

In Christ



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A Father to YOU**

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will — to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. (Ephesians 1:3-10 NIV)

One of the recurring phrases we read throughout Paul’s writing is ‘in Christ’. A simple, yet powerful phrase which has become so familiar that it is easy to overlook its meaning. It is rich in meaning as it expresses the fulness of our inheritance as sons and daughters. Sadly, though, I believe we have often missed the substance that is contained in these two simple words and I’m going to explore this in a more detail so we can discover its hidden treasure.



Although this is a phrase Paul uses on many occasions it is actually something which Jesus gave us. In John 14 Jesus tells his disciples, and therefore us, that he is the way to the Father and that the purpose of being a disciple is that we come to know the Father as Jesus knows him. He is the signpost to someone greater than himself and his desire is that we have a life-giving and life-changing relationship with the Father. Because Jesus is the exact representation, or image, of the Father, he is able to say to his disciples that if they know him, they know the Father as well.

This prompts Philip to make the statement ‘[Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us](#)’. Knowing the Father is enough; it is the only thing which will ultimately satisfy us; knowing the Father is what matters. Philip’s statement enables Jesus to explain the relationship he has with his Father in much more detail. To Jesus, there is no distinction between him and the Father, for he replies: “[How can you say, ‘show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me](#)”. He is conveying to his disciples that he has no life apart from his Father because of the intimacy and unity of their father/son relationship.

In verse 11 he stresses this once again: ‘[Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and Father is in me](#)’ and he supports this by continuing ‘[or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves](#)’. He is doing everything he can to reveal this intimacy and union. If the disciples struggle to comprehend the concept of oneness, then Jesus offers his miracles and his life as proof that the Father is living in him and working through him.

Having made his statement in verse 18 ([‘I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you](#)’) Jesus goes on to show that, not only is he in the Father, but we are too. It is important for us to understand that it is only the gift of sonship which enables us to fully grasp the enormity of what being ‘in Christ’ really means. If we remain in our orphan state we are unable to grasp

the relevance of what Jesus is saying to us. An orphan can only look at the father/son relationship from a distance and will therefore feel excluded and not a part of the beautiful relationship which Jesus reveals.

When we realise that Jesus has dealt with our orphan heart and brought us into sonship then we can begin to see how this relates and applies to us. Not only will we be able to see Jesus in the Father, but we will understand that he is in us and we are in him. As Jesus says in verse 23: **'My Father will love them and we will come and make our home with them'**. The unity of the Trinity is to be shared and experienced by us.

When we start to understand this it's no wonder we can live in peace (verse 27).

It's no accident that chapter 15 starts with the story of the vine and the branches. This would have been a very familiar picture to Jesus' listeners, as vineyards were a very common feature of the Jewish landscape.

A branch has no life of its own. It has to be connected to the vine. It draws its life from the soil, through the vine and is therefore capable of growing and bearing fruit. Jesus gives us this picture to represent our own lives. The source of our life comes from the soil of the Father's love, through the vine of Jesus and into us. We, like the disciples, are exhorted to remain (or abide) in his love. As we remain, as we live in love, we discover that our joy is being made complete. This is not the worldly sense of joy we experience when things around us are going well. It is an inner joy that comes from being planted in love. It is a joy that brings contentment, irrespective of our external circumstances.



This is the foundation Jesus laid and the one upon which Paul builds.

Paul did not teach anything for which Jesus hadn't already laid a foundation. Paul's intimate relationship with the Trinity enabled him to explain in detail the things which Jesus had modelled throughout his life.

When Paul talks about us being 'in Christ', he is referring back to this foundation laid by Jesus. He is pointing not only to the union and intimacy between Father and Son, but he is also explaining the consequence of us being drawn into this relationship. He explains what Jesus' life was like and applies it to us as well.

Before we look at what Paul is revealing to us we need clarity on how we receive this. In Ephesians 1, Paul sets the scene for what it means for us to be 'in Christ' but he knows this is far too big to be grasped with our minds. So towards the end of the chapter, he gives us the key to our understanding and so being able to receive this revelation.

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart

may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. (Ephesians 1:17-18 NIV)

The key to understanding is not knowledge, but the eyes of our heart being opened in order that we might know him and know who we are.

What Paul is expressing is not a human concept but a spiritual one. It is a heart encounter, or relationship, with our Heavenly Father. Like all relationships it is understood, or experienced, in our heart.



Paul's prayer for us is that we would have wisdom and revelation to enable us to see what being in Christ really means. He wants us to know, in an experiential way, what the mystery of being in Christ is all about. He wants to show us that it is possible for us to live as Jesus lived. We can live in the ongoing experience of being loved by the perfect Father in the same way that Jesus did.

As we look at what being 'in Christ' means, I encourage you not to come at this with your mind but to come with an open heart. Allow the Holy Spirit to bring wisdom and revelation that will illuminate your inner being. May our hearts see the goodness of the relationship that we have been born into through our union with Jesus.

We are in Christ. He and the Father have made their home in our hearts. But what does this mean?

Well, to start with we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph 1:3). Not just a few blessings handed out for good behaviour, but **every** spiritual blessing. To me, that sounds like a lot of blessing!

I believe this means that all the resources of the Father's kingdom are made available to us. The list has to be limitless. It must include the Father's provision, his peace, his healing power, his strength, his grace, both the gifts and fruit of the Spirit, his love for a hurting and broken world and so much more. I'm sure you can let your imagination wander as you consider all the things which could be included in 'every spiritual blessing'.

To help us, Paul lists several of the blessings which are ours in Christ: we were chosen by him, we've been made holy and blameless, we have the full rights of sonship, we have been redeemed, forgiven and we've been shown the mystery of his will – all of these have been freely given, not only freely given but lavished upon us (a generous, overflowing provision of abundant blessing).

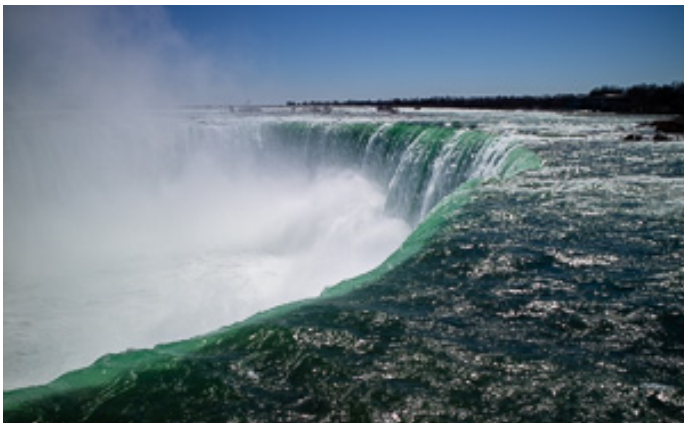
These are individually huge and when taken together represent an almost indescribable inheritance which, if we only partially understood, would change our lives and the way we

think. Seeing these things through the eyes of the heart leads to the renewing of our mind as our understanding is meant to be spiritual rather than cerebral.

We cannot make ourselves be 'in Christ' through our own works. We can only receive it as a gift. Our works will lead to us boasting in our own strength and abilities (Eph 2:8-9), drawing us away from a life that is totally dependent on our Father. Our works are when we decide what is right and wrong and therefore we become the sole determiner of what a 'good' life really is. Allowing the eyes of our heart to be opened will help us make a huge shift, away from self-sufficiency to dependence on our Father.

This can't be grasped by an orphan. An orphan is too focused on their own works and their ability to try and do the right thing.

We have been made alive in Christ and are seated together with him in the Heavenly realms. This is the home of a son or daughter. We have his Spirit in us which enables us to cry out "Abba, Father". The spirit of sonship is the very thing which draws us into oneness with the Father, irrespective of what is happening in our lives. We know we have come home.



In Colossians, Paul develops his exhortation to live 'in Christ'. Once again he contrasts the shallowness of human thinking with the depth of the reality of knowing that our lives are hidden, with Christ, in God (Col 3:3). He wants us to know we have been given the ['full riches of complete understanding, in order that we know the mystery of God, namely Christ'](#) (Col 2:2).

We, who were dead in our sins, have been made alive in Christ, our sins have been forgiven and we have been brought into the fulness, or completeness, of Jesus. In fact, **all** the fulness of the Godhead has been vested in Jesus and it is into that fulness that we have been planted. To me, that sounds like a lot of fulness. It is too big for our human mind to understand which is why we need to see it with the eyes of our heart. We can't enter this fulness when we are constantly trying to work out what is right and what is wrong. We enter by faith in Jesus, acknowledging he has done everything on our behalf and that there is nothing for us to do other than to appropriate the work of the cross through faith.

We are offered freedom. A life lived in Christ is one of freedom, where we are set free from the constraints of the law and the religious mindset we often create for ourselves. We can be free from the ['hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world'](#) and are brought into all the fulness, that is Christ (Col 2:8-10).

In Christ we are no longer subject to the rules of man. We have died to those through baptism and have been raised into new life, in Christ. This is how the Father sees us, seated with Christ in heavenly places.

How do we see ourselves?

I hope you can see the big picture and the glorious inheritance that is ours through Jesus' work on the cross. But even as we gaze upon this, we are aware of the reality gap between what we see and what we experience in our everyday lives. There is a constant struggle as we live in a fallen, broken world with all its pain and heartache. Is there anything then to help us live as the Father sees us?

I believe there is!

We are encouraged to live in love, rooted and established in the immeasurable love of the Father (Ephesians 3:17-19). As we live in love, our spirit will be strengthened and we will be



able to grasp more fully what this love is like. Making love our highest aim (1 Cor 14:1) leads us deeper into intimacy and union with the Father and so causes (or motivates) us to walk as Jesus walked.

Paul shows us that the source of true life is found in Christ ('[the reality, however, is found in Christ' Col 2:17](#)). We need to see ourselves the way the Father sees us. In doing so, our focus is taken off

the very real things we struggle with and we see from a heavenly perspective. We begin to bridge the reality gap we so often experience.

How often have we tried and failed to do all the things referred to in Colossians 3:5-8? We can try and we might be successful for a short time but change will only come as we abide in love and realise that being 'in Christ' is the source of our lives.

[Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. \(Col 3:1-4 NIV\)](#)

'Set your minds on things above'..... often easier said than done, but this is the key to abiding and resting in love. A simple statement which can be so elusive. But if this is the teaching of Jesus being explained through Paul's letters, then it must be possible for us to achieve. We can know we are in Christ. We can live in love.

In Mark 10, a rich young man comes to Jesus and asks what he needs to **do** in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus, the master of conversation, takes him through the requirements of the law, all of which this young man has kept. But that is not enough. Doing all the right things is not the answer; there is something this young man lacked. Now, Jesus

doesn't actually tell him what that thing is. Instead he tells him to sell everything and then follow Jesus. The young man can't do it. He goes away and we read that 'Jesus looked at him and loved him'.

What did he lack? I don't necessarily believe Jesus wanted him to be poor. He looked into that man's heart and saw a security based on his wealth and the dutiful desire to keep all the requirements of the law. He lacked what Jesus had been speaking about in the immediately preceding passage.

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them. (Mark 10:13-16 NIV)

The young man was unable to have a childlike heart. If he had, it would have set him free from the obligations of the law and the security of his wealth. It would have set him free to live from his heart. He lacked a childlike heart and that prevented him from discovering the ultimate security of being in Christ and thus at home with the Father. As Philip said, '[show us the Father and that will be enough](#)'. This young man couldn't see the Father and therefore wasn't satisfied. Instead he wanted to concentrate on '[what must I do?](#)'

His initial question (what must I do?) was the wrong one. He had missed the point. It's not about doing, but it's about who we are. A childlike heart is what enables God to be a Father to us and what makes us know that we are his sons and daughters. Without a childlike heart we can neither enter the Kingdom of Heaven, nor know what it truly means to be in Christ.

Jesus laid this foundation because he knew the heavenly reality. He knew that we are loved by the Father in the same way as he is loved. Jesus is the signpost to his Father. He takes us by the hand and leads us to the Father, the source of love itself. He came to introduce us to love, but much more than that, he came so we could experience love.

[I have revealed to them who you are and I will continue to make you even more real to them, so that they may experience the same endless love that you have for me, for your love will now live in them, even as I live in them!](#) (John 17:26 TPT)

[I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.](#)
(2 Cor 6:18 NIV)

