

# God in Three Persons—Knowing the Son

*‘What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!’* This famous old hymn was written in 1855, by a man whose life was rather tragic.<sup>1</sup> It has a rather sentimental bent and, in spite of being a bit dated, it certainly locks into a way of thinking which is common today. So often Jesus is presented as one with whom a ‘friendship’ is formed. There is nothing wrong with that, as a glimpse at John 15:13–15 will show, but it must be admitted that modern presentations rarely seem to rise above ‘mateship’ or even ‘Facebook’.

As we examine the New Testament, we will see that knowing the Son is far more than having a nodding acquaintance with him. The primary relationship established when we become believers is that of our adoption as sons or, as scripture also puts it, as children of God. But, if we know the Father then we have the Son (1 John 5:12). We do not *have* him as a possession but as one with whom we are intimate in the deepest and purest way: ‘we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ’ (1 John 1:3).

The fellowship with the Father *and* the Son is because it is impossible to know any member of the Trinity in isolation from the others. This is not an intellectual conundrum set for us, but the reality we are brought to: ‘And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent’ (John 17:3). Such knowledge is not of our own doing. We know the Son through the Father and we only know the Father because the Son ‘chooses to reveal him’ (Matt. 11:25–27). But, even if our words are somewhat inadequate, the expectation of the Scriptures is that a rich intimacy with the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is established. So 1 Corinthians 16:22: ‘If anyone does not love the Lord, let [them] be accursed’ (NASB).

## WHO IS THE SON?

The reason for this question is that we tend to make assumptions which sometimes lack evidence. Language is used which is sometimes wrong; for instance, there is the often-heard and doubtless pious expression in prayer: ‘We thank you that Jesus came to earth’. This sounds more like we think of Jesus as an ‘extra-terrestrial’ who landed, did certain things and then left for his home (planet) called ‘heaven’. This is not intended to demean those who pray this way. It is intended, at the least, to suggest that other people, without our experience of the work of Christ, may hear us and respond as they hear and respond to so many other stories.

In the Scriptures, the Son of God is the man (male person!) Jesus, whom we call ‘Christ’, which means that he was the Jewish Messiah. That is the starting point. Even in the Old Testament, sonship such as we are referring to is far more limited. As I understand it, this sonship is limited to the nation and to the king. So there is the instruction to Moses:

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/What\\_a\\_Friend\\_We\\_Have\\_in\\_Jesus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/What_a_Friend_We_Have_in_Jesus).

Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD: Israel is my firstborn son. <sup>23</sup> I said to you, “Let my son go that he may worship me.” But you refused to let him go; now I will kill your firstborn son’ (Exod. 4:22–23),

and the comment in Hosea:

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son (Hosea 11:1; cf. Jer. 31:20).

The king who is called ‘the Son’ is David:

I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you’ (Ps. 2:7; cf. Ps. 89:26–27).

David’s ‘offspring’ is also promised a place of sonship in 2 Samuel 7:14:<sup>2</sup>

I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings (2 Sam. 7:14; cf. 1 Chron. 17:13).

With such a limited background, we may understand the dramatic affect which meeting and knowing the man Jesus had on his disciples, especially with their role as apostles. Starting with Matthew’s gospel, we see that the first references on this level (i.e. other than as Mary’s baby son) look back to the statements of Hosea and Psalm 2 (Matt. 2:15; 3:17, followed the by the devil’s use of the Psalm 2 title in the temptations). We may conclude that Matthew is presenting Jesus as the fulfilment of Israel and as the true ‘Son of David’ (Matt. 12:23), especially as the phrase ‘son of’ may often indicate someone ‘having the character of’ (see John 17:12; 2 Thess. 2:3).<sup>3</sup>

Matthew’s gospel has three verses in chapter 27 which seem to identify Jesus as ‘the Son of God’ (they ‘seem to’ because only one does so specifically):

... and saying, ‘You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross’ (Matt. 27:40).

He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, ‘I am God’s Son’ (Matt. 27:43).

Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, ‘Truly this man was God’s Son!’ (Matt. 27:54).

If we just assume that this means ‘Jesus is God’, we may be doing Matthew an injustice. Twice previously Matthew has recorded a link between ‘Son of God’ and ‘Messiah’ or ‘Christ’:

Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God’ (Matt. 16:16).

But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, ‘I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God’ (Matt. 26:63).

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<sup>2</sup> This statement is somewhat enigmatic. Taken as a reference to the Messiah, the question concerning his iniquity remains unanswered. In Gen. 6:2, the reference to ‘the sons of God’ is puzzling, the context possibly indicating the moral deterioration of the godly line though Seth. Isaiah 9:6 speaks of a son to be born to ‘us’ (meaning Judah or all Israel, 9:1) but this sonship seems defined by that of David (9:7). A final use of ‘Son of God’ is in AV of Dan. 3:25, should better be translated ‘a son of the gods’.

<sup>3</sup> See also the phrase ‘children of’ as in Eph. 2:3, etc.

Of course that does not mean that Matthew might not believe in the deity of Christ; it only would mean that saying so was not his purpose.<sup>4</sup> What is more, if we only read Matthew, we might want to argue that the comment, ‘he said, “I am God’s Son”’, is not true. Nowhere in Matthew does Jesus say that. Jesus’ preferred title is ‘Son of man’, and that title certainly does not imply deity. It does imply humanity.<sup>5</sup>

It is the gospel of John which makes the issues clearer. The Son is the ‘only begotten’ and was also the eternal word. The Son of God, the Messiah, is far more than the Son of man, though that phrase is used on a number of occasions. He is the Son of man because he is the word become flesh. The stress in John’s gospel is that Jesus the man is the eternal word, present and active at and from creation because he was with the Father prior to creation.

His incarnation (i.e. his becoming flesh) did not mean that he became Son at that point. He was always the Son, just as the Father was ‘the everlasting Father’ (Isa. 9:6). As we saw in the previous chapter, he was incarnate in order to make known the Father, but this was in a particular context, namely that of atonement. He came as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). His work in this regard meant that he must be present as the lifted up serpent in the wilderness (John 3:14; 12:32). His coming to bestow the Spirit (John 1:33, 14–16; 20:22) was the bringing into being the new creation in himself. It is his breath that transforms the disciples and sets them on the path which he has marked out; namely, the forgiveness of sins (John 20:22–23). His sonship now determines the life and ministry of his disciples (John 20:21).

Jesus’ humanity was a real humanity. He was not God in the guise of a human being. Scripture does not define the inner being of the word become flesh, that task was taken up and never adequately completed by the church throughout the centuries. Prior to the statements concerning the triune nature of the one God, there were many ‘discussions’ which attempted to define the nature(s) of Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

While these seemingly esoteric questions are not answered in the Scriptures, there is an answer there which we should observe. It is Jesus’ choice of the title ‘Son of man’ for himself. My reason for saying this is, briefly, that the title is drawn from Daniel 7:13 (cf. Ps. 8:4) and there the context points to the restoration of humanity in him. In this great program we understand that God has chosen and used Israel to bring the Messiah to the world, ‘in order that the world might be saved through him’ (John 3:17). The apostles have taken this up by drawing repeated distinctions between those in Adam and those in Christ. Their language is occasionally explicit (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15)

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<sup>4</sup> I have said elsewhere, and so will not detail it now, but it is my contention that the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, are, each in their own way, written as concluding documents for the Old Testament.

<sup>5</sup> The concluding verses of Matthew, known as the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20), contain the Trinitarian formula: ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .*’ (Matt. 28:19). I have no doubt concerning its truth, but a difficulty remains. These words seem out of place within the context and development of Matthew’s gospel and as a result there has been much discussion concerning them. I have sympathy with the discussion by C. K. Barrett, in *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition*, SPCK, London, 1947, 1966, pp. 102f. However, these verses do not affect the topic we are dealing with. They do, however, point us towards the later (i.e. later than the resurrection day) statements by Paul in Romans 6, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Christians should read their own history. If nothing else it might help us see that the questions we raise are not new but have been raised—and there have been answers given—many times over in the past 2000 years. Two books which may assist us are F. F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame*, Paternoster, Exeter, 1958 (pp. 245ff.) and N. R. Needham, *2000 Years of Christ’s Power: Part One—The Age of the Early Church Fathers*, Grace Publications, London, 1997 (pp. 263–86).

and occasionally implicit (e.g. Eph. 1:22; Phil. 2:6) but there is a strong understanding that ‘Son of God’ is not a title to be recited in some creed but is an essential matter if we are to understand who we are. Thus:

God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. 1:9).

Christians are not called to be armchair theologians but to be engaged in the great battles which are taking place around us. So it does make a great difference if we know who it is that determines our identity and our destiny.

## KNOWING THE SON

‘Do you not know . . .’ is a phrase that occurs some fifteen times in the New Testament. Two those statements are:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (Rom. 6:3).

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? (1 Cor. 6:15).

I suppose we should admit that there may be many ‘in Christ’ who do not know it. It may be a sad commentary on the church’s proclamation, but there it is. However, we can see in Paul’s argument that we should know! Part of the apostolic proclamation was (and is!) that we are intimately joined to Christ. The implications of that are immense.

## Our Calling

We have been *called* into the fellowship of God’s Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. We say this because our fellowship, our *koinōnia*, with Jesus Christ is often spoken of as deriving from our choice or decision (by whatever name). Hardly! As we said previously, when we were called we were taken as defeated rebels. Our will was *not* to respond but pure mercy came and our wills were changed (e.g. 1 Tim. 1:12–14).

Now, if the effective calling came from God, then it really makes little difference to us when that choice was made. As it is, the Scriptures are quite plain. We were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 1:4–5 puts it:

. . . he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.<sup>5</sup> He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will . . .

He destined us for adoption. However, also ‘before the foundation of the world’, the Father loved the Son (John 17:24). Romans 8:28–30 has it:

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.<sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.<sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

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<sup>7</sup> I think that were we to examine what it means to be chosen ‘in Christ’, i.e. in the Jewish Messiah, rather than to engage in debates about a philosophically described as ‘the doctrine of predestination’, much of the supposed problem with the doctrine may be minimised. See my paper, ‘Chosen in Christ’ in the 2001 Ministry School, *Christ’s Gospel to God’s World*.

The goal was conformity to the image of the Son. If we refer back to Romans 5:12–21, we will see that our previous conformity was to Adam. We were his ‘maleficiaries’ (the opposite of beneficiaries, I presume). Luke observed that Adam was the son of God (Luke 3:38), while Jesus is the new Adam, the new man, and we have been redeemed from our death existence and the authority of darkness in Adam and transferred into the kingdom of the Son of the Father’s love. This transference demanded that our sins be forgiven (Col. 1:12–14). But ‘since without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins’ (Heb. 9:22), there must be a death! And so we find that the lamb was slain from the foundation of the world<sup>8</sup> (Rev. 13:8; cf. Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:19–20).

Of course, what is also clear is that our calling was made evident when the gospel was preached. Without a doubt, there are some whose hearing the gospel was by their being in a Christian context over a long period of time, perhaps from birth, while others may have found themselves in a Christian group and gradually, even imperceptibly, became Christians. But according to Paul’s paragraph in Romans 8, ‘those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified’, all these items took place at a particular point in time.<sup>9</sup> That point in time was when we became one with the last Adam, the second man, ‘the man Christ Jesus’ (1 Tim. 2:5).

## Co-crucified

I do not think that the Scriptures spell out a timetable of when things took place, or in what order they should, but they do tell us how we come to know Christ. The preaching of the gospel is not a formula to be followed, but an event to be observed. Look what happens when we preach Jesus Christ and him crucified.<sup>10</sup> What I do think is that in the New Testament coming to Christ was associated with being baptised. It was not the act of baptism so much as the preaching of the gospel which was of major significance (1 Cor. 1:17–18) but, nonetheless, baptism was an event in the life of the believer which did convey amazing realities.

In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; <sup>12</sup> when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead (Col. 2:11–12).

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup> By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

<sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup> We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup> For whoever has

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<sup>8</sup> Those reading different translations may observe that this translation (AV, NIV) differs from that in the RSV and NRSV, which have: ‘everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered.’ Both are possible. Given the almost complete verbal parallel in Rev. 17:8 perhaps the NRSV is more probable. In practice, I doubt there is much difference.

<sup>9</sup> The verbs, predestined, called, justified and glorified, are all Aorist tenses, which in this context can mean nothing else than that it has happened!

<sup>10</sup> This is important, for if we do not see Christ in sovereign action in the proclamation, we may want to associate effective evangelism with our theological rationalisations.

died is freed from sin.<sup>8</sup> But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.<sup>9</sup> We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.<sup>10</sup> The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.<sup>11</sup> So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:1–11).

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ;<sup>20</sup> and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me . . .<sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal. 2:19–20; 5:24).

The Colossians passage probably has behind it some sort of Judaizing demand for circumcision. Paul's response was to declare that when the believer was baptised all those legal demands were fulfilled because Christ fulfilled them and we have been joined to Christ. The Galatians statement is a plain declaration that those who belong to Christ not only crucified the flesh, but also that the flesh remains crucified!<sup>11</sup> Their crucifixion, the judicial death demanded by the law of God if there is to be forgiveness of sins, took place when Christ was crucified. We were in him when he died. His death was our death.<sup>12</sup>

We must give attention to the Romans passage, though a detailed commentary is beyond our scope here. Paul is dealing with serious accusations. People were saying,

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<sup>11</sup> 'Have crucified' is a Greek perfect tense.

<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to see how Calvin and Luther commented on the Galatian statement. First Calvin (*The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, trans T. H. L. Parker, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1965, p. 106, italics in the text):

*And they that are Christ's.* He adds this to show that freedom belongs to all Christians, because they have renounced the flesh. Moreover, he reminds the Galatians what is true Christianity in relation to the life, lest they should profess themselves Christians falsely. The word *crucified* is used to indicate that the 'mortification of the flesh is the effect of Christ's cross. This work does not belong to man, but it is by the grace of Christ that we have been planted into the fellowship of Christ's death, so that we might no longer live to ourselves (Rom. 6.5). If, by true self-denial and the destruction of the old man, we are buried with Christ, we shall enjoy the privilege of the sons of God. Not that the flesh is entirely destroyed, but it ought not to exercise dominion but should yield to the Spirit.

The *flesh* and its *lusts* are put for the root and the fruits. The flesh itself is the depravity of corrupt nature, from which all evils proceed. Now it is clear that the members of Christ are injured if they are still held in bondage to the law, from which all who have been regenerated by His Spirit are set free.

Then Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (James Clarke & Co, London, 1953, pp. 526f.):

This whole place concerning works, sheweth that the true believers are no hypocrites. Therefore let no man deceive himself; for whosoever, saith he, pertain unto Christ, have crucified the flesh with all the vices and lusts thereof. For the saints, inasmuch as they have not yet utterly put off the corrupt [and sinful] flesh, are inclined to sin, and do neither fear nor love God so perfectly as they ought to do. Also they be provoked to anger, to envy, to impatience, to carnal lust, and such-like motions, which notwithstanding they accomplish not; for (as Paul here saith) they crucify the flesh with all the passions and vices thereof. Which thing they do, not only when they repress the wantonness of the flesh with fasting and other exercises, but also (as Paul said before) when they walk according to the Spirit: that is, when they being admonished by threatenings of God, whereby he sheweth that he will severely punish sin, are afraid to commit sin; also when they being armed with the Word of God, with faith and with prayer, do not obey, the lusts of the flesh.

When they resist the flesh after this manner they nail it to the cross with the affections and desires thereof, so that although the flesh be yet alive, yet can it not perform that which it would do, forasmuch as it is bound both hand and foot, and fast nailed to the cross. The faithful then so long as they live here do crucify the flesh; that is to say, they, feel the lusts thereof, but they obey them not. For they being furnished with the armour of God, that is, with faith hope and the sword of the Spirit, do resist the flesh; and with these spiritual nails they fasten the same unto the cross, so that it is constrained to be subject to the Spirit. Afterwards when they die, they put it off wholly: and when they shall rise again from death to life, they shall have a pure and uncorrupt flesh without all affections and lusts.

Both men took sin in the believer seriously!

and they still do say, that if justification is by grace then do what you please. His response was strong. ‘Do you not know’ means that the readers ought to have known what has happened to them. Presumably the gospel they received was extensively taught. Paul himself stayed in some places for a considerable time, for instance he stayed eighteen months in Corinth (Acts 18:11) and over two years in Ephesus (Acts 19:8, 10) and Priscilla and Aquila were also able to teach ‘more accurately’ (Acts 18:26).

Baptism was a focal point in the whole action of conversion.<sup>13</sup> The passage from Romans 6 (above) deserves our careful attention, since Paul commences his rebuttal of the accusation that sin does not matter since we are saved entirely by grace, by pointing to our baptism. We were baptised into Christ Jesus and so became one with him in his death. The soul that sins it shall surely die (Ezek. 18:4, 20). It must die if there is to be peace in the conscience. ‘Nothing will satisfy the conscience of man which does not first satisfy the conscience of God’.<sup>14</sup> Mere ethical behavior will not satisfy either us or God because the matter requires not expiation but propitiation:

For we have lost the sense of sin, which is the central issue of all ethic because it turns on the relation of the conscience to the conscience of God. And apart from sin grace has little meaning.<sup>15</sup>

It is not simply a redemption we need. If Christ had come to perform a certain work of redemption, and then had ceased to be; if He had come to satisfy a divine justice with a holy victim, and had then passed into nothingness after satisfying the conditions and leaving the way free for God’s love to go forth; if He had come to perform certain preliminaries of our salvation, and not for ever to be our Salvation—then we should have had in Him neither the Redemption nor Salvation that we need. We need a living Redeemer to take each one of us to God, to be for every one to-day all that He could have been upon earth to any one in that great yesterday, and to be for ever what He is to-day. We need a living Redeemer to plead for us in God, not against God, but against our accusing conscience, to be our Advocate with the Father against our self-condemnation. We need Him as the human conscience of God to come to our rescue against our conscience—and the more so as our conscience is quickened, socialised, exalted, and aggravated by solidarity with all the damnation of the world. Conscience makes us men and heroes. Yes, but it is conscience, too, that mocks our manhood with the memory of our sin, our neighbour’s, and our kind’s. If we were left alone with our conscience it would do more, on the whole, to overwhelm us than to redeem us or support us. We need some surety more sure and merciful and universal than our conscience. We need something more worthy than our natural moral manhood. We need to be made ‘more sure that we are Christ’s than that we are men’, more the servants of Christ’s conscience than the heroes of our own, more penitents than stalwarts, more saints than iron-sides. That is our need of a Redeemer, of a living human Redeemer, a moral owner and King, a living Christ, a Lord and Master more immortal than ourselves, and the root of all that makes our immortality other than a burden. We need a living Redeemer. We need Him for a living faith. And we need Him, as I have already said, *for a living God*—for the reality of a living God.<sup>16</sup>

It is by the conscience that mankind is one by its witness of the one power over it; and Christ gathers up the conscience of the race, and, in His own Soul, sets it in the active light of the conscience of God. To a holy God the salvation of the world’s evil soul is a matter of conscience.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See my paper, ‘Something New Is Here’ in *Baptised into Christ Jesus*, 2009 Ministry School, NCPI, Blackwood, p. 2.9. The whole 2009 school looked at the topic of baptism and is highly recommended.

<sup>14</sup> Attributed to P. T. Forsyth.

<sup>15</sup> P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, NCPI, Blackwood 1994, pp. 31f.

<sup>16</sup> P. T. Forsyth, ‘The Living Christ’ in *God the Holy Father*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1987, pp. 92f.

<sup>17</sup> P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1988, p. 187.

What we discover in our baptism is that we as a race were joined to Christ. We were in Adam, not just as individuals but as a race. It was a race that we deserved to die. So Romans 6:6: ‘We know that our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin’. Most modern translations have something like ‘our old self’, but Paul said ‘our old *man*’ and that surely makes perfect sense in the light of his argument in Romans 5:12–21: ‘one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all’ (5:18). That act by one man, Jesus Christ, was his taking Adam into himself and bearing the judgement of God’s holiness in himself. Christ can have no blemished bride:

What Christ presented to God for His complete joy and satisfaction was a perfect racial obedience. It was not the perfect obedience of a saintly unit of the race. It was a racial holiness. God’s holiness found itself again in the humbled holiness of Christ’s ‘public person.’ He presented before God a race He created for holiness.<sup>18</sup>

Created for holiness (cf. Eph. 2:10) means that those in Christ are now free to stand before the Father without guilt. They are holy and blameless before him. Through the law they have died to the law. The law condemned us in Christ and judged us in Christ so that we are now free from the law as a condemning, judging power. No longer do we want to be free from the law as the expression of the beautiful holiness of God since we are now set for participation in that holiness (2 Pet. 1:3–4). Seeing Christ therefore on the cross, we see ourselves and so we can ‘logically’<sup>19</sup> reach only one conclusion:

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:11).

## Co-Buried

Mark Twain once said, ‘The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated’.<sup>20</sup> In relation to our topic, I suggest that such a comment is more likely to be on the lips of the great accuser, the deceiver of the whole world. Romans 6:6, after declaring the death of Adam, and so of all those in him, adds: ‘so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin’. It would not take too much for us to doubt this. Our own flesh seems intent on denying the conclusion that we have died to sin.

How can we counter the accusation that we are still guilty? Actually, the reports of our death are *not* greatly exaggerated at all. In fact there is good evidence to the contrary. That evidence lies in our baptism. Romans 6:4 says: ‘we have been buried with him by baptism into death’ and Colossians 2:12: ‘you were buried with him in baptism’. ‘Buried with him’ could be ‘co-buried with him’. The verb means ‘to honor with funeral rites’.<sup>21</sup> The only ones to be so honored are those who are dead. It would make little difference how old we were; all that matters is that this baptism is the expression of our burial. Perhaps this is the reason why Paul not only says ‘that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures’ (1 Cor. 15:3) but then he also adds

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<sup>18</sup> P. T. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1994, p. 129.

<sup>19</sup> The Greek word for ‘consider’ in Rom. 6:11 is λογίζεσθε (*logizesthe*) from λογίζομαι (*logizomai*) which means ‘to count, reckon, calculate’ etc.—i.e. we take into account what has been presented and see the result.

<sup>20</sup> *Everyman’s Dictionary of Quotations and Proverbs*, D. C. Browning (compiler), Dent, London, 1951, p. 385.

<sup>21</sup> Liddell and Scott.



(v. 4): ‘and that he was buried’. His death was a real death: he was buried. So, therefore, was ours.

## Co-Raised

If Jesus’ death was real, as evidenced by his burial, so was his resurrection:

... and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,<sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.<sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died.<sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.<sup>8</sup> Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me (1 Cor. 15:4–8).

Now if we were in him in his death and burial, we were also in him when he was raised from the dead. So Colossians 2:12:

... you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

The proclamation of ‘Jesus and the resurrection’ (Acts 17:18) was, therefore, more than a matter of history. The apostolic question was not ‘who moved the stone?’ but ‘don’t you see the implications for fallen humanity if Jesus was indeed raised from the dead?’:

Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.<sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his (Rom. 6:4–5).

We have not yet been raised from the dead. We are still in this body of death (Rom. 7:24). Our outer nature is wasting away (2 Cor. 4:16—live with it!). Our hope is for the resurrection of *our* bodies. Christ’s resurrection is the guarantee of that (1 Cor. 15), so our hope is not embarrassing (Rom. 5:5). The gift of the Spirit, poured out by the risen Jesus (Acts 2:33), sets us securely into that:

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.<sup>10</sup> But *if Christ is in you*, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.<sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you (Rom. 8:9–11).

To have the Spirit of God is to have Christ in us. So we have this hope:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.<sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God;<sup>20</sup> for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope<sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.<sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now;<sup>23</sup> and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:18–23).

We can go further. Not only do we have hope, are we saved in hope, but also there is a reality now, known by faith alone to be sure, but a reality nonetheless. That reality is ‘the

power of his resurrection' (Phil. 3:10). We have been made alive together with Christ and we are seated with him in his exaltation in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:5–6).<sup>22</sup> There is a man on the throne now, and as we were once in the first man, Adam, so now we are in the last Adam. The holy city is secure in heaven (Rev. 21:2; Col. 3:3). If that is so, then nothing can separate us from the Love of God in Christ. And to see us through to that goal, then we must see that it is not some pious expectation we have but it is *Christ himself in us* who is the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). We note again, then, Romans 6:4:

Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Newness of life in us—now. Resurrection for us—then. But Christ's resurrection is the power in us now. It is the fact of us being united with him in his death, burial and resurrection that means that we have his life and his reign over history in us. No wonder Paul said:

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death,<sup>11</sup> if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead (Phil. 3:10–11).

The route we may have to follow in order to attain to the resurrection from the dead may not be clear (the 'somehow' of verse 11). But what matters is that the power of Christ's resurrection is controlling all history and is to be known.

## CHRIST IN US

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ;<sup>20</sup> and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:19–20).

Our life is a life of faith. That means that we stand only on the word of God to us. That word is more than just on paper. It is the living word of the living saviour to each one and to all of us in him. *Christ lives in me, in us, and we live in him.* This not a guarantee that we will be personally successful in what we do, simply that we will reach the goal he has established. Of course it is also our confidence that if he tells us what to do, then we can and must do it because he is the one at work within us.

It is the power at work within us that is significant. That power is the power by which God raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:20). Hence Paul's benediction:

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine,<sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen (Eph. 3:20–21),

and the command:

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him,<sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving (Col. 2:6–7).

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<sup>22</sup> I urge you to download and listen to or watch the 2011 Summer School session by Brian Arthur. It is available from <<http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=1311173732>>.