



## At home in the heavenlies

The act of God in our regeneration is so momentous that no single category of thought is sufficient to describe the changes it brings about in and for us. It is an eruption from death to life, a translation from darkness to light, an initiation from folly into wisdom, a second birth and begetting, a transition from a broken covenant to a saving covenant, a manumission from thralldom and tyranny into glorious freedom, an immigration from the land of nonentity into full citizenship — in a word, a coming home to God.

So vast are the implications, indeed, of the act of regeneration that Paul, to draw our languid attention to what God has done in us, uses a phrase which all but defies our analysis and comprehension. He announces that we are '*in the heavenlies*'. This phrase occurs only five times in his writings and is to be found only in the Epistle to the Ephesians. The term cannot merely mean 'in heavenly things' because, as Charles Hodge correctly points out, it almost always has a local sense. In more than one occurrence of the phrase there is the idea of a dynamic divine exaltation from a lower to a higher sphere or realm (Ephesians 1:20; 2:6). In our familiarity with the *words* we are apt to overlook the remarkable fact that the same location in the heavenly sphere is attributed to believers as is attributed to Christ Himself. And it is attributed to us *now* and not simply beyond the veil of time.

It is not easy for our minds to appreciate that we are already in heavenly places. We are accustomed to thinking of heaven as a place and a state still future. Certainly we are not in heaven yet. There is the intermediate state of heaven after death. Better still, there is a full and complete state of heaven after the judgment, where we shall be made perfect in body and soul with the Lord forever. Heaven is still future. But the heavenly state *is* present to God's people in at least one sense; and this is what we find difficult to define. Difficult as the concept is, however, Paul has placed it on record that already God 'hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus' (Ephesians 2:6).

It is tempting to define our sitting in Christ in the heavenlies as having nothing more than a representative sense. Christ is there literally; we are there representatively. This interpretation of the phrase yields good doctrine, certainly. He is there as our Head and, as such, He guarantees our future presence in heaven since we are the members of His mystical body. But there is good reason to believe that this insight, precious as it is, does not exhaust the apostle's thought when he declares that believers are now seated in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus.

In addition to the thought of Christ's representation of His people in heaven is the idea of their present spiritual union with Him. The life which flows in us is a heavenly life. The sap, so to speak, which nourishes the souls of God's saints on earth is of a heavenly source and origin. Even while we are still here on earth we partake of a celestial energy, which is being daily and even hourly imparted to our hearts by Christ. The life of God's saints is even now furnished and fed out of that same crystal fountain which they are all to drink from eternally in their final resting place. It is a life which is '*hid with Christ in God*' (Colossians 3:3), to us and to the world invisible and secret, yet real and supernatural.

But there is surely more still implied even than this in the apostle's declaration that we are seated in the heavenlies. The term is so brilliantly felicitous that it could only come by supernatural inspiration. As a phrase divinely chosen, it conveys the impression of state and even of status through the imagery of geographical location. To be seated in an aerial position is to be above all the world. It is to enjoy a privileged vantage-point, from which we see and know what others cannot see or know.

This is exactly what the people of God now enjoy. They are in a state of grace and that is a state in which they are enabled to see the vanity of all earthly power and glory and the transience of all that is done '*under the sun*'. To be in the heavenlies is to be in the very suburbs of glory. We do not yet see the sights that we shall see hereafter. But we are already aware of them. Like villagers who have travelled from the countryside towards a great capital city and become aware of the distant hubbub of the city while they are still on its outskirts, and before they reach the city gates, so believers are already conscious of the stir within the celestial city into which they are not yet quite entered. Through our acquaintance with God and His Word we are in a degree familiar already with the secret agencies of providence, with spiritual interventions, with divine decrees, the sounding of trumpets, the emptying of vials, the ascending and descending of angels, the song of the redeemed, the opening of the seals, the cries of souls under the altar, the thunderings of Sinai and, above all, the mediation of the Son of God between earth and heaven. These things are the constant commerce of heaven and those who live in the suburbs of the city become accustomed to the distant sound of them because of their relative proximity.

Older theologians used to explain '*the heavenlies*' in the following way. The visible heavens (or sky) they termed the heaven of nature (*caelum naturae*); the place of bliss where God is visible they called the heaven of glory (*caelum gloriae*); the '*heavenly places*' of the Epistle to the Ephesians they termed the heaven of grace (*caelum gratiae*). The distinction is excellent. That is just the term we are searching for. Believers are already in the heaven of grace. '*Grace is young glory*', as our Puritan forefathers aptly put it. Grace is glory in the bud; and glory will be grace in full flower. The two are not absolutely separate states. The one is preparatory to the other and leads into it by an inevitable progression.

This is not true of the two states which precede the state of grace. The state of innocence in which Adam was created could not be said to be the natural precursor of the state of either sin or confirmed holiness. It was a probationary state, mutable and unstable as yet. Similarly, the state of sin into which Adam's fall brought the whole human race was not a natural precursor of the state of grace. On the contrary, it was the preliminary phase of everlasting death. But the state of grace most emphatically *is* a preliminary, and a foretaste even, of glory, immortality and eternal life in heaven.

The point we need to see is that the state of grace is nearer to the state of glory than it is to the state of sin. Believers are nearer in character to God and the angels than they are to unregenerate and lost sinners. The good that they will is greater than the evil which they do. This is so because grace in believers is more truly their character than indwelling sin.

There is no continuity between the states of sin and of grace. But there is great continuity between grace and glory. If God has delivered us from sin to grace, He will much more translate us from grace to glory. There is more divine intervention required to lift us from sin to grace than from grace to glory. This appears to be implied in what Paul states in Romans 5:9-10. That we are now regenerate argues that we must shortly be perfect. God has lifted us from the grave of sin and he will shortly lift us from the grave of death also.

It remains to state, in conclusion, that we must strive to cultivate daily a demeanour and a bearing of heart and mind which are consistent with our heavenly position in Christ. Of Sibbes it was said that '*heaven was in him before he was in heaven*'. This is true in a measure of all the regenerate. But the great Christians of the past and their writings are supremely valuable because they share with us the secret of a consistent spirituality. They were in heaven as to their affections long before their souls got there. May we too learn to be at home in the heavenlies!

Maurice Roberts

© 2015  
[www.christianstudylibrary.org](http://www.christianstudylibrary.org)