

OUR UNION WITH CHRIST

Introduction

- “One of the most precious truths in all Scripture is the doctrine of the believer’s union with the Lord Jesus Christ. The concept of being united to Christ speaks of the most vital spiritual intimacy that one can imagine between the Lord and his people. While Christ relates to believers as Lord, Master, Savior, and Teacher, they are not merely associated with Christ as the object of his saving grace and love. It is not that Christians merely worship Jesus, obey him, or pray to him, though surely those privileges would be enough. Rather, they are so intimately identified with him and he with them that Scripture says they are united—he is in them and they are in him.”¹
- I do not believe there is any other New Testament doctrine which is more important and less understood than our union with Christ.
- As one author has said, *our union with Christ lives in the prepositions of the New Testament.*²
 - His point is that while it is one of the central focuses of the New Testament, it is often overlooked because it is spelled out with *in Christ or with Christ, in Him, or with Him, through or in Him.*
 - All in all, there are over 73 uses in Paul’s writings alone that us with, in or through.
 - For our own edification, **24 of those are in the Ephesians.**
- “Nothing is more central or basic than union and communion with Christ.”³
- Why is this? Why should we take *the rest of our Christian life and study this vital doctrine?*
 - There are two areas of the Christian life which come from our union with Christ that we should never overlook...our identity and our headship.
 - In other words, we can answer the three questions that our society struggles with outside of Christ
 - **Who are you (identity)? Who do you serve (allegiance)? How do I live (purpose)?**
- While we are going to study through all the benefits of our union with Christ, they all point to who we are, who we serve, and how we live.
- “Every spiritual blessing which believers receive flows to them out of Christ. Hence Jesus in speaking of the coming Paraklete could say unto His disciples: “He shall glorify me; for He shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you,” John 16:14. Subjectively, the union between Christ and believers is effected by the Holy Spirit in a mysterious and supernatural way, and for that reason is generally designated as the *unio mystica* or mystical union.”⁴

¹ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 602.

² <https://ftc.co/resource-library/articles/union-with-christ-an-unbreakable-fellowship/>

³ John Murray, *Redemption*, 161.

⁴ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (GR, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing co., 1938), 447.

- “The *ordo salutis* (Latin for “order of salvation”) refers to the way Scripture describes the logical sequence by which God applies the benefits of Christ’s redemption to individuals. These benefits include effectual calling, regeneration, faith, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification.
- It’s important to understand that this is not a timeline. The *ordo salutis* is not a checklist of events that unfold over minutes, days, or weeks. It’s not as though someone is regenerated on Monday, justified on Tuesday, adopted on Wednesday, and indwelt by the Spirit a week later. Rather, these saving acts occur **simultaneously and inseparably** in real time—at the moment we are united to Christ.
- He opens our eyes—and we see. He unstops our ears—and we hear. He gives us a new heart—and we believe. And in that moment, the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ through regeneration, granting us faith by which we rest in Him. All of salvation’s benefits—regeneration, justification, adoption, and indwelling—are applied together in the believer’s union with Christ.”⁵
- This means that our union with Christ is not on the timeline of or *in* the order of salvation, it is **because** we have been united with Christ that we now have salvation and all the subsequent benefits.
 - “Instead, union with Christ is the matrix out of which all other soteriological doctrines flow.”⁶
- “...union with Christ is in itself a very broad and embracing subject. It is not simply a step in the application of redemption; when viewed, according to the teaching of Scripture, in its broader aspects it underlies every step of the application of redemption. ***Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ.***”⁷

A Survey: How far back it goes and how far forward it takes us.⁸

- “The foundation of salvation itself in the eternal election of the Father is in Christ.”
- **Ephesians 1:3-4** “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, {4} just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love...”
 - This shows that our union with Christ...our being *in Christ* was not something that is just tacked on after our salvation or even a benefit from our salvation.
 - While we are not able to fully understand or even resolve, we know that it was because of God the Father’s choosing us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we are born again.

⁵ <https://www.monergism.com/union-christ-and-ordo-salutis-simultaneous-not-successive#:~:text=In%20Summary,Spirit%E2%80%94and%20so%20we%20believe.>

⁶ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 603.

⁷ Murray, *Redemption*, 161.

⁸ List and subsequent material taken from Murray’s *Redemption*, 162-164.

- It is important that while talking about salvation in eternity past, Paul starts with our union with Christ and that it is because of that union we have been blessed with *every spiritual blessing* and *that we would be holy and blameless...*
- “It is also because the people of God were in Christ when he gave his life a ransom and redeemed by his blood that salvation has been secured for them; they are represented as united to Christ in his death, resurrection, and exaltation to heaven.”
- **Ephesians 1:7** “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace...”
 - Since you and I were *in Christ* before the foundation of the world, when Christ died, it was then through His blood that we are actually redeemed.
 - Being in Christ means that Christ is our representative before God and when God put His wrath upon Jesus, it was for all those who are in Christ.
- “It is in Christ that the people of God are created anew.”
- **Ephesians 2:10** “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”
 - Since we have died in Christ, we have also been created in Christ.
 - Our new creation is not for us, but for the good works that God has prepared for us to walk in throughout our Christian life.
 - This ties together...in Christ before the foundation of the world, in Christ when He died, created anew in Christ so that we can now live for our new King through the works He has for us.
- “It is in Christ that all believers die.”
- **1 Thessalonians 4:14** “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.”
 - Not only is our new life in Christ, but we will also be in death with Him.
 - This is the comfort that every believer has in this life for the next. We do not die without Christ, our union is not severed because of death.
- “...it is in Christ that the people of God will be resurrected and glorified.”
- **Ephesians 2:6-7** “...and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, {7} so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”
 - We were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, made alive in Christ in this life, will die with Christ and pass on to the next and be glorified with Him.

- “Union with Christ is a very inclusive subject. It embraces the wide span of salvation from its ultimate source in the eternal election of God to its final fruition in the glorification of the elect. It is not simply a phase of the application of redemption; it underlies every aspect of redemption both in its accomplishment and in its application. Union with Christ binds all together and insures that to all for whom Christ has purchased redemption he effectively applies and communicates the same.”⁹

The application of our union with Christ.

- “But union with Christ is an important part of the application of redemption. We do not become *actual* partakers of Christ until redemption is effectually applied.”¹⁰
- How is it that we become partakers of our new identity which was given to us before the foundations of the world?
- Before we are born again, we have none of the benefits of our union with Christ in real time.
- **Ephesians 2:12** “...remember that *you were at that time separate from Christ*, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, *having no hope and without God in the world.*”
- Even though Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus knowing they were saved, he also reminded them that it was not always that way.
- There was a time that they were *separate from Christ* and they were *without God in the world*.
- In fact, not only were they once separate from Christ, in **Ephesians 2:3** “...by nature children of wrath...”
- They may have been chosen before time, but in time they were not always what God knew them to be.
- If we are born hostile towards God and only able to live for ourselves, but have been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world...how do we take hold of what God has chosen us for?
- This is why the study on effectual calling is so important to understand...
- **1 Corinthians 1:9** “God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”
- It is only when people are called through the gospel message that God effectually calls them unto Himself and dead sinners are given new life and become partakers of their union or fellowship with Jesus.
- Those who were in Christ before time, are called to participate in their union with Christ sometime in the course of their earthly life.
- How do we know that we have heard this effectual call? That we were in Christ before the foundation of the world?

⁹ Murray, *Redemption*, 165.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

- In other words, “How then to we get ‘into Christ’? The Scriptures reply, by faith.”¹¹
- When we hear the call of the gospel and respond by faith, we then have our new life, we have our identity which is hidden in Christ.
- “Faith not only rests upon Christ, but according to the language of the New Testament, brings us ‘into’ Christ.”¹²
- **John 2:11** “This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.”
- **Romans 10:14** “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?”
- **Galatians 2:16** “...nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.”
- **Philippians 1:29** “For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake...”
- “...the emphasis is on the need to be taken out of ourselves and our sin, and be ‘found in Christ.’ That gives union to Christ a very important practical dimension. It is not to be thought of primarily as a subjective experience which encourages us to look in and down. Rather is it something which lifts us up and out, and draws us on to the glorious liberty of the children of God.”¹³
- While we are not going to *feel* anything differently, we are going to have benefits of being in Christ and *know* that He is now in us and we in Him.
- While we have been effectually called through the gospel and have responded with saving faith, our union with Christ is both applied and **sustained through the work of the Holy Spirit.**
- “Through the Holy Spirit Christ now dwells in believers, unites them to Himself, and knits them together in a holy unity...”¹⁴
- **1 Corinthians 12:13** “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”
- **Galatians 3:2-3** “This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? {3} Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”

¹¹ Ferguson, *The Christian Life*, 101.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 450.

A STUDY THROUGH THE BIBLE RE: OUR UNION WITH CHRIST

- We want to know what the Bible says about our union with Christ. If we never seek to find out who we are, who we serve, and what our purpose is, we wander looking for things that are already ours in Christ.
- “The great temptation most of us face is to believe that very little has happened to us through grace. We still stumble and fall far short of the high calling which is ours in Christ. Scripture encourages us to hold a different perspective by enlarging our understanding of what God has done for us, and has begun to accomplish in us.”¹⁵

Who are you (identity)?

- New Creation: **2 Corinthians 5:17** “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”
- New Family With God: **John 1:12** “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name...”
- New Family With God’s People: **Romans 12:4-5** “For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, {5} so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”
- New Standing with God: **Romans 8:1** “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”
- New Life to Live: **Colossians 3:3** “For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”
- New Victory: **2 Corinthians 2:14** “But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.”
- New Satisfaction: **Colossians 2:10** “...and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority...”

Who do you serve (allegiance)?

- God: **Romans 6:11** “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”
- One Another: **Romans 7:4** “Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.”

¹⁵ Ibid., 97.

- Christ: 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 “For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; {15} and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.
- Live by Faith: Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”
- Seeking the Above Things: Colossians 3:1-2 “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. {2} Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.”
- Keep Jesus’ Commandments: 1 John 2:4-6 “The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; {5} but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: {6} the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”

How do you live (purpose)?

- Walk in God’s Works for us: Ephesians 2:10 “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.
- Confidence in Christ: Philemon 1:8 “Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper...”
- Live for Christ: Colossians 2:6 “Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.”
- To Bear Fruit: John 15:5 “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”
- To Grow: Colossians 2:7 “...having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.”
- These are just broken down into three categories, but there are more that we can talk about. We are going to look at how all of these intertwine in our new lives.
- In other words, what are the abundance of benefits which come from now being found in Christ that we can know and be blessed with in our daily living.
- I believe one of the most overlooked realities is our new family.

- “...the union of believers with Christ furnishes the basis for the spiritual unity of all believers, and consequently for the communion of the saints. They are animated by the same spirit, are filled with the same love, stand in the same faith, are engaged in the same warfare, and are bound for the same goal.”¹⁶
- I believe this is the most important part to remember if we are going to have real joy and fruit as we walk through this life.
- God has not just created us for community, but then saved us so that we would long to be with one another and find true community since we are all in Christ.

OUR CURRENT AND ONGOING TRANSFORMAION IN CHRIST

- “...when we are joined to him there is also a sense in which his life and power become available to us to transform our lives. We may even go so far as to say that when we are united to Christ the whole of his past life is made available to us, not simply to compensate for our past (by way of pardon) but actually to sanctify our present lives, so that our own past my not inescapably dominate our present Christian life.”¹⁷
- While we are going to discuss this far more when we go through progressive sanctification (the lifelong process of becoming more like Christ), it is important to remember who we are in Christ.
- Jesus did not die for you so that you can remain the same person who is dominated by sin in their life.
 - Yes, when Jesus died and you were brought into Him, you did not lose your personality; but you became a new creature from the inside out.
 - You still have likes and dislikes, you still have skills, hobbies, and other interests. But now instead of having a life which is all about you, it is now all about Christ.
 - All that we had before has a new or repurposed meaning. What we did for our own personal pleasure or edification, we now do for Christ, His people, and the church.
- He did not bring you into His family so that you can wander the earth looking for some place or people group that you belong to.
- He did not give you the mind of Christ or a new nature so that you can spend your life as a Christian always wondering if God is for you or against you.
- He did not lay the punishment of our sins on the back of our Savior so we would then live under condemnation; seeking to earn our right standing before God.
- **There are two areas of transformation that Ferguson points out¹⁸:**

¹⁶ Berkhof, Systematic Theology, 453.

¹⁷ Ferguson, *The Christian life*, 103

¹⁸ Found in pages 103-106 in *The Christian Life*

- The first is the cost of being in Christ. When we are taken from death to life, from being in the world to being in Christ, it does cost us something.
- As Ferguson says, “Union with Christ involves sharing in and with Christ, and that implies commitment to him principally as a crucified and risen Lord. During his own ministry this was the central emphasis in his preaching.”
- This is the idea of dying to the world and living for Christ...in other words, the cost of discipleship.
- Since we share in resurrection of Jesus, we also share in His death.
- This is why Paul could say, **Galatians 6:14** “But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”
- We are dead to this world because we have been made alive to Christ. As we die to our self and life for Christ, we are going to also die to the world.
- This is what it means to be in Christ...to participate in His death and resurrection.
- The second area is the other side of death...it is resurrection and life that we now have because we are in Christ.
- Ferguson points out three ways we can experience this new resurrected life in Christ:
 - We now have great dignity.
 - He says, “As I look at myself I see failure, sin, sometimes shame and disgrace. But that is neither the ultimate nor the whole truth about me as a Christian. No! I am united with Christ, a joint heir of his riches, a child of God.
 - We now have confidence in our prayer to God:
 - “If I am united to Christ, then all that is his is mine. So long as my heart, will and mind are one with Christ’s in his Word, I can approach God with humble confidence that my prayers will be heard and answered.”
 - We now have protection in temptation:
 - “The reminder of what we have become by grace is a constant defense against slipping back into what we were by nature.”
 - “How can I, who am united to the Lord Jesus Christ, give way to this temptation?”

Why should we keep learning more about our union with Christ?

- As John Owen wrote, this union “is the cause of all other graces that we are made partakers of; they are all communicated unto us by virtue of our union with Christ. Hence is our adoption, our justification, our sanctification, our fruitfulness, our perseverance, our resurrection, our glory.”¹⁹
- The more we know who we are and what has been given to us, the more we bask in the glory of God and seek to walk worthy of the gospel.
- This is not for God’s love to grow towards us, but because He has given us more than we can ever imagine or deserve through Christ.
- Our union is not just a stated fact, but something that is a continual source of power for the one who is in Christ. We now live through His power as He is working both in us and through us for His good pleasure.
- There are no other religions or faiths or other spiritual leaders who have dealt with their followers in such an intimate way. All other “gods” say *come to me to be worthy*.
- “Such intimate spiritual union is unique to Christianity. In no other religion is the object of worship said to become the life of the worshiper. Muslims do not speak of being in Allah or in Muhammad; Buddhists never say that they are in Buddha. They may follow the teachings of their respective leaders, but Christians alone are said to be *in Christ*, united to him as their representative, substitute, and Mediator.”²⁰
- “The Christian life is a life of radical extra-spection. For every look to ourselves, we should be taking ten looks to Christ. And every time we look at ourselves, what we see should lead us back to Christ. Any sin we find should drive us to the work of Christ *for us*. And any good we find in ourselves should reveal the work of Christ *in us* and *through us*. Any weakness we find should lead us to the power of Christ *toward us*.”²¹
- Let the idea of Christ in you and you in Him truly find rest in your thoughts and heart. When that truth penetrates your full being, you find real and lasting rest in your Savior.
- **2 Thessalonians 3:5** “May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.”
- **Hebrews 12:1-3** “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, {2} *fixing our eyes on Jesus*, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. {3} *For consider Him* who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, **so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**”

¹⁹ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 609.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 603.

²¹ Jared Mellinger, *Think Again*, 155.