

Living in Union with God

In the Foundations study 'Fellowship with God' we learnt that the Father has called us into the fellowship that Jesus enjoys with the Father, and that through the cross Jesus has established this union for us. However, when I (Pip) became a Christian I never understood this reality. I knew that my sins were forgiven but I often felt condemned or guilty. I didn't have an assurance of salvation and thought I needed to work hard to keep in God's good books. I thought that his love for me and his acceptance of me depended on my behaviour. I basically transferred my experience of an earthly father upon my heavenly Father and for many years lived from a place of striving. The reason for this study is to help you realise the reality of your new birth so that you may enjoy this union that Jesus has won for you.

The miracle of new birth

Three things happened at the point of your salvation

1. Your sins are forgiven
2. You are One in Christ
3. Your friendship with the Lord is established

Forgiveness of sins

Romans 5:1+2, 17

'Therefore, having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God' – 'for if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one (Adam), much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.'

When you became a Christian the legacy of your life without Christ was cancelled. He wiped the slate clean. You now stand before the Father through Jesus and now you have peace with God. But there's more! All of heaven's resources are made available to you in your walk of faith. Jesus has given you the gift of his righteousness and the abundance of grace so that you can now reign in life rather than 'life' reigning over you!

One in Christ

1 Corinthians 6:17

'...but he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him'

Not only are your sins forgiven and you have peace with God and access to all of his favour but your new birth has united you as one spirit with God.

How did you become one in Christ?

When Jesus died – you died. What does this mean? I had a picture that helped me see this for myself; I saw myself lying on the ground as though dead (because of sin) and Jesus stooped down and picked me up and laid me upon his back and bound me to him. When he died on the cross I saw that I had died with him; when he was buried I saw that I was buried with him; when he rose from the dead I saw that I was raised with him; when he sat down at the right hand of God I saw that I was seated with him. He took my old life of sin and judgment through his death and in exchange, through his life I received his inheritance. I am

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made alive together with Christ and my union with him is secured. I am one in him. Water baptism is the physical demonstration of this spiritual reality. The following verses explain this...

Ephesians 2:1-9

'And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.'

Jesus has established your position before the Father

1. You are seated with him in the heavenly realms
2. You are united with him; one spirit - this is what it means to be 'in Christ'

Just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one; so we have been brought into this same union and fellowship. Adam and Eve enjoyed this before their fall. Through faith in him, Jesus has restored us to this friendship with God; a sweet communion to experience daily until we realise the fullness of our union when we are with him in eternity.

The friendship of the Lord

Psalm 25:14

'The friendship/ the secret counsel/ the secret of the Lord is with those who fear him and he will show them his covenant'

The friendship of the Lord is with those who fear him – this is not a fear of terror but one of awe and wonder in the knowledge of who he is - the King of Glory who stooped down to save you so that you can know him. The fear of the Lord is a reverential fear that honours him as your first love. It is a love of prime importance from which all other loves will find their order and health. God's love for us is costly - Jesus died for us; he simply invites us to the same devotional love. The fear of the Lord is to say to him;

'You first and You only. Even though I fall and fail; be my first love over all other loves.'

To fear the Lord is to honour, to glory, to treasure, to value and delight in him. The consequences of our devotion to him are that he responds beyond all comparison – he will share his heart with you, his friendship.

In **Isaiah 66:2** the prophet wrote ...

"But on this one I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit and who trembles at My word."

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Isaiah was speaking to God's people who were giving lip service to God but doing their own thing. One who is humble and reveres God is a sweet fragrance to him and attracts his attention.

In **Matthew 7:22-23** Jesus said,

"Many will say to Me in the day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

Jesus was effectively saying to the religious community; 'You did these things in my name but I didn't know you and neither did I consent to your works'. The type of knowledge Jesus described here was one of intimate acquaintance.

How much of what we do is really initiated from what God wants? For many years I was a believer who was zealous and passionate for the Lord and did many things 'in his name'. However, it is all too easy to subtly shift our affections from loving the Lord to loving doing his work and when that happens, our relationship with him can become a means to an end. Although I did all these things in his name and had a living relationship with the Lord, I now see such presumption and pride in my life. I didn't realise it at the time. But as I look back over those years, I now see I was living from selfish ambition which scripture says gives clear ground to the enemy (**James 3:14-16**). I realise that in spite of my love for the Lord, I didn't fear him – to be honest I didn't really understand what the fear of the Lord was. A time came in my life when the Lord stripped everything away. What I considered at the time to be the worst of times became a time of deep transformation. I began to see how my work had become an idol and I saw the false identities it gave. I saw it for what it was – another love. I began to learn the secret of the fear of the Lord. I began to value what he values. He values your friendship more than what you do for him – in fact, he doesn't need you!

God speaks to us from the place of devotion and friendship when he knows we treasure him more than all else; only then will he entrust his heart and guide us in what he wants us to do and how he wants it done.

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The miracle of your new birth has established your union in Christ and your friendship with the Lord. You are one in Christ and your home is in him and his home is in you. The Holy Spirit has secured your union with the Father and the Son. He will teach you how to walk by faith in this spiritual reality. Being God's friends means that we want him to be Lord of our lives; his Lordship means that **HE** is our reference point for life.

John 14:23

'If anyone loves Me he will keep My word and My Father will love him and We will come to him and make Our home with him.'

Living in union with God is a daily walk of faith involving choices. The question is, will I walk in the flesh or will I walk in the Spirit? What does this mean? Simply, will I live according to the desires and dictates of my own heart which the Bible describes as the old man, or will I

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live according to the desires and leading of the Holy Spirit (new man)? The following verses describe this as putting off your old way of life (old man) and putting on your new way of life (new man). Take some time to read the following passages.

Ephesians 4:17-24; Colossians 3:5-10; Ephesians 6:11-17

Putting off and putting on

When we wake up each morning it's not just our outer clothing we need to put on! We need to be intentional in clothing ourselves in Christ throughout the day. You have a choice to put off the behaviours of your old way of life and put on the new nature that you have received in Christ. Clothe yourself in the Word of God to keep you anchored through the storms; clothe yourself in the faith God gives you and deal quickly with unbelief; clothe yourself in the righteousness Jesus gives you and hang up your own! Put on the armour of God as your protection; put on the hope of your salvation for your mental health and stability.

We live in two realms; the seen and the unseen. Whilst we are united with Christ in the unseen realm we are living out our seen lives through our occupations and in our neighbourhoods, facing all the ups and downs and the good and bad of life. The fact is we will mess up! You will fail but when you are sincere in your friendship with the Lord, you will begin to see that whatever you go through or experience, God will work all things together for good and he will use these things to draw you closer to him (**Romans 8:26**). Instead of beating yourself up and becoming introspective about how useless you might feel as a Christian, you can be assured that you are loved by him and that his grace is enough for you. The following passage gives an encouraging example of this...

Luke 22:31-32

'And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you that he may sift you as wheat but I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

Simon Peter seems to have been an 'all or nothing' type guy. He seemed to be on the ball one minute and totally miss the point the next minute! On meeting Simon, Jesus renamed him 'Peter' which means rock. But in these verses Jesus calls him by his birth name. He knew Simon was going to betray him even though Simon declared he would die for him. Jesus knew that Simon was going to fail and not be very rock-like. What gives us hope in this example is that Jesus knew Simon's failure would humble him, strengthen his faith and through him, strengthen the faith of others. The same is true for you. Temptations and tests will humble you to realise that you will fail, you can't do it by yourself. God doesn't tempt us but he will use the circumstances of life to make us more like him; to create a deeper dependency in him. Only by living in union with Christ we walk this walk of faith. The following verse is a fantastic declaration of this reality and worth committing to memory.

Galatians 2:20

'I have been (past tense) crucified with Christ and I live (present tense) no longer I (self) but Christ lives in me and the life I now live I LIVE BY FAITH IN THE SON OF GOD WHO LOVED ME AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR ME.' Praise God!