

# Union with Christ

## Key to Victory

*Update 2/6/2024*

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Tulsa, OK

2023

# Introduction

## Preface

The goal of this work is to aid believers in Jesus Christ to discover the riches of grace that God has given us in His Son. His grace not only prepares us for eternal glory, but also equips us for victorious Christian living today.

The present study is much more personal to me than simply an academic pursuit. Soon after my conversion to Christ, in my study of God's Word, I observed the centrality of the principle of being "in Christ." Since that time, I have continued to reflect on this teaching and apply it to my Christian life, and it has become the central truth and driving force in my Christian experience.

At the same time, I am amazed that such a foundational principle for all of Christian living finds so little place in the life of the Church. Therefore, my hope is that this work will aid readers to understand who we are in Christ and who He is in us, so that we can fully enjoy the benefits of our position in Him and thereby advance in our personal Christian walk to the glory of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I would like to express my gratitude to my wife Nancy for her proofreading the text and helpful comments.

## About the Author

Dr. Thomas Wespetal was born in 1957 in Racine, Wisconsin. He received Christ at age 17 and the following year followed Him in water baptism. In that same year, he experienced the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, after which he began attending Pentecostal and Charismatic fellowships.

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## Chapter 1. The Definition of “Union with Christ”

### A. Introduction to the Concept “Union with Christ”

In our Christian life, we often encounter personal struggles and failures, that is, we often fail to meet our expectations of what we think a Christian ought to be like. Even though we try to overcome our weaknesses and shortcomings, we frequently make the same mistakes time and time again. Why can we not attain victorious Christian living? Is it possible that something fundamental is missing in our Christian experience? Does the Word of God teach a more effective way of growing in Christ? We believe that it does through the believers' appropriation of their union with Jesus Christ.

The goal of this work is to expound on the biblical teaching of the believer's union with Christ, which consists of two elements: our position in Christ and Christ's presence in us. Jesus expressed it concisely in John 14:20: “...you in Me, and I in you.” In this work, we will attempt, with God's help and based on Holy Scripture, to define the concept of the believer's union with Christ and to describe how to appropriate this truth in our personal Christian experience. We will discover that the study and application of this theme can aid us both in our spiritual lives and in our lives in general.

Very frequently, the Bible, either directly or indirectly, mentions the believer's union with Christ. Although, as Gaffin writes, “The expression ‘union with Christ’ does not occur in the Bible,” at the same time “it fairly describes the central reality in the salvation revealed there.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Gaffin R. B., Jr. Union with Christ: Some Biblical and theological reflections // McGowan A. T. B. Always reforming: explorations in systematic theology. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006. – P. 272.

We can express the same truth in more biblical terms by saying that we, as believers, are in Christ, and He is in us.<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to note that in the 2766 verses of Paul's epistles, we encounter 150 instances where he alludes to the believer being in Christ, employing such expressions as "in Jesus," "in the Lord," "in Christ," "in whom," or "in Him." This means that in every twenty verses of Paul's writings, he refers to this special relationship between the believer and the Lord. Besides these phrases, this concept is expressed in other terms as well, and not in Paul's works alone.

The fact that Scripture gives such an emphasis to this teaching compels us to search out this truth with eagerness and open-mindedness in order to better understand God's plan and to fully enjoy all the benefits of the salvation that He accomplished for us.

Let us demonstrate how exhaustively Paul connects the "in Christ" concept with the blessings of salvation. In Christ we have justification (2 Cor 5:21), eternal life (Rom 6:23), sanctification (1 Cor 1:2), grace (1 Cor 1:4), reconciliation with God (2 Cor 5:18-19), freedom (Gal 2:4), blessing (Gal 3:14; Eph 1:3), kindness (Eph 2:7), access to God (Eph 2:13), forgiveness of sins (Col 1:14), peace (Phil 4:7), provision (Phil 4:19), faith and love (1 Tim 1:13-14), life (2 Tim 1:1), salvation (2 Tim 2:10), participation in the Body (Rom 12:5), new creation (2 Cor 5:17), adoption (Gal 3:26-28), renewal (Rom 8:2), calling (Phil 3:14), spiritual power (Eph 6:10), enrichment (1 Cor 1:4-5), promise (2 Cor 1:19-20), knowledge (Eph 4:21), inheritance (Eph 1:11), spiritual circumcision (Col 2:11), resurrection (Phil 3:21), victory over death (1 Cor 15:57), comfort (2 Cor 1:5), fruitfulness (Phil 1:11), the Holy Spirit (Tit 3:6), and whatever else might be needed (Rom 8:32).

Furthermore, Paul reveals how our position in Christ defines every aspect of the life of the believer. In Him, believers boast (Phil 3:3), walk (Col 2:6), are comforted (Philemon 20), die (1 Thes 4:16), thank God (1 Thes 5:18), greet one another (Phil 4:21), write (Rom 16:22), labor (1 Cor 15:58), testify (Eph 4:17), rejoice (Phil 3:1), stand (Phil 4:1), exhort (1 Thes 4:1), lead (1 Thes 5:12), command (2 Thes 3:12), have confidence (Gal 5:10), etc.

As we have mentioned, the concept "union with Christ" includes not only believers' position in Him, but also His presence in them. Consequently, it is important to consider both aspects of this union. Nonetheless, since in contemporary Christianity the concept of being "in Christ" is so rarely discussed, we will direct more attention to that aspect in this book. Gardner agrees, "Christ lives in us, and we live in Him. The former has been rightly much stressed, but the latter does not seem to have been widely emphasized."<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, theologians in recent years are devoting more attention to the biblical witness concerning this truth and the central place it occupies in the theology of the apostle Paul. A leading New Testament scholar, Thomas Schreiner, feels, "One of the most significant

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<sup>2</sup>The well-respected Evangelical theologian, Wayne Grudem, elaborates on the definition of union with Christ. He adds to the ideas our being "in Christ" and Christ being "in us" the ideas that we are "like Christ" and that we are "with Christ" (Grudem W. Systematic theology: An introduction to Biblical doctrine. – Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reference Software, 1994. – P. 840). Nonetheless, as we shall see, these additions are not really necessary. The idea of being "like Christ" is not a component of one's union with Christ, but a result of it. In addition, the phrase "with Christ" is connected with our participation in the redemptive events of Christ's career and thus serves as a subset of being "in Christ."

<sup>3</sup>Gardner R. F. R. Union with Christ // The Reformed Journal. 9, no. 7. 1959. P. 5.

elements of Paul's Christology is his teaching about being 'in Christ.' Union with Christ or participation with Christ is surely one of the fundamental themes of his theology."<sup>4</sup> The highly respected Morris Silva writes, "It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this doctrine for Paul's teaching; this is what gives coherence to everything he says about salvation."<sup>5</sup> Former Dallas Seminary professor S. Louis Johnson considers union with Christ "perhaps the most characteristic Pauline teaching."<sup>6</sup> Campbell insists that we must restore this teaching to its proper place of prominence, since "a faithful understanding of Paul is impossible without it."<sup>7</sup>

Other authors also affirm the centrality of union with Christ, not only in Paul's thought, but in general. Thomas Boston states that union with Christ is the most important, comprehensive and fundamental privilege of believers, and that all other blessings are derived from and based on it.<sup>8</sup> Ferguson feels that the concept of union with Christ "must therefore be the dominant motif in any formulation of the application of redemption and the dominant feature of any 'order' of salvation."<sup>9</sup> C. R. Campbell adds, "Virtually every aspect of the Christian life is informed in some way by the believer's union with Christ."<sup>10</sup>

However, in spite of its centrality in biblical thought and its growing recognition among theologians, the Church in general seems unaware that this teaching even exists. Letham laments, "Today not much is said about union with Christ from the pulpit, and until recently, little was written about it."<sup>11</sup> Wilbourne refers to it as a forgotten treasure.<sup>12</sup> Marcus Johnson, who wrote a book on this theme, admits, "I, too, have wondered how such a crucial aspect of

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<sup>4</sup>Schreiner T. R. *New Testament theology: magnifying God in Christ*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008. – P. 314.

<sup>5</sup>Silva M. *Galatians* // Carson D. A., France R. T., Motyer J. A., Wenham G. J. *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition*. – 4th ed. – Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994. – P. 1215.

<sup>6</sup>Johnson S. L., Jr. *Studies in the epistle to the Colossians* // *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 118. 1961. P. 247.

<sup>7</sup>Campbell C. R. *Paul and union with Christ*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012. – P. 375.

<sup>8</sup>Boston T. *The complete works of Thomas Boston*. – V. 1. – P. 549.

<sup>9</sup>Ferguson S. B. *Ordo Salutis* // Ferguson S. B., Wright D. F. *New dictionary of theology*. – Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988. – P. 480-481.

<sup>10</sup>Campbell C. R., p. 443. Kaufman concurs (Kaufman P. *The one and the many: corporate personality* // *Worship* 42. 1968. P. 554), as well as the following: Harris M. J. *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* // *The new international Greek Testament commentary*. – Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005. – P. 431; Longenecker R. N. *Paul: Apostle of liberty*. – New York: Harper & Row, 1964. – P. 169; Fung R. Y. K. *Justification by faith in 1 & 2 Corinthians* // *Evangelical Review of Theology*. 5. 1981. P. 184; Mawhinney A. *Baptism, servanthood, and sonship* // *Westminster Theological Journal*. 49(1). 1987. P. 46; Walvoord J. F. *Identification with Christ* // *Elwell W. A. Evangelical dictionary of theology*. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 588; Wilbourne R. *Union with Christ*. – East Sussex: David Cook, 2016. – P. 184; Johnson M. P. *One with Christ: An Evangelical theology of salvation*. – Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013, Kindle Ed. – P. 20; Letham R. *Union with Christ: in Scripture, history, and theology*. – Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011. – P. 1; Austin-Sparks T. *Union with Christ*. – London: Witness and Testimony Publishers. – P. 6-7. We may add to this list none other than Karl Marx, who, in his youth, wrote the following: "Union with Christ bestows inner exaltation, consolation in suffering, calm assurance, and a heart which is open to love of mankind, to all that is noble, to all that is great, not out of ambition, not through the desire for fame, but only because of Christ" (Marx, Karl // Geisler N. L. *Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999. – P. 443).

<sup>11</sup>Letham, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup>Wilbourne, p. 135.



the biblical portrayal of salvation, woven so deeply into the historic evangelical tradition, for so long escaped my notice.”<sup>13</sup>

We can also cite Walvoord in this regard: “...justification, sanctification, deliverance, access to God, inheritance, and glorification are actual and possible because of the believer’s position in Christ. Failure to recognize the importance and significance of this doctrine has issued in many false teachings and has denied to many Christians the joy of their salvation.”<sup>14</sup>

A factor likely contributing to the Church’s neglect of this clear biblical teaching is spiritual pride. Tannehill expresses it this way.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, Evangelical Christians are ready to admit that they need God’s mercy and forgiveness in order to be justified before Him. This, of course, requires them to humble themselves and admit their total dependence on God. On the other hand, after turning to Christ, believers are tempted to retain *something* in which they can still boast, and they find it in their strivings for holiness, trying to overcome sin by personal discipline and devotion.

As we shall see, however, the biblical teaching of the believer’s union with Christ deprives one of any claim for boasting and puts one in a place of humility and total dependence on the Savior. As Tannehill affirms, “If man accepts the cross as God’s act of grace, he must give up his boast, for such acceptance means the recognition that his life is based upon God’s gift, not on his own achievements.”<sup>16</sup>

So then, since every achievement in the Christian life is a direct consequence of union with Christ, all glory goes to God alone: “By His doing you are in Christ Jesus,” therefore, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord” (1 Cor 1:30-31). All that we have we receive from God by grace (1 Cor 4:7).

## **B. The Believer’s Position in Christ**

As mentioned above, the most straightforward expressions of the believer’s position in Christ are the phrases “in Christ,” “in the Lord,” etc.<sup>17</sup> In order to properly define these expressions we must closely examine their usage in the New Testament. First, we note that they are used primarily by two authors: Paul and John. Yet, these two writers use these phrases differently. However, these variations of usage, in the final analysis, compliment one another.

### **1. What the Bible Says**

#### **a. In John’s Writings**

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<sup>13</sup>Johnson M. P., p. 24.

<sup>14</sup>Walvoord J. F. The work of the Holy Spirit in salvation // Bibliotheca Sacra. 98. 1941. P. 426. Rightmire and Strong concur (see Rightmire R. D. Union with Christ // Elwell W. Evangelical dictionary of Biblical theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – P. 789; and Strong A. H. Systematic theology. – Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1907. – P. 795-797).

<sup>15</sup>Tannehill R. C. Dying and rising in Christ: a study in Pauline theology. – Berlin: Verlag Alfred Topelmann, 1966. – P. 125.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Campbell (Campbell C. R., p. 67) and others concur.

John employs this phraseology in relation not only to believers and Christ, but also to the Father and the Son. For example, the Father is “in” the Son, and the Son is “in” the Father: “The Father is in Me, and I in the Father” (Jn 10:38); “I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me” (Jn 14:10-11). The idea of the Son being “in” the Father implies an intimate knowledge of the Father by the Son and close fellowship with Him: “The only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (Jn 1:18). The idea of the Father being “in” the Son implies the manifestation of God’s power through the Son: “The Father abiding in Me does His works” (Jn 14:10). When the Son is glorified, the Father is glorified in Him (Jn 13:31-32).

As far as the relationship between Christ and believers, John graphically represents this connection in the parable of the vine and the branches (Jn 15:1-8). Just as branches grow from the vine and the vine supplies life to the branches, believers are in Christ and He is the source of their spiritual life. Therefore, believers are called to “abide in Him” (Jn 15:4; 1 Jn 2:28). Peterson thinks that unlike Paul’s “in Christ” phraseology, John’s expression “abide in Him” contains more meaning. It implies not only a positional status “in Him,” but also active fellowship with Him.<sup>18</sup>

In John’s gospel, a believer’s abiding in Christ is demonstrated by bearing the fruit of that relationship: “He who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit” (Jn 15:5). We see the same idea in other Johannian passages: “By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 Jn 2:5-6); “The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him” (1 Jn 3:24). In the book of Revelation, it states that abiding in Christ can involve enduring suffering for Him (Rev 1:9; 14:23). In Revelation, in fact, Jesus is the model for righteous suffering (see Rev 1:5; 2:13).<sup>19</sup>

John’s Gospel expresses the concept of union with Christ employing still another metaphor – receiving Christ’s body and blood: “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him” (Jn 6:56). Union with Christ is also associated with receiving His Word: “If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father” (1 Jn 2:24; also see 1 Jn 2:27; 2 Jn 9). In addition, God’s seed (1 Jn 3:9), God’s love (Jn 17:26), and eternal life (1 Jn 3:15) abide in the believer.

Finally, for John union with Christ is often expressed in the idea of “knowing God” not in the sense not of obtaining mental knowledge of Him, but as personal fellowship with Him in a spiritual union. The following example demonstrates the parallel between abiding in Christ and knowing Him: “The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.... The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 Jn 2:4, 6). We encounter the same idea of experientially “knowing Him” in the writings of Paul (Phil 3:9-10) and Peter (2 Pet 1:3) as well.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, in John’s writings we witness a dramatic step. Quoting the words of the Savior, John compares the relationship between the Son and the Father with the relationship between the believer and God: “...that they may all be one; even as You, Father, {are} in Me and

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<sup>18</sup>Peterson R. A. Union with Christ in the Gospel of John // *Presbyterion* 39/1. 2013. P. 15-16.

<sup>19</sup>Macaskill G. Union with Christ in the New Testament. – Oxford, Oxford Press, 2013. – P. 286-287.

<sup>20</sup>Macaskill sees indications of union with Christ in Peter’s epistles as well: 1 Pet 2:24; 4:1, 13 (*Ibid.*, p. 276-279).

I in You, that they also may be in Us... I in them and You in Me" (Jn 17:21, 23); "I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (Jn 14:20).

This means that John relates abiding in Christ to participation in the very life of the Trinity. We must not conclude, however, that believers become divine or a part of the Trinity in essence, but rather that they may enjoy close fellowship with the Godhead comparable to that which exists between the Father and the Son, yet not at that level. Participation in the life of the Trinity also includes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer, of which John also writes (1 Jn 3:24; 4:4, 13). The Spirit is also the One who reveals to believers the significance of their spiritual union with God (Jn 14:16-20).<sup>21</sup>

Finally, John speaks of the believer being not only in the Son, but in the Father as well: "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 Jn 4:15-16). At the same time, John insists that our abiding in the Father is dependent on and derived from our position in the Son: "We are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 5:20).

## **b. In Paul's Writings**

In our investigation of Paul's teaching on union with Christ, we will omit such common expressions as "faith in Christ" and "hope in Christ," since in such phrases Paul is not using "in Christ" in his special, technical sense. We also omit passages where "in Christ" refers not to a believer's position in the Lord, but to what Christ Himself possesses (e.g. Col 2:9; 2 Cor 5:19).

In Paul's writings, the phrase "in Christ" may acquire various shades of meaning, and sometimes it is difficult to define these nuances. Wedderburn notes, "One might well question whether any one way of use is likely with ἐν Χριστῷ (Ἰησοῦ) (i.e. "In Christ Jesus") and ἐν κυρίῳ (i.e., "in the Lord"), nor should it disconcert us if it is often hard to be certain which particular adverbial or adjectival sense is conveyed."<sup>22</sup> In spite of this obstacle, we will attempt to define Paul's manifold usage of this phrase.<sup>23</sup>

First, by the phrase "in Christ" Paul might simply mean being a Christian. For example, certain passages speak of individuals as Christians, employing the formula "in Christ" (Rom 16:7-8, 10-11, 13; Eph 6:21; Philemon 16). Sometimes churches or brethren in general are "in Christ," that is, "Christian" (1 Thes 2:14; Gal 1:22; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1, 14; Col 1:2). Believers greet one another "in Christ," i.e., as fellow Christians (Phil 4:21; 1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:12), and receive one another as such (Rom 16:2). Believers die "in the Lord," that is as Christians (1 Cor 15:18; 1 Thes 4:16). Finally, widows must marry only "in the Lord" (1 Cor 7:39), i.e., other Christians.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, Wikenhauser feels that this expression "is much more pregnant with meaning

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<sup>21</sup>Letham, p. 4; Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament*, p. 256.

<sup>22</sup>Wedderburn A. J. M. Some observations on Paul's use of the phrases "in Christ" and "with Christ" // *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*. 25. 1985. P. 87.

<sup>23</sup>Some citations are taken from Wikenhauser A. *Pauline mysticism* / Trans. J. Cunningham. – Friebrug: Herder, 1960. – P. 24-30; Longenecker, Paul, p. 167, Campbell C. R., p. 73ff; Schreiner, p. 315-317; Wedderburn, p. 89.

<sup>24</sup>In addition, 1 Cor 16:24, "My love be with you all in Christ Jesus," may mean "with all you Christians." In 2 Corinthians 12:2, "a man in Christ" means "a Christian." In 1 Corinthians 9:2, "You are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord," may mean "you as Christians."

than our word 'Christian.'"<sup>25</sup> C. R. Campbell agrees, "The 'periphrasis of Christian' usage cannot be divorced from the essential reality of location in the realm of Christ."<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, this expression can refer simply to Christian faith. For example, in the church at Corinth there were many "tutors in Christ" (1 Cor 4:15), which means that the church received much instruction in Christian faith. Moreover, in Colossians 2:7, Paul calls believers to be "firmly rooted" and "built up in Him," that is, in Christian faith. Furthermore, Paul speaks of his "ways" in Christian faith (1 Cor 4:17). "Babes in Christ" (1 Cor 3:1) are those yet undeveloped in Christian faith, while the "mature in Christ" (Col 1:28) are spiritually mature believers. In addition, a person can be "wise" in Christian faith (1 Cor 4:10).<sup>27</sup>

Sometimes this phrase means "for the Lord's sake." Wives submit to their husbands, slaves to their masters, and children to their parents "in the Lord," i.e., for the Lord's sake (Col 3:18, 20; 4:7; Eph 6:1). Believers jailed "in Christ" suffer for His sake (Eph 4:1; Phil 1:13; Philemon 23). Christian ministers serve "in Christ," that is for His sake (Eph 6:21; Col 4:7; 1 Cor 9:1-2; 15:58; Rom 16:3, 9, 12).

At the same time, these instances may possess the nuance of "spiritual power from Christ." People do these things not only for the Lord, but also by His power. Some passages, in fact, speak directly of being strengthened by Christ's might, such as, "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might" (Eph 6:10). Wikenhauser claims that in Christian ministry, "the activity in question takes place entirely in the sphere of Christ," that is supernaturally.<sup>28</sup> Schreiner concurs, "Basing commands in the union that believers have with Christ indicates that their obedience comes not from self-effort but rather is God's supernatural work."<sup>29</sup>

We must also mention those cases where Paul uses this formula to express gratitude for what Christ has done for us. Three times he repeats the injunction, "Rejoice in the Lord," that is, for what He has done (Phil 3:1; 4:4, 10). In a similar way, Paul speaks of Jesus as the one in whom we boast (Rom 15:17; 1 Cor 1:31; 15:31; 2 Cor 10:17; Phil 1:26; 3:3).<sup>30</sup> However, Schreiner feels, "In some of these texts there may still be the notion of one's union with Christ, so that one boasts, for example, because of one's union with Christ."<sup>31</sup>

Paul assigns still other meanings to the phrase "in Christ." It may indicate that Jesus is the object of our hope (Phil 2:19) or devotion (Eph 1:1), the source of our authority (Philemon 8; 1 Thes 4:1; 5:12; 2 Thes 3:12; Eph 4:17) or confidence (Rom 14:14; Phil 1:14; 2:24; Gal 5:10; 2 Thes 3:4; Eph 6:20), or the verification of some claim (Rom 9:1; 2 Cor 2:17; 12:19).

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<sup>25</sup>Wikenhauser, p. 30.

<sup>26</sup>Campbell C. R., p. 126

<sup>27</sup>Also see Eph 4:21: "truth is in *Christian faith*," Phil 4:1: "Stand firm in *Christian faith*," (similar in 1 Thes 3:8), and Col 2:6: "walk in *Christian faith*." Additionally, Timothy is Paul's "beloved and faithful child in *Christian faith*" (1 Cor 4:17). Similarly, Paul is a "father in *Christian faith*" for those he led to Christ (1 Cor 4:15). Also note: "Live in harmony in *Christian faith*" (Phil 4:2) and, "Live godly in *Christian faith*" (2 Tim. 3:12). Finally, according to *Christian faith*, God's will is for us to be thankful (1 Thes 5:18).

<sup>28</sup>Wikenhauser, p. 29.

<sup>29</sup>Schreiner, p. 317.

<sup>30</sup>In connection with the usage of the verb *καυχάομαι* (*kauhaomai*), i.e. "boast," in 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17 and Phil 3:3, Wikenhauser correctly comments that this verb requires placing the preposition *ἐν* (*en*) before its object. Therefore, these instances may not be examples of the classic "in Christ" formula, but simply a grammatical necessity. See Wikenhauser, p. 23.

<sup>31</sup>Schreiner, p. 315.

We are yet to examine Paul's two most frequent "in Christ" usages, which often overlap with one another: "in Christ" in the sense of "through" or "by means" of Christ, and location in the "sphere" of Christ.

Let us highlight several passages that correspond to the sense "by means" of Christ.<sup>32</sup> "In Christ," i.e., "through Him," God provides forgiveness of sins and justification (Rom 3:24; Gal 2:17; Eph 4:32), victory (Col 2:15; 4:17), spiritual circumcision (Col 2:11), blessing (Eph 1:3; Gal 3:14), sanctification (1 Cor 1:2), grace (1 Cor 1:4-5; 2 Tim 1:9; Eph 1:6), ministry (1 Cor 1:5), power (Phil 4:13), glorification (2 Thes 1:12) and eternal life (Rom 6:23). Through Christ Jesus, God created all things (Col 1:16), upholds all things (Col 1:17), accomplishes His purpose (Eph 1:9, 20; 3:11) and receives glory (Eph 3:21). In summary, Rightmire writes of "Christ as the channel through whom God works his will, elects, redeems, forgives, blesses, imparts new life, and builds up the church."<sup>33</sup> Yet, Schreiner makes the qualification, "The redemption that belongs to believers 'in Christ' may be both instrumental and locative."<sup>34</sup>

In some instances, it seems that Christ is not so much the means or instrument of God's actions as much as the agent or doer of the action Himself.<sup>35</sup> We can cite Col 4:17: "Say to Archippus, 'Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord (that is, "from the Lord"), that you may fulfill it,'" and 1 Corinthians 7:22: "called in the Lord," i.e., "by the Lord."

However, the expression "in Christ" most frequently refers to believers' location in the "sphere" of Christ or their "positional status" in Him. Macaskill confirms, "The phrase 'in Christ' ... clearly has a locative sense at many strategic points, where it demarcates a sphere (or state) of existence."<sup>36</sup>

What exactly is this "sphere" of Christ? A good starting point for our understanding is 1 Corinthians 1:30, which reveals that our position or status in Christ comes from the Father and leads to certain benefits: "By His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption."

In addition, in the "sphere" of Christ are located many, if not all the benefits of salvation, in particular: no condemnation (Rom 8:1), the law of the Spirit of life (Rom 8:2), love, grace and faith (1 Tim 1:14; 2 Tim 1:13; 2:1; Rom 8:39), salvation (Phil 3:9; 2 Cor 5:21; Eph 1:7, 13; Col 1:14; 2 Tim 2:10), the high calling of God (Phil 3:14), a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), comfort (Phil 2:1), provision (Phil 4:19), fullness (Col 2:10), access to God (Eph 2:13; 3:12), light (Eph 5:8), resurrection (1 Cor 15:22), inheritance (Eph 1:10-11; 2:7), and many others.

In this "sphere," all of God's promises are "Yes," to which we say "Amen" (2 Cor 1:20). God accomplishes His election in Christ (Eph 1:4, 9). In Christ, we are seated in heavenly places (Eph 2:6) and are re-created in Him (Eph 2:10). Finally, in Christ, the Church is unified (1 Cor 11:11; Gal 3:28; 5:6; Rom 12:5; Eph 2:15; 3:6; Phil 4:2).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>This usage of ἐν Χριστῷ (*en Hristy*), i.e. "in Christ," functionally overlaps with the phrase διὰ Χριστοῦ (*dia Hristy*), i.e. "through Christ."

<sup>33</sup>Rightmire, *Union with Christ*, p. 789.

<sup>34</sup>Schreiner, p. 316.

<sup>35</sup>Campbell C. R., p. 73ff.

<sup>36</sup>Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament*, p. 249.

<sup>37</sup>Other possible references to the "sphere" of Christ include: Rom 6:11, 23; 8:39; 1 Cor 15:18, 22; 16:19; 2 Cor 1:21; 2:14; Gal. 2:4; 5:6; Eph 2:20; 3:21; 5:8; Phil 4:7; 2 Tim 1:1, 9, 13; 2:1, 10; 3:15; Philemon 20.

We also note that in many cases where “in Christ” indicates means or instrumentality (see above), the meaning “sphere” of Christ may also be appropriate. Wikenhauser comments, “It is significant that Paul so often wrote ‘in Christ’ in places where we would have expected to read ‘by Christ’. Evidently he wished to bring out the point that to some extent Christ was the abode of God’s gracious presence.”<sup>38</sup> E. Best agrees, “Christ is the ‘place’ in whom believers are and in whom salvation is.”<sup>39</sup> Seifrid also concurs, “Even when ‘in Christ’/‘in the Lord’ is used to describe an instrument or manner of action, ‘Christ’ is understood as a defining ‘sphere.’”<sup>40</sup>

We hasten to add that, although the formula “in Christ” enjoys a great variety of usage, all these usages have certain affinities with the meaning “sphere” of Christ. On the other hand, none of the other above-mentioned meanings is able to encompass the wide range of usages of this phrase as well as the “sphere” of Christ can.

Campbell agrees that the other usages of this formula “are not disconnected from the overarching theme of union.”<sup>41</sup> He also reminds us that the basic meaning of the Greek preposition ἐν (*en*), i.e. “in,” is “location.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the locative sense “should be our first consideration when analyzing each instance.”<sup>43</sup> Longenecker comments,

In most passages where it is possible that Paul meant only Christian by the term, or where it is asserted that the instrumental, causal, source or dynamic idea is uppermost in his thought, the local designation... can just as easily be seen.<sup>44</sup>

We must add that if Paul had wanted to emphasize *various* aspects of our union with Christ, he would have likely used different grammatical constructions employing a variety of prepositions to do so.<sup>45</sup> The fact that he used the same construction, “in Christ,” clearly shows his focus on a unified conception. Therefore, we conclude that the idea “sphere” of Christ or “position” in Him was primary in Paul’s mind.

Moreover, Wikenhauser observes that not only does the phrase “in Christ” relate to our position in Him, but the title “Christ” used alone in the genitive case does as well.<sup>46</sup> The latter carries many of the same connotations as the former, namely: for Christ’s sake (Eph 3:1; Philemon 9), Christ as the source of help (Phil 2:30) and belonging to Christ. In these cases, location “in Him” is implied (Gal 3:29; 5:24; 1 Cor 15:23; 2 Cor 10:7).

Finally, Lincoln holds to the opinion that, unlike the expression “in Christ,” the phrase “in the Lord” focuses more not on who we are in Christ, but on what we must do for Him.<sup>47</sup> E. Best,

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<sup>38</sup>Wikenhauser, p. 25

<sup>39</sup>Best E. *One Body in Christ*. – London: SPCK, 1955. – P. 8. Nonetheless, Best excludes certain texts which seem to indicate the “sphere” of Christ, for example, Col 1:16-17 (Best, p. 20).

<sup>40</sup>Seifrid M. A. *In Christ*. // K. DeRuiter. *Dictionary of Paul and his letters*. No city: InterVarsity Press, 1983. – P. 434.

<sup>41</sup>Campbell C. R., p. 328.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>44</sup>Longenecker, Paul, p. 168.

<sup>45</sup>Longenecker also notes this (Longenecker, Paul, p. 165)

<sup>46</sup>Wikenhauser, p. 34-46.

<sup>47</sup>The following support this view: G. A. Robinson, K. Barth, and C. F. D. Moule. See Lincoln A. T. *Ephesians* // Metzger B. M., Hubbard D. A., Barker G. W. *Word Biblical commentary*. – Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1990. – P. 157.

though, challenges this idea and claims that the two expressions are interchangeable.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, having performed an exhaustive analysis of these expressions, Campbell also discovered that they carry the same connotation.<sup>49</sup>

### **c. Comparing John and Paul**

As we have noted above, John's usage of the concept "union with Christ" differs significantly from Paul's usage. For Paul, union with Christ generally relates to a believer's position before God, the acquisition of salvation, or the lifestyle that flows out of relationship with Christ. John, though, connects union with Christ not only with Christian living, but even more so with fellowship with the Father and the Son. John less often associates union with Christ with salvation.

C. F. D. Moule associates Paul's usage of the concept with Christ's role as the representative of humanity in God's salvation plan, which we will discuss in detail in the next chapter. Moule continues that John, on the other hand, stresses the vital relationship between Christ and His own. Moule also observes that Paul speaks more often of the believer being in Christ than of Christ being in the believer, while John does the opposite.<sup>50</sup> In addition, Seifrid makes the interesting point that, unlike John, Paul rarely speaks of both aspects of union with Christ (Christ in us, and we in Christ) in the same context.<sup>51</sup>

In Macaskill's comparison of these authors, he notes that Paul speaks almost exclusively of union with the Son, while John will speak of union with both the Son and the Father.<sup>52</sup> Paul, in fact, usually speaks of abiding "in God" when quoting the Old Testament (e.g. 2 Cor 6:16).<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, Paul (albeit rarely) will sometimes speak of believers or churches being "in God" (1 Thes 1:1; 2 Thes 1:1; Col 3:3).<sup>54</sup>

So then, in contrasting John and Paul's usages of union with Christ, we see that they clearly compliment one another. In general, Paul sees union with Christ as our position in Him leading to specific benefits of salvation. For John, however, union with Christ leads to the knowledge of the Triune God and vital fellowship with Him. This contrast creates a healthy balance. Although union with Christ is indeed the guarantee of salvation's benefits, we must not understand God's salvation plan as a purely mechanical process. Union with Christ includes personal fellowship with the living God.

## **2. Further Elaboration on the Concept "Sphere of Christ"**

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<sup>48</sup>Best, p. 30-31.

<sup>49</sup>Campbell C. R., p. 73ff, 198.

<sup>50</sup>Moule C. F. D. *The phenomena of the New Testament* // Moule C. F. D., Ackroyd P., Filson F. V., Wright G. E. *Studies in Biblical theology*, 2nd series. – Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1967. – P. 25, 31.

<sup>51</sup>Seifrid, p. 433.

<sup>52</sup>Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament*, p. 22.

<sup>53</sup>Wikenhauser, p. 68-69.

<sup>54</sup>Moule C. F. D., p. 27.

Having examined different instances of Paul's employment of the expression "in Christ," we concluded that its basic sense for Paul is location in the "sphere" of Christ or "position" in Him. In this section, we will seek to clarify exactly what Paul meant by this.

### **a. The Mystical Approach**

In the past, many liberal theologians in their reflections of the phrase "in Christ" interpreted the "sphere" of Christ in mystical terms. Wikenhauser defines mysticism as "that form of spirituality which strives after (or experiences) an immediate contact (or union) of the soul with God."<sup>55</sup>

Although mysticism, in the positive sense of personal fellowship with God, is a natural and desired result of Christ's indwelling the believer, the mystical approach in general exaggerates this idea and thereby introduces a serious distortion of God's truth. In fact, in Paul's thought, personal fellowship with God relates not so much to the idea of the believer being in Christ as to Christ being in the believer.

Many trace the modern study of union with Christ to the work of the German theologian Adolf Deissmann (1866-1937). Along with others, Deissmann associated the believer's position in the "sphere" of Christ with a mystical experience with Him in the Spirit. He understood Paul's thought in the following way.<sup>56</sup> Although Paul acknowledged Jesus Christ as a historical person, he related to Him more as a spiritual entity comparable to the atmosphere in which people live. Life in this "atmosphere" is equated with life "in Christ." Deissmann writes,

Christ is for Paul not a person of the past, with whom he can only come into contact by meditating on the words that have been handed from him, not a "historical" personage, but a reality and power of the present, an "energy," whose life-giving powers are daily expressing themselves in him.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, Deissmann essentially equated Jesus with the Holy Spirit: "Christ is Spirit; therefore He can live in Paul and Paul in Him."<sup>58</sup> Consequently, the preferred method of fellowship with Him is through mystical encounter. In Deissmann's opinion, mysticism is "every religious tendency that discovers the way to God direct through inner experience without the mediation of reasoning. The constitutive element in mysticism is immediacy of contact with the deity."<sup>59</sup> For Paul, his definitive mystical encounter with Christ supposedly occurred on the road to Damascus.

Johannes Weiss (1863-1914) held a similar view.<sup>60</sup> Weiss believed that Jesus was liberated from His bodily condition and now exists in a purely spiritual form. He writes of Christ, "The

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<sup>55</sup>Wikenhauser, p. 14

<sup>56</sup>See Deissmann A. Paul; a study in social and religious history / Trans. W. E. Wilson. – Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1972. – P. 136-157.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>60</sup>See Weiss J. Earliest Christianity; a history of the period A.D. 30-150 / Trans. and ed. F. C. Grant. – New York: Harper & Row, 1937. – V. 2. – P. 463-471.



fixed outlines of the personality had been softened and dissolved, and replaced by the idea of a formless, impersonal, all-penetrating being.”<sup>61</sup> Again, Christ is equated with the Spirit: “What is true of Christ is also true of the Spirit and the reverse.” They are “in some way identical.”<sup>62</sup>

When the Spirit is supposedly imparted at water baptism, the believer is joined with Christ in the Spirit and “Life-powers” from Him flow to the faithful. According to Weiss, “The Spirit appears as a fluid which surrounds us and also penetrates us.”<sup>63</sup> As a result, “(Paul) feels, or thinks he feels, that he has become another; he has been freed entirely from himself, and Christ governs his thinking and willing, like a strange power.”<sup>64</sup>

Another German theologian from this period, Wilhelm Bousset, embraced the mystical approach as well.<sup>65</sup> He understood union with Christ in the following way. All that we really know about the historical Jesus was that He died on the cross. The Early Church, however, glorified Jesus, calling Him “Lord.” In addition, during the celebrations of the Eucharist and water baptism, believers experienced a special feeling of intimacy with the glorified Christ. According to Bousset, Paul went beyond the intimacy connected with the sacraments and sought the Lord in personal mystical encounters. Bousset comments, “Thus for Paul Christ becomes the supra-terrestrial power which supports and fills with its presence his whole life.”<sup>66</sup> Thus, the Holy Spirit is the spirit of Christ, and to be “in Christ” is to be “in the Spirit.”<sup>67</sup>

Unfortunately, the mystical approach sometimes exerts its influence on more conservative theologians as well. Evans, for example, summarizes the view of Geerhardus Vos, an eminent professor of theology at Princeton University in the 19th-20th centuries: “According to Vos, Christ does not merely have the Spirit; he has become Spirit such that the Spirit decisively conditions the human existence of the glorified Second Adam.”<sup>68</sup>

In refutation of the mystical approach, we can highlight two main weaknesses. First, one may challenge equating Christ with the Spirit. Paul repeatedly speaks of Jesus Christ as a real

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 465.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 464.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 467.

<sup>65</sup>See Bousset W. *Kyrios Christos; a history of the belief in Christ from the beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus* / Trans. J. E. Steely. – Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1970. – P. 119-193.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>67</sup>We may list other thinkers who advance the mystical view in some form. Roman Catholic priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin championed a pantheistic view that we, together with all creation, are in unity with God. Therefore, we are in union with Christ in connection with our participation in the created order (See Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, p. 296-297. Noted in Erickson, M. *Christian theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985. – P. 949). Friedrich Schleiermacher equated union with Christ with an awareness of His presence. In such an awareness “impulses flow to us from Him.” (See Schleiermacher F. *The Christian Faith*. – 2nd. ed. / Ed. H. R. Mackintosh, J. S. Stewart. – Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928. – P. 425-426). Weber concurs, “Paul’s consciousness is filled with Christ; Christ is the focus of his interest, and the thought of Christ influences him everywhere” (*Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift*, p. 213; noted in Wikenhauser, p. 97). Paul Tillich taught that in Christ we discover the “New Being” that delivers us from “existential estrangement.” A person must experience the “inner power of the New Being in Jesus Christ” (See Tillich P. *Systematic theology*. – Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957. – V. 2. – P. 172).

<sup>68</sup>Evans W. B. Three current reformed models on union with Christ // *Presbyterion* 41/1-2. 2015. P. 22. This view reminds one of James Dunn’s errant conviction that “the Spirit is that which is divine in Christ” (Noted in Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament*, p. 29).

historical figure and a divine Person in distinction from the Spirit.<sup>69</sup> In addition, Wikenhauser observes that when in Scripture the Son is associated with the Spirit, the sense is not to equate them as persons, but to indicate their corporate work in the life of the believer. Moreover, Wikenhauser explains that in 1 Corinthians 15:45, when we read that Christ is a “life-giving spirit,” Paul does not mean that He became the Holy Spirit, but that He now dwells in a glorified, spiritual body.<sup>70</sup>

Second, the classic mystical approach to the knowledge of God in general leads to serious distortions. Carl Henry voices the following objections to mysticism.<sup>71</sup> In classic mysticism, people are “absorbed” into God and lose their individuality. Such thinking is foreign to Paul’s theology. Henry writes, “The character is profoundly altered by the new birth, but the ‘I’ or ‘me’ remains an ontological reality” (see Gal 2:20). Second, in the words of Henry,

The Bible moreover prescribes no mystical exercises or occultist techniques for approaching deity; it proclaims instead the intelligible comprehensibility of divine revelation and approves intelligible verbal prayer to God, as Jesus himself exhorted his followers to address the Father (Matt. 6:9ff).

In addition, Henry notes that the human dilemma consists not in “ontological disjunction from the Divine... to be overcome by man’s pursuit of ecstatic union with the Ineffable,” but in separation from God because of human sin. In consequence, due to the close association of the term “mysticism” with unbiblical convictions and practices, Henry even recommends avoiding its use in describing a believer’s personal fellowship with the Lord.<sup>72</sup>

Other objections to mysticism exist as well. Rightmire correctly notes that union with Christ is not a personal achievement, as mystical aspirations are, but a gift of God received by faith (see 1 Cor 1:30). He also highlights the moral question, since true union with Christ aids one not only in knowing God, but in obeying Him as well.<sup>73</sup> In refutation of a pantheistic understanding of union with Christ, Martin aptly claims, “This union must never be thought of in such a way as to blur the distinction between the Creator and the creature.”<sup>74</sup> Additionally, Macaskill and others denounce mysticism because it minimizes the personal character of the believer, while true union with Christ enhances it.<sup>75</sup>

In summary, although the Christian experience of “Christ in us” certainly contains a subjective element that we may roughly term “mysticism” (in the sense of personal fellowship with the Lord), this feature in no way exhausts the entire concept of union with Christ and in no way justifies the exaggerated idea that Christ can be equated with the Spirit.

## **b. The Historico-Redemptive Approach**

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<sup>69</sup>For example, see Matt 28:19; Jn 15:26; 1 Cor 12:3; 6:11; 2 Cor 13:14; 1 Pet 1:2 and many others.

<sup>70</sup>Wikenhauser, p. 84-87.

<sup>71</sup>Henry C. F. H. God, revelation, and authority. – Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999. – V. 1. – P. 73.

<sup>72</sup>Campbell concurs (Campbell C. R., p. 412).

<sup>73</sup>Rightmire, Union with Christ, p. 792.

<sup>74</sup>Martin A. N. Union with Christ // Lecture series at Toronto Baptist Seminary, February 15-17, 1978. – P. 42.

<sup>75</sup>Macaskill, Union with Christ in the New Testament, p. 166; Stewart J. S. A man in Christ. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975. – P. 16; Wilbourne, p. 179.

Beside the mystical approach, an alternative view exists called the historico-redemptive approach. According to this theory, our position in Christ possesses a historico-redemptive character, that is, it concerns our real participation in the historico-redemptive events in the earthly career of the Savior, who serves as our representative before the Father.

The key verse in confirmation of this approach is 1 Corinthians 1:30, where we read, “By His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.” We note that according to this verse, our position in Christ does not consist in some mystical encounter with Him, but that He *became* something for us as our representative, namely, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. So then, due to our position in Christ we are justified, sanctified, and redeemed.

Paul echoes this thought in 2 Corinthians 5:21: “He made Him who knew no sin {to be} sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Again we see that “in Him” we are counted righteous because He “was made” something for us – a sacrifice for sin.

Many passages point to our position in Christ as the arena of our salvation. “In Him” we have salvation (Phil 3:9; Eph 1:7, 13; Col 1:14; 2 Tim 2:10), new creation (2 Cor 5:17), fullness (Col 2:10), access to God (Eph 2:13; 3:12), resurrection (1 Cor 15:22), inheritance (Eph 1:10-11; 2:7) and much more. Clearly, union with Christ results not only in fellowship with God, but also in the acquisition of salvation.

Even though in the mystical approach the believer experiences salvation as well, the representative nature of Christ’s work is not recognized, but the benefits of salvation come through mystical encounter, as Schleiermacher claims, “Impulses flow to us from Him.”<sup>76</sup> According to Scripture, though, the blessings of salvation come to us by virtue of the fact that Christ “became” something for us as our representative.

In order to unpack the concept of the “sphere” of Christ in line with the historico-redemptive approach, we will employ, with some modifications, the methodology of C. R. Campbell.<sup>77</sup> We will demonstrate that the believer’s position in Christ consists of three elements: (1) the role of Christ as our representative, (2) our participation in the redemptive events of Christ’s life,<sup>78</sup> and (3) our inclusion in the Body of Christ, i.e., the Church. We will devote the next chapter to the theme of Christ’s representative role in redemption. Chapter 3 will discuss our participation in the redemptive events of Christ’s life and participation in His Body, the Church. In the following lines, though, we will attempt a brief resume of these three themes.

In dealing with Christ’s representative role in redemption, we encounter a prominent biblical theme called “corporate personality,” which we will discuss in detail in the next chapter. In brief, according to this principle, one person can represent an entire group before God with the result that the representative’s actions affect the entire group. In other words, God deals

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<sup>76</sup>Schleiermacher, p. 425-426. Weber concurs, “Paul’s consciousness is filled with Christ; Christ is the focus of his interest, and the thought of Christ influences him everywhere” (Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift, p. 213; noted in Wikenhauser, p. 97).

<sup>77</sup>Campbell C. R., p. 413.

<sup>78</sup>We will employ the expression “redemptive events” to indicate Christ’s death, resurrection, exaltation and Second Coming.

with an entire group as with one entity. In relation to salvation, our “corporate head” is Jesus Christ.

For the time being, we will delay examining biblical texts demonstrating this principle, but will instead appeal to authors writing in confirmation of its presence in Scripture. Rightmire, for example, writes, “When the apostles John and Paul speak of being ‘in Christ,’ they are referring to solidarity with the corporate personality.”<sup>79</sup> E. Best agrees, “The solidarity of the Elect with Christ seems explicable in terms of corporate personality.”<sup>80</sup> Berkhof adds, “Christ is representative of His Body in an ‘organic’ union.”<sup>81</sup>

Letham makes an important distinction between the concepts of “representation” and “substitution,” the latter connoting “taking the place of another.” He correctly asserts that Christ’s representation of humanity before God includes an element of substitution as well. This is evident in His taking sinful humanity’s place on the cross. Yet, Christ could be our substitute only in virtue of His being our representative.<sup>82</sup> Harris holds the same opinion: “When Christ died, he was acting both on behalf of and in the place of all human beings. He represented them by becoming their substitute.”<sup>83</sup>

Concerning our participation in the redemptive events of Christ’s life, the Bible clearly teaches that God made us participants in four events in the Savior’s earthly career: His death, His resurrection, His exaltation, and His Second Coming. In other words, the believer has died with Christ, been raised with Him, exalted with Him, and will be glorified at His appearance.

The final element of the believer’s position in Christ is participation in His Body, the Church. Being “in Christ” as individuals means being united with other believers, who are also “in Him.” Because of union with Christ, there is an intrinsic unity between all believers in Him.

Clowney comments on this aspect: “Union with Christ does bind Christians together by the ties of the Spirit. By our union with Christ, we are united to each other.”<sup>84</sup> Longenecker echoes this thought, “The Apostle could never envisage a Christian who could rejoice in the personal aspect of being ‘in Christ’ without likewise accepting the corporate and social nature of that relationship.”<sup>85</sup> M. P. Johnson adds, “The soteriological reality of being joined to Christ is at one and the same time the ecclesiological reality of being joined to Christ.”<sup>86</sup>

Finally, C. F. D. Moule makes an important qualification that union with Christ does not mean that the believer is totally identified with Christ – this is not a “union of identity.”<sup>87</sup> Even though we stand in union with Christ, we remain individual persons. The term “corporate personality” simply indicates that Christ is our representative, and that we participate in certain events in His history.

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<sup>79</sup>Rightmire, *Union with Christ*, p. 791.

<sup>80</sup>Best, p. 16-17.

<sup>81</sup>Berkhof L. *Systematic Theology*. – 4th ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1941. – P. 448.

<sup>82</sup>Letham, p. 62-64.

<sup>83</sup>Harris, p. 421.

<sup>84</sup>Clowney E. P. *The Biblical theology of the Church* // Carson D. A. *The Church in the Bible and the world: an international study*. – World Evangelical Fellowship, 1987. – P. 56.

<sup>85</sup>Longenecker, Paul, p. 167.

<sup>86</sup>Johnson M. P., p. 196.

<sup>87</sup>Moule C. F. D., p. 27.

### C. Christ's Presence in the Believer

According to Scripture, not only is the believer in Christ, but Christ is in the believer. As mentioned earlier, the apostle John especially emphasizes this aspect of union with Christ, but Paul makes mention of it as well, yet not as frequently. Note the following examples:<sup>88</sup>

- It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me (Gal 2:20)
- Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col 1:27)
- If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness (Rom 8:10)
- ...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith (Eph 3:17)
- Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? (2 Cor 13:5)

So then, both John and Paul confirm that union with Christ consists of two elements: we in Christ and Christ in us. Clowney makes the following comment: "We are not only in Christ; Christ is in us. That is to say, Christ not only stands in our place, he also dwells in our hearts."<sup>89</sup> Similarly, Walvoord claims that union with Christ "is not identification alone; it is also a union of life. Through regeneration the believer partakes of eternal life. He is united to Christ not alone by divine reckoning, but also in the reality of common life."<sup>90</sup>

Comparing the presence of Christ in the believer with the position of the believer in Christ, C. F. D. Moule makes the following important qualification: "The believer exists completely in Christ while Christ does not exist completely in the believer."<sup>91</sup> In other words, the entire life of the believer in every respect is located in Christ, yet He does not manifest through any single believer the fullness of His divine glory.

Wiersbe also makes a valuable contribution to our discussion by noting that, although at times we do experience a feeling of closeness to the Lord in our personal fellowship with Him, our union with Christ is not based on feeling, but on fact. We accept the truth of His dwelling in us by faith.<sup>92</sup> Finally, Martin aptly comments that when Christ lives in and through us, "it is not a union that negates the full exercise of all my redeemed humanity."<sup>93</sup> In other words, we do not become puppets in the hands of God, but real participants in the manifestation of His life through us.

All must agree that Christ Himself does not indwell the believer, but the person of the Holy Spirit.<sup>94</sup> Consequently, in the writings of Paul we see many references to the indwelling Spirit. Smedes affirms that the Spirit so closely identifies Himself with Christ that one may speak of His

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<sup>88</sup>Wikenhauser includes 1 Corinthians 2:16 – "We have the mind of Christ" (Wikenhauser, p. 65-66).

<sup>89</sup>Clowney, *The Biblical theology of the Church*, p. 170.

<sup>90</sup>Walvoord, *The work of the Holy Spirit*, p. 427.

<sup>91</sup>Moule C. F. D., p. 26.

<sup>92</sup>Wiersbe W. W. *Prayer: Basic training*. – Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988. – P. 128-129.

<sup>93</sup>Martin A. N., p. 53.

<sup>94</sup>The following support this view: J. Calvin, L. Smedes, M. Erickson, R. Gaffin, E. Clowney and many others (See Smedes L. B. *Union with Christ*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983. – P. 127-129; Erickson, p. 952-953; Gaffin, *Union with Christ*, p. 274; Clowney, *The Biblical theology of the Church*, p. 55).

indwelling as the indwelling of Christ Himself: "He (the Spirit) is the functioning Christ."<sup>95</sup> At times, the New Testament even speaks of the Holy Spirit as the "Spirit of (Jesus) Christ" (Phil 1:19; Rom 8:9). In Romans 8:9-10, the phrase "Christ in you" is equated with the indwelling of the Spirit.

In addition, Wikenhauser notes in Scripture the following parallels between Christ and the Spirit.<sup>96</sup> Both in Christ and in the Spirit believers: stand (Phil 1:27; 4:1); speak (2 Cor 2:17; Rom 9:1); have fellowship (1 Cor 1:9; 2 Cor 13:13); have joy (Phil 4:4; Rom 14:17); have life (Col 3:4; Gal 5:25); are sanctified (1 Cor 1:2; Rom 15:16); are justified (Gal 2:17; 1 Cor 6:11); will be raised (1 Cor 15:22; Rom 8:11); and abide (1 Cor 1:30; Rom 8:9).

At the same time, Rightmire stresses that we must not fully identify the Spirit with the Son: "Paul distinguishes between Christ and the Spirit, but views the function of the latter as mediating the former to believers."<sup>97</sup> F. F. Bruce similarly asserts,

It appears, then, that there is no difference between the indwelling of the Spirit and the indwelling of the risen Christ, so far as the believer's experience is concerned, although this does not mean that Paul identified the risen Christ and the Spirit outright. There is a dynamic equivalence between them, but they are nevertheless distinguished. The Spirit conveys the resurrection life of Christ to believers (which may be further reason for his being called the Spirit of Christ).<sup>98</sup>

Although it is imperative to take into consideration both aspects of union with Christ, some commentators emphasize the indwelling of Christ in the believer to the neglect of our positional aspect "in Him." Among such thinkers, we may include none other than the great reformer John Calvin. Although at times he speaks of our place in Christ, he gives greater prominence to the action of the indwelling Spirit. Calvin writes,

Therefore, to that union of the head and members, the residence of Christ in our hearts, in fine, the mystical union, we assign the highest rank, Christ when he becomes ours making us partners with him in the gifts with which he was endued (*Institutes of the Christian Faith*, 3.11.10).

Some commentators go beyond Calvin and regard the believer's position in Christ as simply life "in the Spirit." Being "in Christ" is simply living in the Spirit's presence and in fellowship with Him. This resonates with the liberal, "mystic" view discussed previously.

For example, Wilhelm Bousset claims that being "in Christ" and "in the Spirit" is the same thing, and that our position in Christ is derived from our position in the Spirit.<sup>99</sup> In Wikenhauser's opinion, believers are "all surrounded and permeated by the one spiritual

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<sup>95</sup>Smedes, p. 135. A. Wikenhauser claims that in us "Christ works thru the Holy Spirit" (Wikenhauser, p. 58). Also see Moule C. D. F., p. 25.

<sup>96</sup>Wikenhauser, p. 53-54.

<sup>97</sup>Rightmire, *Union with Christ*, p. 792.

<sup>98</sup>Bruce F. F. *Paul: Apostle of the heart set free*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977, reprint 1988. – P. 313.

<sup>99</sup>Noted in Campbell C. R., p. 34.

Christ,” and “Christians live in him and receive from him continuous supernatural powers.”<sup>100</sup> Smedes not only claims that “When the Spirit is in us, Christ is in us,” but also, “When we are in the Spirit, we are in Christ.”<sup>101</sup> Stewart agrees that being “in Christ” means being “in the Spirit,” claiming that “Christ is the redeemed man's new environment,” that is, the new atmosphere in which he lives.<sup>102</sup>

However, later in this volume we will demonstrate the biblical teaching of our position in Christ. It consists not in the presence of the Holy Spirit, but in the representative role of the Son and the believer's participation in the redemptive events of His history. So then, our position in Christ does not derive from our relationship with the Spirit, but vice versa. The work of the Spirit is to actualize in our lives the benefits we enjoy in virtue of our position in Christ. Tannehill concurs, asserting that the personal experience of the believer with the Spirit depends upon “the objective status of being-in-Christ.”<sup>103</sup> Seifrid also affirms that being “in Christ” results in life “in the Spirit,” and not the other way around.<sup>104</sup> In chapter 6, we will examine in more detail the role of the Spirit in applying the benefits of our position in Christ.

Shedd, therefore, errors in proposing that our legal standing “in Christ” derives from His personal presence in our lives, i.e., “Christ in us.” He writes, “Upon this spiritual and mystical union, rests the federal and legal union between Christ and his people. Because they are spiritually, vitally, eternally, and mystically one with him, his merit is imputable to them, and their demerit is imputable to him.”<sup>105</sup>

Contrary to Shedd, as we already discussed, the major outcome of our experience of “Christ in us” is the practical application of all of salvation's benefits provided for us through our legal standing in Christ and our corresponding participation in His life events. In addition, we must ask how the Spirit of God (i.e., “Christ in us”) can enter the heart of those who have not yet received their legal status of justification before God? It is imperative that our legal status precedes our personal experience with the Spirit. In Galatians 4:6, Paul announced, “Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” Note that God's Spirit enters the heart only after the believer has received the forensic status of adoption into God's family.

The following scheme will graphically summarize the believer's union with Jesus Christ:

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

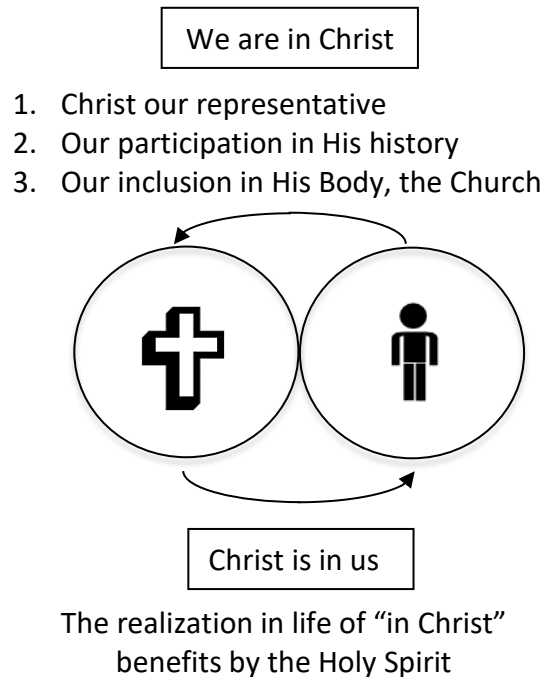
<sup>101</sup>Smedes, p. 54. Yet, in another place, Smedes more accurately speaks of the believer's position in Christ in terms of His redemptive work: “A new historical situation was created for men by Christ; to be in that situation, which began at Calvary and climaxes in the ‘new earth’ to come, is to be ‘in Christ’” (Smedes, p. 91).

<sup>102</sup>Stewart, p. 157. Rightmire also embraces this exaggerated view, asserting that in the expression “in Christ,” Christ is understood “mystically as the Spirit of the glorified Lord.” He compares Him with the air, which both surrounds and indwells a person (Rightmire, *Union with Christ*, p. 789-790).

<sup>103</sup>Noted in Thiselton A. C. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text // The new international Greek Testament commentary*. – Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000. – P. 189-190.

<sup>104</sup>Seifrid, p. 434.

<sup>105</sup>Noted in Evans, p. 27, who also cites Gaffin in support (p. 24).



#### D. Origin of the Concept “Union with Christ”

Debates have raged about the origin of the concept “union with Christ.” How exactly did Paul arrive at this conception? Did he borrow it from another source? Liberal theologians assert that he adapted it from Hellenistic thought, more specifically, from the “mystery religions.” Let us investigate this claim.

Among those championing a Hellenistic origin, we can mention J. Weiss, who claimed that Paul’s ideas are “connected in some way with the language of the Hellenistic mystery cults.”<sup>106</sup> In Weiss’ opinion, Paul adapted the Stoic idea of an all-encompassing, impersonal force governing the universe to Christ and His Spirit.

Wilhelm Bousset, whose view on mysticism we have already discussed, also advocates this position.<sup>107</sup> Although he acknowledges a distinction between Paul’s teaching and Hellenism, nonetheless he considers that Paul borrowed the idea of the believer’s participation in the death and resurrection of Christ from pagan myths: “One will not be able to avoid the impression that here (i.e., in Hellenism) is given the spiritual atmosphere within which the Pauline dying-with-Christ and rising-with-Christ is located.”<sup>108</sup>

It is curious to note that in ancient Greece, myths existed which in ways resemble the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the mystery religions of Orisis, Attis and Dionysis, ritual participation in the death and resurrection of a god claimed to lead to liberation and deification. There also existed the myth of the “heavenly man,” who descends from heaven, gathers his faithful and

<sup>106</sup>Weiss, p. 463.

<sup>107</sup>Bousset, p. 157, 164-167, 193.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 193.



returns to heaven.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, as an example of the principle of “solidarity” in ancient Greece, Porter cites the tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, where an entire city was punished for the king’s transgression. In Sophocles’ version of this tragedy, the king appeals to Tiresias for help with the words, ἐν σοὶ γὰρ ἔσμεν, i.e. “because we are in you.”

On the other hand, many object to this theory, citing clear distinctions between Paul’s thought and the teachings of Hellenism.<sup>110</sup> According to the mystery religions, people obtain salvation through participation in a ritual act, while Paul considers the saving act to be the historical death and resurrection of Christ. In addition, the Greek legends are mythological, while Christianity is based on real history. Moreover, the “god” of Stoicism is an impersonal force that penetrates the universe, unlike the God that Paul served.

How about the incident in the tragedy *Oedipus Rex*? C. F. D. Moule responds that solidarity is not in view here, but simply an appeal for help in the sense “we are relying on you!”<sup>111</sup> We also consider that the mystery religions appeared *after* Christianity, and that their devotees anticipated absorption into the deity, which Paul never taught. In refutation of this theory, others note that Paul’s teaching leads to the moral transformation of the worshippers and healthy relationships between them, which the mysteries do not promote. Finally, in the mysteries, the devotee takes the initiative to seek union with God, while Paul taught that God takes the initiative to reach out to us: “By His doing you are in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:30).

We may also point out that Paul was not a Hellenist, but a “Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee” (Phil 3:5) and was “educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers” (Acts 22:3). In addition, the material to be presented in the next chapter leaves little doubt that Paul derived his ideas of solidarity from the Old Testament. Bruce confirms, “Paul was thoroughly conversant with the Hebrew concept of corporate personality.”<sup>112</sup>

So then, Paul did not borrow his conception of union with Christ from the Greeks, but followed the clear Old Testament principle of solidarity, which we will investigate in the next chapter. He derived his understanding not from mystery religions, but under the tutorage of the Holy Spirit, who led and instructed him.

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<sup>109</sup>Noted in Davies W. D. *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: some Rabbinic elements in Pauline theology*. – 2nd ed. – London: SPCK, 1958. – P. 89; Wikenhauser, p. 191-192; Best, p. 45, 86.

<sup>110</sup>Davies, p. 90-91; Wikenhauser, p. 197; Moule C. F. D., p. 40; Ridderbos H. *Paul: an outline of his theology* / Trans. J. R. De Witt. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975. – P. 59-60; Shedd R. P. *Man in community: A study of St. Paul’s application of the Old Testament and early Jewish conceptions of human solidarity*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964. – P. 96-97; Longenecker, Paul, p. 162-163; Best, p. 164.

<sup>111</sup>Moule, C. F. D., p. 40.

<sup>112</sup>Bruce F. F. *Epistle of Paul to the Romans*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963. – P. 126.



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## Chapter 2. Christ Our Representative

In chapter 1, we claimed that our position in Christ consisted of three elements: (1) the role of Christ as our representative, (2) our participation in the redemptive events of Christ's life, and (3) our participation in the Body of Christ, i.e., the Church. We will devote this chapter to the first of these elements, Christ as our representative, which is based on the biblical concept of "corporate personality."

As mentioned earlier, "corporate personality" refers to the phenomenon, often encountered in Scripture, when God deals with an entire group as with one entity. According to this system, the fate of a representative of the group becomes the fate of the entire group.

The theologian possibly championing this theory more than any other, H. Wheeler Robinson, defined it thusly: "The whole group, including its past, present, and future members, might function as a single individual through any one of those members conceived as representative of it."<sup>113</sup> Shedd defines it from a different angle as "the application of merit or demerit to those who did not individually participate in its evoking cause."<sup>114</sup>

Even the expression itself, "corporate personality," hints at its meaning. In the world of business, individual companies can unite to form a corporation, where they combine their assets and liabilities into a single account. Thus, two entities become one. The same occurs in marriage, where two people not only unite their finances, but also adopt a common life.

### A. Corporate Personality in the Old Testament

#### 1. Description and Examples

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<sup>113</sup>Robinson H. W. Corporate personality in ancient Israel. – Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1964. – P. 25. We must qualify, though, that the concept of corporate personality presented in this book differs somewhat from Robinson's understanding. Robinson focused more on solidarity as a feature of Hebrew culture. He wrote, "The group possesses a consciousness which is distributed among its individual members and does not exist simply as a figure of speech or as an ideal" (Robinson, Corporate personality, p. 30). We will demonstrate, though, that this principle has its roots not in Hebrew thought or culture, but in God's dealings with His people.

<sup>114</sup>Shedd, Man in community, p. 12-13.

The conception “corporate personality” was no novelty to God’s people – they observed it throughout their history.<sup>115</sup> This confirms our earlier conviction that the apostle Paul derived his “union with Christ” doctrine from the Old Testament revelation and not from Hellenistic thought.

Let us look at some examples. In Numbers 16:27-33, we learn of the rebellion of Dathan and Abiram, whose families perished along with them in their rebellion. When Hiel disobeyed and rebuilt Jericho, it was not he who perished, but his sons (Josh 6:25; 1 Kin 16:34). Moreover, when Achan sinned, his entire family shared in his tragic fate (Josh 7:1-5, 24-26). The Bible records that Canaan incurred a curse because of his father’s inappropriate act (Gen 9:25ff). David’s sin with Bathsheba led to his son’s premature death and other later calamities in his family (2 Sam 12:11-14). Gehazi’s greed led to a similar result (2 Kin 5:27).

The representative of the people is sometimes the king. In 2 Samuel 1, we read that in the days of David God punished Israel with a three-year famine for a sin previously committed by Saul. Moreover, as a result, Saul’s sons were executed. When David held an “illegal” census of the people, he himself suffered no personal consequences, but the inhabitants of Jerusalem suffered instead (2 Sam 24:15-17; 1 Chr 21:7). The idolatry of Solomon resulted in the division of Israel into separate kingdoms (1 Kin 11:12-13), and similar behavior by Jeroboam and Ahab led to a curse on their offspring (1 Kin 14:10-12; 2 Kin 21:21-24). Because of Manasseh’s sins, the people of Judah were exiled to Babylon (2 Kin 21:1-18; 23:26-27; 23:36-24:6).<sup>116</sup>

The system of corporate personality applied not only to Israel, but to other people groups as well.<sup>117</sup> Because the Moabites and Ammonites refused to aid Israel on its route to Canaan, they were excluded from the assembly of Israel for ten generations (Deut 23:3-6). The Amalekites as a whole were punished for a similar reason. Saul was commanded,

Thus says Yahweh of hosts, “I will punish Amalek {for} what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey” (1 Sam 15:2-3).

We may cite other examples. When the people of Israel entered Canaan, God directed them to exterminate the entire population of the region. In addition, the entire household of Abimelech was placed in jeopardy when he took Abraham’s wife (Gen 20:7, 18; also see Gen 26:10). The people of Edom incurred a curse and became subject to Israel because of their patriarch Esau (Gen 27:37; Mal 1:3-4). All of Egypt suffered because of the stubbornness of Pharaoh (Ex 7-12), just as the family of Haman suffered for his guilt (Esther 9:6-10).

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<sup>115</sup>Several examples were taken from Robinson, Corporate personality; Shedd, Man in community; and Kaminsky J. S. Corporate responsibility in the Hebrew Bible // Clines D., Davies P. R., eds Supplemental Series of the Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, no. 196. – Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.

<sup>116</sup>At the same time, Kaminsky notes that, along with Manasseh, the people also shared in the guilt (see 2 Kin 21:15; 22:17; 24:20). Therefore, in this instance of punishment, there existed both corporative and individual factors (Kaminsky, p. 38-39).

<sup>117</sup>Examples taken from Robinson, Corporate personality; Shedd, Man in community; and Kaminsky, Corporate responsibility.

On the other hand, according to this principle of solidarity, one may not only incur undeserved retribution, but also attain undeserved blessing. For example, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob received an inheritance in the promised land thanks to the faithfulness of their ancestors. Even Ishmael received a blessing, because he, too, was a descendent of Abraham (Gen 21:13).

Deuteronomy 10:15 provides a direct confirmation of our claim that God's blessing on Israel is derived from Abraham's relationship with Him: "Yet on your fathers did Yahweh set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, {even} you above all peoples, as {it is} this day." Isaiah makes the same association: "But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, descendant of Abraham My friend" (Isa 41:8). Shedd correctly states, "It was for the sake of the patriarch Abraham that all the signal interventions... on Israel's behalf were wrought."<sup>118</sup>

In a similar way, all the descendants of Aaron, both the godly and the ungodly, inherited the priesthood. The high priest served as representative for the entire people of God. The Lord commanded Moses, "As a jeweler engraves a signet, you shall engrave the two stones according to the names of the sons of Israel; you shall set them in filigree {settings} of gold. You shall put the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, {as} stones of memorial for the sons of Israel, and Aaron shall bear their names before Yahweh on his two shoulders for a memorial" (Ex 28:11-12). In Shedd's words, "The priest incorporated the group in himself and presented himself as a corporate personality to God."<sup>119</sup>

In the same fashion, sons of David ascended the throne thanks to his faithfulness to the Lord. We read in Isaiah 37:35 that God will defend Jerusalem not for the sake of the leaders of that time, but "for My own sake and for My servant David's sake." Moreover, blessings came upon the descendants of Phinehas (Num 25:12-13), Jehu (2 Kin 10:30) and Lot (Gen 19). Concerning Lot's case, Shedd insightfully observes that the subsequent behavior of Lot's daughters shows that God spared them not because of their own godliness, but for their father Lot's sake.<sup>120</sup> Finally, Jacob's prophetic declaration concerning his immediate sons determined the future fates of the twelve tribes of Israel who descended from them (Gen 49).

This principle of solidarity stands behind the edict in Ex 20:5-6 (Deut 5:9-10): "...visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

We may cite many passages in the poetic books indicating curses on the descendants of the ungodly (Ps 20:11; 37:28) and blessing for the descendants of the righteous (Ps 24:12-13; 36:25-26; 68:36-37; 101:29; 111:2-3; Prov 11:21). It is important to note that we cannot attribute the blessing on the descendants of the righteous to excellent childrearing by the parents. The book of Proverbs contains many directives for proper childrearing, but only one promise for blessing on children (Prov 11:21). The Psalms contain most of the promises of blessing, yet they say nothing about proper childrearing.

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<sup>118</sup>Shedd, *Man in community*, p. 60.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 18.

The book of Hebrews introduces an interesting example of corporate personality. According to the author of Hebrews, while Levi was still unborn in the “loins” of Abraham, he paid tithes through Abraham to Melchizedek (Heb 7:9-10; see Gen 14). In this manner, the author of Hebrews argues that the priesthood of Melchizedek, who received tithes, is greater than the priesthood of Levi, who paid them.

We must not omit the example of the “scapegoat” (Lev 16). Lattey makes the following comment, “But whatever interpretation be put upon the scapegoat, that some sort of solidarity is established between it and the offerer... will hardly be denied.”<sup>121</sup> In addition, the entire Old Testament sacrificial system worked off the principle that a sacrificial animal can serve as a substitute for individual in need of forgiveness.

However, we must qualify that those under corporate punishment could escape it by means of personal devotion to the Lord. This was so in the case of Rahab, who should have perished along with the other inhabitants of Jericho (Josh 2:8-14; 6:22-24).<sup>122</sup> Yet, she was delivered because she feared God. In addition, the Moabites were excluded from the assembly of Israel, yet Ruth was welcomed due to her faithfulness. Furthermore, one of the descendants of the cursed Jeroboam received mercy because “in him something good was found toward the Yahweh God of Israel” (1 Kin 14:13). Finally, some Egyptians, who heeded the warning from God, saved their possessions from the hail (Ex 9:20). Therefore, we cannot claim that corporate punishment is inevitable.

On the other hand, those who are recipients of corporate blessing may still forfeit it through personal disobedience. For example, David’s dynasty ended (in Old Testament times) because it strayed from the God of Israel. In addition, the descendants of Eli were excluded from the priesthood because of their unruly lives. Reuben lost his birthright because “he defiled his father’s bed” (1 Chr 5:1). Leviticus 26:42 announces that Israel must repent in order to inherit the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Two sons of Aaron perished because of disrespect for the Lord’s ordinances (Lev 10:1-2). Concerning the spiritual condition of Israel in Ezekiel’s time, God said, “Even {though} these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, by their {own} righteousness they could {only} deliver themselves” (Ezek 14:14).<sup>123</sup> Therefore, it is not impossible to lose a corporate blessing.

Finally, Kaminsky reminds us that, even though later generations may be punished for personal sins, there exists a phenomenon of “accumulated” guilt, which may introduce a corporate factor in their chastisement. He writes,

“The fact that the generation which received the punishment was sinful does not necessarily mean that the punishment follows the principle of individualized retribution. This is clearly a case of trans-generational corporate retribution in which the party who receives the punishment did act wickedly, but nevertheless received the punishment that had been building for several generations.”<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup>Lattey C. Vicarious solidarity in the Old Testament // *Vetus Testamentum* 1. 1951. P. 272.

<sup>122</sup>Also of note is that by her faith, Rahab secured not only her own safety, but also safety for her family (Josh 2:12-13). However, in this case the family still needed to fulfill a condition – stay in the house during the battle (Josh 2:18-19).

<sup>123</sup>Noted in Shedd, *Man in community*, p. 19.

<sup>124</sup>Kaminsky, p. 44.

In support of this thesis, Kaminsky cites Gen 15:16, where it is written that God's punishment of the Amorites had been delayed because "the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete."

## **2. Answers to Objections**

Nonetheless, the above-mentioned exceptions do not nullify the principle of solidarity. The original status of blessing the priests, kings and people in general enjoyed was not due to their merit, but because of the faithfulness of their ancestors. Additionally, even if some descendants lost the corporate blessing, the opportunity to obtain it still remained for future generations.

In spite of the overwhelming witness to this principle in the Old Testament, some commentators still challenge its validity, namely J. Porter and G. Rogerson.<sup>125</sup> Their counterarguments have caused many to doubt H. Wheeler Robinson's views on corporate personality. However, in the light of the conclusive biblical evidence supporting it, we must affirm with Bodine, "The movement away from Robinson is unfortunate, since there is a recognition in the Old Testament of a corporate reality."<sup>126</sup> Shedd agrees, "The evidence which can be garnered from almost every page of the Old Testament approves H. W. Robinson's choice of the descriptive term, 'corporate personality.'"<sup>127</sup>

Porter objects that the Law of Moses proscribed punishments only for the individual offender, not for groups. He feels that instances of corporate punishment occurred only in cases where the transgression was especially severe.

Porter also offers alternative explanations to some examples of solidarity in the Old Testament text: (1) a man's family was considered his property, and so their affliction served as punishment for him as well; (2) sin creates a certain physical "uncleanliness" that must be cleansed in order to restore ceremonial purity; (3) since a man's name lived on through his descendants, their punishment had repercussions for him as well; (4) a leader could be punished by loss of his subjects.

However, Porter's objections prove unsubstantial. First, he tries to replace the unifying concept of "corporate personality" with a variety of different solutions. We may appeal here to the well-accepted maxim, "Occan's razor," which states, "When presented with competing hypotheses about the same prediction, one should prefer the one that requires the fewest assumptions."<sup>128</sup>

Second, the explanations Porter suggests also depend on the principle of solidarity. As Kaminsky notes, Porter has not "eliminated the notion of corporateness by providing other alternative explanations that are non-corporate", he simply presents "various aspects of a common way of corporate thinking."<sup>129</sup> When Porter claims that: (1) a man's family is

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<sup>125</sup>Rogerson J. W. The Hebrew conception of corporate personality: A re-examination // Journal of Theological Studies 21. 1970. P. 1-16.

<sup>126</sup>Bodine W. R. Review of "Corporate personality in ancient Israel" by H. Wheeler Robinson // Bibliotheca Sacra 139. 1982. P. 277 (CD-ROM from Galaxie Software, Garland, TX).

<sup>127</sup>Shedd, Man in community, p. 41.

<sup>128</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occam%27s\\_razor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occam%27s_razor)

<sup>129</sup>Kaminsky, p. 20.

considered his property, (2) a man can be punished by losing his offspring, and (3) a leader can be punished by losing his subjects, is this not an appeal to solidarity?

Porter does correctly note that corporate punishment is absent from the Mosaic Law. In fact, Deuteronomy 24:16 forbids it. Nevertheless, the fact that Mosaic Law does not proscribe corporate punishment does not nullify the many examples where God in fact dealt with people groups in this fashion. As far as Deuteronomy 24:16 goes, one may assume that here God forbids *people* from applying this principle on their own initiative. Yet, God is free to take the initiative in applying corporate retribution.

Rogerson's objections address the research methodology of H. Wheeler Robinson. Rogerson feels that in his research Robinson drew heavily from the work of Henry Maine on ancient law codes and the work of L. Levy-Bruhl on anthropology. Rogerson discredits Levy-Bruhl's research and claims that Robinson misinterpreted Maine. On this basis, Rogerson feels that Robinson's conclusions should be abandoned.

However, Rogerson's claim that flaws in Robinson's research methodology undermines his conclusions is unfounded. One may actually agree with Rogerson's objections without jeopardizing one's confidence in the concept of corporate personality. If corporate personality adequately explains the biblical data and provides us with a useful conceptual model, then it makes no difference how Robinson reached his conclusions. The biblical text itself provides strong confirmation of this view without needing to appeal to ancient law codes or anthropology.

Another opponent of the corporate personality view is O. P. Robertson, who advances the thesis that the curse on Canaan (see Gen 9:25) occurred "for a sin that he himself was yet to commit."<sup>130</sup> Although Robertson correctly states that that offspring of Canaan did commit abominations (see Gen 10:19), thus demonstrating the sinful tendencies in that family line, Scripture ascribes Canaan's curse not to his future transgressions or those of his descendants, but to the shameful act of his father, Ham (Gen 9:24).

Finally, we express strong disagreement with the claim that the idea of corporate personality in the Old Testament is only a metaphor. In light of the many examples presented earlier, we concur with Shedd, "The evidence of solidarity in the Old Testament must not be considered figuratively. It is a true realism."<sup>131</sup>

## **B. Corporate Personality in the Intertestamental and Rabbinic Literature**

When we survey the intertestamental period and the writings of Rabbinic Judaism, we see clear evidence that the concept of solidarity was embraced at that time as well. We actually see some development of this idea. Let us look at a few examples.

Concerning Israel, Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai (2nd c. AD) claimed, "If one of them sinned, they are all punished."<sup>132</sup> Rabbi R. Jose the Galilean echoed this thought. He felt that if one

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<sup>130</sup>Robertson O. P. Current critical questions concerning the "Curse of Ham" // Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 41. 1998. CD-ROM from Galaxie Software, Garland, TX. – P. 181.

<sup>131</sup>Shedd, Man in community, p. 26.

<sup>132</sup>S. S. Schechter, Some aspects of Rabbinic theology. – London, 1909. – P. 191 (taken from Shedd, Man in community, p. 45).

Israelite did not eat the Passover sacrifice, he would place the entire congregation in jeopardy.<sup>133</sup> We may also cite Midrash Rabbah (5th c. AD):

(Rabbi) Hezekiah taught: It is said, Israel is a scattered sheep (Jer. 50:17). Why are Israel likened to a sheep? Just as with a lamb, when it is hurt on the head or on any other limb, all its limbs feel it, even so it is with Israel: if (only one) of them sins, all of them feel it" (Lev. Rab. 4.6).<sup>134</sup>

In trying to explain this Jewish mindset, Shedd appeals to the concept of corporate personality: "Because suffering in the Jewish mind was invariably integrated with chastisement, no alternative to the explanation that the righteous shared the demerit of the wicked occurred to the Jewish thinkers, since in fact the innocent do suffer."<sup>135</sup>

Solidarity related not only to experiences of suffering, but also of blessing as well. The Jews, in fact, coined a term for the transmission of blessing: *zachuth*. For example, the death of a martyr can transmit *zachuth* to the entire congregation (see 2 Macc 7:37-38; 4 Macc 6:28-29; 17:21-22; Test. of Benjamin 3:8).<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, in the Midrash Tanhuma (5th c.) it is stated: "Israel will be redeemed only when it forms one single band: when all are united, they will receive the presence of the Shechinah. Therefore Hillel said (*Aboth* 2.5), 'Separate not thyself from the community'" (*Tanh. B. Nizzabim*, 25a).<sup>137</sup>

It is especially interesting to investigate the intertestamental and rabbinic teaching on original sin, i.e., the transmission of guilt, death and depravity from Adam to all humanity. In fact, this is the aspect of corporate personality that plays a key role in the biblical concept of union with Christ, as we shall see later. We will begin by looking at references to original sin in the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature.<sup>138</sup>

Not a few references confirm the claim that thinkers of that time saw a connection between the sin of Adam and human mortality, which, curiously, the Old Testament does not explicitly teach. For example, *4 Ezra* claims, "And to him (Adam) thou commandedst done only observance of thine, but he transgressed it. Forthwith thou appointedst death for him and for his generations" (3.7).

The author of the apocryphal *2 Baruch* also affirms, "(Adam) brought death and cut off the years of those who were born from him" (17.3), "Because when Adam sinned and death was decreed against those who should be born..." (23.4), "O Adam, what hast thou done to all those who are born from thee?... For all this multitude are going to corruption" (48.42-43), and, "Adam first sinned and brought untimely death upon all" (54.15). *2 Baruch* 56:5-6 ascribes to Adam's sin not only death, but also all the calamities that humans endure.

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<sup>133</sup>Mechilta de-Rabbi Simon b. Jochai / Ed. Hoffmann. – Frankfurt-a-Main, 1905. – I.94 (taken from Shedd, *Man in community*, p. 45).

<sup>134</sup>Midrash Rabbah / Trans. J. Israelstam; ed. H. Freedman, M. Simon. – 3rd ed. – London, New York: The Soncino Press, 1983.

<sup>135</sup>Shedd, *Man in community*, p. 66.

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 59-65.

<sup>137</sup>Montefiore C. G. and Loewe H. M. J. *A Rabbinic anthology*. – Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1938. – P. 352.

<sup>138</sup>This is especially noted in Sanday W., Headlam A. C. *A critical and exegetical commentary to the Epistle to the Romans*. – 5th ed. // *The international critical commentary*. – Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902. – P. 33, 137.



Curiously, the book *Wisdom of Solomon* indicts the devil as the source of death: “By the envy of the devil death entered into the world, and they that belong to his realm experience it” (2.24). Sometimes Eve is seen as the cause of human mortality: “From a woman did sin originate, and because of her we all must die” (*Sirach* 25:24). Similarly, the Books of Adam and Eve claim, “Adam said to Eve: ‘What hast thou done? A great plague hast thou brought upon us, transgression and sin for all our generations’” (44.2). We encounter the same view in the *Apocalypse of Moses*, 32.

Concerning inheriting depravity from Adam, ancient authors differ. On the one hand, *4 Ezra* confirms this idea: “O thou Adam, what hast thou done! For though it was thou that sinned, the fall was not thine alone, but ours also who are thy descendants!” (7.118). At the same time, according to rabbinic teaching, God created people with two impulses: a good impulse (*yetzer ha-tov*) and an evil impulse (*yetzer ha-ra*), which a person must overcome. After Adam’s sin, this task became more difficult:

For the first Adam, clothing himself with the evil heart, transgressed and was overcome; and likewise also all who were born of him. Thus the infirmity became inveterate; the Law indeed was in the heart of the people, but (in conjunction) with the evil germ; so what was good departed, and the evil remained (*4 Ezra* 3.21-22).

Weber affirms that the Jews so understood human depravity: “Sin, to which the bent and leaning had already been planted in man by creation, had become a fact; the ‘evil impulse’ gained the mastery over mankind, who can only resist is by the greatest efforts; before the Fall it had had power over him, but no such ascendancy.”<sup>139</sup>

On the other hand, *2 Baruch* emphasizes human independence from Adam in regard to human sinfulness: “For though Adam first sinned and brought untimely death upon all, yet of those who were born from him each one of them has prepared for his own soul torment to come” (54.15). In addition, “Adam is therefore not the cause, save only of his own soul, but each of us has been the Adam of his own soul” (54.19).

Finally, one must consider that the books that contain references to solidarity with Adam, namely *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, were likely written in the mid-late first century A.D.,<sup>140</sup> and therefore are an unlikely source for Paul’s depiction of Adam as a corporate head of humanity.

## **C. Corporate Personality in the New Testament**

### **1. Adam and Christ**

By far, the most significant example of the principle of corporate personality, which affects us all, is the transmission of sin and its consequences from Adam to all his descendants. Although, as we have already seen, the rabbis in their time spoke of our union with Adam, the New Testament speaks more directly to that truth. We affirm with Robinson, “The thoroughly

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<sup>139</sup>Altsyn. Theol., p. 216; noted in Sanday, p. 137.

<sup>140</sup>Charles R. H. Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament. – Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913. – V. 2. – P. 470, 552.

Hebraic contrast of Adam and Christ made by the apostle Paul... draws all its cogency from the conception of corporate personality.”<sup>141</sup>

Kaufman agrees that corporate personality “underlies the whole range of relationships, not the least of which is the Pauline teaching on the first and second Adams.”<sup>142</sup> Shedd concurs, “The whole of Paul's anthropology and soteriology is built on the Hebraic conceptions of the solidarity of the race.”<sup>143</sup> Yet, Shedd makes the important point that unlike the more selective Old Testament depictions of solidarity, Paul relates it to the entire human race.<sup>144</sup>

So then, to gain a proper understanding of humanity's solidarity with Adam and the corresponding idea of union with Christ, we must carefully examine Paul's teaching in Rom 5:12-19. Our passage under study is located at the end of Paul's discussion of justification (chps 1-5), in which he speaks of righteousness as a gift of God through faith in Jesus Christ. In this section, Paul advances a series of arguments to support this doctrine, the last of which is a parallel between Christ and Adam based on the concept of corporate personality (Rom 5:12-21).

Paul's primary claim is that all of humanity is guilty and stands condemned before God because of Adam's sin. Nevertheless, all may be counted righteous through Christ:

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous (Rom 5:18-19).

Note that through the transgression of Adam humanity inherits guilt and condemnation, while through the obedience of Christ we can receive righteousness. Our union with Christ is similar to our union with Adam. That which Adam did affects us all, since we are in union with him. In a similar way, that which Christ did affects us as well, thanks to our union with Him. In the words of Moule, “Paul could think of Christ in the same way as he thought of Adam, as the inclusive personality of the whole race.”<sup>145</sup> Collins notes, “As the sin of Adam was legally and effectively *our* sin, so the obedience of Christ is legally and effectively the righteousness of all believers.”<sup>146</sup>

Murray makes the necessary qualification, though, that the consequences of Adam's sin do not exactly parallel the benefits of salvation in Christ. God's goal in redemption is not to simply restore to the believer Adam's original position and spiritual condition, but to take the believer still higher. He writes, “There is a solidarity of evil and a solidarity of good, but the latter far

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<sup>141</sup>Robinson, Corporate personality, p. 37.

<sup>142</sup>Kaufman, p. 546.

<sup>143</sup>Shedd, Man in community, p. 103. Similarly, Bruce writes, “Paul was thoroughly conversant with the Hebrew concept of corporate personality, and his thought could readily oscillate on the one hand between the first man Adam and sinful mankind, and on the other hand between Christ, ‘the second man’, and the community of the redeemed” (Bruce, Epistle of Paul to the Romans, p. 126).

<sup>144</sup>Shedd, Man in community, p. 111.

<sup>145</sup>Moule C. F. D., p. 29.

<sup>146</sup>Collins G. N. M. Federal theology // Elwell, W. A. Evangelical dictionary of theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 443-444.

surpasses the former in the quality of the obedience of Christ as compared with Adam... whatever we have lost in Adam we have more than gained in Christ.”<sup>147</sup>

It is also necessary to recognize that, although in Rom 5:12-19 Paul teaches that people inherit the guilt of Adam’s sin, they are also guilty for personal sin. At the same time, the presence of personal guilt does not nullify the fact of guilt inherited from Adam. If that were the case, then Paul’s argument in Rom 5:12-19 for justification in Christ would come to nothing. The parallel between them would be meaningless.

In Romans 5:12-14, Paul defends his position in the following way. Adam’s sin led to his own death. Yet, after Adam, death afflicted his offspring as well, who were not guilty of the only offense punishable by death – eating the forbidden fruit. Paul’s conclusion: Adam’s sin has consequences for his descendants as well. Thus, he is humanity’s representative according to the principle of corporate personality.

At the same time, the statement “who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam” implies that people commit personal sin (against conscience, for example – see Rom 2). However, only Adam’s sin in the Garden resulted in the propagation of death in the world.<sup>148</sup> Paul states this directly in verse 15, “By the transgression of the one the many died,” and in verse 17, “By the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one.”

The concluding words of verse 12 draw much exegetical attention: “And so death spread to all men, because all sinned.” Many interpreters mistakenly assume that Paul is speaking here of the sins people personally commit, not of humanity’s participation in Adam’s sin. For example, Best defends the thesis that people did not sin *in Adam*, but *as a result* of his initial sin. He writes, “Each individual may sin and die because of Adam, but the whole race is not made into a personality which sins and dies.”<sup>149</sup>

Morris, on the other hand, insightfully points out that the use of the Greek aorist tense ἥμαρτον (*hemarton*, i.e. “sinned”) “points to one act, the act of Adam; we would expect the Greek present or imperfect tense if the apostle were thinking of the continuing sins of all people. Paul says that all sinned in Adam, not in imitating him (cf. Bruce). And it ignores the context with its strong insistence on the sin of one man (not all of us) as the cause of the trouble.”<sup>150</sup>

Morris’ view also finds support in the parallel Paul draws between condemnation in Adam and justification in Christ in this passage. If people are subject to death and condemnation due to personal sin and not the sin of Adam, then we force the conclusion that justification comes not through Christ, but through personal righteousness. This claim, though, directly contradicts

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<sup>147</sup>Murray J. Adam // Bromiley G. W. The international standard Bible encyclopedia. Rev. ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979–1988. – V. 1. – P. 49. Murray’s view runs contrary to that of James Dunn, who feels that Paul borrowed the rabbinic idea of a “glorified Adam,” where God had planned to glorify Adam, yet the latter forfeited that opportunity due to his disobedience. Consequently, Jesus came as the Second Adam to restore for humanity the glory forfeited by Adam (noted in Macaskill, Union with Christ in the New Testament, p. 130-132; Wright N. T. The climax of the covenant: Christ and the law in Pauline theology. – Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993. – P. 19). Although some rabbis so taught, Paul gives no evidence of borrowing from this tradition. Paul bases his thought not on Jewish tradition, but on Old Testament revelation.

<sup>148</sup>Morris L. The Epistle to the Romans. – Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988. – P. 234.

<sup>149</sup>Best, p. 41.

<sup>150</sup>Morris, Romans, p. 231-232. Similarly, see Westberg G. C. The two Adams // Bibliotheca Sacra. 94. 1937. P. 40.

the essence of the gospel. In addition, verse 19 makes clear, “As through the *one man's* disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of *the One* the many will be made righteous.” Westberg confirms, “Is righteousness reckoned to us through Christ? So is guilt reckoned to us through Adam.”<sup>151</sup>

## **2. Federalism or Realism?**

Acknowledging that solidarity exists between Adam and humanity in sin, death and condemnation, we must next raise the question of the mechanism of this solidarity. Two theories are advanced: federalism and realism. According to the theory “federalism,” Adam was humanity’s representative in Eden. Consequently, what Adam did in the Garden affects us all. Adam violated his covenant with God and thereby brought on all his offspring, who were included in that covenant, the curse of the Fall.<sup>152</sup> In “realism,” people somehow actually participated in Adam’s transgression, since they were “in him” when he ate of the forbidden fruit.<sup>153</sup>

In resolving this issue, we must return to our initial, tripartite definition of the concept “in Christ” – Christ as our representative, our participation in His redemptive events, and our connection to the Body of Christ, the Church. If our union with Adam is analogous to our union with Christ, then we would expect them to have common features. In the words of M. Johnson, “For Paul, our intimate union with Christ has both legal and transformative benefits... If there is a single union with Christ with multiple implications, why not say the same of union with Adam?”<sup>154</sup> Therefore, Adam’s role runs parallel, at least in the first two elements, to our union with Christ. Adam was not only our representative before God, but we are also real participants in his history.

So then, our unions with both Christ and Adam contain elements of both federalism and realism. Through our unions with Adam and Christ, we both obtain a certain legal status through their role as representative and experience an alteration of our nature due to our “organic” connection with them.

## **3. Misconceptions Exposed**

### **a. The Theory of “Eons”**

Unfortunately, many contemporary authors fail to acknowledge our unions with Adam and Christ in a representative and organic sense, as we have discussed and demonstrated above. Rather, they feel that Adam and Christ created certain “conditions” that consequently

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<sup>151</sup>Westberg, p. 40.

<sup>152</sup>Berkhof L. The history of Christian doctrine. – London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1937. – P. 147; Thiessen H. C. Lectures in systematic theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949. – P. 188-189; Marino B. R. The origin, nature and consequences of sin // Horton S. Systematic theology. – Revised Ed. – Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 1994. – P. 267ff.

<sup>153</sup>Berkhof, History, p. 134; Thiessen, p. 188.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., p. 73, 77.

determine the fate and the behavior of their “followers.” These special “conditions” are termed “eras” or “eons.”

Thus, by transgressing God’s commandment, Adam created the unfavorable conditions of the present era. On the other hand, Christ, through His obedience, created the favorable conditions of the future era that believers in Him may in part enjoy today. As a result of participation in one or the other of these “eons,” people behave in a certain way and receive certain blessings or curses.

These “eons” themselves seem to possess certain powers that enable them to exercise a domineering influence on people. Shedd writes in this regard, “Adam was responsible for man’s implication in the Aeon and his subjection to its external powers.”<sup>155</sup> Tannehill claims, “Such a dominion is a power field. It is the sphere in which a power is at work,”<sup>156</sup> and, “The individual is under the dominion of the powers of the old age. He is unable to free himself by himself.”<sup>157</sup>

Let us cite other authors holding to the “eon” theory. C. R. Campbell explains his view as follows: “It is not ‘corporate personality’ that is the controlling notion in the comparison between Adam and Christ, but rather the contrasting realms they represent,”<sup>158</sup> and, “Adam and Christ open the door to their respective domains, providing the means by which others may enter in.”<sup>159</sup> Peterson writes,

By his disobedience, Adam determined the character and outcome of the present evil age. By his obedience, however, Christ has determined the character and outcome of a new age.... When Christ died to sin, it was the end of one epoch in human history and the beginning of another. Believers have died to sin inasmuch as they have been transferred from the old epoch to the new.<sup>160</sup>

However, this teaching does not correspond to Paul’s thought. In reading Rom 5:12-19, we come away with the impression that Paul connects people’s fate not with the effect of some abstract “sphere of influence” created by Adam or Christ, but with the concrete histories of these individuals: “For as *through the one man’s disobedience* the many were made sinners, even so *through the obedience of the One* the many will be made righteous.” So then, Adam and Christ were not groundbreakers of new eons, but concrete individuals, who define the fate of those in personal union with them by means of specific acts they performed.

Furthermore, this theory contradicts a basic theological truth. The problem with people is not the conditions in which they live, but the individuals themselves. It is fantastic to suggest that an abstract, impersonal eon can exert a domineering effect on humanity. It is also difficult to conceive how Adam’s transgression could have created the conditions of the present eon. It is more reasonable to posit, along with Scripture, that the problem with humanity is the

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<sup>155</sup>Shedd, *Man in community*, p. 120.

<sup>156</sup>Tannehill, p. 19.

<sup>157</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>158</sup>Campbell C. R., p. 344.

<sup>159</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 346.

<sup>160</sup>Peterson D. *Possessed by God* // Carson D. A. *New studies in biblical theology*. – Downers Grove, IL: Apollos-Inter Varsity Press, 1995. – P. 96-97.

internal derangement of human nature that is communicated to Adam's offspring as a result of his sin.

Along with this, when Paul states that "as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin" (Rom 5:12), he does not mean that some abstract forces, namely "sin" and "death" entered the world to exercise dominance over it. Here, Paul is employing personification. Adherents of this theory, though, appear to take these terms literally as elements of the present, evil eon.

Sin does not exist apart from humans as some powerful, impersonal force, but is a distortion and corruption of human nature, which God originally created perfect. Our passage's context makes it clear that sin is not located in some "cosmological sphere," similar to the platonic ideals, but within the individual: "But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good" (Rom 7:20-21). Thus, death and sin are not external spiritual forces, but distortions or corruptions, introduced into the original sinless human nature established by God.

In addition, there exists a danger connected with the trajectory of this teaching – it can lead to Pelagianism. Pelagius taught that people are not sinful by nature, but are simply under the influence of external forces that lead them to transgress.

## **b. The Covenant View**

Another erroneous view on solidarity is that the relationship between Christ and the believer is best expressed not in terms of corporate personality, but in terms of "covenant." Macaskill, for example, considers "covenant" the unifying factor between the various aspects of our relationship to Christ: "Covenant, I think, gives us a thicker word for this than the language of sphere (or domain) that some use for the locative 'in Christ.'"<sup>161</sup> He concludes,

This covenantal framework must serve as the starting point for reflection on participation or union with Christ. That starting point must involve a recognition that, as the Elect One, the Messiah, Jesus is the covenant representative.... To be united to Jesus, to be in him, is to be in the covenant through his representative headship.<sup>162</sup>

In response to the "covenant" theory, we must note that in the New Testament the term "covenant" is rarely used to describe our relationship with God or salvation. It appears in the New Testament almost exclusively in quotations from the Old Testament or in discussions of God's covenant with Israel.

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<sup>161</sup>Macaskill G. Union(s) with Christ: Colossians 1:15-20 // Ex auditu. 33. 2017. P. 105.

<sup>162</sup>Macaskill, Union with Christ in the New Testament, p. 298. Other writers embrace this view as well. Kaminsky holds that the idea of corporate punishment "flows out of the covenant theology" (Kaminsky, p. 54). Shedd writes, "The buttress and intermediary the Old Testament conception of the corporate unity of the nation was the covenant" (Shedd, Man in community, p. 19). White thinks the same: "In Jesus... the covenant by which God would unite himself with the human family through the mediation of an appointed family head is finding its final historical actualization" (White R. F. The last Adam and his seed: An exercise in theological preemption // Trinity Journal 6 New Series. 1985. P. 67).

We must note, however, several exceptions to this rule. We encounter the term: (1) when Jesus spoke of the new covenant in His blood (Lk 22:20), (2) when Paul referred to himself as a minister of the new covenant (2 Cor 3:6), and (3) in several passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews. At the same time, we note that: (1) Jesus taught in the context of the Old Testament, (2) Paul's goal in 2 Corinthians 3:6 was to show that his ministry was more glorious and effective than Moses' was under the old covenant, and (3) the Epistle to the Hebrews was written especially for Jews to prevent their return to Judaism.

It would be quite odd to speak of covenant as the conceptual key to understanding the relationship between Christ and the believer when the word seldom appears in the New Testament text. Clowney agrees, "It is awkward to express sonship or divine dwelling in strictly covenantal terms."<sup>163</sup> On the other hand, the abundance of passages mentioning the believer's union with Christ (we are in Him, or He is in us) clearly indicates that union with Christ is the necessary conceptual key.

The concept of "covenant," which abounds in the Old Testament, is, in fact, another form of expression for the idea of corporate personality. The concept was likely introduced in the Old Testament to prepare God's people to accept their coming Messiah as their "corporate head." So then, instead of considering corporate personality a derivative of the covenant concept, as some have claimed, the concept of covenant derives from the idea of corporate solidarity.<sup>164</sup>

### **c. Adam and Israel**

We must examine still another deviation from a true understanding of Paul's teaching in Rom 5:12-19, advanced by N. T. Wright.<sup>165</sup> He feels that in the Old Testament and intertestamental periods, Adam was perceived not as a representative of all humanity, but as a type or symbol of Israel. Wright writes, "Israel is, or will become, God's true humanity. What God intended for Adam will be given to the seed of Abraham. They will inherit the second Eden, the restored primeval glory... He (Adam) is the whole eschatological people of God."<sup>166</sup>

Wright supports his position by noting that in Israel, God will make a new creation (Jer 3:16; Ezek 36:11), which will resemble Eden (Isa 11:1ff; 45:8). Like Adam, Israel will someday rule the world. He cites several apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works in support as well.<sup>167</sup> Wright feels that Paul modified this Adam/Israel typology in order to create his Adam/Christ typology: "The Messiah, however, has now been installed as the one through whom God is doing what he intended to do, first through humanity and then through Israel."<sup>168</sup> By means of His obedience, Messiah accomplished what neither Adam nor Israel was able to do, and therefore became the Savior.

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<sup>163</sup>Clowney E. P. *Interpreting the Biblical models of the Church a hermeneutical deepening of ecclesiology* // Carson D. A. *Biblical interpretation and the church: text and context*. – Exeter: Paternoster Press, 2000. – P. 80.

<sup>164</sup>Shedd, *Man in community*, p. 13.

<sup>165</sup>Wright, p. 20-40.

<sup>166</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 20-21.

<sup>167</sup>See *Jubilees* 2.23; 3.30-31; *Testament of Levi* 18.10; *1 Enoch* 90.19, 30, 37ff; *4 Ezra* 3.4-36; *Wisdom of Sol.* 2.23-24.

<sup>168</sup>Wright, p. 29.

On the other hand, this teaching undervalues Christ's redemptive work on the cross. Jesus does not save us by His sinless life, as Wright supposes,<sup>169</sup> but by His sacrifice on Calvary (see the discussion in chapter 3). Moreover, in Rom 5:12-19 Paul clearly reveals that he considered Adam to represent all of humanity, not simply Israel. In Romans 5, Paul fails to mention Israel at all. He addresses the Israel question only in chapters 9-11. There he relates that Israel's mistake was not their failure to live up to God's expectations (through the Law), but their seeking justification by works.

#### 4. Final Thoughts

Besides Romans 5, the New Testament contains other parallels between Adam and Christ.<sup>170</sup> For example, commentators often note the contrast in Colossians 3 and 4 between the "old man" and the "new man." The former is the expression of the fallen Adamic nature, while the latter is the new life in Christ. Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 5:27, Christ introduces the new creation, which implies a contrast with Adam and the old creation. In Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, he is even more direct, where Adam and Christ are contrasted in connection with the future resurrection of the dead: "For since by a man {came} death, by a man also {came} the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor 15:21-22).

Other commentators draw parallels not only between Adam and Christ, but also between Christ and other biblical heroes or events in the sense of corporate personality. Shedd points out that all the blessings of Abraham are in the "seed of Abraham," i.e., in Christ.<sup>171</sup> Davis sees in Jewish tradition of yearly recounting the meaning of Passover a parallel with the believer's participation in the redemptive events of Christ's history.<sup>172</sup> In this latter case, though, we must remember that reliving the events of Passover is only a mental exercise of remembrance. Union with Christ, however, involves a real participation in the history of our Lord.

Next, we claim that the system of corporate personality is "typological" in nature. Fritsch correctly define a "type" as "an institution, historical event, or person, ordained by God, which effectively prefigures some truth connected with Christianity."<sup>173</sup> God established the principle of solidarity not to create a new penal system, but to acquaint His people with this concept in order to prepare them conceptually to receive Messiah Jesus as their corporate head in relation to salvation. Kaufmann concurs,

It does not seem to be too farfetched to see all other examples of corporate personalities in the Old Testament in the same relationship to Christ that Paul clearly

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<sup>169</sup>Wright, p. 37-39. Also see George T. Galatians // New American commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994. – P. 292.

<sup>170</sup>See Shedd, Man in community, p. 150-159; Motyer S. Man, old and new. // Elwell, W. A. Evangelical dictionary of theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 728; Ridderbos, p. 64; Best, p. 40.

<sup>171</sup>Shedd, Man in community, p. 137.

<sup>172</sup>Davies, p. 104-110.

<sup>173</sup>Fritsch C. T. Fritsch, Principles of biblical typology // Bibliotheca Sacra 104 (1947). P. 214; cited in LaRondelle H. K. The Israel of God in prophecy: principles of prophetic interpretation. – Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983. – P. 36.



establishes for Adam. These too were only types, copies and shadows of him who was to come.<sup>174</sup>

The biblical text itself supports the claim that the relationship of Adam (and, consequently, the entire system of corporate personality) to Christ is typological in nature. In fact, in Romans 5:14 we find one of the rare New Testament usages of the Greek term τύπος (*tupos*), i.e. “type”: “Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type (τύπος) of Him who was to come.” Here we see that Adam is a “type” or representation of Christ. Note that we find this typological relationship in a context focusing on the concept of corporate personality (Rom 5:12-19).

Therefore, the fact that Adam, as a corporate head, is a type of Christ as a corporate head, may imply that the Old Testament system of corporate solidarity itself is typological in nature as well. The system of corporate solidarity, then, was not meant to replace the penal system prescribed in the Torah, but to serve as a symbol of how God will redeem His people through union with Christ, their corporate head.

This would answer the question as to whether or not the system of corporate personality is still in force today. We recall Porter’s earlier observation that there is no mention of corporate punishment in the Law of Moses. In addition, in the Old Testament narrative God did not always punish in this way. Shedd gives an example from Numbers 16:35, where 250 followers of Korah perished without apparent consequences to their families.<sup>175</sup>

Again, God’s goal in corporate punishment was not to establish a new penal system, but to prepare His people conceptually to receive Jesus Christ as their corporate head in relation to salvation. It seems that as soon as God had accomplished His purpose for the system of solidarity, it began to fade out.

Our conclusion is supported by the observation that as Old Testament history was coming to a close, we see evidence of this system’s soon disappearance. God revealed through His latter prophets,

- In those days they will not say again, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” But everyone will die for his own iniquity; each man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge (Jer 31:29-30).
- “What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, ‘The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children’s teeth are set on edge’? “As I live,” declares the Lord Yahweh, “you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore. Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die” (Ezek 18:2-4).

The infrequency of references to solidarity later in the Old Testament is also notable. We see it only in reference to: (1) God’s continuing covenant with Israel (Jer 31:31; Ezek 37), (2) Israel’s past history (Jer 16:11-13), and (3) instances where not God, but people employ this principle (Neh 13:1-3; Esther 9:6-10). In the New Testament, we encounter only one possible

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<sup>174</sup>Kaufman, p. 558.

<sup>175</sup>Shedd, *Man in community*, p. 13.

application of this principle in Matthew 23:34-35, yet even here we are dealing more with an “accumulation” of guilt, to which the people of Jesus day also personally contributed.<sup>176</sup>

We also note that the only Old Testament figures who continue to function as corporate heads, besides, of course, Adam, are Abraham and David. The physical descendants of Abraham continue to maintain their position as God’s chosen people, and a physical descendant of David (Messiah Jesus) continues to rule. It is also interesting to note that God established a concrete covenant with these two figures. Other examples of corporate personality, not reinforced by a covenant, are not noted later in biblical history.

So then, in this chapter we have investigated the first aspect of our position in Christ – His role as our representative or corporate head. In light of this truth, we can better understand how Jesus can represent all of humanity before God the Father and how His history can affect those with faith in Him. In Adam, all humanity inherits the curse of guilt, depravity and death, while in Christ, believers in Him receive justification and eternal life. In the next chapter, we will investigate the phenomenon of our participation in the redemptive events of Christ’s history.

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<sup>176</sup>The Gospels contain still other mentions of solidarity in the first century. Nonetheless, except for the instance in Matt 23:34-35, the other passages record only people’s opinion on the matter, namely Jesus’ persecutors (Matt 27:25) and His disciples (Jn 9:2).



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## Chapter 3. Participation in the Redemptive Events of Christ Life and in His Body, the Church

Earlier in this book, we claimed that our position in Christ consisted of three elements: (1) Christ's role as our representative, (2) our participation in the redemptive events of Christ's history, and (3) our participation in the Body of Christ, i.e., the Church. This chapter is devoted to the final two topics.

### A. Participation in the Redemptive Events of Christ's Life

#### 1. The Concept's Meaning and Biblical Basis

In the previous chapter, we discovered that because of the principle of corporate personality we enjoy a relationship of solidarity with Christ. This means that His representative role has consequences for those who believe in Him. In the present chapter, we will discover that this relationship of solidarity also resulted in the believer's real participation in the redemptive events of the Savior's career: namely, in His death, resurrection, exaltation and Second Coming.

Tannehill expresses it this way, "Christ's death and resurrection are not merely events which produce benefits for the believer, but also are events in which the believer himself partakes."<sup>177</sup> This phenomenon corresponds to the theory of "realism," which we touched on in the previous chapter. We, who are "in Christ," were actual participants in certain events in the life of our Lord.

Campbell insightfully comments on the connection between the first two elements of our position in Christ, i.e., Christ's representation and our participation in His history, that is, between the federal and vital aspects of his representation.<sup>178</sup> He writes, "They may be understood as referring to the same ultimate spiritual reality (i.e., our position in Christ) even

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<sup>177</sup>Tannehill, p. 1.

<sup>178</sup>See Campbell C. R., p. 351.

though one term (i.e., Christ's representation) is reserved for the stative of union with Christ while the other (i.e., participation in Christ's history) is a dynamic participation in the events of Christ experience."<sup>179</sup> Clowney also allows a place to the believer's real participation in the life of our Lord: "While this representative relation is always in view, Paul's understanding of our union with Christ is richer than forensic relation."<sup>180</sup>

It is also important to emphasize that we participate in events in Christ's history *in virtue of His representative role*. Only because He is our "legal" representative do we have the opportunity to participate in His life.<sup>181</sup> We concur with Ahem, "He, who died and rose again as a corporate personality, is able to share with his members the salvific effects of his death and resurrection."<sup>182</sup> Macaskill also agrees, "The idea of a participatory co-crucifixion is grounded here on the representative or vicarious significance of Jesus' death."<sup>183</sup>

However, it would be erroneous to suppose that the converse were true, i.e., that due to our participation in Christ's history we enter into a forensic, representative relationship as well. As stated before, without the foundation of a "legal," representative relationship with Christ as our corporate head, we have no basis to participate in his life events. In Scripture, only after one is appointed as a "corporate head" does he begin to exert an influence on those under his headship.

When the Scriptures speak of the forensic aspect of our position with Christ, we usually encounter the phrase "in Christ." This phrase usually refers to our "legal" position in Christ on the basis of which all the blessings of salvation are provided to us. When we speak of our real participation in the redemptive events of Christ's life, we generally encounter a related phrase, "with Christ." For example, Paul writes in Galatians 2:19, "I have been crucified *with* Christ." Best makes the comment, "The Christian does not hope, work or believe 'with Christ,' but 'in Christ'; he does not die and rise to new life 'in Christ' but 'with Christ.'"<sup>184</sup> Davis adds the thought, "The formula ἐν Χριστῷ ('in Christ') only becomes fully intelligible in the light of certain other passages where Paul speaks of having died and risen with Christ."<sup>185</sup>

Let us investigate further how Paul uses the construction "with Christ."<sup>186</sup> Sometimes he uses it in a conventional sense of physically being with someone. For example, after death Paul expects to be "with Christ" (Phil 1:23). The same applies to our gathering to Him at His Second Coming (1 Thes 4:17; 5:10) when He brings "with Him" the departed saints (1 Thes 4:14).

More frequently, however, Paul employs the formula "with Christ" in a derived sense to refer to the believer's participation in certain events in the Savior's history. First, believers were included in the death of Jesus, that is, they were crucified with Him:

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<sup>179</sup>Ibid., p. 231. Parenthetical statements not in the original citation.

<sup>180</sup>Clowney, *The Biblical theology of the Church*, p. 54.

<sup>181</sup>See Campbell C. R., p. 351.

<sup>182</sup>From Ahem B. M. *The fellowship of His sufferings* // *Catholic Bible Quarterly*. 22. 1960. P. 10. Yet Ahem connects this experience with water baptism, which we refute in chapter 6.

<sup>183</sup>Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament*, p. 235.

<sup>184</sup>Best, p. 60.

<sup>185</sup>Davies, p. 87.

<sup>186</sup>See discussion in Campbell C. R., p. 220-236; Hansen G. W. *The Letter to the Philippians*. – Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: Eerdmans, 2009. – P. 88-89; O'Brien P. T. *The Epistle to the Philippians: a commentary on the Greek text*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991. – P. 132-134; O'Brien P. T. *Colossians, Philemon* // Hubbard D. *Word Biblical commentary*. – Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1982. – P. 170-171; Best, p. 60-62.

- Rom 6:6-8 – ...knowing this, that our old self was crucified with {Him,}... if we have died with Christ
- Col 2:20 – If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world...
- Col 3:3 – For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
- Gal 2:20 – I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.
- 2 Cor 5:14 – One died for all, therefore all died.
- 2 Tim 2:11 – It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him

It is vital to note that all of these texts speak of our participation in the death of Christ as a fact accomplished in the past. Dying with Christ is not something that we strive for, but something God has done for us by uniting us with His Son in His death. When Jesus died on Calvary, believers in Him died as well. Commenting on 2 Cor 5:14, Macaskill writes, “For Paul, the death of Jesus on the cross was ‘one for all’ ... so that ‘all’ are considered to have died *in that moment*.”<sup>187</sup>

Nevertheless, George makes the important point that participation in Christ’s death in no way implies that we aid Him in His redemptive work. He states, “The mystery of atonement requires that the death of Christ be unique, unrepeatable, and isolated.... With reference to his substitutionary suffering and vicarious death, only Jesus, and he alone, can be the Substitute and Vicar.”<sup>188</sup> At the same time, we were real participants in this event: “The very benefits of Christ’s atoning death... are without effect unless we are identified with Christ in his death and resurrection.”<sup>189</sup>

Along with participation in Christ’s death, the New Testament speaks of our participation in His resurrection as well. God did not leave us in the grave, but raised us together with Christ. Here is the New Testament witness:<sup>190</sup>

- Eph 2:5-6 – even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him.
- Col 2:12-13 – You were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him.

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<sup>187</sup>Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament*, p. 234. We note, however, one exception, when Paul wrote of dying with Christ as his goal: “...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil 3:10). This juxtaposition of a past along with a present/future experience of the death of Christ is discussed in chapter 5.

<sup>188</sup>George, *Galatians*, p. 199.

<sup>189</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>190</sup>Although Romans 6:4 lacks the phrase “raised with Christ,” the sense is clearly implied: “As Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” Gaffin comments here, “The believer’s continuing walk in newness of life is based upon resurrection with Christ” (Gaffin R. B. *The centrality of the resurrection*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978. – P. 47).

- Col 3:1 – Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above.
- 1 Pet 1:3 – Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The passage in 1 Peter 1:3 is especially noteworthy. It reveals that our spiritual experience of the new birth is the result of Christ's physical resurrection from the dead – it is our present experience of His glorious victory over death. The other passages cited above also speak of spiritual transformation through the resurrection or make a contrast with our former lives in sin, emphasizing our introduction into newness of life. Like our participation in Jesus' death, our co-resurrection with Him is spoken of as an event accomplished in the past, yet it affects our present experience.<sup>191</sup>

In the future, we anticipate a participation in Christ's resurrection in yet another sense – through the resurrection of our physical bodies:

- 1 Cor 15:21-22 – For since by a man {came} death, by a man also {came} the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.
- 2 Tim 2:11 – It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him.
- 2 Cor 4:14 – ... knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you.
- Rom 6:8 – Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.

Other passages of Scripture reveal that the believer has been exalted with Christ: God “seated us with Him in the heavenly {places} in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6), and, “put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body” (Eph 1:22-23). So then, the present position of believers in Christ is their being seated in heaven with Christ at a place of power and authority.

The final Christ-event in which the believer participates is His revelation in glory at His Second Coming. The Bible teaches that at that time believers will be revealed with Him, i.e., they will be perfected and glorified. We read, “When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory” (Col 3:4), and, “We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is” (1 Jn 3:2).

We must keep in mind that at the present time, the fullness of our life in Christ is “hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:3). Our glorified state is still “hidden,” because He is “hidden.” Only when He is “revealed” will we “be revealed with Him in glory.”

Therefore, Christ is our “hope of glory” (Col 1:27). Together with Peter, we all are partakers “of the glory that is to be revealed” (1 Pet 5:1). Additionally, Peter counsels us, “Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:13). A great inheritance awaits us, since we are co-heirs with Jesus Christ (Rom 8:17).

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<sup>191</sup>Noted in Gaffin, The centrality of the resurrection, p. 42.

In summary, we affirm that the believer has died with Christ, been raised and exalted with Him, and will be revealed with Him at His Second Coming. Campbell states well the main aspects of this union:

Union with Christ involves the participation of believers in the events of Christ's narrative, including his death and burial, resurrection, ascension, and glorification. Believers are described as having died with Christ, having been raised with him, and so forth, such that the significance of these events pertain to us as it pertains to him.<sup>192</sup>

Interestingly, besides these obvious references to the believer's participation in the redemptive events of Christ, Tannehill sees hints of it in other Scripture passages as well.<sup>193</sup> In 2 Corinthians 1:3-9, Paul speaks of his sharing in the sufferings of Christ, in which he experiences an identification with the Savior's death. At the same time, he experiences a supernatural comfort from the Spirit, which may be considered a participation in Jesus' resurrection.<sup>194</sup>

Later in the same epistle, Paul draws a similar parallel between His sharing in Christ's sufferings (i.e., participation in His death) and experiencing supernatural strength (i.e., participation in His resurrection) (see 2 Cor 12:9). In addition, in 2 Corinthians 13:4 we read, "For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we will live with Him because of the power of God {directed} toward you." A similar parallel is seen in 2 Corinthians 4:11: "For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh."<sup>195</sup>

In Philippians 3, Tannehill also sees Paul's participation in the death of Christ (v. 10) and in His resurrection as well: both spiritually (v. 10) and physically (v. 11). In addition, in Romans 8:17 we again encounter the combination of suffering (i.e., death) and glorification (i.e., resurrection): we are "fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with {Him} so that we may also be glorified with {Him}."

Note that in Tannehill's examples, participation in the death of Jesus relates only to sharing in His sufferings, which is indeed part of one's union with Christ (see chapter 5). Along with sharing in His sufferings, though, there are still other aspects of participating in Christ's death, which we will discuss in detail in chapter 4.

We must also consider Martin's contribution to our question, when he comments on the "prehistory" of our union with Christ, since God chose us in Him from eternity past (Eph 1:4; 2 Tim 1:9).<sup>196</sup> Johnson also makes note of this:

In the case of election we can speak of a kind of pre-temporal union with Christ – a union that somehow existed before and above time – that is the source of the time-and-space application of that union to the people of God.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>192</sup>Campbell C. R., p. 408.

<sup>193</sup>Tannehill, p. 91-127.

<sup>194</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>195</sup>Also see Harris, p. 917.

<sup>196</sup>Martin A. N., p. 18.

<sup>197</sup>Johnson M. P., p. 35.

Those whom God has chosen as his own have always been “in Christ,” and so they come to enjoy the realization of that union in their earthly lives.<sup>198</sup>

The idea of the believer’s real participation in the redemptive events of Christ’s career appears in the writings of several prominent evangelical thinkers. Louis Berkhof, for example, writes, “In an objective sense (the Church) was crucified with Christ, she died with Him, she arose in Him from the dead, and was made to sit with Him in the heavenly places.”<sup>199</sup> B. B. Warfield concurs that believers died with Him on Calvary.<sup>200</sup> According to F. F. Bruce, believers “shared by faith-union with him those experiences which were his historically: his crucifixion and burial, his resurrection and exaltation.”<sup>201</sup> Martin expresses this truth especially well:

So it is that His death is reckoned their death, His resurrection their resurrection, and His session at the right hand of the Father their session with Him. Then the Scripture says we shall be glorified together with Him.<sup>202</sup>

In light of the fact that Jesus accomplished everything necessary for our salvation and complete victory, Paul can boldly claim, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, {he is} a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Cor 5:17), and, “In Him you have been made complete” (Col 2:10). The apostle John writes about the fullness of Christ, “For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace” (Jn 1:16). In light of the riches of our position in Christ, we better appreciate the significance of Paul’s words in Romans 8:32, “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?”

## **2. Refutation of False Views**

Unfortunately, every clear biblical teaching becomes clouded by various incorrect views that hinder people from fully appreciating God’s truth. We will examine several of these views in respect to our participation in Christ’s history.

### **a. Rejection or Undervaluation of True Union with Christ**

The world of theology in general often highly values the contributions of the well-known German professor Rudolf Bultmann. However, his views reflect a radically liberal view that often distorts God’s truth. So it is in his view of union with Christ. According to Bultmann, there

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<sup>198</sup>Ibid., p. 36. Also see Letham, p. 65; and Gaffin, Union with Christ, p. 272-274.

<sup>199</sup>Berkhof, Systematic theology, p. 448.

<sup>200</sup>Warfield B. B. Faith and life; 'conferences' in the Oratory of Princeton seminary. – New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1916. – P. 436.

<sup>201</sup>Bruce F. F. The Letter of Paul to the Romans – 2nd ed. // Morris L. The Tyndale NTC. Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1985. – P. 130.

<sup>202</sup>Martin A. N., p. 29.



is no real, historical sharing in the redemptive events of Christ's life. The Church simply proclaims the idea of union with Christ to inspire its members. He writes,

In the New Testament, God's deed in Jesus Christ is not understood in the same way; it is not a historical event that is decisive for the history of Israel, so that by virtue of historical solidarity every later generation receives the benefit of what Jesus meant to his generation... The message of the forgiving grace of God in Jesus Christ is not a historical account about a past event, but rather *it is the Word which the Church proclaims*, which now addresses each person immediately as God's Word.<sup>203</sup>

Seeing that liberals in general do not take seriously the historicity of the Bible, it is hard to give much credence to Bultmann's views. The evidence for biblical historicity is more than adequate to affirm that Jesus accomplished our salvation in history, and that Paul is not exaggerating in his claims that we have a real share in these redemptive events. We see no evidence in the text that Paul is speaking in metaphors.

We concur with Martin that union with Christ "is not just an idea, it is not an empty term; there is a real union."<sup>204</sup> Johnson feels likewise: "Paul calls us to newness of life not on the basis of the 'notion' that we have died and are resurrected with Christ, but on the basis that the power of Christ's death and resurrection is an operative reality in our lives."<sup>205</sup> Ridderbos writes that dying and rising with Christ "is not a question of dying to sin in a metaphorical sense (conversion, or something like it), but of the participation of the church in the death and burial of Christ in the one-time, redemptive-historical sense of the word."<sup>206</sup> Finally, we cite the words of Augustus Strong:

The believer is said to be in Christ. Lest we should regard the figures mentioned above as merely Oriental metaphors, the fact of the believers' union with Christ is asserted in the most direct and prosaic manner.<sup>207</sup>

At the same time, in connection with our real participation we must make the following qualification. Romans 6:5 states, "For if we have become united with {Him} in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be {in the likeness} of His resurrection." Does the word "likeness" imply that our sharing in Christ's death and resurrection is not real, but only analogical? It appears that Moule thinks so, when he asserts that "in the likeness of His death" refers to our decision to personally die to sin.<sup>208</sup>

On the other extreme, Tannehill views the term "likeness" as full identification of Christ's death with our participation in it. His interpretation, though, becomes questionable in the light

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<sup>203</sup>Bultmann R. Prophecy and fulfillment / Trans. J. C. G. Greig // Westermann C. Essays in Old Testament hermeneutics. – Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1963. – P. 30.

<sup>204</sup>Martin A. N., p. 53.

<sup>205</sup>Johnson M. P., p. 228.

<sup>206</sup>Ridderbos, p. 206.

<sup>207</sup>Strong, p. 797. Campbell feels the same (Campbell C. R., p. 411).

<sup>208</sup>Moule H. C. G. The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans // Perowne J. J. S. Cambridge Bible. – Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1908. – P. 114.

of Paul's words in Roman 8:3: "God {did:} sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." We reject the idea that, during His passion, Jesus became sinful in essence.<sup>209</sup> This means that "likeness" cannot mean full identification.

Gaffin and Ridderbos offer a more convincing option. They draw a distinction between our participation in Jesus' death and His death itself, yet they do not reject our real participation in it. If we full identify our death with His, then we are identifying ourselves as Christ Himself, removing the ontological distinction between Him and us. Therefore, it is necessary to create a certain "ontological distance" between Christ and the believer so that they do not merge into one person.<sup>210</sup> This is likely why Paul inserts the qualifying phrase "the likeness of His death."

Another misconception is voiced by the highly respected conservative theologian, Wayne Grudem. While not rejecting the historical nature of the biblical narrative, he nonetheless unnecessarily minimizes the real, historical union between Christ and the believer. In his opinion,

Believers were present in Christ *only in God's thoughts*. God *thought of us* as going through everything that Christ went through, because he was our representative... When Christ died, God thought of us as having died... In the same way, God thought of us as having been *buried* with Christ, *raised* with him, and *taken up to heaven* with him in glory.<sup>211</sup>

It seems that Grudem is undervaluing the fact that believers have a real share in Christ's history. The connection between Christ and the believer may be difficult to express with precision, but it certainly is more than something that occurs in God's imagination. A. J. Gordon addresses this misinterpretation when he writes that our solidarity with Christ is not merely "a life running alongside his, and taking shape and direction from it. It is his life reenacted in his followers."<sup>212</sup>

### **b. The Believer's Participation in Christ's Entire History**

Another errant view on the believer's participation is the idea that God made us participants not only in certain redemptive events in Jesus' life (i.e., death, resurrection, exaltation and Second Coming), but in all of His history. Some assume that all that Jesus did in the course of His entire earthly life has direct influence on believers today. Correspondingly, our connection to Christ is not by virtue of His appointment as our corporate head, but by His incarnation, i.e., His taking on our humanity. Through the incarnation, it is felt, the believer has an "organic union" with the Lord and, consequently, "access" to His entire earthly history and participation in it.

A strong adherent to this view is M. P. Johnson. In his words, "The eternal Word of God, furthermore, joined himself to our estranged humanity in the incarnation, so that by bearing us

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<sup>209</sup>Tannehill, p. 32-36.

<sup>210</sup>Ridderbos, p. 207-208; Gaffin, The centrality of the resurrection, p. 48-50.

<sup>211</sup>Grudem, Systematic theology, p. 841

<sup>212</sup>Gordon A. J. In Christ: The believer's union with his Lord. – Boston, MA: Gould and Lincoln, 1872, reprint Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1964. – P. 13.

in him through his life, death, and resurrection, he might restore us to fellowship with God.”<sup>213</sup> The incarnation is also thought to be the means by which the believer is included in Christ’s redemptive events: “Christ assumed our flesh into his existence; thus, when we are joined to him, we are crucified, buried, and raised with him.”<sup>214</sup> Peterson defends the same position: “Had he not become one of us, we would never be joined to him... No incarnation, no union with Christ.”<sup>215</sup>

Thomas Torrance takes this view to the extreme.<sup>216</sup> Along with the above-mentioned thinkers, he also holds that believers share in Jesus’ entire history. Lee describes Torrance’s view thusly: “It is our sharing though the power of the Holy Spirit in Christ’s incarnational union with us realized through his whole incarnate life.”<sup>217</sup> In addition, we are justified before the Father as a result of Jesus’ sinless life, since we were “in Him” and participated in His sinless career. Therefore, our justification comes from our “participation in his human righteousness.”<sup>218</sup>

Moreover, since we share in Jesus entire earthly experience, His obedience somehow enables and empowers our obedience as well. Lee describes Torrance’s view: “Our obedience rests upon the victorious obedience of Christ.”<sup>219</sup> Furgenson reasons similarly in regards to Jesus’ “sanctification” (see Jn 17:19): “Because this has taken place first in Christ our representative, it is possible for it to take place also in us thru the Spirit.”<sup>220</sup>

Finally, Torrance teaches that Jesus took upon Himself not a sinless human nature, but a fallen one in order to heal and restore it: “The Son of God assumed our fallen humanity and our corrupt nature into union with himself,”<sup>221</sup> and, “Our fallen humanity has been assumed, cleansed, healed, redeemed, sanctified, and regenerated by Jesus Christ in his Incarnation.”<sup>222</sup>

In the world of theology, we learn of a distinction between the “active” and “passive” obedience of Christ. His “active” obedience refers to his sinless lifestyle on earth, while His “passive” obedience refers to His redemptive work alone. Along with others, Letham regards that we benefit not only from Christ’s passive, but also from His active obedience. In other words, we were “in Him” when He lived His righteous life and participated in His good works: “Because of his union with us and our union with him, we were in him as he did it... his actions are ours.”<sup>223</sup> As a result of this participation, Jesus’ righteousness is considered ours as well.

Our response to this theory is as follows. Although this view appears attractive from a logical point of view, it nonetheless lacks Scriptural support. A key verse in its refutation in Romans 5:18: “Through *one act of righteousness* there resulted justification of life to all men.”

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<sup>213</sup>Johnson M. P., p. 56.

<sup>214</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>215</sup>Peterson R. A., p. 15.

<sup>216</sup>See Lee K. W. *Living in union with Christ: The practical theology of Thomas F. Torrance*. – New York: Peter Lang, 2003. – P. 110-217.

<sup>217</sup>Lee, p. 201.

<sup>218</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>219</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>220</sup>Furgenson S. *The Reformed view // Alexander D. L. Christian spirituality: Five views of sanctification*. – Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 1988. – P. 50.

<sup>221</sup>Lee, p. 151.

<sup>222</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>223</sup>Letham, p. 59, 62.

The King James Version, however, translates this verse in a way that could support the participation-righteousness view: “By the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.”<sup>224</sup> The Greek phrase in question is δι’ ἑνὸς δικαιομάτος (*di’ henos dikaionomatos*). Most translations prefer “through one act of righteousness,” instead of “by the righteousness of one,” yet the point is debated.<sup>225</sup>

An examination of context, though, clearly favors the “one act” position. Concerning Adam’s history, which is paralleled with Christ’s, only one transgression is in view: “the offense of Adam” (v. 14), “the transgression of the one” (v. 15), “one {transgression}” (v. 16), “the transgression of the one” (v. 17), “through one transgression” (v. 18), “through the one man’s disobedience” (v. 19). Since the goal of the passage is to compare Adam’s history with Christ’s, it logically follows that justification in Christ comes not from participation in His entire history, but by His one act of obedience at Calvary.

Smedes also comments on this question in our favor: “The parallel between Adam and Christ, then, is focused on the decisive events in which each was the central figure.”<sup>226</sup> Goppelt also agrees, “In each instance the single act of one as a consequence that affects the entire human race.”<sup>227</sup> Additionally, the universal testimony of the New Testament concurs that Jesus redeemed us exclusively by His sacrifice of Calvary. For example, we read in Romans 3:24, “...being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.”

We find still more support for our view in Romans 5:18. Here, Paul uses a more unusual term for “righteousness,” namely δικαίωμα (*dikaionoma*). His usual term is δικαιοσύνη (*dikaiosisune*), while δικαίωμα (*dikaionoma*) can refer to a “righteous deed.”<sup>228</sup> This usage confirms the conclusion that a single “righteous deed” is in view, i.e., Jesus’ sacrifice on Calvary.

In addition, nowhere in Scripture do we see the incarnation depicted as the determining factor for the believer’s union with Christ. Paul clearly states the goal of the incarnation in Hebrews chapter 2:

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.... He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people (Heb 2:14-17).

The incarnation of the Son of God was necessary so that He could become “a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” So then, the incarnation plays a key role in Christ becoming humanity’s representative. Nonetheless, *only by virtue of Christ’s appointment as our representative and not by the*

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<sup>224</sup>Dunn also prefers this translation, although he favors the “one act” view of Romans 5 in any case (Dunn J. D. G. Romans 1–8 // Hubbard D. Word Biblical commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1988. – P. 283).

<sup>225</sup>See the discussion in Dunn, Romans 1–8, p. 283 and Morris, Romans, p. 238..

<sup>226</sup>Smedes, p. 83-84.

<sup>227</sup>Goppelt L. Typos: The typological interpretation of the Old Testament in the New. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982. – P. 129.

<sup>228</sup>Arndt W., Danker F. W., Bauer W., Gingrich F. W. A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature. – 3rd ed. – Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000. – P. 249.

*incarnation alone* does the believer qualify as a participant in the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus.

In 1 Timothy 2:5, Paul writes about the incarnation: “For there is one God, {and} one mediator also between God and men, {the} man Christ Jesus.” Again, we see emphasized the incarnation of Christ in the sense of His role as our representative before God the Father. We see no indication that the believer has access to Jesus’ entire history through His incarnation.

Therefore, the believer has the privilege to share in the redemptive events of Jesus’ life not due to His taking upon Himself human nature, but by virtue of His role as humanity’s representative. The incarnation was necessary, in its turn, so that Christ could become our true representative. Consequently, the believer is not a participant in all the events of Christ’s history, but only in those where He was appointed our representative as indicated in Scripture, namely in his death, resurrection, exaltation and Second Coming.

We may also benefit from the research of Seifrid, who observed that the expression “in Jesus” occurs very rarely – Paul prefers the expression “in Christ.” Seifrid feels that this “suggests an emphasis on the exalted status and saving role of the Messiah.”<sup>229</sup> If our union with Christ derived from His incarnation, we would expect to see more references to “in Jesus” than to “in Christ.” Whiting concurs, “The New Testament never speaks of the believer as being ‘in Jesus’ but always refers to him as being ‘in Christ,’ ‘in the Lord,’ or ‘in the Lord Jesus Christ.’ Our union with Christ is a oneness with Him in His Messianic and Mediatorial office rather than in His manhood or earthly life.”<sup>230</sup>

We must also comment on Torrance’s view that Jesus inherited a sinful human nature, which does not reflect biblical teaching. The goal of His immaculate conception was that He would be “holy” (Lk 1:35). Paul taught that God sent His Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom 8:3). In other words, Jesus possessed all human attributes except sin. Paul also claims, “(He) knew no sin” (2 Cor 5:21), and John echoes this thought, “In Him there is no sin” (1 Jn 3:5).<sup>231</sup>

Mascall attempts a more moderate approach – although we do participate in Christ’s entire history and derive power from His righteous life, His redemptive work on Calvary is still necessary to experience this life-transforming power.<sup>232</sup> However, we still lack any biblical confirmation that the incarnation is the key to the believer’s sanctification.

In conclusion, we offer this final refutation of the claim that the “active” obedience of Jesus results in our justification. In Romans 4, Paul relates how Abraham became righteous – God “credited” faith to him as righteous (v. 22). We are justified likewise, “...to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (v. 24). The word translated “credited,” λογίζομαι (*logidzomai*), is a commercial term meaning to put to one’s account.<sup>233</sup> Therefore, receiving the gift of righteousness results from our faith being credited to us as righteousness, not from inclusion in the active obedience of Christ.

In conclusion, we make the following qualification. On the one hand, we highly esteem the life Jesus lived before His passion events. His history is extremely valuable to us for several

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<sup>229</sup>Seifrid, p. 433.

<sup>230</sup>Whiting A. B. The rapture of the Church // Bibliotheca Sacra. 102, 1945. P. 363.

<sup>231</sup>See a detailed discussion of this point in the appendix.

<sup>232</sup>Mascall E. L. Christ, the Christian and the Church. – London, Longmans, 1946. – P. 74-78.

<sup>233</sup>Arndt, p. 597.

reasons. First, He showed us a perfect example of a life lived for God. Second, if Jesus had not lived a perfect life, He could not have been a sacrifice for our sins. Third, His sinless life confirms His claim to be the holy Son of God, whose righteousness is credited to us in a legal/representative fashion through faith (see chapter 4).

On the other hand, we find no biblical evidence that we are justified directly as a result of Christ's incarnation, or that we directly participated in His righteous life with the exception that we are made partakers in His death, resurrection, exaltation and future Second Coming.

### **c. The Teaching of Theosis**

"Theosis" is the teaching that our union with Christ extends to the point that we obtain divine life and attain, in the end, divinity. Some define it as simply god-likeness, but the actual teaching affirms becoming divine. The fourth-century Church Father, Athanasius, stated the classic formulation of the doctrine: "He was made man that we might be made God."<sup>234</sup>

This teaching has affinities with the previous view of participation in Christ's life through His incarnation. Adherents of theosis claim that when Jesus became incarnate, He took upon Himself not a solitary human nature, but humanity in its entirety. His divinity so permeated His humanity that he deified the latter – it became a "deified" human nature. Since Christ's humanity was universal in scope, deifying his personal human nature simultaneously deified human nature in general. Therefore, those who are in Christ can have their human nature permeated with divine life and consequently become divine themselves.

At the same time, defenders of this view make the qualification that obtaining the divine nature does not make us divine in the full sense that God is divine. They teach that God has two modes of existence: His "essence" and His "uncreated energies." The latter consists of His manifestations and actions in relation to creation. Theosis is the assimilation of God's energies into humans, but not His essence. Nonetheless, since God's "energies" are one "mode" of His existence and not something external to Him, the believer in fact does unite with God and becomes divine.

The theosis doctrine is more characteristic of Eastern patristic theology than Western and is embraced by the Eastern Orthodox Church. Nonetheless, some modern Western thinkers show affinities with aspects of this teaching as well.<sup>235</sup> Letham, for example, claims, "The basis of our union with Christ is Christ's union with us in the incarnation."<sup>236</sup> Furthermore, "Christ's human nature was deified by its assumption by the Son of God."<sup>237</sup> However, Letham goes even farther than the traditional theosis doctrine – the believer assimilates not only God's "uncreated energies," but something still more.<sup>238</sup>

In response, we again note, as in the previous section, that there is no biblical support for this position. Adherents appeal to the following passages, but, as we shall see, they do not

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<sup>234</sup>Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54.

<sup>235</sup>Other authors showing some affinity with this view include: Smedes, p. 6-7; Laubach F. C. *Christ liveth in me // Christ liveth in me and Game with minutes*. – Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1946. – P. 10; Mascall, p. 97; and others.

<sup>236</sup>Letham, p. 21.

<sup>237</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>238</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 127.

teach this doctrine: 2 Peter 1:3, John 10:36, and 1 Corinthians 6:17. In 2 Peter 1:3 we read that we “may become partakers of {the} divine nature.” The word translated “nature” is φύσις (*phusis*), i.e., “nature” or “essence.” Yet, defenders of classic theosis strongly object to the idea that we become sharers in God’s essence, but only in His “energies.” Therefore, this verse lends no support to this theory. Peter is simply speaking of the manifestation of God’s life through believers when the indwelling Holy Spirit expresses that life through them.

In John 10:36, Jesus is quoting Psalm 82:6, which reads “I said, ‘You are gods.’” It is clear that the term *Elohim* refers to people here, i.e., the judges of Israel. It is used in a similar way in Exodus 21:6 and 22:8. Therefore, the title *Elohim* does not always have to refer to a divine being. The psalmist is referring to the judges of Israel at that time, to whom these words were originally directed. In fact, in this psalm God is not praising these leaders for some spiritual attainment, but issuing them a rebuke.

Note also that it does not say, “You will be gods,” but, “You are gods.” The doctrine of theosis claims that this a future reality, not a present one. Furthermore, Jesus quotes these words not to his disciples, supposedly in pursuit of deification, but to the Pharisees, His opponents.

Warfield captures the sense of Jesus’ words well.<sup>239</sup> Having already established that He is equal to the Father (Jn 10:33), His goal in this debate with the Pharisees was to answer accusations made against Him of blasphemy. Jesus shows here that the title *Elohim* is appropriate to all who are worthy of that designation. In the Old Testament, it could be used in relation to the judges of Israel. So then, how can the Pharisees object if Jesus uses it in relation to one who is greater than Israel’s judges, the one whom “the Father sanctified and sent into the world?”

Concerning 1 Corinthians 6:17, here Paul draws a parallel between sexual relations with a harlot and the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the believer. In both instances, however, the issue is not a merging of persons or an interpenetration of one’s nature into another, but only a close personal relationship between parties.

Furthermore, in refutation of this position we object to assigning to God various “modes” of existence, namely His essence and His energies. Scripture makes no such distinction. In the biblical text, such attributes as wisdom, goodness, holiness, etc. are not manifestations of God’s “divine energies,” but descriptions of God’s nature or essence. The Bible claims that “God *is* light” (1 Jn 1:5) and “God *is* love” (1 Jn 4:8). It does not say that God “manifests Himself” as light or “manifests Himself” as love. These words describe His very nature.

Even if we allow that someone might assimilate God’s so-called “energies,” we must recognize that God’s energies, as adherents of this theory define them, contain everything that is not part of God’s essence. Since, as it is supposed, the contents of God’s essence is unknown, then everything attributed to God in Scripture belongs to His energies. If believers can assimilate all of God’s energies, then they can attain to all that is ascribed to God in Scripture. The absurdity of such a position is evident.

Finally, this view contradicts the doctrine of Christ as defined by the Council of Chalcedon, which is embraced by all orthodox Christian confessions. According to the Chalcedonian

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<sup>239</sup>Warfield, B. B. The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield, Volume 1: Revelation and Inspiration. – Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008. – P. 84.

Definition, Christ's two natures do not merge, and no transfer of attributes occurs between them. So then, the teaching that divine attributes were communicated to the human nature of Jesus violates the standard, orthodox understanding of Christ's nature.

#### **d. Jesus Experienced Spiritual Death and Suffering in Hell**

Unlike the teaching "theosis," where a person identifies with Christ to the degree of becoming divine, some identify Christ with sinful humanity to the degree that they claim that in order to redeem people, He died both physically and spiritually. According to this theory, Jesus became a sinful being on the cross, descended into Hades, there suffered the penalty for sin, and then rose both from spiritual and physical death. It is thought that if Jesus did not die spiritually or suffer in Hades, He did not fully identify with us in our sinful condition or take the full weight of punishment that we deserved.

A leading proponent of this view was E. W. Kenyon (1867–1948), a former Baptist pastor and founder of a Bible institute named Bethany.<sup>240</sup> Concerning Christ's condition on the cross, he taught, "Sin was not reckoned to Him. Sin was not set to His account. He became sin,"<sup>241</sup> "His spirit was made sin,"<sup>242</sup> and "He became one with Satan in spiritual death, to make us one with God in spiritual life."<sup>243</sup>

In support of his theory, Kenyon claims that the Father abandoned the sinful Jesus on the cross, who then cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Matt 27:46). Additionally, Jesus referred to the bronze serpent in the wilderness, which was a symbol of sin, as a type or symbol of Himself (Jn 3:14). Kenyon also cites Isaiah 53:9, where the word describing the death of Messiah (מָוֶת - *mavet*) is in the plural, supposedly showing that Jesus died twice: physically and spiritually. He also sees in Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "He made Him who knew no sin [to be] sin on our behalf," a confirmation of his belief that Jesus became a sinful being on the cross.

Moreover, Kenyon asserts that after His death, "For three days and three nights the Lamb of God was our Substitute in Hell,"<sup>244</sup> "He went to Hell in order to take us to Heaven,"<sup>245</sup> and "We were 'in Him' when He went down into the place of suffering."<sup>246</sup> He considers that Jesus' sufferings in Hades are figuratively described in Psalm 88 and Matthew 12:40. Finally, after three days of suffering, "We were declared righteous when Christ was declared righteous."<sup>247</sup> His "spiritual resurrection" is allegedly recorded in Acts 2:24, 13:33 and 1 Peter 3:18.

In refutation of this view, we can say the following. First, Jesus could not have become a sinful being and at the same time remain God. In 1 John 1:5, we read, "God is Light, and in Him

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<sup>240</sup>Kenyon E. W. Identification: A romance in redemption. – Kenyon's Gospel publishing society, 2012; Kenyon E. W. What we are in Christ / Ed. J. McIntyre; Hejzlar P. Two Paradigms for Divine Healing. – London: Brill, 2010. – P. 88-93; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E.\\_W.\\_Kenyon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E._W._Kenyon).

<sup>241</sup>Kenyon, Identification, chp. 3.

<sup>242</sup>Ibid., chp. 4.

<sup>243</sup>Ibid., chp. 5.

<sup>244</sup>Ibid., chp. 6.

<sup>245</sup>Ibid., chp. 1.

<sup>246</sup>Kenyon, What we are in Christ, chp. 1.

<sup>247</sup>Ibid., chp. 4.



there is no darkness at all.” We also note that Jesus remained obedient to His Father to the very end on the cross. His behavior demonstrates that He remained blameless in character, even unto death. Additionally, Peter states, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross” (1 Pet 2:24). Note that Jesus did not become sinful in essence, but “bore our sins *in His body*.” Colossians 1:22 confirms, “He has now reconciled you *in His fleshly body* through death.”

Concerning 2 Corinthians 5:21, it is important to note Paul’s usage of verbs here. In the phrase, “We might become (γίνομαι) the righteousness of God in Him,” he chooses the standard word for a change in nature, γίνομαι (*ginomai*). However, in the phrase “He made (ποίηω) Him who knew no sin {to be} sin on our behalf,” we encounter a different verb, ποιέω (*poieo*), which has the basic meaning of “to do” or “to make.”

On the one hand, ποιέω (*poieo*) can indeed indicate a change in nature, such as in John 4:46. Another meaning, though, is “to appoint.” Revelation 3:12 is an example: “He who overcomes, I will make (ποίηω) him a pillar in the temple of My God.” The sense of Revelation 3:12 is not that God will change our nature and make us stone pillars, but that He will appoint us to an important position in His kingdom. Paul may mean the same in 2 Corinthians 5:21 – the nature of Jesus did not change, but He was appointed a sacrifice for sins. If Paul meant to indicate a change in Jesus nature, he likely would have used the more standard term, γίνομαι (*ginomai*).

Harris points to the parallel between 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Isaiah 53:9-11, of which Paul was likely aware. In the Isaiah passage, Messiah was sinless (v. 9), He justified others (v. 10), and He became a sacrifice for sin: “If He would render Himself {as} a guilt offering (ἡχαῖα)...” (v. 10).<sup>248</sup> Isaiah does not prophecy that Messiah would become sin, but an offering for sin. Harris also notes that the Hebrew term ἡχαῖα (*hata’ah*) can mean either “sin” or “sin/guilt offering,” which may have given Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:21 freedom to use the Greek ἁμαρτία (*harmatia*), i.e. “sin,” in the sense of “sin offering” as well.<sup>249</sup> Ralph Martin shares this view: “Our conclusion is that the text is leaning on an Old Testament testimony, namely, Isa 53:10 where “offering for sin”... is what is implied in ἁμαρτία.”<sup>250</sup>

Furthermore, Jesus’ words on the cross, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” were taken from Psalm 22:1. Jesus may have quoted these words not because the Father had forsaken Him, but to indicate that He was fulfilling this Messianic psalm at that moment since Psalm 22 describes the sufferings of crucifixion to be endured by Messiah. Additionally, Jesus may have also been expressing His human, emotional reaction to His situation, *as if* God had forsaken Him in His sufferings. Nonetheless, an actual rupture in the relationship between Father and Son is impossible since they are eternally joined in the Trinity.

Concerning the symbolism of the bronze serpent, one must consider that not every element of a type carries over or has prophetic significance for its fulfillment or “antitype.” The aspect of the bronze serpent that had significance for Jesus was not that He became as wicked as a snake, but that both situations were means of bringing salvation (see Jn. 3:14-15). It is also important to note Jesus’ words, “As Moses *lifted up* the serpent in the wilderness, even so must

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<sup>248</sup>Harris, p. 456.

<sup>249</sup>Ibid., p. 452.

<sup>250</sup>Martin R. P. 2 Corinthians // Hubbard D. Word Biblical commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 1986. – P. 157.

the Son of Man be *lifted up*.” The parallelism is not that the serpent represents Christ as sinful, but that as the serpent was lifted up, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.

What about the use of the plural Hebrew term for “death” in Isaiah 53:9? This is simply a case of a stylistic use of a term. We see the same phenomenon in Ezekiel 28:10, where clearly only one death is in view: “You will die the death(s) (מָוֶת - *mavet*) of the uncircumcised.”

We next tackle the question of Jesus’ supposed descent into Hades. A series of Scripture passages seem to indicate that He did indeed descend there: Eph 4:9; Matt 12:40; Rom 10:7; Acts 2:27; 1 Pet 3:18-20. Drawing on Church history, we note that the Apostles Creed also confesses that Christ “descended into hell.” If we allow that Jesus did indeed go down into the nether world, it does not necessarily follow that He suffered torment there. Not one of the above-listed verses so indicates.

Scripture is emphatically clear that the physical death of Christ on the cross is sufficient for the forgiveness of sins. His shed blood, not His alleged sufferings in Hades, cleanses us from our sins. We also recall Peter’s witness, “He Himself bore our sins in His body *on the cross*” (1 Pet 2:24). In addition, at the moment of His death, Jesus uttered the words, “It is finished.” At that very moment, Jesus obtained for us salvation from sin. In addition, at that moment the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom, showing that the way to God’s presence was now open. Thus, the universal testimony of Scripture is that the physical death of Jesus accomplished our salvation.

Finally, the passages of Scripture that supposedly speak of Jesus’ “spiritual resurrection” say nothing of the sort. Acts 2:24 and 13:33 refer to His physical resurrection, and 1 Pet 3:18 refers to His descent into Hades after His death.

## **B. Participation in Christ’s Body, the Church**

Until now, we have focused our attention on the personal benefits that come to those who are in Christ. We must not fail to mention, though, the communal aspect of that union – those who are united to Christ are united to others who are also united to Him, i.e., with the Body of Christ. Campbell well states, “Union with Christ also involves the incorporation of believers into his body, temple, church... belonging to Christ means that we belong to one another.”<sup>251</sup>

Best is correct in his view that one can see in the “the Body of Christ” the concept of corporate personality. If Christ is the Head both of our corporate personality and of the Church, then the phrase “the Body of Christ” is appropriate to express our solidarity both with Him and with one another.<sup>252</sup> Clowney concurs, “Paul’s concept of the body of Christ is drawn from his doctrine of our union with Christ,”<sup>253</sup> as does Campbell, “The nature of the church... is grounded in union with Christ.”<sup>254</sup> Shedd writes similarly, “The doctrine of the Body of Christ is there for an explicit application of the Hebraic conception of corporate personality.”<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>251</sup>Campbell C. R., p. 409.

<sup>252</sup>Best, p. 106.

<sup>253</sup>Clowney, *The Biblical theology of the Church*, p. 56.

<sup>254</sup>Campbell C. R., p. 383.

<sup>255</sup>Shedd, *Man in community*, p. 165.

The interpretation of the “Body of Christ” metaphor has drawn much attention in scholarly circles. It occurs so often in Paul’s writings that it is difficult to call it a mere metaphor. In three passages, in fact, Paul practically equates it with the Church: “And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:22-23), “He is also head of the body, the church” (Col 1:18), and, “I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church” (Col 1:24). In addition, Paul so closely identifies Christ with the Church that in 1 Corinthians 12:12, he does not write “For even as the body is one and {yet} has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is *the body of Christ*,” but “so also is *Christ*.”<sup>256</sup> Even our physical bodies seem to be connected with Him (see 1 Cor 6:15).<sup>257</sup>

Campbell advances the interesting theory that the expression “Body of Christ” is not merely a metaphor, but there seems to “be a spiritual reality to which the metaphor refers.”<sup>258</sup> He also claims, “This metaphor rests on an ontological reality.”<sup>259</sup> Johnson echoes this view, asserting that Paul intended “for us to understand his language realistically.”<sup>260</sup>

On the other hand, Johnson cautions us not to fully identify the Church with the Body, as if Christ and the Church were one entity, or that the Church is some sort of extension of the incarnation.<sup>261</sup> The Roman Catholic Church may be committing an error in this regard when it denies the metaphorical sense of this expression.<sup>262</sup> In the final analysis, we concur with Johnson that this conception occupies a “middle ground” between metaphor and reality and is, in essence, a “mystery.”<sup>263</sup> Best attempts to describe it as follows, “This basic idea is not something which can be expressed easily in explicit logical terminology.”<sup>264</sup>

In spite of the difficulty of precisely defining the metaphorical character of this designation, the formula “Body of Christ” brilliantly expresses the very essence of the Church, since the Church consist of born-again people who manifest together the life of Jesus Christ and accomplish together His ministry. Austin-Sparks says it well, “When the Body of Christ is healthy, there is a spontaneous expression of Christ.”<sup>265</sup> In Shedd’s words, “This is the Church possessed of the life of Christ, mediated through the Holy Spirit, existing as an actual extension of His personality.”<sup>266</sup>

Wayne Grudem insightfully notes that Paul has not one, but two perceptions of the Church as the Body.<sup>267</sup> First, in 1 Corinthians 12 the members make up the entire Body including the head (see 1 Cor 12:15-17). Here, Paul emphasizes the interconnectedness of the members and

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<sup>256</sup>Noted in Best, p. 110.

<sup>257</sup>Noted in Campbell C. R., p. 270

<sup>258</sup>Ibid.

<sup>259</sup>Ibid., p. 288.

<sup>260</sup>Johnson M. P., p. 199.

<sup>261</sup>Ibid., p. 198, 203. We must also remember that Johnson holds to the opinion that our participation in the history of Jesus is made possible through His incarnation. Consequently, he mistakenly assumes that the Church is organically connected with the physical body of Jesus.

<sup>262</sup>Note in Best, p. 98.

<sup>263</sup>Johnson M. P., p. 201.

<sup>264</sup>Best, p. 99.

<sup>265</sup>Austin-Sparks, p. 100.

<sup>266</sup>Shedd, *Man in community*, p. 199.

<sup>267</sup>Grudem, p. 858-859.

the interrelationships among them. In Ephesians and Colossians, though, Christ fills the role of the Head (Col 2:19; Eph 1:22-23; 4:15-16; 5:23). Here, Paul stresses Christ's position of authority in relation to the believers as well as His role as provider/protector.

In order to properly understand the concept of the Body, it is crucial to precisely define the relationship between the Church and salvation. Some erroneously teach that receiving salvation depends on participation in the Church. For Bultmann, for example, being "in Christ" means being "articulated into the 'body of Christ' by baptism."<sup>268</sup> In other words, "To belong to the Christian Church is to be 'in Christ' or 'in the Lord.'"<sup>269</sup> Schweitzer reasons likewise: "The expression 'being-in-Christ' is merely a brachylogy for being partakers in the Mystical Body of Christ."<sup>270</sup> Mascall adds, "Becoming a Christian and becoming a member of the Church are synonymous."<sup>271</sup>

We enter true union with Christ, however, through personal faith in Him. Enns correctly affirms the "union with Christ that all believers are brought into at the moment of conversion."<sup>272</sup> Therefore, our personal union with Him is primary. Since union with Christ is the basis for our salvation, the claim that inclusion in the Church is necessary to be united to Christ is the same as claiming that the Church is a necessary mediator of salvation to people. Both evangelical faith and the biblical testimony itself, however, refute this idea.

In summary, on the one hand, union with Christ is necessarily linked with inclusion in the Church since all believers share among themselves a common union with the Lord. We also affirm that being "in Christ" does indeed involve being "in the Church." Davis correctly states, "Paul knows nothing of solitary salvation."<sup>273</sup> Best adds, "There is no suggestion that a man can be a believer and not be a member of this community."<sup>274</sup>

On the other hand, it is vital to specify that individuals enter the Church in virtue of the fact that they have already personally entered into union with Christ through faith. It is erroneous to claim that people enter union with Christ as a result of joining the Church, or that their position in Christ is derived from church membership. In other words, although the experiences of entering into union with Christ and inclusion in the Church happen simultaneously, nevertheless they follow a logical order. Believers are included in the Church as a result of entering a personal union with Christ. They do not enter into union with Christ as a result of being included in the Church.

Finally, many commentators correctly stress that participation in the Body does not mean a loss of individuality by the members. The Bible emphasizes both the individual life of the believer and the corporate life of the Body. Nevertheless, Bouttier's proposal deserves consideration, that the personal development of the individual believer can be maximized only

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<sup>268</sup>Bultmann R. *Theology of the New Testament* / Trans. K. Grobel. – New York, Scribner, 1951-1955. – V. 1. – P. 311.

<sup>269</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 1, p. 311.

<sup>270</sup>Schweitzer A. *The mysticism of Paul the apostle*. – London, Adam and Charles Black, 1956. – P. 122-123.

<sup>271</sup>Mascall, p. 109.

<sup>272</sup>Enns P. P. *The Moody handbook of theology*. – Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989. – 349.

<sup>273</sup>Davies, p. 86.

<sup>274</sup>Best, p. 29.

when people live “together in one Body.”<sup>275</sup> Furthermore, he states, “In Christ, and through our fellows, everyone at last becomes himself.”<sup>276</sup> For Paul, “Being in Christ means that existence will henceforth be determined by others.”<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>275</sup>Bouttier M. Christianity according to Paul / Trans. F. Clarke // Moule C. F. D. Studies in biblical theology – Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1966. – P. 68.

<sup>276</sup>Ibid.

<sup>277</sup>Ibid., p. 71.



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## Chapter 4. The Benefits of Being in Christ

Having defined our position in Christ as being: (1) beneficiaries of His representation, (2) participants in His redemptive events, and (3) members of His Body, we can now specify the concrete blessings that come to us in virtue of this position. In this chapter, we will learn of the superabundant grace, which God in His overwhelming generosity has granted us in His Son. In Christ, God has given us all that we could possibly need in any area of life. As Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, God “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly {places} in Christ” (Eph 1:3). As a result, “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” (Rom 8:32).

Although the blessings of God are varied, Taber, along with others, reminds us that they all come to us thanks to our union with Christ: “All the blessings of God are ours by virtue of our union with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection. God meets every human need through the message of the Cross.”<sup>278</sup> Erickson agrees, “In one sense, union with Christ is an inclusive term for the whole of salvation.”<sup>279</sup> Schreiner attributes the extensive blessings available through Christ to the greatness of His person:

The astonishing wonder of the blessings (new creation, redemption, election, and righteousness) suggests that Jesus Christ shares the same status with God. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain how salvation and all its attendant blessings could be secured through union with Christ.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>278</sup>Taber M. Christ – the message and the messenger // Grace Journal. 2(2). 1961. P. 22.

<sup>279</sup>Erickson, p. 948; Similar view in Chafer L. S. Systematic theology – Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993. – V. 6. – P. 41; Martin A. N., p. 10; Murray J. Redemption – accomplished and applied. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955. – Reprint 1987. – P. 161.

<sup>280</sup>Schreiner, p. 317.

We must also emphasize that, although God richly pours out blessing even on the unbelieving world (Matt 5:45), His grace for salvation is available only through Jesus Christ. It is written, "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who alone can lead His flock to eternal life (Jn 10:1-9). He said of Himself, "No one comes to the Father but through Me" (Jn 14:6).

## **A. Benefits Connected with His Representative Role**

Christ's work as our representative relates our legal position or status before God. As our corporate head, He is able to occupy our place, and we in turn, as far as it is possible for humans, can occupy His. Therefore, there exist two dimensions to His representative work. On the one hand, He can take upon Himself the punishment for our sins, occupying our place of guilt before God, even though He never sinned. On the other hand, He shares with us His righteousness and His sonship. Therefore, Christ's representative work provides forgiveness of sins, the gift of righteousness, and adoption as God's children.

### **1. Forgiveness of Sin**

One of the functions of a representative is to serve as a substitute and occupy the place of those whom he represents. The Bible clearly teaches that the Son of God took our place of punishment on the cross so that believers in Him might have forgiveness of sins. Examine the biblical witness:

- He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross (1 Pet 2:24)
- Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many... (Heb 9:28)
- Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (Jn 1:29)
- He made Him who knew no sin {to be} sin on our behalf (2 Cor 5:21)
- Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us (Gal 3:13)
- All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but Yahweh has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him (Isa 53:6)
- For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Mk 10:45)

The final passage is especially significant because it employs the preposition *ἀντι* (*anti*), translated "for." The basic meaning of this word is "instead of" or "in exchange for." We can read, therefore, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom instead of/in the place of many."

However, the substitutionary work of Christ is more often expressed by the preposition *ὑπερ* (*hyper*), for example, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for (*ὑπερ*) us" (Rom 5:8; also see Lk 22:20; Jn 15:13; Rom 8:32; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 2:9; 1 Pet 3:18). The preposition *ὑπερ* (*hyper*)

usually means “on behalf of,” or “for the benefit of,” but also may serve as a synonym of ἀντι (*anti*) as seen in the following examples:

- For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for (ὕπερ) our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:3).
- Who gave Himself for (ὕπερ) our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age (Gal 1:4).

Notice in these examples that Jesus died “for” sins. This cannot mean that He died “for the benefit of” sins. He died as a substitute for the sins people have committed. Therefore, in these verses the proper sense of ὕπερ (*hyper*) is “instead of” or “in exchange for.” Since Jesus took upon Himself our sins, we can receive forgiveness through Him.

The forgiveness of sins is also implied in the concept of “redemption”: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses” (Eph 1:7; also see Heb 9:12, 15). Jesus is our ransom as He Himself declared, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). In other verses speaking of redemption, we encounter the term ἀπολύτρωσις (*apolutrosis*). This is a commercial word used in business and for the liberation of a slave.<sup>281</sup> In our case, it refers to liberation from slavery to sin and its consequences (Rom 6:22-23). It also refers to our ultimate glorification in the future (Rom 8:23; Eph 1:14; 4:30).

As a result of forgiveness of sins, the believer enjoys peace with God, i.e., “reconciliation.” Later in the same chapter, Paul announces, “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Rom 5:10-11). He writes to the Corinthians likewise, “Now all {these} things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ” (2 Cor 5:18).

## **2. The Gift of Righteousness and Positional Sanctification**

Christ’s role as our corporate representative also results in the believer being considered righteous before God. The Bible calls this “justification.” Justification differs from forgiveness of sin in that the latter involves only removal of guilt from the sinner. Nonetheless, removal of guilt does provide a certain justification since the sinner is no longer considered guilty of transgression. This element of our justification through forgiveness of sins is absolutely necessary, in fact, in order to wipe out the guilt of past sins before the gift of righteousness can be bestowed.

However, in Christ God provides an even more firm foundation for the believer’s justification – the gift of righteousness, or the reckoning of the righteousness of Jesus Christ to the believer. The great exchange, which God accomplished in Christ, is described in 2 Cor 5:21:

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<sup>281</sup>Rightmire R. D. Redeem, Redemption // Evangelical dictionary of biblical theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996. – P. 664.



“He made Him who knew no sin {to be} sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Other passages confirm that the believer obtains Christ’s righteousness:

- But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor 1:30).
- ...and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from {the} Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which {comes} from God on the basis of faith (Phil 3:9).
- For in it {the} righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous {man} shall live by faith (Rom 1:17).

So then, God accomplishes the justification of believers not only by removing the guilt of past sins, but also by imputing to them the righteousness of Christ, our corporate head. Westberg writes, “This state of positive righteousness is ‘much more’ than deliverance out of a state of condemnation.... Beyond the deliverance from the condemnation, there is the provision of a state of positive righteousness which is one of abiding acceptance.”<sup>282</sup> Austin-Sparks adds, “Union with Christ means that God is utterly satisfied with Him, and therefore with me and you as in Him.”<sup>283</sup>

The benefit of receiving the gift of righteousness is that the righteous status of believers before God does not depend on their living perfect lives before Him after conversion in order to maintain this status. Unfortunately, the post-apostolic church seems to have never fully grasped the truth of imputed righteousness, and as a result, many Church Fathers tainted the gospel with moralism and salvation by works. In light of this truth, though, we affirm that still imperfect believers undergoing the process of sanctification are nonetheless considered righteous before God by virtue of the gift of Christ’s righteousness reckoned to their account through faith.

All evangelical commentators affirm that, according to Scripture, justification comes “in Christ” (see Gal 2:17). Nonetheless, the debate as to the mechanism of justification, that is, how the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer, continues. In this book, we defend the view that our righteous status before God is based on our position “in Christ” as our representative. According to the biblical principle of corporate personality, Christ’s righteous status becomes our righteous status through faith in Him. Believers are “clothed” in the righteousness of Christ (Gal 3:27).

Others mistakenly base our justification either on our participation in Jesus’ sinless life, or on the presence of the righteous indwelling Holy Spirit in our hearts. Concerning the first option, we have already discounted this theory in the previous chapter. We rule out the second option based on the biblical teaching that justification does not result from “Christ in us,” but from “we in Christ” (see Gal 2:17; Rom 3:24).

Nonetheless, some feel that if our justification is based on the representation of Christ, yet our sanctification is based on our real participation in His death and resurrection (see section

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<sup>282</sup>Westberg, p. 45.

<sup>283</sup>Austin-Sparks, p. 33.

B), that creates not one, but two unions with Christ: one “forensic,” and the other “vital.”<sup>284</sup> Horton takes the matter even farther to propose that justification is not connected to union with Christ at all, but logically precedes it: “According to classic Reformed treatments... the act of justification is logically prior to union... once justification has provided the legal ground, all of the gifts of God’s grace are freely given in union with Christ.”<sup>285</sup>

Such thinkers are concerned that if justification and sanctification are considered parts of a single union, then people may confuse their relationship to one another and conclude that sanctification is a prerequisite for justification. Therefore, two unions are deemed necessary: a “forensic” union leading to justification, and a “vital” union leading to life transformation of the believer.

On the other hand, we can defend the position that only one union exists. This single union can contain different aspects held together by an intrinsic unity. We have earlier highlighted three aspects of this single union: Christ’s representative role, our participation in His redemptive events, and our inclusion in His Body, the Church. This scheme preserves the integrity of our union with Christ and, at the same time, allows justification to have logical priority as part of the first and foremost aspect of this union – Christ as representative, corporate Head. All the benefits of salvation, therefore, are based in this single union and flow out from it.<sup>286</sup>

Therefore, we must strongly stress that the forensic aspect of our position in Christ, that is, the positional righteousness we have due to our union with our Representative, must logically precede the life-transforming aspect, i.e., our sharing in His history. In technical terms, we must preserve a proper *ordo salutis* (“order of salvation”): justification – sanctification – glorification. If justification does not logically precede sanctification, then salvation comes by works, and the Reformation (and biblical) teaching of justification by faith alone is nullified.

Finally, it is necessary to say a word about “positional sanctification.” Jesus is not only the “Righteous One,” but also the “Holy One.” In Acts 3:14, Peter calls Him the “Holy and Righteous One.” Believers share with Christ not only His status as righteous, but also his status as holy. Consequently, believers in Jesus are “sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling” (1 Cor 1:2) because Christ “became to us... sanctification” (1 Cor 1:30).<sup>287</sup> However, both holiness and righteousness also have a practical application to our lives, which we will discuss later in connection with our participation in Jesus’ death and resurrection.

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<sup>284</sup>Among those holding to the “two union” view are such prominence figures as Jonathan Edwards, Albert Schweitzer, Charles Hodge, Louis Berkhof and others.

<sup>285</sup>Horton M. S. *Covenant and salvation*. – Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007. – P. 147-148.

<sup>286</sup>For example, “The believer’s justification is never applied apart from or prior to union with Christ by faith alone” (Tipton L. G. *Biblical theology and the Westminster standards revisited: Union with Christ and justification sola fide* // Westminster Theological Journal. 75. 2013. P. 4.), “Union with Christ undergirds all the stages of the *ordo salutis*, and all the redemptive benefits are distinct-yet-inseparable aspects and manifestations of union with Christ” (Cho Y. Anthony Tuckney (1599-1670) on union with Christ // Westminster Theological Journal. 79. 2017. P. 310), “The singular, realistic union with Christ is the ground of all blessings” (Johnson M. P., p. 75) and others.

<sup>287</sup>Also see 1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 1:1; Heb 3:1; 10:10; 13:12.

### 3. Adoption into God's Family

Christ, in connection with His representative role, can share with the believer, as much as possible, His status of sonship. In Mawhinney's words, "It is not at all surprising to find the believer's sonship clearly based on Christ's sonship. God sent forth his Son... in order that we might receive the adoption as sons."<sup>288</sup>

The New Testament abounds in references to believers as "God's children" (see Jn 1:12; Rom 8:16; 1 Jn 3:1; and many others). We cite the Epistle to the Hebrews, where Christ's sonship is specifically linked to ours: "For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one {Father;} for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb 2:11).

However, when we claim that we are God's children, we must make the stipulation that our status as God's sons and daughters differs from Christ's status as Son of God. Jesus occupies a unique position in relation to the Father. He is the "Only-begotten Son" and has a special relation to the Father, being Himself God.

In this connection, it is interesting to observe that Jesus never equated His relation to the Father with that of His followers. He never used the phrase "our Father" in reference to both Himself and His disciples. He once replied to Mary Magdalene, "Go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God'" (Jn 20:17). Note that He does not say "our Father" and "our God," but "My Father and your Father, and My God and your God," marking a distinction between His sonship and that of His disciples.<sup>289</sup>

Unlike the teaching of the apostle John, who emphasized the experiential side of the Christian life, the legal term "adoption" is more characteristic of Paul's writings. In four instances, we note his use of the Greek term for adoption, *υιοθεσία* (*huiiothesia*). In two of these cases, he associated our adoption with our position in Christ.

In Eph 1:4-5, we read, "He predestined us to adoption (*υιοθεσία* - *huiiothesia*) as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself." Here, it is clear that adoption occurs in Christ.<sup>290</sup> In Galatians 4:4-5, we see the same: "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (*υιοθεσία* - *huiiothesia*)."

As far as Paul's use of this term in general, we note the following features. God's plan from eternity was to adopt believers in Christ (Eph 1:4-5). Adoption has its basis in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (Eph 1:4-5; Gal 4:4-5). When someone turns to the Lord, that person is liberated from the status of slave and receives the status of a child of God (Gal 4:7). The Holy Spirit, who is the "Spirit of adoption," enters the heart of believers and makes them aware of their new position in God's family (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15-16). Finally, when Christ returns, believers

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<sup>288</sup>Mawhinney, p. 46.

<sup>289</sup>Stein makes the same observation in the Lord's Sermon on the Mount. In relation to His disciples, He says to the disciples, "Your Father" (Matt 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 4, 6), while in relation to Himself – "My Father" (Matt 7:21; cf. Matt 10:32-33). Stein concludes, "His 'Sonship' was different from that of his followers. He was by nature the Son; they were 'sons' through adoption" (Stein R. H. *Fatherhood of God* // Elwell W. A. *Evangelical dictionary of biblical theology* – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996. – P. 247-248).

<sup>290</sup>Dauids P. H. *Adoption* // Elwell W. A. *Evangelical dictionary of theology*. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 26.

will receive the full measure of their inheritance in God, which includes a new and glorified body (Rom 8:19-23).<sup>291</sup>

## **B. Benefits Connected with Participation in His Redemptive Events**

Unlike Christ's role as our representative, our participation in the redemptive events of Christ's career do not result in a special *position* or *status* before God, but in a change in our spiritual *condition*, that is, how we live. Thanks to Christ's representative work, we obtain a special status before God (forgiven, justified, adopted), but because of our participation in His history, we experience life-transformation.

Nonetheless, as we argued earlier, our sharing in His history is possible only because of the "legal" position we occupy in Christ. Thanks to this legal status, the believer may become a partaker in certain events in Christ's life, namely His death, resurrection, exaltation, and Second Coming in glory.

At the same time, we note that this "participation" operates in two directions. On the one hand, believers are partakers in the redemptive events of Christ just mentioned, each of which yields certain benefits. On the other hand, Christ also participates in our history in the sense that He took upon Himself our sickness. Consequently, the believer may enjoy the blessing of divine healing.

### **1. The Believer's Participation in Christ's Death**

#### **a. Deliverance From Sin's Power**

Jesus not only bore the punishment for our sins in order to liberate us from guilt, but our old (sinful) self died along with Him so that we might experience liberty from sin's power and live in victory over it. God has, in fact, already accomplished the sanctification of the believer through the death of Christ. Paul states in Romans 6:6, "Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with {Him,} in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin." Note that our sinful nature has already be done away with through Jesus' death.

The believer has already been circumcised by the circumcision of Christ (Col 2:11-13; Rom 2:28-29; Phil 3:3). Circumcision in the Old Testament served as a symbol of the sanctifying power of Christ's death. Johnson confirms,

That, comparable to the Old Testament rite of circumcision in which the flesh was cut away from the bodies of the Israelites in token of possession by the God of Israel, so believers in union with Christ in His death have died with Him to the old man and its relationship with Adam and sin. This has freed them from the thralldom of sin.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>291</sup>Rees T. Adoption // Bromiley G. W. The international standard Bible encyclopedia. – Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988. – V. 1. – P. 55.

<sup>292</sup>Johnson S. L., Jr. The complete sufficiency of union with Christ // Bibliotheca Sacra. 120. 1963. P. 16.

Galatians 5:24 also speaks of the death of Christ as the means for deliverance from the power of sin: "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." We also cite Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." This deliverance from sin's power took place at the moment of Christ's death.

Murray points out that not only Paul, but Peter also spoke of our participation in Christ's death to sin. He wrote, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (1 Пет. 2:24). Murray summarizes, "*Death to sin* means that the old man has been crucified and the body of sin destroyed."<sup>293</sup> He also states, "No fact is of more basic importance in connection with the death to sin and commitment to holiness than that of identification with Christ in his death and resurrection."<sup>294</sup>

Other writers join Murray in their emphasis on deliverance from sin's power through identification with Christ's death. A. J. Gordon claims, "In Christ crucified we put off the old man.... The cross was for the destruction of the body of sin."<sup>295</sup> In Meadors' words, "The believer's union with Christ delivers him or her from the power of sin."<sup>296</sup> Letham adds, "Union with Christ is the foundational basis for sanctification and the dynamic force that empowers it."<sup>297</sup> Numerous other authors also support this view.<sup>298</sup>

Johnson comments on a commonly held misconception of sanctification, "Sanctification is sometimes thought of as our response to the saving work of Christ rather than as an integral part of that work. Similarly, we often conceive of our holiness as rooted in our attempt to manifest our gratitude to God for forgiveness, rather than as a manifestation of our new life in Christ."<sup>299</sup> In other words, believers are powerless to sanctify themselves. It is accomplished only by virtue of identification with Christ in His death. The contribution the believer makes to that process is discussed in chapter 6.

Some commentators, especially who hold to the "eon" theory (see chp. 2), mistakenly claim that believers themselves were not crucified with Jesus, but humanity's sinful nature in an abstract sense perished there. Tannehill writes that Jesus bore "the inclusive reality of the old aeon."<sup>300</sup> Consequently, we are to interpret this co-crucifixion with Christ not as the "death of

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<sup>293</sup>Murray J. Definitive sanctification // Calvin Theological Journal. 2. 1967. P. 7-8.

<sup>294</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>295</sup>Gordon, p. 57-58.

<sup>296</sup>Meadors G. T. Power // Evangelical dictionary of biblical theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996. – P. 619.

<sup>297</sup>Letham, p. 6.

<sup>298</sup>See Rightmire, Union with Christ, p. 791; Martin A. N., p. 104; Howell D. N., Jr. Pauline eschatological dualism and its resulting tensions // Trinity Journal. 14(1). 1993. P. 15-16; Bousset, p. 180; Ridderbos, p. 30; Macaskill, Union with Christ in the New Testament, p. 197; Peterson D., p. 54; Moule H. C. G., p. 114; Knight G. W. The Pastoral Epistles: a commentary on the Greek text // The new international Greek Testament commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press. 1992. – P. 403; Torrance J. B. Cross, crucifixion // Wood D. R. W., Marshall I. H., Millard A. R., Wiseman D. J. New Bible dictionary. – 3rd ed. – Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996. – P. 247; Packer J. I. Concise theology: a guide to historic Christian beliefs. – Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993. – P. 173; Chafer S. L. The doctrine of sin // Bibliotheca Sacra. 93. 1936. P. 9-10; Johnson S. L., Jr. The complete sufficiency, p. 16.

<sup>299</sup>Johnson M. P., p. 116.

<sup>300</sup>Tannehill, p. 28.

individual believers one by one,” but the “death of the believers as men of the old aeon.”<sup>301</sup> Ridderbos concurs that the “old man” is “the supra-individual sinful mode of existence... the present mode of human existence ruled by sin.”<sup>302</sup> Such a view, though, contradicts the teaching of Paul, who applies Christ’s death on a personal level: “*Our* old self was crucified with {Him},” and, “*I* am crucified with Christ” (Gal 2:19).

Another misguided theory concerns the phrase “the body of sin,” which was done away with by Jesus’ death (Rom 6:6). Ridderbos incorrectly reasons that Paul is speaking of the physical body as the “seat of sin.”<sup>303</sup> Furgenson is more moderate in his affirmation that the expression refers to “bodily existence as the sphere in which sin’s dominion is expressed.”<sup>304</sup>

However, the Bible clearly teaches that the “seat of sin” lies not in the physical body, but in the heart (Mk 7:21). Therefore, we concur with Peterson, “The ‘body of sin’ appears to be a way of speaking about the whole person as controlled by sin.”<sup>305</sup> Or, in Fitzmyer’s words, “The ‘body of sin’ is not merely the material part of a mortal human being, as opposed to the soul, but the whole person considered as earth-oriented, not open to God or his Spirit, and prone to sin.”<sup>306</sup>

Along with giving strength to resist sin, our union with Christ also provides motivation for godly living. In light of the fact that we have died with Christ, Paul directs believers to “lay aside the old self” (Eph 4:22). In the context of the believer’s position in Christ, Paul writes to the Colossians, “Consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry” (Col 3:5). In a similar way, he exhorts the believers in Rome, “Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts” (Rom 6:12). Stewart summarizes, “To be united to Christ means to be *identified with Christ’s attitude to sin*.”<sup>307</sup>

## **b. Deliverance from the Law**

In Romans 7:1-4, Paul claims that in Christ believers have died to the Law and that this is a necessary step to bear fruit for God: “Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God” (v. 4). Paul considered the Law not only powerless to justify a person, but also a hindrance to sanctification. One must be delivered from the Law to make progress in spiritual life (see Rom 6:14; 7:1-4; Gal 2:19-20; 2 Cor 3:6).

Paul explains himself in chapter 7 of his epistle to the Romans. He assures us that the Law is indeed holy and spiritual. The problem is, though, that people, in their sinful state, cannot keep it (v. 7-23). The nature of sin is such that when one hears a commandment, sin immediately produces a resistance to it. This is why Paul claims, “The power of sin is the Law” (1 Cor 15:56).

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<sup>301</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>302</sup>Ridderbos, p. 208.

<sup>303</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>304</sup>Furgenson S. The Reformed View, p. 59.

<sup>305</sup>Peterson D., p. 99.

<sup>306</sup>Fitzmyer J. A. Romans // The Anchor Bible. Vol. 33. – New York, Doubleday, 1993. – C. 436.

<sup>307</sup>Stewart, p. 196.

If the Law is good, then why does the born-again individual need deliverance from it? How can a direct application of Mosaic Law actually hinder spiritual growth? Schreiner advances an interesting theory in this regard. We will employ his approach with some modifications.<sup>308</sup>

Schreiner reasons that the Law of Moses was an integral part of God's covenant with Israel, and that one should not divorce the elements of that covenant from one another. According to the old covenant, the Law determined the lifestyle of those under the covenant, and forgiveness of sins was obtained through the sacrificial system. In addition, in this covenantal system, the Gentiles occupied a lower position than the physical descendants of Abraham. Finally, the initiation rite to the covenant (for males) was circumcision. The unity of the Law, then, led Paul to conclude, "I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law" (Gal 5:3).

Interestingly, this theory helps explain why Paul regarded Peter's refusal to eat with Gentiles a denial of justification by faith (see Gal 2:11-16). Schreiner feels that if one belongs to the old covenant, then one must observe all its stipulations and utilize only those benefits that the old covenant provides. In Paul's mind, then, Peter's refusal to eat with Gentiles indicates his allegiance to the old covenant.<sup>309</sup> If he has returned to the old covenant, then he forfeits forgiveness through Christ (see Gal 5:4) since the old covenant provides forgiveness only through animal sacrifices. Therefore, only one way remained for someone under the old covenant to be justified – through perfect obedience to the Law.

Therefore, Paul's rebuke was not so much that Peter was disrupting the unity of the Church, as it was that he was putting the truth of the Gospel under jeopardy. Here, we are reminded of Paul's instruction in Ephesians 2:11-16 that the elimination of the Law leads to the unification of Jews and Gentiles in one Body.

Schreiner's theory may prove helpful in resolving the question of why a direct application of Mosaic Law to the new covenant believer may prove detrimental. If Schreiner is right, then a person under the old covenant can benefit only from those provisions contained in the old covenant. Such a one, then, forfeits not only forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice, but also the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is given only to believers in Christ in the context of the new covenant (Ezek 36:26-27; Jn 14:17; Gal 4:6; Rom 5:5).

So then, in the context of the old covenant (including the Law of Moses), the Holy Spirit does not manifest His sanctifying power (at least to the same degree) that He does in the context of the new covenant. The Law has no ability in itself to empower for obedience (see Rom 8:3; Gal 3:21). It is part of the "ministry of death," which gives place in God's plan to life in the Spirit (2 Cor 3:7-8, 17-18). Therefore, we can better understand why Paul reproofed the saints in Galatia who returned to the Law, saying, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Gal 3:3).

Finally, we must note that deliverance from the Law does not justify an immoral lifestyle. In order to motivate people for godly living, however, Paul usually appeals to other principles besides the Mosaic Law: the principle of love (Rom 13:8-10; 1 Cor 13:13; Gal 5:6), the leadership of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:16-18; Rom 8:4, 14), the imitation of God (1 Cor 11:1; Eph

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<sup>308</sup>Schreiner, p. 85-87.

<sup>309</sup>Here we must keep in mind that the Law did not actually forbid Jews from eating with Gentiles. The concern was most likely that Gentiles would serve non-Kosher food.

4:32), union with Christ (Rom 6:2, 11; Col 2:20; 3:3), the teachings of Jesus (1 Cor 7:10; Acts 20:35) and the apostles (1 Cor 14:37; 2 Thes 3:14). The Law of Moses is occasionally appealed to as supplemental to these principles (Rom 13:8-10; Eph 6:2-3).

## **2. Christ's Participation in the History of the Believer: Deliverance from Disease**

As we mentioned earlier, the idea of “participation” concerns not only our sharing in Christ's history, but also His sharing in ours, in particular, in relation to healing from sickness and disease. The biblical testimony reads, “He himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases” (Matt 8:17).

Some suppose that the redemptive work of Christ applies only to our spiritual life. Serious students of Scripture, though, must all agree that Jesus bore not only our sins, but our sicknesses as well. The Matthean passage quoted above occurs in a context recounting the healing ministry of Christ as a fulfillment of a prophecy of Isaiah:

When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill. {This was} to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: “He himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases.”

It is well accepted that Isaiah 53 in its entirety relates to the sufferings of Messiah. Matthew was acquainted with this prophecy and attributed Jesus' healing ministry to His work on the cross. Therefore, healing is yet another benefit deriving from the sufferings of Messiah and therefore comprises one of the elements of our union with Christ.

We will confirm our claim that Isaiah, and Matthew after him, were speaking of physical healing. Isaiah wrote,

Surely our griefs (חַלִּי) He Himself bore, and our sorrows (מַכָּאֲבֵינוּ) He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being {fell} upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed (Isa 53:4-5).

The Hebrew term חַלִּי (*hali*) nearly always occurs in the sense of “disease” or “wound” in the body.<sup>310</sup> The sense of “wounded in spirit” is encountered very rarely (only in Ecc 5:16; 6:2). Therefore, we may confidently conclude, along with Matthew, that Isaiah 53 teaches that Messiah bore on the cross our physical ailments.

Concerning the term מַכָּאֲבֵינוּ (*mahov*), in most cases it is difficult to determine its exact meaning from context – it may refer to healing of soul as well as body.<sup>311</sup> One clear example exists of physical healing (Job 33:19), and one of healing for the soul (Ecc 1:18). Therefore, although the usage of the term מַכָּאֲבֵינוּ (*mahov*) cannot serve as confirmation of our thesis,

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<sup>310</sup>See Deut 7:15; 28:59, 61; 1 Kin 17:17; 2 Kin 1:2; 8:8-9; 13:14; Isa 1:5; 38:9; Jer 6:7; 10:19; Hos 5:13; Ps 41:3; 2 Chr 16:12; 21:15-19

<sup>311</sup>See Ex 3:7; Jer 30:15; 45:3; 51:8; Ps 32:10; 38:17; 69:26; Ecc 2:23; Lam 1:12, 18; 2 Chr 6:29



neither does it contradict it. However, since the phrases “our griefs He Himself bore,” and “our sorrows He carried” are in parallel, it is very likely that מַחֲוֹן (*mahov*) connotes physical healing as well.

Peter cites Isaiah 53 in 1 Peter 2:24, “By His wounds you were healed.” We recognize that the context of 1 Peter 2 speaks of the salvation of the soul, not healing for the body. It appears, then, that Peter relates Isaiah 53:4-5 primarily to spiritual salvation. This corresponds to the Septuagint translation, which also relates this passage to spiritual salvation. In the Septuagint, instead of the words “our sicknesses He Himself bore” contained in the Hebrew text, we read οὗτος τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν φέρει, i.e. “Our sins He bore.” Peter begins verse 24, in fact, in this way. Still, Peter’s application of Isaiah 53:4-5 to spiritual salvation, though, does not nullify its original meaning in relation to physical healing.

In summary, Harrison correctly states,

Christ’s atonement not merely took away human sin (Jn 1:29) but brought sickness and disease within His saving work as well. If this identification of the Servant with the crucified Lord is correct, it is entirely proper to see in the cross a basis for physical as well as spiritual healing.

When we look at Scripture passages recounting Jesus’ healings, it is crucial to note that He never refused healing to anyone who requested it from Him. In many cases, we specifically read that He healed all.<sup>312</sup> Peter announced, “He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil” (Acts 10:38). Duffield ascribes great significance to this observation:

It is a remarkable thing, and one worthy of a great deal of consideration, that Jesus healed every one who came to Him, or who was brought to Him, for healing. In addition... one would have expected that, if it is not God’s will to heal all who come to Him for healing in the Church age, there would have been some suggestion of this in the ministry of Jesus.<sup>313</sup>

The New Testament not only lacks any reference to Jesus refusing healing, but also records an instance when He specifically expressed His desire to heal. A leper approached Him with the words, “If You are willing, You can make me clean.” Jesus “moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’” (Mk 1:40-41). In addition, in the Acts of the Apostles we witness several examples where God healed all in need through the apostles (Acts 5:16; 19:11-12; 28:9).

We also cite a New Testament passage addressed directly to the Church:

Is anyone among you sick? {Then} he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered

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<sup>312</sup>See Matt 4:23; 8:16; 9:35; 12:15; 14:14, 36; 15:30; 19:2; 21:14; Lk. 6:18-19.

<sup>313</sup>Duffield G. P., Van Cleave N. M. Foundations of Pentecostal theology. – Los Angeles, CA: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1983. – P. 381-382.

in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him (Jam 5:14-15).

Some may object that God's plan for healing His people in the past no longer applies to believers of this age. Yet, seeing that the New Testament contains a concrete promise of healing *to the Church*, we can claim with confidence that God's attitude toward healing, reflected in earlier biblical passages, remains in force in the church age. We also note in the passage from James the connection between healing and "the name of the Lord," which links divine healing with our position in Christ.

### **3. The Believer's Participation in Christ's Resurrection**

#### **a. The New Birth**

The new birth, or "regeneration," is that experience by which a believer in Jesus Christ receives new life and a new nature. The Holy Spirit enters the heart of each believer to renew, teach, direct, strengthen, sanctify and comfort.

Horton correctly notes that regeneration as well as justification "are the effect of union with Christ."<sup>314</sup> According to Scripture, we receive regeneration in virtue of Christ's resurrection from the dead: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet 1:3). Just as the Lord Jesus passed out of death to life, believers in Him pass out of the condition of spiritual death into a new condition – new life in Christ.

Paul also links the experience of the new birth with Christ's resurrection. We read in Romans 6:4, "As Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." He repeats this thought in Ephesians 2:5-6: "Even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ... and raised us up with Him." Colossians 2:13 reads, "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him."<sup>315</sup>

It is significant that when Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, He immediately charged them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn 20:22). This indicates that the experience of the new birth through the Spirit was connected with His physical resurrection and became available from that time.

Several commentators express this truth well. A. J. Gordon, for example, draws the following comparison: "In Christ crucified we put off the old man, in Christ risen we put on the new man."<sup>316</sup> In Berkhof's words, "The mystical union with Christ also secures for the believer the continuously transforming power of the life of Christ."<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>314</sup>Horton M. S. Traditional reformed view // Beilby J. K., Eddy P. R., Enderlein, S. E. Justification: Five views. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011. Kindle Edition, 1102.

<sup>315</sup>Packer J. I. Regeneration // Elwell W. A. Evangelical dictionary of theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 1000-1001.

<sup>316</sup>Gordon, p. 57-58.

<sup>317</sup>Berkhof, Systematic theology, p. 452.

Rightmire rightly emphasizes that the Christian calling is more than just imitating Christ's example: "Christian experience is more than an imitation of the life and teaching of Jesus. It is the present experience of the risen Christ indwelling the believer's heart by the Spirit."<sup>318</sup> Campbell also speaks of this life transformation: "It is important to observe that the fruit here described (in Gal 5:22-23) is not produced by a believer, but by the Holy Spirit working through a Christian who is in vital union with Christ."<sup>319</sup> In the words of F. F. Bruce, these are qualities which only Jesus Christ can produce."<sup>320</sup> Walvoord concurs, "If the disciples were to bear fruit, they could do so only in virtue of their union with Christ."<sup>321</sup>

## **b. The Resurrection of the Body**

The second aspect of our participation in Christ's resurrection consists of our future physical resurrection from the dead in an immortal, glorified body. Scripture confirms the connection of our resurrection with His: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor 15:22), and, "If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom 8:11).

The Bible reveals that our future bodies will be like the risen body of our Lord: "...who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory" (Phil 3:21), and, "Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor 15:49).

How can we characterize the risen body of our Lord and our new resurrected bodies? First, it was a true physical body. The disciples saw Him and touched Him. He ate food with them. Consequently, we can expect to receive a glorified, but still physical body. Second, Jesus rose in the same body that was crucified. Our mortal bodies will be raised as well. The new body is immortal (1 Cor 15:42), just as Christ's new body is not subject to death: "Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him" (Rom 6:9).

Next, the new body is a glorious body (1 Cor 15:43). The word "glory" can refer to a "brightness" (Matt 13:43; Dan 12:3), or simply indicate special abilities of the new body. In addition, the new body is powerful (1 Cor 15:43). This may refer either to the fact that this body does not tire, or maybe to other special abilities. Finally, the new body is spiritual (1 Cor 15:44), which does not mean that it is immaterial, but that it possesses certain qualities characteristic of spirit.

## **c. Justification?**

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<sup>318</sup>Rightmire, *Union with Christ*, p. 789.

<sup>319</sup>Campbell D. K. *Galatians* // Walvoord J. F., Zuck R. B. *The Bible knowledge commentary: an exposition of the Scriptures*. – Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985. – V. 2. – P. 608.

<sup>320</sup>Bruce F. F. *Philippians* // Gasque W. W. *A Good News commentary*. – San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983. – P. 13.

<sup>321</sup>Walvoord J. F. *Prayer in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ* // *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 91. 1934. P. 469.

Some authors mistakenly suppose that our justification before God results from the resurrection of Christ. Tilton, for example, teaches that Christ's resurrection was His justification, or more precisely His vindication before the world, showing the Father's approval of Him.<sup>322</sup> Therefore, as participants in His life, we became participants in His justification as well. Another adherent of this view was Geerhardus Vos, who taught, "Just as Christ is the justified one by virtue of his Spirit-wrought resurrection and resurrection life, so also the believer is justified by the reception of this same Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of Christ."<sup>323</sup>

Gaffin offers another variant of this teaching, connecting the "justification" of Jesus with His ultimate liberation from the power of sin.<sup>324</sup> He writes, "Paul does not view the justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification of the believer as separate, distinct acts but as different facets or aspects of the one act of incorporation with the resurrected Christ."<sup>325</sup> The following passages supposedly support this view. Paul wrote that Jesus was "delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification" (Rom 4:25). In addition, 1 Timothy 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 6:11 speak of the role of the Spirit in justification.

On the other hand, the key Scripture passages on justification of the believer associate it not with Christ's resurrection, but with His death for our sins as our representative on the cross. We read:

- ...being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood... so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom 3:24-26)
- ...having now been justified by His blood... (Rom 5:9)
- So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men (Rom 5:18)
- By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities (Isa 53:11)

Concerning Paul's words in Romans 4:24, "delivered over because (διὰ) of our transgressions, and was raised because (διὰ) of our justification," the word "because" (διὰ - *dia*) indicates two things: that Jesus died because we have already sinned, and was raised because we were already justified, namely by His death.

We do not challenge the claim that Jesus was justified (or vindicated) as a result of His resurrection by the Spirit – not before God, but before the world. His execution was as criminal was public, and therefore His vindication must needs be through a physical resurrection from the dead as well.

The Spirit does play a role in our justification (1 Tim 3:16; 1 Cor 6:11), but only in the sense that He applies *all* the benefits of Christ's redemptive work to us, including our justification.

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<sup>322</sup>Tipton, p. 11. Yet Tipton also acknowledges the role of Christ's redemptive death in our justification. He thus proposes two bases for our justification.

<sup>323</sup>Evans, p. 23

<sup>324</sup>Gaffin, The centrality of the resurrection, p. 125-126.

<sup>325</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

In summary, we conclude that attributing our justification to the resurrection is merely a mistaken attempt to ascribe all aspects of our salvation to our participation in the entire life of Jesus. Yet, in light of the evidence examined earlier, we reject this position. Our justification is linked to the forensic aspect of our position in Christ as our corporate head, and not to our participation in His history.

#### **4. The Believer's Participation in Christ's Exaltation**

The next aspect of our position "in Christ" is being partakers in His ascension and exaltation. After His resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven, where He now resides. When He ascended, He also was exalted and became King of Kings, as the Scripture says, "God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name" (Phil 2:9). In other words, Jesus was exalted to the place of power and authority. Together with Him, God "seated us with Him in the heavenly {places} in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6). Now, Jesus invites us to share His power and authority.

##### **a. Power for Ministry**

Although God's power is available for all believers in Christ, we must mention a special event in the history of the Church that occurred on the Jewish Feast of Pentecost. Before this feast, Jesus promised His first disciples that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit through an experience called the "baptism in the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:8). On the day of Pentecost, Jesus' words were fulfilled, and from that time onward, the disciples' ministry was characterized by supernatural power.

In Acts 2:33, Peter announced that this empowering experience was tied to the exaltation of Jesus: "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear." Note that the outpouring of the Spirit was directly connected to the exaltation of Jesus Christ. In addition, in Ephesians 4:7-11 Paul writes that the exalted Jesus gives gifts to His Church. So then, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is our participation in the exaltation of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament contains many examples of people receiving the baptism in the Spirit after their conversion to Christ. We recall that in John 20:22, Jesus imparted the Holy Spirit to His apostles in the form of regeneration. Some days later, however, they received the power of the Spirit in the form of the baptism in the Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:1-4). Moreover, many Samaritans came to Christ as a result of Phillip's preaching, but the Spirit "had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 8:16). When Peter and John came, though, "they {began} laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:17).

Let us examine Paul's experience. When he encountered the Lord on the road to Damascus, without doubt, he received Him at that time as His Lord and Savior. However, later, when Ananias laid hands on him, he was filled with the Spirit (Acts 9:17-18). Finally, in the city of Ephesus Paul met several disciples of John the Baptist, brought them to faith in Jesus and baptized them in water. Then, "when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they {began} speaking with tongues and prophesying" (Acts 19:6). It is also worth

mentioning that the Lord Jesus Himself, as an example for us, did no miracle until the Spirit descended on Him (Lk 3:21-22; Acts 10:38).

Now, all believers in Jesus can receive the same Spirit baptism, through which they can more fully share in the exaltation of Jesus, that is, benefit from the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit in their lives and ministries.

### **b. Authority over Satan and Deliverance from His Power**

Christ's exaltation means that He was given "the name which is above every name" (see Phil 2:9-11). Therefore, He has all authority in heaven and on earth. Before His ascension and in anticipation of His exaltation, Jesus announced to His disciples, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt 28:18). Now, Jesus resides "at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb 1:3; 8:1; 12:2).

His position at the Father's right hand means that Christ now possesses authority over all the powers of evil. Therefore, Peter writes, "...who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him" (1 Pet 3:22). Paul echoes this thought in writing, "He is the head over all rule and authority" (Col 2:10).

Of course, since Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, all the powers of darkness were already subject to Him. Jesus displayed His spiritual authority during His earthly ministry by casting out demons (Mark 1:23-25). Even before His exaltation, Jesus endowed His disciples with spiritual power: "Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy" (Lk 10:19).

However, the authority Christ received in connection with His exaltation has importance for the Church. He was exalted in His capacity as the Head of the Church. Paul states,

... seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly {places,} far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Eph 1:20-23).

Therefore, since believers are positionally located in Christ, He shares with the Church His authority over the devil and all demons. Arnold writes the following, "Sharing with Christ in His exaltation is particularly important as we consider spiritual warfare because this enables sharing with Christ in his present authority over that realm."<sup>326</sup> Unger also holds this view: "Realizing we are what we are 'in Christ' (Rom 6:1-10) and reckoning upon our wondrous position of union (Rom 6:11) is the ground and the source of our power over the devil and his hosts."<sup>327</sup>

At the same time, it is important to emphasize that the believer's victory over the powers of evil is inseparably connected with the redemption Jesus accomplished through His sacrificial death for us. Let us explain.

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<sup>326</sup>Arnold C. E. Three crucial questions about spiritual warfare. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997. – P. 40.

<sup>327</sup>Unger M. F. Biblical demonology. – Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press, 1952. – P. 222.

Satan exercises influence over people in three ways: through accusation, temptation, and affliction. First, the Bible testifies that Satan is the accuser (Rev 12:10). Since all people have sinned against God, Satan has a basis for accusing us before God. However, thanks to the shed blood of Christ Jesus, Satan has lost that basis for accusing believers in the Lord (Rev 12:11). The forgiveness of sins, provided by Christ, delivers the believer from Satan's accusations.

Satan's second maneuver is temptation. Since people are born enslaved to sin, Satan is able to manipulate their behavior by tempting their sinful desires. In this way, he can control those under sin's power and cause them to do his will. However, Jesus not only took upon Himself the punishment for our sins, but destroyed sin's power as well (Rom 6:6). Therefore, believers are free from Satan's control through temptation.

Finally, Satan is active causing physical afflictions to come on people. Yet, God's promise stands to protect His children from evil (Ps 91, 121).

So then, on the one hand, the *death* of Christ delivers us from the power and dominion of darkness. On the other hand, as mentioned above, the *exaltation* of Christ provides the believer with power and dominion over the works of Satan and demons.

Lincoln comes to the following conclusion:

Union with Christ is extended to a union with him in his exaltation to heaven, sharing his triumph over the cosmic powers.... It serves to remind the readers that they have been transferred to a new dominion inaugurated by Christ's resurrection and exaltation, in which they can experience new life and liberation from the powers which previously held them enslaved.<sup>328</sup>

## **5. The Believer's Participation in Christ's Second Coming**

Finally, the believer will be revealed with Christ in glory at His Second Coming. The following verses proclaim this truth:

- For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory (Col 3:3-4).
- Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is (1 Jn 3:2).

At the present time, our life is "hidden with Christ." This means that, although we may enjoy many of the blessings connected with our union with Christ now, the full riches of that position are revealed only when Christ is revealed at His Second Coming. Again, we see a connection between Jesus and us. While He is still "hidden" in heaven, the fullness of our life in Him is also "hidden." But when He "appears," we shall attain perfection and glorification.

So then, our position in Christ has an eschatological dimension, which finds fulfillment only in the future. In the next chapter, in fact, we will discuss which features of our union with Christ are available in this life, and which are reserved for the future. Together with Peter, we "fix

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<sup>328</sup>Lincoln, p. 117.

(our) hope completely on the grace to be brought to (us) at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:13).

Nonetheless, we can preliminarily detail now the blessings that await us: a new, glorified body (Rom 8:23), transformation into the likeness of Christ (1 Jn 3:2),<sup>329</sup> and seeing God in His glory (Matt 5:8). In addition, Jesus promised His disciples a sharing in His future earthly kingdom. The book of Revelation records, "You have made them {to be} a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." (Rev 5:10).

Johnson gives the following fine description of the benefits associated with Christ's return:

To say that we are, and shall be, glorified in Christ means that our union with him will reach its full, final, and glorious climax as we are raised in our bodies to enjoy everlasting perfect communion with and likeness to Christ. As we come to the full realization of our glorification in Christ, the benefits of which we have already partaken, and which he has continually upheld and preserved, will be fully realized."<sup>330</sup>

Glorification, then, is the summation and realization of all the blessings and promises we have been given due to our inclusion in Christ.<sup>331</sup>

### **C. Benefits Connected with Participation in His Body, the Church**

Many practical applications flow from our inclusion in the Church, the Body of Christ. First, since all believers are united in one Body and in one union with the Head, then they must live in unity among themselves. We cannot tolerate discrimination between parties: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). In the light of our position in Christ, "from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh" (2 Cor 5:16).

In Ephesians 2, Paul directly links the unity of the Church with the redemptive work of Christ:

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both {groups into} one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, {which is} the Law of commandments {contained} in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, {thus} establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity (Eph 2:13-16).

Second, mutual care and concern should exist among members of the same Body. In a context addressing healthy interrelationships in the Church, Paul writes, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if {one} member is honored, all the members rejoice

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<sup>329</sup>One may qualify, though, that this moral transformation will occur at death, prior to Christ's Second Coming.

<sup>330</sup>Johnson M. P., p. 171.

<sup>331</sup>Ibid., p. 188.



with it" (1 Cor 12:26). In his epistle to the Ephesians, he continues the same thought: "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Eph 4:32).

Third, each member of the Body occupies a certain place in it and is called to perform a certain function for the good of all: "...from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love" (Eph 4:16). Even though the gifts among the members differ, they all benefit the Body. Therefore, Peter instructs, "As each one has received a {special} gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet 4:10).

Aside from the expression "Body of Christ," other metaphors express the unity that exists between Christ and the Church and between members of the Body, as well as describe the character of the Church in general.<sup>332</sup> The Church is God's flock (1 Pet 5:2) – it depends on God's care, protection, etc. The Church is God's temple (1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21-22), the place of habitation for God's Spirit (1 Cor 3:16; Rev 2:1). It stands on the foundation of Christ (1 Cor 3:11; 1 Pet 2:4-6; Eph 2:20; Acts 4:11). All believers are priests, who bring God sacrifices of praise and good works (1 Pet 2:5). The Church is the Bride of Christ (Rev 21:2; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:30-32). It enjoys an intimate relationship with Jesus and is an object of His special love.

In addition to all that has been said, the New Testament abounds with other instructions for life in the Body. Yet, to engage in a full study of the character of the Church would require another volume.

#### **D. Concluding Thoughts**

We have divided the benefits of union with Christ into three categories: benefits connected with His role as our corporate head, benefits connected with our participation in His redemptive events, and benefits connected with our participation in His Body, the Church. Our final observation concerns how the nature of these specific benefits corresponds with their respective categories.

Benefits associated with Christ's representative role, i.e., forgiveness of sins, the gift of righteousness, and adoption into God's family, all relate to the believer's *status* before God. The sinful status of the believer was applied to Christ in His substitutionary death, and the status of righteousness and sonship Christ possesses by nature is applied to the believer by grace. Thus, we share in Christ's status, as He shared in ours.

Benefits associated with our participation in His redemptive events, i.e., deliverance from sin, sickness and law, power for Christian life and ministry, and the hope of resurrection and future glory, relate to the believer's personal *experience*. Christ's experience of death, resurrection, exaltation, and Second Coming appears in the believer's experience in the form of victorious Christian living. Thus, Christ's experience becomes our experience.

Finally, benefits associated with participation in Christ's Body, the Church, relate to the believer entering into *community* with others who are also in Christ. Solidarity with Christ has a

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<sup>332</sup>Thiessen, p. 307-308; Dusing M. L. The New Testament Church // Horton S. Systematic theology. – Revised Ed. – Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 1994. – P. 532ff.

communal aspect of life in the Body. Thus, the members of Christ become the members of our spiritual family.



Image by Steve Haselden from Pixabay

## Chapter 5. Other Important Aspects of Union with Christ

In discussing the believer's union with Christ, some questions and concerns may arise that we must address. First, what participation do believers have in the sufferings of Christ? Second, is the system of "corporate personality" fair, seeing that Adam sinned, but all people suffer as a result? Third, who is included in this union with Christ: only believers, or all humanity? Next, when can we expect to fully enjoy the benefits of our union with Christ? Finally, what about union with God the Father? Does the Bible say anything about that? We will devote this chapter to these special topics.

### A. Participation in the Sufferings of Christ and Separation from the World

In the previous chapter, we spoke of the benefits available through union with Christ. At the same time, the New Testament testifies to still another aspect of this union, which we must not omit. An inescapable part of our Christian experience is suffering for Christ. As Berkhof writes, "His sufferings are, in a measure, reproduced and completed in the lives of his followers."<sup>333</sup> Campbell concurs, "Since Christ suffered, believers will inevitably follow him in his sufferings."<sup>334</sup>

Jesus, in fact, alerted His disciples to this consequence of following Him: "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before {it hated} you.... If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (Jn 15:18-20). Mark records the following challenge from our Lord: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me" (Mk 8:34). Jesus invited His disciples to "drink the cup that I drink," and "be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized" (Mk 10:38). Note in these verses that suffering for Christ is directly connected with our union with Him.

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<sup>333</sup>Berkhof, Systematic theology, p. 453.

<sup>334</sup>Campbell C. R., p. 380.

Paul also teaches this principle: “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12). He also claimed that we are “fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with {Him} so that we may also be glorified with {Him}” (Rom 8:17). In a similar fashion, the apostle John, while in exile on Patmos, considered himself a “fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance {which are} in Jesus” (Rev 1:9).

We will examine Paul’s teaching in Colossians 1:24 in more detail. He writes, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.” Here, we must not understand Paul’s statement to “fill up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” as referring to Paul’s sufferings having redemptive significance.<sup>335</sup> Paul is working off the principle of union with Christ and claiming that the Church receives a certain “quota” of suffering, which it is appointed to endure. In his sufferings, Paul is “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” in the sense of filling up a certain measure of this “quota” of suffering.

We find a confirmation of our thesis in Revelation 6:10-11, where the martyrs ask, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” The Divine answer: “Until {the number of} their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.” It appears that a certain amount of suffering is assigned to the Church, which is fulfilled both by the martyrs and by other believers as well.

Best advances another view – Paul was referring to the “messianic woes,” which, according to Jewish tradition, must occur before His appearance.<sup>336</sup> On the other hand, it seems doubtful that Paul would rely on rabbinic tradition. Ellis supports our conclusion that Paul is associating our suffering with the sufferings of Christ, not with the “messianic woes.”<sup>337</sup>

We must also note Paul’s attitude toward His sufferings for Christ – he rejoices in them. This corresponds to what the Lord Jesus Himself taught His disciples: “Blessed are you when {people} insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great” (Matt 5:11-12). The Apostolic Church did just that. After the apostles were beaten, “they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for {His} name” (Acts 5:41). Johnson makes the following comment, “It is no wonder, then, that Paul rejoiced in his sufferings. Seen in the light of his union with Christ, they were transfigured and made an occasion for fellowship with Him, as well as a benefit to the body, the church.”<sup>338</sup>

O’Brien suggest still another reason to rejoice – our future sharing in the glory of God, as Paul wrote, “...if indeed we suffer with {Him} so that we may also be glorified with {Him}” (Rom 8:17).<sup>339</sup> Here, we must clarify that participation in Christ’s sufferings does not earn one’s salvation or glorification by God. Suffering for Christ is simply one of the multiple components

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<sup>335</sup>In this regard, Wikenhauser comments that in describing the “afflictions of Christ” in Colossians 1:24, Paul employs the term *θλίψις* (*phlipsis*), which is never used in relation to Jesus’ redemptive sufferings (Wikenhauser, c. 160). Also see Bouttier, p. 82-83, who calls Paul’s sufferings not “redemptive,” but “eschatological.”

<sup>336</sup>Best, p. 136.

<sup>337</sup>Ellis E. E. Colossians // Pfeiffer, C. F., Harrison, E. F. The Wycliffe Bible commentary: New Testament. – Chicago: Moody Press, 1962. – P. 136.

<sup>338</sup>Johnson S. L., Jr. Studies in the epistle to the Colossians // Bibliotheca Sacra. 119. 1962. P. 231.

<sup>339</sup>O’Brien, Colossians, Philemon, p. 170.

of union with Christ. Those who are in union with Him can expect both sharing in His sufferings and appearing with Him in glory.

It is interesting to compare Jesus' sufferings with those of Stephen, with whom we can draw a parallel. Both were tried before the Sanhedrin and were accused of blasphemy. Both were slandered by false witnesses. Both Jesus and Stephen were driven from the city. Both spoke of the "Son of Man": Stephen saw Him in a vision, while Jesus claimed to be Him. Both prayed that God would receive their spirits. Both Stephen and Jesus forgave their enemies. It is very unlikely that these parallels happened by chance. They were recorded to show that believers, after the model of Stephen, are sharers in Jesus' sufferings.

Schweitzer makes the interesting observation that Paul often compares his sufferings for Jesus with the condition of death (see Phil 3:10-11; Rom 8:35-36; 2 Cor 1:8-10; 4:8-12; 11:23; Gal 6:17), which may also demonstrate an association between the believer's sufferings and those of Jesus Christ.<sup>340</sup>

We must make another clarification. When we speak of suffering for Jesus, we mean those trials that are directly connected with our life of Christian discipleship and service. The following passages make that clear:

- But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you (1 Pet 4:13-14).
- For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ... For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came {to us} in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life (2 Cor 1:5-8).

Therefore, it is improper to speak of the general tribulations that all people experience as suffering for Jesus. Lenski agrees, "It is a mistake to call all our suffering a cross.... The cross is that suffering alone which results from our faithful connection with Christ."<sup>341</sup> The Lutheran theologian Mueller also concurs, "It is only the Christian who is said to bear a cross, and this indeed as he exercises his Christian calling in the world."<sup>342</sup> On the other hand, Tannehill notes an exception to this rule. In Romans 8:17-23, it seems that Paul connects suffering for Christ with the general suffering in the world.<sup>343</sup>

Another issue related to Christian suffering and self-denial is the separation from the world our connection with Christ involves. Since Christ has left the world and resides in heaven, our affections and hopes are directed there as well. Paul expresses it well in his letter to the Colossians:

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<sup>340</sup>Schweitzer, p. 141-143.

<sup>341</sup>Lenski R. C. H. The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel. – Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1943. – P. 624.

<sup>342</sup>Mueller D. T. Christian dogmatics. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934. – P. 424. Macaskill reasons the same (see Macaskill, Union with Christ in the New Testament, p. 246).

<sup>343</sup>Tannehill, p. 114.

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:1-3).

In a similar way, Paul warns the Christians in Philippi about those who “set their minds on earthly things,” and reminds them, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:19-20).

## **B. Is the Principle of Corporate Personality Unfair?**

At first glance, it seems that the system of “corporate personality” and the corresponding systems of “union with Adam” and “union with Christ” are unjust. Adam’s transgression leads to misery for all his descendants. Christ alone is righteous, but sinners can be justified in Him.

Yet, without the system of corporate personality in place, matters would be much worse. If we began life without the inherited curse from Adam, as the heretic Pelagius taught in the fourth century, we would have no innate tendency to sin. Nonetheless, we would still have free will and the potential to sin. After our first personal sin, we would be under condemnation with no hope of redemption, since without the principle of solidarity we could receive no benefit from Christ. The absence of solidarity would affect both our relationship with Adam and our relationship with Christ. We would inherit neither sin from Adam, nor righteousness from Christ.

However, with the system of corporate personality in place, we begin life in a sinful state, having inherited guilt and depravity from Adam. Yet, by one act of faith, we can be joined to Christ and receive forgiveness and justification thanks to His representative and substitutionary work as our corporate head. Therefore, without solidarity, one transgression leads to damnation without hope of redemption, while with solidarity, one act of faith leads to justification and eternal life. We strongly prefer the second option.

## **C. Who Can Benefit from Union with Christ?**

The question arises, “Does union with Christ apply to all people, or just to believers in Jesus?” If Jesus represented *the whole* of humanity before the Father, then why would the benefits of His redemptive work not automatically apply to all? Did Paul not write, “As through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men” (Rom 5:18)? At first glance, it seems that both the sin of Adam and salvation in Christ have universal application.

This observation could support the theory of “universalism,” which states that in the end, all will be saved. The Bible, though, does not support this view, but speaks plainly of the eternal damnation of the lost (see Isa 66:24; Matt 25:46; Mk 9:44; Rev 14:11; 20:15).

Another approach claims that all people are included in union with Christ and are already saved and justified before God, but people must personally accept the gospel to enjoy these

benefits. Augustus Strong is one supporter of this view.<sup>344</sup> He fears that if Jesus did not incorporate all humanity into His redemptive work, then He did not die for all.

Thomas Torrance reasons similarly:

“The vicariously fulfilled work of Christ can never be nullified by our rejection or unbelief. Our participation in this ontological resurrection can never be determined by our will, act, effort, and decision.” We are “ontologically united with him, our resurrection has already taken place in him.... Only he who makes a faith response to it ‘discovers’ his ontological involvement in the resurrection of Christ and in the objective reality of Jesus Christ, and enjoys the fruit of the resurrection, i.e., salvation and justification.”<sup>345</sup>

At the same time, one must consider Austin-Sparks’ objection that the New Testament speaks only of active believers as being “in Christ.” We may assume from this that unbelievers are not “in Him.”<sup>346</sup>

Nevertheless, this theory does gain support from 1 Cor 15:22: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.” Does this imply that the resurrection of all people, both righteous and unrighteous, derives from an all-inclusive union with Christ? If that is so, then in some sense all people are included in union with Christ and will benefit from it, at least in regard to physical resurrection.

A third point of view operates on the concept of “potential.” Although theoretically all people were included in Christ during His redemptive work, their position “in Him” is only potential. Only when one turns to the Lord is that potential realized. The main Scripture supporting this option is Romans 5:17: “For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.” The word “receive” indicates that one benefits from one’s union with Christ only through putting personal trust in Christ. Whereas the consequences of Adam’s sin automatically transmit to his descendants, the abundance of grace is only for those who receive it.

The “potential union” view conforms to the New Testament testimony that only believers are truly in Christ. Best agrees, “We can certainly say that there is a potential solidarity of all men with Christ and a real solidarity of all believers with him.”<sup>347</sup> Mounce reasons likewise, “Paul did not intend to imply that the result of Christ’s atoning work automatically provided justification for all regardless of their willingness to accept it.”<sup>348</sup> Morris expresses this thought as follows, “All people insofar as they relate to Adam are sinners and insofar as they relate to Christ are righteous.”<sup>349</sup>

Finally, a fourth theory limits the application of union with Christ still more. It claims that all humanity was not included in Christ’s redemptive work, but only those chosen by God. This is

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<sup>344</sup>Strong, p. 802.

<sup>345</sup>Lee, p. 128-129.

<sup>346</sup>Austin-Sparks, p. 39.

<sup>347</sup>Best, p. 38.

<sup>348</sup>Mounce R. H. Romans. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995. – P. 145.

<sup>349</sup>Morris, Romans, p. 240.

the Calvinistic view. For example, Hodge believes that in eternity past, God gave His Son “a certain portion of the human race,” whom He represented, and for whom He died. Hodge writes, “He was the representative of those given to Him, i.e., of those who were in Him.... He was therefore the federal head, not of the human race, but of those given to Him by the Father.”<sup>350</sup>

Berkhof, in support of the Calvinistic view, argues that it is necessary for the elect to be included in union with Christ before their conversion, since fallen persons are not able in their own strength to repent or believe in Jesus. This is possible only by God’s prevenient grace made available exclusively to God’s chosen ones through union with Christ. At the time when God calls His chosen ones to Himself, the Holy Spirit, by virtue of their inclusion in Christ, enables them to repent and believe.<sup>351</sup>

On the other hand, the Calvinistic view directly contradicts Paul’s teaching in Romans 5:18 that, at least potentially, “through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to *all men*.” In addition, it violates the clear parallel between the universal transmission of both Adam’s sin and Christ’s righteousness, noted in Romans 5. Moreover, the Bible teaches that Jesus did not die only for the elect, but also for the whole world: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29) and “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor 5:19).

All things considered, we prefer the “potential union” theory, since it corresponds best to the biblical witness. We must take seriously that, according to the New Testament, only believers are actually in Christ. This position “in Him” is potentially available to all, since the Father appointed His Son the “Second Adam,” i.e., the representative of all humanity. This potential, however, is realized only through personal faith in Jesus as personal Lord and Savior.

Concerning Strong’s objection, noted above, that denying an actual universal union with Christ implies that Jesus did not die for all, we respond that in His capacity as humanity’s representative, Jesus truly bore the punishment for the sins of all. Now, by virtue of Christ’s representation, God can offer to the unbelieving world access to union with Christ by accepting His redemptive sacrifice. Yet, although Christ in His death functioned as humanity’s representative, the Bible does not give us liberty to consider unbelievers to be “in Him” before their conversion to Him.

However, when unbelievers accept the substitutionary work of Jesus on the cross for their sins, they enter into this union and are eligible for its benefits. For them, the death of Christ has potential benefits that are realized at the moment of faith. Therefore, we make a distinction between the “potential union” with Christ, which applies to all people and in virtue of which Jesus became the substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of the world, and an “actual union,” which applies only to believers and results in the blessings inherent to it.

Concerning Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor 15:22, it appears that the resurrection of both the righteous and unrighteous does indeed derive from Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Some object, though, that here Paul has in mind only the resurrection of the righteous. Nonetheless, the fact that Paul compares death in Adam, which applies to all, with resurrection in Christ weakens that objection.

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<sup>350</sup>Hodge C. Systematic theology. – V. 2. – P. 551.

<sup>351</sup>Berkhof, Systematic theology, p. 449.



Mantzaridis claims that, in general, the Church Fathers taught that, although believers are raised in connection with Jesus' resurrection, unbelievers are raised merely by a manifestation of God's glory.<sup>352</sup> Yet, the biblical text does not support this view. E. Best proposes another misguided solution. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul's aim is simply to draw a parallel between Adam and Christ, but not to precisely detail the implications of that comparison.<sup>353</sup> However, in refutation of Best's view we note that the implications of Christ's resurrection are clearly indicated – an all-inclusive resurrection of the dead.

Therefore, we conclude that in relation to the resurrection of the dead the "potential union" with Christ is realized unilaterally for all people as an exception to the rule of a need for personal faith. There will be an all-inclusive resurrection at the end of time (Jn 5:28-28), and God employs the resurrection of the Second Adam as the basis for the resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

One must also consider that the resurrection of unbelievers scarcely compares to the resurrection of the righteous. The latter receive glorious, powerful, immortal bodies. On the other hand, even though the resurrected bodies of the unbelievers are also immortal, we can hardly call their future state "glorious." So then, their participation in union with Christ is minimal.

Finally, some teach that children of believers in Jesus automatically enter into covenant with God in virtue of their belonging to a Christian family. Adherents of this position term union with Christ as "federal," "vital" and "*natural*." However, Fesko and Shedd make the important qualification that this final term is inappropriate to describe true union with Christ.<sup>354</sup> In relation to salvation, there is no transmission of blessing by natural descent. Only those who are personally linked to Christ by faith enjoy union with Him.

#### **D. When Will Our Union with Christ Be Fully Actualized?**

In discussing the topic of union with Christ, it is vitally important to define when one can expect to receive the benefits the Father offers us in His Son. Some aspects of this union are available immediately upon receiving Jesus, others are progressively realized in the Christian life, and still others are experienced only in eternity. In the world of theology, we encounter the phrase "already, but not yet." This means that certain of the benefits of union with Christ are available now, but others – only in the future.

This approach corresponds to the biblical view of two eras or ages. The first is the present age, which is characterized by sin, death and the powers of darkness. The coming age is one of perfection in the Kingdom of God. Between them, though, exists an intermediate period, in which the Christian now lives. During this stage, we experience our blessings in Christ only partially. Although, believers in Jesus enjoy an abundance of grace now, they still await the consummation of God's plan and the attainment of perfection at the end of time.

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<sup>352</sup>Mantzaridis G. I. The deification of man: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox tradition. – Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984. – P. 119.

<sup>353</sup>Best, p. 40.

<sup>354</sup>Fesko J. V. Vos and Berkhof on union with Christ and justification // Calvin Theological Journal. 47(1). 2012. P. 55; Shedd, Man in community, p. 112.

At times, theologians have emphasized one side or another of this truth. Those who emphasize the present realization of our benefits in Jesus advance “realized eschatology.” Those who stress our future inheritance – “futuristic eschatology.” An intermediate position is “inaugurated eschatology,” which claims that the Kingdom of God has been inaugurated, but still awaits its consummation.

Several key Scriptural passages demonstrate a two-sided biblical eschatology, thus supporting the view of inaugurated eschatology.<sup>355</sup> For example, concerning the biblical teaching on the end times, 1 Corinthians 10:11 teaches that we already live in them, while 1 Timothy 4:1 speaks of them as a future phenomenon.

- 1 Cor 10:11 – Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.
- 1 Tim 4:1 – But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.

Concerning the resurrection from the dead, Romans 6:4 reveals that in Christ, believers have already experienced a spiritual resurrection, that is, the new birth. Yet, 1 Thessalonians describes a coming physical resurrection.

- Rom 6:4 – ...as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.
- 1 Thes 4:16 – The dead in Christ will rise first.

Regarding the coming of God’s Kingdom, we see the same duality. According to Luke 17:21, God’s Kingdom is already present in the world. On the other hand, Jesus taught His disciples to pray for the Kingdom to come.

- Lk 17:21 – Nor will they say, “Look, here {it is!}” or, “There {it is!}.” For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.
- Matt 6:10 – Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

In relation to the gift of the Spirit, on Pentecost Day Peter announced that God has already poured out His Spirit. However, in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he reminds us that the presence of the Spirit is a pledge of still greater future blessings.

- Acts 2:17 – “And it shall be in the last days,” God says, “that I will pour forth of my spirit on all mankind.”
- Eph 1:13-14 – You were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance.

Wikenhauser draws our attention to other examples of two-sided eschatology. We are: justified now (1 Cor 6:11; 5:1) and in the future (Gal 5:5; Rom 3:30); children of God now (Rom

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<sup>355</sup>McGrath A. E. Christian theology. – 5th ed. – West Sussex, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. – P. 445-446.

8:14; Gal 4:6) and in the future (Rom 8:23); in the heavenlies now (Eph 2:6) and in the future (2 Cor 5:8; 1 Thes 4:17).<sup>356</sup>

We observe this duality in Romans 5 as well. When describing the blessings of being in Christ, Paul sometimes prefers using the future tense: “will reign in life” (v. 17) and “will be made righteous” (v. 19). Mounce comments that “the future tense of the verb probably points to a time yet to come when believers will join with Jesus Christ in his reign,”<sup>357</sup> yet he also allows that it can relate to the present experience of believers, since they already enjoys an initiation into this new life. Dunn agrees, “Believers already experience something at least of the new life... even if its full manifestation is not yet.”<sup>358</sup>

“Realized eschatology,” though, not only lacks scriptural support, but also, as Bouttier insightfully notes, unnecessarily burdens the believer with unrealistic expectations for things not attainable in this age.<sup>359</sup> On the other hand, “futuristic eschatology” is also problematic, as Martin notes: “Union with Christ is never a purely position reality... it is *life-transforming and ethical*.”<sup>360</sup>

Johnson aptly comments on inaugurated eschatology: “Our union with Christ is both definitive (we have been decisively united to Christ) and progressive (we are continually growing in our union with him)... we continue to grow into the fullness of Christ throughout our lives.”<sup>361</sup> Bouttier states that the blessings in Christ which we receive in this life motivate us to press on in faith, anticipating the fullness of blessing that awaits us: “The new life appears as a continual invitation to go further, reminding us of what we have not yet received, the inheritance that is being kept for us in heaven.”<sup>362</sup>

Martin adds that even the occasional discouragement which believers in their striving for holiness experience is just another confirmation of the future inheritance in Christ yet to come. He writes that when the Christian is frustrated with a lack of holiness, it is evidence of union with Christ because “God has not decreed that he shall yet attain it in this life, and it is the very thing that causes his pain, even the disparity between what he knows he shall be and what he is presently.”<sup>363</sup> In other words, the certainty that we will ultimately attain perfection actually causes the discouragement we experience when we fail to live up to that expectation now.

A. J. Gordon introduces a healthy perspective toward one’s striving for holiness in Christ. In light of our position in Christ, we enter the struggle against sin from the vantage point of a victor: “He who is in Christ fights *from* victory in his very attempts to fight *for* victory.”<sup>364</sup> Even personal failures in the process of sanctification can benefit the believer, since they compel one to trust less in one’s personal strength, and more in the Lord. Dunn makes the following comment on this paradox between defeat and victory in the Christian life:

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<sup>356</sup>Wikenhauser, p. 207.

<sup>357</sup>Mounce, p. 145.

<sup>358</sup>Dunn, Romans 1-8, p. 283.

<sup>359</sup>Bouttier, p. 35-36.

<sup>360</sup>Martin A. N., p. 57-58.

<sup>361</sup>Johnson M. P., p. 129.

<sup>362</sup>Bouttier, p. 38.

<sup>363</sup>Martin A. N., p. 67.

<sup>364</sup>Gordon, p. 95.

No religious experience however profound or spiritual or inspired or glorious sets the believer free from the limitations of his present experience. On the contrary it is precisely that experience which most clearly manifests the paradox of power in weakness, of life through death, of greatness as serving, which is to be recognized as typically Christian.<sup>365</sup>

In the following statement, Douglas Moo combines all three temporal aspects of our union with Jesus Christ: “The *past* experience of dying with him and being raised with him is the basis for our *present* status as people whose heavenly identity is real and secure, yet hidden, an identity that will be gloriously manifested in the *future*.”<sup>366</sup> Peterson writes similarly, “The present and future dimensions of our sanctification are brought about by Jesus’ dying and rising for us. But our present experience is one of tension and incompleteness as we await entire sanctification with the resurrection of our bodies.”<sup>367</sup>

König views these temporal aspects of being in Christ from a different angle.<sup>368</sup> When Jesus came to earth, He accomplished salvation “for us,” that is, without our participation. At the present time, He accomplishes salvation “in us,” i.e., with our participation through the Holy Spirit. In the end, He will accomplish salvation “with us,” seeing that we will be revealed together with Him in glory (see Col 3:4).

Although union with Christ has these three temporal dimensions, Tannehill appropriately comments that this concept nonetheless possesses a unifying cohesion: “There is no such clear distinction between references to a present participation in new life and to rising with Christ in the future. Both ideas occur within the same passage as variations on one theme.”<sup>369</sup>

So then, believers in Jesus already enjoy certain blessings of the future age. According to the Jewish understanding, blessings such as the outpouring of the Spirit, access to God’s presence, regeneration and justification before God are available only during the period of Messiah’s glorious kingdom on earth. The Christian, however, can enjoy them now.

As Campbell expresses it, “The realm of Christ is an eschatological entity in which the age of righteousness has broken into the present world.”<sup>370</sup> According to Torrance’s understanding, “Future telescopes back into the present age.”<sup>371</sup> As Turner puts it, “In her union with Christ the church has already received a foretaste of that end.”<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>365</sup>Dunn J. D. G. *Unity and diversity in the New Testament: an inquiry into the character of earliest Christianity*. – Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1977. – P. 195.

<sup>366</sup>Moo D. J. *The letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* // Carson D. *The Pillar New Testament commentary*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008. – P. 244.

<sup>367</sup>Peterson D., p. 113.

<sup>368</sup>König A. *The eclipse of Christ in eschatology*. – London: Marshall Morgan and Scott; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980. – P. 46, 64.

<sup>369</sup>Tannehill, p. 130.

<sup>370</sup>Campbell C. R., p. 410.

<sup>371</sup>Lee, p. 113-114.

<sup>372</sup>Turner M. *Ephesians* // Carson D. A., France R. T., Motyer J. A., Wenham G. J. *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition*. – 4th ed. – Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994. – P. 1228.

One of the most ardent supporters of inaugurated eschatology was Albert Schweitzer.<sup>373</sup> Unfortunately, he came to his conclusions by false premises. He felt that Jesus expected the Kingdom to come during His earthly ministry. However, as we know, it did not. This forced the Early Church to pose the question, “Why have so many blessings of the future age already manifest, including Jesus’ resurrection from the dead?” In response, Paul allegedly advanced the idea of a partial fulfillment of the eschatological kingdom in the present age. In Schweitzer’s opinion, Paul proposed that “the solidarity of the Elect with Christ was already working itself out in the period between His Resurrection and Return.”<sup>374</sup> Schweitzer concluded,

In consequence of his eschatological view of redemption, Paul is obliged to maintain that the powers of death and resurrection which were made manifest in Jesus, now, from the moment of His dying and rising again onwards, are at work upon the corporeity of those who are elect to the Messianic Kingdom and render them capable of assuming the resurrection mode of existence before the general resurrection of the dead takes place.<sup>375</sup>

Nonetheless, even with his strong emphasis on eschatology, Schweitzer did not deny the historico-redemptive aspect of union with Christ. The blessings of the future age, which the Church now enjoys, are based on the past redemptive work of Christ:

In the mystical Body of Christ, “dying and rising again with Christ as already taken place.... Their flesh, with its passions and lusts, has been destroyed, as though they had been crucified with Christ.... The essential character of this new state of existence is that they are men who have been dead and have been made alive.”<sup>376</sup>

One must be careful not to put too much emphasis on eschatology and thereby neglect the historico-redemptive significance of union with Christ. In other words, one must not consider that Christ’s redemptive work consists simply in bringing elements of the age to come into the experience of believers today. Although we affirm this truth, we must give greater attention to union with Christ as a historico-redemptive event. The benefits of redemption are not so much future blessings superimposed on the present, as they are past provisions available in the present. Through His completed redemptive work, Christ has already granted all the benefits of salvation, which will be manifest, each in its time.

In conclusion, we must attempt to enumerate those benefits of being in Christ that relate to the present and those that are reserved for the future. First, we must hasten to clarify (contrary to Gaffin) that the present and future aspects of union with Christ do not correspond to “internal” (i.e., spiritual) and “external” (i.e., material) blessings – the former available now, and the latter available only in eternity.<sup>377</sup> Many “external” blessings are granted in Christ for

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<sup>373</sup>Noted in Ridderbos. p. 29-30.

<sup>374</sup>Schweitzer, p. 109.

<sup>375</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>376</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>377</sup>Gaffin, The centrality of the resurrection, p. 59-61.

believers today, and some “internal” benefits (such as freedom from temptation) await us only in the future.

All evangelical believers accept the biblical witness that in Christ we now have forgiveness of sins, justification before God and access to Him, adoption into His family, inclusion in the Universal Church, the gift of the Holy Spirit, authority over the devil, and participation in the sufferings of Christ. Benefits reserved for the future include physical resurrection, freedom from all temptation and affronts from the devil, and participation in the earthly reign of Messiah Jesus.

Two issues, though, remain hotly debated, namely the questions of complete sanctification in this life and physical healing from all disease. Although a thorough discussion of these topics would require writing separate volumes, we will attempt to give a brief proposal. Strictly from a biblical point of view, one may conclude that these states are theoretically possible, since the Scriptures give us high expectations for victory over sin and sickness. However, experience teaches us that their actual attainment is rarely if ever experienced. Therefore, we recommend that believers rather focus on *progress* and *improvement* in the areas of spiritual and physical health, standing on God’s promises of victory over sin and sickness. Even if their attainment is elusive, one can always rejoice in the final victory over these enemies that awaits us in eternity.

We also note that this delay in appropriating all the benefits of being in Christ works toward our advantage as well. When blessings are delayed, we must develop and exercise patience and endurance until the victory comes. Patience and endurance are irreplaceable qualities for the development of a complete Christian character, and their development depends on encountering difficulties and opposition. Both James and Paul comment on this:

- Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have {its} perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (Jam 1:2-4).
- And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Rom 5:3-5).

Along with patience, Paul speaks of the development of another necessary character quality that the Christian attains by waiting – hope. He further comments on this in Romans 8:24-25: “For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he {already} sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.”

So then, the goal of the believer in this life, as far as it is possible, is to reach our potential in Christ. We affirm with Dixon, “The Christian life is really a journey of ‘becoming what you are in Christ!’”<sup>378</sup> Gordon puts it this way: “Christian experience is the making real in ourselves, of what is already true for us in Christ.”<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>378</sup>Dixon L. The doctrine of salvation // Emmaus Journal. 10(2). 2001. P. 217.

<sup>379</sup>Gordon, p. 20.

## **E. The Believer's Union with the Father**

Until now, we have mainly investigated the believer's position in Christ, especially in the teachings of the apostle Paul. We must not neglect, though, to recall the testimony of John about the believer's union not only with Jesus, but with the Father as well. Here, we will briefly remind the reader of material already covered in chapter 1.

John employs the "in someone" phraseology not only in relation to believers and Christ, but also to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son. For example, the Father is "in" the Son, and the Son is "in" the Father: "The Father is in Me, and I in the Father" (Jn 10:38); "I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me" (Jn 14:10-11). The idea of the Son being "in" the Father implies an intimate knowledge of the Father by the Son and close fellowship with Him: "The only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him" (Jn 1:18).

Furthermore, in John's writings we witness a dramatic step. Quoting the words of the Savior, John compares the relationship between the Son and the Father with the relationship between the believer and God: "...that they may all be one; even as You, Father, {are} in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us... I in them and You in Me" (Jn 17:21, 23).

This means that John relates abiding in Christ to participation in the very life of the Trinity. From this, we must not conclude, however, that believers become divine or a part of the Trinity in essence. Rather, they may enjoy close fellowship with the Godhead comparable to that which exists between the Father and the Son, yet not at that level. Participation in the life of the Trinity also includes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer, of which John also writes (1 Jn 3:24; 4:4, 13).

Finally, John speaks not only of the believer being in the Son, but in the Father as well: "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 Jn 4:15-16). At the same time, John insists that our abiding in the Father is dependent on and derived from our position in the Son: "We are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 5:20).



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## Chapter 6. How to Appropriate Union with Christ

Having recognized the magnificent blessings available to us in the Lord Jesus, we must next learn how to actualize these blessings in everyday life. Grudem confirms, “We also must be brought into an actual relationship with Christ through which the benefits of salvation can be applied to our lives by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>380</sup>

Gaffin makes an important distinction between a historico-redemptive union with Christ and an existential union with Him.<sup>381</sup> Christ accomplished the former through His death, resurrection and ascension, which we have already discussed in detail. The existential union involves the real experience of the power of this new life. Gaffin correctly comments that our Christian experience should include this existential aspect as well.

We devote this chapter to discovering the role of the Holy Spirit in applying the benefits of being in Christ as well as our personal participation in that process.

### A. The Role of the Holy Spirit

According to the New Testament, the Holy Spirit plays an irreplaceable role in actualizing our union with Jesus Christ. The Spirit’s work is closely linked with that of the Savior in His death, resurrection and ascension to glory. A key verse in this regard is John 16:14, where Jesus speaks of the Spirit, “He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose {it} to you.”

Concerning the application of Christ’s death to the believer, we read, “If by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:13). On the one hand, Jesus rendered our sinful nature powerless 2000 years ago through His death on Golgotha. On

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<sup>380</sup>Grudem, Systematic theology, p. 842

<sup>381</sup>Gaffin, The centrality of the resurrection, p. 45-59.



the other hand, the Spirit now applies this victory over sin to the believer. With the Spirit's help, the believer can truly gain victory over the sinful nature.

Similarly, although God has provided us with new life through the resurrection of Christ, the Spirit now accomplishes this spiritual renewal in us, believers. Paul writes to Titus, "He saved us... by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Tit 3:5). Finally, although power for ministry is available through our identification with Christ in His exaltation, the Holy Spirit manifests this power through us (Acts 1:8).

Smedes makes the following comment, "The Spirit is the living contact between the victorious Jesus and all who are united with Him."<sup>382</sup> That which Christ accomplished for us through His death, resurrection and ascension, the Holy Spirit brings to us and applies to our lives. Smedes notes that Calvin also taught that the Spirit "takes what is Christ's and brings it 'down' to us."<sup>383</sup> König expresses this thought as follows: in Christ, God accomplishes His plan *for* us, while by His Spirit, He accomplishes His plan *in* us.<sup>384</sup> He continues, "The Holy Spirit conveys Jesus and all the riches he gained for us through the cross and resurrection into our lives."<sup>385</sup>

Martin defends the position that the work of the Spirit is fully determined by the redemptive work of Christ and limited to those parameters. He claims, "There is no activity of the Spirit in the application of redemption apart from union with Christ."<sup>386</sup> Rightmire agrees, "The Spirit never acts apart from Christ."<sup>387</sup>

The Scriptures devote much attention to the work of the Spirit in sanctifying the believer. We often encounter in the Bible the combination of "sanctification" and "the Spirit" (e.g. Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 6:11).<sup>388</sup> The Spirit lives within believers, guides them, and produces the fruit of the Spirit in them (Gal 5:22-23). Persons filled with the Spirit lead a godly life (Eph 5:18-21). They experience an internal spiritual renewal (Col 3:10). It is fair to conclude that the Spirit "activates" in the life of the believer the victory over sin that Jesus obtained through His death.

M. Johnson makes the important correction that the oft-encountered phrase "Jesus saves us, and the Spirit sanctifies us" lacks precision. He clarifies, "This idea may strike some as theologically tidy, but it is barely biblical."<sup>389</sup> The fact is that both Christ and the Spirit sanctify. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus obtained for us victory over sin and a new life. The Spirit realizes those blessings in our lives. Howell confirms, "The release from sin's penalty and power is grounded in the death of Christ and mediated through the ministry of the Spirit."<sup>390</sup> F.

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<sup>382</sup>Smedes, p. 26. Nonetheless, in discussing this question, Smedes somewhat blurs the personal distinction between Christ and the Spirit (see p. 43-53).

<sup>383</sup>Noted in Smedes, p. 32.

<sup>384</sup>König, p. 45.

<sup>385</sup>König, p. 67. Also see Tannehill, p. 80.

<sup>386</sup>Martin A. N., p. 11. Also see Shedd: "This resurrection life is made effective through the working of the Holy Spirit who represents Christ on earth" (Shedd, *Man in community*, p. 154).

<sup>387</sup>Rightmire, *Union with Christ*, p. 792.

<sup>388</sup>White R. E. O. *Sanctification* // Elwell W. A. *Evangelical dictionary of theology*. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 1053. The phrase "sanctifying work of the Spirit" in 1 Peter 1:2 refers to the work of the Spirit in drawing the unbeliever to Jesus (likewise in 2 Thes 2:13).

<sup>389</sup>Johnson M. P., p. 116.

<sup>390</sup>Howell, p. 16.

F. Bruce adds, “The Spirit has come to make effective in them what Christ has done for them.”<sup>391</sup>

Concerning sanctification, the role of the individual is often exaggerated. Although, as we will soon demonstrate, the human factor is indeed present and vital, Chase reminds us that the spiritual fruit mentioned by Paul in Galatians 5:22-23 is not the fruit of human effort, but the fruit of the Spirit, which is borne in the believer’s life “when he is living in vital union with Christ.”<sup>392</sup> Chafer adds, “The very purpose of union with Christ is that the believer may ‘bring forth fruit unto God.’”<sup>393</sup>

Some may think it strange that God does not answer more speedily prayers for individual spiritual growth. Often, believers seem to stay on the same spiritual level for most of their Christian lives, although they may be earnestly seeking God. The problem may lie in how we approach the Lord. When we request from the Father victory in our spiritual lives, His answer is: “I have already given you victory in my Son. Receive it!” In other words, we appeal to the Father, but He refers us to Christ.

In the search for victorious Christian living, others appeal primarily to the Holy Spirit – that He might fill us and give us strength. Pentecostals, in fact, often seek a “fresh infilling of the Spirit.” Yet, when appealed to for spiritual breakthroughs, the Spirit responds just as the Father does, “Look to Christ!” The Spirit does not save, but rather applies the finished work of Christ to the believer: “He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose {it} to you” (Jn 16:14). The Spirit does not draw attention to Himself, but to Jesus.

M. Johnson superbly expresses this thought: “The Spirit did not come to mediate his own presence, to glorify his own name, to teach us about himself, or to form the body of the Spirit.”<sup>394</sup> Johnson cites Calvin in this regard: “Nothing, therefore, is bestowed on us by the Spirit apart from Christ, but he takes it from Christ, that he may communicate it to us.... for he does not enlighten us to draw us away in the smallest degree from Christ.... In a word, the Spirit enriches us with no other than the riches of Christ, that he may display his glory in all things.”<sup>395</sup> Murry adds, “First, it is by virtue of what Christ has done that the action of both the Father and the Spirit take effect.”<sup>396</sup>

Such an appeal to Christ in no way minimizes the importance of or violates the dignity of the Father or the Spirit. William Boardman explains,

“When therefore we trust wholly in Jesus for all, we do not rob the Holy Spirit of the honor justly his due, but we honor him by complying with his teachings and showing his work,”<sup>397</sup> and “There is no fear of honoring the Father or the Spirit too little by honoring

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<sup>391</sup>Bruce, The letter of Paul to the Romans, p. 132.

<sup>392</sup>Chase E. L. Reflections of an industrial chaplain // Bibliotheca Sacra. 107. 1950. P. 99.

<sup>393</sup>Chafer, Systematic theology, v. 4, p. 61.

<sup>394</sup>Johnson M. P., p. 44.

<sup>395</sup>Calvin’s commentary on Jn 16:14; noted in Johnson M. P., p. 45.

<sup>396</sup>Murray, Definitive sanctification, p. 13.

<sup>397</sup>Boardman W. E. The higher Christian life. – New York: Garland, 1984 (Originally published by Boston, MA: Henry Hoyt, 1858) – P. 98-99.

the Son too much. The deeper and fuller and stronger our trust in Jesus, the sweeter and richer the indwelling presence of the Spirit will be.”<sup>398</sup>

Due to ignorance of or inattentiveness to the clear biblical teaching concerning union with Christ, many sincere believers in Jesus, who fully depend on Him for forgiveness of sins and eternal life, nonetheless set Him backstage in relation to other issues of Christian life and growth. The will of the Father and the Spirit, though, is that Christ be at the center of all matters that concern victorious Christian living. Otherwise, God’s power will not be fully active in our lives. We await God’s intervention, but He has already intervened and provided victory in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Some theologians mistakenly claim that the Spirit not only “activates” our union with Christ, but also establishes us in that union. In other words, it is thought that the Holy Spirit is the one who causes us to be “in Christ.” In support, they appeal to 1 Corinthians 12:13: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” According to Walvoord, “Baptism by the Spirit brings the believer into the body of Christ,” and, “that baptism also places the believer in Christ Himself.”<sup>399</sup> Campbell agrees that the baptism in the Spirit “joins all believers to Christ and unites them within the church, Christ’s body.”<sup>400</sup> Enns adds, “At the moment of regeneration, the Holy Spirit places believers into union with Christ.”<sup>401</sup>

However, we must recall that in 1 Corinthians 1:30, Paul stated, “By His (the Father’s) doing you are in Christ Jesus.” Therefore, it is not the Holy Spirit who establishes us in our position in Christ, but the decree of God the Father. In 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul is not speaking of union with Christ, but of our introduction into the Church. The verse simply teaches that the Spirit *actualizes* our inclusion into the Church, which was *accomplished* by our being placed in Christ by the Father and, consequently, into Christ’s body, the Church.

Enns’ proposal that “at the moment of regeneration, the Holy Spirit places believers into union with Christ” is also misguided. As we indicated in chapter 3, the new birth is not the cause of our union with Christ, but its result. Regeneration is part of our participation in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. God the Father placed us in Christ and made us sharers in His resurrection, while the Spirit realizes the life-transforming power of that resurrection in us through spiritual regeneration.

This union with Christ is so magnificent that Paul found it necessary to pray that God would enable the Church to fully grasp this truth. The Spirit is the one who brings this revelation to us:

...making mention {of you} in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. {I pray that} the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

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<sup>398</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>399</sup>Walvoord, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, p. 421–446.

<sup>400</sup>Campbell D. K., v. 2, p. 600.

<sup>401</sup>Enns, p. 349. Also see Walvoord J. F. *Identification with Christ* // Elwell W. A. *Evangelical dictionary of theology*. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 588; Toussaint S. D. *Acts* // Walvoord J. F., Zuck R. B. *The Bible knowledge commentary: an exposition of the Scriptures*. – Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985. – V. 2. – P. 409; Chafer, *Systematic theology*, v. 4, p. 59-60.

and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. {These are} in accordance with the working of the strength of His might (Eph 1:16-19).

Erickson comments, “Knowledge of this union is inaccessible to humans except through special revelation from God.”<sup>402</sup> Austin-Sparks, however, makes the qualification that special revelation is needed, not in order to understand this truth *at all*, but rather “to give all this its true and full value.”<sup>403</sup>

## **B. The Role of the Believer**

On the one hand, we know that through union with Christ we have received all the benefits connected with salvation and that the Holy Spirit actualizes these blessings in our personal lives. On the other hand, this does not occur against our will, but requires our personal participation in the process.

In discussing this question, we first of all recall that our position in Christ is not the result of personal achievement. Scripture teaches us, “By His doing you are in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:30). Our place in Christ is a demonstration of our heavenly Father’s grace and mercy, for which we are eternally grateful.

Furthermore, in contrast to our automatic inheritance of sin and death from Adam, the blessings of life in Christ do not come to us mechanically. The “abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness” come to those who receive it (Rom 5:17).

The human factor in the process of obtaining salvation’s benefits, including sanctification, includes three elements, outlined in Galatians 5:19-25, namely, knowledge, faith and submission<sup>404</sup>:

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

The first element includes knowledge of God’s will, so that we can walk in agreement with it. In verses 19-23, Paul list the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. These guidelines help us understand what is pleasing to the Lord and what is not. We gain our understanding of God’s will by studying the Bible.

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<sup>402</sup>Erickson, p. 952.

<sup>403</sup>Austin-Sparks, p. 6.

<sup>404</sup>It is interesting to note the same order in chapter 6 of Paul’s instruction to the Romans. Victory over sin results from the same three factors: (1) knowledge, in this case that we have died with Christ (Rom 6:6), (2) faith to consider ourselves dead to sin (Rom 6:11), and active submission to the Holy Spirit (Rom 6:13).

The second element is faith. In Galatians 5:24, we read that one must rely on Christ's finished work of salvation, which includes the crucifixion of the old, sinful nature. We can cite other passages of Scripture that emphasize the role faith in realizing union with Christ.

In discussing how union with Christ manifests in his own personal life, Paul writes, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the {life} which I now live in the flesh I live by *faith* in the Son of God" (Gal 2:20). He gives similar instruction to the church in Ephesus: "So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through *faith*" (Eph 3:17). In light of our participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, the saints in Rome must "*consider yourselves* to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:11). Our faith becomes effective "through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake" (Philemon 6). In such an atmosphere of faith and expectation, the Holy Spirit works more freely and fully to apply Christ's redemptive work to our lives.

We can cite other theologians who share this view:<sup>405</sup>

*Though God sanctifies by grace, human beings are responsible to appropriate God's grace by faith. Faith is "the" means of sanctifying grace.*<sup>406</sup>

The former self... is killed. She (i.e., "the sinner") is dead to sin, the flesh, and the law, and will one day be dead to death. And she is alive to God – and therefore must consider, identify herself as such.<sup>407</sup>

Victory over all the power of the evil one is not by human works or self-effort but on the basis of the believer's faith in his position in Christ.<sup>408</sup>

Our sanctification lies not in our works, good intentions or efforts to be holier, but in seeking Christ by faith alone.<sup>409</sup>

At the same time, M. Johnson, citing John Calvin, clarifies, "Faith should never be separated from salvation in Christ, but faith surely needs to be distinguished from the Christ whom faith receives."<sup>410</sup> In other words, faith itself does not save or sanctify, but only Christ. Faith is simply God's appointed method for appropriating the benefits of salvation, secured by

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<sup>405</sup>Also see Gaffin, Union with Christ, p. 273; Macaskill, Union with Christ in the New Testament, p. 245; Bruce, Epistle of Paul to the Romans, p. 132; Pink A. W. Regeneration or the New Birth. – Swengel, PA: Reiner Publications. – P. 35; Furgenson, The Reformed View, p. 51; Fitzmyer, Romans, p. 438; Shedd R. P. Justification and personal Christian living // Carson D. A. Right with God: justification in the Bible and the world. – Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002. – P. 173.

<sup>406</sup>Mullen B. A. Sanctification // Elwell W. A. Evangelical dictionary of biblical theology (electronic ed.). – Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996. – P. 708-713.

<sup>407</sup>Smedes, p. 108.

<sup>408</sup>Unger, Demonology, p. 220.

<sup>409</sup>Fesko J. V. Sanctification and union with Christ: a Reformed perspective // Evangelical Quarterly. 82.3. 2010. P. 197.

<sup>410</sup>Johnson M. P., p. 52.

Jesus Christ. Morris confirms that through faith a person "cleaves to his Saviour with all his heart."<sup>411</sup>

Martin makes another important qualification. The nature of faith is such that it is not based on subjective feelings, but on the acceptance of the truth of God's promises. He comments, "You are not to wait until you feel some kind of celestial flutter in your soul before you believe that you have been raised in Christ. This truth is addressed to faith; faith embraces it."<sup>412</sup> Wikenhauser reasons likewise: union with Christ "is a reality, an objective fact which does not depend on perception of the operations of Christ. It is true, of course, that these operations can be perceived, but they are real whether we notice them or not."<sup>413</sup>

Needham shares an interesting thought that in order to truly walk by faith, one needs to alter one's self image. One must think of oneself as a new creation in Christ: "This fundamental awareness of identity brings a believer into the wholesome, positive atmosphere in which God's intention of manifesting His holiness in the world can be fulfilled."<sup>414</sup> Thomas echoes this thought, "The Christian's goal is to cultivate the same concept of himself... Only then can he respond to sin's beckonings in the way a dead man would and to God's directions in the way the resurrected Christ would."<sup>415</sup>

Finally, Galatians 5:25 records the final step in the process of applying our union with Christ – submission: "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." If we expect power from the Spirit for holy living, then we must allow Him to work in our lives and change us. Paul also stresses this aspect of sanctification in Romans 6, where we read, "Do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin {as} instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members {as} instruments of righteousness to God" (Rom 6:13).

Furthermore, in light of the fact that we have died and been raised with Christ, Paul exhorts believers to "lay aside the old self" and "put on the new self" (Eph 4:22-24). It is interesting to note the parallel between this passage and Colossians 3:8-10, where Paul relates that the old man has already been put away in Christ: "You laid aside the old self with its {evil} practices, and have put on the new self" (Col 3:9-10). In one sense, the work of sanctification is already complete in Christ, and in Colossian 3, Paul speaks from that vantage point. On the other hand, the practical working out of that reality is still in process. This is what Paul emphasizes in Ephesians 4.

Therefore, M. Johnson correctly notes that union with Christ is not a call to passivity in relation to holiness: "Believers are commanded in the clearest possible terms to pursue holiness at all times and with all of their persons."<sup>416</sup> Peterson agrees, "We must make choices

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<sup>411</sup>Morris L. L. Faith // Wood D. R. W., Marshall I. H., Millard A. R., Wiseman D. J. New Bible dictionary. – 3rd ed. – Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996. – P. 358.

<sup>412</sup>Martin A. N., p. 107.

<sup>413</sup>Wikenhauser, p. 108. Austin-Sparks mistakenly proposes the converse: "This union is not something official, something legal or formal. It is affectional" (See Austin-Sparks, p. 26).

<sup>414</sup>Needham D. C. Birthright: Christian, do you know who you are? – Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1979. – P. 82. However, Needham is greatly mistaken in assuming that God makes us new creatures in our spirit, which he considers the true self. According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, God makes us new creatures positionally in Christ.

<sup>415</sup>Thomas R. L. Improving evangelical ethics: An analysis of the problem and a proposed solution // Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. 34(1). 1991. P. 10–11.

<sup>416</sup>Johnson M. P., p. 136-137.

that are consistent with our new standing in Christ.”<sup>417</sup> In the words of Furgenson, “Sanctification is by no means a mystical experience in which holiness is ours effortlessly. God gives increase in holiness by engaging our minds, wills, emotions and actions. We are involved in the process.”<sup>418</sup> Foos adds, “What is true positionally, identification with Christ in death to the old life (cf. Rom 6:6-7; 7:4), is to be made actual.”<sup>419</sup>

Nonetheless, if believers rely on their own zeal and determination to become holy, failure is sure to ensue. This is why Paul warns us in Romans 7 of depending on our ability to keep the Law. The Law actually arouses the flesh and paradoxically strengthens the sinful impulse in people. The primary purpose of the Law is to lead people to desperation and hopelessness, so that they learn to rely on God, and not on themselves, embracing an attitude of humility before Him.

Mueller expresses well the relationship between the Law and faith: “While the Law thus reveals sin (mirror)... the power to accomplish sanctification and to do good works comes alone from the Gospel.”<sup>420</sup> Simply knowing the difference between good and evil is inadequate to lead to sanctification, as demonstrated in the moral failure of Israel. The power of the gospel is needed to make progress in spiritual living.

Therefore, sanctification consists of more than mere imitation of Christ, but also requires obtaining power from Him. In the words of Torrance, “The cross is the symbol of our union with Christ, not simply in virtue of our following his example, but in virtue of what he has done for us and in us.”<sup>421</sup> M. Johnson adds, “Sanctification can never be confused with moralism, and neither can it be reduced to a life of gratitude or imitation. It is, rather, God forging us into the likeness of Christ through our participation in his death and resurrection.”<sup>422</sup>

Smedes agrees that union with Christ involves more than the imitation of Christ, but provides supernatural strength for its accomplishment. He claims,

The other wrongheaded notion is that Paul means that our individual decision to stop living a selfish and sinful life and to start living a God-oriented life is our dying and rising with Christ.... It is an evasion from Paul’s realism to assume that when he says I died with Christ, he only means that I “ought” to die.<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>417</sup>Peterson D., p. 96.

<sup>418</sup>Furgenson, *The Reformed view*, p. 67. Likewise comment: Ridderbos, p. 253-257; Wikenhauser, p. 151; Best, p. 49; Turner, p. 1240; Guthrie D. *New Testament introduction*. – 4th rev. ed. – Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press. – P. 583.

<sup>419</sup>Foos H. D. *Mortification* // Pfeiffer C. F., Vos H. F., Rea J. *The Wycliffe Bible encyclopedia*. – Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1975.

<sup>420</sup>Mueller, p. 390.

<sup>421</sup>Torrance J. B., p. 247.

<sup>422</sup>Johnson M. P., p. 118. Likewise write: Tannehill, p. 111; Best, p. 46; Wikenhauser, p. 99; Chafer L. S. *The saving work of the Triune God* // *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 106. 1949. P. 7.

<sup>423</sup>Smedes, p. 95. Other writers comment on the futility of attempting to sanctify oneself outside the context of union with Christ. Charles Hodge, for example, claims, “All that the Scriptures teach concerning the union between the believer and Christ, and of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, proves the supernatural character of our sanctification. Men do not make themselves holy... the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine” (Hodge, v. 3, p. 217-218). Rightmire states, “This is more than a gospel of ethical example (an impossible ideal), but the indwelling of Christ who provides the motive power to live in obedience to God” (Rightmire, *Union with Christ*, p. 792). Douglas Moo comments, “This ‘putting to death’ of sin is not only demanded by our

James Denney adopts the contrary view. He errantly proposes that in such passages of Scripture as 2 Corinthians 5:14, 2 Corinthians 5:21, and Galatians 5:24, Paul meant that the death of Jesus does not accomplish our sanctification, but just inspires the believer to become a better person.<sup>424</sup> He writes, “The whole of the Christian religion lies in that. The whole of the Christian life is a response to the love exhibited in the death of the Son of God for men.”<sup>425</sup> However, just a quick glance at these passages and others previously mentioned convinces us that the death and resurrection of Jesus does more than merely inspire, but also transforms the Christian. In order to study such key passages in more detail, refer to the Appendix.

Stewart also errors when he equates faith with obedience. He claims, “Faith includes... trusting His guidance, obeying His commandments, praying in His name, giving Him our love.”<sup>426</sup> This statement contains a contradiction. If people are able by themselves to “obey His commandments” and “give Him our love,” then why do they need a Savior? In that case, obedience and love are attainable without the aid of God’s grace. It is more correct to state that faith is trust in God’s promises of victory in Christ, which enable one to obey and love God. We must be careful to distinguish the roles of faith and submission and not confuse them.

So then, Chafer provides a fair summary of the matter: “The union with Christ has provided a possible deliverance; but it must be entered into and claimed by acts of faith like those expressed in the words ‘reckon,’ ‘let not,’ and the additional words which follow in the passage: ‘But yield yourselves unto God.’”<sup>427</sup> Grudem reasons likewise, “The role that we play in sanctification is both a *passive* one in which we depend on God to sanctify us, and an *active* one in which we strive to obey God and take steps that will increase our sanctification.”<sup>428</sup> Martin also expresses it well, “Let your mind be filled with the reality of your union with Christ, and then *conduct yourself accordingly*.”<sup>429</sup>

The following illustrations can aid us in understanding the relationship between faith and submission. When wanting to start a car, it would be foolhardy to simply sit in the driver’s seat and expect the car to drive itself. The driver must turn the key and operate the car. Likewise, it profits little to simply expect God’s intervention in our spiritual lives, while we do nothing, adopting a passive attitude toward spiritual growth.

On the other hand, it is equally foolish to stand behind the auto and attempt to push it with the key. The driver must utilize the power of the engine. In a similar way, believers can never make progress in their spiritual life relying on their own strength. One must rely on the finished work of Christ. Faith and submission harmoniously work together and complement each other.

We may suggest another illustration. To light a match one needs two elements: a matchbox and oxygen in the air. The atmosphere may contain enough oxygen to do the job, but without a

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incorporation into Christ; it is also empowered and effected by it” (Moo, p. 255). J. R. Williams concurs (see *Renewal theology*. – Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988. – V. 2. – P. 105).

<sup>424</sup>Denney J. *The death of Christ* / Ed. R. V. G. Tasker. – London: Tyndale, 1951, reprinted 1952. – P. 84-96.

<sup>425</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>426</sup>Stewart, p. 185.

<sup>427</sup>Chafer, *Systematic theology*, v. 6, p. 280.

<sup>428</sup>Grudem, *Systematic theology*, p. 754

<sup>429</sup>Martin A. N., p. 34.



person's participation striking the match, there will be no result. On the other hand, a person can strike the match all day, but if oxygen is somehow lacking, there will also be no result.

In a similar way, God's power, made accessible through Christ's redemptive work, is necessary for spiritual progress. A person, though, must apply effort and cooperate with the grace of God in Christ in a way similar to one striking a match. In addition, believers must create in their lives an atmosphere of faith, expecting the power of God to manifest, and strive for holiness within the context of that atmosphere of expectation.

Finally, we must discuss the relation of union with Christ and water baptism. Some key passages of Scripture seem to imply that a person enters into union with Christ at the moment of receiving water baptism and as a direct result of it. Note the following:

- Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life (Rom 6:3-4).
- In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead (Col 2:11-12).
- For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Gal 3:27).

Albert Schweitzer, among others, defends this position: "Without baptism there is no being-in-Christ."<sup>430</sup> According to the teaching of Thomas Torrance, the grace of Christ is communicated to us "through sacramental elements."<sup>431</sup> In Flanagan's words, "Faith is useless which does not lead to baptism. One must pass through the waters of baptism to enter the messianic Kingdom."<sup>432</sup>

However, a closer look at these key passages of Scripture may lead us to a different conclusion. The pro-baptism view claims that water baptism results in not only union with Christ, but also the reception of salvation itself, since we cannot divorce one from the other. Yet, when Paul gives his exhaustive treatment of God's plan for justification in Romans 1-5, he nowhere mentions the necessity of water baptism for receiving eternal life. This would be a colossal omission if Paul actually believed in salvation through baptism.

Even in Paul's discussion of holiness in Romans 6, he does not insist on the necessity of water baptism for sanctification either. He simply appeals to the universal experience of water baptism among believers to summon them to holy living. Paul reasons thus: if one has died to sin in Christ, then how can one still live in it? Then, he points to water baptism as a "visual aid" to illustrate the believer's participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. Therefore, for Paul, baptism simply serves as a starting point for his argument.

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<sup>430</sup>Schweitzer, p. 117.

<sup>431</sup>Lee, p. 135.

<sup>432</sup>Flanagan N. Messianic fulfillment in St. Paul // Catholic Biblical Quarterly. 19. 1957. P. 481. Also see Fitzmyer J. A. Spiritual exercises based on Paul's Epistle to the Romans. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995. – P. 94-96; Bruce, The Letter of Paul to the Romans, p. 129; Ridderbos, p. 213; Wikenhauser, p. 111ff.

Then, as soon as Paul has reminded the church at Rome of their identification with Christ's death and resurrection in water baptism, he leaves that train of thought to speak directly of what that ordinance symbolically represents – a real sharing in the historical events of the death and resurrection of Jesus: "Our old self was crucified with {Him,}... If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him." (v. 6-8). Now Paul is no longer talking about baptism, but the historical fact of Christ's death and resurrection and the believer's participation in it.

Then, Paul reveals how this participation in Christ's death and resurrection is realized in our lives – through faith: "Consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (v. 11). Victory over sin comes not through water baptism, but by faith in the redemptive work of our Savior.

Concerning Colossian 2:11-12, we observe a similar approach. Paul's topic is, again, the believer's sanctification. This time, however, Paul does not stress the need for sanctification, but its source – Jesus Christ. Paul provides two illustrations of the sanctifying power of Christ's work: circumcision and water baptism, both of which symbolize the sanctification of believers, more precisely, the elimination of the sinful "flesh." Just as in Romans 6, Paul quickly ceases talking about water baptism and goes directly to what baptism symbolizes – the historical fact of Christ's resurrection and the believer's participation in it. "You were also raised up with Him." Then, he indicates how this sanctifying power is released: "Through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead" (v. 12).

Finally, in the light of what we have said thus far, it would be appropriate to interpret Galatians 3:26-27 in the same sense. Paul speaks of the adoption of believers through faith in Jesus: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (v. 26), and then gives two illustrations of our inclusion in Christ: water baptism and putting on clothes: "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (v. 27). Again, faith is the factor that brings blessing from God. Baptism, then, is an external sign of our inclusion in the Son, through whom we receive the adoption.

In confirmation of our view, we may cite a number of Evangelical authors. M. Johnson, for example, writes, "Baptism shows us that we have been put to death in Christ and have been raised to new life in him."<sup>433</sup> Robertson concurs, "Baptism is the public proclamation of one's inward spiritual relation to Christ attained before the baptism."<sup>434</sup> Finally, in Schreiner's opinion, "Paul refers to baptism in Romans 6 and Colossians 2 because baptism recalls the conversion of the readers from the power of sin... the simplest and easiest way to recall the readers' conversion is to speak of their baptism,"<sup>435</sup> and, "Those who are baptized have already undergone a spiritual change when they were buried and raised with Christ.... Baptism functions as a pictorial representation of such."<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>433</sup>Johnson M. P., p. 227.

<sup>434</sup>Robertson A. T. Word pictures in the New Testament. – Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933.

<sup>435</sup>Schreiner T. R. Baptism in the Epistles // Schreiner T. R., Wright S. D. Believer's baptism: Sign of the new covenant in Christ. – Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2006. – P. 75.

<sup>436</sup>Ibid., p. 78-79.



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## Chapter 7. Tracing the History of This Teaching

As mentioned earlier in this volume, for generations now the Church has been neglecting the biblical teaching of the believer's union with Christ. Nevertheless, throughout the course of church history, this teaching was preserved in one form or another, and we can trace the history of its development.

In a previous chapter, we related how the origins of this teaching are sometimes ascribed to certain liberal theologians, beginning with Adolf Deissmann. Our goal here, though, is to trace this teaching outside the context of liberal theology, beginning with the Church Fathers. In contemporary times, we can ascribe the rediscovery of this teaching not to Deissmann, but to William Boardman. In the second part of this chapter, we will examine his history and the histories of those who developed the doctrine after him.

In this chapter, we will also discover that in the church world certain figures have at times distorted this biblical principle. Therefore, along with detailing the history of this doctrine, we will evaluate the validity of various interpretations of union with Christ that have appeared over time.

### A. Early Teaching

#### 1. Irenaeus

Among early commentators on the believer's union with Christ, the most prominent was the second century Father, Irenaeus. His theory, called "recapitulation," taught that Jesus passed through all the stages of human life in order to restore perfection to humanity. In Irenaeus' words, "Wherefore also He passed through every stage of life, restoring to all

communion with God.”<sup>437</sup> By His obedient life, He eradicated the sinfulness of humanity. At the same time, by virtue of His Deity, He transmits to people divine life.<sup>438</sup>

Let us cite several excerpts from Irenaeus’ chief work, *Against Heresies*. First, it was necessary for God to become human, “recapitulating Adam in Himself, rightly receive a birth, enabling Him to gather up Adam [into Himself]” (3.21.10). The goal of His incarnation was to restore the human condition: “God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man (3.18.7). He annihilated humanity’s sin by His obedience: “That the Lord then was manifestly coming to His own things, and was sustaining them by means of that creation which is supported by Himself, and was making a recapitulation of that disobedience which had occurred in connection with a tree, through the obedience which was [exhibited by Himself when He hung] upon a tree” (5.19.1).

Second, by virtue of His Deity, the Son of Man can communicate divine life to His disciples by the agency of Holy Spirit: “By uniting man to the Spirit, and causing the Spirit to dwell in man, He is Himself made the head of the Spirit, and gives the Spirit to be the head of man” (5.20.2). Finally, Christ communicates His victory over Satan to His followers: “He has therefore, in His work of recapitulation, summed up all things, both waging war against our enemy, and crushing him who had at the beginning led us away captives in Adam, and trampled upon his head” (5.21.1).

In evaluating Irenaeus’ teaching, we note first of all that he correctly links union with Christ with salvation. For Irenaeus, union with Christ plays a central role in God’s redemption plan. Nevertheless, he errs in proposing that union with Christ involves the entirety of Christ’s history and not just the redemptive events in it, as we demonstrated in chapter 3.

Moreover, Irenaeus incorrectly claims that forgiveness of sins is accomplished not so much by Jesus’ satisfaction of divine justice on the cross, as by replacing Adam’s disobedience with His own obedience. Again, as we showed in chapter 3, forgiveness of sins and the gift of righteousness is granted not on the basis of our participation in Jesus history, but because of His representative and substitutionary work as our corporate head.

Finally, Irenaeus’ views on the impartation of divine life to people through the Holy Spirit paved the way for the subsequent teaching of theosis. Irenaeus, in fact, was one of the first to use the formulation, echoed in the teaching of many after him, “God became man, so that man could become god.” His exact words were, “Our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself.”<sup>439</sup> However, in chapter 3, we refuted the theosis teaching.

## 2. The Eastern Church Fathers

After Irenaeus, nearly all the Eastern Fathers viewed union with Christ through the prism of theosis, that is, union with God’s uncreated energies and transformation into divinity. This teaching especially characterized the Alexandrian school of thought. Clement of Alexandria, for

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<sup>437</sup>*Against Heresies*, 3.18.7.

<sup>438</sup>Schaff P., Schaff D. S. *History of the Christian Church*. – New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910. – V. 2. – P. 586-587.

<sup>439</sup>*Against Heresies*, book 5, preface.

example, wrote, “The Word of God became man, that thou mayest learn from man how man may become God” (*Exhortation to the Hellenists*, 1.1). His student Origen echoed this thought:

From Him there began the union of the divine with the human nature, in order that the human, by communion with the divine, might rise to be divine, not in Jesus alone, but in all those who not only believe, but enter upon the life which Jesus taught (*Against Celsus*, 3.28).

The Alexandrian bishop Athanasius gave the classic expression of the theosis teaching in the fourth century, and after him, the Cappadocian Fathers:

For He was made man that we might be made God (Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, 54)

...in order that I too might be made God so far as He is made Man (Gregory Nazianzus, *Oration*, 29.19).

He Who holds together Nature in existence is transfused in *us*; while at that other time He was transfused throughout *our nature*, in order that our nature might by this transfusion of the Divine become itself divine (Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, 25).

Again, we refer the reader to our refutation of theosis in chapter 3.

### 3. Augustine and the Western Church Fathers

The most renowned of the Western Fathers, Augustine (4th-5th c.), expressed his view on union with Christ in his work *A Treatise on the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants*.<sup>440</sup> First, he claims that without union with Christ there is no salvation:

No man can obtain eternal life without that union with Christ which is effected in Him and with Him, when we are imbued with His sacraments and incorporated with the members of His body (3.11.19).

Although we may agree with Augustine in part, it concerns us to see his connection between union with Christ and participation in the sacraments and incorporation into the Church. He further specifies his meaning:

Without union with Christ there is no man who can attain to eternal life and salvation.... The inevitable conclusion from these truths is this, that, as nothing else is effected when

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<sup>440</sup>Augustine. *A treatise on the merits and forgiveness of sins, and on the baptism of infants* // Schaff P. Saint Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings / Trans. P. Holmes P. – New York: Christian Literature Company, 1887.

infants are baptized except that they are incorporated into the church, in other words, that they are united with the body and members of Christ (3.4.7).

All, therefore, who have to be changed and raised must meet together in a union with Christ, so that the Christ who descended may ascend, reckoning His body (that is to say, His Church) as nothing else than Himself (1.31.60).

So then, in Augustine's opinion, persons enter into union with Christ through water baptism, and their status in Christ is connected with participation in the Church. However, in the previous chapter we discussed the relationship of union with Christ and water baptism, and in chapter 3, we showed that one is not joined to Christ through the Church, but vice versa.

A brief time before Augustine, another Western Father, Hilary of Poitiers, also associated union with Christ with water baptism and membership in the Church. In his comments on Galatians 3:27-28, he wrote,

That these are one amid so great diversities of race, condition, sex, – is it from an agreement of will or from the unity of the sacrament, since these have one baptism and have all put on one Christ? What, therefore, will a concord of minds avail here when they are one in that they have put on one Christ through the nature of one baptism? (*On the Trinity*, 8.8).

In like manner, the Roman Catholic Church strongly stresses the necessity of Church and sacraments for union with Christ. The Catechism of the Catholic Church claims: "Spiritual progress tends toward ever more intimate union with Christ. This union is called 'mystical' because it participates in the mystery of Christ through the sacraments,"<sup>441</sup> and, "the principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion is an intimate union with Christ Jesus."<sup>442</sup> Concerning the relation of Christ and the Church, we read, "It is in the Church that Christ fulfills and reveals his own mystery as the purpose of God's plan: 'to unite all things in him.' St. Paul calls the nuptial union of Christ and the Church 'a great mystery.'"<sup>443</sup> In addition, Catholics ascribe to Mary a special union with Jesus.<sup>444</sup>

The main weakness in Augustine's teaching, and along with him the Roman Church, is claiming that Church sacraments are prerequisites for entering union with Christ. In addition, Catholics refer only to our vital union with Christ and not to our participation in his death, resurrection, and exaltation. Nonetheless, the Catholic Church correctly teaches that union with Christ is the source both of spiritual fruit in the believer's life and effective Christian ministry.<sup>445</sup>

#### **4. The Mysticism of Bernard of Clairvaux**

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<sup>441</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church. [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM#fonte](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM#fonte). № 2014.

<sup>442</sup>Ibid., № 1391. Confirmation also leads "the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ" (№ 1309).

<sup>443</sup>Ibid., № 772. Also see № 542, 789.

<sup>444</sup>Ibid., № 964.

<sup>445</sup>Ibid., № 2084, № 864.

Before concluding our discussion of the Catholic position, we must investigate the mystical approach to union with Christ advanced by Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), the founder of the Clairvaux monastery. Schaff characterizes Bernard as “the model monk of the Middle Ages, the most imposing figure of his time, and one of the best men of all the Christian centuries. He possessed a magnetic personality, a lively imagination, a rich culture and a heart glowing with love for God and man.”<sup>446</sup> About him, Luther states, “Bernard loved Jesus as much as anyone can.”<sup>447</sup>

Bernard’s understanding of union with Christ focuses on “mystical love.”<sup>448</sup> A person who is seeking God must develop a personal relationship with Him through contemplation. Doing good works “prepares the soil” for effective contemplative. Bernard wrote, “Therefore you must take care to surround yours [i.e., your bed] with the flowers of good works, with the practice of virtue, that precede holy contemplation as the flower precedes the fruit.”<sup>449</sup>

A person must “ascend the ladder” of union with Christ, passing through four stages. First, one learns to love oneself for one’s own sake. Second, one learns to love God for one’s own sake. Third, one loves God for God’s sake. Finally, one loves oneself for God’s sake. In the end, “All human feelings melt in a mysterious way and flow into the will of God,”<sup>450</sup> yet this climax is reached only after death. Bernard speaks more of union with God than union with Christ, yet the former is accomplished through Jesus. Additionally, the contemplative life is for the monk, not for the so-called layperson.

In evaluating “mystical love,” we must keep in mind that Bernard is guided in his thinking more by the writings of John than of Paul. Like John, he speaks more of personal union and fellowship with the Lord. Yet, in order to have a complete picture of union with Christ, one must consider the following elements of Paul’s teaching as well.

First, union with Christ is not accomplished by human striving, but by God the Father’s decree: “By His doing you are in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:30). Second, Bernard omits the forensic aspects of Christ’s representation and our participation in His redemptive events. Third, doing good works is not a condition for entering union with Christ, but its result. In addition, the benefits of union with Christ come not so much through contemplation as through faith. Finally, unlike Bernard’s emphasis on the monastic life, the New Testament extends union with Christ to all believers.

## 5. Martin Luther

In Martin Luther’s theology of union with Christ, we discover some inconsistencies. He is famous, of course, for championing the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone. In addition, he taught that God imputes righteousness for justification as a forensic act, unlike the Catholic doctrine of justification as an impartation to the Christian of a righteous nature.

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<sup>446</sup>Schaff, v. 5, p. 211.

<sup>447</sup>Ibid., v. 5, p. 219-220.

<sup>448</sup>Discussion taken from Tamburello D. E. Union with Christ. – Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994. – P. 65-79.

<sup>449</sup>*Sermones super Cantica*, 46.5; noted in Tamburello, p. 65.

<sup>450</sup>*De diligendo Deo*, 10.28; noted in Tamburello, p. 67.

According to Luther, the believer obtains a “foreign righteousness,” that is, not one’s own righteousness, but that of Christ.

However, in recent times, some students of Luther advance the thesis that he based his doctrine of justification on the believer’s union with Christ. Commenting on Luther’s thought, Campbell states, “Luther apparently saw no contradiction between the imputation of righteousness and union with Christ... the father of the Reformation held a view of imputation that depended on union with Christ.”<sup>451</sup>

It is thought that, in Luther’s opinion, God does not reckon faith as righteousness apart from the person of Christ, but considers believers righteousness in virtue of the fact that the Righteous One lives in them. It is also believed that Luther’s aid, Phillip Melancthon, was the one who introduced the doctrine of God reckoning faith as righteousness *before* Christ enters the heart and *separate* from His personal presence.<sup>452</sup> The Formula of Concord reads, “God is not really present in a Christian when declaring him or her righteous through faith for Christ’s sake.”<sup>453</sup>

Let us cite some excerpts from Luther’s works. On the one hand, he speaks of a real participation by the believer in Christ: “Mine are Christ’s living, doing and speaking, his suffering and dying, mine as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, suffered, and died as he did.”<sup>454</sup> He compares this union with the marriage union (see Eph. 5:29-32).<sup>455</sup> Among other things, the believer obtains the righteousness of Christ in this union: “Through faith in Christ, therefore, Christ’s righteousness becomes our righteousness and all that he has becomes ours; rather, he himself becomes ours.”<sup>456</sup> Moreover, “It is impossible for one to be a Christian unless he possesses Christ. If he possesses Christ, he possesses all the benefits of Christ.... Righteousness, strength, patience, humility even all the merits of Christ are his through the unity of the Spirit through faith in him.”<sup>457</sup> More specifically he says,

Therefore faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ.... Therefore the Christ who is grasped by faith and who lives in the heart is the true Christian righteousness, on account of which God counts us as righteous and grants us eternal life.<sup>458</sup>

So then, on the one hand, believers have a “foreign righteousness,” i.e., the righteousness of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, acquiring this “foreign righteousness” requires receiving Christ Himself and His presence in our hearts. Pannenburg juxtaposes these aspects of Luther’s

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<sup>451</sup>Campbell C. R., p. 402. Also see Macaskill, Union with Christ in the New Testament, p. 82.

<sup>452</sup>Webber D. J. The “mystical union with Christ”: The new Finnish school compared with early twentieth-century American theology // Logia 21(1). 2021. P. 14.

<sup>453</sup>Noted in Peura S. Christ as favor and gift // Braaten C. E., Jenson R. W. Union with Christ: The new interpretation of Luther. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998. – P. 45.

<sup>454</sup>Luther M. Luther's works / Ed. H. J. Grimm. – Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1957. – V. 31. – P. 298.

<sup>455</sup>Ibid., v. 31, p. 298, 351. Also see Barth K. Church dogmatics / Trans. G. W. Bromiley. – Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1962. – IV.3.2.

<sup>456</sup>Luther's works, v. 31, p. 298.

<sup>457</sup>Ibid., v. 31, p. 189-190.

<sup>458</sup>Ibid., v. 26, p. 130.



teaching in the following manner.<sup>459</sup> We are considered righteous people in virtue of the Righteous Christ, who lives in us. Yet, that righteousness remains “foreign” because it is not our personal righteousness, but the righteousness of the abiding Christ. Therefore, in one sense this righteousness is “outside” of us, since it is in Christ, yet in another sense it is “in” us, since Christ dwells within.

In studying Luther’s thought, we must also glance at his view of Romans 5:15: “But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.” Luther focused on the phrase “the grace of God and the gift by the grace,” and taught that “the grace of God” referred to the gift of righteousness through faith, but the “gift by the grace” is the sanctifying work of the indwelling Christ.<sup>460</sup> Luther thought it necessary to distinguish these items, but not to divide them. They act together in the life of the Christian. Nevertheless, the “gift by the grace,” that is, the sanctifying work of the indwelling Spirit, is dependent on and based upon the “grace of God”, i.e., the gift the righteousness.<sup>461</sup>

Along with many other theologians, Luther believed that a person enters into union with Christ at the moment of receiving water baptism.<sup>462</sup> However, here we encounter another inconsistency in Luther’s theology. How can salvation be by faith alone, if fulfilling an ordinance is also required?

In evaluating Luther’s teaching, we hasten to comment that we highly esteem his contribution to the teaching on justification by faith, which sparked the Reformation and birthed the Protestant movement. Nevertheless, Luther was a person of his day and possessed some inaccurate views on the biblical teaching of the believer’s union with Jesus Christ. Like many of his time, Luther emphasized union with Christ as His presence in the believer. However, as we have demonstrated, union with Christ has two aspects: His presence in us, and our position in Him. Due to his neglect of the second aspect of this teaching, Luther was unable to present us with a complete picture of this truth.

As we have shown in chapter 3, our righteousness depends not on the presence of the Righteous Christ in us, but on His role as our representative as head of our “corporate personality.” By virtue of our forensic position in Christ, He shares with us His righteous status, and by virtue of our participation in the redemptive events of His history and the presence and activity of His Spirit in us, our lives are being transformed into His image.

## **6. John Calvin**

Many theologians feel that John Calvin based his entire system of soteriology on the concept of union with Christ. Karl Barth, for example, felt that for Calvin union with Christ was

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<sup>459</sup>Pannenberg W. Systematic theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991–1998. – V. 3. – P. 216-217.

<sup>460</sup>Braaten C. E. Response to Simon Peura, “Christ as favor and gift” // Braaten C. E., Jenson R. W. Union with Christ: The new interpretation of Luther. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998. – P. 73.

<sup>461</sup>Braaten, Response to Simon Peura, p. 73; Peura S. Christ as favor and gift // Braaten C. E., Jenson R. W. Union with Christ: The new interpretation of Luther. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998. – P. 43-44.

<sup>462</sup>Peura, p. 53-54; Braaten, Response to Simon Peura, p. 74.

“the common denominator under which Calvin tried to range his whole doctrine of the appropriation of the salvation achieved and revealed in Christ.”<sup>463</sup>

On the one hand, Calvin was ready to affirm that our participation in the death of Christ meant deliverance from the power of sin. In his comments on Romans 6:6, he wrote, “This old man, he says, is fastened to the cross of Christ, for by its power he is slain.”<sup>464</sup> In his words, sharing in the death of Christ provides us with a secret energy.<sup>465</sup> He also mentions participation in Christ’s resurrection, “If we are partakers in his resurrection, we are raised up by means of it to newness of life, which conforms us to the righteousness of God” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.3.9).

Calvin also speaks of the eschatological significance of union with Christ: “...not that we immediately cease entirely to sin, but that we become at last victorious in the contest,”<sup>466</sup> and, “This renewal, indeed, is not accomplished in a moment, a day, or a year... death is the only termination to this warfare” (*Institutes*, 3.3.9). As we claimed in chapter six of this volume, Calvin also taught that the Holy Spirit applies the benefits of union with Christ. He refers to the “the secret efficacy of the Spirit, to which it is owing that we enjoy Christ and all his blessings” (*Institutes*, 3.1.1).<sup>467</sup>

Finally, we can note two other elements in Calvin’s teaching that correspond to the biblical witness. He also speaks of union with Christ in terms of union with His Body, the Church.<sup>468</sup> In addition, in commenting on Romans he recognizes the human factor in this process: “You must daily proceed with that work of mortifying, which is begun in you, till sin be wholly destroyed.”<sup>469</sup>

We must note, however, that Calvin stresses Christ’s presence in us more strongly than our position in Him, as shown in the following citations:

To communicate to us the blessings which he received from the Father, he must become ours and dwell in us... all which he possesses being, as I have said, nothing to us until we become one with him” (*Institutes*, 3.1.1).

...the residence of Christ in our hearts, in fine, the mystical union, we assign the highest rank, Christ when he becomes ours making us partners with him in the gifts with which he was endued (*Institutes*, 3.11.10).

Macaskill confirms the priority Calvin gave to the indwelling Christ: “It is absolutely vital to the understanding of Calvin that we recognize that this is not simply a matter of the naked

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<sup>463</sup>Barth, IV.3.2, p. 552. Also see Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament*, p. 82.

<sup>464</sup>Calvin J. *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* / Trans. and Ed. J. Owen. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959. – P. 224.

<sup>465</sup>Calvin J. *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians* / Trans. T. H. L. Parker; Ed. D. Torrance, T. Torrance. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965. – C. 42.

<sup>466</sup>Calvin, *Romans*, p. 225.

<sup>467</sup>Also, see his commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:11.

<sup>468</sup>Tamburello, p. 97; Oden T. C. *Life in the Spirit: systematic theology*, vol. III. – San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1992. – V. 3. – P. 280.

<sup>469</sup>Calvin, *Romans*, p. 229.

imputation of status, of a property of Christ being externally transferred to us. It is about the indwelling presence of the one who is righteousness in himself. We do not receive the benefits of Christ apart from receiving Christ himself.”<sup>470</sup> In this way, Calvin was able to forge a tight connection between the doctrines of justification and sanctification:

By faith we apprehend the righteousness of Christ, which alone reconciles us to God. This faith, however, you cannot apprehend without at the same time apprehending sanctification.... Christ, therefore, justifies no man without also sanctifying him (*Institutes*, 3.16.1).

Moreover, Calvin holds the position that Christ obtained His personal righteousness through His obedience, and by virtue of our union with Him, His righteousness is credited to us through our connection with His humanity. The humanity of Christ is the “channel” for the transmission of His divine power to people.<sup>471</sup> Calvin states, “His flesh is a channel to pour out to us the life which resides intrinsically, as they say, in His divinity.”<sup>472</sup> Calvin’s understanding here reminds us the Irenaeus’ teaching of “recapitulation”:

This is the wondrous exchange made by his boundless goodness. Having become with us the Son of Man, he has made us with himself sons of God. By his own descent to the earth he has prepared our ascent to heaven. Having received our mortality, he has bestowed on us his immortality. Having undertaken our weakness, he has made us strong in his strength. Having submitted to our poverty, he has transferred to us his riches. Having taken upon himself the burden of unrighteousness with which we were oppressed, he has clothed us with his righteousness (*Institutes*, 4.17.2).

So then, Calvin’s teaching on union with Christ sometimes fully agrees with the biblical witness, but at times deviates from it in ways we have refuted earlier in this volume. Evans notes the same, “Calvin’s view of union with Christ involved a matrix of realistic, spiritual, and forensic categories which was never fully explained.”<sup>473</sup>

Therefore, we advise selective adherence to Calvin’s view. On the one hand, Calvin treats well the ideas of our sharing in the redemptive events of Christ’s history, the progressive fulfillment of that union, inclusion in the Body of Christ, the role of the Spirit in actualizing this union in the life of the believer, and the believer’s participation in this process. On the other hand, we refrain from adopting his views on the role of Christ’s incarnation and on the non-forensic basis for justification.

## **B. Modern Thinkers**

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<sup>470</sup>Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament*, p. 84.

<sup>471</sup>Smedes, p. 9-12; Evans, p. 26.

<sup>472</sup>Commentary on John 6:51. Noted in Tamburello, p. 92.

<sup>473</sup>Evans, p. 13.

## 1. Hudson Taylor

Few may know that the famous 19th-century English missionary to China, Hudson Taylor, ascribed his success in missionary endeavors to his union with Christ. A brief description of his experience in this regard can be found in the publication *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*, written by his son and daughter-in-law.<sup>474</sup> They describe his experience as follows.

After a constant struggle with repeated failures and disappointments in the process of sanctification, Taylor realized his identification with Christ after reading a letter written to him by John McCarthy, who had discovered this truth not long before. McCarthy wrote, "Abiding, not striving nor struggling; looking off unto Him; trusting Him for present power."<sup>475</sup> After receiving the truth of the "exchanged life," Taylor experience a total transformation of his attitude and orientation in life.

Taylor describes how he approached the attainment of holiness prior to this experience: "I prayed, agonized, fasted, strove, made resolutions, read the Word more diligently, sought more time for meditation – but all without avail. Every day, almost every hour, the consciousness of sin oppressed me."<sup>476</sup> Then, he grasped his identification with Christ: "I am a member of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.... Can Christ be rich and I poor? Can your right hand be rich and your left hand poor?" and he concluded, "I am dead and buried with Christ – ay and risen too! And now Christ lives in me."<sup>477</sup>

Although it is hard to decipher the entire theology of Hudson Taylor from these quotations, it is clear that through his recognition of his union with Christ he received not only new inspiration, but also the spiritual power that he failed to receive by his strivings "in the flesh."

## 2. William Boardman

William Boardman (1810-1886) served for 20 years as a Presbyterian minister before leaving his denomination as an independent.<sup>478</sup> Although he was an American, his most effective ministry was in England. He travelled England in company with the preacher Robert Pearsall-Smith, whose meetings eventually gave birth to the Keswick Movement, of which we will speak later.

Boardman's groundbreaking work, *The Higher Christian Life*, written in 1958, lays out his understanding of victorious Christian living through faith in Jesus Christ. The book sold 100,000 copies in England and the United States. B. B. Warfield comments that his book "inaugurated a movement which has affected the whole Protestant world."<sup>479</sup>

Boardman's teaching emphasizes that sanctification comes not through human striving, but by faith in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. In defense of his thesis, he cites Paul's rebuke of the saints in Galatia with the words, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit,

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<sup>474</sup>Taylor H., Taylor G. Hudson Taylor's spiritual secret. – Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1932. – 253 p.

<sup>475</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>476</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>477</sup>Ibid., p. 161-163.

<sup>478</sup>His story is recounted in Warfield B. B. Studies in perfectionism. – New York: Oxford University Press, 1931. – V.2. – P. 466-472.

<sup>479</sup>Ibid., v. 2, p. 465.

are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Gal 3:3). He also draws a parallel showing that one appropriates sanctification the same way as justification – by faith:

We have one process for acceptance with God, that is faith; and another for progress in holiness, that is works. After having found acceptance in Jesus by faith, we think to go on to perfection by strugglings and resolves, by fastings and prayers, not knowing the better way of taking Christ for our sanctification, just as we have already taken him for our justification.<sup>480</sup>

Moreover, Boardman correctly notes that, although we can claim grace for sanctification entirely at any one time, the actual victory not does appear immediately, but progressively as the Christian grows spiritually. A believer receives "only the entrance... upon the process of sanctification – not sanctification completed."<sup>481</sup> He also properly states that trust in the Lord for victory leads to a deep humility before Him. In Boardman's opinion, when believers rely on Christ, they experience "a sense of absolute dependence upon Christ for holiness of heart and life."<sup>482</sup>

In addition, Boardman rightly views that the faith that truly obtains victory in Christ is an active faith, which leads to a commitment to obedience: "Faith accepts the command and obeys."<sup>483</sup> Several factors can hinder the Christian's spiritual development. Boardman lists: feelings of inferiority, fear of people's reactions, unwillingness to obey in all things, over attachment to law, and asceticism.

A unique feature of Boardman's teaching is his insistence on a "second conversion" to Christ for the purpose of sanctification: "There is a second experience, distinct from the first – sometimes years after the first – and as distinctly marked, both as to time and circumstances and character, as the first – a second conversion, as it is often called."<sup>484</sup>

On the other hand, in another place Boardman claims that having a conscious experience of the "second conversion" is not necessary: "Let Jesus be received as the all in all, and that is enough! Whoever can say, 'Jesus is mine and I am his, that he is complete and I am complete in him,' and say the truth, has the experience whether he has an experience to relate, or not... Christ, without any marked experience whatever, is all-sufficient."<sup>485</sup>

Nevertheless, Boardman goes to the extreme to claim that one must have active trust in Christ for sanctification in order to qualify for heaven: "It is necessary for all to come to the point of trusting in the Lord for purity of heart to be prepared for heaven... it is a point that must be gained, or heaven must be lost."<sup>486</sup> Yet, the New Testament nowhere makes such a requirement for salvation.

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<sup>480</sup>Boardman, p. 52.

<sup>481</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>482</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>483</sup>Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>484</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>485</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>486</sup>Ibid., p. 206.

Two years after Boardman published his work, J. J. Abbott wrote an evaluation of it, advancing the following critiques.<sup>487</sup> First, he sees a contradiction in the claim that Boardman speaks both of a present, complete victory in Christ, and of a progressive process for its attainment.<sup>488</sup> However, this critique reveals a weakness not in Boardman's teaching, but in Abbott's understanding of the nature of faith. In order to receive something from the Lord, one must first receive it by faith before it appears in one's experience (1 Jn 5:14-15; Mk 11:23-24). Therefore, people may claim that they have something by faith before its full apprehension in life.

Second, Abbott objects that Boardman fails to mention the usual means of growth embraced by all Christians (the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, etc.).<sup>489</sup> Abbott criticism is fair, but one must also be careful that these means of grace do not crowd out the redemptive work of Christ, which is the exclusive means by which God sanctifies the believer. The study of the Word does not so much sanctify believers as it informs them how to please God and appropriate the grace of Christ. Even the work of the Spirit, as we discussed previously, is not independent from the work of Christ, but is derived from it and applies it to everyday life. Christ must occupy the central place in the attainment of spiritual growth, not Christian disciplines.

We must also note that Boardman does mention Christian disciplines. He feels, though, little need to write about them, since the Holy Spirit will remind believers of these things. In addition, if people truly trust in Christ, then they will in no way neglect these practices, but they will happen more spontaneously: "...abiding in Jesus we shall be watchful and prayful, diligent and faithful, secure from the adversary and cheerful as the lark."<sup>490</sup>

Third, Abbott fears that this "fast-tract" to holiness will lead many believers to disillusionment from lack of immediate results.<sup>491</sup> On the other hand, Abbott neglects to note that discouragement and disillusionment are nearly the universal experience of Christians who seek sanctification outside the context of union with Christ (see Hudson Taylor's testimony). The union-with-Christ teaching is intended to solve this very dilemma.

Finally, although Abbott severely criticizes Boardman's book, at the same time he admits the need for a book that will show the way to victory through union with Christ. He writes, "It seems to us that a book on Christian sanctification, written from the point of union to Christ, showing how, by faith, we are one with Christ... (would be) a real desideratum in our Christian literature." However, somehow he does not feel that Boardman's book accomplishes this goal."<sup>492</sup>

The prominent Reformed theology, B. B. Warfield, also weighed in on Boardman's publication.<sup>493</sup> He correctly objects to Boardman's view on a two-stage salvation: justification by faith followed by sanctification by faith. Warfield expresses the more orthodox (biblical) view

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<sup>487</sup>Abbott J. J. Boardman's higher Christian life // Bibliotheca sacra. 17. 1860. P. 508-535.

<sup>488</sup>Ibid., p. 516.

<sup>489</sup>Ibid., p. 511, 514.

<sup>490</sup>Boardman, p. 320.

<sup>491</sup>Abbott, p. 528-529.

<sup>492</sup>Ibid., p. 528.

<sup>493</sup>Warfield, Studies in perfectionism, v. 2, p. 475-493.

that justification and sanctification are “indissolubly together as but two stages of the one salvation secured by the one faith in the one Christ.”<sup>494</sup>

Warfield also considers Boardman’s paradox of seeing sanctification as something both received by faith and accomplished progressively in life inconsistent. Yet, as mentioned in our assessment of Abbott above, such a paradox is inherent to the nature of faith.

Moreover, it troubles the Calvinist Warfield that Boardman emphasizes human participation in the sanctification process, since Calvinists reject any synergy in God’s salvation plan. Yet, Boardman’s view here does not trouble those who do not share Warfield’s Calvinistic convictions.

In evaluation of Boardman’s teaching we note the following. On the one hand, Boardman correctly affirms the completeness of Christ’s work, in particular concerning sanctification, and the need for faith to receive God’s grace for victory. On the other hand, Boardman’s view seems to lack definition as to how exactly Christ accomplished this victory. He never specifically speaks of the believer’s participation in Christ’s death, resurrection and exaltation, but simply of trusting Christ for victory in sanctification. Thankfully, those who further developed his teaching successfully closed this gap.

Finally, as was mentioned, the main shortcoming, even danger, of Boardman’s teaching is the requirement for receiving sanctification by faith for attaining salvation. Thankfully, followers of his teaching did not insist on this view.

### **3. Robert and Hanna Pearsall-Smith**

Boardman’s book had a great effect on the American preacher Robert Pearsall-Smith and his wife Hanna. They travelled with Boardman preaching his message, especially in England.<sup>495</sup> A key preaching service was held in London on May 1, 1873. Although only 16 people were in attendance, they were so moved by the message, “Victory in Christ,” that from that time on the ministry spread rapidly. In subsequent services in England, people claimed to receive the “second blessing,” as described by Boardman.

Other notable services were held for students at Cambridge and Oxford, and at Brighton. With each subsequent service, the number of attendees grew, reaching a peak of 7000 participants. The future founder of the Keswick movement (see below), Thomas Harford-Battersby, attended the Oxford meeting.

At the same time, not all welcomed this ministry. Critics accused the Pearsall-Smiths of teaching momentary sanctification. Curiously, the prominent American evangelist, Dwight Moody, who was travelling in England at that time, failed to join the meetings, even though he had earlier claimed to have received the “second blessing.”<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>494</sup>Ibid., v. 2, p. 481.

<sup>495</sup>Their history is recited in Carpenter J. A. Forward // *The Keswick movement: a comprehensive guide* / Ed. C. E. Jones // ALTA Bibliography Series, No. 52. – Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press; The American Theological Library Association, 2007. – P. xi-xii; Pollock J. C., Randall I. *The Keswick Story*. – Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2006. – P. 17-50; Figgis J. B. *Keswick from within*. – New York, London: Garland Publishing, 1985. – 192 p. Originally published in London: Marshall Bros., 1914. – P. 13-38; Warfield, *Studies in perfectionism*, v. 2, p. 497-553.

<sup>496</sup>Pollock, p. 24.

Although Robert Pearsall-Smith was invited to preach at Keswick, he declined and returned to America, never to preach again. The reason for his withdrawal is unknown, but several theories exist. Some suspect him of sexual impropriety, others blame illness, still others propose doctrinal irregularities. Nonetheless, his wife Hanna continued her ministry, which consisted mainly of writing on the topic of sanctification by faith.

Pearsall-Smith's teaching, briefly stated, promoted victory over *conscious* sin through faith in Jesus Christ. Consequently, he was not promoting the attainment of total perfection, since unconscious sins could still persist in the life of the believer.

Pearsall-Smith outlined the steps needed to acquire this victory over sin. First was a total surrender of one's life to the Lord. This surrender included forsaking all personal reliance on self-effort for sanctification. Second, one must receive sanctification by faith in Christ's redemptive sacrifice on Calvary, as testified to in Romans 6:11: "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." After having this crisis experience, e.g. the "second blessing," a process of gradual liberation from conscious sins by the power of God begins in the believer's life. The greater one's faith, the greater will be the victory.

However, unlike the "holiness movement" teaching, Pearsall-Smith denied that human sinfulness is eradicated by the second blessing – it remains, rather, until death. A believer's deliverance consists in the end of sin's dominion over the believer. One can live in victory over it.

J. B. Figgis, an early participant in the movement and personal witness of its development, describes the way to victory taught by Pearsall-Smith: "He does it all, and your part is to surrender, His to take that which you surrender."<sup>497</sup> Hanna Pearsall-Smith adds, "When I trust Him He gives me deliverance from the power of sin, as well as from its guilt."<sup>498</sup> A student of the Pearsall-Smiths and founder of this movement in Germany, Theodor Jellinghaus, expresses the experience thusly: "In the blood and death of Jesus not only forgiveness but also *direct and immediate* breaking of the power of sin, cleansing from sin, and uninterrupted victory over sin, are to be had on the surrender of faith."<sup>499</sup>

In many ways, the teaching of the Pearsall-Smiths aligns with the biblical portrayal of union with Christ. They taught sanctification through the redemptive work of Christ and the key role of faith in its acquisition. Unlike the false teaching of the holiness movement, which was spreading at that time as well, the Pearsall-Smiths did not teach the immediate and total eradication of the sinful nature through intensive prayer for sanctification.

On the other hand, in the Pearsall-Smiths' teaching, we do not hear mentioned other blessings available to the believer through union with Christ, such as: power for ministry, authority over the devil, healing, etc. Their passion for attainment of holiness, possibly, distracted them from appreciating other aspects of our position in Christ.

Moreover, they claimed (and Boardman in particular) that a "crisis of faith" was necessary before one could receive the "second blessing." At this "crisis," one would make a complete surrender to the Lord and receive sanctification by faith. Yet, one may challenge this view.

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<sup>497</sup>Figgis, p. 24.

<sup>498</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>499</sup>Jellinghaus T. Das völlige, gegenwärtige Heil durch Christum. – 4th ed. – 1898. – P. 20. Noted in Warfield, Studies in perfectionism, v. 1, p. 351.



When a person initially receives Christ, they already make this step of surrender to God. The Bible does not speak of an additional experience of this type after one's conversion to Christ.

It seems adequate that believers can merely accept by faith their position of victory in Christ over sin without a concrete crisis experience and subsequently progress in their acquisition of the grace of Christ. Quite possibly, the teaching of the necessity of a "crisis of faith" arose as an imitation of the similar practice in the holiness movement, which was exercising a strong influence on believers of that time who were seeking victory over sin. At the same time, one must recall that a supplemental experience with the Spirit is a Scriptural teaching in regard to receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5, 8), as described in chapter 4 of this volume.

Finally, Pearsall-Smiths' teaching promised victory only over "conscious sins." Yet, if the old man was truly crucified with Christ, that crucifixion includes not just the "conscious" believer, but the "unconscious" believer as well. Therefore, through union with Christ, one may expect increasing holiness even in areas of unconscious failings.

#### **4. The Keswick Movement**

The next step in the development and dissemination of the teaching of union with Christ in the 19th-20th centuries took place during a Higher Life Conference in the city of Keswick, England.<sup>500</sup> As mentioned before, Thomas Harford-Battersby, pastor of St. John's Anglican Church in Keswick, received the "second blessing" during the Pearsall-Smith meeting at Oxford. Harford-Battersby, along with the Quaker Robert Wilson, invited the Pearsall-Smiths to lead a conference in Keswick on the theme of union with Christ. After they made all the arrangements for the conference, Pearsall-Smith, as noted above, withdrew. Nevertheless, on June 28, 1875, the conference was launched with 400 persons in attendance.

The conference speakers expounded on Boardman and the Pearsall-Smiths' teaching on receiving the "second blessing," i.e., complete victory over conscious sin through union with Christ. The key element in obtaining this victory is faith. In the words of a modern adherent of traditional Keswickian teaching, J. R. McQuilkin, "Faith is thus the key to appropriating God's provision for successful Christian living."<sup>501</sup> Although the practice of regular Christian disciplines (i.e., prayer, Word, etc.) are necessary, faith is the moving force. McQuilkin claims, "As we continue to trust God the Holy Spirit, the means of grace become operative in our lives."<sup>502</sup> A witness of the early years of the conference, J. B. Figgis, relates the teaching of those early days:

How are we separated from sin? By the death of Christ. "If one died for all, then all died." Then what have you to do in order to die to sin? To take hold of the fact. To believe that Christ by His death has created a separation between you and your sin; that

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<sup>500</sup>This story is recalled in Figgis, *Keswick from within*; Pollock, *The Keswick Story*; Bundy D. D. *Keswick: a bibliographic introduction to the Higher Life Movements*. – Wilmore, KY: Fisher Library, Asbury Theological Seminary, 1975. – 89 p.; Carpenter J. A., *Forward*; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keswick\\_Convention](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keswick_Convention).

<sup>501</sup>McQuilkin J. R. *The Keswick perspective* // Gundry S. N. *Five views on sanctification*: Zondervan, 1987. – P. 167.

<sup>502</sup>*Ibid.*

the old man (that is, the man you used to be) is on Christ's cross, and that the new man in you is free to be used of God by His Spirit.<sup>503</sup>

You must *reckon* yourself dead in the person of Christ, because Christ has gone thru death, and you have gone thru it with Him ... the old man buried as far and as long as I remain in faith.<sup>504</sup>

Keswick instructed people seeking the "second blessing" to undergo the process outlined by the Pearsall-Smiths: total consecration to the Lord following by a surrender of trust in one's position in Christ. The process of attaining victorious Christian living begins after this crisis experience. Figgis recalls that people came to Keswick "very specially for blessing, some of them indeed, had already found it, and the rest we fancy, almost to a man, had resolved not to go away without it."<sup>505</sup>

Some church leaders strongly opposed this movement, accusing the "Keswickians" of teaching attainment of perfection in this life. Participants in Keswick, however, denied that teaching, regarding sanctification as a lifelong process, not a momentary acquisition. Figgis relates the teaching of that time: "Perfectly it cannot be until we stand before Him in glory, but we have yet to learn how far it may be attained in this life."<sup>506</sup>

The Keswick conference followed a certain fixed order with the goal of leading the attendees into the "second blessing." The Sunday service highlighted the spiritual inheritance of the believer. On Mondays, there was a call to repentance. Tuesday's teaching was on union with Christ. Wednesday was devoted to the Lordship of Jesus. Friday's sessions discussed practical Christian living. During the week, special services were conducted for men, women, youth, children and ministers. Still other services were devoted to prayer and missions. The attendees spent from 6-7 hours a day in services.

The early preachers at Keswick were from the Anglican Church, but in time, preachers from other groups took the pulpit as well. Church unity was a special emphasis, as reflected in the motto of the conference – "All One in Christ Jesus." Among the more well-known speakers at Keswick were Hudson Taylor, Evan Roberts (founder of the Welsh Revival), Andrew Murray, A. J. Gordon (founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance), Billy Graham and John Stott. For several years, Stott appeared annually, seeking to bring clarity to the biblical doctrine of sanctification.

The Keswick Conference also played a role in birthing other Christian movements, such as InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, The Volunteer Student Movement, and the Missionary Conference in Edinburgh. Conferences similar to Keswick appeared worldwide. One such conference in India drew over 100,000 attendees. Although the Keswick Conference also helped spark the Pentecostal Movement, the Keswick leaders did not welcome the Pentecostal teaching on tongues. Only in the 1990's did Keswick begin inviting Pentecostal or Charismatic speakers, and then only more conservative ones.

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<sup>503</sup>Figgis, p. 86.

<sup>504</sup>Ibid., p. 106-107.

<sup>505</sup>Ibid., p. 57-58.

<sup>506</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

From the first, Keswick sponsored missionary work, and eventually the Conference commissioned its own missionaries, especially with the goal of spreading the Keswick message among other missionaries. The famous missionary to India, Amy Carmichael, was the adopted daughter of the co-founder of Keswick, Robert Wilson.

Toward the end of the 20th century, many changes were introduced into the Keswick Conference. It lasted three weeks, more time being devoted to family recreation. The order of services was also altered, with only one general topic being covered the entire time. Less attention was paid to missions, and more to humanitarian work. More women occupied the pulpit. Attendance, however, continued to increase. In 2010, 12,000 persons were in attendance.

The main change in this movement, though, was that from the 1960's, less and less messages were devoted to victory in Christ – the preaching focused on more “standard” topics of interest to the evangelical church. The present Keswick symbol of faith, amazingly, does not even mention union with Christ (see <https://keswickministries.org/about-keswick-ministries>). In other words, Keswick ceased being Keswick.

In evaluating this movement, we may offer the same response that we made to the teachings of William Boardman and the Pearsall-Smiths, since the Keswick Conference, in general, simply echoed their teachings. Nevertheless, we must add that, although we thus critique the Keswick teaching, in its time, it was one of the rare witnesses remaining in the Church of the biblical teaching of union with Christ. Therefore, when the movement lost that distinction, the Church in general suffered a great setback.

## 5. Watchman Nee

In the 20th century, the most well-known adherent of the union-with-Christ teaching was Watchman Nee (1903-1972). The classic expression of his understanding is found in the book *The Normal Christian Life*.<sup>507</sup> Let us first briefly review Nee's history.<sup>508</sup>

Nee was a Chinese believer and preacher who suffered for his faith under the communist regime, spending 20 years in prison, where he died. Before his imprisonment, he travelled, preached, led seminars and founded a number of congregations that led to the formation of a church movement called the “Local Churches,” which persists to this day.

The book *The Normal Christian Life* is, in general terms, a study of Paul's epistle to the Romans, chapters 5-8. Throughout the book, Nee defends the position that “God makes it quite clear in his Word that he has only one answer for every human need – his Son, Jesus Christ.”<sup>509</sup> Nee unpacks this thought, first of all, by claiming that *blood* of Jesus, shed on the cross, provides people with forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God. Moreover, he asserts that deliverance from the power of sin comes through the *death* of Jesus: “The Blood deals with the sins, but the Cross must deal with the sinner.”<sup>510</sup>

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<sup>507</sup>Nee Watchman. *The Normal Christian Life*. – Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1977. – 300 p.

<sup>508</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watchman\\_Nee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watchman_Nee)

<sup>509</sup>Nee, p. 2.

<sup>510</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 26.

Although all were made sinners in Adam, victory over sin is made possible through Christ. In other words, Nee operates on the principle of “corporate personality.”<sup>511</sup> Nee states, “In Adam, we receive everything that is of Adam; in Christ, we receive everything that is of Christ.”<sup>512</sup> Namely, God made us participants in the death, resurrection and exaltation of His Son, Jesus Christ.

The death of Jesus makes possible deliverance from sin while His resurrection provides us with new life. We obtain these blessings in virtue of the fact that we have died with Christ, been buried with Him, and been raised with Him. In addition, Jesus is the “Last Adam” in the sense that His death put an end to the old era of sin. He is also the “Second Man” in the sense that His resurrection dates the start of the era of God’s new creation. Being “in Christ” means transition from the old era to the new one.

In order to attain to victory over sin and the new life secured by Christ, four steps are necessary: “know,” “consider,” “present yourselves to God,” and “walk in the Spirit.” The first step is to know that by His death Christ has already secured victory over the power of sin, which is our victory as well (Rom 6:6). A true understanding of this truth comes only by personal revelation from God, which those seeking victory in life must obtain from Him: “Such knowledge comes from divine revelation. It comes from the Lord himself.”<sup>513</sup>

The next step is to consider oneself dead to sin, but alive to God in Jesus Christ (Rom 6:11). Faith actualizes the already finished work of Christ in the life of the believer. In this regard, Nee states, “When the Lord Jesus was on the Cross, I was there in him. Therefore I reckon it to be true. I reckon and declare that I have died with Him.”<sup>514</sup>

The third step is to present oneself to God (Rom 6:13): “God requires of me that I now regard all my members, all my faculties, as belonging wholly to him.”<sup>515</sup> In addition, “My giving myself to the Lord must be an initial fundamental act. Then, day by day, I must go on giving to him.”<sup>516</sup>

The final necessary step to victorious Christian living is to walk in the Spirit (Rom 8:9). Nee feels that the key to walking in the Spirit is to rely entirely on the indwelling Spirit to live His life through us, and to have no confidence in our own abilities (i.e., “the flesh”): “Living in the Spirit means that I trust the Holy Spirit to do in me what I cannot do myself.”<sup>517</sup> Along with this, walking in the Spirit requires submission to Him, which naturally follows when we have the revelation that the Spirit lives in us.

According to Nee, the Holy Spirit plays a special role in realizing our union with Christ. The Spirit actualizes in the life of the believer that which Jesus accomplished through His death and resurrection. Nee expresses it this way: “What the Father has devised concerning us the Son has accomplished for us, and now the Holy Spirit communicates it to us.”<sup>518</sup>

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<sup>511</sup>Nee never uses this term, but his understanding of the topic correlates with this conception.

<sup>512</sup>Nee, p. 32.

<sup>513</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>514</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>515</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>516</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>517</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>518</sup>Ibid., p. 201-202.

In addition, Nee believes that the believer can receive a special experience with the Spirit that will result in more effective ministry – the “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” The baptism in the Spirit, in fact, is our participation in the exaltation of Jesus Christ. Nee notes that Jesus poured out His Spirit only after His ascension to heaven. However, unlike the Pentecostal teaching of tongues as the sign of Spirit baptism, Nee felt that this confirming sign may vary among recipients of Spirit baptism.

Nee summarizes our three-pronged sharing in the history of the Savoir as follows: “Because the Lord Jesus died on the Cross, I have received forgiveness of sins; because the Lord Jesus rose from the dead, I have received new life; because the Lord Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of the Father, I have received the outpoured Spirit.”<sup>519</sup>

Nee comments on the relation of the Christian to the Law based on Romans chapter 7. In order to live a victorious life, one must die to the Law and live by the Spirit: “Christ makes demands, but he himself fulfills in us the very demands he makes.”<sup>520</sup> The Law was given to show us our inability to fulfill it: “So we can say, reverently, that God never gave us the Law to keep: he gave us the Law to break!”<sup>521</sup> Believers, though, have already died to the Law, since they have already died with Christ.

Nee touches on still one other aspect of our union with Christ – we are in one Body in Him. He emphasizes the importance of the fellowship of the Church and our participation in it. God’s purpose is to “bring many sons to glory” (Heb 2:10), which implies the participation of all believers in the Body of Christ.

In the closing chapters of his book, Nee departs from the topic of union with Christ to talk about the human soul. In his opinion, it is not enough to just overcome the sinful nature. Believers must humble their soul before the Lord and live in full dependence on Him, thus fulfilling the words of Christ: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me” (Matt 16:24).

Nee devotes the final chapter to the theme “wasted for the Lord.” Working off the example of Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus who anointed the feet of Jesus with costly perfume (Jn 12), Nee concludes that it is impossible to “waste” something on the Lord. God is worthy of all we have, even if our sacrifice brings no apparent benefit to people. Yet, when someone sacrifices oneself to the Lord, the house is “filled with the fragrance of the perfume,” that is, from that person the “fragrance of Christ” is perceived by others (2 Cor 2:15).

It is not coincidental that Nee’s teaching on union with Christ is similar to the Keswick version. In 1938, Nee attended and participated in a Keswick conference. Two years after his visit, Nee preached two series of messages, the contents of which were adapted for the books *The Normal Christian Life* and a similar publication, *Sit, Walk, Stand*.<sup>522</sup>

In evaluating Nee’s treatment of union with Christ, we note that he correctly reflects the main aspects of the biblical teaching concerning corporate personality, our participation in Christ’s redemptive events, and the role of the Spirit in applying the work of Christ to the believer. He also properly defines our role in appropriating God’s grace in Christ through faith

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<sup>519</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>520</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>521</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>522</sup>Cliff N. Watchman Nee’s ministry in retrospect // *Evangelical Review of Theology*. 8. 1984. P. 292-293.

and submission to the Lord. In comparison with previous teachers listed in the chapter, Nee provides us with the most faithful description of this truth.

In addition, unlike some others, Nee rightly stresses that union with Christ involves unity with other believers in one Body. His teaching is also unique in that he includes our participation not only in the death and resurrection of Jesus, but in His exaltation as well, which provides us with power for ministry through the baptism in the Spirit. Finally, although he refers to the teaching on “eras” or “eons,” which we critically discussed in chapter 4, he does not deny or minimize, as others do, that we do have a real and personal participation in the redemptive acts of Christ.

Nevertheless, we can subject Nee’s views to some corrections. First, it is somewhat artificial to separate the actions of Christ’s “blood” and His “death,” and claim that the first provides forgiveness of sins, while the second – deliverance from sin’s power. The term “blood” is simply a symbolic representation of death. Conceptually, “blood” and “death” are synonyms. The death (blood) of Christ provides both forgiveness of sin’s penalty and deliverance from sin’s power.

Additionally, Nee claims that in order to receive this truth, one needs a special revelation by the Holy Spirit. Although we also affirm that the Spirit reveals to us the significance of our union with the Lord (see Eph 1:15-19), Nee’s pretention that such a revelation is absolutely necessary to conceptualize union with Christ at all is exaggerated. Possibly, Nee is attempting here to preserve, although in a different form, the Keswickian distinction of a “crisis” experience in connection with initiation into union with Christ. For Boardman and the Pearsall-Smiths, the crisis consists of complete surrender to the Lord, while for Nee it is a special revelation by the Spirit.

We also need to consider Nee’s understanding that after receiving sanctification by faith, believers must then submit their soul to their spirit. This teaching derives not from Scripture, but from Nee’s view on the “spiritual man.” He believes that the true person is the spirit and that other components of the person (i.e., soul and body) must submit to it. However, Nee is misguided in his anthropology. A person is not a spirit, but a combination of components in an intrinsic unity. In addition, if sin was conquered through the death of Christ, then what “rebellion” remains in the soul to be overcome by a different means? If believers have already gained victory over sin, then why must they secure still additional victory over their already sanctified-by-Christ soul?

Finally, although Nee’s approach to union with Christ is a marked improvement over his predecessors, we cannot adhere to some other aspects of his general teaching. For example, in his book *Spiritual Authority*, he insisted on total and absolute submission by church members to their leaders. He stated, “If God dares to entrust His authority to man, then we can dare to obey. Whether the one in authority is right or wrong does not concern us. The obedient one needs only to obey.... Insubordination is rebellion.”<sup>523</sup> Nee also held to a negative and critical attitude toward other Christian denominations.<sup>524</sup>

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<sup>523</sup>Spiritual authority, p. 71; noted in Cliff, p. 293.

<sup>524</sup>Cliff, p. 293

## 6. William Durham and the Assemblies of God

The final figure that exerted a significant influence on the development and spread of the teaching on union with Christ in the 20th century was William Durham (1873-1912).<sup>525</sup> Durham was a Baptist, who devoted himself to serving Christ after seeing a vision of Him on the cross. In time, he joined the holiness movement and became a pastor in Chicago.

When he heard about the revival on Azusa Street, Durham travelled there and experienced the Pentecostal outpouring, i.e., the baptism in the Holy Spirit. William Seymour, founder of the revival, prophesied that whenever Durham would preach, the Holy Spirit would fall on people. Durham returned to Chicago and began preaching about the Spirit baptism. Many attended his meetings, including some future Pentecostal leaders, such as Amy Semple McPherson, the future founder of the Pentecostal "Foursquare Gospel Church."

As Seymour had predicted, Durham's church experienced revival. Services sometimes lasted until dawn. The congregation often sang in other tongues. A blue mist sometimes appeared in the sanctuary, and when it appeared, people were known to fall under God's power. Unfortunately, internal opposition arose against Durham and he was forced to leave his church. He, therefore, moved to Los Angeles to take part in the revival on Azusa Street.

However, Durham had abandoned the teaching of the holiness movement, accepted by early Pentecostals, that sanctification was attained momentarily through intensive prayer and that such an experience was a necessary prerequisite to receiving the baptism in the Spirit. Because of this, Seymour forbade Durham to preach at Azusa Street, and Charles Parham, founder of the modern Pentecostal movement, considered him a heretic.

Nonetheless, Durham launched a new ministry in Los Angeles, which peaked in attendance at 1000 persons. More and more people became convinced of Durham's view that people can receive Spirit baptism without previously receiving the experience of entire sanctification.

In May of 1910, Durham revealed his teaching on sanctification – "The Finished Work of Christ."<sup>526</sup> He claimed that through His death and resurrection, Jesus accomplished everything necessary for a person's sanctification. At the moment of conversion to Christ, people receive entire sanctification in virtue of their participation in Christ's death and are therefore free from sin. A "second blessing" is not needed. Believers must merely receive the victory already provided by Christ through faith. Durham writes,

We are dead with Christ, buried with Him, and raised up to walk in newness of life with Him.... this was made real in us when we became identified with Christ through faith and the new birth.<sup>527</sup>

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<sup>525</sup>His story is told in Farkas T. G. William H. Durham and the sanctification controversy in early American Pentecostalism, 1906-1916 // Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. – Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1993. – p. 119-174.

<sup>526</sup>See Durham, (№ 1), 1912, p. 1-3; Durham, (№ 2), 1912, P. 1-4; Durham W. Some other phases of sanctification // Pentecostal Testimony 2 (№ 2). 1912. P. 7-9.

<sup>527</sup>Durham W. The finished work of Calvary // Pentecostal Testimony 2 (№ 1). 1912. P. 3.

It is in conversion that a man receives Jesus Christ, the glorious Son of God, and is made a new creature in Him, and old things pass away and all things become new.<sup>528</sup>

Durham considered that for believers the old, sinful nature no longer exists – they possess only the new nature from the Holy Spirit. In his words, “Has a man who is in Christ sin in him? No. It could not be. We do not come into Christ with the ‘old man’ in us. God has one time put our old man into Christ, and nailed him to the Cross, and, bless God, all who are in Christ are crucified with Him, and their old man is dead in Him,”<sup>529</sup> and, “A man is not in Adam and Christ at the same time. Christ and Adam are not in a man at the same time.”<sup>530</sup>

Consequently, the Christian’s task is not to attain holiness, but to preserve one’s deliverance from sin received by faith and to live accordingly: “God’s Word makes it plain that when God saves a man, He cleanses him,” and there remains just to “abide in Christ, receive and walk in the Spirit, hold fast the faith, grow in grace.”<sup>531</sup> So then, even though believers are already sanctified in Christ, they can still mature in Him.<sup>532</sup>

If believers nonetheless sin, they must restore their relationship with God, since justification and sanctification go together. The loss of one can mean the loss of the other. In Durham’s words, “God never saves a man from outward sins that He does not save him from inward sin at the same time.... It takes justification and sanctification together to both to make Bible salvation.”<sup>533</sup>

On the one hand, we value Durham’s contribution in general to the budding Pentecostal Movement of his time. It is said that thanks to him, more than half of the early Pentecostals abandoned the holiness teaching of the necessity of a “second blessing” before receiving the baptism in the Spirit.<sup>534</sup>

On the other hand, the erroneous aspects of his teaching are obvious. Durham does not affirm that sanctification, received by faith in Christ’s redemptive work, is progressively worked out in the life of the believer. He expects complete victory over sin from the first day of conversion to Christian faith. This will inevitably lead to disillusionment for those who hold this expectation.

Additionally, Durham distorts the biblical doctrine of justification. According to Scripture, while believers, still in their imperfections, are undergoing the process of sanctification, they are still considered righteous before God for Christ’s sake. Finally, even though from the perspective of our faith our sinful nature has been destroyed, in our experience it remains an active force. We recall the warning given by John the apostle, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn 1:8).

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<sup>528</sup>Ibid.

<sup>529</sup>Durham, (№ 1), 1912, p. 2.

<sup>530</sup>Durham, (№ 2), 1912, p. 3.

<sup>531</sup>Ibid.

<sup>532</sup>Durham, Some other phases of sanctification, p. 9. Also see Farkas, p. 264.

<sup>533</sup>Durham, (№ 1), 1912, C. 3. Also see Faupel D. W. William H. Durham and the Finished Work of Calvary // Knight H. H. From Aldersgate to Azusa Street: Wesleyan, holiness, and Pentecostal visions of the New Creation. – Pickwick Publications, 2010. – P. 237-245, and Farkas, p. 242.

<sup>534</sup>Faupel, p. 237-245.



Fortunately, in time, the more radical elements in Durham's teaching fell by the wayside, and only the positive elements remained – victory over sin through one's union with Christ, and its acquisition by faith in that union. After Durham, many Pentecostals began to embrace a hybrid view, combining elements from both Durham and Keswick – sanctification comes through faith in union with Christ, but it is actualized progressively without the need for a "crisis" or "second blessing."<sup>535</sup>

The main representative among Pentecostals of this modified view is the Assemblies of God, whose understanding of sanctification is reflected in the point 9 of their statement of faith:

Sanctification is realized in the believer by recognizing his identification with Christ in His death and resurrection, and by faith reckoning daily upon the fact of that union, and by offering every faculty continually to the dominion of the Holy Spirit.<sup>536</sup>

### C. Conclusions

With this, we conclude our investigation of how the union-with-Christ teaching has developed over church history, as well as our study of the topic in general. Nevertheless, this is not likely the end of the story. We stand on the threshold of a great restoration of this powerful biblical truth to the Church today. This volume, then, ends with the note of hope that both in the Church in general and in our personal lives, we will see still more chapters written in the history of the believer's union with Jesus Christ.

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<sup>535</sup>Ibid., p. 237-245; Farkas, p. 270.

<sup>536</sup><https://ag.org/Beliefs/Statement-of-Fundamental-Truths#9>. It is interesting to note that the Assemblies of God has held this position only since 1961. Before that, we read, "Entire sanctification is the will of God for all believers, and should be earnestly pursued by walking in obedience to God's word." Farkas proposes that the earlier version was adopted so as to not offend believers coming over from the holiness movement, but that the latter version was actually the Assemblies position from the beginning (Farkas, p. 181-184).

## Appendix. Analysis of Key Passages

In the second chapter of this volume, we investigated the concept of “corporate personality.” In the context of that investigation, we discussed in detail Paul’s instruction in Romans 5:12-19. Nevertheless, it will be useful to study other key passages in connection with the biblical concept of union with Christ, which we have referred to only in passing in this book, in order to confirm their proper interpretation.

### Romans 6:1-11

This passage marks the transition between Paul’s discussion of justification and his discussion of sanctification. Paul will introduce the thought that God’s plan consists not only of forgiveness of sins and positional righteousness, but also of deliverance from the dominion of sin in the believer’s personal life.

This deliverance incorporates four vital elements: liberation from sin’s power (chp. 6), freedom from the Law (chp. 7), life in the Spirit, and the future consummation of salvation (chp. 8). The theme of our passage is liberation from the power of sin through faith-identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus, symbolized by water baptism (6:1-11). Moreover, the believer’s victory also requires willful submission to God (6:12-23).<sup>537</sup>

Taber provides a good analysis of the structure this passage. He highlights four key words: “know” (v. 6), “consider yourselves” (v. 11), “present yourselves” (v. 13), and be obedient (v. 16-17), although this fourth injunction is more implied than stated. Taber further expounds on the command to “present yourselves”: “When we know the facts, and reckon them to be true of ourselves, then a definite act of the will in complete surrender to the will of God is called for.”<sup>538</sup>

#### Verse 1

Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν; ἐπιμένωμεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, ἵνα ἡ χάρις πλεονάσῃ

*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?*

In the first three verses of chapter 6, Paul asks the question that would likely arise in light of his teachings in Romans 3-5: “Should a believer continue to sin so that God would show more grace?” The fact that Paul anticipated such a question shows that a proper reading of Romans 3-5 would predictably create the concern that Paul’s teaching of salvation by grace could lead to wanton moral behavior among believers in Jesus. Paul now prepares to address this concern.

#### Verse 2

μὴ γένοιτο. οἵτινες ἀπεθάνομεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, πῶς ἔτι ζήσομεν ἐν αὐτῇ;

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<sup>537</sup>Taber, p. 20.

<sup>538</sup>Ibid.

*May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?*

Paul responds the suggestion of remaining in sin with a resounding “No!” He employs here the Greek optative mood, which in this context expresses revulsion at the idea. Then Paul masterfully demonstrates why continuing in sin is not an option for the Christian – those who have died to sin can no longer live in it. The third century Father Origen described dying to sin as follows: “To obey the cravings of sin is to be alive to sin; but not to obey the cravings of sin or succumb to its will, this is to die to sin.”<sup>539</sup>

### **Verse 3**

ἢ ἀγνοεῖτε ὅτι, ὅσοι ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθημεν

*Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?*

In order to clarify and strengthen his position, Paul appeals to the personal experience of the Roman Christians in water baptism. The rite of baptism symbolizes three things: cleansing from sin, burial with Christ, and resurrection with Him. In our text, Paul focuses on the final two aspects: burial and resurrection. Mounce asserts that burial “certifies the reality of death.”<sup>540</sup>

This verse presents certain difficulties for non-sacramentalists, since it seems to imply that the act of water baptism itself actualizes the believer’s identification with Christ, an idea which leads to the false conclusion that salvation comes through water baptism. To avoid this implication, some propose that the “baptism into Christ Jesus” refers not to water baptism at all, but to our participation in His death on Calvary. However, Paul is likely appealing to the actual experience of water baptism by the Roman believers to substantiate his upcoming argument. We must conclude, then, that in our text, “baptism” refers to immersion in water.

However, in light of the entire biblical teaching on salvation, one must conclude that baptism does not actualize union with Christ, but rather symbolizes it. Paul employs the physical act of water baptism to represent the conversion experience, which occurs when a person believes. Mounce confirms that Paul uses “the ritual act of baptism as a symbol of the complete redemptive event that finds its effectual cause in the death of Christ and its completion in the faith of those who believe.”<sup>541</sup>

### **Verse 4**

συνετάφημεν οὖν αὐτῷ διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος εἰς τὸν θάνατον, ἵνα ὥσπερ ἠγέρθη Χριστὸς ἐκ νεκρῶν διὰ τῆς δόξης τοῦ πατρὸς, οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς περιπατήσωμεν

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<sup>539</sup>Noted in Mounce, p. 149.

<sup>540</sup>Ibid.

<sup>541</sup>Ibid.

*Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*

Instead of immediately drawing the conclusion suggested in verse 3, that dying with Christ means dying to sin, Paul further develops the thought of identification with Christ – we are participants not only in His death, but also in His resurrection. His logic is compelling. If we are participants in His death, then it follows that we are sharers in His resurrection as well.

It is curious that Paul does not speak of our resurrection with Christ as an already accomplished fact, as he does in Ephesians 2:5-6 and Colossians 2:12-13, and as he does in this verse concerning our death with Christ. Nonetheless, the words “so we too might walk in newness of life” implies a real participation in the power of Christ’s resurrection now. In this way, Paul vindicates his initial claim that his teaching does not lead to lawlessness. Participation in the resurrection of Christ is a summons to live a new life.

### **Verse 5**

εἰ γὰρ σύμφυτοι γεγόναμεν τῷ ὁμοιώματι τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως ἐσόμεθα

*For if we have become united with {Him} in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be {in the likeness} of His resurrection,*

Paul repeats his thought of our sharing in Christ’s resurrection, strengthening the logical connection between identification in His death and His resurrection. Paul qualifies, though, that we are made sharers in the “likeness” (ὁμοίωμα - *homoioma*) of His death.

Possibly, Paul employs the term ὁμοίωμα (*homoioma*) to avoid making a complete identification of Christ with the believer. The fact that His death is our death does not mean that we are Christ. Those who are “in Christ” are actual participants in His death, yet that does not imply total identification with His person. The term ὁμοίωμα (*homoioma*) preserves this ontological distinction.

### **Verse 6**

τοῦτο γινώσκοντες ὅτι ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος συνεσταυρώθη, ἵνα καταργηθῇ τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας, τοῦ μηκέτι δουλεύειν ἡμᾶς τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ

*knowing this, that our old self was crucified with {Him,} in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;*

This verse is key for Paul in this passage. Here, he speaks of a real (but not absolute, as just discussed) participation in Jesus’ death in relation to our “old man,” i.e., our sinful nature. Mounce expresses it well, “Believers, by definition, are those who by their union with Christ

died with him on the cross.”<sup>542</sup> Dunn concurs that in this verse Paul’s intention is to “describe the death of believers as something which has already happened.”<sup>543</sup>

Believers must “know” of this truth, which is the first imperative in this passage. Taber insightfully notes, “One must know the simple story of the Gospel in order to be saved, and one must know something about union with Christ in order to be sanctified.”<sup>544</sup>

The term καταργηθῇ (*katargethe*), i.e. “done away with,” can mean, “to cause something to lose its power or effectiveness” or “to cause something to come to an end or to be no longer in existence.”<sup>545</sup> The second meaning is preferred, since “death” does more than make the body ineffectual, but eliminates life in the body altogether. This corresponds to Paul’s teaching on the new creation in Christ. The sinful nature is not only brought under control or neutralized, but is removed in Christ, a reality which works itself out progressively in our experience.

One should understand the phrase τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἀμαρτίας, i.e. “the body of the flesh” as a synonym to “the old man” in the sense of life under the dominion of sin. Ridderbos mistakenly proposes that the physical body is the “seat of sin.”<sup>546</sup> The Bible, however, unmistakably teaches that the root of sin is not the human body, but the heart (Mk 7:21). In addition, Paul’s goal here is that the body of sin might be done away with in the believer. Paul certainly does not intend that believers should live outside the body!

Therefore, together with Peterson, we affirm that the body of sin “appears to be a way of speaking about the whole person as controlled by sin.”<sup>547</sup> Fitzmyer agrees that it refers to “the whole person considered as earth-oriented, not open to God or his Spirit, and prone to sin.”<sup>548</sup> Paul possibly uses the metaphor “body” to remind one of the sacrifice of Christ’s body for our redemption, but he is not implying that the physical body is the seat of sin.

## Verse 7

ὁ γὰρ ἀποθανὼν δεδικαίωται ἀπὸ τῆς ἀμαρτίας.

*for he who has died is freed from sin.*

Appealing to logic, Paul concludes that those who have died can no longer sin. Consequently, our participation in Christ’s death means sin no longer has dominion over our lives. At the same time, Paul uses an atypical verb to describe this liberation – δικαίω (dikaioo), which can imply deliverance, but more commonly has the forensic meaning “to justify.”<sup>549</sup> Paul may be making a conceptual link here with the infinitive of the previous verse, δουλεύειν (*douleuein*), i.e. “be slaves to sin.” A legal relationship exists between master and slave. It appears that Paul seeks to emphasize that death not only makes people unresponsive

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<sup>542</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>543</sup>Dunn, Romans 1-8, p. 307.

<sup>544</sup>Taber, p. 20.

<sup>545</sup>Arndt, p. 525-526.

<sup>546</sup>Ridderbos, p. 30.

<sup>547</sup>Peterson D., p. 99.

<sup>548</sup>Fitzmyer, Romans, p. 436.

<sup>549</sup>Arndt, p. 249.

to that, to which they died, but also destroys the legal bond between parties. Morris confirms, “A slave who dies is quit of his master, and those who die with Christ are acquitted from their old master, sin.”<sup>550</sup>

### Verses 8-9

εἰ δὲ ἀπεθάνομεν σὺν Χριστῷ, πιστεύομεν ὅτι καὶ συζήσομεν αὐτῷ, εἰδότες ὅτι Χριστὸς ἐγερθεὶς ἐκ νεκρῶν οὐκέτι ἀποθνήσκει, θάνατος αὐτοῦ οὐκέτι κυριεύει

*Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.*

Paul continues his theme in these verses, emphasizing the permanence of victory in Christ. His logic is again compelling. If Christ has defeated death, then death cannot not rule over Him. As participants in His death, then, it follows that we are also made sharers in his victory over death and “believe that we shall also live with Him.”

Mounce aptly characterizes the resurrection life described by Paul in this context not as a future physical resurrection, but as a spiritual renewal.<sup>551</sup> Nonetheless, Morris also sees in the use of the future tense an eschatological as well as a non-eschatological dimension:

We should probably see an eschatological dimension in the future tense here, but understand it in a way that does not obscure its application to Christian life here and now.... Paul is saying that the believer lives with Christ now and that this union will be even more wonderful in the life to come.<sup>552</sup>

### Verse 10

ὁ γὰρ ἀπέθανεν, τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ἀπέθανεν ἐφάπαξ· ὁ δὲ ζῇ, ζῇ τῷ Θεῷ

*For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.*

Paul now alters the trajectory of his argument to connect Christ’s victory over death with His victory over sin. The ongoing victory of Christ over death also includes an ongoing victory over sin, since “the death that He died, He died to sin once for all.” Dunn explains, “The rule of sin finds its final expression in death (5:21); so the climax of the dying to sin is the dying to death and the dying of death as a power dominating human life.”<sup>553</sup> The permanent nature of our victory over death (and, consequently, over sin as well) is emphasized by the word ἐφάπαξ (*ephapadz*), i.e. once for all time.<sup>554</sup>

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<sup>550</sup>Morris, Romans, p. 253.

<sup>551</sup>Mounce, p. 152.

<sup>552</sup>Morris, Romans, p. 254.

<sup>553</sup>Dunn, Romans 1-8, p. 323.

<sup>554</sup>Arndt, p. 417.

## Verse 11

οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς λογίζεσθε ἑαυτοὺς [εἶναι] νεκροὺς μὲν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ζῶντας δὲ τῷ θεῷ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ

*Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

Here, Paul reaches the climax of his argument, expressed in a summons to his readers to consider themselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. He employs the verb λογίζεσθε (*logidzesthe*), i.e. “consider,” which means in our context “to determine by mathematical process, reckon, calculate.”<sup>555</sup> Thus, believers can have as much assurance that their union with Christ will result in victorious Christian living as they have in mathematical certainty.

This summons has both an existential and an ethical dimension. First, believers must affirm by faith that in Christ their sinful nature has been destroyed and that they have already been set free from sin’s power. We applaud Mounce’s understanding of the existential significance of this event: “Now we are to take our place with him and regard sin as something to which we also have died. Paul was not suggesting that we imitate Christ. He was speaking of a reality that took place when we by faith were incorporated into Christ. Our responsibility is to take with all seriousness the fact that in Christ we have died to sin.”<sup>556</sup>

The ethical dimension, which is expounded in detail in the following context, involves consecration of the will to live for Jesus. Morris writes, “Christ’s death and resurrection have altered their position, and they should live in accordance with the new reality.”<sup>557</sup> Both aspects play an important role, since attempting to live a Christian life without reliance on the cross and resurrection is futile. On the other hand, recognition of one’s position in Christ without a personal application of that reality to one’s life will also prove ineffective.

Paul concludes this passage with phrase ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (“in Christ Jesus”) in order to remind his readers that deliverance from sin and death occurs only through the believer’s union with Jesus Christ.

## Romans 8:1-9

The main theme of Romans is God’s righteousness, and this section (chps. 6-8) is devoted to the development of righteous behavior, i.e., the pursuit of sanctification. Chapter 7 closes with Paul’s cry of desperation at his helplessness to keep the Law, “Who will set me free from the body of this death?” His answer: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” In chapter 8, then, Paul will describe the next step in attaining this victory, beginning with the concept “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.”

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<sup>555</sup>Ibid., p. 597.

<sup>556</sup>Mounce, p. 153. Morris agrees, “There is no question of imitation; by faith we become one with Christ and this means a real death to our former life” (Morris, Romans, p. 250).

<sup>557</sup>Morris, Romans, p. 256.

Morris makes an interesting observation that in our passage “there is not a single imperative. Paul is talking about life in the Spirit, life in which the Spirit guides so constantly that there is no need for a string of commandments.”<sup>558</sup>

## Verse 1

Οὐδὲν ἄρα νῦν κατάκριμα τοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ

*Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

The term κατάκριμα (*katakrima*), i.e. “condemnation,” and its common-root words usually refer to a court verdict and subsequent sentencing.<sup>559</sup> Yet, if Paul is speaking here of forensic justification before God, then the basis for justification is different here than in other Pauline passages and the New Testament in general, where it arises from Christ’s sacrifice (especially see Rom 5:18; 8:33). Romans 8:2, however, basis this “justification” on “the Law of the Spirit of life.”

Morris holds the view that the word κατάκριμα (*katakrima*) refers to the entire previous context, i.e., chapters 1-5: “It is much more likely that Paul is referring to the whole of the preceding argument. He has taken several chapters to bring out the way God saves us in Christ, and in the light of the whole of that massive argument he can say there is now no condemnation.”<sup>560</sup> Dunn connects Romans 8:1 with Romans 5:18, which is the only other instance of the New Testament usage of κατάκριμα (*katakrima*): “So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.”<sup>561</sup>

Although this view has merit, we still must inquire why Paul connects justification (Rom 8:1) with the law of the Spirit of life (Rom 8:2). For theological and contextual reasons, it seems appropriate to define κατάκριμα (*katakrima*) more in the sense of “moral failure,” since the context is speaking of victory over the power of sin.

We also note use of the related verb κατέκρινεν (*katekrinen*) in verse 3: “For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God {did:} sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and {as an offering} for sin, He condemned (κατέκρινεν - *katekrinen*) sin in the flesh.” The result of verse 3 is that we are set free from the law of sin and death (v. 2) and able to fulfill the requirements of the Law (v. 4). As we shall demonstrate later, the term κατέκρινεν (*katekrinen*) in verse 3 should be understood not as “condemning” sin in the flesh, but “destroying” sin in the flesh (i.e. the sinful nature). Therefore, the κατάκριμα (*katakrima*) word group does not always have a forensic sense.

At the same time, Paul’s warning in verse 13, “If you are living according to the flesh, you must die,” could be referring to moral failure leading to condemnation. The good news is,

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<sup>558</sup>Morris, Romans, p. 299.

<sup>559</sup>Arndt, p. 518.

<sup>560</sup>Morris, Romans, p. 300.

<sup>561</sup>Dunn, Romans 1-8, p. 415.



though, that those who remain in Christ do not experience moral failure thanks to the liberating effect of His death and the working of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer (v. 2-4).

In any case, we must preserve the New Testament principle of salvation through faith alone apart from works, since Paul convincingly demonstrated this truth in chapters 1-5. Commenting on Romans 8:1, Mounce affirms: “The just penalty incurred by the sins of the human race was paid by the death of Christ. The unfavorable verdict has been removed. Now all those who are in Christ are the beneficiaries of that forgiveness.”<sup>562</sup>

## Verse 2

ὁ γὰρ νόμος τοῦ πνεύματος τῆς ζωῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἠλευθέρωσέν σε ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ τοῦ θανάτου

*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.*

Hodge incorrectly claims that the “law of the Spirit of life” is the gospel.<sup>563</sup> Moreover, Dunn, seeing that Paul calls the Torah “spiritual” in 7:14 and refers to fulfilling it in 8:4, mistakenly concludes that this phrase refers to the Torah. He admits, in fact, that most commentators disagree with him, since “there is the contrast with 7:6, with its sharp and apparently mutually exclusive antithesis between γράμμα (i.e., “letter”) and πνεῦμα (i.e., “spirit”); and the even more striking dismissal of any idea that the law could give life in Gal 3:21.”<sup>564</sup>

In the parallel phrase “the law of sin and death,” the term “death,” standing in contrast to life from the Spirit, likely refers to spiritual death, i.e., a life in bondage to sin. Thus, Paul forms a tautology between the terms “sin” and “death” to create poetical symmetry with the expression “Spirit of life.” In Romans 7, we note that the word “death” has this connotation as well.

In the following verses, Paul unpacks what these contrasting laws are and how they operate. Mounce gives us a preview: “The new law of the Spirit says that only by living in union with Christ Jesus can believers break the power of sin in their lives. It is the Spirit of God who provides victory, and that Spirit is the possession of every true child of God.”<sup>565</sup>

## Verse 3

Τὸ γὰρ ἀδύνατον τοῦ νόμου ἐν ᾧ ἡσθένει διὰ τῆς σαρκός, ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ υἱὸν πέμψας ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας καὶ περὶ ἁμαρτίας κατέκρινεν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐν τῇ σαρκί

*For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God {did:} sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and {as an offering} for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,*

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<sup>562</sup>Mounce, p. 174.

<sup>563</sup>Morris, Romans, p. 301.

<sup>564</sup>Dunn, Romans 1-8, p. 416.

<sup>565</sup>Mounce, p. 175.

Although Paul was formerly a Pharisee and zealous defender of Mosaic Law, now he sees the Law in a different light. It is not the way to attaining success in spiritual life, but fails to produce true moral reform: “For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh...” He explains in chapter 7 that the problem was not in the Law itself, but in those who were supposed to keep it. Mounce concludes the same, “Does not experience teach us that every attempt to live the Christian life apart from the empowering presence of the Spirit of God ends in defeat?”<sup>566</sup> Paul reasons as follows – the Law cannot sanctify, because it appeals only to human frailty, i.e., “the flesh.”

As mentioned earlier, the term “condemnation” here likely refers to the destruction of our sinful nature through Jesus’ sacrifice. Mounce expresses it well: “The Greek verb in the second sentence of the verse refers not only to the pronouncement of judgment but to the execution of the sentence as well,”<sup>567</sup> that is, not only to the condemnation of the flesh, but also to its elimination.

God’s solution to our sin problem was to send His Son as a human. Although He was sinless, His commonality with sinful people allowed Him to serve as a representative substitute for them before God. We note that God sent Jesus “in the *likeness* of sinful flesh,” preserving the truth that Christ’s humanity, unlike ours, was sinless. He died for sin on behalf of all, and in this way, God annihilated humanity’s sinful nature (“He condemned sin in the flesh”).

Mounce correctly notes that the expression that God condemned sin “in the flesh” does not refer to humanity’s sinful nature, but to the humanity of Christ: “That is where God condemned sin. It was in the person of the incarnate Son that the Father brought an end to the power of sin.”<sup>568</sup> Morris agrees, “It was what Jesus did ‘in the flesh’ that condemned sin.”<sup>569</sup>

Now, believers can enjoy freedom from sin’s power through the death of Christ as the Spirit applies this grace to their lives and believers walk by the Spirit.

#### Verse 4

ἵνα τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ νόμου πληρωθῇ ἐν ἡμῖν τοῖς μὴ κατὰ σάρκα περιπατοῦσιν ἀλλὰ κατὰ πνεῦμα

*so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

We affirm with the NASB translation the rendering of the Greek δικαίωμα (*dikaionoma*) as “requirements.” Although Paul may be using a subjective genitive in the phrase τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ νόμου, i.e. “that which the Law requires,” a better alternative is the partitive genitive, or “the essence of the Law.” In light of Paul’s general teaching on the Law, the second option is

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<sup>566</sup>Ibid.

<sup>567</sup>Ibid.

<sup>568</sup>Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>569</sup>Morris, Romans, p. 303.

preferred since in other passages, Paul, together with other New Testament writers, advances the idea that love is the fulfillment or “essence” of the Law (Rom 13:8; Jam 2:8; Mk 12:29-31).

Morris wisely comments, “Notice that Paul does not say ‘we fulfil the law’s righteous requirement’, but that ‘the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in us’, surely pointing to the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer.”<sup>570</sup> Even though Dunn focuses attention of the active participation of the believer, he nonetheless agrees that sanctification “is only possible as an eschatological reality, as enabled by the Spirit given in the outworking of Jesus’ death and resurrection.”<sup>571</sup>

The phrase “who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” is parallel to the phrases “law of sin and death” and “law of the Spirit of life.” In the next verse, Paul will explain how these laws operate and lead to corresponding behavior. Dunn defines “spirit” and “flesh” as “two alternative and opposed drives which come to expression in the ethical character of everyday decisions and relationships.”<sup>572</sup>

### Verse 5

οἱ γὰρ κατὰ σάρκα ὄντες τὰ τῆς σαρκὸς φρονοῦσιν, οἱ δὲ κατὰ πνεῦμα τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος

*For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.*

The use here of the participle ὄντες (*ontes*), i.e. “are,” in contrast to the verb περιπατοῦσιν (*peripatousin*), i.e. “walk” in verse 4, reveals that we are not dealing with behavior here, but essence or character. Therefore, those who “set their minds of the flesh” are those whose are by essence carnal. The same applies to those who are “according to the Spirit.” The believers’ “essence” corresponds to the Spirit, and therefore they set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

In this context, the verb φρονέω (*phoneo*), i.e. “set mind,” most likely refers not so much to the contents of thought as to the general orientation of thought or one’s worldview. It is unlikely that Paul considered constant, intensive mental concentration on the Spirit the indicator of life in the Spirit and the prerequisite for experiencing “life and peace.” This is not the typical experience of believers, and they cannot attain it by human effort (i.e., “in the flesh”). Mental concentration on spiritual things must be the result of the Spirit’s work, not a condition for it.

### Verse 6

τὸ γὰρ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς θάνατος, τὸ δὲ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος ζωὴ καὶ εἰρήνη

*For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,*

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<sup>570</sup>Ibid., p. 304.

<sup>571</sup>Dunn, Romans 1-8, p. 424.

<sup>572</sup>Ibid., p. 424.

The genitive constructions φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς (“mind set on the flesh”) and φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος (“mind set on the Spirit”) are likely genitives of source. A person’s worldview is defined by either worldly values or the values of God’s kingdom. It is significant that in the sentence τὸ γὰρ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς θάνατος, τὸ δὲ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος ζωὴ καὶ εἰρήνη (“For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace”) there are no verbs. We should likely supply the verb “leads to.” We then read, “For the mind set on the flesh leads to death, but the mind set on the Spirit leads to life and peace.”

### Verses 7-8

διότι τὸ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς ἔχθρα εἰς θεόν, τῷ γὰρ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐχ ὑποτάσσεται, οὐδὲ γὰρ δύναται· οἱ δὲ ἐν σαρκὶ ὄντες θεῷ ἀρέσαι οὐ δύνανται

*because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able {to do so,} and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

These verbs complete Paul’s thought of the operation of the law of sin and death and allow us to summarize his teaching in that regard. It is clear that people living by the flesh are disobedient, hostile and cannot obey God. Their lifestyle is characterized by the word “death,” which in this context connotes moral failure. They have a “mind set on the flesh,” i.e., they view life through the prism of worldly values.

The “law of sin and death” is the reason for their hostile attitude toward God. The law of sin and death is the domination of sin over the life of an unregenerate individual. People’s attempts to attain obedience by their own efforts will fail, as demonstrated in Israel’s (as a microcosm of all humanity) disobedience under the Law. So then, people (believers or unbelievers) cannot find liberation from sin in themselves, but must abandon all self-reliance and enter into the “law of the Spirit of life.”

### Verse 9

Ἑμεῖς δὲ οὐκ ἐστὲ ἐν σαρκὶ ἀλλ’ ἐν πνεύματι, εἴπερ πνεῦμα θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν. εἰ δέ τις πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ οὐκ ἔχει, οὗτος οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτοῦ

*However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.*

In this and the previous verse, we encounter a third expression for describing the conditions of an unregenerate and a regenerate person – ἐν σαρκὶ (“in the flesh”) and ἐν πνεύματι (“in the Spirit”). Here, the sense is not so much essence or behavior, but rather sphere of influence. An unregenerate person lives in the “sphere” of the flesh and is under its influence. For the regenerate person the converse is true.

Paul adds the condition, “If indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.” Only if the Spirit dwells within can someone live in the sphere and under the influence of the Spirit. In the same way,

only if the Holy Spirit lives within can a person experience rebirth, and consequently be “in the Spirit” and walk “according to the Spirit.” Finally, Paul affirms that all true believers have the Holy Spirit.

Summarizing Paul’s teaching of the “law of the Spirit of life,” we may say the following. All believers have the Holy Spirit (v. 9). Those who have the Spirit are “in the Spirit,” or under His influence (v. 9). Believers are not only “in the Spirit,” but are also “according to the Spirit,” that is, they have a spiritual worldview (v. 5). This is the basis for walking in the Spirit (v. 4), which, in turn, leads to “life” (i.e., moral success) and “peace” (v. 6). Those who walk in the Spirit fulfill the requirements or essence of the Law, which is love (v. 4). The flesh cannot prevail, because the death of Christ has annihilated sin’s power (v. 3). The Spirit applies the redemptive work of Christ to our lives (v. 2). This is the “law of the Spirit of life.”

So then, victory over sin and sanctification from the Spirit occurs when the Spirit applies the redemptive work of Christ to the lives of believers, bringing deliverance from the dominion of sin. We recall Mounce’s summary: “The new law of the Spirit says that only by living in union with Christ Jesus can believers break the power of sin in their lives. It is the Spirit of God who provides victory, and that Spirit is the possession of every true child of God.”<sup>573</sup>

### **1 Corinthians 1:26-31**

The First Epistle to the Corinthians is part of an extended correspondence with the Corinthian congregation, where the situation was quite unstable. In this letter, Paul addresses various problems he had heard about and answers questions posed to him by the church.

This epistle does not have a single thematic focus. Yet, it is interesting that of all the problems and questions Paul addresses he mentions first of all disunity in the congregation, devoting four chapters to this issue. In 1:10, he introduces this topic, but, starting at verse 17, he deviates from it to talk about “true wisdom.” Our passage, consequently, is found in this sub-context.

To illustrate the tie between church unity and true wisdom, we may cite Paul’s appeal to the latter when he discusses the existing division between his “followers” and “followers” of Apollos (3:4). The latter were likely enamored by Apollos’ literary eloquence and knowledge of philosophy, which the Greeks highly valued. Therefore, in order to keep the Corinthians from overvaluing Apollos and undervaluing him, it became necessary for Paul to define and defend true wisdom. However, Paul is not competing with Apollos for attention, but rather wants the congregation to value the contributions both parties make and thus preserve unity among themselves.

In 1:18-31, Paul discredits the world’s wisdom in that it failed to lead humanity into utopia. The main problem with worldly wisdom is that it leads to pride, which undermines God’s plan of bringing people into dependence on Him and bringing glory to Himself. Therefore, God accomplished salvation through the “foolishness” of the cross, which is scandalous to human sensibilities. In addition, God’s election reflects this agenda as well in that He chose the

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<sup>573</sup>Mounce, p. 175.

marginal of society (v. 26-29). Thus, the main thrust in our passage is humility before God and dependence on Him.

## Verse 26

Βλέπετε γὰρ τὴν κλῆσιν ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι οὐ πολλοὶ σοφοὶ κατὰ σάρκα, οὐ πολλοὶ δυνατοί, οὐ πολλοὶ εὐγενεῖς·

*For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;*

Paul begins this verse with a present imperative βλέπετε (*blepete*), i.e., "consider." The Corinthian believers must understand the condition they were in before their call to salvation.

This verse reveals that that gospel was embraced, first of all, by the lower classes of Corinth. Nonetheless, when Paul writes, "not many wise... not many mighty, not many noble," he does not fully exclude the existence of upper class Corinthians as well in the church. Ciampa and Rosner, in fact, list a number of persons who were possibly people of status.<sup>574</sup> We also note in 1 Corinthians 11 the presence of both poor and well-to-do at the Lord's supper.<sup>575</sup>

The three-fold repetition "not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble" is a poetic device Paul uses. It echoes the words of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 9:23-24: "Thus says Yahweh, 'Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am Yahweh who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,' declares Yahweh."<sup>576</sup> These passages differ in detail, yet have the common feature of excluding those having worldly advantage.

## Verses 27-28

ἀλλὰ τὰ μωρὰ τοῦ κόσμου ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, ἵνα καταισχύνῃ τοὺς σοφοὺς, καὶ τὰ ἀσθενῆ τοῦ κόσμου ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, ἵνα καταισχύνῃ τὰ ἰσχυρά, καὶ τὰ ἀγενῆ τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὰ ἐξουθενημένα ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, τὰ μὴ ὄντα, ἵνα τὰ ὄντα καταργήσῃ

*but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,*

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<sup>574</sup>Such as Stephen (1:16; 16:15), Chloe (1:11), Gaius (1:14; cf. Rom 16:23), Sosthenes (1:1; cf. Acts 18:17), Aquila and Prisca (16:19; cf. Rom 16:3; Acts 18:2, 26); Ciampa R. E., Rosner B. S. *The First Letter to the Corinthians*. – Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010. – P. 105.

<sup>575</sup>Fee G. D. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* / Ed. N. B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, G. D. Fee, J. B. Green. – Rev. ed. – Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014. – P. 83.

<sup>576</sup>Ciampa and Rosner support this view: "Jeremiah provides the pattern for Paul's threefold dismissal of the wise, the powerful, and the well born" (Ciampa, p. 111).

Paul again employs the three-fold poetic device. He expands the third element, “not many noble,” expressing this thought in three different ways: “the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not.” So then, God chooses and calls those that the world rejects and scorns. Ciampa and Rosner see an Old Testament parallel: “God’s choice of the humble nation Israel was likewise surprising and unanticipated... (Deut. 7:7). This is a stable pattern in salvation history. From Genesis onward, where he consistently bypasses the firstborn, God chooses the most unlikely figures, a model he followed in Corinth.”<sup>577</sup> God’s intention in choosing the weak is to undermine human pride, which is likely the main obstacle to people receiving salvation.

Also notable is that God’s election is not unconditional, as Calvinists propose, but depends on people’s humility. Those who occupy more disadvantaged positions in society are more likely open to God’s intervention and more inclined to depend on Him. Jesus reflects this truth in Matthew 11:25, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from {the} wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.” James does as well: “Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world {to be} rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (Jam 2:5).<sup>578</sup> Additionally, Thiselton reminds us that during His earthly ministry, “Jesus shared table fellowship with the outcasts who were not among those whom religious and social Jewish society counted as ‘somebodies.’”<sup>579</sup>

## Verse 29

ὅπως μὴ καυχῆσθαι πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ.

*so that no man may boast before God.*

Verse 29 reveals what results from God’s election undermining human pride – no one can boast before Him. God’s choice of the weak and foolish will certainly confound the strong and wise, since the Holy Spirit will supply believers with all the might and wisdom they require. The strong and wise, relying on their own abilities, will not be able to rival the strength and wisdom of believers. In this way, Paul’s proclamation, “The world through its wisdom did not {come to} know God,” contrasts with the success of the Church, where the cross is the “power of God” (v. 18), and Christ is the “wisdom of God” (v. 30).

## Verse 30

ἐξ αὐτοῦ δὲ ὑμεῖς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ὃς ἐγενήθη σοφία ἡμῖν ἀπὸ θεοῦ, δικαιοσύνη τε καὶ ἁγιασμός καὶ ἀπολύτρωσις

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<sup>577</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>578</sup>Taylor M. 1 Corinthians / Ed. E. R. Clendenen. – Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014. – P. 76.

<sup>579</sup>Thiselton, p. 184.

*But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,*

In verse 30, Paul transitions to His favorite theological theme, which reflects the essence of his theology – the believer’s union with Christ. This theme supports the thrust of Paul’s argument in this context – humility before God and church unity – in several ways. First, the fact that those are in Christ are there “of God” again reminds us of God’s mercy in allowing us to be included in Christ. No one can boast in such a position. Second, the theme “union with Christ” emphasizes the unity of the Church and may aid in resolving the issue of division in the church at Corinth. Finally, Thiselton proposes that the believers’ high calling in Christ may offset the shame they may experience being, in general, from the lower classes.<sup>580</sup>

The conjunction τε (*te*) separates the ideas of Christ as “wisdom” from God, and Christ as “righteousness, sanctification and redemption.” Christ as “wisdom” refers to Him as the general solution for humanity’s ills. In other words, it serves as a synonym to “salvation.”<sup>581</sup> How God applies that salvation is expressed in the following terms: righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

Thiselton confirms, “Wisdom is redefined and explicated as receiving the *gifts* of righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.”<sup>582</sup> Douglas Fee concurs, “These are not three different steps in the saving process; they are rather three different metaphors for the same event (our salvation that was effected in Christ), each taken from a different sphere of our human existence and each emphasizing a different aspect of the one reality.”<sup>583</sup>

Moreover, the use of the verb γίνομαι (*ginomai*), i.e. “became,” does not refer to a change in Christ’s nature, but rather to His role as humanity’s representative before God. Thanks to His representation, His redemptive work can apply to our lives.

## **Verse 31**

ἵνα καθὼς γέγραπται· ὁ καυχώμενος ἐν κυρίῳ καυχάσθῃ.

*so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."*

At the end of this passage, Paul again cites Jeremiah 9:23-24: “Let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me.” In this way, Paul has reached his goal – the advancement of humility before God.

## **2 Corinthians 5:12-21**

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<sup>580</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>581</sup>Ciampa, p. 109.

<sup>582</sup>Thiselton, p. 192.

<sup>583</sup>Fee, p. 90.



Paul writes to the Corinthian church, a congregation with which he had a troubled relationship. The church had earlier openly resisted his apostolic authority, yet by the time of this writing, it seems that the crisis had passed. Paul writes this letter on his way to Corinth, where he hopes to further strengthen the church in faith. Nonetheless, some pockets of resistance remained active in the Corinthian congregation. Therefore, Paul hopes that through this letter he might fully regain the loyalty of this church and fully restore his apostolic authority.

In our passage, Paul is “boasting” in his ministry in order to give the Corinthian church reason to have confidence in him and resist those trying to undermine his ministry. Paul defends his sincere motives – they are based on love for the church, unlike his competitors’ selfish motives. Consequently, Paul urges the church to listen to him, not to his opponents. In the context of his plea for loyalty, Paul transitions into a discussion of union with Christ, which becomes the main topic of our passage.

The surrounding context for our passage is Paul’s reflections on his ministry. He highlights the strengths of his work (2:14-4:6), the weakness of his humanity, requiring the aid of the Spirit (4:7-5: 8), and the goal of his mission – new life in Christ and reconciliation with God (5:9-7:4).

### Verses 12-14a

οὐ πάλιν ἑαυτοὺς συνιστάνομεν ὑμῖν ἀλλ’ ἀφορμὴν διδόντες ὑμῖν καυχήματος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, ἵνα ἔχητε πρὸς τοὺς ἐν προσώπῳ καυχωμένους καὶ μὴ ἐν καρδίᾳ. εἴτε γὰρ ἐξέστημεν, θεῷ· εἴτε σωφρονοῦμεν, ὑμῖν. ἡ γὰρ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ συνέχει ἡμᾶς

*We are not again commending ourselves to you but {are} giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have {an answer} for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us,*

Paul had no need to defend himself to the church, since they had already restored their allegiance to him. Yet, to further strengthen his position, he feels the need to “boast” in his ministry. As was mentioned above, in order to underscore his apostolic authority, Paul compares those who serve with impure motives with the pure motives with which he and his associates serve (v. 12). Garland comments that Paul’s opposition, “Whoever they are, they boast in appearances – what is external, superficial, and transitory – instead of the heart – what is internal, essential, and eternal.”<sup>584</sup>

In verse 13, Paul describes his behavior before God with the verb ἐξίστημι (*existemi*). In this form, the word means, “to be out of one’s normal state of mind.”<sup>585</sup> A paraphrase of verse 13 might read, “If I act like a crazy man, or as a sensible one, in any case my motives are right.”

It is very possible that Paul here is speaking of his occasionally eccentric behavior, when he took upon himself, as it seems, unnecessary risks for the sake of the gospel (for example, his

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<sup>584</sup>Garland, D. E. 2 Corinthians. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999. – P. 273.

<sup>585</sup>Arndt, p. 350.

arrest in Jerusalem, or during the riot in Ephesus). Harris supports this idea by citing 2 Corinthians 6:4-5 and 11:23-28.<sup>586</sup> Paul sometimes displayed excessive zeal. This was true both before and after his conversion (also consider the instance with John Mark in Acts 14).

In verse 14, Paul summarizes the previous two verses, claiming that he is motivated by love. The genitive construction ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, i.e. “the love of Christ,” could be a genitive of source, “love from Christ,” or an objective genitive, “love for Christ.” One must consider, though, that it is impossible to love God or others without the supernatural aid of the Holy Spirit, who is the source of Christ’s love in us. Therefore, we prefer the genitive of source: “love from Christ.”

Paul describes how the love of Christ motivates him with the verb συνέχω (*sunecho*), which often connotes compulsion.<sup>587</sup> However, the conventional word for “compulsion” is not συνέχω (*sunecho*), but ἀναγκάζω (*anankadzo*).<sup>588</sup> In addition, theological considerations rule out the meaning “compulsion” since Jesus said, “My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matt 11:30). Similarly, the apostle John writes, “His commandments are not burdensome” (1 Jn 5:3), and Paul concurs, “For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Rom 8:15).

Various translators suggest a meaning such as “a strong impulse,” which is the likely meaning here:

- NASB95: “For the love of Christ controls us”
- NIV84: “For Christ’s love compels us”
- KJV 1900: “For the love of Christ constraineth us”
- NRSV: “For the love of Christ urges us on”
- ESV: “For the love of Christ controls us”
- NEB: “For the love of Christ leaves us no choice.”<sup>589</sup>

## Verses 14b-17

κρίναντας τοῦτο, ὅτι εἷς ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν, ἄρα οἱ πάντες ἀπέθανον· καὶ ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν, ἵνα οἱ ζῶντες μηκέτι ἑαυτοῖς ζῶσιν ἀλλὰ τῷ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἀποθανόντι καὶ ἐγερθέντι. Ὡστε ἡμεῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν οὐδένα οἶδαμεν κατὰ σάρκα· εἰ καὶ ἐγνώκαμεν κατὰ σάρκα Χριστόν, ἀλλὰ νῦν οὐκέτι γινώσκομεν. ὥστε εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις· τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρῆλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονεν καινὰ

*having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know {Him} {in this way} no longer. Therefore if*

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<sup>586</sup>Harris, p. 417-418.

<sup>587</sup>Arndt, p. 970-971.

<sup>588</sup>Louw J. P., Nida E. A. Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains. – 2nd ed. – New York: United Bible Societies, 1996. – V. 1 – P. 475.

<sup>589</sup>Harris, p. 419.

*anyone is in Christ, {he is} a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*

Beginning with the participle κρίναντας (*krinantas*), i.e. “having concluded,” Paul changes the trajectory of his instruction. The participle κρίναντας (*krinantas*) expresses cause or reason. Paul is explaining how the love of Christ came to compel him – he identified with Christ’s death and resurrection, received a new, resurrection life, and dedicated this new life to God. Consequently, the nature of this new life, which is love, now directs his steps and empowers his service. In verse 14, Paul unveils how this new order in Christ came to be. Jesus died for all, and in His death all died. Therefore, the old has passed away in Him, and the new has come (assumedly) through His resurrection.

Harris correctly notes that the phrase “one died for all” resembles the expression “Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8; cf. 1 Cor 15:3).<sup>590</sup> Moreover, “Given the fact that ἀπέθανον (“death”) is aorist, there is no reason to distinguish this death from the time of the death indicated by the earlier aorist ἀπέθανεν (“death”), the time of Christ’s crucifixion. When Christ died, all died; what is more, his death involved their death.”<sup>591</sup>

This interpretation is supported by the fact that the word “all” refers to all people. If Paul was speaking only of believers in Jesus, one could possibly conclude that imitation of Christ’s example of self-denial was in view. Harris concludes, “It is certainly more appropriate to see this ἀποθανεῖν (“death”) of the πάντες (“all”) as an actual “death” than as a potential “death.”<sup>592</sup> The aim of this verse is not only to inspire, but to empower and enable believers to identify with Christ in His death and resurrection by faith, so that they might live “no longer for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”

Next, Paul gives an ethical charge (v. 15) that identification with Christ in His death and resurrection naturally leads to a life devoted to Him and not to oneself, since those who have died with Christ have received a new life from Him. Harris writes, “The intended result of the death of Christ was the Christian’s renunciation of self-seeking and self-pleasing and the pursuit of a Christ-centered life filled with action for the benefit of others, as was Christ’s life.”<sup>593</sup>

Concerning the phrase “therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh,” Paul makes two applications. First, he applies it to Christ to refute the idea that He was simply a good man and teacher of morals. One must acknowledge who He is in truth – the incarnate God (v. 16). Garland explains that Paul’s meaning here is the one must not judge Christ by human standards (see 1 Cor 1:16-17).<sup>594</sup> He writes, “It is more likely that Paul refers to his own pre-Christian evaluation of Jesus as Messiah in this verse.”<sup>595</sup>

Second, Paul refuses to see Christians (and, assumedly, himself) from the perspective of their present weakness and imperfection (i.e., “in the flesh”), but rather as those who are new creatures in Christ. In Garland’s words, “Paul now sees others according to their standing with

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<sup>590</sup>Ibid., p. 420.

<sup>591</sup>Ibid., p. 421.

<sup>592</sup>Ibid., p. 422.

<sup>593</sup>Ibid.

<sup>594</sup>Garland, p. 283.

<sup>595</sup>Ibid., p. 285.

Christ.”<sup>596</sup> Paul urges us to view life with the eyes of faith and consider others and oneself worthy of great honor and having great potential in light of who we are in Christ (v. 17).

Garland also comments on the eschatological significance of the phrase “new creation”: “The new heaven and new earth and the complete transformation of believers remain a future hope,” yet he sees a present application as well: “But for Christians they are so certain to be fulfilled that their lives are controlled by this new reality that still awaits consummation.”<sup>597</sup> So then, one must not neglect the historical significance of our inclusion in the redemptive events of Christ’s life, which make this new creation a present reality for us.

## Verses 18-21

τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ καταλλάξαντος ἡμᾶς ἑαυτῷ διὰ Χριστοῦ καὶ δόντος ἡμῖν τὴν διακονίαν τῆς καταλλαγῆς, ὥς ὅτι θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ κόσμον καταλλάσσων ἑαυτῷ, μὴ λογιζόμενος αὐτοῖς τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν καὶ θέμενος ἐν ἡμῖν τὸν λόγον τῆς καταλλαγῆς. Ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ οὖν πρεσβεύομεν ὡς τοῦ θεοῦ παρακαλοῦντος δι’ ἡμῶν· δεόμεθα ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ, καταλλάγητε τῷ θεῷ. τὸν μὴ γνόντα ἁμαρτίαν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς γενώμεθα δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ

*Now all {these} things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin {to be} sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

Paul claims that God appointed apostles as His messengers and entrusted the gospel to them. He mentions this to further secure the allegiance of his audience. In this context, Paul again discusses the redemptive work of Christ, but this time not from the perspective of sanctification, but justification. In Christ, God the Father (because of their Trinitarian connection) makes reconciliation possible with Himself through His Son. God accomplished that reconciliation thanks to the great exchange of our sin for Christ’s righteousness.

In Christ, God has provided a firm foundation for us to attain the status of righteousness by imputing to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The great exchange, which the Father accomplished in Christ, is masterfully described in verse 21: “He made Him who knew no sin {to be} sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Other passages confirm that we indeed receive the very righteousness of God: “...and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from {the} Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which {comes} from God on the basis of faith” (Phil 3:9); “For in (the gospel) {the} righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous {man} shall live by faith’” (Rom 1:17); “But by His doing you are in

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<sup>596</sup>Ibid., p. 284.

<sup>597</sup>Ibid., p. 287.

Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness” (1 Cor 1:30). So then, Jesus Christ is our righteousness.

### **Galatians 2:15-21**

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul writes to a congregation that he and Barnabas had recently established. The church was experiencing a crisis from teachers who were requiring circumcision and keeping the Law for salvation. These teachers came from the church in Jerusalem, yet the Jerusalem church did not endorse them (see Acts 15:24).

In the context prior to our passage, Paul is reproving Peter for shunning fellowship with Gentiles after men from James joined him in Antioch. This shows that tensions existed in the Early Church between church leaders over the issue of continuation of Jewish rites and rules for Jewish Christians. Paul, for example, saw the Jewish believers under a new covenant and was ready to publicly oppose the leading apostle Peter, his own colleague Barnabas, and the men from James over this issue.

By doing this, Paul was introducing a fundamental alteration in how the Church needed to understand the gospel. Salvation was for all, both Jews and Gentiles, through faith in Jesus alone, apart from the Law. The Jerusalem church endorsed Paul’s position in regard to the Gentiles, but not for the Jews (Acts 15). Jerusalem felt that the gospel for the Gentiles differed from the gospel for the Jews (Gal 2:7-9) and that circumcision and law keeping was incumbent for the latter (Acts 15:19; 21:20).<sup>598</sup>

The connection that existed between Paul’s opponents in Galatia and the Jerusalem church forced Paul to seek endorsement from the other apostles over the circumcision of Gentiles issue. It is interesting to note that he received their endorsement, but with the qualification that his gospel was meant for the Gentiles, while Peter and James’ gospel was for the Jews. Paul was not content, though, with this arrangement and needed to show that the gospel of grace through faith was for all: Gentiles and Jews.

Paul’s chance eventually arrived. Before “certain men from James” came, Peter apparently sympathized with Paul’s position and was willing to share table fellowship with Gentile believers. When he withdrew, Paul accused the premier apostle of hypocrisy. Paul, being a Jew, said to Peter, also a Jew, “we” believe in salvation through faith in Christ, not through the Law. Then, Paul announced that he had died to the Law in order to live for God. In this way, Paul claimed that his gospel of freedom from the Law includes the Jews.

However, Paul was aware that some could accuse him that his gospel could lead to lawlessness. Therefore, in our passage, his main thrust to show that his gospel was adequate to secure both the justification and the sanctification of believers.

### **Verse 15**

Ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἐθνῶν ἁμαρτωλοί·

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<sup>598</sup>Yet, Peter seemed to sympathize with Paul’s position (see Acts 15:10-11).

*"We {are} Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles;*

Paul addresses Peter with the words "We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles," in order to bring out their previously held nationalistic bias.

### **Verse 16**

εἰδότες [δὲ] ὅτι οὐ δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπίστευσάμεν, ἵνα δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ.

*nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.*

Paul's teaching here harmonizes with Romans chapters 3-5, where he defends the truth of justification by grace through faith alone in the redemptive work of Christ. George makes the interesting observation that in verse 16, Paul thrice repeats the words "works of the Law," thereby emphasizing the salvation by works is completely excluded.<sup>599</sup> George also correctly rejects the idea that the phrase "works of the Law" refers to Pharisaical legalism or the ceremonial law. He rightly states that it refers to "the commandments given by God in the Mosaic legislation in both its ceremonial and moral aspects."<sup>600</sup> Longenecker agrees, "Paul directs his attack not just against legalism, which the Old Testament prophets and a number of rabbis of Judaism denounced as well, but against even the Mosaic religious system, for he saw all of that as preparatory for and superseded by the relationship of being 'in Christ.'"<sup>601</sup>

### **Verses 17-18**

εἰ δὲ ζητοῦντες δικαιωθῆναι ἐν Χριστῷ εὐρέθημεν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἁμαρτωλοὶ, ἄρα Χριστὸς ἁμαρτίας διάκονος; μὴ γένοιτο. εἰ γὰρ ἃ κατέλυσα ταῦτα πάλιν οἰκοδομῶ, παραβάτην ἐμαυτὸν συνιστάνω.

*But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! For if I rebuild what I have {once} destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor.*

George interprets the phrase, "For if I rebuild what I have {once} destroyed," as the attempt to reestablish the Law as the means of justification: "Speaking in paradoxical language, Paul said that to go back on this fundamental commitment would be, in effect, to build back the

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<sup>599</sup>George, Galatians, p. 193.

<sup>600</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>601</sup>Longenecker R. N. Galatians // Hubbard D. Word Biblical commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 1990. – P. 85-86.

old structures of repression and slavery, structures that have been once and for all shattered by Christ's death on the cross and the pouring out of his Spirit upon his people."<sup>602</sup>

F. F. Bruce concurs, "When law-abiding Jews like Peter and himself cease to look to the law as the basis of their justification before God and find that justification in Christ instead, they put themselves effectively on a level with 'sinners of the Gentiles.'"<sup>603</sup> Consequently, Christ becomes, so to speak, a "minister of sin" in the following sense: "In the argument of Paul's opponents, if law-abiding Jews had now to be reckoned as 'sinners', just like those who lived without the law, then the number of sinners in the world was substantially increased, and so (as they understood Paul's position) Christ was made a servant or agent of sin."<sup>604</sup> Consequently, the phrase, "If I rebuild what I have {once} destroyed," means, "Any one who, having received justification through faith in Christ, thereafter reinstates law in place of Christ makes himself a sinner all over again."<sup>605</sup>

Longenecker arrives at a similar conclusion.<sup>606</sup> In his view, verse 17 is an acknowledgement that those who seek justification still commit sins in this life. Yet, this does not mean that Christ endorses or empowers a sinful lifestyle. Verse 18 reveals that the answer to our sin problem is not to return to the Law, which the believer has laid aside both for justification and for sanctification, but dependence on Christ. Longenecker writes, "To go back to the law (as a Christian) after having been done with the law (for both acceptance before God and living a life pleasing to him) is what really makes one a lawbreaker.... To revert to the Mosaic law as a Christian is what really constitutes breaking the law, for then the law's true intent is nullified."<sup>607</sup>

## Verse 19

ἐγὼ γὰρ διὰ νόμου νόμῳ ἀπέθανον, ἵνα θεῷ ζήσω. Χριστῷ συνεσταύρωμαι

*For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God.*

The phrase διὰ νόμου νόμῳ ἀπέθανον, i.e., "through the Law I died to the Law," means that the Law condemned Paul, and he had been "executed" with Christ. Therefore, he has died and the Law no longer has jurisdiction over him. Paul's death to the Law also liberated him to live by the Spirit for God. This teaching echoes Romans 7 about the need for freedom from the Law to live for God. Longenecker claims that this liberation is not only from the curse and guilt of the Law, but also from the Law itself as a principle: "Jews hold to a nomistic or Torah-centered lifestyle in expressing their faith and Christians are to be Christ-centered in expressing theirs."<sup>608</sup>

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<sup>602</sup>George, Galatians, p. 197.

<sup>603</sup>Bruce F. F. The Epistle to the Galatians: a commentary on the Greek text // The new international Greek Testament commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982. – P. 140-141.

<sup>604</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>605</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>606</sup>Longenecker, Galatians, p. 90.

<sup>607</sup>Ibid., p. 90-91.

<sup>608</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

Although Paul writes in the first person, George comments, "...he was describing what might be called the normal Christian life. What was true for Paul is true for all believers who have been justified by faith in Jesus Christ."<sup>609</sup> George also rightly notes that by the term "Law" Paul implies "the God-given commandments and decrees contained in Old Testament Scriptures," yet at the same time, "There is an ethical imperative in the Christian life that flows from a proper understanding of justification."<sup>610</sup>

## Verse 20

ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῇ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός· ὃ δὲ νῦν ζῶ ἐν σαρκί, ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῇ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντός με καὶ παραδόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ

*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the {life} which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.*

In this verse, Paul unveils the secret of his spiritual success – his acknowledgement and appropriation of his participation in the crucifixion of Christ, where his old nature was put to death. F. F. Bruce claims that believers "share his death to the old order ('under law'; cf. 4:4) and his resurrection to new life," and comments on the use of the Greek perfect tense: "The perfect tense συνεσταύρωμαι (i.e., "crucified with") emphasizes that participation in the crucified Christ has become the believer's settled way of life."<sup>611</sup>

Furthermore, Paul identifies with Christ in His resurrection, which becomes for him the source of strength for his new life. In the words of F. F. Bruce, "This new life in Christ is nothing less than the risen Christ living his life in the believer."<sup>612</sup> In particular, this power is found in the indwelling Spirit. Bruce comments, "It is by the Spirit that the risen life is communicated to his people and maintained within them."<sup>613</sup> George writes, "The 'I' who has died to the law no longer lives; Christ, in the person of the Holy Spirit, dwells within, sanctifying our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit and enabling us to approach the throne of God in prayer."<sup>614</sup>

Campbell offers the following summary: "In Galatians 2:20 Paul enlarged on the meaning of verse 19. He 'died to the Law' because he was crucified with Christ; he was able 'to live for God' because Christ lived in him. Basic to an understanding of this verse is the meaning of union with Christ.... Having been thus united to Christ, believers share in His death, burial, and resurrection."<sup>615</sup>

However, the release of that power depends on a constant dependence on the redemptive work of the one "who loved me and gave Himself up for me." F. F. Bruce calls faith "the bond of

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<sup>609</sup>George, Galatians, p. 198.

<sup>610</sup>Ibid.

<sup>611</sup>Bruce, Galatians, p. 144.

<sup>612</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>613</sup>Ibid.

<sup>614</sup>George, Galatians, p. 201.

<sup>615</sup>Campbell D. K., v. 2, p. 596.



union with the risen Christ.”<sup>616</sup> Campbell insightfully notes, “Yet Christ does not operate automatically in a believer’s life; it is a matter of living the new life by faith in the Son of God. It is then faith and not works or legal obedience that releases divine power to live a Christian life.”<sup>617</sup>

Furthermore, Paul speaks of his life “in the flesh,” yet this term does not refer to his sinful nature. Bruce explains: “There is, nevertheless, an unmistakable tension set up by the coexistence of life in the mortal body and life in Christ – by the fact that the life of the age to come ἐν Χριστῷ (i.e., “in Christ”) has ‘already’ begun while mortal life ἐν σαρκί (i.e., “in the flesh”) has ‘not yet’ come to an end.”<sup>618</sup>

## Verse 21

Οὐκ ἄθετῶ τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ· εἰ γὰρ διὰ νόμου δικαιοσύνη, ἄρα Χριστὸς δωρεὰν ἀπέθανεν.

*I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness {comes} through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.*

It seems that here Paul returns to verse 16 to add another argument in defense of justification by faith alone. He appeals to an argument from history – if salvation came through the Law, then Christ had no reason to die. The fact that He died shows that the old system was ineffective. To reject the sacrifice of Christ means to reject God’s grace.<sup>619</sup>

## Ephesians 2:4-7

Ephesians 2:4-7 is a passage in which Paul asserts that salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone. Such an attitude is totally foreign to his upbringing and training as a Pharisee. This demonstrates that his encounter with Jesus produced a radical change in his worldview.

The thrust of the epistle as a whole is the believer’s position in Christ. Paul examines both the theological and practical aspects of this truth. Our passage communicates this truth as well. Watchman Nee insightfully notes the creative use of verbs in organizing Paul’s thought. The believer is “seated” in glory (1:3-3:21), “walks” in Christ (4:1-6:9), and “stands” against the devil (6:10-20).<sup>620</sup> The section of being “seated in glory” with Christ highlights all the members of the Trinity: the Father’s plan (1:3-19a), the work of the Son for believers (1:19b-3:13), and the activity of the Spirit in believers (3:14-21).

The general context of our passage concerns Christ’s victory – He is exalted above all others. Yet, His victory is not for Himself alone. The enemies of Christ are also under the feet of His Body, the Church (1:22b-23). Next, Paul recounts our history prior to conversion – we were

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<sup>616</sup>Bruce, Galatians, p. 145.

<sup>617</sup>Campbell D. K., v. 2, p. 596.

<sup>618</sup>Bruce, Galatians, p. 145.

<sup>619</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>620</sup>Nee Watchman. Sit, Walk, Stand.

by nature sinners (2:1-3). On the other hand, the attainment of our present glorious status results purely from the grace and love of God, which we obtain independently from our works (2:4-7). Good works are the result of our status in Christ, and not the means to obtain or maintain it. Therefore, all the glory is God's for His amazing grace (2:8-10).

After recounting our glorious position in grace and its effect on our lives, Paul moves on to apply this truth to the Church. Union with Christ unites all believers in one Body (2:11-3:13). Union with Christ naturally leads to church unity, since in the Body of Christ there are no ethnic distinctions.

#### Verse 4

ὁ δὲ θεὸς πλούσιος ὢν ἐν ἐλέει, διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ ἣν ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,*

As was mentioned above, attaining the glorious status of righteousness is totally due to the mercy and love of God. O'Brien express it this way, "The whole paragraph emphasizes that he acted on our behalf simply because of his own gracious and merciful character."<sup>621</sup>

The conjunction δὲ (*de*), i.e., "but," expresses surprise that God would respond to sinful people with such mercy and grace. The word order πλούσιος ὢν (*plousios on*), i.e. "being rich," indicates emphasis and shows that God abounds in mercy and grace. The reason why He is so merciful is explained by the phrase διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ ("because of His great love") – it is an expression of His loving nature. He loves not only in theory, but also in action. The phrase "with which He loved us" refers to the magnanimous expression of His love through the cross.

#### Verses 5-6

καὶ ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν συνεζωοποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ, – χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι – καὶ συνήγειρεν καὶ συνεκάθισεν ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,

*even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly {places} in Christ Jesus,*

Paul attributes our attainment of the glorious position described in 1:22-23 to our inclusion in the ascension and exaltation of Jesus Christ. Most likely, Paul mentions our being made alive in Christ and our resurrection with Him to contrast with the fact that once we were dead in sin (v. 1-3). We must be made alive in order to reign with Him. In order to preserve the contrast between "dead in sin" and "alive in Christ" Paul does not mention our participation in the death of Jesus in this context.

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<sup>621</sup>O'Brien P. T. The letter to the Ephesians // Carson D. The Pillar New Testament commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999. – P. 164.

Possibly, this explains why Paul makes a distinction between being made alive with Christ and being raised with Him – in order to employ the word “life” in contrast to “death.” It is also possible that the combination of the expressions “made alive” and “raised” implies that this new life has direction and expression. We are not made alive to simply remain in the grave.

This movement from death to life and from life to resurrection continues in our being seated with Him in glory. We occupy the same place that He occupies over all things – over angels and all other created things. At the same time, we are not equal with Him, but are under His authority and dependent on His life. Unlike His status, our status is derived from His. O’Brien concurs that our position is not equal to Christ’s: “Christ’s exalted status in the heavenly realm is not shared since his relationship to the Father is unique.”<sup>622</sup>

Paul here speaks of the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus as historical events, in which by God’s grace believers participated even before their birth. The compound words συνεζωοποίησεν (*sunedzoopoiesen*), i.e. “made alive with,” συνήγειρεν (*sunegeiren*), i.e. “raised with,” and συνεκάθισεν (*sunekathisen*), i.e. “seated with” reflect this historical connection.

Lincoln agrees, “Believers are seen as included in Christ, so what God accomplished for Christ he accomplished for him as the representative, the head of a new humanity.”<sup>623</sup> He also correctly states that the connection between us and Christ is not simply a metaphor, but has real substance: “When Paul used the language of dying and rising with Christ in Rom 6 and Col 2 and 3, he had in view not primarily some subjective religious experience on the part of believers but rather thought of believers as having been Christ’s partners in the events of past redemptive history.”<sup>624</sup>

Although we claim that Christ experienced a physical resurrection, not a spiritual one, nonetheless His resurrection benefits us initially only spiritually. The very same power that restored life to Jesus’ dead body now enables the believer to live for God.

## Verse 7

ἵνα ἐνδείξηται ἐν τοῖς αἰῶσιν τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις τὸ ὑπερβάλλον πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἐν χρηστότητι ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

*so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

The culmination of our salvation and our final participation in union with Christ occurs at the revelation of His glory, when we are revealed with Him in glory (1 Jn 3:2; Col 3:4). Even though our victory in Christ is already accomplished, it is progressively realized in our experience and reaches its culmination only at the return of Christ. O’Brien writes, “Realized eschatology of Ephesians 2:5 and 6 are balanced by the future dimension of v. 7 (cf. 1:21), thus

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<sup>622</sup>O’Brien, Ephesians, p. 171.

<sup>623</sup>Lincoln, p. 105.

<sup>624</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

confirming that a future eschatology has not been entirely displaced by this stress on the presence of salvation.”<sup>625</sup>

Bruce claims that our glorification will be an ongoing witness for all ages of the grace and goodness of God: “Throughout time and in eternity the church, this society of pardoned rebels, is designed by God to be the masterpiece of his goodness.”<sup>626</sup> Lincoln adds, “The raising of believers from spiritual death to sit with Christ in the heavenly realms is the supreme demonstration of God’s surpassing grace.”<sup>627</sup>

Finally, it is important to note that throughout our entire passage the phrases ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (“in Christ Jesus”) and τῷ Χριστῷ (“with Christ”) are repeated to emphasize that our salvation comes through Christ and only through Him.

### Colossians 2:8-13

Paul wrote this epistle to a congregation that he had never personally visited. The church in Colossae was apparently founded by Epaphras (1:7), a resident of that city (4:12-13), who served as Paul’s co-worker and was likely converted to Christ by Paul. Therefore, Paul feels a fatherly attachment and responsibility for the well-being of this congregation (2:1). We also note that Paul writes to this congregation with authority because, most likely, he considers that it lies under his apostolic jurisdiction.<sup>628</sup>

Guthrie rightly asserts that Epaphras, most likely, sought out Paul in prison to inform him of the false teaching that was influencing the church and to ask his advice.<sup>629</sup> Douglas Moo agrees, “Paul has undoubtedly been informed by Epaphras about the threat of false teachers.”<sup>630</sup> It is thought that this heresy was a hybrid of Hebrew and early Gnostic thought, since it concerns “philosophy,” (2:8), “the traditions of men,” (2:8, 22), “elementary principles of the world,” (2: 8), “the worship of angels,” (2:18), abstinence from certain foods, (2:20-22) and observance of Jewish feasts (2:16-17). Most importantly, this heresy diminished the role of Christ, which prompted Paul to emphasize His uniqueness (1:15-20; 2:9-10).<sup>631</sup>

#### Verse 8

Βλέπετε μή τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ κενῆς ἀπάτης κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν·

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<sup>625</sup>O’Brien, Ephesians, p. 169.

<sup>626</sup>Bruce F. F. The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians / NICNT. – p. 288; noted in O’Brien, p. 173.

<sup>627</sup>Lincoln, p. 110.

<sup>628</sup>Guthrie, p. 565.

<sup>629</sup>Ibid., p. 565.

<sup>630</sup>Moo, p. 185.

<sup>631</sup>Guthrie, p. 569.

*See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.*

This verse reflects the main concern of the passage – that the congregation in Colossae would not abandon or minimize the value of Christ by adopting an alternative means of salvation.

Melick notes the presence of the definite article before the word φιλοσοφίας (*philosophias*), i.e. “philosophy,” and its absence before the following words κενῆς ἀπάτης (*kenes apates*), i.e. “empty deception,” which basically equates these two expressions. This philosophy, then, is empty deception. Melick also reasons that this definite article indicates a specific philosophy, which means that philosophy in general is not in view.<sup>632</sup> Douglas Moo allows the translation: “empty philosophy,” thereby claiming, “Paul has no intention of criticizing ‘philosophy’ as such, but only the kind of philosophy being propagated by the Colossian false teachers.”<sup>633</sup> O’Brien and others claim that in antiquity, the term “philosophy” was used in a general sense for nearly any type of instruction.<sup>634</sup>

This false philosophy operates not on God’s revelation, but on human tradition and the elementary principles of human thought.<sup>635</sup> Moreover, this philosophy has demonic roots (“elementary principles *of the world*”). Finally, it is essentially non-Christian, that is, not “according to Christ.”<sup>636</sup> Moo confidently claims, “Any teaching that in any way detracts from Christ’s exclusive role is by definition both wrong and ineffective.”<sup>637</sup>

The word στοιχεῖον (*stoicheion*), i.e. “elemental principles,” can mean “basic components of something, *elements*,” or “transcendent powers that are in control over events in this world.”<sup>638</sup> Because of its connection with the terms “philosophy” and “the traditions of men,” the first definition is preferred. Verse 20 confirms this conclusion, where the same word is used in connection with abstinence from certain foods. In addition, in another context, Paul uses this term for the elemental principles of the Law (Gal 4:3). In Hebrews 5:12, this word applies again to elementary principles, but this time in relation to Christian teaching.<sup>639</sup>

From experience, we can define some of these elemental principles, which are found universally in human religion and philosophy: self-improvement through education and self-discipline, mysticism as a method to contact the inner “I” or a deeper reality, reconciliation with God through good works, the basically good nature of man, human happiness as the ultimate value, and others.

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<sup>632</sup>Melick R. R. *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* // New American commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991. – P. 252.

<sup>633</sup>Moo, p. 185.

<sup>634</sup>O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, p. 109.

<sup>635</sup>Melick, p. 252.

<sup>636</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>637</sup>Moo, p. 193.

<sup>638</sup>Arndt, p. 946.

<sup>639</sup>Moo also observes that the meaning “angelic powers” is found only in post-Christian writings (Moo, p. 188). He also claims that Paul uses other terms to describe angelic powers (see 1:16, 20; 2:10, 15) (Moo, p. 192).

## Verse 9

ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς,

*For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,*

In verse 9, Paul begins to substantiate his claim that no other religion can compare with Christian faith. First, Christ possesses the fullness of the Godhead. He is not simply a human teacher with good ideas, but God in the flesh. What other religion can boast the same?

Paul enhances the sense of the word πλήρωμα (*pleroma*), i.e. “fullness,” by adding the adjective “all,” which is superfluous. A “fullness” already connotes “all.” Thus, Paul leaves no room for doubt that Christ is fully divine. One must concur with O’Brien that the verb κατοικεῖ (*katoikei*), i.e. “dwell,” is in present tense to indicate that even now “the whole fullness of God resides in the resurrected and exalted Christ.”<sup>640</sup>

The word θεότης (*theotes*), i.e. “Deity,” means, “the state of being god, *divine character/nature, deity, divinity*.”<sup>641</sup> Christ possesses all the characteristics and qualities of God, which makes Him one with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

## Verse 10

καὶ ἐστὲ ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι, ὃς ἐστὶν ἡ κεφαλὴ πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας.

*and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;*

The first part of verse 10 completes the thought of verse 9, creating a play on words. In verse 9, ἐν αὐτῷ (*en auto*), i.e. “in Him,” relates to Christ’s condition – all the fullness of Deity dwells “in Him.” In verse 10, though, the phrase ἐν αὐτῷ (*en auto*) speaks of the believer’s condition – we have our fullness in Him. Therefore, the expression ἐν αὐτῷ (*en auto*) in verse 10 carries the more metaphorical sense of the “sphere” of Christ, or believers’ union with Him, while in verse 9, this phrase relates to the actual “location” of the divine nature “in Christ.”

Correspondingly, in verses 9-10 we see in the nominal and verbal forms of the word πλήρωμα (*pleroma*) this same contrast. In Christ’s case, He is filled with the nature of Deity. In our case, we attain our fullness or perfection in Him, that is, reach our potential in Him. Melick expresses it well, “Just as Jesus was fully God, believers are fully complete in him.”<sup>642</sup>

Paul’s frequent repetition of the phrase ἐν αὐτῷ (*en auto*) in this passage draws attention to the central motif in his overall theology – all the benefits of redemption are available to the believer through union with Jesus Christ. O’Brien writes, “The language and word order again draw attention to the motif of incorporation – it is in union with Christ alone that they possess

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<sup>640</sup>O’Brien, Colossians, Philemon, p. 112. Melick notes that the use of πλήρωμα (*pleroma*) in Gnostic thought refers to the sum of the emanations of God. Although many postulate that Paul used this term in this sense to refute Gnosticism, Melick correctly states that such an approach would have minimized the claim of Christ’s full divinity, since these “emanations” were not fully divine (Melick, p. 254-255).

<sup>641</sup>Arndt, p. 452.

<sup>642</sup>Melick, p. 256.

this fullness already.”<sup>643</sup> In Chafer’s words, “The child of God is complete; but so great a transformation is due to the all-determining fact that he is in Christ.”<sup>644</sup>

The second part of the verse offers the second reason why Christian faith excels over all others – Christ not only possesses God’s nature, but also God’s authority.

O’Brien correctly stresses the connection between this verse and the theme of the entire epistle – the refutation of false teachers in the light of Christ’s excellence: “This false teaching is opposed to Christ because the readers have *already* been filled in him, *i.e.*, in their union with Christ they have received fullness of salvation. So they do not need to stoop down before the spiritual powers of the universe or to observe their rules to attain this fullness, as the false teaching demanded.”<sup>645</sup>

## Verse 11

Ἐν ᾧ καὶ περιετμήθητε περιτομῇ ἀχειροποιήτῳ ἐν τῇ ἀπεκδύσει τοῦ σώματος τῆς σαρκός, ἐν τῇ περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ,

*and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;*

In verse 11, Paul expounds on the third reason for Christianity’s preeminence – it provides a complete salvation. Here Paul highlights the believer’s liberation from the power of sin.

Paul illustrates this liberation under the figure of circumcision. Circumcision initially was the sign of the covenant between Abraham and God, which God required of all his male descendants (Gen 17). It became clear as the Old Testament narrative unfolded that this ordinance was not simply an initiation rite into the covenant, but mandated life in conformity with the covenant. Correspondingly, Jeremiah could call unbelieving Israel of his time “uncircumcised in heart” (Jer 4:4; 9:25, 26). Even in Moses’ time, God foresaw the need for heart-circumcision, so that Israel would walk in His ways (Deut 30:6).

However, by Paul’s time the physical symbol of circumcision became more important than that which it symbolized – a sanctified life. Some Judaizing Christians, in fact, required Gentile converts to be circumcised, not appreciating that the symbolism of circumcision had already been fulfilled in Christ’s circumcision of the believer’s heart by the Spirit (Phil 3:3; Rom 2:29; Gal 6:15).

The dative of means in the phrase περιτομῇ ἀχειροποιήτῳ (“a circumcision made without hands”) shows how we have been (or, more precisely, how we have not been) circumcised. Physical circumcision achieves no spiritual goal. Melick comments that this “points to a spiritual reality. It is a spiritual act done by God himself.”<sup>646</sup> The use of the subjective genitive, “the circumcision of Christ,” reveals who does this circumcision – Christ.

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<sup>643</sup>O’Brien, Colossians, Philemon, p. 113.

<sup>644</sup>Chafer, The saving work, p. 146.

<sup>645</sup>O’Brien P. T. Colossians // Carson D. A., France R. T., Motyer J. A., Wenham G. J. New Bible commentary: 21st century edition. – 4th ed. – Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994. – P. 1270.

<sup>646</sup>Melick, p. 257.

The prepositional phrase ἐν τῇ ἀπεκδύσει τοῦ σώματος τῆς σαρκός, i.e. “the removal of the body of the flesh” refers to the elimination of the sinful nature, not the physical body.<sup>647</sup> Paul also uses the figure of the body to describe the sinful nature in Romans 6:6 (“the body of sin”) and 7:24 (“the body of death”). Moo concurs, “‘The circumcision of Christ’ is a metaphor for the conquering of the power of sin that takes place when a person comes to Christ.”<sup>648</sup>

## Verse 12

συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνηγέρθητε διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν·

*having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead,*

The adverbial participle συνταφέντες (*suntaphentes*), i.e. “having been buried”, defines how we were “circumcised” – we were buried with Christ in baptism. Moo rightly claims, “Although the participle is aorist, it is almost certainly indicating a contemporaneous action,”<sup>649</sup> i.e. this spiritual circumcision occurs simultaneously with baptism.

Nonetheless, in the light of the whole Bible teaching, one must qualify that baptism is a symbolic representation of salvation, depicting believers’ participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus, whose redemptive acts are the true means for heart-circumcision. Melick agrees, “Paul related the concept of circumcision to baptism. The primary stress lies on the spiritual experience of believers in their union with Christ.... Clearly, it is at the time of salvation that this spiritual circumcision was performed.”<sup>650</sup>

So then, Paul teaches here that baptism symbolizes the same thing that circumcision does – the elimination of the sinful nature. Melick again confirms, “Circumcision and baptism are two illustrations of salvation.”<sup>651</sup> Furthermore, he holds the view that baptism does not replace circumcision: “The logic of the passage demonstrates that Paul relates circumcision to baptism, rather than baptism to circumcision.... He developed the meaning of the Christian’s circumcision by appealing to baptism, rather than defining baptism in terms of the Old Testament circumcision.”<sup>652</sup>

Next, Paul transitions from identification with Christ’s death to identification with Christ’s resurrection. Thus, this verse highlights a second aspect of our salvation in Christ – in Christ, we

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<sup>647</sup>Dunn and O’Brien are mistaken in equating the circumcision of Christ with His crucifixion – that His flesh was “removed” (Dunn J. D. G. *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: a commentary on the Greek text.* – Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996. – P. 158; O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, p. 117). Such a metaphor is totally foreign to Paul’s style and that of the New Testament authors in general. In addition, the use of the terms “circumcision” and “flesh” in verse 13 clearly refer to human depravity.

<sup>648</sup>Moo, p. 200.

<sup>649</sup>Moo, p. 201.

<sup>650</sup>Melick, p. 259.

<sup>651</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>652</sup>*Ibid.*



have not only deliverance from the power of sin through His death, but also an introduction to new life through His resurrection.

Commentators note the difference between Paul's use here of the past tense for believers' participation in Christ's resurrection, unlike the use of the future tense in Romans 6. O'Brien explains that in Romans chapter 6, Paul also implies a past tense aspect, otherwise how could the believer "walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4), unless they have already been raised with Christ? O'Brien clarifies that in his epistle to the Romans, Paul is wrestling with the question of sanctification and therefore needed to stress the practical outworking of Christ's resurrection in the life of the believer with use of the future tense. In the epistle to the Colossians, though, he is battling a Christological heresy and therefore must emphasize the completed work of Christ with use of the past tense.<sup>653</sup>

Paul confirms that our union with Christ truly includes a sharing in His physical resurrection from the dead, and that the benefits of that resurrection are available to believers today.

Concerning the expression διὰ τῆς πίστεως, i.e. "through faith," when we respond to God's offer of Christ by faith, we experience the power of His resurrection. Melick states, "The resurrection life of the believer is effected by faith in the power of God who alone can bring it about."<sup>654</sup> In so doing, Paul qualifies his earlier statement on baptism – baptism does not acquire God's grace, but faith in what baptism represents.

Our text characterizes God, who is the source of this power, as the one "*who raised Him from the dead.*" What is required is not a general faith in God, but a specific faith in the God who raised Jesus from the dead and has raised us up to new life in Him as well.

### Verse 13

καὶ ὑμᾶς νεκροὺς ὄντας [ἐν] τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ τῇ ἀκροβυστίᾳ τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν, συνεζωοποίησεν ὑμᾶς σὺν αὐτῷ, χαρισάμενος ἡμῖν πάντα τὰ παραπτώματα.

*When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,*

The phrase "dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh" describes the condition of spiritual death. The sense is, "dead, which is expressed in sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh." A play on words is evident. Just as physical uncircumcision leaves the foreskin on the body, the lack of spiritual circumcision leaves the sinful nature untouched in the individual.

The adverbial participle χαρισάμενος (*harisamenos*), i.e. "forgiven," points to the means of making the believer alive – through the forgiveness of sins. Here, Paul is making an important clarification. The effectiveness of the death and resurrection of Jesus for defeating the flesh and introducing newness of life, depends on receiving a judicial forgiveness from God.<sup>655</sup> Thus, the

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<sup>653</sup>O'Brien, Colossian, Philemon, p. 121.

<sup>654</sup>Melick, p. 261.

<sup>655</sup>Arndt, p. 1078.

aorist participle χαρισάμενος (*harisamenos*) has both a temporal aspect, that is, “after He forgave us,” and a causal aspect, “i.e., “because He forgave us.”

So then, Paul introduces the third aspect of our salvation in Christ. Salvation includes not only victory over sin’s power and reception of new life, but also forgiveness of sin’s guilt.

### Colossians 3:1-4

In the previous section, we described the historical background of the letter to the Colossians and its goal to refute a certain heresy threatening the congregation that undervalued the importance of the person and work of Jesus Christ. The main theme of this epistle, the centrality of Christ, plays a key role in the study of the passage now under consideration. If Jesus really does occupy center stage, then He must be first in our hearts and affections as well. In other words, our values, goals, dreams, and lifestyle should reflect that perspective.

Paul’s main goal in this exhortation is clearly stated – “Keep seeking the things above,” “Set your mind on the things above.” He grounds his exhortation in the believer’s union with Christ – our life is where He is. In Paul’s thought, we have died with Christ, been raised with Him, and are now seated with Him in glory. This glorious new life will be fully manifest, though, only when He appears.

Moo comments on the surrounding context, “It applies the key theological concept of union with Christ, which Paul develops negatively in vv. 16–23 to counter the false teaching, in a positive direction, calling on believers to recognize the basic implications of their status as ‘dead’ to the ‘elements of the world,’ ‘alive’ with Christ in heaven, and destined for glory.”<sup>656</sup>

#### Verse 1

Εἰ οὖν συνεγέρθητε τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἄνω ζητεῖτε, οὗ ὁ Χριστός ἐστὶν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ Θεοῦ καθήμενος

*Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*

Throughout this passage, Paul stresses the believer’s union with Jesus Christ. In fact, he mentions all four aspects of that union: death, resurrection, ascension/exaltation (implied together) and revelation/glorification. According to verse 4, Jesus is “our life.” O’Brien and others note the fourfold repetition of the title “Christ” instead of using pronouns: “Paul goes out of his way to emphasize that true Christian existence is found ‘with Christ.’”<sup>657</sup>

Moo summarizes Paul’s teaching as follows: “Paul grounds these commands with reminders of the believer’s identification with Christ in both death (v. 3) and resurrection (v. 1). And he concludes with an expression of confidence that this identification will extend to

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<sup>656</sup>Moo, p. 244.

<sup>657</sup>O’Brien, Colossians, Philemon, p. 166-167.

Christ's second coming, when believers will 'appear with him in glory' (v. 4)."<sup>658</sup> He also claims, "By believing in Christ, the Colossians have identified with Christ in these events and so experience all the benefits they confer."<sup>659</sup>

Consequently, believers orient their lives from a heavenly perspective, since they are already there in Christ. O'Brien echoes Paul's exhortation, "Since you have shared in Christ's resurrection your aims, ambitions, in fact your whole outlook, are to be centered in him."<sup>660</sup> This becomes possible through identification with Christ by faith. Moo writes, "It is possible because our union with Christ severs us from the tyranny of the powers of this world and provides us with all the power needed to live a new life."<sup>661</sup>

At the same time, Paul does not deny the future, eschatological aspect of the believer's participation in Christ's resurrection. Moo states, "Without denying the reality of a future resurrection with Christ, Paul, following his typical 'already/not yet' paradigm, asserts that those who belong to Christ have already experienced a 'spiritual' resurrection with Christ. Because they are 'in him' and Christ has himself been raised to sit at the right hand of the Father, so believers can be said to have been 'raised with' him."<sup>662</sup>

Although Paul employs spatial categories like "above" and "on the earth," his main idea is eschatological, as O'Brien explains, "Paul is thus employing spatial categories in a qualitative manner... to describe two spheres which correspond to the eschatological schema of the two ages."<sup>663</sup>

## Verse 2

τὰ ἄνω φρονεῖτε, μὴ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

*Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.*

In this context, the verb φρονέω (*phroneo*), i.e. "set your mind," likely refers to one's orientation of thought. It stands in parallel with the verb "seek" (v. 1). Since Christ, who is our life, is in heaven, our hearts, dreams, desires, and thoughts should correspondingly be there as well.

## Verses 3-4

ἀπεθάνετε γὰρ καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν κέκρυπται σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐν τῷ θεῷ· ὅταν ὁ Χριστὸς φανερωθῇ, ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν, τότε καὶ ὑμεῖς σὺν αὐτῷ φανερωθήσεσθε ἐν δόξῃ

*For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.*

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<sup>658</sup>Moo, p. 243.

<sup>659</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>660</sup>O'Brien, Colossians, Philemon, p. 159.

<sup>661</sup>Moo, p. 249.

<sup>662</sup>Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>663</sup>O'Brien, Colossians, Philemon, p. 161.

The first aspect of our union with Christ is highlighted in verse 3 – our participation in His death. On this account, O'Brien writes that the term "ἀπεθάνετε should be rendered 'you died' for it points back to the specific occasion of their union with Christ in his death."<sup>664</sup> Melick echoes Paul's point, "If the believer died with Christ, how does he now live? He lives in resurrection as a new creation of God."<sup>665</sup> In other words, union with Christ now defines the believer's life.

A parallel passage, 1 John 3:2, confirms Paul's point of believers' participation in Christ's revelation from heaven as the culmination of their salvation: "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is."

Therefore, the word "glory" in verse 4 of our passage anticipates the completion of our salvation in Christ. In addition, the summons to "seek" (v. 1) and "set your mind" (v. 2) reflect hope – hope for future completion in Christ. Our present experience can only approximate that glorious state.

O'Brien reasons likewise, "Their new life was currently hidden with Christ in God (v. 3) but awaited its manifestation at the Parousia (v. 4)."<sup>666</sup> Moo summarizes, "Paul focuses on the believer's union with Christ. The past experience of dying with him and being raised with him is the basis for our present status as people whose heavenly identity is real and secure, yet hidden, an identity that will be gloriously manifested in the future."<sup>667</sup>

Moo adds still another element to the picture – security. The phrase "in God" can "remind us that the time between our initial identification with Christ and the revelation of that status on the last day is a time when God is working to keep us secure in that relationship."<sup>668</sup> O'Brien also comments on the phrase "hidden in God": "Centered in God means that the hidden life is secure, unable to be touched by anyone."<sup>669</sup>

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<sup>664</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>665</sup>Melick, p. 282.

<sup>666</sup>O'Brien, Colossians, Philemon, p. 160.

<sup>667</sup>Moo, p. 244.

<sup>668</sup>Moo, p. 251.

<sup>669</sup>O'Brien, Colossians, Philemon, p. 166.

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