

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 11, Foundations for Union with Christ, John 17

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This is Dr. Robert Peterson in his teaching on the Holy Spirit and Union with Christ. This is session 11, Foundations for Union with Christ, John 17.

We continue our studies in Union with Christ, particularly now Union with Christ in John's Gospel, and we are up to John 17, which speaks of the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son, and the Son and believers.

The Son sees himself in the great priestly prayer of John 17; he sees himself as having completed his mission and returned to the Father. That's his mind. That's his viewpoint. In my estimation, the traditional division is correct.

Jesus prays for himself, verses 1-5, his disciples verses 6-19, and the world verses 20-26. Jesus prays in verse 21, John 17:21, verse 20, I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son is the basis for the unity of those who will believe in Jesus through the Apostle's witness.

Jesus prays that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may be in us, that the world may believe that you have sent me—mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son, and the Son and believers. Believers are in the Father and the Son.

My heading is wrong, I apologize. There should be mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son, and the Father and the Son, and believers. Believers are in the Father and the Son.

Only here, John speaks of believers being in the Father and the Son. Every other time, believers are said to be in the Son. As previously noted in John 14:23, the Father and Son are said to indwell believers 14:23. John thus encourages systematizing his teachings.

In fact, though John never says systematically, we conclude that we are in the Holy Trinity. This is an inescapable conclusion, given the unity of the Godhead. We distinguish the divine persons but never separate them.

Even the separation evidenced by Jesus' cry of dereliction from the cross in Matthew 27:46, My God, my God, why have you abandoned me, is relational and not ontological. It did not disrupt the Trinitarian being of God. Here, believers are caught up in the mutual indwelling of the Godhead.

We maintain the creator-creature distinction and insist that the Trinity indwells one another and us in ways we do not indwell the Trinity. Still, it is mysterious and marvelous to try to understand that believers are in the Trinity, in a creaturely, grace-caused way, through Christ and the work of the Spirit. How's that for qualifications? We participate in the divine love and life that the Trinitarian persons have always shared in a creaturely way.

God is the eternal, infinite creator. We are neither eternal nor infinite. Well, we're not the creator.

We're not creators equal. Either we're creatures. God is infinite, eternal, and the creator.

We are finite and limited. We're immortal, we're created, and then we last forever, but we're not eternal. And we are creatures, and we always will be.

And the mutual indwelling of the Trinitarian persons is by nature. It's who they are as the one God. Our indwelling of the Trinity, those words are just outrageous, is by grace.

Not by nature. It is only through Christ and union with him that we participate in God's love and life. Although John doesn't teach it, Paul plainly teaches that the Spirit is the main actor joining us to Christ, even as he's the main actor in the application of salvation.

In a creaturely, grace-caused way, through Christ and the operation of the Holy Spirit, believers participate in the divine love and the divine life that the Trinitarian persons have always shared. God brings us into union with Himself. It seems to me, even during these very lectures, after teaching these things for many, many years, that I have made some progress in understanding.

That is because this is new to us in many ways, and in some ways, we are impacted by it in ways we are perhaps not impacted by things we've always believed. Namely, that God gives eternal life, God gives us eternal life, and we have fellowship with God. But those are two different ways of saying the same thing.

When we say we have eternal life, we mean we who are spiritually dead and devoid of the life of God, Ephesians 2:1 to 4, have been made alive with Christ, raised up with him, and were made to sit in the heavenly places with him. We share God's

eternal life. Furthermore, 1 John 1, around verse 3, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

It rolls off of our lips, it's kind of commonplace to us, but it is not. We fellowship with the eternal, immortal God. So really, this perichoresis business as wonderful as it is, is not altogether new.

It is as incomprehensible as creatures dead in sin, participating and enjoying God's eternal life now and forever, and even those same creatures having fellowship with the triune God now and forever. The co-adherents of the Father and Son and the Son's co-adherents with believers. Jesus continues to talk to the Father in verses 22 and 23.

The divine glory the Father gave to the incarnate Son is the basis for believers being unified, even as the Father and Son are unified. The glory that you have given me, John 17:22, I have given to them, that they may be one, even as we are one. Jesus adds verse 23, I in them and you in me, Father, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them, even as you loved me.

Jesus adds verse 23, he combines the Father's indwelling the Son with his own indwelling believers. I repeat, the divine co-adherents, perichoresis, and circumcission are unique and cannot be duplicated with mere creatures. Still, the measure that Jesus gives for Christian unity is that between the Father and the Son.

And that unity involves the Father's indwelling the Son and the Son's indwelling Christians. Once more, John points us in a missional direction. All of this is true.

God in us and us in God, so that the world may know that you sent me, Jesus says, and that you love the world, even as you loved me. In that regard, I speak reverently: God is a missionary God, and his Son surely is a great missionary with a capital M. Jesus returns to the theme of love in verse 26. He rehearses his words earlier.

25, O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. 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. Jesus returns to the theme of love and rehearses the words given earlier, verses 6 through 8, that tell us he revealed the Father to the ones the Father gave him.

Now he adds, he will keep revealing the Father to them. His purpose is that the love the Father had for the Son may be in the disciples and that Christ may be in them. It is fitting that the last three words of this great prayer speak of the Son's indwelling the people of God as a fulfillment of the ministry given him by the Father, and I in them.

It's the same for the Greek text, and I myself in them. Conclusion for John's gospel. The gospel of John has much to say about union with Christ.

John never speaks of believers dying with Christ or being buried and raised with him, as does Paul, nor does he speak, as Paul does, of God's blessing us in Christ. Instead, Jesus speaks largely in the first person, in his discourses of the bread of life, the good shepherd, the vine, the branches, and in his high priestly prayer to teach complementary truths to those revealed by Paul in his letters. The Father and the Son indwell one another.

The Father and the Son will indwell believers. In fact, the Spirit's going to come, and he's going to be with them and in them. The Father and Son and believers will mutually indwell one another.

Father and Son indwell one another. Father and Son will indwell believers, and the Spirit will, too. Father and the Son and believers will mutually indwell one another.

Father and the Son indwell one another. John declares that the Father is in the Son and indwells him. The Son is in the Father, and the Father and the Son are in one another.

In sum, the Father and Son mutually indwell one another. It is what it means for God to be a tri-unity. If I say bi-unity, it just means this is as much as John has said up to this point, and the Lord used Paul to flesh this out in Trinitarian terms.

I'm not denying that God has always been three in one. However, he has not always made that known, and it seems to me the doctrine of the Trinity is a subset of the doctrine of grace. We learn that there are two persons in the Godhead when the second person becomes a human being for us sinners and our salvation, ultimately dying and being raised.

We learn that God is a tri-unity when the Father and the Son send the Spirit at Pentecost. God always has been that way, but he doesn't reveal that fully until redemptive history moves to the Incarnation and then to Pentecost. The Father is in the Son.

Addressing the Father before his death and resurrection, Jesus prays concerning believers. He says, I in them and they and you in me. 17:23.

I, Jesus, in believers, and you, Father, in me, Jesus said. And the Father indwells the Son. Being in the Son is equivalent to indwelling the Son, as the following parallelism reveals.

Jesus says to Philip, do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say to you, I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. The Father is in me. The Father dwells in me.

John 14:10. Additionally, the Son is in the Father. Jesus prepares the disciples for his exit and the Spirit's entrance. In that day, you will know that I am in the Father.

14:20. In point of fact, the Father and Son are in one another. The Father is in me. I am in the Father.

10:38. Do you not believe I'm in the Father, and the Father is in me? 14:10. Believe me, I'm in the, and the Father is in me. 14:11. Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you. 17:21. That's four times.

We conclude then that the Father and the Son are in one another or, said differently, indwell one another. Because of this perichoresis, mutual divine indwelling, amazingly, seeing Jesus, a man on earth, means seeing the invisible Father. 14:9. None of the passages above include the Holy Spirit in the mutual indwelling.

This fits John's pattern of relegating the Spirit's ministries largely to after Pentecost. Thus, by admitting that John does not say so, we systematize his teachings and include the Holy Spirit. All three Trinitarian persons are in one another.

They share the divine life. Each of them is holy God and is in the other two divine persons. I won't draw that out again, lest I put you to sleep.

The Father and the Son will indwell believers. John affirms that the Son will be in believers and the Father and the Son will come to make their home with them. In sum, S-U-M, the Father and the Son will indwell believers.

The Son will be in believers. Jesus promises that when he sends a spirit of truth, you will know that I am in my Father, you in me, and I in you. 14:20. Not only will Christ indwell believers, he will also make them aware of his presence.

In his priestly prayer of the Father, Jesus twice says he will be in believers. In believers. Jesus gives the disciples glory so that they may be united even as we are one.

I in them, and you in me. 17:22-23. A few verses later, he says he made the Father known to the disciples and will continue to do so that the Father's love for the Son may be in them and I in them—verse 26.

Moreover, both the Father and the Son will indwell Christians. Jesus communicates this vital truth with a warm image. Anyone who loves and obeys Jesus will receive a special blessing and be especially loved by the Father.

And speaking of the Father, Jesus declares we will come to him and make our home with him. 14:23. The Father and the Son will make their dwelling place with believers. Of course, Fuller's New Testament revelation teaches us to include the Spirit in this divine indwelling.

In fact, Paul chiefly assigns this role to the Spirit. Carson cites St. Augustine in this verse as arguing for, quote, the indwelling of the triune God in the believer, close quote. I am delighted to see St. Augustine systematizing what John does not say.

The Father and the Son and believers will indwell one another. John teaches that believers will be in the Father and the Son. Jesus and believers will be in one another, and Jesus and his disciples will mutually abide in one another.

Again, to summarize, the Father and the Son and believers will mutually indwell one another. Believers will be in the Father and the Son. Jesus prays for the unity of future believers and uses the unity of the Father and Son as his measure.

Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us. 17:21. John frequently says Jesus and believers will be in one another or abide in one another. Jesus predicts and quotes that, on that day, you will know that I'm in my Father, you in me, and I in you.

14:20. Jesus and his true disciples will mutually abide in one another. My flesh is true food. My blood is true drink.

Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. 6:55-56. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

I'm 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. Because of the Father's love for the Son and their love for the world and because of the Son's incarnation, death, and resurrection, believers will be in the Father and the Son.

Amazing as it sounds, believers will mutually indwell the Trinitarian persons as an act of grace insofar as creatures can partake of the divine life. David Crump's words are pointed and quote, mutually indwelling the life of God as the heart and soul of John's understanding of salvation. Every believer's inclusion within the exchange of divine life and love between the Father and the Son is the essence, the heart, and the soul of his message about eternal life, close quote.

That's a journal article, David Crump, re-examining the Johannine Trinity, perichoresis or deification, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 59, number 4, year 2006, page 410. That quote was from. John includes the Holy Spirit in the mission of God. Jesus will ask the Father to send the Spirit to indwell and be with believers, and they will know him.

They will know the Spirit, John 14, 17. Although John does not correlate the Spirit's work and union with Christ as Paul does, John provides the raw materials for systematic theology to do so. I do not apologize for my reputation of being repetitious concerning such a point because it shows I'm seeking and working hard to base my systematic theology upon the Bible.

No apology. Application. The question cries to be asked.

So what? What difference does this Johannine theology make? First of all, believers should be filled with wonder and worship at these truths and the realities they convey. What human beings would conceive of them? No human being. To me, it's evidence of the divine fingerprints all over the Gospel of John.

Who would make this stuff up? Here is much food for thought and for the adoration of a God who would love us like that. Second, we must eat and drink the Son of God, who is our true food, 6:55-57. That is, let me do those verses again.

They're so rich. John 6:55-57. My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.

Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. No wonder he scandalized the Jews. As the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he will also live because of me.

That is, we must eat and drink the Son of God, our true food. We must rely on him for spiritual sustenance as we rely on our daily bread for physical life. The incarnate Son gives us eternal life now and will raise us from the dead unto eternal life at the end of the age.

Third, because of the co-adherence of the divine persons, we must focus on the Son to learn of the invisible Father, 14:8-11. Our study of union with Christ must lead us not away from his person but deeper into his person. We derive many benefits, but they are only from union with Christ. He must remain our focus.

If we want to learn of God's character, words, and ways, we must study Christology because he said, whoever has seen me has seen the Father. I am in the Father, and the Father is in me, John 14.9-10. Fourth, we are branches who have the privilege and responsibility of abiding in the vine, the Son of God. This means that we abide in

his love, the love which was the Father loved him, John 15:9. We continue in a personal relationship with Jesus.

Because we know that he loves us, we love him in return. We love him who first loved us. We enjoy rich fellowship with him as we walk with him in obedience.

Answered prayers and joy follow. Fifth, after hearing of the mutual indwelling with the Father and the Son in Jesus' prayer, in John 17:22-23, the glory you've given me, Father, I've given to them that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one so that the world may know that you sent me and love them even as you loved me. Sixth, after hearing of that mutual indwelling of the Father and Son in Jesus' prayer in 17:22-23, we must be motivated to live out the unity for which Christ prays.

It is shameful for us to allow doctrine, prejudice, or anything else to keep us from welcoming other Christians as Christ welcomed us. Romans 15:7. Accept one another as God has accepted you. Or is it Christ? Either my quote's wrong, or my statement's wrong.

I can't live with that. Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you. Oh, it's even better.

For the glory of God. I love it. Instead, we must be doctrinally sound believers, which includes living out the Bible's doctrines of love for and fellowship with other believers.

That is, we should be able to give the right hand of fellowship to any other true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. It doesn't mean we throw all denominational distinctive to the wind. It doesn't mean we follow a LCD, least common denominator Christianity, because other things are important besides the gospel.

But it means the gospel is most important and is surely the basis of our receiving one another and our fellowship with other believers. Sixth, we too are caught up in the mission of God. We are to pray that God might make our lives count in bringing the good news to those who need it.

This concludes our study of union with Christ in the fourth gospel. And now we turn to union with Christ in Paul's letters.

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