

THE ACCOMPLISHED WORK OF CHRIST

If our cities are to be transformed, it will happen through transformed people. It saddens me when I speak with Christians who do not understand who they actually are in Christ. If we want to see communities change, it must start with people discovering who they truly are in Christ and learning how to represent this new life in broken communities. If Christ followers have the wrong understanding of who they are, they will not have the influence to affect society. They are children of light, no longer subject to the dominion of darkness, yet many live as if nothing has changed.

We are now in Christ, and Christ is in us. Until we all understand that and live in it fully, it will always be beyond our reach to become city changers who can bring about the kind of community and culture we long to live in. Meaningful change in our culture, and enduring change in communities, is rooted in *transformed character*.

This kind of change begins in the lives of individuals who have been transformed into the image of the Son of God.

True transformation in communities will be sustained only when we establish people in their true identity, revealed through the redemption in Jesus Christ. We need gospel-centered environments that will create an understanding of God's intention for their individual lives and their effect on society. All true transformation starts with and is sustained by *knowing God*.

Knowing God means gaining a deep understanding of God's work in the three dimensions of *identification*, *intimacy*, and *integrity*.

Identification

The gospel is *good news*. It is the good news that you and I were included in the redemption purchased by Jesus Christ on the cross. You were fully implicated in the fall of Adam. You became a sinner—not because you sinned but because you were included in the bloodline of Adam.

In the same way, you were fully included in the redemption won by Jesus. You have been proclaimed righteous, not because of your own righteous deeds but because you were folded into the moment of His perfect sacrifice and victory on the cross. Through faith in Christ's completed work on the cross, you and I no longer approach life from the perspective of the fall of Adam but from the perspective of victory in Christ.

That bears repeating: You are no longer living in Adam—defeated, declared guilty, full of sin, awaiting punishment. You are

now living in Christ—victorious, declared innocent, full of God’s righteousness, and forever beyond punishment.

Living in light of Jesus’s completed work is a daily choice. Every minute, you can choose to live from the Tree of Life (the victory of Christ on our behalf) or from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (continuing to practice the inferior life in Adam).

A New Paradigm

It will help to look at how Paul discussed this in the book of Romans:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 3:23–24)

The first part (v. 23) is the bad news, the old truth: everyone stood condemned before God because everyone had sinned, both directly and through the bloodline of Adam. Then comes the very, very good news (v. 24): we now stand justified—not because of anything we’d done but because of Christ’s completed work.

All ministry done right originates from verse 24, not verse 23.

So many Christians are still trying to fix themselves, as if they’re stuck in verse 23. They talk about their sinfulness, their tendency to rebel against God, and their unworthiness. I think they may do it partially out of a well-intentioned desire to remain humble before God and not think too highly of themselves in relation to Him. But what it results in is a false humility and a

defeated life, so far from what God intended for them as to be almost unrecognizable.

When a godly couple adopts a child, they don't want that child to grow up saying, "I'm so sorry I'm not really your child. I won't eat much, I promise. I won't make a mess or make any sounds or ask anything of you. I'm so, so sorry that my existence causes you to have to buy more groceries. If you have any awful jobs, please give them to me. Nothing is too degrading for me—it's only what I deserve. I vow to dedicate my life to trying to make you not sorry you took me in."

Of course not! That couple wants the child to forget all about being adopted and wants him or her to feel exactly like a child naturally born into the family. They want the child to make noise and make messes and raid the fridge and put things on the grocery list and act entirely as if he or she fully and permanently belongs. They want the child to live in joy and security and to exercise all the privileges of being a beloved part of the family.

So many Christians live as though God must be sorry He let them into His family. Maybe they stowed away or got there illegitimately. Maybe they bribed the butler and sneaked in unawares. They try to live so that God won't notice them and remember how He really does need to kick them out once and for all.

But God wants His children to live as though they own the place. He wants them to live like royalty. Not in the sense of bossing people around or behaving arrogantly, but in the sense of taking authority and living as if they really do belong in the castle.

Everything we do as Christians—our preaching, teaching, counseling, evangelism, prayers, and worship—must come from understanding that justification has been established in our lives and

that we have redemption in Christ Jesus. We are not still negotiating redemption with God, hoping to win His favor someday. No, God took the initiative to redeem us. Now it is something we discover more and more through revelation and embrace by faith.

Over the last few years, I have witnessed the rise of what I consider a wonderful practice in the church, and that is what I will refer to as the “come as you are” invitation to all. This means that we in the church will embrace, without any judgment, any person who wants to come to any of our gatherings. However, a common failing I often see in connection with that is the belief that those people should “leave as they were.”

Yes, everyone can come to Christ just as they are. The invitation is wide open to all, and no one has to get fixed before coming to the Fixer. But that doesn’t mean there should be no revelation that would reposition that person’s life. Being accepted in love is the first step. But letting people depart without helping them find fullness of life would not be in line with Christ’s redemptive work on the cross.

People who have engaged Jesus and embraced redemption should experience fundamental transformation in their lives. Jesus’s followers should all discover the mirror image of their new identity. This identity is being reflected to us through Jesus Christ. For this is what it means to be His disciples.

It is problematic when we as Christ followers, wanting to make people feel comfortable and not judged, portray ourselves as still being “sinners.” We somehow forget that some of the worst sinners in the time of Jesus felt very comfortable around Him, though He was the most holy person on the planet. We must be cautious not to degrade the implications of redemption in our effort to create an

environment where sinful people feel comfortable. Remember, we are not sinners because we do sinful deeds; we were declared sinners because of our association with Adam. Just as we are not righteous because we do righteous deeds—we are now righteous because we are in Christ.

Divine Exchange

The basis of our new life in Christ is established in the divine exchange that took place on the cross.

For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:17)

Adam's sin was applied to all humans. Equally, Jesus's righteousness is offered to all humans too.

Paul goes on:

Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. (Rom. 5:18)

In the mystery of God's love plan, one man would die for all people. Spiritually speaking, all people simultaneously died in

Christ's death so that all could legally share in His glory. At the cross, God allowed all people to be represented in the single act of one man's sacrifice, a sacrifice that invalidated the claims of darkness and ignorance over all. When history recorded the death of one man, eternity recorded the repositioning of humanity.

Now, being in Christ, we are no longer sinners—we are the very righteousness of God:

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, *that we might become the righteousness of God* in Him. (2 Cor. 5:21)

We may still choose to sin, but that's not the same as being sinners. That was our condition when we were still in Adam, before we came to Christ. "Sinner" was what defined us, even when we sometimes miraculously chose not to sin. But now, in Christ, we are redeemed ones—the righteousness of God—and that remains the definition of our character, even when we sometimes choose to sin.

Jesus Christ has paid the price for every human being to be reunited in relationship with God. Scripture is clear that even when we were hostile enemies of God, He reconciled to us to Himself through His Son.

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Rom. 5:10)

So many billions of people on Earth do not understand this. All Christ followers must discover that they have been associated with Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension.

A New Identity

Before Christ came to Earth, God and humanity were separated. In the previous "dispensation" of the Old Testament, when God did speak to mankind, He did so through the prophets. However, when Christ came (in the "new dispensation" recorded in the New Testament), God spoke to mankind through His Son. God opened a new conversation with humanity, and that new conversation now defines our identity and relationship with Him.

God, who at various times and in various ways
spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,
has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.
(Heb. 1:1–2)

God could not speak to humanity with greater clarity or accuracy than He revealed in His Son. If you want to truly understand your place in the universe, you must discover the Son of God, Jesus Christ, because in Him you find your identity and design.

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be
conformed to the image of his Son, that he might
be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.
(Rom. 8:29 NIV)

Jesus has become the pattern for our new identity! The essence of the gospel is the knowledge that we have been redeemed to a new creation that finds its design in Him. Our life mission now is to be like Jesus. This is the essence of all discipleship.

Now We Live It Out

Our Author's signature is nowhere better displayed than in our redeemed lives. God has done the work of reconciling us to Him, through Christ.

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Cor. 3:18)

The mirror reflects who we are in Christ. This realization is so much more effective than the exercise of our willpower. Our job is to look at a reflection. A mirror shows you only what is real. We must discover who we are now, because we are in Him.

The Greek word behind the English word *glory* in that passage is where we see God's opinion of you and me. The Greek word *doxa* is said to be a word denoting someone's opinion of something. *Vine's Expository Dictionary* defines the word this way: *doxa* "primarily signifies an opinion, estimate, and hence, the honour resulting from a good opinion."²

So if we say something is glorious, we're saying we have such a good opinion of it that we praise it. We could call it the "very high

opinion resulting in praise.” Now let’s replace *glory* with that definition in the verse:

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the *very high opinion resulting in praise* of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from *very high opinion resulting in praise* to *very high opinion resulting in praise*, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

That is the point of the gospel. And Paul says we can see ourselves in the picture when we behold the glory of God. As we behold Him, we are now discovering, as in a mirror, His opinion of us. We discover who we truly are so we can live as He desires us to live.

Through my beholding Him accurately as in a mirror, I am looking at the proclamation of God over my life. I see Jesus now as the definition of who I am and of who I am becoming. Not in a religious way or getting all sentimental about Him, but in the sense of desiring to know Him more so that I can discover who He has redeemed me to be.

Redemption in our lives happens when we discover ourselves in this good news story and when we judge ourselves as being included in the completed work of Jesus Christ.

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died....

Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known

Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Cor. 5:14, 16–17)

Our identification with Christ—with His death, His resurrection, and His ascension—is the basis of our new identity. See yourself as dead to your old life, raised into resurrection life, and seated with Him in a position of authority in heavenly places. The impact of the gospel is a transformed life. Not just blessed people or encouraged people, but transformed people.

This newfound sense of being accepted by God also leads the way for us to have liberty to stand in an intimate and quality relationship with the Father.

Intimacy

God is not still making up His mind about humanity. That's already done. Nor am I still negotiating my salvation with God. It's settled. But what is left to do is to discover myself in the initiative of God. I must get back to the reality that God found us in Christ long before He lost us in Adam.

Here's a secret most people have never learned: the primary reward of Christianity is not heaven—the primary reward of Christianity is restored intimacy with the Father. It is only from the perspective of His eternal purpose that we see the true meaning of our lives.

This was evident in the life of Jesus, who was so different from every other human being on the planet.

- There was something unique in how He spoke (as one with authority).
- There was something unique in how He prayed (as if He were personally speaking to the Father).
- There was something unique in how He handled challenges (as if He were aware that He had divine authority).
- There was something unique in how He engaged people (He was not intimidated by their status or sinfulness).

It was clear that Jesus lived with a deep awareness of the presence of the Father in His life. He said so Himself: “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30 NIV).

Jesus wanted people to understand that His union with the Father was what gave Him the ability to function in the pure design of what God had intended every human being to enjoy.

Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do. (John 14:10–12)

Man was originally created to enjoy fellowship and intimacy with the Father, but that proximity was interrupted by Adam and Eve's sin. Jesus came to show us that this could once again be possible and we could have and enjoy intimacy with the Father.

Through Christ, we have *proximity* and *immediacy*. Our connection with God is perfect. "Religion," that imitation of true Christianity, thrives on *distance* and *delay*.

In the New Testament, there is an ever-present awareness of the awesome truth that God has made His abode in us. It's an awareness of union with Him. The Spirit of God is depicted as being present and ready to hear our call. Anyone who talks about God being distant or deaf does not share in the same Spirit we find in the New Testament writings. Those writings overflow with a rich awareness that God has restored the union with us He always desired.

When Jesus spoke to His disciples just before He laid down His life, the focus of His communication to the disciples turned to the theme of the privilege that was about to become theirs: reunion to relationship with the Father.

Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know. (John 14:1–4)

Jesus wasn't talking about a construction site in heaven. He has the ability to create with one word, so He's not overseeing some building project that has occupied Him for the last two thousand years as He labored to create some nice neighborhood for us to live in. The context of this whole chapter is Jesus sharing how He is going to create access for us to the Father, as He was enjoying it here on Earth.

However, the disciples did not understand where Jesus was going or how to get there, so they asked Him about it. In His reply, He makes it clear that we *can* understand where He is going and we can know the way:

Thomas said to Him, "Lord, *where You are going*, and how *can we know the way?*"

Jesus said to him, "*I am the way*, the truth, and the life. No one *comes to the Father* except through Me." (John 14:5–6)

We can know where Jesus is going because He declares His destination: *the Father*. And we can know the path to that destination because Jesus declares the way: *through Jesus Himself*.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off *have been brought near* by the blood of Christ. (Eph. 2:13)

It is in this intimate relationship with God that our lives fundamentally change and we start living in a new way. We saw earlier that

there was something unique in how Jesus spoke, prayed, handled challenges, and engaged people. When we enter into this new life with Him, the way *we* speak, pray, handle challenges, and engage people will change as well. These things will be fundamentally altered when you live with the awareness of God's fullness in your life. You now do life differently. This is the basis of how we will deeply affect our world.

This is what Jesus said to Philip when he challenged Jesus, still wanting to somehow reach out to see the Father and not recognizing that the Father was already present in what Jesus was doing:

“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.”

Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.”

Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:7–9)

Jesus reinforced *this* message, this understanding of His own intimate relationship with the Father, to the disciples as the most important thing He could communicate just before laying down His life. He wanted them to remember His intimacy with the Father, because He was about to establish that same intimacy as the privilege of all mankind.

Count how many times Jesus emphasized that intimacy with the word *in*.

Do you not believe that I am *in* the Father, and the Father *in* Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells *in* Me does the works. Believe Me that I am *in* the Father and the Father *in* Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves. (John 14:10–11)

This was a radical statement. The Jewish religious establishment of the day could not accept that a human being could place himself in any kind of relational intimacy with God. To them, God was a consuming fire, as unapproachable as a tornado. Even today, many religious people refer to the *transcendence* of God, that God is almighty and all-powerful but untouchable, but they do not know the *immanence* of God, that He becomes very present and approachable, having made His residence in us.

When Jesus came, He introduced a totally new framework for relating to God. In the New Testament, God no longer bestows His nearness on us on the basis of our good performance; He comes to make His home in us, not because we deserve it but because He has decided it.

And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot

receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He *dwells* with you and will be *in* you. I will not leave you orphans; *I will come to you.*

A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but *you will see Me.* Because I live, you will live also. (John 14:16–19)

At that day you will know that I am *in* My Father, and you *in* Me, and I *in* you...

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 14:20, 23)

God desires to be in us. We are the natural environment He designed for Himself. He chose humanity as His place to reside. His ultimate intention was never for His Word to be contained only in a book or a doctrine but for it to be expressed in human form. The physical body of Jesus did not restrict God. In fact, He found full expression in Him. Jesus on Earth was the exact expression of the invisible God revealed in a human body.

Conversely, God Himself is also the natural environment in which humanity is to live. God is in us, and we are in Him. What an unrestricted environment He gave us. He is our comfort zone.

For in Him we live and move and have our being.
(Acts 17:28)

We are to become comfortable in Him, just as He is comfortable and at home in us. We are His holy temple, and He is the grace environment in which we live. He is our natural habitat, the environment we were created for, and vice versa.

You are designed for intimacy with the Father. You are His chosen “structure.” You are His mobile temple, and He desires no other dwelling.

You are the Father’s chosen address on Earth.

As city changers, we engage our world, our communities, and our cities differently when we understand the glorious unity we now have with God.

Integrity

On the basis of our understanding of our true *identity* in Christ and our privilege of sharing *intimacy* with God, we now live in a new way, which we can refer to as *integrity*.

Humanity is so overwhelmed by the consequences of the fall of Adam that they do not recognize the implications of the triumph of Christ. Jesus’s victory through the cross and resurrection is one in which humanity has been included, and it far exceeds the implications of Adam’s fall. Through faith, we can now live the way Jesus lived when He walked in the flesh here on Earth. The difference between Jesus Christ and us, in terms of living a victorious life of integrity, is His understanding of who He was and His awareness of the presence of the Father.

Identity precedes activity—the way you see yourself determines how you live!

Walking Worthily

Paul writes this in Ephesians:

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called. (Eph. 4:1)

Let's unpack this verse a little, because it holds a key for us. The Greek word behind the English word *worthy* is *axios*. *Axios* means

- “weighing, having weight, *having the weight of another thing of like value*, worth as much
- befitting, congruous, corresponding to a thing.”³

I emphasized the phrase that is most pertinent to us here. If I put that definition into Paul's sentence in place of the word *worthy*, we find that we are to walk as if we have the same weight of the calling with which we are called.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word often used for *righteousness* is *tsedeq*, which refers to the crossbeam on a scale of balances. If Christ is the standard of measurement and He is placed on one side of a scale, then the only thing that will balance the scale will be something that reflects His likeness and image. That's who we are in our inner, redeemed selves, and keeping that image in mind will help us live more godly lives as we walk the streets of Babylon.

Christ is the measure of our integrity. This is why Paul spent the first three chapters of his letter to the Ephesian church communicating to them their true identity and position in Christ.

Temptation tampers with our integrity. But temptation is temptation only when your spiritual identity is leaning toward accepting an inferior identity. Temptation would convince you of shortcoming, lack, need, and imperfection. But the wisdom that comes from above persuades you of your fullness and completeness in Christ.

Embracing the truth of your “spirit identity” as revealed in Christ is what empowers you to overcome temptation. It becomes your armor and weaponry to stand when attacks come your way.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (Eph. 6:10–13)

As we deal with temptation by putting on the armor of God (recognizing who we are in Christ), we acknowledge that we have been empowered—not just to qualify for heaven but also to be part of God’s mission here on Earth. Therefore, we embrace the good news of the gospel to live in a new way as we engage everyday life.

But we need to wake up to the glorious reality that we partake in the unsearchable riches of Christ. This will deeply affect our lives and change the way we live. With this conviction, we are ready to engage a hostile and broken world.

When we know who we are in Christ and when we live with the constant awareness of God's presence, we're city changers, bringing His presence into our world, and we're ready to be a redemptive presence in Babylon.

