

Mary Craig Ministries, Inc.
Series: The Benefits Of Salvation
Union with Christ
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The Holy Spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling. The “in Christ” relationship between Christ and the elect individual does not first come into existence when the sinner places his faith in Christ. Rather, it is an all-embracing relationship in its saving references. God takes it up and includes it within all that He has done, is doing, and will do in behalf of the sinner. Thus the believer has every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ.

[Ephesians 1:3-10](#): Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, **4**even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love **5**he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, **6**to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. **7**In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, **8**which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight **9**making known^c to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ **10**as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

[The Father] chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. The elect, those who would be saved, were not even contemplated by the Father in the ultimate counsel of His predestinating love apart from union with Christ. They were chosen in Christ. As far back as we can go in tracing salvation, we find “union with Christ.” It is not something tacked on, but there from the outset.

God electing certain people in Christ from all eternity does not mean that they have therefore always enjoyed the fullness of His favor and that for them there is no transition from wrath to grace in real time and space, in history. The Scriptures take the reality of creation with total seriousness and never stress the eternal election of God in such a way so as to reduce to zero the reality and significance of creation and creation’s history. God providentially orders and governs history to His own holy ends. To the contrary, though eternally loved according to election, until the elect one trusts Christ as their personal Savior, they are *actually* “by nature children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3) and are “separate from Christ...without hope and without God in the world.” (Ephesians 2:12).

This explains how Paul in Romans 11:28 can say of the Jewish race in their spiritual blindness that they are both “from the standpoint of election beloved” by God and “from the standpoint of the gospel, [God declared] enemies,” and both at the same time. It is only when they are brought to faith in Christ in their effectual calling that the elect *actually* become partakers of Christ and the salvation blessings of His cross work.

Romans 11:27-29: ...27And this is My covenant with them when I take away their sins. 28 Regarding the gospel, they are enemies on your account; but regarding election, they are loved on account of the patriarchs. 29For God's gifts and His call are irrevocable....

All the elect, though "beloved according to election," are God's "enemies according to the gospel" until they repent and trust Jesus Christ, God's Son and Messiah.

Romans 6:6 – our old man was crucified with Him: the believer's union with Christ in His death.

Romans 6:5 – Here Paul speaks of the believer's union with Christ in His resurrection. (cf Ephesians 2:6)

Ephesians 1:6, 7 – In Christ we have redemption and forgiveness.

Ephesians 2:10 – Paul relates the genesis of redemption's application to the sinner to the "in Christ" relationship.

Ephesians 1:13 – having believed, we were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.

1 Corinthians 1:5 – In Him we have been enriched in every way, thus relating the Christian's sanctification to the "in Christ" relationship. Cf John 15:4, 1 John 2:5, 6

Romans 5:10 – The Christian's security for time and for eternity is related to the "in Christ" relationship since we shall be saved by His life.

1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16 – The Christian's union with Christ is indissoluble and continues even in death when the body, being still united to Christ, rests in its grave until the resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:22 – It is in Christ that the Christian will be raised from the dead in the end times.

Romans 8:17 – It is with Christ that Christians are finally glorified.

Union with Christ "embraces the wide span of salvation from its ultimate source in the eternal election of God to its final fruition in the glorification of the elect. It is not simply a phase of the application of redemption; it underlies every aspect of redemption both in its accomplishment and in its application." (John Murray, page 165)

The Scriptures offer several figures to illustrate the believer's union with Christ:

1. stones in a **building** and the building's chief corner stone (Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:4, 5)
2. **branches** of a vine and the main vine itself (John 15:1-8)
3. members of a **body** and the body's head (Ephesians 4:15, 16)
4. a wife (**bride**) and the wife's husband (Ephesians 5:22, 23)
5. the covenantal (federal) relationship between the race which descended from Adam by ordinary generation and Adam himself (Romans 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:22, 48-49)

6. the relationship which exists between the persons of the Godhead itself (John 14:23; John 17:21-23)

The believer's union with Christ is spiritual and mystical. The bond of that union between the believer and Christ is the Holy Spirit Himself. So, the claim of a reality of a union apprehended by the human intelligence only in the Word/faith construct, might be doubted or denied altogether by the uneducated Christian. We are not to doubt! The Scriptures make it clear that though it is spiritual and mystical, this non-material union with Christ is as real as though there were in fact a literal umbilical cord uniting them, reaching "all the way" from Christ in heaven to the believer on earth.

John 14:10, 11: **Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words I say to you, I do not speak on My own. Instead, it is the Father dwelling in Me, performing His works. 11 Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me— or at least believe on account of the works themselves.**

John 17:20-23: **I am not asking on behalf of them alone, but also on behalf of those who will believe in Me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I am in You. May they also be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 I have given them the glory You gave Me, so that they may be one as We are one— 23 I in them and You in Me—that they may be perfectly united, so that the world may know that You sent Me and have loved them just as You have loved Me.**

The Christian's very existence as a Christian as well as his growth in grace (Romans 6:1-14) and his hope of glory (Col. 1:27) are all grounded in his vital spiritual union with Christ. It is from Christ that the Christian derives all his strength and power to live the Christian life (2 Cor. 12:9). The Christian life hinges upon one's union with Christ. To doubt or to deny this union with Christ injures the soul and stunts the Christian's growth in grace. On the other hand, sin will not reign as king in the life of the Christian who self-consciously considers himself dead to sin, by virtue of his union in Christ's death to sin, and his being alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:10-14).

Summary. "Union with Christ is the fountainhead from which flows the Christian's every spiritual blessing—pardon, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. Chosen in Him before the creation of the world, and in the divine mind united with Christ in His death and resurrection, the elect, in response to God's effectual call, are through God's gift of faith actually united to Christ. Their union with Christ is in no sense the effect of human causation. 'The union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God's grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband...' (*Larger Catechism, Westminster Confession of Faith, Ques. 66*) " (Reymond, page 739)

"Though this union is spiritual and mystical, the Christian's union with Christ is nonetheless as real as the Spirit of Christ Himself is real. By virtue of his actual union with Christ the Husband in His death and resurrection, the Christian, as Christ's bride is forgiven of "her" sin and liberated from the Law—"her" previous husband (the "fruit" from which earlier "union" being always "stillborn"), and made sweetly capable of doing that which "she" could never do before—"bear holy fruit to God." (Romans 7:4, 5) To the degree that the Christian "reckons himself dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11), i.e., to the degree that the Christian takes seriously the reality of his

Spirit-wrought union with Christ, to that degree he will find his definitive sanctification coming to actual expression in his experience of progressive sanctification. The holiness of a Christian's daily walk directly depends upon his union with the Savior." (Reymond, page 739)

Union with Christ is an inseparable bond. It is the heart of the Gospel. "We know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit" (1 John 4:13).

Bibliography:

Murray, John. Redemption Accomplished and Applied. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989.

Reymond, Robert L. A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998 (pages 736-739)

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Recommended reading on this: Hudson Taylor on "The Exchanged Life" (from *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*); Madame Guyon on *Deeper Experiences of the Christian Life*; and Andrew Murray's books, *Union with Christ* and *Holy in Christ*.

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