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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Sunday morning, 31st. December, 1950

Text: 2 Corinthians 5.17

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new."

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In this chapter the Apostle Paul shows that he lived, more or less, in an abiding confidence with respect to his own spiritual state and standing before God. He was indeed, dealt with in a remarkable way. Blessed with such a clear manifestation of the Son of God in his soul, he appears to have enjoyed the sweet comfort of an assurance of eternal life through Christ Jesus, and to abide in that comfort in his soul's feeling. So here in this chapter, he says, "For we know" - not, 'we hope' but "we know"! He knew that, if this earthly house of his tabernacle were dissolved, he had a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. A wonderful thing for a sinner to be able to say and to feel fully persuaded of in his own soul, as the Apostle was!

This is actually so with every one who is in Christ, being thereby free from condemnation; yet in the experience of the Lord's people there is a great diversity of feeling in regard to that assurance. Some walk much in darkness, are tried and tempted, torn and harassed by the enemy concerning their own cases, and do not feel to have that clear view in their souls' experience of their standing, that they would desire to have; whereas others are blessed with more of the consolation and joy of the gospel and a sense of their own personal interest in the love of God, which, more or less, continues with them. Some of those who have this original favour, this experience in their souls of the gospel and of forgiveness, have yet, in later days, great and sore temptations, so that as to experience in this particular, no clear line can be drawn; but if there is a desire for His mercy the Lord promises to come down to and embrace even those who think upon His Name, saying, "They shall be Mine in that day when I make up My jewels." I will own even those who think upon My Name, I will own them as My jewels. So it will be in that day that awaits us all, at

Christ's second coming. "Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." It is a wonderful mercy to have some clearing up of things in our souls, to feel that we are indeed upon the Foundation, to enjoy some of the comfort and blessing of the gospel, to be able to say "I know whom I have believed" and to rejoice in some inflowing of the love of God in Christ in our souls.

The Apostle says, "If our earthly house", that is this tabernacle of our bodies, which is not only an earthly house, but a house of earth, for God created man of the dust of the ground; thus it is a house of earth, and we shall return to the earth in the Lord's appointed time. This occasions no grief of mind to a vessel of mercy, who would not live always here, feeling this is not his rest, and graciously anticipating the day when mortality will be swallowed up of life. We that are in this frail tabernacle groan. It does not take long to take a tabernacle down. With some of our friends this tabernacle is weakening as expressed in a verse of a hymn -

"I feel this mud-walled cottage shake"

and some can say,

"And long to see it fall."

It is wonderful where there is a spiritual anticipation of heaven. This does not consist of some material desire to get out of trouble or affliction, which any one may have in a state of nature, but in a holy desire to be free from sin and to dwell where Jesus is. It is noticeable here that the Apostle's spirit was burdened, for he says, "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 that awaits every chosen vessel of mercy. Mortality belongs to us here and we realise the truth that this mortal frame must soon return to earth. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." Mortality will be swallowed up of life in that great day, for "The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be

raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed... Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

Now the Apostle would point out that there is a judgment day coming and I hope we may not forget that. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." This does not mean that the justification of a sinner in the sight of God for his eternal salvation stands upon the ground of his works. Where the grace of God is, and the faith of Christ is wrought in the soul, one is made a new creature; but the evidence and effect of life in the soul is revealed in good works, spiritual works, works of faith, good works brought forth by the influence and power of the gospel in the soul. O, it is a great thing to be brought away from all legal standing, and to fall flat before the cross of Christ, to see our salvation absolutely in that remarkable sentence, "It is finished." and then under the influence of that grace seek to manifest the fruits of faith and to "Walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing", being fruitful in every good work.

Here in the word I have read, the Apostle defines the standing of all quickened, spiritual souls in the Lord Jesus Christ and the change that has been wrought in them, in their hearts, and in their lives. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature." - that is a new creation - "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." A knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ in the soul's salvation is purely spiritual; there is nothing of the flesh in it; it is not a natural apprehension. Many knew Christ after the flesh who did not know Him after the spirit, but the knowledge here defined does not consist in the fact that they saw and knew Him in the days of His flesh, but rather that they are joined in union to Him under a spiritual revelation of His glorious Person whereby they are new creatures in Him. It is a great thing to be brought to this knowledge of Christ, for "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the

only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."

This brings before my mind a dream I once had about my dear father some years after his death in our own home where we lived as a family. My father appeared at the window of the dining-room and began conversing with me on spiritual things. I said to him, Father, don't you remember when you were alive you had four sons? I named each one to him. He said, 'We know no man after the flesh.' I tried again to bring him back to the family relationship but he made no reply, yet to a sentence of a spiritual nature he responded at once. I could get no connection with former family ties; he was beyond all that. This I believe had some lasting impression on my spirit. You see, there are many people, and good people, who take the view of a recognition of earthly relationships in heaven, but the Spirit has not made that clear to us. There we shall know no man after the flesh but as the whole family of the redeemed of the Lord. As to earthly relationships we can leave that point, knowing that we shall be with the Lord, and our happiness will consist (if we are His) in being there for ever to dwell where Jesus is. An old minister once said, (when asked if we should know each other in heaven) 'When I set my eyes on Him I shall never want to take them off.' What a mercy to be favoured to say and feel "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee!" One thing we do know, there will be no disappointment there, no grief, no blighted hopes, but full satisfaction, perfect peace, unalloyed happiness, world without end.

Now to Paul this was being "in Christ". O what a wonderful mercy it will be to be found in Him, clothed in His righteousness and washed in His blood. "If any man" whoever he is, Jew, Gentile, high, low, rich, poor, whoever he is, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away". Even before regeneration we may say that every child of God is in Christ in the decrees of the Blessed Trinity, in that everlasting covenant in all things ordered well; they are in Christ there every one of them and their standing is

secure in the hands of Christ, they are His! Thus wrote the Apostle to the Ephesians, "According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world." Now if we were not chosen in Him there, we shall never be in Him, for the choice then made was an immutable choice, never to be changed or revised. "For ever Thy Word is settled in heaven." All the elect were known there in the eternal purposes of God and what an amazing wonder of all wonders surely it must be, if a few poor sinners like you and me in this sanctuary here and now, were in the purposes and love of God before the world was; that His thoughts were "thoughts of peace and not of evil to give us an expected end." - we who are unworthy of the least of His mercies. O what mercy, what condescension, what glory was revealed here, and what sovereignty, for here the line was drawn between the two parties, the righteous and the wicked, the saved and the lost, there in God's immutable purposes.

Every vessel of mercy was appointed to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Now all His people therefore are in Him in that immutable covenant in the councils of the eternal Three. So that though we cannot pry into the secret purposes of God, I believe there can be some opening up of this truth in the experience of the children of God, whereby they are favoured in a gracious way to see by faith their names enrolled in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Not only so; His people are in Christ in covenant union as defined in the Scriptures, and this is particularly opened up in the figure used by the Lord where He says, "I am the Vine, ye are the branches. Now the life of the branch consists in union with the Vine; it draws its life and sap from its union with the stem; it lives not alone, it is a part of the Vine. "Ye are the branches." "Every branch in Me" - yes, in Me - and this refers to all His people, that is all His spiritual seed; they are in Him under this figure as described by the Vine and the branches. Then again, the Lord Jesus being the glorious Head of the Church, all His members are His body mystical, in union with Him, in an indissoluble union, that can never

be dissolved or broken, an abiding union. It is true that we may have many dark days, sharp temptations, many fears, much conflict; but if we are really in Christ we are perfectly safe, the union can never be broken. "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away". If there is no real spiritual life there is no evidence of union with Christ. "Every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit."

Again, the children of God are in Christ in the merit of His sufferings. They have fellowship in those sufferings, seeing that the Lord Jesus in taking our nature upon Him, did so vicariously; He suffered, not for Himself, but for all His children, all whose names were in the Lamb's Book of Life. He bore the burden, endured the curse that pertained to them; He was "made sin" for them; He bore their sins away in His own body on the tree; all through His life of suffering every vessel of mercy was in union with Him. They died and rose again with Him because they were in Him; they were in Christ when He groaned in Gethsemane, they were in Him there, and when He expired upon the cross they were in Him there; as Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me:"

Not only so, but by being in Christ all His people are absolutely free from condemnation. Their condemnation fell upon their Surety. Is not this an amazing consideration for a sinner? "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." What a wonderful mercy it is for any sinner deserving hell, knowing it and feeling it, to be joined in such a union as this! "No condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." O believer have you ever had a moment when you could, as it were, look at the law with all its terrors, and death, and the judgment day, with complacency, under the influence of this doctrine - "There is therefore now no condemnation?" No condemnation for me? No condemnation for you? O to be able to look at the law where justice stands with its drawn sword and to see it fully appraised and absolutely satisfied through the flowing blood of Immanuel's veins, and to get just a glimpse of the Saviour bleeding on

Calvary's cross, for a black, unworthy sinner! O that amazing sight.

"I saw One hanging on a tree
In agonies and blood."

To be in Christ then is to be free from condemnation. "Therefore if any man be in Christ."

Further they are in Christ in the power of His mediatorial glory. They are in Him now in His exaltation in heaven as much as when He groaned upon the tree, as much in Him as when the choice of His elect was made in His eternal decrees. O have you not sometimes been favoured to look from earth by faith into heaven to see a Man there for you? As good Richard Dore said, 'There is a Man in heaven whom I love and who loves me.' "If any man be in Christ." His people are in Him also by His quickening grace. "You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." This is the first experimental evidence of that eternal union.

"The appointed time rolls on apace
Not to propose, but call by grace."

Here is a vessel of mercy going the course of this world, going his own way, arrested, dealt with, brought down, quickened, convinced and turned in the way to heaven. His people are in Christ also through the manifestations of His grace and love. God makes them so. When He reveals Himself in your own soul's feelings, the gospel is yours! When gospel deliverance comes, when the pardon of sin is felt, you are in Christ then in the sweet manifestation of His love, and you know it too. They are in Him to dwell for ever with Him, therefore they are new creatures, old things are passed away: all things are become new; new creatures, born a new creation, which means that from the time they are quickened into divine life, they possess a life, a principle they did not possess before and which they will never lose. This is the work of the Spirit of God in the soul; it is a new creation. Such have a new heart, new eyes, new hands, new feet, new desires, new affections that are Godward; their feet are turned into the ways of peace. What a mercy then to be brought to a saving

knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and to be given an assurance of being in Him. It will be well then, old things will pass away and all things will become new - that is to say, they are brought to the knowledge of new things to which before they were strangers; they have a new name, as in Isaiah - "Thou shalt be called by a new name." "Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married."

They have a new way, a way that is opened for them in the gospel even the Lord Himself, who is the Way, the Truth and the life; a new and living Way consecrated for them through the rent veil of His flesh. The old way is now passed away; the sacrifices of the ceremonial law, all these things are done away in Christ; He Himself is the Way. Moreover they have a new prospect. "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before", they are new creatures in Christ. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." Their future destiny rises before faith with the joy and happiness of all that are in Christ, knowing that such are blessed, everlastingly blessed. This is true of every one who is taken from earth to heaven. O what a mercy it will be to be prepared to die, to have a standing for eternity, to know that our sins are forgiven, and to have nothing to do but to die. It is wonderful to feel that, to feel that you are a pardoned child, to be able to look up and say, my Father! to be brought away from all refuges of lies to the one and only Hiding place.

May it be so with us!

Amen