

# YOU IN CHRIST & CHRIST IN YOU

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All scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise stated.

Two of the most astounding truths in the New Testament are the miraculous realities of “being in Christ” and “Christ being in you.” If you and I could grasp the many realities that are encompassed in these two amazing truths, our lives would be infused with more of a sense of security and joy that we are all seeking.

Why does Paul place so much emphasis on being “in Christ?” It must be a very important reality, especially to the apostle Paul, because the terms “in Christ, in Him, in the Lord, in God” are mentioned well over 160 times in his letters while the term “Christian” appears only three times, twice in the Book of Acts and once in 1 Peter. The one thing that most accurately describes or characterizes a man or woman as a follower of Christ in the New Testament scriptures is that of he or she being “in Christ.” To really appreciate and ultimately experience the blessings and benefits of being “in Christ” we must understand and accept what God means regarding the reality of “identification.” Identification, in this context, is ascribing to oneself the qualities, characteristics, and even the experiences of another person. To be “in Christ” God is ascribing to us the qualities, characteristics, and even some of

the actual experiences of Christ. Pause and think about that for a moment. If we are “in Christ” God views us exactly the same way He views His Son, Jesus. If you are like me, you are not just wanting to know the truths of God but by the help of the Holy Spirit you want to testify, like Paul, based on your own personal life experience, “... *in Him (Christ) we live and move and have our being...*” (Acts 17:28). In a moment we will begin to explore the scriptures that validate that this is indeed true.

When we read scripture we often unconsciously tend to interpret it through the lens of our own experiences and limitations rather than just focusing on the explicit words of God as recorded in the Scripture. We allow our natural minds to adjust the meaning of a particular scripture to make it fit into an interpretation that makes it reasonable to us rather than allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal truths that extend beyond our current knowledge and experience. God’s word is true to Him and for us whether or not we presently understand, believe, and accept it. Whether or not we believe and accept a truth in God’s mind makes it no less true. Our rationalized interpretation only keeps us from experiencing the life-changing blessing of such a truth in our lives. Let’s consider the following scripture: “*But of Him (God) you are **in Christ Jesus**, who became for us wisdom from God - and righteousness and sanctification and redemption*” (1 Corinthians 1:30). How do we get “in Christ Jesus?”

First of all, even our initial acceptance of Christ as our Savior is of God, the Father. *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day”* (John 6:44). Of course, for our part, we come to be “in Christ” when we accept Him as Savior and Lord, but it all starts with God. What does it mean to be “in Christ.” It is not like being inside of Christ the way someone would be inside a room or a hammer would be inside a toolbox. Being in Christ is being united to Him like a branch is united to and part of a tree or an arm or leg is an integral part of a human body or a husband and wife having become one flesh. To be “in Christ” is to be completely identified with Him. Before God begins His great sanctifying work of shaping us into the image of Christ, He first places us in the same position as Christ. *“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”* (Ephesians 2:4-6). You can see why it is sometimes hard to believe and accept the things that are true to God. He raised us right out of the grave of our sins and seated us together in heavenly places “in Christ Jesus.” May somehow the Holy Spirit enables us to experience the astounding truth of the security that is ours every day of our lives “in Christ.”

We are never more our truest selves than who we actually are in Christ. It may be hard for us to believe that even though it is absolutely true. Let me give you an example: Take a perfectly white bed sheet, hang it on the wall, then take a black magic marker and paint a small black dot on the sheet, then ask people what they see. Almost everyone will say, “I see a black dot.” The overwhelmingly larger portion of the wall hanging is a white sheet, not the black dot. Think of your life “in Christ” as the white sheet. Sure, you are battling with some besetting sins, but these no longer define your life. When God looks at you He sees the white sheet of Christ. *“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God”* (Colossians 3:3). Our truest self is not the person we tend to see as one who is constantly battling besetting sins but is the self that is hidden with Christ in God. We cannot successfully battle those besetting sins unless we know we have a secure position in Christ. Paul said, *“I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of me”* (Philippians 3:12). Christ Jesus laid hold of us first and placed us in Himself. It is from that position we press on to overcome sin, the world, and the devil. May the Holy Spirit help us to know and see ourselves in this position. Paul said in Romans 8:1, *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”* This says to me that we cannot walk by the Spirit until we have the security of knowing that being “in Christ” means there is no condemnation to us. Trying to walk by the Spirit while still feeling that we are under condemnation is like trying to kindle a fire underwater. The harder you try, the more discouraged you become.

How do we get to this place of “no condemnation in Christ?” In the realm of the Spirit, we undergo a process ordained by God which results in our identification with Christ. It may happen in an instant as far as our concept of time is concerned, but it still occurs in a series of experiences that we undergo in Christ. Consider the following scripture: *“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. For if we have been united together*

*in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 6:3-11). God ascribes to us the very experiences of death, burial, and resurrection as Christ experienced. We can, like Paul, come to the reasonable conclusion that we are dead to sin and alive to God “in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:11). We can also declare as did Paul, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new”* (2 Corinthians 5:17). If you are “in Christ” all these things are true of you too. What are some of the other benefits that are ours “in Christ?”

### Wisdom from God

*“But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God.....”* (1 Corinthians 1:30). *“That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* (Colossians 2:2-3).

### Sanctification

*“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours”* (1 Corinthians 1:2). *“But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us .....sanctification”* (1 Corinthians 1:30).

### Redemption

*“Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 3:24). *“But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us .....redemption”* (1 Corinthians 1:30). *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace”* (Ephesians 1:7).

### Unity in Christ

*“So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another”* (Romans 12:5). *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Galatians 3:28).

I could go on and on listing the benefits we have “in Christ”: eternal life (Romans 6:23), made alive (1 Corinthians 15:22, Ephesians 2:5), triumph (2 Corinthians 2:14), created for good works (Ephesians 2:10), brought near (Ephesians 2:13), strong in grace (2 Timothy 2:1), faith (2 Timothy 3:15), peace (1 Peter 5:14), preserved (Jude 1:1). You see, Christ is not an instrument that God used to repair all the problems man has caused. He did not come just to be a bridge over the chasm between us and God although that is all true. He came not only to make a way for us to be saved but to be our salvation and to unite us inextricably to Himself. *“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate*



*us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:38-39, KJV).

All the benefits we have “in Christ” are ours after we are saved, but God is far from finished with us at that point. Romans 8 is such a critical chapter in the New Testament because it is here that we see the intersection of being “in Christ” and having “Christ in us” by the Holy Spirit. To walk in the Spirit we must first know that we are “in Christ.” I want you to see the verses, Romans 8:1 and 4 together: *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.....that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”* In verse 1, being “in Christ Jesus” is emphasized. We must see and accept the truth that there is no condemnation to us because we are “in Christ.” In verse 4 something being “fulfilled in us” is emphasized. What is it that God wants to put in us that enables us to have the righteous requirements of the law to actually be fulfilled in us?

See Romans 8:9-11: *“But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”* God puts “Christ in you” through the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit who will take you from not just being “in Christ” with all the characteristics of Christ ascribed to you but will transform you such that the characteristics of Christ will actually be formed in you. *“To them, God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory”* (Colossian 1:27). We will have the righteous requirements of the law fulfilled in us when Christ is completely formed in us. The following scripture comes to my mind often and helps me to remember that the Holy Spirit is not just trying to make me into a person who thinks, speaks, and acts like Christ, but He is rather in the process of literally forming Christ in me: *“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption”* (1 Corinthians 1:30, KJV).

So, we can see that not only does God want to place us “in Christ” but He also wants “Christ to be formed in us.” In my mind I visualize a portrait artist painting your portrait as you sit still for hours while he works. When he finishes it and you look at it for the first time, you might say, “That does not look like me; I don’t look that good.” Think of God as the portrait artist. As He paints your portrait, He, of course, looks at you so that He might capture your correct likeness. However, because you are “in Christ”, He cannot help but see you with the characteristics of Christ. If you were to see the portrait as He is painting it, you would think that what you see is not you at all. However, as God finishes the portrait, the Holy Spirit will be finishing His work in you. *“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is”* (1 John 3:2).

Having Christ in us by virtue of the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit enables us to walk in the Spirit in our everyday lives. *“As you, therefore, have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him”* (Colossians 2:6). Notice to whom Paul credits his daily walk: *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me*

*and gave Himself for me”* (Galatians 2:20). Oh that God would make this truth to be as real to us as it was to the apostle, Paul.

Being placed “in Christ” happens immediately upon salvation. We certainly have a measure of Christ in us when we are saved. *“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless indeed you are disqualified”* (2 Corinthians 13:3). However, having Christ completely formed in us is a process that takes place over a lifetime. *“My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you”* (Galatians 4:19).

*“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3:7-14).

Even at this point in Paul’s life, he admitted that the process of having Christ completely formed in him was not over yet. He still had a way to go, and so do we. *“And let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not”* (Galatians 6:9). .... *“being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 1:6). What is that prize, that thing for which Christ laid hold of Paul; what is that which we shall reap; what is that work that will be completed? I believe it is Christ, the Anointed One, being fully formed in us, the hope of glory.

To me, Colossians 3:1-17 seems to put all this together in a wonderful way. We will take it a section at a time. *“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory”* (Colossians 3:1-4). The apostle, Paul, is saying that we are Identified with Christ in His death, and therefore, our life is hidden with Christ in God. Since we are also raised with Christ from the dead, we should set our minds on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Remember that Ephesians 2:6 tells us that we were raised up together and made to sit together in the heavenly places, “in Christ.” Paul also tells us that Christ is appearing in us. How could we not have our minds set on things above?

For some reason, our minds still tend to drift down to the things on earth, so Paul tells us what we must do about that. *“Therefore, put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since*

*you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all* (Colossians 3:5-11). This passage begins with "Therefore." This is saying that what is true in the preceding verses 1-4, now that with the resources that we have "in Christ" and the presence of "Christ in us" within us is the power to kill our earthly impulses. In addition, we can put off anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language, and lying to one another. This is one of those passages of Scripture that we must believe in order to achieve. If we will accept the truths of us being "in Christ" and having "Christ in us", earthly impulses will become detestable to us. As Christ hates those things, He will cause us to hate them. They will eventually wither and die like a plant whose taproot has been cut.

You see, the old Adam life is now really only a masquerade and disguise. It is no longer who we are in our truest selves. We have put on the new man. We have renewed knowledge which is now in the image of Christ who created us. There is nothing separating us from one another now; we are one in Christ, and Christ is all and in all. Oh, that we could see things the way God does, that we could believe what God believes. May we take God at His word and not rationalize that it is unattainable.

*"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful"* (Colossians 3:12-15). We are to clothe ourselves with the attributes of the "Second Man" (1 Corinthians 15:47): tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; being patient and forgiving of one another as Christ forgave us, and finally putting on love, which binds us together in the peace of God with thanksgiving.

*"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him"* (Colossians 3:16-17). When Christ is in us the word of Christ must, therefore, dwell in us in all of its richness. Martin Luther said in his work, "The Personal Prayer Book" that prayer should be preceded by allowing our thoughts and affections for God to be warmed for prayer by meditating on a passage of Scripture such as the words of Christ. He said we should allow them to instruct us, evoke in us praise and thanksgiving, cause in us an attitude of repentance, all leading to prayer that is pleasing to God (paraphrased by the author of this article). Finally, whatever we do or say, let it be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God, the Father, through Him.

In conclusion, may we be reminded that through our belief and acceptance of the finished work of Christ on the cross and in His resurrection from the grave, God has forgiven our sins and placed us "in Christ." When He looks at us He sees us inextricably grafted into Christ. May the Holy Spirit help us to see ourselves as God sees us, not as the self that struggles with the often besetting sins but as one who is of God, in Christ, who has become for us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (ref. 1 Corinthians 1:30). May we know undoubtedly that there is no condemnation for us who are "in Christ Jesus" (ref. Romans 8:1) unbound from the power of sin and free to walk according to the Spirit who God has placed within us (ref. Romans 8:4). Now by the working of the indwelling Holy Spirit, the person of Christ is being formed in us, "*Christ in you the hope of glory*" (Colossians 1:27).

At the beginning of this article, I told you that many Christians will read astounding passages of Scripture and rationalize an interpretation based on their own limited knowledge and experiences rather than allowing the Holy Spirit to expand their knowledge of the truths of God to lead them into the deeper experiences in Christ for which we all hunger. The scripture with which I will end this article has, for years, been one of those scriptures for me. However, in doing the study for this article, I have decided to no longer doubt God but, in this passage, to take Him at His word. I hope you will too. "*being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ*" (Philippians 1:6).†

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## SHARON STAR

The Sharon Star is a monthly publication and mailed as a free-will offering plan. The articles within are intended for inspiration and information to those who are interested in the unfolding revelation of the Word of God.

Published by:  
Global Missions Inc. in North Battleford,  
Saskatchewan, Canada.

The Sharon Star is found online at:  
www.globalmissionsinc.org/sharon-star

Publications Mail Agreement 40012206

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