

III. Belonging to Christ: Can we be at home in Jesus?

Aim: Understand how believers are identified with Christ, share in the life and fellowship of the Trinity in Christ and are part of the church as the body of Christ.

Review:

We spent last week's meeting by looking deeply at our union with Christ. I hope you went home that night with a deeper understanding of the gospel. Jesus really is the gospel. There is no single aspect of our christian faith and life of which union with Christ is not the centre. We place our trust in him and receive every blessing of God from him. What a saviour he is. To give us his Holy Spirit and bind us to himself. He is so wonderful.

This week I we will look at what it means to belong to Christ. We will ask ourselves the question "**can we be at home in Jesus?**"

Maybe you don't know what to make of this question, or you're going "yeah, of course we can!" Whatever your immediate thoughts are, I believe that this topic is really relevant for us.

One reason is that our hearts are complicated. In your life you will mess up and sin and then feel like you've disqualified yourself and that God no longer loves you. And you'll wonder if you were ever saved at all. To know that we belong to Jesus and seeing that in the Bible will be a great help for us when our own hearts condemn us.

Here's a second reason: When we learn that we belong to Jesus and that we are identified with him, then all the other voices that want to tell us who we are become silent. Jesus defines who we are. When we define ourselves by anything other, we will be left anxious, feeling like imposters, feeling like failures **or** thinking we are the greatest person to ever walk on the face of the earth – depending on how our day is going.

When we belong to Jesus, we have a solid identity in him, that cannot be taken away.

We will look at three topics that relate to our belonging to Christ: 1. Our identity in Christ; 2. Our relationship with the Trinity; 3. Our belonging to the Church.

3.1. Our identity in Christ:

Does anybody know why Christians call themselves “Christians” and not for example “The Followers” or something else?

In the book of acts we first encounter this description for the disciples of Jesus:

Acts 11:26: And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

As the first followers of Jesus arrived in Antioch the people there noticed about them that they are ALL ABOUT this Christ. They just won’t stop talking about him. And so, the people of Antioch identify them as “Christians” because that’s what they are: They follow his teachings, they worship him as the son of God, and they keep talking about him.

Now, currently there are streams in Christianity that prefer to call themselves “followers”, “disciples”, or “the way”. None of that is wrong in and of itself. But I think that to call yourself a “Christian” is to express something that is profound: Namely, your union with Christ. It expresses that all that you are, you are in union with Jesus.

In Galatians 2 Paul expresses our identity in Jesus beautifully:

Galatians 2:20: ²⁰ **I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.** And the life I now live in the flesh **I live by faith in the Son of God**, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Last week we spoke about how Jesus has done for us what we could not do but also how we are, in a sense, taken into his death and resurrection in our union with him. It’s the same thought here. Jesus “who loved me and gave himself for me” is the one through whom we are saved. He has done this for us. And he did this to be in close relationship with us.

Jesus was crucified for our sin on the cross. Our old self was crucified with Jesus, and we were raised to new life with him. This is where it gets personal:

If I believe that Jesus died for me and my sins are forgiven, then that means I died with Jesus. If he saved me and made me alive by binding me to himself, then I am not my own any longer.

This has to do with identity: You don't define who you are any more. Christ does. If you were crucified with Jesus, then you are dead to your past, dead to your guilt. And you are dead to your old self: You don't revolve around yourself anymore.

Jesus is now the centre of your life. Your past no longer defines you. Jesus is your new identity. If he died for sin, you died there with him.

"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me": If you are in Christ, your life is no longer yours. You now belong to Jesus, and he is the king over your life.

But as we have seen last week, Jesus is not a stranger who remains outside of us: We dwell in us through his Spirit. Here Paul is saying the same thing: "I no longer live but **Christ lives in me**"

He is present in us. He lives in us through his Spirit. He brings about the new life. He loved me and gave himself for me. Therefore, now I am inseparably bound to him: **I have nothing in myself, and I have everything in Christ.** I consider everything that I was as dead. And I live as one who is ruled by Jesus, and I do so in the closest possible fellowship with him.

In our union with Christ we are re-defined, or re-identified.¹ Grant Macaskill writes about this: "Paul is now Paul-in-Christ; Paul-in-himself is a thing of the past."² We no longer define ourselves and we no longer live ourselves.

Here is a wonderful implication of this: We are not saved by faith and then have to maintain our salvation by works, or by living in the right way. We live as Christians in the same way that we were saved in the first place: By union with Christ. **We live in the new life through him in us.**

Illustrate: Sometimes things happen to us that have such an impact that it changes who we are: Say a guy called "John" becomes a Father. From this day on the fact that he is a dad is one of the most important things about him. He is now John, who has a kid. He is still John. Yet when you get to know him, one of the first things you learn is that he is a Father.

¹ Macaskill, Living in Union with Christ, 56.

² Macaskill, Living in Union with Christ, 53.

Here is the thing: When we come into union with Christ, this changes who we are from top to bottom. We are fundamentally changed by this union. What you were before is longer true of you: you are now in Christ. All that Christ is and has is now yours in him.

Can we be at home in Jesus?

Yes. By faith in him, we have died with him and were raised with him. He is now our life. He is the one who directs us and has authority over us. But more than that, he is present in us. In a way, Jesus makes home in us.

3.2. Belonging to Jesus means being in communion with the Trinity

The second theme I want to look at to answer our question of “can we be at home in Jesus” is to look at how Jesus brings us into relationship with the triune God.

For that sake we must take a moment to understand what we mean by the Trinity. You may have discovered that the word “Trinity” is not used in the Bible. Yet we Christians have been using that word throughout the history of the church because it wonderfully expresses a mystery that is foundational to our faith: Namely, that God is one being in three persons.

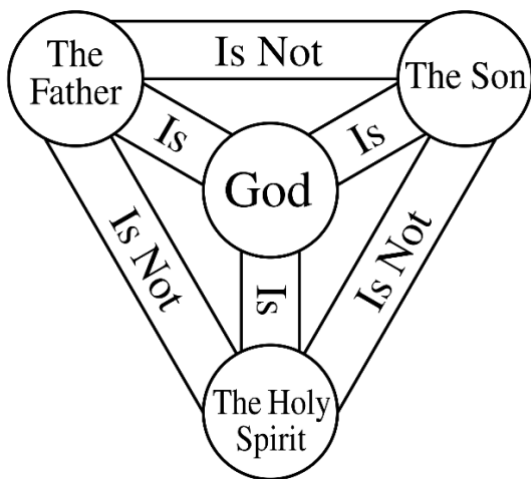
Sadly we don’t have time here to cover this topic more in-depth. I would love to really dive into this with you but since this is a foundations course we’ll talk about the foundations.³

If you review all the passages we looked at in the last two meetings you’ll notice how our salvation is a work of the Trinity. The Bible is literally packed with this. The Father, the Son and the Spirit are each involved in creation, in redemption and recreation.

Only the one true God creates and only God saves. Yet we see that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all doing this. The consequence of this is: God is one being and three persons.

³ For a helpful introduction to the Trinity: Donald Fairbairn, *The Trinity*, Union Publishing 2024.

Each person is fully and indivisibly God. Yet each person is distinct from the other.



I strongly advise you to stay away from illustrations or examples of the Trinity. They are always oversimplifications that misrepresent the Trinity in really problematic ways. This graphic, however, has historically been used to visualize how God is one being in three distinct persons.⁴

With this in mind, let's look at a few passages from the Bible that will help us understand the Trinity more:

3.2.1. One God in three Persons

Jesus, the eternal Son of God:

1 Corinthians 8:6: yet for us there is **one God, the Father, from whom** are all things and **for whom** we exist, and **one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom** are all things and **through whom** we exist.

In a very important text in the book called Deuteronomy God speaks to his people, the Israelites:

Deuteronomy 6:4: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Simplified, this says that there is no other God besides the one true God. There is only one God. Now in 1 Corinthians this text is picked up: there is one God, who is the Father. He made all things and we were made for him. And there is one Lord, who is Jesus Christ. The Father created all things through him and we exist for God through him.

⁴ For further study see the Athanasian Creed.

In the Old Testament God carries the title of “Lord”. He is the sovereign king, the ruler of his people and the whole earth. In the New Testament, Jesus carries this title. So, the New Testament shows us that there is a plurality in unity. Notice how Jesus is directly involved in everything the Father does.

God has spoken all things into existence and through Jesus all things came into existence. The Father has made us for himself and through Jesus we exist for God. That is, in a reconciled relationship with him.

In this passage, Paul takes the confession is that God is one and that includes Jesus. There is **one God**, who is **the Father** and **the Lord Jesus Christ**.

John: 17:4-5: ⁴I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, **Father, glorify me** in your own presence with the **glory that I had with you before the world existed**.

This is the prayer that Jesus prayed in the garden Gethsemane the night before he was crucified. See how Jesus speaks to the Father here. The key word here is “Glory”: Jesus has glorified the Father by doing on earth what the Father has sent him for. He has perfectly done all that the Father wanted him to do, and he has been the perfect reflection of the Fathers glory.

Then Jesus asks the Father to glorify him in the Father’s presence. Okay, so the Son has glorified the Father and the Father glorifies the Son.

Now Jesus says something enlightening: “*with the glory that I had with you before the world existed*”: This is one of the texts that teach us that Jesus is not a created being. He was always with the Father before anything was created. And he had the same glory as the Father.

As we have learned, Jesus is one Person with two natures: True God who has become true human. He came down to us, to our level, to reunite with God. Now as he is about to go back to the Father, he asks that he will be glorified in his humanity as he as always been in his divinity.

Remember what we said last week: In our union with Christ, his story becomes ours and he shares his glory with us. This text says the same thing with a different emphasis. This text focuses on the divinity and glory that Jesus has. Now, when the Father glorifies Jesus in his

humanity, this is for our sake. The Father glorifies the Son so that he can share his glory with us.

These texts clearly identify Jesus and the Father as being one God yet distinct persons. The Holy Spirit is also described in this way. Though with the Holy Spirit we see this primarily in how he acts. So, we see that he too must be God because he does what only God can do. Here are two examples:

I will not leave you as orphans:

A few chapters before the prayer we just looked at, Jesus comforts his disciples by speaking to them. A few weeks after he was raised from the dead he went back to heaven to his Father. But before that he said to them:

John 14:16-20: ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. **You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.** ¹⁸ **“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.** ¹⁹ Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ **In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.**

See how thoroughly trinitarian this Text is: Jesus will ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will forever be with us.

Jesus promises his Disciples that the Holy Spirit will be in us. It's important for us to understand that this has happened at Pentecost, when the Father sent the Spirit into the hearts of the believers. Since then, the Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of believers as he unites them with Jesus.

Through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, Jesus is present in us. See the close unity between the Spirit and the Son and yet how they are distinct persons.

And see how comforting this truth is for us: Jesus does not leave us as children without a Father – as orphans. He comes to us and stays with us.

And in verse 20 Jesus makes another profound statement: **In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.**

With “in that day” Jesus again refers to Pentecost, which has already occurred in history. Today we receive when he brings about our saving faith in Jesus. The point here is that believers come to know that Jesus is in his Father, that we are in him and that he is in us.

So there are different kinds of unions. Jesus is perfectly one with the Father. They are one in being but they are distinct persons.

Jesus has also made himself one with us: We are in him and he is in us. As we have seen, this is through the Holy Spirit who indwells us. So the life that the Father and Jesus have, Jesus also shares with us.

Through our union with Jesus, we share in this wonderful relationship that the Father, Son and Spirit have.

Again, if this is going over your head, you are not alone. We are not like God, therefore we cannot understand him fully. But, carefully describing how God reveals himself to us opens our eyes to his majesty and beauty. The goal with this is not for us to put God into drawers and to make him make sense to us.

The goal of this is worship. To see that God is totally different from us but that he is the fountain of life, love and joy and of everything that’s good **in himself**, that lets us realize what a privilege it is to know him and be in relationship with him.

Summary:

Firstly: God exists eternally in a perfect relationship between each person of the Trinity with overflowing love, joy and peace.

This is wonderful news to us. This means that God does not in any sense, at all, need us for anything. He is perfectly fine.

God created us because he wants to share his life, his joy, and peace with us. We are created out of the overflow of love that God has in himself. God doesn’t need us to get his fix. Instead he made us to share in his joy and love.

Secondly: Our salvation is the work of the triune God. There is no gospel apart from the one true God who exists in three persons.

Thirdly: In our union with Jesus, we partake, or share, in this relationship. We certainly don't become part of the Trinity. We do not become God, or gods. We become fully human by the glory and life and joy we receive from Jesus. It is by the Spirit who indwells us and binds us to Jesus that we get to share in this life.

Can we be at home in Jesus?

Yes. In our union with him, the Holy Spirit dwells in us and therefore Jesus is present in us. But even more than that, we also share in the life and joy that the triune God has in himself in eternity. We were created to share in this overflow and in our union with Jesus, we do.

3.3. Belonging to Jesus as the Church

The third and last theme I want to show you tonight is how the Church belongs to Christ.

The Bible describes the church in several ways that together form a big picture. Simply put, the church is the Community chosen by God that follows Jesus and worships God.

Let's look at four ways God describes the Church in the Bible:

The first theme is that the Church is the People of God that he gathers to himself from all nations and in all times.

1 Peter 2:9-10: ⁹ But **you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession**, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who **called you out of darkness into his marvelous light**. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but **now you are God's people**; once you had not received mercy, but now **you have received mercy**.

This is a wonderful but dense text. We are described as a chosen race, a royal priesthood and a people for his own possession.

With these descriptions we are told that the church is unique. It's a people that God creates for himself.

- **We are chosen**, because he is the one who draws us to him. He comes to us and brings us home. To be chosen means that God has looked at you in love and willed to save you. The church is the community of the chosen – a chosen people.
- **Being a royal priesthood** means that through Jesus we all have direct access to God. We need no other human to bring us into God's presence.
- **We are a holy nation**. That means, the Church is set apart from all other nations. People from all the nations of the earth belong to the Church. Our king is not any mere human. Jesus is Lord. Jesus is our king. We are a holy nation because we belong to him.
- **A people for his own possession**: This expresses ownership. Christ redeemed us with his blood. Therefore, we now belong to God.

This is what the church is. Now, Peter gives us a few contrasts:

- **God has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light**: Before Jesus came for us, we were in darkness. But he called us out of the darkness into his light. Remember how God spoke all things into existence in the creation of the world? The same happens when we become believers: Jesus calls us to himself. And with this call he creates faith so we can respond to this call.
- **Once not a people, now a people**: We once had no home. Nowhere to truly belong to. But now we do. We have an identity and a family now in the Church of God. We now belong to the people of God, and he is our home.
- **Once not received mercy, now received mercy**: We once were lost in our sin and completely helpless. But Jesus has shown us mercy. He has forgiven us our sins and washed us while we couldn't help ourselves.

To summarize this: The Church is beautiful. In the Church we experience the wonderful love that God has for us because we belong to the people of God. We are the community of all those who are united to Jesus and so we are a family. We belong to Christ and to one another.

Now we will look at two metaphors the Church is described with.

The body of Christ:

1 Corinthians 12:12-14: ¹² For just as **the body is one and has many members**, and **all the members** of the body, though many, **are one body, so it is with Christ**. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into **one body**—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink

of one Spirit. ¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. [...]. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

A body consist of several limbs or members: Hands, arms, legs, eyes, nose, and so on. Yet none of these members form a body on their own. Only when they are together, they do. This is a picture for how we belong to Jesus.

In all of us the Spirit of God is at work and were joined into one body at our baptism. This is despite our different backgrounds – be they ethnical, economical, or whatever else.

We are many different members, but we are only one body. We are all different from one another in our personalities, our gifts, our stories. But in Christ we all belong to the same person and thus we become like a single body. We belong to Christ together.

Colossians 1:18: he is the head of the body, the church.

This is a helpful addition to the last: While we are all together the body of Jesus, he alone is the head of that body.

In ancient times people understood the head to be the controlling centre of the body. The head has authority and rules over the body. So it is with Christ and his Church. While we inseparably belong to him, he alone has authority over us. He alone gives life to us in this close fellowship we enjoy with him. This is a vital union. Christ gives us life and direction.

The flock of Christ:

John 10:14-16: ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and **they will listen to my voice.**

Here is one more way in which the Bible speaks about the Church: The Church is the flock of Christ. He is our shepherd, and we are his sheep. He provides for us, he leads us and protects us and pays with his own life to defend us. He does not lose even one. He goes after us if we

stray and gently carries us back. He looks after our health. He leads us through darkness and danger to everlasting rest.

Can we be at home in Jesus?

Yes. For as the church we are the chosen people of God which he gathers to himself from all peoples and times. We belong to him as his body, the Church, of which he is the head. As the church we are his bride, waiting for the wedding day when we will be fully united to Christ. We are the flock of Christ, our Shepherd, and he will not lose even one.

3.4. Heidelberg Q 1: What is your only comfort in life and death?

That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ; who, with his precious blood, has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by his Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto him.