

*a sincere heart and a sure faith, because we have been made free from a guilty conscience, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.*

HEBREWS 10:19-22 NCV™

The reference to Jesus Christ's body as "the curtain" (v. 20) is drawing a parallel between: his death which opened a way for believers to confidently enter into God's presence; and the curtain which the high priest went through to enter the Most Holy Place of God's presence, in the tabernacle and later in the temple.

### **God's people have access to God through Jesus Christ – by the Holy Spirit**

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *It is through Christ that all of us, Jews and Gentiles, are able to come in the one Spirit into the presence of the Father.* EPHESIANS 2:18 GNT

Verses such as this which speak of God's people relating to God (e.g. praying to him) "through" Jesus Christ, appear to have in view one or more of the following three concepts: Jesus Christ's death opening the way into God's presence; Jesus Christ's priesthood; and God's people being "in" Jesus Christ. All three are aspects of Jesus Christ's mediatory role in a believer's relationship with God.

*Pray for persecuted Christians*

## CHAPTER 16

# The Standing of God's People

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## I. Basics

This chapter looks at the standing or position of God's people in relationship to God. Probably the most basic aspect of this is that they belong to God, as his people. As such the relationship between believers and God is both a strong one and a close one. This is underlined by them being his family and also his church.

### Prologue: God Draws People to Himself

#### God chooses people (to be his people)

[JESUS:] If the Lord had not shortened those days, no one would be saved. But for the sake of *the elect whom he has chosen*, he has shortened those days. [MARK 13:20](#) ISV

These verses illustrate that the Bible teaches that God chooses some people to be his, and so to be saved. Yet the Bible also teaches that God desires and provides for the salvation of all people (cf. *God invites all people to come to him and be saved*, p. 176). In coming to terms with this "tension" in Scripture, bear in mind that as the Bible teaches both "sides", the truth lies in both of them, as opposed to a position that is a compromise of both.

#### God moves people to believe and turn to Jesus Christ

[JESUS:] *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*, and I will raise him up at the last day. [JOHN 6:44](#) NET

But among them [believers] were some men from Cyprus and Cyrene who came to Antioch and began talking to the Hellenistic Jews too, proclaiming the Lord Jesus. <sup>21</sup>*The hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number of people believed and turned to the Lord.* <sup>22</sup>When the church in Jerusalem heard this news, they sent Barnabas all the way to Antioch. <sup>23</sup>When he arrived, *he rejoiced to see what the grace of God had done ...* [ACTS 11:20-23A](#) ISV

The people's belief and turning to the Lord (v. 21b) is attributed to neither how the message was presented nor the people's own initiative, but to the "hand of the Lord" (v. 21a) – evidencing "the grace of God" (v. 23).

### God's People Are One Body 'in' Jesus Christ

#### All believers – including Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free – are one body "in" Jesus Christ

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female – for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.* [GALATIANS 3:28](#) NET

Oneness in Jesus Christ takes primacy over all distinctions. In him "there is no difference" (GNT, NCV) between contrasting groups such as Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free people, and males and females. For no group is spiritually superior to another, and all are equal before God (cf. Ephesians 6:8-9). Note that the use of "Greek", as opposed to "Jew", appears to denote all Gentiles.

#### The church is the body of Christ

Now *the church is his body, the fullness of him* who fills all in all. [EPHESIANS 1:23](#) NET

The description of the church as the "body" of Christ figuratively depicts the spiritual union of Jesus Christ with his people, and points to the oneness that his people have together in their relationship to Christ.

#### Jesus Christ is the head of the body

*He is the head of the body, the church*, as well as the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead, so that he himself may become first in all things. [COLOSSIANS 1:18](#) NET

### Epilogue: God's People Relate to God through Christ

#### Jesus Christ's death and priesthood have opened the way into God's presence for God's people

[THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] So, brothers and sisters, *we are completely free to enter the Most Holy Place without fear because of the blood of Jesus' death.* <sup>20</sup>*We can enter through a new and living way that Jesus opened for us. It leads through the curtain—Christ's body.* <sup>21</sup>*And since we have a great priest over God's house,* <sup>22</sup>*let us come near to God with*

## The Significance of Being 'in' Jesus Christ

Generally speaking at least, the spiritual standing and blessings that believers have are based on them being "in" Jesus Christ. As referred to earlier, this means that they are granted by God the standing and blessings that Jesus Christ has attained on behalf of those so associated with him.

### "In" Jesus Christ God's people are redeemed and forgiven

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of *the Son he loves*, <sup>14</sup>*in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.* [COLOSSIANS 1:13-14](#) NET

### "In" Jesus Christ God's people have righteousness

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] God made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so *that in him we would become the righteousness of God.* [2 CORINTHIANS 5:21](#) NET

"In" Jesus Christ believers share in the righteousness of God (cf. GNT).

### "In" Jesus Christ believers are identified with him in his death, resurrection and life

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *In him you also were circumcised* – not, however, with a circumcision performed by human hands, but *by the removal of the fleshly body, that is, through the circumcision done by Christ.* <sup>12</sup>*Having been buried with him in baptism, you also have been raised with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead.* <sup>13</sup>*And even though you were dead in your transgressions and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he [God] nevertheless made you alive with him [Christ], having forgiven all your transgressions.* [COLOSSIANS 2:11-13](#) NET

Verses 11-12 speak of one's sinful nature being cut off through one being buried and raised with Christ. Following on from this, Paul speaks of believers being given life with Christ (v. 13).

## God's People Belong to God

### God's people belong to him

[PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] However, you are chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, *people who belong to God.* [1 PETER 2:9A](#) GW

### They are God's people . . .

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *God loves you and has chosen you as his own special people.* [COLOSSIANS 3:12A](#) CEV

### . . . and God is their God

[ABIJAH, KING OF JUDAH:] *But as for us, the LORD is our God* and we have not rejected him. [2 CHRONICLES 13:10A](#) NET

### God's people likewise belong to Jesus Christ

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] If we live, it is for the Lord that we live, and if we die, it is for the Lord that we die. *So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.* [ROMANS 14:8](#) GNT

## God's People Are His Family

### Each believer belongs to the family of God

[PAUL, TO NON-JEWISH BELIEVERS:] Now you who are not Jewish are not foreigners or strangers any longer, but are citizens together with God's holy people. *You belong to God's family.* [EPHESIANS 2:19](#) NCV™

### God is their Father

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] To all those loved by God in Rome, called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from *God our Father* and the Lord Jesus Christ! [ROMANS 1:7](#) NET

### They are God's children

But to all who have received him [Jesus Christ] – those who believe in his name – *he has given the right to become God's children* <sup>13</sup> *children not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband's decision, but by God.* [JOHN 1:12-13](#) NET

Those who accept Jesus and believe in him (v. 12a) are enabled to become God's children (v. 12b) – born of God (v. 13) into spiritual life.

### As God's children, they are also heirs of God

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *And if children, then heirs (namely, heirs of God and also fellow heirs with Christ) – if indeed we suffer with him so we may also be glorified with him.* ROMANS 8:17 NET

### God's People Are His Church

See also: 26. *Being One Body*, p. 217

### God's people form his church

[PAUL, TO THE EPHESIAN CHURCH LEADERS:] Watch out for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. ACTS 20:28 NET

The term "church" denotes an assembly or body of believers that belong to God. Additionally, it can be used more generally of God's people as a whole – the worldwide church.

### The church is God's temple, in which God dwells by his Spirit

[PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH:] Do you not know that *you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?* 1 CORINTHIANS 3:16 NET

He [Jesus Christ] is the one who holds the whole building together and makes it grow into a sacred temple dedicated to the Lord. <sup>22</sup>In union with him you too are being built together with all the others into a place where God lives through his Spirit. EPHESIANS 2:21-22 GNT

### Jesus Christ is the ruler of God's church

But *Christ is faithful as a son over God's house.* HEBREWS 3:6A NET

This speaks of Jesus Christ being "in charge" (CEV, GNT, NLT) of God's house or church – i.e. its ruler or Lord.

*Pray for persecuted Christians*

## II. Being 'in' Jesus Christ

Arguably the most fundamental change in the standing of God's people in relationship to him that followed what Jesus Christ accomplished, is that they are now "in" Jesus Christ. Being "in" Jesus Christ involves the association or correlation of believers with Jesus Christ, by which God views them in association with his Son.

It is based on, or at least connected with, their spiritual union with Jesus Christ – in which they participate with him in such things as: his victory over sin and death; his life; and other blessings he has secured. (See also the comment below in *God's people are united with Jesus Christ*.) As such it has great significance in the relationship of believers to God.

Note that expressions like "in Jesus Christ" sometimes have other meanings, such as "through Jesus Christ". While the verses in this section have been interpreted here as using such expressions to speak of believers being "in" Jesus Christ, in some instances the meaning is debatable.

### God's People Are 'in' Jesus Christ

#### God's people are "in" Jesus Christ

From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints [in Ephesus], *the faithful in Christ Jesus.* EPHESIANS 1:1 NET

#### Jesus Christ identifies himself with God's people

Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, *anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.*' MATTHEW 25:40 NCV™

The King in this parable represents Jesus Christ himself. Commentators generally interpret "my people" to be referring to Christians.

#### God's people live with Jesus Christ

[PAUL:] For we also are weak in him, but *we will live together with him,* because of God's power toward you. 2 CORINTHIANS 13:4B NET