
The Picture of our Union with Christ

Romans 6:1-14; Galatians 3:23-29; Colossians 2:18-25

We need a true union with Christ:

We were separated from God.

We were dead in sin.

We were made alive by the Word and Spirit.

We have been joined to Christ by being placed in Him.

This is a mystery. We do not know directly how this works. We know it by a series of comparisons in analogies and metaphors.

This union is similar to the union in the incarnation. We have been united to Jesus in such a way that we are a part of His spiritual body.

It is a true, spiritual reality. There is real union by the Spirit without us becoming God and without us losing our personhood or identity.

There is a spiritual baptism by the Spirit.

To be baptized by the Spirit is the act, where the Holy Spirit, places us into the spiritual body of Christ. The Spirit applies the death and resurrection of Jesus in that joining, that union.

It means that we have also died with Jesus and been raised with Him. Again, the Bible says this is true whether we can understand it fully or even communicate it clearly. Our union in Christ is how Jesus' work in salvation is applied to us or is imparted to us.

So, we are to believe the words of the Bible. This is called faith. We hear the words, believe them, engage them with our souls and trust completely on what those words promise and provide. In God's grace, He has given us a picture in the New Covenant that visibly and physically shows us what the Spirit did with us and for us at our salvation.

There is a physical baptism by water.

It was illustrated by Jesus in His own baptism.

It is commanded by the Lord. The church is to baptize those who want to be Christians.

It is a picture of the spiritual. Baptism does not cause the reality, but is the consequence of the reality.

It shows our union in Christ. We are immersed in Christ as illustrated by our immersion in water.

It shows our union in the gathered church. We are joined to and become a part of a local gathered church as illustrated by our immersion in water.

This being placed into Christ by the Spirit which is publicly shown by being placed into water has three very important implications for us as Christians.

We Share in Christ's Death and Resurrection (Romans 6:1-14)

¹ *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?* ² *By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?* ³ *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

⁵ *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.* ⁶ *We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.* ⁷ *For one who has died has been set free from sin.* ⁸ *Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.* ⁹ *We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.* ¹⁰ *For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.* ¹¹ *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

¹² *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.* ¹³ *Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.* ¹⁴ *For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*

Its Biblical Language

Our union in Christ is itself an immersion and is pictured by an immersion. The word used in English in most texts is the word "baptism". The word in the original language of the New Testament always meant "to place into, to immerse, to put in so as to unite with."

There is a condition to receiving the benefits of the death and resurrection of Jesus. we must have been placed into [baptized] Christ Jesus (v.3). All of those who are placed into Christ are placed into [baptized] His death and are said to have died with Him.

Then, in verse 5, the parallel to being placed into Jesus' death is to be united to Christ. This being placed into Christ (v.3) means we have been united with Him (v.5). The fact that Paul uses both terms confirms our understanding of the word, "baptize". It is a *to be placed into* in such a way that there is *a union with*.

Its Ordained Picture

The ordinance of the church called "baptism" was given to us to visualize our immersion in and union with Christ. For baptism to be a true portrayal it needs to be immersion. Otherwise, the picture does not portray our being placed into Christ so that we are united to Him. I understand that there are other traditions the use different modes. However, only immersion in water truly and fully represents the spiritual reality it was always intended to convey.

It is important for you to understand that we believe in baptism by immersion. This is not a matter of liberty, conscience or choice. This is a Biblical belief, a closely held conviction. We hold to immersion because of the language of the Bible, the reality it is meant to portray and the examples of it in the Bible narratives.

Its Spiritual Reality

There are two spiritual realities that are being pictured and therefore taught to us as well.

When we are immersed in Christ, we are immersed in His death. Therefore, we are separated from, or have died to, the old realm. The person going down into the water is going down into Jesus and His death. Though they are still in the old physical realm, they have died to its power.

When we come up out of the water, we are showing that we have been spiritual raised from the dead. We are part of the new creation that Jesus began in His resurrection. We are united to Christ and therefore to His resurrection. His resurrection life, power and newness is now what we live in.

Its Entailed Responsibilities

Since these are truths the Bible teaches, this raises two important questions right in the text.

- Do you believe these truths now that you know them?
- Have you applied these truths to you? Have you personalized them?

Now, since we know these truths through faith, through believing God in an obeying way, then we have a set of commands that implement these truths.

- Don't let sin dominate you. You are responsible to not allow the old you and the old world control you. You should not because it does not.
- Don't present yourself to sin. You are responsible to not had the reins of control to your old self or to the old realm. If you do, then you are surrounding control to them.
- Do present yourself to righteousness. You are responsible to give to the Lord control of your body and soul. The more you do, the more you will be the willing slave of living righteousness.
- Do let the new realm dominate you. The only way the new you and the new creation will dominate your life is to believe these truths and consciously bow your will to the Lord.

So, we stand on one side as old people in the old realm. We are immersed into Christ. We are immersed into His death. We died. We also come up out of the water united to live a new kind of life. We have been raised. Now, we live a new kind of life because we are a new kind of people in Christ.

We Receive a Spiritual Circumcision (Colossians 2:8-15)

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Our Sharp Warning (v.6-8)

If Christ is central, then here is what is entailed.

We must walk by faith (v. 6-7)

Continue as you began; that is, live the Christian life by faith through grace. You are saved by faith. Now, live by faith. Faith then will be rooted and grounded in truth. Christian life is shaped and sustained by the truth. It is the only way. Therefore, live by faith through grace with the effect that our hearts are filled with gratitude.

We must be on the guard (v. 8)

Against being captured by lies and myths which would teach us alternative, but false ways to live the Christian life. We know where those come from – they are not grounded in the Scripture. Guard against any form of Christian living that is rooted in culture or in the Mosaic Covenant. So we apply the standard, which is Christ Himself. Please understand... the truths about being in Christ are essential to the Christian life.

The wisdom of God is clearly shown in the truths surrounding the phrase, “in Christ”. By making Christ the center of all God’s provision for us, He has ensured that Jesus is honored. Jesus becomes the Christians’ treasure, teaching and transforming wisdom. If we turn away to the seductive and persuasive systems of human wisdom, we will struggle and fail in our Christian life. We will be robbed of that which is our only hope and help, that we believe, trust, embrace and walk in Christ.

Our Transforming Instruction (v.9-15)

This paragraph is the foundational instruction that relates Christ’s work on the cross to our heart and behavior transformation.

Our Fullness in Christ (v.9-10)

There is reciprocal fullness which displays the sufficiency of Christ. All of God is in Christ bodily. In the incarnation we see the example and the enablement to live a fully, God-pleasing life in this world.

All believers are indwelt by God in Christ. In the indwelling by the Spirit, we receive all that fullness. This does not make us deity; but it does enable us to live holy. This idea is all through Paul and Peter's writings.

Our Circumcision in Christ (v.11-12)

So much misunderstanding arises from this verse. I need to make the following exegetical and theological points to clear the way for the central truth taught here for our subject.

- Old Covenant circumcision is the type of New Covenant circumcision, not baptism.
- The circumcision of males in their flesh is the type of the circumcision of all believers in the spirit.
- The command to circumcise in the Old Covenant has been fulfilled by Christ at the cross and applied to us by the Spirit at conversion.
- The command to circumcise infants in the Old Covenant is never repeated in the New Covenant either as a command or by an example.
- Baptism in most texts simply means, "To place into." We know from the context whether water or Spirit baptism is being referred to.
- Water baptism represents the whole work of the cross and resurrection with an emphasis on our dying and being raised with Him.

Before our conversion, our outer man and our inner man were intertwined so that we were sinful in our persons and in our deeds.

When we were saved, the Holy Spirit "circumcised" us; that is, He cut our inner man, our heart away from the flesh/world/old man/the outer man.

This circumcision is caused by our union with Christ by the Holy Spirit into the death and resurrection of Christ.

This has its effect in holiness by faith. When we believe this to be true, then the power of sin is nullified and the resurrection power of God by the Spirit produces the holiness of Christ and the fruit of the Spirit so that we walk by faith. The inward work accomplished at the cross, applied to us at conversion, is the Christ-centered foundation for our Christian living.

Our Resurrection in Christ (v.13-15)

Our union with Christ in His resurrection means that we have not only died to the world/flesh/old but now are made alive by being united to Christ.

We are granted a new life raising us out of spiritual deadness. Our new life in Christ and the resurrection power that brought it about is the power available by faith to live godly lives. We need no longer be subject to the power of sin in the world or the flesh because of the work of Christ applied by the Spirit.

We are forgiven of our trespasses freeing us from guilt. We need no longer be burdened and weakened in our consciences by guilt over our sins which have been forgiven at conversion and through confession as believers.

The debt incurred by the legal demands of the Law was satisfied. We are no longer under the demands or debt of the Law since the debt required was paid and the demands fulfilled in Christ. We do not go back to the Law to live as Christians.

Our spiritual enemies were disarmed empowering victory over them. We need no longer be defeated by Satan, demons or any other spiritual being or power seeing that they have been defeated and shamed by Christ's death and resurrection.

We are a True Son of Abraham (Galatians 3:23-29)

The third important aspect of being in Christ that is represented by baptism is that we are a true son of Abraham.

²³ Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

As we follow Paul's thinking here, we must remember that he is dealing with an issue that kept being brought into the churches. They were trying to bring Christians back under the Mosaic Law. They were trying, in particular, to bring Gentiles under the Mosaic Law. It is interesting that these false teachers recognized that the Gentiles had not been under nor subject to the Mosaic Law. To them, becoming a Christian meant you had to come under the Mosaic Law at least with circumcision. You could not claim to be a true spiritual descendent of Abraham and his faith, if you refused circumcision. Paul deals with this error from many angles. Here, he deals with it as an aspect of being "in Christ".

The text really has three key time ideas...

Before the faith came (v. 23-24)

Before the present era of faith in Christ, the Mosaic Law served as a jailor. It held the Jewish people (remember, Gentiles were NEVER under the Law) captive until the revelation of the faith arrived.

Before the present era of faith in Christ, the Mosaic Law was a guardian. The Law functioned, not like a modern tutor, but like a Jewish guardian who not only taught the children but was charged to protect them from moral failure.

Now that faith has come (v. 25-26)

Note the “until” in verses 23-24 and the “now” in verses 25-26. Something has changed. Now that the New Covenant, the era of faith in Christ has come, no one is captive, and no one is under a guardian. Even for Jews, that era is past. It was just as wrong to keep Jewish Christians under the Mosaic Law as it is to try to put Gentile Christians under the Law. The time of Mosaic Law is over. Why?

Because we are all full sons in Christ. We are all the spiritual descendants of Abraham. Paul does not trace our heritage to Law nor does he put us back under the Law. He traces our heritage back to Abraham. We are now, in Christ, by faith, the full spiritual sons of Abraham.

Now that you are in Christ (v. 27-29)

What made the difference? We are all, Jew and Gentile, in Christ. Those old natural boundaries no longer divide us. We are all one in Christ, regardless of race, nation, social status or gender. No one has a special status or higher spirituality because of these. Our spiritual standing is solely based on the fact that now, in Christ, by faith, we are all, Abraham's sons.

Now to us this does not feel so important. But it is. When we are placed in Christ, we are sons of Abraham not the slaves of the Law. We no longer in Adam but in Christ. We are not under Law, but under grace. We not in the line of Moses. We are in the line of Abraham.

Thinking it through

Why are going over this *again*.

Our being in Christ is one of the most important truths for the Christian. It is fundamental to understanding how Jesus' death and resurrection is applied to us for both our salvation and our transformation.

Here is some of what we must believe in an obeying way. Because we are in Christ:

We share in Christ's death and resurrection so that we do not live like the old people we used to be and live like the new people we are becoming.

We receive a spiritual circumcision that frees us from being controlled by the old person we used to be.

We are the true descendants of Abraham so that we do not live by the Law.

These great truths require us to respond by living by faith. We are to believe God's truths, God's New Covenant promises and God's New Covenant commands in an obeying way.