

Ephesians Chapter 1 Part Two

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[0 : 00] Thank you. It's not the tune I was familiar with as a child, but it's nice to learn a new tune. Let's turn to that passage in Ephesians chapter 1.

Well, I have been thrilled recently by what I think is one of the central truths of the New Testament, and which, surprisingly, I think is neglected.

And the truth that I'm talking about and I want to talk about tonight is what we call union with Christ. Union with Christ.

According to the New Testament, the church, and that includes every individual believer in the church, is one with Jesus.

One with Jesus. So I want to explore that with you tonight. New Testament doesn't just say that we're close to Jesus or near to Jesus, although, of course, that's true.

[1 : 25] That says that we are one with Jesus. We are one with Jesus. Well, I want to do four things tonight. First of all, I want to look at the New Testament evidence for this.

Does the New Testament actually teach this? That will be quite brief. Then I want to try to explain what it means to be one with Jesus, because it's not obvious, is it? What does it mean to be one with Jesus?

One with somebody else? So I want to try and explain what it means. And then thirdly, I want to give you an illustration, which hopefully will throw a bit more light onto it.

And then finally, I want to share with you some of the implications of this great truth. And don't worry, it's not going to be as long as you think. So number one, the New Testament evidence.

Is this what the New Testament actually teaches? I'll base this largely on Ephesians. As we saw this morning, Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians with this outpouring, this torrent of praise to God for the blessings of the salvation that we enjoy.

[2 : 38] God has blessed us, he says, with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. He starts back in eternity. Chosen. Predestined.

Adoption. Redemption. Forgiveness. Acceptance. Love. Knowledge and insight, which we were thinking about this morning. Hope, which we were thinking about this morning.

A world that is one, under one head, Jesus Christ. Unity. Sealing with the Holy Spirit.

You're familiar with these blessings, I'm sure. This tremendous avalanche of blessing with which Ephesians begin. And I'm sure you've heard preachers do as I've often done and do series of sermons on each of these blessings, which is a great thing to do.

And which I've often done myself. But tonight I want to concentrate, not on any one of these blessings, but on a little phrase that occurs so often in this opening sentence, which as we saw this morning is actually one sentence in the Greek, one breathless sentence.

[3 : 53] There's one little phrase which is so common that it's easily overlooked. In fact, it's so common, Paul uses it so often, you might think it's a kind of habit of speaking that is picked up.

We all have peculiar habits of speaking, don't we? Little phrases that we use, perhaps sometimes without thinking. And they don't mean very much. And we might think that this little phrase that Paul uses is one of those.

It's one of his little quirks of speech, which actually doesn't actually mean very much. It's just something Paul liked to say, we might think. If we think that, we'd be completely wrong.

Because this phrase is absolutely crucial. It's the centre of Paul's thinking. It's the centre of his gospel. And the little phrase that I'm thinking about is the phrase, In Christ.

In Christ. God has blessed us in Christ. With every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. He's chosen us in Christ.

[5 : 07] In him we have redemption through his blood. He loves us and he's accepted us in the one he loves. We've been sealed in Christ with the promised Holy Spirit.

So in Christ occurs again and again and again in this passage. Not just because of Christ, although that's true, but in Christ.

And actually, this phrase, In Christ, or in him, or in the Lord, occurs 164 times in the 13 letters of Paul.

So do you agree that it's probably quite important? 164 times in Paul's letters, Paul talks about Christians being in Christ.

I'll give you one or two examples. In 2 Corinthians chapter 12, Paul describes himself simply as a man in Christ. A man in Christ.

[6 : 14] In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, 5, he says, If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. In Romans chapter 8, he says, There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

And I could give you many other examples. So, all the blessings that we enjoy as Christians are in Christ. We are in Christ, Paul said.

And that's why we're blessed. We're blessed in Christ. Now, in chapter 2, it gets even more puzzling.

Because the preposition changes from in Christ to with Christ or together with Christ. And Paul actually says in chapter 2, we read it, didn't we, that we were dead in sins but God made us alive with Christ.

Christ. He made us alive with Christ. He raised us with Christ. He seated us in the heavenly realms with Christ, in Christ, with Christ.

[7 : 27] And elsewhere, he says, we were crucified with Christ. What does that mean? We were crucified with Christ. We were buried with Christ. We were raised with Christ. Christ. So we're in Christ and we're with Christ and we were with Christ when he died and when he was buried and when he rose again and when he ascended into heaven.

What does it mean? And not only does Paul say that we are in Christ, Paul also says that Christ, if we're Christians, is in us by the Holy Spirit.

That's what a Christian is, someone in whom Jesus dwells by his Spirit. If you're looking at somebody in whom Jesus dwells by the Spirit, then you're looking at a Christian. That's what a Christian is.

So we're in Christ and Christ is enough. And there are actually over 200 examples in Paul's letter of this kind of union with Christ terminology.

In fact, it's so common, as I said, that we tend to overlook it. But we shouldn't because it's actually the heart of the Gospel, it's the centre and the nerve of Paul's Gospel.

[8 : 49] And incidentally, it's not just Paul's idea. If you read John's Gospel, you'll find Jesus saying that he is in us and we are in him just as he is in the Father and the Father is in him.

And it's in John's Gospel that Jesus says, I am the vine. You are the brancher. Okay? So, do you agree that this is what the New Testament teach you?

That we are one with Jesus? That we are united in some sense, we are united to Jesus like branches are united to a vine, like a body is united to a head, Paul says.

Pretty close union, isn't it? Heads and bodies, pretty close. That's how we are united to Jesus, says Paul.

He's the head of the body, the church. Okay, so that's the New Testament evidence, that's point number one. Come now to point number two. What does it mean?

[9 : 57] What does the New Testament mean by union with Christ? Well, there are two kinds of union. The first is what we might call a legal union, a legal union.

Now, by a legal union, I mean one person acting on behalf of another person or other persons legally.

my father, my late father, gave me power of attorney over his affair.

I never actually had to exercise my powers of attorney, but I could have done if it had become necessary. power of attorney means that the person with that power of attorney decides, makes decisions on behalf of an incapacitated relative who can't make decisions himself.

The other person with power of attorney makes the decisions and those decisions are accepted as the decisions of the person he's representing. So, in the sight of the law, excuse me, they are one.

[11:16] They are one. If you belong to a trade union and the trade union goes on strike, you may be against the strike, you may not want to be on strike, but if you're in the union, you're on strike.

Because you belong to that union. The union represents its member. They're on strike. In the year 1707, I think it was, there was an act of union between two countries which had quite often been at war.

The two countries I'm thinking about are England and Scotland. I come from Carlisle, which at times has been in Scotland and at other times has been in England.

But in 1707, there was an act of union and the two countries decided to be one country legally. They had one king who was a Scotsman.

No, he wasn't. That was 1607. James I of England, 6th of Scotland. I'm talking about 1707. I think the king was probably German actually. But they had one king.

[12:31] They had the same king. They were united under one king. They had the same currency. If England's currency was pound sterling, then Scotland's currency was pound sterling.

They were one. They'd been apart, but they were now legally one. Now you can think of our union with Christ as a legal union.

God has provided sinners with someone to act in their name on their behalf before him.

He has provided Jesus to act on our behalf. And that means that whatever Jesus did, whatever Jesus achieved, God regards the church as having done and as having achieved in Christ.

Can you believe this? Jesus' life of obedience that pleased the Father. This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Jesus' life of obedience that pleased the Father.

[13:49] Jesus' death, which was a death for sin. That life of obedience that pleased the Father is regarded as our life of obedience that pleased the Father.

Because he was our representative legally before God. God. His death for sin was our death for sin. His burial was our burial.

His resurrection was our resurrection. His victorious entrance into his Father's presence was our victorious entrance into the Father's presence. His seating, his being seated in the heavenly realms was our being seated in the heavenly realms because he was us.

He was doing it for us. He was doing it as our representative, as our substitute and our representative. He was doing it in our name.

Don't you think this is wonderful? You're allowed to nod. How would you rather stand before God on the day of judgment? Would you rather stand before God with your own achievement, with your own attainment, with your own righteousness or would you rather stand before God in Christ?

[15:19] Pointing to him and saying look at what he's done. He's done it. I haven't but he has and he did it as my representative.

He did it in my name. Look at him. I know which I would prefer. So that's a legal union.

But then also we have a living union. A living union is much deeper and more intimate than just a legal union. Now a living union is, well, take something like a shoot or a branch that you want to graft into a shrub.

You graft it into the shrub. And the two become organically one. Really one. One organism sharing one life.

The life of the shrub becomes the life of the branch. When I was at school doing physics which I hated we used to do experiments with iron filings and magnets.

[16:34] And we're not talking about life here but the iron filings were attracted by the magnetism to the magnet. The magnetism that was in the magnet was now in the iron filings and the two became one.

And indeed as we were thinking this morning the iron filings that were attracted to the magnets were attracted to all the other iron filings. The magnetism that was in the magnet was in them all.

So it's all one. For magnet think Jesus. For iron filings think individual Christians.

For magnetism think the power of the Holy Spirit. That's a living union. That's what a Christian is. Someone who is united by the Holy Spirit to Jesus Christ.

A Christian isn't just somebody who believes the right things. You can believe the right things and not be united to Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. A Christian is somebody who is united to Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

[17:47] A living union. with Jesus. Now of course when we talk about Jesus as the vine and Christians as the branches or Jesus as the head and Christians as the body or the members.

We're obviously using pictures. We know that Jesus isn't a literal vine and we are not literal branches or Jesus is not a literal head and we're not a literal body. but while these may be metaphors the union that they describe is not a metaphor.

It's not metaphorical. It's real and it's actual. Christians are united to Jesus Christ. and this union between Christians, the church and Jesus is a far deeper union than any other union in the universe.

In fact the only union that is deeper than this one is the union between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is an unbreakable union unlike the union between England and Scotland which was established in 1707 which is very definitely breakable and nearly was and probably still will be eventually the way things are looking.

But this union between the church and Jesus Christ is unbreakable. It's the essential fundamental fact about every Christian believer.

[19 : 25] It's what a Christian is. A Christian is somebody who is united to Jesus. So that's the second point.

What does the New Testament mean by union with Christ? It means a legal union, Jesus acting on behalf of us as if he and us were the same person in God's sight.

God's and it is a living union. Now thirdly I'm going to give you an illustration which I hope will throw a little bit of light onto this subject and I'm also going to give you a parable.

Okay? So here's an illustration. It's a biblical illustration. Perhaps the most amazing way that the New Testament describes union with Christ is by using the picture of marriage.

The New Testament says that the church is not only the bride, the body of Christ, it is the bride of Christ. Now a marriage is a legal union but hopefully it's a little bit more than that.

[20 : 30] It is a living union as well. And if you just turn over to the end of Ephesians chapter 5, could you just turn over to the end of Ephesians chapter 5?

This is a section where Paul deals with husbands and wives, wives and husbands. Verse 25, husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for them.

But I want to go down to verse 30, 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 am talking about Christ and the church. Can you see what's happening there? Paul quotes Genesis chapter 2, the standard definition of marriage in the Bible. What is marriage? Marriage is a man leaving his father and mother being united to his wife and the two become one flesh. That's what a marriage is.

[21 : 33] Paul quotes that at the end of Ephesians 5 and he basically says this, he says that's about marriage, it's a standard definition of marriage, but actually he says, he uses this word mystery again, which we were looking at this morning, this is a profound mystery, this is a secret nobody understands unless God shows them, I'm talking about Christ and the church.

So he says that that verse about human marriage is actually also about Christ and the church. Jesus left his father, Jesus was united to his bride, the two become one flesh.

Now, this is mind boggling, don't you think? Is this mind boggling or not? I think it's mind boggling, boggles my mind. It's the stuff of fairy tales.

We took our grandchildren to Disneyland Paris last August, so I've got fairy tales on the break. This is Cinderella, isn't it?

And all kinds of other fairy stories as well, which are basically the same story, an ugly, poor, wretched, miserable woman, sorry ladies, because it's always that way around, against all the odds this prince, this handsome, rich, famous prince falls in love with her, marries her, and the two become one.

[23 : 33] The two become one. That's what Jesus says, what God has joined together, let man not separate. The two become one. That's what a marriage is. That's what the church, church's relationship to Jesus is.

what happens in a marriage? All that I am, I give to you, all that I have, I share with you.

With all my worldly goods I thee endow. so we endow Jesus with what we've got. What have we got? Nothing. But our guilt and our sin and our shame.

And he takes it. That's what happened on the cross of Calvary. Our bridegroom took it for his bride.

Took what belonged to her. And he gives us what belongs to him. What belongs to him becomes our. His righteousness, his obedience, his death for sin, his burial, his resurrection from the dead,

his ascension to heaven, his being seated at the right hand of God, his position as son, his glory, it all becomes our.

[24 : 56] That's what happens in a marriage. That's what marriage is. That's why Martin Luther called this the great exchange. This is the gospel.

The Lord Jesus Christ became one of us. He took our humanity upon himself subject to all its pain and weakness and death.

He became one with us. He accepted on our behalf our sin, our shame, our death, our death, our judgment. If you've got a joint bank account, if you're married and you've got a joint bank account, and you overdraw, that death is not just yours, it's your partners who may not have overdrawn.

He may have been very, very careful with his money. But if he's married to you and you've overdrawn, he has to pay.

Because it's a joint bank account. That's what happened on the cross of Calvary. Jesus, because of his union with us, had to pay our debt.

[26 : 15] He had to pay for our sin. That's what happened at the cross of Calvary. And he shares with us all that he is and all that he had.

His obedience, his death under the judgment of sin, his victorious resurrection, his ascension into the heavenly realms, his glory, his sonship, ours, mine.

Because I'm the bride and he is the bridegroom. Now I've got a parable for you now. Jesus used to teach parables, he used to teach in parables and the thing about the parables of Jesus is that he often didn't give any explanation.

Sometimes if the disciples insisted he would give an explanation to his disciples in private afterwards but when he was talking to the crowds he just told a parable and let them to think it out. Sometimes I think we should do that actually rather than trying to sock everything to somebody all in one go. We should just say little mysterious things and leave them to think things out. That's what Jesus did.

[27 : 35] I'm going to try what Jesus tried, what Jesus did actually so well. I'm going to give you a parable and I'm not going to give you the explanation. You're going to have to work it out.

If you're desperate and you can't work it out ask me afterwards and I'll tell you what the explanation is. Okay? Here's a parable. There's a woman.

She's destitute. Her debts are entirely the result of her own mismanagement, her own folly, her own wrongdoing. She lives in a squalid dirty hostel for the homeless.

She's terrified of the police. She does everything she can to avoid the bank manager. She faces a future of shame, hunger, hopelessness, disease and probably early death.

The son of the chairman of the bank falls in love with her.

[28 : 45] that means that he has to visit the squalid hostel where she lived and there he encounters a great deal of suspicion and opposition and envy from the other inmates but he visits that hostel and he claims his bride and he marries her and he lets her have a joint bank account at his father's bank with him.

So her debts become his and he very very quickly pays them off. His wealth becomes hers.

Her shame becomes his. His honour becomes hers. She's no longer afraid of the bank manager.

She's no longer afraid of the chairman of the bank.

In fact she can now walk into the plush offices in the city of London of the chairman of the bank with complete confidence and call him father.

That's the parable. Work it out. Okay? Finally the implications of union with Christ. What are the implications of union with Christ?

[30 : 08] And I can only very briefly just mention a few. first of all how we think about Jesus. We must make much of the Lord Jesus Christ.

All our blessings are not just because of him but in him through union with him. These blessings are not just impersonal things separate from the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is Jesus Christ who is our salvation. Salvation isn't just something that Jesus gives us. Not that that's true.

Jesus is our salvation. Jesus is our righteousness. Jesus is our sonship, our sanctification, and so on.

That's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 30 for instance. 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 30 Paul says it is because of him, the Father, because of him, God, that you are in Christ

Jesus who has become for us wisdom from God that is our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

[31 : 28] We are in Christ Jesus who is our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. He is these things. These things aren't something impersonal, separate from him to read about in particular chapters in a systematic theology textbook, although that's not a bad thing to do.

These things are Christ. They come to us in union with Christ. So we must make much of Christ. And then how we think about ourselves? How we think about ourselves? Well, we're nothing apart from him. Nothing apart from him. But in him, we're everything.

Never think of yourself apart from Christ, apart from Jesus. God never does, if you're a Christian. He never thinks of you apart from Jesus, nor should you.

When you think of yourself, think of him. Is he accepted by the Father? So are you. Can he ever be condemned? Neither can you.

[32 : 39] Is he God's beloved son? So are you. Is he holy and spotless in God's sight? So are you. That's how you should think of yourself when you go to prayer.

In Christ. Did he die the death that sin deserved? So did you. Your death has been died in Christ. It's over.

Finished. Was he buried under the burden of sin? So are you. Was he raised to newness of life? So are you. Is he seated in the presence of God?

In the heavenly realm? Paul says, so are you. That's how you should think of yourself if you're a Christian. In Christ. Never think of yourself as separate from him.

And this union with Christ is the power behind all Christian living in the New Testament. Christian living is simply fellowship with or participation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[33 : 46] Everything we do, we do as one with Jesus. Everywhere we go, we go as one with Jesus. So that makes us very careful what we do.

And very careful where we go, because we're doing it as one with Jesus. Can I ask you to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 6, where there's a remarkable passage.

1 Corinthians chapter 6. We've nearly finished. But I do want to mention this, 1 Corinthians chapter 6 verse 15.

Paul is addressing here an issue which was very important in the city of Corinth, which was a notoriously immoral, sexually immoral see-poor.

Prostitution was rife. Even in the pagan temples there would have been sacred so-called prostitution. So prostitution was part of the life of church members before they'd become Christian.

[34 : 50] And Paul has to warn some of the men in the church about it. And this is his argument. Verse 15. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?

Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never. Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said the two will become one flesh.

There it is again, you see that quotation from Genesis chapter 2. But, verse 17, he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

So how can you go and say a prostitute if you're one with Jesus? Says Paul. Apply that to anything else you want to apply it to. How can you do it if you're one with Jesus?

Romans chapter 6. Paul says, okay, some people are saying that I'm teaching, because of all this emphasis on grace, some people are saying that I'm teaching that people can continue in sin so that grace may abound.

[36 : 00] God forbid, he says, don't even think about it. Don't even think about it. Why not? Don't you know, he says, that when you were baptized, you were buried with Christ, and you were raised with him to newness of life.

Remember who you are. You're one with Jesus. You're united to Christ. How can you continue in sin? Would that woman, now married to a millionaire husband, ever choose to go back to life in that squalid hostel for the homeland?

She never would. It might take her some time before it really dawns on her that she must now live the life of a millionaire at. If she's not used to living like a millionaire, it's not going to come quickly or easily.

It's going to take some time before she really understands that she's to live now as a millionaire because that is what she is, united with her husband. That is what she is.

Therefore, she must live like that. She mustn't live as if she's not a millionaire because she is. it may be difficult to blot out the memories of her past, but she must do so because a millionaire is now what she truly is, in and with her husband and that is what we are, in Christ.

[37 : 47] So how we think about Jesus, how we think about ourselves, how we think about other believers, but I dealt with that this morning, so I'm not going to deal with that again. How we think about other believers, if the iron filings are united to the magnet, they are inevitably united to each other, one with each other.

I'd have preached these sermons, incidentally, the other way around if it hadn't been Remember and Sunday. I would normally preach on union with Christ before preaching on union with each other, but because it was Remembrance Sunday this morning, I felt we had to preach on unity with each other this morning, but really logically this sermon comes before this morning's sermon.

Have you got that? Have you worked that out? Good. How we think of other believers that dealt with out this morning, and finally how we think of persecution. How we think of persecution.

Persecution is sharing in the sufferings of the Christ to whom we are united.

Absolutely inevitable. Absolutely inevitable. If the head suffers, the body suffers. If the bridegroom is hated, it rubs off onto his bride.

In fact, people will express their hatred of the bridegroom if they can't get at him through the way they treat his bride. If the vine is attacked, the branches are attacked.

[39 : 18] If Christ suffered, then his body will suffer with him, and that's what's happening all over the world. And we're going to have to get used to it. We're going to have to get used to it, because we have been amazingly preserved and protected from it for the last few centuries.

But we're going to have to get used to it, because that is not the norm. The norm, Philippians chapter 1, unto you it has been given, granted, unto you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe on it, but also to suffer.

It's part of the package to suffer for his sake. And that's what's happening to increasing numbers of Christians all over the world. And I can't guarantee that we're going to continue to be protected from it, as if there was something special about her.

So get used to the idea of being one with a Jesus who is hated by this world. And if you are one with a Jesus who is hated by this world, that is what is going to happen to you, in some form or other.

But if he's our bridegroom, it's a privilege. It's a privilege to suffer with him and for him. So, how are you united to Christ?

[40 : 48] If there's anyone asking that question here tonight, how are you united to Christ? By faith in him. Come to him. Come to him. Ask him to accept you.

Trust in him. Believe that all he did, he did for you. He is your gracious savior. willing to be united even to you.

If you come to him as a sinner and say that you want to be part of his bride. May God help you to do so. And by nature and by practice far, how very far from God.

Yet now by grace brought nigh to him through faith in Jesus' blood. So near, so very near to God, I cannot nearer be, for in the person of his son, I am as near as he.

so dear, so very dear to God, more dear I cannot be, the love wherewith he loves the son, such is his love to me.

[42 : 06] So we pray that you help us to believe that Lord Jesus and to live in the light of him. Part us now with your blessing, be with us during this coming week, keep us from sin, give us opportunities to give a reason for the hope that we have to anyone who asks us, pray that people will ask us, and we pray that we'll be able to share something of the good news with them.

Part us with your blessing, in Jesus' name, Amen.