

**Christian Identity: Who You Are in Christ**  
**Message 4: What It Means to be “in Christ”**

The Bible uses the union of marriage as a picture of the union of Christ and his church. In fact, the Bible calls the church “the bride of Christ.” As Christ loves the church, so a man should love his wife. As the husband and wife are united in marriage, so Christ and his people are united in an inseparable bond. As a bride identifies herself with her husband, so God’s people identify themselves by their union with Christ.

We’ve been considering this matter of Christian identity in our Summer Sermon Series. Thus far, we’ve seen that Christians identify themselves as those made in the image of God, as children of God, and as the people of God. This is who we are; this is our identity.

Today I want to consider another aspect of Christian identity. We must identify ourselves as those who are “in Christ.” If you are a Christian, you are “in Christ.”

What does it mean to be “in Christ”? Paul uses the expression “in Christ” or something like it over 160 times in his letters. This is clearly an important principle that we should understand. In fact, being “in Christ” is one of the most significant parts of Christian identity.

**Quote:** *Every aspect of God’s relationship to believers is in some way connected to our relationship with Christ. From God’s counsels in eternity past before the world was created, to our fellowship with God in heaven in eternity future, and including every aspect of our relationship with God in this life—all has occurred in union with Christ.*<sup>1</sup>

Once you know who you are in Christ, you then know how you should think and behave. Sadly, many people don’t know who they are in Christ and they don’t know what being in Christ means. They don’t know how it affects their identity, their view of themselves. We need to know who we are in Christ so we can do what God expects us to do.

What does it mean to be “in Christ,” and how does that affect our identity?

I. Definition

---

<sup>1</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 840.

- A. Being “in Christ” is another way of referring to union with Christ. This union with Christ happens when we get saved. We come to be “in Christ” at the point of conversion, when we cross from spiritual death unto spiritual life. It happens when we are born again. Faith in Christ for salvation unites us with Christ in his life, death, resurrection, and glorification.
- B. Union with Christ describes that inseparable spiritual bond existing between the believer and Jesus Christ which results from the baptism of the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

1 Corinthians 12:13 *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.*

**Quote:** Union with Christ encompasses the whole spectrum of our salvation from its conception in the mind of God to its consummation in the new heavens and the new earth. Our election was “in Christ” (Eph 1:4) and so are all the [resulting] benefits, namely, our calling, redemption, regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification (Rom 8:29-30, 38-39; 1 Cor 1:30; John 15:1-11; 1 John 2:5-6). Our entire present experience and future destiny is “in Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

- C. Since God thought of believers as “in Christ” from eternity past (Eph 1:4; 2 Tim 1:9), whatever Christ did, we did. Because Christ was our representative, God attributed to us everything that Jesus experienced.

**Quote:** In virtue of this union we are (in our measure) what He is. We are the sons of God in Him. And what He did, we did. His righteousness is our righteousness. His life is our life. His exaltation is our exaltation.<sup>4</sup>

Union with Christ means that, in the mind of God, the believer is joined with Christ in his life, death, resurrection, and glorification. We are even seated with Christ in heaven.

Eph 2:6 *[God] raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,*

---

<sup>2</sup> Rolland McCune, Systematic Theology notes, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary. Much of this section is based on these notes.

<sup>3</sup> Greg Herrick, “An Introduction to Christian Belief: A Layman's Guide.” <https://bible.org/seriespage/7-soteriology-salvation>

<sup>4</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 127.

D. Let's consider several passages from the Bible that assert the believer's union with Christ:

1. Passages

- a) Romans 6:3, 5 *All of us ... have been baptized into Christ Jesus*
- b) Romans 8:1 *There is no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus.*
- c) 2 Corinthians 5:17 *If any man is in Christ...*
- d) Galatians 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*
- e) Galatians 3:27 *For all of you ... were baptized into Christ*
- f) Ephesians 1:4 *He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world*
- g) Ephesians 2:10 *Created in Christ Jesus...*
- h) 2 Timothy 1:9 *... His own purpose and grace ... was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began*

This is just a small sampling of passages in the NT that assert the union of Christ with those who believe in him. So this is a very clear and important biblical idea.

2. Several passages of Scripture illustrate this unity between Christ and the believer.

- a) John 10:14 *I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.*

The **shepherd and sheep/flock**—the flock is dependent upon the shepherd

- b) John 15:5—**vine and branches**—the branches “abide” in the vine; the branches receive life and nourishment from the vine; they are attached to one another.
- c) Romans 7:4 *... you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead...*

The **husband and wife**—the two are one flesh; they are united together; the two become one

- d) 1 Corinthians 12:12 *For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.*

The **body and its parts**—all the parts of the body are in union; they are all parts of the same body

- e) Ephesians 2:20–22 *having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*

A **building and foundation**—the building depends on the foundation; the building and the foundation are one structure.

All of these pictures illustrate what it means to be “in Christ.” They show a relationship of dependence and union. We are united to him and dependent on him for everything we have.

**Trans:** So this union with Christ—being “in Christ”—refers to our spiritual union with Christ in his life, death, resurrection, and glorification. God sees believers are sharing in and depending on Christ.

**Before going on, we should mention what the state of unbelievers is.** Unbelievers are not in Christ; they are still “in Adam.” That is, they are in union with Adam and his fall into sin. Their sin has not been forgiven; they are dead in trespasses and sins.

1Co 15:22 *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.*

If you are still “in Adam,” your current condition and ultimate destiny is spiritual death; you are not made alive in Christ. The only hope we have for eternal life is in Christ. There is no salvation outside of union with Christ, and that happens through repentance and faith.

## II. Outward expression of union with Christ

- A. Baptism is an outward expression of union with Christ. The Bible states that water baptism is a public identification of the believer with Jesus in His life, death, and resurrection.

Romans 6:3–5 ... *we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.*

Colossians 2:12 *buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.*

1. Baptism pictures this unity with Christ. We identify publicly with Jesus when we are baptized.
2. Sadly, some mistakenly hold that baptism *produces* what it signifies, i.e., that baptism is the means by which one comes into union with Christ. They teach that baptism *produces* this union; baptism is the channel through which we are united with Christ.

That's what the word "sacrament" means—a channel of saving grace. On that view, baptism is the means by which we are united with Christ.

But the Bible clearly teaches that personal *faith* is the means by which we are united with Christ. Baptism *symbolizes* spiritual union; it does not produce it. Repentant faith produces union with Christ.

3. Baptism is an important symbol of our identification and union with Christ. We should not neglect identifying with Christ by means of baptism. Baptism is the initial step of obedience after salvation, and it is the primary means of public identification with Christ.
4. Refusal to be baptized amounts to repudiation of (i.e., refusal to be publicly identified with) Christ. Every believer ought to be baptized. But the act of baptism will not cause union with Christ.

- B. The Lord's Supper expresses our union with Christ.

1. When we eat of the bread and drink of the cup in the Lord's Supper, we are spiritually identifying with Christ's suffering and death. I.e., we are "proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). Participation in the Lord's Supper demonstrates our faith in the merits of Christ's death.
2. And like baptism, the LS does not *produce* union with Christ; it only signifies or pictures it. The LS is not a channel of saving grace; it's a memorial that proclaims Jesus' death. We do it in remembrance of Jesus and because we are united with him, not in order to be united with him.

**Trans:** If we are in union with Christ through faith, then we should be baptized and partake of the Lord's supper to show that union. Both of these ordinances demonstrate our union with Christ.

**BTW, if you are *not* united with Christ through faith, it doesn't matter how many times you get baptized or take the LS.** Those religious acts will not bring you into union with Christ. The only thing that can do that is repentance and faith.

### III. The results and benefits of union with Christ

#### A. The believer enjoys a living union with Christ. John 14:19, 15:1-8

Spiritual life and growth come from abiding in Christ. We are "connected" to Christ and spiritual life and nourishment come through Him to us. The believer depends on Christ the way the branch depends on the vine.

**Quote:** Having exercised faith to believe in Christ, we must also exercise faith to draw upon the life and nourishment that comes to us from Christ through our living union with him.<sup>5</sup>

Colossians 2:19 ... [Jesus is] *the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.*

That's what it means to "abide in Christ." We are in Him and He is in us (John 15:5; Gal 2:20; Col 1:27). Christ Himself within us is our ultimate source of spiritual strength.

Abiding in Christ amounts to obeying his word.

---

<sup>5</sup> Jerry Bridges (2012-03-02). *Who Am I? Identity In Christ* (Kindle Locations 336-338). Cruciform Press. Kindle Edition.

John 15:10 *If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; ...*

John 15:14 *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.*

- B. The believer enjoys participation in all spiritual blessings. Union with Christ means that we receive all the benefits that Christ promised to those who follow Him.

Ephesians 1:3 *God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.*

What are some of these spiritual blessings/benefits that we enjoy because of being “in Christ”?

1. Freedom from the regulations of the OT law—Romans 8:2
2. New life—2 Corinthians 5:17
3. Sanctification—Romans 6:6 *... our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.*
4. Fruit-bearing—Romans 7:4 *we should be fruit unto God*
5. The Spirit—Galatians 3:13-14 (“through Jesus Christ” [KJV] is literally “in”)
6. Completeness—Colossians 2:10 *you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.*
7. Resurrection or participation in the Rapture—Romans 8:10-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16
8. Glorification—Romans 8:17

- C. The believer enjoys a position in the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:13 *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.*

Ephesians 1:23 *The church which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*

The spiritual union we enjoy with all other believers in Jesus is because we are all united in Christ. The fellowship we enjoy with other believers in our local church is likewise based on our union with Christ.

John 17:21 *... that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, ...*

Romans 12:5 *So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

Galatians 3:28 *For you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

This spiritual unity that all believers have should result in warm fellowship with one another. If we are truly one in Christ, then we should act like it. Petty little disagreements and conflicts should not upset the unity of the body. In fact, we must not allow that to happen. We need to work through and solve our conflicts because we are spiritually united to one another. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

John 15:12 *This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.*

That spiritual union among believers should be very evident in the local assembly of believers.

- D. The believer enjoys assurance of salvation and eternal security.

Ultimately, salvation is based on our union with Christ. Once united to Christ, nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:35-39). Our “in Christ” union can never be broken; it is permanent.

Colossians 3:3 *For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*

**Quote:** To describe the believer’s life in this manner is to indicate that it is doubly safe. It is hidden away with Christ, and He is seated on the right hand of God in heaven. Surely there could be no safer refuge than this. To have one’s life hid with Christ in God is to be in vital association with the One who is in heaven as a forerunner, guaranteeing the safe arrival in due time of all who are in Him (Heb 6:20).<sup>6</sup>

- E. The believer behaves as one united to Christ. Union with Christ changes our behavior.

1 Corinthians 6:15–18 *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! ... he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. 18 Flee fornication. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits fornication sins against his own body.*

---

<sup>6</sup> Homer Kent, *Treasures of Wisdom: Studies in Colossians & Philemon.*



The point of that passage is that one “joined with the Lord” must flee fornication. Being united with Christ in his life, death, and resurrection means that we must live consistently with that union. Christ is always with us, and that affects how we live. The Holy Spirit indwells us. We are in union with Jesus, so we must behave as if that is true. Who I am affects what I do. I am joined with the Lord; I cannot live in rebellion and disobedience.

Romans 6:2 ... *How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*

When we encounter temptation and seduction to sin, we must remember who we are—we are in union with Christ. Jesus bought us out of the marketplace of sin; we belong to him. We died with him and rose with him; we live with him. We are his sheep and his bride. How can those in union with Christ live in a way that denies that union?

Ro 6:6, 11 *knowing this, that our old man was crucified with [Him], that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ... Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

One of the most important ways that Christians identify ourselves is “in Christ.” We are united to Christ like a branch is united to a vine, like a husband is united to a wife. We depend on him like a building depends on its foundation or like one part of the body depends on the other parts of the body.

Is that how you identify yourself? Is that how you feel about your relationship to Jesus? Do you see yourself as a sheep following your shepherd? Do you see yourself as a branch connected to and dependent upon the vine? I hope so.

Our spiritual union with Christ in his death, burial, resurrection, and glorification should have an enormous influence on how we live. Our identity is deeply connected to who we are “in Christ.” We dare not identify ourselves in ways that violate or contradict that deep connection.

Maybe you are still “in Adam” today. I urge you to change that identity. You can become “in Christ” and enjoy all the privileges of that position through repentance and faith.