

# One With Christ, Or One In Christ?

## Eph. 4:1-6

preached @ Hawkwood Baptist Church  
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### Ephesians 4

- 1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.
- 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.
- 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.
- 4 There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called--
- 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism;
- 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

### Intro.

I begin by reminding you of the main reason for our holding one service throughout the summer — *to remind ourselves of the importance of unity within the body of Christ*. There are secondary benefits, of course. It gives our worship leaders and nursery workers a bit of a rest. It also gives those of us who normally attend the second service a little more time each Sunday to enjoy the beautiful summer days that God *occasionally* sends to us Calgarians.

But let me say it again, the primary purpose for our having one service in the summer is to promote unity and renew relationships within the body. Unity among believers matters to Jesus, as we heard a few moments ago when Philip Schachtner read to us from John 17.

Also, we want, if possible, to avoid the trap of creating two congregations. As a practical matter, it's impossible to relate well to people you don't know, even when you're both in Christ and both indwelt by the same Holy Spirit. How can we get to know one another unless from time to time we attend the same worship service?

Let me be clear. I'm not suggesting we eliminate one of our worship services, not at all! For very excellent reasons we should maintain two services for nine months of each year. Nevertheless, we ought to do all we can to promote widespread *knowledge* of one another, *love* for one another and finally *unity* with one another within the body of Christ at Hawkwood. From the perspective of the elders, at least, promoting unity is a significant component of our summer services. It's a sad day when a faithful member from one of our services speaks up at a business meeting only to hear someone from the other service whisper, "Who's that?"

Now let me be a little more personal. In connection with the overall theme of unity I want to speak to you this morning about the great temptation to go solo in your walk with the Lord. That's the theme that I've tried to address in today's title. Everybody wants Jesus to be with them. Fewer want to be in Christ. Everybody wants a friend and companion, somebody who always "has their back;" few want a Lord and Saviour, and it is especially hard to want to be one of many servants of Christ.

Let me explain, first by offering examples of what I mean when I say "One With Christ."

Here is Anglican Bishop of Woolwich John A.T. Robinson's book *Honest to God* (1963), in which God is no longer "up there" or "out there," but only "in here," that is, God is to be found in my interpretation of the world around me, and in my interpretation of what is right or wrong for my life. The book explicitly promoted **moral relativism** (that there are no fixed principles of right and wrong) and **situational ethics** (Love is always more important than rigid rules and the right thing to do is always anything that promotes love). Throughout the book the underlying assumption is that in the end God appreciates and supports us if we will simply be honest and frank in our self expression. Robinson's book held up a religious mirror image to the popular hippie philosophy of the day that was best summed up in the expression, "If it feels good, do it."

*Are You Running With Me, Jesus?* (1965)

by Malcolm Boyd, another Anglican priest, but this time an American. This book is a collection of so-called prayers by a man who in more recent years has rejected orthodox Christianity altogether. His prayers bear little resemblance to anything prayed in God's word, but that's incidental to my present point, which is to show that the default position of the human race is to expect Jesus to join us in our pursuits rather than the other way around.

*God Is My Co-Pilot* (book and movie, 1943,45) by Col. Robert Lee Scott Jr., an American fighter pilot in the Second World War. Now I admit it's a great title, one of those succinct phrases that has inspired a thousand bumper stickers and songs. I read this book back in high school, and my memory is that the title refers to the Scott's gratitude to God for preserving his life through many battles. In the meanwhile, he describes things he did during the war that indicate he had no interest at all in obeying God, or knowing God. The question is, are we any different when we ask God to bless us and keep us while we go through life doing "our thing," or pursuing our goals with little or no concern for obedience to Christ?

All this leads up to the following

**Principle:** When it's just me and Jesus I find that we are in agreement an amazing amount of the time.

When it's just me and Jesus He seems to always affirm my political opinions, He takes my side in every argument, He loves the same things I love, the same music, the same literature, the same activities. When it's just me and Jesus I find He always agrees with me when I need to sleep in on Sunday morning, when I need to read the newspaper instead of His Word, when I choose my spouse, my career, my recreation. When it's just me and Jesus I'm the most amazing Christian I've ever known. He seconds my every motion, and I love it when he whispers in my ear that I'm right and all the other Christians are wrong.

This kind of individualism is the spirit behind many of the cults. Charles Taze Russell founded the Jehovah's Witnesses in part because he was convinced everyone before him had been wrong. The same spirit was exhibited by Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism. To get closer to home, I fear that one impetus behind the popularity of the modern house church movement is the desire "to do church the way I want. I can start when I want and end when I want. I can even skip

altogether when I want and no one will call to make me feel guilty. I can interpret Scripture the way I want, pray or not pray as I see fit, sing or listen to the songs I like. I can serve or not serve others as I please. And the best part of it is, Jesus is ready to bless it all.

Related to this, in spirit at least, is the pursuit of the perfect church, the church that I like, that meets my needs and caters to my preferences, that never challenges me to have to make the effort of maintaining unity with "different" people.

This is what I mean by being "with Christ," just me and Jesus. And the thing is, there's more than a little of this spirit in all of us.

But according to this morning's text God has not called us to be *with* Christ. Rather He has called us to be *in* Christ. "There is one body," Paul writes, and we are in that body along with everyone else who is in that body. In the body of Christ every Christian influences every other Christian. That means our thoughts about God are challenged and refined by others. Our behaviour is examined more objectively because suddenly the Spirit of Christ is freed to speak hard truths to us through other minds and hearts.

It also means that the only practical way to love Jesus is to love His body. I may, or may not love Jesus when I repeatedly ask Him to protect me through all my escapades, but there is no doubt that I love Jesus when I live according to the precepts of this passage in Ephesians 4.

So remember, these are precepts for loving the body of Christ, which means they are really precepts for loving Christ Himself.

#### I. Precepts found in Ephesians 4.

- A. We're to follow the examples set by the best Christians. It is no accident that Paul mentions at this point that he is a "prisoner for the Lord." He wants us to understand that starting with Jesus, and extending down through 2,000 years of sacrifice and service, obedient Christians are those who gladly chain themselves to God's will for a lifetime — loving God and loving other Christians through thick and thin.

If you want to be all that Christ wants you to be you have to be more like Paul, or more like Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, Jim Elliot, his wife Elizabeth Elliot, Bill Wallace, Mother Teresa, Watchman Nee or Bruce Olson, and on and on we could go.

#### B. We're to live according to God's call on our lives.

1. First we must accept that we have only come to Christ because we were called! (Eph. 2:1-5) It was neither our wisdom nor our innate goodness that brought us to the Faith.
2. Then we must accept that every aspect of our salvation is a result of God's gracious interference in our lives. He sent the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin and judgment. He graciously opened our understanding so that we could accept that Christ's death really did pay for our sin! Then He granted us new hearts so that we could willingly repent of our sinfulness and call upon the Lord for salvation.

3. Finally, we must accept that the whole point of the call was to take us out of Satan's kingdom (where there is only sin and death ) and place us in Christ's Kingdom (where there is righteousness, love and eternal life).
  4. What does that mean practically?
    - a. humility (specifically not a virtue in the ancient world)
    - b. gentleness (every instinct and every passion, every motion of my mind and heart and tongue and desire, under the control of God's Spirit)
    - c. patience (literally longsuffering, specifically slowness in avenging wrong or retaliating when hurt by another — God's attitude toward men)
    - d. bearing with one another in love (lit. "forbearance": also a divine quality, the practical outworking of longsuffering involves bearing with one another's weaknesses, not ceasing to love one's neighbours or friends or fellow church members because of those faults in them which offend or displease us — all of these are necessary components of true Christian love),
- C. We're to accept that God has given each of us a vocation. "when you were called" Our focus is to be on service, rather than being served
- D. Remember the human component of our "one hope." I Thess. 2:19-20 For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.
- E. We must never forget the inherent Spiritual unity of the entire body of Christ! "There is **one body** (to deliberately cause or maintain separation from other Christians is equivalent to deliberately separating from Christ) and **one Spirit** (every division is a grief to the Holy Spirit, every refusal to promote unity a quenching of the Holy Spirit) . . . **one Lord** (not just one in belief, but one in allegiance and obedience), **one faith** (one basic set of beliefs and teachings), **one baptism** (the outward sign of our common life in Christ); **one God and Father** of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Such conviction about God should bind men more closely than any human tie. Christians believe that they 'live in a God-created, God-controlled, God-sustained, God-filled world' (Barclay) and that God is working out His purpose through them, individually and corporately.

Conclusion: V. 3 We must make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Jesus' prayer (John 17:23). "May they be brought to complete unity . . . ."

"Christ is the Son of God who died for the redemption of sinners and resurrected after three days. This is the greatest truth in the universe. I die because of my belief in Christ."  
— Watchman Nee