

# (1) No condemnation in Christ

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[ 0 : 00 ] 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verses 17 to 21. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Father God, we do thank you so much for the depths of your word.

[ 1 : 05 ] We thank you that every time we come to your word, the Bible, you give us fresh insight and new understanding. And we ask that this would be the case right now as we start this sermon series on our union with Christ.

Please, would your Holy Spirit open our eyes to see the wonderful truths contained in it. And please, would you soften our hearts so that we might live boldly in the light of the truth.

And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, today, as Simon said, is the start of a new series entitled Life in Christ as we spend four Sundays looking at the life-changing implications of what theologians call our union with Christ.

The life-changing implications of our union with Christ. Now, that may mean nothing to you. I wouldn't be surprised if some of us have never heard of that phrase before, our union with Christ.

It's not something that is taught much in churches today, and yet it is one of the key central doctrines of the New Testament. We're going to see over the next four weeks that our union with Christ speaks of a deep, intimate connection that all believers share with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 2 : 31 ] The very second we believed in him, God put us in Christ, spiritually speaking. And so the Bible speaks often of us being in him, or in the Lord, or in Christ.

That's what it means by our union with Christ. By faith we are united to him. So just have a look down at verse 17 of the passage that was just read to us from 2 Corinthians.

Verse 17, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation. Verse 19, That is, in Christ.

God was reconciling the world to himself. And verse 21, For our sake, He made him, that's Christ, to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Now this phrase, in Christ, in him, in the Lord, it comes up 164 times in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul alone. And it could be you've read it hundreds of times yourself.

[ 3 : 48 ] But because of its sheer frequency in Scripture, the way we use it so often in Christian speak, it's quite possible that we overlook its significance and we fail to appreciate just how remarkable it is to be united to Christ.

Because as we're going to see, to be united to Christ is to share in Christ's life. If we're one with him, then all the benefits of his life, his death, his resurrection, flow to us.

We share his position, we share his life, because we're united to him. So that's where we're going to be going over the next four weeks. And just to show you up front sort of the benefits that we have in Christ, why it's great to have a sermon series on our union with Christ, just look at that table on the front of that separate sheet.

And that probably looks really overwhelming, brain overload time. We're not going to go through it all now. But I thought it'd just be helpful to give you a snapshot of all the benefits that we have from our union with Christ.

And not least just to show you up front, you know, the Bible is constantly, New Testament constantly speaking about it, bursting with these references to being in Christ and the life-changing implications we have on it, have in it.

[ 5 : 04 ] Now, in our sermon series, we're just going to pick up on four of them. So we're just scratching the surface, but you might like to use that list over the coming months to look up the references, meditate on the truths, use it to fuel your prayer times in the Lord as we think about our union with Christ over the next month.

But my aim for this series is just to introduce us to the theme, to begin to get our heads around it, what it means to be in Christ, to begin to appreciate the marvellous implications of it.

Now, as I say, because this is all new to us, still sort of in an introduction here, I just want us to give us three illustrations that the Bible uses to help us begin to get our heads around what it means, this union with Christ theme.

So if you thought it was a little bit strange, or if you're wondering how you can be in Christ if you're in this building right now, hopefully these illustrations will help. So first, you can see there on the sheet. The Bible speaks of our union with Christ as a head and a body.

Ephesians 1, 22. God gave him, that's Christ, as head over all things to the church, which is his body. Okay, Christ pictures the head, we're pictured of the body, pretty obvious.

[ 6 : 17 ] If I'm walking over here, my head and my body go together, obviously come back, head and body working together. It'd be a bit bad if they didn't do that. And Paul says, he uses the illustration, so this is what it's like with Christ.

He's the head, we're the body, we're united, we're one. Where he goes, we go. If he died, we died. If he raised, we were raised. If he's up in heaven now, ruling over everything, then so are we, by faith in him.

Head and body united together. Second picture the Bible gives of our union with Christ is that of a tree and a branch. So in John 15, Jesus says, I am the vine, you are the branches.

And we think of a trunk of a tree, think of the life in it, which flows out to the branches, allows the fruit to blossom. Well, so it is with the believer in Christ.

We're united to Christ, fused together with him, and his life flows into us like the sap of a tree to the vines. We have his power, his resurrection power, his life in us because we're united to him.

[ 7 : 20 ] And the third picture the Bible gives of our union with Christ is that of a husband and wife. Ephesians again, down on the bottom of the sheet. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

This mystery is profound, and I'm saying it refers to Christ and the church. So this afternoon, Dave and Rachel from Grace Church are getting married.

And as they say, I do, and the minister pronounces what God has joined together, let no man put asunder. Something mysterious happens. They become one flesh.

Two people become one. And again, this is the picture of what happens to the believer when they put their trust in Jesus Christ. We become one flesh with him.

And I think this may be one of the most helpful pictures for understanding how we can be here in the building, Christ in heaven, yet at the same time united. Think of a marriage, husband and wife.

[ 8 : 26 ] So there are three pictures, again, just to help us to begin to think about our union with Christ. Head and body, vine and branches, husband and wife. Think about those pictures, keep them in mind as we go through this series together.

Okay, we're ready now to look at our first implication of our union with Christ. A glorious, wonderful implication it is too, and it is this.

That even though we are by nature terrible sinners, even though we're all by nature guilty before God, guilty before a holy God, struggling daily with sin, the guilt of sin, because of our union with Christ, we are no longer condemned by God.

Or, as Paul puts it in Romans 8 verse 1, there is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Now, it doesn't matter who we are today or how long we've been a Christian, isn't it true that we all find ourselves struggling with condemnation?

Those feelings of guilt, those feelings of shame over our sin, even over those sins that we've already confessed to God. So, it could be the remorse of the father who broke a promise to his child because of a deadline at work, whatever it is.

[ 9 : 52 ] It could be the self-condemnation arising from repetitive sins that don't seem to go away, gossip, greed, drunkenness, lust, pornography.

It could be the shame and embarrassment of the minister or Bible group leader who cracked the unhelpful joke or insulted a fellow Christian. It could be just those sustained feelings of guilt we have through a lack of prayer, a lack of joy, a lack of patience with our children.

It could be over not loving your spouse as you should. Evangelistic opportunities missed, church services ignored as we stayed at home. We all struggle with this. These sustained feelings of guilt which very quickly they slow us down in the Christian life as the weight of their condemnation just buries us down and weighs us down on our shoulders.

And it's not helped by the fact that the devil, he loves to jump on top when we're feeling like this and start whispering these condemning accusations in our ears. Do you really suppose God's going to forgive you this time?

I mean, how many times has it been now? He loves to make us feel bad. Can't believe you've just gone and done that. What were you thinking? Do you not realise how angry God's going to be with you now? He wants to make us undermine our relationship with God.

[ 11 : 18 ] I hope you don't think God still loves you. What after you've gone and done that as a Christian? You know, these accusations are being hurled at us by the devil every day.

I'll be like that until heaven. And so it's tempting to think that these feelings of condemnation are just normal and we accept them and they're part and parcel of the Christian life. But as we've just seen, the Bible tells us there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

Without Jesus Christ, yes, it is true. That we all deserve to be condemned and punished for our sin. It's right to be weighed down by our feeling of guilt and shame. But the point is, we do have Jesus Christ.

And the Bible tells us there is no condemnation for those who trust in Christ. Romans 8 verse 1 tells us we are free from all condemnation.

Now this can be hard to believe, but it doesn't mean it's any less true. It is true that we are free from all condemnation. And that means we most definitely are also free from all feelings of guilt and shame, free from all accusations of the devil, no matter how great a sin you've committed, no matter how repeated your sin is, if you're in Christ, trusting in his death, confessing your sin to him, you can never be condemned.

[ 12 : 44 ] Because there's no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Isn't that wonderful? Now as I just said, this truth can be hard to believe.

For some of us here, it just might seem too good to be true. Well, the Bible doesn't just tell us the fact that there's no condemnation. The Bible gives us the reason for it too.

So let's look now at the convincing proof God gives us for this. This is 1.5 on the separate sheet. And that is by virtue of our union with Christ, our sin is reckoned to him and Christ's righteousness is reckoned to us.

So have a look at verse 21 again on page 1163. This marvellous truth that will help us fight back against the devil's accusations, these feelings of condemnation. Verse 21.

For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[ 13 : 59 ] This first tells us that on the cross, Jesus took all our sins on himself. as if they were his own so that now God gives us the righteousness of Jesus as our own.

Let me say that again. On the cross, Jesus took all of our sins on himself as if they were his own so that now God gives us the righteousness of Jesus as our own.

and that's why there's no condemnation for the believer because Jesus has taken the condemnation for us. That's why he died. All of God's anger at our sins is placed on Jesus' shoulders as he dies there for you and me.

The sins of our past, the sins of today, the sins of the future. Jesus Christ, he's paid for them all. He's taken all the condemnation which means we really are free.

There's no condemnation for those in Christ. But that's not all. Because of our union with Christ, we are now clothed with the righteousness of Jesus.

[ 15 : 17 ] In him, we might become the righteousness of God. God now looks at us as if he's looking at Jesus because we're in him and he's perfect, he's sinless, he's righteous.

His life of perfect, sinless righteousness is credited, reckoned to us. So of course there's no condemnation for those in Christ.

Now I'm sure you've all seen this illustration before. This, my left hand, represents me. The light up there is God. And this book, it's a bit unfair to give it to the Bible, is my sin.

Maybe I should choose another book, I don't mean to be irreverent here. And because of my sin, I can't have a relationship with God. Because of my sin, I'm guilty before a holy God.

God must punish me because of my sin and I'm trapped and I can't know him. Enslaved to sin.

Jesus, on the other hand, there's a perfect relationship with God. He's got no sin.

[16:21] He's righteous before God. And on the cross, Jesus Christ takes our sin upon himself as if it was his own.

So all the condemnation, all of God's anger at our sin goes on him as he dies. And so now, well, we're righteous before God. Free to have a relationship with him.

because all our sin has been taken. All the condemnation has gone on Jesus. And you might have seen it that some people use a white handkerchief and pass that back over to show Christ's righteousness.

But I think this is a helpful illustration to show how, or why now, there is no condemnation for us. I do want to give just one qualification to that illustration.

There is a danger that you, it doesn't speak about our union with Christ. So here, Christ and the believer are separate. This gets passed over and we're separate. Actually, it's because of our union with Christ.

[17:18] So I've just said it's because we are in Christ that Christ pays for our sin and we're in him that his righteousness comes to us. So, I'm not sure if this is helpful or not, but it's more that by faith in Christ we are united to him.

And as Jesus Christ dies, we die with him. Sin is paid for by Christ. Jesus rises, we rise with him.

And where's Christ now? In heaven, perfect sinners, writers. And we're with him, united to him.

It's really intimate and connected. And therefore, there's no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

Now, whether that modified illustration helps or not, I will leave to you.

And you have those three illustrations from the beginning. But what I hope is absolutely clear is that there is no condemnation because Christ has taken it for us because we're united to him.

Our sin is reckoned to him, his righteousness is reckoned to us. We are completely free from any condemnation. This is such good news. It is such good news.

[18:30] And I want us to spend the remainder of our time driving home the implications of this freedom that we have in Christ. Freedom from condemnation. There are three implications.

The first is this. Our freedom from guilt, our freedom from all condemnation, it is real. So when we say this, it's not like we're going through some game of let's pretend.

Apostle Paul is not asking us just to simply cover over our problems or to suppress our guilt or pretend it's not really there. He is asking us to see ourselves and our sin in a new way through our union with Christ and the historical fact that Jesus Christ really did die for our sins 2,000 years ago. His death is real and so our freedom from condemnation is real. Not just pretending that we're not guilty. We are not guilty.

We are no longer condemned. As verse 19 of our passage puts it, that is in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself not counting their trespasses against them. He doesn't anymore.

[19:45] He doesn't count our sin against us. It's not let's pretend it is real. And this doesn't, this is true regardless of how we feel. We spoke earlier about the feelings of condemnation we carry around after we've confessed our sin.

but God assures you there is now no condemnation. You don't need to feel that way anymore. You can tell your feelings they're wrong. By union with Christ it tells us more about us than our own feelings or emotions do and so God wants us to fight our emotions to say to ourselves no look I'm in Christ now so I am righteous in God's sight.

I'm in Christ now so my sin has been dealt with. I don't need to feel guilty anymore I shouldn't feel guilty anymore. And when the devil starts hurling his condemning accusations at you we can look to Christ see ourselves united to him see his death dying for our sins see him raised to new life and that's where we're with him righteous, sinless perfect in God's sight.

Repeat back to the devil this verse no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. This is not let's pretend this is real. The second implication of there being no condemnation in Christ is that God is

100% for us.

So I'm not sure if you ever think of God a bit like a traffic warden or something just waiting to smack you down with a hefty fine as soon as you step out of line. Or perhaps you find yourself sometimes feeling a bit tentative coming to God in prayer because you feel ashamed or guilty about some sin.

[ 21 : 31 ] Chances are if you do you're struggling with this issue of condemnation and God wants to say to you you're in Christ now and because you're in Christ now you're righteous in my sight.

You're clothed in Christ's perfect sinless righteous life. I'm no longer angry with you because Christ has taken all the punishment for your sin. If you're in Christ I love you now like I love my own son. So come to me in prayer. I'm your father in heaven. Don't think of me as a traffic ward. Don't be tentative in coming to me. I'm for you. 100% for you.

Is this not liberating for our relationship with God? God? Now don't get me wrong God does still discipline us as a father lovingly disciplines his children.

God does still rebuke us from his word. He does correct us from his word. He does test us as he moulds us into the likeness of Christ. But all the judicial anger all the condemnation all the damning judgment it is gone forever.

[ 22 : 42 ] if you're united to Christ you're not going to hell anymore. Only parts of this short life are all the hell you will ever know.

We're in Christ. We are righteous. We are loved eternally by God the Father. God is 100% for us. The third and final implication of there being no condemnation in Christ is that it frees us up from any self-condemning or self-atoning on our part.

So some people even though they are forgiven in Christ can't seem to forgive themselves. Should have known better. Can't believe I did that. Such an idiot.

And they keep beating themselves up replaying the moment over and over unable to forgive themselves even though they've confessed their sin to God. I know this is something that I particularly struggle with.

And it's just a great truth here. I need to keep reminding myself there is no condemnation for me now that I'm in Christ. If I've confessed the sin to God it's over.

[ 23 : 54 ] It's paid for. I'm forgiven. If God has forgiven me I can certainly forgive myself. Yes I may need to make apologies to people I've offended. Yes I may need to confess sins and make restitution with people but we don't need to go on tormenting ourselves in a spirit and cycle of self-condemnation because Christ has taken the condemnation for us.

We're free. No condemnation for those in Christ. And this also means that you don't need to deal with the guilt yourself. I'm not sure if you ever find yourself saying sorry to God and then over again and then over again for the same sin as if your sort of repeated words of forgiveness will actually deal with the guilt yourself.

Or it could be you make promises to God after you're feeling guilty and shameful for saying I'm going to make changes. I'm going to try harder next time. I'm going to get focused. I'm going to pray longer. I'm going to read my Bible more. As if these future godly acts will deal with your present feelings of guilt and shame.

Do you ever find yourself doing this? I'm sure we all do. And it shows that we haven't fully grasped yet this wonderful truth. In Romans 8 verse 1 there's no condemnation. I don't need to deal with your condemnation yourself.

You can't do it anyway. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can wash away our guilt and shame and condemnation. Marvelously he was willing to do that just for us.

[ 25 : 18 ] And it's through our union with Christ that the benefit of his death, dying for our sin, flows to us. So if that's you, confess your sin to God and know you're forgiven.

Know the wonder of this verse. Say to the person you've offended, I'm sorry, forgive me, and leave it at that. Nothing else needs to be said, neither to God nor to the other person.

And don't try to deal with the guilt yourself with these promises of future godliness. Then you make yourself more guilty when you fail at that. Rather, know that Christ has dealt with all your sin once for all.

You are righteous in Christ. As I say, I think this is wonderfully liberating. We don't need to condemn ourselves. We don't need to atone for ourselves.

God is 100% for us. This freedom from condemnation, it is real. No condemnation, let it sink in. No condemnation.

[ 26 : 21 ] There is no condemnation for Mark Jackson, who is in Christ Jesus. Put your own name in. There is no condemnation for who is in Christ Jesus. Now, as we come to the end of today's sermon, it could be that you're thinking perhaps that all this teaching on no condemnation opens up the door for us to go out with a free license to sin.

I mean, if we're in Christ now, forgiven, righteous, we can do what we like, right? Well, no, not right. Our union with Christ does not mean we have a free license to sin, and if you want to know the reason why, we'll have to come back next week as we continue our series in our union with Christ. But for now, let me pray for us and thank God that in Christ he does not count our sin against us. Let's pray together. Father God, we do thank and praise you afresh this morning for this glorious truth, this wonderful truth, of our union with Christ, and that there is now no condemnation for us if we trust in the Lord Jesus.

Praise you that all our sin has been reckoned to him. We praise you Lord Jesus for dying in our place. Praise you that all his righteousness has been reckoned to us. And so we ask, Father God, you'd help us to believe this truth, and so fight our feelings of condemnation, to fight back against the devil's accusations, to fight against our own self-condemning, self-atoning tendencies, and live in the freedom that we are fully forgiven, eternally loved, completely righteous in your sight. We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.