

Positional Truth

A precious aspect of Christianity is positional truth. God has endowed us with great spiritual blessings, and these are central to fully understanding the Gospel. They are hard to understand, though. For example, if we're *in Christ*, we're in the promised Messianic Kingdom because Jesus is the King, but we're not really experiencing it because the Kingdom is yet future. Let's think about some of these positional truths of Scripture, what they are and their significance to us.

"If Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin" (Romans 8:10). "Dead"? I'm writing this and you're reading this because we certainly are NOT dead. Yet Paul writes, "your body is dead!" This is an example of a positional truth. In the mind of God, all sinners are dead. That's what God's oracle declared in Genesis 3. It's what Scripture repeatedly affirms, "The soul that sins shall die." And, "The recompense for sin is death." We're *in Christ*, which is another positional truth of supernal cosmic significance. It means we're identified with Christ, and further that we're *in Him* in the sense of Noah and his family were in the ark that preserved them from the judgment of the Flood. So Romans 8:10 has this meaning: We who have identified with Christ are to regard ourselves as dead, and dead bodies don't sin, can't sin. Or, in other words, if we're identified with or joined to the Holy One of Israel, we need also to be holy. The Holy Spirit indwells us to enable us to be holy, if we obey Scripture. Let's get this great truth: I am very much alive right now, breathing and conscious of everything, but I'm to regard myself as God does, as dead because of sin. And therefore I won't sin.

Paul takes this thought further, writing in Galatians 2:20, **"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live . . ."** Atonement theology states this truth: We're not only dead because of sin, we're dead because sin demands punishment, and Christ died on the cross as my penal substitute. The positional truth here is, in God's mind, I was there *in Christ* dying *with* Him. Christ was not merely my atoning substitute, nor merely my representative, but I was there on the cross *identified with* the Christ who died for sin. I was not dying on the cross the death I deserved, for the death I deserved in perfect justice is eternity in hell. No, I was there on the cross united with Christ, an infinitely valuable Person, who died the death I deserve. This is identification theology. It's the singular idea that Paul develops in Romans 6. The meaning of this is greater than we can imagine: As I'm now a dead man, I'm dead to sin. So my present life is the life of the One with Whom I'm identified, the risen, exalted Jesus. My life is no longer all about Me. It's all about Jesus.

"Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above . . . Set your minds on things above . . . For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:1-3). Another positional truth is this, we have new, resurrected life *now*, and therefore we're seated in the heavenlies with Christ. Wow! What an astounding statement this is. I'm *me*, sitting at this desk typing on a keyboard, yet positionally, spiritually, I'm with Christ on His throne with God. In God's mind, this is so. Therefore, I must be holy. I must actually live the resurrected life of Christ. My thoughts, my values, my priorities – all these and more, must be those of a resurrected, exalted person. Hey! This isn't just abstract theology. This is the full truth of the Gospel. If we "believe" the Gospel, we also must commit to living out the truths of the Gospel.

"You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness" (Romans 6:18). Set free from sin? Huh? Me? Paul writes this because, in God's mind, it's true! Justification means we're really free from sin. Now my very real every-day experience is, I still sin and, I regret to have to say, I'll probably continue to do that till I die and am buried in a grave somewhere. But my position in Christ is, I've been set free from sin. And then the rest of this verse is even more powerful. I have become a "slave to righteousness." "Slave" means that's my new position, a required, indeed a demanding one, in Christ. Woe to me if I fail to fulfill the obligations of a "slave." Later, in Ephesians, Paul will develop this idea as the putting off of the "old man" and putting on the "new man," ie, living the life of righteousness enabled by Christ's Spirit. Paul couldn't be clearer than he is in Romans 6:16, We're either slaves to sin, resulting in death, or we're obeying Christ. Positional truth necessarily merges into moral truth.

"You received the Spirit of sonship [adoption]" (Romans 8:15). We are "sons of the Most High." God has taken us into His family, as it were, by adopting us. This is a positional truth, a blessing too wonderful even to contemplate. Imagine (if possible), that by grace, a holy, infinite God takes sinful, disobedient, rebellious, finite creatures into a most intimate personal relationship, that between a father and a son. God calls us His "heirs" (even though He's obviously not going to die), because as "heirs" He has given us the right of inheriting all that He has, viz, everything that exists. Think of it! God

holds us in such infinitely high esteem that He'd give us His entire cosmos. Sons—even adopted ones—also have such wonderful privileges as unhindered access to the father. The invitation to pray and to be heard by our Creator God is overwhelmingly supernal. But sons also have responsibilities, serious ones. Sons must honor their father. Sons must obey their father, carrying out his will. And Sons must be *like* their father. Jesus develops these Father/Son or family responsibilities in the Gospel of John (see particularly Chapters 5, 6, and 8). Jesus honored the Father, unlike the Pharisees. He obeyed the Father despite the humiliation and suffering it necessitated. And Jesus was exactly like the Father, whereas the Pharisees were just like their “father” the devil. These are *our* responsibilities, as well, as adopted sons: To honor God in a world in rebellion against Him, to obey Him despite the (perhaps) terrible cost, and to be like Him, ie, godly. We do these first by knowing and then obeying His Word.

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Do we understand positional truth? **“God gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were”** (Romans 5:17). God called Abraham “righteous” (although he was not), and He calls us “saints” (although we certainly are not) and “righteous” (although we are not that either). God, of course, has the sovereign right to do as He pleases with us according to His holy will, but it's deeper. Because God is eternal, what's true and real in the future is true and real in prior time, indeed throughout *all* time, as well. Truth is eternal, i.e., timeless, and therefore it is also retroactively effective. This means, we're to live today, this present life, in view of our future promised existence.

In God's good and just administration of creation, He has decreed that we who are His image have certain responsibilities that reflect or mirror God's Person and that fulfill His will. We have a creaturely obligation to obey the God who gave us life, and who speaks, and who loves us. But our responsibilities go way beyond creatureliness. Thus, the core elements of what we call “salvation,” namely, justification, identification and adoption, are to create an intimate, loving and trusting relationship with God Himself. “We love Him because He first loved us.” Positional truths, although by grace they are entirely God's doing, don't mean that we're simply passive spectators in a great drama of God's doing. We have a necessary role to fulfill, one that glorifies God, one that involves knowing His Word and lovingly obeying Him.

Obedience to God's Word, by the way, is not “works” salvation. It is not “works” to obey the One who so loved us that He gave Himself over to horrible suffering in order to rescue us from the everlasting punishment in hell that we really deserve. If we know who Jesus is and if we trust Him, then we'll acknowledge that His will (that is, His teachings and commands) are infinitely wise and good and we'll obey them. And we'll do it out of love for Him. We'll do it to say “Thank you” and to show how much we value what He did for us. We'll do it because we're already (positionally) in His future Messianic Kingdom. We'll do it to exalt Him.

Faith is, after all, knowing, loving and trusting God. It is therefore also trusting in the future as God has promised it's going to be, and living as if the future is now and we're living it. Faith is also knowing and trusting in propositional truths, including positional truths, that are otherwise totally unknowable, and living as if they are really absolutely true. Faith is living out truth. It's demonstrating by a real life, lived in the here and now before a world of people and angels, that the God we love speaks truth. The Gospel is, in essence, an invitation to know, trust and love Jesus and to live all of God's precious spoken truths, thereby entering into an intimate, personal, eternal relationship with our Creator God.

Let's conclude with this thought. Scripture affirms a radical concept, viz., God defines reality. Reality is not only what we perceive, but is what God knows to be true and real. And He has revealed certain (but not all) of that reality for us in Scripture. God is Spirit. He is infinite, and He transcends His physical creation. And He has decreed how things are to be in His creation. So He can, for example, forgive sins and declare a person to be righteous even though, as we perceive things, that person is anything but righteous. And He has the right to stipulate on what condition(s) He will create that reality, namely faith (as described and defined in His Word, not what we assume “faith” to be). Our responsibility as finite creatures is to accept God's Word as defining reality, lovingly accept His condition(s), and live based on it, not on the basis of what we suppose is true. Oh, that we would understand this most fundamental of all concepts!