

# One in Christ

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We are in the middle of studying Acts. Actually we are kind of near the end of our study. We are going to study for a few more weeks. And last week we got to a point of studying Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus and in that conversion there was a sentence that I really wanted to talk about out of that story and it was so important and it was going to be such a huge point... Actually as I studied it, it became kind of the eighth subpoint that was going to eat Boston. And so decided I had to give its whole sermon all to its own. And so this week it seems like we are jumping out and studying something else, but I assure you we are still very much studying Acts and I hope to make that clear as we go on.

But I will be reading to you from Ephesians one, the first 14 verses. And this is just a sampling of Paul's teaching on union with Christ. And to be honest, again, to get a kind of a holistic view of Paul's teachings on union with Christ I tried to just read through his letters and take out every section having to do with union with Christ. I got through Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. I didn't even go through the big books, right, just the easy ones. And I already had four pages of texts.

And so essentially I am preaching on the entire New Testament today, so I thought I would just read a sampling if that's all right. So we will just read the first 14 verses from Ephesians one.

Please hear the Word of the Lord.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all

wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.<sup>1</sup>

This is the reading of God's Word.

All men are like grass and all of our glory is like the flowers of the field and the grass withers and the flowers fall, but not God's Word. God's Word never falls, but it stands forever. Let's give attention to it.

When I was an intern at the University of Tennessee there was a guy there who had a fascinating story. The first time I saw him he was in a wheelchair and there were large parts of his body missing and the rest of him was covered with this covering. He was terribly burned and the story I later found out was that he had been very depressed. He had failed out of school and was... had just kind of thrown everything away with a drug induced lifestyle and in a kind of depressed, drug high state he poured gasoline on him. He went out into the front yard of his house, poured gasoline all over himself and lit himself on fire.

A girl across the street saw him in the yard, saw what he was about to do, grabbed a blanket, was already to the street before he ever lit a match and put the fire out and saved his life. She then began ministering to him and loving him and would visit him daily in the hospital and would read the Bible to him and he was converted.

And at that point she made this statement that in my cynicism I want to say was a mistake because it rang so true that every time you saw him you had to hear it. And what the statement was: God took away my body to save my soul. I am a living miracle. And it glorious the first like 40 times you hear it. But it is so wrong, so deeply down into his soul that he could not say his name without telling you, "I am a living miracle. God took my body and gave me my soul."

Sometimes that happens to people. At the point of their conversion they will get a sentence or something that really kind of encapsulates everything and it gets so down into their soul they never get over it.

Last week we studied the apostle Paul and he was on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus. And if you don't know the story I will just recap... recapitulate it for you? And what he was doing was this. He was going to Damascus to arrest Christians. He was

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 1:1-14

not seeking Christians. He wasn't trying to love on Jesus. He was not trying to find Jesus. He was not a seeker looking for truth. He had all that stuff. He hated Jesus and he wanted to eradicate from the earth anybody who loved him. And while he was on that road he got literally thrown to the ground by Jesus and from that state he looks up and he says, "Who are you, Lord?"<sup>2</sup>

And Jesus tells him, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."<sup>3</sup>

And what I would suggest to you is that statement runs so deeply into Paul... His name was Saul at that point. He changed his name to Paul. Don't let that confuse you. Same verse. That statement got so deep into Paul's soul that I believe he spent the rest of his life unpacking it, that Christians and Jesus are so closely united that to talk of one is to talk of the other. There is no difference. There is no separation. It became for him his... the entirety of his message. It summarized everything he summarized.

When he tried to explain his ministry he said, "I am filling up in my body the sufferings that are lacking of Christ. I am doing Christ's work. I am his body."

When he tried to summarize his ethics, when he was trying to teach people things that we think, kind of ABC of Christianity like don't go sleep with prostitutes, you know, it's not a... that's pretty much step one of Christianity. He would say, "Don't go... You are joined to Christ. You are Christ's. Don't go join the body of Christ to a prostitute."

Like, ok, check.

When he is trying to explain marriage he talks about how a husband should love his wife and he says, "You know, you should love your wife the way you love your own body. Nobody ever hated his body. You take care of it. You clean it the way Christ does his body because we are members of his body and because the two are one. As it is written..."

He almost gets confused about what he is talking about if that were possible under the Holy Spirit, but he says, "As it is written a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. It is a big mystery. I am talking about Christ and the Church."

When he is talking about his Ecclesiology he says, "What is the Church? The Church is the body of Christ. Christ is the head of the body. You can't have one without the other."

When he is talking about Soteriology, how somebody gets saved, how someone comes into a relationship God he says that you were raised together with Christ. You have been crucified with Christ. You will be seated in heavenly places with Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 9:5

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Everything. When he is explaining to you why you shouldn't be a racist he says, "In Christ Jesus there is no such thing as a Jew or a Gentile, a Greek or a Scythian, a slave or a free, a man or a woman."

Everything to him, it all comes back to this one point. You are in Christ. To be a believer, to be a Christian is to be in Christ.

And I want to take a little time today, not... Certainly not to bring out every facet of that. That's what I call my wife's calling to bring out every facet about that. That is kind of what I do. But to bring out a few... the clearest and most important facets of it in sketch detail.

Union with Christ is like... it is like anything that is important. Anything that is big and important and powerful and beautiful in life gets lost and destroyed when you define it. You just see it. Kind of like defining how you ride a bicycle. You know, don't read those books. Just go out. You just have to see it. You have to do it.

It is like trying to define love. Don't you hate those books that try to say, "Well, this is what love is..."

And we'll go, "Nope. That's not it. I don't know what it is, but I know that what you wrote doesn't cover it."

And the Bible knows that and Jesus knows that and so he gives us pictures of this union. He gives us pictures of a vine to branches. Where you get your life, you get your vitality from me. He gives us pictures of the relationship between a head and a body. Is there a distinction between the head and the body? I guess. I don't ever want my head to be distinct from my body. It is a goal of mine to never let my head be distinguished from my body, but I guess they could be separated, but you kind of lose both, don't you, when you separate head from body. Pretty instantly you have neither.

He talks about the union of... He talks about himself as the bread of life. Could there be anything more intimate, any more unified than food to your body? When you think about, I mean, somehow this body underneath these clothes is made up of Twinkies and candy corn and hamburgers and pizza. Somehow all that stuff becomes this. I don't know how. You don't really know how either, but it becomes this.

And it is what he is saying. You have to eat. You take me into yourself and let you be made up of me. And it is ok that you don't understand that. He talks about us being one flesh, married to Christ, having the same purpose, the same goals, the same intentions, the same intimate.

If you are a believer with Christ you are one with Christ. First of all you are one with Christ physically. You are one with Christ physically. Wherever you are Jesus is there. And that may bother you a little bit.

You are like, “Well, I don’t see him.”

Well, you don’t see most of the important stuff about you. You don’t see the radio waves all around you. You don’t see how thinking takes place. You don’t see imagination. You don’t see anything that makes yourself human.

You are with Christ. He is so closely linked to you that you cannot leave him. You can’t leave him. He is with you. That is what he... That is what Jesus said to the apostle Paul. “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”<sup>4</sup>

“I am not persecuting you. I did that last... you know, two months ago when you were killed. But I haven’t touched you since or I have been touching your disciples.”

And he says, “No. Anything you do to them, you are doing to me.”

I have a friend and mentor named Joe Noven and whenever I mention his name Bianca giggles because she says, you know, Joe, you love him so much, you know. I want to grow up to be just like him and I never will. But he is holy and all that and he is a great preacher and he did... he took this trip to India several years ago and with his oldest son. And he was preaching in the world’s largest ghetto, in the ghetto of New Delhi in India. And as he was preaching the gospel police came up and they started yelling at him in a language he didn’t understand and he looked at his friend there, P.T. Chapachandra and he said, “What are they saying?”

And he said, “Well, the police are telling you to stop preaching.”

And Joe said, “Well, what should I do?”

And his friend said, “Well, my Bible had some very clear verses about what you should do if the police tell you stop preaching. Does yours not have any?”

And Joe began crying. And he said, “Will you take care of my son?”

And he said, “Do not worry about your son. He is with Jesus.”

And Joe said, “No. Don’t say that. In America that means he is dead already. Don’t... don’t say that he is with Jesus.”

And that’s kind of our mentality, isn’t it? When someone dies they go to be with Jesus. And what Christians throughout the history have known is that we are always with Jesus. He is always with us.

The question for you is: Why don’t you experience it? If we don’t experience it, that doesn’t mean he is not there, right?

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<sup>4</sup> Acts 9:4

Haven't you ever driven a car with someone inches away from you and yet felt like they were miles away? Why was that? Was it because you weren't really close? No, you were close. There you are.

Why was that? Well, it was because you were thinking about completely different things. You were in different worlds. You had different things on your mind, different intentions, different goals.

The reason why don't feel very close to Jesus very often is because we are just not thinking about what he is thinking about.

We are sitting here thinking about, you know, well, primarily we are thinking about how do I look today? What did so and so just think of me? You know? I am thinking about me and then I think about football and then I think about my children.

And, you know, and Jesus is there thinking... And when we see somebody, seriously. We are thinking to ourselves, "What does this person think of me?"

When Jesus sees that person Jesus is right there next to us. He sees this person and thinks, "How can I help him. What can I do to love them? How can I keep them from destroying themselves? How can I bring them life?"

We are not thinking that so we are... Even though we are next to Jesus, even though we are so close to him that we can't be separated from him, we are a million miles away.

But I want you to know, I do want you to know that he is with you. Even in the valley of the shadow of death he is with you and you have no fear. We are one with Jesus physically. We are one with Jesus covenantally.

Throughout the New Testament, especially in Romans five Paul talks about what it means to be in Jesus. And basically you could describe it like this. We understand this from another covenant that many people joined, the covenant of marriage.

On the day I got married, June 6, 1992 on that day Bianca made a terrible financial decision. You know, she made a bad decision for a lot of reasons, but she made a terrible financial decision because at that point in history she was not in debt. Ok, the second she said, "I do," actually the second she signed that piece of paper, bam, she was in big debt because I was in big debt and my debt became her debt. That is how community property works. Kind of a nice deal.

So, you know, I was \$30,000 in debt from school and from stupid purchases and from living on a credit card for two years and she was fine until she married me. My debt became hers.

Now when I first met Bianca I thought she was rich and thought I liked her for her money, but that didn't work out. But... Sorry, an old honesty thing. But, you know, I loved her anyway, dated for years after I knew the truth and married her.

Had she been rich which was the plan of going to Vanderbilt, had she been rich then her wealth, her riches would have become mine and that didn't work out so well. But, you see, what would have happened, my debt became hers. Her riches became mine. That is oneness. That is covenantal oneness. And that is what happens to us. When we believe upon Christ our sin becomes his, our debt becomes his. His wealth, his righteousness, his acceptance of the Father becomes ours. And that is a beautiful thing and our sin becomes his and he has paid for it.

2 Corinthians five says, "He made him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God."<sup>5</sup> Our sin becomes his. We are crucified in Christ and he pays for it. He pays for it.

When I was in Cleveland, Mississippi, had our first child and all the family came in town and we had like a three bedroom house, well, a two bedroom house that was dirty and gnarly, but... and other issues. And hot and no air conditioning and all the family was coming and wanting to stay with us. And my brother came into town and I didn't have a room for him and I didn't have any money and he didn't have any money and so I called up this lady in our church who was very hospitable, always had her house open to guests and she only lived like four houses down from me and I asked if maybe her guestroom would be open. And I didn't get her. I got her husband and he is like, "Oh, I'm sorry. There is somebody else staying with us."

And, "Ok, bye."

Well she found out I had made that call and was appalled and called back and said, "I want to help."

That was all she said. So I had no idea what was going on. And she said, "I made a reservation for you down at such and such hotel."

So I drove my brother down to the hotel not knowing what, "I want to help means," but we are just going to go with it, right.

So I go check out... we go to check out the next day, breakfast with my brother and he says.. I said, "Well, I guess we'll go check out now." And so I go into the desk to find out how much money I owed and they just kind of looked at me like, "Well, Miss Austen made this reservation, right?"

"Yes."

"So what are you doing here?"

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<sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21

And I had no idea what this means, but they were like, “Have a nice day, Mr. Jones.”

And I am kind, you know, going, “I think I am getting away with this. You have a nice day, too,” and just sneak out.

Well, what I later found out was Mrs. Austen owned that hotel and when she said, “I want to help,” that means, “How many rooms do you need. It is my home. It is my other home. My hotel.”

And so, you know, at that point I could give this person on the other side of the counter I wanted to give them it wouldn't have anything to do with this room, though, right? It would have just been like a tip and I wasn't really in the mood to do that, but if I wanted to that would have been fine. But it was paid for. And once it is paid for, it is paid for. And she really paid for it. I mean she bought it.

Well, your sins have been really paid for. Jesus has really taken your beating.

You don't believe that. And you know how I know you don't believe that because when God makes you aware of a sin in your life, you really enjoy beating yourself up for it. You won't move on until you feel like you have adequately beaten yourself up for it. And what I want you to know is somebody has already been beaten up for that sin. As a matter of fact, you have already been beaten up for that sin in Christ.

And as a father I can tell you that once a spanking is administered, you kind of want to move on. You want to get to the ice cream portion and then everybody be happy again, right? That is what you want to do. After you have to give the spanking, you go get the ice cream. We are all happy again.

And God doesn't look at you and say, “Oh, I am so glad you are still crying about something that was a spanking administered 2000 years ago for.” He doesn't want you to sin. That's why he makes you aware of it, but he is not interested in you being beaten up for it any more. You are not making your relationship with God any better by beating yourself up. You are not making him like you anymore. You are not doing anything but refusing to believe the gospel by beating yourself up for what Jesus has already been beaten up for.

And not only has he taken our sin, but we have received his righteousness. It is put upon us. We are beloved and we are dressed in his righteousness and none of us gets that.

Several years ago a movie, probably the goriest, most bloody and therefore the most popular movie of all time was made, *Saving Private Ryan*. And if you haven't seen it I am about to ruin it for you, but its ok. There is still a lot of blood. You will still love it. But in that movie it is about, you know, World War II and the D-Day invasion and there is this soldier there that needs to be saved and he doesn't want to be saved. He is not



asking to be saved, but a troop is sent out to rescue and save... You probably guessed his name, private Ryan.

And so they go and they rescue him from the front lines and they bring him back and every man, almost, in that troop that is sent to rescue him dies in the effort and when he is finally brought to safety the oldest guy in the group gets killed in kind of the final act of the movie and he looks up and he says, “When you get back home, earn it.”

What is he saying? He is saying, “You see all of this that we have done for you. Live your life in such a way to earn what we have done for you.”

Now usually despite themselves, Hollywood gets the gospel pretty close to right because it is just the best story there is and so whenever they tell a good story they get it.

Well, what I want you all to understand is this. That is as far from the gospel as it can possibly be and you believe it is the gospel. You believe that it is your job to earn what Jesus has done for you and the fact of the matter is he earned it for you. It has been earned. You can’t earn anymore. And you need to understand that about yourself, that you are as good as you are going to get. You are as beloved in the Father as you can possibly be. You can’t earn anything else. It has been earned for you. There is nothing left to earn. You are God’s treasured daughter. He loves you. He is delighted to see you. You can’t earn anything more.

Last week I was driving around and this may be one of you all’s cars. If it is, I am embarrassed to say this, but I have to use it as an illustration. I saw a license plate and it said, “L-V,” which I took to be short for love. A two and a B. 2B Mom, you know, and then this... The driver of this minivan just loves to be mom.

And I thought to myself, “I’m so glad that is not my license plate because I would feel guilty every time I got into that van, you know.” It’s like every time I got into the van I would be like, “I don’t love it. I ain’t loving it today. I should, I guess. In theory I love being dad.” You know. But some days I just don’t.

And I want you to know that it is ok that some days you just don’t love being mom. Some days it is ok that you just don’t love being dad or you don’t love being wife or you don’t love being husband or you don’t love being friend. It is ok. You don’t have to beat yourself up for that. Jesus loved it for you. Wear that.

I... This idea of Jesus earning it for us, it covers our reputation. I tell you... I want to tell you again what was going on this weekend at Presbytery. We had two men both caught in sin, both brought to a point of repentance, and they had to stand in front of this group of colleagues and confess their sin. And they both said—it is beautiful—“The thing I feared above all fears was being made of no reputation, of losing, of completely and forever ruining my reputation and I have done that.”

And at that moment when they said it they were wearing nothing but Jesus. And they were so beautiful.

I wish I weren't here right now. I wish I was listening to them preach because they are wearing Jesus. They quit caring about what you think about them. They quit caring about their reputation and they started wearing Jesus' reputation. Beautiful. And the freedom they enjoy from it. It covers our reputation. It covers our perfectionism. It covers our shame. It covers our shame.

I heard a story this week about a man and a woman, fall in love, get married. And they are doing everything fine and then as their marriage starts drawing further and further away from her husband and becoming less and less affectionate and finally he says, "What is it? You have got to tell me right now. What are you so afraid of? What is it that makes you grow so cold to me in the bedroom? What is going on?"

And she said, "I can't tell you. I can't tell you."

And finally just kind of blurts out this story and of all the things that she has done and things that have been done to her in a life of absolute shame. And she looked at him and she said, "I feel dirty." And she went off and closed the door behind her.

And her husband left the house and he assumed it was to stay and he left to go to a department store and he went and found a full length bright white nightgown and he brought it back to her and he explained the gospel to her again and he said, "When you come into this bedroom, you wear this. You are clean in Christ. You are clean. You are wearing Jesus. He is clean for you."

That is what it means to wear Jesus and we forget that. We are one in Christ physically. We are one in Christ covenantally and we are one in Christ relationally. We are in him. We are God's son in him.

And that is something we have to remind ourselves of because it is hard to remember that. It is hard to remember what being in a relationship does to us.

I was married and had three, four kids in [?] and we bought a new minivan and we bought a minivan through the internet in Houston so I flew from Jackson, Mississippi to Houston and drove the van back and it was a 25 hour round trip. You know, all the things we had to do, it took 25 hours and so, you know, me being kind of the macho man guy, love that kind of stuff, you know, left the house at 5:30 in the morning, got back at six in the morning. Of course no sleep, tons of caffeine, I almost fell asleep on the road like 30 times.

And got home. Macho man. And the next day I began to be convicted of my sin because I did something that bachelors can do and if you know if you are bachelor and you want to go risk your life doing something stupid have at it. That's your business. But I had no right to jeopardize the life of my wife's husband. I had no right to jeopardize the life of

my children's daddy. And I was foolish. I forgot. I was thinking of myself as a bachelor. I forgot that being in this new relationship made me different. I couldn't just do what I wanted to do. You can't do that when you are a daddy, when you are a husband. You are something different.

You have got to learn to think of yourself as God's child. Stop thinking of yourself as his pet, stop thinking of yourself as his slave and think of yourself as his child, beloved, dear, precious, wanted.

Mother Teresa gave her life for the poor in the slums of Calcutta, was asked often about pain and she said, "The greatest pain in the world is not caused..." She said this all the time. "The greatest pain in the world is not caused by poverty. The greatest pain in the world is not caused by sickness. It is not even caused by hunger." She said, "The greatest pain in the world is the pain of being unwanted and that is a pain that we can all help to alleviate."

And that sounded really good so I thought I would throw it in, but it didn't really get to me. But after I heard that... about a month after I had that I was flipping the channels one night and I saw one of those hallmark movies. I hate those things, man, because I am such a softie, you know, and complete sucker for them. And I don't remember. All I remember was it had two black actresses, Cicily Tyson and Randy and evidently Randy was Cicily Tyson's daughter and, you know, I don't know. Evidently they didn't really like each other. I don't know what went on, but at the end of the thing Randy gets an award—and this is all I saw—Randy is getting an award. She is making a dramatic speech, of course, because it is a Hallmark movie.

And she says, "You know, I never wanted rewards. I never wanted awards. All I ever wanted in my life was for my mom to come into the bedroom and wake me up and tell me I am so glad you are my little girl. That is all I ever wanted."

I hate that kind of stuff because you are like, [?] I want to cry. I want to cry. But a lot of us are living our life in such a way to force somebody, to force somebody to look at us and say, "I want you. I am so glad you are my son. I am so glad you are my friend. I am so glad you exist." A lot of us are trying to force somebody to say that to us.

And what we have to do is reshape the way that we think about God to understand that he gave his Son for you. What else would he have to do to convince you that he is so glad you are his little girl? He is so glad you are alive. He wants you.

And we have to preach that message to ourselves and internalize it and let it change the way we understand ourselves and everything else that we [?]. You are not alone. You are not even yourself. You are in Christ.

Please pray with me.

