

Union With Christ

2. What Is It?

RANKIN
WILBOURNE

UNION
WITH
CHRIST

The Way to Know and Enjoy God

Foreword by JOHN ORTBERG

The Gap

What the gospel says
is true of me (I'm
forgiven, accepted,
and secure)

What I say I believe

Grand, high
promises of God

How I really see
myself

What I'm experiencing

Gritty details of our
everyday lives

Question from a skeptic: "If the gospel is supernatural, as you say, then why doesn't it seem to make more of a difference in the lives of so many who claim to believe it?"

Union with Christ is a “Gap-Filler”

- The concept of being united with Christ is not new
 - Calvin: 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. Therefore ... he had to become ours and **to dwell within us**.
- Christ as “outside of” us vs. Christ uniting his life to ours
- Note: A deep understanding of our union with Christ is not the only gap-filler.

What, Exactly, Is Union with Christ?

- First, let's admit that there is an element of *mystery* to this

Ephesians 5:25-33

25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,

30 because we are members of his body.

31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

32 This **mystery** is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

What, Exactly, Is Union with Christ?

- First, let's admit that there is an element of *mystery* to this
 - We can't completely comprehend everything about our union with Christ
- Examples of other mysteries essential to the Christian faith
 - Jesus is both fully God and fully man
 - Trinity: One God, three persons

Calvin on Our Union with Christ

For my own part, I am overwhelmed by the depth of this mystery, and am not ashamed to join Paul in acknowledging at once my ignorance and my admiration ... whatever is supernatural is clearly beyond our own comprehension. **Let us therefore labor more to feel Christ living in us, than to discover the nature of that intercourse.**

What, Exactly, Is Union with Christ?

1. You are in Christ.

2. Christ is in you.

You Are In Christ

- Paul never referred to Christians as “Christians”—his preferred term is those who are “in Christ”
- Other writers also used the term “in Christ” to refer to believers

Examples of Paul Referring to Christians as Being “In Christ”

- **Rom 8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are **in Christ Jesus**.
- **Rom 16:3** Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers **in Christ Jesus**,
- **Rom 16:7** Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were **in Christ** before me.
- **1Co 15:18** Then those also who have fallen asleep **in Christ** have perished.
- **2Co 5:17** Therefore, if anyone is **in Christ**, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Examples from NT Writers

Rom 6:11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God **in Christ Jesus**.

Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life **in Christ Jesus** our Lord.

Rom 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are **in Christ Jesus**.

Rom 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free **in Christ Jesus** from the law of sin and death.

Rom 8:39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God **in Christ Jesus** our Lord.

Rom 12:5 so we, though many, are one body **in Christ**, and individually members one of another.

Rom 16:3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers **in Christ Jesus**,

Rom 16:7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were **in Christ** before me.

Rom 16:9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker **in Christ**, and my beloved Stachys.

Rom 16:10 Greet Apelles, who is approved **in Christ**. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus.

1Co 1:2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified **in Christ Jesus**, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

1Co 1:30 And because of him you are **in Christ Jesus**, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

Examples from NT Writers (more)

1Co 3:1 But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.

1Co 4:15 For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

1Co 4:17 That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

1Co 15:18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

1Co 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

1Co 16:24 My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

2Co 1:21 And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us,

2Co 2:14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

2Co 2:17 For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

2Co 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

2Co 12:2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.

2Co 12:19 Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved.

Examples from NT Writers (still more)

Gal 1:22 And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.

Gal 2:4 Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—

Gal 2:17 But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not!

Gal 3:14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Gal 3:26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Gal 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

Eph 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

Eph 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,

Eph 2:6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

Eph 2:7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Examples from NT Writers (even more)

Eph 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Eph 3:6 This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Php 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

Php 2:5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

Php 3:14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Php 4:7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Php 4:21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you.

Col 1:2 To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

Col 1:28 Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

1Th 4:16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

1Ti 1:14 and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

2Ti 3:12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

Examples from NT Writers (the end..finally!)

Phm 1:8 Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required,

Phm 1:20 Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.

Phm 1:23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you,

1Pe 3:16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

1Pe 5:10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

1Pe 5:14 Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

Do you get the picture?

What Does It Mean to Be “In Christ”?

- Christ represent us
 - Example: soccer forward scoring winning goal
 - David and Goliath
- This is very thorough!
 - We have been **crucified with** Christ (Gal 2:20)
 - We have been **buried with** Christ (Rom 6:4)
 - We have been **raised with** Christ (Col 3:1)
 - We have been **seated with** Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6)

Paul had to invent new Greek words for these!

Being In Christ

- Every part of Christ's life has significance to us
 - If we are "In Christ", we are participants with him
- Question: What happens to our identity when we are in Christ?
 - We don't need to prove ourselves any more
 - We don't need to manage our own reputation
 - We don't need to be intimidated by anyone
 - We don't need to fear the judgment of God
 - We can rest

What, Exactly, Is Union with Christ?

1. You are in Christ.

2. Christ is in you.

Christ In Us/You

- John 13-14
 - 13:33 Jesus would be leaving them
 - 14:1 Don't be troubled
 - 14:16-17 I'll send a Helper to dwell with you forever
 - 14:18 I will come to you
 - 14:19 We live because He lives
 - 14:20 Jesus is in us and we are in Jesus
- Gal 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ...Christ lives in me
 - What, practically, does it mean that it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me?

Christ In Us/You (cont'd)

- 1 Cor 3:16
 - What was the temple?
 - What does it mean that we are God's temple?
 - Is this easy to grasp? (2 Co 13:5)

Christ in You = Change

- Christ dwelling in us in His Spirit is a guarantee that we can and will change
- What were some characteristics of how Jesus lived according to the Bible?
- Jesus was the perfect human—he is what human is supposed to look like
- Because his Spirit is within us, we carry around incredible resources (Eph 1:18-19)

Our Nature Has Changed

- Batman vs. Spider Man
- “Union with Christ is not a reality to be understood, but a new reality to be lived, through faith.” (Wilbourne)
 - What is the difference between these two things?
 - Which is harder (to understand or to live)?
- Eph 3:14-21: What does this passage have to say about what we’ve been talking about?

Something to Grow Into

- Two helpful analogies
 - Marriage: two become one
 - True on the day that they're married
 - Something that a couple grows into over time
 - Growing to maturity (Eph 4:11-15)
 - Imagine a little boy wearing his father's dress shirt
 - Likewise, we need to grow into the reality of our union with Christ
 - We don't need to strive to achieve it
 - We do need to strive to lay hold of what is already ours

Summary

- Union with Christ means
 - We are in Christ
 - Christ is in us
- This is an objective reality for believers—something God has done
 - Yet, it is something that we need to grow into