

# One in Christ Jesus

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When a person believes in Jesus Christ, accepting him as his risen Lord, he is born of God and spiritually created in Christ Jesus. As a result, this new believer identifies with Christ in all of Christ's accomplishments: past, present and future. "In Christ" the believer has already been judged as to his spiritual standing before God and the verdict is "not guilty" (Rom. 8:1; I Cor. 1:30). This is not because of the believer's own righteousness but because of Christ's sacrificial death and the resulting gift of righteousness which God gives, or credits, to believers on the basis of grace (Rom. 3:21-5:17). The Book of Ephesians speaks about this new creation in Christ:

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:8-10).*

Being created in Christ Jesus is the work of God, not man. It is a spiritual creation, not physical, and is accomplished by a believer being born of God's Spirit and incorporated through that Spirit into the spiritual body of Christ, the church of God. The Letters of Ephesians and I and II Corinthians explain this truth:

*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are*

*God's possession - to the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:13-14).*

*The body is a unit, although it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink (I Cor. 12:12-13).*

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come! (II Cor. 5:17).*

For the believer in Christ all things have become new because he is now a new creation in Christ. He has been baptized with the Spirit, not water, into the one body of Christ. As a result, the believer stands before God clothed with the righteousness, holiness and redemption that have been made possible by Christ's death and resurrection. All of this is God's own work of grace which he imparts to us, in Christ, through the Spirit. As Paul says:

*You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (I Cor. 6:11).*

*It is because of him [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God - that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption (I Cor. 1:30).*

Christ died for us and paid the ransom price for the sins of all mankind (I Tim. 2:4-6). When we accept this sacrificial death of Christ for us by believing in him as our risen Lord, we receive the benefits of all that he accomplished for us. The gift of "righteousness" means that we have been justified, or acquitted of our sins, and therefore stand in a new right relationship with God: accepted and at peace with him (Rom. 4:23-5:2). The word "holy" means that

we have been set apart for God and are now God's "saints" or "holy people" with our citizenship in heaven (Eph. 2:19; Phil.3:20).<sup>16</sup> The word "redemption" means that we have been bought back and set free from the spiritual bondage of sin and of Satan's realm of darkness and transferred into the dominion of Christ's kingdom or rule (Col. 1:13-14).

This redemptive work of Christ on our behalf is a truth that every believer should understand. It is through Christ's work that we are redeemed, not through our own work. As a result of believing in Christ and being incorporated into him, we identify with him in all that he did, is doing, and will do on our behalf. The following list shows our spiritual identification with Christ in all of his accomplishments:

"In Christ" we as believers:

- were crucified with him (Gal. 2:20),
- died with him (Rom. 6:3),
- were buried with him (Rom. 6:4),
- were made alive with him (Eph. 2:5),
- were raised up with him (Eph. 2:6),
- are seated in heaven with him (Eph. 2:6),
- will appear with him in glory (Col. 3:4).

It is precisely because of this spiritual identification of the believer with Christ in all of his accomplishments that we now stand before God clothed in the righteousness, holiness and redemption that are ours in Christ.

Biblically, Christ is *the* elect or chosen one of God in whom all of God's purposes are accomplished (e.g. Isa. 42:1; Luke 9:35; Eph. 1:1-14). All who are incorporated into Christ - through faith and the Spirit - become a part of God's elect or chosen people and thus share with Christ in all of God's purposes "for those who

love him" (Rom. 8:28; I Cor. 2:9; James 2:5). This is all in accordance with God's foreordained plan. In fact, the Book of Ephesians shows that God actually chose us in Christ before the creation of the world in order that we would become his children and live in intimate fellowship with him:

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will - to the praise of his glorious grace which he has freely given us in the One he loves (Eph. 1:3-6).*

God chose and predestined us to be his children before the creation of the world. This was his plan of salvation. God knew that man would sin and in his wisdom and love he prepared a plan so that through his Son, Jesus Christ, we could be redeemed back to him. In his wisdom, God knew that people would believe. Therefore in his love, he made it such that when we did believe we would become his children. God's choice and predestination of us, therefore, is based on his own foreknowledge of a people who would believe but with no interference in our freedom to choose. It was our decision to believe. God simply predestined the results of that belief - for us to become his children! The Book of Romans summarizes these wonderful truths in God's plan of salvation:

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And*

*those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then shall we say in response to this: If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:*

*'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'*

*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:28-39).*

In Christ Jesus we are God's children; foreknown before the creation of the world; called to be his own chosen people; justified so as to be righteous and blameless before him. And, even though Christ has not yet returned, already assured of appearing with him in glory.

### **The People of God**

All true believers in Jesus Christ together make up the one family of God and the one church of the body of Christ. This is a spiritual family and spiritual church which

transcends every man-made denomination, division or sect. The Spirit of God binds all believers in Christ into a new people of God united above and beyond all worldly distinctions. This collective sense of being the new people of God is stated in many different ways within the New Testament Letters. Sometimes Old Testament imagery (e.g. the temple of God) is used to describe God's people while at other times completely different and new terminology (e.g. the body of Christ) is introduced to describe the new spiritual realities that exist under the new covenant. Look at the Old Testament imagery used in the Book of I Peter:

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God (I Pet. 2:9-10).*

In the Old Testament the nation of Israel was the called and chosen people of God. The New Testament, however, reveals that because of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and his giving of the holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost a new covenant relationship has been established between God and his people. Now all who believe in Christ - irrespective of ethnic, social or religious background - are part of the new covenant people of God (cp. Matt. 21:33-43; I Pet. 2:4-10; etc.). As Paul says:

*It is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus and who put no confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3; cp. Gal. 6:16).*

This is simply Old Testament language being applied to the new covenant people of God. All that was promised in the Old Testament to God's covenant people, Israel, now becomes the rightful inheritance of God's new covenant

people in a way far greater than the Old Testament people ever saw or conceived. This is all a result of the work of Christ and the giving of God's gift of holy Spirit to all who believe in Christ. Look at the following verses from the Book of Ephesians:

*For through him [Christ] we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him [Christ] the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Eph. 2:18-22).*

What magnificent truths! We are fellow citizens with all of God's people regardless of ethnic race or national boundaries. We are united together in a citizenship that transcends and supersedes the national citizenships of this world. Our allegiance is therefore first and foremost to God and his kingdom. No national, ethnic or family allegiance can ever take priority over that. We are members of God's household - bound together in God's family by his Spirit of which we are born. In fact, so great is this new relationship with God that the Bible teaches that we, as God's chosen people, are now the temple of the living God. God, the creator of the heavens and the earth, now lives in us by way of his Spirit!

### **One in Christ**

Throughout the New Testament this new special relationship of God with his people is emphasized over and over along with the love and care that God's people are to have for each other. In Old Testament times it was often thought that only Israelites or converts to the

religion of Israel could be part of God's people. Gentiles, i.e., all of the other ethnic groups of the world, were thought to be impure and unclean. Though it was foretold in the Old Testament that these Gentiles would one day be blessed by God, it was never thought that they would be accepted as part of the people of God on an equal basis with Israel. However, as a result of the life, death and resurrection of Christ and then his giving of the holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost all barriers dividing God's people have been forever broken down (Eph. 2:11-18). Look at the Letters to the Galatian and Corinthian churches:

*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26-28).*

*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink (I Cor. 12:12-14).*

Water baptism in the name of Christ can be very meaningful and significant but it is only symbolic of a far greater spiritual reality. For it is only the one Spirit of God in which we are "all baptized" - at the moment we believe in Christ - that truly cleanses us and unites us together in the one body of Christ. This spiritual baptism into Christ is far greater than any kind of water baptism which we may undergo. For it is a baptism in the life-giving power of God's own Spirit which God himself, through Christ, pours out upon all who believe (Titus 3:4-7; cf. John 1:32-34; Acts 1:5; 2:33; 11:15-17; 15:7-9).

As a result of this God-given "unity of the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3) there are no longer any distinctions among the people of God on the basis of ethnic race, social and economic status or national citizenship. It makes absolutely no difference to God whether a believer in Christ is black or white, rich or poor, European or American because God is no respecter of persons - only of conditions (Acts 10:34-35). Anyone - absolutely anyone - who believes in Christ is accepted by God into his family on an equal basis with everyone else because we are "all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

### **The Mystery Of Christ**

This truth concerning the equal composition of the church of the body of Christ - the new covenant people of God - was so revolutionary that it was not immediately understood by the people of New Testament times. In fact, it was not even revealed by God until many years after the original outpouring of the holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Instead, it was a "mystery" or "secret" hidden in God and never before revealed until it was finally made known to the apostle Paul and then to the other New Testament apostles and prophets. Paul's Letters to the Ephesian and Colossian churches set forth explicitly the wonderful truth regarding this mystery:

*Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers*

*together in the promise in Christ Jesus (Eph. 3:2-6, emphasis added).*

*This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.....for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in all its fullness - the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col. 1:23b-27, emphasis added).*

As a result of all that Christ has accomplished, *Gentile* believers in Christ now share equally with Jewish believers in all that God has promised to his people. All who believe in Christ - whether Jew or Gentile - are now "heirs together," "members together of one body," and "sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus". In addition, Christ, by way of the Spirit, now lives in each and every believer (Rom. 8:9-10). So incredible are these truths that had "the rulers of this age" known about this mystery "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (I Cor. 2:8). In fact, by instigating Christ's crucifixion Satan himself thought that he had accomplished his greatest victory ever over God; but in truth, it was exactly the opposite, because Christ's sacrificial death and his victorious resurrection sealed Satan's doom and gained victory forever for the people of God (Col. 2:9-15; Rom. 16:20). Now a new people of God is being formed made up of all who believe in Jesus Christ from every nation, family and ethnic race of the world. In this new people of God "there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all" (Col. 3:11). What a great truth! For when

Christ was personally present on earth he could only be in one place at one time. Today, however, he is present, by way of the Spirit, wherever there is a Christian believer. Therefore, as the church of the body of Christ, with Christ in each and every member, we are his representatives wherever we may be in this world. The Apostle Paul sums up this wonderful truth in God's plan of salvation:

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.*

*The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:20).*

As God's children, created in Christ Jesus, foreknown and chosen before the creation of the world, it is now our joy, privilege and responsibility to "declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light" (I Pet. 2:9), so as to bring others into the blessings of God's salvation as well.