

THE TRUTH AS IT IS IN CHRIST

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One of the great challenges that faces the Christian Church today is how can God justify the ungodly [Romans 4:5] and still maintain His integrity to His holy law which condemns sinners [Galatians 3:10]? Because no law will allow an innocent person to die for the crime of a guilty one many sincere people, especially Islamic scholars, accuse Christianity of being an unethical religion. Their main argument is that the doctrine of substitution, as taught by Christianity, is based on a faulty Roman law which allowed an innocent man, Christ, to die in place of the guilty human race. Hence they accuse the Christians religion of “legal fiction.”

It is true that even the law of God clearly prohibits an innocent man dying for the guilty — “the soul that sins, it must die” [Deuteronomy 24:16; Ezekiel 18:1-20 emphasis supplied]. What then is the Biblical solution to the problem of “legal fiction.” The answer is the in Christ motif or idea, the central theme of the apostle Paul’s theology.

There is a key phrase that runs through Paul’s epistles. If you were to take this phrase out, there would be very little left of Paul’s exposition of the gospel. This recurring phrase is the expression in Christ or in Christ Jesus. This phrase is sometimes expressed by other similar phrases, such as, in Him, by Him, through Him, in the Beloved, together with Him, etc. These are all synonymous terms implying the in Christ motif.

The truth behind this phrase was first introduced by Christ Himself, when He told His disciples to “abide in me.” These are the undergirding words of the gospel. And if we don’t understand what the New Testament means by this expression in Christ, we will never be able to fully understand the incredible good news of the gospel.

There is nothing we have as Christians except we have it in Christ. Everything we enjoy and hope for, as believers, i.e., the peace through justification by faith, the Holy Spirit power to live holy lives through the experience of sanctification, and the blessed hope of glorification, is ours always in Christ. Outside of Him we have nothing but sin, condemnation, and death.

The expression in Christ, however, is a rather difficult phrase to understand. Just as “you must be born again” was mind-boggling to Nicodemus; so likewise, the concept of in Christ is a very difficult idea for us to understand. This is especially true of the western mind. How can I, as an individual, be in someone else? Worse still, how could I, born in the twentieth century, have been in Christ who lived almost 2000 years ago? This makes absolutely no sense to our western way of thinking. As a result we miss the full blessing that God has prepared for us in Christ.

What does Scripture mean when it tells us that we were together with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, and now, are sitting with Him in heavenly places [Ephesians 2:5-6]? Because we cannot fathom these facts we tend to ignore or skim over them. Yet

the whole understanding of the gospel hinges on our understanding the significance of these two vital words in Christ.

The in Christ motif or idea is based on the biblical idea of solidarity or corporate oneness. Therefore, if we are to come to grips with this phrase we must first understand what the Bible has to say about solidarity. Two New Testament texts help us understand Biblical solidarity. The first is Romans 9:12, a quotation taken from Genesis 25:23 — the twins, Esau and Jacob, represent two nations, not individuals. The second is Hebrews 7:7-10 — Levi paid tithe to Melchizedek in Abraham, since he was “in the loins” of his great grandfather Abraham when he paid tithe to Melchizedek.

Because the Bible teaches that the human race is the multiplication of Adam’s life the fundamental truth of Scripture is:

God created all men in one man — i.e., in Adam [Acts 17:26].

Satan ruined all men in one man — i.e., in Adam [Romans 5:12, 18a].

God redeemed all men in one man — i.e., in Christ [Titus 2:11; 1 John 2:2].

In order to save fallen humanity, God had to first qualify Christ to be our substitute so that He could live and die in our place. God did this by uniting Christ’s divinity to our corporate humanity, that needed redeeming, in the incarnation. This is the in Christ motif [see

1 Corinthians 1:30]. Through this union Christ became the second or last Adam (the word adam in Hebrew has a collective significance and means mankind).

As our substitute and representative Christ had to meet the full demands of the law in order to save fallen humanity. By His perfect obedience Christ met the positive demands of the law, and by His death He met the justice of the law. Thus, in this doing and dying He legally justified all men and became humanity's Savior [Romans 5:18; Ephesians 2:5-6]. Just as in Adam all die, likewise Scripture declares that in Christ all shall live [1 Corinthians 15:21-22].

Because God created man with a free will, Christ's identity with us has to be reciprocal to make the legal justification He obtained for all men effective individually. This is what justification by faith is all about. Faith is the channel or instrument by which the believer accepts his or her united with Christ and Him crucified (Galatians 2:19-20). This two-sided union — You in Christ and Christ in you — is what constitutes true Christianity and man's only hope of salvation: standing legally just before God's holy law [Romans 10:4].

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