

1. **Introduction:** Our goal is to understand **What it Means to be “In Christ.”**
  - ◆ Another name for the doctrine of being “in Christ” is “Union with Christ.”
  - ◆ Union with Christ is a comprehensive doctrine of salvation based on Spiritual Union of individuals with Christ. This spiritual union is vitally real, nothing ethereal or fuzzy.
  - ◆ To understand the doctrine understanding certain fundamentals is necessary including the doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation, and the work of the Holy Spirit..
  - ◆ After studying the fundamentals, we will dig into the question of **What it Means to be “In Christ” or in “Union with Christ”** using Ephesians 2:1-10 as our beginning text.
  
2. **Verses on Being “In Christ:** All Scripture is from the ESV unless otherwise designated.
  - ◆ 2 Corinthians 5:17, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”*
  - ◆ Romans 8:1, *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*
  - ◆ Romans 6:11, *“So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”*
  - ◆ Galatians 3:26, *“For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.”*
  - ◆ Summarizing these verses we see that “in Christ” believers are new creations, are under no condemnation, are dead to sin, are alive to God, and are children of God through faith.
  
3. **Why Study Union with Christ:** It is a comprehensive doctrine. All steps of salvation find a place in the doctrine of Union with Christ. The doctrine’s power lies in the way it holds together and organizes all elements of salvation “in Christ.”
  - ◆ As quoted by Bill Kynes, H.R. Mackintosh a 19<sup>th</sup> century British theologian said, **“It is not putting it too strongly to say that union with Christ is a brief name for all that the apostles mean by salvation.”** This provides strong incentive to understand the doctrine.

4. **Lewis Smedes View:** “How can a person who lived two thousand years ago radically change a human life here and now: How can Jesus of Nazareth radically affect us, as persons, to the depths of our being” How can He reach out over the great span of time that divides us from Him and change us so profoundly that we can become ‘new creatures’ in Him?

Does the Jesus of the past become, in fact, the Jesus of the present? The Apostle Paul say that He does. And this is the difference between His influence and that of any other influential person. He touches us here and now, not merely by the ripples of the historical currents He once set in motion, but by entering into union with us personally. Union with Christ – this is the sum and substance of the Christian person’s status, the definition of his relationship to Jesus, the large reality in which all the nuances of his new being are embraced.” (All Things Made New: A Theology of Man’s Union with Christ, Lewis Smedes, Eerdmans, 1970, p. 7).

5. **Purpose of Salvation:** Everything God does has a purpose. He is a God of purpose. In Revelation 21:3 John says, “*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.’*”

- ◆ I believe this verse concerns “the ultimate purpose of salvation,” namely God’s intent to redeem and sanctify a people for Himself.
- ◆ God’s amazing grace, through faith, saves sinners “**from**” the penalty due their sins, but God also saves sinners “**for a purpose.**” They are to live in His presence eternally.
- ◆ I believe God’s plan of redemption for sinners includes not only redemption from sins but also purposeful preparation for eternal life with Him (such as laying up treasures in heaven).
- ◆ We know little about details of eternal life, but for our benefit, a great many things have been revealed about how to prepare for eternal life, salvation being the first thing.
- ◆ Not everything in mortal life will affect heavenly life. The question then is, “What things in mortal life will have a positive effect on eternal life?”
- ◆ A complete answer is not possible but surely preparation includes right relationship with God, family, and other people. Storing right kinds of

knowledge in our mind. Developing the right kind of wisdom. Having the right attitude toward God, other people, and things.

- ◆ In mortal life, God gives opportunities to acquire godly wisdom, knowledge, attitudes, and relationships which will be treasures in heaven and pleasures for us in this mortal life.
- ◆ Wealth, power, status, quantities of worldly goods, etc. will have no direct effect on our heavenly status.
- ◆ **But** the way we chose to use such things and our attitude toward them, will be either a future disaster or a heavenly treasure.

**6. General Comments on Union with Christ:** Paul, John, and Peter all refer to Spiritual Union with Christ. Paul uses “in Christ” (more than 140 times). Since fallen people are spiritually dead and not “in Christ.” There is nothing within their own power that can change their state. God must intervene. In His grace He does intervene and gives new spiritual life “in Christ.”

- ◆ God’s salvation has two vital threads. (1.) Imputation of righteous earned by Christ.
- ◆ (2.) Transformation to holiness by a process that, though they participate, believers can neither initiate nor control. Both “imputation” and “transformation” are required.
- ◆ Imputation of righteousness is called “justification.” In justification God imputes Christ’s earned righteousness to believers and judicially declares them “justified” before Him.
- ◆ The only path to justification is by grace through faith or “justification by faith alone.” As we shall see, faith is actually never “alone,” but faith alone leads to justification.
- ◆ “Transformation to holiness” will be discussed later.

**7. Two Categories of Sin Problems:** There are two categories of sin problems:

- ◆ Category 1: Willful disobedience of God’s law. The sin of willful disobedience comes under God’s righteous judgment and carries a death penalty.
- ◆ Category 2: All have a sin nature inclining them to sin. Adam and Eve did not have a sin nature but acquired one by willfully disobeying God. They fell from their original pure state of grace, died spiritually, acquired a heritable sin nature, and began to die physically.

- ◆ The Fall into sin changed all their relationships. That with God, with each other, and between their body and soul. The earth itself fell under God’s curse.
- ◆ Consequences of the “fall” continue to affect every descendant of Adam.
- ◆ Since Adam and Eve’s sin, all people are born spiritually dead. All have a sin nature inclining them to sin. In their own power, no one can do anything to change that situation.

8. **Two Kinds of Solution for Two Kinds of Sin Problems:** Our defective (fallen) human nature makes sinning inevitable. Breaking God’s moral law is a universal problem. So there are two related categories of sin problems – having a sin nature and the breaking of God’s moral Law. God solved the two problems differently.

- ◆ Human effort cannot solve either problem. God in love and grace chose to solve both problems but with two distinct categories of solutions, both made possible by Jesus Christ through His incarnation, perfect life, and substitutionary death.
- ◆ Disobeying God’s moral Law is a legal or forensic problem and receives a legal solution.
- ◆ Fallen human nature (possessing a sin nature) is an ontological (related to being) problem. The “fallen being” with its sin nature must be transformed to something equivalent to Adam and Eve’s original before-the-fall state or better.
- ◆ So we see that fallen people have both a legal (forensic) and an ontological (being) problem. These are quite different in kind. One solution solves the breaking God’s moral law. The second solves the ontological sin nature problem.
- ◆ God obeys His own Law (is law-abiding). Therefore, both solutions must satisfy the Law.
- ◆ We will consider first the legal problem and then the ontological problem.

9. **The Legal Issue Resolved:** A sinner’s legal problem is a lack of righteousness demonstrated by disobedience to God’s moral law. How is that problem to be solved?

- ◆ God’s solution to the legal or forensic part of the sin problem is based on vicarious actions of the incarnate Christ. The Law must be satisfied. Therefore, the divine Son took to Himself a human nature and lived for a time on earth to do what was necessary.

- ◆ As the federal head of those to be redeemed, He acted as their vicarious substitute (legally able to do things for another) to do for them what they could not do for themselves.
- ◆ To be legally righteous under the Law required living a perfect life of obedience. Jesus did that for all who would believe in Him.
- ◆ To deal with the death penalty for sins, the righteous, sinless Jesus took upon Himself the punishment (including death and God’s wrath) due the sins of all who would believe.
- ◆ God applies the benefit of these vicarious actions to those chosen to be redeemed.
- ◆ Thus, Christ’s substitutionary perfect life under in Law provided a righteousness apart from the Law which could be imputed to believing sinners making them legally righteous.
- ◆ And Christ’s substitutionary death on the cross paid the penalty due sins, enabling the Father to legally declare believing sinners free from the death penalty due sin (pardoned).
- ◆ Salvation is not a single simple and indivisible act. Salvation earned by Jesus, is applied to believers in a sequence of acts and processes including calling, regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, glorification. Once begun salvation will be completed (Rm. 8:30).
- ◆ All are distinct but related, each having a purpose within the overall process of solving the human problems of disobedience of God’s moral Law and possessing a sin nature.
- ◆ The salvation work of Christ satisfied (propitiated) the Father’s wrath against the sins of those for whom Christ died.
- ◆ The Father imputes both Christ’s earned righteousness and Christ’s payment of the death penalty due sins to each one who believes.
- ◆ This incredible exchange – Christ’s righteousness for our sin and its due penalty – is all of grace. We did nothing and can do nothing that would earn justification or pardon. The Holy Spirit works faith enabling the sinner to believe.
- ◆ Being pardoned and declared “legally righteousness” based on Christ’s work takes care of the legal problem including the **penalty** due for all past, present, and future sin. The legal issue for a believing sinner is settled instantaneously, but the “sin nature” problem remains.

**10. The Sin Nature Issue Resolved:** Paul says everyone who is justified will be made holy (Romans 8:30). “Making holy” (or sanctification) is a process.

- ◆ Dealing with the sin nature problem requires a “transformation of being” in which a believer’s sin nature is ultimately eliminated. Sanctification is dealing with the ontological problem. Sanctification, which means “making holy,” begins with regeneration.
- ◆ Sanctification continues throughout mortal life. Christ and the Father send the Holy Spirit to indwell each justified believer. The Holy Spirit is instrumental (crucial, necessary) in the sanctification process.
- ◆ The indwelling Holy Spirit enables, guides, and encourages developing holiness to oppose and eventually defeat the sin nature (at glorification). Believers should cooperate with the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, by doing things corresponding to what the Holy Spirit is doing within them (Philippians 2:13).
- ◆ Avoid acting, thinking, or speaking in ways that grieve (Ephesians 4:30) or quench (1 Thessalonians 5:19) the Holy Spirit. Strive to keep in step with the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ Believing, justified sinners are gradually transformed into an image of Christ. When glorified, the redeemed will be like Christ, righteous and holy, legally and experientially.
- ◆ The sin nature will be gone. Until then, John, in his letters, says the sin nature, though diminished, is still present. Believers will sin from time-to-time. If we say we don’t sin we lie (1 John 1:18).

**11. What is Next:** The Holy Trinity.