

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 16, Foundations for Union with Christ in Paul, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, And 2 Timothy, Initial and Final Greetings

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This is Dr. Robert Peterson and his teaching on the Holy Spirit and Union with Christ. This is session 16, Foundations for Union with Christ in Paul, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians and 2 Timothy, and then language and literature, greetings, and in Christ.

In this lecture, our goal is to finish Paul's union with Christ texts and then begin a study of the union in Paul in terms of his language and viewing his letters as literature.

Colossians 3:15, Colossians 3:12, put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience, bearing with one another and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other. As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your heart to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

After teaching that Christians have died with Christ and been raised with him in Colossians 2:20, 3:1, and 3:3, Paul applies these two aspects of union with Christ to the church. Believers are to put to death sinful practices because they died to Christ, Colossians 3:5-11. And Christians are to put on godly qualities and actions, verses 12-17, because they've been raised with Christ. Dying with him involves putting to death sinful practices.

Being raised with him involves putting on godly attributes and actions. Among them are letting Christ's peace rule in their congregation and being grateful to God, verse 15. That the apostle means communal peace and not merely peace in individual hearts is communicated by the reference to the body of Christ.

Quote, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. God called us individually to himself in salvation. But that individual call involves our being called into the people of God, the church.

We were called to promote harmony and unity when we, quote, were called in one body. There is the interplay between the plural hearts and the singular body. As God's people submit to Christ's peace and promote harmony in the congregation, they fulfill a purpose for which God summons them to the body of Christ.

It's referenced to the body that indeed speaks of union with Christ. 1 Thessalonians 4.16, starting with 4:12, 4:13, the special second coming passage. 1 Corinthians 4:13, but we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of Christ, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.

And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord.

Therefore, encourage one another with these words. The Thessalonians had become confused in their understanding of the last things. They did not anticipate some of their number dying before the second coming.

When that occurred, their faith was upset. Paul writes to calm their fears. He describes Christ's return.

Christ will descend, and an archangel will announce his coming, accompanied by a trumpet blast. And deceased believers will not miss out. Rather, they will be raised from the dead and will accompany living believers to meet Jesus in the air as a welcoming committee.

When the Lord comes back, the dead in Christ will rise first. Being dead in Christ refers to the status that describes all who die as believers in Christ. The use of in Christ here does not describe the manner in which such deaths took place but rather indicates the sphere under which the dead are situated.

Even death does not break the union. We are still in him. Union with Christ is definitive.

It defines the people of God. So, Paul could say in those salutations and conclusions, which we'll examine in a few minutes, Lord willing, that he uses in Christ frequently in those epistolary salutations to designate the people of God. We are defined by union with Christ.

Union with Christ is personal. Paul uses the image of marriage, the most intimate of human relationships, to communicate spiritual union between believers and Christ. And union with Christ is not only definitive and personal.

It is permanent. Death itself cannot separate us from the Son of God. The dead in Christ will rise first.

Deceased believers are described as the dead in Christ. We are joined to him in life and in death. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, the end of Romans 8, and nothing can separate us from Christ and union with him.

2 Timothy 1:8, and 9. I chose this passage, which in some ways is parallel to Ephesians 1:4. God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world because this one is less familiar than that. God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world. In two places only, Paul speaks of a pre-creation of the world.

A temporal election of God's people, Ephesians 1:4, and right here in 2 Timothy 1:8, and 9. Therefore, Paul tells Timothy, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me, his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. In two places, Paul speaks of a pre-temporal election. God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world, Ephesians 1:4. Here, God saved us because of his own purpose and grace, which grace he gave us in Christ Jesus, literally before eternal ages.

Two places speak of pre-temporal election, and those same two places speak of pre-temporal election in Christ. Paul encourages his understudy Timothy to boldness in the ministry and willingness to suffer for the gospel. Paul speaks of Christ as the one who saved and called his people to holiness.

God did so not by taking into account human efforts but because of his own purpose and grace. Paul specifies that this grace was given to us in Christ Jesus, and again, my own translation, before eternal ages. The in Christ language is used instrumentally, as the next verse confirms, and which has now been manifested through the

appearance of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Some true believers in Christ claim that this in Christ language speaks of a condition of God foreseeing who would believe and thereby basing his election upon it. It does not. It speaks of the same thing that the rest of the in Christ language speaks of, union with Christ.

The difference is that this is pre-temporal planning, not only for God to choose a people for his name, but to plan the means of saving them in time and space. That is, Ephesians 1:4 and 2 Timothy 1:9 speak of God not only choosing a people, but choosing to save them in union with Christ. It's a prospective union, just as much union, but now planned by God and later accomplished in history by the Holy Spirit.

2 Timothy 2:1 says, you then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you've heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, and trust a faithful man who will be able to teach others also. Paul encourages his understudy, Timothy, to boldness in the ministry and willingness to suffer for the gospel, as we saw in the previous place. Here Paul seeks to encourage Timothy to persevere in the ministry.

He tells him, quote, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The apostle qualifies grace by using in Christ Jesus as a locative, indicating the sphere of Christ, the domain over which he rules. Paul thus tells Timothy to be strong in the grace that exists within Christ's realm, his kingdom, his domain.

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. As always, union speaks of a relationship to Christ. Here, specifically, it looks like the realm that God has put us in, saving us freely by his grace.

2 Timothy 2:10, remember Christ Jesus, verse 8, risen from the dead, that is divine, the offspring of David, that is human, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound. Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Paul writes as a prisoner for the sake of the gospel. Why? He does so for the sake of those whom God has chosen, quote, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. Someone will ask, if they are the elect, why do they need to obtain salvation? Aren't the elect automatically saved? The answer to both questions is that election means God's choosing people for salvation.

They do not obtain that salvation until they believe the gospel. Paul, the most fervent teacher of the doctrine of election in scripture, was also a zealous missionary.

He was eager for God's chosen people to hear the gospel, believe, and obtain salvation.

Again, Paul speaks of salvation in Christ Jesus. And here alone, he uses the very word salvation. Paul perseveres through hardships, including imprisonment, so that, quote, the elect may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, close quote.

In Christ Jesus, similar to its occurrences in 1 Timothy 1:14 and 2 Timothy 1:1, appears in apposition to a substantive, this time salvation. And like it's used in those two places, it's best regarded as indicating a state or condition. Salvation is conditioned by Christ, such that in Christ, Jesus marks out the specific Christian character of the salvation to be obtained.

Again, Campbell, *Paul in Union with Christ*. This salvation involves resurrection and eternal life on the new earth with God and all his saints. Paul uses a cipher for these concepts when he simply adds to salvation that is in Christ Jesus the words, with, eternal, close quote.

Eternal glory. We have finished our study of Pauline texts that speak of salvation. We are ready now to move to union with Christ in Paul, language, and literature.

Lewis Smedes, whom I gave credit for having the best book on union with Christ until the last 10 years, for about 50 years, his very good book, *Union with Christ*, a biblical view of the new life in Jesus Christ, was the only good book available. It still is a good book. Smedes is undoubtedly correct.

Quote, Paul's message was Christ crucified. The object of his preaching was to summon men and women to a decision about Jesus and his cross. So, in 1 Corinthians 1, he says, 2, he says, I have desired to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

But Paul was also the apostle of our union with Christ. In the new age of the spirit, close quote, Smedes. Indeed, Paul preaches Jesus' death and resurrection as the most important events in the history of the world.

And he also preaches God's means of connecting saved persons with Jesus and his cross. Union with Christ. Certainly, other New Testament authors write of union with Christ.

We acknowledge a significant doctrine of union with Christ in John's Gospel, as we have seen, and the first Epistle, which I hope we have time for. But all things considered, Smedes is right. Paul is the apostle, quoting him, of our union with Christ.

Paul, Smedes said correctly, “is the apostle of our union with Christ.” We now summarize Paul's teaching after having worked through representative texts. We now summarize the doctrine and the teaching that we draw from them, much of which you'll recognize from what we have surveyed, in four themes.

These are union in greetings in Paul's letters, in Christ's language. I've mentioned it in bits and pieces. Now, it's time to systematize.

Being in the Father and the Son, uniquely in Paul in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, chapter 1, verses 1 and 2. Participation in Jesus' narrative. So now we move to union with Christ in Paul in his language and literature. Union in greetings, the very language in Christ, being in the Father and the Son, and Paul's notion of participating in Jesus' story.

Union in greetings. We begin by pointing to a neglected feature, the appearance of the union in fully one-half of Paul's epistolary greetings at the beginning and end of his letters. In a word, union pervades his thought, Romans 1:1 and 4 through 6. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, a reference with union.

The end of Romans 16:3 and 7 to 13. Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. Greet Andronicus and Junia, who were in Christ before me. Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ. Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those in the Lord, who belong to the family of Narcissus. Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord.

Good grief, how many times does he say it? Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, Romans 16:3 and 7 through 13. I Tertius, Romans 16:22, who wrote this letter, greet you, you guessed it, in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 1:2, to the church of God that's in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.

1 Corinthians 16:19, Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 16:24, my love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 1:11, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 6:21, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will tell you everything. I pointed that one out, we actually studied that one. To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons, Philippians 1:1. Philippians 4:21, greet every saint in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 1:2, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae. Colossians 4, 7, Tychicus will tell you all about my activities, he's a beloved brother and faithful minister and faithful servant in the Lord. Colossians 4:17, see that you fulfill the ministry you have received in the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 1:11, to the church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:16, 18, rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 2 Thessalonians 1:1, to the church of the Thessalonians, in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Timothy 1:1, Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus. And lastly, Philemon 23, Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you. Whew! Paul's mind is steeped in thoughts of union with Christ.

If all 13 of his epistles contained initial and final greetings, that would make 26 slots for greetings. Paul refers to union 18 times, 15 different times, as reoccurrences overlap in those initial and final greetings. Plainly, he thinks of union with Christ when beginning and finishing his letters.

It is never far from his thoughts or prayers. In Christ language, when most people think of union with Christ, their minds immediately go to Paul's use of in Christ and its equivalents. In the Lord, in the Lord Jesus, in him, in whom.

While the apostle's presentation of union with Christ is greater than these occurrences, in Christ language plays an important part in his thought. Accordingly, we will treat it among the themes and pictures that speak of union. Again, I gratefully acknowledge a debt to Constantine Campbell in his remarkable Paul in Union with Christ, an exegetical and theological study.

I learned much from him and built upon his solid foundation of lexical semantics, exegesis, and theology. He considers the use of the preposition in or in to be flexible, the role of its context to be most significant, the spatial sense to be primary, the idea of sphere, domain, or realm as central in figurative uses, and the phrase in Christ as denoting a personal relatedness. I agree with these conclusions and draw special attention to the last one.

In Christ language denotes personal relatedness, a connection to the person of Christ. This is vital to our present concerns. In keeping with the flexibility of the preposition in, sometimes translated in, often in the expression in Christ and its synonyms, our summary will show more than eight major nuances, shades of meaning, of usage for in Christ and its equivalents.

Although recognizing these nuances is important to discourage a simplistic understanding of appearances of in Christ, this could give a false impression. While I agree with Campbell's identification of various nuances of uses in in Christ language, I underscore his last point above. Each usage of in Christ conveys personal relatedness in addition to any other meanings it may hold.

I will label this idea of personal relatedness as a broad sense of in Christ language. Here I introduce the distinction between broad and narrow senses of in Christ language. A broad sense primarily has another nuance besides direct union with Christ, while a narrow sense refers directly to union with Christ.

Every use of in Christ communicates a connection between believers and Christ that pertains to union with Christ, union in a broad sense, even if many of these uses also have other nuances. So, while we want to appreciate the trees and the nuances, we don't want to miss the forest. In Christ, language always speaks of union in a broad, indirect sense.

In this section, I will list the various major nuances in Christ language and then focus on texts that teach union with Christ in a narrow direct sense. I will not attempt to include every nuance here but will only include references that have more than three occurrences. There are many such minor nuances.

Major nuances include agency, association, cause, instrument, manner, object of faith, periphrasis for Christian, and realm, sphere, or domain. Conclusion. If you want to see those details in detail, I commend *Salvation Applied by the Spirit, Union with Christ*, as my full treatment of this subject in a book.

Conclusion. Paul's writings are replete with references to in Christ, in Christ Jesus, in him, in whom, and in the Lord, which all have the same reference, Jesus Christ. Most of these references do not refer to union with Christ in the narrow sense and direct sense but in a broad and indirect sense.

That union with Christ is not only precise and their only nuance. That is, union with Christ in the majority of references is not their precise and only nuance. They have other nuances or shades of meaning, but they always show connectedness to Christ.

Various nuances. These various nuances and shades of meaning are important in drawing attention to Christ's person and work applied to individuals and Christians. Their variety highlights various manifestations of the application of salvation.

Salvation is always in Christ, always in relation to him. And this relation is expressed as an agency, association, cause, instrument, manner, the object of faith, paraphrasis for Christians, or realm, among many other minor ways. We've chosen these eight major nuances out of 20 or more.

Paul uses in Christ language to show agency and instrumentality. The idea is that God accomplishes salvation and other things through Christ. We distinguish agency from the similar idea of instrumentality by ascribing to the former origination of this specific action.

When Paul speaks, uses in Christ to portray Christ as agent, Christ himself takes the initiative. When Paul portrays Christ as an instrument, God the Father takes the initiative and accomplishes good things through his son. Both agency and instrumentality set forth Christ as the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 1 Timothy 2:5. Paul also uses in Christ and synonyms to depict an association between Christ and his people.

At times, this association sets forth persons as influenced by Christ. The apostle uses in Christ terminology to present Jesus as the cause of various things, including various ministries. Christians engage in diverse enterprises because of the person and work of Christ.

Sometimes in Christ, language is used to show the manner in which believers do many things, which is affected by their union with Christ. At times, this portrays a manner pleasing to Christ. Many times, Paul employs in Christ nomenclature to set forth Christ as the object of saving faith.

Christian faith and hope are in him. Paul uses in Christ so commonly that it becomes a way for him to indicate the adjective or noun Christian when referring to people, roles, or churches. Most often, the apostle uses in Christ equivalents to depict, as we have seen, the realm, domain, or sphere over which Christ is Lord.

This is frequently set over against the realm of Satan, sin, and death. Jesus is Christus's victor, Christ our champion, in his death and resurrection, defeating our foes and giving us victory by transferring us into his domain. This is what we mean.

God's people submit to Christ's rule, enjoy its many benefits, and stand strong against God's enemies. Union with Christ as a nuance. As we have seen, though these expressions have many different shades of meaning and nuances, they all establish a relationship between human beings and Christ, which we have called union in a broad sense.

But at a minimum, nine occurrences speak of union with Christ in a narrow, direct sense. Their nuance is union. Christians are in union with Christ corporately and individually.

Moreover, they have a secure status before God and a new manner of life in common with other believers. Because of God the Father, they are in Christ Jesus,

who became to them, quote, wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 1 Corinthians 1:30. The crucified Christ, who to the world was nothing but foolishness and weakness, is to believers God's wisdom and power. The crucified one is the risen one, and in union with him, ours are all the blessings of salvation.

The result is that we do not boast in the world or ourselves, but in him who loved us and gave himself for us, 1 Corinthians 1:29-31. Justification, along with every other aspect of the application of salvation, comes to us in union with Christ. Believers, thus, are declared righteous in him, 2 Corinthians 5:21. Christ shared in the plight of believers and of sinners by grace through faith. By grace through faith union with Christ, believers share in him and his saving righteousness. So that key Pauline justification verse, God made him who knew sin to be sin for us, that in him we might become the righteousness of God, that use of in him speaks of union with Christ in a direct sense.

We're declared righteous in union with him and his righteousness. Union with Christ is so determinative of salvation for the apostle that he describes Christians in this way, Jesus Christ is in you, 2 Corinthians 13:5. As a corollary of this principle, those who do not have Christ in them, quote, fail to meet the test, close quote, of Christian identity, 2 Corinthians 13:5. In addition, union with the crucified and risen Lord makes people Christians, not only in the first place, as they serve God, but they continue to participate in Christ's death and resurrection, 2 Corinthians 13:4. He was crucified in weakness and lives by the power of God. So, Paul attests, quote, we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you, we will live, we live with him, we will live with him by the power of God, verse 4. Western Christians too easily individualize and contemporize the Christian faith.

We focus on ourselves as individuals and the time in which we live. While this is not completely wrong, it is short-sighted in two ways. First, scripture takes a larger view.

God joins individuals to his son in order to comprise the church. Union with Christ means union with other believers. Moreover, Paul startles us by taking a much larger view.

God plans to unite, quote, all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, Ephesians 1:10, as we have seen. Paul views union with Christ and what it accomplishes, salvation, as individual, corporate, and cosmic. We must not allow our rugged American individualism to cause us to miss a significant portion of the Bible's teaching, the corporate and cosmic dimensions.

The Bible never denies the individual. People have to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as individuals to be saved, but right away, they're in the church, and in God's plan, the whole cosmos is going to be brought together in Christ. Am I denying the existence of eternal hell? I am not.

Second, though we should not deny the existence of eternal hell, we should not neglect the present. A biblical worldview demands that we expand our horizons in light of God's past eternal plan and future eternal goal. In eternally past, Ephesians 1:4, God formulated his purpose to bring all things together in his son.

This will happen only in the fullness of time, Ephesians 1:10, that is, when Christ returns. Christ-centeredness takes on new meaning when we realize Christ will be the center of a reunited world, for it is God's plan to unite all things in Christ as a goal. In a spiritual warfare passage, Paul commends believers to put on the whole armor of God as they war against cosmic powers over present darkness, Ephesians 6:11 and 12.

While it's common to note Paul's appeal to Roman military armor and weapons, as we have seen, it is not as common to note his appeal to Isaiah's descriptions of Yahweh and Messiah engaged in war. Seen in this light, believers discover a picture of union with Christ. Christians are to put on the Lord's armor, a quote that evokes a sense of union with Christ in the matter of spiritual warfare.

In that way, we put on him. Hence, when Paul writes, quote, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might, close quote, verse 10, he urges readers to be strong due to their tie to the mighty Christ, that is, Ephesians 6:10. Paul will give up everything, including ancestry and reputation, due to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, Philippians 3:8. He regards his former laurels not only as loss, but now regards them as rubbish, a euphemism, verse 8. Why? Quote, to gain Christ and to be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, but that which comes through faith in Christ, Philippians 3:8 and 9. Paul is willing to exchange everything for Christ, for in so doing, he gains Christ and his righteousness. Campbell is convincing, quote, to be found in him, verse 9, here expresses union with Christ.

Paul has gained Christ. He is found in him, and he shares his righteousness. Because of the personal nature of gaining Christ, here justification is a subset of union with Christ.

By gaining Christ, we gain all the blessings of salvation, including saving righteousness. This profound text is basic to an understanding of union with Christ. Quote, in him, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.

It's talking of Colossians 2 now. And you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority, Colossians 2:9 and 10. First, Paul speaks of Christ's union with God.

Then the apostle speaks of our union with Christ. The two ideas are inseparable. I have a little friend that joined me.

It is only because of Christ as God's incarnate nation, it is only because Christ as God's incarnate one, that we are in Christ and become one with God. Of course, Christ's union is by nature and eternal, and our union is by grace and temporal. We believe and are joined to Christ.

He is God in the flesh, the Lord Jesus. We are sinners joined to God in Christ. Consequently, Paul here joins Christ in whom all the fullness of deity lives in the body and Christians who are given fullness in him.

We are given all that we need to use 2 Peter 1 language, maybe verse 3. We are given all we need for eternal life and godliness. The Colossians, indeed, all of God's people, are made complete in a living union with this divine Christ. They find all that they need in union with him.

In our next lecture, we will move on to being in the Father and the Son and then participating in Paul's narrative. After which, we will begin to study the Lord's willing union with Christ in Paul's pictures and themes.

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