

John 14 and 15 Union and its Rewards

Jesus has frequently taught His disciples of the close bond between Himself and God the Father. He now begins to speak more than before about the Holy Spirit, making it clear that these three coexist in close harmony. The Son of God came into this world in the flesh so that human beings like us could be saved from our sins and inherit eternal life and *share* this sweet intimacy with the Lord and with one another.

One of the disciples asks about God the Father and Jesus says, ‘Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father...I am in the Father and the Father is in me...If you love me you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth....If anyone loves me he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him...the Holy Spirit Whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things...Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.’

Jesus has already told the disciples he’s leaving them and returning to the Father and they’re naturally anxious and upset. He tells them and us not to be overcome by fear or sadness. Even though we don’t see Him physically now, He is constantly with us through the presence of the Holy Spirit. We are very much connected with God and this is His will and desire. Those who repent from sin and trust in Jesus are not just forgiven our sins and promised heaven instead of hell, we are ‘united’ to our Lord, reborn and being nurtured in His likeness through the work of the Holy Spirit.

According to Jesus it’s all very relational, like family.

In our family there are six of us, my wife and I and four grown up children. At the moment we are in several different countries. Because we are not physically in one place and can’t see or hear or touch one other does this mean we aren’t a family? Of course not! We know and love each other in a very unique bond. We’re connected, we belong together, we are and will always be family, even if we are often apart.

Now while this is true, it’s not something we should take for granted. Being a family gives us a basis and context for relationship, but relationships need maintaining. Quality time, regular communication, shared interest and concern and ready help. We need to stay in touch! And it’s this ongoing mutual practise of loving relationship that makes family such a special, joyful thing.

Back in chapter one of this Gospel, the Apostle John declared that all who receive Christ, who believe in His name are given power to become children of God. Christians, whatever our background, age or temperament are God's beloved family, united to Christ, indwelt by the same Holy Spirit. He makes us so. However just like any other family we need to 'keep in touch', maintain a positive connection with the Lord and each other.

'I am the true vine,' Jesus says in ch15, 'you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.' As the family grows and branches out, staying connected to stem and root is what makes us blossom and flourish and prove fruitful in a multitude of positive ways. Just as the sap from the stem nourishes the branches of a vine, the presence of Christ in us by His Spirit helps us grow in faith and mature fruitfully.

So how does this work in practise? How do we 'remain' in Him? Jesus saves a person and makes them a child of God the first time they consciously trust in Him as Saviour but how do we stay close and live as members of God's family?

As we said about any family, quality time and regular communication are vital to keep relationships healthy. We need to develop godly habits like coming to worship on the Lord's Day. It's not impossible to practise faith on our own but the Lord wants us to do it together in the fellowship of His Church. He commands us to 'love one another'.

There's an old chorus that goes, 'Read the Bible, pray every day if you want to grow.' Make it part of your daily routine, begin and end each day with prayer. Name your family before the Throne of Grace every morning and pray the Lord's Prayer. Begin the day seeking the honour of His name, the spreading of His Kingdom's influence and His will in your life and the lives of those you'll meet that day. Lay your head on the pillow each night with thanksgiving for the Good Shepherd's protection and provision through the day.

And set aside a little time to read some Scripture. A million and one other influences will flood your mind during these waking hours. Balance those with a little of God's truth and wisdom!

As we seek to 'remain' in Jesus, as we practise our faith in the Lord with these spiritual disciplines, what kind of results should we expect? Let's look again at what Jesus says to reassure His anxious disciples in the upper room.

Well, the Spirit will prompt us to loving obedience. Look how often Jesus links love and obedience together in this passage. As we prayerfully surrender to

God's will each day we'll find ourselves prompted to make life choices that honour God. Some things we won't be comfortable doing any more. Goodness and righteousness become increasingly attractive. We care less about gratifying ourselves and more about pleasing our Maker. Ironically it appears the more believers sacrifice for their Master, the happier and freer they become!

More, the powerful supply of help from Jesus through the Spirit will make us fruitful in His service. We can expect to see prayers answered. We will be enabled to extend His ministry and mission further and wider. We find a growing concern for others, for their wellbeing, not least their salvation.

And finally for now, Jesus promises we shall know His joy and His peace. It's the joy of serving, knowing we are in God's will. It's a peace that is often beyond our understanding, a quality of calm assurance even when facing tremendous challenge. Look at the Lord at this last Supper. He knows He is about to suffer unimaginable grief and pain yet He is composed, concerned for His friends, gently reassuring them. This peace of Christ which trusts in God's plan that all will in time be well He gives to His followers through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

We will have trouble in this world, He says, but we mustn't lose heart. He has overcome the world and so shall we, when we remain in Him!