

Union With Christ

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- [0 : 00] We've reached chapter 11 in Sinclair Ferguson's book, The Christian Life, A Doctrinal Introduction,! And we're pretty much right at the middle page-wise of the book.
- ! We find a person. We find Christ Jesus himself. Christians are people. You, if you are a Christian, are somebody that is in, not some sort of abstract doctrine or truth, but you are joined and in Jesus Christ.
- And everything else that we've studied before and that we're going to study after flows out of this truth that we find in chapter 11.
- And so today's chapter is called Union with Christ. Union. Joining with Christ. Now, you know that most of, if not all, of Paul's epistles begins with some sort of variation, begins with something like this.
- To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus. It's always some sort of variation of these people, wherever they are, and some sort of description about them, that are in Christ Jesus.
- [1 : 49] When Paul thought about saints, he thought about them as in Christ Jesus. Now, I wonder if that is how you invariably think about yourself.
- When Paul thought about Christians, when he thought about people like you and me, he thought about they are in Christ Jesus. That is one of the most important things about them, if not the most important thing about them.
- And I wonder, when you think about yourself, your circumstances, your life, the truths about you. Do you think about yourself as invariably, I am in, I am united to Christ Jesus.
- So Christ is, we are in him. And the Bible also talks about, the New Testament talks about also Christ being in us.
- So it's this mutual being in. For example, Romans 8.10. But if Christ is in you.
- [2 : 59] So he's talking about just the normal Christian life. But if Christ is in you. Your body is dead because of sin. But your spirit is alive. Or your spirit is life.
- Because of righteousness. When you think about yourself. You should think of yourself as, I am in him. And he is in me.
- I am in him. And he is in me. It's union. It's joined life together. You cannot think of yourself as somehow separated from Christ Jesus.
- It's the same thing with newly married couples. Or any married couples. You can no longer think of yourself as just yourself anymore.
- You always have to take into consideration, no, I have a joined life with that other person. And that's the same thing with a Christian life. It's because that we are joined with Christ.
- [4 : 04] That everything that is mine is his. And everything that is mine is his is mine. And now we don't have to turn to Ephesians chapter 1.
- Because I know that most of you can probably think of when the pastors talk about, or when teachers talk about being in Christ, we invariably turn to Ephesians chapter 1.

Because there you see that we have every spiritual blessing in Christ. So we know that very well.

All of God's spiritual blessings come to us, not sort of directly, but because we are in Christ.

We are attached to the vine. We are attached to the fountain. We are attached to Jesus himself. And so all of our blessings, they're not somehow separated from him.

[5 : 02] They come to us because we have him. We're united to him. It's personal. Now, maybe you know who Mark Webb is.

He spoke at the ski retreat. So we have the high schoolers in here today. And if they were at the ski retreat, they know who Mark Webb is. He's a pastor, or was a pastor in Mississippi.

He's no longer there. But about 20 years ago, he spoke at the Reformed Baptist Family Conference in, I think it was Marion, Indiana. It was 20 years ago.

And you know what they say, this is what people say, that the first thing that, well, the very first thing that people remember about a sermon is something that they disagree with.

That's the sad truth. The second thing that they remember is an illustration that they really connect to. So there was, he had an illustration 20 years ago that I've remembered ever since.

[6 : 05] And so now here I am bringing it back from the dead. And this is what he was saying. Talking about himself, he said something like this. I used to think in my Arminian days that salvation sort of worked like this.

is everyone needs a ticket in order to be saved. Everyone needs a ticket to get into heaven. And in the gospel, tickets just rain down and come into everyone's back pocket.

And if I'm going to be saved, I have to take that ticket out and cash it in, turn it in, turn it over, whatever. And to be saved, you need to take that ticket out and use it.

And if you did that, you'd be saved. And then he said, well, then I became a Calvinist and I thought, oh, the tickets only fall down into the elect people's back pocket.

And so there's not indiscriminate amount of tickets that fall down to everyone's back pocket. It's, oh, it must be just the elect's back pocket and they take it out and they use it and then they're saved.

[7 : 13] And then he said something like this. The more I studied the Bible, the more I realized there aren't any tickets. There's only Christ Jesus. There aren't any tickets.

You don't need a ticket in order to get Jesus. You need Jesus Christ, the Savior himself. There's just Jesus.

You have to have him. He's not the road sign. He's not the entrance ticket. He is the way, the truth, the life.

If you're going to have spiritual life, you have to have him. He's not a means to get spiritual life. He is the life itself. He is salvation itself. And so, when the Bible thinks about us, especially in the New Testament, it sees us as, if you're a Christian, God gives you grace, we're graced, we're redeemed, we're reconciled, we're chosen, we're justified, we're sanctified, and it's in him.

It's because we're united to him. He's the ticket, so to speak. Not just his work. We talked about this Sunday night a few weeks ago.

[8 : 33] Not just his work, not just his benefits, not just truths about him, but him. Knowing him. Connected to him.

So he says, come to me. Not believe these certain truths, but come to me. He says to Nicodemus, I'm going to be lifted up.

And when I am lifted up, men will look to me and be saved and be healed. Now, all spiritual blessings are ours because we are united to him.

Now, that's the explosive, life-giving, profound, expansive, amazing truth really at the center of all of the Apostle Paul's theology.

And so we want to talk about a couple of things. At the beginning here, we want to talk about where did Paul get that idea? And then we're going to talk about what does it mean?

[9 : 43] How are we united? How are you? How are you united to Christ Jesus? So where did Paul get this idea? I guess the simple answer is that God taught it to him.

The Holy Spirit taught it to him. Paul did receive direct revelation. Through visions, through being taken up into the third heaven, through direct revelation.

But I don't think everything that Paul learned and talked about, he received directly in that way. He meditated on the Old Testament.

He thought about it. He thought about it in light of what he knew now. And he read his Old Testament through this lens of, oh, Jesus Christ has come.

And now how do these two things go together? And so this idea of union with Jesus isn't just Paul's theology. It's the Bible's whole theology.

[10 : 53] Paul only takes it sort of to the highest peak. He only sort of clarifies it and shows exactly how Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of everything that the Old Testament talked about and what that implies.

And so we want to look at just the Old Testament, or just, not just the Old Testament, but the whole biblical background to this idea that I am united to Christ. Because when we see the entire Bible's picture of how salvation works, we see this doctrine from all different angles and aspects, and we can go deeper in it.

So where did Paul get this idea? Well, for one, union and communion with God is at the very heart of all Old Testament theology, where they mutually belong to each other.

So in the Old Testament, God repeatedly says, these are, I am theirs and they are mine.

Mutual ownership. Mutual connection. Mutual life. Living together is all over the Old Testament. So, flip in your mind to the book of Hosea.

[12 : 17] Hosea. In the book of Hosea. The first three chapters, can anyone tell me what's the first three chapters about? Of the prophet Hosea.

In a sentence. Gomer? Not just Gomer. Hosea.

Yeah, Hosea marrying Gomer. First three chapters are this marriage. And this marriage gone wrong. And this marriage brought back together.

And Hosea and Gomer, God is saying, this is a prophetic, this is a revelatory picture of what my relationship is like with my people.

I am married to them. My heart is bound up in them. And in Hosea's case, or Gomer's case, and in Old Testament Israel's case, and their hearts go astray.

[13 : 20] And yet I love them and I'm joined to them. It's a marriage. Now, the Lord is in a marriage covenant with His people.

He's bound Himself to them. And they have bound themselves to Him. And so, Isaiah 54 talks about your maker is your husband. You're married to Him.

He loves you. He's connected to you. Now, there's also all of these Old Testament pictures of corporate union. Where one man represents the many.

Or the many are connected to one man. So, one man went down, David went down into the valley to fight Goliath.

and David defeated Goliath. But what else happened that day? What did that mean? What did that mean for Israel?

[14 : 24] It meant Israel defeated the Philistines. David defeating Goliath meant that Israel defeated the Philistines. The one and the many were connected.

Moses stood in the breach and represented God's people. The high priest's sacrifice was for all the people. So, on the day of atonement, when the high priest made a sacrifice, he wasn't there just for himself.

He wasn't there primarily for himself. He was representing. It was like all of Israel was joined to this one man making this one sacrifice.

in Isaiah, in the servant songs, the righteous one carries not just not his sins but the sins of the many.

He and them are joined. It's like all of them are in this one man connected to him. Many more examples can be given where the one and the many are united.

[15 : 31] Where it's this joined life together. Now, do you see how, and I think you do, how all of those things point to Jesus and his people?

This idea of, oh, we're united to Christ is not a new thing at all. It's the whole Old Testament coming to fruition.

But it's not just the Old Testament. Paul did not, Paul had more than the Old Testament. Now, I don't know if he had the Gospels like we have the Gospels.

They were still being written. But he definitely had the words of Jesus. In 1 Corinthians, I believe, he quotes Jesus.

And it's almost an exact quotation of what we see in the Gospels of, oh, this is how the Lord's Supper was instituted. Paul had some form of the Gospels.

[16 : 32] Now, he might not, again, have had the Gospels like we do, but he definitely had access to the stories, the parables, the events. He had witnesses, maybe he had written copies of some of that.

And in the New Testament, Jesus himself makes it clear that he is united to his people. I am the vine. They are the branches. John 17, the last evening together, he's talking about I'm united to the Father.

The Father's in me. I'm in the Father. Lord, make them one as we are one. I'm in them. They're in me. We're connected. So, Paul knew from how Jesus spoke while he was on earth that Jesus takes his, he's united to his people.

So, Paul's thinking about that. Now, then just think about what was Paul's first introduction when he met Jesus in person for the first time.

What did Jesus say to him on the Damascus road? what's the first sentence out of the Lord's mouth? Why are you persecuting me?

[17 : 55] Do you see the connection? Paul's very first introduction to the risen Lord is the Lord saying, me and my people, you can't separate them.

you hurt them, you hurt me. You persecute them, you're persecuting me. That was the avalanche.

That truth was the avalanche that destroyed Paul's life and saved him. That day, that's the avalanche that Paul's Christian life started with.

That truth that Jesus and his people are united. They're with him. He's with them. He's with them. So, that's the background. And so, when Paul is talking about these people are, you're in Christ, you have to see that he's not just, that's not an easy phrase or just a couple of words that he just likes to throw in.

That has the whole Old Testament. That has all of the Gospels sort of like packed into it. It's like a doctrinal black hole.

[19 : 05] You know what I'm saying? Where infinite density in one little phrase. That's what it is. The whole Christian life gets fitted into that.

So then, Christian, do you think about yourself that way? Yourself, I mean, we've talked about our identity a lot. Is this a part of, when you consider yourself, do you think of yourself as, I am, I'm united to Jesus.

He's with me. I'm with him. So that's the background. So then, how are we then united with Christ? And we're going to just talk about the different ways this looks.

You are united to him covenantally. Covenantally is the first one. So we are united with him in the new covenant. In the new covenant.

In the new covenant, Christ takes us to himself. And he gives himself to us. And so he takes our sins. He dies for them.

[20 : 13] And our sins are forgiven. He gives us his righteousness. We talked about justification. We have justification. It's by faith. But it's in virtue of our connection with Jesus Christ.

We're in this new covenant with him. Hebrews makes much of this. Jesus Christ is called the high priest of this better covenant.

Of this new covenant. So Aaron and his family, Aaron and his descendants, were the priests of the old covenant. They represented God's people in the old covenant.

And so through Aaron, through Aaron, through the Levitical priesthood, God and his people were related, were connected. So the relationship depended upon their sacrifices.

The maintenance of that relationship depended upon their sacrifices, the priest representation. And the law came to Israel and it was a law that came through Moses on the tablets of stone.

[21 : 23] And so it demanded obedience. It required obedience if they were going to stay in the land, if they were going to receive the blessing. But the whole Old Testament, on the whole, as far as the history goes, is the history of the failure of God's people in this covenant.

That way of living with God, with the priests, with those animal sacrifices, with law on the tablets of stone, that kind of relationship, that kind of union, was impossible for them to maintain.

So the blood of bulls and goats offered by Aaron and the Levitical priests couldn't take away sin finally. Law written on stones, on tablets of stone, could really only finally condemn the people, because it wasn't on their hearts.

There was no change of heart for most of the people. And so the priests failed. The people failed. The sacrifices weren't enough.

The law on tablets wasn't enough. That kind of covenant union with God and his people, that could never last.

[22 : 45] It could never finally save. They could never finally enter the rest that God had promised through that covenant. And Hebrews says we needed a better covenant.

We needed a better relationship, a better union with God. And Hebrews 8 says Jesus is a priest forever, and because of God's oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

covenant. So Israel was joined all together, so to speak, under Aaron and the priests. And now we are united to Christ and his priesthood.

And his priesthood is forever. He doesn't die. He doesn't fail. His sacrifice is perfect once for all.

You know how Hebrews makes such a big deal out of that. And because it only happened once, that shows us that that one time was enough. You don't need any more sacrifices.

[23 : 53] The sins have been forgiven. Hebrews 8, 6 says the ministry Jesus has received, the priesthood that Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is a mediator is superior to the old one.

And then in this covenant, covenant, the law doesn't come only on tablets of stone. It comes and he says, I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts.

No longer will a man teach his neighbor or a man his brother saying know the Lord because they will all know me. Why does the law come to our hearts and we say, I know the Lord and I want to obey him.

It's because we're joined to Jesus. that's what he does in us. And so here's our union with Christ because we're joined to Jesus in the new covenant because he's our priest and we're connected in him.

We're all represented by him. He's our great high priest. And so now our sins are forgiven and we know God and the laws written on our hearts because Jesus himself dwells in our hearts.

[25 : 07] The great law keeper dwells in our hearts. And he's praying for us and he's pleading for us and he is representing us. And so you aren't alone, Christian.

You're united with Jesus. And his sacrifice atones for your sins. So he says their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.

because we're united to Jesus. He's our priest. His sacrifice is for us. Our sins are completely and forever forgiven.

Now what does that mean? What is this union with Christ and his priesthood and in the new covenant? What does that mean practically for us? Turn in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 10.

Hebrews chapter 10. And look at verse 19. And I just want to read verses 19 through 25.

[26 : 14] And look at the practical outworkings of our union with Christ. That we're covenantally promised in this promise together.

So Hebrews 10 verse 19 and we'll read through verse 25. Therefore brothers since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way open for us through the curtain that is his body and since we have a great priest over the house of God let us draw near to God with a sincere heart.

And in full assurance of faith having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess for he who promised is faithful and let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing but let us encourage one another and all the more as we see the day approaching. because we are all together united to Jesus Christ it means we should have confidence we should have assurance we should have the liberty of a clean conscience and more than that we should be encouraging one another encouraging one another with these things in meeting together like we are today.

We do this because we're all joined together in him. So not half assurance full assurance confidence to enter the most holy place and so when we come to God we can say I'm with him.

[28 : 13] I'm with the slain perfect high priest the perfect victorious finished priest. I'm with him. He's mine and I am his.

So we're united in this new covenant in this everlasting eternal covenant. Well how else are we united with Jesus Christ? We have to be really quick here.

We only have six minutes. How else are we united to Jesus Christ? So we're united covenantally. We're in the new covenant with him. We're also united with him and this is what Sinclair Ferguson calls a fleshly union.

And what he means by that is we are united with him in our humanity. We're brothers in human nature.

so let me put it this way. Here's the question and I want you to really think hard about this and I want you to raise your hand. Who here was born from a woman?

[29 : 21] Who here was you two weren't? Who here was born of a woman? All of us. Galatians 4.4 says something about Jesus and Jesus himself is here with us by his spirit and he says God sent his son born of a woman.

You're just like him. He's just like you. Everything you are everything in your humanity. The fragility, your limitations, your will, your thought, everything accepting sin.

He's just like you. The feelings, the thoughts. He shares that with you. He's our brother.

We're united with him. He because he's taken himself a human nature. And so right now a human is at the right hand of God.

right now in heaven a human has overcome death completely. A human has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the son of God, and so let us hold firmly to the faith that we profess.

[30 : 44] What gives you balance? What gives you security? What gives you help and comfort when things are really hard and really bad and you're thinking about giving up your faith?

Our comfort in days of pain and trial is we do not have a high priest who's unable to sympathize with us in our weaknesses. It wasn't like Jesus wasn't weak.

He was weak. And he's able to sympathize with us in our weakness because he himself was in weakness himself.

So we're united with him by divine covenant and by divine incarnation. We're united with him by faith, in faith.

Nearly 50 times or thereabouts in the New Testament, it says we have believed in Christ or into Christ. Christ. So faith is something where we are taken out of ourselves.

[31 : 53] Faith takes us out of ourselves, it takes us out of our sin, and it puts us into Christ. Christ. So sometimes we talk about faith as falling into his arms.

Well, it's even more intimate and more than that. It's falling into his arms and then being wrapped around and absorbed into him. Not that we become him or he becomes us, but faith puts us into Christ like a vine or a branch is put into a vine.

And so the whole of your Christian life, it doesn't matter if you're a man, woman, young, old, whatever you do, the whole dynamic of your Christian life is this dynamic of the life I live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself.

The whole dynamic of the Christian life is we draw life from him by faith. Faith is this active principle of taking Christ, taking himself, taking what he is giving us.

So we're united to him by faith. We're united with him spiritually. 1 Corinthians 6, 17, but he who unites himself with the Lord is one, not two, he is one with him in spirit.

[33 : 13] So we're united to Christ in spirit, spirit to spirit by the Holy Spirit. spirit. So for you died and your life is now hidden.

Your life is now hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ who is your life appears, then you will also appear with him in glory.

Christ who is your life. You share by the Holy Spirit, you share in the resurrection life of Jesus Christ.

Your spiritual life is connected to the same resurrection life that he has in himself. And so by the spirit he was raised from the dead and he's given new life and by the same spirit we have new life.

How are we united to Christ? We're united with him extensively and that just means it's a wide, it's all-encompassing union. Much of what Paul has to say about our union with Christ, can be summed up like this, if we are united to Christ, then we are united to him and all that he has done for us.

[34 : 27] If we are united to Christ, then we are united to him and all that he has done for us. So what that looks like and what that means is Romans 6 works this out.

He died, so we died to sin. He was buried, and so our old man is buried. He rose, and so we will rise, and we do rise.

He was declared with power to be the son of God through his resurrection, and we are made children of God. His glorious life is now hidden. I just read that, and it's going to be appeared, it's going to appear, and when he appears, we're going to be glorified.

Charles Wesley put it like this, just listen to this language, soar we now where Christ hath led.

So we're soaring up to where Christ has already gone, following our exalted head. So a body goes wherever the head goes, and we're following him, we're connected to him. Made like him, like him we rise.

[35 : 34] Ours the cross, the grave, the skies. He had his cross, his grave, and his ascension, and we have our cross, our grave, and our ascension.

We follow him in everything. We share in his sufferings, and he shares in our sufferings. I have to fast forward here. Paul puts it like this, we always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

Are you suffering? Are you dying because of your faith in some way? Not like necessarily martyrdom, but that's what he's talking about. I've committed myself to Jesus Christ, I've committed myself to God the Father, and that means I'm suffering.

Paul's saying we always carry the death of Christ around with us, and so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.

It's like his life is shining out of us, because we're connected to him, we're united to him. So we're united to his cross and his sufferings.

[36 : 54] Now, this is where we're going to end with just this illustration. In Germany in the 1930s, so much of the Christian church went over to Hitler. I remember I quoted one time, or I read something one time where some of the liberal, some of the non-Bible believing pastors in Germany said Hitler is now the spirit of Christ among us.

Now, not everyone thought that. A lot of people thought that, or at least going along with it. But Dietrich Bonhoeffer and some few others resisted and said no.

And eventually he was imprisoned and near the very end of the war he was strangled in a prisoner of war camp or in a prison camp. And my question is, where do you get the courage to stand when Hitler is the chancellor?

And the whole church is saying, yep, we follow him, which is a warning to about the fickle nature of humans, isn't it? But where do you get the courage to stand in the evil day when all around evil reigns?

And it's infested and infected even the church itself. Well, it's because Bonhoeffer understood something of his union with Christ.

[38 : 13] And he said this in his book, Discipleship, about discipleship. As we embark, as we begin upon discipleship, we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death.

We give our lives to death. Thus, it begins. The cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise God-fearing and happy life.

life. I think a lot of times, especially in America, we think that that's our right and our due as Christians. We'll have a God-fearing and happy life all the way to the end.

And he's saying that the cross, if that happens, is not sort of some terrible end to the otherwise God-fearing and happy life. But it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ.

When Christ calls a man, when he calls himself, calls a man to himself, he bids him come and die. Bonhoeffer, in a certain way, had already died to himself.

[39 : 21] He had already joined himself to death through the cross. And so death in a prison camp wasn't the beginning of his death. It was the end of death for him.

It was the entrance of, into a new experience of union with Christ and glory. So union with Jesus, a deep understanding of it, made all the difference for Bonhoeffer.

So, assurance, comfort, courage, life, holiness, all of it flows out of being united with Christ. And so my homework for you is this. I want you to think about that.

Think about it. Meditate upon that. See yourself in this doctrine and this truth. Think about it. We're dismissed.