

Pictures of Our Union With Christ

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[0:00] So the first 14 verses of Ephesians chapter 1, let's read the word of God. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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.

For he chose us in him 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 he has freely given us in the one he loves. In him, 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.

And 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 reached their fulfillment.

[1:28] To bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. 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.

In order that we, who are the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also 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. At the heart of our faith is a mystery.

Colossians chapter 1, Paul says this. I become its servant, speaking of the church, by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness.

[2:43] The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them, God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Now, when we think of a mystery in our culture, in our time, we think of something unexplained. So you're reading a murder mystery, and you know there is some explanation of how and why and who murdered this person.

But you don't know what it is yet. It's a mystery. So mysteries in our culture are something that's still a secret. But it's very important to realize that when Paul uses that word, he means almost the exact opposite.

He means something that was once secret, but has now been revealed. It was once hidden, but it is now made known. And so Paul could pretty much say that he could sum up his whole ministry, all of his preaching with this, that I am making known the mystery among the Gentiles, the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you.

God had called him to one thing, and that was to unpack piece by piece and to say, hey, look at this. All of the different glorious riches that we have in Christ, the glorious riches of this mystery of Christ in you.

[4:21] So he was called to unpack the riches of our union with Jesus Christ. Now, my mother-in-law loves to send my daughter's presents, and she does it pretty much the same way every time.

She gets a box. She writes it to A1 and Phoebe Webb on it, and the girls get it, and they open it up, and it's the jackpot. It's not one present.

It's not two presents. It's all sorts of little presents. So there's crayons and coloring books and T-shirts and candy and gum and chapstick and little toys. It's everything that would wow and impress a seven-year-old and a five-year-old. That's what union with Christ is like. It's a box with lots and lots of treasure.

And out of that box comes everything that could wow and impress you, the saints of God. It's the box that holds all the treasure.

[5 : 28] Now, why is it the box that holds all the treasure? Why is this mystery that Christ in you and we are in him, our union with him, why is it the box that holds all the treasure?

Well, you can think about it like this. Christianity is a historical religion. Now, by that I don't mean that it happened.

It's an old religion. I don't... That's not what I'm saying. I mean, it's a religion based on once and for all historical facts.

Our confession is a confession. We say we believe certain historical things happened. So this is what Paul wrote to Timothy.

Behold, the mystery of godliness is great. He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

[6 : 34] And so we're not talking about a mythology. We're not talking about a legend. We're not talking about something that happened in a galaxy far, far away a long time ago. No, 2,000 years ago, the Son of God became man.

He took on humanity, our flesh. He appeared in a body. And he lived and he died under Pontius Pilate, a Roman governor from 2,000 years ago.

And he was resurrected on the third day. And he ascended 40 days later. Now, our whole salvation, your eternity, depends on those historical realities, those historical events.

But the question is, how can those things that happened a long time ago affect me today? What are those things that took place that Jesus lived and died and was resurrected so many years ago?

What does that have to do with my life today? How can his death bring me cleansing and forgiveness? Lots of people were crucified.

[7 : 50] Lots of people were great teachers. Lots of people were great leaders. Why isn't he like Julius Caesar or Napoleon Bonaparte? Great leaders, very interesting men.

But not going to save me. Why is Jesus different? And the answer is in this mystery. It all depends upon this thing, this union, this one time secret that's now revealed.

So we are united with Christ. And that's why his life and his death and his resurrection are for me. They affect me and my life because we are in him and he is in us.

And so we're bound together in this intimate union. And so because we have, we're united to him, that means all the glorious riches are ours in Christ as we're joined to him.

Now, how important is it to understand this truth? How important is it to understand and appreciate it? Well, it's absolutely vital if you're going to understand your Bible.

[8 : 57] And we're going to see that in the next few weeks as we explore this topic. Once you see it, you're going to see that it's everywhere in your New Testament. But it's more than that.

It affects how you live the Christian life. Now, the Christian life is not external rules. It's not mores, social mores.

It's not just things that we do. It's not something that we decided to do, that we're going to do or be. It's not at all. The Christian life is completely dependent and is an outflow of our union with Jesus Christ.

So the Christian life isn't just what would Jesus do on a bracelet on my wrist. It's the spirit of Jesus Christ in my heart.

There's a vast difference. It's not just an example of what to do. Jesus is inside me, giving me strength and help to do it. And so the more you love and appreciate and are consciously living and depending on this reality that I am in Jesus and Jesus is me.

[10 : 15] That's how godliness comes about. So for the next few weeks, we're going to explore this vast and precious mystery. And so this evening, I want to start with a question.

And the question is, what is this union like? What is it like? Give me some pictures to tell me what this thing that we're talking about, what kind of thing is it?

Now, pictures help, don't they? I can describe a lion. But it's so much easier and so much better and so much clearer to have a picture of a lion. And so this evening, I want to give you seven pictures of what our union with Christ is like.

We're not going to dive down really deep and explore any of them in great detail. We're going to have time to work them out. But today, this evening, I just want to start giving you a feeling for what we're talking about.

What does it mean? What do I mean when I talk about union with Jesus Christ? It can be a very mystical, kind of spiritual, ethereal, out there sort of thing.

[11:21] And so I want to give you some pictures to show you what it's like. Now, the first two pictures come from Jesus himself. And the first one is from John 15.

You don't have to turn there. We'll turn to some others. It's Jesus last night with his disciples. And he says to them, I believe, as they're walking through the streets of Jerusalem, I am the vine and you are the branches.

If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing. So vine, a vine and its branches.

That's what our union is like. That's what it's a good picture of it. So what does that picture tell us about our union with Jesus, our relationship with Jesus? Well, it says it's organic, not mechanic. The union is a union of life and fruitfulness. We could think of other kinds of union. So your car is quite a different, it's quite a union of all sorts of different things working together, isn't it?

[12:34] You have all these different machines and parts and pieces, all united, working together. And so you have alternators and belts and fans and radiators and wires and all sorts of things.

And when you put them together, you get a car that works. They're united. But are they united in the same way that a vine and its branches are united?

Well, not really. A vine is alive. And out of the vine comes the branches. The life of the branches flows from the vine. And so without the vine, the branches can't do anything.

They're worthless. Jesus says the only thing they're good for is you pick them up and you burn them. But is a car like that? Well, not usually.

You can take a battery out of your car and put it into another car most of the time and both will continue to work. You can take the alternator out of one car and you can put it into another car and it will start to work.

[13:35] Because cars aren't alive. They're a machine. The union isn't the union of living things. But our union with Christ, your union with Jesus, it isn't like a car.

It's like a vine and its branches. So life flows from Jesus to you. He is our life. Colossians says, when Christ, who is your life, appears.

Jesus is an interchangeable part of the Christian life. He's not something that you can take out and put to the side for six months and the car will keep going.

The vine, the branches will keep growing. It's not like that at all. He's not like the air conditioner that's in your car that for six months of the year, you don't touch it, doesn't do anything.

And your car just runs just fine. Jesus isn't like that. Without him, you can't go at all. He is our life.

[14:40] Our life is completely dependent upon him. And so here's the application. And the application should be clear as you think about it. Do you want to be godly? Do you want to be godly?

Well, there are some things that just won't work in and of themselves. And what I mean are some of the normal things that we think of when we think, OK, I want to be a godly person.

And so I focus on reading my Bible and praying and doing godly things. Now, do those things work in and of themselves?

Well, they can't. And the reason is, is because there's no life in those things. There's life in Jesus. Those things are good if they get us to Jesus. But if we put our weight and our trust and our hope in doing these things, then in reality, we're putting our weight and our hope and our trust on me.

There's no life in me. But if I use those things to increase my faith, to live in Jesus, to have communion and fellowship with him, then I'll be fruitful. Without him, we can do nothing.

[15:47] But if those things are helpful for getting us to Jesus, for syncing us up with him, then they're wonderful, beautiful things. So he's the power source. We're plugged into him.

And those disciplines are sort of like flipping the light on. The electricity flows in that way. So that's our first picture.

He's the vine where the branches, our life and our strength, all come from him. Here's the second picture. It's found in John 6. How about you turn there? John chapter 6.

And verse 47. And this is what Jesus says.

I tell you the truth. He who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life.

[16:47] Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. The bread is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world.

And then skip down to verse 54. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.

Perhaps next week at the Lord's Supper, not next week, in two weeks, we'll talk about this passage. But let's think about it just for a minute.

[17:48] What is our union with Jesus like? Well, it's like bread and the eater. It's like food and the person who's eating.

It's like your relationship with food on your table. Now, isn't eating a strange thing? Sometimes it just is so weird to me that something outside of me I could put inside of me, and then that thing that was once outside of me can become a part of me.

So think about it. You want some pizza, and you call up Papa John's, and you order a pepperoni pizza, and then they deliver it to you. And then you sit down and you eat it. And the weirdest thing happens.

That becomes a part of you. You take it in. It's broken down and digested, and it gives you life. It gives you energy and strength.

And it gets so close to you that you are able to start to control it and manipulate it. You began to use it. It was once outside of you.

[18:51] Now it's inside of you. It was once no good to you, but now it's your life. It's your strength. It gives you energy. It goes inside of you, and it becomes a part of you. That's a picture of what Jesus is like.

He was once outside, but now he's inside. He was once of no use to us, but now he's of great use. We once had no power, but because he's inside of us, we have great power.

You see, how potent is Jesus Christ? Well, Jesus says, when you eat me, eat my flesh and drink my blood, you actually have eternal life.

So when you eat pizza, you get hungry again because the energy is finite. There's only so much there. But when you take in Jesus and when Jesus becomes a part of you, the energy is infinite. That's why Paul could say, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Christ was in him powerfully working by the spirit. See, the limits of Paul's abilities were not contained in Paul himself.

[19:56] The limits of Paul's ability was Christ, was his strength. There was no end of Paul's abilities because there was no end to the strength of Jesus Christ.

And so what does that mean for tomorrow? What does it mean that you're connected to Jesus like that? What is that going to mean tomorrow? Well, it's going to mean this, that no matter what you face, no matter what difficulties you face, no matter what hard people you live with, no matter what troubles you have, you can have confidence.

Because your strength is not dependent upon you, it's dependent upon Christ in you. You've feasted, you've ate the living bread.

And that living bread is your strength. It's Christ in you. Now, our third picture. So our second one was bread and the eater, food and the eater.

The third is this. It comes from the Old Testament. It's a picture of the king and his people. A picture of the king and his people. In the ancient world, and even in some cultures today, the king and the people are much more closely attached and put together than even our president.

[21:11] Even though in some ways, when our president goes somewhere, he is representing all of us. So if he goes to a foreign country, he is treated with respect because he is representing everything about America, about the United States.

But in the ancient world, it was even closer. They were a union, a united, they were united together. So in 2 Samuel chapter 5, David is crowned.

He's crowned of all the 12 tribes. He was already the king of Judah and Benjamin, but now the 10 other tribes come to him. And this is what they said. We are your flesh and blood.

So they come to David and say, we are your flesh and blood. We're a part of you. We belong to you. We submit to you. You are the head. We will be the body. Or think about it like this.

Remember when David sinned and called for a census. And God punished him. Who suffered?

[22:17] It was the people. David sinned, but the people felt it. And through them, David felt it. When they were suffering and dying, David wasn't sitting back saying, I missed one.

I really dodged a bullet there. That could have been me. It wasn't like that. As they were in anguish, so he was in anguish. His guilt brought down the wrath of God.

Now, do you see how our relationship with Jesus is like that? He's our king. We are his own flesh and blood.

That's another pressure that we're going to get to in a few minutes. But did our king ever sin? No, he didn't. He was completely righteous. And we received the blessing.

It's just like David's situation, except backwards. We sinned and he suffered. The king suffered for the sins of the people.

[23:23] The king was righteous and we are blessed. The people were sinful and he was cursed. And because we're joined together, it's appropriate. It's right for the king to suffer for his people's sin.

And see, when God has put us together with Christ as the king and we as the people, we didn't elect Jesus. We didn't say we want Jesus to be our king.

God gave him the throne. God made him the king. And he put us together. We were transferred, transplanted from one kingdom to the next. And so our king, the king, and the people were joined together.

And what God has joined together, man cannot part. So that's our third picture. Here's the fourth picture. It comes from the Old Testament and the book of Hebrews.

It's the picture of the high priest and the people. Now, the author of Hebrews, in his mind, asks a question.

[24:26] He says, why was it necessary for Jesus to become a man? Why did he have to do that? And then he answers, for this reason, he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

How closely did Jesus associate with his people? Well, he came and he became one of us. And he suffered with them.

He suffered with us. There's nothing that we suffer or experience that Christ doesn't know and hasn't experienced on his own. He was tempted along with us and he was tried along with us.

And now he can sympathize with us because our weakness isn't something strange to him because he's experienced it himself. Now, why did he come?

Well, it was so that he could offer up his body as a sacrifice for our sins. Normally, the sinner suffers for his own sin.

[25:45] But Jesus is so closely united to us as a priest that when he offers up his body, it will do. He's one of us, and so he's dying as one of us.

He counts for us. His pain counts for us. His sorrow and his punishment set us free because that union is so close. And so what do you do when your heart troubles you?

And Satan tells you of the guilt within. Upward I look and I see him there who made an end to all my sin. Jesus is my salvation because I'm connected to him.

Because he's with me. I'm united with him in life and in his death. He's my great high priest. Here's the fifth picture.

It's a picture of the head and the body. So we've had the king and the people. We've had the priest and the people. And now we have a picture of the head and the body. Well, what is Jesus to us?

[26:52] How close are we? What kind of union is this? Well, he's of the same body. We are the same body. He's the head. We are the body. From him comes every direction.

So think about this. Your head directs your body. From him comes light. From him comes nutrients. Every impulse, every direction comes from him. And so from him we see light.

To walk. To live. We get our ability to move. And so in him we have life. But we are his body. Paul talks a lot about that.

He uses that metaphor a lot. Where did he learn that? Where did he learn that? Well, I think he got his first lesson on the road to Damascus. Remember, Saul of Tarsus was breathing out threats. He was breathing out threats against God's people. He was a terror to the church. And Jesus met him in this blazing light. And he talked to Saul.

[27 : 56] And what did Jesus say? Did he say, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting the church? Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting my people?

The people that believe in me? No, he said, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? So let that sink in.

How close are you to Jesus Christ? He says, they are me. They are me. What you do to them, you do to me.

What they feel, I feel. The same way that I can say to my hand or to my stomach, my hand is me. My stomach is me. My foot is me.

Jesus says to each one of us, that is me. That is me. That arm is me. That eye is me. They're attached to me. They are my very own.

[28 : 52] There's no division between body and head. And there's no division between Christ and his people and his body. So much we could say about so many of these things.

But we are hurrying on. Sixth picture is a picture of the temple. A picture of the temple. So will you turn to 1 Peter chapter 2.

1 Peter chapter 2, verse 4. As you come to him, the living stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him, you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

So this is a very odd way of thinking about things. This is a very interesting little picture. You have a living stone. That's odd in and of itself.

Stones are not generally living. But this is a living stone. In fact, this is the living stone. He's the cornerstone. He's the capstone.

[30 : 12] He's the first brick and he's the last one of the temple of God. And if you're the first and the last, that means you're the whole thing. He's the capstone of God's temple.

Or you can think about it. Remember in John where he clears out the temple and everyone's angry. And Jesus says, tear down this temple and I will rebuild it in three days.

And John says he was talking about his body. He is the temple. He's the living stone. And then we are joined to him as living stones.

And so brick by brick, person by person, we are added to the temple. And as we come and we're connected to the temple, to Jesus, we become the temple.

We become a spiritual house, a temple to praise God. That's one reason Paul says, make sure that you keep yourself sexually pure. Your body is a temple.

[31 : 17] Well, how could Paul say that? Well, how do we become the temple? Well, it was exactly through this, through our connection to Jesus.

Paul says we're united to Christ. We are one with him in spirit. We're one with him in spirit. Now, remember the Old Testament.

On the day that the temple and the tabernacle were dedicated, God's spirit filled the temple in glory. And there's this blazing glory and everyone was terrified.

Now, the amazing thing is that God's spirit has filled us. And the way it has happened is God's spirit filled the first temple, Jesus.

And as we are connected to Jesus, the spirit enters into us. And we become one in spirit with him. We become these living stones. And we are connected to the temple.

[32 : 20] And as we are connected to the living stone, the true temple, we become a temple for God. And that means union with Christ determines the reason you exist.

Why do you exist? Well, what you are decides why you exist. A car is made for driving and going places and exists for that purpose.

Well, why do you exist? Well, what are you? You are God's temple. And that's why we were being built into the spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Temples exist for worship. Why do you exist? You exist to worship and praise God. You've been prepared. You've been equipped. The spirit has entered you.

And through Christ, you find your destiny. You find your fulfillment of worshiping God. So that's the sixth picture, a temple. Now, here's the seventh and the last.

[33 : 30] It's the union of marriage. The union of marriage. You know well that passage in Ephesians. And so I'll read it to you. It's talking about husbands and wives.

And this is what the apostle Paul says. He who loves his own wife loves himself. That's union, isn't it?

To love someone is to love yourself. After all, no one ever hated his own body. There's another picture. That person is my body.

Paul says, but he feeds and cares for us just as Christ does the church. For we are members of his body. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife.

And the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery. I am talking about Christ and the church.

[34 : 33] What is our union with Jesus like? It's like the loving marriage between a man and a wife.

It's a passionate union of lovers. It's a committed covenant relationship for life.

And so married people have given themselves to each other completely and totally. This union that we have with Jesus is not just a cold spiritual reality, a set of facts, and we just happen to fit in the right category.

It's not like that. It's the union of a husband and a wife. It was the union of Adam and Eve. So it's passionate, expressive love.

He gives himself for her. That's what the passage says. And she, in turn, gives herself to him. Now, the oneness of marriage is renewed and expressed in the marriage bed where the couples give each other, give themselves to each other, and surrender and exposure.

[35 : 58] That's a picture. That oneness is a picture of the union that we have with Jesus. But it's more than that.

Marriage is a covenant union. And Jesus has covenanted himself to his bride. He's promised in his own blood to be everything that she needs.

And the most solemn promises, he's given his life to her. And he says, I'm going to love her, and I'm going to care for her, and I'm going to wash her, and I'm going to do whatever she needs.

And that's why when she sinned, and that's why when she deserved the depths of hell, he went in her place. And it was completely the right and good thing to do.

Because when a man and a wife come together, her assets become his assets, and her debts become his debts. And when Jesus marries the church, all of her debts, all of her bills, he takes on, and they become his, and all of his riches become ours.

[37 : 14] Becomes ours. Now, if you think about that for a while, can you imagine what that means for us? When we are with Jesus, and when we are taking what is his, and we're using it for ourselves, we're not stealing.

We're taking what belongs to us. My wife goes in and uses money that I have earned, and she buys groceries, and she feeds herself with it.

And I don't say, what are you doing? Because what is mine is hers. And what is hers is mine. And so that means that we have at our, we have at hand all the riches of Jesus Christ.

And we could probably talk about that for a long time. But all of our debts became his. So what was Jesus doing on the cross?

He was dying for his wife. What will men do for a woman that they're passionately in love with?

Well, they'll kill. They'll kill.

[38 : 24] When jealousy and the passion of a husband is stirred up, Solomon says, watch out.

Watch out. Because you're not going to be able to pay him off until he has you. And on the last day, there will be hell to pay for all those who mistreated the bride of the Lion of Judah.

But what will a man do for a woman that he's passionately in love with? Well, he won't just kill. He will die. He will die.

And so what brought Jesus to the place where he was whipped and torn and beaten and mocked and scorned and hung up as a piece of shame? Well, it was love.

It was love for his wife. Love for his bride. His wife was in trouble and he gave himself up for her.

And so what is our union with Jesus like? Stronger than death.

It's unyielding as the grave, Song of Songs says. What is this love like? It's unyielding as the grave.

It's the very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench it.

[39 : 38] Many rivers cannot wash it away. That's how committed, how loving, how intent Jesus is in having his bride to himself and being united with him and taking care of all of her problems.

Jesus loves us like that. And so if you're lost today, doesn't Jesus love move you?

He died for sinners. He died for sinners so that they wouldn't have to die the second death. And so the question is, why would you perish when he's come full of grace and saying, come, come to me, come to me without money and buy?

That's another way of saying, just take, just take it. Get into me. He's so full of love. And so here's safety. He's saying, get into me.

Here's safety. Here's wealth. Here's salvation. Here's redemption. Here's forgiveness. Here's new life. Everything you need for life and eternity is in me.

[40 : 52] So what do you do? You, you believe, you walk away from your bad things. That's repentance. And you walk away from your good things. That's faith.

When you say, I don't have anything good. I don't have anything bad. Lord, I need you. So come just as you are.

and he will save you. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your son.

Thank you for this mystery of our union and connection with him. There is depths of mystery here that we are just beginning to explore.

Just beginning to understand, I pray that you would open up our eyes. Holy Spirit, come and let us see the truth of your word and let us take that truth and start to live on it and believe it.

[41 : 58] That we would act and live like people who have been brought into this beautiful union with Jesus Christ. That in him, we have everything that we need.

In him, we have every spiritual blessing in heavenly places. In him, we have life. In him, we have redemption. So Lord, let us lay a hold of you this week.

When we are faced with difficult times, let us be close to you. That we would give ourselves to you and that we would believe your love. And may that goodness keep us from sinning and keep our hearts soft and pliable towards you.

I pray that you would go on transforming us and changing us. And I pray for those who are outside of Jesus, call them in and save some even tonight.

Thank you that you are willing. I pray that you would do that for your name's sake. Amen. Amen.

Let's stand and sing hymn 319.