

Christ in You

by Ray C. Stedman

The purpose of revelation is nothing less than the transformation of human lives. Your contact with the Bible should be changing you. If it isn't, then something is drastically wrong with the way you are going about it, for this is a living book with a living message which, when it touches human life, begins to transform it and make it over. Now, it takes the entire book to do the whole job, and this is why we have been taking a quick survey through the entire Bible – in order that we might see what it has to say and how it says it.

We have seen that the purpose of the Old Testament was preparation, and that of the New Testament is fulfillment – or realization, if you want to make it rhyme! In the New Testament, the Gospels and The Acts go together to give us a presentation of the Person of Jesus Christ. That is the great theme of those five books. The four Gospels are God's inspired image of Jesus Christ as he is. The Acts is a historical record of the proclamation of this wonderful, magnificent personality among the sons of men throughout all the earth. These books are designed to teach us and instruct us in the one Person who is able to transform our lives. Of course, the entire Bible is about Christ, but particularly in the Gospels and The Acts you find him stepping out of the shadows as a living, breathing man, in whose life we see all the character of God manifested in terms of human personality.

When we come to the Epistles – which occupy the largest part of the New Testament – we are dealing not with preparation or presentation, but with explanation. These letters of the New Testament are intended and designed to make clear to us all that is involved in the mystery of Christ. If you don't think Christ is a mystery, I suggest you spend some time meditating on his Person. There are depths and heights in Jesus Christ which no mind can grasp. The purpose of the Epistles is to present

Christ on such a kindergarten level of truth that we may understand, lay hold of, and enter into his life. They do this beautifully.

There are three groups of Epistles. The first four – Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians – are grouped together around the theme “Christ in you,” i.e., “Christ in you, the hope of glory,” as Paul phrases it in Colossians 1:27. This is the transforming principle of the Christian life. This is what makes us different, if we are different at all, from any other human beings on earth – Christ in you. These four Epistles develop this theme.

The next group consists of nine Epistles – Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. These all gather around the theme “you in Christ,” i.e., your life lived in relationship to the rest of the body of Christ. Here you have the church coming into view – the fact that we no longer live our Christian lives as individuals; that we are not just so many people struggling along trying to lay hold of Jesus Christ, but that we do it together. More and more I am becoming aware that this togetherness is absolutely essential. I cannot ever lay hold of all that Jesus Christ ought to be to me unless you do it with me. You can't either, without me. We need each other. This is set forth in these nine Epistles.

Then comes the last group of eight Epistles – Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, and Jude. These all gather around one great theme – the method of life in Christ, which is “faith” – how to walk by faith. When you have comprehended that, you have said all there is to say about how to live in Christ.

So we have this great span of Epistles, designed to make all the mighty truth which is so gripping, so captivating, so compelling in the Gos-

pels available to us in terms of practical experience. This is exactly what they are for.

Notice that the order in which I have listed the Epistles is the order in which they appear in our New Testament. They were not written in that order. Romans was not the first letter written, by any means; I rather think it was either the letter to the Galatians or the first one to the Thessalonians. But I am confident that their present arrangement in our New Testament was compiled under the oversight of the Holy Spirit, for in each group the Epistles follow a definite pattern which takes us from foundational, fundamental letters right on through to the detailed development and application of the basic theme of each group. There are three groups, and there are three fundamental Epistles. If you want to grasp in brief compass what the letters of the New Testament teach us, spend your time in these three fundamental Epistles. Get to know them. Master them. For here the great truth of God is crystallized – focused – in three basic areas. The rest of the letters simply develop even more profoundly the truths which are set forth in these three. The three are Romans, Ephesians and Hebrews.

In this study we survey the first group – Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians.

Romans is THE great foundational letter of the New Testament. In this book you find the full sweep of salvation from beginning to end, in all its fullness. If you want to see what God is doing with you as an individual, and with the human race as a whole, master the book of Romans.

As you read this book you discover that it develops salvation in three tenses – past, present and future. Or:

- I *was* saved when I believed in Jesus;
- I *am being* saved as the character of Jesus Christ now becomes manifest in my life; and
- I *shall be* saved when at last, in resurrection life, with a glorified body, I stand in the presence of the Son of God and enter into the fullness of the truth of God manifest in the ages of ages which stretch out unendingly into eternity to come.

These three tenses of salvation can be gathered up in three words which are very familiar to those who have studied the Bible to any extent:

- *Justification* is the first word – the past tense – I was justified when I believed in Jesus Christ. Justification is that righteous standing by which a man is found in the presence of God without spot – just as if he had never sinned.
- The second word – the present tense – is that much misunderstood and abused word – *sanctification*. Oswald Chambers said, “Sanctification is the appearing of the characteristics, the perfections, of the Lord Jesus in terms of your human personality.” That is a pretty good definition of sanctification. It is a glowing, growing, wonderful process taking place in your life by which you become more and more Christ-like – which is another way of saying that you become more of a man or a woman.
- *Glorification* – the future tense – of course, is the completion of this transformation when we stand in the presence of Christ.

Romans develops the theme of salvation in this way and then illustrates it – in Chapters 9 through 11 – out of the history of the great illustrative nation, the picture nation – Israel. Finally, it applies salvation in the various areas of life – first of all in individuals, then in the body of Christ and the whole realm of civil government, and then reaching out into the rest of society.

In **1 Corinthians** we find the practical correction of the tendency to carnality by the understanding of the principles of spirituality. Carnality and spirituality are the two divisions of this book. First, the carnality: If you have read 1 Corinthians you know what I mean. What a mess! Here were people divided up into little schisms and factions and cliques, at each other’s throats, dragging each other before courts of law, gossiping, fighting with one another, even getting drunk at the Lord’s Table, and busying themselves with chitchat about philosophical systems while the most hateful forms of immorality were parading themselves in full

view in the Corinthian church. The theme of this Epistle is in Chapter 1, Verse 9:

God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. {1 Cor 1:9 RSV}

This is what the book of Romans sets before us as the secret of Christian life – this fellowship with Jesus Christ. And 1 Corinthians takes this theme and develops it, showing us that the lack of this fellowship causes carnality; but its presence brings us over into spirituality, where we walk in resurrection power and resurrection life.

Then, **2 Corinthians** is the practical exhibition of victory under pressure. This is the great Epistle of trials and difficulties and hardships. This is life at its rawest edge. The theme of the letter is triumph in the midst of all that. Verse 14 of Chapter 2 sets it forth:

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. {2 Cor 2:14 RSV}

The Epistle goes on to show how through the midst of perplexities, stresses, persecutions, hardships and trials, there is grace abounding. Near the end, in Chapter 12, you have this tremendous passage:

But [God] said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong. {2 Cor 12:9 RSV}

This is what Christ has come into your life to do – to make it possible for you to be strong, right where you are.

The last letter of this group, **Galatians**, is a red-hot needle by which Paul intends to jab Christians awake – stir them up a bit. This is the hottest Epistle in the New Testament, because Paul is angry. He is obviously and unmistakably angry. He is deeply disgusted with the Christians in Galatia,

and he doesn't hesitate to say so. He is angry because they are so easily led astray from the position of truth which they understood and knew – led off into some weakening, debilitating doctrine which is sapping their strength and turning them into carnal Christians. The theme of the letter is freedom – freedom in Christ. You find it in Chapter 5, Verse 1:

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. {Gal 5:1 RSV}

Once we were bound with our flesh – with our carnal ideas. In our own efforts we were trying to serve God. Then Christ came and, through the Spirit, cut all these ties and set us free so that we could be real men or women and walk in the liberty that he has in mind for us. “Now,” Paul says, “for God's sake, please don't go back into that again! Stand fast in the liberty wherein Christ has set you free.” This is the answer to all the legalism from which the Church has suffered ever since – all the guilt and condemnation and weakness and frustration, all the failure of the flesh. The answer is to set forth the mighty power of the Holy Spirit at work in a human life.

I love to read the book of Galatians. This is the Epistle, by the way, that set fire to Martin Luther's soul. He used this book as a mighty weapon to cut his way through all the ritualism and the terrible burdens of legality and liturgy that the Church had heaped upon the truth of God, and to set people free. This is the great Epistle of human freedom. And as you read it you can see that there is a mighty burning in the heart of the apostle, urging Christians to break away from this ordinary, no-different-than-anybody-else kind of living, and to discover the mighty power of the Holy Spirit – like a great river – flowing through our life, cleansing it, and making us able to walk in the fullness of the Spirit of God. This is what God is after.

And as we do this we discover that if we “walk by the Spirit” we shall “not gratify the desires of the flesh,” {cf, Gal 5:16}. Our lives become literally transformed.

All this gathers around the theme “Christ in you” – the greatest theme the mind of man has ever contemplated.

Prayer:

Our Heavenly Father, thank you for this glimpse of the purpose in your heart for us. Lord, open our eyes. Make us ready to hear, ready to obey. Save us from this

deathly, barren fruitlessness that plagues us and distresses us so. Teach us to walk in faith, Lord, into a mighty experience of the grace and glory of Jesus Christ, alive in us, and manifesting his life through us. For we pray in his name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Rd. Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.