

Preamble

As I look around at the modern society in which we find ourselves I wonder how we managed to live before the advent of so many “must have” items that are available today. For instance, how did we live before the smart phone came into being? Before that time we somehow managed to survive without the need to call people every few minutes or to walk into people or street furniture because we had our heads down gazing at a small screen. How did we manage before the advent of establishments such as Costa and Starbucks, other coffee shops are available, which enable us to walk down the street clutching a plastic or cardboard cup full of an expensive and scalding hot coffee? How did we exist before the advent of social media, especially Twitter and Whatsapp, which enables us to insult and attack those we don't like or even know with total impunity as well as being able to read trivia about so-called celebrities? I could go on as I'm sure there are many more aspects of our modern lives that we used to be able to cope without, but which now seem to be essential to modern living.

All of that leads me to ask the question: how did we exist before we came to faith in Jesus Christ? How did we live without Him in our lives? In the verses I want us to look at today Paul talks of our being “*with Christ*” and “*in Christ*” something which brings a huge change in our lives and the most amazing benefits which we would never have dreamt of before knowing Him.

Recap & Introduction

So far in our walk through the opening ten verses in **Ephesians 2** we've given thought to our being sinners who are subject to God's wrath; then how God intervened on our behalf by sending His Son Jesus to pay for our sins; and most recently how we are saved by God's grace. Let me remind you that our being saved is brought about by God's intervention and not by anything we have done or could even contemplate doing; it is all down to God in His love, mercy and grace.

As **2:1-3** make clear, any sinners who think they have a relationship with God are wrong; there is no such relationship simply because as sinners we stand condemned before the throne of God. That situation existed until God intervened on our behalf to save us, an unmerited action signalled by those wonderful words “*But God*” in **2:4**. As a result of that merciful and loving intervention we now have a close relationship with our Heavenly Father. It is that relationship that I want us to think about this morning as we consider the role of Jesus Christ in our new lives as children of God as described by Paul in **2:4-10**.

Part 1

As we continue our detailed look at **2:4-10** I want to think about a couple of phrases that are each repeated three times, these being: “*with Christ*” in **2:5-6**; although the words “*in Him*” are used in **2:6** the meaning is the same; and “*in Christ*” in **2:6-7 & 10**. Being both “*with Christ*” and “*in Christ*” form a vital part of our Christian lives. The great preacher Martyn Lloyd Jones stated in a sermon on this passage that “*according to Ephesians 2 and*

*elsewhere, you are not Christians at all unless you are joined to Christ and ‘in Him’*¹. Whilst it’s perfectly OK to say and read that what does it actually mean? Lloyd Jones makes a similar comment later in his sermon when he says *“This is Christianity, to believe and know that, because we are joined to Christ, something of His life is in us as the result of this vital indissoluble union, this intimate, mystical connection.”*² The thoughts of our being “with” and “in” Christ are very much intertwined and so we’ll look at these further as we move forward in the passage.

Part 2 – With (2:5-6)

Let’s start this morning by looking at those words “with Christ”. They first appear in Ephesians when Paul tells us we were “made alive with Christ” (2:5). Contrast that with what Paul told us in 2:1 when he said that we were “dead in our sins and transgressions” (2:1) and so being made alive is quite a transition. God initiated that transition for us by raising us up with Christ just as Paul tells us in 2:6 as he says “God raised us up with Christ”. We already know that Jesus was raised from the grave following His crucifixion. Now, when we come to faith in Him as Lord and Saviour, Paul tells us we are raised with Him although we are raised from the grave of sin. Without Christ in our lives we are condemned to suffer God’s wrath and the consequences that that condemnation brings. Very obviously we are physically alive and so Paul is talking here of our being made spiritually alive which quite simply means being alive with Christ in a spiritual sense. We learn more about this from what Paul said to the Romans when he told them in 6:4 “just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” As we come to faith in Jesus we can see that we die to sin, and by way of confirmation of that Paul tells us in Romans 6:2 “We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”. When we then look at Romans 6:7 we see that “anyone who has died has been freed from sin” and then in Romans 6:8 Paul adds that our faith means “... if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.” Paul wrote to Timothy about our living with Christ and he told him “If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him.” (2 Timothy 2:11-12) That is what being “made alive” truly means.

Not only have we been “made alive with Christ” but in 2:6b Paul adds that we have been “seated with Him in the heavenly realms”; what a glorious thought, just as the Lord sits with God in the heavenly realms so will we when we leave our lives here on earth. Why would God do that; after all we are sinners who don’t deserve God’s love and mercy let alone His forgiveness. Paul answers that question in 2:7 when he says God did it “in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace”. We thought about that grace last time I spoke to you and we learned that God has an abundance of grace and His riches will never diminish. He keeps on dispensing that grace as and when He sees fit and yet no matter how much grace He bestows on us it will never run out.

As part of His grace God used His great power and raised Jesus from the grave and then seated Him at His right hand. We saw what Paul had to say about that in 1:19b-21 when he

¹ Lloyd Jones, Martyn, *God’s Way of Reconciliation - An Exposition of Ephesians Two*, Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1972, page 102

² Lloyd Jones, page 106

spoke to the Ephesian believers about God's great power and said *"That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."* That is all truly amazing but even more amazing is that God also does the same for us which is something we learn from **2:6**. Now whilst Jesus as God's Son, deserved His seat next to His Father; we as sinners most certainly don't deserve it and yet, in His love, mercy and grace, God does actually seat us in heaven with Him.

I want to explore that last thought a little more by taking a look at **Philippians 2:5-8** before linking that with our thoughts on **Ephesians 2**. In those verses in **Philippians** Paul wrote and told the believers in Philippi that *"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!"* Jesus became an ordinary human being and lived among us; He happily suppressed or laid aside His deity so He could be His Father's servant and work among us sharing the good news of His Father's love and our salvation. Just hold that thought for a moment. As I mentioned a moment ago, in **Ephesians 1:19-20** we read that God used His enormous power and raised Christ from the grave; Paul wrote that God's power *"is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms"*. Now, here in **2:6**, we read *"God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms"*. Just think about that for a moment; we learned from **1:19-20** that God had raised His Son from the grave and seated Him *"in the heavenly realms"* and now we see in **2:6** that WE have been raised with Christ and seated with Him *"in the heavenly realms"*. I find that to be the most amazing aspect of salvation; not only have we been forgiven our sins; not only will we no longer be subject to God's wrath but we now find ourselves raised up with Christ and seated with Him in heaven. It's as if God has made us equal with Christ and just as Christ became equal with man and lived among us, now we see something similar but the other way round. That is a most amazing change in our relationship with our Heavenly Father as we move from being condemned to a lake of burning sulphur to being seated with Jesus Christ in heaven. Jesus is sitting at His Father's right hand and we will join Him. His earthly ministry began when He joined us, and now as a result of that ministry and God's grace we have the assurance that we will join Him at some time in the future.

Part 3 – In (2:7 & 9)

In his Commentary on Ephesians, the theologian John Stott suggests that *"Fundamental to New Testament Christianity is this concept of the union of God's people with Christ."*³ He

³ Stott, John, *Commentary on Ephesians - Bible Speaks Today*, electronic version, section on Ephesians 2:4-10

goes on to add that “*what makes them distinctive is their new solidarity as a people who are in Christ*”.⁴

When we become Christians we become part of Christ and He becomes part of us. This is all part of the supernatural mystery of knowing Christ and we will only know the full details of how all this happens when we meet Jesus face to face at which time all will become clear. In line with his comments that I quoted earlier, Martyn Lloyd Jones said “*The Scriptures make this definite assertion: I am not a Christian, I cannot be a Christian at all, without being in Christ.*”⁵ I accept that this isn’t easy to understand but I would suggest that those words illustrate our union with Christ. When a man and a woman join together in marriage it is accepted that two become one and they are united in a unique relationship. Something similar happens when we come to faith in Christ; we become one with Him and He dwells within our hearts and lives.

However, when we look at **2:6** we see reference to both being “*with Christ*” and “*in Christ*” and both are true. We are “*with Christ*” when we are seated in the heavenly realms with Him and we are also “*in Christ*” as a result of being united with Him. We may expect that all of this will come later when we leave this earthly life; however, in **Ephesians 2** Paul seems to be suggesting that what he is talking about applies to us now and difficult though it may be to comprehend we are seated with Christ right now and don’t have to wait for that to happen. On the other hand, the late 19th century commentators Jamieson, Fausset and Brown suggest that “*Our union with Him is the ground of our present spiritual, and future bodily, resurrection and ascension.*”⁶ Either way, as believers in Christ we have that assurance that we will spend eternity both “*with Christ*” and “*in Christ*”.

Going back to that thought that we have been made alive with Christ, Paul has similar thoughts in his Epistle to the Romans where he writes, “*In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*” (**Romans 6:11**). We have already been told in **2:5** that we have been made alive “*with Christ*” and here in this verse in Romans we learn that we “*are alive to God in Christ Jesus*”. Our being “*in Christ*” means that we become part of the body of Christ which is His church. When we were dead in our sins we had no chance whatsoever of drawing near to God or having a relationship with Him. There is nothing we can do of our own volition to change that situation; any change that happens is all down to God and that change is both deep and fundamental. Not only are we made alive through God’s grace but we are made alive “*in Christ*”; Christ occupies us in a supernatural way, not as demons occupy people and take over their lives but as a loving, forgiving and merciful Saviour Who leads us on to the right paths for our lives.

As we think about our being “*made alive*” I am reminded of the time that Jesus was talking to Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the ruling council. They were talking about the kingdom of God and Jesus told Nicodemus that no one could see the kingdom of God unless he was born again. Jesus went on to add “*I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the*

⁴ Stott

⁵ Lloyd Jones, page 106

⁶ Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary on Ephesians 2:6*, electronic version

Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' (John 3:5-7). I believe that we can read that as being the same as Paul's comment about our being "made alive". Jesus was talking about being born of the Spirit just as being "made alive" is also a spiritual birth since that is what happens when we come to faith in Jesus. When we experience that spiritual birth and are "made alive" Christ dwells in us and we dwell in Him, hence that phrase "in Christ". As part of that Paul told the Corinthian believers in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" There is a wonderful hymn that we sing from time to time titled "I am a new creation". The opening verse says, "I am a new creation, no more in condemnation, here is the grace of God I stand". That is where we find ourselves when we are "made alive with Christ"; we become that new creation and we do now stand in God's presence thanks to His abundant grace.

Part 4 – Kindness (2:7)

Looking back to 2:7 we read that God raised us and seated us with Christ, "in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." The NLT version of the final phrase in that verse talks of our being "united with Christ Jesus". We could also read it as saying that all this happens "through Christ". In other words, God showed His kindness towards us by sending His Son to die on the cross so that we might be saved through His actions and not through anything we did or can do.

Not only have we been made alive in Christ but we see in 2:7 that in doing that God is demonstrating His grace through His kindness towards us. John Stott suggests that kindness should be added to God's love, mercy and grace as part of our salvation. God is inherently kind and He expressed that kindness towards us by allowing His Son to die on the cross at Calvary. Not only are we saved by grace but in saving us God demonstrated His kindness towards us through that saving act.

The commentator William MacDonald suggests that in order to illustrate the enormity of God's kindness Paul builds words upon words. MacDonald puts these thoughts this way: "His kindness towards us; His grace in His kindness toward us; the riches of His grace in His kindness toward us; the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us"⁷ Francis spoke to us a couple of weeks ago on the subject of kindness being a fruit of the Spirit and emphasised that, as Christians, we should demonstrate all the fruits of the Spirit but especially kindness given that we have such a wonderful example in the person of God Himself. It is important for us to remember that God showed His kindness towards us when we least deserved it. At that time we were lost and condemned sinners and yet God, in His loving and merciful kindness, forgave us and accepted us into His family. His kindness didn't end there since He also gave us a seat in heaven with His Son, Jesus Who now dwells within us.

Conclusion

⁷ MacDonald, William, *Believers Bible Commentary*, Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville, Tennessee, 1995, page 1918

In the opening three verses of **Ephesians 2** we read about the sorry state in which we exist if we don't know Christ as Lord and Saviour. We live in a world of sin; we follow the ways of the ruler of the kingdom of the air; worst of all, we are condemned to face the wrath of God and there can only be one outcome from that situation.

Now in **2:4-10** the mood changes and Paul tells us of God's love, mercy, grace and kindness. All of these are shown towards us even though we are sinners and don't deserve such consideration. That thought of our being "*made alive*" by God despite our being sinners is quite amazing and Paul makes it clear that as a result of that awesome event, Christ dwells in us and we are now able to say that in our new lives we are both "*with Christ*" and "*in Christ*".