

July 5th, 2020

Union With Christ

1 Corinthians 1:4

A Christian is a person with an entirely different identity

We now come to the most important section in Paul's entire letter. Everything else that he is going to say depends on what he says in these six verses (v.4-9). Why do I say that? Because here Paul tells us *who we are*. Becoming a Christian is not *merely* a series of actions that happen to us—the Spirit causes us to be born again, after which we believe the gospel and experience conversion, our sins are forgiven and Christ's righteousness is imputed to us which is justification, we then die to sin more and more and live to righteousness which is sanctification, lastly at the resurrection we shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted and be made perfectly happy and holy with a new bodies and live forever in the presence of God which is glorification. All of that is true. But the most fundamental thing about becoming a Christian is that we given an entirely new identity. A Christian is a person who is has come into *union* with Jesus Christ. Paul says it like this in **Galatians 2:20** "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Did you hear it? Paul is no longer *merely* Paul—it is no longer *I* who live. Nor is Paul simply become a better version of himself, he says Christ lives *in me*. Paul "...is becoming Paul-in-Christ."¹

The most basic problem we face

You see the most basic problem with the Corinthians was that they didn't understand that they had a *new identity*. Every problem in the Corinthian assembly stemmed from this fact: they forgot *who they were*. Dear congregation, this is why Paul's letter is so relevant for us. We face a crisis of identity. Your most basic problem, as well as mine, is how we think about ourselves. Who am I? Don't you see that this is indeed the crisis of humanity itself? It is at the core

¹ Grant Macaskill, *Living In Union With Christ: Paul's Gospel and Christian Moral Identity*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Baker Academic, 2019), pg. ix)

of all the problems we are facing as a nation right now. Who am I? My most basic identity is that I am black or that I am white. Doesn't our identity go much deeper than skin color? Do you see why identifying that way has led to the divisions that we had? Or consider the gay/trans community, the reason why suicide is so high amongst them is because they are resting their entire identity upon their perceived sexuality. Your sexuality is only a part of you, it is not *who* you are. If we rest our identity on anything less than who we really are, we are aiming at heartache. Paul begins this letter by telling us who we are.² You are in Christ. That is the Christian's most vital identity marker. You are united to Christ. It is no longer you who live, but Christ who lives in you.

The Big Idea...

The Christian's most fundamental identity, is that he is "*in Christ Jesus*"

- ☆ Union With Christ: the Key to the Corinthian Letter
- ☆ What Is Our Union With Christ?
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I. Union With Christ: the Key to the Corinthian Letter

The meaningless preposition?

Please look with me at v.4. Paul says this "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you *in Christ Jesus*."

² Only after Paul establishes this fact does he in effect say: "now go be who you are"—that is what the rest of the letter is about.

Now the Apostle Paul uses that phrase “*in Christ*” over 120 times in the NT.³ And for many of use that little preposition “*in*” carries almost no weight. One theologian noted:

“...we could remove the expression “*in Christ*” from many of the sentences in which we use it...nothing would be lost...because it does not bear any real load in our thoughts. It is an empty idiom one that we use casually and thoughtlessly, much like we use expressions such as “at the end of the day” or “to be honest.”...We use them as low-level turns of speech that could be discarded from the sentence with altering its meaning.”⁴

Or perhaps we interpret the word “*in*” to mean something else. Think about how different v.4 would read if Paul were to say “*by Christ Jesus*”: “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you *by Christ Jesus*.” That would change everything! God has salvation for His people, and we receive this salvation *by Christ Jesus*—Jesus acts as the middle man, transferring grace from the Father to us. Is that how we understand “*in*”?

The first doctrine that Christ taught Paul

Let’s turn to Acts 9:4. This is the account of Paul’s conversion. The very first doctrine that Jesus teaches Paul is this doctrine of our union with Christ—the doctrine of being “*in Christ*.” After Paul saw the light from heaven flashing around him in v.3, we pick up in v.4 “And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting *me*?” Now that is Jesus who

³ *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology 3rd Edition*, Edited by Daniel J. Treier & Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2017), pg. 908

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Although Paul never uses the phrase “union with Christ” he does speak about our being “united to Him” in Romans 6. This doctrine may not be as immediately conspicuous as say justification, however to ask where the NT speaks about our union with Christ would be tantamount to asking “where do we find water” while sitting in the middle of the ocean.

⁴ Julie Canlis quoted in Macaskill, pg. 42

is speaking to Him. We know this because He says in v.5 “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” Isn’t that fascinating? Jesus Christ had already ascended to Heaven. Paul wasn’t persecuting Christ. He was persecuting the Church. That’s the context. v.1 says that Saul was “...breathing threats and murder against the disciples of Christ.” So then why does Jesus say: “...why are you persecution *me*?” Because by persecuting the Church, Saul was persecuting the very people *in whom* Jesus dwelt. They were “*in Christ*.” “By hurting Jesus’ body, the church, [Saul] was hurting Jesus.”⁵ Isn’t that amazing? The first doctrine Jesus taught Paul was the doctrine of the Church’s union with Christ.

The key to Corinthians

How deeply did that impact Paul? Let’s turn back to 1 Corinthians. Here’s my claim: this doctrine of our union with Christ *not only* became the foundation of Paul’s theology, but it is the key to understanding 1 Corinthians in particular.⁶ Walk through Corinthians with me. Consider how many times Paul references our union with Christ.

1:2 “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified *in Christ*”

1:4 “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you *in Christ Jesus*”

1:5 “that in every way you were enriched *in him*”

1:9 “God is faithful, by whom you were called *into the fellowship of his Son*”

⁵ R.C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess: A Systematic Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*, (Orlando, FL.: Reformation Trust, 2019), pg. 556. Sproul goes on to say “...the embodiment of Christ in this world today is His Church.”

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Calvin says elsewhere “And this ought to be carefully noticed, so that we may not do any wrong to the godly, for God will at length see that he is injured in their persons. And then also no common consolation may be hence derived, that all who molest us are carrying on war against God, and that all who injure us act sacrilegiously toward him.” John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XI*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 2009), pg. 47

⁶ “The conception of a mystical union between Christ and the believer, as it is the pivot of the Apostle’s entire theology, is also the key to the intricacies of the First Epistle to the Corinthians.” Thomas Charles Edwards, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Published by Forgotten Books 2012, Originally Published 1885), pg. XXII

1:30 “And because of him you are *in Christ Jesus*, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption”

2:16 “...But we have *the mind* of Christ?” Why is that? Because what is His, is ours—by our being united to Him.

3:1 “But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but...as infants *in Christ*” Even when rebuking them, Paul can’t get away from their union with Christ.

3:22 [beginning at the end of v.22] “...all [things] are yours...” Why are all things ours? By virtue of our union with Him. **v.23** “and *you are Christ’s*”

4:15 “For I became your father *in Christ*”

4:17 “That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child *in the Lord*, to remind you of my ways *in Christ*”

5:7 “Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, *as you really are unleavened*” Why can Paul say that Christians really are unleavened—that is free from sin? Because when Christ died to sin, we died *with* Him by virtue of our union.⁷

6:11 “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified *in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*”

6:15 “Do you know know that your bodies *are members of Christ?*”

6:17 “But he who is *joined to the Lord* becomes *one spirit with him*”

6:19 [end of the verse] “You are not *your own*”

7:22 “For he who was called *in the Lord* as a slave is a freedman of the Lord”

7:39 “A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only *in the Lord*”

8:12 Paul says that in wounding the weaker brother’s conscience “...you sin *against Christ.*” Why can he say that? Because the weaker brother is united to Christ, and in sinning against him we sin against Christ.

9:1 [end of the verse] “Are not you my workmanship *in the Lord?*”

9:2 [end of the verse] “...you are the seal of my apostleship *in the Lord*”

⁷ cf. Romans 6:5

10:16 “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation *in the blood of Christ*? The bread that we break, is it not a participation *in the body of Christ*?”

11:11 “Nevertheless, *in the Lord* woman is not independent of man nor man of woman”

11:24 “This is my body *which is for you*, Do this in remembrance of me.” The Lord’s Supper is a visible declaration that Christ has voluntarily united Himself to us.

12:13 “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into *one body*”

12:20 “As it is, there are many parts, yet *one body*”

12:27 “Now you are *the body of Christ* and individually members of it”

15:22 “For as *in Adam* all die, so also *in Christ* shall all be made alive”

15:58 “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that *in the Lord* your labor is not in vain.

16:24 “My love be with you all *in Christ Jesus*. Amen”

Our union with Christ throws light on every problem

That’s amazing. The first truth found in 1:2 and the last truth that Paul speaks of in this letter—as well as everything in between—is the truth of our union with Christ. It’s *this doctrine* that he uses to correct the Church. How?

- * In chapter 1, he shows us that our union with Christ destroys any ground for the boasting—“because of him you are in Christ Jesus, *who became to us* wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, ‘let the one who boasts, boast *in the Lord*.’”⁸
- * In chapter 6, he shows us that our union with Christ is incompatible with a lifestyle of the sexual immorality—“shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?...he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.”⁹

⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:30-32

⁹ 1 Corinthians 6:15

- * In chapter 9, he shows us that our union with Christ is *the* motivation to not sin against our weaker brother—“thus in sinning against your brothers, you sin against Christ.”¹⁰
- * In chapter 10, he shows us that our union with Christ is inconsistent with worshiping idols—“you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy?”¹¹

Not the gospel in *general*, but our union in *particular*

In every problem that we see in 1 Corinthians, it's not *merely* the gospel in *general* that Paul gives as a remedy, but our union to Christ in *particular*. Meaning, Paul wants us to see, that there is no deliverance from sin, outside of our union with Christ. If we find *another* power source to be moral, to fight sin, to love God and our neighbor—if we find *another* power source to do any of those things *other than* from *our union with Christ*, then we are not actually doing any of those things.¹² In fact to do any of those things apart from our union with Christ is idolatry.¹³

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 9:12

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 10:21-22

¹² “To conclude, we have all grace and holiness from Christ, or we have it of ourselves. The old Pelagian fiction, that we have them from Christ because we have them by yielding obedience unto his doctrine, makes ourselves the only spring and author of them, and on that account [it was] very justly condemned by the church of old, not only as false, but as blasphemous. Whatever, therefore, is not thus derived, thus conveyed unto us, belongs not unto our sanctification or holiness, nor is of the same nature or kind with it. Whatever ability of mind or will may be supposed in us; what application soever of means may be made for the exciting and exercise of that ability; whatever effects, in virtues, duties, all offices of humanity, and honesty, or religious observances, may be produced thereby from them, and wrought by us,—if it be not all derived from Christ as the head and principle of spiritual life unto us, it is a thing of another nature than evangelical holiness.” John Owen, *The Works of John Owen Vol. 3*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 522-523

¹³ “Paul never allows moral issues to be considered in isolation from our identity in Christ. He never allows them to become issues in their own right, things we can do or activities we can perform in order to be considered as conforming to a standard. His use of eucharistic imagery takes us back to the basis of the goodness manifest within the believer and the believing community, the personal presence of Christ, “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” I am holy, because he is holy. It is important for us to ask whether we employ a similar strategy or whether—unlike Paul and rather more like the Pharisees and the circumcision party—we start with the issues, with definitions of Christian ethical positions, and don't stress at each and every turn that these will themselves, become matters of idolatry if approached apart from our union with Christ.” Macaskill, pg. 90

Please look again our verse, v.4 “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God *that was given you in Christ Jesus.*” Do you see? Beloved you have *no grace* to do anything that pleases God outside of your union with Christ.

Paul’s starting point

This is *why* Paul is starting here. He is not commanding any change from the Corinthians quite yet. Why? Because if Paul omits this doctrine, then he is offering them and us a Christ-less morality. Paul’s vision for the Christian life is this: we can never, never be improved or repaired by our own strength.¹⁴ We can only ever change in conjunction with our union with Christ. That’s our **first point**. The key to the Corinthian letter and all of life, is that all grace is only found in our union with Christ.

II. What Is Our Union With Christ?

What our union with Christ *does not* mean

What does Paul mean by saying that we are “in Christ?” What does our union with Christ *mean*? Let’s start with the *negative*—what our union with Christ *does not mean*. **First**, our union with Christ is *not* merely a figure of speech or an analogy. Paul doesn’t want us to think that our relationship with Christ is *like* be united to Him. No he wants us to understand that we are ontologically—in our very being—united to Him. **Secondly**, our union with Christ does *not* mean that we become part of the *essence* of God. This is a modern Mormon teaching—“As man now is, God once was: As God now is, man may be.”¹⁵ That

¹⁴ Macaskill, pg. viii

¹⁵ Source: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/teachings-of-presidents-of-the-church-lorenzo-snow/chapter-5-the-grand-destiny-of-the-faithful?lang=eng> Accessed July 4, 2020

is a heresy and is blasphemy.¹⁶ **Isaiah 45:5** says “I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God.” **Thirdly**, our union with Christ does *not* mean the destruction of our identity. That is the teaching of Eastern mysticism, that we will lose our selves and become one with the cosmos. That is utterly pagan. The Scripture teaches us that we will possess a conscious personal identity after death, and that for all eternity we will be individuals with individual personalities.¹⁷ **Fourthly**, our union with Christ is *not* simply a mere association that you would see in human societies.¹⁸ There are musical clubs, or political clubs, or adventure clubs where people are united around a common purpose or doctrine or activity. We are not united to Christ *only* in this way. As if our union was merely an agreement with Christ’s doctrine or His mission. No our union is far deeper than that.

What our union with Christ *does* mean

So then what is our union *positively*? What does it mean to be in union with Christ? The Bible describes this union in six ways.

¹⁶ WCF 26.3 This communion which the saints have with Christ, doth not make them in any wise partakers of the substance of his Godhead; or to be equal with Christ in any respect: either of which to affirm is impious and blasphemous.

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One may object and quote 2 Peter 1:4 which says that “through them (the precious and great promises) you may become partakers of the divine nature.” Peter doesn’t mean that we will become a god, or that we will share in His essence. This is clear from the OT. Isaiah 45:5 “I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God.” Peter means that we will become like Him, that is we will come to share in a greater way some of those attributes that we don’t currently have. 1 John 3:2 “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears *we shall be like him*, because we shall see him as he is.” How shall we be like God? What what is God like? He is perfectly righteous, all-wise, full of peace and joy and happiness, and “everything good that can be named.” Therefore “whoever becomes a partaker of the nature of God receives all this, namely, he lives forever, possesses endless peace, pleasure and joy, and is sincere, pure, just and almighty against Satan sin and death.” [Martin Luther, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, Trans. & Ed. John Nichols Lenker, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Kregel Classics, 1990), pg. 236]

¹⁷ “The difference between pagan mysticism and Christian mysticism is that Christianity never sees the goal of religious faith as the annihilation of personal identity or the loss of the self. Rather the goal is a heightened understanding of the self as it relates to God.” Sproul, pg. 554. In other words, Christianity is the redemption of our identity, while paganism is the destruction of it.

¹⁸ A.A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 1999), pg. 483

1. This is a spiritual union

1 **Corinthians 6:17** says “But he who is joined to the Lord [union] becomes *one spirit* with him.” 1 **John 4:13** “By this we know that we abide in him and he in us [union], because he has given us of *his Spirit*.” How remarkable! Before you were a Christian, you shared one spirit with the devil. Paul says in **Ephesians 2:1-2** “...you were dead in the trespasses and sins... following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work *in the sons of disobedience*.” That spirit used to be at work *in you*. It was *in you*, you were *united* to the spirit of the prince of darkness. But now that you are united to Christ, you share His Holy Spirit with Him. You and Christ drink from the same Spirit, you partake from the same Spirit, you are indwelt by the same Spirit, the same Spirit who delight in Christ delights in You. The Holy Spirit is the bond that you and Christ share. The Puritan Thomas Manton illustrated this by considering the bond between yeast and dough. He says “Look! It impossible to sever the leaven and the dough once they are mingled and kneaded together for the leaven transforms the nature of the dough into itself, so Christ and a believer, when they are united together, there is no parting them anymore...he that is joined to the Lord is *one spirit*; what closer and more abiding union can be imagined?”¹⁹ That is the **first way** we are to understand our being “in Christ,” we are one Spirit with Him.²⁰

2. This is a vital union

Meaning it is through this union that we have life *itself*. The greatest statement of Christ giving us life through our union with Him is **Galatians 2:20** “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, *but Christ who lives in me*.” Calvin says here “He does not live his own life, but is animated by the secret power of Christ; so that Christ may be said to live and grow in him; for, as the soul enlivens the body, so Christ imparts life to his members. It is a

¹⁹ Charles Spurgeon, *Flowers From a Puritan's Garden: Illustrations and Meditations*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2017), pg. 113-114

²⁰ This is also a holistic union, meaning “it embraces our entire person, our bodies through our spirits.—1 Corinthians 6:15, 19.” Hodge, pg. 484

remarkable sentiment, that believers live out of themselves, that is, they live in Christ.”²¹ Jesus illustrates this truth in **John 15:4**, He says “I am the vine; you are the branches.” What is it that gives the branches life and buds and leaves and fruit? It is the succus or the sap, the juice and nourishment that flows from the vine to the branches. If anything intercepts this sap from flowing from the vine to the branch, then not only will the branch cease to bear fruit, but it will wither and die. It is only through the union of the branch to the vine that the branch lives. Jesus is the vine, and we are united to Him as a branch. He nourishes every believer united to Him with grace in order to live, just as the vine provides the succus or the juice to it’s branches. Loved ones, the reason you have spiritual life, the reason you love the Trinity, and the Scripture, and the Church, and long for Heaven, is because Jesus is living in you. If He wasn’t living His life through Your life, you wouldn’t do any of those things. Or as Jesus said it in **John 15:5** “...apart from me you can do nothing.” That is the **second way** we are to understand our being “in Christ” —we are in a vital union with Him—all our spiritual life comes solely from Him.²²

3. This is a mystical union

This is a word that has negative connotations for most modern evangelicals. But it was the word that the Puritans were fond of. Listen to how they put it in the Larger Catechism:

Q. 66. What is that union which the elect have with Christ?

A. 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;

²¹ Online commentary on Galatians 2:20

²² John Owen catechizes it like this: Q. “What is our union with Christ? A. An holy, spiritual conjunction unto Him as our head, husband, and foundation, whereby we are made partakers of the same Spirit with Him, and derive all good things from Him.” John Owen, *The Works of John Owen Vol. 1*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 489

So what do they mean by *mystically*? Primarily they mean it is a *mysterious* union.²³ When Paul speaks about the union of husband and wife in Ephesians 5, he says in v.31-32 “‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This *mystery* is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” What is the profound mystery? Christ’s union with the Church. The two really *become* one. Mystical is truly the best word for it, “because it so far transcends all the analogies of earthly relationships.”²⁴ Marriage is the closes analogy that can be given, but even that falls infinitely short. In a mystical way the believer and Christ become one with one another. Paul understood this when all other earthly unions with friends, and fellow believers failed. He said “...no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me...but the Lord stood by me and strengthened me...” (2 Timothy 4:16-17). Mystically, mysterious, Paul experienced his union with Christ *especially* when all other unions dissolved. Dear believer that’s why your union with Christ is the most precious of all unions. There is no hole or prison cell or sickness or depression that can prevent you from experiencing it. It is entirely other-worldly. That’s the **third way** we understand our being “in Christ”—we are united to Him mystically.

4. This is a covenantal union

Our union with Christ is covenantal. Under the covenant of works, all mankind sinned in Adam. His sin was imputed to us precisely because we were included *in him* covenantally. What this means is that “everything that was true of Adam became true of [you] because [you] were in Adam and came out of

²³ That’s how Geerhardus Vos understand it. He says “This bond is called the mystical union, *unio mystica*. It bears this name because it lies beneath the consciousness. It does not consist in a fellowship or exchange of thought, but in a real though incomprehensible fellowship of life. Mystical stands here in contradistinction to the rationally transparent. In a certain sense, all the deeper actions of life are mystical, mysterious, but this union is so in a double measure.” Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 4: Soteriology, The Application of the Merits of the Mediator by the Holy Spirit*, (Bellingham, WA.: Lexham Press, 2015), pg. 21

²⁴ Hodge, pg. 483

him.”²⁵ That’s the teaching of Romans 5, v.19 says “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners...” We were born in sin, before we ever sinned one time, because we were born federally, or covenantally in Adam.

But now that we are *in Christ* “all our legal or covenant responsibilities rest upon Christ, and all his legal or covenant merits [rest on] us.”²⁶ Martin Luther made this easy to understand in a book he wrote called *The Freedom of the Christian*. In it, Luther wrote of a good and generous king who seeks out bride to marry. But who does this king pursue? A penniless prostitute. Now this prostitute couldn’t make herself look like a queen, let alone act like a queen. But the King loved her in spite of her status. On the day of their wedding, what did the king do? He pledged himself to her. He gave her his name. He took on her debt. Her enemies became his enemies. His riches became her riches. Her prostitute status was vanquished and she became the queen. That is what our federal union with Christ looks like. Jesus took on all our sin, *because* He brought us into union with Himself. We take on all His righteousness, because now whatever belongs to Him, belongs to us.²⁷ That’s why Paul can say later on in **1 Corinthians 3:22** “...all [things] are yours,” why? Because **v.23** “..you are Christ’s.” Whatever is true about Him is now true about you. This is Paul’s whole teaching in **Romans 6**. Because we are united to Christ, we died in Him, and therefore we are now dead to sin. Sin can never have dominion over us again—meaning it can never be our master *again*, it can never destroy us *again*. Why? Because Christ already died to sin, and because we are in Him—we also died to sin. It is the most astonishing teaching. This covenantal union means that our status with God is never, never based on what we do. It is only based on who we are united to—which is Christ. Even “...if we are faithless, he remains

²⁵ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6: The New Man*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2015), pg. 41

²⁶ Hodge, pg. 484

²⁷ Why does the believer have the righteousness of Christ? Precisely because He is in Christ. Christ’s righteousness is not like some abstraction that He gives to us in a box. We have the righteousness of Christ, because we have Christ Himself.

faithful—for he cannot deny himself.”²⁸ Since we are united to Him, that means He can never deny us. That’s the **fourth way** we are to understand our being “in Christ”—we are united to Him covenantally.

5. This is an intimate union

The book of the Song of Solomon is really *the book* that shows the intimate union that Christ has with His Church. The bride’s refrain throughout this love son is “My beloved is *mine*, and I am *his*.” (**Song 2:16**) Notice the language of ownership “I am *my beloved’s* and *my beloved is mine*” (**Song. 6:3**). It is intimate union. Once you can understand the poetry of this book, it is one of the most thrilling books to read. Listen to how Christ speaks to you. “Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful!”²⁹ “You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you. Come with me...my bride”³⁰ “You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride; you have captivated my heart with once glance of your eyes.”³¹ Beloved, that is Christ speaking to you. Isn’t that unbelievable? He is fully and comprehensively aware of all your failings, and sin, and yet this is how He thinks of you and speaks to you. When Jonathan—David’s bosom friend—died in battle, David lamented “I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women” (**2 Samuel 1:26**). That’s a picture of Christ’s intimate love for us. His love for us surpasses all other human loves. Why? Because we have be united to Him. And He cares for us as a man would care for His own flesh. **Ephesians 5:29-30** “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of *his body*.” Christ is not waiting for you to be a better version of *you* before He speaks tenderly to you, before he calls you His beloved. You are already His beloved, because He has made you one with Himself. That’s the

²⁸ 2 Timothy 2:13

²⁹ Song of Solomon 4:1

³⁰ Song of Solomon 4:7-8

³¹ Song of Solomon 4:9

fifth way we are to understand our being “in Christ”—we are united to Him most intimately.

6. This is an indissoluble union

Meaning this union can never be broken. The union Christ makes with believer can never be undone. “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (**John 10:28**). The reason why the believer has absolute security in his salvation, is because his very life, his eternal life is hidden with Christ in God. **Colossians 3:3** says “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” In order for your union with Christ to be broken, Christ Himself would have to be defeated. That’s why the greatest guarantee of eternal life is in Jesus’ words in **John 14:19** “Because I live, you also will live.” Our eternal life doesn’t depend merely on Christ’s power, or His love for us. But it depends on His very life—the life we have been united to. Only if Christ can die, will we ever die. This is why Job could confidently say “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God” (**Job 19:25-26**). This is what the climax of the whole Bible points to “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?...neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 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” (**Romans 8:35, 38-39**) Everything Paul lists in this catalog are the most powerful forces in the universe, but none of them can dissolve our union with Christ. “Christ and believers are so firmly joined together, that all the powers of earth, and all the united strength of hell, shall never be able to...separate them one from another.”³² Again this is why this union is called mystical, because it transcends every other union. Every other union can and will be dissolved. The husband’s union with his wife will be dissolved, the children’s union with their parents, even best friends can be

³² Thomas Brooks, *The Works of Thomas Brooks Vol. 5*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2001), pg. 513

separated. Or to use the metaphors from Scripture—the head will be separated from its members, the foundation will be separated from the house, the vine will be separated from the branches—even the soul itself will be separated from the body itself at death. But this union between Christ and a believer, can never weaken by degrees, can never lose strength over time, it will endure even when the heavens and the earth pass away. Beloved do you see why this union answers the crisis of identity? Every other claim you have for who you are, and what will become of you is fleeting. Every other identity marker, save this one, is like the grass that withers when the breath of the Lord blows on it, it is like the mist that appears for a little time but then vanishes. But this identity—being “in Christ” has roots that go deeper than the mountains, this identity rests upon the foundations whose builder and maker is God. That’s the **sixth way** we are to understand our being “in Christ”—our union with Him can never be dissolved.

Our condition vs. our position

Last Lord’s Day we spoke about the distinction between a believer’s condition vs. a believer’s position. Understanding this distinction can be the difference between delight and despair. A Christian’s condition is his circumstances, or his present experience. Whereas a Christian’s position is his legal status. Think of the thief on the cross. What was his **condition**—his experience? He was in agony, it wasn’t just the asphyxiation or the fact that he was bleeding out. he was facing the certainty of death. In his condition, he was terrified. But what was his **position**—his legal status before God? Jesus told him “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (**Luke 23:43**). As Christians, it is absolutely vital to consider our position before we consider our condition. That’s Paul’s method here. This union that Paul speaks of in **v.4** of being “*in Christ*” has nothing to do with your condition, it has nothing to do with your experience. Paul is dealing with objective facts and subjective experience has no place here whatsoever. Paul is *not* talking about something that will happen to Christians. Nor is he talking about something that ought to happen to us. Paul is saying this union is what has already happened to us. If

you are a Christian, you just are united to Christ, in a spiritual, vital, mystical, covenantal, intimate, indissoluble union. And it doesn't matter if you feel that way or not. What do feelings have to do with that? "How many of you 'feel' that you sinned in Adam? But you believe it because God's Word tells you that it is true."³³ So when God's Word tells you that you are truly "in Christ," what does it matter what kind of a week you had? That doesn't even enter into the picture. Your experience has nothing to do with your being "in Christ." Paul is telling this to people who were in a terrible condition. Many of them were living lives unworthy of the King. And yet shockingly Paul tell them 'you are *in Christ*.' Dear congregation, you must realize this about yourselves. Being *in Christ* means just this, that "you are *complete in Him*" (**Colossians 2:10**). When will you be complete in him? Not later. No, this doesn't depend upon your experience. You are complete now. Why? Because you are *in Him*—in Christ Jesus.

III. Union With Christ: the Source of All Praise

The only thing Paul can praise

Let's look at our verse one more time. Notice we've only really considered that phrase "in Christ" so far. How does Paul respond to this truth? **v.4** "*I give thanks to my God* always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus." Notice that Paul is *not praising* the Corinthians for any achievements on their part. In fact, he's not even considering anything that they are doing whatsoever. Most of the verbs in **v.4-9** are in the passive voice which means they didn't do these things, these things were done to them: (**v.4**) grace was *given* them *in Christ* (**v.5**) they were *enriched in Him*; (**v.6**) Christ was *confirmed* in their midst; (**v.9**) God *called* them into fellowship with Jesus Christ.³⁴ No, Paul is *not* praising the Corinthians, he's praising God—"I give

³³ Lloyd-Jones, 43

³⁴ Insight by Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), pg. 62

thanks to my God.” You see, Paul knows all the flaws of this Church. He got the report from Chloe’s people. He received the letter from the Church itself. What can he praise them for? Nothing. They’ve disqualified themselves in every way. That’s why Paul praises God. *“I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus.”* He’s giving thanks to God that the Christian life is not built upon the foundation of human performance. Don’t you see, this verse is really the banner that flies over your life. What would Paul write about your life? How would he address your sex life, your boasting, your despising leadership, your trampling over Christians who disagree with you, your American-flavored idol worship, your behavior in the Church of God? If he was able to see you as God sees you, there would be nothing to commend. The only thing he could say is this:

“I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus.”

Hallelujah! Jesus is my life

Beloved that is why our union with Christ is the source of all praise in the Christian life. Christ does not unite Himself to us because we are clean, but so that He may clean us.³⁵ Christ does not unite Himself because we have lived a good life, but so that He can give us life itself.

But as I ran my hell-bound race
 Indifferent to the cost
 You looked upon my helpless state
 And led me to the cross
 And I beheld God’s love displayed
 You suffered in my place
 You bore the wrath reserved for me
 Now all I know is grace

³⁵ Owen, pg. 467

Hallelujah! All I have is Christ
 Hallelujah! Jesus is my life

Can you say that loved ones? Can you say that *Jesus is my life*? Don't interpret that in a subjective sense as if you're saying "I live for Jesus"—Jesus is my life *in the sense* that I'm absorbed with Him all the time. That's not what the song is saying. It's a declaration that "Jesus is my life" in the objective sense. In other words, He is literally the source of my life. "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Don't you see, Jesus *just is* your life, because you are *in Him*. That's how the Christian life begins—with a declaration of your unconditional status. You are positionally in Christ, and it matters not at all what your condition looks like. Nothing can change that status in Christ. He is your life. Your morality is not your life. Your success as a parent or an employee is not your life. Your finances are not your life. Your relationships are not your life. Your reputation is not your life. Jesus is your life. "For you have died, and *your life is hidden with Christ* in God. When Christ *who is your life* appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (**Colossians 3:3-4**).

To those who have no life

If you are not united to Christ this morning, then you have no life. That is the most miserable thing that could ever be said of you. Oh to be without hope and without God in the world. Do you desire to come into union with this Savior? Do you desire to become one Spirit with Him, to receive life from Him, to never be separated from Him again? The Scripture says "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life" (**1 John 5:12**). How do you come into possession of the Son? By believing on His name. "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." (**John 20:31**)

