



+ This Sunday at Magdalen Road church we continued our series in Paul's letter to the Colossians. We began by thinking about different ways we use to describe being Christians. For example we talked about being 'saved', making a 'decision for Christ', 'following Jesus' or simply by being a 'believer'. What is striking though as you read Paul's letters particularly, is the way that he often describes being a Christian. Whilst all the things above are true, a phrase that Paul uses again and again and again, perhaps we don't use so much, is the idea of being **in Christ**. Theologians would call this the idea of union with Christ.

+ Union with Christ starts the Christian life and changes everything.

We tried an analogy to help us to see the importance of being in Christ. Imagine rather than being stuck in Oxford at half term you are at Heathrow airport ready to board and fly to Spain. What relationship do you need with the plane outside for you to get to where you want to go? Do you need to be for example, under the authority of the plane? Perhaps inspired by the plane? Or perhaps even following the plane? Of course not you need to be **in** the plane! The question did you get to Spain will then be part of the larger question 'did the plane get to Spain?' If the answer to that is yes, and you are on the plane, then you also would've arrived in Spain!

At its heart the biblical idea of being 'in Christ' is something like that-through faith in Jesus Christ we become united to him and so we are 'in him'. This means that whatever is true of Jesus is also true of us. One theologian but it like this "union with Christ is the Christian life is not some small particular blessing that might go along side the key blessings of the gospel. No union with Christ is the Christian life".

From v6-7 in the passage you see that when we receive Christ Jesus as Lord, then we are joined to him and found 'in him'. Paul uses at least four different pictures or descriptions to help us see the difference that union with Jesus makes, but also some of the implications it has for the way we have to think about ourselves now and for the kind of life we ought to be living.

-V11 - we have been **circumcised** by Christ. Circumcision in the Bible is a littoral cutting off of flash what Paul says here though is that as Jesus's body was torn away at the cross was so our sinful nature our sinful self ruled by the flash with him has also been cut away and put off. In him our old selves have been circumcised.

-V12 - we have been raised with him through **baptism**. As we receive Christ is Lord believe and I baptised so it's as if as we go down into the water we die with Christ and I buried with him but then as we come out of the water so we rise again to new life with him. It's as if we die with him on good Friday but then I raised again with him on Easter Sunday.

-V 13 we have been made **alive** with him. We were dead in our sins we were uncircumcised enough flash but now we have been made and live with God in Christ.

-V 14 a new life comes because we **no longer are in debt to God** our creator and our judge. The picture Paul paints is of us being stood before a holy and good God in court, totally guilty and in debt to him as the creator and judge of the universe. We deserve everything coming to us except we didn't deserve forgiveness and

grace, and yet in Christ he cancelled the charges against us, paying them himself for us. In so doing he disarmed the spiritual powers and authorities including Satan. All his weapons of fear guilt condemnation and accusation are taken away for those in Christ, because Jesus took them for us.

We noted two brief points of application here:

- None of these things are urgent they are simply by nature of our union with Christ. Nothing we do you can change how God feels about us we are loved because we are in Christ.
- We are now completely different and alive. We have life in him because we have been baptised in him circumcised by him made alive with him and forgiven by him.

+ Union with Christ is all you need and so continue in him.

The truth above are not simply for baby Christians in the nursery, but truths that we need for the entirety of our lives. Paul is urging us and the Colossians to **continue** to live our lives in him V6. This is the language of architecture-when building a structure you need solid foundations well so the Colossians have their roots in christ but it's as if they are looking elsewhere for them to grow up. That makes no sense! But in V8-as we've seen in previous weeks it seems there is a group within Colossae seeking to lead them astray-the whispering of false teachers supposedly drawing them on but actually away from Christ.

In Paul's day pagan spirituality would involve local diet is associated with various parts of creation e.g. farming. Little God is in charge of different things you could be placated or pleased by what you do, the sacrifices you offer. Yet what Paul is saying is that their preoccupation with rules or driving them back to their pagan worship in the past-hollow and deceptive philosophy is that depend upon human tradition. Strikingly He includes some of the Jewish worship and tradition within this as they re-adopt those things however good they were at the appropriate time it is in fact join them back into a pagan world for you-synching up with their pre-Christian muscle memory. And anyway why would they want to do that V9-10? - they have fullness because they are in Christ, and in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives. We talked about roast dinners and crumbles here. If you're full (which they are!) you don't need to go to McDonald's for a big Mac!

The question for us though, is if V9-10 are true, then why are our Christian lives so mediocre? Why do we find living for Christ so hard, still struggling with sin each day?

At this point we each picked a project for the next few weeks - an opportunity to really ground these truth in areas of our lives where we are not satisfied. Examples may include getting angry with people. Perhaps a lack of self control that means we self-medicate to numb the pain (eg through food or alcohol, shopping, pornography or self harm).

The plan each week is to consider our project through the lens of the verses in front of us. How do Paul's words to the Colossians help us?

We noted two things for this week that we will build upon in future weeks

1. Paul's preferred name of Jesus in this letter seems to be **Christ**. That is not a surname but a title. He is wanting to remind and emphasise the Christian is having new citizenship as we live with a new king in charge. We are people who have received him as Lord. Welcome to the Realm where Christ reigns supreme.
2. We are to stay **connected** to Christ by faith. How could we go anywhere else? Where else could we find power when as the head everything is under him? We are totally new people now. We have been circumcised in him V 11-our whole road by the flesh self has been put off.V 12 we have been baptised with him. V 13 we have new life in him and when we feel ashamed and condemned because we've mucked up again then V 14 a debt to guard has been paid.

The danger is we (1) either forget the reality of the old being gone and so live as we used to. Or else (2) we try and do more to deal with arson but three methods that depend on human tradition. Looking inside for strength and implementing rules, regulations and rituals. What we need to do though is remember who he is and see who we now are as we live our lives in him.

If in Jesus the fullness of God lives and if we are joined to him then we have all we need.

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Here are some questions for your group as always please feel free to adapt for the people in the room

Brainstorm what you can remember so far from Colossians.

Have you ever heard of union with Christ before? What do you understand it to mean? Do you agree that it 'is the Christian life'? Why or why not?

What examples does Paul give of how we are new creations? V11-V14. What point is he making do you think? How does this help us as we seek to live the Christian life? How does this change questions of image and identity?

What would you say to somebody who was unsure as to whether they had been forgiven by God?

How is union with Christ not simply the way into the Christian life, but also the way on?

What does it mean that we have been brought to fullness V10? Do you feel full? Why or why not?

As appropriate please encourage your group to discuss perhaps impairs your project for the next few weeks. How does remembering Christ as our king and loads hopeless? How does remembering that we are now alive in him help us?

Please note that these projects will be built upon, there are no doubt questions - But this week was foundational as we were simply seeking to use this passage to begin to help us.