

1. **Introduction:** We are just beginning to scratch the surface of what it means to be “in Christ” and how God made it possible for rebellious, spiritually dead, sinners to be united with Him. Consider these quotes from theologians about Union with Christ and what makes it so important.
  - ◆ John Murray: **“Nothing is more central or basic than union and communion with Christ. ... Union with Christ is in itself a broad and embracing subject ... 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 of the finished work of Christ. Indeed the whole process of salvation has its origin in one phase of union with Christ.”** (*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p. 171-172, Eerdmans, 1955).
  - ◆ Bill Kynes: **“Union with Christ is that spiritual reality whereby we as believers are joined to our Lord such that what is true of him becomes true of us. This spiritual union is the means by which space and time are transcended and we share in all the benefits of Jesus’ work in history on our behalf. It is central to our understanding of who we are as Christians”** (*Union with Christ: The Sum of Our Salvation*, C.S. Lewis Institute, *KNOWING & DOING*, Winter 2007).
  - ◆ Louis Berkhof: ***Union with Christ is “that intimate, vital, and spiritual union between Christ and His people, in virtue of which He is the source of their life and strength, of their blessedness and salvation.”*** (*Systematic Theology*, Eerdmans, p 449).
  - ◆ Charles Spurgeon: **“There is no joy in this world like union with Christ. The more we can feel it, the happier we are.”**
2. **Salvation Needed and Supplied:** Adam and Eve’s fall from grace caused them and all their progeny to be separated from God. Because of His great love for the humans He created, God devised and carried out a plan to enable humans to be reunited to Him.
  - ◆ The plan of salvation (redemption from the consequences of the Fall) requires a spiritual union between God and humans. To appreciate how this was accomplished, we need to understand things about God and the humans He created in His image.
3. **About God:** God is One in nature (or essence) and three in Persons. The three divine Persons are in a union so complete that they share one divine nature and mutually indwell one another. The Trinity is one God.
  - ◆ Acts and works of the Trinity are divided into two categories as “internal works” and “external works.” That is, a category for acts and works internal to the Godhead, and a separate category for acts and works external to the Godhead.
  - ◆ Knowledge about internal acts and works of the Trinity is very limited as not much has been revealed.

- ◆ We know the Persons of the Trinity are distinguished from one another by personal properties. The Father is eternally unbegotten, the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, and the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son.
  - ◆ In terms of their deity, the three persons are identical, each possessing the fullness of the one divine essence. They each possess all the divine attributes. They differ from one another only in terms of their personal relations or properties.
  - ◆ The Persons of the Trinity love one another and counsel together. Little else is known about the internal activities of the Persons of the Trinity.
  - ◆ External works of God are those works by which He accomplishes things outside Himself. They include works of creation, providence, and redemption.
  - ◆ God created all things out of nothing. Providence is God's preserving and governing all His creatures and their actions. Redemption is God's supernatural work in saving His people from their sins.
  - ◆ In acts outside the Godhead, all three Persons always act together, although one Person may take the lead, as in the Father plans, the Son makes possible, and the Holy Spirit applies what the Father has planned and the Son made possible.
  - ◆ Another way to say this is that all three Persons are involved in all external work but not in the same way. The Father acts from Himself, the Son acts from the Father, and the Spirit acts from the Father and the Son.
  - ◆ Some external work reveals one Person more clearly than the others. For example, while all three are involved in redemption, the Father stands out in the planning, the Son in accomplishing redemption, and the Spirit in applying redemption.
  - ◆ External works of God in redemptive history involve covenantal provisions, miracles, works of judgment and salvation, the establishment of His kingdom, and the securing of the new creation.
  - ◆ God's internal and external works are purposeful and consistent with His character.
  - ◆ God's works in redemptive history are established based on the Person and saving work of Christ. Accordingly, they function on the already/not-yet structure of His first and second comings.
4. **About People:** Though created as an image of God, holy and righteous, Adam and Eve sinned and plunged themselves and their progeny into a state of spiritual death and separation from God. No one can do anything in their own power to change their situation. Left to themselves, people will sin according to their fallen nature and be forever separated from God. But God, rich in grace and mercy, having a great love for the humans He created, established a plan of redemption to give them new spiritual life and restore them to fellowship with Him.

5. **Enabling a Saving Union between Humans and God:** While a union between humans and God cannot be as complete as the total union between the Persons of the Trinity, that union appears to be the model for Union with Christ.
- ◆ Divine and creaturely attributes cannot be mixed. Thus, a salvation union between God and humans cannot join God's divine nature directly to a human nature.
  - ◆ If one of the Persons of the Trinity had a sinless human nature, that could serve as the point of union between God and humans.
  - ◆ No member of the Trinity inherently possesses a human nature to serve as a point of union. That problem was solved by having the Son (Mediator between God and Humans) take to Himself a human nature becoming one person (the Christ) with both a divine and a human nature.
  - ◆ Since a human nature is all the essential attributes of a human including a body, the Son took to Himself a human nature by becoming incarnate (in the flesh).
  - ◆ The Son's human nature was acquired in such manner that it was unfallen and sinless.
  - ◆ His human nature in no way detracted from or interfered with His divine attributes. There would be no mixing of human and divine attributes, no exchange of human attributes for divine or vice versa.
  - ◆ This astounding miracle was done through the power of the Holy Spirit acting on and through the Virgin Mary. A unique child was born, a Son, the God-man, having His divine nature and a sinless human nature.
  - ◆ The Son thus became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth. He is one person (the Christ) with two natures, both directed by His divine "I".
  - ◆ In Philippians 2, Paul says that the incarnate Son did not use His divine nature to build Himself up in the eyes of men, but humbled Himself as an obedient servant, obedient even to the point of death on a cross.
  - ◆ Christ's sinless human nature provides the commonality in nature necessary to make spiritual union between God and man possible. The mutual indwelling between Christ's divine nature and the Father and the Holy Spirit extends union with Christ to the other two members of the Trinity.
  - ◆ In the God-man humanness and divineness are not separated but in union. There is but one Christ. His divine and human nature are distinct, as are the acts coming from each, yet His two natures are truly and completely united in the one person Christ.
  - ◆ Since the Fall, every human is born spiritually dead. In order to have spiritual union with Christ, a person must have spiritual life.
  - ◆ God's first step in creating a spiritual union between Christ and a human is to give spiritual life to that person through spiritual regeneration (being born again by the Holy Spirit).

- ◆ When God makes a human spirit spiritually alive, it is united to the human spirit of Christ. Regeneration is “in Christ.” Individuals are “saved” by being united to Christ.
  - ◆ Our spiritual Union with Christ connects through Christ’s mutual indwelling with the Father and Holy Spirit producing union with the Trinity. No more separation.
  - ◆ Unlike the union of mutual indwelling among the Persons of the Trinity in which the Three Persons all have the same attributes, our union with Christ, of course, does not mean we acquire Christ’s divine attributes.
  - ◆ Redemption is through Union with Christ. Legal and transformative benefits of salvation flow to individuals through that union to make them righteous and holy according to God’s original design. The Holy Spirit applies all benefits.
6. **A Few of the Things Union with Christ Means to a Believer:** In Christ you were given grace before the world was created. <sup>NIV</sup>2 Timothy 1:9, “*He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.*”
- ◆ In Christ you are loved by God with an inseparable love. Romans 8:38–39, “*For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,<sup>39</sup> 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.*”
  - ◆ In Christ you were redeemed and forgiven all your sins. Ephesians 1:7, “*In him [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,*”
  - ◆ In Christ you are justified before God and the righteousness of God in Christ is imputed to you. 2 Corinthians 5:21, “*For our sake he [God] made him [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*”
  - ◆ In Christ you become a new creation and child of God. 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.*” Galatians 3:26, “*For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.*”
  - ◆ We in Christ and Christ in us through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Colossians 1:27, “*To them [the redeemed] God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*”
  - ◆ John 14:23, “*Jesus answered him, ‘If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.’*”
  - ◆ John 15:5, “*I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*”
7. **What is Next:** More on how our Union with Christ comes to pass.