

IN OR OUT?

"I knew a man in Christ." II Corinthians 12:2.

This sermon title is very brief, but there are two very important words in it. Both are prepositions and are among the shortest words in our language, "in" and "out." Short as they are, they express the condition of every soul in the world in his relation to the Lord. He is "in Christ" or "out of Christ." As to our text, it was not very important to Paul whether he was in or out of the body so far as the revelation which God gave him was concerned, but it was most essential for him to know whether he was in or out of Christ. "I knew a man in Christ." This is what he wanted to stress. The one who had been let down in a basket was lifted up gloriously in a vision, and it was because he was "in Christ."

We must always bear in mind that God makes a difference between men, and the difference is marked by the preposition we face. Men are either "in Christ" or "out of Christ."

Someone may ask, "What does it mean to be out of Christ?" This is a good question and deserves a careful answer. The only satisfactory answer will be found in the Word of God. Here is a plain statement of the sinner's state, "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." Ephesians 2:12. He is Christless because he is out of Christ, friendless because he is an alien, homeless because a stranger, hopeless because there is no foundation upon which to base a hope, and Godless because he can only be approached through Christ.

He may be in good moral standing among his fellow citizens, or even a member of the church, but being in Christ is the all-essential thing. If he is without Christ, all is lost, and he is utterly without hope. "No hope" is written on the faces of multitudes. They are "without Christ," therefore, without hope of any sort. It is not an attractive picture, but it is impossible to paint one when the conditions are unattractive. There is nothing attractive for the physician when he has to tell a patient the extremity of his physical condition when he is in the grip of a horrible disease. In the judgment of the world a man's moral and respectable life ought to count with God and he should be regarded as being "in Christ," but the scriptures teach otherwise.

For a soul to be without Christ is to be outside of Him. Christ is the ship, as it were, and all else is sea, and how dreadful the sea aside from the ship! He is the ark of safety and all else is the awful storm of judgment. "He that believeth not is condemned already." This is the reason why we sing:

"Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save."

To be without Christ is to be without light. "And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them." John 6:17. "He then having received the sop, went immediately out: and it was night." John 13:30. Jesus declared that He is the light of the world, and to refuse Him is to be in the blackness of darkness. There need not be any guesswork as to one's spiritual condition. According to these two prepositions--in or out--every soul is bound for heaven or hell. The marvel of sin is the ruin it works, and the mark of grace is the glorious transformation it produces. It all depends on whether a man is "in Christ" or "out of Christ."

Let us recount the riches of grace or the incorruptible treasures which belong to the man "in Christ." If a man is in Christ he has certain possessions which are invaluable. Among them are the following:

I. A Life That Can Never Be Forfeited.

The life to which I refer is that which comes from God as a gift. Christ said, "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." John 10:28. The real life is that which is spiritual. Outside of this gift people exist but do not live. The life promised in this great text is unconditional. There are two great classes of promises in the Word of God. Some of these promises are unconditional and others are conditional. Certain blessings are promised to the children of God if they meet certain conditions, but in this passage, concerning the gift of eternal life, not a single condition is laid down. It is an unconditional promise. Promises pertaining to Christian experience are conditional, but those that pertain to real Christian living are not.

II. A Relationship That Can Never Be Broken.

How clear the Word of God is at this point! When a person becomes a Christian an eternal sonship is established, and who ever heard of sonship coming to an end? It is impossible by the nature of the case. In Galatians 3:26 we read, "For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." This is the work of the Holy Spirit. No one ever became a child of God by his own power. We are begotten from above. Ecclesiastes 3:14 reads as follows: "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him." This relationship which is eternally secure has not been established that men may abuse it and find in it a license to do whatsoever they please, but to "fear before Him." Since it is a divine work, we can be "confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Philippians 1:6.

One cannot educate himself into this relationship. It is of God. One cannot work himself into this relationship. Its origin is outside of himself. One cannot live himself into this relationship. He is dead in trespasses and sins and has no ability to bring it about. One cannot imagine himself into it, because it must be accepted in simple faith on the basis of what the Word of God teaches. Even so, let us remember that we cannot disobey ourselves out of this relationship. No one can go from His salvation back to a lost condition. Disobedience will be dealt with but not to the severance of the relationship any more than a disobedient child becomes unborn in relation to his parents.

III. A Righteousness That Can Never Be Tarnished.

We may wonder why this is and how it could possibly be. We think of righteousness from the human standpoint and the righteousness that we know is something that is variable. But when we become Christians and we are "in Christ" we get what Christ is and has. "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." II Corinthians 5:21. When we are "in Christ" we have His righteousness and we have God's righteousness. This is what the Word says and may God help us to believe it and to rejoice in it.

IV. A Title That Can Never Be Disputed.

"And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." What could be more assuring than this? Some people do many strange things to obtain some kind of worldly title and distinction and often when it is gained it proves to be worthless, but it is not so with this for it is divine in nature and centers in the character of God.

V. A Peace That Can Never Be Forfeited.

The blood of Jesus Christ has settled our sin debt. Jesus paid it all and we have availed ourselves of the peace which He Himself purchased for us. Reconciliation has been effected by His work and communion has been established. The blood of Christ

has settled everything and there is nothing between to disturb the peace which we have found in Him.

VI. An Inheritance Which Can Never Fade.

"To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." To the Christian heaven has been made secure. With all its wonders and glories it has been guaranteed to him. "In Christ" the Christian lacks nothing. He is "complete in Him." What amazing grace this is! Nothing can be added to it or taken from it. "Out of Christ" is the position through the grace of God and the finished work of Christ. "For Christ" is the blessed privilege of all who name His name, and "with Christ" is the glorious hope that possesses the heart of the redeemed of God.