

CHIEF MINISTRIES

November 2017

Where are you right now as you read these words? Are you sitting on your favorite spot in the day room or chapel? Getting on a bus? Flying on a plane? Wherever you are physically, you are still here on earth - either on the ground or in the air - rather than in heaven. You are in a physical body, not a resurrected, spiritual body, and you are living in this world, not the world to come.

There is nothing controversial in my saying you're a human being living in this world. You need sleep every day. You need to eat. You may need money to pay bills. Whether you're married with children or single, your part of the cycle of life in our world. You might attend a funeral one day and see a baby being born the next because this is the nature of life here on planet Earth.

Yet, Paul wrote to the Ephesians, *"But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, made us alive together in Christ (by grace you have been saved), and He raised us up and seated us together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus"* (Ephesians 2:4-6). We just established that we're all living here on planet Earth. So, what does it mean to be "raised up" and "seated together in the heavenly places in Christ?"

This passage reflects our positional standing in Jesus. Right now, in Him, we are seated in the heavenly places. This is a spiritual reality, not a fantasy. These verses speak of an actual spiritual state, not an imaginary condition. As Paul explained in Colossians 3, *"If you then were raised with Christ, desire those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on earth. For you are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life shall appear, then you also shall appear with Him in glory"* (Colossians 3:1-4).

Notice carefully what the Apostle Paul wrote to these believers: you were raised with the Messiah; you are dead; your life is now hidden with the Messiah in God. At the same time, we are still here on this earth, we are still physically alive, and we still have to deal with earthly things. That's why Paul writes in the very next verse, *"Therefore put to death the parts of your earthly nature: sexual immorality, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry"* (Colossians 3:5). And that's why he continues exhorting the Colossians in practical terms: *"You also once walked in these when you lived in them. But now you must also put away all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie one to another, since you have put off the old nature with its deeds, and have embraced the new nature, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created it"* (versus 7-10).

Do you understand Paul's point? In Jesus we have been given a new nature, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created it (reread verses 7-10). Which Paul describes in Ephesians 4:24 as, *"created according to God in righteousness and true holiness."* But we still live in these bodies, in this fallen world, with minds that must be renewed. And so, we must "put off" the

old nature and “put on” the new nature. In other words, we must live out the spiritual realities here in this world.

This is a constant theme of the New Testament, which speaks of “already but not yet” spiritual realities. Failure to grasp the biblical tension of “already/not yet” is a failure to grasp the biblical grace, and Jesus Himself. The kingdom is now; the kingdom is not yet. I am saved; I am being saved. The hour has come; the hour is yet future. I am sanctified; I am being sanctified. I am a new creation; I await resurrection. I am now a child of God; I am exhorted - sometimes warned - to endure to the end. So, grace is both the virtue that saved me as a free gift and that governs me throughout the process of ongoing sanctification. But it never erases my free will or the call to be a faithful steward.

So, we are already redeemed (Ephesians 1:7) and we already have the Spirit, but at present the Spirit “is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession” (verse 14 NIV). We are already seated in heavenly places with Jesus (Ephesians 2:6), but at present we are living in earthly bodies, because of which we groan (2 Corinthians 5:2), so that what is mortal might be swallowed up by life (verse 4). We are already adopted as sons (Romans 8:15), but for now, we “groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (verse 23 ESV).

We have already died in sin and cannot live in it any longer (Romans 6:1-7), yet we must consider ourselves dead to sin and not let it rule our lives (Romans 6:11-19). We have already put off the old self and put on the new self (Ephesians 4:22-24), yet we are instructed to “put to death” and “put off” that which pertains to our earthly nature and “put on” that which pertains to our new self (Colossians 3:5-14 ESV). This is what is meant by “already and not yet.” And this is what I mean when I say “we have been sanctified, we are being sanctified, and we will be totally sanctified.” Our sanctification is positional (past), progressive (present), and perfect (future): Sanctification or Holiness of life is a threefold aspect: 1) Positional, which is passed through the work of Christ in our redemption, and confers upon the Christian a perfect position, as a child of God (Hebrews 10:10). 2) Progressive, which is the present work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, bringing one’s character development into conformity with his position in Christ, and this is experiential throughout one’s lifetime (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Colossians 1:28; 2 Peter 3:18). 3) Perfection, which is future and will be completed when the Christian arrives in heaven, and then his character behaviors will be as perfect as his position is in Christ (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13; Philippians 1:6; 1 John 3:2-3).

Some teachers reject the concept of “positional righteousness” or “positional holiness,” claiming that if our righteousness or holiness is positional, it is not real. But this is a false and un-biblical dichotomy. Spiritual realities are real, but they are not yet fully realized while we live in this body. We have one foot in this world and one foot in the world to come. We have died to sin, yet we still fight a battle with sin. (Anyone telling you that he or she no longer has to deal with sin - ever, in any form - is either lying to you or self-deceived.) That’s why Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:11, “*Dearly beloved, I implore you as aliens and refugees, abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul.*” (He would not have written this, nor would the New Testament authors have written many other related verses, if we were not in a battle.)

We have already been resurrected and raised up spiritually with Jesus, yet we eagerly await His appearing and our bodily resurrection. Our lives are now “*hidden with Christ in God*” (Colossians 3:3), yet we are living our lives openly in this world, seen by all. Both are simultaneously true, and the key is for these spiritual truths to so permeate our hearts and minds that we live them out here on earth.

Let's flesh this out by looking at Paul's teaching in Romans 6. Paul anticipated that his readers might misunderstand the message of grace which is why he wrote: *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may increase? God forbid! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Do you not know that we who were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him by baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."* (Romans 6:1-4)

I remember being baptized in water at the Brownsville Revival in Pensacola, Florida the Friday before Father's Day in 1997. Someone had made mention of how the water would be filthy after all of us were finished. For a moment, I thought filthy, really? I was shocked! Why? Then I realized it was a spiritual point: my sins which were many and were utterly filthy were now washed away, washed down the drain so to speak. As Ananias said to Saul/Paul, *"Rise, be baptized and wash away your sins, and call on the name of the Lord."* (Acts 22:16)

Baptism, then, symbolizes the washing away of our sins. As we go into the water and come back up out of the water, it symbolizes our dying to sin, with Jesus, and our rising in new life, with Jesus. All this is a spiritual reality and it speaks of our positional standing: we are dead to sin and raised up into new life. Now we must walk this reality out, since we are still living in physical bodies in this fallen world, a world in which Satan is still tempting and deceiving.

Paul continues, *"Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death has no further dominion over Him. For the death He died, He died to sin once for all, but the life He lives, He lives to God."* (Romans 6:8-10) What does this mean on a practical level? *"So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."* (Romans 6: 11-14)

Here Paul explains that since we are (positionally) dead to sin, we need to consider that to be a reality, since it sure doesn't feel like we are dead to sin. After all, the drunkard in the coffin is not tempted in any way with alcohol, nor is the physical body of a dead adulterer tempted with lust. In that sense, we have died to sin.

And that's exactly what Paul says has happened to us spiritually. We have already died to sin, just as surely as Jesus died on the cross, but we now have to take hold of that spiritual reality and live it out in the flesh. So, Paul tells us to consider ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God through Jesus, to *"not let sin reign"* in our mortal bodies, to *"not yield"* the parts of our body to sinful desires.

The battle is real and the victory is real! This is another example of "already but not yet" in the Bible. We have already been given complete and total victory over sin, but we have not yet experienced to totality of that victory in this world. If we had, there would never be temptation, sinful desires, or spiritual battles. In the same way, Satan was defeated at the cross, but we are still in a battle with him in this age. The key for us is to take hold of our spiritual standing - seated with Jesus in heavenly places, equipped with the authority of Jesus's name - and from that place of victory to wage spiritual war.

I would encourage you to take a moment and read the rest of Romans 6, where Paul teaches us how to live these things out, as well as Ephesians 4 – 6 and Colossians 3. These chapters combine the spiritual with the practical, the realities of the age to come with the realities of this present age, presenting a balanced picture of what it means to be a child of God and how the Lord requires us to live. I would also encourage you to read all of Paul’s letters carefully, looking for the phrase “in Christ” or “in Him,” where Paul describes exactly who we are and where we stand in Jesus.

A few verses from Ephesians 1 indicate how incredibly rich these truths are: *“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, to be holy and blameless before Him in love; He predestined us to adoption as sons to Himself through Jesus Christ according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace which He graciously bestowed on us in the beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood and the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace.”* (Ephesians 1:3 – 7)

Every good thing we have, we have in Jesus, and that is as true today as it ever will be. Yes, it’s all about His blood and His grace, and that will be our boast throughout our lives in this world and in the world to come. But that is only one very real part of the story.

The other very real part of the story is that we are still living on planet earth, which is why so much of the New Testament addresses how we are to live in this world. In keeping with that, Paul urges the Ephesians to take off their old nature, *“which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,”* and to put on our new nature, *“which was created according to God in righteousness and true holiness.”* (Ephesians 4:22, 24)

What exactly does this mean? It means that we stop lying and instead speak the truth; that we control our temper; that we give no place to the devil; that the thief stops stealing and instead works constructively; that we speak only edifying, life-giving words; that we not grieve the Holy Spirit. In short, *“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, outbursts, and blasphemies, with all malice, be taken away from you. And be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.”* (Versus 31 – 32).

This in fact, is just the beginning of Paul’s practical exhortation, which continues in the fifth chapter, where we are exhorted to be imitators of the Lord, to be holy in our conduct, to walk and live as children of light, to submit one to another - for husbands to give themselves to their wives as Christ did for the church, for wives to submit to their husbands as to the Lord - and, continuing into chapter six, for parents to lead their children rightly and for children to honor their parents. This is what it looks like when those seated in heavenly places in Jesus are still living here on this earth.

How then does God see us? Does he see us as righteous and holy, since as we have stated a number of times already, the moment we are born again, God declares us righteous and holy? Does He see us as perfect because we are now in Jesus, His perfect Son?

The answer to this is the answer to this whole chapter. It is yes and no, already and not yet. The Lord sees us as “righteous” in terms of being “not guilty.” He does not always see our conduct as righteous. He sees us as “holy” in terms of our being set apart as holy to Him. He does not always see our conduct as holy. We are already righteous and holy, but we are not yet fully righteous and holy.

That's why when Jesus speaks to the seven congregations in Asia Minor in Revelation 2 – 3, addressing each "angel" or the leader, He starts with these words: "*I know your works*" (Revelation 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15). This is then followed by a specific critique of the things that were wrong in these congregations, along with specific praise for the things that were right, with words of promise and encouragement for those who would repent.

Jesus did not see these congregations and their leaders as perfectly holy and righteous, in which case there would have been no place for correction. Nor would He have said to them, "*I know your works*." But He did see them as declared righteous by God and called to be holy, because of which He rebuked some for failing to live this out and commended others for being faithful in their calling.

Some modern grace teachers have misunderstood these truths, as if the positional realities are the only realities, as if we are always perfectly holy and righteous in God's sight, as if there is no battle to fight with sin since we have already died to it. Because of this error, these teachers sometimes ridicule those who hold to a more biblically balanced position as if we were in some kind of spiritual Stone Age. But rather than get into a spiritual war with those in error, let's focus on living out the truth. That will bring glory to God and gratification to our own souls.

Keep on working out your salvation with fear and trembling.

I'm praying for you.

Chief

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Christ's

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