

Prayer & The Session of Christ

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.

(Colossians 3.1-4)

By way of review let me briefly summarize last week's notes on the session of Christ. It may be described as Jesus assuming his rightful place at the right hand of God. It is the final step in a natural sequence of events that includes the resurrection, ascension and exaltation of Christ. Just as the resurrection, ascension and exaltation reveal the glory of the resurrected Christ, so too the session of Jesus is evidence of the power and glory of his person. The session depicts Jesus' present relationship with God the Father. Though this subject is not often addressed from pulpits, nor for that matter is a doctrine extensively developed in theological textbooks, it is nonetheless significant for a number of reasons. The session of Christ demonstrates the finality of his work of salvation; it is part of the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy of the Old Testament (Psalm 110.1); it satisfies Jesus' own utterances about who he is and where he was going (John 7.33; 8.14; 13.1; 14.2-3); it restores Jesus to the exalted pre-incarnate position he enjoyed with the Father (John 17.5); it confirms the relationship between the Son and the Father; it sets the stage for the ongoing intercessory work of Jesus as the believers' exalted high priest (Hebrews 7.27-8.1). As with the other post-resurrection narratives in the New Testament, the session focuses the reader's attention on the exalted glory of Jesus (Romans 8.34; Ephesians 1.15-23; 2.5-6; Colossians 3.1; Hebrews 1.3; 7.26; 8.1; 10.12). New Testament writers quote Psalm 110 as a prophetic reference to the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ sitting at the right hand of God (Matthew 22.42-45; Acts 2.34; Hebrews 1.13; cp. Romans 8.34; Colossians 3.1; 1 Peter 3.22). This position of authority is the means by which Jesus exercises his authority over the church; in his session he functions as the reigning high priest. He is the Lamb on the throne who will open the seven seals to bring judgment on the earth prior to the great day of the Lord (Revelation 5 and 6) when the last facet of his exaltation will be completed.

Paul's commentary on the full scope of regeneration in Ephesians 2 is one of the most remarkable and practical revelations in Scripture. The graphic description of spiritual bondage to the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient allows for no mistaken idea of an inherent goodness in mankind. By nature everyone is the object of God's wrath; it is only the great love of God, who, rich in mercy, is able to give new life to those whom

he has chosen in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1.4). Thomas Schreiner accurately comments on the mind-bending implications of this text:

Victory over Satan and his demonic agents does not come from some sort of mystical experience, according to Ephesians. Triumph comes through the infusion of the resurrection-life of Christ, which is granted on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:4-10). Believers are made alive with Christ, raised with Christ and seated with him. Not only was Christ raised from the dead, but he was also seated at God's right hand. By definition this means that he now rules over all demonic powers (Ephesians 1:21). It follows, therefore, that "all things have been subjected under his feet" (Ephesians 1:22). This statement, based on and rooted in Psalm 110:1, identifies Jesus as the Lord of David, the second Adam, who now exercises his rule over all creation." (Thomas Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, p. 233)

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SESSION, REDEMPTION & PRAYER

The session of Christ is the rock solid foundation of the Christian's authority and confidence in prayer. Though the doctrine of the session receives little attention, understanding it is of inestimable practical value for the believer. The Christian's access to the throne of grace is secured by nothing less than the Christ's completed work of salvation. The believer's assurance that his prayers are effectual is rooted in the efficacy of Christ's atonement. A knowledge that Jesus continues to intercede on behalf of those whom the Father has called to be conformed to the likeness of the Son ought to be an encouragement to pray with confidence: *And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to all this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us* (Romans 8.30-34). The apostle John also links the believer's faith in Christ to his confidence in prayer: *I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him* (1 John 5.13-15). So, too, the author of Hebrews ties the salvific work of Christ to the believer's belief that his prayers will be heard. Moreover, he demonstrates that the work of salvation is ongoing, in that what God has begun in the believer's life he will continue to perfect (cp. Philippians 1.6). This is accomplished in part through Christ's continued intercession to the Father on their behalf: *He*

sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoint as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever. The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man (Hebrews 7.27b-8.2).

A powerful statement regarding the believer's positional relationship with God in Christ is contained in the Ephesian letter. As with the preceding examples of Jesus' session, Paul associates the efficacy of Jesus' atonement with his session; more than that, he boldly describes the believer's faith in the Lord Jesus as the means by which every Christian has access to the mighty power of God. This is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at God's right hand (Ephesians 1.19-21). Paul opened his letter with an affirmation of praise to God for the efficacy of his grace in bringing about the salvation of believers: *In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons 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* (Ephesians 1.5-6). Paul continued with a prayer that the Ephesians might enjoy a Spirit of wisdom and revelation through whom they might know God better, thereby appropriating, through grace, that which is needed to live a life pleasing to God (Ephesians 2.10; cp. 2 Corinthians 7.1). The power that raised Christ from the dead is the same power that brings everything into subjection to Christ.

DEAD IN SIN (Ephesians 2.1-3)

The Ephesians were spiritually dead in their transgressions and sins. Before their conversion they did not honor God; they did not honor God in their thinking, speech or actions. This is not to say that they were as wretched as they might possibly have been, only that despite whatever natural good the unregenerate man might do, they remain alienated from the perfection of God's glory. No matter how virtuous they considered their lives they could not please God and at the same time deny the efficacy of his only Son's atonement.

In any event such a good deed does not spring from the root of gratitude for the salvation merited by Jesus Christ. It is not a work of faith, therefore. It is not done with a conscious purpose to please and glorify God and to obey his law. Now, it is with respect to such spiritual good that men are by nature dead. It is a fact that even men with a reputation for virtue have been known to answer every gospel appeal with utter disdain. Their proud heart refuses to accept the urgent invitation to confess their sins and to accept Christ as their Savior and Lord. ... He lacks the ability to bestir himself so as to give heed to that which God demands of him (Ezek. 37; John 3:3, 5). Only when God turns him is he able to

turn from his wicked way (Jer. 31:18, 19). Besides all this, he is under the sentence of death, under the curse because of his sin in Adam (original sin) to which he has added his own trespasses and sins. William Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, p. 112.

Everyone, not just the Ephesians, lived at one time under the despotic authority of the ruler of the kingdom of the air; everyone suffered from a natural predilection towards selfish living, gratifying the inclinations of their sinful nature. All such people are objects of God's wrath.

ALIVE IN CHRIST (Ephesians 2.4-7)

The prospect of adequately satisfying the righteous demands of an infinitely holy God through righteous behavior is an impossibility. Paul claims that salvation does not originate with man, but with God. It is the consequence of his great love for us. Salvation is a product of God's grace, not an individual's meritorious work. Though once spiritually dead in their sin, the Ephesians are now alive with Christ. Jesus' own death and resurrection is the typological pattern of the new birth for the Christian. Paul carries this image forward by identifying the believer with the post-resurrected Christ who is exalted and seated at the right hand of God in heaven (Ephesians 2.6). Thus, the destiny of Christ is the destiny of every Christian. So then, *"You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household"* (Ephesians 2.19; cp. Romans 8.37-39).

According to 1:19-22 Paul praises God's incomparably great power by which he raised and exalted Christ to a position far above every level of the powers. Now this exalted Christology is applied directly to the readers of the letter. Because they have been identified with Christ in his resurrection and exaltation, they, too, have a position of superiority and authority over the evil powers. They no longer live under the authority and coercion of the rule of the kingdom of the air (2:2). The implications are clear: since they have been transferred from the old dominion to the new reign of Christ, they do not have to succumb to the evil one's designs. The power of God which raised Jesus from the dead is now available to them as they live in this world (cf. 2:10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15), take their stand against the devil's schemes, and struggle against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (6:11-12). Peter O'Brien, *Ephesians*, p. 171.

NEW CREATION (Ephesians 2.8-10)

While the Christian's new life in Christ is radically different from what he previously experienced, it is only preparatory for eternity (Hebrews 11.13-16). Everyone who believes in Jesus has eternal life. Even though his body dies, that

which constitutes conscious life continues. Jesus said: *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”* (John 11.25-26; cp. John 1.12-13; 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18). The penetrating question is: Do you believe this? Jesus’ resurrection is at the heart of the gospel (Romans 10.9-13; 1 Corinthians 15.1-11). The Christian is inseparably linked to Christ (Romans 8.38-39; cp. 1 Peter 1.4-9). His access to God is uninhibited; his life is wrapped up in post-resurrected Jesus. The resurrection, ascension, exaltation, and session of Christ give the believer unrestricted access to God and the freedom to live his life with a loving abandonment toward his heavenly Father.