

## Standing, State, and Service

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(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 38, 1953-5, page 132.)

That the creature has been called into existence to serve the will and pleasure of the Creator is a statement that hardly requires proof, yet the fact is plainly stated in Scripture, when we read, "O Lord . . . Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4: 11). When this sinks into our hearts, we begin to realize how great is the havoc produced by sin, in that corner of the universe into which it has entered.

Now, sin is "lawlessness," as 1 John 3: 4 should read. It is the creature asserting itself against the Creator, declining to be subject, striking out to do its own will and pleasure. At the outset and for many centuries rebellious man was left to himself, when he lapsed into such a state of violence and corruption that the earth had to be cleansed by the flood. In the succeeding centuries conditions rapidly deteriorated, with the added menace of idolatry. This state of affairs God met by calling out one man, Abraham, and from him raising up a nation, that should be under His special instruction.

When He sent Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt, God said to him, "Ye shall **serve God** upon this mountain" (Ex. 3: 12). During the controversy with Pharaoh the word repeatedly was, "Let My people go, that they may **serve Me.**" And when the people were at Sinai, the word was, "Ye **shall serve** the Lord your God" (Ex. 23: 25). The law was given that the people might know God's will for them, and serve by obeying it.

But one thing the law was not designed to do. It did indeed give them a certain standing as the acknowledged people of God, but it could not produce within them that state, which would dispose them to obey. As the Apostle Paul writes, "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law" (Gal. 3: 21); and there is no righteousness in the creature save in obedience to the Creator. So, if we are to serve God, we must not only have an assured **standing** before Him but also be endowed with a spiritual **state**, which enables us to do His will.

What the law could not do or provide has reached those of us who have believed the Gospel of our salvation, and who have consequently been "sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1: 13) Let us observe how this is worked out in the Epistle to the Romans.

The opening verses of Romans 5 not only declare our justification by faith, in virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ, which means we are cleared from all imputation of guilt before the throne of God, but speak also of "this grace [or, favour] wherein we stand." Our standing is in the favour of God, but inasmuch as there is nothing appealing to sight, in us or about us, declaring this wonderful fact, we only at present have access into it by **faith**. When the Lord has come and we are glorified with Him the favour in which we stand will be manifest to the **sight** of all.

In the latter part of Romans 5, further light is cast upon this favour in which we stand. We have received reconciliation by our Lord Jesus Christ, and even beyond this, He has become to us a new Fountain of life. Before conversion we were just living in the natural life we had derived by generation from Adam; now we have been brought into that "justification of life," of which verse 18 speaks, and look forward to "reign in life by One, Jesus Christ" (verse 17). In short, our standing before God is now "in Christ Jesus," and it is so stated in Romans 8: 1. Our standing is of surpassing wonder; "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1: 6). Our service, then, without a doubt, must have an elevated character in keeping with it.

Consequently, we do not travel far into Romans 6 before we are confronted with the obligation to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6 : 4). We pass on into Romans 7 and find we are to serve in "newness of spirit." (Romans 7: 6). This is the obligation laid upon us, and the basis for it is found in the death and resurrection of Christ, both in Romans 6, and in the beginning of Romans 7. For us there is deliverance both from the service of sin and the bondage of the law. We have become "the servants of righteousness," and "servants to God."

This new and holy service is set before us as flowing from our new standing in Christ Jesus. This doubtless we all acknowledge, but at the same time we have to confess that at the outset we found ourselves painfully unable to serve as we desired. Hence the experience which the Apostle details for us in the latter part of Romans 7. The flesh is still in us and proves its strength, so that we have to say, "when I would do good, evil is present with me." To dwell upon this painful experience is not our present object, but rather to pass on into chapter 8, where is expounded the Christian **state**, that corresponds to and is connected with the Christian **standing**.

The deliverance which is at last found, by the "wretched man" of Romans 7, is "through Jesus Christ our Lord," but also it is wrought in the energy of the Spirit of God. The believer receives the Spirit in order that He may take control. Too often we think of Him only as One who comforts us and is a Helper in our infirmities. He is all this, but He is more. Just as Christ is our sovereign Lord on high so the Spirit holds sovereign rights within us. The word "law" in Romans 8: 2, has the significance it carries when we speak of "the laws of the universe," meaning thereby certain forces, ordained by the Creator, that exercise their power uniformly and constantly.

We have a new life — "life in Christ Jesus." But not only so, we have the Spirit, who gives energy to that life, indwelling us. And it is His controlling power that sets us free in experience and practice from the power of sin and death, that used to control us in our unconverted days, and that, apart from the control of the Spirit, would still work havoc in the life of service: to God to which we are dedicated.

In keeping with this, we find the further statement in Romans 8 that while "they that are in the flesh cannot please God," we are not "in the flesh, but in the Spirit," if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in us (Rom. 8 and 9). He indwells us that He may control us, giving us the capacity to walk in newness of life and serve in newness of spirit, producing thus within us a **state** that corresponds to our **standing** without. If "in Christ Jesus" expresses our standing, "in the Spirit " expresses our state.

The flesh still being in us, we may all too easily pander to it, and thus grieve the Holy Spirit by whom we are sealed to the day of redemption, and this to our spiritual loss. We may also lose the sense and confidence of our standing in Christ, also to our spiritual loss, but no failure of this sort on our side impairs what God has wrought in His wonderful grace. In Christ we stand, no matter what our feelings may be. If we sow to the flesh we shall of the flesh reap corruption, but the Spirit as the Comforter abides with us forever, and if we walk in the Spirit we shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. In Him we possess the power that enables us rightly to serve God.

Hence, though we have our service mentioned in Romans 6 and Romans 7, it is not until the proper Christian state is revealed, in Romans 8, that the thought of our service is unfolded in detail. Immediately we reach Romans 12 it comes before us. The first step is the presenting of our bodies as "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God," which is described as our "reasonable," or "intelligent" service.

For every one of us the body is the vehicle of thought, speech and action, but it is the Spirit of God who is to control us and not the body. The body is to be livingly devoted to God, as of old

sacrifices were devoted to Him in death; and, thus devoted, the ways of the world cease to form us, our very minds are renewed; and doing the will of God, we prove how good, acceptable and perfect that will is. The way of God is ever to work from the within to the without. The diversion from the way of the world to proving for oneself the good way of God, is not something imposed upon us from without, but something produced as the fruit of the renewing of the mind within.

The rest of Romans 12, together with Romans 13, Romans 14 and the early verses of Romans 15, all give us the various forms that the service of God may take, in regard to ourselves, our fellow-Christians, governments, and the world without generally. Romans 14: 18 may be taken as applying to all these forms of service, inasmuch as they all lead practically to "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," which is the outcome of the service of Christ.

The Christian standing being of so elevated a character, and the Christian state being so far in advance of what was possible before the work of Christ was accomplished and the Spirit was given to indwell believers, it is not surprising to find that the service opened out to us has a character about it that was not known in earlier days. Like the Thessalonians we serve "the living and true God," who has been revealed to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Be it remembered that though we distinguish between our standing and our state and consider them separately, we do not divide between them, as though it were possible to have one without the other. They go together. The entrance of sin shattered man's original standing before his Creator. It also disrupted him internally; his innocence was lost and sin began to reign in his mortal body. In the work of Christ and in the gift of the Spirit both these disasters have been met, and **much more than met.**

Let us see that in the grace and power of what God has thus effected our lives are devoted to the service of our Lord.