

## Union



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I'm here to talk about union with Christ. What is union with Christ and why does it matter? Well, it might surprise you to realize that union with Christ is an essential theme in the teaching of the New Testament. We find it especially in the writings of the apostle Paul, but also in the apostle John and the apostle Peter too. But what is it, and why do we need to know about it? Well, I'm really passionate about this subject because I think it is so important for us to understand how it is that God makes us right with Himself, how it is that God blesses us with all the gifts that He bestows upon us, and how it is that we are to live. It affects all those things very deeply, very profoundly.

Theologians isolate union with Christ down to four key terms, and I want to briefly unpack these terms. The terms are *union*, *participation*, *identification*, and *incorporation*. *Union* has to do with this idea of being one with Christ. He is in us by the Spirit. We are in Him. It's a bit like the marriage metaphor that Paul uses in Ephesians 5, that we become one flesh with Christ. Union has to do with this mutual indwelling. It's a nuptial marriage kind of idea and it's an intimate idea.

Then we have *participation*. Participation has to do with connecting to Jesus and sharing in the key events of His narrative. So, when He is put to death, when He dies, Paul says we died with Christ. When Jesus is buried, He says we are buried with Christ. When Jesus is raised from the dead, we are made alive with Christ, and so on and so forth. We participate in these key events of Jesus' narrative.

Then we have the third term, *identification*, which means I am no longer to be identified in Adam. I am no longer identified in this rebellious world, but now I am in Christ. I am under the rule of Christ, I belong to Christ's team, and that has huge implications for the way we live and for the way that we understand our identity.



The fourth term is *incorporation*. This means that when we become united to Christ, we also become united to each other. If I am in Christ and you are in Christ, then we are connected together by being in Christ together, sharing in the one Spirit and sharing in the one Lord and God. So union with Christ is a corporate idea.

Now, just to run through those four terms again, we have *union*, *participation*, *identification*, and *incorporation*. And when we put those things together, we get a fully orb'd sense of this metaconcept of what union with Christ is.

Now, what I want to do in the rest of this time is to just look at one of the most famous passages relating to union with Christ in the Bible, and it comes from Ephesians 1. This is a glorious introduction to an amazing letter. But in the introduction to the letter, Paul refers to our union with Christ no less than 11 times. He uses the language of being in Christ, or in Him, or through Christ, or through Him. And what we see in this passage from verses 11–14 is that every spiritual blessing that God bestows upon us is given to us in and through Christ, that our union with Christ is the way that God bestows His gifts. And so, I want to demonstrate that just by reading through this passage and emphasizing [see emphasis added to key phrases below] the places where Paul uses our union with Christ language.

<sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>For he chose us in him

### Ephesians 1:3–14 NIV

Ephesians 1:3. “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*.” There it is in the very first verse, verse 3. Every spiritual blessing is given to us by God *in Christ*. Our union with Christ is the vehicle through which God chooses to bless us. And then Paul just lists a bunch of these blessings.

Verse 4: “For he chose us *in him*,” *in Christ*, “before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons *through Jesus Christ*, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which [is] freely given us *in the one he loves, in Christ*” (vv. 4–6).

Verse 7: “*In him*,” *in Christ*, “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed *in Christ*, to be put into effect when the times [will have] reach[ed] their fulfillment—to bring [all

which he purposed **in Christ**,<sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, **even Christ**.

<sup>11</sup>In **him** we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, <sup>12</sup>in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup>And you also

**Ephesians 1:3–14** NIV

things] in heaven and on earth [together] under [one head, even] *Christ*” (vv. 7–10). That’s literally “*in Christ*.”

Verse 11: “*In him*,” *in Christ*, “we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to . . . hope *in Christ*, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also [when you] were included *in Christ* when you heard the [word] of truth, the gospel of your salvation. [Having] believed, you were marked *in him* with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory” (vv. 11–14).

So even in that short passage, we see that the gift of salvation, redemption, the forgiveness of sins, sonship, adoption, being predestined, being chosen, the gift of the Holy Spirit, receiving an inheritance. They’re all *in Christ*. They’re all given to us *through Christ*, through our connection and relationship to Christ. Jesus is the one who mediates God’s blessings to us so that we might enjoy them and praise His name forever.