

Not Of This World

Introduction

In some of my other studies I refer to believers as being in Christ and not of this world, and usually list a couple of Scripture references to support those statements. The purpose of this study initially was to provide a more comprehensive set of verses and passages to remind myself of these truths. As it progressed, it seemed beneficial to also add passages that provide applications to these truths. That is, because we are in Christ and not of this world, we are considered by God to be ambassadors for Christ. Furthermore, if we conduct ourselves as His ambassadors in the manner exhorted by God, then we can expect to suffer persecution. My hope is that these passages are as helpful to you as they are to me.

In Christ

If we believe that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again (the gospel of our salvation— I Corinthians 15:1-4), then God considers us to be in Christ and He is in us. God considers us to be members of Christ's body, with Christ being the head of the body (I Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18). Furthermore, God has adopted us as His own children (Romans 8:14-17).

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)¹

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us [*believers*], even when we were dead in our transgressions [*sins*], made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him [*God*] in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He [*God*] might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7)

However, you [*brethren*] are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him [*God*]. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him [*God*] who raised Jesus for the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8:9-11)

Of this church I [*Paul*] was made a minister according to the stewardship from [dispensation of] God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out [fulfil] the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints [*believers*], to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:25-27)

Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age [*world*], he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness

¹ All references are quoted from the *New American Standard Bible* (1996). Words in brackets are either equivalent words from the *King James Version* or, if in italics, were added by me for clarification.

before God. For it is written, “He is the one who catches the wise in their craftiness”; and again, “The Lord knows the reasonings [thoughts] of the wise, that they are useless.” So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas [*Peter*] or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God. (I Corinthians 3:18-23)

“I [*Paul*] have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in [by the faith of] the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we [*believers*] were all baptized into one body [*the body of Christ*], whether Jews or Greeks [Gentiles], whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (I Corinthians 12:12-13)

(See also Romans 6:3-11; Galatians 3:26-28; Ephesians 5:28-30; Colossians 2:13; 3:1; I Thessalonians 4:13-17)

Citizens of Heaven

Therefore, as believers—children of God—we are in the world but not of it. In effect, we are aliens in this world because we are citizens of heaven. Furthermore, we don’t have dual citizenship—that of the world and of heaven—because the world is the realm of Satan and we no longer belong to him (Ephesians 2:1-3; Galatians 1:3-4).

“If the world hates you [*the disciples*], you know that it has hated Me [*Jesus Christ*] before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.” (John 15:18-19)²

“I [*Jesus Christ*] am no longer in the world; and yet they [*the disciples*] themselves are in the world, and I come to You [*God*]. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are. While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition [*Judas*], so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” (John 17:11-14)

Jesus answered [*Pontius Pilate*], “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants [*disciples*] would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.” (John 18:36)

² Such references to *the world* by Jesus, Paul, and others refer, depending on the context, to this sinful world or the realm of Satan, to the worldly (godless) system in which we live, and to the children of disobedience—nonbelievers (Ephesians 2:1-3). Therefore, the physical world is not against us; instead, it is the spiritual forces of Satan, working through human institutions and people, that are opposed to the truth of God and to all of God’s children (Ephesians 6:10-17; Galatians 1:3-5).

But may it never be that I [Paul] would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Galatians 6:14)

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. (Philippians 3:20-21)

Therefore if [because] you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)

Ambassadors for Christ

Because we continue to live in this world, we are ambassadors for (representatives of) Christ and should desire to live appropriately (not conforming ourselves to the sinfulness of the world) and as an example of God's love to nonbelievers.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (II Corinthians 5:20)

Therefore I [Paul] urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual [reasonable] service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)

Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear [shine] as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I [Paul] will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. (Philippians 2:14-16)

Let no one look down on your [Timothy's] youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. (I Timothy 4:12)

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders [nonbelievers], making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. (Colossians 4:5-6)

So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith [believers]. (Galatians 6:10)

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons [children] of disobedience [nonbelievers]. Therefore do not be partakers with them;³

³ Paul was exhorting the Ephesian believers to not live according to sinfulness as the nonbelievers live (and as they themselves once lived—Ephesians 2:1-3; 4:17-24), but to live as representatives of Christ and the truth of God—the Light of God—so that perhaps some may see their need for salvation (Ephesians 5:11-14).

for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn [proving] what is pleasing to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:6-10)

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law [of Moses]. For this, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 13:8-10)

(See also Colossians 3:1-17; I Thessalonians 4:9-12; Titus 3:1-2)

Suffering for Christ

As Jesus told His disciples in John 15:18-19, we can expect to suffer persecution if the world identifies us with Christ; that is, *if* we truly live for Christ as we are exhorted to live. We will suffer because the world can't tolerate the truth of God. Furthermore, just as the people of Israel (God's chosen nation) persecuted and killed God's prophets for telling them the truth of God (Acts 7:51-52), we may also suffer at the hands of fellow brethren for sharing or living according to the word of God (Galatians 4:16; 5:13-15, 26; II Timothy 1:15).⁴ God has told us how to respond to persecution, and His way is different than how we might be inclined to do.

Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (II Timothy 3:12)

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I [Paul] come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me. (Philippians 1:27-30)

And not only this, but we [believers] also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:3-5)

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. (Romans 12:14)

To this present hour we [Paul and his coworkers] are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we

⁴ Suffering from fellow believers can be in the form of rejection or lost fellowship (being ostracized), hateful speech, anger, false accusations, being considered a heretic, etc. These responses are usually due to a misunderstanding or misuse of the word of God (Galatians 3:1-3; I Timothy 4:1-3; 6:3-5; II Timothy 4:1-4).

try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.
(I Corinthians 4:11-13)

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. “But if your enemy is hungry, feed Him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
(Romans 12:17-21)

(See also Matthew 5:11; Romans 8:16-18; II Corinthians 1:5-7; I Thessalonians 2:14-16; I Peter 4:15-16, 19)

Summary

If we believe the gospel of salvation—that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was resurrected—then we are in Christ and He is in us. Because of this, we are citizens of heaven at the right hand of God and alien residents of this ungodly world; that is, we are in the world but not of it. Furthermore, we are Christ’s ambassadors—His representatives—for as long as we live in this world. If we live as we ought to live, then we will be persecuted because this sinful world rejects the truth of God. Do the people we associate with see Christ in us?

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