

# *MORE SEED & BREAD, ISSUE NO. 299*

## **IN CHRIST**

By Andrew Brown

Jesus only took a few disciples up the mountain. They saw what others missed. **Jesus was transfigured before them and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light** (Matt. 17:2). Peter later explained that this vision looked into the Millennium (2 Pet. 1:16). The disciples witnessed Jesus speaking with Elijah and Moses. Peter said **if you wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah** (Matt. 17:4). Peter offered to build three centers of activity (bases of operations) for these men to carry out their work. Immediately the cloud encompassed them all and the Voice said, **This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him** (Matt. 17:5). At this Divine rebuke, the disciples fell to the ground, terrified. Peter knew these men are to be raised with jobs to perform, but he made an enormous mistake: assigning these men a place equal with Jesus. For Jesus (Jehovah) will not share His glory with another (Isa. 42:8). Graciously, Jesus touched them relieving their fear. **Lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone** (Matt. 17:8). May we also take this admonition to heart, removing all trappings set alongside the Lord, seeing Jesus only.

The lesson of "Jesus only" is desperately needed today. Countless counterfeits threaten to deceive the believer who seeks to give Christ His rightful place. Religions calling themselves "Christian" do not portray Him as He declared Himself to be, and place attachments onto the relationship with Christ. Christ won freedom for the sinner, but these requirements add their chains. **It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery** (Gal. 5:1). **Your adversary, the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour** (1 Peter 5:8). Satan craftily disguises these attachments as attractive activities, ceremonies, or manners of life that make a "good Christian," but in reality they compromise knowing the Lord. Liberated

believers are a main target for this predator and must stand aware of his schemes lest they lose their first love.

The sufficiency and glorious blessing of being "in Christ" is set forth in Ephesians and Colossians. Upon believing *in Christ*, the Lord deposited in us the Spirit, a portion of Himself, guaranteeing our redemption. **You were sealed IN HIM with the Holy Spirit of promise who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession to the praise of His glory** (Eph. 1:13-14). *In Christ* we have a sure inheritance and are God's own possession! **IN HIM we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace** (Eph 1:7). The Lord made an incomparable transaction available: our sin for His righteousness. Redemption is the result of His finished work and our belief. It is not due to any additional reason or action on our part. We were dead in our sins, but He made us alive together with Him, **canceling out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross** (Col. 2:13-14). Our debt is paid in full! In perfect wisdom (Eph. 1:8) He lavished grace and blessing upon us, calling us saints and adopting us to be His representatives in His future work (Eph. 1:5).

The blessings set forth for those in Christ are immeasurable. Falling prey to the performance of ritual, tradition or fulfillment of the lists of requirements given by religious organizations distract from the true treasures found *in Christ*. **IN HIM you have been made complete** (Col. 2:10). The believer is complete in Jesus Christ; lacking nothing that must be supplied elsewhere! The second chapter of Colossians demonstrates that being in Christ satisfies all necessary requirements. **IN HIM you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands** (Col. 2:11). Circumcision was the initial act of a law-keeping Israelite, and after Moses instituted the law, the two ideas were used almost interchangeably. The law was a means of pleasing Him. Now God is pleased with those *in Christ*. The physical act of circumcision or keeping the law is unnecessary as the heart of the believer is set apart in Christ.

Man-made rituals given the term "baptism" should be considered in the full light of God's truth. Men have perverted this Scriptural concept. The word "baptism" is not a translation but a transliteration of the Greek. An unbiased word study leads one to find that baptism means "identification." This explains how Ephesians 4:5 states there is "one baptism." Baptism (identification) with

Christ is no water ritual! There is a ritual of baptism and there is a reality. Upon belief in Christ as Savior we are identified with His death and resurrection, "baptized" apart from any unnecessary ritual. In Christ **we have been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith** (Col. 2:12). Religion magnifies the *ritual* and ignores the reality. The wonderful reality needs no ceremony. Baptism takes place when we meet Him on the cross where we deserved to be, but He instead took the burden of our sins. In believing we are identified with His death, burial, and resurrection (Col. 2: 12; Rom. 6:1-5).

God implores those who love Him to walk in His wisdom, warning of hindrances on the way. **My son, give attention to my wisdom, incline your ear to my understanding; that you may observe discretion and your lips may reserve knowledge** (Prov. 5:1-2). This Proverb describes a man caught in the snare of adultery. **For the lips of an adulteress drip honey and smoother than oil is her speech** (Prov. 5:3). The tale is of a married man getting enticed by a smooth-speaking adulteress dripping with temptations. This illustration goes deeper than the surface speaking of the snares of religion.

**Keep your way far from her and do not go near the door of her house** (Prov. 5:8). Stay away from the "door" of religion, God warns. Staying passionate with your wife is compared to staying connected to God and not being turned away and contaminated by religion. **Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be exhilarated always with her love. For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress and embrace the bosom of a foreigner?** (Prov. 5:19-20). Why leave the passionate relationship with God for a false, unsatisfying substitute? Don't give your vigor and life away to **the cruel one. And your hard-earned goods will go to the house of an alien** (Prov. 5:9-10). Religion calls for goods and leads to groaning. God's apostle said, **I will not be a burden to you, for I do not seek what is yours but you** (2 Cor. 12:14). The Corinthians had plenty of money, but God wanted something more important: their hearts! Remember, it was the religious community in Israel that took charge of crucifying the Lord.

Being cleansed from sins and in a relationship with Christ brings great freedom and delight. Believers desire to rise up and live in a manner pleasing to their Savior, no longer in the pit of worldliness. This longing to serve the Lord must be carried out as He desires. Too often the changing standards of seemingly godly men are sought after instead. Christ is sufficient and teaches us how to

love Him in truth through the pages of His Word. Christ and His Word must remain the ultimate authority in the life of the believer. **Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths** (Col. 2:16). No contrary opinion should set us out of Christ's freedoms. The believer in Christ has been guaranteed life. Satan wants to destroy the next steps in building up that relationship by igniting busyness in many activities and "good works" outlined by the so-called churches of today. Through John, God declared: **I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth** (3 John 1:4). These words give insight into what delights God. It should be no surprise that the enemy of God puts great effort into tearing believers away from truth. Instead of examining what the Lord has spoken and getting to know Him as He is, they think the pinnacle of service is found where men have placed it. Many are being pulled farther away from the blissful nearness they could enjoy with the Lord.

In this culturally derived mold, the focus is taken away from Christ. Believers should be sitting at the Master's feet learning from Him, finding what pleases Him. Yet the mold hardly allows an awareness of the Word of God. Guidance in study is helpful, but even the best pastor cannot compare to the Lord! What happens when the Bible teaches differently than the church? Consider the directive given with Mary and Martha. **Only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her** (Luke 10:42). Sitting at the Lord's feet is necessary and best. The twelve disciples spent three years with Jesus and so did Paul (Gal. 1:18). Christianity is a lifelong, deepening relationship with Jesus, not just a Sunday thing, a new social life, or rules. **Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch! (Which all refer to things destined to perish with use) in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men** (Col. 2:21-22). Christ offers life; mere religion is destined to perish. Examining ourselves by the directions He has so lovingly given us may take us on a lonely path at times, but we are nearer to Him. It is with those who are also in Christ that we will find the deepest bond and truest care. Even meeting regularly with like-minded, passionate believers is not what justifies the believer before God. The church is not a mediator between man and God, Christ is (1 Tim. 2:5). God's presence can be entered into with boldness and confidence through faith *in Christ* (Eph. 3:12). Our life is hidden with Him (Col. 3:3-4).

Israel had a religion given to them directly by God that no one can or should try to keep today. Even with the gift of directions from the Lord, they quickly moved into idolatry and broke the covenant God made with them. By the time of Judges they did whatever was right in their own eyes. In Judges 17 and 18, Micah hired a Levite priest to practice idolatry. Blind to his hypocrisy, Micah thought, **Now I know that the Lord will prosper me, seeing I have a Levite as priest** (Judg. 17:13). Micah had polluted the relationship God established. The priest was taken away from Micah who wanted to fight to get him back. What was his problem? **He said, You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and have gone away, and what do I have besides?** (Judg. 18:24). If God's people would come to Micah's question here, being stripped of all religion, they could realize they have Christ! Religion misses this truth. **All treasures of wisdom and knowledge** (Col. 2:3) are hidden in Him! He can never be taken away! If all the accessories of the culturally acceptable "Christian life" are removed where does that leave the believer? Let him be found *in Him in Christ*. (All verses from the *New American Standard Bible*.)

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