

“How shall we then live?” Series #1

IN UNION WITH JESUS

Introduction:

We are all here because we are God’s people, followers of Jesus Christ. We confess “Jesus Christ” as “my Lord”.

We have a sense of calling to share our faith with others and to be involved in God’s work.

So we are here as “God’s servants” – who will be involved in a variety of Christian ministries. But we are also “God’s children”, as “followers of Jesus”.

This means that we have more to think about than just the challenge to share our faith with others. As followers of Jesus, we have the challenge to keep going and keep growing up in Jesus, to keep pressing on in our faith and not to fall away or to slide back into the world. Cf. Demas – 2 Tim.4:10.

This is not something that we can and should take lightly, as if it is something that can be assumed without any carefulness. cf. “See to it”, “Take care”: Heb.3:12; 8:5; 12:15,25.

We are living in “the evil day”: Eph.5:17; 6:10f. We cannot just drift along in the Christian life. We are called to be serious followers of Jesus – not half-hearted or occasional followers of Jesus. The enemy is looking for such so that he can snatch away and corrupt the seed, the word of truth that has been sown in their hearts.

Jesus told His disciples that only those who endure to the end will be saved. See Matt.24:13. We recognise that in the days ahead, there will be intense and severe testings. See 2 Tim.3:1 ff; 1 Peter 4:17.

Jesus Himself said in Matt.7 that the gate into God's kingdom is "narrow", which speaks of difficulty to enter into the kingdom of God. Of people who do all sorts of things for God, see Matt.7:21 but who in the end are not welcomed.

So we need to continually pay attention to our Christian walk. Just as much as I need to continually stir up love for my wife and she for me. Love that is not nurtured will eventually die!

Testimony: The more I walk the Christian way, the more I realise that these are important warnings. Why? Because the older I become, the more I see of the sinfulness of my own heart. What does this say to me? If I am left to myself to make it through the Christian life – left to my own commitment and dedication, then there is little hope. My heart turns away from following Christ so easily. I CANNOT DO IT BY MYSELF.

So if all we have to think about is how hard the Christian way is, then I must and would feel very troubled and afraid.

So then, how are we to press on and keep going in the Christian life? Not just so that we might finish off, but even more importantly, that we might run well and finish well – so that we cross the finish line, not as defeated soldiers but as those who run well to the end.

Paul's testimony: 1Cor.9:27; Phil.3:10-12. See Acts 20:24; 2 Tim.4:6-7.

This is the question that we will wrestle with on Wednesday mornings (except for two fasting days), the issue of our own personal walk with God:

- ◆ How can I keep going . . . growing in my Christian faith?
- ◆ How can I live in this world for the glory of God growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus, going from strength to strength?

The title I've given to this series is: "HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?"

Common Thoughts & Responses:

Many Christians respond to this question by referring to the many things that Christians should or ought "to do" or not to do. Mostly these are "rules and regulations" that have to do with a Christian's performance in the Christian life.

Examples:

- ◆ Spiritual disciplines like reading the Bible, praying, fasting etc.
- ◆ Going to church (religious duties)
- ◆ Wearing certain clothes
- ◆ Doing good to others
- ◆ Trying to live by the golden rule

These have largely to do with what happens on the outside – the externals. This is the kind of thinking that plagued the religious leaders of Jesus' day, especially the Pharisees: self-righteousness, becoming holy by keeping to rules, rather than by accepting God's gift of true righteousness.

Of course it is very important that we Christians live in a way that honours God, and to guard against living in the ways of the people who do not know God. Many things are written down in the Scriptures about the way we are not to live (eg Gal.5:19-21) so that we might inherit the prize. Of course the Bible speaks about the moral commands of God that we are all obligated as Christians to follow.

But is this the way we are to grow up in the faith? Do we grow by keeping to the Law? Or is that the response of God's people who have been changed by God and given a new heart? Cf. Ez.36:26,27.

Those Christians who believe that God's way to grow us in the faith is by our following God's commands/laws believe that if we do our part, hopefully God will do His part. We must try to go as far as we can, and then when we can't go any further,

or we're run out of our own spiritual energies, we then must call out to God to help us finish the race. Which means of course that there could be some really strong and committed Christians who with all their self-disciplines and zeal may be actually able to make it through to the end without the final "help!" call to God.

This belief and outlook for living and growing in the Christian life is founded upon a strong belief in one's SELF. It is nothing more than a spiritualised form of SELF-EFFORT. "I should be able to do it, if I try hard enough and keep to the Christian rules. And in this way, I will become a strong Christian."

No, you will become one of two kinds of Christians: a proud Christian who prides himself/herself in being able to make the grade by their own hard, self-fought efforts; or a total failure of Christian who tries and falls, and tries again and falls, and re-commits his/her life again and goes well for a while, and then falls.

Is that the way that God has set down for us to walk the Christian walk? Is pride or miserable failure God's norm for our Christian lives? NO! There is another way. But we cannot come to this way unless we are prepared within our own hearts to let go of our own dependence for living and growing on self-effort. We must repent from this (and we'll talk more about "repentance" in a few weeks time).

See Col.2:6,7. Compare: Gal.2:16,17; 3:1ff.

The wonderful truth is that we came into the Christian family because of the work of Christ, and we continue on in the Christian way because of the work of Christ.

See 1 Cor.1:30: "*But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."*" ¹

¹*The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

³⁰ »But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption: ³¹that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” 2

The answer to our question: How in God’s plan are we to keep going, and to keep growing? God’s way and answer is: HE HAS PLANNED THAT WE GROW TOGETHER IN UNION WITH CHRIST.

Two or three key words in 1 Cor.1:30 are: righteousness, holiness and redemption. What do these words mean?

STUDY OF PAUL’S EXPRESSION “IN CHRIST”:

“In Christ” (like a “formula” for expressing a relationship) is a very special and loved expression from the pen of the apostle Paul. It is a very important phrase used 76 times in the NT, mostly by Paul. (This does not include other similar expressions such as “in the Lord” or “in Him who empowers me”, eg. Phil.4:13.)

It is therefore very important that we understand the message that the Spirit of God through the apostle is seeking to bring to us.

To understand it, we have to, first, talk a little about language and translator difficulties.

When we begin to learn another language, we soon discover that a very simple word can have more than one meaning; in fact, that one word may have a wide variety of meanings in different contexts.

21901 American Standard Version, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1994.

One such common word in Greek is the preposition “en”. It sounds very much like our English word “in” and that is one of its meanings. So it can mean something as simple as “in the room”. But it has other meanings: on, at, by, & with.

A language such as Greek is very rich and so it takes more than just a simple looking up a dictionary to find out the basic meaning of a word to know what how it should be understood. We need to go further and deeper.

This is the case with the use in Rom.3:24. We may think that Paul is speaking about something “spacial” = that we are somewhere spacially in the literal body of Christ. Whereas the meaning of this Greek preposition in this particular instance “denotes a close personal relationship”. Perhaps it can be compared to a person saying in our language: “I have you always in my heart”. By this we mean that that person will often have strong feelings in our innermost spirit for that person no matter where we are.

In other words, the Scriptures teach us through the use of this phrase “in Christ” or “in the Lord” that God has placed us into a personal and intimate relationship with Christ, a relationship with Christ that is so close that it is described with such an expression of close, personal relationship – just as Jesus’ relationship with His Father could be described as His being “in the Father”. Cf. John 5:38 “And you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent.”³

It is also important to note that this Pauline formula is especially common with verbs that denote a conviction, hope etc. (See Gal.5:10; Phil.1:14; 2 Thess.3:4; Rom.15:17; 14:14; Phil.2:19; Rom.15:17; Phil.4:2; Eph.6:1.)

Summarising.

Some of the aspects of our being “in Christ” as God’s people include . . .

- ◆ life in Christ Rom.6:11,23
- ◆ love in Christ Rom.8:39

³*The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

- ◆ grace which is given in Christ 1 Cor.1:4
- ◆ freedom in Christ Gal.2:4
- ◆ blessing in Christ Gal.3:14
- ◆ unity in Christ Gal.3:28

WHAT IS GOD’S MESSAGE OF ENCOURAGEMENT FROM HIS WORD?

God the Father has placed us into union with Jesus. This was His divine work. We live because of Him. His life pulsates through our spiritual veins.

When we put our trust in God’s work accomplished through Christ, God credits to our account all of Christ’s righteousness. Hence we can say that He is OUR righteousness. God has exchanged our unrighteousness with the righteousness of Jesus. See 2 Cor.5:21.

Instead of being our “dead in our trespasses & sins” Ephesians 2:1-3

1 AND you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4

we are now alive in Christ. Ephesians 2:4-7

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 5

*4*The New American Standard Bible, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

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This isn't theory. This isn't even just a theological statement of truth though it is that. It is God-spoken FACT. This is the vital foundation of our living for Christ – living IN CHRIST. Living THROUGH CHRIST. There is NO OTHER WAY for us to make it – HE IS ALIVE IN US IN ORDER TO LIVE HIS LIFE THROUGH US. Not our best for Him, but God's work in and through us.

This gives us so much assurance that we will make it through to the end. According to God's Word, God has hid us together "in Christ".

The perfect tense of the Greek verb tells us that this is something that has happened in the past but has continuing significance on into the present and future. So here we read that together with Christ we have been hid in God = in this most intimate and personal relationship. (cf. John 5:24.)

Compare that to the aorist tense of "you died". A moment of time in the past when we died. When was that? When Christ died, we died. So when He was raised to life from the dead, we also were raised to life "together with Him". See Rom.6:1-10; John 14:18,19.

Can this really be true? Do I have such a secure place "in Christ"? Or am I in reality "in and out" of Christ all in the same day, even the same hour depending upon my staying in touch with God and obeying His commands? Is it a matter of my holding on to Him? Or is it His having put me where I need not be afraid and that there He is holding on to me?

See Psalm 91:1; 1 John 5:18; John 10:27-30; 2 Tim.1:12

Here is the glorious truth – what God has said. We are "in Christ". This is the strong and enduring foundation stone of truth for our entire Christian pilgrimage.

So what? What action or response is our responsibility?

- ◆ To believe what the Scripture says about our relationship with Jesus; which can be expressed as "resting" in Jesus – to continually bring it to mind as the enemy fills our minds with his lies; cf. "Jesus, I am resting, resting...."

- ◆ To draw near to Jesus – to Jesus Himself. Not just to His Word, nor to some other thing connected with Him. Rather that our focus may be upon Jesus Himself. See Eph.2:20. To delight ourselves in keeping company/fellowship with Jesus; and to hate anything that hurts or distracts or threatens to destroy this intimate fellowship and relationship with Him. (In this way, we can interpret the words of Jesus about our love and devotion for Him must be so intense that it appears as if we “hate” other human beings in comparison, eg our family. Not about neglect of family responsibility, but about the first priority.
- ◆ To abide in Jesus – remain in Him. Never to forsake Him. Never to let go of Him or allow anything to come between Him and us so as to cut us off from Him. To hold on to Jesus – to give Him the foremost attention of our lives. Which means that we must not allow any other relationships, other “things” etc. to become an idol that threatens our primary relationship with Jesus.

Conclusion:

WE LIVE BECAUSE OF JESUS, AND WE LIVE BECAUSE OF OUR LIFE-UNION WITH HIM. This is the foundation of our Christian lives and our growth and perseverance as a believer.

Just as much as we continue existing in this world because God gives us breath to breathe, so we continue breathing spiritually because God has placed His spiritual breath (the Spirit of Christ) within us. The moment we stop breathing, that moment we die. So the moment we stop drawing our spiritual life’s breath from Jesus, that moment we begin to die spiritually.

The FACT is: God has through the life of Christ breathed into our innermost beings the very breath of God. We now live because the living Spirit of God and of Christ lives within us. We have inherited God’s divine nature – 2 Peter 1:3ff.

He has made us come alive, and He keeps us alive. And we live by faith in Him. That’s the next part.

Comment based on Roy Hession's book, We would see Jesus, chapter 7, "Seeing Jesus as the Way".

See to know God through knowing Christ – through Christ who is the Way. By placing our faith and hope in Him and what He did for us when we were without hope (Rom.5:8).

God has not left us to fend by ourselves but has made a Way. From that point on, we are to grow "in union with Jesus".

JESUS is God's Way – both into God's kingdom, and also for every step we walk along the Christian way until we meet God face to face.

It is not – God saves me, but then after that it's up to me and all the energies I can muster up to save myself by myself. JESUS is the Way. We begin the journey with Him and we walk through Him and with Him all the way. HE is the One who saves us in the past, present and the future. There is no other way that will guarantee our reaching heaven's shores.

New Testament verses: “in Christ”

Directions: Read through as many of the verses below as you can, noting what particular message that the apostle Paul and Peter are giving to God’s people about their unique and glorious relationship “in Christ”. Make some brief notes of your thoughts beside each verse you read. Meditate on these truths. Let God’s truth sink in deeply to both mind and spirit.

Ro 3:24	2 Co 5:17	Php 4:7
Ro 6:11	2 Co 5:19	Php 4:19
Ro 6:23	2 Co 12:2	Php 4:21
Ro 8:1	2 Co 12:19	Col 1:2
Ro 8:2	Ga 1:22	Col 1:4
Ro 8:39	Ga 2:4	Col 1:28
Ro 9:1	Ga 2:17	1 Th 2:14
Ro 12:5	Ga 3:14	1 Th 4:16
Ro 15:17	Ga 3:26	1 Th 5:18
Ro 16:3	Ga 3:28	1 Ti 1:14
Ro 16:7	Eph 1:1	1 Ti 3:13
Ro 16:9	Eph 1:3	2 Ti 1:1
Ro 16:10	Eph 2:6	2 Ti 1:9
1 Co 1:2	Eph 2:7	2 Ti 1:13
1 Co 1:4	Eph 2:10	2 Ti 2:1
1 Co 1:30	Eph 2:13	2 Ti 2:10
1 Co 3:1	Eph 3:6	2 Ti 3:12
1 Co 4:10	Eph 3:21	2 Ti 3:15
1 Co 4:15	Eph 4:32	Phm 8
1 Co 4:17	Php 1:1	Phm 20
1 Co 15:18	Php 1:13	Phm 23
1 Co 15:19	Php 1:26	1 Pe 3:16
1 Co 15:31	Php 2:1	1 Pe 5:10
1 Co 16:24	Php 2:5	1 Pe 5:14
2 Co 2:17	Php 3:3	
2 Co 3:14	Php 3:14	