

The Believer's Position in Christ  
Steven R. Cook, D.Min., M.Div.

At the moment of faith in Christ, God transfers the believer into the body of Christ, the Church. A spiritual transference occurs and a new identity is secured. From that instant, the believer is in Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ).<sup>1</sup> Paul writes, “But by His doing you are **in Christ Jesus**” (1 Cor. 1:30). The phrase “by His doing” translates ἐξ αὐτοῦ (*ex autou*) which denotes source, identifying God as the causal agent. The believer does not place himself into Christ; God does. This is positional truth. It is judicial and actual, not experiential or emotional. The declaration that a believer is in Christ is judicial because it is God’s legal act of transferring him from Adamic condemnation into a new standing of righteousness and life in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 8:1). The preposition ἐν (*en*) is locative, pointing to placement within a new sphere. The believer is transferred from Adamic headship into Christic headship: “For as in Adam all die, so also **in Christ** all will be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22). Walvoord notes, “Before salvation, the individual was in Adam, partaking of Adam’s nature, sin, and destiny. In salvation, the believer is removed from his position in Adam, and he is placed in Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

In Christ, the believer shares in Christ’s righteousness, eternal life, and acceptance before the Father. Scripture states, God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become **the righteousness of God in Him**” (2 Cor. 5:21; cf. Phil. 3:9). According to Ryrie, “When the individual receives Christ, he is placed in Christ. This is what makes him righteous. We are made the righteousness of God in Him. This righteousness alone overcomes our desperate, sinful condition and measures up to all the demands of God’s holiness.”<sup>3</sup> Chafer adds, “Imputed righteousness is secured by a vital union with Christ, while divine justification is a judicial decree of God which is based on, and is an acknowledgment of, imputed righteousness.”<sup>4</sup>

Scripture also reveals that Christ is our life, for “When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory” (Col. 3:4); and “the free gift of God is **eternal life in Christ Jesus** our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). The believer stands accepted before God, who “**made us accepted in the Beloved**” (Eph. 1:6). This acceptance means we will never face the lake of fire, for “there is now **no condemnation** for those who are **in Christ Jesus**” (Rom. 8:1).

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul uses the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ and closely related expressions such as ἐν Κυρίῳ (*en Kurio*) and ἐν αὐτῷ (*en auto*) with great frequency. The exact count depends on whether one includes only the precise phrase “in Christ” or all cognate expressions. The strict phrase ἐν Χριστῷ occurs approximately eighty-five times in the Pauline epistles. When related formulas are included, the number exceeds one hundred fifty occurrences. This repetition signals a doctrinal emphasis.

<sup>2</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* (Galaxie Software, 2008), 141.

<sup>3</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 345.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 274.

At the instant of faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit identifies the believer with Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension (Rom. 6:3–5; Eph. 2:6). Paul wrote, "For all of you who were baptized **into Christ** have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Gal. 3:27). This baptism is the Spirit's work of union, not water baptism (1 Cor. 12:13). It occurs once and permanently. Scripture states, "Therefore, if anyone is **in Christ, he is a new creature**; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:17). The phrase "in Christ" speaks of standing before God, not performance in daily life.

Positional truth means God now sees the believer as sharing in Christ's accomplishments. When Christ died, our position died with Him; when He was raised, our position was raised with Him. Paul commands, "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but **alive to God in Christ Jesus**" (Rom. 6:11). The believer understands what God has revealed, and because God has integrity and cannot lie (Heb. 6:18), the believer, by faith, reckons it to be so. God's Word defines reality, and we accept His estimation of who we are. Experience may fluctuate; position does not. It rests on Christ's finished work.

An illustration clarifies this. A bankrupt man is legally adopted by a wealthy benefactor and transferred into a new family. Instantly his status changes. He shares the family name and privileges, though he may still think like a poor man for a time. So the believer is rescued "from the domain of darkness" and transferred into a new realm (Col. 1:13). Position changes before behavior does. This position is permanent. Jesus said, "And I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:28), and "having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). Discipline may come for disobedience (Heb. 12:6), but the believer is forever secure from eternal condemnation (Rom. 8:1).

Positional truth forms the foundation for growth. One does not live the Christian life to get into Christ, but because he is already in Him. Paul exhorts, "Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called" (Eph. 4:1). The walk refers to how we live after being saved. Constable notes, "To walk in a worthy manner means to bring one's conduct into harmony with one's calling."<sup>5</sup> God does not force the Christian to walk. The Christian must obey, by faith (2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 10:38). The calling precedes the walk. To be in Christ is to possess a new identity, a secure standing, and a permanent union with the risen Lord. All spiritual advance flows from that fixed position.

---

<sup>5</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Eph. 4:1.