

Who . . .

. . . Are You ?

. . . Are You

Talking To?

. . . Do You

Belong To?

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# Who Are You?

If you ask me who I am, I could simply give you my name. Would that be enough? Maybe, if you were just checking through a list of people. When I went to the clinic for my booster jab, that's almost all they wanted to know. They also asked for my date of birth, to make sure that they had the right person there. Perhaps they have two or more patients with the same name. Quite important to give the right injection to the right person! Often, people want my address as well, for much the same reason.

But does that really answer the question? We may not be bold (or cheeky) enough to ask people to their face "But who are you **really**?", but we usually want to know more about them so that we begin to feel that we know them. Perhaps we will chat with them a little and ask about their family, their work, their home and their friends. Maybe we will also talk with other people who know them and find out a bit more. If a friendship starts, it will probably be because we have found some areas of each other's lives that are similar and then, as the conversations deepen, we find out more about 'what makes them tick' and the friendship becomes closer.

Have you asked yourself the same question? About your own self? "Who am I, really?" "What is my real identity?" "How would I describe myself?" Or do those sorts of questions seem either worrying or pointless? Worrying, perhaps, because they come close to asking whether your life has any meaning or purpose and you may not have a very good answer to that. Or pointless because "What difference do the answers to these questions make to my normal everyday life?"

We can easily pass by questions like these and just live in the present moment, living life as it comes, with its pleasures and pains, without asking ourselves 'deep' questions, perhaps deliberately avoiding them. But usually, sooner or later, we find ourselves facing them. Maybe a crisis triggers it and we begin to seek answers. Perhaps many of the normally stable factors in our lives are suddenly upset and we find ourselves strangely isolated? We may question the purpose of life in general, suddenly feeling very small and insignificant in a confusing world.

Why am I going on about this? Just that I want to look at some of what the Bible says about who we are, and it is all too easy to put these 'religious bits' in a separate compartment of our lives which is reserved for Sundays and perhaps other occasions when we meet with other Christian believers. Some of these truths have become so familiar that we fail to see the real meaning of the words we use so often . . .

## I Am A Child of God.

Just take a step back for a moment and try to understand what an awesome claim this is. Many people's idea of God is not necessarily the traditional Christian picture, and in fact our own understanding may have been limited by our familiarity with the words. Perhaps we know what it says in **John 1:11-13** : *"He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."*

For many who believe that there is a God, they don't see him as the benevolent father-figure that we may have grown up with, nor as the terrifying all-righteous Judge of all mankind. They may start with the idea of an almighty creative power, not necessarily personal but certainly all-powerful. If they begin to think that he just **might** be personal as well, then they are probably still thinking in terms of power and perhaps control of the whole of creation. A truly awesome being!

Now, take that understanding of an awesome, creative and all-powerful being who is over the whole of creation – and add the claim that we make of being his children. WOW ! How comfortable are we to try to explain this claim to our non-Christian friends? Have we thought it through?

Just for a moment, let's look at the words used in the New Testament. The word translated 'children' in **John 1** is the Greek word '*tekna*', which literally means 'born ones'. So we have been born to God as our Father. In case there could be any doubt about that, the word translated 'born' literally means

‘begotten’ or ‘fathered’. You and I, individually fathered by God, the all-powerful creator! That’s quite a claim!<sup>1</sup>

This is very different from the idea that all human beings are ‘God’s children’. Paul touches on that in Athens, in **Acts 17:28,29**, where the word translated ‘children’ is different, linked to our word ‘generic’ meaning ‘of the same type’. It seems to be linked to the fact that **all** human beings are made ‘in God’s image’, i.e. like him in many ways, especially perhaps in our personal individuality. (**Genesis 1:26,27**) Basically, here Paul is saying that we humans are made in God’s likeness and that, simply from that fact alone, we should realise think that God himself can not be represented by something man-made, just a lump of wood, metal or stone.

There are many New Testament references to the fact that, through trust in the Lord Jesus, we have become children - ‘born ones’ - of God.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps one of the most exciting aspects of this is that we have also become . . .

### Heirs with Christ.

What does this mean? An heir is someone who inherits, someone who receives property, wealth, title or power, usually from someone who has died. In **Romans 8:16-17**, Paul writes: *“The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, since we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.”* For us to be ‘fellow heirs with Christ’, it means that Jesus must also be an heir – but an heir of what?

In **Hebrews 1:2**, it says that *“in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”* In **Colossians 1:18** it says “. . . so that he himself will come to have first place in everything.” (Other translations say ‘pre-eminence’ or ‘supremacy’). Read the whole stunning passage from **verses 13-20** !

A time is coming when the most amazing announcement will be made: *“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ; and he will reign for ever and ever.”* (**Revelation 11:15**). Perhaps we are aware of this but see it as something far off and somehow remote from us but, about 600 years before Jesus’ birth, the prophet Daniel was given these insights into future events: *“And behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a son of man was coming, and he came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom . . . His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away . . . But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever, for all ages to come . . . The Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favour of the saints of the Highest One, and the time came when the saints took possession of the kingdom . . . The the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; his kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey him.”* (**Daniel 7:13-14,18,22,27**) I certainly don’t understand all the details in Daniel and Revelation, but I think I know who the ‘son of man’ is, who the ‘Ancient of Days’ is and who are ‘the people of the saints of the Highest One’ are! These passages show us a little of what is coming in our future as **heirs with Christ**. You may be a little surprised to see that all the events and the coming kingdom are **‘under the whole heaven’**, in other words, here on earth. Not some vague idea of ‘going to heaven’, but the establishment of the kingdom of God on this earth!

We get another hint of this amazing future in **Romans 8:18-25**, especially **verses 19-22**. The whole of creation has been placed under the control of mankind and, as a result, is ‘groaning’, waiting and longing for the time when the children (‘born ones’) of God will be revealed in glory as his sons and heirs.<sup>3</sup>

Don’t miss this point: Paul reminds us that sharing Jesus’ glory in the future means sharing in suffering with him now. But any suffering we undergo is nothing compared with that future glory! (**v.17**)

But that’s all in the future, of course, what about NOW? Two things, each perhaps a little less spectacular than future glory, but in some ways even more miraculous . . .

<sup>1</sup> For more about spiritual rebirth, see ‘Reborn’ at [www.justonecandle.uk](http://www.justonecandle.uk)

<sup>2</sup> **John 1:12, John 11:52, Romans 8:16 & 17, Romans 8:21, Romans 9:8, Ephesians 5:1, Philippians 2:15, 1 John 3:1, 2 & 10**

<sup>3</sup> See also **Acts 3:21, 2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:1**

## We are Heirs Already, not Slaves!

I make absolutely no apology for coming back to this again! One of the commonest traps for Christians to fall into is legalism. We may know that we are no longer under the Ten Commandments, no longer bound by rules and regulations, but we still slip so easily into trying to follow patterns of behaviour – set by the Bible, by Christian teachers, by our friends or by our own idea of what we ‘ought to do’. Consciously or not, we start thinking that God’s blessing in our lives is dependent on our performance. It isn’t. He always acts according to his grace, not by the measure of our achievement. We have been set free!

Do you remember the picture that Paul uses in **Galatians 3:23 - 4:7**? In those times, the son and heir of a rich man would be placed under the authority of a trusted slave, who kept the boy in line with his father’s wishes and trained him, making sure that he went to school and learned his lessons properly. Then, when the son had matured and was ready to take his place in the adult world, his father would set a date when he would declare his son as his heir. At that point, the boy (now recognised as an adult) would no longer be under the control of the slave and would start to act as the junior head of the household.

That, says Paul, is what has happened to us. We used to be under slavery but now we are heirs in our Father’s household.<sup>1</sup> **We are no longer under law. It has no more place in our relationship with God our Father.** Another way of saying the same thing is that we are dead to the law. (**Romans 7:6**)

There is a wonderful Old Testament promise about sonship. See **Hosea 2:23, 1:10**, quoted in **Romans 9:25,26, 1 Peter 2:9-10**

But here is another amazing fact: Right here, right now, we can begin to share our Father’s own divine nature! Who am I? I am someone who is . . .

### . . . Gradually Becoming More Like Jesus

Wow! That’s quite a claim! Perhaps not one that we will want to share around too much, because we know that our lives don’t always match up! BUT it is still what the Lord tells us is really happening in our lives, so we need to take it on board for ourselves as we go on discovering who we really are. And **maybe** – hopefully, anyway – some of our closest friends, our spouses and close family will actually detect changes in our lives which confirm that it really is happening!

Looking first at the completion of the process gives us a strong hint as to how this works in our lives. In **1 John 3:2**, John looks at who we are now and then at who we shall be when we see Jesus. A simple statement: *“We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”* The transformation will be complete because the revelation will be complete.

Paul writes about this process in **Ephesians 1:15-19** (– and onwards!). He longs for the believers in Ephesus to have more and more real knowledge of the Lord Jesus – and then spends much of the rest of the letter expanding that revelation for them! And again, in **Ephesians 3:16-19**, he asks the Father to strengthen them *“with power through his Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith . . . that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”* He prays much the same for the believers in Colossae in **Colossians 1:9-12**.

But is this just to fill our heads with facts, or is it of some practical use? How can our increasing revelation and knowledge of Jesus – who he is and what he has done – make any real difference to who we are? *“Therefore as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, having been firmly rooted, being built up in him and established in your faith . . .”* (**Colossians 2:6-7**)

Yes, as believers in the Lord Jesus, our lives have been joined with his and we are **in him**. And all the promises of God are ‘yes’ **in him** (**2 Corinthians 1:20**), ready for us to take hold of them. Peter writes about the same process in **2 Peter 1:3&4**: *“His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and excellence. For by these he has granted to us his precious and magnificent promises, so that by them*

<sup>1</sup> This ‘placing as a son’ is translated confusingly as ‘adoption’ in most Bibles. The ‘tutor’/‘guardian’/‘schoolmaster’ mentioned in **3:24 & 25** is actually the word used for that trusted slave.

*you may become **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust."*

So, how does this work? How can I take hold of God's promises in such a way that my life will be changed?

'Revelation' and 'knowledge' of Jesus may sound super-spiritual, but this is how it works for me:–

Something 'lights up' for me, usually from what I have read in the Bible or from what someone has said or written. Sometimes I begin to better understand a Bible passage that I have known for years. It may or may not come with strong emotions, but it becomes firm and settled with me and I feel that I really know it. I have 'heard' something that God has spoken to me. A 'promise', if you like.

This 'hearing' produces faith. We don't need to try to manufacture faith ourselves! My reaction is sometimes 'Can this really be true?' But the more I 'listen', the more the conviction grows. Paul sums it up neatly: *"So faith out of hearing and hearing through the word of Christ."* (**Romans 10:17** – literal translation). Paul also refers to 'the obedience of faith' and I think I know what he means. There are times when what I am 'hearing' is clear enough, but the implications on my life may not be what I expect or even want. Then it's a choice: do I go with what is becoming an increasing conviction, or do I disregard it and carry on as before? Will I take hold of this promise with its built-in spiritual growth, even if the results may be uncomfortable?

The process of being transformed may have its ultimate completion when Jesus returns, but it is certainly going on now. *"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."* (**2 Corinthians 3:18**) For a wonderful blend of spiritual instruction and practical application, try reading the whole of Paul's letter to the **Colossians** !

So, who are you – who am I ?

A child of God, fathered by him.

A son and heir (yes, this applies to male and female alike) in the future and right now.

Someone who is being transformed to be like Jesus.

Why should all this be true for me? There is ultimately only one answer – the love of God. That he should care enough for us, for you, for me, that he would make all of this happen in our lives. We may have become accustomed to hearing about the love of God, but think about it again . . .

All of this for us when we were completely away from him!

I am someone who is loved by God!

Fear not, for I have redeemed you,  
I have called you by name,  
you are mine.  
**Isaiah 43:1**

God demonstrates his own love toward us,  
in that while we were yet sinners,  
Christ died for us.  
**Romans 5:8**

Dave Taylor June 2022

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# Who Are You Talking To ?

Have you ever felt a little uncertain about who you are talking to when you pray?

Have you heard other Christians praying and either wondered how they seem so clear who they are talking to, or else realised that they too may be a little confused . . ?

I have certainly found myself in all those different places at different times, so let's see whether we can discover a little more clarity together . . .

As far as I can remember, as a young boy before I became a believer in Jesus (and probably after as well!), I used to 'pray' by asking God to do things that I wanted, perhaps to get me out of difficult situations. These were 'prayers' of minor desperation when I had run out of other options, and many people experience the same thing. Even some common slang expressions probably come from these situations, when people who have no particular faith say things like "Oh my God!" or "God help us!"

In my early years as a Christian, I copied what I heard other believers saying. They said 'Lord' when they prayed, and I think I started by thinking that they were talking to Jesus. But then that bit which usually came at the end – 'in Jesus' name' – made me wonder. If we were praying to the Lord Jesus, why did we need to say 'in his name' at the end? So I sort of worked out that we were talking to God and that the name of Jesus was like some sort of password that (hopefully) made sure that God would listen to what we were saying to him. I had heard about the Holy Spirit but was not really clear how he was involved. And, I must admit, I definitely thought of him as 'it' rather than 'him' and found it a bit strange that some people **insisted** that we had to refer to him as a person. More of that later.

People have been talking to God – or at least trying to – since the dawn of time, and the world is full of stories and myths from countless different and often ancient traditions.

In **Genesis 1**, the creation story speaks simply of 'God', but by **Genesis 2:4** we begin to see that he has a name. In almost all modern Bibles, that name is represented by LORD in small capitals. This name continues to be used throughout the books of the Old Testament. Perhaps this is another reason that we use 'Lord' when we talk to him, but it is easy to forget that **this was not a title but the name of God**.

We need to turn forward to **Exodus 3:13-15** to find the origin of that name. God appears to Moses in the burning bush and commissions him to go back into Egypt and rescue the descendants of Jacob (the 'sons of Israel') from their centuries of slavery there. Moses protests that the people will want to know who this God is who claims to be 'the God of your fathers'. And so God reveals his name 'I AM WHO I AM' in **v. 14**, or just 'I AM' for short.

It is easy for us to miss the connection with the next verse, where he says that his name is The LORD, the God of their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The word represented in our Bibles as LORD is a Hebrew word written with the four sounds YHWH, which has sometimes been pronounced as 'Jehovah' but is probably more accurately 'Yahweh'. Its meaning is generally accepted as being 'The One Who Is', so this is really a concise way of expressing the same as 'I AM WHO I AM'. See some more explanation in **Exodus 6:3** and **Genesis 17:1, 35:11 & 48:3**.

All the other nations around had their own 'gods' and the Egyptians had several of their own. They all had names, so it was important for Moses to be able to report the name of God to his people. Remember that they had been in Egypt for more than 400 years since Jacob had travelled there with all his family, then about 70 people. They now numbered more than 600,000, but we know almost nothing about them for those 400 years. Now Moses appears



and says that he has a message from ‘the God of the ancestors’ – a real ‘blast from the past’ – and that his name is ‘The One Who Is’. In other words, the only true God; all the others are not God at all. By saying ‘Our God is the LORD’, Jews were making a strong claim!

Why am I looking at this? Simply because the whole of the Old Testament uses this word YHWH as the name of God and our Bibles invariably write it as LORD. As a result, we tend to miss that **this is God’s personal name**. Many Jews treated it with such respect that they did not dare to say it out loud and they substituted their word for ‘Lord’, (*Adonai*) especially when in prayer. This is how we got the use of LORD. *Adon* means lord or master and it was also commonly used as a respectful form of address, like ‘Sir’.

We know that the British queen is Queen Elizabeth and we have no hesitation in referring to her by her personal name. But, if we were to meet her in person, we would not call her ‘Elizabeth’ to her face but would call her ‘Ma’am’, which is the feminine version of ‘Sir’. So maybe this is something like the Jewish practice.

Personally, I am becoming a little less convinced! How about all the place names like ‘The LORD Will Provide’ (**Genesis 22:14**) and all the people’s names beginning with ‘Jeho’, ‘Je’ or ‘Jo’. Every time they spoke the name of Jehoshaphat, for example, they were saying ‘YHWH has judged’! And Moses changed the name of his assistant from Hoshea (‘Saviour’) to Jehoshua (‘YHWH is Saviour’)! (**Numbers 13:16**) The Psalms are full of proclaiming the Name of the LORD. See **1 Chronicles 16:31**, which is also **Psalms 96:10**.

In the New Testament, the Greek word is ‘*kurios*’, which once again means lord or master and was also used as a respectful form of address, like ‘Sir’. So it is not surprising that the disciples called Jesus Master and Lord. In fact, every time that they called him Master *or* Lord, it is that same word *kurios*. It was not just a religious word; it was the general word used for the master, the boss, the ‘governor’, the chief. So, you would call your employer *kurios*. Would our attitude change if we started calling Jesus ‘the Boss’?

We don’t see the Name of God in the New Testament. He is referred to simply as God.

But Jesus introduces a new and very personal name for him: Father. There are 6 times in the Old Testament where God is referred to as ‘Father’<sup>1</sup>, and some of them seem to point forward to a new relationship between the people of God and God himself as their Father, but no-one in the Old Testament addressed God as ‘Father’, not even King David.

The Lord Jesus changed all that. Right from the Sermon on the Mount onwards, Jesus referred to God as ‘your Father’ when speaking to the crowds. This was something new! When he referred to God as ‘my Father’, the disciples began to understand (slowly!) that he was the Son of God. The Jewish authorities also understood, and objected strongly because he was making himself equal with God<sup>2</sup>.

And then, when the disciples ask him to teach them how to talk to God, he tells them to call God their Father (**Matthew 6:9, Luke 11:2**), in the same way as he does! I wonder whether they tried it –?

In **John 14** and **16**, at the Passover meal, after Judas had left the upper room, Jesus introduces the eleven to the Father and the Holy Spirit in more depth. And now he takes them on another stage in talking to their Father – asking the Father **in the name of Jesus!**<sup>3</sup>

It is significant that the Lord Jesus tells them at this point, when he has been telling them about the Father, about the Holy Spirit, and about the fact that he is about to leave them to go back to the Father. Everything is about to change.

<sup>1</sup> **Psalms 89:26, Isaiah 63:16, 64:8, Jeremiah 3:4, 3:19, 31:9** plus **Isaiah 9:6** referring to the Messiah.

<sup>2</sup> **John 5:18, 6:41**

<sup>3</sup> **John 14:11-14, 15:7,16, 16:23-30**



Up until then, there had not been free access into the presence of God for everyone who believed. Jews needed to go through the process of offerings and sacrifices for sins, and even then only the high priest could enter the 'holy of holies', not the ordinary people. Now, through offering himself as **a sacrifice that was able to put away sin**, Jesus was about to open the way into the presence of the living God.<sup>1</sup> The curtain in the temple, which separated the holy place from the rest of the building, was torn from top to bottom when Jesus died on the cross, symbolising the removal of the barrier.<sup>2</sup>

Until then, the Holy Spirit had only been given to special people and sometimes for 'one-off' situations. In just a few weeks, he would be poured out on all the disciples, not just the eleven, and then believers would continue to receive him, right up to the present day.

The Holy Spirit is intimately involved in our relationship with our Father. Because we are sons of God through faith in the Lord Jesus, "*God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'*" (**Galatians 4:6**). We have seen before how we have been released from slavery to law and have been made sons and heirs. **Romans 8:15** uses that same word (meaning 'being recognised as a son' but usually translated 'adoption') and says, "*For you did not receive a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you received the Spirit of being recognised as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'*"<sup>3</sup>

'Abba! Father!' is used in just one other place in the New Testament, in **Mark 14:36**, when Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane and asking his Father that, if it were possible, he would not need to die. We have been brought into a relationship with our Father where we can talk to him in the same way as Jesus did!

Even in the specific details of talking to our Father, we need the Holy Spirit to work. See **Romans 8:26 & 27** and **Ephesians 6:18**.

The Holy Spirit is not just some sort of divine force, he is a person. How could he not be, if God has sent forth **the Spirit of his Son** into our hearts? How could the spirit of Jesus be just a force? Jesus himself says to the disciples "*you know him because he abides with you and will be with you.*" (**John 14:17**) In other words, they have already known the Holy Spirit in the person of Jesus. Quite apart from that, even the language of what Jesus says makes it clear: the Greek word for 'spirit' or 'breath' is *pneuma*, a neuter word, so normally this would be referred to as 'it'. Jesus very clearly uses masculine words when talking of the Holy Spirit, referring deliberately to 'he' and 'him'.

Paul is clear, too: "*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty . . . Just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*" (**2 Corinthians 3:17-18**)

I can't find any Bible examples of people praying to the Holy Spirit. To me, this is not surprising, as the Holy Spirit is chiefly concerned with working inside us and with his power upon us. It somehow seems strange to think of talking to the One who lives in me!

Perhaps surprisingly, there don't seem to be many examples of people praying specifically to the risen and ascended Lord Jesus. I can think of only a few: Stephen, as he is dying, says "*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!*" and "*Lord, do not hold this sin against them!*" (**Acts 7:59,60**). And then Saul of Tarsus in **Acts 9:5** asks "*Who are you, Lord?*" when Jesus meets him on the Damascus road. Then possibly the disciple Ananias in Damascus, later in the same chapter. Paul has a conversation with the Lord Jesus which he records in **Acts 22:17-21**. There may be some more . . .

<sup>1</sup> **Hebrews 9 & 10** are full of the details, and especially **9:11-14, 23-28, 10:1-10, 19-22**

<sup>2</sup> **Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38**

<sup>3</sup> 'by which' sounded wrong when I quoted it. The Holy Spirit is a Person, so 'by whom' should be right. I checked the Greek, and it is! The word translated 'by' basically means 'in', so '**in whom**'. That's better!

The emphasis seems to be strongly on a relationship with our Father God **through** the Lord Jesus, who is the one through whom the relationship has been made possible. As Paul writes to Timothy, “*There is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*” (**1 Timothy 2:5**). The word translated ‘men’ and ‘man’ is the word *anthropos*, which means a human being. Jesus has not stopped being human. There is a human being seated at the right hand of God, The One Who Is! Wow!

\* \* \* \* \*

So, is this beginning to be a bit more real to us? Are we getting a bit clearer who we are talking to? Do we know the basis of how we can approach ‘The One Who Is’ and actually call him our Father?

\* \* \* \* \*

Getting back to my own experience, for years I continued to pray ‘Lord’ in very general terms. I heard some people pray ‘Father’ but never ventured to do so myself. And then I began to see that I was **in Christ**, that God himself had placed me in Jesus and had joined my life to his, that in Jesus he really had given me ‘everything pertaining to life and godliness’.

Because I had been placed in Christ, Jesus’ death on the cross was effective for me, my failures and sins were forgiven and I was no longer in slavery to them. My old life was gone, I had the new life of the Holy Spirit inside me and his power was upon my life.

I had begun to see more clearly what had already been true from the time I first believed: I was a child of God. **God was my Father because I was joined to his Son.** Because I had been joined to the Son, I could ask in his name.

I started to call him Father because now I really knew that he was my Father. Looking back on it, I can see that I began to understand fatherhood much more clearly as a result. Sadly, like many men of my post-war generation, I had never had a close relationship with my father, so this had been largely unknown territory for me.

\* \* \* \* \*

So, who are you talking to?

Perhaps to the Lord Jesus himself, to thank him for what he has done, but more likely to the all-powerful Creator, ‘The One Who Is’, who has become your Father through what his Son accomplished, once for all, through his death, burial, resurrection and ascension.

*Therefore, since we have confidence  
to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,  
by a new and living way  
which he inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh,  
and since we have a great priest over the house of God,  
let us draw near with a sincere heart  
in full assurance of faith . . .*  
**Hebrews 10:19-22**

Dave Taylor June 2022

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# Who Do You Belong To?

## 1 – Bought With a Price

“**Belong** to?! I don’t **belong** to anyone! I am my own person.”

We value our independence and the thought that we might be **owned** by someone else may possibly make us angry – or depressed. We don’t want our lives to be dictated by other people’s ideas; we don’t want to be pushed around like some insignificant pawn on a vast global chess board. **BUT . . .**

At the same time, we all have a desire, even a need, to fit in, to be part of something, **to be loved**. We join clubs, groups, societies, websites, mailing lists, movements, political parties, supporter clubs, pressure groups, even churches. Maybe we think that we join them entirely because of the values that they represent, the changes that they are campaigning to bring about, causes that are dear to us. All of that is probably true, but would we feel the same if there was no sense of **belonging**?

Belonging brings with it **loyalty**, a sense of wanting to preserve and protect other members of the group to which we belong – “We have to look after each other!” It is only a short step from there to competitive loyalty, one group against another, defending our own group and even attacking ‘opponent’ groups. When we get to that stage, has belonging gone too far?

And then we may commit ourselves to partnerships, business partnerships, team partnerships and perhaps especially life-partnerships – marriage. Commitment, belonging, loyalty, security, love.

“**So, OK, I’m a Christian believer. Who do I belong to?**”

Toughest answer first: If you are a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, a disciple, one who is being taught by him, you are NOT your own person! You are **owned** by Someone Else, who has actually **bought** you, who has paid an enormous price for you, a price you could certainly not afford. *“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought <sup>1</sup> with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”* (**1 Corinthians 6:19,20**) Paul is writing in the context of temptations to sexual immorality, so the words are targeted in that direction, but the general point is clear. More about bodies and sex later!

He underlines it again (this time with the illustration of slavery) in **1 Corinthians 7:23**, and the point is made clearer still: This is an **exclusive ownership** ! If

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<sup>1</sup> The word ‘to buy’ is *agorazo*, from *agora*, the Greek market place, where all buying and selling took place, including buying and selling of slaves. One of the words translated ‘redeem’ in the New Testament is *exagorazō* – ‘to buy **out of** the market place’. The other is *lutroō* – ‘to release’, and the commonest word translated ‘redemption’ is *apolutrōsis* – ‘release away’.

one Master has paid the price for you, you can not be the slave of another. But what consolation such ownership brings with it! A promise made to Israel in **Isaiah 43:1** : *“But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, and he who formed you, O Israel, ‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed <sup>1</sup> you; I have called you by name; you are mine!’ ”* Called by name. Not just bought out of the marketplace as a nameless slave, but selected by the One who has known you from the beginning. Ownership, yes. But personal and loving selection.

There are many references to the **fact** that we have been **bought with a price**, including **Revelation 5:1-10**, which gives us just a little glimpse into the purpose of God in paying that enormous price for us.<sup>2</sup>

Paul in **Romans 1:1**, calls himself a ‘slave of Christ Jesus’ but that certainly does not mean a hard and slavish relationship! For example, in **Romans 8:38-40** he writes: *“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Paul is a slave in **response** to that love, and counts his own life as being over, crucified with Christ and yet living in him, by faith in him *“who loved me and gave himself for me.”* (**Galatians 2:20**)

There are two passages in the Old Testament, right in the heart of the Law, which give an illustration of this sort of willing subjection to slavery. They refer to the same scenario, where a Jew actually buys another Jew as a slave, who will serve him for six years before being released. At the end of the six years, the slave can choose to remain in slavery to this family **because he loves them**. He then has his ear pierced as a mark of his ongoing slave service. See **Exodus 21:2-6** and **Deuteronomy 15:12-17**.

At the end of **Romans 11**, Paul writes about the severity, kindness and mercy of God in his dealings with the Jews and with Gentile believers *“. . . so that he may show mercy to all.”* (**v.32**), which leads Paul on to one of his famous ‘therefore’s: *“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, your spiritual service of worship”* (**Romans 12:1**). See also **Romans 6:12-19** & **Romans 14:7-9**.

**“Do I belong to anyone else?”**

We talk about family members as ‘ours’: **my** father, **my** mother, **my** brother, **my** sister, **my** son, **my** daughter, and so on. So in a real way they ‘belong’ to us

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<sup>1</sup> In Old Testament days, one who fell on hard times could be ‘redeemed’ by a close relative, in line with principles set out in the Jewish Law. This is exactly what Boaz did for Ruth (and therefore for Naomi as well) in **Ruth 3 & 4**.

<sup>2</sup> Some more verses to follow up: **Acts 2:28**, **1 Corinthians 7:23**, **Ephesians 1:7,14**, **Colossians 1:12-14**, **1 Peter 1:17-19**, **2:9**, **2 Peter 2:1**.

and we ‘belong’ to them, but the Lord Jesus has some difficult words to say into family relationships:— *“If anyone comes to me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”* (**Luke 14:26**. See also **Matthew 10:34-38**, **Mark 10:29,30**, **Luke 12:51-53**.) All the scholars agree that ‘hate’ here means ‘hate by comparison to our love for the Lord’, but the message is clear: family loyalties are insignificant when compared to our relationship with our Master. Many personal histories of men and women of God have examples in which that stronger commitment was severely tested. You may have also experienced some of that yourself or seen it play out in others’ lives.

In his own case, there was at least one occasion when Jesus showed that his family relationships were secondary. (See **Matthew 12:46-50**, **Mark 3:31-35**, **Luke 8:19-21**) Natural family relationships, normally in relationship with a father (see **Ephesians 3:14,15**), are put in the shade by the relationship of ‘the obedience of faith’ with THE Father. Even when he is just 12 years old and Mary incorrectly refers to Joseph as being his father, the young Jesus pointedly refers to his priority relationship with his true Father and his need to be involved in his affairs (**Luke 2:41-52**).

That didn’t mean, though, that Jesus had a bad relationship with his natural family! At the beginning of his ministry, Mary and Jesus’s brothers stayed with him and his disciples in Capernaum (**John 2:12**). Later, his brothers did not believe in him (**John 7:5**) – possibly with a similar reaction to his radical teaching that caused many disciples to drift away in **John 6:66** – but it seems that they came back, as they and Mary were very much part of the early church in Jerusalem (**Acts 1:14**).

But there is an important ‘family’ relationship which needs careful attention. Our wives and husbands, the life-partners whom our Lord has given to us. Yes, even they must take second place to the Lord Jesus, and it is a happy marriage which starts with that mutual understanding or, if not at the very beginning, then at a later stage establishes his Lordship as the top priority.

But there is more! In **1 Corinthians 7:4**, Paul writes this: *“The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife.”* This continues on from the passage we looked at earlier, where he was writing about our body as a temple of the Holy Spirit in the context of avoiding sexual sin. Now he goes on to write about our sexual relationships within marriage, and this verse certainly goes a long way to dispel the idea that Paul was a misogynist! How many of his modern-day critics would go so far as Paul does and say “I don’t have authority over my body, but my partner does” – especially in terms of sexual relationships ?!

It’s really important to see what Paul means here. He does NOT mean that one partner can say to the other “I own your body, so you must do what I want.” Rather that each of you can say to the other “my body is given over to you, to

please you.” It means **giving, not taking**. And, once again, within the framework of the Lordship of Christ in your individual lives and in your marriage together.

There’s a striking parallel here, between our marriage relationships with each other and our individual relationships with the Lord. In **Romans 6:16 & 19**, Paul writes about being ‘slaves of righteousness’ and in **6:22** about being ‘slaves of God’ and the key, he says, is that we present ourselves to God. This is echoed in that familiar passage in **Romans 12:1-2**, where he urges us to present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice.

Yes, we have been bought with a great price, but our Father does not **force** us into service. He longs for us to respond to his love by willingly presenting and offering our bodies to him as ‘living sacrifices’. If he does not **demand** our slavery, despite having bought us, how can we **demand** compliance from our marriage partner? We can’t. Again, the key is presenting or offering ourselves to each other. And, of course, although the context of **1 Corinthians 7:4** is our sexual relationships within marriage, it’s not only about sex but about our ongoing marriage partnership in all its aspects. **We have given ourselves to each other**,<sup>1</sup> once for all, but the process continues throughout our lives together.

In a similar way, **Romans 12:1-2** is about our need to make a ‘once for all’ commitment in **response** to the fact that we have been ‘bought with a price’, and then speaks of the ongoing process as our lives continue to be transformed – a transformation that proves itself in real daily life! The rest of that chapter is all about practical ways in which our changed lives are visible.

\* \* \* \* \*

These are some of the basics, some starting points for our understanding of who we belong to as followers of Jesus, and some of the **practical implications** in our day-to day living. Next time, hopefully we shall explore more about the purposes of God and who our Father has **designed** us to belong to – along with some danger areas!

Dave Taylor April 2024

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<sup>1</sup> In **1 Corinthians 7:32-35**, Paul writes about how the married person is concerned to please their partner and contrasts that with the single person who can concentrate on being concerned ‘about the things of the Lord’. I used to think that he is criticising marriage here and advising against it, but actually all he is doing is stating facts: Husbands and wives are concerned for each other, and that is as it should be; single people don’t have that additional concern and so can concentrate exclusively on pleasing the Lord.



# Who Do You Belong To?

## 2 – High Stakes !

Last time, we looked at our own personal relationship with God as a result of the fact that we have been ‘bought with a price’, along with how that works out in some of our close personal relationships with other people.

Now we need to explore some ‘high stakes’ areas that follow on as we extend relationships beyond ourselves and our immediate close family circle.

The first follows on from our personal relationships. The second is a high priority area where the purposes of God are bound up with our ‘belonging’.

In each case, the stakes are high and the dangers are real.

**“Is any belonging ‘off limits’ for a Christian?”**

In other words, are there any close ‘belonging’ relationships that won’t fit with the fact that we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Well, there’s one fairly obvious one, summed up in a well-known verse, and we probably remember the Authorised (King James) version best: *“Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?”*<sup>1</sup> The old translation is ‘unequally yoked’, which is the literal meaning of the Greek word, and the picture is graphic: trying to get two different types of animal harnessed side by side to pull a cart or a plough! <sup>2</sup> Out of balance, maybe pulling in different directions, with two completely different approaches. An obvious non-starter!

But where do we draw the line? And does that apply retrospectively? In other words, when we first come to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, if we are already in a close relationship or partnership with someone who is not a believer, do we need to break it off? The closest relationship is marriage, and Paul is very clear that a believer should not split from their unbelieving spouse if their partner is willing to stay with them in the marriage (**1 Corinthians 7:12-16**). In fact, a more accurate translation of ‘*do not be bound together with unbelievers*’ would be to say ‘*do not become bound together with unbelievers*’. So it seems that the same principle may apply: not necessarily pulling out of existing close relationships with non-Christians, but avoiding getting involved in fresh ones. But these are guidelines, not rules, and there may well be circumstances in which we do need to pull out of close partnerships that are potentially, or actually, damaging.

This does NOT mean that we have nothing at all to do with non-believers! Some ‘Christian’ sects have gone that far, and some Jewish ones too. We only have to look at the reaction of the Pharisees to Jesus mixing with ‘tax collectors and sinners’

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<sup>1</sup> Read the whole passage: **2 Corinthians 6:14-18**

<sup>2</sup> There was even an Old Testament commandment against this, in **Deuteronomy 22:10** !



to see that very clearly. And also, of course, to see that Jesus did not agree with them! <sup>1</sup> Paul makes it very clear in **1 Corinthians 5:9-11** that associating [literally, 'being mixed up together'] with non-believers with all sorts of undesirable lifestyles is unavoidable. It's those close partnerships which can be dangerous, in which we begin to 'belong' to each other.

**“What about other Christians? Do I belong to them? Do they belong to me?”**

In a word, YES ! Both! But let's look at a little more detail . . .

We belong together because we are one body and are individually members of that body (**Romans 12:5**). What body is that? The body of Christ, the Church. That doesn't mean any one organised group that calls itself a church, but **all** those – and **only** those – who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. We saw last time that each one of us who is a disciple of Jesus has been **bought with a price** and we are not our own. We belong to him and **we belong to each other because we belong to him** and our individual lives have been joined to his. In a very real way, we have a shared life source. Just like a human body needs all its parts to be working properly in order to enjoy healthy life, so it is with the body of Christ.

How did we become members of that body? Not by joining an organisation, not by agreeing to a 'statement of faith', not by signing anything, not by going through any ceremony, not even by believer's baptism. No, we became members of the body of Christ by being given new life, by being re-born by the Holy Spirit of God: *“as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”* <sup>2</sup> And it is God himself who has joined us to the Lord Jesus, as Paul says so succinctly in **1 Corinthians 1:30**: *“by his doing you are in Christ Jesus”*.

It's tempting for us to try to work out and define who is **in** and who is **out**, but there is only One who really knows: *“the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.’ ”* Let us join with those who 'name the name of the Lord' and leave to him the judging of who is really his! <sup>3</sup>

Paul has a lot to say about the Church in all his letters, but in **Ephesians 4:15-16**, as he is writing about our need to grow up and mature in Christ, he writes these amazing words: *“ . . . we are to grow up in all things into Him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”* So, clearly, each individual part needs **both** to be fitted together with all the other parts **and** to be working properly, so that it causes the growth of the 'body' (the Church). And, as he so graphically writes in **1 Corinthians 12:14-26**, we all need each other. No part of the body can say that it doesn't need all the other parts, nor that it is somehow not part of the body itself.

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<sup>1</sup> **Mark 2:16, Luke 5:30, 15:2.**

<sup>2</sup> **John 1:12-13.** See also Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, **John 3:1-21.**

<sup>3</sup> **2 Timothy 2:19**

Let's not forget to whom Paul wrote that letter! It was to the believers in Corinth, who had quite a few problems in their fellowship, not least the fact that they had started dividing into special 'loyalty groups'. It's the first problem he addresses, from **1 Corinthians 1:10** onwards and again in the whole of **ch.3**, and he comes back to it in **ch.12** as he writes about the proper functioning of the Church as the Body of Christ.

Back in **1:10-13** and **3:4-9, 21-23**, he refers to some believers there who had been saying "I belong to Paul", "I belong to Apollos" or "I belong to Cephas (Peter)". Was Paul flattered by the 'loyalty group' who said that they followed him? Very definitely NOT! Surprisingly, perhaps, he was also not impressed by another group who said "I belong to Christ", and we can only guess that probably it was because they had set themselves up as **another** separate group who said "We are the only really spiritual ones, WE belong to Christ – not like the rest of you who are following men!"

Paul, Apollos <sup>1</sup> and Peter were all genuine and valuable preachers and teachers, each one bringing their own important contribution to the growth of the whole Church, and specifically to the church there in Corinth. Instead of taking all that the Holy Spirit was giving them through each of these different individuals, at least some of the Corinthian believers made the big mistake of choosing to 'follow' just one of them, and then formed their own groups and separated from the others. Were any of those three men 100% complete in what they taught? Probably not. Had they all seen the same truths as clearly as each other? Definitely not! (Just compare Paul's letters, Peter's letters and the letter to the Hebrews and you will see some significant differences in emphasis, but they are consistent with each other and all valuable!)

Can we see the close parallels with the situation that we seem to accept as 'normal' in our own situations? Different groups with different names, often following specific teachers or doctrines, and finding all sorts of 'good' reasons why we couldn't possibly join with those other people with different loyalties but who also 'name the name of the Lord'? I fear that Paul's diagnosis would be the same for us as it was for the Corinthians: Not spiritual; infants not adults; 'fleshly'. (**1 Corinthians 3:1-6**) Should we be surprised at our lack of spiritual progress?

"No," Paul says, "you have got it the wrong way round. You don't belong to me or to Peter or to Apollos – all three of us belong to you! Come to that, all things are yours, you belong to Christ and he belongs to God the Father!" (**1 Corinthians 3:21-23**)

This would all be important enough if we were simply thinking about the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ in our present-day situations, the effectiveness of our communication of the Good News to those around us, and the way in which we are enabled to grow and develop as we function properly together in the Body of Christ. That is vitally important, but there is a whole extra dimension that we can all too easily miss – God's eternal purpose and where we fit into it.

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<sup>1</sup> Apollos is probably less well-known to most of us. Catch up on his history in **Acts 18:24-28**. Some scholars believe that he **may** have written the book of Hebrews. Paul definitely appreciated him! See **1 Corinthians 16:12** & **Titus 3:13**.

Last time, we looked briefly at **Revelation 5:1-10**, and just caught that tantalising last statement in **v.10** “*You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.*” These words are written about those who have been purchased with the blood of Jesus out of every ‘tribe and tongue and people and nation’. That’s us! One of the important reasons we were purchased was to bring us into the kingdom of God, “*For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son*” (**Colossians 1:13**). This is both a present and a future kingdom, and in neither case is it a passive kingdom, but one in which we have responsibilities. We don’t know the details of the future kingdom, only that we shall share in the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ when he returns. The parable he told about the nobleman and his slaves gives us some clues! <sup>1</sup>

So, this “*growth of the body for the building up of itself in love*” that Paul writes about in **Ephesians 4** is not only about making the Church more effective here and now. It is also about preparing and training us together for our responsibilities in the coming kingdom and, as we have already seen, that growth and development requires the proper working of each individual part in the **building up of the whole body**. If (like the Corinthians did) we choose to separate ourselves from other members of the Body of Christ, how can that process work properly to cause the growth of the body?

We have an Enemy who wants to frustrate God’s plans and purposes, both for the Church here and now and also for its future role in the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ on this earth. <sup>2</sup> Obviously, from his point of view, he will try to do anything he can to limit the effective growth of the Body of Christ. Perhaps we have not realised how vital it is that we begin to function more and more on the basis of being members of that Body, and not on the basis of belonging to the loyalty groups and labels that we have grown used to?

\* \* \* \* \*

Are we ready to start discovering this glorious freedom? To begin to recognise that the labels we have adopted are meaningless? To find that we are already ‘members of one another’ simply on the basis of the fact that we are joined to the Lord Jesus Christ? <sup>3</sup> We need to take to heart Paul’s clear instructions about accepting each other even if we do not necessarily share exactly the same convictions – **Romans 14** is not just about food offered to idols!

Dave Taylor    May 2024

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<sup>1</sup> **Luke 19:11-27**. See also **Daniel 7:13-14,18,22,27**. Here’s a link to a talk on the parable (sorry, no printed notes): <https://www.justonecandle.uk/Recordings/ReadyForTheKingdom.mp3>

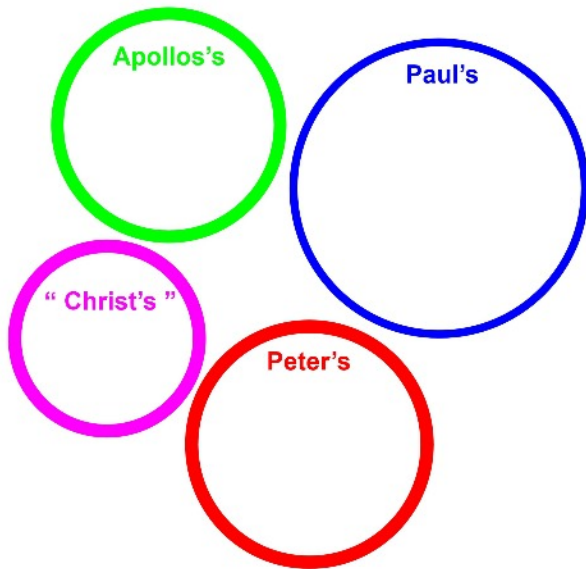
<sup>2</sup> **Ephesians 6:12**

<sup>3</sup> **Romans 12:4-5, 1 Corinthians 12:22-27, Ephesians 4:25**

# 4 simple diagrams to illustrate the Church in Corinth

## The Church in Corinth

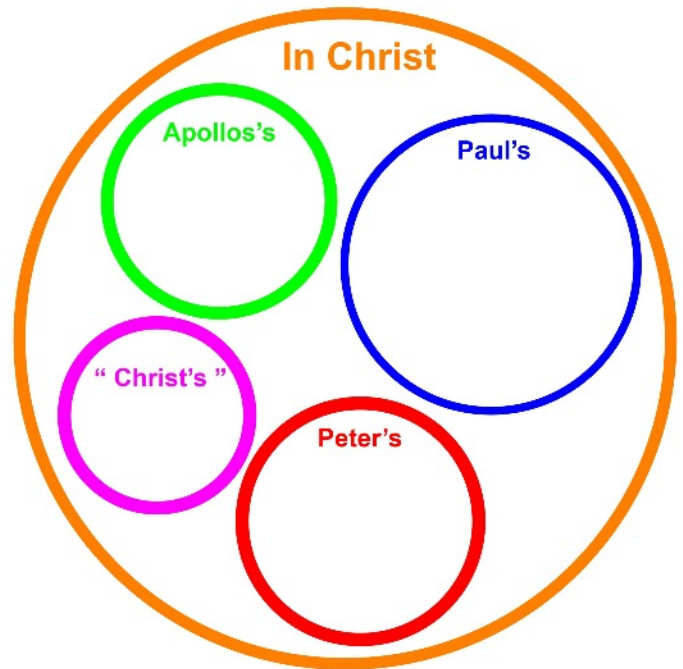
1. How they saw themselves



'Belonging' to separate loyalty groups,  
not to each other

## The Church in Corinth

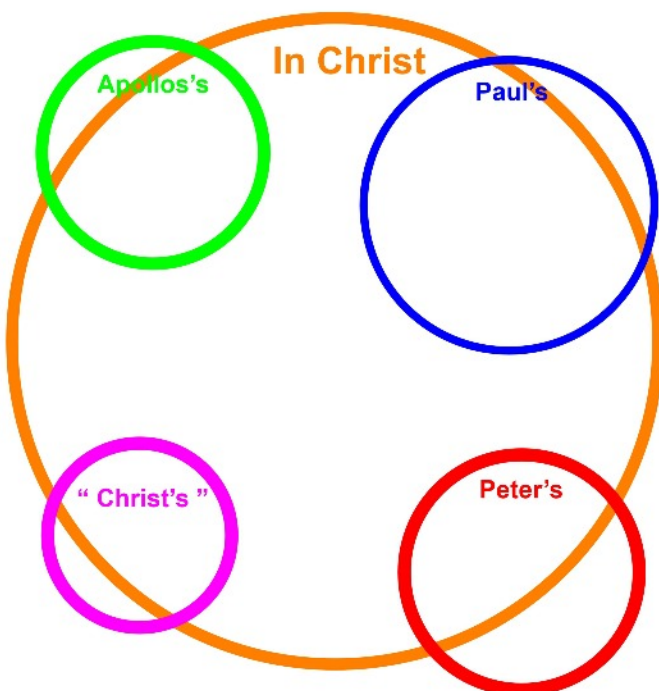
2. "Is Christ divided?" NO!!



Paul draws a line around the separate groups:  
"God has placed you in Christ!"

## The Church in Corinth

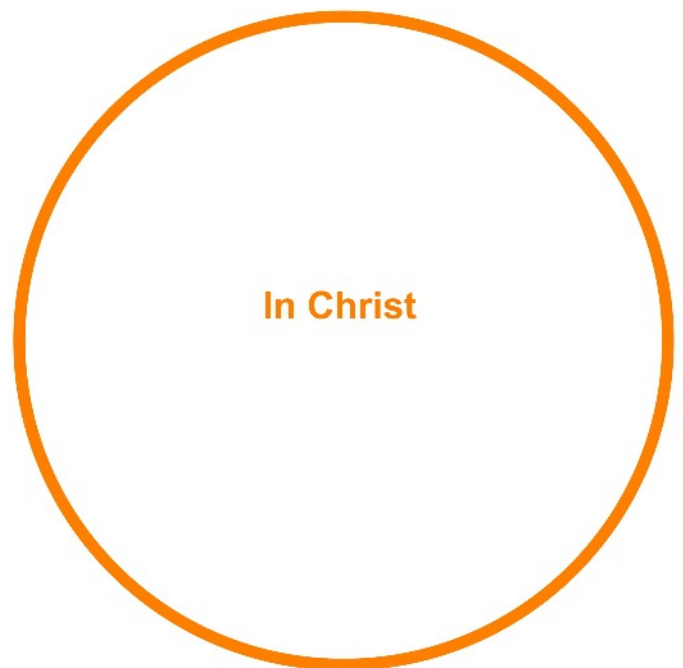
3. What often happens



Possible to belong to a loyalty group  
without belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ

## The Church in Corinth

4. The real situation



In reality, from God's viewpoint,  
the separate loyalty groups don't exist.  
Believers are already one in Christ.

