

The Believer's Standing Before God

Jeremiah 9: 23&24

“Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.”

The believer's standing before God

I Corinthians 1: 30

“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

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Introduction

As believers in this present world we often are forgetful of the power of God that is ours and as a result fail to avail ourselves of it. It is my hope that at the conclusion of this study we will have a better awareness of the power God has given us as believers. I know that a workable knowledge of the power of God in our lives is of great benefit, as we go through our daily walk in this world.

These two verses in God's word are commentaries on one another. The passage in I Corinthians is the fulfillment of the word God spoke through his servant Jeremiah. We as believers in this day and age need to understand that we are a delight to the Eternal God, in His Son Jesus Christ!

In verse thirty of chapter one of Paul's first letters to the Corinthians, we as believers are told some things of great value. In order to better understand how these things are of benefit to us, let's take a quick look at the background of the writing of them.

I. The background of I Corinthians

In consideration of the background of I Corinthians, I believe that answering three questions will give us what we need to know in order to understand what I hope to present in this study.

A. Where?

The first question to consider about the background of I Corinthians is where do I find an account of Paul's visit with these people?

In Acts chapter 18 we first read of Paul's dealing with the people in Corinth; this was during the second missionary journey. There are some important things that occur during his time with them.

Paul first addresses the Jews and those Gentiles that were associated with them in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. When Paul was joined by Silas and Timothy, whom he had left in Macedonia, he begins to testify in the synagogue that Jesus was The Christ. This was not well received by those who heard him! As a result, Paul is led by the Spirit to proclaim a forthcoming judgment upon Israel. Acts chapter 18 verse 6:

“And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.”

This is the first time in the book of Acts that Paul makes this statement to the nation of Israel. I believe he was speaking, in this case, to those who lived within the area of Corinth. There are two reasons that I believe this. 1) In Paul's later journeys he continues

to address those of Israel and 2) It is at the end of Acts when Paul pronounces this same judgment on the leaders of the nation of Israel in Jerusalem that signifies the end of the Acts period and the beginning of Paul's revelation of the mystery.

In Corinth, the Lord appears unto Paul and tells him that He has many people in this city who need to hear the truth. As a result of the door being closed to Israel in this area of Corinth, Paul teaches a message devoid of any national relationship to God.

This led to a conflict between the Jews and Paul, resulting in Paul being brought before the magistrate Gallio, who had been sent there to rule by Rome. What Paul began to teach that got him into trouble concerned justification by faith in Christ alone, and not by the keeping of Jewish laws. I believe Paul began to teach those believers in Corinth that they were made just before God by faith in Christ alone. Not in faith in Christ, and not in keeping the Jewish laws. There are two reasons that I believe he began to teach justification by faith alone to those in Corinth, who believed:

1) because of what they accuse Paul of while before the magistrate (Acts 18:13)

“... This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the Law.”

To the Jews, God could only be honored through the keeping of the laws given to Israel. The idea that a man, especially one from among the Gentiles, could gain the right to honor God through faith, apart from the keeping of their Law was unacceptable to them! These same men who opposed the teachings of Paul remained in this city after Paul had journeyed elsewhere. They were a continual source of contention and teachers of error among those who had believed Paul!

2) The second reason is because of what is written in Acts chapter 15. In this chapter, Paul is giving an account of his teachings to the Gentiles to the twelve in Jerusalem. James, the leader of the twelve concludes the matter in verses 19 and 20 of this chapter with these words:

“Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God; but that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.”

It is interesting that Paul's difficulties in Corinth began after he had turned to the Gentiles who had believed, and began to teach them that they could worship or honor God through faith in Christ alone!

B. Why?

The next question to be considered about the background of this letter of Paul is why was this letter written?

The assembly in Corinth had some within their assembly who had either not believed Paul or had misunderstood what he had taught them. These people had created much strife and contention in the assembly. Paul had received word of this from those of the household of Chloe (I Corinthians 1:11). This letter was written in order to correct the errors that had arisen there among these brethren.

Martin Luther underwent great persecution from those of the religious community when he began to understand and to teach that “the just shall live by faith.” In this present day there are many who would seek to place the true believer under laws and ordinances of the past, instead of standing before God by faith alone!

“That as it is written, He that glorieth let him Glory in the Lord.” I Corinthians 1:31

C. Who?

The third question to be asked is who is addressed in this letter written by Paul?

This letter was written to those within the assembly in Corinth who truly believed. Whenever the truth is put out, it is only those to whom the Lord has shown the truth that recognize it. Those who believe error instead of the truth are always present among those who believe. The tares are among the wheat, and the poor are always among the rich! Paul has to identify those who have truly believed among this assembly, for these are the ones who will understand what he is saying.

In the first few chapters of this letter we find some things presented that will only be understood by those who possess true faith. It is the babes or little ones in the faith that Paul is concerned about. He desires that they be nourished and fed, that they may learn to eat meat and to grow further in their faith in the Lord. We know this by what Paul says in chapter 3:1-2 and verse 26a of chapter 1.

I Cor.3:1-2, “And I brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able you bear it, neither yet now are ye able.”

Paul desired to speak to those who understood the source and author of their calling

I Cor. 1:26a, “For ye see your calling brethren...”

Paul is addressing those who see or understand their calling, that it was entirely of the Lord, and not dependant upon anything that they had done or could do in the flesh, (I Cor. 1: 26b-29)

II. The believer’s standing before God

The statement made by Paul in the very beginning of verse 26 of the first chapter in I Corinthians is of crucial importance in our life as a believer.

“For ye see your calling, brethren”

Our understanding of this statement is crucial to our viewpoint as a believer. The believer who understands his calling has a firm stance and foundation upon which to build his Christian walk. I believe another way to look at this statement would be to say, for you (the believer) see (understand) your calling, brethren (my fellow believer). I Corinthians 1:2

The calling of God in regards to the believer is given to us in verses 24-29 of this chapter.

“But unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty; and the base things of the world, and the things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea and the things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.”

Paul, in writing this letter, understood that the true believer knew his calling of God was not based upon anything that he had done. The calling of the believer was based entirely upon the unmerited favor of God alone and not upon any action of the flesh!

The believer who understands the source of his calling is far better prepared to face the challenges he faces in his Christian walk. When we know assuredly that our calling is based solely upon a work of grace in our hearts, the faith which we possess is seen as an active growing thing, which began within the counsels of God!

The standing of the believer begins with a work of God in his life. The believer who understands this has a sound foundation upon which to build his life of faith!

I Corinthians 3:11 “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

A. The basis of faith is wisdom

I Corinthians 1:30 “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption”

The scripture contain many things concerning wisdom. We are told in the Proverbs to seek wisdom (Proverbs 4: 5-7),

“Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principle thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.”

We are told that to have wisdom is of great value (Proverbs 8:11)

“For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.”

In Psalms 111 verse 10 we are told:

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth forever.”

Wisdom is seen in Ecclesiastes 7:12 to be the source of life to all to whom it is given:

“For wisdom is a defense, and money is a defense: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it.”

The believer has gained wisdom with God because he has been made of God in Christ. The word wisdom appears more times in the letters to the Corinthians than in any other letters written by Paul. It appears eighteen times in this first letter written by Paul to the Corinthians. It is used seventeen times in the first two chapters. Paul seeks to establish in the hearts of these believers that their calling is not based upon any work of wisdom from men, but rather as a result of the power of God on their behalf!

I Corinthians 2:5 “That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”

The power of God, within the believer, is his as a result of an act of the Spirit of God, by which he moves from a state of ignorance to wisdom. I have combined some verses from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians to show you this.

I Corinthians 1:21; I Corinthians 3:19&20; I Corinthians 2: 12,13,16

“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.”

The true believer has received the wisdom of God because he has received Christ himself, who is God in the flesh, and in whom is the wisdom of God.

B. The outcome of wisdom is justification

I Corinthians 1:30 “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness.”

As a result of the wisdom of God, the believer through faith has received righteousness. The believer through the wisdom of God has attained a standing of being right before God. Another term for being righteous before God is justification, which is the teaching of this verse. The Westminster Catechism defines justification in this way:

“Justification is an act of God’s free grace to sinners, in which he pardons all their sins and accepts them as righteous in his sight; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, imputed to them by God and received by faith alone.”

From this we may see that attained righteousness is indeed justification before God!

It is important that the believer understands that his justification is a result of a declaration of God, who has declared him righteous on behalf of Christ. The righteousness of the believer is imputed unto him. The word imputed means to lay to another’s account. The sin of the believer has been laid to another’s account, Paul tells us this in II Corinthians 5:21:

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

The believer needs to understand that because of this transaction on his behalf, there are no degrees of justification. He is not partially justified; there is nothing lacking in his righteousness with God. He is completely and totally righteous before the eternal God!

The believer who grasps this firmly by faith will be able to say with firm conviction that I am totally and completely right before God through Jesus Christ!

Paul, in Philippians chapter three, proclaims that any righteousness he may have attained through any means other than faith was as refuse compared to the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. Philippians 3:7-9:

“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ, Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ. And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”

The believer, as a result of the wisdom of God, has attained the imputation of righteousness and stands as one just before God!

C. The ongoing work of justification is sanctification

I Corinthians 1:30

“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification,...”

The true believer has received the mind of Christ, and as a result he has the wisdom of God. He has also been declared as completely righteous, in regards to his position before a Holy God. The result of his imputed righteousness is reflected in his walk upon this earth.

The role of sanctification in our life is one of progression, and deals with our experience upon this earth. It is the result of the work of the Spirit of God in the life of the believer. The Spirit of God begins a work of holiness within the present life of the believer, and it is this work which drives us to seek the holiness of God in our daily walk.

The responsibility of the believer who is justified is the walk of sanctification. The term sanctification means to set apart for holy service. The believer has been set apart from the world to live a life of holy service to God.

It is important in our lives as believers to understand that there is a difference between our justification and our sanctification. Our justification was a one time declaration of God of the imputation of righteousness; this is ours forever more. As long as God is, we will be declared righteous! Our sanctification is the outworking of our justification within the daily life of the believer. It is the daily struggles we undergo in our quest for holiness that make up our sanctified walk. God has declared us holy; we must strive to be as we have been declared.

Often times we fail in our walk with the Lord and depression over our failure sometimes results. It is at this time we must understand that because we are justified, we will be enabled in spite of our weak efforts to be sanctified. Romans 8: 33, 35, 37- 39.

“Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Paul also speaks to the believer concerning our walk towards holiness in Philippians chapter 3, verses 13-15.

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect (of full age), be thus minded: and if in any other thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.”

In this passage in Philippians Paul tells us as believers the secret to a sanctified walk with our Lord. We are to forget about the times when we have failed to meet the mark of perfection God has set for us. Instead of dwelling on the past, we are to strive for the future perfection that is ours in Christ Jesus. The most important factor in our sanctification is the continual striving for perfection. The believer must be constant in his

seeking out the work of perfection in his life. It isn't so much the attainment of perfection as it is the striving for it!

Justification is the declaration of perfection; sanctification is the striving for it. The believer is to seek holiness in his daily walk on this earth!

Paul often speaks of his striving for perfection in his Christian walk throughout his writings. His constant reminder of strength is the fact that his power for perfection comes from Christ alone. (II Corinthians 12: 9-10)

“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

As believers there will be times that we fall far short, as we live out our new position of declared holiness. At these times we must understand that it is the power of Christ that maintains our effort for perfection! He alone empowers and sustains us in the face of our frailty. He has invested his life on our behalf! He will patiently persevere and lovingly continue faithful to us, even when we fail Him.

D. The believer receives redemption

I Corinthians 1:30 “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”

As we continue to consider this verse let us review what has been said. First of all we have seen that the believer stands as a result of the power of God. He receives Godly wisdom as a result of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The calling to the gospel is a direct result of an act of the power of God. (I Cor. 2:5)

“That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”

The three great things that are freely given to him as a believer are shown to us in verse 30 of chapter 1 of I Corinthians. “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”

The first is justification, which is imputed righteousness. As a result of the believer being justified, a life of holiness which is pleasing to God begins. This is a progressive walk with the Lord. The second is hope. The believer's hope, in the hills and valleys of his life of sanctification, is that God has justified him or declared him to be righteous in spite of his many failures in life. The believer's goal is to continue to press on towards a life of perfection that he has been set apart by an act of God to pursue.

The final and conclusive gift of the believer is a result of the other two. The believer is redeemed by the one who has purchased him from the penalty of sin.

It is interesting to note that the term 'redeem' is used only twice in Paul's writings, and that is in Galatians 4:5 and Titus 2:14. The term 'redeemer' is never used, but the term 'redeeming' is used twice (Eph. 5:16 & Col. 4:5), and the term 'redemption' is used nine times. (Heb. 9:12 &15; Rom. 3:24; Rom. 8:23; Titus 2:14; Eph. 1:7& 14; Eph. 4:30; Col. 1:14; and here in I Corinthians 1: 30)

In order to understand this term, let us first consider the meaning. In the dictionary the term redeem means to buy back or to purchase something for a set price, to free from a lien, or to set free from captivity by reason of payment, to make good, to atone for. The term redeemer is a person who redeems. Redemption is the act of redeeming.

In this verse in I Corinthians (1:30) the believer is seen to already have redemption, as through Christ Jesus righteousness and sanctification and redemption is made unto him.

Let's review some of the times Paul uses these terms, in order to see what it is that we as believers now possess.

1) The term 'redeem' Galatians 4: 4-5, and Titus 2:14

"But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

"Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

In these verses we see that Christ is the redeemer, who was sent to redeem men. The purpose of this redemption is to create a people who strive after good works. In this verse in Titus we see the work of sanctification being closely related to the reason for redemption, in that the redeemed were made so for the purpose of a life of good works. From looking at these verses, we can see that Christ is the redeemer, who was sent to redeem us unto a life of sanctification!

2) The term 'redeeming' Eph. 5:16, and Colossians 4:5

The times this term is used in these verse deal with a personal responsibility of the believer, and will not help us in this study at this time.

3) The term 'redemption' (Heb. 9:12; Rom. 3:24and 8:23; Titus 2:14; Eph. 1:7& 14; Rom. 4:30; and Col. 1:14)

Time will not allow us to look at all of these; I believe these four will help us the most!

Hebrews 9:12; Romans 3:24; Col. 1:14; Eph. 1:7

"Neither by the blood of bulls and of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. Being justified freely by his grace through redemption that is in Christ Jesus. In whom we have redemption

through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.”

From these verses we understand that the price of the redemption of the believer is the shed blood of the Son of God, through which we have been set free from the bondage and penalty of sin.

The benefit of the redemption of the believer is given to us in these two verses: Ephesians 1:13 c, and 4:30 “...Ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.”

The believer is purchased from the confinement of sin and set free to a life of holiness by the purchase price of the blood of Christ. Christ has given us His Holy Spirit as a proof or earnest of the completed transaction. He has sealed us unto Himself for that appointed day when he will receive what he has redeemed.

Having considered these verses within the writings of Paul, we now have a better understanding of the meaning of I Corinthians chapter 1:30.

I believe justification and sanctification can be explained in this way: justification and sanctification are the wings of the same bird; the bird cannot fly true without a correct combination of the two. I believe that the bird to which the wings are attached is the bird of redemption, for the believer must have all three!

R.E. Rhoades had a good way to remember the relationship of these three things to the believer, “The believer is saved, the believer is being saved, and the believer will be saved.”

All aspects of what we as believers are, past, present and future, are fulfilled within the understanding of our justification, our sanctification and our redemption!

III. Why we should know these things

It is my observation that many believers seem to be ignorant of the three great things that they are given through the wisdom of God. Some think that the relationship they have with God was brought about through an act of their own will and wisdom; some think that they must work good works to be worthy of righteousness; and some think that by failure to perform good works they may lose Christ!

To all of these I say: it is Christ, who through His own wisdom, called us to believe. It is Christ who paid the price for our imputed righteousness! It is Christ who keeps his possession safe, through His love and the gift of His Spirit. The knowledge of these things should be a comfort and a constant source of strength for us as believers. Remember, Christ paid for us with his own blood, was buried for us and rose on the third day as a worthy Saviour for all who believe! The believer has the very power of God in

him, that same power that raised Christ from the dead! If God be for us, who can be against us?