

# Union with Christ

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 23 July 2023

Preacher: Nick Louw

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, I have a confession to make. When I was a teenager, one of my favorite movies was True Lies with Arnold Schwarzenegger.

I don't know, anybody seen that movie or familiar with that movie? It came out in the 90s. It was a really fun action movie. But if you haven't seen that movie, it's a story about a man called Harry Tasker, played by Arnold Schwarzenegger, who was the average family man who sold business software.

And according to most people around him, the most exciting thing he would do is go on a sales conference. And he was very excited about his sales conferences. But what people didn't know about this very average-looking family man, Harry Tasker, is all that was only a cover for his real job, which was a highly trained agent for Omega Sector, a top-secret counterterrorism organization. And his so-called sales conferences are actually missions infiltrating secret enemy Russian bases and saving the world. And he's on all these adventures.

But True Lies was the story of a man who lived two very different lives and how he managed to live those lives together. One of his lives was very ordinary-looking, and the other was far more than ordinary.

[ 1 : 3 0 ] It was extraordinary. A man who lived two lives. Now, I think that is actually a very apt description of a true Christian.

A true Christian is a person who lives two lives, where the natural life they live day to day is actually a cover for a much more extraordinary life, engaging in heavenly, eternal realities.

Henry Scougal was a man, a great Christian man, who wrote a letter in the 1600s, which has become famous and been published multiple times, where he explains to a friend of his the nature of true Christianity.

And I remember this was in the 1600s in England. This was in a time where everyone was a Christian. The country was officially Christian, and so everyone was officially a Christian.

But it was difficult, therefore, to distinguish between what made a nominal Christian and what made a true Christian.

[ 2 : 3 8 ] And so this man, Henry Scougal, wrote to his friend who was battling with this and described it in this long letter, which is now being published, and it's called The Life of God and the Soul of Man.

If you come across it, I highly recommend you read it. And he described in his letter that a true Christian is a person who lives both a natural life and a divine life at the same time.

He explains it like this. He says, The natural life is characterized by our desire for things that are pleasing and acceptable to our nature. You know, things like getting a job or getting food, getting comforts, entertainment, pleasure from things and people.

The life that we all know very well and we're all familiar with. And for many people, that is the only life they know. That is the only life they have. The life where you go to work, you earn money, you spend your money, you go to sleep, you go on holidays.

That life where that is all what it's about. It's the natural life. And there's nothing wrong with that life in and of itself. It's the way God made us to have a life on earth as physical beings, to look after and pursue our physical needs.

[ 3 : 5 4 ] But the Bible teaches that a true Christian also has another life. A life that is called to higher and greater and eternal things.

And that life, that divine life, controls their natural life. That, according to Skugel, is what a true Christian is.

And he writes this whole letter describing what that natural life is about. But knowing this, knowing just this idea that I've been putting forward now, that a true Christian lives two different lives. A natural life, but also a divine life. Knowing that and understanding that as a Christian is actually essential if we're going to live the Christian life properly. It really helps us to understand what it means to live the Christian life.

And this morning I want us just to delve into the Bible and understand how that works. How that divine life works. Where it comes from. And what it means to focus on living that.

[ 5 : 01 ] But to understand it, we first need to delve into the doctrine we're looking at this morning. A deep and profound biblical doctrine. Which is called union with Christ.

It's something that the theologians have been studying and diving into for years. But what's interesting is if you look at church history, it's a doctrine that the average Christian back in the day was familiar with.

The average Christian understood it. But today it's kind of been relegated into academic circles. And the average Christian in the pew often hasn't fully grasped what this deep biblical teaching of union with Christ means.

And so that's why I thought it would be good for us to dive into it this morning. You see this doctrine union with Christ tells us that the divine life, this other life Christians live that they have inside them, is actually the very life of Christ himself living inside his people.

It's Christ's life inside us. And as I said, it's such a profound and yet overlooked aspect of Christianity that it's so important for us to understand.

[ 6 : 10 ] And it's so important because the Bible teaches that this union with Christ is actually the whole point of the gospel.

It's the whole point of what Jesus did when he came and died and rose again. It's what he did to unlock for humans on earth.

And we see that in Colossians 1 that Dylan read for us earlier. I'm going to read it again, especially verse 27. This is Paul writing to the Colossians to help them to understand this divine life and how he, Paul, and the other apostles are sacrificing their lives in order for them, for the Colossians and Christians to live this new life inside them.

And he writes this in Colossians 1.27. God wanted to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ in you.

The hope of glory. Do you notice how Paul defines his gospel there? The main thing that God wants to make known to you and me, the Gentiles.

[ 7 : 29 ] What is the main thing God wants to make known? It's not that your sins have been forgiven in Christ so that you can live in heaven. That's not the gospel according to Paul here.

That's what lots of Christians think the gospel is. Christ died for my sins so that I can one day live in heaven. No, according to this, the gospel is Christ died for your sins so that Christ can live in you. You see the difference? And it's a profound difference. The gospel happened. This rescue mission occurred. Jesus did something which we're going to celebrate later that actually washes clean the sins of those who believe in him.

But not so that you can live in heaven one day. That's not primarily the reason. It's so that Christ can live in you now. The results of the gospel aren't just something about the future.

It changes something in the present, something profound. And Paul speaks about this as a verse before in Colossians 1. As the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.

[ 8 : 41 ] The mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. In other words, this idea, this teaching that Christ is going to dwell inside his people on earth is something that God has been planning right from the beginning.

A mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed and this mystery is Christ in you. It's something that God has actually been planning right from the beginning.

For his son's life to take up residence inside human beings on earth. Now to understand how that is a mystery right from the beginning, we need to go back right to the beginning.

We need to go back to Genesis. And so when you think of Genesis, Genesis 1, 2, and 3, you know, the count of creation, Eden, and the fall.

What do we learn there about why God made humans? Well, we learn that his goal for humans was to live essentially in two realms at the same time.

[10:00] To live in the natural realm of the physical world as natural beings, but also to live in the divine realm of the heavenly world as spiritual beings. God designed humans uniquely as images of himself, right?

He said that he made us in his image, unlike the animals. The animals are just creatures that are designed for the natural realm. Humans are different.

Humans are creatures that are designed for the natural and divine realms to be able to interact in that overlap of realms. And the Garden of Eden, we read about earlier, was this overlap in Genesis 1, where human and divine lived and interacted together.

And humans were essentially the heavenly rulers of an earthly realm. They were to represent God on earth and to rule over earth. And all the blessings, and you read it in Genesis 2 there earlier, all the blessings of heaven were going to flow through this Eden into the rest of the world.

And humans were the agents of those heavenly blessings to earth. It was a beautiful picture of heaven and earth overlapping. And the relationship between the spiritual and the earthly realms.

[11:20] But that didn't last, right? Because humans were tempted into sin, to turn their back on God, to think that they can do things on earth without God.

And we've had that attitude ever since, that turning our backs on God and wanting to be the boss of our own lives. And ever since humanity's fallen to sin, all we've ever known is actually life in the natural realm.

When sin entered, you see, we read what happened in Genesis 3, humanity was banished from this overlapping place of divine life.

And they were banished into the earthly realm, cut off from this divine life, and cut off therefore from eternal life, that the divine life from God gives.

So that's what we learned in Genesis. That humans were meant, humans were designed to live in that overlap, but sin has banished us from that. But you see, we also read on, and we realize that's not the end of the story.

[12:30] God has always had a plan, and that's what the whole story of the Bible is about. From Genesis to Revelation, God's plan is to restore humans back into that space of divine natural life.

And that's why Genesis 1, 2, and 3 are about humans living in that place at first, but then being banished from it. And if you go right to the end of the Bible, in Revelation, the very last chapters of Revelation are about the restoration of humans back into that place.

Even better, Eden. A heavenly city where God and humans dwell together. And everything in between, Genesis and Revelation, is the story of how God is achieving that goal.

God has always planned to restore humans back to this divine life, but what we discover as we read the story in the Bible is the only way that that could happen, because of the sin that has banished us from the divine life, the only way that could happen is if the sinless life of Jesus comes inside of our lives.

If the sinless life of Jesus, who is the only person who is fit to live in that overlap as the perfect divine human being, his life needs to enter into our lives for us to be able to live in that place again.

[13:53] Jesus came from the heavenly realm to the earthly realm to save people in the earthly realm and reconnect us with the heavenly realm.

That is the story of the gospel. And that is exactly, in fact, what Ephesians 2 verse 6 means. You would have read this in your daily devotions not a few weeks ago.

Ephesians 2 verse 6 says, He also raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavens in Christ Jesus.

It's an amazing verse. You know why that's an amazing verse? Because it's in the past tense. Did you notice that? Talking to true believers, those who have received God's Holy Spirit, have already been raised up to heaven, according to this verse.

It's in the past tense. What it's saying is that through our union with Christ, just as He is in us on earth, we are already in Him in heaven because we are united to His life.

[15:07] And that is how God, that is how Jesus, even though He's in heaven, physically, is on earth in His people. But that's also how we are already in heaven. We already have a place, an identity, and a presence in the heavenly realms if we are true Christians because we are in Christ.

This is a profound biblical teaching. It's like, I was thinking of a way to illustrate it and the best I could come up with, and it's not great, but it's still, it makes the point.

You know sometimes in movies where you see those high-level political movies with the, you know, the President of America and he's communicating with people elsewhere in the world, but they're all around a conference table in the White House.

And here's the President and maybe the Chief of Staff, but then you've got the people he's talking to and they're on screens in the conference room and they're having this conference and they're having this meeting.

But they're not there. They're in some far-flung other country in the world, but they are there because they're virtually there and they're, in a very real way, their presence is there and they're having this interaction with the President.

[16:14] They're there, but they're not there physically. Well in the same way, through union with Christ, just as Christ is really on earth in His people, so we are really in heaven, in Him, and we have a presence and interaction in the heavenly realms through Christ.

We exist and have a presence in both spaces. If we are in Christ, we live two lives. If we are in Christ, we live a natural life, a day-to-day life, but we also, and this is a life that's often missed and underestimated by Christians, we live a divine life with a presence in heaven already.

That's the mystery of the Gospel God wants to make known to you, according to Colossians 1.27. Early church father, Irenaeus, puts it like this, the Son of God became the Son of Man so that the sons of men might become the sons of God.

And that alone, that union with Christ that Jesus died and rose to be able for us to experience, that alone is what will allow us to live the lives we were made for right at the beginning.

We were made to live not just natural lives like the animals, just hunting for food and pleasure. We were made to live natural divine lives, physical and spiritual divine lives in that overlap.

[17:50] That's what we were created for, but because of sin, it's only through your life being united to Christ, you being in Him and Him being in you, that you can ever live the life you were made for and therefore be fully human.

You can only be fully human insofar as Christ is in you and you are in Christ. And that is what He came to earth and died to enable you to be.

He enabled you to be fully human again. And that also is why as Colossians 1.27 says, this union with Christ is our hope of glory.

That's how Paul says it. Our hope of glory. I'll read it again. Colossians 1.27 God wanted to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

And what that's saying is that Christ in you doesn't just give you hope that your sins are forgiven and that you are safe in the judgment one day. But if you are united with Christ, what that means is that all the glory He has now becomes yours because you are in Him.

[19:15] Martin Luther, the great reformer, described it in this way. He says, by this mystery, as the apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh.

And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage, it follows that everything they have, they hold in common, the good as well as the evil.

Accordingly, the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were its own. You see what he's saying there? He's saying that when Christ is united to a human soul, when His life is inside a human, it's as if a marriage has taken place which is in community of property where just as Christ inherits all of our evil on Himself and deals with it on the cross, we inherit therefore all the glory that is due Him.

It's a common holding together of what is ours and His in one. That is the result of our lives being united to Him according to the Bible.

But if that is true, now if all this that I've been saying in trying to describe this profound biblical doctrine of union with Christ is true that Christ is really in you if you're a Christian and you are really in Him in Heaven, if you understand that and you really believe it, it will change you.

[20:54] This is such an important doctrine because if a Christian understands it, it changes them. And Paul actually goes on two chapters later in Colossians to describe just how understanding this reality changes a Christian.

Turn with me to Colossians chapter 3 because the first section of Colossians chapter 3 is a summary of all the ways that being united to Christ changes someone.

And I wonder if it's also not a useful way of assessing your own life to see whether the divine life is indeed living inside you as you compare your life to these verses.

Colossians 3 1 to 11 let me read that. So if you have been raised with Christ seek the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on things above not on earthly things for you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears then you also will appear with him in glory.

[ 22 : 17 ] Therefore put to death what belongs to your earthly nature sexual immorality impurity lust evil desire and greed which is idolatry. Because of these God's wrath is coming upon the disobedient and you once walked in these things when you were living in them but now put away all the following anger wrath malice slander and filthy language from your mouth do not lie to one another since you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self you are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your creator in Christ there is not Greek or Jew circumcision and uncircumcision barbarian Scythian slave and free but Christ is all and in all and so before we finish I just want to summarize from this passage how being united with

Christ having Christ's life actually living inside you changes you firstly it gives you a whole new identity it changes the way you look at yourself look at the beginning of verse 10 of Colossians 3 and you have put on the new self you are new you are a new person when you have Christ's life living in you no longer are you just a natural human living in the natural world and natural life now you have become if you have Christ in you truly human because you have both natural and divine life inside you you are a new person secondly not only does it give you a new identity it gives other Christians a new identity to you think about this look at verse 11 in Christ there is not Jew or Greek circumcision or uncircumcision barbarian Scythian slave and free but Christ is all and in all I wonder if you've considered that your Christian brother or sister has Christ inside them Christ is inside them just as Christ is living in you he is living in the Christian brother or sister next to you and so when you look at them again you you see them in a whole different way when you believe that when you understand that Christ is inside them you don't judge them anymore by human criteria you don't see them as merely human anymore and you you're able more to overlook their human flawed sinful irritating characteristics because there's something deeper and more profound and more important inside them

Christ alive is in them they are people in whom Christ dwells and importantly through whom Christ ministers to you have you ever thought of that often we we waiting for Christ to help us Jesus help me with this Jesus have a word for me Jesus speak to me and Jesus is saying yeah I'm trying to through the Christian that's right next to you who you're ignoring who you're not going to growth group because you're too busy with your life and your troubles I'm right there in them I've got something to say to you you know Jesus works and ministers in our lives through his people in whom he is he lives but Christ is all and in all and so seek out other Christians if you want more of Christ in your life because he's in them thirdly when we are united to

Christ life when you are united to Christ life it gives you a new status not just a new identity not just a new view of other Christians but a new status before God himself verse three for you died that's your status you're dead but he's talking about your sinful nature that is under God's wrath is now dead already if you are in Christ if Christ life is in you if Christ death is in you and that's by the way one of the things we celebrate in the Lord's supper we once again take Christ's death inside ourselves that's what we're doing when we eat and drink this and it gives you a new status therefore you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God your sins can no longer condemn you because Christ's death is in you it counts as yours remember you hold all things in common with [ 27 : 28 ] Christ when you are united to him which means that your sin belongs to him and his death that atoned for it belongs to you and they are paid for your sins are paid for if you are in Christ fourth it gives you a new purpose look at verse one so if you have been raised with Christ seek the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God if divine life is in you you no longer live just for the natural life the natural life does no longer control you but you are called to live for a higher calling you are possessed by Christ's life and priorities now if Christ is in you fifth it gives you new power in you power that you didn't have before look at the second half of verse 10 of Colossians 3 you are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your creator you are being renewed from the inside out

Christ's life in you is changing you and enabling you to do new things and to live and think in new ways that you couldn't before that your earthly life would never be capable of and six it gives you a

new destiny to be united to Christ look at verse four oh this is awesome when Christ who is your life appears then you also will appear with him in glory the true you will appear in all its glory when Christ appears in all his glory when you are if you are attached to him if he is in you and you are in him so to end I want to ask you a question do you have Christ's life living inside you today because it's that life that will give you

Christ's priorities it's that life that will make you passionate about Christian things it's that life that will cause you to think God's thoughts and to worship him in truth maybe that's not you maybe you just find yourself going through the motions here at church the worship is not heartfelt your thoughts are not God's thoughts your priorities are not Christ's priorities you look around at these other Christians and you feel a bit awkward because they seem so much more passionate than you truly feel that was me once when I grew up in going to church one of the things I remember as a young teen is that I looked around at the other Christians around me during worship and they were passionate they were singing you could see it was in their hearts in their voices in their eyes and I just didn't feel that well maybe that's you maybe that's you well if that is

Christ wants you to experience his life inside yourself to renew your knowledge to renew your passion to renew your life from the inside out pray and ask Christ for his divine life to enter into you truly receive his Holy Spirit and be born again and if you have received and you know Christ's life is in you then you need to realize you have a higher calling in this world you have a divine life you get to be truly human and so prioritize living that life over your natural life in practical ways in how you spend your time don't organize your time around pursuing the things of the natural life so much as you pursue the things of the divine life don't organize your resources so that you have more things for the natural life organize your resources and spend your money so that you invest in the divine life both yours and others in the decisions you make where to live what job to get don't make those decisions based on the natural life make those decisions based on the divine life

God's priorities God's work God's kingdom allow you see the divine life to control your natural life not the other way around don't allow your natural life to determine how much you're going to how much effort you're going to put into the divine life no that's the wrong way around let your divine life actually control how much effort you're going to put into the natural life you know what I'm saying and then nourish that life you know the Bible if you have that life inside you the Bible says your responsibility is to use the means of grace God has given you to nourish that life with the things that God tells us will grow and strengthen it inside us especially maybe if you feel like it's grown cold recently is that you maybe you know and you've experienced the divine life inside you but recently you've just been so drawn into the priorities of the natural life and you've forgotten what that feels like to be passionate about

[ 33 : 07 ] God to think God's thoughts to love Christ with your whole heart and you've forgotten that and it's grown cold you used to feel it but you don't feel it anymore well I want to tell you you need to nourish that you need to get it back and the Bible tells us we need to take active steps to nourish the divine life Christ's life inside us how do we do that first with the word the word of God is the primary diet that nourishes the divine life inside us because this very thing is what caused the divine life to enter you in the first place and it so therefore will cause the divine life to stay and be nourished in you as you keep delving into it keep reading it keep meeting with other Christians to read it keep sitting under sermons and feeding on God's word realize how much you need it to nourish the divine life you can nourish the natural life quite fine without this all you need for that but the divine life which is eternal and far more important this is what you need to nourish that don't neglect it then also other

Christians other Christians help you to nourish the divine life inside you meet with other Christians who have Christ's life inside them which works like coals in a fire right coals get hot and they maintain their heat when they're in contact with other hot coals not when they're isolated by themselves it's the same with Christians that's why daily devotions growth groups Sunday services the things that we're stressing this year is vital for your spiritual health those are not just things you need to be more spiritually healthy they're things you need to nourish the very divine life inside you if you're a Christian don't neglect them another way to nourish the divine life is praying and praying together with other Christians the prayer meeting we're going to have on Wednesday is one of the key ways that we as Christians step out of the natural life and engage in the divine realm from earth it's an amazing experience if you know what's going on when we meet together as

Christians we are entering into that overlap between heaven and earth we are engaging in the divine realm and we are exercising the divine life inside us when we gather together for prayer don't neglect it don't miss it and finally the Lord's Supper which we are now going to consider how that feeds our divine life so let us turn to that now let us engage in the sacrament of communion but before we do let me just explain what we're about to do in terms of what we've learned from scripture this morning you see the significance of communion the significance of eating this bread and drinking this wine this juice and the fact that God is endowed it with spiritual significance for us this whole activity that we're about to engage in as

Christians comes and the significance of it comes because we are united with Christ if you're not united with Christ this is just bread and just grape juice from spa it's nothing more than that but if you're united with Christ this does something to that divine life inside you 1 Corinthians 10 16 Paul says this talking about communion he says is the cup of the cup is is not a participation in the blood of Christ and the bread that we break is this not a participation in the body of Christ or another translation is a communion in the body of Christ and the blood of Christ that's what the word communion comes from communion have you ever wondered what it means communion what is it referring to communion refers to the communion of our lives with Christ and that's why the act of eating and drinking is so vital whenever we eat something you see we're recognizing that for physical life to carry on we need something outside to come into us to nourish us well it's the same with our divine life when we eat the

Lord's supper we recognize that we need the life and death of Christ to be inside us to it actually does something to us doesn't it when you ate that steak last night or whatever it was for supper you had last night it did something inside you maybe you didn't feel it right away or at all but you know that as you eat it it's good for you we know it's going to nourish us in ways we can't see the same happens when we consume the Lord's Supper in faith as Christians it's given to us by God it comes with the promise that through it in ways that we can't see God promises to nourish our divine life as we take it in faith of what it represents and that's why Jesus commanded his people to do this on a regular basis because it's the primary way God not only reminds Christians of our union with Christ but he strengthens and nourishes that union and that's why Christians shouldn't miss this shouldn't miss the fourth

[ 38 : 34 ] Sunday of the month by the way if you going away on holiday if you have to choose a Sunday to miss church don't miss this one because this is not just a mere sign God does something when we do this God does something in us that we can't see