . . .

But I had quite a shock as well. As I started telling my team mates what I had begun to see, I was expecting them to respond with comments like: "Yes, isn't it great? Our lives really have been joined to Jesus! We're really delighted that you have come to see that, too." But what did I find? Glazed expressions, a sort of response that said "yes, of course, we've all known that for ages, what's all the fuss about?" Faintly positive but almost dismissive!

I had really thought that they were all 'in the good' of what I had been looking for and had just 'found'. Now it didn't seem like that any more. I really couldn't be sure, and I remain unsure when I get a very similar response (or lack of it!) when now, decades later, I still try to share that same precious truth.

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Why am I sharing this right now? I know that I have shared some parts of my 'history' before, so please forgive the repetition. Hopefully, it will not be wasted.

As you will have realised, the fact that I have been joined to the Lord Jesus Christ has become fundamental to my life. The simple revelation that I am **in Christ** started to bring purpose, direction, peace and certainty into my life from that evening all those years ago, and the process continues up to the present day. If it were just something that had been a particular blessing to me as an individual, but was not for all believers, then I **could** (possibly!) remain quietly satisfied and grateful to my Father for having opened my eyes and say little or nothing more about it.

But, as I read the New Testament, and especially Paul's letters, I keep finding references to being **in Christ**! It's not just an occasional reference, either; it's the expression that Paul uses most frequently to describe the Christian believer. One of the first verses that I was shown after I became a Christian was **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."* That phrase 'in Christ' was often passed over as just another way of saying that someone is a Christian. I certainly missed it at the time; I was focused on the old passing away and the new coming. All very important, vital in fact, but the **cause** of the old going and the new coming was that I was now in Christ, joined to him. No-one told me that, and I suspect that many or even most new believers are not given that vital information.

Having missed out on that understanding at the beginning of our 'walk', perhaps it is not surprising that it takes a significant eye-opening, revelation if you will, for us to begin to appreciate what our Father has done in joining us to his Son. Remember that caring brother who tried to tell me that I had been 'blessed with all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ' – ? Perhaps I might have discovered more of those blessings sooner if he had checked with me that I really **knew** that I was in Christ, if he had explained to me the truth of **1 Corinthians 1:30**, that God had already placed me **in** his Son. But imagine how he and I might have felt if he **had** probed a bit more: "Do you know that you are in Christ, David?" "Well, I have been a believer for several years; that's the same thing, isn't it?" Would we both have felt that he was questioning whether I really was a Christian? Would I have been offended? Would he have felt that he was treading on my toes? It would have needed more time and lots of grace for him to be able to lead me to that place of seeing and knowing. Maybe he had the understanding himself but just didn't have the words to help me. Or maybe he was not really clear enough himself?

I don't need to know the answers to those questions. Weeks later, the Lord opened my eyes.

As I look around, I see believers who seem to be in the same predicament that I was in all those years ago. Wanting more spiritual reality but having little clue how they might find it. As the writer of **Proverbs 13:12** knew only too well, *“Hope deferred makes the heart sick . . .”*, so perhaps it is understandable self-defence if they give up that quest and settle for ‘safe’ religious routine. But in the second half of that verse, he writes *“. . . but desire fulfilled is a tree of life.”* If you find yourself identifying with this, may I gently encourage you to press on to find that fulfilled desire? It’s worth it; it really is a tree of life!

I would love to just say to each believer: “God really has placed you in Christ! Start exploring your inheritance! Take hold of what your Father has given you in his Son!” But I know that no-one can do that ‘cold’, without first of all **knowing** that it is true. Pretence is more deadly than a lack of faith, and there is little more sickening than to hear ‘truth’ shared without any sense that the person sharing it has really ‘seen’ it for themselves. The words may be 100% correct, but without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, those ‘true’ words fall like stones to the ground.

Yes, of course ‘everyone knows’ that Christian believers are in Christ, but how real is that knowledge? The Lord Jesus himself knew that there were plenty of people who heard his words who would not properly hear what he said: *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”*¹ Paul repeatedly asks the Lord to give believers revelation and true knowledge so that they will truly know more of what it means to be in Christ and so that they **will** take hold of the inheritance: –

*“. . . 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 having been 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 1:16-19).*

*“. . . we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask **that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding**, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and **increasing in the knowledge of God**; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light” (Colossians 1:9-12).*

Perhaps it is worth saying that the word Paul uses for ‘knowledge’ in both these passages is *epignōsis*, a word that means more than just the retaining of information; it means recognition and appreciation of that information. The ordinary word for ‘knowledge’ is *gnōsis*, and the ‘*epi*’ bit means ‘above’ or ‘on top of’, so this sort of knowledge is ‘above knowledge’; in other words, the real thing!

In his second letter, Peter picks up the same theme: –

*“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the **knowledge** of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that 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 divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust” (2 Peter 1:2-4).*

It may seem an obvious comment, but Paul would not have been praying like that if he did not expect his prayers to be answered. It was his **realistic expectation** that God **would** give these believers a genuine spiritual appreciation of ‘the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints’. He had the same realistic expectation for all believers. It is still a realistic expectation for us today.

In the same way, Peter writes about a genuine expectation that their lives would continue to be transformed – becoming ‘partakers of the divine nature’ – through that same recognition and appreciation (he uses the same word, *epignōsis*.) This is not some theoretical knowledge, a mere collection of correct doctrine, but **truth becoming experience** as we actually become **sharers of God’s own nature**. Yes, that is what he says! Amazing and mind-blowing.

¹ **Matthew 11:15, Mark 4:9,23, 7:16, Luke 8:8, 14:35**

Which brings me to the next question: Why don't we hear or read anyone teaching about what it means to be in Christ? In the last 20 years or more, I can't recall hearing anyone else saying anything at all about this most fundamental truth. Maybe I live too far off the beaten track and move in very restricted company, but if you have been fortunate enough to benefit from such vital teaching, I think you are probably in a minority – a *small* minority!

It is time – long overdue – for us to rediscover the reality that Paul and Peter knew, the theme that runs through the whole New Testament, that we who have put our trust in Jesus have been joined to him, that we are branches of the vine which is Jesus himself (**John 15:5**) and that in him we have an inheritance to explore **now**, not merely a secure eternal future. In fact, increasingly entering into our inheritance now is a vital part of our Father's plan for us **in** that eternal future! More of that another time!

In closing, let me share a beautiful illustration from the experience of Watchman Nee: –

I remember one day in Shanghai I was talking with a brother who was very exercised concerning his spiritual state. He said, "So many are living beautiful, saintly lives. I am ashamed of myself. I call myself a Christian and yet when I compare myself with others I feel I am not one at all. I want to know this crucified life, this resurrection life, but I do not know it and see no way of getting there." Another brother was with us, and the two of us had been talking for two hours or so, trying to get the man to see that he could not have anything apart from Christ, but without success. Said our friend, "the best thing a man can do is to pray." "But if God has already given you everything, what do you need to pray for?" we asked. "He hasn't", the man replied, "for I am still losing my temper, still failing constantly; so I must pray more." "Well", we said, "do you get what you pray for?" "I am sorry to say that I do not get anything", he replied. We tried to point out that, just as he had done nothing for his justification, so he need do nothing for his sanctification.

Just then a third brother, much used of the Lord, came in and joined us. There was a thermos flask on the table, and this brother picked it up and said, "What is this?" "A thermos flask." "Well, you just imagine for a moment that this thermos flask can pray, and that it starts praying something like this: 'Lord, I want very much to be a thermos flask. Wilt Thou make me to be a thermos flask? Lord, give me grace to become a thermos flask. Do please make me one!' What will you say?" "I do not think even a thermos flask would be so silly," our friend replied. "It would be nonsense to pray like that; it *is* a thermos flask!" Then my brother said, "You are doing the same thing. God in times past has already included you in Christ. When He died, you died; when He lived, you lived. Now today you cannot say, 'I want to die; I want to be crucified; I want to have resurrection life.' The Lord simply looks at you and says, 'You *are* dead! You *have* new life!' All your praying is just as absurd as that of the thermos flask. You do not need to pray to the Lord for anything; you merely need your eyes opened to see that He has done it all."

That is the point. We need not work to die, we need not wait to die, we *are* dead. We only need to recognize what the Lord has already done and to praise Him for it. Light dawned for that man. With tears in his eyes he said, "Lord, I praise Thee that Thou hast already included me in Christ. All that is His is mine!" Revelation had come and faith had something to lay hold of; and if you could have met that brother later on, what a change you would have found! ¹

*"... 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 having been 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 1:16-19).*

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¹ Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life*, (1957) Chapter 3: *The Path of Progress: Knowing*