

S E R M O N XXIII.

A REAL CHRISTIAN, A MAN IN CHRIST.

2 COR. Chap. xii. Ver. 2.

I knew a Man in Christ; or, A Man in Christ.

OF all the apostles and ministers which our Lord Jesus Christ ever had, or will have, Saul of Tarsus (afterwards called to be an apostle) was and will be found the greatest. He received the gospel immediately from Christ. God revealed his Son in him: so that his knowledge and understanding of the Father's everlasting love to the persons of the elect, of the Son's complete and everlasting salvation, and of the testimony and witness of the Holy Spirit to the truths and doctrines of the everlasting gospel, were such, that he says himself, *I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles*: whilst in the true humility of his own spiritual mind, he adds, *I am nothing*. His faith in Christ was suited to his knowledge of him, firm and unfeigned; his love to Christ was fervent, flaming, and vehement; his zeal constant; so that he was continually employed in spreading the name, fame, honour, and renown of his most adorable Lord. He rejoiced

in so doing, and thanks God for the effects which followed it, saying, *Now thanks be unto God which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ.* As his very soul was engaged in this most delightful work, so his travels were great, and his journies very many. *Bunting*, one of our English geographers, computes, that from Paul's first setting out from Damascus, to preach the unfearchable riches of Christ, to the time of his being a prisoner at Rome, he had traversed one hundred and ninety thousand two hundred and seventy miles. As he was so fully and spiritually illuminated by the day-spring from on high, and most abundantly successful, he had many enemies. Even some who called themselves apostles and ministers of Christ, withstood, spoke against, and backbit him. He speaks of these in the two former chapters; as also of his sufferings and persecutions for the gospel's sake. Yet the church of God is gainer hereby to the present moment. It was the occasion of his giving us an account of his rapture into heaven, and of what befell him afterwards, in which we have a choice experience of his, that, in all probability, would have been concealed, had it not been for the opposition which he met with. He begins this chapter thus: *It is not expedient for me, doubtless, to glory.* No one was a greater enemy to glorying in the flesh. He was dead to all below Christ. He was fully determined to glory only in the cross of Christ. He therefore alters the subject

he was constrained by those he wrote to, to be upon. Yet he must give them to know he had a knowledge of the visions and revelations of the Lord, as much as, and more than any of them could boast of. However, he speaks of it in a concealed way. *I knew a man in Christ.* He means himself. He knew himself to be one in Christ, and with Christ; and he would not view himself abstracted from him, nor speak of himself but as in him. *I knew such an one above fourteen years ago, caught up into the third heaven.* Yet I cannot say concerning this, whether the body and soul were transported thither. How this was I cannot tell. Yet this I know (such an one, *whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body:* how this was, I cannot say, God knoweth the case. Yet I know the truth of this) that such an one was *caught up to the third heaven.* *And I knew such a man: (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell, God knoweth): how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful (in the margin it is not possible) for a man to utter.* I know the truth of this rapture. Yet whether the soul was absent from the body, and thus admitted into the immediate presence of Christ; or, whether the body and soul were raised up to the state of glory, this I cannot say; it is the truth of the being translated first to the third heaven, then to paradise, is all I know, or can declare of the matter. Most conceive the third heaven and paradise one and the same. I rather prefer Dr. Goodwin on this point, who considers the third heaven to be the ultimate state of glory, in which

body and soul will be glorified, and where God, in all his persons and perfections, will be to elect angels and saints, *all in all*; and paradise, the immediate state between this and the resurrection of the elect in their bodies, that state into which Christ entered immediately on his yielding up the ghost, and to which he promised to admit the thief, saved on the cross, when he said to him, *Verily I say unto thee, to day shalt thou be with me in paradise*. What the apostle saw in heaven, in paradise, he speaks not of. He tells us he *heard unspeakable words*: such as he could not himself utter on earth. My design is to speak of the definition given of a Christian, of a real believer, in these words, *I knew a man in Christ*. My text, however, will be shorter, as I shall confine it to the words *a man in Christ*. Which are a true definition of a spiritual man. Twenty folios could not, says Mr. Romaine, have so fully expressed it. A real Christian, a true believer, a child of God, he who is born again, is *a man in Christ*. The expression is comprehensive; the title is glorious. The idea raised in our minds from it by the Holy Ghost, is heavenly and divine. To be *in Christ* is true blessedness: to know Christ is true Christianity: to receive Christ is the very essence of it: to believe on Christ is life everlasting: to live on Christ is practical godliness: to die in Christ is real blessedness: and to live with Christ in the state of blessedness and glory, will be the consummation of everlasting bliss. May the Lord the Spirit be most graciously present with me, whilst I attempt to give you the substance of the words

before me,—*a man in Christ*. Even so be it, O Lord! As the knowledge of Christ, as set forth in the gospel, is a most invaluable blessing; so also to know Christ to be ours, or, in other words, to know our personal interest in him, is of vast importance. *No one can call Jesus Lord (my Lord, and my God) but by the Holy Ghost*. My design is, to point out how this is made known to any of us, from the word, and by the Spirit of God. Therefore from these words, or this definition of a real believer, *a man in Christ*, I will set before you the following particulars :

First, I will consider the words themselves, *a man in Christ*; the very phraseology being vastly instructive and significant.

Secondly, I will inquire into the original of being *in Christ*.

Thirdly, how our being *in Christ* is manifested by regeneration and a new creation in us.

Fourthly, in what way and manner the Holy Ghost gives us evidence and proofs thereof. And,

Lastly, the blessedness and fruits thereof.

According to what is proposed in my division of the subject, I am first to consider the words themselves, *a man in Christ*; the very phraseology being very instructive and significant. *A man in Christ*. This is the only place where this peculiar phraseology occurs. We read of believers in Christ; of being in Christ; of being one Spirit with the Lord, *i. e.* with the Lord Jesus, but no where of *a man in Christ*, but in the passage before us. And as it is used but this once in all the Bible; and when an account is given of the

apostle's being favoured with visions and revelations of the Lord, it is the more remarkable, and worthy of our notice. The phrase, *a man in Christ*, serves to point out and suggest the vast difference of a man in Christ, and a man out of Christ. It implies, that what a man in Christ is, he is, in consequence of his being in him. It points out his high original. It shews that our apostle would consider of no being he had, but what he had in him. That he considered himself as having being and well-being in him. He speaks suitably to this, when he elsewhere says, *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.* Suggesting that a new creature, or a new creation in the soul, arises from being *in Christ*. These two words, *in Christ*, are as important as any in the New Testament. These words in our text come home still closer unto us. We are either in Christ, or out of him. As Mr. Romaine used to say, "Sirs, you are either
" in Adam, or in Christ. If in Adam, you are in
" your sins; and dying in union with him, you will
" perish everlastingly. If in Christ, you are not in
" your sin, because he hath saved you in himself
" with an everlasting salvation." The expression, *a man in Christ*, is most fully adapted to keep up in our minds the vast difference and distinction between a real believer, and a nominal one; it contains also in it matter for the mind to contemplate on. As the phrases, Lord's day, Lord's table, Lord's supper, Lord's word, Lord's people, carry with them a stamp of dignity and majesty; so the expression, *a man in Christ*, does the same. It is instructive, as it implies

that being in Christ is a matter of the greatest importance. It is very significant, as it shews from whence the believer's all comes, even from Christ, in whom it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell. Let then this title, *a man in Christ*, be considered by us, in its importance and significancy. Let us learn to make a proper use of this phraseology. Let us make the true and only distinction between man and man by it. And may the Lord himself sanctify the use of it unto us, for his own name, his truth and mercy's sake. I proceed according to my division of the subject before us,

Secondly, to inquire into the original of being *in Christ*. If we make the inquiry, and search the sacred records for it, we shall find, that our being, and well-being in Christ, our union to his person, and interest in him, are founded on the everlasting love of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and that it is the fruit of that eternal act in the mind and will of God, which is styled in Scripture, election; whereby, from eternity, God, out of the love wherewith he loved us, chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. By which choice of our persons in Christ, our head, we had a virtual subsistence in him, as members in an head: and being thus in him, we were united to him, and had life in him before the world was. Hence we find these expressions made use of by the Holy Ghost on these subjects: *Chosen in him, before the foundation of the world: blessed in him with all spiritual blessings: predestinated to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ: accepted in the beloved.* All which are ascribed to the

praise of the glory of JEHOVAH the Father's grace, Eph. i. 6. The apostle gives us a summary of it in these words: *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began,* 2 Tim. i. 9. As the elect were *in Christ* before the world began, so they had being and well-being in him, such as they could not, and did not lose in time, although they fell in Adam, their nature head, and lost all their nature purity in him. To give the elect being *in Christ*, is the foundation of all the grace they receive from Christ their head. They had life in him, and he received the promise of life for them before the world began; so Paul declares. *In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began,* Titus i. 2. This is the high original of being *in Christ*: it springs from the infinite love of the essential and co-equal Three in the incomprehensible Godhead, which is most freely and fully set before us in the word of truth; and which we are enlightened into the knowledge of by the Holy Spirit of truth: whose prerogative royal it is to lead his people into all truth. Hereby the word of *truth as it is in Jesus*, enlightens the mind of the regenerate, into the knowledge of *God, and of the Father, and of Christ: in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* To be *in Christ*; to be related to the person of Christ, God-man; to be one with him; to be interested in all his communicable titles, grace, and glory, is to be blessed beyond expression; yea, beyond the uttermost stretch of con-

ception: and yet *this honour have all his saints*. It well becomes them therefore to say to each other, *Praise ye the Lord*. As all the elect were *in Christ* before the world was; and out of the riches of grace which the Eternal Three were pleased to express towards them, they had a supercreation union and being *in Christ*, and thereby were predestinated to the uttermost blessedness of well-being in him; so they were ordained to receive and partake of supernatural blessings from him, and therefore they must receive a supernatural birth from him, that may suit them to participate of the blessings and benefits which belong to both the state of grace, and the state of glory. This leads me, therefore,

Thirdly, to shew how our being *in Christ* is manifested by regeneration and a new creation in us. Beloved, it is an important truth, and one which should be preserved in the mind, and kept clear and distinct in our views, in preaching, hearing, conversation, prayer, and in all our worshipping acts, that there is a secret being *in Christ*, as the ground of an open, manifestative being in him. The former is founded, as hath been already declared, on the love of all the persons in the Godhead, to the persons of the elect; out of which they were chosen in him: and which love is the bond of union between the persons in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and the church. The open manifestation of this takes place in the day of God's power; when, according to the settlements of grace in the will, council, and settlements of the Essential Three, the Holy Ghost is

sent down from the Father and the Son, to take possession of the heart, and form a vessel of mercy for JEHOVAH's praise. Christ, the head of the elect, is their life. He is the root of their regeneration, as Adam is the root of generation. He sends down the Holy Ghost, who works on the soul, and produces in it a new and spiritual birth, which is altogether supernatural and divine. This new birth is the fruit of eternal election, and the open discovery thereof. It consists in a new and spiritual faculty, whereby the new-born are fitted and capacitated to receive, know, and understand the things of God, and are made meet to hold and enjoy fellowship with God. Regeneration produces a new creation in us. We are born from above. We are, as the church of England expresses it, "born into Christ." Or, as Paul says, *translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son*, Col. i. 13. We have in regeneration, new and spiritual faculties, senses, and affections, suited to new, spiritual, and supernatural objects and subjects, which are now revealed to us, and set before us. We have in regeneration, a new and spiritual understanding given unto us, whereby we know Christ, and receive the knowledge of his person, love, and salvation into our minds, and acknowledge him to be our Lord and our God. We have spiritual eyes with which we see Jesus in the glass of the gospel. We have spiritual ears to hear his most blessed voice in his word of grace and truth. And we say, individually, for ourselves, *it is the voice of my beloved*. We have a spiritual palate, so that we taste and relish his love;

and therefore say, *O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him*, Psalm xxxiv.

8. We have spiritual hands to handle Christ, the word of eternal life. We have spiritual feet to walk in him, the way to all the grace and glory of the Father, and to run with alacrity in the way of his holy commandments. In fact, like as the natural faculties and senses of the mind, are suited to the proper objects and subjects on which they are to be exercised, so the spiritual faculties and senses which the regenerate are the subjects of, are fitted and suited to Christ and spiritual things. The Lord's people are, in his own time, regenerated, or born again, and made new creatures in Christ Jesus, that they may have the true knowledge of God imparted to their minds, and be favoured with a knowledge of their interest in the Father's love, in the Son's salvation, and in the graces, gifts, and consolations of the Holy Ghost. We are not born again that we may have an interest in Christ, and be the children of the most high God; but we are born again, because we are *in Christ*, and are, by divine predestination, *the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty*. It is an inconceivable blessing to apprehend spiritual and immutable truth, as it is revealed and stated in the Lord's word, and to have it stated in our minds by the teachings of the Holy Spirit, as he hath stated it in the word. Election is the foundation of all God's acts in Christ towards us, in us, and upon us. The covenant acts of the holy trinity upon the foreviews of the fall, on the behalf of the elect, are the original of the everlasting gospel. The incarnation, life, obedience, sacrifice, and death of Christ,

are the salvation of the elect. He hath saved them: and they are in him *a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing*. They are, in the sight of their heavenly Father, as he beholds them *in Christ*, holy, righteous, pure, and complete. The Holy Ghost works in them, and for them, as the elect of God, as the members of Christ, a divine nature. So saith Peter, 2 Ep. i. 4. And it is wrought in them by omnipotent energy, without their wills having any thing to do with it. They are wholly passive in the work of regeneration. It is the immediate fruit of election. It is wrought in their souls instantaneously. They cannot say when and where it was wrought; but, being born again, they can give a blessed testimony, and some of them a very clear one, of what has taken place in their souls in consequence of their being regenerated. Regeneration, or a new creation in us by the Spirit of the living God, always carries its own evidence with it, that such are *in Christ*. We should ever keep our oneness with Christ apart by itself, and the blessings and benefits which follow it in their due order. Regeneration is not conversion. The former is the cause, the latter the effect. Regeneration is the act of God towards us, and upon us. Conversion is our act towards God. We can never be converted to the Lord, let us experience what we may, until we have so apprehended *God in Christ*, as to be perfectly satisfied of his everlasting love and good will towards us, in his beloved Son. Then, and not before, we shall say, *Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be*

turned. Regeneration, or a new creation in our souls, is the fountain and spring of all those spiritual acts which the Holy Ghost produces in us. He lives, and hath his indwelling in our souls. Hence believers are said to be *the temple of the living God*. He puts forth his life giving influences within us. He draws forth our spiritual graces into act and exercise. He communicates life and light to our spiritual faculties, and exercises them, and feasts and feeds them with discoveries of the Father's love, and Messiah's finished salvation. The Holy Ghost is the author of our new birth, and of every spiritual faculty, sense, and affection contained therein. He is the root, spring, and life of our every spiritual action. He is the great manifestor of our Being in Christ, of our union to him, of our interest in him. He is pleased to begin his work in us in regeneration; making us new creatures, and producing a new creation in our souls. So saith our apostle. *If any man be in Christ he is a new creature, 2 Cor. v. 17. A man in Christ, who is openly declared to be so, by the Lord's effectual grace towards him, is born of God—born again—he is a new creature. And he is created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them, Ephes. ii. 10.*

I proceed, fourthly, to shew in what way and manner the Holy Ghost gives us evidence and proofs thereof. It is an ineffable blessing to know Christ. Many love to hear of Jesus and his salvation. Some of you that constantly attend upon, and are well pleased to hear the gospel of the blessed God, it

would give you real pleasure and soul satisfaction, could you have gospel, real and well-grounded evidence of your being interested in the unsearchable riches of Christ. For your sakes I have taken my present text, and shall keep you in mine eye in the present head of discourse. May the Lord the Spirit help me to speak so judiciously, clearly, and precisely to the subject, that you may receive and enjoy real benefit therefrom. As to be *in Christ* is the greatest of all blessings, because such as are in him are the objects and subjects of all the love of God, so the knowledge of personal interest in Christ, the head of the whole election of grace, is most truly blessed and desirable. It should be remembered, that the Holy Ghost only can give any of us to know our real and personal interest in Immanuel. The Lord the Spirit is most graciously engaged according to the economy of the everlasting covenant, to testify of Jesus, and take of the things which are his and shew them unto his called ones. Blessed be his name, he enlightens their understandings to receive the knowledge of the person, love, work, and salvation of Christ, from the written word; in which Christ is set forth in all the fulness of his grace—in all the perfection of his righteousness—in all the virtue and efficacy of his most precious bloodshedding, with all the blessings of his redemption. A spiritual apprehension, an intuitive perception of the Lord Jesus Christ, from the word, and by the Spirit, is the fruit of regeneration, and the best evidence of spiritual life that can be given. Our Lord, speaking to his Divine Father, says, *And this is life eternal, that*

they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent, John xvii. 3. . And in the 6th chapter of John, he says, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life.* The former shews and proves, that eternal life consists in the knowledge of the only true God, in knowing Father, Son, and Spirit, as they have revealed their distinctive personalities in the God-man Mediator, and in knowing Christ in his office and capacity of mediatorship. The latter shews in what way this is manifested; it is by believing. And our Lord pronounces of such, that they have *everlasting life.* Now, believing in Christ, is not everlasting life; and yet such as believe on Jesus, have everlasting life. The true explanation of this is as follows: it is the knowledge of Christ which is everlasting life. In our knowing Christ, we have everlasting life in our minds. And faith is the immediate effect of our knowledge of the person and work of Christ, and of the Father's love to us in him, made known unto us in the word, and testified unto us by the Holy Spirit. So that as it is the very effect of everlasting life, and such as know Jesus, have everlasting life, our Lord therefore most truly declares, *He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.* He is the object of our faith. His word is the ground of our faith. The record and testimony of the Father concerning him, is the warrant for our believing. The salvation of Jesus is the subject on which our faith is exercised. Christ is the immediate object of our faith. By him ye *believe in God that raised him from the dead, and gave him glory,*

that your faith and hope might be in God, 1 Pet. i. 21. It is a most blessed piece of heavenly instruction, which the Holy Ghost is most graciously pleased to give his beloved ones, to shew and make clear to them in what way, and by what means the salvation of Christ is received into their minds, and enjoyed in their hearts. It is by faith. The word of the gospel is styled *the word of faith*. And Paul tells us, *faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God, Rom. x. 17.* It is what we hear in the preaching of the everlasting gospel concerning Christ, which makes way for our believing on him. The whole of which is summed up by Christ himself in these words: *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* I lately received a letter from a young person, about seventeen years of age, in which she says, “ I have
“ received Christ, but I say nothing to any one about
“ it: for I scarce find any of the Lord’s people but
“ think they are saved upon the footing of something
“ wrought in them. I want a free, complete, and
“ finished salvation. And blessed be the Lord, in
“ him my wants are fully supplied. Therefore the
“ salvation of Jesus suits me, because I have nothing
“ to do with it but to believe it.” I would set my seal to this, for I consider it a true gospel view of the subject. Faith is the most simple act of the spiritual mind, on, and towards our Lord Jesus Christ. It is so simple, that it cannot be described any more than thought can. You all know what it is to think, but who can describe the simplicity of it. You can

say it is the act of the mind, exercised on the objects and subjects which engage it. So faith, after all that we say to simplify its act and exercise, is nothing more nor less than the spiritual mind exercised in thinking on Christ. Faith is, if I may so express it, spiritual thought. Our Lord himself so expresses it, when he puts the question, *What think ye of Christ?* It is so spoken of also, under the idea of thought, in the Old Testament. *Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name,* Malachi iii. 16. So that the Holy Ghost giving a spiritual understanding to the new-born soul to know Christ, and enlightening the renewed mind into a supernatural apprehension of him, Christ is thereby received into the mind, and enjoyed in the heart; and thus Christ is in us the hope of glory. Hereby also we have evidence and proof of our personal interest in Jesus, and know that we belong unto, and are partakers of Christ, because we have a true knowledge of him in our minds, and real fellowship with him in our hearts, through the word, and by the Spirit, in believing. And thus we clearly understand the apostle, when he says, *Ye are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus,* Gal. iii. 26. Christ's dwelling in our hearts by faith, and our faith exercised in beholding him, and taking in believing sights and apprehensions of him, brings always its own evidence with it, that we are in him, and in his way; and, by this means, the Holy Ghost gives us evidence and proofs thereof.

I come, lastly, to speak of the blessedness and fruits of this. With respect to the blessedness of being in Christ, of knowing that we are in him, it can never be fully conceived on earth, nor perfectly comprehended in heaven. Yet here below, we, who are favoured with but a glimpse of it, and have a real sense and enjoyment of it, find it exceeds all we can possibly express. We find the knowledge of Christ to be a perfect antidote against all the miseries of life, a shield to protect against the fears of death, and a spring of endless consolation. And to know this Jesus to be ours it increases our joy in him, it causes us to make our boast in his name, and to triumph in his praise. Yea, we aim at it again and again,—to make his praise glorious. The knowledge of Christ, and interest in him, are, in our views, realities of infinite worth, of inexpressible moment. The apostle John says, for himself and other believers, *We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true : and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ.* 1 John v. 20. To know him that is true, and to know that we are in him that is true, is the fountain and spring of everlasting consolation. Believers, you should never suffer this to be called in question. You should always maintain your confidence in Christ by faith in his word and work. Every spiritual breathing of mind after Jesus, is a proof of your interest in him. *Hereby know we, saith John, that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit,* 1 John iv. 13. Your estimation of the person of Christ is the very fruit of

your knowledge of him. Your high prizing of the blood and righteousness of Christ, is the real effect of the views you have had of the consummate worth, perfection, and excellency of the Saviour's work in the light of faith. As sure as Christ is precious to you, and hath the supreme place in your heart, so sure he dwelleth in you. And you would not delight yourselves in him, if the Holy Spirit had not taken of the things of Christ, and shewed you his glory. I will therefore say, if you cannot live without thinking on Christ, without worshipping him, speaking of him, and conversing with him, you are spiritual persons, ye are *born of the Spirit*. This being the fruit of your knowing Christ, study him. Think, speak, and consider deeply in your own souls, on your blessedness in him. Live, O live, in a continual dependence on him. Put your every concern into his hands. Cast your every care on him. And be assured, that when Christ your life shall appear, ye shall also appear with him in glory. May the Lord the Spirit bless this feeble attempt to honour Christ, and instruct you: and to Father, Son, and Spirit, all the glory shall be ascribed now and for ever. *Amen.*

F I N I S.

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