

FBC POWELL, 6-3-18 AM NOTES  
"The Christian's Union with Christ--An Introduction"  
Romans 5:12-21  
# 1 in Series, "The Christian's Union with Christ"

**2 Corinthians 5:17 (NASB)** "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

Do to Be or Be to Do?

**Ephesians 1:3 (NASB)** "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ."

**Ephesians 1:4-5 (NKJV)** "<sup>4</sup> Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, <sup>5</sup> having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will."

**Ephesians 1:6 (NKJV)** "To the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved."

**1 Corinthians 15:10b (NASB)** "...I labored even more than all of them..."

**1 Corinthians 15:10c (NASB)** "... yet not I, but the grace of God with me."

**Ephesians 4:1 (NASB)** "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called."

"Union with Christ is the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation."

—John Murray

"The subject of spiritual union is the most important, the most profound, and yet the most blessed of any that is set forth in the sacred Scriptures; and yet, sad to say, there is hardly any [doctrine] which is now more generally neglected." —Arthur Pink

I. Our Union with Adam

*Come, desire of nations come!  
Fix in us Thy humble home:  
Rise, the woman's conquering seed,  
Bruise in us the serpent's head;  
Adam's likeness now efface,  
Stamp Thine image in its place:  
Second Adam from above,  
Reinstate us in Thy love.*

—Charles Wesley (1739)

A. Adam Was Our Federal Head

B. Adam Was Our Seminal Head

**Hebrews 7:9-10 (NIV)** “<sup>9</sup> One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, <sup>10</sup> because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.”

II. Our Union with Christ

**1 Corinthians 15:22 (NASB)** “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.”

**Romans 5:10 (NASB)** “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.”

**Philippians 1:21 (NASB)** “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

**Philippians 3:9 (NASB)** “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.”

**1 John 5:20 (NASB)** “And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”

III. Our Heart for the Lost

**Genesis 5:3 (NASB)** “When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a *son* in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth.”

## **Chapter 1: The Christian’s Union with Christ – an Introduction**

### **Romans 5:12-21**

I am always excited when we begin a new series, but I can’t remember a time that I have been more excited than I am about the series we are introducing today. The title of the series is, *The Christian’s Union with Christ*.

The doctrine of *The Christian’s Union with Christ* is considered by many theologians to be the most important doctrine in Scripture related to the doctrine of salvation. Many of you may be saying, “I’ve never heard of the doctrine of ‘The Christian’s Union with Christ!’” At least parts of what is included in this vitally important doctrine goes at times by different names. Sometimes it

is called “The Doctrine of the Christian’s Identity in Christ”; Hudson Taylor called these truths “The Exchanged Life”. Sometimes this doctrinal truth is presented in a command such as, “Christians, Know Who You Are”. For me personally, my Christian life was profoundly changed when I discovered what was called “Your True Identity in Christ” from Ephesians 1-3. These truths turned my whole concept of the Christian life upside down or more accurately, “right side up.” The human instrument through which I discovered these truths was Dr. Charles Solomon and some people he had discipled (primarily Bob Culbertson who at that time was my Associate Pastor at Parson’s Baptist Church in Columbus, Ohio). Though I had never articulated it, my approach to the Christian life was what I will call a “Do to Be” approach. I understood that salvation was not my doing; I knew salvation was by grace through faith – a gift of God, not of works (Ephesians 2:8-9). But even while going through seminary, I never fully understood that not only is salvation by grace through faith, living out the Christian life is also by grace through faith. My unstated but actual approach to the Christian life was “*Do* what the Bible commands and you will *be* pleasing to God. I call that, “The *do to be* approach to the Christian life.”

It wasn’t in a flash of light, a strange experience or through the personal appearance of an angel that I learned that my approach to the Christian life was backward. It was a process of hearing truth from the Scripture by a brother in Christ who was further down the maturity road than I was. It involved having the Holy Spirit turn on the light of my mind and then filling me to enable me, as a pattern of life, to live out the truth of Scripture. I certainly haven’t arrived, but I see progress. What I began to see as I went deep into the Scripture is that I had it backward! The Christian’s walk of obedience and victory is not “do to be”, it is “*Be to Do*”! If that sounds like a bunch of “double talk”, hang with me.

The Scriptures that deal in depth with the details of what the Christian life looks like (mostly the Pauline epistles – especially Romans and Ephesians) start with who we are, who God has made us to be, and then move to what we should do. I am going to use Ephesians as an example. In Ephesians 1-3, we are seldom told to *do* anything. We are told over and over who we are because we are in union with Christ – “in Christ.” That little phrase “in Christ” or “in Him” or the equivalent is used over 160 times in the Pauline epistles. Here are a few examples of who we are and what is true of us because we are in union with Christ.

Ephesians 1:3: “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places in Christ*.” Do you understand what he is saying? In union with Christ, we already have given to us every spiritual blessing in the *heavenly places*.

Ephesians 1:4-5 (NKJV): “just as He chose us *in Him* before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” It is not what we *do* that makes us holy and without blame and earns our being adopted into His forever family. He took the initiative to choose us and make us holy and without blame because we were in Christ. It is out of that uninfluenced love that He chose us and adopted us. What did we *do* to deserve that? Nothing! Let’s take just a couple of other examples of how when we were placed in union with Christ, we received the blessings that many people are trying to earn.

Ephesians 1:6 (NKJV): “to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.” What did we do or what can we do to be accepted by God? We can’t do anything to earn it; it is ours only because of our union with Christ!

We could spend hours just in the book of Ephesians looking at and rejoicing over all that is ours in Christ. But does that mean that there is no work, no labor in the Christian life? That is

certainly not what I am saying. The Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:10b: "...I labored even more than all of them..." Paul speaks often of his hard labors, his deprivation of so many of the comforts of life, and the hard trials he went through for the sake of the Gospel. However, there is a difference when we are laboring in our own strength to gain God's acceptance and when we are laboring as one who is filled with joy because he/she is already accepted.

1 Corinthians 15:10c: "... yet not I, but the grace of God with me." When we know that we are accepted by God because we are "in Christ", we face laboring for the Lord with a whole new viewpoint. We labor because we love the One we labor for, but we also labor because we are so grateful that we are in union with Christ and accepted in Christ. As we labor in the work, it is not in our strength, but in the enabling grace of God!

Oh, how important it is that we understand our union with Christ – that after salvation, we are "in Him". The labor we do is through the enabling grace of God; this kind of labor is carried out with joy. Remember that I told you earlier that we are told to do almost nothing in Ephesians 1-3. It is interesting that when we get to Ephesians chapter 4-6, he begins it this way: Ephesians 4:1: "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." In chapters 4-6 we are told to "do, do, do," but it is done out of that union with Christ.

I am not sure why the typical church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has so neglected this truth of our union with Christ. When we go back to the earlier centuries, we find that union with Christ was clearly proclaimed. Let me give you two examples from theologians who are now with the Lord. John Murray said, "Union with Christ is the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation." Arthur Pink said, "The subject of spiritual union is the most important, the most profound, and yet the most blessed of any that is set forth in the sacred Scriptures; and yet, sad to say, there is hardly any [doctrine] which is now more generally neglected."

With that background, I want to lay a strong foundation for the truths we are going to build on for the next four-six weeks concerning our union with Christ. We will answer such questions as, "Why were we not in union with Christ when we were physically born?" "Why do we have to be born again?" "What was wrong with us at birth?" These are basic truths, but if you don't understand them, you will never understand the glorious truths of what it means to be in Christ. These truths will be presented around two unions.

## **I. Our Union with Adam**

For the remainder of this message, we will be primarily in Romans laying a foundation for our study of our union with Christ. My favorite Christmas carol is Charles Wesley's *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing*. I like it because it is chocked so full of theology. In many of the newer versions, the fourth verse, the best verse (in my opinion), is left out. I have a 1940 edition of *The Broadman Hymnal* that has the missing verse. It says:

*Come, desire of nations come!  
Fix in us Thy humble home:  
Rise, the woman's conquering seed,  
Bruise in us the serpent's head;  
Adam's likeness now efface,  
Stamp Thine image in its place:  
Second Adam from above,  
Reinstate us in Thy love.*  
—Charles Wesley (1739)

There is more theology in that verse than some theology books!

An understanding concerning our union with Adam is found in Romans 5. Many Bible scholars consider Romans 5:12-21 to be the most difficult passage in Romans and one of the most difficult in the New Testament. Let's see if we can get some understanding of it since it is impossible to understand our union with Christ until we understand our union with Adam. Paul's primary goal in this passage is to show how one man's (Jesus) death provided salvation for many. He ties that truth in with the truth that one man's sin produced condemnation for many. Throughout the rest of Romans 5 we have a comparison and contrast of Adam and Christ, or as they are identified later, the first Adam and the second Adam. What we will see are two men reigning over a kingdom: Adam's kingdom is that of ruined humanity and Christ's kingdom is that of redeemed humanity. In Adam's kingdom, all are unforgiven sinners; in Christ's kingdom, all are saints – saints that still struggle with and battle the flesh, but as to their nature, saints. In Adam's kingdom death reigns, but in Christ's kingdom life reigns. Adam was given dominion over the old creation and he sinned and lost it. Because of Adam's sin, all mankind is under condemnation and death. Christ is King over a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) and through the cross He brought justification and righteousness and union with Himself.

A key word in verses 12-21 of Romans 5 is the little word, "one." It is repeated eleven times in the passage. It carries the idea of identification with or union with another. What we will see is that every physical descendent of Adam is one with Adam in his sin. Actually, we were in Adam when he sinned. Every person who has been justified (declared righteous) is identified with, is in union with, is in Christ.

Before we proceed, let me lay something out for you that it is very important for you to see. The whole argument of Romans 5:12-21 assumes that Adam was a literal person, the first human being that God created. When we deny the literal creation account and that Adam was a real historical person, we destroy the whole argument of this passage. If Genesis 3 is just a parable where Adam is a made-up character who pictures every man, then the argument of Romans 5 falls apart. I cannot over-emphasize how important it is that we approach Genesis with a literal approach and thus see Adam and Eve as historical figures.

### **A. Adam Was Our Federal Head**

By federal head, I mean that Adam represented all mankind as our head. As our head, our representative, his actions affected all that he represented. Let me illustrate this with a very imperfect illustration. Donald Trump is the "federal head" of the United States of America. You may say, "Well I didn't vote for him." That's irrelevant; he is your President and politically he is your federal head. If Donald Trump makes a declaration of war with another country, then the whole USA is at war with that country and since you are a part of the USA, you are at war with that country. That illustration breaks down if you push it too far, but it gives you an idea of what the theologians mean when they say that Adam was our federal head. When Adam was judged for sin, we received that judgment also.

### **B. Adam Was Our Seminal Head**

This view, first detailed by Augustine in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, says that the whole human race was in Adam when he sinned. We see this view that we were in our ancestors in Scripture. For example, we see it in Hebrews 7:9-10 (NIV): "One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor." We won't go into the context here of the point that the writer of Hebrews was

illustrating. I only want you to see the view that Levi, Abraham's great grandson, was seen to be in Abraham before Jacob or Levi was ever born. Here is that concept of "one" that we looked at in the introduction. Augustine or the writer of Hebrews didn't know a lot about genetics, but today with our knowledge of genetics, we know that all mankind really was in Adam's gene pool.

As a sidelight, do you see why the virgin birth was necessary? Jesus was fully human, but had he been born with a human Father, He would have received the curse of Adam's sin and Adam's nature and would have died for His own sin and not ours.

And so, we see that as our federal head and our seminal head, Adam both represented us and contained us when sin invaded the world through Adam's sin. If a person objects to that or rejects that, he has taken away the grounds of his own salvation. If one man could not represent and contain us in sin, one man (the second Adam from above) could not represent us and contain us on the cross and in righteousness. The presence of sin is taken back to Adam who both represented and contained us.

## **II. Our Union with Christ**

1 Corinthians 15:22: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive." When a person savingly believes in Christ, he is not only forgiven, he is also united with Christ. He is "in Christ." Theologians call this "the mystical union." It is what we were describing in the introduction of this message and what we will go deeper in through coming messages. Romans 5:10: "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." The preposition that is translated "by" in "saved by His life" can and probably should be translated "in His life". We are saved because we are in union with the living Christ.

In our lostness, we were identified with Adam ("in Adam") and in salvation, we are identified with Christ ("in Christ"). In the introduction, we saw this union with Christ in the Epistles as a prominent theme. We spent most of our time in the book of Ephesians, but we also see it elsewhere, such as in Philippians.

We see this union with Christ referred to in Philippians 1:21: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

We see it again in Philippians 3:9: "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."

A last example is 1 John 5:20: "And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."

## **III. Our Heart for the Lost (Romans 5:12)**

From the biblical perspective, there were two great acts in history: There was the act of Adam, which brought condemnation and death, and there was the act of Christ at Calvary which brought justification and life. All humanity was in Adam, and all who would repent and believe are in Christ. The universality of death is explained by the penalty God placed on Adam's sin. In Genesis 2:17, God told Adam that if he sinned, he would die. Adam sinned, and God kept His Word. Adam's spirit died to God immediately, his soul continued to function but had the light

turned off and thus operated in darkness. After sin came in, Adam's body began the process of dying. That penalty of sin was passed to all Adam's descendants. Genesis 5:3: "When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of *a son* in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth." Seth was born with a spirit that was dead to God, a mind that was blinded (2 Corinthians 4:4), and a body that was dying. Seth's children were born the same way, his grandchildren, the same way, the same with Noah and his three sons all the way to you. As Adam was the door through which sin entered, sin was the door through which death entered. Death was not built into creation. Death came with sin.

## **Conclusion**

I do not want this series, this message, to just be learning some difficult biblical facts. I am asking God to set a fire under us that we might become passionate about sharing the Gospel with those who are in Adam, hopeless and helpless. Are you in Adam, or are you in Christ?

### **NASB** (New American Standard Bible)

All scripture taken from the NASB unless otherwise indicated.

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### **NIV** (New International Version)

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