

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 8, Foundations for Union with Christ, Acts, Participation, John's Gospel

© 2024 Robert Peterson and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Robert Peterson in his teaching on the Holy Spirit and Union with Christ. This is session 8, Foundations for Union with Christ, Acts, Participation, John's Gospel.

In this lecture, our goal is to complete laying the foundations for the doctrine of union with Christ in John's Gospel and Paul's letters by finishing our survey of the foundation for union with Christ in the Old Testament, which we've already covered, in the Synoptic Gospels, which we've done, and now for the Book of Acts, we have talked about the first two aspects, and that is the identification of the people of God, this time with Jesus himself and his pouring out the Spirit on the church, the incorporation of the people of God, which very much has to do with Pentecost and its results, and Christian baptism, which inaugurates someone into the church.

Thirdly, participation in union with Christ is anticipated in the repetition of Jesus' story and in Luke's use of Isaiah's suffering servant motif in Acts. The participatory aspect of union with Christ appears in two main places in Acts, in the repetition of Jesus' story in the church's life and in Luke's use of Isaiah's suffering servant passages.

So, first of all, the participation of believers in the repetition of Jesus' story in the life of the church. Of course, we should view the two volumes Luke, Gospel of Luke, and Book of Acts as a whole. Dennis Johnson is very helpful. His book, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*, is outstanding and has proved very helpful to me.

Luke-Acts is a unit. Dennis Johnson notes that one of the interpretive keys of Acts is Luke's Gospel. Luke and Acts contain a number of parallels that draw important connections between the story of Jesus and that of the early church.

The most meaningful connection, as we consider union with Christ in Acts, is the manner in which the story of the early church is, in many ways, a repetition of the story of Jesus as told in Luke's Gospel. There are structural markers that suggest the Jesus-church parallel is part of Luke's literary intention. Parallels between Jesus and the church at the start of both Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts include these.

First, I'll just mention it and then go back and document it. Anointing by the Spirit is first. Second, a sermon explaining the anointing.

Third, effective ministry in the power of the Spirit leads to fourth, opposition slashing persecution by Judaism's leadership. First of all, for the Gospel of Luke and the life of Jesus, we see in Luke 3, Jesus being anointed by the Spirit, Luke 3, 21-22. Now, when all the people were baptized and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice from heaven said, you are my beloved Son.

With you, I am well pleased. This is Jesus being anointed with the Spirit. Secondly, a sermon explaining the anointing is found in the very next chapter of Luke's Gospel.

In chapter 4 and verse 16, Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. As was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read, as was the fashion. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.

He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind. To set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Then he rolls up the scroll and sits down and says amazingly, in verse 21 of Luke 4, today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. So, the pattern is set by Luke's Gospel. Jesus is anointed with the Spirit at his baptism.

Then Jesus himself gives a sermon explaining the anointing in terms of the Old Testament prediction of Isaiah the prophet in Isaiah 61 verses 1 and 2. Thirdly, effective ministry in the power of the Spirit. We see this in many places in Luke's Gospel. Luke 4:1, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for 40 days, being tempted by the devil.

4:14 and Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. In Luke 4:18, as we read, Jesus quotes Isaiah 61, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me. And then just one more place, in Luke 10:21, we read of Jesus; in the same hour, Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. Jesus had pronounced woes on the unrepentant cities and talked about God's sovereign plan and the reciprocal knowledge of the Father and the Son as the passage unfolds further. But our point is this: Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit before he said these words.

So here's the pattern in Luke's Gospel: Jesus anointed by the Spirit, Jesus gives a sermon explaining the anointing, we see effective ministry in the power of the Spirit throughout Luke's Gospel, ministry by the Lord Jesus leading to opposition slash

persecution by Judaism's leadership. We see it in Luke 9:22; he tells his disciples to keep it a secret. At this point, the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised, Luke 9:22. Then the actual scheming occurs in Luke 22 verses 1 and 2. Now, the feast of unleavened bread drew near, which is called the Passover, and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people. Now, here's the point: Luke in the book of Acts shows how God's dealing with the early church followed this same fourfold pattern that we just observed in the life of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke.

So, Luke part 1 if you will shows these four elements in Jesus' life, Luke part 2, that is Acts, shows them replicated considerably, not precisely, in the life of the early church. Let me document that. Of course, Acts 2 at Pentecost is the anointing of the church by the Spirit.

Boom, the Holy Spirit comes in newness and power; God does a sound and a light show, the rushing wind and the tongues of fire resting on the disciples, and there is surely the anointing by the Spirit. Immediately following is Peter's first sermon in Acts, and what he does is he explains the anointing. These men are not drunk, he says, but this is what is uttered through the prophet Joel.

In the last days, I'm reading from Acts 2:17, and he's quoting from Joel 2. In the last days, God declares that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. And he just did so. So, the pattern from Luke in Jesus' life is reproduced in the pattern of Acts in the life of the church.

The Spirit comes at Pentecost, the church is anointed, and there's a sermon immediately following explaining that anointing; that would be Stephen's sermon, and he does more than quote Joel. He goes on to show how the Father, in verse 33, says Jesus was raised from the dead, 32, being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit. He has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

Thirdly, the ministry is an effective ministry in the power of the Spirit. Jesus had it, and so did the church, and it started early on. The Spirit is not always mentioned, although the disciples continually the apostles continually give glory to Jesus and say that they're doing these things in his name, but sometimes the Spirit is expressly mentioned, as in 4:8. Then Peter, Peter, and John are hailed before the Sanhedrin and they don't back down an inch, 4:8. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done by a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man

is standing before you well. And in 4:31, after the authorities threaten the apostles, it does no good.

As a matter of fact, in Acts 4:31, they prayed together, and after that, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. So, here's the point. Participation in Jesus' story, which is very much Paul's teaching, we died with Christ, we're buried with him, we're raised with him, we're seated in heaven with him, and there's even a sense that, as we'll see, we're coming again with him.

Remember, I said, in a sense, that's true. Paul does not confuse us with Jesus, but he says we're so dynamically spiritually linked to him that our true identity as his people will only be revealed when we appear, Colossians 3:3, when he appears in his second coming in the same verse. The word appearing is used, the verb to appear, of Jesus and of his church remarkably.

So as was with Jesus, so is with his church, anointing with the spirit, sermon explaining the anointing, effective ministry in the spirit, and fourth, of course, Acts is filled with opposition slash persecution by the Jewish leadership, and we need to go no further than Acts 4:17 and 18. The persecutions of Paul are incredible in the second half of Acts, but for now, 4:17 and 18, the Sanhedrin is talking among themselves. In order that it may spread no further, this message these guys are preaching about Jesus among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in his name.

So, they called him and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. And of course, they continue to put them in jail and so forth, and they strongly persecute the church until the church, God scatters it and thereby spreads the gospel, beginning to fulfill the promise of Acts 1:8. At various points, not only does the church reproduce Jesus' story in the church's life by God's providence, but at various points in Acts, Jesus is paralleled by Peter, Stephen, and Paul. The parallels include Stephen's dying word that echoed Christ's passion.

Jesus had said, Father, forgive them for they do not know what they're doing, and Stephen cried out in his death throes, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit, and Lord, do not hold this sin against them. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Jesus said, Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit.

Stephen says, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Jesus says, don't hold this sin against them. And Stephen says pretty much the very same words.

We see a parallel not only in Stephen's words, but in Peter's, sorry, Paul's final journey where he's resolved to return to Jerusalem for a third time, just as Jesus was. First of all, Jesus in the book of Luke, Luke 9:51, we see Jesus see his resolve as

incredible. When the days drew near for him to be taken up, that sounds like Luke 1, his ascension is called for his taking up.

He set his face to go to Jerusalem, and indeed, nothing will deter him from finishing his course and ending up in Jerusalem, where he would die for the sins of the world, for the sins of his people. Paul, in a similar fashion, returns to Jerusalem for a third time, as we see in Acts. Our point is, that there are parallels between the lives of Peter, Stephen, and Paul in the book of Acts.

And we're just illustrating a few of those. This is part of that larger point, participation in the repetition of Jesus' story. Not exactly union with Christ, but this lays the foundation for union with Christ in Paul's letters.

In Acts 20:22, Paul speaks to the Ephesian elders at Miletus when he says, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there. And in 21:13, I am ready, he says, not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. The brothers cannot dissuade him from this.

They try, and they finally say the Lord's will be done. They yield to God. So, Paul resolutely returns to Jerusalem a third time, even as Jesus did.

So, we can see how the apostles participated through replication in the story of Christ. They repeated aspects of his story in their own lives. This participation suggests that the church participates in the story of Jesus in its discipleship and mission.

The recapitulation of Jesus' story in the early church's life points to the story as a kind of union with Christ via fellowship with him, especially fellowship with his sufferings. This participation is not exactly parallel to union with Christ. It does not diminish the exclusive nature of Christ's work, but it provides a picture of what it means to be united to Christ.

Second and last, concerning this participation theme in Acts, as part of the divine foundation for union with Christ in John and Paul, is participation in Luke's use of Isaiah's suffering servant passages. We looked at those briefly when we thought about the Old Testament foundation for union with Christ. Now, in Luke, the servant songs are alluded to with reference to Jesus, while in Acts they are quoted with reference to the apostles as God's messenger.

Once again, this pattern is in the life of Jesus, the life of the church, and, in this case, the apostles. First, Simeon in Luke greets the infant Jesus as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles." This is an allusion to Isaiah 49:6. We will see that Luke, in Acts, quotes

Isaiah 49:6. I will read it once here, and it can do double duty, but it is fascinating; Simeon only quotes the first part of it.

Luke quotes the whole verse in Acts. Isaiah 49:6, it is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to bring back the preserved of Israel. Now, here's the part that's quoted.

I will make you a light for the nations so that my salvation may be reached at the end of the earth. Simeon greets the infant Jesus with the first part of these words. This baby will be a light for revelation to the Gentiles, the nations, an allusion to Isaiah 49:6. In Acts 13:47, Paul and Barnabas appeal to the same passage as a command for themselves as messengers of the gospel.

Paul had begun to have a good response by the crowds in Pisidian Antioch, and the Jews in jealousy when Paul and Barnabas came back to preach again, stirred the crowds up against the apostles, and as a result, they turned from the Jews to the Gentiles, and in so doing, they quote this verse. First of all, Paul and Barnabas speak boldly. It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you, Jews, since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life.

Behold, we are turning to the Gentiles, Acts 13:46. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, I have made you a light to the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth—a fuller quote of that second part of Isaiah 49:6. And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorified the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. Paul and Barnabas appeal to the same passage as Simeon did in the gospel of Luke in the words that I just read.

In Luke, Jesus is the light for the Gentiles, but in Acts, the apostles become the extension of that light to the Gentiles. Thus, the mission of the church is wrapped up in its relation to the Son. Second, the programmatic verse of Acts, Acts 1:8, alludes to the servant songs to suggest further connections between Jesus and his people.

But you'll receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Whereas Simeon's quotation of Acts 49:6 omits the final phrase, that my salvation may reach the end of the earth, Luke picks up the line in Acts 1, when Jesus commissions his disciples. You'll receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Dennis Johnson explains, “the most explicit allusion to the servant songs is the expression to the last part of the earth, close quote, within this quote, which is verbally identical to the Septuagint, Greek translations, reading of Isaiah 49:6.” Thus,

Luke's use of this quotation in Acts 1:8 extends the mission of Jesus through his church in Acts. In Luke's gospel, Jesus is the light to the Gentiles.

In Acts, the church takes that light to the ends of the earth. Both Jesus and his people fulfill Isaiah's picture of the suffering servant. The church fulfills the picture insofar as it continues to participate in Jesus' story by embodying his mission in its ministry.

We affirm the uniqueness of Jesus as the suffering servant. Only his suffering atones for sin. The suffering of God's people does not atone for sin.

He more than later talks about, in his own ministry, sufferings, filling up what is lacking in the sufferings of Jesus. He's not talking about making atonement. Paul is alluding to the fact that Christ, apparently, the same theme reverberates in the book of Revelation.

Christ has allotted a portion of suffering to his church. And in union with him, we suffer, even as in union with him we shall be glorified. Christ's suffering alone is redemptive.

But as God's people suffer in the pursuit of his call, they participate in his story. A participation that Paul will later suggest means more than following in the footsteps of Jesus, but rather sharing in his sufferings that we might also share in his glory. Romans 8:17. We are the true children of God, the context says, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Romans 8:17. Conclusion for Acts, even as we did for the Old Testament and Synoptic Gospels, we have thought in terms of incorporation, in terms of identification, incorporation, and participation as the antecedents, if you will, the redemptive-historical antecedents of union with Christ. Those portions of scripture don't teach the doctrine of union with Christ, but they lay a foundation for its exposition in John's Gospel and Paul's letters. In Acts, union with Christ is not explicitly stated, nor are the inner workings of salvation explored.

Instead, Acts seeks to document the spread of the kingdom of God from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the end of the earth. As people repent and believe in Jesus, they are baptized and given the Holy Spirit. Acts provide the redemptive-historical foundation for union; that is, Pentecost provides the reality of union enacted in the life of the Church in baptism through the Spirit and in participation in Jesus' story, and hints at the further formation of a concept of union through identification, especially in Paul's conversion.

Paul's conversion was a historical event that changed the greatest persecutor into the greatest proponent, with due acknowledgment of Peter's being a champion in the first half of the book of Acts. Paul, as the apostle to the Gentiles, was without

parallel, and yet it was that Damascus Road experience that identified him forever as Christ's servant, as he says in all of his letters, as Christ's slave. And as an apostle, even one called out of due time, 1 Corinthians 15, not worthy of being called an apostle, because as he said, I persecuted the Church of God, but he was an apostle, and he saw the risen Christ in this special appearance of Christ on the road to Damascus, his special Christophany, and Paul was never the same.

It changed his identity. He became a man in Christ. He became a man united with Christ, although Acts doesn't tell us what that means.

It illustrates it in the life of the apostle Paul. Acts does not define the doctrine of union but shows us what union looks like when acted out in the life of God's people. When we consider the main themes of Acts in light of its genre, it was a narrative of the early Church, not a doctrinal epistle.

In light of its purpose to describe the Church's growth, not to give a systematic exposition of the Christian faith, which is what Romans approximates, and context within Luke, Acts, and the whole New Testament so when we consider the main themes of Acts in light of one, its genre, it's an early Church narrative, its purpose describing that Church's growth, and its context as part of Luke, Acts, and the whole New Testament, we find union not explicitly taught, but enacted on the missional stage. We have in Acts clues as to what the life of the Church today should be as we live in union with him. For example, we should consider suffering, especially for persecution's sake, as a form of participation in Christ.

Paul does, that I might know him, Philippians 3, and the power of his resurrection, sharing in his sufferings. It's explicit. Thus, suffering is not to be shunned, and it is certainly not to be sought after.

Suffering is not to be shunned but understood as part of what it means to be a Christian. So, the same three themes of identification. In this case, the Church is identified with Jesus' story, and individual believers are identified with Jesus as they take his name in baptism, incorporation, what is Pentecost, but the birthday of the New Testament Church in which the people are made part of the body of Christ by receiving the spirit as they respond to the gospel message.

And as well, of course, participation in the story of Jesus, which is reproduced in outline form in the Book of Acts, anticipating union with Christ. Having thus explored or laid a foundation for union with Christ in the Old Testament, Synoptic Gospels, and Book of Acts, we move to actual union with Christ, and we have two very different presentations in the New Testament. Oh, it's in other places besides Paul and John's gospel.

1 John, for example, has some important things to say that should be studied in light of John's gospel. There are some passages in the other text of the New Testament and other books of the New Testament, but there's no question that John and Paul are the theologians of union with Christ. Union with Christ in John's gospel.

John and Paul say much about the union. They use different idioms, very different idioms, different vocabulary, and different emphases, but their teachings overlap. I'd like us to explore five passages in John's gospel from which we will draw out the teaching of union with Christ.

First of all, John's bread of life discourse in John 6. I'll give the detailed verses as we work through them. Mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son in John 10. Third, mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son, and the Father and the Son and believers.

In John 14. Jesus the vine, believers the branches in John 15. Fifth, mutual indwelling of Father and Son, and the Son and believers in John 17.

Five passages. Jesus' bread of life discourse, John 6. Mutual indwelling of Father and Son, John 10. Mutual indwelling of Father and Son, and they and believers, John 14.

Jesus the vine, believers the branches, John 15. Mutual indwelling of Father and Son, and the Son and believers, John 17. First, Jesus' bread of life discourse, John 6, and here are the verses: 32 to 35, 40 to 41, 40 to 41 and 38 to 58.

Jesus' bread of life discourse, John 6:32 to 35, and 48 to 58. John 6 puts union in the context of the incarnation of the Son of God and God's plan of salvation.

With a sign and sermon, a not infrequent combination in the fourth gospel, with a sign and sermon, Jesus portrays himself as the bread from heaven. Jesus' disciples give loaves and fish to the people. When all are full, the disciples collect twelve baskets with pieces of leftover bread.

This is the background. This is the sign, which is John the Apostle's word for Jesus' miracles. Jesus' main word for the same is the works that the Father gave him to do.

So, there's the sign, multiplication of the loaves and the fish, a miracle of God. John connects this sign, this miracle, with a message so that the sermon and the sign go together. Manna from heaven.

Jesus connects this miracle with the Old Testament's redemptive history. This reminds a ton of readers of Jesus multiplying loaves and fish, of God's feeding the Israelites with manna in Exodus 16. The people ask for a sign in Exodus 16, reminding them that God fed their fathers with manna in the wilderness.

The people in John's day ask Jesus for a sign reminiscent of the manna. He gave them bread from heaven to eat, John 6:31. That is a citation from Nehemiah 9:15, summarizing God's provision for his people—day after day in their wilderness journey.

It's also similar to language in Psalm 78:24, 25, and Psalm 105:40. So John 6:31 cites Nehemiah 9:15, Psalms 78:24, 25, and 105:40. In John 6:32 and 33, we see that Jesus supersedes this great miracle.

Jesus then said to them, truly, truly I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my father gave you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. As is customary in John's gospel, they misunderstand Jesus, and they say, sir, give us this bread always.

They're looking for a constant buffet. They want regular food from heaven and do not have to work for food. And they misunderstand.

One of the features of John's style, one of the dozen or so features of John's style, is misunderstandings. Jesus speaks in the spiritual plane. The people understand him in the physical plane.

They misunderstand his words. Sometimes, there's humor connected with this. Sometimes there's a mystery.

There's almost always revelation of who the son of God is. In keeping with the purpose statement of John in John 20:30, and 31, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these signs are written that you might believe that Jesus is Christ, the son of God and that you might have life in his name.

Jesus supersedes Old Testament figures. He supersedes figures, institutions, and events. Here, he supersedes God's giving Israel manna through Moses.

Manna temporarily satisfied Israel's physical hunger until the next day. But the word made flesh satisfies the world's spiritual hunger. Again, I pointed out the misunderstanding, and verse 35 is significant.

I'm the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, Jesus said. Whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

As water satisfies thirst, and as bread satisfies hunger, so the incarnate son of God satisfies every believer spiritually. In verses 36 through 47, we have a panorama of the father's and son's roles in salvation. Let me read through this section.

After saying he's the bread of life, and after making a parallel coming to him and believing him in 35, Jesus says, I said to you that you've seen me, and yet you not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me, I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my father. Everyone who looks on the son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

So, the Jews grumbled about him because he said, I'm the bread that came down from heaven. Jesus said, they said, they said, is this not Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, I have come down from heaven? Jesus answered them, do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to me except unless the father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day.

It is written in the prophets that they will all be taught by God. Everyone who has heard and learned from the father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except he, who is from God.

He has seen the father. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life.

Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I'm the living bread that came down from heaven.

A panorama of the father's and son's roles in salvation is given in these verses. I think this is a good time for us to break because this is a little involved and beautiful, a little longer section. So, let us take that up again in our next lecture.

This is Dr. Robert Peterson in his teaching on the Holy Spirit and Union with Christ. This is session 8, Foundations for Union with Christ, Acts, Participation, John's Gospel.