

The Believer's Present Position

by Lewis Sperry Chafer

The sermon explores the believer's present position in Christ, emphasizing the importance of understanding Positional Truth and living in accordance with it amidst a worldly system.

Scripture: Philippians 3:20

Topics: "Positional Truth", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Lewis Sperry Chafer emphasizes the importance of rightly dividing the Bible to understand God's message for different ages and people. He explains the need to distinguish between Positional Truth, which reveals the believer's current relationship with God, and Life Truth, which outlines their responsibilities and provisions for fulfilling God's will. Chafer highlights the believer's separation from the world, their heavenly citizenship, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as key aspects of their present position. He stresses the believer's role as ambassadors for Christ, called to witness and evangelize in a world ruled by Satan, while maintaining a distinct separation from the values and systems of this age.

Transcript

Since the Bible contains God's message to the people of the ages, it must be rightly divided if the body of truth concerning any particular age or people is to be clearly understood. There are, undoubtedly, many things in common in the various ages, and, because of that fact, the superficial use of the Scriptures has been to treat the entire book as a direct message to all people of all time. This method, as has been stated, has resulted in great confusion as to the Divine program.

When that portion of Scripture which directly applies to the present age has been discovered, that, too, must be divided; for the present time is a period of mixture among the people of the earth--the saints of God tenting among the citizens of the Satanic system, and having nothing in common with them beyond the ordinary things of this earth life.

Again, that particular body of truth which applies to the child of God in this age may be divided, and a portion be called "Positional Truth" in that it unfolds the believer's present relation to the Godhead, the heavenlies, and the present world; while another may be known as "Life Truth" in that it is a particular statement of his present responsibility in conduct and service, and also includes the provisions of God whereby he may fully accomplish the whole will of God. A partial study of Life Truth is reserved for the next and last chapter; while this chapter is to be devoted to the believer's present position and separation from the world.

The importance of Positional Truth is suggested by the fact that, in the context of Scripture, it precedes the statement of Life Truth; forming the basis of its appeal. As an illustration of this it may be seen that the order of the doctrinal Epistles is first, to state a great Positional Truth, which is then followed by an appeal for a life consistent with the truth revealed. The first great section of the book of Romans (Chapters 1-8), sets forth the fact of a great and full salvation; this is followed (omitting the dispensational parenthesis of Chapters 9-11) by the closing section (Chapters 12-16), which is a detailed description of the life a saved person should live, and which opens with this appeal: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." So, in the first section of the letter to the Ephesians (Chapters 1-3), the believer's position is unfolded, and this is followed by a section (Chapters 4-6), which is a series of injunctions for a heavenly walk; this section opens as follows: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." No appeal for faithfulness in the Christian life will be found to be adequate or effective that does not follow this same order, or that is not based upon some great revealed fact of the new life in Christ. It is probable that the present neglect and disregard for Positional Truth has, in spite of moral exhortation, borne its legitimate fruit in a time-serving worldly Church.

It is a beautiful example of the harmony of the Scriptures that, while the evil of the present age is so-clearly described, the true child of God is most carefully separated from its relationships, and is seen to be in a position so independent of all the authority of the world, that he can walk with the Lord in unbroken communion and fellowship, even while surrounded by this spiritual darkness. And, though the Scriptural statements as to the ever increasing darkness of this age be rejected, no meaning can be given to these passages that separate the believer from this world, without the recognition of the black background of the failure and sinfulness of this age. It is noticeable that the modern systems take no notice of the difference between the saved and the unsaved, as they also make little of the future state. This is in accordance with the fact that both of these truths are wholly dependent upon regeneration; and that is the one truth these systems are originated by Satan to resist.

The believer's position is set forth in at least seven positive revelations, three of which concern his change from the darkness of Satan to the light of God; two concern his relationship to the heavenly sphere; and two concern his relationship to the Satanic order. A careful study of these important passages will reveal the great reality of Redemption.

The first Divine movement for the salvation of an individual, after the prayer of intercession by the Spirit, is illumination by the Spirit. This same work is also mentioned as the "convicting" or "convincing" of the Spirit. In this part of the Divine undertaking, the blinding by Satan is temporarily removed and the soul beholds, by Divine vision, the Lord of glory and the way into eternal life through Him: but woe to the soul thus favored, who repeatedly turns from that vision in rejection! Of such it is written: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessings from God: but that which

beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned. But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak" (Heb. 6:4-9). Here there is pronounced a permanent return to the awful blindness of Satan for the one who rejects the illumination of the Spirit; but there is also offered an ever-widening of vision and glory to the one who accepts the Lord as He is revealed by the Spirit, for he then comes into possession of the "things that accompany salvation."

This illuminating work of the Spirit is mentioned by Paul in his words to King Agrippa, wherein he describes his own commission to service. He claimed to have been appointed by the Lord who spoke to him from the Glory. He relates that by this commission he was sent "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:18). This is the exact order of the Divine movements in redemption; the illumination of the Spirit is placed before everything else. There is probably no more neglected truth in modern evangelism than this preliminary work of the Spirit: yet it is the Divine preparation for the intelligent action of the human will; and if the right choice is made, it unveils the eyes for all the coming ages.

This important illuminating work of the Spirit is completely described in Jno. 16:8-11 as being a revelation of the judgment, by the Cross, of all sin and condemnation; the vision of the glorious righteous Christ, now in heaven; and the realization of the sin of rejecting Him. The passage is here given: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged." The true child of God is, then, one in whom the Spirit has wrought in lifting the blinding by Satan and revealing to some extent, even now, the surpassing glory of Christ. Sin, too, has become a terrible reality, and the Cross and the precious blood have become the basis of his confidence toward his God.

Another revelation of the present position of the believer is that he has partaken of the Divine nature through regeneration by the Spirit. This truth is stated in many passages, a few of which are here given: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (Jno. 1:12, 13). "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (Jno. 3:5-8). "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (Jno. 10:10). "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" (Gal. 6:15). "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5). "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (II Cor. 5:17). "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (II Pet. 1:4).

The reality of this mighty transformation is in no way evident in present visible things, but must be accepted by faith. It is no less than a translation from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of Christ,

"who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13). And by it one is said to be delivered from this present evil age: "Who gave himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of God and our Father" (Gal. 1:4), and, also, according to the above passage, "to have escaped the corruption that is in the world" (Satanic system).

The new life that is thus imparted is none other than the very life of Christ: "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9). "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (II Cor. 13:5).

The third great fact of the believer's present position in separation from this world is that the Holy Spirit is given unto him, at the moment of his regeneration, to indwell him, in place of the energizing power of Satan who "worketh" with energy in the children of disobedience: "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit that is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5). "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (I Cor. 2:12). "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" (I Cor. 6:19).

Another phase of the believer's position is revealed in the fact that he is said to be a citizen of heaven; his home center or citizenship having been moved there from the earth. His name would, therefore, appear only among the celestial beings, in any true census of the universe. The reality of this unseen relationship is brought out in several passages: "For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Himself" (Phil. 3:20 R.V.). "For ye know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, Who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (II Cor. 5:1-8).

Again, as to the believer's position in that which is termed in Ephesians "the heavenly places,"--though the supplying of the word "places" is very misleading. The meaning of the word "heavenly" here is not so much of locality as of experience: as is indicated by the use of the same word in other passages where the believer is said to be "heavenly" in standing and relationship (Heb. 3:1; Eph. 2:6. See also Matt. 18:35; Jno. 3:12; I Cor. 15:48).

Dr. C. I. Scofield makes the following statement on this important phase of the believer's position:

"The Christian is 'heavenly' by calling (Heb. 3:1), by citizenship (Phil. 3:20), by inheritance (I Pet. 1:4) and by resurrection life (Eph. 2:6), as a member of that body of which the Head is actually in heaven. The

heavenly (or 'in heavenly places,') therefore, is the sphere of the believer's present association with Christ. This is shown by the constant context, 'in Christ Jesus.' The believer is now associated with Christ in life (Col. 3:4; I Jno. 5:11, 12), position (Eph. 2:6), suffering (Rom. 8:18; II Tim. 2:11, 12; Col. 1:24; Phil. 1:29); service, (Jno. 17:18; Matt. 28:18-20), and betrothal (II Cor. 11:1-3).

"The believer is to be associated with Christ in Glory (Jno. 17:22; Rom. 8:18; Col. 3:4), inheritance (Rom. 8:17), authority (Matt. 19:28; Rev. 3:21), and marriage (Eph. 5:22, 33; Rev. 19:1-9).

"The believer's 'spiritual blessings' (Eph. 1:3), therefore, are to be possessed or experienced only as he lives in the sphere of his joint life, joint position, joint suffering, joint service and joint marriage pledge with Christ. In so far as he lives as a natural man whose interests are earthly, and avoids the path of co-service and (if need be) co-suffering, he will know nothing experimentally of the exalted blessings of Ephesians. 'It is sufficient that the servant be as his Master.' Christ took account of Himself as a heavenly Being come down to earth to do His Father's will." (Scofield Bible Correspondence Course, Book 2; page 288.)

Thus it may be seen that the believer is not only a citizen of heaven, but that he has also been brought into a position where many privileges of the heavenly experience are open to him.

In like manner, the believer's position in relation to this world is not only a separation from the world by nature and purpose; but he is also said to be a stranger and a pilgrim among the inhabitants of this dark age. "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: which in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles" (I Pet. 2:9-12). The same expression of "strangers and pilgrims" is used, also, in regard to the faith descendants of Abraham: "these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth" (Heb. 11:13). This same wide difference between the people of this world and the people of God is also stated in passages where the world is understood to be the system over which Satan now rules: "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world (Satanic system) shall keep it unto life eternal" (Jno. 12:25). "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world (Satanic system) is the enemy of God" (Jas. 4:4). Love not the world (Satanic system), neither the things that are in the world. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (I Jno. 2:15-17).

The word "lust," constantly used in description of the Satanic system, has a much larger meaning in the Scripture than its present popular use, where it refers only to that which is sensual. In these passages quoted, it refers to the whole Satan-inspired ambition of humanity, and includes their principle of self-help, and their struggle for all that, to them, is highest and best. It is unlawful, in that it disregards the truth of God; and it is related to that which is physical, because it magnifies the finite being and its resources.

Two other striking passages concerning the relation of the believer to the world are here given: "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world (Satanic system)" (I Jno. 4:17). "As thou hast sent me into the world (Satanic system), even so

have I also sent them into the world (Satanic system)" (Jno. 17:18).

The last revelation of the believer's position to be mentioned here, is in regard to his service for the world. The unbounded love of God has called him into fellowship with Christ in the great work of this age; and in that connection he is under commission to evangelize, by a process of witnessing, to the uttermost parts of the world. In this undertaking he is promised the immediate presence of Christ, to whom all power, both in heaven and in earth, has been given (Matt. 28:18-20). The language of the inspired Book describes such witnesses as "Ambassadors for Christ": "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (II Cor. 5:20). And the ambassador's message is also given in the next verse of the same passage: "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (we who knew no righteousness).

Nowhere does the saint need more direct teaching of the Spirit than in regard to the relation he sustains to this world. In spite of the similarity of his earth life to that of the world's people, he must reckon himself to be dead in Christ and raised to newness of life. Expecting the world to misunderstand him and even to hate him, he must "wisely walk before them who are without." He is called upon to "use this world but not to abuse it;" and that which is of itself pure and good may become undesirable to him at times, because its use would further the interests of Satan.

Some have taken the extreme position of assigning to Satan the material universe and everything that is in the world to-day; not recognizing the fact that no material or physical thing is evil of itself. God created all things good. Satan has created nothing, and his present relation to the world is only as a permitted usurper who appropriates and devastates the things of God in the interests of his own ambition. He is the file-leader in a great and terrible rebellion against the government of God: but the natural universe, like all the powers of the human mind and will, belongs primarily to God, the Creator; and by title of inheritance, they belong also, to the child of God: "therefore let no man glory in men.

For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (I Cor. 3:21-23). Yet, since Satan is making use of many good things to cover his evil purpose, the child of God must, for the present, discern the hidden evil and, in loyalty to his Lord, reject everything that may further the workings of Satan. The Scripture is very clear on this point, and discusses one issue as an example of all similar issues.

This discussion in Scripture is of food which of itself is perfectly good, but may be a means of great harm when associated with the purposes of evil. The passages are as follows: "Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of: for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. For meat destroy not the work of God.

All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (Rom. 14: 13-21). "What say I then? that the idol is anything, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is anything? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.

Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than He? All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth. Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.

If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof: conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks?

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved" (I Cor. 10:19-33).

The question becomes a practical one, in view of the present progress in discovery, science, and psychology. A theory must not be rejected because it is new or mysterious; for the marvelous inventions of the age are often as useful in spreading the Gospel as in furthering the interests of Satan. The newly acquired knowledge of the universe may be as valuable to the progress of good as to the advancement of evil.

There can be but one final test as to what shall be accepted and what shall be rejected, and that must be made by the individual alone before God (Rom. 14:22). In connection with any such question we may ask, "Is the real work of redemption hindered, or its true basis rejected? Is this a direct denial of the truth, by which souls will be hindered, or is it a counterfeit which may decoy them away from their only hope in the priceless blood of the Cross?" Beyond this, a child of God may safely be "all things to all men that he may save some."

The Christian can see more of beauty in the world, make larger use of its learning, and more fully appreciate its good, than can the children of this age: yet he must now, above all things else, be content with his limited commission, and be jealous of the interests of his Lord and King. Much of his present perplexity would be relieved if he could but realize that he is temporarily tenting where an enemy rules, and where he is the object of that enemy's fiery darts, yet hedged about by the omnipotence of God; called to bear the one message of redemption by the Cross, in the capacity and hidden dignity of an ambassador from the throne of the Most High; even now possessing a glory which shall soon be unveiled in the presence of his Lord; waiting that morning when his Lord shall come again and receive him unto Himself.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net