

Found in Christ

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0:00] Imagine the scenario where you're conversing with a person who has never heard of Christianity. They might be in the hospital and they've got the little form and there's no version of Christianity there.

! There's no knowledge of it at all. They've never heard of the fact that their Bible exists. They've never seen a Bible. They've never heard of Jesus Christ. No concept of the church at all.

And in conversing with them, you mentioned that you're a Christian. And it's a term that they are just not familiar with.

And so they ask you, what do you mean by that? What is a Christian? How would you answer that? What would you say? How do you answer that question?

Maybe various forms of it might be something like, well, I believe in Jesus of Nazareth and I follow his teachings.

[1:02] Maybe you're a person who follows and adheres to Christianity. Maybe, well, my parents were Christian. I was born a Christian. I've been baptized.

That's what makes me a Christian. Maybe it's a person who lives in a way that's guided by the values of Jesus of Nazareth. Someone who's a member of the church.

Its potential, particularly if you've been hanging around churches for a bit, you might use language like, well, I'm someone who's been born again. I've been saved. I believe in Jesus.

I have faith in Jesus. Or I'm a follower of Jesus. Now, a number of those descriptors are certainly descriptors of the Bible, the Bible uses. But none of them are the dominant descriptor of what it means to be a Christian.

The New Testament uses a phrase to describe the Christian that is everywhere in the pages of the New Testament, very dominant in the New Testament, but almost nowhere in our churches, to the point where I've not had a single Christian, and I myself have not used it when someone's asked me, what is a Christian?

[2:17] I've never used the term in Christ. I'm in Christ. In our society, a Christian, the term Christian is often open to a broad interpretation.

Broad interpretation. And anyone can identify themselves as being Christian, particularly if it helps their political agendas. But in our society, Christianity is not so much connected to the person of Jesus, or vaguely so, but it can be connected to things like traditional values and ethics and conservative politics and institutions.

This is particularly in Western civilization. And all of those things together kind of blur what it means to be a Christian, and therefore what it means to live the Christian life.

The term in Christ is entirely different. Entirely different. Because the term in Christ demands that we reflect on something that is a dynamic relationship and a living relationship.

And so what we're doing is, as we launch into term three, we're spending this term on this issue, on the term in Christ, on this deep foundational biblical term.

[3:52] Theologians call this whole topic, the theology, it's called union with Christ. It's a theology of union.

And the reason we're doing this term is because if we misunderstand the dynamic of what it means to be Christian, the dynamic of our relationship to Jesus and his relationship to us, then we entirely misunderstand Christianity, and we entirely misunderstand what it means to live the Christian life.

And if you've been with us throughout the course of this year, you might initially think that this topic here is entirely left field.

How do they come up with this one? Why now? Why this one? The reality is, if you've been with us, you would have hopefully seen that we've touched on it multiple times already.

We started the year in the book of Ephesians, looking at who is the church. Not what is the church, but who is the church. And which is why we've read Ephesians 1 again this morning, is because what we understand the book of Ephesians is that the church is in Christ.

[5:16] Wrapped up in him, all that is his is ours. Everything that the church is and has been called to do is hinge, is entirely connected and hinges on us being united to Christ.

And last term, we were looking at Ephesians 5 and marriage, and we were confronted with this startling claim that when God brought Adam and Eve together in the union of marriage, right at the very beginning of the Bible, Ephesians 5 says that right at the beginning of the Bible, when God did that, that is a picture of a far greater reality.

The marriage, as the Bible describes it, points to something much bigger, the union of a man and a woman in marriage, where the two become one, which Ephesians 5 says is a profound mystery, is a pointer to the greater reality of the union between Christ and his church, his people.

And so we're going to unpack that reality. To understand the dynamic of our union with Christ ultimately leads to a greater confidence of what Christ has done for us, a deeper assurance and a hope as Christians, and particularly confidence in living out the Christian life.

And that really is what we want for you here at St. Paul's, for you to see not just the truth, the goodness and the beauty of it, that your affections and your hearts would grow for Christ.

[7:05] So that's where we're heading. And today is really an introductory. In fact, when you think about it, the whole term is really going to be an introduction to the topic.

There's a lot of old history stuff written about this. Ironically, amazingly, the theology of union with Christ went unnoticed for, in recent history, the last couple of hundred years, not referred to much. But fortunately, more recently, theologians are going, hang on a bit, we've left this one behind and we need to re-engage with it. So, first of all, I've got three points on the St. Paul's app.

Ephesians 1 opens with an astonishing claim. Praise be the God and Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing.

See there? Every spiritual blessing. He has blessed us. It's already happened. Not that he will bless us, he has blessed us, and with every spiritual blessing.

[8:19] And the language here is absolute language. That is, that is, there's nothing held back. There's nothing overlooked at all. Nothing is lacking. The word blessed is a very significant word.

It means, it's close to the Hebrew word shalom, which means that every joy and every benefit that your heart and your soul needs and longs for has been fulfilled.

That's what it means to be blessed. And what we see in Ephesians is God's plan for all time and eternity is to bless, and that he has blessed.

A Christian is someone who's been already blessed with every spiritual blessing from God.

And then what Paul does is he goes on and he writes, he gives a list for it. And each one of these lists, each one of these words could be expanded again, more and more and more to libraries of books.

[9:34] We're referred to as being holy, blameless, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, we're given knowledge of God. The blessings go on and on. The implications of them are huge, but the key to receiving all of the blessings in verse 4, sorry, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 11 is the term in Christ and its various forms.

That is how you receive all the blessing. That is how you get every desire and longing of your heart and your soul fulfilled.

It's in Christ. And so the language here in Ephesians, as is the New Testament, is that to become a Christian is not simply to get Jesus as your Lord to obey or as a model in life to follow or as a saviour to be grateful for.

A Christian is someone who has been put in Christ, being put in Christ so that everything that is his becomes yours.

That's what it means. All the blessings and privileges of the Christian life is by virtue of being united to Jesus Christ.

[11:01] Now, our union with Jesus, as I said, is by far one of the most important theological concepts in the New Testament.

It's the umbrella theology that connects so many of the important truths and doctrines of the Christian faith. Many scholars agree that the term in Christ is the central category in the Apostle Paul's thinking and his writing in the New Testament.

He uses the term himself over 160 times. But it's not just Paul. The term in all its various forms is used over 200 times in the New Testament as the default way of identifying someone who is what we would call a Christian or a follower of Jesus.

And the language of union in the New Testament is used in two different ways. First of all, there's the cosmic level, the big level, if you like, where on the cosmic level, union with Christ means that he is your leader.

And as he goes, so you go. His fate becomes your fate.

[12 : 37] Now that may seem odd, especially for those of us who would come from more of a Western cultural perspective. But for most human cultures throughout most of human history, including the Bible times, this way of thinking about a leader and his people or their people was actually normal and natural.

Entirely normal. The idea is the idea of corporate solidarity or another theological term to referring to it is a federal headship.

that is the idea that as the leader goes so that people go.

I don't want to delve into it too much because I'm stealing too much of John's sermon for next week as he takes us a bit deeper into this. But the Bible usually uses it in a very big cosmic way.

simply is that the idea is that the one represents the many and the many are represented by the one.

[13 : 48] If the President of the United States declares war on another country, the citizens of that country are at war with that country by the declaration of the President. It's that idea.

2 Corinthians 5.14 speaking of the work of Christ and how it connects to us says one has died for all and therefore all have died because Christ has died and those who are united to him share his fate. Like Jesus, the Christian too has died to their old life. 1 Corinthians 15.22 is the whole Bible in a short summary.

As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. And so every human being alive or has ever walked the face of this earth is either in one of those two categories.

They're either in Adam or they are in Christ and that is the absolute fundamental defining reality of all of humanity.

[14 : 56] and the message of the New Testament is absolutely thrilling at this point. To be united to Christ as your federal head is to be placed in that new realm with him alive in his new creation.

Jesus Christ plunged through death and out of the other side resurrected into the dawning of a new creation and to be in him means that he has pulled you with him from death to life.

That's what it means. Now, the other way that the New Testament uses the image, the language of union with Christ is much more personal and intimate, not just a federal headship sense.

And to display this, the authors of the New Testament use vivid imagery to communicate it so that we can understand a bit clearer. One of the images is that of the vine and the branches in John's Gospel.

So John 15, 5, I'm the vine, you are the branches, if you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit and apart from me, you can do nothing.

[16 : 27] That's going to be unpacked further down the track by Ash, if I remember correctly. Jesus says, he's the vine, we are the branches.

And so what we have here is a picture of our relationship with Jesus that is an organic connection. connection. It's an organic, alive connection.

There's also the imagery that we saw last term of the one flesh union in Ephesians 5. We are members of his body.

For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery, but I'm talking about Christ and the church.

And so in Ephesians 5, as we looked at last term, we have here a sexual imagery and a very deeply intimate imagery that portrays the exclusivity, the closeness, the intimacy of our union with Jesus.

[17 : 40] Just like a couple in marriage, the Christian is made one flesh with Jesus. We are, as it says in Ephesians 5, we are members of his body.

Another image of union is how the New Testament refers to the church as the body of Christ with Christ as our head.

1 Corinthians 12 27. Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it. What we see in every case is there's this organic intimate uniting where we share in the properties.

We are one with Christ, in Christ. The vine gives life to the branches, the head directs the body and the body parts, neither can exist without the other.

The husband nourishes and cherishes his wife as he does his own body. So what we see in the New Testament is that a Christian, becoming a Christian, being a Christian, is far deeper.

[18:58] It is far more wondrous than walking an aisle or praying a prayer or raising a hand or going forward in evangelistic reality.

being a Christian is far deeper than coming to church and reading the Bible and praying. To be a Christian is to be united, one, with the living, reigning, resurrected Jesus Christ so that all is his, is ours.

And at the core of it, implication of it for us, is 2 Corinthians 5.17. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation.

The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. Being in Christ brings a absolute radical transformation and reorientation.

God's is a movement from an external attempt to make myself right in God's eyes to an inward righteousness that entirely reorientation transforms my life.

[20:17] That's what it means to be in Christ. Now, admittedly, it's an elusive concept. And so, maybe one of the reasons why we don't talk about it much, it's much easier to grasp the ideas of being a follower of Jesus, or to being someone who, Jesus, my Lord, and I obey Jesus, or that Jesus is my saviour and he's forgiven me for my...

Much easier to grasp hold of those concepts and to explain those concepts. Much easier to grasp the concept of Jesus being my leader, or my Lord, or my saviour, or my inspiration, or my teacher, or my ruler.

So, how does being in Christ work? Maybe this illustration might help. And it's an illustration I got from one of the resources that I've been reading in the past few weeks.

You book a trip to Tasmania, say, for instance, hi to all the Tasmanians online. You're at the airport, you're ready to begin your trip, and the plane going to Tasmania is also at the airport, ready for the trip.

The question is, what is your relationship to the plane? What's your relationship to the plane? would it help, for example, to be under the plane?

[22:02] To submit yourself to the plane's authority, because it is a much more greater authority you are on this whole thing of aerodynamics and airline travel, so just to submit yourself and be under the plane.

would it be helpful to be inspired by the plane? Stand in the terminal as you see the plane take off and you go, my goodness, look at, I mean, how, you know, one day I'm going to do that.

One day, a bit more practice, I too am going to run down this runway, and I too am going to flap my wings, and I am going to fly just like that. Would that be helpful?

Is that your relationship to the plane? Would it be helpful to follow the plane? Open up flight radar 24, push follow, get, and as the plane takes off, you run down the runway, and you get after it as fast as your little legs can go, and you follow the path on flight radar, and eventually, maybe, you get to Tasmania.

Is that your relationship to the plane? You see, the key relationship you need with the plane is to get in it.

[23:25] Is that not right? I mean, it might be, I might be pushed out, but it's to get in the plane. It's not helpful to be under it, not helpful to be behind it, not helpful to be inspired by it.

You need to be in it, and the reason is because by virtue of being in the plane, what happens to the plane happens to you.

The question of your arrival to Tasmania will be answered, that is, the question of did I arrive to Tasmania, will be answered by a prior and more important question.

Did the plane arrive in Tasmania? Because if it did, I do too. It's as simple as that. And at its heart, that is the New Testament's idea of being in Christ.

What the New Testament is saying is that through faith in Jesus Christ, we become united to him, and that unity with him means that anything that is true of Jesus is true of you.

[24:53] And you had as much to do with it as being someone who sits on a plane waiting for the destination to arrive.

it's all him. The late theologian and pastor John Stott summed up really neatly, I think.

He said, the relationship is the relationship is something much more than a formal attachment or a nodding acquaintance, something more than even than a personal friendship.

It is nothing less than a vital, organic, intimate union with Jesus Christ involving a shared life and love. life. That's what it means to be in Christ, a vital union, a dynamic union with him.

Now, this, of course, leads to another question, and this again will be unpacked more and more, so very brief, on how to get in Christ, therefore. What does it mean to be in Christ?

[26:04] How does that happen? And this is where we might be confused about this, because in so many places, in so many people's thinking, the way to get in Christ is to find myself approved of him, to live in such a way that he will approve of me, God will approve of me.

But the key to unlock every spiritual blessing in Ephesians 1 is verse 7. In him, that's Christ, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.

In Christ, God has redeemed us, brought us back into relationship with himself through the blood of Jesus.

And in that, my sins are forgiven. And this is really a summary or points to the deep central point of the Christian faith, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world.

Note that, the eternal God who always existed, God the Son, came into this world made as a human. God took the initiative to unite himself to us in human flesh in order to represent humanity to God, back to himself.

[27:37] He not only became like us, but he came like us in order to deal with our deepest problem and the thing that was keeping us separated from God and his blessing, and that is that word sin in Ephesians 1.

sin, some reform in the Bible, is a desire to live independently of our creator, to not be in him at all, not even be with him.

It's the sin that Adam committed with Eve at the very beginning of the very beginning of the Bible. Bible. And as Jesus came into this world, taking on human flesh, he lived a life of perfect obedience to God, the one person who is the only one who's ever done every single thing that God's always required.

And that included obedience, dying on a Roman cross, being rejected by God so that we could be brought back to God.

He faced expulsion so that we could be brought in. He willingly allowed God's justice for our sin to be poured out on him, on that cross, so that we could be redeemed, we could be ransomed, we could be brought back in Christ.

[29:13] And when God poured out his anger on Jesus on that cross, he satisfied the just demands of God's justice.

It's like in Australia, one of the things, in fact, in my previous life, Rob said he used to work as a nurse, I used to work in the national parks, and apart from things to do with feral animals, the other things I used to do was bushfire, I used to fight bushfires, and one of the things we used to do in fighting a bushfire is a thing called control burning.

And with control burning, what you do is it's a defensive mechanism, and it's one of the tips for those of you who have never been out there in the bush and you're going to be in the summer, here's a little tip for you, always take a box of mattress with you.

If there's a bushfire that's looming on you, one of the most, the clearest ways to be safe in a bushfire is to start a fire. That is, as a fire's looming on you, start a fire, and as this fire's coming and this fire's burning, step into the fire zone.

Step into what's been burnt. Why? Because a fire can't burn what's already been burnt. It's burnt. It's one of the safety mechanisms. So I used to go and start fires, it was fantastic.

[30:50] In fact, one back burning control burn, or one control burn I started to ward off a bushfire that was coming, was so fierce, it started another fire 10 kilometres away.

That was my bad. anyway, I mean, gave those people something to do too. Anyway, so what the Bible's telling us here is that God has poured out his justice for our sin on the person of Jesus Christ, scorched earth, and Jesus calls us to stand in the scorched earth, cling to the cross, the work of Christ, because when you are in Christ, you have died with him and you are safe from the justice of God.

The fire can't strike there again because you're safe in Christ. Christ. And so what the union of God and man in the coming of Jesus Christ is, it is so, so affirming, but it's not flattering.

His presence in flesh, uniting himself with us, tells us that we are on the wrong track as humanity. And we need redemption.

As we didn't say it, one of the old creeds of the church, the thing called Nicene Creed, helps us to understand our union with Christ in salvation terms.

[32 : 32] For us and for our salvation, he came down and took on human flesh. It is for us and our salvation that he united himself to us.

And things only need saving when they've gone horribly wrong. and if God is united to us in the coming of his son, in the person of Jesus Christ, then in his saving death and resurrection, we are united to him.

In Philippians 3, Paul uses this language. He says, all the things I used to have confidence in, all the things that I put my hope and my trust in, that God would find me approved.

He said, I now consider them lost. I consider them garbage, refuse, sewage. In fact, the language is even stronger than that. Now that I am in Christ.

And the language he uses is, I am found to be in Christ. Not that I went finding Christ, I am found in Christ.

[33 : 48] Jesus Christ came to him, found him, initiated union with him. It is what he has done for us all. And Ephesians 1 tells us that his whole motive, God's whole motive, was a motive of love, of his goodwill, of his grace.

And the promise is that everyone who repents and believes and puts their faith in him is united to him. And in being united to him, everything that is his is yours.

The heart of the matter is not how much faith you have. You know, imagine jumping in that plane, you're heading to Tasmania and you've done it multiple times, you don't even take any notice anymore of the safety briefing and every time there's a bit of a bump and stuff like that and there's a little bit of turbulence, you go, whatever, you know, been here before, joy.

But over the aisle from you, there's someone in the safety briefing taking notes and reflecting on it and asking the hostess multiple times, you know, can you please go and check on the pilots to make sure everything's as they're expecting it to be.

You know, they're a nervous traveller, every time there's a bump, we're going to die. When you get to Tasmania, do you both get to Tasmania?

[35 : 20] The nervous, anxious flyer and the confident flyer, do you both get there? Yes, you do. Because your anxiety levels mean absolutely nothing to the process.

It's got everything to do with the plane. It's got everything plane. See, one of the many wonderful things about being in Christ is that it causes us to take our eyes off ourselves and to put our eyes fiercely focused on him.

When we understand the foundation of our salvation is to be found in him, then we know that it's not faith in the abstract or the amount of faith that will save us, but it's the one to whom we have our faith, that we are saved in him.

Which just brings me briefly to my last point that we are secure in Christ. That's one of the big implications for this, which is why we want to be speaking in this season.

The whole point for us to understand it is so that our comfort and our joy soars, soars as we melt into the calm reassurance of who God actually is and who we are in Christ.

[36 : 43] I would be encouraging you in this series to let your mind and your heart go deep into the reality of this truth of union with Christ. You are in Christ.

You have every spiritual blessing. He is your intimate companion moment by moment. Being in Christ means you cannot lose.

You are inexhaustibly rich for you are one with Christ and he is himself inexhaustibly rich.

He is the heir of the universe. And through no activity of your own or my own, but by the sheer and mighty grace of God, you have been folded in, brought in, the triumphant and tender ruler of the cosmos, Jesus Christ.

That means nothing can touch you that does not touch him. Nothing can touch you that does not touch him.

[37 : 55] That's what it means. anything to get to you, every pain, every assault, every disappointment has to go through him first because you are in him.

And when you are in the midst of that moment of pain and suffering and doubting and confusion and disillusionment, he's not out there, you are still in him.

and it has to go through him to get to you, to get to me. You are shielded by his invincible love. Everything that comes into your life, no matter how hard it is, comes from and through the tender care of Christ. he himself feels your anguish even more deeply than you do.

He feels it even more deeply than you do because you're one with him. You're united to him.

[39 : 14] Amid the storms of your and my little existences, sins, the sins that we know we struggle with, the sufferings, the failures, the faltering, the waywardness, the wandering, the lack of following.

In all those things, he will walk you into his eternal presence. He will do it.

not just with you, he is in you and you are in him. His destiny falls on, sorry, his destiny now falls on you.

Everything that is his is yours in Christ. His union with you at both the macro and the micro levels guarantees that he will walk you into heaven, into everything that he's promised.

How do I know? Because he's achieved it all already.

[40 : 28] How do I know that he's not going to reverse his plans? He won't reverse his plans. He can't undo his union with you any more than he can be de-incarnated in human flesh any more than he can be de-crucified, any more than he can be de-resurrected, any more than he can de-ascend.

And if he was to do any of that, union stops. But it won't. It won't.

you were in Christ. And so as we go through this series, draw strength from your oneness with Jesus.

You are no longer alone. You are not isolated. And when you sin, don't give up. he hasn't turned his back on you in any way, shape, or form.

In fact, in that moment, he draws close to you, even closer than you thought he was. In that moment, he draws close and he lifts your chin and he looks you in the eye and he says, I am your existence, not your sin, I am your existence and your existence is this, I am in the Father and you are in me and I am in you.