



### **“ONLY IN CHRIST”**

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Perhaps you're a member of an exclusive club or society. There is typically some benefit for the member and the organization often serves some useful purpose in its community. I want to talk to you about a very special and exclusive class of people the Bible speaks about time and time again. It's a spiritual society that offers benefits and privileges unlike any other and it certainly has the greatest mission and purpose on the face of the earth. I'm talking about those who are "in Christ." That's a familiar expression to a student of the Bible but what does it mean and are you "in Christ" right now? The Apostle Paul said in Romans 7:24-8:1, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Paul tells us here about one of the great blessings of being "in Christ." It and many other blessings and spiritual privileges are found ONLY in Christ.

The phrase "in Christ" appears at least 76 times in New Testament. Some of those occurrences refer to the redemptive plan of God that came to fruition in Christ. Other times the phrase is used to refer to the knowledge or revelation of God that was made known in the person, the message and in the work of Christ. But the overwhelming majority of those 76 occurrences refer to the special relationship of Christ to the obedient believer. The baptized believer is pictured in the Bible as being joined to Christ in a spiritual union. Paul said in Galatians 3:27, "For as many of us as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." In other words, when I am buried with Christ in baptism I come up out of the water in a new relationship with Christ that I didn't have before. In fact, baptism is the one step in a person's conversion that accomplishes that.

Think about it this way. When a sincere sinner hears the word of God that creates faith in that sinner's heart. He or she comes to understand the fact that they are a sinner and that they are lost in that condition. The gospel teaches them that Christ is the Son of God Who came to earth to provide a way of salvation through His death on the cross. When a person comes to believe that, his or her understanding

in relation to God has changed. That change creates a desire to do God's will and be saved but that person remains in their sins until that faith causes them to respond to the overtures of the gospel. That's where repentance comes in. Faith will then cause a sinner to be sorry for the life he has lived and it will produce a decision to change his life. That's what repentance is. Faith produces a change of understanding or of the intellect. Repentance produces a change of heart or will but neither of those steps in and of itself changes the relationship of the sinner to God. Those steps only move the sinner to do what is necessary to obtain a relationship with God through Christ. That's where baptism is involved. In 1 Peter 3:21, Peter said "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." You see what Peter is telling us is that there is a desire or an appeal in the mind and heart of the sinner to have a clear conscience in the sight of God. Faith and repentance are what create that desire. So, what is the answer to that appeal? Peter said it is baptism. Baptism is not a physical bath. It has nothing to do with washing away the external filth of the body. But it has everything to do with making one clean on the inside and giving him a good conscience in the sight of God. Why? Because in baptism, God has made it possible for the blood of Christ to wash away our sins. Our sins had separated us from God. But upon our faith and repentance, in baptism our sins are forgiven and the result is, we then obtain a reconciled relationship with God. Baptism does what faith and repentance alone do not! It changes the relationship of the sinner to Christ. That's why Paul said when we are "baptized into Christ, we put on Christ." He also said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

Now it's only in this wonderful new relationship that I can enjoy the blessings and promises of God. Another passage where the phrase "In Christ" occurs several times is over in Ephesians chapter 1. In verses 3-5 Paul says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." Notice that Paul says all spiritual blessings are found in Christ! He, of course, is talking about salvation and all of the benefits that belong to member of the body of Christ.

He also says that we have been predestined to obtain those blessings. Now, that word "predestinated" (or "predestined" as the modern translations have it) is often misunderstood and misused. It means to "limit in advance." That means God determined that the blessings of the gospel would only be enjoyed by an exclusive group of people. The Calvinist believes that individuals are pre-determined to be saved or lost. That is to say; the question of whether you would ultimately be saved or lost was answered a long time ago long before you were even born. The Bible, however, would grossly contradict itself if that were true. Paul isn't talking about the predestination of individuals. He is talking about the predestination of a classification of people. That class is not determined by race or ethnicity nor is it determined by socio-economic or regional factors. It is simply talking about those who would be in Christ as opposed to not being in Christ. The point is, all spiritual blessings have been reserved or limited in advance only to those who would be in Christ Jesus. In this chapter, Paul uses the terms "in Christ" or "in Him" no less than seven times. In verse one; he addresses those who are "faithful in Christ Jesus". In verse 3; he says we have all spiritual blessings "in Christ". In verse 4; he says we were chosen in Him. That is to say, those in Christ were chosen to inherit the promises of God. In verse 7; he says we have redemption in Him. Verse 9 tells us that He has gathered all things in Christ. That simply means that all of the components of God's eternal plan all perfectly come together in Jesus Christ. Verse 11 says that we have obtained an inheritance in Him and verse 13 says we who are saved have been sealed by the Holy Spirit in Him. In other words, we have the guarantee of eternal salvation given to us by the Holy

Spirit in the word which He revealed and gave us to read and follow. That guarantee is only afforded by the Spirit, though, to those who are in Christ!

Paul leaves no doubt that it's important to be found in Christ. In fact, it's essential! No one can be saved outside of Him! Why? Because every spiritual blessing that God affords are found only in Him. I want to talk about a few of the vital privileges that are found only in Christ and I want you to think about how essential all of them are to a person being in a right relationship with God and being saved.

First of all; only in Christ can my sins be forgiven. No one who has failed to have their sins forgiven by God can ever expect to be saved. The scriptures tells us that "the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither His ear heavy that He cannot hear, but your iniquities have separated between you and your God and your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear." (Isaiah 59:1-2) That's the whole problem with the divine-human relationship. Sin destroyed it and so for that relationship to be restored here and eternally, sin has to be removed from the picture. Since God is holy and cannot countenance evil, sin has to be removed before a person can be right with the Lord. Well, the Bible is clear about the fact that we can't remove it our self. It takes the vicarious death of Christ on the cross to accomplish that. That's why Paul said there in Ephesians 1:6-7 "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;" Notice that! Paul said we have been accepted not by our own merit but by His grace and that grace was extended to man when Christ died in man's place and offered His blood as the price of our redemption.

Now I want to ask you...where can a person who refuses to obey Christ turn for the forgiveness of his sins? For those of you who may have bought into this pluralist world view of religion today...did Muhammad die for anyone's sins? Can the animal sacrifices of the Jewish-Mosaic system pay for the sins of man in order to remove them? The Bible says in Hebrews 10:11 that they can't. Can the moral and upstanding man who doesn't practice any kind of religion rely on his goodness or morality to counter the bad he has done? Paul reminded us that there is 'none righteous, no not one.'" So again I ask; where can the person who refuses to place his obedient faith in Christ go to be forgiven of his sins? And my friend, no one will be saved without having his sins forgiven. Can't you see that blessing is found only in Christ? If you're depending on your own strength or the teachings of some other religion to get you to heaven, you should understand that you are rejecting the only provision God ever made for you to have your sins taken off the books and the slate wiped clean between you and God.

When Paul wrote the book of Hebrews, he was very worried about people who were abandoning their faith in Christ because they were being opposed and persecuted. Some of them were going back to the Old Testament law and leaving the church. Paul paints a very dark picture of their plight when he says in Hebrews 10:26-27, "For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." He's talking about people who were willfully leaving Jesus Christ and he says those people bring upon themselves sure condemnation because there is no sacrifice for sins outside of Him.

Secondly, I want to talk about that idea of condemnation. Only in Christ can I be free from condemnation!

Now, every man stands condemned in the eyes of God outside of Christ. Even the devoutly religious man is condemned without Christ and the benefits of the New Covenant.

I want to go over to Romans chapter 7 for a moment. This is a somewhat complex passage of scripture and one that has been horribly abused and misrepresented over the years. We don't have time to read the chapter here but what you'll find is that Paul is expressing great frustration in these verses. Paul talks about these two opposing forces at work within himself that are leaving him in a state of condemnation and despair. In verses 7-11 he talks about the commandments of the law and how he had every desire and every good intention of keeping every one of those commandments. His heart was in the right place. He desperately wanted to keep the law and please God. However, it seemed that as hard as he tried, sin was always right there at the door and because of the weakness of his own flesh he ending up sinning. He said the result was that the law, which was in and of itself a good thing, had resulted in his spiritual death. He sadly concludes in verse 14; "I am carnal and sold under sin." That's a terrible condition to be in, isn't it? Especially since the Bible tells us in the very next chapter, verses 6-7 "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Do you think Paul is referring to himself as a Christian in those verses?

I have heard some people made a big mess out of Romans 7. They tell us that Paul is describing the plight of every Christian in those verses. No matter how hard we try to do the Lord's will, the flesh is stronger and so we're all just miserable sinners and there's no use in trying to keep the law of God. The problem with that is, those words that Paul uses to describe himself as a sinner cannot refer to a faithful child of God in Christ Jesus! We are not carnal nor sold under sin. We're free from sin! We walk after the things of the spirit and not the things of the flesh according to Paul in Romans 8:5. You see, Paul is not describing himself or anyone else as a Christian. He is personifying himself back under the Law of Moses before Christ came. That law could only justify the person who never made a mistake in trying to keep it. If a person ever sinned, there was no provision for his forgiveness except prospectively in the hope that one day God would provide the ultimate sacrifice by sending His Son to die for man. So, Paul and every other person were trapped back under that law. There was no getting out from under the penalty of the law and the shadow of eternal death. That's why he cries out in verse 24 "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" That should be the anguished plea of any person who is outside of Christ today. But Paul doesn't leave his own question unanswered. In the next stroke of his inspired pen he says "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" And the very next verse which begins what we recognize as the eighth chapter says "There is NOW" ... get that friends..."there is NOW no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." There's the relief Paul was looking for. He couldn't find it in that old system that was in place before Christ came and established the better covenant. But he says there is NOW no condemnation to those who are in Him. Are you "in Christ" today? If not, there's a cloud hanging over your soul. It's the dark cloud of God's fury and God's wrath and indignation over your sins. He wants you to be saved but you've got to be forgiven of your sins first and the only place you can do that is in His precious Son, Jesus Christ.

There's another blessing that's found only in Christ and that's the privilege of prayer. In our most recent study we talked about the fact that sinners don't have the same right of access to the throne of God as Christians do. The Bible never tells an alien sinner anywhere to pray. That's because the person whose life is characterized by sin is not in a position to pray to God. Now this gets back to the idea that God is holy and God is absolutely righteous. As a result of that, any person who comes into His presence must be holy as well. One of the most wonderful and enlightening studies of the Old Testament is the study of the tabernacle. That old system of worship was a type or a picture pointing forward to the plan of redemption in Christ. Perhaps you remember a little bit about that tabernacle that God told Moses to make for the children of Israel. It had three distinct areas in it. There was the outer court. Then there was the Holy Place. And ultimately, there was the Holy of Holies or the Most Holy Place. The Most Holy

place was where God dwelt among His people. His glory filled that sacred room and there was only one man who could enter it and that was the High Priest and that was only one time a year on the Day of Atonement. The Holy Place was a hallowed place as well. That's where the articles of worship and service were found and only the Priests could go in there. Even they had to perform a sacrifice to God and wash their bodies in a laver of water outside the door to that compartment. They had to be cleansed and put on their special priestly garments before they could go in there and burn incense to the Lord and partake of the other items of service.

That's all a picture of how it is now in Christ. We don't have some man in a long robe or in a backwards collar to perform our worship to God on our behalf. That's wrong. The New Testament teaches that in this dispensation of time we all who are saved are Kings and Priests unto God. (Revelation 1:6). Now, just like those priests back there, we have to wash and adorn ourselves in the garments of righteousness before we can enter the realm of worship and praise to God. Jesus is our sacrifice and the laver of water represents the waters of baptism a person goes through on his way into the church of the Lord. When that takes place he becomes a priest and he or she can come into the church of the Lord and offer spiritual sacrifices and acts of praise and worship to the Lord.

Back in that physical tabernacle you'll remember there was a heavy veil that separated between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. That veil was impenetrable except by the High Priest on that one special day of the year. He would take the blood of a sacrifice into that sacred chamber and he would meet God in a manner of speaking. He would offer that blood to God on behalf of all of the sins of the people. Well, Jesus is our High Priest. After He died on the cross, His blood was offered up to God in Heaven as an atonement and a propitiation for our sins. That settled it once and for all. When our Savior died on Calvary's rugged crest that day something amazing happened in that temple back inside the city of Jerusalem. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon and according to practice, the priest would have been in that first holy place officiating on behalf of the people. Suddenly, when Jesus our High Priest yielded up His spirit in death, the ground shook and that big, heavy, mysterious veil ripped in two from top to bottom...or from heaven downward and that bewildered priest saw something his eyes never imagined. He saw into the Most Holy Place. That was the greatest symbol of all that took place when Jesus died. It meant the way had been opened up between the Holy Place or the church and the Most Holy Place which is heaven. Now, the result of that is according to the apostle Paul over in Hebrews 4:16, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Jesus came down here and fitted Himself to be our High Priest. He came down to be our Mediator and our intercessor. Because of what He did and the position He occupies, He has opened the door of heaven. Now, through Him as our High Priest...every priest...that is every Christian can go straight to the throne of grace. There is no longer enmity between the righteous God and offending man. Christ has mediated that dispute. He intercedes for us in the presence of God and the result is we who are found in Christ can go boldly to the throne of God in prayer and access the wonderful privileges found therein. That's why those outside of Christ can't pray and be heard. I must come into Christ and I do that according to Galatians 3:27 by being "baptized into Christ".

Finally, I want to leave you with this wonderful thought; Only in Christ can I have eternal hope! In view of the great blessings we've discovered are only in Christ, what hope can a person possibly have who is outside of Him? 1 Peter 1:3-4 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." Remember that Paul said in Ephesians 1:11 that we have obtained an inheritance in Christ. An inheritance of what? All of the promises of God, not the least of which is that

blessed Promised Land flowing with milk and honey...the land of Canaan. Not the one here, but the one up there. Are you in Christ today? Have you been baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins? Why not let us help you do that today.

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