

The Righteousness of God and Union with Christ (Reworked for Salvation Series 09-07-2025)

Before we begin, I would like to say something about union with Christ. This is a topic I have preached on many times. Our union with Christ is so vital to our salvation, we can never overlook it or forget it or leave it out. If we do this, we lose the Gospel itself! For Christ said, **“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing”** (John 15:5). The vine and the branch is a picture of union, a picture of vitality, a picture of life itself.

As we need food to supply our bodies with nourishment, so we need Christ to nourish us. Our union with Christ is ongoing, and without Him we can do nothing! Therefore, the doctrine of union with Christ may be the most important doctrine you’ve ever heard of. The whole of our salvation can be summed up with the reality that we are united with Christ. It is the best way to describe ALL the blessings of salvation. Whether in eternity past (election), in history (redemption), in the present (effectual calling, regeneration justification, and sanctification), or in the future (glorification), our salvation is summed up in the fact that we are united with Christ. What is HIS is ours! ALL the blessings of God are found in Christ. And, if by faith, you are united with Him, then all of what belongs to Him belongs to you.

The doctrine of the union with Christ is so common in the NT. Over 200 times in Paul’s letters and two dozen times in the writings of John we see expressions like “in Christ,” “in the Lord,” “in him.” As Christians we are found in Christ (Phil. 3:9), preserved in Christ (Rom. 8:39), saved and sanctified in Christ (2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Cor. 1:30). We walk in Christ (Col. 2:6), labor in Christ (1 Cor. 15:58), and obey in Christ (Eph. 6:1). We die in Christ (Rev. 14:13), live in Christ (Gal. 2:20), and conquer in Christ (Rom. 8:37), just to name a few. Another 32 times Paul speaks of believers participating together with Christ in some aspect of redemption, whether it’s being crucified with Christ, being buried with Christ, being raised with Christ, or being seated with Christ. Apart from this kind of union, all the blessings of Christ would be outside us. And it is only by the Spirit that we are joined together with him in this union and enjoy both Christ himself and all his benefits.

It is interesting that at the very end of Christ’s life, right before he went to the cross, Jesus prayed for this union. In John 17:21-23 he said, Father, I pray **“that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one . . .”** Then again in v. 26: He says, **“I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”** As I have preached two sermons on justification, and next week, I will preach on the doctrine of sanctification, I want to mention two truths. Then, I have 5 applications as we take the Lord’s Supper today and examine ourselves.

1. Union with Christ is the basis of our justification. **“This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”** When we remember Christ’s death, we remember that our justification, our right standing before God, is based upon what he accomplished on the cross. Christ took our

sin upon himself and he gave us his righteousness. This is the greatest exchange in the history of the universe. And, through the means of faith, we are united to Him.

To the Apostle Paul, this was the most beautiful truth. In Phil 3:8-9 he said, **“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.”**

2. Union with Christ is the basis of our sanctification. (We will explore this doctrine next week.) Remember the verse I read a few minutes ago. **I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.** If justification is the one time act where God declares us righteous because of Christ and his work on the cross as our sin-bearing substitute, sanctification is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in us. This means our growth in holiness is completely dependent on our union with Christ.

Application 1. We need Christ ALL THE TIME. If we don’t have a proper understanding of this truth, we may separate justification from sanctification. So what does this look like practically? It is sad to say this, but it looks like a typical SB. I don’t know how many people I’ve talked to who have made some “decision” for Christ, walked an isle, raised a hand, been baptized, become members of a church, but when you look at their lives, you actually see the opposite of sanctification. You see a person who says, *“I’m a Christian,”* but doesn’t love God’s commands. In fact, God’s commands are really burdensome. There is no real love for God’s people. This is evident from their lack of desire to meet with them. They certainly don’t love the church, unless there is a wedding or a funeral. You see, what they’ve done is separate justification from sanctification. They say, *“I’m a Christian. I’m justified. Look at what I’ve done.”*

Some of you who are older may remember the Lordship controversy. There were those who would say, *“Jesus is my savior, but I just haven’t made him my Lord!”* These people would say, *“I am justified. I am in a right standing before God. It doesn’t really matter what I do from now on.”* These are the people of whom Paul said, **“*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?*; to which he replies, “**How can we who died to sin still live in it?**”** Probably the most frightening words in all the Bible are these found in Matt. 7:21-23: **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’** Personally, I am ok with the statement *“if He is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all.”* We cannot separate justification from sanctification. To have Christ is to have all of Christ—his justifying grace as well as his sanctifying grace. Both the righteousness of God in our standing and the righteousness of God displayed in our holy living are fruits of union with Christ. So many people want to stop with “salvation” at the beginning.

“Oh, I’m saved now. I’ll just relax.” But, salvation is not just a decision at the beginning. It is also a continued life of godliness, all the way to heaven.

Practically, you need Christ to save you. You need him to keep you. You need him to help you through every second of every day. You need him as you battle with laziness. You need him as you battle with anger. You need him as you struggle with impatience. You need him when your anxiety goes up. You need him to help raise ungodly kids. You need him. You need him! As we examine ourselves, let me ask a few questions: *“Has coming to Christ influenced your whole life? Are you continuing to come? Do you come to Christ daily to be renewed by His blood and to seek refuge and grace at His side? Do you have a lively and active faith that propels you toward Christ, day by day, hour by hour?”* We remember this today as we hear the words, ***“This is my body broken for you.”***

Application 2. God will supply all our needs according to his riches and glory IN CHRIST! As Christians, Christ is our life, our food, our robe of righteousness, our protector, physician, light, shepherd, vine, horn of salvation, dew, cornerstone, sun of righteousness, precious ointment, consolation, fountain, lamb, bundle of myrrh, way, truth, glory, gift, author and finisher of our faith, rock, sword, desire, covenant, hope, river, power, wisdom, Holy One, altar, and passover.” (Ralph Robinson). Notice that all these things are everything we need for godliness. This means we lack NOTHING! One of my friends (TB) used to say, *“You got the tools, you can do the job.”* This means that you always have the tools for the job! God’s desire and design is to make you holy and he will give you EVERYTHING to make sure this happens. And this EVERYTHING is found in Christ and your union with Him. We remember this today as we hear the words, ***“This is my body broken for you.”***

Application 3. Union with Christ will produce overcoming faith. Branches that are attached to the vine will grow. Our vine is the source of life. In the same way, a life of overcoming faith will flow from our union with Christ. This is not the overcoming faith of health, wealth, and prosperity! But, it is so much more! Let me read some words in Heb. 11. **“By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain”** (v. 4). **“By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him”** (v. 5). **“By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith”** (v. 7). **“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going”** (v. 8). **“By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised”** (v. 11). **“By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau.”**²¹ **By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.**²² **By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.**²³ **By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.**²⁴ **By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter”** (vv. 20-24). **“And what more shall I**

say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets-- ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight” (vv. 32-34). We have so many examples. I can promise you this. Those who go to heaven have faith. And whether it is OT saints looking forward to the promise of the Gospel or us today looking back at the Gospel, there is a faith that overcomes the world and all things from here to heave. And remember this: Those who endure to the end will be saved. It is not how we start the race. It is how we finish it. None of us are promised tomorrow. But, especially if you are older, finish the fight of faith well. And, God is a God of grace!

Application 4. Union with Christ prepares you for heaven. John Owen wrote: “*There is no imagination wherewith man is besotted more foolish, none so pernicious, as this, that persons not purified, not sanctified, not made holy, in this life, should afterwards be taken into that state of blessedness which consists in the enjoyment of God.*” In other words, “*What makes you think you will enjoy heaven if what you really enjoy are the things of this world?*” Heaven is where Christ is! If you don’t love him now and pursue him now and look unto him now, what makes you think that if you die, you will love him on the other side? And if you do love him now, give praise to God who is preparing you to meet him! By the Spirit, He is making you more holy to prepare you for that great reunion in the sky. And I am not talking about reunion with old friends.

Application 5. Union with Christ ensures that God gets all the glory. It begins with his righteousness, is declared in the person and work of Christ, and we are the recipients. We get the benefits! What is His is ours. This is why we can say, “**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places**” (Eph. 1:3). God gets the glory! Now, one more time before we take the Lord’s supper, let me read the most beautiful words: “***This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.***”