

"In Christ."

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As there seems to be some confusion abroad in regard to the standing of the believer, we purpose briefly to examine it, in the hope of establishing some of our readers in the truth.

1. We ask then, in the first place, Is the believer's standing found in Rom. 5: 2? That he is there justified through faith, has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, is brought through Christ into the present enjoyment of God's favour, and rejoices in the hope of His glory, is plainly stated; but does all this — immense as are the blessings indicated — set forth the believer's standing? If so — for so far the believer has not died with Christ; we mean, thus far in the teaching of the epistle — he might still be in the flesh; for as yet it is only the question of sins, of guilt, that has been dealt with Abraham was equally justified with ourselves, and, though not brought into the same blessings, his standing would then be similar, similar in that he was also in the flesh. The difference, we apprehend, would lie rather in the character of his blessings. It is quite clear that we have in this scripture the believer's judicial position, or, to speak with greater accuracy, the position into which God in His grace has judicially brought him, consequent upon the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ; but we cannot accept this as giving us the truth of our standing.

2. Two scriptures seem to us to speak very distinctly on this subject. The Lord, speaking to His disciples, says, "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." (John 14: 20.) The apostle Paul writes, "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." (Rom. 8: 9.) Now it is evident that our Lord is speaking of the time after the coming of the Comforter, the One who should abide with His own for ever, dwelling with them and being in them. He adds, moreover, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live ye shall live also." It is then that He says, "At that day ye shall know," etc. This surely is Christianity — the Holy Ghost on earth and dwelling in the believer, and through this the believer able to apprehend the position of Christ, that He is in His Father, the believer in Christ, and Christ in the believer. So in Romans 8 there are three connected things — our being in Christ, the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, and Christ Himself in us. (vv. 1, 9, 10.) And in the ninth verse the apostle expressly contrasts the being in the flesh with being in the Spirit, the latter conditioned by the Spirit of God dwelling in us. If therefore it is true that every believer who has peace with God has the indwelling Spirit, and that every one such is "in Christ," we are forced to the conclusion that our standing is represented only by these words. According to the contrast drawn by the apostle every unbeliever is "in the flesh," and every believer is "in the Spirit;" also "in Christ," according to the first verse. (We do not here enter into an examination of the precise force of the expressions.) "In Christ," then, we understand to set forth the standing of every believer who has been sealed of God by the Holy Ghost. That there needs an experience and practical condition for the entering into and enjoyment of this blessed truth — that God now sees us, not in Adam, in the flesh, but in Christ

— is seen from the position of Romans 7 in relation to Rom. 6 and Rom. 8; but that is altogether another question.

3. Another thing should be observed. The term "in Christ" is not necessarily of the same force in Romans as in 2 Corinthians 5 and Ephesians; but it has to be expounded in each place in accordance with the distinctive teaching of the epistle. For example, "In Christ," in Ephesians 2: 6, undoubtedly implies union with Christ; but this could hardly be said of Rom. 8: 1, nor, indeed, of John 14: 20. As another has said, speaking of this last passage (we quote from memory, but, we think, correctly), "It is not union, but nature and life, and our place in that nature and life." In the same way God's righteousness has a different force in Rom. 3 from what it has in 2 Cor. 5: 21. In Romans it is "upon all them that believe," and this too in the place where those that believe are; but in 2 Cor. 5 we are made God's righteousness in Christ in the place where He is.

4. Again, if the standing of the believer is found in Rom. 5: 2, the relative significance of the place Christ occupies at the right hand of God is missed. With all reverence be it said that a man, Christ Jesus, though the eternal Son, is in the glory of God. And just because He is there as man, it is also our place, in the wonderful grace of God, according to His eternal counsels. It is not too much to say that Christianity cannot be understood apart from the recognition of the truth that Christ is glorified as man. This decides at once the question of the believer's standing. It cannot, on this very account, be lower than "in Christ" in the place where Christ is. That is the believer's standing now; by-and-by he will be conformed to that standing, for God has predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

5. Having then seen that our standing as believers can only be expressed by the term "in Christ," we freely admit, nay, insist upon, the fact that the believer's standing is ever the measure of his responsibility. But a right condition of soul is never begotten by contending for responsibility. It is grace that restores and establishes, and the more fully grace is understood and enjoyed, the more perfectly will the walk of the believer correspond with his standing. To know his standing is a condition for a right walk; but, even if the standing is known, the state will never be right as long as *the eyes of the believer are upon himself*. The danger, therefore, of the contention that "in Christ" is state or condition, and not standing, lies in the occupation of the believer with himself, and in his consequent efforts (always useless, because they suppose power on his part) to attain to a right condition of soul. The result is only legality.

6. To sum up, then, two things are to be noted. Through the work of Christ for us we are brought into a new position. We were under condemnation, but in virtue of His atoning sacrifice we now stand in the abiding favour of God. God who, in all that He is, was against us on account of our sins, is now for us on account of the efficacy of the precious blood. But this is not all. On the cross God dealt also with what we were, as well as with what we had done. We have been crucified with Christ, and thereby sin has been condemned in the flesh. (Gal. 2; Rom. 8.) But if the cross closes up the history of the first man in responsibility, Christ in resurrection has taken the place of the second man; and, consequently, every believer is brought, through the death and resurrection of Christ, into a new place before God. Now it is this new place, viz., "in Christ" (not now in Adam) that represents our standing.

We hope to return to the subject in a future number, if the Lord permit. E. D.