

JUST BELIEVE IT

- A. Introduction: The New Testament was written by men who interacted with Jesus. These eyewitnesses (or their close associates) wrote to tell the world what they saw and heard. The documents that they wrote reveal who Jesus is and why He came to earth. Jesus came into this world to die for sin.
1. God created human beings to become His sons and daughters. But sin has disqualified humanity from God's family. There is nothing we can do on our own to restore ourselves to our created purpose.
 - a. God, motivated by love, chose to deal with our condition by grace—His unearned loving kindness. Two thousand years ago, He took on flesh and was born into this world. John 1:1; John 1:14
 1. Jesus is God become man without ceasing to be God—fully God and fully man. Jesus took on a human nature so that He could die in our place for sin.
 2. Through His death on the Cross, Jesus satisfied justice on our behalf. We can now be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus. Heb 2:14-15; Rom 3:24; Rom 4:25; I Pet 3:18; etc.
 - b. When a man or woman acknowledges Jesus and His sacrifice, God justifies that person, or declares them not guilty of sin. The effect of Jesus' sacrifice so thoroughly cleanses us from the guilt of sin that God can then indwell us (in our innermost being) by His Spirit and life.
 1. The entrance of His life produces a change in our nature that restores us to our created purpose. We are changed from sinners by nature to sons and daughters by nature. John 1:12-13
 2. This inward infusion of life not only changes our nature and makes us sons and daughters through a new birth, it is the beginning of a process of transformation that will ultimately restore every part of our being to what we were meant to be before sin damaged the family.
 2. Christianity is more than a set of creeds (beliefs) and moral codes (behaviors)—although it has both. Christianity is an organic (living) relationship between God and man whereby we become partakers of the life in God, the Spirit of God, through union with Christ.
 - a. The New Testament uses three word pictures to try to convey the believer's relationship to Jesus once they believe on Him. All the word pictures depict union and shared life—vine and branch (John 15:5); head and body (Eph 1:22-23); husband and wife (Eph 5:31-32).
 - b. John 20:31—John the apostle wrote his gospel so that men will believe on Jesus and have life through His name (the Greek word translated life is *zoe*). John used this word over thirty times in his gospel. *Zoe* refers to life as God has it, that which God has in Himself (*Vine's Dictionary*).
 1. John specifically said that Jesus came to earth so that men and women can have *zoe*, and that Jesus died so human beings can receive *zoe*. John 10:10; John 3:16
 2. Note something that John wrote in one of his epistles (letters to Christians): I John 5:11-12—God has given us eternal life (*zoe*), and this life (*zoe*) is given through union with His Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son does not have life (Williams).
 3. Almighty God is in us by His life and Spirit to complete us, restore us, and empower us to live effectively in this difficult world. We have more to say tonight about union with Christ through faith in Him.
- B. John also wrote a lengthy account of what happened at the Last Supper the night before Jesus was crucified and gives us many details about Jesus' final words to His men (chapters 13-17).
1. John and the other apostles heard the Lord promise that, although He was soon going to leave, He and the Father would send the Holy Spirit. Jesus said He has been with you and shall be in you. John 14:16-17
 - a. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as another Comforter. The Greek word for another means another of the same sort—of the same kind as I am (John 14:16, Wuest). The Greek word translated Comforter (*parakletos*) means to call to one's side to aid and encourage; one called upon to help.
 - b. Comforter has various shades of meaning. Note how the Amplified Bible amplifies the word—I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Intercessor,

Advocate, Strengthener, Standby) (John 14:16).

- c. Jesus went on to tell His apostles that union between Himself and all believers was about to occur: So when that day comes (after I am risen) you will know that I am living in the Father and that you are one with me, for I will be living in you (John 14:20, TPT).
 2. Jesus' statements reveal some things about the nature of God. God is One God Who simultaneously manifests as three distinct Persons—the Father, the Word or Son, and the Holy Spirit.
 - a. These three Persons co-inhere or share one Divine nature. You can't have one without the other. The Father is all God. The Word (the Son) is all God, and the Holy Spirit is all God.
 1. The Bible doesn't explain God's nature; it simply tells us about Him. The eyewitnesses made no effort to explain God's triune nature. Nor did they try to explain union with Christ.
 2. They simply accepted Jesus' words about Himself, the Father, and the Holy Spirit—and their relationship to believers. John 14:16-17; John 14:20-21; John 14:26; John 16:13-15; etc.
 - A. Once Jesus authenticated everything He said by rising from the dead, His disciples went out to proclaim what they saw and heard in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—without attempting to explain it. Matt 28:19-20
 - B. It is beyond our ability to fully understand or explain the nature of the Infinite God and how He has chosen to interact with finite men and women. The point is that God, by His Spirit and life is in us. We don't need to understand or explain it. We just need to believe it.
 - b. Christians talk about asking Jesus to come into our hearts. That phrase isn't wrong per se, but it isn't New Testament language. And, it can water down the reality of what has happened to us.
 1. The New Testament does not talk about Jesus in our hearts. It speaks of us giving our hearts to Jesus by making the decision to live for Him and commit our lives, will, and destiny to Him.
 2. The Resurrected Lord Jesus is now in Heaven. Both He and His eyewitnesses make it clear that Jesus is in us by His Spirit and life—union and shared life.
 3. John later wrote a well known passage in one of his epistles (letters to believers): He who lives in you is greater (mightier) than he who is in the world (I John 4:4, Amp). John wrote these words in the context of false teachers who were influencing the church.
 - a. These false teachers were inspired and indwelt by wicked antichrist spirits. John assured believers that you have already won this battle because the Greater One is in you. Nothing can come against you bigger than God in you.
 - b. Sadly, for many of us, this powerful statement is little more than a religious cliché. But it was written by an eyewitness who saw Jesus made alive again by the power of the Greater One—the same God who indwelt John and the apostles (and us) by His Spirit and life. Eph 1:19-20
- C. The apostle Paul was not present at the Last Supper. In fact, he was at first a zealous persecutor of followers of Jesus. But when Jesus appeared to Paul three years after the resurrection, he became a believer.
1. Acts 9:1-5—Jesus appeared to Paul as he travelled to Damascus, Syria to arrest Christians. The Lord asked Paul: Why are you persecuting Me? However, Paul wasn't pursuing Jesus for arrest. There's no evidence that Paul had any interaction with Jesus before this moment. Paul was harming Christians.
 - a. In this first encounter with the Lord Paul received a vivid illustration of the believer's union with Christ. Jesus, through His words to Paul, revealed that He is aware of the union between Himself and believers—even if we aren't: Paul, when you persecute believers, you persecute Me.
 - b. Jesus appeared to Paul on a number of subsequent occasions and taught him the message that he preached. Jesus commissioned Paul to proclaim this previously unrevealed aspect of God's plan to recover His family from sin—union with Christ through shared life. Gal 1:11-12; Col 1:25-27
 - c. Paul wrote 14 of the 21 epistles in the New Testament. These letters reveal what Jesus taught Paul and what he preached. Note these passages about union with Christ.

1. Eph 1:5-6—For it was always his perfect plan to adopt us as his delightful children through our union with Jesus...for the same love he has for the Beloved, Jesus, he has for us. And this unfolding plan brings him great pleasure (TPT).
 3. Eph 2:5—Even when we were dead [slain] by [our own] shortcomings and trespasses, He made us alive together in fellowship and in union with Christ (Amp).
 4. Eph 2:10—For we are God’s masterpiece (NLT), because He has created us through our union with Christ Jesus for doing good deeds which He beforehand planned for us to do (Williams).
 2. Paul himself lived with the awareness that God was in him by His Spirit and life to strengthen and empower him. This awareness gave him confidence in the face of life’s hardships.
 - a. Paul knew that the Lord Jesus Christ, by His power and grace in him, would enable him to make it through whatever came his way, through whatever circumstances he encountered.
 1. When Paul asked Jesus to stop a demonic being from stirring up trouble, the Lord told him, My grace is enough to empower you to deal with it. My strength (grace) is made perfect (reaches its intended goal) in weakness. Paul responded: Now I am glad to boast about my weakness, so that the power of Christ may work through me (II Cor 12:9, NLT).
 2. When Paul was imprisoned in Rome, facing the possibility of execution he wrote: I have strength for all things in Christ Who empowers me—I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him Who infuses inner strength into me (Phil 4:13, Amp).
 - b. Acts 28:1-6—At one point Paul was shipwrecked off the island of Melita (or Malta). By God’s grace, all on board the ship made it to shore where islanders welcomed them with a warming fire.
 1. As Paul gathered sticks for the fire, a deadly snake bit him. The islanders assumed that Paul was a murderer who escaped the sea, but now justice had caught up with him. But Paul simply shook the snake off and was unharmed.
 2. Paul’s confidence in the situation was not undermined by guilt and condemnation over his past. (People died because of his actions as a persecutor). Paul knew that because of the Cross and union with Christ, his identity had changed from sinner to holy, righteous son of God.
 3. And he knew that Jesus in him by His life and Spirit is greater than the effects of a venomous snake. The Lord told His followers that deadly snakes would not harm them. Mark 16:18
 3. Paul, in his letters (epistles) to believers, urged them to live with the awareness of the fact that, through union with Christ, God is in them. This union is a source of confidence, power, and, self-control.
 - a. He exhorted Christians to avoid sexual sin because of this union: Have you not realized that your bodies are integral parts of Christ himself...the man who joins himself to the Lord is one with him in Spirit...your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you (J. B. Phillips, I Cor 6:15-19).
 - b. He exhorted them to come boldly (confidently) to God for help in time of need because they now have access Him through this union: And in union with Christ, and through trust in him, we find courage to approach God with confidence (Eph 3:12, 20th Cent).
 - c. He reminded them that a process of restoration and transformation is underway in believers: Carry to its ultimate conclusion [likeness to the Lord Jesus] your own salvation with a wholesome, serious caution and trembling (Phil 2:12, Wuest); For it is God who is at work within you, giving you the will and the power to achieve his purpose (Phil 2:13, J. B. Phillips).
- D. God works in our lives by His grace through our faith, both before and after we are saved from sin’s penalty. When we believe what God, by His grace, has provided He, by His power, brings it to pass in our lives.
1. Gal 2:20—Paul wrote that he lived by faith or trust in and on Jesus. Paul knew that at the Cross his sin was paid for and his old identity as sinner came to an end. He knew that Jesus in him, by His Spirit and life, was his source of his strength. Therefore he had confidence and hope in every circumstance.
 - a. Faith (trust in, reliance on) can be difficult for us because the object of our faith is invisible. We

can't see Jesus with our eyes. And we all experience emotions and thoughts (stimulated by what we see and feel) that, in the moment, are more real to us than God.

b. Even Paul didn't see Jesus all the time. Paul only saw the Lord when He appeared to him. Like us, Paul felt the fear, pain, sorrow, lack, frustration generated by his circumstances. II Cor 12:23-29

1. The shipwreck that led to Paul being washed up on the island of Melita was preceded by a terrible storm that tossed the ship around for days. It was clear that they would not survive.

What kind of emotional, mental, and physical effects did this have on the people on board?

2. An angel from God gave Paul the Word of God: The ship will be lost, but all aboard will survive. Paul's response: I believe God. What He said will come to pass. Acts 17:22-26

A. However, there was no change and the situation got worse. Paul had only the Word of God as his assurance that he and the others would survive. In the face of emotions,

thoughts, and circumstances Paul (like us) had to keep his focus on Jesus, the Word of God.

B. Paul is the one who wrote that we must our race "looking away [from all that will distract] to Jesus (Heb 12:2, Amp)", the source and perfecter our faith. Faith or trust in God comes from focusing our attention of the object (source) of our faith.

2. Faith or trust in God doesn't deny what it sees or feels. Faith recognizes there is more information available to us than what we see or feel. Sight and emotions don't have all the facts in any situation.

a. John wrote that grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17). The Greek word translated truth means the reality lying at the basis of appearance—or the way things really are.

b. The Word of God—the Living Word, Jesus, Who is revealed through the written Word, the Bible—shows us the way things really are.

1. Because of God's grace expressed at the Cross, we belong to God Who is in us by His life and Spirit and nothing can come against us that is bigger than God Who is now our Father .

2. Don't try to feel it. Just believe it. Accept what God says as fact. We understand what it means to take someone at their word in normal human interactions. If someone we trust tells

us something, we take it as fact. We don't try to believe. We either do or don't.

A. Humans can lie, be mistaken, or fail. God can do none of that. Regular reading of the New Testament (cover to cover, over and over) will build your confidence in God.

B. The New Testament persuades us of God's goodness and willingness to help as it reveals Jesus. And it roots out issues in us that keep us from fully trusting God. Heb 4:12

3. Take time to think about these issues. Go over it in your mind—the fact that God is in you by His life, the fact that Jesus Christ is in you by His Spirit. Let that reality dawn on you.

3. God is in us by His Spirit and life to strengthen and empower us to live effectively in this very difficult world. You can learn to live with the awareness that God is in you by His Spirit and life. I don't mean you feel it or see it. I mean it is part of your view of reality which affects how you deal with life.

E. Conclusion: Knowing, accepting, and believing the fact that we are in union with Christ gives us confidence and peace in the present and it gives us hope for the future.

1. This union with Christ is the basis of your identity—I'm a son or daughter of God by new birth. And it is the source of your strength (the Greater One is in me to help me). Don't try to feel it. Just believe it. Accept is as so.

2. We face the devil and life's difficulties in union with Jesus. And we stand before God our Father in union with the Perfect Son. We can do all things through Him in us by His power. Much more next week!