**Union with Christ**

*“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”*

(Calvin, Institutes, III.1.1).

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

*who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places”*

(The Apostle Paul, Eph. 1:3)

Union with Christ grants us a new identity in the present, and guarantees what we will be in our future.

* “Handy man special:”[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Note:** I would encourage you to read J.I. Packer on (effectual call, illumination, and regeneration)

**The Centrality of Union with Christ in Scripture: A Preliminary Overview**[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. *We are elected and predestined in the eternal Son of God*
   1. **Ephesians 1:4** – “just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him”
   2. **Ephesians 1:5** – “In love, He predestined us to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will”
2. *In perhaps its broadest description, our personal experience of salvation is described as a dying and rising with Christ.*
   1. **Ephesians 2:4-6** – “God even when we were dead in sins and transgressions…*raised us up with him* and *seated us in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*.”
   2. **Col. 2:11-13** – “And in him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands. . . having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with him through faith in the working of God.”
   3. **Col. 3:1-4** – “If then you have been *raised with Christ*, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have *died, and your life is hid with Christ in God*. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.
3. *We are also called in Christ:*
   1. **1 Cor. 1:9** – “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”
   2. **2 Tim. 1:9** – “God saved us, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was granted in Christ Jesus from all eternity.”
4. *Regenerated in Christ:*
   1. **Ephesians 2:4-5, 10** – “But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, *made us alive together with Christ* (by grace you have been saved). . . for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared in advance for us to walk in.”
   2. **Col. 2:13** – “And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, *God made alive together with him*, having forgiven us all our trespasses”
5. *Justified in Christ:*
   1. **Romans 8:1** – “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus....”
   2. **2 Cor. 5:21** – “He made him who knew no sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.”
   3. **Gal. 2:17** – “But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!”
   4. **1 Cor.1:30** – “He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption”
6. *Sanctified in Christ:*
   1. **1 Cor. 1:30** – “He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and *sanctification* and redemption”
   2. **1 Cor. 6:11** – “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”
7. *Persevere in Christ:*
   1. **Romans 6:4** – “Therefore, we have been buried with him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”
   2. **1 Cor. 1:4-9:** –“I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and all knowledge -- even as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you -- so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ; who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”
8. *Die in Christ:*
   1. **Rev. 14:13** – “And I heard a voice saying, ‘Write, blessed are the dead who *die in the Lord* from now on!’ ‘Yes” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.”
   2. **1 Thess. 4: 17** – “For the *dead in Christ* shall rise first.”
9. *Future Resurrection and Glorification in Christ:*
   1. **1 Cor. 15:22** – “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” Those who will be made alive will be made alive in Christ.
   2. **Romans 8:30** – “Those whom he foreknew (in Christ) he also predestined (in Christ), called in Christ,(in Christ) justified in Christ (in Christ), will also be glorified (in Christ).”

*In sum, then, there is no blessing which applies to the believer apart from union with Christ.*

**The nature of mystical union with Christ: Personal, Spiritual, and Eschatological. Eph. 1:3-14**

* “*Mystical*” – Union with Christ “so greatly transcends analogies in human relationships in its intimacy, efficacy and excellence” (Hodge, Outlines of Theology, 483).

**Towards “Devotion”** (“*How People Change*,” 16):

Central Point: The hope of personal growth and change rests on my union with a person, Jesus Christ, who powerfully acts to change my heart and make it more and more like his.

Personal Application: Change takes place when I embrace the person and work of Christ and my union with him in the context of my daily struggles.

Relational Application: to have an effective ministry to others I need zeal to help them understand and experience the benefits of union with Christ.

1. **Union with Christ is Personal** 
   1. **Ephesians 1:3**
   2. **Ephesians 1:7**
   3. **Ephesians 1:11**

**Bavinck on Union with Christ**: “This fellowship with the person of Christ brings with it the sharing in all his blessings and benefits. There is not sharing in the benefits of Christ unless we share in his person, for the benefits are not to be separated from the person. That would be to a certain extent conceivable if the benefits which Christ conferred were material goods. A man can give us his money or property without giving us himself. But the benefits which Christ gives are spiritual in kind. They consist above all of his favor, his mercy, his love, and all these are gifts which are thoroughly personal in kind and are not to be separated from the person of Christ. The treasury of benefits has not been deposited somewhere on earth, in the hands, say, of pope or priest, or in church or sacrament. It is to be found exclusively in Christ himself. He is the treasury. In him the Father turns his friendly, gracious face to us, and that is all our salvation.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. **Union with Christ is Spiritual**

* What we mean here is that our Union with Christ is *effected* by the Spirit, who himself is the Lord.
  1. **Ephesians 1:3** – “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every **spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places”
  2. **Ephesians 1:13-14**

**Bavinck again is helpful**: “[Union with Christ] is made possible by the fact that Christ shares himself with the believer through the Spirit. Because by his passion and death Christ has so perfectly earned the Spirit and all his gifts and powers that he, Christ himself, can be called the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17), he has also earned the right to give that Spirit to whom he will. The Spirit of God has become the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the Son the Spirit of the Lord.[[4]](#footnote-4) To have received that Spirit is to say that one has received Christ, for whoever has not the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Christ, is not his own (Rom. 8:9-10). Just as God gives [the Son] to the world, so Christ gives himself to the church through his Spirit.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

1. **Union with Christ is Eschatological** (*already-not yet*)
   1. We are united to Christ in his *death and resurrection*, and for that reason our union with Christ is eschatological in nature.
   2. To put the matter a bit differently, union with Christ involves participation in the “new creation” resulting from his exaltation.
      1. **2 Corinthians 5:16-19**
      2. **Ephesians 1:3-14**

Union with Christ (towards personal and relational application)[[6]](#footnote-6)

Change in the Christian life is a lifelong process. What are the key ingredients for growth and change? How would we answer that (bible study, prayer, fellowship with others, church attendance, reading Christian books, sacraments etc.)? All of these things are benefitial. These are the “means” not the ends. These things are not to be pursued in an ends to themselves, but as the means by which we recognize our need, and grow in fellowship with the person of Christ (by the Spirit). Only a deeper relationship with Christ will change our hearts.

Central Point: The hope of personal growth and change rests on my union with a person, Jesus Christ, who powerfully acts to change my heart and make it more and more like his.

Personal Application: Change takes place when I embrace the person and work of Christ and my union with him in the context of my daily struggles.

Relational Application: to have an effective ministry to others I need zeal to help them understand and experience the benefits of union with Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:1-3

Colossians 1:15-23

Colossians 1:21-23; 2:1-15

1. Illustration taken and adapted from: Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change Study Guide: How Christ Changes Us by His Grace* (Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Lane G. Tipton, “Union with Christ: Its Foundational Status and Fundamental Structure (Part I) ST 313 Lecture Outline” (Westminster Theological Seminary, Spring 2010). Much of this outline and content is owed to Dr. Tipton. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Mr Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956)., 399-400. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 2:16; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 4:6; and Phil. 1:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*., 398. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Lane and Tripp, *How People Change Study Guide*., 16-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)