

5: Our union with Christ

Introduction

Let's start with a hymn:

'Tis finished, the Messiah dies

Recap

To start with...

Session 1. Our need of salvation

Then...

Session 2. Christ's obedient life: perfect God becomes perfect man... in order to die as sacrifice for us.

Session 3. Christ's death on the Cross.

Session 4. Christ's resurrection, ascension and heavenly rule.

Sessions 2-4 = SALVATION ACCOMPLISHED = the once-for-all-time, sufficient, historical, unrepeatable work of Christ in achieving salvation.

But from now on we are moving to: SALVATION APPLIED = how it is that someone can benefit from the finished work of Christ. How is it that what Christ has done can be any use to me?

Opening prayer and Bible reading

Ephesians 1:1-14.

Group discussion – Ephesians 1:1-14

- Briefly list the “blessings” which Paul notes here.
- What repeated words and themes do you notice in these verses?
- How is it that we enjoy all the blessings listed here?
- What is the purpose of these verses? What are they meant to “do” to us?

Introducing the theme of union with Christ

A question: how might you become rich?! A survey a while back revealed that as many as 26% of people said that they would marry someone for their money [letssingit.com survey, 2005]. Sounds dodgy, but the reasoning is sound: marry a rich person and all their wealth becomes yours. And if you don't have much money that's quite sensible!

The Bible teaches us that the Christian is in union with Christ – a union that is a bit like a marriage. And we benefit from that union in the same sort of way that a pauper would benefit from marrying a millionaire.

We've already mentioned the doctrine of union with Christ during this course. In this session we'll dig deeper into the “what” and the “so what” of union with Christ. It is a deeply wonderful and beautiful doctrine.

1. Union with Christ: an introduction

(a) A definition

“God joins to Christ those people whom he intends to save. What Christ does determines their eternal destiny. All Christ's blessings are given to those in union with him.”

(b) “In Christ”, “with Christ”

The key Bible phrase which speaks of union with Christ is “in Christ” or sometimes “with Christ.”

It’s incredibly common in the NT, chiefly in Paul’s writings. So common that we may have stopped noticing it, though in our recent preaching in Colossians I trust it’s begun to imprint itself upon our minds.

You may have noticed some examples in our reading from Eph 1...

- Ephesians 1:3-4, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing **in Christ**. For he chose us **in him** before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”
- Ephesians 1:7, “**In him** we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace”
- Ephesians 2:4-5, “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive **with Christ** even when we were dead in transgressions”

Christ possesses every spiritual blessing – they are HIS. And the Christian receives those blessings because they are IN CHRIST. In fact they are a Christian only *because* they ARE in Christ... with Christ... joined to Christ.

It’s worth labouring this point a little...

All the good stuff that God can give us comes from being united TOGETHER WITH CHRIST.

All the good stuff that there is to be had – comes from being united TOGETHER WITH CHRIST.

All the good stuff God gives comes ONLY from being united TOGETHER WITH CHRIST.

Let me **illustrate** that physically: here’s a large chocolate tin. Imagine it isn’t a chocolate tin, but it is Christ. And if you look inside you find that Christ possesses the sweetest, richest, most beautiful things: life, grace, salvation. They are all His. And if I want to enjoy those things: they can only be found if I am IN HIM... if I am in the tin... if I am joined in union to Christ.

But there’s even more than that to be said...

(c) Christ is in me!

It’s a reciprocal relationship. I am IN CHRIST. And also, Christ is IN ME. For example, we read in Colossians 1:27, “To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

(d) I’m joined to Father and Holy Spirit too!

When in fellowship with the Son, also in fellowship with God the Father and God the HS too.

John 14:23, “Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

John 14:16-17, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever--¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”

1 John 1:3, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”

Romans 8:9, “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.”

Now: the doctrine of union with Christ is a hard one to get our heads around. And so the Bible gives us different pictures or illustrations to help us understand it...

(e) Scripture illustrations: union with Christ is like...

We'll see that that God gives us MANY different pictures to help us understand union with Christ. No one illustration does the job. Each one is "LIKE" union with Christ – but is not "identical" to union with Christ.¹

This variety teaches us that we cannot reduce union with Christ to any one of these. "There is similitude but not identity" in each. We cannot either reduce our union with Jesus to the union between inanimate objects like stones, nor raise it to the level of union within the Godhead. "Union with Christ does not mean that we are incorporated into the life of the Godhead... analogy does not mean identity."

- **the union in the Godhead**

John 14:20, "On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you."

John 17:23a, "I in them and you in me..."

- **Adam and humanity**

We won't dwell here. We thought about this previously Scripture says that there is a union between Adam and humanity: he is our covenant head – we are in federal union with him. As such, we're told that he is a "type" of Christ: that is, Christ is also a covenant head like Adam – only much, much better.

Key texts here are Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Cor 15:19-49.

- **Man and wife**

Jesus calls himself a "bridegroom" (John 3:29). He calls his people his bride (Rev 21:2). But perhaps the key verses here are Eph 5:31-32 (– although the whole section from vv22-33 is important).

Ephesians 5:31-32, "'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.'" ³² This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church."

So, God gave us human marriage as a picture, as a visual aid. It tells us stuff about the marriage relationship between Jesus Christ and Christians. This marriage union with Christ is a hard thing to get our heads round: we can't see it, can't feel it, there's no wedding ring on your finger to remind you about it. But it's real. And it's awesome. And God has given us human marriage to function as a window into the amazing, unbreakable, unshakeable marriage union between Christ and Christians.

- **The head and various members of the human body**

Ephesians 4:15, "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

- **A vine and its branches**

This is the picture that runs through the whole of John chapter 15.

John 15:1-5, "'I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ 'I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing..."

- **Stones and corner stone in one building**

¹ John Murray helpfully points out that "there is similitude but not identity." We cannot reduce union with Christ either to that between inanimate objects like stones, nor raise it to the level of union within the Godhead. Thus, "union with Christ does not mean that we are incorporated into the life of the Godhead". John Murray, *Redemption accomplished and applied*, p168.

Ephesians 2:19-22, “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

1 Peter 2:4-5, “As you come to him, the living Stone-- rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him--⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

2. The nature of the union (what is it like?)

(a) spiritual

It is a “spiritual” union.

But what does that mean? This word – “spiritual” – has become distorted in general usage: “I’m a spiritual kind-of person” might just mean you like listening to funny music, or you consult with mediums.

But in the NT, “spiritual” refers to that which is of the Holy Spirit. We saw last time how closely dependent are Christ and the HS in the work of salvation. Ascended and glorified Christ received the Spirit and possesses Him in a new way. And then pours out his Spirit upon the church.

And it is the Holy Spirit which is the bond of the union between Christ and his people. Here are some texts:

1 Corinthians 12:13, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-- whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-- and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

1 Corinthians 6:17,19, “But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit... Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?”

1 John 4:13, “We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.”

(b) faith-union

“Faith” is ESSENTIAL in being united to Christ. Just as the HS is the bond of union – such that we could speak of a Spirit-union. So too we can speak of faith as the bond of union: it is a “faith-union.”

Ephesians 3:17, “...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”

We’ll talk more about faith in a later session. But “faith” is the work that God does in us, which calls us to himself. Trusting in Him is GOD’s work – we can’t do it, because we are dead and enslaved.

(c) mystical

Union with Christ IS a mystery. That’s what it says in Eph 5:32. And Col 1:26-27. But what does that mean?

In the bible “mystery” or “mystical” does NOT mean something unintelligible, vague or fluffy. “Mystical” union is not some weird, rapturous experience that feels like being on drugs.

In the bible “mystery” means something which we cannot work out on our own – but which God has revealed to us in his trustworthy word. It is something revealed by God, in his word. Faith rests not on something fuzzy and wishy-washy, but on God’s solid Word. The Bible tells us about our union with Christ.

Lastly, union with Christ is...

(d) real

Just because we can't see it with our eyes, does not mean that it is not real. There is much more to God's universe than meets the eye. And part of that is our union with Christ.

It's a union wrought by the HS whom we cannot see. It's a union wrought through faith – which simply trusts what God says in his word. But this union IS real.

Actually, it's as real as if there were a literal umbilical cord united us to Christ, reaching from Christ in heaven to the believer on earth. [An illustration borrowed from Robert Reymond's *New systematic theology*.]

3. The extent of the union (what does it entail?)

There are 3 dimensions to union with Christ. [Not three different unions – but one union with different dimensions].

(a) In eternity past: our election in Christ

"Election" or "predestination" is "in Christ." Turn back to Ephesians 1 – look at vv3-4, and v11.

What does that mean? Those whom God will save, were NEVER considered in the mind of the Father outside of union with Christ. He chose his people in Christ. When we trace salvation right back to its fountain, we find "union with Christ" – it's there for all eternity. When God thinks about those people who he'll save throughout all eternity, he thinks about them as being "in Christ."

(b) At the Cross: our death and resurrection with Christ

We're not now in eternity past, but moving to the events of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension. And God's chosen people were "in Christ" when he gave his life as a ransom and was raised from the dead.

We see that we died and were raised with Christ

Turn to Romans 6:1-10

"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- ⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God."

When Christ died on the Cross, "we died with Christ." It's put most clearly there in v8 - "We died with Christ." That means that my old self was crucified with Christ as he died on the Cross.

And because with him in his death, so too – end of v5 – "united with him in his resurrection." When Christ was raised from the dead, I was "with him". The full fruits of that union are yet to be seen – they won't be seen until the resurrection at the end of the age. But Christians died and were raised with Christ.

Notice something important in all of this: **Christ is both representative AND substitute**. What does that mean?

- Substitute: Within this union, Christ takes my sin and is punished INSTEAD OF ME. I am NOT with him.

- Representative: also within this union, we WERE with Jesus as he died upon the Cross. And that matters because my sinful nature was killed off as Jesus died: thus freeing me from the rule of sin.

And both those things are true: “instead of me”, AND “with him”. When we think about “union”, we need to remember they are both true. Union with Christ doesn’t blend me and Christ – we are still personally distinct, two different individuals. It is CHRIST who bears the sin, not me. But, at the same time, I am “with him” as he dies upon the cross. And just as Christ emerges free from sin’s rule, so do I because I am joined to him.

So, let’s summarise: In God’s mind, I am united to Christ in election... and as Jesus dies on the Cross. And that’s not fictional – it’s a real union. I am “in Christ” back in the counsels of eternity. I am in and with Christ as he hangs upon the Cross.

However – and this is an important point to note – it’s not until my lifetime and the moment of my conversion that salvation is actually APPLIED to me.

And that’s what we turn to next...

(c) In our present experience: salvation is actually applied to us in Christ

Union with Christ is a broad subject. But it’s especially important a part of the application of redemption.

John Murray writes: “We do not become *actual* partakers of Christ until redemption is effectually applied... it is by the effectual call of God the Father that men are made partakers of Christ.”²

In God’s mind I am united to Christ in election and at the cross. But it’s not until my conversion that salvation is applied to me, and I am actually joined to Christ.

- **The necessity of conversion**

Until salvation is applied we are under the wrath of God:

Ephesians 2:3, “All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.”

Until converted you are not truly “in Christ” – note how Paul can speak of a before and after of “in Christ.”

Romans 16:7, “Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.”

How then are we to understand the status of someone elected in Christ, who died and rose in Christ, but who has not yet actually been called by God into an actual experienced union with Christ? There seems to be a parallel situation in Romans 11:28 which may help us here:

Romans 11:28, “As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs,”

Read in context we see that this verse is talking about those of the Jews who WILL eventually believe in Christ. What is their status? “Loved according to election”, is how Paul literally puts it; they are loved from the point of view of God’s predestining plan. But at this moment in time, “enemies.”

All that is simply to make this crucial point: “without application redemption is not redemption.”³

- **In Christ we are justified**

Back to the Chocolate Tin. Here’s my credit card which I put inside...

² John Murray, *Redemption accomplished and applied*, p165.

³ A 17th century dogmatic principle, cited in Richard Gaffin, *By faith, not by sight*, p20

It's got my name on it and with it comes my infinite debt and spiritual bankruptcy. What do I bring to the marriage? What do I give to Christ? Only my sins, death and damnation.

What does He give to me? Righteousness or justification is imputed to me. I am clothed with Christ. (We'll think about justification in more detail in a few of weeks time). That's what we see in Philippians 3:8-9.

Philippians 3:8-9, "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."⁴

- **In Christ we receive new life and we live the Christian life**

Actually all of salvation is in the blessings tin! New and everlasting life...

Ephesians 2:4-6, "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,"

Colossians 3:3-4, "For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

We are re-created in Christ

Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

We live the Christian life in Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:4, "I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. ⁵ For in him you have been enriched in every way-- in all your speaking and in all your knowledge"

- **In Christ we die and will rise**

We die in Christ. The union is not broken by death.

1 Thessalonians 4:14-16, "We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first."

And we will be raised and glorified in Christ

1 Corinthians 15:22, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."

Romans 8:17, "Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."⁵

4. The significance of the doctrine:

The Bible applies the doctrine in various directions...

⁴ See also Galatians 2:17

⁵ An aspect of union with Christ is sharing in the sufferings of Christ. See 2 Corinthians 1:5-7 ("the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives"), 2 Corinthians 4:10 ("We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body"), and 1 Peter 4:13-14 ("But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.").

To promote sanctification:

- both because it's in union that we're given grace to grow in holiness
- and because union moves us to thanks, devotion and obedience
- at any given moment I am and always will be in union with Christ. I fight Satan and sin and the world in union with Christ.

To promote confidence and joy and security

- eg. see Col 3:3-4.

Apart from this doctrine, we do not have Christ, we not have the Gospel and we are lost. John Calvin puts it nicely:

"First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value to us." (Institutes 3:1:1, cited R. Gaffin, *By faith not by sight*, p44)

If not in Christ, then you are not saved. Salvation is nowhere else. But if a Christian, then...

- God has made you and Christ, ONE.
- God will never treat you as being separate from Christ.
- God can never look at you and not see Christ together with you.

Being IN CHRIST really matters. Being IN CHRIST is indescribably wonderful.

5. Homework:

- Read through and sing Charles Wesley's hymn below.
- Next session in TWO WEEKS TIME: election and predestination.

'Tis finished! The Messiah dies,

Cut off for sins, but not His own:
Accomplished is the sacrifice,
The great redeeming work is done.

'Tis finished! all the debt is paid;
Justice divine is satisfied;
The grand and full atonement made;
God for a guilty world hath died.

The veil is rent in Christ alone;
The living way to Heaven is seen;
The middle wall is broken down,
And all mankind may enter in.

The types and figures are fulfilled;
Exacted is the legal pain;
The precious promises are sealed;
The spotless Lamb of God is slain.

The reign of sin and death is o'er,
And all may live from sin set free;

Satan hath lost his mortal power;
'Tis swallowed up in victory.

Saved from the legal curse I am,
My Savior hangs on yonder tree:
See there the meek, expiring Lamb!
'Tis finished! He expires for me.

Accepted in the Well-beloved,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
I see the bar to heaven removed;
And all Thy merits, Lord, are mine.

Death, hell, and sin are now subdued;
All grace is now to sinners given;
And lo, I plead the atoning blood,
And in Thy right I claim Thy Heaven!

Charles Wesley

Appendix: Scripture's various statements and explanations of union with Christ.

John 14:20 On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.

John 17:23a, I in them and you in me...

Ephesians 2:19-22, Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

1 Peter 2:4-5 As you come to him, the living Stone-- rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him--⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:12-19 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned--¹³ for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law.¹⁴ Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.¹⁵ But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!¹⁶ Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.¹⁷ For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.¹⁸ Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

1 Corinthians 15:19-49 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.²³ But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.²⁷ For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ.²⁸ When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.²⁹ Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?³⁰ And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour?³¹ I die every day-- I mean that, brothers-- just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord.³² If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."³³ Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."³⁴ Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God-- I say this to your shame.³⁵ But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?"³⁶ How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.³⁷ When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.³⁹ All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another.⁴⁰ There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another.⁴¹ The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and

star differs from star in splendor.⁴² So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable;⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.⁴⁵ So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.⁴⁶ The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual.⁴⁷ The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven.⁴⁸ As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.⁴⁹ And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

Ephesians 5:22-33 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church--³⁰ for we are members of his body.³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."³² This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church.³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

John 3:29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.

Ephesians 4:15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

John 15:1-5 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Miscellaneous notes on union with Christ

John Murray, *Redemption accomplished and applied*

From chapter headed "Union with Xt", pp161-173

[p161] Without considering union with Christ "not only our presentation of the application of redemption would be defective but our view of the Xn life would be gravely distorted. Nothing is more central or basic than union and communion with Christ... 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."

NT expression "in Christ" = union w Christ.

Scripture does not just apply "in Christ" to the application of redemption.

[p162] It is broader than that.

Different aspects of the union

Election is "in Christ" (Eph 1:3-4).

"... that means that those who will be saved were not even contemplated by the Father in the ultimate counsel of his predestination love apart from union with Christ – they were *chosen* in Christ. As far back as we can go in tracing salvation to its fountain we find "union with Christ"; it is not something tacked on; it is there from the outset."

Redemption is in Christ:

"the people of God were in Christ when he gave his life a ransom and redeemed by his blood..."

United to Xt in his death, res, and exaltation to heaven (Rom 6:2-11, Eph 2:4-6, Col 3:3-4).

[p163] "This is... another way of saying that the church is the body of Xt, and 'Xt loved the church and gave himself for it' (Eph 5:25).

Recreated in Christ:

Eph 2:10, we are his workmanship, created in Xt Jesus unto good works.

We live the Xn life in Xt.

Rom 6:4, 1 Cor 1:4-5, cf I Cor 6:15-17.

We die in Xt

Believers fall asleep in Xt or through Xt and are dead in Xt (1 Thess 4:14,16)

"Could anything illustrate the indissolubility of union with Christ more plainly than the fact that this union is not severed even in death?"

Raised in Xt

Raised incorruptible in Xt, 1 Cor 15:22. With Xt they will be glorified, Rom 8:17.

Some applications:

[p164] "We thus see that union with Christ has its source in the election of God the Father before the foundation of the world and it has its fruition in the glorification of the sons of God. The perspective of God's people is not narrow... not confined to space and time; it has the expanse of eternity. Its orbit has two foci, one the electing love of God the Father in the counsels of eternity, the other glorification with Xt in the manifestation of his glory. The former has no beginning, the latter has no end.... And because temporal history falls within such a perspective it has meaning and hope... [the believer] cannot think of past, present, or future apart from union with Xt... [p165] Apart from union with Xt we cannot view past, present, or future with anything but dismay and Christless dread."

Union with Christ is a broad and all-embracing subject. BUT it is an impt part specifically of the application of redemption. "We do not become *actual* partakers of Christ until redemption is effectually applied... it is by the effectual call of God the Father that men are made partakers of Christ."

What is the nature of this union?

1. It is spiritual.

[p166] This has become a distorted and vague word. But in the NT [p166] refers to that which is of the HS. Thus, the bond of the union is the HS himself. See 1 Cor 12:13, 6:17,19, Rom 8:9-11, 1 Jn 3:24, 4:13.

"We need to appreciate far more than we have been wont to the close interdependence of Christ and the HS in the operations of saving grace." (Rom 8:9, 2 Cor 3:18, 1 Pet 1:11). "That the HS is the bond of this union does not diminish the mystery bit this truth does throw a flood of light upon the mystery and it also guards the mystery against sensuous notions, on the one hand, and pure sentimentality, on the other."

Not the kind of union of the Godhead. Or of the two natures in Christ. Or of body-soul in one man. Or of the union of feeling, affection, understanding, mind, heart, will and purpose.

"Here we have a union which we are unable to define specifically. But it is union of an intensely spiritual character consonant with the nature and work of the HS."

2. It is Mystical.

[p167] NOT something unintelligible and which we cannot understand at all. Define it scripturally, eg. see Rom 16:25. It is "something which eye hath not seen nor ear heard neither hath entered into the heart of man but which God has revealed unto us by his Spirit.

Union w Christ is mystery, see Eph 5:32, Col 1:26-27.

3. Scripture illustrations:

[p168] (i) the union in the Godhead, John 14:23, 17:21-23.

(ii) Stones and corner stone, Eph 2:19-22, 1 Pet 2:4,5.

(iii) the union betw Adam all of posterity, Rom 5:12-19, 1 Cor 15:19-49

(iv) man and wife, Eph 5:22-33, cf John 3:29

(v) head and other members in the human body (Eph 4:15-16)

(vi) vine and branches (Jn 15)

This variety teaches us that we cannot reduce union w Xt to any one of these. "There is similitude but not identity." Cannot either reduce it to the union between inanimate objects like stones, nor raise it to the level of union within the Godhead. "Union w Xt does not mean that we are incorporated into the life of the Godhead... analogy does not mean identity."

[p170] "Union w Xt is the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation... it is adoption into the family of God as sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty that accords to the people of God the apex of blessing and privilege. But we cannot think of adoption apart from union with Christ."

[p171] "There is no truth "more suited to impart confidence and strength, comfort and joy in the Lord than this one of union with Xt. Is also promotes sanctification, not only because all sanctifying grace is derived from Xt as the crucified and exalted Redeemer, but also because the recognition of fellowship w Xt and of the high privilege it entails incites to gratitude, obedience, and devotion. Union means also communion and communion constrains a humble, reverent, loving walk with him who died and rose again that he might be our Lord."

Union Christ, and union with the other persons of the Trinity

Because in union with Christ, also in similar relation with Father and HS

- see John 14:23, Father and Son will come and live in his people.

- [172] Also HS, John 14:16,17

Hence John says "And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1:3). Also Rom 8:9.

ie. not union with Xt ALONE.

[p173] "It is not the blurred confusion of rapturous ecstasy. It is faith solidly founded on the revelation deposited for us in Scripture and it is faith actively receiving that revelation by the inward witness of the HS. But it is also faith that stirs the deepest springs of emotion in the raptures of holy love and joy."

We sit in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6)

Life is hid with Christ in God, (Col 3:3).

Heb 9:24, Christ entered into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God for us.

Robert Reymond, *New systematic theology*

Union is...

- Spiritual: that is, by the HS
- mystical: we can't see it know it only because revealed in Word, which we are to believe
- real: as real as if there were a literal umbilical cord uniting them, reaching from Christ in heaven to the believer on earth.

The elect are:

- in the divine mind united with Christ in his death and resurrection [would we say "loved according to election?]
- then when effectually called actually are united to Xt.

Salvation accomplished:

Christ dies INSTEAD OF ME

My old crucified WITH XT (Rom 6:6)

... in the context of federal union (in mind of God I am united to Xt and loved because elected, though still an enemy (Rom 11:28).

Richard Gaffin, By Faith, not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation

Gaffin's book addresses Paul's understanding of how the individual receives salvation. (Cp. New Perspective which argues this really isn't an imp't question for Paul at all).

Chapter 2 – The order of salvation and the “Center” of Paul's theology

[p18] The term *ordo salutis* can have two distinct senses:

- one more detailed and technical is the usual sense. Has in view the logical or causal or even chronological “order” or sequence of “various discrete saving acts and benefits as these are unfolded within the actual life of the individual sinner.
- The more general use may refer to the “ongoing application of salvation, in distinction from its once-for-all accomplishment, from what we may call, following Herman Ridderbos in coining a Latin counterpart, *historia salutis*, the history of salvation.

[p19] Gaffin is concerned with the second. Seeks to establish whether Paul is in fact concerned with salvation in its ongoing application. Contra some, will show that Paul IS concerned with how one gets saved.

Can see this concern in Paul in various ways. Eg. the necessity of faith

- not all have faith, if you believe you'll be saved, (2 Thess 3:1-2, Rom 10:9).
- So, salvation is only appropriated effectually where faith in Christ is present.

So, a key 17th dogmatic principle is correct:

[p20] “without application redemption is not redemption.”

Gaffin seeks to establish what are Paul's core concerns.

Goes to 1 Cor 15:3-4.

[p24] Paul “is concerned with matters of individual appropriation only as they are integrally tethered to and flow from his redemptive-historical focus.”

[p26] “Specifically, the center of his theology is the death and resurrection of Christ in their eschatological significance.”

Eschatology for Paul has dual focus: (i) not only re: Xt's second coming, but (ii) also his first which inaugurated the end of the age for the church.

Union with Christ

[p36] This is “the central truth of salvation for Paul.”

It is described in various ways

- prepositional phrase “in Christ/the Lord”, sometimes “with”.

Scope of union seen by Adam-Christ contrast in Rom 5 and 1 Cor 15.

“What each does is determinative, in fact life-and-death decisive, respectively, for those “in him,” as their representative, and in the case of Christ as their substitute in propitiating the just wrath their sins deserve (eg. Rom 3:25-26). In this respect, “for us,” “for our sin” and “in him,” “with him” are correlative and inseparable; the former functions only within the bond indicated by the latter. At the same time, “for us” signals the uniqueness of Christ and what is irreversible and non-interchangeable within this bond.”

[p37] Three-fold distinction to “in Christ” – NOT different unions, but aspects of the single union.

- (i) predestinarian (Eph 1:4)
- (ii) past, or redemptive-historical, the union involved esp in Xt's death and res
- (iii) present, the union involved in the actual possession or application of salvation; in that sense an existential union. Hence Paul can speak of those “in Christ before me” (Rom 16:7), and of a time when he was a child of wrath (Eph 2:3)

[p38] Focusing esp on Present Union: it is REPRESENTATIVE, and LEGAL, and MYSTICAL

See Eph 5:32, mystery. BUT this intimacy does not remove or blur the personal distinction between Xt and

Xn (just as husband and wife do not lose personal distinction in one-flesh union).

“The personal identity of each is maintained. ‘Mystical’ union does not efface or otherwise compromise personal integrity. This means that in present union Xt retains his representative and substitutionary role...”

Present union is also SPIRITUAL:

“not in an immaterial, idealistic sense but because of the activity and indwelling of the HS... As spiritual, that is, effected by the HS, it is neither ontological (like that between the persons of the Trinity), nor hypostatic (like that [p39] between Xt’s divine and human natures), nor psychosomatic (between body and soul in human personality), nor somatic (between husband and wife), nor intellectual and moral (a unity in understanding, affections and purpose).

“Spiritual union stems from the rel betw Xt and the HS given with his glorification and lying in back of that union.”

Present union has a RECIPROCAL character:

- not just us in him, but HE in us. Col 1:27.
- This is VITAL (ie. vivifying): “Christ indwelling by the Spirit if the very life of the believer: ‘I no longer live, but Xt lives in me’ (Gal 2:20); ‘your life is hid with Xt in God’ (Col 3:4).”

Present union is INDISSOLUBLE

- this follows from it being rooted in election (Eph 1:4)
- will most certainly reach resurrection-glorification “in Christ”, (Rom 8:17, 1 Cor 15:20,23).

Union and justification

[p41] Relational and legal concerns in salvation (the forensic and participatory) belong together.

- “the participatory or relational involves an inalienable legal, forensic aspect, and the forensic does not function apart from but always within the participatory.”
[Christ in me, Christ for me]

The role of faith

Faith is essential in being united to Xt.

[p42] “Faith for Paul is fairly seen as the bond of that union, viewed from the side of the one united with Christ (Eph 3:17).”

“Faith unites to Christ so that his death and resurrection are mine, in the sense of now being effective savingly in my life. Better, faith is the work of God by his Spirit, effective in ‘calling’ sinners, otherwise ‘dead in trespasses and sin’ (Eph 2:1,5) and thus utterly incapable of faith in and of themselves, ‘into the fellowship of His Son’ (1 Cor 1:9), into union with Christ, who is what he now is as crucified and resurrected.”

NB. Gaffin says he has deliberately framed the above in terms of an *individual’s* union with Xt. Has done so because of present climate in which individual is being obscured by the corporate.

- individual: Gal 2:20 “who loved me and gave himself for me”
1 Tim 1:13,15, “I... obtained mercy.”
- but there is a corporate dimension too. [p43]
Call into fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9) “is at the same time and inseparably a call into the fellowship of his Spirit-baptised body (12:13).
Believer’s bodies are individually temples of the HS (1 Cor 6:19, cf 1 Thess 4:6,8), but church itself as one if God’s temple (1 Cor 3:16-17).

The center of Paul’s theology and the order of salvation

[p43 con’t]

“The center of Paul’s soteriology, at the center of his theology as a whole, then, is neither justification by faith nor sanctification, neither the imputation of Christ’s righteousness nor the renewing work of the Spirit. To draw that conclusion, however, is not to “de-center” justification (or sanctification), as if

justification is somehow less important for Paul than the Reformation claims. Justification is supremely important, it is absolutely crucial in Paul's 'gospel of salvation' (cf. Eph 1:13). Deny or distort his teaching on justification and that gospel ceases to be gospel; there is no longer saving 'good news' for guilty sinners. But no matter how close justification is to the heart of Paul's gospel, in our salvation, as he sees it, there is an antecedent consideration, a reality, that is deeper, more fundamental, more decisive, more crucial: Christ and our union with him, the crucified and resurrected, the exalted, Christ. Union with Christ by faith – that is the essence of Paul's *ordo salutis*.

[p44] Cites **Calvin**, who writes in Institutes 3:1:1

"First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value to us."

[p50] "There is no justification apart from that union [see Gal 2:17 and Phil 3:8-9]... Here is a consideration that has sometimes been eclipsed in the Reformation tradition, where a tendency is observable to conceive of justification as a stand-alone imputative act, without particular reference to union with Christ...

"But what about imputation? As Paul sees it, does union, as justifying, leave no place for imputation? Does union, as it has been put recently, make imputation 'redundant'? [Rich Lusk]... Union with Christ, as already noted, is such that it does not destroy the personal distinction between him and the believer. The "in him" does not cancel out the "for us/me" that Christ remains just for those in union with him. There is a very real sense in which in union with Christ, Christ remains 'outside' of the believer.

So, what's the GROUND of the justification that's mine in union with Christ? Three options:

[p51] (i) Xt's own righteousness, complete and finished in his obedience culminating on the cross
(ii) the union itself, the fact of the relationship
(iii) the r'ness and obedience being produced by the transforming work of the Spirit in those who are justified.

"It appears that the current readiness to dispense with imputation stems from taking either of the latter two factors just mentioned, whether or not intentionally, as, in effect, the ground of justification. But neither is sustainable."

- the relationship, however real, cannot be basis of justification. It is not a rel as an entity but a PERSON that justifies and saves. (eg. Gal 2:20).
- Gaffin suspects that (ii) will gravitate to (iii)
- Nor does ongoing work of Spirit form ground of justification. "It is Christ's sacrifice for me, not the Spirit's work in me, that is the basis of m being forgiven."

"In union with Christ, his righteousness is the ground of my being justified. That is, in my justification his righteousness becomes my righteousness. But this, with the exclusion of the other two possibilities just noted, is virtually and necessarily to be at the notion of imputation. His righteousness is reckoned as mine. An imputative aspect is integral, indispensable to the justification given in union with Christ."

Calvin worth quoting – on how he does and doesn't understand salvation to be "outside" of believers. Institutes 3:11:10

"Therefore, that joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our heart – in short, that *mystical union* –are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. *We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body – in short, because he deigns to make us one with him.* For this reason, we glory that we have *fellowship of righteousness* with him."

