

Systematic Theology II: Union with Christ and Glorification

This morning we come to our last class in Systematic Theology II. We have examined the person and work of Jesus, and the doctrines related to salvation. As we draw the class to a close we want to look at two important realities: union with Christ and glorification.

Union with Christ

One of the most oft repeated realities in the New Testament is the concept of union with Christ. For the believer, this union has implications for our past, present, and future. We will examine four aspects of our union with Christ which will serve as our points. These are four facts: (1) we are in Christ, (2) Christ is in us, (3) we are like Christ, and (4) we are with Christ. These aspects deliver to us all the benefits of salvation which the Father ordained and which Christ secured for us.

I. We are in Christ

In our lesson on divine adoption I mentioned that one of the best ways to describe a Christian is to say that a Christian is “one who has God as Father.” That is true.

However, another fundamental way to describe a Christian is to say a Christian is a person that is “in Christ.” This is a dominant way to describe the Christian life throughout the NT epistles. With this in mind, we want to look at this aspect of union with Christ (being “in Christ”) most in depth of the four aspects.

You and I can say we are “in Christ” in a number of ways. We want to look at how we are in Him in God’s eternal plan, during Christ’s life on earth, and during our present life.

➤ *God’s Eternal Plan*

First, God's eternal plan. Let's turn to that glorious chapter, Ephesians 1, to get a glimpse of this.

In verse 4 we read of the predestining power and wisdom of God. As we read, hear this as God's declaration over you:

“Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.” (Ephesians 1:4)

We were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. In a very real sense if you are a believer this morning, then you were as good as God's from before time began. His purpose was always to unite us to Christ and make us a holy set apart people. In verse 11 we see that the result of our salvation in eternity future, namely our inheritance, was secured in eternity past. Verse 11:

“In Him, we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.” (Ephesians 1:11)

Our inheritance is bound up with our union with Christ, and that union is seen foundationally in the way that God chose you and me to be His own, before we were ever born. We were in the thoughts of God from eternity past, and those thoughts of God were that we would be “in Christ.” Through nothing of our own merit (I mean we weren't even born to be able to do good or evil!) God called us to Himself, so that when, in His timing, we came to exist in flesh and bone, we would experience a special saving relationship with Him through Christ. In this relationship we experience all the many blessings and priveleges of being united to Christ.

➤ *During Christ's Life on Earth*

The second way in which we are “in Christ” is that while Jesus was on this earth, He lived as our representative. By nature we all are under the curse and dominion of sin due to the Fall of Adam. Because of Adam’s sin, we who are his descendants inherit a sinful nature and inability to live righteously in our own strength. However, for those of us who have been chosen before the foundation of the world, everything that Jesus did in his time on earth; God counted as though we had done.

This boggles the mind! Of course none of us in this room were alive when Jesus walked the roads of Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. And the overwhelming majority of believers who will be together in heaven one day did not exist in the timeframe of the 33 years Jesus was on earth. However, in God’s thoughts we were counted as though we went through everything that Christ did – because He lived as our representative and Substitute.

Examples:

1. Jesus perfectly obeyed the Father. And through union with Christ, God counts that perfect righteousness to our account. In **Romans 5:19** we see this glorious reality:

“For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”

Through one sin from Adam we were thrown into chaos. But, through the consistent obedience of Jesus, we are gifted a clean bill of health, a 100% test

result, a diploma of excellence. What a wonder that God thinks of Christ's righteousness as belonging to us!

2. On the flipside, just as Christ's righteousness was credited to us, our sin was credited to Him.

"For our sake he (God) made him to be sin who knew no sin"

(2 Corinthians 5:21)

God knew every sin we would ever commit in word, deed, or thought and He counted them to Christ's account, as though they were His, so that He would bear our penalty for them.

3. As our representative, Christ's experience of death, burial, and resurrection – the principal gospel elements – were counted as our experience. Not in the sense that we in any way earned our own salvation through participating in saving acts. Rather, in being tied to Jesus, all the blessings of salvation which were earned by Him are irrevocably ours.

Paul lays out this idea in Romans 6. Let's turn there and start reading in verse 3:

"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to

nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.” (Romans 6:3-6)

So when Jesus died, the Father thought of us as having died. He thought of us as being buried and raised with Christ.

In Christ, we have all the spiritual blessings that He earned on our behalf. And God counts them as ours, as though we had earned them. Our life and hope and future is inextricably tied to Christ.

➤ *During Our Present Life*

All the ways of being “in Christ” we have considered so far took place in the thoughts of God before we ever existed in time and space. However, once we were born and came into a living relationship with Christ through conversion, all the blessings of salvation that God counted as ours from the foundation of the world, became actualized as we live the Christian life.

So, we just discussed how God counts Christ’s death as ours and His resurrection as ours. These realities impact our Christian walk here and now.

Let’s look back at Romans 6. Paul declares that we are dead to sin. He connects that to Jesus’ death and says that our old selves were crucified with him. This is seen in the radical change in relationship that we have with sin. To have a new relationship with Christ, is to have a new relationship with sin. Sin is no longer our friend and comfort, but the very thing we go to war against everyday. The Holy Spirit works a change in us so that we become increasingly dissatisfied with the attractions of our “former manner of life.” Paul calls this being dead to sin.

But not only do we lose taste for our old pattern of life; we also gain great affection for God, for His Word, for His people – we increasingly desire to serve the Lord and are given grace to do that. This is life! And Paul calls this being “alive to God”. This happens because of us being joined to Christ in His resurrection.

Two important verses here in Romans 6:

(v. 4) “we were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

(v. 11) “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

We are called to live new lives in Christ, but not without being enabled to do it. We are new creations in Christ, who do not have to live under the dominion of sin anymore. Because of our union with Christ in His death and resurrection we are given power to not only fight sin, but to increasingly, by the Spirit, find greater victory.

It could be said that every aspect of our existence as a believer is tied to us being “in Him.” We so enter into this new realm, that every action in our present life is to be done “in Christ.” This means it is done by His power and for His glory.

So Paul the Apostle could say that he spoke the truth in Christ (Romans 9:1), rejoiced in the Lord (Philippians 4:10), and commanded and encouraged people in the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess 3:12). We are to live our lives “in the Lord”, “in Christ”. This is the way

the NT depicts the Christian life. We have been brought into the realm of supernatural living – living in union with Christ in whatever we do.

How does knowing we are to do everything “in Christ” affect our lives? How should it affect our attitudes and demeanor? How does it impact the way we work, spend our vacations, time, money? How does it impact what we talk about? With coworkers, friends, family?

** Our last point about being “in Christ” is that we are not only “in Christ” as individuals but as a corporate body. The people of God together make up Christ’s body and He is the head. And so as we are united to Him, we are also united to each other. And so here at Grace, we can collectively be said to be in Christ as a church (made up of those with faith in Christ). We are “in Christ” together!

II. Christ is in us

It’s the dominant theme that we are in Christ, but it can also be said that Christ is in us. Galatians 2:20 speaks both of our union with Christ in His death, as well as our union with Him in the fact that He lives in us.

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20)

We are told in Colossians 1 that the mind boggling mystery that God has revealed is that He abides not only with the Jews, but with Gentiles also. So that mystery is “*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*” (Colossians 1:27)

Think about that. Christ in you. To be a Christian is not just to agree with a set of ideas or doctrines, to know the information the Bible reveals. It is to have the very real personal presence of Christ in us. Him abiding in us and us in Him. This is to be a great surge to our faith and is the source of any power we have to walk in holiness. We can walk in holiness because we are in Christ and we have been raised with Him to newness of life. And we can walk in holiness because Christ is in us, and every action done for His honor comes from His power and not our own faltering efforts alone. When we remember that Christ is in us, it should feed our sense of dependence on Him. As the song says, "I need thee every hour." And He is faithfully there with us every step of the way. We can have confidence that He will be the one who gets us through.

Do you have this confidence? Do you think of Christ living in you from day to day? Everyday you wake up, have your coffee, grab a quick bite, brush your teeth and head out to work. Every day you try to stay alert as you face the tiredness of studying all night for an exam, or staying awake with a fussy baby. Every day you feel like you just don't have enough left in the tank to make it. Do you remember that Christ lives in you? He is that source of strength.

III. We are like Christ

A third aspect of union with Christ is that we are to be like Christ. We are exhorted again and again to live our lives as followers of Christ. And followers imitate those whom they follow. A straightforward verse in **1 John (2:6)** says:

"Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."

This ties two aspects of union together saying – if you are “in Christ” (abiding in him), you should be “like him” (imitate him). And it only makes sense right? How could we say we are vitally connected to Christ, so tied to him that everything he has done is applied to us; how can we claim that and then not look anything like him?

We are called upon to reflect Jesus in our lives. Some examples:

- the instruction in Ephesians 5: “*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*”
- Colossians 3:13: “*As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*”
- Romans 15:7: “*Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you.*”

Love, forgive, welcome in light of the way Christ has treated you. He laid down his life for us, and 1 John says, “we ought to lay our lives down for our brothers and sisters.”

This stuff is all over the NT. We are to live in step with who we are. We are in Christ.

Christ is in us. And so we are called to live like it. The ultimate goal is that one day we will be perfected in glory, in perfect conformity to Christ just like we were predestined to be. This will never happen in this life, but we are to strive towards more growth and maturity.

IV. We are with Christ

A final aspect of union with Christ is that we are “with Him” and He is “with us.” This is similar to him being in us, but we could categorize this aspect as more of a relational one. While Christ being in us is the source of our strength in living for Him, Christ being with us and us with him brings the blessing of sweet fellowship. At the close of the Great Commission Jesus tells his disciples, “*I am with you always, to the end of the age.*” Well,

right after that He left physically and ascended to heaven! But His presence was with them, and we have that very real presence with us today as well. We live our whole life in His presence. In His presence there is fullness of joy, comfort, learning, and love. And we can experience greater measures of these blessings in him. We will one day experience them perfectly when He returns and we are glorified. For now we enjoy His fellowship in that he hears our prayers and intercedes for us and sustains our very life all the way to the end.

There is so much Scripture we cant get into about our union with Christ! We should simply know it is a beautiful and integral reality about our life “in Christ” (I can’t even explain it without referring to union!)

We are in Christ. Christ is in us. We are like Christ. We are with Christ. Let these four aspects give you great comfort of your union with Jesus and stir you to greater conformity to Him.

Glorification

With the time we have remaining we will more briefly cover the topic of glorification.

We have hinted at it some by saying that some realities of union with Christ will only be fully realized when we are glorified in the age to come. So, lets talk about that.

➤ *What is glorification?*

Wayne Grudem in his systematic theology defines glorification like this:

“Glorification is the final step in the application of redemption. It will happen when Christ returns and raises from the dead the bodies of all believers for all time who have died, and reunites them with their souls, and changes the bodies

of all believers who remain alive, thereby giving all believers at the same time perfect resurrection bodies like his own.” (chapter 42)

I. Scriptural Evidence for Glorification

The OT contains evidence that people looked forward to a day of resurrection, although the details were not as fleshed out for them as it is for us.

Job for instance speaks of the end this way:

“For I know that my redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has thus been destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.” (Job 19:25-27)

Prophecy spoke of resurrection as well. One very specific prophecy about the end times in Daniel says:

“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” (Daniel 12:2)

A very clear picture of resurrection to judgment that we see discussed in the NT as well.

In fact, we have Paul’s testimony that the Jews believed in resurrection (although they did not trust Christ) when he is on trial before Felix. He declared that he had “*a hope in God, which these men [Jews] themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.*” (Acts 24:15)

Lazarus' sister Martha stated that she believed her brother would rise again "in the resurrection on the last day." (**John 11:24**) So, clearly old covenant believers had a concept of a coming resurrection of the body.

The full revelation of this reality would come with the NT.

The main passage on bodily resurrection and glorification is in the majority of **1**

Corinthians 15. We read in verses **51-52**:

"Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed."

1 Thessalonians adds some fuel to the fire in verse **14**:

"since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep."

and in verse **16b-17**: *"and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord."*

Here at the culmination of all things we have the reuniting of the soul and body. Right now there are disembodied souls in heaven. They really encompass the essence of the person, they are the person. However, there is no body. From 1 Thessalonians we glean that when Christ returns those souls will come with Him and be reunited with their bodies that are resurrected – and then meet the the Lord in the air.

As an aside: Paul is all about practical theology throughout his epistles. Now, if you remember Pastor Jones mentioned on Sunday that Peter used eschatology to call God's people to holiness. He did not bring it up just so we could debate end time theories. Paul is doing something similar here. Bracketing his delineation of end time resurrection are these words in verse 13:

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.”

and verse 18:

“Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

I love this! Paul has a very specific purpose for telling us about resurrection of the body. Hope. Truth is to give us confidence. He wants us to be encouraged and to encourage others regarding the great hope we have in Christ.

That's just a wonderful pastoral principle and also a reminder for how we should view any doctrine we study. We do not learn doctrine in order to be able to debate, or be respected, or make inside jokes. No! The point of doctrine is for the edification of ourselves and of our brothers and sisters. That we would persevere in faith, and hope, and love.

Back on track: We are to eagerly wait for the coming of Christ – our coming glorification. Paul describes this in Philippians 3 saying:

“Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the

power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.” (Philippians 3:20-21)

So, what is this body like?

II. Resurrection Bodies

We get a look at the contrast between our present mortal bodies and the coming glorified ones in 1 Corinthians 15:

“So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44)

There are four pairs of contrast:

1. Perishable/Imperishable

While our bodies now degenerate over time, get dragged down by disease, and decay, inching towards death - our new bodies will know none of this. They will always be healthy and full of vitality. The fear of death will be gone. You will no longer have to strain to hear, struggle to see, fear an unexpected medical diagnosis.

2. Dishonor/Glory

Our bodies will no longer be marked by deterioration and lack of dignity that comes if we live long enough. Rather, our new bodies will be radiantly glorious. **Matthew 13:43** says: *“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”*

3. Weakness/Power

Our present mortal bodies are limited in power and often frail. We get tired easily, have need of food, water, and sleep to replenish strength, and are susceptible to disease over and over again. We are helpless to overcome death. But, our new bodies will be marked by strength. Not in the sense that we will be omnipotent, or that we will be “superheroes”, but we will have every bit of strength sufficient for living in God’s world to joyfully do His will for all eternity.

4. Natural/Spiritual

Our new bodies will be different from our present mortal ones. They will still be physical but perfected. We can look at Jesus’ own resurrected body as a possibility of what our spiritual bodies might be like. He was flesh and bone – He told the disciples to touch Him and he even ate fish with them. In that sense his “spiritual” or resurrected body was like our present one. But He also passed through the walls of the tomb and appeared and disappeared in an instant before the disciples. His likeness remained, they knew who He was, but He was also altogether different. This is perhaps a glimpse of what our resurrected bodies will be like.

To maintain the bodily resurrection and glorification of believers is essential.

- First, Scripture teaches it, and that is our guide for faith and practice. People sometimes find it hard to believe. But, our finite mind’s inability to parse out every detail is no reason to reject the revelation of the Infinite Sovereign Ruler of the Universe. I’m gonna trust him on this one – that He can accomplish what He says He will do. If He has to reassemble molecules, that’s no sweat for Him. He is omnipotent.

- Second, it shows the goodness of God's material/physical creation. Some philosophies have said that matter/material is bad or inferior and the spiritual realm is where it's at. Well, God has designed that physical glorified bodies be in his eternal kingdom. He called his creation very good in the beginning. And he meant it.

Closing Remarks:

The promise of glorification/bodily resurrection is a great hope. Is that something you think about and look forward to? It has been purchased through Christ.

The Lord has put within us a love for life and yet sometimes we can get so caught up in its details that we forget the importance of what is to come. Paul felt it right to say that "if it's for this life only that we have hoped in Christ, then we are of all people most to be pitied." He saw it as pivotal that we have an established future hope. If not, then the Christian life makes no sense. Do we believe this?

For those who have experienced friends and family members dying and going to be with Christ, I'm sure your longing for the future hope is great. To be with them again, glorified, perfected – relationships heightened – and in the presence of the Lord of all. What great things we have in front of us.