

The Status of an Heir

by Watchman Nee

Watchman Nee's sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding our identity as heirs in Christ and the necessity of receiving God's grace for our salvation and daily living.

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "Grace"

Description

Watchman Nee emphasizes that true Christianity is about receiving God's grace, paralleling believers with Isaac, who was born into freedom, unlike Ishmael, who represents slavery. He explains that our inheritance in Christ includes both our position in Him and His life within us, which empowers us to live victoriously. Nee stresses that salvation and the Christian life are gifts from God, not achievements of our own, and that we must recognize our identity in Christ to experience true freedom and holiness. He illustrates that just as a ticket's fate is tied to the book it is in, our lives are intertwined with Christ's work and presence. Ultimately, the Christian life is about receiving Christ as our all, allowing His nature to manifest in us.

Transcript

The distinctive feature of true Christianity is that it compels people to receive. The letter to the Galatians draws a close parallel between ourselves and Isaac, and shows that we are people who receive just as he did. We are heirs (3. 29; 4. 7). We partake of the promises (3. 22; 4. 28). There is an inheritance in view, and we enter into that inheritance (3. 18; 4. 30 f.). In all these things we are at the receiving end.

Ishmael was born into slavery. His mother was a bondwoman and he shared her status. Slavery was his inheritance. But Isaac, because of the status of his mother, was born to freedom. In New Testament terms Sarah represents grace, just as Hagar represents law (4. 24 f.). Grace means that salvation is a free gift of God, for which we do not work. He does it all.

In Paul's letter to the Romans he makes it clear that the sinner depends on grace for his salvation. In these chapters of Galatians he shows us that the believer depends equally upon grace for his continuation in the Christian life. We never did anything, or gave God anything, for our salvation. Now we are to go on in the same way, not making even faith something that we do but looking trustfully to His grace and continuing to receive. For Christ has prepared for us everything.

There are two sides to Christ's work expressed in two simple statements. Firstly, you and I are in Christ. Secondly, Christ is in you and in me. Every fruit of our union with Christ is governed by these two

statements of what God has done. The Lord Jesus Himself puts this in a concise sentence which says: 'Abide in me, and I in you' (John 15. 4).

By virtue of our position in Christ we benefit from all the accomplished facts of His history: His life on earth, His death and resurrection, and His session at God's right hand. All His work becomes ours, all that He has already done and that is covered by the statement, 'It is finished.' By virtue of the further fact that Christ is in us, we become partakers of His life. All His power, all that He can do now, all that He is today, becomes ours. Both these aspects of our union with Him are included in our inheritance; if we want to enter into all our inheritance, then we must see them both. If we only know that we are in Christ, we are passive and weak. If we only know that Christ is in us, life is uphill and something is missing. Neither is sufficient alone. Both are gifts already given to us to provide for our life, our future, our standing before God, our practical holiness-everything.

God begins by giving us a new position so that we have a new start. He does this by placing us in Christ. If I am down at the bottom of a horrible pit, then I continue there with no way of getting out of it, until God lifts me out and puts me upon a rock. That is what He has done for us in Christ. By placing us in Him He has settled all our past, just as by placing the life of Christ within us He has given us all we need for the present and for the entire future. The two sides are necessary to deliver us out of our agonized striving to attain, and into that place of rest where all is from God.

How we need that new start in Christ! We are sinners in God's sight and we need deliverance and a new standing before God. We shall never have it in ourselves.

I belong to the race of Adam, and I have only Adam in me. Not only is my conduct bad but I am bad. The man himself is wrong and not merely his actions.

As young Christians we take a long time to learn this. Only after bitter experience does it dawn on us that it is no mere question of dropped goods but of the faultiness of the bag containing them. If we find one thing after another is dropping out of our pockets, we eventually give up putting them back in there. We feel around instead to see if perchance the pocket has a hole in it! It is the unfailing recurrence of our sins of hasty speech, quick temper, avid self-seeking and so on, that, even when we know God's forgiveness, exposes the fact that the trouble is within ourselves.

The apostle Paul makes this clear in the first section of Romans where, down to the beginning of chapter 5, he shows us how man's conduct is wrong, and how the cure for this is God's forgiveness through the precious Blood of Christ. Then in the second section, down to chapter 8, he shows us how the man himself is wrong and must be dealt with. What is the remedy here? It is one thing only: for that man himself to die.

God does not say 'the soul that sins must get his sins cleansed'; He says 'the soul that sins must die'. 'He that hath died,' says Paul, 'is justified from sin' (Romans 6. 7). There is no other remedy. In the sight of God we must die.

But what sort of salvation would be ours if we were to end there? There is the need for a resurrection to new life, and a new start. We must not only die in God's eyes, we must rise again. But surely, too, there must be a new position. I must not only live but I must live for God; and He is in heaven, so I must ascend there. Thus there must be a death, a resurrection and an ascension before the trouble I have inherited from Adam is reversed.

How can this possibly be? How can I die, and be raised, and ascend to where God is? The simple answer is that I cannot. Man may seek this kind of death, but he can never attain it. He may seek resurrection, and all he achieves is a grave. He may seek heaven, but he finds himself earthbound. To escape from the inheritance of Adam and from sin's reign is an insuperable problem.

There is indeed only one solution, and this is clearly stated in 1 Corinthians 1. 30. The Chinese version of the statement is: 'That you are in Christ Jesus, is of God.' This is a most important affirmation. It is God's work that has placed me in Christ Jesus. It is nothing that I have done or could ever do. And everything for my salvation stems from the fact that God has done it.

You have seen this illustration before, but I will repeat it. I have a bus ticket here, and I put it into the pages of this book. Now I put the book into the fire and burn it. What happens to the ticket? Or I throw the book into the river. What about the ticket? Or again, I make the book up into a parcel, and take it to the Post Office and mail it to Europe. Where is the ticket now? You can answer each question with absolute assurance; and yet it is a fact that, once it was in the book, I did nothing more with the ticket as such. I did not send the ticket to Europe, I sent the book. Because the ticket is in the book, where the book goes the ticket must go. It has a part in everything that happens to the book. When I tell you what has happened to the book, you do not have to stop and think what has happened to the thing that is included in the book.

We have been placed into Christ. When Christ was put to death, we died in Him, because we are in Him (Romans 6. 6). Moreover, the work of God did not stop there, for the Lord Jesus rose and ascended to His right hand. But because we are in Christ Jesus, we also were made alive with Him, and raised, and seated with Him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2. 5 f.). We have a new standing in the presence of God, and it is not something to which we attained but something which is ours because we are in Christ. These facts, which are historically true of Him, become real also in our experience.

It is important to realize that scripture makes our death, resurrection and ascension to be 'given' historic facts in Christ. The fact that our old man 'was crucified with Him is something we know (Romans 6. 6). Unless we have cause to reckon ourselves not to be 'in Christ', we cannot say that these facts are untrue. They follow logically from what God has done in the initial step of our salvation.

I cannot sufficiently emphasize that this is the first element in our inheritance in Christ. Our death in Christ Jesus, and the freedom from sin which goes with that death, are not doctrine but inheritance. They are not things that I have to do but gifts that I have received. However hard I try, I shall only prove to myself that by striving it does not work. But if I see that God has worked, and that that 'old man' who has been such a problem was crucified long ago, then I shall know what it is to walk in newness of life.

Here I must share with you my own experience. Thirteen years ago I came to the point where I knew that there was a lack somewhere in my life. Sin was defeating me, and I saw that something was fundamentally wrong. I asked God to show me what was the meaning of the expression, 'I have been crucified with Christ.' For some months I prayed earnestly and read the Scriptures, seeking light. It became increasingly clear to me that, when speaking to us of this subject, God nowhere says, 'You must be,' but always, 'You have been.' Yet in view of my constant failures this just did not seem possible, unless I was to be dishonest with myself. I almost turned to the conclusion that only dishonest people could make such statements.

Then one morning I came in my reading to 1 Corinthians 1. 30. 'You are in Christ Jesus,' it said. I looked at it again. 'That you are in Christ Jesus, is God's doing!' It was amazing ! Then if Christ died, and that is a

certain fact, and if God put me into Him, then I must have died too. All at once I saw. I cannot tell you what a wonderful discovery that was.

The trouble with us today is that we think crucifixion with Christ is an experience we have somehow to attain. It is not. It is something God has done, and we have only to receive it. The whole difference lies here: Is the Cross a doctrine to be grasped and then applied? Or, Is it a revelation which God flashes upon my heart? It is quite possible, as I have proved, to know and preach the doctrine of the Cross without seeing the wonderful fact.

All God has done, He has done first of all to Christ, and only then to us because we are in Christ. God does nothing directly upon us. Apart from and outside of Christ, God has no work of grace. Here is the preciousness of 1 Corinthians 1. 30. God has not only given us Christ but Christ's experience; not only what He can do but what He has already done. From His death onwards, all that He has is ours. This is the divine provision that Isaac illustrates to us.

But we must not stop there. We have seen the fact of Christ, of all that He has already done in the past which we now have in Him, and which settled our own past because we are in Christ. But the other side of the coin is this, that Christ is in us, not for the past but for today and for all the future. His life is given to us, so that now He, exalted in heaven, is our life-power. I, in Him, have received His finished work. He, in me, gives me His power.

How can we be victorious, righteous, holy? First we must understand clearly that God has not constituted Christ our Example to be copied. He is not giving us His strength to help us imitate Christ. He has not even planted Christ within us to help us to be Christ-like. Galatians 2. 20 is not our standard for record-breaking endeavour. It is not a high aim to be aspired to through long seeking and patient progress. No, it is not God's aim at all, but God's method. When Paul says, 'Yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me,' he is showing us how only Christ satisfies God's heart. This is the life that gives God satisfaction in the believer, and there is no substitute. 'Not I, but Christ,' means Christ instead of me. When Paul uses these words he is not claiming to have attained something his readers have not yet reached to. He is defining the Christian life. The Christian life is the Christ life. Christ in me has become my life, and is living my life instead of me. It is not even that I trust Him as a separate, sufficient act. No, God gives Him to be my life.

Moreover, in that new life there is a law-the law that determines what that life is like in expression. It is not just that a life is present in me, for if this were all, I would then have to hold tightly on to it. No, there is a law of that life (Romans 8. 2) and that law looks after itself.

When we put a book on a table, we do not always need carefully and precisely to place it right down on the table's surface. We can let it go, just as we can drop a piece of paper into a wastepaper basket. The law of gravity is working, and it ensures that the book will fall into place. Without the law of gravity we would have to be more careful, or it might go up instead of down. But the law takes care of it, and we do not have to. Just so, we do not need to look after the law of life in Christ Jesus; the law will look after us!

Often we find something in the Christian life difficult, and so we turn to God for help. Really that is wrong. We are trying to use the life, instead of letting the life use us. Let go, and the law will operate, and the life itself will work. Say to God, 'I cannot do it, but Your life in me can and will. I am putting my trust in You.' There is not even needindeed there is seldom the time---consciously to exert faith in this matter. There is a law, and a law must always work; we have only to rest in it. Like Isaac, we have everything done for us by the Father.

It is just here that the second half of 1 Corinthians 1. 30 is so splendid. 'Christ Jesus was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.' This means that my righteousness and yours is not a quality or a virtue; indeed it is not a thing at all-but a living Person. My holiness is not a condition of life but a Person. My redemption is not a hope but Christ in me, the hope of glory. Yes, Christ in me, and Christ in you-this is all we need.

The daily life of the Christian is summed up in the word 'receive'. Every challenging thing that God demands of me long-suffering, meekness, humility, goodness, holiness, joy is not something I am, or something I do, or some virtue I acquire or attain to. It is Christ in me. Each is the manifestation of Him. Let Him be revealed, naturally and spontaneously, and that is enough.

'He is made unto us . . .' If He were our Justifier, Sanctifier, Redeemer, we could understand. But it does not say He does these things. It uses abstract nouns: He is these things. Christ in us meets every demand of God, and every demand of the circumstances around us.

It is not in us to be humble, nor shall we find it helps to trust in the power of Christ to make us humble. Christ is humble, naturally-that is, by His very nature-and He is made our humility, for Christ is our all. Even faith and trust and obedience, if we regard them as virtues by which we attain, will prove ineffective. It is not that I trust His Word, therefore I can be long-suffering. It is that Christ is long suffering, and, praise God, Christ is in me! Once again, this is Isaac, natural, simple, spontaneous, trusting implicitly and without question, because the Father has made absolutely sufficient provision.

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