

NEW GLASSES

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The church throughout most of the world has inadvertently taught what I call a false “geography of God.” Nearly everyone who has grown up in the church, as well as most of those outside of the church (at least in western cultures) conceives of God as “out there somewhere” beyond the Milky Way. Popular culture pictures Him as an old man with a white beard issuing edicts from an oversized throne somewhere beyond Betelgeuse. Christianity in our day has only reinforced this popular conception. Songs like, “*I’ve got a home in glory land...way beyond the blue,*” or “*I’ve got a mansion just over the hilltop...*” reinforce the notion that heaven (where God resides) is located in some far off astral location. We know, of course, that God is omnipresent, and that He exists everywhere, in all things, throughout the entire cosmos. Unfortunately, this “omnipresent” understanding of God has relegated Him to some far off celestial dwelling in the minds of most Christians—and probably most non-Christians as well.

Among Christians, this remote *geography of God* is reinforced by teachings that Christ is someday going to return to earth from that far off abode and burst through the cumulus clouds and set His physical feet on Mount Olives located near Jerusalem, Israel. Before this takes place, according to some teachings, there will be a “rapture” or a “snatching away,” of those believers who are found worthy so they can escape the tribulation that will be coming upon the earth. Of course, the place that they will be raptured to is that “land of milk and honey” beyond the starry skies. This concept of God, and His place of residence, has

rendered the church anemic and totally ineffective in its mission in the world today.

The basis for this view comes from a couple of passages of scripture which have been grossly misunderstood. After Jesus had been with His disciples forty days, and had given them instructions to wait for the promised Holy Spirit before leaving Jerusalem, He was taken to His place of glorification with the Father:

“And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:9-11)

Throughout most of the church world, Jesus being taken up into a cloud is taken literally, to mean that He physically ascended through earth’s atmosphere. When the witnesses tell the disciples that this same Jesus will return in like manner, it is then interpreted to mean that at some future point in time He will return in the physical atmosphere (through the clouds). Many preachers will then link this passage with Paul’s description to the Thessalonians that *“...we which are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord”* (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Similarly, the synoptic gospels speak of Christ coming in great clouds of glory (Matthew 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:25-28). These passages become the basis for the “rapture theory” that many of us have been taught. I am deeply convicted that this understanding is a complete misrepresentation of these glorious passages. I will return to this at greater length in the last section of this article.

A New Geography

We are heartened that more and more people are rejecting this pathetically distant God. Despite the misunderstood “caught up in the clouds” passages, the witness of scripture presents an altogether different cosmic map of God’s

whereabouts. The Old Testament understanding was that God dwelt in the Holy of Holies within the tabernacle, and later Solomon's temple. He would manifest occasionally outside of the Holy of Holies as when, for example, He would appear in the cloud by day and fire by night when leading the children of Israel through the wilderness. While the Old Testament understanding of God brings Him a little closer to home, God remains a being *external* to those who are believing on Him. It is in the New Testament that we are presented with a radically different *geography of God*. Jesus said to the Pharisees when asked when the kingdom of God should come, "*Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you*" (Luke 17:21). Jesus was introducing a profoundly new understanding of not only *when* the kingdom of God should come, but *where* it is to be found. ***The kingdom of God is here now, and it is within each of us.*** It seems that the Pharisees had no better understanding of God and His Kingdom than do the religious leaders today who are prognosticating the time and location of the return of Christ from His astral residence to establish His kingdom on earth!

This radical shift in understanding the *geography of God* that Jesus brought has profound implications for the life of the believer. The apostle Paul expands upon this understanding throughout his letters. To the Corinthians, who were engaging in all manner of sexual immorality, Paul wrote, "*What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost [which is] in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?*" (1 Corinthians 6:19) Paul is establishing here and elsewhere in his epistles, that because the kingdom of God is within us (and God resides in His kingdom), we are to govern ourselves according to kingdom principles. The shift in the *geography of God* has very practical implications.

Paul recognized that this shift has implications that go far beyond the admonition to not sleep with prostitutes. He knew, as must we, that it is Christ residing within us that empowers us to live victoriously because he knew that it is no longer *us* who lives, but it is *Christ in us* (see Romans 9:8-11; Colossians 1:27; 3:3). You see, this shift in the *geography of God* is not merely a change in our conceptualization about the location of God. It entails a radically new understanding of our very identity! This is why Jesus said "*Repent (metanoēō; get a paradigm shift) for the kingdom of God is at hand*" (Matthew 4:17). It is not

merely about how and where we see God to be located. This shift changes everything about who we see ourselves to be and how we see the world around us. Indeed, it represents a shift in our very identity. We are no longer merely “sinners saved by grace,” but we are one with Him as He is in us and we are in Him. This gives us an entirely new glasses prescription through which to bring into clear focus the destiny to which we have been called.

New Glasses

If the Spirit of God now dwells in us (Romans 8:11), we now see ourselves and the world around us through an entirely different lens. It is not so much that *we see Christ in us* (though we do), but rather because He now dwells within, *we see ourselves*, as well as the world and the events therein—past, present and future—through HIS eyes. The reason, of course, is that not only is Christ in us, but scripture says that *we are also in Him!* (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:6, 4:15). Because He is in us, and we are in Him, He is the lens through which we now see ourselves and the world around us.

This new lens gives us a new identity. As I mentioned above, we no longer see ourselves as “sinners saved by grace,” but we understand that we are righteous because He, who is our true identity and through whose eyes we now see is righteous. This is not, of course, a righteousness of the old Adam; old Adam is in the process of being crucified! Indeed, Paul instructs us that we are to reckon ourselves already dead to old Adam. He is emphatic about this:

“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with [him], that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6:6-11)

What a difference this *shift in geography* makes! We now live free from the condemnation of sin. We are not a “sinner saved by grace;” we have an entirely new identity, that being *Christ in us, the hope of glory* (Colossians 1:27).

The church has hammered into us the bankrupt identity that we are merely sinners saved by the grace of a God who stands afar off pitying our wretched condition and throwing out some sort of life line to save us from our miserable plight. It is certainly true that we are of Adam’s race in our natural condition, and it was only through the initiative of our gracious Heavenly Father sending His only begotten Son into this cesspool of humanity that we have been set free from the law of sin and death. We understand this, and we are certainly humbled by it. We also recognize, however, that this very understanding of ourselves is the ground that the enemy has to condemn and discourage us. This mindset is his playground. If we are merely sinners saved by grace, we are still of old Adam, and that person is the realm in which the enemy has his habitation! As we come to embrace this new understanding of the *geography of God*, we understand that we are now a **new creature**, now truly recreated in the very image of God. This is truly what it means to be born again. We are no longer that “sinner saved by grace”—*that man is old Adam*; we are sons of God, joint heirs with Christ of all the riches of the kingdom of God.

Let it be known that we share with Christ His full inheritance, including His immortality! This is a subject of great interest to those who have ventured on this kingdom journey, and admittedly remains a great mystery as to how it is to be manifest. Many are of the mistaken notion that it simply means that this body of flesh will somehow be supernaturally invigorated to live forever. Hardly. This bag of bones that we call our body is part of old Adam, part of that old identity that we have shed for the new creation that we are in Christ. There is a principle in scripture that we might call the principle of the dying seed. Jesus said, in speaking of His own death, *Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit* (John 12:24). The principle here is very clear: death brings forth life. We might use the analogy of the acorn which, only when it falls to the ground and its outer shell decays, does it give life to the mighty oak tree. The life of that oak tree is fully present in that

acorn; but that life remains dormant until the form of the acorn gives way to that creation which is so much more mighty and glorious than itself. Like the humble, unassuming acorn, our body of sin and deterioration is the very abode in which God has chosen to take up residence and into which He has chosen to breath His life. And this life will take on a totally new and glorious form, as the old passes away and behold all things (including our bodies) become new.

There is, of course, much that remains a mystery surrounding our immortality. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthian church (15:51) states that we shall not all sleep, but that we all *will be changed*, suggesting that there will be those who shed this mortal body without going to the grave. Many get caught up in the drama of wondering and hoping that they will be among those who do not go the way of the grave. May I be so bold as to ask the question, *what does it really matter?* The wonderful truth is that, whether by way of the grave or not, we shall shed this humble acorn body to take on that glorified body so beautifully exemplified by the mighty and stately oak tree. Just as the oak tree is of a different order than the acorn, so we who are in Christ and in whom Christ dwells are of a different order than the physical existence that we perceive through our natural senses. The natural is only that which gives birth and expression to our true inheritance, which includes an altogether new, glorified and immortal body where death shall no more reign.

Paul further states in verses 53 and 54 of the same chapter that corruption must put on incorruption and the mortal must put on immortality. This passage suggests that we actively participate in this process. And how is it that we actively participate? Some believe that we do this by engaging in all manner of life-prolonging measures to attempt to somehow bring about their immortality. This is doing nothing more than trying to preserve old Adam! May I suggest that our participation in putting on immortality takes place as we speak forth that new identity (that mighty oak tree) that we truly are and renounce the old identity (a mere acorn) that we appear to be in the natural—and then we rest in His Sabbath rest as He takes it from there.

We understand, of course, that this inheritance is not some cheap grace that is freely bestowed, willy nilly, upon anyone who would proclaim themselves to be a

son of God. Our sonship inheritance is a position to which, according to Paul, we were called before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). This is a calling to a position in Christ which entails much chastening, purging and refining (Romans 8:16-17). Anyone who is on this kingdom journey can attest to the Lord's dealings in their lives in any number of capacities. And we submit to these chastenings, though it is certainly the case that we are prone to resist them at first. Despite the reluctance we may feel at times, we know that we cannot turn back or turn aside from the suffering that the Lord has ordained for the very purpose of molding us into the likeness of His Son. This very perseverance, regardless of the stumbles along the way, is the basis for our claim to our new identity. The enemy will certainly murmur in our ear that we have failed the test, that we have been disqualified; but the enemy is a liar. Our identity is sure. WE ARE SONS OF THE MOST HIGH! Gone is any sense of inadequacy, because we are now living and acting as His ambassadors. An ambassador is someone who has been given all the authority of a king, president or prime minister to act and negotiate on their behalf. *We are His ambassadors!* Gone is all sense of sin consciousness. Old Adam may be busy at work in our members, but we are no longer old Adam! We are now in Christ, a totally new creation! With Paul, we boldly declare that *"[There is] therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."* (Romans 8:1) This radical shift in who we now know ourselves to be has revolutionary implications for almost every facet of our lives.

This new lens revolutionizes our prayer life. Since He is now within and is therefore our very identity, we no longer pray the long supplicatory prayers of a pathetic sinner saved by grace, pleading with a god "out there somewhere" to "heal sister Betty," or "save brother Brown and help him to quit drinking and beating his wife;" and then cross our fingers and hope that God has heard and will answer our prayer the way that we want Him to. Rather, because He has now taken up residence within us, and we are now in Him, operating by His authority as His ambassadors, our strategy in prayer is to seek Him deep within and come to a knowledge of what He is doing in a given situation. Having that knowledge, we then declaratively, and with the authority of the witness of the Spirit within, speak forth that reality. Jesus, who is our forerunner, established this principle

when He said, *“Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.”* (John 14:10) Jesus is the pattern Son for us, his many brethren. We can and must know His will and purpose in any given situation—even if it doesn’t make sense to us in the natural—and then speak forth that Word of Life into that person or situation. This is truly kingdom prayer!

This new lens revolutionizes our relationships with others. As we become firmly established in the knowledge of *the geography of God* and our identity in Christ, we relate to others less and less from a natural perspective—understanding and explaining their behavior and views on the basis of personality quirks, childhood trauma or any other naturalistic understanding. More importantly, our relationship with others is no longer based upon how well we get along; or the “chemistry” that exists between us; or any natural affinity that we may have toward that individual. We now see our spouses, our children, our friends and our enemies through the eyes of Christ who resides within us and within them. These are not merely alcoholics who had a rough childhood and an alcoholic father. They are not merely women going through menopause. Surely, all of these things may be at work, but they are, first and foremost, children of God for whom Christ died. We see and relate to them as spiritual beings, the Christ-indwelt beings for whom they are. The apostle Paul made this quite clear in his second letter to the Corinthians (5:15-16): *“And [that] he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. **Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we [him] no more.**”* Much of the church world, sad to say, continues to know Christ after the flesh. It continues to focus on the historical Jesus, celebrating His birth, death and resurrection as historical events to be commemorated. Paul declares that we are to now know Him as the risen and glorified Christ who, as He promised His disciples, has come to reside in them with Holy Ghost power. If Christ now resides in us, and in those around us, we also relate to them on the basis of their new identity, which is *Christ in them, the hope of glory*. One might ask, “Well then, how are we to relate to those who do not even acknowledge Jesus as Lord or Savior?” We relate to them no differently than we do to saints

who have been walking with the Lord for decades. I make the bold assertion that Christ indwells the heroin addict in the shooting gallery or the alcoholic on skid row just as fully as He does in the dear old saint who has crowned Jesus as Lord for fifty years. The only difference is that the addict and the alcoholic simply have not acknowledged that fact (presumably). But scripture makes it clear that they all will eventually (Philippians 2:10)! And it is only Christ within each and every one of them who will bring them to this place of humble submission. Hence it is Christ within them that we now see and to whom we now relate through the eyes—*the new glasses*—of Him Who is within us.

The new lens revolutionizes how we see the world around us. This shift in the *geography of God* provides opportunity to see the world and events around us through *His* eyes, which is a very different perspective than that which we are able to see merely through the eyes of old Adam. When we look around us, in the natural, we see death and destruction all around. We see governments going to hell in a handbasket. We observe homelessness in unprecedented numbers in our cities. Today's youth, including possibly our own children, are caught in the grip of addiction as never before. It is little wonder that we are seeing ever increasing rates of suicide throughout the land (Centers for Disease Control, 2024).

Those who are called to this road of sonship, who operate out of the knowledge that God resides within them and that their identity is Christ, are able to approach these matters from a very different perspective. We view the world and the circumstances of our life, not from the perspective of what it looks like in the natural, but *rather from the perspective of what God has said and promised*. God had promised Abraham that he would bring forth a son, and that he, through that son, would be the father of many nations. Abraham had to be quite incredulous, as he was nearly 100 years old, and Sarah his wife was 90. Little wonder that, operating out of his natural mind, Abraham succumbed to the urgings of Sarah and took up with Hagar, a much younger woman. But Ishmael was not the child of the promise. Abraham continued to believe God for the promise. And when Isaac finally came, Abraham was further tested by the Lord, who asked him to sacrifice Isaac upon the altar. This had to be incomprehensible to Abraham's

natural mind. He was nevertheless obedient. He stood on God's promise and not on his own understanding. We read that when Abraham beheld the place afar off where he was to take Isaac to be sacrificed, he told the two young men who accompanied them, *"Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you."* (Genesis 22:5). Note here that Abraham did not say that *I* will return to you. The inference here is that **we** will return to you. Abraham's trust in the Lord's provision despite what the circumstances appeared to be is further demonstrated when Isaac said to his father that he saw the wood and the fire, but queried Abraham about where the sacrifice was. Abraham replied to his son, *"My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering."* (Genesis 22: 8) Abraham spoke **God's reality**.

The apostle Paul affirms that Abraham believed God's promise despite what the circumstances appeared to be:

*"Therefore [it is] of faith, that [it might be] by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, [even] God, who quickeneth the dead, and **calleth those things which be not as though they were**. Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be."*(Romans 4:16-18)

Christ, now having taken up residence within us, has equipped us with spiritual eyes to see the world around us as *He* sees it, just as Abraham did, and it is to that spiritual reality that we now respond. Elsewhere Paul states,

"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed [them] unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God."
(1 Corinthians 2:9-10)

This understanding has very practical implications for us as we walk out our daily lives. It means that we no longer speak forth that which we *feel* or which our natural mind rationally thinks in response to a given situation. Our response instead is to retreat to that inner sanctuary and ask the Lord to remind us of the promises that He has given. Jesus did this in the wilderness when He was being tempted. Indeed, we see Paul doing this in the above exhortation to the Corinthians—*“but as it is written...”* We then speak forth *that* reality, renouncing the smokescreen before us. Herein lies a major key to victorious overcoming which is our inheritance!

The new lens revolutionizes our understanding of the return of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom. I mentioned at the beginning of this article that the common perception among Christians that God exists in some far off heaven somewhere (where we will join Him when we die) finds support in the common understanding of Jesus’ discourse with the disciples just prior to His ascending back to the Father after being with them some 40 days after His resurrection. I have quoted that passage of scripture above, but it bears repeating here as we consider this and other passages more closely in light of our new understanding of the *geography of God*.

“And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:9-11)

As mentioned, most Christians today believe that Jesus was taken up into a literal, physical cloud; that He physically ascended through the cumulous clouds of earth’s atmosphere. When the messengers in white tell the disciples that this same Jesus will return in like manner, it is believed that at some future point in time He will return in the literal clouds of the physical atmosphere. This passage is usually linked with Paul’s description to the Thessalonians that *“...we which are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet*

the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” (1 Thessalonians 4:17) Similarly, the synoptic gospels speak of Christ coming in great clouds of glory:

“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of the heaven shall be falling, and the powers that are in the heavens shall be shaken. And then they shall see the Son of Man coming in clouds with much power and glory” (Mark 13:24-27; see also Matthew 24:29-31 and Luke 21:25-28).

These passages become the basis for the “rapture theory” that many of us have been taught. There are several things that we must take note of when we consider these scriptures. First, we must understand that being “caught up” almost always refers in scripture to being taken to another realm in the Spirit. Paul, for example, refers to (presumably) himself being *caught up* into the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2). He is certainly not referring to his being physically propelled through space to some astral location. Secondly, and most importantly, we must understand the symbolism of the term “clouds” in scripture. In my reading of scripture, this symbolism was first used when the children of Israel were in the wilderness, being led by a cloud by day and fire by night. There was, no doubt, a physical cloud that could be observed by the Israelites. More importantly, however, the cloud represented the very presence of God. And so it is in scripture, that “cloud” symbolically represents God’s presence—either Yahweh Himself, as in the cloud in the wilderness, or in His people as the writer to the Hebrews speaks of the great “cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1). And so it is that Jesus was “caught up” into the very presence of His father (a cloud). It is significant, I believe, that when Jesus was taken up into heaven, it was **a cloud** (singular) that received Him. This cloud was the Father Himself, as the cloud represents His presence then, just as it did when it (He) was leading the children of Israel through the wilderness. However, the account of Jesus’ return has Him coming back in **clouds** (plural) in two of the three accounts in the synoptic gospels. Can these clouds be any other than the saints in whom the Father dwells? I am absolutely convinced that they are, and that the witnesses’ proclamation that He will return “in like manner” refers to the fact that Jesus will

return into the presence of God just as He departed into the presence of God (the cloud), only this time God's presence is in *many clouds* (saints).

I would point out one further thing regarding the synoptic gospels' accounts of Jesus return. Two of these accounts (Mark and Luke) have Jesus returning *in* (Greek *en*) the clouds; however Matthew's gospel has Jesus returning *upon* (Greek *epi*) the clouds. Young's literal translation correctly translates this Greek term *epi* as upon while the King James Version translates all of these accounts as "in" the clouds. In one sense, this distinction is not all that significant, as Jesus is indeed returning IN his saints. The distinction does, however, highlight the fact that not only does Jesus return in His saints, but it suggests that He is their head—He returns *upon—epi—*them. The three synoptic gospels thus present a complete portrait of the return of Christ—He is returning *in them* to rule and reign *with and upon them*, as their head. The kingdom that Jesus is establishing, even now, is a kingdom in which He is reigning in His saints. These saints are in ever increasing preparation as they are learning to function as Christ—as an anointed one—and Jesus Christ alone as their head.

The kingdom message speaks much of ruling and reigning with Christ. This is a profound truth that has been unveiled with increasing clarity and volume in the hour in which we live. If we are to fully understand and *experience* this truth in our lives, we must fully know the reality of *Christ in us, the hope of glory*. We must know it, not only as an objective fact which we affirm, but as a *lived experience* wherein we not only embrace the reality of Christ in us—but in knowing this, we see ourselves and all that which is around us *through the lens of Christ in us, the hope of glory!* This can only take place as we fully recognize our new identity in Christ. We function effectively in this new kingdom day as kings and priests unto God, only as we function *as Christ*—as "anointed ones." Only in the wearing of these new glasses (the eyes of Christ in us) will we truly rule and reign with Him in the kingdom age which is even now upon us. This is truly a glorious thought.

REFERENCE

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