

July 12th, 2020

# Our Past, Present, and Future Union With Christ

1 Corinthians 1:4-9

## **The missing notes**

Paul has been laying the foundation at the beginning of this letter. He has shown us what the Church is, and how it is different than the state. He has show us how the Christian's position is different than a Christian's condition. And he has shown us how the Christian's fundamental identity marker is that He has been united to Christ. And it's this union with Christ that we tragically so often miss in our gospel today. Listen carefully to gospel account that we often hear and preach today:

The death of Jesus pays for our sins— He takes the punishment that we deserve. Through His resurrection we are justified and are accounted righteous before God. He then ascended into Heaven where He even now makes intercession for us. He has given us the Holy Spirit for our sanctification and growth in holiness until He returns or until we die and go to Him.

Now is problematic with that gospel account? It's not that it says anything wrong, it's that it doesn't say enough. Imagine, for those of you who play the piano, sitting down to play some great piece. But the piano is missing some of the keys, so when you play you are either forced to substitute another key for the one that is missing, or you just omit that key altogether. How would that great composition sound? It would be missing something wouldn't it? No matter how hard you tried, your piece would measure up to the original. "As vital notes from the scale were lost, the remaining notes, though good, were

insufficient to make up for their absence.”<sup>1</sup> That’s often what’s wrong with the gospel account we give today. It’s not that we necessarily say wrong things. It is that we are missing vital notes. The Bible does not speak of a Christ outside of us. That kind of Savior doesn’t save. No Jesus saves by coming into union with us. Over 120 in Paul’s writings, it’s Christ in you. **Colossians 1:27** “Christ *in you*, the hope of glory.” He does not say, Christ *in heaven* the hope of glory.<sup>2</sup> We ought not to think of a Christ who *merely* sits in Heaven, though that is an amazing truth. But what is even more amazing is this: Christ *in you*, the hope of glory. This is the Christian’s new identity. He is no longer himself. “It is not longer I who live”, Paul says, “but Christ who lives *in me*.”

### *The Big Idea...*

The Church doesn’t lack a thing as we wait for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ because we are *in Him*

- ☆ Our Past Union With Christ (v.4)
- ☆ Our Present Union With Christ (v.5-7)
- ☆ Our Future Union With Christ (v.8-9)

## I. Our Past Union With Christ

### God already gave us to Christ

Last Lord’s Day we only looked that phrase in v.4 *in Christ*—“I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given

<sup>1</sup> Grant Macaskill, *Living In Union With Christ: Paul’s Gospel and Christian Moral Identity*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2019), pg. 5

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Manton, *The Works of Thomas Manton Vol. 11*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2020), pg. 28

you in Christ Jesus.” The question here is, *when* did God give us this grace *in Christ*? At what point in time were we united to Jesus? The word *given* in v.4—the “...grace *given* you Christ Jesus” is our first clue. Given is in the aorist tense in the Greek, which means it is a verb that has already happened. God already gave. That’s why the English translation puts *given* in the past tense. God has “given” us the grace in Christ. Why is that important? Because it tells us that our union with Christ, *and* the grace that we are given *in Him*, happened in the past. The question is: *when* in the past? When in the past did God consider us *in Christ*?

### **Our three-fold union with Christ**

The Puritans answered that question in three distinct ways.<sup>3</sup> We were united to Christ in eternity past, in Jesus’ earthly ministry, and in our effectual calling. So we have an eternal union with Christ, an earthly union with Christ, and an effectual union with Christ.

#### **1. Our eternal union with Christ**

Please turn with me to **Ephesians 1:3-4**. Paul opens his letter very similar to His Corinthian letter, except He goes into much greater depth of our union with Christ. Pay attention to those *in Christ* phrases. Beginning in v.3 “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, even as he chose us *in him before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and blameless before him.” Our union with Christ didn’t begin in time. God chose us to be united to Christ *before* the foundation of the world, meaning before time *itself*. To even think about this short circuits the brain. Augustine attempted to speak about God existing and acting outside of time and this is what he prayed

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<sup>3</sup> Joel Beeke & Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine For Life*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), pg. 482

“...although you were before time, it is not *in time* that you precede it. If this were so, you would not be before all time. It is in eternity, which is supreme over time because it is a never-ending present, that you are at once before all past time and after all future time...Your years are one day, yet your day does not come daily, but is always today, because your today does not give place to any tomorrow nor does it take the place of any yesterday. Your today is eternity...You made all time, you are before all time; and the ‘time’...when there was no time was not time at all.”<sup>4</sup>

Augustine shows us that absolute difficulty of thinking about God outside of time. We can’t imagine it. There is no analogy. Time and eternity are different species altogether. We should never think of time like a drop of water and eternity like the ocean. They have no correspondence with one another. The words “before” and “after” and “then” and “when” only correspond to time, but they have no bearing on eternity.

Therefore, in the mind of God, there was never a “when” when He united us to Christ. There was never a “before” —as in *before this moment* we were not united to Christ, and *after this moment* we were. As long as God has been God, we have been united to His Son —“even as he chose us *in him* before the foundation of the world.” In one sense, God’s people have never *not* been united to Christ. That is our eternal union with Christ.

## 2. Our earthly union with Christ

By this I mean the believer’s union to Christ in time past during His earthly death and resurrection. Please turn with me to **Romans 6:5-6**.<sup>5</sup> This is

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<sup>4</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, Trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (New York, NY.: Penguin Books, 1961), pg. 263 [XI.XIII]

<sup>5</sup> The previous verses that speak about our being baptized into Christ have nothing to do with water baptism. It is the baptism of the Holy Spirit that Paul is speaking about. Scripture describes at least two baptisms 1) Water (Matthew 28:19); and 2) Spiritual (1 Cor. 12:13). It is obvious that Paul is referring to the latter here, because we are not united to Christ by an external act, but only through the work of the Holy Spirit. cf. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6: The New Man*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2015), pg. 29-37

perhaps the most important single chapter on our union with Christ. Paul says this starting in v.5

“For if we have been *united with him* in a death like his, we shall certainly be *united with him* in a resurrection like his. We know that *our old self was crucified with him* in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.”

Paul says “our old self was crucified with him.” That’s how he wants us to understand the crucifixion. Who died on the cross? Jesus *and* we with Him because of our union with Him. This adds an entirely different dimension to how we think about the atonement doesn’t it? Who died on the cross? Not just Christ’s physical body, but His mystical body also. Meaning, when Christ died to sin, we who were united to Christ *from eternity* died with Him. That is, our old unregenerate sin-dominated man died with Christ. Romans 6 is one of the most powerful chapters in the Bible that demonstrates that Christ didn’t die for some random undermined set of people. No He died for those united to Him, and they, in a sense, died with Him. That is our earthly union with Christ.

### 3. Our effectual union with Christ

By this last type of union I just mean that when the Holy Spirit effectually calls us and persuades us and enables us to believe in Christ, then we *in our experience* become united to Him. Let’s turn back to 1 Corinthians 1. Paul’s entire argument in chapter one is to destroy the boasting of the Corinthian Church. They began to boast proudly that one was better than another because of what teacher they aligned with. I think this is such a fascinating psychosis that belongs to the human condition. The gospel says that because of our sin, we have become so sinful, so unclean, that the worms of the dust have a better standing with God than we. One of Job’s friend’s got it right. He said in **Job 25:4, 6** “How then can man be in the right before God? How can he who is born of woman be pure?...how much less man, who is a maggot, and the son of man,

who is a worm!” That’s why the Puritans were so fond of saying that we are worms and lower than worms. So here we are, a room full of worms. And what the Corinthians were doing, is they were arguing over who was the better worm. It’s like what Winston Churchill once said “We are all worms. But I really think I am a glow worm.”<sup>6</sup> I told Monica that the other day, and she quickly replied: “I think I am a silk worm.”

So how do you stop a bunch of Christian worms from fighting over who is the better worm? You remind them that they are not in Christ because of themselves. Look at **v.30** “And because of him you are *in Christ Jesus...*” Paul is concluding his argument regarding God’s effectual call. In **v.26-28** we discover that it is God who effectually *calls* Christians to be Christians. **Ephesians 2:5** “...even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together *with Christ*—by grace you have been saved.” That’s our experiential union with Christ. God *even* made that happen. It’s not your free will that united you to Christ. It’s not that you were raised from good parents. It’s not you are a better worm than other people. No, it’s God. God the Holy Spirit united you to Christ in your effectual calling. You had nothing to do with it.

### **We forget we are worms**

Why is this so important to stress? Because your biggest problem is that you forget you’re a worm. What does a worm like you have to offer God? Why would the infinitely holy God unite His precious Son to the likes of you and me? We should be utterly astonished. It is always at this point where we go astray in our lives. We forget the grace of the gospel. **v.4** says “I give thanks to my God always for you *because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus.*” The grace of God was given you only in your union with Christ. When did that happen? It didn’t happen one day when you decided you would become a Christian. No one, properly speaking, simply decides to become a Christian. No one can claim they united themselves to Jesus Christ.

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Johnson, *Churchill*, (New York, NY.: Penguin Books, 2009), pg. 3

You and I were *eternally* united to Christ. **Ephesians 1:4** “even as he chose us *in him* before the foundation of the world.”

You and I were united to Christ in His *earthly* ministry. **Romans 6:6** “We know that our old self was crucified *with him*.”

You and I were united to Christ in our *effectual* calling. **1 Corinthians 1:30** “And because of him you are in Christ Jesus.”

Any theology that denies these three aspects of our union with Christ is cutting Paul off at the knees. He can't stop our boasting if we have some ground to stand on. He wants us to be able to answer the question correctly at the very beginning of this letter: What was the decisive cause of your union with Christ? Was it God or yourself? Was it something God did *or* is it something you did? Did you *cause* God to unite you to Christ by your believing? Or did God cause your believing by uniting you to Christ from eternity? Paul is crystal clear. Our union with Christ began when there was no time. That's our **first point**. We had no part in uniting ourselves to Christ—by grace we have been saved.

## II. Our Present Union With Christ

### **Enriched in Him**

So then how does our eternal union with Christ play effect us *in time*? Paul says in v.5 “...that in every way you were enriched *in him* in all speech and all knowledge.” *Enriched* means to make rich or wealthy, to supply with abundant property or goods. In his other letters Paul uses different language. In **Colossians 2:10** he says we “have been *filled* in Him” or that we are complete in him.<sup>7</sup> But here Paul speaks about the Corinthians being rich. Perhaps because Corinth was such an affluent city, that Paul was contrasting the riches

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<sup>7</sup> NASB

that the world offers with the riches that are found in union with Christ. Paul says “...*in every way* you were enriched.” *In every way*. What does “in every way” mean?

### ***In every way?***

First, we need to understand this phrase most broadly. Our union with Christ is the fountain from which all other blessings flow. In theology, there is a Latin term called the *ordo salutis*, it means the order of salvation.<sup>8</sup> There is a certain order in which salvation takes place, certain parts come before other parts, and to get those parts out of order can result in heresy. For instance if we put **sanctification** - the process of being made more holy; *before* **justification** - the act of God imputing Christ’s righteousness to us through faith alone, we lose the gospel. **Galatians 2:21** “...if righteousness were through the law [i.e. my attempt at holy living], then Christ died for no purpose.” So it’s vital we get the order of salvation right. Where does union with Christ fall? Well we already saw that we were united to Christ from eternity. **Ephesians 1:4** “...he chose us *in him* before the foundation of the world” So election—God’s choosing us—is the only thing that comes prior to our union with Christ. But union comes before everything else. Why is this important? Because it teaches us everything we need for salvation—justification, sanctification, adoption, glorification, all come from our union with Christ. “To have Christ is to have all.”<sup>9</sup> That’s what it means *most broadly* when Paul says “*in every way* you were enriched in him.”<sup>10</sup>

But Paul gets more specific. Look at again at the end of v.5 “...in all speech and all knowledge.” Now these two things specifically are things the

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<sup>8</sup> Paul gives us a “mini-ordo salutis” in Romans 8:30 “And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”

<sup>9</sup> Beeke & Jones, pg. 483

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WLC Q.69 What is the communion in grace which the members of the invisible church have with Christ?  
A. The communion in grace which the members of the invisible church have with Christ, is their partaking of the virtue of his mediation, in their justification, adoption, sanctification, and whatever else, in this life, manifests their union with him. (also cf. SCQ. 30-32)

<sup>10</sup> cf. 1 Corinthians 1:30



Corinthians are fighting about. They are fighting over speech in chapters 12 & 14 and knowledge in chapter 8. Paul is beginning this letter by alluding to these things. In essence, “Why are you fighting over those things? These are gifts that come from your union with Christ. What do you have that you did not receive?<sup>11</sup> And *why* did you receive them?”<sup>12</sup>

### Proof of Christ

Paul continues in v.6 “...even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you.” They were enriched in these gifts, so that *the testimony about Christ* —meaning the preaching of the Gospel<sup>13</sup> would be *confirmed*, or established, or put past doubt, or made certain among them.<sup>14</sup> When the gospel of Christ was preached, and these things—speech and knowledge—leapt into existence, it was proof that Christ was in their midst.<sup>15</sup> How? Think of it like this: when you look at the world, and you see hatred, wrath, arrogance, malice, slavery to lust, murder—ask yourself, whose image do those things show forth? Satan’s. **Ephesians 2:2** says that “the prince of the power of the air, [that] spirit...is not

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:7

<sup>12</sup> “...their speech and knowledge is not something they achieved by studying under the most prominent rhetoricians and philosophers, but they have been given them as gifts of God (v.4).” Stephen T. Um, *1 Corinthians: The WORD of the CROSS, Preaching the Word*, Series Editor R. Kent Hughes, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2015), pg. 18

<sup>13</sup> 2 Timothy 1:8

<sup>14</sup> “When Paul preached about Christ to the Corinthians, God guaranteed his testimony [confirmed his gospel] by enriching them with spiritual graces and gifts.” 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. 64.

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The Amplified Bible puts it like this: 5 “[So] that in Him in every respect you were enriched, in full power and readiness of speech [to speak of your faith] and complete knowledge and illumination [to give you full insight into its meaning]. 6 In this way [our] witnessing concerning Christ (the Messiah) was so confirmed and established and made sure in you.”

<sup>15</sup> “The effects of the preaching (i.e., the testimony about Christ) includes such things as people coming to faith, the growth of the church, a demonstrable change in people’s lives, and so on. These things are a guarantee of the truth of the gospel. These are effects that everyone can see, and so they point back to their cause, Paul’s testimony about Christ’s death for sinners.” Kim Riddlebarger, *The Lectio Continua: Expository Commentary on the New Testament: First Corinthians*, (Powder Springs, GA.,: Tolle Lege Press, 2013), pg. 14

at work in the sons of disobedience.” Those awful things are proof that Satan is at work in the world. But when there speech—that is, talk of the gospel, and knowledge—that is, understanding it, when there is love, and mercy and forgiveness, and a transformation of people’s lives, it is proof that Christ’s gospel is at work.

Dear congregation, God has given us proof of Christ *here*. Though we are far from perfect, don’t you see the effects of Christ among us? These manifestations of brotherly love, and forbearance, and kindness, and hope and repentance, and looking to the interests of others are all proofs that Christ is in our midst. These only come from being enriched *in Him!* There is no other source or explanation for these things. How gracious that God would put this verse in the Bible! That we could see tangible effects of our union with Christ!<sup>16</sup>

### **The second coming**

Let’s look at v.7. It connects directly to v.5. Paul says in v.5 “... in every way you were enriched *in him* [Christ]” v.7 “...so that you are not lacking in any gift, *as you wait* for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Let’s consider the last part of this verse first. Paul speaks here of the event of all events: the *revealing* of our Lord Jesus Christ. The revealing or apocalypse means “...a disclosing or uncovering of something (or Someone) that has been hidden.”<sup>17</sup> Paul is showing us that this is the highest and best attainment of the Church, when the Savior is finally uncovered, when He is finally disclosed to the world, when He comes out of hiding as it were. It is simply indisputable that the second coming of Christ was *the* object of longing to all the early Christians.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Which is why Paul points out that unholy living is so inconsistent with our union with Christ, because it images forth another master. “The problem with sexual immorality (ch.6) is precisely that it is incompatible with the holiness associated with the believer in union with Christ.” Macaskill, pg. 89

<sup>17</sup> Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 65

<sup>18</sup> Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 8

It was the first promise that was given to the disciples after they saw Jesus ascend to Heaven. **Acts 2:10-11** “And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, *will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.*”

It is the last prayer of the of the saints in the book of Revelation: “He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” *Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*”<sup>19</sup>

The *revealing* of Christ Jesus is great hope at the foundation of every NT book.

**Philippians 3:20** “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it *we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*”

**Titus 2:11-13** “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, *waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.*”

**Colossians 3:4** “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Can you imagine it? When Paul says that Christ will be *revealed*, he means that right now “...we do not perceive Him as He really is.”<sup>20</sup> On that day, we will see Him like never before.<sup>21</sup> And just the very sight of Him will fundamentally change us forever. **1 John 3:2** “Beloved, we are God's children now, and what

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<sup>19</sup> Revelation 22:20

<sup>20</sup> Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 65

<sup>21</sup> When John the Apostle saw Jesus *revealed* in **Revelation 1:7**, he fell at his feet as though dead. When the three saw Jesus *revealed* on the mount of transfiguration, they fell on their faces and were terrified (**Matthew 17:6**).

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.*"

### **Why mention it here?**

Here's the question: Why does Paul mention the second coming of Christ *here* in the opening of his letter? Because this is supposed to be the "fundamental orientation for all believers."<sup>22</sup> All believers ought too long to see Christ. That's what it means to be *in Him*. Right now you do not see Him as He is. Right now you look through a glass dimly. Right now you only know in part. *But then* you shall know even as you have been known. Then you shall see face to face. Why do we need to be reminded of that? Because in so many ways, we are just like the Corinthians. They had become carnal and fleshly and were starting to live for the same things that the world lives for. Though they trusted Christ, they were living as though this world was all there was. Dear congregation, when was the last time you meditated on and longed for the second coming of Jesus Christ? I don't mean that you want Him to come back *merely* in order to escape this trouble or that heartache. But you want Him to come back in order to be *with Him*. You cry out like bride in Song of Solomon who can't find her beloved "If you find my beloved...tell him I am sick with love..."<sup>23</sup> When was the last time you considered the Day of His revealing, when all people will either experience unspeakable terror or unspeakable joy? Are you eagerly waiting for the day, as Paul speaks about it here? Is it the longing of your life? Do your desires match up with the desires of the NT Church? If not, pray for it. Call on the Spirit of the Lord to awaken these desires. Certainly He will give them to you.

### **Christians don't lack a thing**

Alright, let's put the logic of these middle verses together. Because we are *in Christ* (v.4); because we have been enriched *in him* in every way (v.5);

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<sup>22</sup> Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 66

<sup>23</sup> Song of Solomon 5:8

therefore v.7 says we "...are not lacking in any gift, as [we] wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ." Now we arrive at the another problem. Some of you are waiting with all eagerness for the second coming, but you feel that you are lacking in many things that would sustain you until that day. This verse doesn't resonate at all with you. Paul says because you are *in Him*, you don't lack a single thing. Yet in your experience you feel lacking in every way. You feel scared. You feel weak or anxious or depressed. Or you are racked with physical pain and always feel on the verge of just giving up. Inwardly, you feel completely incompetent. You are always hungering and thirsting after righteousness and never feeling satisfied. So how can Paul say "you are not lacking in any spiritual gift." He is explicitly saying that we have all we need. So how do we make sense of this?

Well we have to understand what it is that we really need. Beloved, imagine being on your death bed. You are about to leave this world. You are about to leave all your possessions, all your achievements, all your loved ones, and you are about to meet the Judge of the Universe face to face who knows everything that you have ever done. What do you need in that moment? All you need is found in your union with Him.

If you have been united to Christ then you have already died to death itself. **Romans 6:6** "We know that our old self was crucified *with him* in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin."

If you have been united to Christ, then you will be experience resurrection. **Romans 6:5** "For if we have been united *with him* in a death like his, we shall certainly be united *with him* in a resurrection like his."

What more do you need than that as you wait His second coming? That's our **second point**. Your present union with Christ, means you lack nothing in this age. You have everything you need for life and death, for body and soul *in Him*.

### III. Our Future Union With Christ

#### Faithful to the end of the line

Our first point covered the past, our second the present, now we look to the future. **v.8** says “who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Now this “who” properly speaking is God the Father. He is the Person giving us grace in Christ in **v.4**, and Paul immediately refers to Him again in **v.9**. “God is faithful, by who you were called...” It doesn’t fit to refer the “who” to Christ because then Paul would be saying: ‘Christ will sustain you...in the day of Christ.’<sup>24</sup> So God the Father is the one who will sustain us to the end. Why? **v.9** gives us the first reason. Because God is faithful. He is firm, steadfast, true, constant, unwavering. It is impossible that God be unfaithful. **2 Timothy 2:13** “...if we are faithless, *he remains faithful*—for he cannot deny himself.” Notice the truth of this passage rests the attributes of God. In **v.4** we are put into Christ because of the *Father’s grace*. In **v.9** we stay in Christ because of the *Father’s faithfulness*. Beloved God will finish the work He began in us. **Philippians 1:6** “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” God will sustain us to the end! I always tear up on that part in the film when Steve Rogers, the scrawny little man from Brooklyn—not yet Captain America—tells his best friend Bucky “Thank you Buck, but I can get by on my own.” Bucky says “The thing is, you don’t have to, I’m with you till the end of the line pal.” The reason why I tear up is because I see God in that scene. He will remain with us till the end of the line, because no one is more faithful than God. **Romans 11:29** “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”

"Great is Thy faithfulness, " O God my Father,  
 There is no shadow of turning with Thee;  
 Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not  
 As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

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<sup>24</sup> Hodge, pg. 9

### **The certainty of Christ + the certainty of the Christian**

Now what does God promise to do in v.8? He promises to “...*sustain* us to the end.” This Greek word for *sustain* is the same word for the word *confirm* in v. 6. Recall it means to establish, or put past doubt, or made certain. Just as the gospel of Christ was made certain and put past doubt in the midst of the Corinthians, so the Christian perseverance to the end is certain, and past all doubt. This is the first promise in the block of verses. v.4-7 are all indicatives or declarations. But here Paul gives us a gospel promise. The promise of perseverance.

### **The perseverance of the saints**

The perseverance of the saints is a most precious doctrine. Listen to how the WCF defines it.

They, whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.

This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.<sup>25</sup>

A true Christian can never be lost.

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<sup>25</sup> WCF 17.1-2

### The objections against the perseverance of the saints<sup>26</sup>

Now there are three main objections against the perseverance of the saints. The **first objection** says that these promises that God makes of our perseverance are not unconditional promises but conditional promises.<sup>27</sup> In other words, there are conditions that we have to meet as believers in order to finally persevere. But think of the absurdity of that argument. If we persevere in continuing to meet these supposed conditions, God will grant us perseverance. That's no promise at all. What good is it for God to promise something that we have already attained? It's like say "I'll give you ownership of your house, provided that you own it."

The **second objection** against the perseverance of the saints says that God will preserve us against external enemies, but not from internal enemies. In other words, God always does what He promises, but man can withdraw himself from God. This is the classic response to **John 10:28** "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand." 'Yes no one can snatch you out of God's hand—He protects you from external enemies, but you can jump out of God's hand.' How do we respond to this? God promises not only to protect us from external enemies but from ourselves as well.<sup>28</sup> **Jeremiah 32:40** "I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me." 'Ah but I know a guy who used to believe, but he has turned his back on God, he jumped out of God's hand.' I **John 2:19** "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us."

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<sup>26</sup> Much help here from Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology Vol. 2*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 1994), pg. 597-601

<sup>27</sup> The point is not, that there are no conditional promises in Scripture. There are, e.g. Jeremiah 18:7-10. And there are unconditional promises in Scripture, e.g. Hebrews 13:5. The point is that this promise of our perseverance cannot be a conditional promise, because the conditions are part of the promise itself.

<sup>28</sup> "The promise of Christ would be futile. For what would it help to be guarded against external enemies if danger always hung over us from internal enemies? Believers out to fear not only from others, but more especially from themselves." Turretin, pg. 599



The **third objection** says that God promises perseverance to the Church, but not to particular believers. But this is just sophistry. Whatever God promises to the Church or the body of Christ, certainly is also true for individual believers because they "...share in the nature of the body."<sup>29</sup> God's care for His Church is not limited to the corporate body. In fact, what do we find in the gospel? Jesus leaves the ninety-nine sheep in the open country, and goes after the one that is lost until He finds it (**Luke 15:4**). Those are the three main objections against our perseverance and all of them can't stand up to Scripture or plain reason.

### The guiltless Christian

Look how strongly Paul speaks about this in **v.8** "God will sustain you to the end, *guiltless* in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." Guiltless or as other translations say blameless. This word doesn't mean that a Christian is free from every sin, it means he is free from every charge laid against him.<sup>30</sup> How can God say that? Do you *feel* guiltless today? What about this past week? What do you think your prospects are for guiltless, blameless living this next week? Beloved I don't care what type of worm that you think you are, how can you ever live for even an hour that is blameless? Then how can God, justly, without forgetting that He is the righteous Judge of the universe say that we will be blameless on the day?

### Into the fellowship of His Son

Because we have been united to His Son and when He sees us, He sees Him! That's how **v.9** ends. "God is faithful, [That is, He will hold you guiltless. Why? Because...] you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." Into the *fellowship* of His Son. Fellowship means the share<sup>31</sup> that you

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid*, pg. 597

<sup>30</sup> "The word means, not "blameless in character," but, "free from any charge" (Romans 8:33)." Thomas Charles Edwards, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Published by Forgotten Books 2012, Originally Published 1885), pg. 8

<sup>31</sup> Philippians 3:10

have in something, or the participation you have in it.<sup>32</sup> Beloved the Church has a fellowship, a real share in Christ. And Christ considers this fellowship so deep with His Church that says He is incomplete without her. Listen to how Paul puts it in **Ephesians 1:22-23** “And [God] put all things under his feet [Christ’s] and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” Did you hear it? The Church, which is His body is called “the *fullness* of him.” Follow me here. If the Church is the fullness of Him, then it follows that without the Church, Christ is not full, He is not complete. How are we supposed to understand this? If we consider Jesus as God Himself, He is perfectly complete, perfectly full. We could never “complete” Jesus in this sense. That would be heresy. If we consider Jesus as the Mediator, the God-man, again Jesus lacks nothing. **Colossians 2:9** “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.” No as Mediator, we don’t complete Jesus. But Jesus as the Mystical Person, as the Head that is joined to the body, as the Heavenly groom that is joined to His earthly bride, He considers Himself incomplete without His Church. We are His fullness. That’s what Paul says: “the church, which is his body, the fullness of him.” Christ is not full or complete without His body, just as a head without it’s body parts is not complete.<sup>33</sup> I think this is the most unbelievable verse in Scripture.<sup>34</sup>

What does this have to do with our perseverance? Well simply this, we most certainly will be saved in the end, because to say that a Christian could

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<sup>32</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:16

<sup>33</sup> Manton, pg. 30. 1 Corinthians 12:12 “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”

<sup>34</sup> John Calvin says here: “This is the highest honor of the Church, that, until [Christ] is united to us, the Son of God reckons himself in some measure imperfect. What consolation is it for us to learn, that, not until we are along with him, does he possess all his parts, or wish to be regarded as complete!” [John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XXI*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 218] Matthew Henry says “...the church is said to be his fullness, because Christ as Mediator would not be complete if he had not a church. How could he be a king if he had not a kingdom? This therefore comes in to the honor of Christ, as Mediator, that the church is his fullness.” Jonathan Edwards says here: “...the church is said to be the [fullness] of Christ...*as if* Christ were not complete without the church...man is incomplete without the woman, she is himself; so Christ is not complete without his spouse.” Source: <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaGlsby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/cC4xMjoyNz Mud2plbw==>

ever be lost is to say that Christ's own body could be maimed. If a Christian could be lost, then Christ in His mystical union would not be full, would not be complete. Beloved that is why the greatest chapter in the Bible is grounded in our union with Christ. "For I am sure that 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*." Why can't we be separated from the love of God? Because we are *in Christ Jesus our Lord*. We have been called into His fellowship.

### **To those not united to Christ**

If you are united to Christ this morning, then you truly have everything. But if you are not united to Christ, then you have nothing. And the Scripture says that even what you have will be taken away from you. Paul says "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are [reprobate]."<sup>35</sup> Oh dear friend that is the worse thing that could ever be said about you, that you would be reprobate. Lost. Damned for all eternity. But that is not the worst part. The worst part is that you would never know Jesus Christ intimately, personally, spiritually—that you would never be united to Him. He is everything. He is the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, He is the way, the truth and the life. Trust Him this morning. The promise is so clear. That if you come to Him by faith, if you receive Him as He offers Himself to you in the gospel, then He will come and abide in you, and make His home in you.

[Prayer]

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<sup>35</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:5

**Song:** The Church's One Foundation

The first line...

The church's one foundation  
is Jesus Christ, her Lord;

In this song the word "one" is repeated 8 times, showing our oneness with Christ and His body, the church. But pay attention especially to the last stanza:

Yet she on earth hath union  
with the God the Three in One,  
and mystic sweet communion  
with those whose rest is won: