

THE IN CHRIST MOTIF

A paper presented to *The Gospel Study Group* at Andrews University

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Introduction

The primary purpose of this paper is to present the *objective* reality of the *In Christ* motif that was accomplished in the earthly mission of Christ for the *entire human race*. This is the Everlasting Gospel of Revelation 14 that was planned before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), or before time ever began. It became a reality in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ (2 Timothy 1:8-10). This is the foundation of the *subjective* experience of the *In Christ* motif to all individuals who by faith obey the gospel, the truth as it is in Christ.

When Christ came to this sin-cursed world some 2000 years ago, to be the Savior of mankind, He was introduced to the frightened shepherds of Bethlehem on Christmas night with these words—*Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people* (Luke 2:10).

According to John 3:17, this is how Christ described His earthly mission to Nicodemus—*For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world (mankind), but that the world through Him might be saved*. In order to fulfill this mission Christ had to meet the full demands of the law on behalf of the human race. This demand is twofold, *obey and live* or *disobey and die*. Christ confessed this to the Jews in Matthew 5:17, *Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill*.

Turning to John 17:4, note how Christ confessed to His Father the fulfillment of the first part of His earthly mission (*obey and live*): *I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given me to do*. From birth to manhood (30 yrs.) Christ fully met the positive demands of the Law, in thought, word and deed, as mankind's substitute and representative.

However, this perfect obedience could not cancel our sins. To fulfill the second demand of the law (*disobey and die*), Christ went to the cross and met the justice of the law. Thus, by His perfect life and sacrificial death, Christ could announce to the entire human race the good news of great joy—*It is finished* (John 19:30).

But it was the apostle Paul whom God set aside to expound this incredible good news of the gospel, especially to the Gentile world. Note what he penned to the believers of Ephesus in chapter 3:8—*To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach*

among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. It is through the *In Christ* motif that Paul proclaimed the unsearchable riches of Christ.

The In Christ Motif

When reading through Paul's thirteen epistles, a key phrase is noticed. If this phrase were to be removed, very little would remain of Paul's exposition of the gospel. This recurring phrase, which is the central theme of his theology, is the expression *In Christ* or *In Christ Jesus*. This phrase is often expressed by other similar phrases, such as—*in Him* or *by Him* or *through Him* or *in the Beloved* or *together with Him* etc. These are synonymous terms implying the *In Christ* motif or idea.

Many reliable New Testament scholars today recognize that the *In Christ* motif is the central theme of Paul's theology. For example, in *Grace Unlimited*, edited by Clark H. Pinnock, several scholars admit that the *In Christ* motif is at the heart of Paul's theology (see page 176). John R. W. Stott states, "*to be in Christ is a familiar and favorite expression of Paul*" (*The Gospel and the End of Time*, 27).

The idea of being *In Christ* was first introduced by Christ Himself, when He told His disciples *abide* (remain) *in Me* (John 15:4). Obviously, we cannot abide or remain in somebody unless we are already in him. "Abiding in Christ" are the under girding-words of the gospel. If this New Testament phrase is excluded, it will be difficult to fully understand the incredible good news of the gospel.

There is nothing we experience in this world, and the world to come, except we have it *In Christ*. Everything we enjoy and hope for as believers—the *peace* and *assurance* of salvation through justification by faith, the *power* to live holy lives through the process of sanctification, and the *hope* of glorification at His Second Coming, are all ours only *In Christ*. Outside of Him, that is, *in Adam*, we have nothing but sin, condemnation and death (Romans 5:18; 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22).

The phrase *In Christ* is difficult to understand. Just as *you must be born again* was incomprehensible to Nicodemus, so also, the concept of being *In Christ* is a very difficult concept to understand. This is especially true of the western mind. How can an individual be in someone else? Furthermore, how can I, born in the twentieth century, be *In Christ* who lived some 2000 years ago? This makes no sense to our modern way of thinking.

What does Scripture mean when it tells us that we were *together* with Christ in His birth, life, death and resurrection, and now, are sitting in heavenly places in Him (Ephesians 2:5, 6)? Because we cannot fathom these facts we tend to ignore or dismiss them. Yet the whole understanding of the gospel hinges on a clear understanding of the significance of these two vital words ***In Christ***.

The *In Christ* motif or idea is based on biblical solidarity, *the many out of one*. While this was a familiar concept to the Jews of Christ's day, since the Bible is full of it, this concept is foreign to our way of thinking. Yet, if we are to come to grips with this truth, *as it is In Christ*, we must first understand biblical solidarity. Two texts that will help to clarify our understanding are Genesis 25:21-23 (where the twins, Esau and Jacob, represent two nations, not individuals), and Hebrews 7:7-10 (Levi paid tithe to Melchizedek while in the loins of Abraham).

The Gospel in Christ

With this background note how Paul sums up the situation of the human race in 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22—*For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the death. For as **in Adam** all die, even so **in Christ** all shall be made alive* (emphasis mine). These two facts are based on biblical solidarity. However, we have to turn to Romans 5:12-18 where Paul gives the clearest explanation of the incredible good news of the Everlasting Gospel, based on biblical solidarity.

Turning to Romans 5:12-14, Paul discusses mankind's situation *in Adam*. He does this in order to use Adam as a *type* or *pattern* of Christ (verse 14b). Note the three facts he points out in verse 12:

1. Sin entered the world (humanity) through one man, that is, Adam.
2. This sin or transgression condemned Adam to death—Genesis 2:16, 17.
3. Since Adam's sin entered the world, his death also spread to all of mankind.

Paul makes it clear that the reason why Adam's death spread to all mankind is because *all have sinned* (*aorist*—past historical tense). This last phrase is an incomplete sentence. There are only two ways we can truly complete this phrase. Either we all die because we all sinned *like* Adam, or, we all die because we sinned *in* Adam.

The answer we choose has important implications regarding our understanding of the gospel. Keep in mind, the reason Paul is using mankind's situation in Adam is to use him as a *type* or *pattern* of Christ. Therefore, if we say that we all die because we sinned *like* Adam, to be fair to Paul's analogy, we have to conclude that all live because all obeyed *like* Christ. This would completely contradict what Paul says about the human race in his epistles. Note for example, Romans 3:23—*For all have sinned* (past tense) *and fall short* (present tense) *of the glory of God*.

Hence, the only conclusion regarding Paul's phrase, *all have sinned*, is that we all sinned *in* Adam. This is what Paul explains in verses 13 & 14, by choosing a segment of the human race, from Adam to Moses. These people were clearly sinning (missing the mark). But Paul goes on to say that their sins were committed before the law was given through Moses as a legal code, on tables of stone. Therefore,

God could not legally condemn them to death for breaking any specific command, even though they were missing the mark (verse 13).

Nevertheless, people from Adam to Moses were dying, even though their sins were *unlike* the deliberate transgression of Adam (verse 14). The only conclusion, Paul implies, is that they all were implicated in Adam's sin, that is, they sinned *in* Adam. Based on this biblical solidarity, Paul goes on to point out the situation of the entire human race *in Adam* and *in Christ* in verses 15 to 18.

For Christ to be a *type* or *pattern* of Adam, God had to create a second Adam out of Christ. He did this by uniting the divine, eternal *Zoe* life of Christ to the corporate *Bios* life of the human race that needed redeeming—Acts 17:26, 1 Corinthians 15:45. This is what legally qualified Christ, the God-Man, to be mankind's substitute and representative (John 1:14).

Consequently, using the biblical solidarity example of Hebrews 7:10, just as the entire human race was in the loins of Adam, by creation when he sinned, and therefore stand condemned to death; so also, the entire human race was in the loins of the humanity of Christ, by the incarnation when he obeyed, and therefore stand justified to life. This is the whole point Paul is expounding, in Romans 5:15-18. See his conclusion in verse 18: *Therefore, as through one man's (Adam's) offense judgment came (aorist tense) to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's (Christ's) righteous act the free gift came (aorist tense) to all men, resulting in justification of life.*

Note how Professor W.W. Prescott clearly expressed this truth in his lectures on *The Divine Human Family*, at the 1895 General Conference Session, which was later approved by E.G. White as *precious truth*—*What Jesus Christ did in the flesh we did in Him. And this is the most glorious truth in Christianity. It is Christianity itself, it is the very core and life and heart of Christianity. He took our flesh, and our humanity was found in Him, and what He did, humanity did in Him.*

On this *In Christ* foundation our theology will be judged. Therefore, we must measure every belief, practice and doctrine of the church on this truth, *Christ Our Righteousness* (1 Corinthians 3:11-13). I believe this is the Everlasting Gospel of Revelation 14 that God raised the Advent Movement to proclaim to the world in its global mission, before the end comes (Matthew 24:14). This message will ultimately divide the human race into only two camps, those under the banner of Christ and those under the dominion of Satan (1 John 5:19).

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