

In Christ

By Al Felder

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3).

The New Testament is rich with verses that contain the phrase “in Christ”. It is a simple phrase, yet the depth of its meaning is endless. *“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8).* All that the world holds does not even come close to comparing to the riches and blessing in Christ. They are unsearchable the Bible says. We could preach a lifetime of sermons on this subject and only scratch the surface of its meaning. That being said, I want to introduce just a few thoughts on the subject.

The love of God is in Christ. *“³⁸For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, ³⁹Nor 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” (Rom. 8:38, 39).* These two verses have been a source of comfort and hope to many. In them we find that God’s love is great. His love is powerful. In fact, it is so powerful that no external force can separate us from it. Notice, if you will, that I said external force. Everything that is named are all external forces that would try and take us from God. There is nothing, no matter how strong or mighty it may be, that can be successful in this task. The one thing that is not mentioned in this verse, however, is ourselves. Only we can separate ourselves from the love of God by living a life of disobedience in sin.

God extended His love to all men when He sent His Son to this sin cursed world. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).* Yes, God extended His love to all men when He sent His Son, but only those “in Christ” are recipients of that love. Outside of Christ I cannot be benefited by God’s love.

Many people are familiar with the verse we just read, and it is frequently quoted. I am sure that you have heard people quote this verse and say, “whosoever believeth in him shall not perish.” However, the text says, “Whosoever believeth in him should not perish.” The word “should” is very important. In fact there are no unimportant words in the word of God. Every word was given by the Spirit and is significant. The word “should” is conditional, there is a possibility that something might not come to pass. The word “shall” is definite, it is absolute. With this in mind, it is easy to see how the entire meaning of the text can be lost if the word “should” is replaced. Those who believe in Christ should not perish, but it is possible.

Another passage of scripture can help us understand this further. *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned”* (Mark 16:16). The word shall is used in this verse. The Bible says, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” One must believe and obey in order to be saved. As long as I believe and obey God’s commands, I shall be saved. If, however, I fail to obey then I go back to should.

God, through His great and wonderful plan, sent His Son to die for the sins of man. God’s love was displayed on the cross. It is a sacrificial love.

“A young girl suffered from a rare and serious illness. Her only chance of recovery was to receive a blood transfusion from her five year old brother, who had survived the same disease and had developed the antibodies needed to combat the illness. The doctor explained the situation to the boy, and asked if he would be willing to give his blood to his sister. The boy hesitated for only a moment before taking a deep breath and saying, ‘Yes, I’ll do it if it will save sis.’

As the transfusion progressed, the boy lay in bed next to his sister and smiled seeing the color return to her cheeks. Then his face grew pale and his smile faded. He looked up at the doctor and asked with a trembling voice, ‘Will I start to die right away?’

You see, the boy had misunderstood the doctor. He thought that he was going to have to give her all of his blood. He was willing to give his life for hers.”

God’s love for man is even greater than this boy’s love for his sister. There was no misunderstanding between God and Christ concerning what was required of Him. He was beaten, abused, spat upon, mocked, humiliated, and nailed to the cross. Christ knew of all these things. Yet there was one requirement that was almost too much for Christ to bear, for a brief time the Father turned His back on the Son.

I believe that it is this very thing that caused Christ to say, *“If it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt”* (Matt. 26:39). The Bible teaches us about the second member of the Godhead prior to His incarnation. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”* (John 1:1). The Word has always been. He existed in His glorious state in eternity along with God and the Spirit. They are one as the Bible teaches. There is no earthly relationship that compares to the closeness that exists in this relationship. When Christ came to this world, He left this glorious state and became both God and man. He experienced everything that we do (pain, hunger, temptation, fear), yet He was without sin. As He was upon the cross the wrath of God towards the sins of man was poured out upon Him. It was at this time that He cried, *“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”* (Matt. 27:46) For the first time, the Father and the Son were separated because of the sin of man.

Also, unlike the little boy, Christ was not dying for family. He died for enemies of God. *“⁹Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,¹⁰Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And such were some of you”* (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Each one of us was an enemy of God outside of Christ. We were all guilty of sin. There are some sins in this list that we would probably like to cross out, but when we take into account the words of Christ, *“Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart”* (Matt. 5:28), we realize that there are probably fewer that we can cross out than we would like.

Salvation is in Christ. *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). Our only hope for salvation is in Christ. Salvation cannot be found in Mohammed, Buddha, or in the name of any other man. This is an unpopular message in our society, but the Bible is clear. Salvation is only in Christ.

I read an article recently about an organization that was started about thirty or forty years ago. I do not question the sincerity of its founder, but his actions were not according to the word of God. The organization to which I am referring is Campus Crusade for Christ. The article stated that the name Christ was going to be removed from the title. The reason that was given for this is that the name Christ is offensive to nonbelievers and believers. That is amazing. Those who claim to follow Christ are offended by his name. The article went on to say that having the name Christ associated with the organization prevents them from achieving their goal. Apparently, their goal is not the same as God’s. I believe that that is obvious from the fact that they created another body other than what God created. Salvation is only in Christ, if we do not believe this most essential truth from the word of God than we are wasting our time. There is none other name under heaven given whereby men must be saved.

God has chosen us in Christ. *“⁴According 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: ⁵Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will”* (Eph. 1:4, 5). The word chosen in this verse is the same as elect. We often hear about this word and are told that God chose or elected a certain number of people to salvation. In other words, if God did not choose you, you cannot choose Him. You are saved or lost by his decree and there is nothing that you can do.

The word predestinate as found in this verse is the key in helping us understand what the Bible really teaches on this subject. The word means to set boundaries in advance. When God predestinated, He set boundaries. This doctrine is illustrated perfectly by Christ in (John

10:1-9). The sheep fold is the boundary that God has set and there is only one door by which someone can enter that sheep fold. Christ is that door.

The sheep fold is the boundary which represents the Church. ²²*And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, ²³Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all* (Eph. 1:22, 23). The Bible states further that there is only one body in Ephesians 4:4. Salvation is only in Christ, in His body.

This election or predestination is not on an individual basis; rather it is a class of people. Those who obey Christ can be saved. *“And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all that obey him”* (Heb. 5:9). We continue to find that God’s invitation is open to all, not a select few who were handpicked.

This can be understood even clearer by looking at another passage. ¹²*That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: ¹³But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ”* (Eph. 2:12, 13). If salvation is on an individual basis and it is only in Christ, than these Christians to whom Paul is writing would have been chosen in Christ from the foundation of the world. Notice, however, prior to obeying the gospel they were without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world. God did not choose individuals, He chose the plan. He chose the type of person who would be saved, those in Christ.

Liberty is in Christ. *“And that because of false brethren unaware brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage”* (Gal. 2:4). What is the liberty that exists in Christ? It is freedom from sin and freedom to serve God. ¹⁶*Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? ¹⁷But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. ¹⁸Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness”* (Rom. 6:16-18). Outside of Christ there is no song we can sing or prayer we can pray that is acceptable to God. It is only in Christ that we can approach the Father. Outside of Christ we are the servants of sin. Only in Christ can we become the servants of righteousness.

“James Procter was an avowed atheist for most of his life. He was the president of an atheistic society in Manchester, England. It was during this time that he wrote the following words:

‘I’ve tried in vain a thousand ways my fears to quell, my hopes to raise. My soul is night, my heart is steel – I cannot see, I cannot feel.’

During a serious illness Procter questioned his unbelief in God and decided that he had been wrong. It was at this time that he finished his poem:

'I've tried in vain a thousand ways my fears to quell, my hopes to raise; But what I need, the Bible says, Is ever only Jesus. My soul is night, my heart is steel – I cannot see, I cannot feel; For light, for life I must appeal in simple faith to Jesus. He died, He lives, He reigns, He pleads; There's love in all his words and deeds; There's all a guilty sinner needs forever more in Jesus. Tho' some should sneer, and some should blame, I'll go with all my guilt and shame; I'll go to Him because His name, Above all names is Jesus.

Thus, we have the words to the song "In Jesus."

How it is with you, are you missing out on all that there is in Jesus? If so, the Bible tells us what one must do in order to be saved. You must hear, believe, repent, confess Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized for the remission of your sins. *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ"* (Gal. 3:27).