

# Ephesians 1:1-14

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 13 September 2020

Preacher: Paul Levy

[ 0 : 00 ] Welcome to my study. I'm really sorry I'm not with you. We hoped Ellie's Covid test. The results will be back in time.! Turn if you will to Ephesians chapter one and we're going to look at verses one to fourteen.

And I wonder when it was read to you did you notice that a phrase kept coming up again and again and again. It's the phrase in Christ or in him or in Christ Jesus. It's a phrase of enormous importance.

You can measure the importance by the amount of times that that little phrase comes up in the New Testament. It comes up over 200 times and so it's clearly central to the Christian gospel.

It's at the heart of the Christian religion those two words. And so this morning I want us to look at this little phrase in Christ.

Next Sunday morning I want to look at another little phrase. I want us to look at for Christ. And then the Sunday morning after I want us to look at through Christ. Just a little series that we get our bearings as to our relationship with Jesus Christ as his people.

[ 1 : 15 ] In Christ, for Christ, through Christ. And so I want to say something about the meaning of being in Christ and then the implications of being in Christ. And then I want to answer the question if I can.

How do I get united to Jesus Christ? So first of all the meaning of being in Christ. Then at verse 3. Paul says, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing.

He says to the Corinthians, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. What doesn't it mean?

It doesn't mean that we are somehow inside of Christ. I think that's often how this is taught and how we understand it. But it's not that. It's not as if Christ contains the believer.

It rather means that to be united to Christ, to be in Christ, is to be in the closest possible kind of personal relationship.

[ 2 : 26 ] And we know that that's what it means. Because the New Testament gives us the best illustrations of what it means to be in Christ. One is from the Lord Jesus and one is from the Apostle Paul.

Jesus' illustration is in John 15. And the illustration he gives is the vine which has branches joined to it by a living union. I am the vine, says Jesus.

You are the branches. Jesus tells us the only way that you can bear fruit in the Christian life depends on being in me. Being in union with me.

Illustration Paul uses is that of a body which has limbs joined to it by a living union. It joins us in Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 12. And if you put both of those pictures together, you get the Christian as limbs in the body and Christ is the head.

The controlling centre of the body. And so one of these two illustrations teach us about the meaning of this phrase that Paul uses again and again and again and again to describe what a Christian is.

[ 3 : 31 ] One of these two illustrations teach us. They teach us, first of all, that the only way that the life of God flows through us is by us being united to Jesus.

As branches are united to a vine. As limbs are united to a body. And so that is what we mean when we say that someone is in Christ. They are united to him.

And they have all their life from him. Second thing is that these two illustrations teach us that the very same life that is in the vine is in the branches.

And the very same life that is in the bodies and the limbs. And so if you cut the trunk of a vine, you will see the sap, won't you, rising up.

And if you cut a branch, a living branch that is united to the vine, you will see that same sap. Same sap that will be in the branch will be in the vine.

[ 4 : 38 ] If you cut a limb, and it will bleed, won't it? And it will bleed with exactly the same blood that courses through the head and the body.

The same life that is in every limb is in the body itself. Now you see what this means. What is a Christian? It's mind-boggling. A Christian is somebody, the Apostle Paul is telling us in this little phrase, in Christ, is somebody who has the very life of Jesus Christ flowing through her or him. Flowing out of every possible area of life. That's what a Christian is. In the 17th century, there was a remarkable little book published. It was a booklet, really.

And it was written by a man who died at the age of 28. He died, he was already a professor of divinity in the University of Aberdeen.

His name was Henry Scougal. And the title of the book was *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. And what he was doing was answering real confusion in his age, where people thought that what it means to be a Christian, well, it was to be part of the institution of the church.

[ 5 : 52 ] Or it was having the ceremonies of the church in which they participated. Or it was doing acts of righteousness, which they performed. And Henry Scougal says, no, to be a Christian is essentially this.

It is to have the very life of God in you. So that people see the life of God flowing out through you. The booklet had the most remarkable influence on the most remarkable people.

John Newton, the slave trader who became a Christian and then became a minister and a great hymn writer. And he greatly influenced William Wilberforce.

He did a crucial influence on Thomas Chalmers, that brilliant theologian and pastor and churchman who did so much for Scotland. John and Charles Wesley, the fathers of Methodism, were highly influenced.

And Charles Wesley gave it to George Whitefield. George Whitefield was then a student and he was seeking God in Oxford. He was possibly the greatest preacher this country has ever known.

[ 6 : 52 ] And he became a Christian through reading the life of God and the soul of man. Why? As far as we can understand, what brought him to the Lord Jesus was that he suddenly realised that Christianity was not about going to an institutional church.

It was not outward membership of any organisation. It was not performing good acts of righteousness. It was not participating in the ceremonies.

It was the life of God in your life. And George Whitefield was driven to Christ to seek what only Christ could give him. Newness of life.

None of us, I hope, think church is unimportant. None of us, I hope, think the sacraments are unimportant. Jesus himself commanded them. None of us, I hope, think that personal righteousness and holiness and good works and social justice are unimportant.

But I want to say to you, they can be like an empty box from which the jewel has been taken.

[ 7 : 59 ] The jewel is Jesus Christ. They can be like a cup. But no wine in the cup. The wine is Jesus Christ.

But Christian experience is being so united to the Lord Jesus that his life is found in us. That's why when somebody becomes a Christian, there is a transformation that takes place.

And what is it that you begin to see? You see Jesus. That's what people will sometimes say to me. They say I've been struggling to live up to this kind of standard.

As far as I could, I kept failing. But I've been given a new nature. And I've been given a new desire and new ambitions and a new interest. And what has happened?

What has happened in you? You have the life of God in the soul of man. That's what's happened. And that's why the phrase is so important.

[ 9 : 07 ] I want you to see the indispensable necessity of it. Can you see that? That if you cannot receive the life of God any other way than by being united to him, then the most important thing in all the worlds is that I should be united to Jesus Christ.

That I should be in him. Like a branch is united to a vine. Like a limb is united to a body. And so the most important question is not whether I accept and agree with Jesus' teaching.

It's not do I try to follow his ways as best as I can. Or do I have an association with him through baptism and the Lord's Supper? And with the church? The question is, am I united to Jesus Christ?

So that the life of Jesus is seen in me. And that's the indispensable necessity of it. But can you also see the immeasurable and innumerable blessings of this union?

Can you see that? Look at chapter 1 and verse 3 how Paul puts it. He says, blessed be, praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing.

[10:27] What he's speaking about, in other words, is so great, so wonderful that he cries out in praise to God.

He doesn't simply sit down and he says, let me give you the first point on my PowerPoint. This is what union with Jesus Christ is. It means being in him. And this is what it implies. And this is why it is important.

Now, do you notice? Can you get the tone of the passage? He breaks out into doxology and worship and praise. He's overwhelmed. He's out of his depth.

By the blessings that derive from union with Christ. And so his praise flows out of him. And it flows out of him in such a way that in the Greek, in verses 3 to 14, it's actually all just one sentence.

He doesn't draw breath. And the reason for that is why once Paul starts, he finds it impossible to stop. You know that, don't you? You know a child comes in and they've been somewhere. They're really excited.

[11:32] And they want to share it with the rest of the family. And they say there was this and there was that. And there was this other thing. And this person said that. And it was so funny. And they keep on going.

And they keep on going. And we have to say, don't we, take a breath. Hang on a minute. But Paul, in this passage, he can't take a breath. He's so overwhelmed.

By the wonder of what it means to be in Christ. That it just flows on out of him without pause. Now what he does is he clarifies to us what these blessings are.

So secondly, let's see the implications of being in Christ. And we'll see first general implications. And then we'll kind of zone in particular implications. So generally, what are these spiritual blessings?

That is it, actually. They are spiritual blessings. They're not primarily material blessings. Now, there's no question, is it, that when we, when God comes to us in the Lord Jesus and he unites us to him, he blesses us.

[12:36] And he gives us multitudes of material blessings. But the real blessing of the gospel are not material things. But they are spiritual blessings.

And he underlines that, really, in the phrase that comes at the end of verse 3. That he's blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

And if you go through Ephesians, you'll find that phrase again and again and again it comes up. It's one of the big themes. And that phrase doesn't mean in the sky above us.

It doesn't mean in heaven at the end of time when we die. It's really a way of speaking about the world of spiritual reality. The world for which we were created.

And for which God formed us and made us. And this is the realm in which God blesses his people in union with Jesus Christ.

[13:34] And it's very significant that we as Christian people, I think we've stopped thinking about this. And so when we talk about how God has blessed us, you know, somebody says to another, the Lord has blessed us so wonderfully.

What do we normally mean when we say that? If we talk about the blessings of God, we normally talk about them with health or possessions or freedom from difficulties or deliverance from something or family or a great holiday and so on.

And we say God blessed us. How good God has been. Now is that right? Of course it's right. It's really right to be grateful to God for those blessings.

But what I want to say to you this morning is that they are not the essential blessings of the gospel. The essential blessings of the gospel are such that you are enriched and blessed even if you're dying of a deadly disease.

Even if you haven't got two pence in the world. Even if you're really, really struggling in work.

Whether you're like Job and you've been in the midst of tragedy.

[15:06] Maybe your feelings this morning, you're unhappy. And I need to say to you that the real blessings of the gospel are spiritual blessings.

They are in the spiritual realm. For which we were created. The great sickness of the world around us is that men and women have been made by God.

Genesis 2.7. God breathed into the nostrils of Adam and made him into a living being. A living soul. And the great sickness of human beings is that we imagine that we're just like the animals. And so we therefore think it's the material things.

It's the things of this world that will satisfy us. And so we create endless wreckage in our society by living in that way. And Jesus is so emphatic.

[16:07] He says to you and I, he says, lay up treasures. Where? In heaven. What he's really meaning there is not some kind of otherworldly, give all your money away, live like paupers.

He's not saying that. What he's saying to you there is enjoy this world, but prize spiritual blessings above everything else. And I need to say that to my own soul.

Well, as I read God's word that in Jesus Christ, God has blessed us in the heavenly realms with spiritual blessings. Prize spiritual blessings.

Set your heart on them. Not on things that moth and rust corrupt or thieves can break in and steal. Things which decay over time and suddenly leave you desperately poor.

Prize spiritual blessings. Thanks, general thing that Paul says. Not only are these blessings spiritual blessings, but all these blessings are in Christ.

[17:10] And that's the importance of the phrase in the next place. It's that there are no spiritual blessings outside of Jesus. He is our wisdom.

He is our righteousness. He is our sanctification. He is our redemption. All the riches of God are found in Jesus Christ.

And it's in him. In him. That we find all the spiritual blessings that God has for us. And so we dare not spend our time and our energies.

Or some kind of looking for blessing in other places. There is no way to seek Christ. That's why in Philippians chapter 3, Paul's burning ambition.

Do you remember what it is? That I may know him. Because every spiritual blessing is in him. So the vital thing, isn't it? Is to be united to him.

[18:12] And to set your heart. To set our hearts as a congregation on knowing him more and more and more. But then Paul kind of zones in.

He particularizes these blessings. There are several. We're just going to summarize them. It's an amazing passage. So look at the central blessing of the Christian gospel.

The central blessing of the Christian gospel is free grace. Notice that in verse 6. Free grace is the central blessing of the gospel.

Why? Well it's because we're unable to get any of the blessings that God has for us in Christ on our own. You've got no means of purchasing the blessings of God.

You've got no means of earning them. No matter how hard you work. No matter how rich you are. You can never deserve them. You and I are utterly dependent on God giving them to us.

[19:36] And that is why the central blessing of the Christian gospel is free grace. So the reformers said. Didn't they? They taught us that all the blessings of the gospel come to us in Christ alone.

By grace alone. Through faith alone. So Paul says we praise his glorious grace. Which he's freely given us in the beloved.

That is in Christ. The blessing of free grace is the first particular blessing of being in Christ. The second is the blessing of sonship.

Verses 4 and 5. He chose us in him before the foundation of the world. The creation of the world. To be holy and blameless in his sight before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself. As sons through Jesus Christ. According to the purpose of his will. In Christ. In Christ. God has chosen a family. That's what he's saying.

[20:36] In Christ. God has come and he's given us a new status. But before. We were outcasts. From God's presence.

We were rebels against his law. But now he's made us his children. And he's given us the status of being sons and daughters of the living God.

And to Paul that's one of the most wonderful things in all the world. We live don't we in a society that is obsessed with self-worth.

And does all sorts of things to give itself self-worth and status. And the world is craving self-worth. But I want to say to you this morning.

And I need to say to you this morning. That the one thing. That will do something for your self-worth. Is when you begin to understand. What it means to be a child of God.

[ 21 : 40 ] That you've been chosen by God to belong to him. And you have all the privileges of access to him. Of being joined with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you are a co-inheritor. Of the glorious riches of God with him. And in him. And to Paul there's no status in the world like that. And the third particular blessing is the blessing of salvation. Look at verse 7. In him we have redemption through his blood. The forgiveness of our trespass. According to the riches of his grace. So how do we receive. How do you receive liberation. And deliverance from the bondage of sin. How do you be freed from the guilt that you struggle with. And the answer is by being united to Jesus Christ. And so they are.

Too briefly. The innumerable blessings. Of being in Christ. And of course there's multitudes of them beyond all telling. But the most important question. For some of you this morning.

[ 22 : 40 ] Is the last one. And that is how do you become. How do you come to be united to Christ. How do you get to be in Christ. What's the beginning.

And Paul. Speaks to this group of people. And he addresses. Them as those who are in Ephesus. And in Christ. And in Corinthians.

He speaks of those in Corinth. And in Christ. He's not speaking about all the people of the Corinthians. And all the Ephesians. He's speaking about the community of God's people. Speaking about the church.

And so how do you become members of that community. How do you. Be united to Christ. Well Paul speaks about that in verse 13. And he writes to the Ephesians.

And then he says. In him you also. When you heard the word of truth. The gospel of your salvation. And believed in him.

[ 23 : 38 ] You were sealed. With the promised. Holy Spirit. You heard the word of truth. You believed the good news.

Of salvation. And you were marked. In him with a seal. The promised Holy Spirit. How then did it happen. For those of us who are united with Christ.

Well there's a number of answers to that question. Isn't it. One answer is. That we become united to Christ. By God's sovereign purpose. Before the foundation of the world. But what he speaks about. Particularly in verse 13 here. Is that. The union that brings us. To be into Christ. Is a faith union. That is.

You were included in Christ. When you shared the word of truth. You believed the gospel of your salvation. And having believed in him. You were marked with. The seal of the promised Holy Spirit.

[ 24 : 38 ] And so. Whenever the apostles were preaching the gospel. They were asked by people like the Philippian jailer. What must I do to be saved? And the answer was. Believe into. The Lord Jesus Christ.

And you will be saved. And the union between. Christ and the believer. Is a faith union. And we believe.

Into the Lord Jesus Christ. And we put our faith. In Christ. And unless we put our. Faith in Christ. Unless we believe in him. And trust in him. He is of no benefit to us. But when we believe. Into the Lord Jesus Christ.

And God unites us. To Jesus Christ. Through faith. Then I have every spiritual blessing. In him. And so I take.

[ 25 : 35 ] All my needs. And I cast myself. Utterly upon God's riches. And mercy. And grace. In Jesus Christ. And I throw myself on him.

That's why it's so. So crucial. And so. The great question. As we close. Is this. Are you in Christ this morning?

Are you united to him? As a branch is to a vine. And as a limb is to a body. Are you in Christ? Are you trusting him?

Are you trusting him? Have you put your faith. In him? Because there is.

No other question. In the whole wide world. That could possibly be half as important as this. Is there? And so you need to be clear on it. Let's pray together.

[ 26 : 39 ] Amen. Thank you. Gracious Father. For the endless. And unsearchable. And innumerable blessings.

That are ours in Christ Jesus. And we marvel that you unite us through him. And we pray that in our need. You will bring us afresh to the Lord Jesus. Those of us who believed on him. That you would give us a hanger after him. To seek him with all our heart. Those who have never been united to Christ by faith. We pray that you would lead them to pray to you. And grant that they may be given your grace. And that wonderful reality of being united to Jesus. And so help us Lord. We ask to cast ourselves upon your grace and your kindness. And we ask it for the glory of Jesus name. Amen.