



## ONLY IN CHRIST

Kevin Presley

God desires to bless His beloved creation. When He placed the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden in the dawn of time, He had a pure and perfect fellowship with this husband and wife; gave them everything they would possibly need to be happy and live a purposeful and joyful life on earth; and gave them authority over everything else around them. It was a wonderful relationship that God shared with them. The fall changed all of this, however, and the pair was cursed by their sin and driven from their paradise home into a world filled with evil and death. God in His holiness could not countenance sin and thus their relationship with Him was broken. God in His love, however, desired a relationship with mankind, even though they had sinned. This, of course, is what the plan of salvation is all about. God began to lay out and eventually execute a plan to bring mankind back into fellowship with Him and thus reconcile the fallen world to Himself. God, in other words, still desires to bless His beloved creation. His plan would allow Him to offer this restored relationship and these spiritual blessings to a certain classification of people. These blessings would be reserved only for them. Why? Why didn't God simply bless all sinful men and women with these blessings and benefits since He loves them all. It is because God would not then be God. His plan had to allow Him to retain His own holiness while reaching out and being reconciled to unholy sinners. He had to make THEM holy so that they might be joined in fellowship to them. This is the theme of Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus, especially in His opening remarks to them. Let's read together from Ephesians 1, verses 3-11.

Paul writes: ***“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, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness***

***of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.”***

There is a phrase which recurs here and in many other places throughout Paul’s writings: the phrase “in Him” or “in Christ.” He says that God has blessed US (the church) with ALL spiritual blessings in CHRIST JESUS. Why is necessary to be a Christian to enjoy a relationship with God? Our study today will be “ONLY in Christ”.

The sublime teaching of Paul in the book of Ephesians shows how the redemption of mankind was planned in the mind of God from the beginning. God has not been frantically wringing His hands in heaven experimenting with ways to reconcile the fallen race to Himself. He determined from the start that the remedy to sin would involve the sending of His Son and reconciling sinners to Himself through Christ. In the process, he shows why the Christian faith is not just one of many possible ways to God. He affirms that the blessings that belong to saved people are found only in Christ Jesus. In fact, Wilber Fields said in his commentary on the Book of Ephesians that the phrase “in Christ” and other synonymous expressions are used by Paul some 164 times throughout the New Testament. That tells me that “in Christ” is an important place to be found.

Throughout the bible story, you will find where God’s people have always occupied a special place and a special position in the eyes of God. God had fellowship with man inside the Garden of Eden until he was driven out into a cursed and lonely world because of sin. God worked through a special family, that of Seth, and later Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob, and so forth. Then God established a special nation and gave them a particular place to live. God had a relationship with that nation that He did not have with anyone else. All of this was temporary because it pointed forward to the plan that God eventually unfolded through the coming of His Son, Christ Jesus. Now, God’s chosen and special people, those with whom He is in covenant with and those whom He uniquely blesses with all spiritual blessings, are those who are found IN CHRIST. The church OF Christ is another way of referring to those who are spiritually IN Christ. The word church means the called out or the assembly and usually, when the bible uses the word ‘church’, it is speaking of those who have been called out of the world, spiritually speaking, and find their identity in Christ: those whom Christ has gathered in Himself through means of the gospel.

So, being IN CHRIST is a special and privileged position. Just as being an Israelite under the Old Covenant meant being one of God’s chosen people, so being in Christ today means being one of His chosen ones. This is what Paul is talking about all throughout the first chapter of Ephesians when he speaks of us being chosen. He says in verses 4-6: “just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”

There’s some confusion today about what Paul was referring to. Some allege that Paul is saying that God arbitrarily looked ahead in time and selected certain individuals to be saved and excluded others leaving them to be destroyed in hell. In other words, whether you are saved was decided in the mind of God from the beginning of time and if God picked you, then you are saved, and if He didn’t, then you are eternally condemned and you have no choice in the matter. That is classic Calvinism and is a false doctrine. There are many passages that show that man has a will that can either choose or reject Christ. So, what does Paul mean by people being chosen before the foundation of the world? The key is in the phrase “in Him.” “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...” He is not speaking of

arbitrarily choosing certain individuals. He is speaking of looking ahead into time and choosing a class of people to be saved and that is those who are in Christ, His Son. And anyone who will hear, believe, and obey the gospel can be found in Christ Jesus. Paul's teaching about election and predestination does not conflict with the bible's teaching about the free will of man if we understand what Paul means by election. He is simply showing us that God's plan to save and bless sinful man was just that: His plan and was in His mind from the beginning of time and only those who are in Christ will receive all the spiritual blessings that are found exclusively in Him. Thus, being found *in Christ* is to be part of God's holy and separate nation and to enjoy the privileges that belong only to those people. I want us to see today why it is necessary to be found in Christ if we want to be saved and have a reconciled relationship with God and how we enter that blessed condition.

So, not only do those who are in Christ enjoy the distinction of being part of a chosen people, second, Paul says in verse 5 that this includes the wonderful privilege of "adoption as sons." Paul is the only New Testament writer who uses the term adoption and he does so at least five times in Ephesians, Galatians, and his letter to the Romans. It's a metaphor that Paul employs to show the privileged position that people in Christ have, and it illustrates the wonderful relationship that we can have with God through Christ. The Romans allowed one to legally adopt a child and that not only entitled that child to whatever material possessions would fall to a fleshly son but would also give him the same status in society. An adopted son had the same privileges as the actual son. Well, God has only one literal Son and that is Christ. But by being adopted into God's family we share the same access to God and to heaven's blessings that belong to Christ. Isn't that a wonderful thought? Just to think that God looks at us and grants to us the same heavenly blessings that are Christ's! Now, our adoption is in a sense, still incomplete because we are still living on earth in the flesh whereas Christ has already ascended into the presence of the Father. But one day, that too will take place for those who are in Christ when Jesus comes again and our bodies are raised and redeemed, being transformed into the likeness of Christ's resurrection body and we'll live in the presence of the Father for eternity with Christ and all the hosts of heaven. That hope is only found by being adopted as privileged sons into the family of God and that only happens when we enter Christ, His Son, through Whom God has made possible and appointed all spiritual blessings. Yes, God cares about and even blesses all His creation - saint or sinner - with temporal and earthly blessings. The life you have, the air you breathe, the food you eat, the clothes you wear, are all blessings undeservingly given to people through God's grace... but spiritual blessings are found only in His Son, Christ Jesus.

And then, this is only possible, because in Christ, and ONLY in Christ, can we obtain the forgiveness of our sins. Read again, in verses 5-7: "having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Notice, that Paul says that "by His grace" God "made us accepted in the Beloved." We could not be accepted outside of Christ because we were in our sins. All have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23) and our sin made us enemies of God and dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1-3). But by His grace (unmerited favor) His plan included a means of making sinners accepted in His sight. The only way that could be accomplished and God remain holy and just was to provide a means for man's sins to be expiated or covered. That is, of course, why Christ was incarnated and died vicariously upon the cross, so that our sins could be punished, but at the same time, we who had sinned could be pardoned and justified (which means to be treated as though we had never sinned even though we had) and thus be accepted by God. That's the beauty, wisdom, and power of the gospel.

Notice though, that Paul qualifies this forgiveness as being made possible ONLY in Christ. "...By His grace...He made us accepted IN THE BELOVED" which is Christ, His Son. Only through the merits of Christ's death and by receiving the pardon that could only come through His death can we be forgiven of our sins and be received by God as His adopted sons. He says, "In Him (and I might emphasize that ONLY in Him) can we have "redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." You and I could never pay the debt that our sin incurred. As the old hymn says, "in my hand no price I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling." Your goodness and my goodness, your efforts and my efforts will always fall short. We don't have the means to begin to pay sin's debt. But Christ had the riches, and He has the loving concern and mercy to step in and pay the price so YOU can be forgiven and go free.

Do you understand the love and compassion and mercy and grace that took? So many people misunderstand this idea of God's forgiveness. They think that God forgives on a whim or because He feels like it or because we make enough effort and show ourselves to somehow deserve His favor. Friend, that's blasphemous. God's forgiveness is only possible by the merits of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice upon the cross of Calvary. That's what the Christian religion is all about. And I ask you today, how does any other religion answer the problem of sin? How does any other religion; any other philosophy; any other way; make sinful man acceptable in the sight of a holy and just God and God's holiness and justice remain intact? There is no such religion! There is no other way! Salvation from sin and thus reconciliation to God and thus the hope of eternal life was predestined in Christ because Christ was the only way to make it happen and God still be the Holy, just, and loving God that He is. That my friend, is why it is imperative for you to be IN CHRIST if you would have any relationship with God. It is not that Christianity is a superior religion (though it is). It is not that Christianity has a better rule for living (though it does). It is the fact that Christ Jesus was the ONLY means of saving a lost world and reconciling the people of that sinful world to holy God. And that's why you need to be IN CHRIST today. I want you to understand that all spiritual privileges (whether it be the forgiveness of sins; the blessings only Christians can beseech God for through prayer; the assurance and peace of salvation; the right of access to the throne room of heaven in worship and prayer); those things only belong to those who are in Christ.

So now the question before us is: how does one enter Christ? What does the bible teach about becoming part of this chosen people who are found in Him? Are we in Christ just simply by believing it to be so? No, even though belief is necessary. Does the bible teach that we pray our way into Christ? No, even though we do appeal to Christ for a clear conscience and thus, a right relationship with God. (1 Peter 3:21) You will not find one example after the apostles were sent forth to preach the good news of the gospel on the Day of Pentecost where any person was told to say a 'sinner's prayer' to be saved or enter into Christ. We don't repent our way into Christ even though it is essential that we repent of our sins if we want to be saved.

Friend, I want you to listen carefully to what the apostle Paul said about how a person enters Christ. It may not be what your preacher told you but it's what the inspired apostle Paul said. Remember that Paul said we have received the adoption of sons and found acceptance through the forgiveness of our sins in the Beloved (that is Christ)? Read with me what he wrote to the Galatians in Galatians 3:26-27 "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized **into Christ** have put on Christ." And to the Romans he wrote in Romans 6:3-4 "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

You see, it's only when one's faith in the Savior leads him or her in obedience to be buried with Christ in baptism that we enter a new relationship with Him by His grace. Are you in Christ? Have you been baptized INTO Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38); to have your sins washed away (Acts 22:16); and to rise with Him from baptism through faith in the operation of God (Colossians 2:12)? It's not a symbol of a prior faith, it's a transaction of faith that places one by faith into a new relationship with the saving Christ. If you haven't taken that step, you're not in Christ for there's no other way to enter Him according to the word of God. And if you have never placed your faith in Him and been immersed for the forgiveness of your sins, and thus been added to His body, the church, I implore you to do so today.

**©2022 BibleWay Media.** All rights reserved.

BibleWay Media grants permission to copy this material for personal use. Permission is also granted to distribute this transcript as long as it is reproduced in its entirety, used solely for its original purpose of spreading the gospel, and attribution is given to the author and Let the Bible Speak.