

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 9, Foundations for Union with Christ, John's Gospel 6 and 10

© 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 9, Foundations for Union with Christ, John's Gospel, John 6 and 10.

We continue our study of union with Christ in John's Gospel.

We're up to the point where we're looking at the panorama of the Father and Son's roles in salvation in John 6. I have six points in this panorama. It is a different language than Paul's, but there is an overlap of teachings or themes. The Father gives people to the Son in verses 37 and 39. This is one of John's three pictures or themes of election.

The three themes are Jesus, uniquely in scripture, in John 15, being the author of election, and I've got to get the verses right, John 15:16 and 19, uniquely in all of scripture, Jesus is the author of election unto salvation in those verses. The antecedent or prior identity of the people of God. You do not believe, Jesus says in John 10 to his enemies, because you are not my sheep.

My sheep hear my voice, they follow me, I give them eternal life and they will never perish. That is, there are human beings known only to God and his Son and the Spirit as the people of God before they believe. They have an antecedent or prior identity, and their belief in Jesus reveals that identity, at least to them.

Jesus knew from the beginning, John 6, who would believe in him and who would not believe in him. The third picture is the one given here. The Father gives people to the Son in the great priestly prayer in John 17.

Four times, this theme occurs, and this giving of people from the Father to the Son, this divine election, determines the Son's ministry in that chapter, as we will see later, Lord willing. The Father gives people to the Son; in other words, he chooses people for salvation, and he entrusts them to the Son to actually save them. The Father further draws people to the Son, 44 of John 6, but no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

Thirdly, as people come to Jesus, as we see from verse 35, that means believing in him. The parallelism there is plain. I'm the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall not thirst, whereas believing in Jesus is parallel to coming to Jesus.

Thus, in verse 44, no one can come to me, no one can believe in me unless the Father who sent me draws him. John's drawing is akin to Paul's calling. The Father gives people to the Son, and he chooses them.

The Father draws people to the Son. He effectively summons them or calls them to the Son to believe in him. And then people do believe, they come, they believe in the Son. Verses 37, verse 40, 44, 45, 47, compare 65, all over the place.

They gain eternal life is the fourth point in this panorama. I guess if it's a panorama, the fourth view, the fourth picture. We see it in verses 40 and 47: they gain eternal life, and the Son will keep them saved.

This is a doctrine of preservation, God maintaining his people and their salvation from when he brings them to himself until he raises them from the dead. We see it in John 37, and whoever comes to me, I will never cast out. We see it in 39, this is the will of the Father, the one who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he's given me, but raise it up on the last day.

Jesus does not lose any of his people; he keeps them, and he preserves them. And lastly, the Son will raise them on the last day. 39 and 40 put some of this together: this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son, verse 40, and believes in him should have eternal life now, and I will raise him up on the last day.

So here is the panorama. The Father gives people to the Son, verses 37, 39. The Father draws people to the Son. He calls them effectively.

Verses 44, 45, compare 65. The people come to believe in the Son; this is saving faith. 37, 40, 44, 45, 47, compare 65 again, they gain eternal life.

Verses 40, 47, compare 54, 58. The Son will keep them saved, verses 37, 39. The Son will raise them on the last day, verses 39, 40, and 44, compare 54.

I'm going to do it again before I draw three important theological conclusions, but this time I won't mention the verses. Here's the panorama. The Father gives people to the Son. He elects them for salvation.

The Father draws people to the Son, and he calls them efficaciously to the Son. The people come to Jesus. That is, they believe in him.

Fourth, they gain eternal life, which is what Jesus gives them. One of John's major pictures of Jesus is as the bestower or giver of eternal life in this gospel. The Son will keep them saved; this is God's preservation of his people.

Lastly, the Son will raise them on the last day. Three important theological points pertain to the background for understanding union with Christ, which is taught in the fourth gospel.

First, there's a division of labor among the Trinitarian persons. If you're listening to this carefully, you'll say, wait a minute, it's not Trinitarian persons. It's two Trinitarian persons, not three. You're right; the Spirit isn't mentioned in these verses, and that is in keeping with John's habit of teaching concerning the Holy Spirit with reference to Pentecost and thereafter.

Oh, the Spirit does appear in John 3 with the born-again regeneration passage, and he appears in the life of Jesus in other places in the first 12 chapters of John, but primarily, the Spirit is viewed prophetically by Jesus as coming at Pentecost and doing his work then. So, it's the Father and the Son that are in these verses, but there's a division of labor among the Trinitarian persons. The Father gives people to the Son, draws them to him, they come, they gain eternal life, and the Son keeps them and will raise them.

Secondly, there is a Trinitarian, or at least Binitarian, and systematics makes it a Trinitarian harmony among the persons of the Godhead, and they're working for God's people. There's a harmony in this passage between the Father and the Son, and systematic theology takes it a step further and says that when we take into account all the New Testament says, especially Paul, there's a harmony among the persons of the Trinity. We see it so emphatically in Ephesians 1: 3-14, for example.

We also see it in 1 Peter 1:1 and 2, to which we will not turn. Three important theological conclusions. There's a division of labor among the Trinitarian persons.

They have work to do, and they do their work, and they do it, secondly, harmoniously.

Thirdly, there is a continuity in the identity of the people of God. We're back to the identity theme again.

It is the same people the Father gives to the Son, draws to the Son, who comes to him, who believe in him, who gain eternal life, whom the Son keeps, and whom the Son will raise on the last day. That is those the Father gives to the Son that he will raise on the last day. So it goes from step one to step six.

It is exactly what verse 39 does. This is the will of him who sent me that I shall lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. There's a division of labor among the Father, Son, and Spirit with our systematic extrapolation.

There's harmony among the people and the way they work. Those whom the Father chooses, the Son gives eternal life to them, and keeps them, and he will raise them. There's a continuity in the identity of God's people.

It is the same people whom the Father gives to the Son, who ultimately end up being raised by the Son for eternal life on the last day. Oh, they have eternal life now, and that is John's major picture of eternal life. It's the present possession of the believer, but here Jesus goes to the... So, John's eschatology is largely taught to be correctly taught to be realized, but there's also futuristic eschatology, and we see it here in these mentions of the resurrection of the dead in verses 39, 40, 44, and 54.

Jesus is the bread of life. This image focuses on his person, and eating that bread speaks of union with him. Within the framework of verses 36 to 47, Jesus resumes his bread of life discourse in verses 48 through 51, which I have already read.

Jesus is the fulfillment of the manna given to the Israelites in the wilderness. The manna prefigured him. Jesus is the true bread of life.

True, in John's sense, doesn't mean true as opposed to false. Manna was the real bread of life, but in John's sense, true means the fulfilled sense. So, in John 15, Jesus says, I'm the true vine.

Israel wasn't a false vine, but it was incomplete. It failed in its stewardship from God. In Isaiah 5, the Lord looked for fruit and found rotten fruit.

Jesus is the true vine, the ultimate fulfillment of that picture in the scriptures, the ultimate Israel, if you will, who bears fruit indeed in the lives of his people. Likewise, Jesus is the true manna. Manna in the Old Testament is just a type of Christ.

Types are Old Testament historical persons, events, or institutions, with emphasis on historical people, actions, and whole institutions that have a function in the Old Testament redemptive history but that have a greater eschatological function pointing to the life and work of Christ. So, Adam is a type of Christ according to Romans 5.16. Adam is the type of the one who is to come. According to Hebrews 7, Melchizedek, the mysterious king-priest from Salem, to whom Abraham pays tithes, is a type, a prefiguration in his historical personage of Christ, the ultimate king-priest who brings peace indeed.

Types are persons and events. We saw Moses and Elijah appear in Luke 9.31 on the Mount of Transfiguration. Surely they are the law, and the prophets, respectively, personified.

Moses and Elijah are speaking with Jesus concerning his exodus is the Greek word, which he's about to fulfill in Jerusalem. Of course, the translations translate death. They probably put in a marginal note the Greek word exodus.

It was a study Bible, it would say, thus showing that the Old Testament's great event of redemption, the exodus from Egypt, is a type of historical prefiguration of the great redemption accomplished by Jesus on the cross outside Jerusalem. So types are persons, events, and institutions. God ordained the prophetic order in Deuteronomy 18.

I will raise up a prophet for Israel like you, Moses, and I'll put my words in his mouth, and what he says will not fail. This is a prediction of the whole Old Testament line of prophets that culminate, as the book of Acts tells us, in the great and final prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ. Final prophet, aren't there New Testament prophets? Oh yes, but they are the extended ministry of Jesus as he pours out the spirit on his church.

They are New Testament prophets and apostles and they serve him according to Hebrews 1:1, and 2. All New Testament revelation is S-O-N hyphen revelation, son revelation. Prophet priest, the priestly order of Aaron is a type of Christ, although the Lord planned and established a different priestly order, that of Melchizedek, because the third institution mentioned in this triad is not only prophet, priesthood, and the royal office of kingship. It had a tribal requirement: one must be from Judah; the Messiah couldn't be from two tribes at once, so Jesus is from Judah as the son of David, he gets the bloodline from Mary, and if he needs some official thing from Joseph, his stepfather, he gets that too.

But he's not from Aaron; he can't be from Aaron and Judah together; he's from Judah, and he's a king, so God raised up another priesthood through Melchizedek, a very unique one, it only has two members, Melchizedek and Jesus. In any case, types are Old Testament prefigurations of Jesus, historical people, events, and whole institutions established by God, real things in history, real people and events and institutions that were historical that point beyond themselves ultimately in redemptive history to the son of God and his salvation, and even his church. Here, manna, which was a real miraculous, what is it, food, kind of sweet they said, was something God gave them to sustain them, but in God's providence, it pointed toward the greatest manna from heaven, the bread of life, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The manna in the wilderness was a type of bread that comes down from heaven, to quote Jesus' words, that is, the son of God's becoming a human being. The terms eat and feed, with reference to Jesus, dominate the passage, occurring eight times in verses 49 to 58. D. A. Carson, whose commentary on John is my favorite, explains this.

To appropriate, quote, Jesus by faith, as in the preceding verses, is what it means to eat him, to eat his flesh, to feed on him. Jesus gives his flesh in his sacrifice on the cross. To eat the living bread is to believe in his atoning death.

Again, the hearers stumble at Jesus' words. No surprise there. How can this man give us his flesh to eat, they say? Sounds like cannibalism to these guys.

In response, Jesus does not soften his message but makes it more offensive to their ears since the law prohibits the eating of blood. And that's what he says in 53 to 58. What's he doing? Is he being cruel? No, he's being merciful.

And as I like to point out regularly, Acts 6:6 says many, even of the priests, believed in Jesus in the ministry of the apostles in the early church. I do not think they would have done so apart from Jesus having the courage and conviction to stand up to the Jewish leaders again and again and heal on Saturday and offend the leadership by making the people confront the people with the reality of his person. If he had sung them lullabies, they would have slept until the judgment of God.

Instead, he bangs the cymbals. He shakes things up. He overturned the tables of the coin money changers in the temple in order to ultimately show mercy to those who needed to be shaken up out of their spiritual doldrums and to realize the leaders of Israel were corrupt, and they had perverted God's true religion.

Jesus' words are stark. Failing to eat his flesh and drink his blood disqualifies people from eternal life. Eating them gives eternal life now and resurrection life at the end of the age.

Although Christians cannot help but think of the Lord's Supper, their primary referent in these verses is Jesus' sacrificial death, which, of course, is what the Lord's Supper remembers and celebrates, yet John doesn't have the institution of the supper and no direct reference to it. The way to say it would be this: a significant theme of John 6, as we will see right now, is union with Christ. And so that way, the teaching of John 6 pertains to the Lord's Supper because the Holy Supper has a number of meanings biblically, but the most embracing, overarching, summative meaning of the supper is union with Christ, of which the other meanings are subsets.

It's the same for Christian baptism. Both ordinances or sacraments, one the initial rite and the other the ongoing rite, have many meanings, but their most profound and comprehensive meaning is union with Christ because union with Christ is the major way of talking about the application of salvation. Gaining him, one gains every aspect of salvation.

The bread of life discourse has implications for union with Christ because of the language of eating or feeding on him for eternal life. We ingest, in quotation marks,

Jesus by faith so that he becomes a part of us, even as the food that we eat does. Union is explicit in verse 56.

This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever. Here's the first appearance in John of mutual abiding or indwelling.

Let me go back to 56. Yes, I beg your pardon. My flesh is true food, 55.

My blood is a true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood, here it is, abides in me, I read the wrong verse, and I in him. As the living father sent me, and I live because of the father, so whoever feeds on me will also live because of me.

Yes, so it's 56 is the first appearance in John of mutual abiding or indwelling, which occurs six times in the fourth gospel. I'll just do it again. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I abide in him.

The word abide is understood by ellipsis, of course. John speaks often of the father and son indwelling one another, sharing the divine life. We call it perichoresis from the Greek, or circumincession or co-inherence, both from Latin.

Perichoresis, perichoresis, perichoresis, and circumincession, c-i-r-c-u-m-i-n-c-e-s-s-i-o-n, or co-inherence, c-o-i-n-h-e-r-e-n-c-e, both Latin, one more time spelling. Perichoresis is p-e-r-i, like perimeter, it means around in Greek. Choresis, c-h-o-r-e-s-i-s.

Circumference, that comes from Latin into English. Circumincession, c-i-r-c-u-m-i-n-c-e-s-s-i-o-n, a being around, or co-inherence, c-o-i-n-h-e-r-e-n-c-e. Astonishingly, Jesus uses the language of mutual indwelling with reference to him here, or him and the father in other places, and believers.

In verse 656, he abides in me, I in him. Certainly, there are differences between the way the persons of the Trinity mutually indwell one another, good grief, and the way the persons of the Trinity and believers mutually indwell one another. Oh my word, the whole point is there are similarities between how the persons of the Trinity indwell one another and how we and God indwell one another, but we better emphasize the differences lest we be accused of teaching heresy.

Yikes. Number one, the persons of the Trinity are divine and able, mysteriously, it is true, ontologically, to indwell one another for all eternity. There's another difference: this indwelling of the divine persons is eternal.

The persons have ontologically, on the order of being, indwelt one another. So we say there's one God, Deuteronomy 6:4, 1 Timothy 2:5, eternally existing in three

persons, and this mutual indwelling is eternal. So, divine indwelling, perichoresis, circumcission, or co-adherence is part of who God is as God.

God is three in one, and each of the Trinitarian persons is not one-third of God; each one is all of God. So Christians don't have one-third of God in, and with them; they have all of God with them in the person of the Holy Spirit. These things are overwhelming, and the life implications are astonishing, and I actually have a section on the implications and applications, which we'll get to in a future lecture a couple of lectures from now.

So, the Trinitarian perichoresis is, of course, unique. The persons of the Trinity do not share their deity with us, and unlike their eternal mutual indwelling, our fellowship with them had a beginning. But by God's sovereign grace, there are similarities between the Trinity's mutual indwelling and ours with the three divine persons.

I know John leaves the Holy Spirit out; he views the Spirit as post-Pentecost, but as a systematic theologian, I cannot help but bring the Spirit in, and it's legitimate as long as I say John doesn't do it. So I start with what the Bible says and then make a systematic move, a deliberate second step. Similarities.

These similarities include the divine person's fellowship with us due to their deity and grace. 1 John 1:3. Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

And the similarities include our fellowship with the Trinity. The initiative and glory are all God's. God's.

If not for the grace of God manifested in divine election, divine atonement, and divine application of salvation or union with Christ, we would know nothing about this, and this wouldn't even be true. The initiative and glory are all the Trinity's, but the resultant fellowship is also ours. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me.

John 6:57. This is exactly what I meant when I said at the beginning of these lectures: union with Christ is most wonderful, and it is most bewildering. Who can understand these things? Only God has life in himself, and so he is the living Father.

John 6:57. When Jesus says, I live because of him, he speaks of his existence in the incarnation, is my understanding. Those who feed on Christ by faith also live because of him.

That is, the eternal life, eternally resident in the Father and the Son, is communicated to us in the incarnate Son in his atonement and resurrection and in the spirits applying it to us. This union is also indispensable for fallen human beings to be united to God. Excuse me, the incarnation. What I said is true, but in the context here of this

lecture, the incarnation of the eternal Son is indispensable for fallen human beings to be united with him.

Verse 56, a theological axiom, no incarnation, no union with Christ. Oh, it skips steps. No incarnation, no sinless life of Jesus, no crucifixion of Jesus, no resurrection of Jesus, no pouring out the Holy Spirit of Pentecost to join us to Christ.

If the Son of God hadn't become a man, we would not be joined to him by grace through faith as the Spirit worked to join us to Christ. Five passages, that was just the first one—the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son in John 10:37 and 38.

The Good Shepherd discourse this time, John 10:37, if I'm doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. Excuse me, if I'm not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I in the Father.

I'm just reading them ahead of time. Of course, I'm going to explain them, put them in context, explain them, and draw the theology out. That's called exegetical theology.

It's what I do. What a way to earn one's living for 35 years. And now, in retirement, writing, and editing and doing these lectures, praise the Lord.

After the Jews try to bait him into claiming to be the Messiah, Jesus says they're not part of the people of God, and thus they do not believe in him. Yikes. Oh, verse 26.

You do not believe because you're not among my sheep. Oh, Jesus does not. Beat around the bush.

Wow. Once again, he is being merciful. He must confront the error.

But Jesus' own believe in him. He knows them, and they obey him. He gives them eternal life, and they will never perish.

You do not believe me because you're not my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them.

They follow me. I give them eternal life. They shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.

My Father who's given them to me is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of his hand. I and the Father are one in context in our ability to preserve the

sheep as the people of God. Jesus gives his sheep, his people, eternal life, and they will never perish.

No one can seize them from his hand or the Father's hands. 28, 29. He and the Father are one in preserving God's people.

Verse 30. Jesus is accused of blasphemy. The Jews again pick up stones to stone him.

Jesus asks for which of his good works they want to do so. They are indignant. The Jews answered him, it is not for a good work that we're going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.

They cannot deny Jesus healed a lame man. Chapter 5. Gave sight to a blind man. Chapter 9. So, they steer the conversation in another direction.

They refer to his saying, I and the Father are one. He, a mere human being, in their estimation, dares to exercise divine prerogatives, claiming to bestow eternal life and preserve God's people. Jesus defends himself using a Jewish argument from the greater to the lesser.

From Psalm 82 and verse 6. Jesus uses this in John 10:34 to 36. If God did the more difficult thing and called human rulers who stand in God's place gods, which is exactly what he did in the Psalm, Psalm 82:6. In that psalm, God is not very happy with those gods, because they're not, they're standing in his place, but they're corrupting justice so that he will judge them. If God called human beings who represent him on earth, in some way, as rulers or judges, gods, why do Jesus' hearers complain when he does the easier thing? He calls himself the Son of God.

On its face, this argument does not prove the deity of Christ. That's not exactly even what he's doing. He's justifying his ability to call himself Son.

But if one looks at it a little more carefully, his deity is implied because he says, do you say of him whom the Father consecrated, it's the word sanctified, and sent into the world, you are blaspheming because I said I'm the Son of God? He says the Father set him apart, consecrated him, and sent him into the world. That's a divine claim. It's a claim of his pre-existence.

So, the argument itself, the wow-ma-homer Jewish argument, from greater to lesser, from harder to easier, in this case, doesn't prove his deity. It's not his intention at that point, but the details of it actually do imply his deity. Verse 38, even though you do not believe me, believe the works that you, the works that the Father gave me to do, the works that I do.

Believe them, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father. Here we go again. Again, the hearers seek to arrest him, verse 39, for his claims are stupendous.

He declares that the one whom they regard as their God is in him, and he is in their God. Here, for the first time in John, Jesus speaks of the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son. In our last passage in John 6, it was the mutual indwelling, or abiding, they're synonymous, of Jesus and his disciples.

Now, for the first time, the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son. This mutual indwelling, again, perichoresis, or circumcession, is an important corollary of the fact that God is the Holy Trinity. There's only one God who exists eternally in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and these three are not merely successive modes of existence, as in the heresy of modalism, or modalistic monarchianism in the early church.

They're not merely successive modes of existence of the one being of God. Modalism said in the Old Testament that God appeared as Father. The same unique single being, not three in one, appeared in the Gospels as Son, and after Pentecost, the same God, not distinguished, not existing in three persons at the same time, but successively, Father in Old Testament, Son in Gospels, Holy Spirit post-Pentecost.

That's not what Christian theology teaches. Rather, the three persons simultaneously exist as three persons in God. We see it in Jesus' baptism.

The Father speaks from heaven, and the Son, the Spirit, appears as a theophany, a pneumatophany, coming down from God, alighting on Jesus, and remaining on him. From all eternity, there has always been the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God. Perichoresis, or circumcession, is a corollary of these truths.

It maintains that the three Trinitarian persons are not each one-third of the deity but that each is fully God. The Father is all of God. The Son is all of God.

So, Jesus could say, don't you understand, Philip, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father, and the Spirit, not often mentioned by John in these contexts, is all of God. Yes, yet they're not three gods, but only one God. The entirety of the divine essence resides in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

That is what this mutual indwelling means. Or, to say it another way, the three persons mutually indwell one another. It's the same thing.

The Father indwells the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son indwells the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit indwells the Father and the Son. Although the persons are distinguishable, and we must distinguish them, they are inseparable.

We must distinguish the persons. Only the Son became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, not the Father, not the Spirit. Only the Son lived a sinless life, not the Father, not the Spirit.

Only the Son died and was raised on the third day to be the Savior of the world, not the Father nor the Spirit. Nevertheless, they're inseparable. And even the Atonement is spoken of in inseparable terms in the New Testament, where 2 Corinthians 5 says God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.

And Hebrews 9:14 says, why do I always forget a few verses? I may be feeling a need for a Christian tattoo. Hebrews 9, yes, I got it right. 9:14 says, Christ, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without blemish to God.

It's actually speaking of the blood of Christ, cleansing us from all unrighteousness. Christ, through the eternal Spirit, through the Holy Spirit, offered himself without blemish to God. Only the Son died on the cross.

But the cross is the work, if you will, specifically of the Son. But due to the inseparability of the divine persons, God was in Christ, reconciling, 2 Corinthians 5, and Christ in his offering himself up on the cross as a priestly offering and sacrifice, did so through the Spirit. We distinguish the persons.

We never separate them. Although the persons are distinguishable, they are inseparable. And another way to confess their inseparability is to affirm mutual indwelling.

Thus, because the Father indwells the Son and vice versa, Jesus is not guilty of blasphemy. When he speaks, the Father speaks. When he acts, the Father acts.

Moreover, this mutual indwelling, to which John 10.38 attests, is the basis for the mutual indwelling of the Father and Son and Spirit and believers in chapters 14 and 17. It's a good time to break because next, we take up the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son, and they and believers in John 14.

This is Dr. Robert Peterson in his teaching on the Holy Spirit and Union with Christ. This is session 9, Foundations for Union with Christ, John's Gospel, John 6 and 10.