

The Two Sides of Being in Christ

As I continue to grow in Christ, I am continually intrigued by the number of seemingly contrasting concepts we need to hang on to at the same time. For instance, we know we are saved by grace. At the same time, we know we must surrender to God and obey Him. Another example is the fact that we are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, but we can only do that because God is the one in us working so that we may work and will for His good pleasure (cf. **Philippians 2:12-13**).

What I'm learning is that we don't have to be able to quantify these two-sided concepts. We don't have to be able to diagram them and outline exactly how far each side goes. Instead, we just need to say what the Bible says and do what the Bible tells us. God is doing His part. Based on our trust in Him, we just need to do ours.

Just a few weeks ago, I discovered another one of these two-sided concepts in **Psalms 126**. Of course, **Psalms 126** is directly about the restoration of God's Old Testament nation to their homeland. However, I can't help but see the parallel to us as Christians. Just as the Jews had been held captive by the Assyrians and the Babylonians, we have been held captive by sin and Satan. They were restored and so are we. When we see these parallels, we see some great lessons for us in this psalm.

The first half of the psalm says:

*When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then they said among the nations,
"The Lord has done great things for them."
The Lord has done great things for us;
we are glad.*

The Jews had been restored. They were back in their homeland. While it had been Cyrus who issued the decree, they knew who to thank for this. God had done this for them. Even the surrounding nations knew who was to be given the credit. God had done great things for them. And they could rejoice.

That is exactly where we are. We have been restored. According to **Colossians 1:13-14** we have been delivered from darkness into the kingdom of God's beloved Son. We have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins. According to **Romans 8:1** where we are, there is no condemnation. We are in Christ. Because of that, we can rejoice. Our mouth can be filled with laughter. Our tongues can sound forth shouts of joy. We do not have to be filled with misery and despair. We can walk confidently knowing we are in Jesus no matter what happens in our lives.

This may seem a bit unreal. We may feel like it is all a dream, much like Peter did when the angel rescued him from the prison in **Acts 12**. But we really are free. Sin and Satan no longer hold us captive. Let us rejoice. Let us sing and shout for joy. Let us celebrate.

We must never forget this. We can hold on to this. But as we hold on to this joy and this complete restoration, we need to see the second half of the psalm as well.

*Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
like streams in the Negeb!
Those who sow in tears
shall reap with shouts of joy!
He who goes out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
bringing his sheaves with him.*

Wait! What?

Didn't the psalmist say the Lord had already restored Israel? Yes, he did. However, knowing the history, we understand there was more restoring to do. The people shouted for joy at being back in their homeland, however the temple needed rebuilt, the walls needed restored, the homes and fields needed renewed. So, while there was much joy, laughter, and celebration, there was still a lot of tear-filled work to be done.

This is the other side of our concept. Yes, we have been restored. We are in Christ. We can walk confidently in that. We can put away our despair and misery. At the same time, there is still a lot of restoration for us in the future. But notice who

they knew would do the restoring: God. When we were baptized, we were delivered into Christ and His kingdom. However, God was not through with us, moving on to the next person. Oh no. His work had only just begun. At the point, the long, slow process of conforming us to the image of Christ began (cf. **Romans 8:28-30**). But don't forget that God is the one who is working that restoration. Even though we are in Christ and His kingdom, even though we know there is no condemnation, how many times do we see ourselves still falling short of God's glory? How many tears do we still shed because we are not yet fully conformed to the image of Christ or fully restored? Yes, we are restored, but we are still being restored at the same time.

For the Israelites, the psalm talked about their work in sowing seed on long-ignored lands and the hardship of that toil. But we understand that we are sowing the seed of the Spirit in order to reap life everlasting (**Galatians 6:7-9**). Some days that sowing is done in tears as we see our own failures, mistakes, and sins. But even with the tears we have today, the psalmist points out that we can still sow in confidence. In Christ, we may make mistakes today, but we know that He is working and though we sow in tears today, we will reap in joy, coming home with shouts of joy, bringing sheaves of spiritual maturity and growth with us. We can cry out to God to restore us and do so in the confidence that He will do exactly that.

There are two sides to our place in Christ. One side of the concept says we have arrived and we can simply rest in that confidence. The other side says God is still working on us as we sow in tears. But even that side points to a certain future of maturity produced by the grace of God.

We have been restored. Let's rejoice. At the same time, God is restoring us. While we sometimes mourn, we can still look forward to the ultimate joy we will experience in Him. Walk in that two-sided confidence today.

--Edwin L. Crozier