

I BELONG

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, January 15, 2012

When I say, “I believe,” it’s an individual matter. Just me and God. I trust Him. I follow Him. I rely on Him. I worship Him.

But when I say, “I belong,” immediately there is a group of us. There is community, fellowship, sharing, and participation.

“Belong” is also a term of ownership, isn’t it? This shirt belongs to me. It is mine. And if it belongs to me, then it doesn’t at the same time belong to you. Ownership is frequently exclusive. We have property rights.

Ownership applies to things, objects, animals—but what about people? As a figurative term of endearment it may apply to people: “This lovely young woman is my daughter; she belongs *to me*.” Or, as a condition of slavery, of control.

In either case, it describes an exclusivity of relationship, like marriage. One man, one woman, for life. (I know—for lots of reasons—it doesn’t always work out that way, but that’s still the plan.)

“Belong” also may express a certain appropriateness, such as: “That painting really fits this space; it *belongs* here.”

Above all, “belong” expresses relationship, connection, fitting in.

So, when I say, “I believe, and I belong,” I am expressing these three concepts:

- I belong to Christ—He has purchased my soul by His sacrificial death on the cross.
- I belong with Christ—with Him my life begins to make sense and be fulfilled.
- I belong in Christ—He will never leave or abandon me.

To Whom Do I Belong?

Moses wrote (Deuteronomy 7:6):

You are a holy people, who belong to the Lord your God. Of all the people on earth, the Lord your God has chosen you to be his own special treasure.

More specifically, Paul wrote (Romans 1):

⁶ *You are included among those Gentiles who have been called to belong to Jesus Christ.*

As believers, as Christians, we belong to the Lord our God. We are the people of God. He has chosen us to be His “special treasure.” We belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Practically speaking, what does it mean to belong to Christ? It means I am related to Him. We have a relationship. We are together.

It means I am welcome in His presence. I can let go of my guilt. I can lay aside my fear. I can push past my awkwardness. I can COME IN and BE WITH Him.

It means we have fellowship together. I can listen and I can speak. He will listen and He will speak.

Jesus said (John 8),

⁴⁷ *Anyone who belongs to God listens gladly to the words of God. But you don't listen because you don't belong to God.*

We will share joys together. And we will share sorrows and grief. I will never be alone.

Belonging to Christ also means exclusivity. As in the Ten Commandments, I will have no other gods in my life (only Him). I don't belong to myself anymore.

Paul taught (1 Corinthians 6):

¹⁹ *Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, ²⁰ for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.*

Jesus Christ is my Leader. He gets to call the way the game is played. I worship and obey Him alone.

It also means that I represent Him. I act on His behalf and in His name.

Romans 14

⁸ *If we live, it's to honor the Lord. And if we die, it's to honor the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.*

Where Do I Belong?

John's Book of the Revelation builds a strong contrast between "those who belong to this world" and those who belong to Jesus Christ.

I do not belong to this world anymore. I belong now to the Kingdom of God.

As Jesus prayed for His disciples (John 17), He said, ¹⁶ *They do not belong to this world any more than I do.*

How did we get into that relationship with Him?

Paul answers (Galatians 5):

²⁴ *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there.*

By the substitutionary act of Jesus—He took our place, the place we deserved because of our sin. He died for us. And when He died, we died—to this world and its ways. And when He rose from the dead, we arose—to live in the Kingdom of God and His ways.

We belong to God's Kingdom—the Kingdom of Heaven. It's a kingdom full of promise!

Paul preached (Galatians 3):

²⁹ *Now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.*

Belonging to the Kingdom changes the way you live. When you live as God prescribes and as His Spirit leads, you identify yourself with His Kingdom. Your life becomes a signpost for the Kingdom of God. When people observe you and the way you conduct your life and they get a glimpse of God.

1 Peter 3

¹⁶ *If people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ.*

People may make assumptions about you, because you are a Christian. Let them. Don't be concerned. Let them think whatever they want; as you live the life—the Jesus-life—they will change their minds.

You belong to the Kingdom of Heaven. That's why we pray (Matthew 6:10): *May Your will be done on earth, just as it is in Heaven.*

With Whom Do I Belong?

Belonging is about community.

When people give their lives to Jesus, they learn to live appropriately with everyone, beginning with those of their own household.

Ephesians 6

¹ *Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do.*

Colossians 3

¹⁸ *Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting for those who belong to the Lord.*

¹⁹ *Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.*

But Christian community must be wider than your own household; it must include God's whole family.

This isn't just for extroverts (those seemingly happy, gregarious souls who just love to be around people and don't know a stranger). This is about meaningful connections, which is something extroverts sometimes miss.

You may have thousands of acquaintances, but if the relationships are only as thin as skin—if you only meet for business or special occasions—that's not belonging, that's not community.

Paul pictured the Family of God as a living body (Romans 12):

⁴ *Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function,* ⁵ *so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.*

He revealed the connectedness of the Family of God. It is initially a spiritual connectedness, but it can grow—ought to grow—into real-life connections.

He explained (1 Corinthians 12),

¹⁴ Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. ¹⁵ If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body?

You may think you can get along just fine on your own (without the church), but it will only be so if you continue to live as you lived before you met Christ.

Galatians 6 (NET)

¹⁰ So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who belong to the family of faith.

If you intend to live for Christ—to display His impact in your life—you must live in connection with the rest of His Family.

That means connected to a local church, pursuing right relationships with all the people in that church, and with those people reaching as far as possible to embrace people in your community and the world over with the Gospel—the Good News about Jesus.

How Do I Belong?

Belonging is the place to be!

1 Corinthians 3

²¹ So don't boast about following a particular human leader. For everything belongs to you—²² whether Paul or Apollos or Peter, or the world, or life and death, or the present and the future. Everything belongs to you, ²³ and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

Belonging begins with a decision. It's sustained by commitment. It's developed by humility. It bears the greatest, lasting fruit.

Don't just believe in Jesus. Decide today (if you haven't already) to belong to Jesus.

How does one do that?

You may do this by giving Him your heart today.

You may do this by surrendering your will in some matter about which you have been resistant.

You may choose to follow His example and command to be baptized in water as a Christian.

You may choose to pursue membership with this or another local church.

You may do this by pledging your full tithe to the Lord this year.

You may do this by volunteering to serve others in or through the church's ministries.

You may do this by contributing beyond your tithe to support vital, life-giving ministries.

Are you putting off your decision to belong? Does this subject make you uncomfortable? Ask God to show you what is getting in the way of your decision (it's likely there will be some things—natural and familiar things). Begin to dismantle those things, break out of your box, step beyond your comfort zone—make the effort to belong.

Why should you choose to belong?

Because you will honor Christ.

And you will encourage others.

And it will bless you deeply.