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## GROWING IN CHRIST | THE KEY TO GROWTH (10)

May 14, 2023

Colossians 3:1-4

### PURPOSE

To discover and experience Jesus Christ in our midst  
To cultivate mutually encouraging relationships  
To participate in God's mission to the world

### ICE BREAKER QUESTION

10 MIN

What shakes your faith?

### WORSHIP

10 MIN

#### OPENING PRAYER

Holy One, we gather as your people, giving thanks that we can be together to hear your word, offer our prayers, and sing your praises. Draw us together in your love, that we may know you more deeply. Open our hearts to a deeper understanding of your will, and work within our lives, that we may produce the fruit of compassion. Amen.

#### RESPONSIVE PRAYER—Psalm 67:1-7

<sup>1</sup>May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face to shine upon us,

<sup>2</sup>**That your way may be known on earth,  
your saving power among all nations.**

<sup>3</sup>Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you!

<sup>4</sup>**Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,  
for you judge the peoples with equity  
and guide the nations upon earth.**

<sup>5</sup>Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you!

<sup>6</sup>**The earth has yielded its increase;  
God, our God, shall bless us.**

<sup>7</sup>God shall bless us;  
let all the ends of the earth fear him!

### SCRIPTURE READING

*<sup>1</sup>If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup>For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

## BIBLE STUDY Summary and Connection

40 MIN

Recently we began a new sermon series entitled, *Growing In Christ*. In this series we examine the theme of spiritual growth. For followers of Jesus, the whole purpose of their Christian life is to grow up into maturity in order to become the fullest versions of themselves as God has ordained. Furthermore, a serious examination of our spiritual life not only fosters growth, but most importantly, it also acts as a corrective, exposing any false understanding of faith and spiritual growth.

This week's discussion is based on Colossians 3:1-4. Paul wrote this letter to the church in Colossae from the confines of prison. In this letter we see Paul warning the Colossians about the danger posed by false teachers who were imposing strict rules about eating, drinking, and religious traditions. These false teachers were promoting Judaism. The 'high moral code' of Judaism was appealing to the Colossians—who lived in a pagan culture—as it gave them a sense of superiority and exclusivity. Paul warns them about the utter inadequacy of self-righteous moralism in matters of spiritual growth and maturity. Paul exhorts the Colossians by pointing them to the superiority of Christ—the substance, over all human philosophies and traditions—shadows. In 3:1-4, Paul encourages the Colossians to change their perspective—from seeking their identity as Christians in things that are on earth (philosophies, traditions, and fame), to setting their minds on Jesus, who is their true identity (verse 3). In verse 4 Paul reminds the Colossians about the day when God will flood the present creation with the new life which is currently hidden in the heavenly realm. When Christ appears in glory, those who are in Christ will also appear as the new creation—gloriously renewed human beings they already are. Most importantly, in this passage, Paul describes a doctrine that is foundational in enabling us to live the fullest versions of ourselves as God has ordained: Our union with Christ.

Union with Christ is the foundation of all our spiritual experience and all spiritual blessings. Union with Christ could be defined in simple words like this: *You are in Christ and Christ is in you.*

### You Are In Christ

First, let us consider what it means to be 'in Christ,' and how we get 'into Christ?' 'In Christ,' 'in the Lord,' and 'in Him' are technical terms extensively used by Paul (occurs 164 times in the letters of Paul alone). While Jesus referred to his followers as disciples, Paul's preferred way of addressing the followers of Jesus was 'in Christ.' It is the most fundamental way to locate the identity of a follower of Jesus. In other words, to be a Christian is to be united with Christ. A Christian's union with Christ is spontaneous. It happens the moment you place your faith in Jesus. This doctrine undergirds the vine-branch illustration of John 15. Christians are organically united to Christ as a branch is in a vine. Furthermore, to be 'in Christ' is to acknowledge Jesus as our representative head. We participate in Jesus' death, resurrection, and glory. Whatever is true of Jesus is true of his followers. We receive all spiritual benefits by virtue of our union with the source of all spiritual blessings. How do we get 'into Christ?' The Scriptures' resounding reply is by faith. Oftentimes we hear Christians describe their salvation experience by saying, "I received Jesus into my heart." While that expression describes a Christian's subjective experience, it does not capture the objective reality. Sinclair Ferguson makes an insightful observation: "Occasionally the New Testament speaks of becoming a Christian in terms of receiving Christ, and thus getting Christ into our lives. But the emphasis is on the need to be taken out of ourselves and our sin and be

‘found in Christ.’ That gives union a very important practical dimension. It is not thought of primarily as a subjective experience which encourages us to look in and down. Rather it is something which lifts us up and out and draws us on to the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

### **Christ Is In You**

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul writes that the deepest mystery that was hidden for generations has now been revealed. The great mystery is, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (1:27). If you are united to Christ, then, as Paul writes to the Colossians, your life is hidden with Christ in God. In other words, your task is not to try to become someone you are not, but rather to set your mind on the truth and live out the new reality you have already received in Christ. The reality of the Christian existence on earth as ‘new creation,’ flows from what Jesus has first accomplished for us. Jesus became what we are through his incarnation, so that we might become what he is through our union with him. Our union with Christ works through the Holy Spirit. To be united with Christ is to have the Spirit of Christ within you as the real, and dynamic bond between Jesus and us. As Jason once put it in his sermon, “the only thing better than having Jesus *beside* would be to have Jesus *within* you at every moment of your life.”

### **Practical Implications Of Our Union With Christ:**

As Christians we often forget our identity in Christ, and we either strive hard to seek our identity in things of the world or justify our identity in Christ by our self-righteous efforts. We often fail to believe and acknowledge what is already true of us in Christ. As one commentator puts it, “learning to believe what doesn’t at the moment feel true is an essential part of being a Christian. This is what the life of faith is all about.” As we grow in knowledge of our union with Christ, we display the truly human life we seek—the life of genuine and glad holiness that shines right through our personality. Here are some of the practical implications of our union with Christ:

1. The knowledge of our union with Christ gives us a new identity.
2. The knowledge of our union with Christ gives us a new family/community.
3. The knowledge of our union with Christ gives us a new destiny.
4. The knowledge of our union with Christ provides us with great dignity.
5. The knowledge of our union with Christ gives us confidence in prayer
6. The knowledge of our union with Christ protects us in temptation

### **1. Looking at the Bible**

What does the text say? What according to you is the theme of this passage?

- In this passage Paul talks about the past and the future of the Colossians. What according to Paul has already happened and will happen in the lives of the Colossians?
- What is ‘Union with Christ?’ What does it mean to be ‘in Christ?’ and what does it mean to have ‘Christ in you?’
- What are the practical implications of our union with Christ? How does the knowledge of our union with Christ provide us with dignity, confidence in prayer, and protection in temptations?

## 2. Looking at Jesus

At Central we believe that all of Scripture points to Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the theological center of the Bible. Every passage not only points to Jesus, but the grand narrative of the Bible also finds its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus.

- How is our union with Christ both a subjective and an objective reality? How does this knowledge foster our spiritual growth?

## 3. Looking at our Hearts

- How does your union with Christ transform your identity, your family, and your destiny? What comfort and encouragement do you draw from these truths? How do these truths challenge you?
- In verse 2, Paul says, “set your mind on the things that are above.” According to you, what does this actually look like in practice? What obstacles in your life pose a threat to practicing “setting your mind on the things above?”
- How would it change the way we go about our daily lives if we really believed that Christ is “our life” (verse 4)?

## 4. Looking at our World

- How does the reality of our union with Christ invigorate us to lead a faithful life as God’s instruments of grace in this city?

**SHARING**      Share your prayer requests, thoughts, hopes and fears for the coming week, and as you do  
**15 MIN**      consider how this passage might give light to what you are sharing.

**KINGDOM**      Pray that we would see ourselves called by God.  
**PRAYER**      Include other prayer requests.  
**15 MIN**

**SENDING**      God’s word is a lamp to our feet. Christ’s teachings are a light to our path.  
**5 MIN**      May God’s word take root in our lives. May Christ’s love nourish and sustain us. Amen.