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Complementary, Not Contradictory

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet" (Acts 2:34-35).

"Jesus standing on the right hand of God..." "The Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55-56).

"If Christ is in you"; "...his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Romans 8:10,11).

It is a matter that should be clearly understood by all Christians that to confuse the truths of God is very often to nullify their value in the life of a believer, and worse than that, to bring about a condition which is a positive contradiction of what is fundamental to true Christianity. With great seriousness then we seek to discriminate between the different *essential* aspects of the truth, and the above passages represent one of the instances of immense importance. Although there are three quotations given, there are only two really separate matters signified. The first two are but two sides of one thing, but while those two and the third constitute a *full* Christian life, and are essential to such spiritual fullness, *they are two distinctly different things which must on no account be allowed to overlap.*

Christ in Heaven: (a) 'Sitting'

In the first two Christ is represented as in heaven at God's right hand, but in two postures, 'sitting' and 'standing'. There is no contradiction here. We must remember that we are in the presence of language which is figurative. In His "sitting" - "made to sit" (Ephesians 1:20): "Sit thou" (Acts 2:34) -

there is the Divine attestation that His work was complete and perfect, and that as Son of Man He had won and inherited the place of absolute honour and glory. "We see Jesus... crowned with glory and honour" (Hebrews 2:9). The right hand is first the place of honour. It is of great significance that the new dispensation commencing with Pentecost begins with Christ *sitting* at God's right hand. All begins with a work completed! The seventh day the day of rest - becomes the first day. The colours of the rainbow end where they began. It is the law of the octave, the eighth is as the first and marks a new beginning. Our Christian life begins at the point where the work is already completed in our Representative Son of Man. There is nothing to add to it, either in need or possibility. Immediately we try to contribute something to it we *in effect, for ourselves*, nullify it all, and God stands back. We shall come back to that again presently.

Christ in Heaven: (b) 'Standing'

With regard to the second posture of Christ as in heaven - "standing on the right hand of God" - this is seen when the Church is in the conflict, or when things are needing to be done for her, not in the sense of her justification, but for her defence and support in adversity. Thank God, there is One in the glory standing up for us, and He will see to it that the enemy overreaches himself, as in Stephen's case. Much could be said about that, but it is not our subject just now.

We pass straight to the third position of Christ:

"Christ in You"

Any mental difficulty as to two so widely separated locations of Christ at the same time is got over by the further words "By his Spirit that dwelleth in you". Christ and the Holy Spirit are one.

Here we cross over to another phase of things entirely, and the only link between the two is that the second is the outworking of the first.

"Christ in you" is unto our being "conformed to the image of his (God's) Son" (Romans 8:29). It is to work in us that which has been perfected by Him. It is the whole realm of our being made Christ-like; having all the faculties and features of Christ, which are resident in the new life received at new birth, brought to maturity. Every spiritual and Christly virtue has to be brought to full growth; love, meekness, goodness, gentleness, intelligence, etc.; so that we are not just theoretical and doctrinaire Christians, but real ones, spiritually responsible and accountable, with the root of the matter within. This, however, necessitates much discipline; what is called 'chastening'. This discipline, which employs many forms of adversity and trial, has the effect of bringing to light what we really are in ourselves, and it is an ugly picture. Our *own* features do not improve as we go on. We know ever more what poor, wretched, and deplorable men we are, and - but for the grace of God - hopeless. But something is being done deep down which will show itself in due time to the glory of God.

Confusion Leads to Paralysis

But here is the point of our peril. Let no child of God whose heart is toward the Lord, who has not *deliberately* and wilfully and knowingly resisted the Holy Ghost, ever for a single moment confuse 'chastening' and its accompaniments of self-discovery with judgment. You do this at the peril of the joy of your salvation. If a child of God who loves the Lord and wants nothing more than to be well-pleasing unto Him should think that he is under the judgment and condemnation of God because he is finding out how evil his own heart is, that thought carries with it the suggestion that Christ did *not* die for our sins; that the wrath of God was *not* exhausted on Him and by Him when He was

made sin for us. It goes back behind a completed work and Christ's *sitting* at God's right hand, and contradicts and denies the very bed-rock of our salvation - justification by faith. Satan is again *given* the place of power so far as such an one is concerned by such a thought. No, a thousand times No! Although I may discover unimagined depths of iniquity in my own heart, if I have put faith in Jesus Christ as the bearer away of my sin and myself, His perfections are placed to my account and God sees me in Him. This will never, never become to me an occasion for living complacently on the ground of what I am in myself. Without working through all the reasons for and the nature of Christian growth, with all the values in service which issue from it, let me keep on this emphasis. There are so many dear children of God who have so confused the two things mentioned as to be in an altogether negative condition. They are paralysed by their sense of sinfulness. They have seen the need for a subjective application of the Cross of Christ, and have recognized that when Christ died, they died in Him; but the realization that the work is not yet completed *in* them has resulted in their living in a world of death, and knowing little or nothing of the fact which cannot really be separated from union in death with Christ, that is, union in resurrection and exaltation. If such an one should read this, may I say to you that if you are unhappy, worried, depressed, or negative, uncertain, lacking in absolute assurance, and therefore limited in your usefulness to the Lord, you have entirely misunderstood and misapprehended the truth of union with Christ. You are really a contradiction to what you claim to believe. It would be better that you put back your subjective truth until you have got fully and firmly established in the glorious facts of what Christ sitting at God's right hand really means for you. Nevertheless, it is possible to be moving triumphantly and strongly in the path of a deep inward work of the Spirit, while knowing utter dependence and weakness.

Let me appeal to you again that you do not let these two things become confused. If you come upon fresh realizations of your own worthlessness, say, Yes, that belongs to the realm of God's work in me, and He will deal with that, but it makes no difference whatever to my acceptance in the Beloved *so long as I do not condone my wrong, excuse it, and accept it*. Remember, dear friend, that God demands the first ground, the ground of our settled faith in the *finished* and perfected work of Christ, in order to make any beginning inside of us. It would be fatal for Him to touch the inside had He not got that objective faith. We must be careful that we do not upset God's order and bring ourselves on to false ground. This can only result in destroyed testimony and much gratification to Satan at the Lord's expense *in us*.