

In Christ Our Lord

Two weeks ago we focused on the phrase “Through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Last Sunday we focused on the phrase “On Christ the Solid Rock.” This morning we change the preposition one more time and our focus is “In Christ Our Lord.” The New Testament often uses these three phrases, Through Jesus Christ or On Jesus Christ or In Jesus Christ. (I must acknowledge and give credit to John Stott and his book *Understanding Christ* for this series.)

The apostle Paul wrote, **“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven.” 2 Corinthians 12:2** We assume Paul is referring to himself as the man “in Christ” who had this extraordinary spiritual experience. What is significant to us is that he chose that phrase to refer to himself, “a man in Christ.” What does that mean? It isn’t referring to location, like we are “in a closet” or “in a room.” To be in Christ means we are united to Christ, united with Christ in a personal relationship. A man or woman in Christ is, simply put, a Christian.

But to be in Christ is more than a Facebook status, like we are “in a relationship.” We aren’t just friends. Jesus makes this plain to us in John 15 when he says, **“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:5.** To be in Christ is to be in a living, growing, fruitful, productive relationship with Him, the way a branch is in the vine or the tree. Our very life and existence and eternal destiny is dependent upon the vine because we are in the vine! Apart from him we can do nothing.

The bible gives us another picture of what it means to be in Christ when it speaks of us, the church, as the Body of Christ. The apostle Paul writes, **“Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it.” 1 Corinthians 12:27** The church is the body of Christ and He is the head. We are in Christ, like our heart and lungs are in us, a part of us, in a living, vital relationship. Apart from being in Christ, we can’t live. In him we live and move and have our being Paul says in Acts 17. We draw our very life and breath as we are in Christ. Jesus said he came to give us abundant life. Real life is only found in Christ.

A third image the bible gives of being in Christ is found in the example of the marriage relationship between a husband and wife. The apostle Paul likens our relationship with Jesus to that of a husband and wife. He is speaking of the deep love that exists between Christ and the believer when he writes, **“For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ But he who unites**

himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.” 1 Corinthians 6:16-17. There is an intimate, strong, covenant relationship as we are made one with Christ in spirit.

A fourth image is found in the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17. **“I pray also for those who will believe in me... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me...I in them and you in me.” John 17:20-21** It sounds incredible but Jesus is praying for us, that the loving relationship he and the Father share will be reflected in the depth of our relationship with Christ and with the Father and with each other! To be in Christ is to share this extraordinary relationship with the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit and with God’s redeemed people!

Through repentance and faith in the saving work of Jesus on the cross, we are in Christ, united with him. As the branch is united with the vine, as a heart is united with the body, as husband and wife are united in the covenant of marriage, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit are united in the Trinity, so we are united in Christ! It is much more than a casual friendship or passing acquaintance, it is a vital, life giving, life sustaining, intimate union with Jesus Christ.

To be in Christ is to be united with Christ. The point is, **No one is a Christian without being in Christ!** There are all kinds of traditions and explanations and theologies that swirl around the meaning of salvation and what it means to become a Christian, but the bottom line is, you must be united with Christ, you must live in union with Christ to be a Christian. Just agreeing with the doctrine or even being baptized or receiving communion isn’t enough. All those things are part of living a life in Christ, but you must be born again, born of faith, born into relationship, into union with Christ!

Our identity is found here, in Christ. Not in being Assembly of God or Protestant or Pentecostal. Our identity is not in how much we know or how loud we say the Amen but in who we know. To be a Christian is to be in union with Christ and that comes by repenting and trusting in his saving grace.

Biblical statisticians (who knew there were such creatures) tell us the phrases “in Christ”, “in the Lord” and “in him” occur 162 times in the letters of the apostle Paul. It points to the importance and the uniqueness of the personal relationship we have with Christ as Christians.

Consider that this notion of union with Christ, us being in Christ makes Christianity unique among the religions of the world. No other religion involves a personal relationship or

union with its founder. Buddhist don't claim to have a personal relationship with Buddha. Muslims don't have a personal relationship with Mohammed. But we have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We know him. We are united with him. We live in Him and he lives in us! **Jesus is more than a founder of our religion, he is the risen and living Lord of our lives!** Bishop Stephen Neill wrote, "Jesus...was a teacher. But Christianity is not the acceptance of certain ideas. It is a personal attitude of trust and devotion to a person. That person is believed to be alive and accessible to all. The nature of the relation of the Christian to him is described in such phrases as 'whom not having seen you love', 'that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith', 'Christ in you the hope of glory' – phrases which recur in page after page of the New Testament, and make clear that it is this intimate and personal relationship of trust, devotion and communion, which is the very heart of the Christian faith."

Through Jesus Christ we have received God's saving, cleansing, redeeming grace. On Jesus Christ we have built our lives, our hope, our faith. In Jesus Christ we have life. Our identity as Christians is found only as we are found "in Christ." The uniqueness of Christianity is revealed in that we are "in Christ." And look at this: it is in union with Christ that we find "every spiritual blessing." Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians with this: **"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."** Ephesians 1:3

We couldn't begin to list all the spiritual blessings that come to us because we are in Christ, but let me mention a couple of things Paul suggests in this passage. First, **To be in Christ means the blessing of a new identity.**

We live in a world of identity confusion. Because of all the brokenness, people are confused as to sexual identity, gender identity. People of all ages struggle to "find themselves." But if we are found "in Christ" we have a new identity. The Apostle Paul writes, **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come!"** 2 Corinthians 5:17 I'm a new person, a new creation with a new identity born of my relationship with Christ. What does that look like? Paul tells us in Ephesians 1 that our identity is found as a chosen, loved, adopted, accepted child of God. Look with me.

After telling us that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ, Paul goes on to tell us **"He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through**

Jesus Christ, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us.” Ephesians 1:4-8

Trying to figure out who you are? According to the Word of God, if you are in Christ, united with Him by his forgiveness and His saving grace, you are a brand new creation. You have been chosen in Him. Everyone loves to be chosen don't we? He chose you! He created you, chose you and redeemed you, cleansed you from sin so that you can stand before him, in Christ, holy and blameless. In Christ you can live the life you were meant to live. Who are you? You've been adopted into God's family as a son or daughter of the living God. You are loved by the one the Scripture called the Beloved. He has lavishly poured his grace on you. Who are you? You are a child of God and a joint heir with Christ, redeemed by his blood. He paid the price so you could be free. You are forgiven. Your sins and mistakes and messed up choices have been forgiven. You belong to the Father because you are in Christ the Lord. John said, **“See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” 1 John 3:1** This is part of the spiritual blessing given to you in Christ Jesus our Lord. Secondly,

To be in Christ means the blessing of a new life. It is not just that Jesus saved us and now we can tell everyone we are a Christian and our sins are forgiven. That is true. We have a new identity as the redeemed children of God. But there is more. It's not just a new identity, it is a new life! It's not just a box to be checked on our spiritual report card, it is a new birth into a new life in Jesus Christ. The very idea of being “in Christ” is living and dynamic. It means we are becoming like Jesus, being influenced and transformed on a daily basis by the work of the Holy Spirit who now dwells within us. Look at Ephesians again. **“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise...” Ephesians 1:13**

We are in Christ. God has redeemed us through the Son and made us alive by the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit. The old is gone and the new has come. **We have a new identity and more than that, life reigns where death once ruled!** The Holy Spirit works within us. He made us alive and now transforms us day by day, making us conformable to the image of Christ. For us to be “in Christ” means that Christ is “in us” by His Holy Spirit. It

means we are His and His Holy Spirit is reproducing the character of Christ in us, in our choices, our actions, in every aspect of our life. In place of the old deeds and actions of our sinful nature, things like sexual immorality and impurity, hatred, jealousy, envy, discord, rage, selfishness, drunkenness, rebellion of all kinds, the Holy Spirit is producing a new kind of life characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5:22) We call that the fruit of the Spirit. It is a new life, a new way of living. It is what it means for us to be new creations “in Christ.”

To be in Christ means the spiritual blessing of a new identity and a new life and **To be in Christ means the blessing of a new family.** We say being in Christ is having a personal relationship with Christ and that is true. It is personal and it is an individual transformation that takes place in each of us. “If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation.” It is a personal experience we are talking about. However, it is also true that since the bible says we have been adopted and made sons and daughters of God, that means we have brothers and sisters “in Christ.” It is a unique family, made up of everyone who has been redeemed by God’s saving grace and has been born again in Christ Jesus. It is a unique family because the usual walls and barriers that divide people have been torn down. Paul says, **“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28**

All who are in Christ Jesus, all who have that new life of Christ within them by faith in Christ, they are all one family in Christ Jesus. You think your old family was a little crazy, wait till you get to know your new family in Christ. Paul shares quite a list in 1 Corinthians 6. **“Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”** The makings of an interesting family get together. But then Paul says, **“And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” 1 Corinthians 6:9-11**

If anyone is in Christ they are a new creation, with a new identity, a new life and a new family. Old things have passed away. Jesus makes everything new. I don’t care what you used to be, if you are “in Christ” you are part of my family, my brother or sister. Because I am “in Christ” I have an obligation to love those who are also “in Christ.” We are family “in Christ.”

We were all messed up, we all had a story and a past, but thank God we have been washed and sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Are you ready for a new identity, a new life and a new family?

All of this is based on the condition: If we are in Christ. So how do we get there, in Christ? There are all kinds of ways to say what is an action of the heart and of our will. Believe in your heart and confess with your lips that Jesus died for you. Come to him in repentance and faith. Confess your sins and ask Jesus to forgive you and save you. Trust in him. Call on him. Commit yourself to him. Rest your life in him. Ask him to come into your heart and life and take up residence, to take control of your life. Surrender yourself to him. Then choose to abide in Him and He will abide in you and if you do that, Jesus says you will bear much fruit, i.e. you will experience a fruitful, blessed life. (John 15:5) Are you ready for a new identity, a new life and a new family? Open your heart and life to Him and ask Jesus to come in.