

GOD IS OUR REFUGE IN TIMES OF TRIBULATION

SET YOUR MIND ON THINGS ABOVE -- NOT ON THINGS ON THE EARTH

When beset with times of tribulation we must steadfastly maintain our position of abiding in Christ, and all the spiritual blessings He has procured for us.

“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. SET YOUR MIND ON THINGS ABOVE, NOT ON THINGS ON THE EARTH. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” Col 3:1-3.

Tribulation is coming on the earth. Even now God is preparing His children to endure the distress that will be caused by His end-time judgment of the apostate church and on all wickedness in the world, so that we shall endure and not be greatly moved. The way for us to maintain our peace during this time of trauma is to set our minds, or our focus, on the reality of our spiritual position in Christ, rather than on the things that are happening around us on earth.

Spiritually we Have Been Raised in Christ to Heavenly Places

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” Eph 2:4-7. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...” Eph 1:3.

In both readings, the word “places” did not exist in the original manuscripts, being added by translators. A clearer translation would be “every spiritual blessing in heaven in Christ.” God has bestowed on us every spiritual blessing that Christ procured for us by His death on the cross. God’s blessings are in Christ in heaven, and imparted to all who believe in Christ and abide in Him.

Our being in Christ in God is not a geographical location. It is a spiritual position or state, where we have been united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. We are spiritually united with Him, and raised in Him to a position of being entitled to receive every spiritual blessing in heaven in Christ.

Physical things are Temporary, but Unseen Spiritual things are Eternal

The physical things that we see and experience here on earth are temporary, but the unseen spiritual things we have in Christ are an eternal incorruptible reality.

Paul wrote, “**For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the [spiritual] things which are not seen. FOR THE THINGS WHICH ARE SEEN ARE TEMPORARY, BUT THE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT SEEN ARE ETERNAL.**” 2 Cor 4:16-18.

The blessings procured for us by Christ’s death on the cross are laid up for us in heaven and are ours to be received by faith. Being spiritual, they are eternally real.

Blessings Procured and laid up for us in Heaven—Received by Faith on Earth

You do not have to project yourself into heaven by faith to receive your blessings. The word of faith in our blessings is in our hearts here on earth.

“But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, “Who will descend into the abyss?” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Rom 10:6-11.

Christ has procured our spiritual blessings for us by His sacrificial death on the cross. They are in heaven in Christ, to be imparted by Him through the vehicle of the Holy Spirit, as we believe in them in our hearts and receive them by faith.

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Phil 4:19.

Not only are we raised spiritually to receive Christ’s spiritual blessings, we are **“made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ...”** To ‘sit’ is to have a settled accepting attitude of our spiritual position in Christ. We receive the blessings that He procured for us to the degree that we are able to maintain our belief, in a state of rest. Once we have learned to ‘sit,’ in our spiritual position in Christ and His blessings, we must then learn to walk in them here on earth. We must make the reality of our position and blessings our primary conviction, so that it becomes an anchor of faith in all the circumstances that confront us.

For instance, we walk in Christ by knowing Spiritual truths and putting them into practice in our daily lives. For example:

“...that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power...” Col 1:10-11.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Phil 4:13.

“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us...” Eph 3:20-21.

“To this end I also labour, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.” Col 1:29.

“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” 1 John 4:4-5.

In our need, when we pray to Jesus on the basis of all that he procured for us on the cross, the Holy Spirit always testifies to the cross by releasing His overcoming power in our circumstances.

Our Spiritual Blessings

By the cross of Christ, we have been given the authority to receive and walk in a multitude of spiritual blessings, embracing them as being ours personally. For instance,

- Christ has acquired for us eternal righteousness and salvation.
- When we repent, our sins are forgiven, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all the defilement from our sins.

- Jesus Christ is the true vine and we are His branches, able to receive from Him all that we need, as branches drawing life from the vine to bear fruit.
- We have been adopted as children of God. We are now recipients of every blessing of the New Covenant. God is our provider and protector. Our spiritual position is that we are in Christ; Christ is in God; God is in Christ; God is in us in Christ. Our new spiritual lives are hidden in Christ in God.
- We have received indwelling the Holy Spirit as our guide, teacher, comforter, and representor of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Our bodies have been healed by Christ stripes--set free from the curse of the law of sin and death, and are now a temple for the indwelling Holy Spirit. The way has been paved for us to receive the reality of healing and health from God. When we are in tune with His will, He becomes the length of our days.
- We have been given the authority to use the name of Jesus Christ, the name above every name, over all the power of Satan and his spirits of darkness.
- We are never absent from God's presence, and He knows our thoughts and hearts desires. He turns all things to our good because we love Him and choose to fit into His purposes for us.

They are called "spiritual blessings in heavenly places," because they are spiritual and they are in Christ, procured by his death on the cross and raised in him in his resurrection. However, being spiritual, they have to be accepted as truth, and personally claimed by faith before we can experience them as tangible reality in our living.

We are to Abide in Christ and the Spiritual Blessings Procured for us.

Jesus said, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me". John 15:4.

To 'abide' in our spiritual blessings is to maintain our spiritual walk in a state of unwavering belief. "He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight -- if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard..." Col 1:21-23.

The basis for maintaining this steadfastness is to walk in the knowledge that we have become new creations by our union with Christ in His resurrection. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." 2 Cor 5:17-18.

To be new creations we must first discard the old carnal fleshly nature. Jesus prepared the way for us to do this when He became corporate man, or mankind, on the cross. It follows that we, as part of mankind, are incorporated in His death, burial, and resurrection. We can now put off our 'old man,' or old carnal nature, declaring it crucified in Jesus on the cross.

"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." Rom 6:3-6.

Having ‘crucified’ the old man, we now must put on, or clothe ourselves with Jesus Christ, so that He can dwell in us and manifest His life through us.

“Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts.” Rom 13:13-14

“For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ.” Gal 3:27-28.

To dwell in heavenly places in Christ Jesus is to be clothed in Him, whilst He dwells in us and manifests His life through us.

Carnal Death—Spiritual Life

To be resurrected, a person must first to have died. Again, this is a spiritual death and a spiritual resurrection. It is our ‘old man,’ or carnal nature, that has to be voluntarily included in Christ’s death on the cross, before the Spirit raises us.

We can’t have it both ways. Jesus said that before a grain of wheat could gain new life and bear fruit, it had to fall into the ground and die. Similarly, we must be prepared to put off our carnal fleshly natures, declaring them dead and buried with Christ. At that point the Holy Spirit commences a work in putting to death our carnal natures, and bestows on us a new life invested with the Spirit of Christ. There is no short cut. To the degree that we have renounced the deeds and desires of the flesh and placed them on the cross, is the degree that we will know our new life in Christ, with our spiritual lives hidden away with Him in God.

God is omnipresent, that is, having the capacity to be in all places at the same time. He is enthroned in heaven, and yet at the same time He abides in the spirits of all of His children. That is His unbreakable promise.

“For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

“I will dwell in them

And walk among them.

I will be their God,

And they shall be My people.” 2 Cor 6:16

Our bodies are a temple of the living God, and our spirits are the equivalent to the Holy of Holies, where God is enthroned. He is enthroned in heaven, but when we are obedient to His will, His kingdom is in us, and He is also enthroned in our spirits.

“Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.” John 14:23.

Other New Testament Promises of Abiding in Christ in God

“I do not pray for these alone [the twelve disciples], but also for those who will believe in Me through their word [all Christians]; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.” Jn 17:20-23.

“Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.” 1 John 4:15-16.

Jesus our High Priest leads us Through the Rent Veil to Abide in God

“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh [rent on the cross], and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water [of the word].” Heb 10:19-23.

We are told to enter boldly through the blood of Jesus, and the rent veil of His flesh, the two essential conditions for entering into the presence of God.

2. We have to have a settled conviction of our eternal righteousness procured for by Christ’s blood, shed for us on the cross.
3. The rent veil speaks of Christ’s body, voluntarily surrendered to death for us on the cross. As Christ willingly gave up His life for us, so we must voluntarily place our carnal self-lives on the altar of the cross, to be put to death by the Spirit. **“For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”** Rom 8:13-15.

When we are established in Christ, He as our High Priest, leads us further on our spiritual pilgrimage into the presence of God who resides in our spirits.

As our habitation, God becomes our covering; our fortress; our strong tower, our haven of rest and protection from all warfare. When confronted with warfare, oppressions, or trials and tribulations, we must learn to clothe ourselves in Jesus Christ and feed on Him. In Him we retreat into God in our spirits and rest, hidden away in Him, relinquishing our wellbeing into His hands. **“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”** Col 3:3-4

Old Testament Scriptures show us that the Spirit also taught God’s children to retreat into Him as their refuge, shelter, and fortress, against the power of the enemy.

**“For my soul trusts in You;
And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge,
Until these calamities have passed by.”** Ps 57:1.

**“I will abide in Your tabernacle forever;
I will trust in the shelter of Your wings.”** Ps 61:4

**“For You have been a shelter for me,
A strong tower from the enemy.
I will abide in Your tabernacle forever;**

I will trust in the shelter of Your wings.” Ps 61:3-4.

Wings are a reference to the wings of the cherubim who overshadowed the ark of God’s presence in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle.

**“O LORD, my strength and my fortress,
My refuge in the day of affliction...”** Jer 16:19.

**“The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer;
My God, my strength, in whom I will trust;
My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”** Ps 18:2.

**“God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear...” Ps 46:1-2.**

**“God is my salvation and my glory;
The rock of my strength,
And my refuge, is in God.” Ps 62:7**

**“Be my strong refuge,
To which I may resort continually;” Ps 71:3**

**“My stronghold and my refuge;
My Saviour, You save me from violence.” 2 Sam 22:3.**

When confronted with tribulation, our first step should be to retreat into our position in Christ, and in Him into the encompassing presence of God. We should then trust in God’s faithfulness to replace the anxiety and tensions, produced by our self-efforts to protect ourselves, with His peace and rest. We should relinquish all things into His hands—our protection from warfare, deliverance, provision, our ministries, the course of our lives and our life’s purpose. We should let all things go into His hands and enter into His rest.

We Are to Be Still and Trust in God’s Protection

“Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.” Ps 46:10.

Being still is not physical, but a stillness of the heart, resulting from a patient trusting in God’s love and protection. As a prelude to the first onslaught of God’s judgment that will encompass the whole of the earth, making the stoutest hearts tremble with fear at the uncertainty of what is coming to pass, God’s advice to His precious children is,

**“Come, my people, enter your chambers,
And shut your doors behind you;
Hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment,
Until the indignation [when God judges the earth] is past.” Isa 26:20.**

When God moves in His almighty power to judge the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, there will be a time of trauma and distress such as the world as a whole has never seen, with **“men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth...”** Luke 21:26. At this time we are instructed to **“Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation** [the first onslaught of God’s fury] **is past.”** This is not a literal instruction to enter our physical houses, closing the doors behind us. This is a time to retreat into God and rest in Him, making Him our spiritual habitation where we may hide in Him in the shelter of His protection.

This is a time to find our refuge in Jesus, in God, from the fury of God’s judgment of the world, trusting that He will be our fortress and safe haven. It is a time to be still and wait on the Lord, not initiating anything, as in trying to minister to those in distress, for God is preparing the way for people to turn to Him in repentance. It is not His will that any should be lost, but for people to forsake their evil ways and to turn to Him.

The hearts of many will repent and they will turn in obedience to God. We are not to initiate ministry, in particular, we are not to enter into warfare for those in distress, lest we interfere with God's work and partake of their calamity. The fact that we are to hide ourselves "for a little moment," indicates that this first fierce judgmental onslaught will be comparatively short. It is vitally important to remember that the work is the Lord's, and we must patiently wait for Him to initiate any ministry He wants us to be involved in. It is after God has prepared the way that He will call us to minister to repentant hearts seeking truth.

Mature Participants of the Path of the Cross Shall Have a Permanent Rest

All Christians should learn to retreat into God in Jesus Christ as soon as they encounter an hour of trial. But there comes a stage in mature Christian's lives where flesh has been dealt with to such a degree that the Lord is able to have complete reign in them. Consequently they do not go in to God's sanctuary to find shelter only in a time of need, and then after the crisis has passed, resume the normal order of their lives. They will make their permanent habitation in Christ in God, and not depart from that spiritual state. This is the Lord's promise to the Overcomers in His letter to the church at Philadelphia:

"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and HE SHALL GO OUT NO MORE. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, [the status of the bride of Christ] which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name." Rev 3:10-12

God's Protection is Available to all Christians

Even though it is possible to reach that stage of growth where God is our permanent habitation, His promise of protection and rest is open to all who retreat into Him by faith."

**"How precious is Your loving kindness, O God!
Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings.
They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house..."** Ps 36:7-8.

Why is Spiritual Language Difficult to Understand?

Phrases like "heavenly places," "set your mind on things above," "the things which are not seen are eternal," "our outward man is perishing," "the inward man is being renewed," "we were dead in trespasses," "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing," are very difficult for the natural mind to comprehend.

Paul wrote, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Cor 2:12-14. It is the Lord, who knows all hearts, who makes spiritual truth real to us, and distributes its accompanying blessings to whomever He wills.