

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 18, Union with Christ in Paul, Pictures and Themes, Marriage, New Clothing, Filled and Dwelling

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This is Dr. Robert Peterson and his teaching on the Holy Spirit and Union with Christ. This is session 18, Union with Christ in Paul, Picture and Themes, Marriage, New Clothing, Filled and Dwelling.

We continue our study of Union with Christ in Paul, exploring his pictures of union.

We're up to the conclusion of the marriage picture. Paul gifts the church with the intimate picture of union with Christ as marriage in three texts, as we have seen. Here are some conclusions.

Definition. Paul explicitly presents union with Christ in terms of marriage of Christians, of Christ and believers in Ephesians 5:22 through 32. In 1 Corinthians 15:1 Corinthians 6, excuse me, 15 to 17, he also speaks of the relation between Christ and the church as spiritual marriage.

“He who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him,” 1 Corinthians 6:17. The marriage between Christ the groom and the bride, his church, does not erase distinctions between them. The two are intimately joined, but the marriage metaphor does not confuse the two, unlike forms of mysticism in which adherents are supposedly absorbed into the deity.

Intimacy. This is Paul's most intimate picture of union with Christ, that of the closest human relationship, marriage, and sexual union between husband and wife. In his most intimate passage, he focuses on the human body and sexual relations, 1 Corinthians 6:16.

Believers are spiritually joined to Christ in marriage. Campbell draws good applications. The metaphor of marriage to Christ, “underpins ethical constraints related to sexual immorality, prohibits spiritual unfaithfulness, and requires submission of the church to her husband.”

The Holy Spirit. Paul's treatment of the believer's marriage to Christ in 1 Corinthians 6 likely refers to the Holy Spirit, “he who was joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him,” verse 17. Feast speaks of the impossibility of a sexual union between a Christian and a prostitute, quote, because the believer's body already belongs to the

Lord, through whose resurrection one's body has become a member of Christ by his spirit.

Such a union is unthinkable. Grace. We must not miss the place of God's grace in the marriage metaphor of union with Christ.

It is he who prepares the marriage. Jesus takes the initiative and sustains the relationship. His bride, the church, is the object of his affection and the recipient of his care.

Christ, quote, himself is the savior of the body, Ephesians 5:23, my translation, who loves his bride and gives himself unto death for her, verse 25. He lavishes upon her provision and care, verse 29. All of this highlights Christ's wonderful grace shown to his bride.

The church does not earn Christ's love. She is entirely the beneficiary of her lover's advances in her direction—faithfulness and obedience to Christ, our husband.

Paul speaks as a father who betrothed the Corinthians to one husband, even Christ, 2 Corinthians 11:2. Paul aims to present the Corinthians in purity to Jesus at his second coming. Paul does not want his readers to be, quote, led astray from pure devotion to Christ, close quote, verse 3. We, too, must be on guard against impostors and their attempts to seduce us into spiritual adultery. Moreover, as a bride submits to her loving husband in the bonds of matrimony, so the church submits to Christ, her loving husband, Ephesians 5:23, 24.

Campbell's words fittingly conclude our summary of Paul's nuptial ideas of union, quote, the metaphorical joining of husband and wife and their becoming one flesh indicate a profound union between Christ and the church. The metaphor is personal and implies a bond of intimacy that goes well beyond the other metaphors that Paul uses in portraying union with Christ, close quote, and that is, of course, from Campbell's book *Paul and Union with Christ*. A little-known picture that appears in two passages is that of new clothing.

In two passages, Paul directly speaks of union with Christ in terms of believers putting on Christ as they would new clothes, Romans 13:14, Romans 13:27. Two passages directly use the metaphor of getting dressed to signify union with Christ. Paul uses both the indicative and the imperative.

First, the indicative quote, as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ, close quote, Galatians 3:27. Believers have clothed themselves with Christ, they have been united with him, and there it's under the picture of Christian baptism. Paul also uses the imperative, which is to quote, put on the Lord Jesus

Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires, as in the close quote in Romans 13 and 14.

Paul exhorts readers to live for Christ and to live as he lived. We put on Christ once and for all, as symbolized in baptism, but we live out that change of clothes the rest of our lives. Two other kinds of texts relate indirectly to union with Christ.

One kind of text speaks of believers putting on clothing to indicate the new Christian lifestyle. Ephesians 4:21 to 24, Colossians 3:9 to 14. They are to take off the old ways and put on the new qualities of holiness, compassion, and patience.

Another kind of text related indirectly to union with Christ uses language of a change of clothing to point to the eschatological change believers will experience. 1 Corinthians 15:53, 54. 2 Corinthians 5:2 to 4. These texts focus on what God will do for Christians when Christ comes back.

He will clothe them with immortality and eternal life. That is, God will transform them, equipping them with resurrected bodies for eternal life on the new earth. Another way Paul talks about union with Christ is this mysterious language that I'm afraid we too often avoid, where he says we believers are filled to all the fullness.

Four times, Paul speaks of the church in exalted terms as the fullness of Christ or of God or as filled in or with Christ or God. Twice explicitly and twice implicitly, these passages pertain to union with Christ. Ephesians 1:22 and 23.

He put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1:22, 23. Ephesians 3, 19.

The goal is to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:19. Ephesians 4:13.

Another goal statement. Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4:13.

And lastly, Colossians 2:9, and 10. In him, Christ, the whole fullness of dwells of Godhead dwells bodily. The whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him who is the head of all rule and authority.

Colossians 2: 9 and 10. Ephesians 1:22, 23. God put all things under his feet and gave him his head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Christ grants fullness to his church in two ways: as a status given and as a task to be performed. As the triumphant Lord who fills all things with his mighty presence, he grants the church the change of status.

The triumphant Lord does that. The church is filled in him. Colossians 2:10.

And it is already his fullness. Ephesians 1:22. At the same time Christ gives fullness to his church as a task to perform and as a goal to be attained.

He prays that the Ephesians quote may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:19. Paul's goal is that the other churches attain the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:13. O'Brien's summary of this passage. Ephesians 1:22, 23 passage on the fullness merits quotation.

God has given Christ as head over all things for the church. His supremacy over the cosmos is seen to be for the benefit of his people. The church is said to be Christ's body.

This is not stated of the cosmos. Huh. As it was in Greek philosophy, interestingly.

The final clause in verse 23 makes the additional point that the church is Christ's fullness. In Colossians, the term fullness was applied to Christ. Here in Ephesians, it's reference, and the referent is the church.

As head over all things, Christ exercises his sovereign rule by filling the universe. But only the church is his body. And he rules it.

That is fills the church in a special way with his spirit, grace, and gifts. It is his fullness. I just want to read some other texts that speak of this admittedly mysterious and neglected theme.

Ephesians 3:14 through 19. For this reason, I bow my knees before the father, Paul writes, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. According to the riches of his glory, he may grant you strength with power through his spirit in your inner being.

So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of God that surpasses knowledge. That you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

There's our expression. And then Ephesians 4:11 through 16. And the risen Christ gave apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

So that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and captured, carried about by every wind of doctrine by human cunning by craftiness, and deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way to him into him who is the head into Christ from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped when each part is working properly makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. And one more passage.

I just want to get these before I summarize the major points that the apostle communicates through this picture. This idea of Christians being filled with all the fullness of God or all the fullness of Christ. Colossians 2:9 and 10 combine the fullness of deity in Jesus with the fullness he gives to his people so they are sufficient in him, not lacking.

For in Christ, all the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him who is the head of all rule and authority. Conclusion. This magnificent theme is illuminated by three distinctions.

First, we distinguish Christ's fullness from that of his church. All the fullness of the deity is embodied in Christ. Christ.

He is the fullness of God incarnate. As the crucified risen Lord exalted to God's right hand he fills all in all. Ephesians 1:23.

Out of his fullness, the divine human Christ gives fullness to the church. Quote, in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily and you have been filled in him. Close quote Colossians 2:9, and 10 as we just read.

Second, we first distinguish Christ's fullness from that which is ours in him as members of his church. Second, we distinguish the church's fullness as status already given as in the indicative, if you will, and task as that which must still be attained or as is in the imperative, so to speak. Christ gives fullness to his church as both a status granted and a task to be accomplished.

As Lord who fills all things with his mighty presence, he grants the church the status of fullness. The church is filled in him Colossians 2:10, and the church is his fullness. Ephesians 1:22.

Those are those communication statuses already attained. It's not a goal for us it is part of our identity. We are part of his fullness in the church.

Nevertheless, at the same time, Christ gives fullness to his church as a task to do and a goal to be reached. Paul prays that the Ephesians may be filled to all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:19.

Paul's goal is that the church that the church is attained to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4:13. The already not yet distinction in Paul, as we previously mentioned, is his way of saying that the Christian life is not a self-help program.

It's based upon the mighty redemptive deeds of God, the imperative, the instructions to live in the way God wants us to. It's based upon the indicative statements of what God has done for us in his son. On the other hand, the indicative statements of God's mighty deeds that have already been accomplished for us are not an end in itself, but God gives the indicative in order to elicit the imperative.

He tells us what he's done for us in order to claim us and our lives so that we might live for him with our whole hearts. So, the indicative and imperative go together, and this notion of the terms are taken, of course, from grammar ink from Greek from Greek grammar and then applied to theology in the Christian life. The indicative and the imperative is all over Paul's epistles.

So, to speak in very general terms, Romans 1 through 11 speak in the indicative, Romans 12 to 16 speak in the imperative, Ephesians 1 to 3 is the indicative, Ephesians 4 to 6 is the imperative, and so forth. It's the way he works. It is so sound and encouraging.

Third, by discussing fullness and being filled with the fullness of Christ, we distinguish the already and not yet. Already, in Christ, we believers have the status of divine fullness, Ephesians 1:23, Colossians 2:10, and are assured of God's love. Not yet have we attained a lifestyle corresponding to this exalted status.

No kidding. Wow. So, this is a humbling teaching.

Already, we have attained the status of divine fullness. Really? Yes, in the indicative, in God's plan, and even in God's doing in Christ and in joining us to Christ. But that's not the end.

God is not finished with us yet. He gives us the spirit to make this true, to join us to his Son, and also to empower us to live for his Son. Not yet have we lived a lifestyle perfectly in tune with this exalted status.

So, his teaching on the fullness of Christ and then in Christ for the Church motivates the Church to stay on its toes in pursuit of holiness and love. A very important Pauline idea that we have encountered again and again is indwelling. And it is time to summarize that teaching for us in a brief compass, pulling together Paul's teaching on indwelling.

The Holy Spirit savingly unites God's people to Christ and takes up residence in and with them in a special relationship. I count at least 16 places where Paul teaches indwelling. Romans 5:5 Romans 8:9-11 But if the Spirit of Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit of life is life because of righteousness.

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. 1 Corinthians 3:16 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 So glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 6:16 of 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 2 Corinthians 13:5 Galatians 2:20 Galatians 3:13-14 Galatians 4:6 Galatians 4:7 Galatians 4:8 Galatians 5:9 Galatians 5:10 Galatians 5:11 For this reason, Ephesians 3:14 and 17, I bow my knees before the Father, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love and so forth, Colossians 1:27, to them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory, Colossians 1:27.

Colossians 3:11, here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all. Colossians 3:11, 1 Thessalonians 4:8, whoever disregards this, disregards not man, but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you, 1 Thessalonians 4:8. And finally, 2 Timothy 1:14, by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you, 2 Timothy 1:14. These are all the passages in Paul that speak of indwelling.

The apostle employs many different expressions to portray the delightful reality that the Trinity makes its home in and with God's people, as individuals and as the church. Usually, Paul speaks of the Spirit. He says the Spirit indwells us or was given to us, we have the Spirit, we receive the Spirit, and the Father sent the Spirit into our hearts.

Six times, he ascribes indwelling to the Son. He says Christ is in us, lives in us, or dwells in our hearts. Romans 8:10, 2 Corinthians 13:5, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 3:17, Colossians 1:27, and 3:11.

Six times, Paul says Christ indwells us. Romans 8:10, 2 Corinthians 13:5, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 3:17, Colossians 1:27, and Colossians 3:11. Two times, the apostle associates indwelling with God the Father. He says believers are a temple for God who dwells among us and are a dwelling place for the Father. 2 Corinthians 6:16,

Ephesians 2:22. Ephesians 2:22, 2 Corinthians 6:16. It is correct to give pride of place to the Holy Spirit as the person of the Godhead who indwells the saints.

If there are 16 places where Paul speaks of Christians being indwelt, two of them speak of the Father, and six of them speak of the Son, then eight speak of the Holy Spirit. Scripture does this because the Spirit is the prime mover in the application of salvation, or said differently, in uniting us to Christ. Most passages attribute indwelling to the Spirit, but it is incorrect to limit indwelling to the Spirit.

Christians are indwelt by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This should not surprise us because it is already entailed in the Orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, which I summarize. There's one God who eternally exists in three persons, or modes, or centers of consciousness, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

These persons are never separated in essence but must be distinguished. The three Trinitarian persons mutually indwell one another. The operation of the three persons is inseparable.

The unity of essence and inseparability of operation of the three persons should have led us to conclude via systematics, even if Scripture never said so, that believers are indwelt by the Trinity. But Scripture does say so. This incredible corollary to union with Christ would have come to no surprise to the Lutheran and Reformed theologians in the generation after the Reformation, that is, and even the generation after that.

We call them Orthodox Lutheran and Orthodox Reformed theologians. Listen to Richard Muller, who includes indwelling in his definition of union with Christ for the post-Reformation Orthodox, both Reformed and Lutheran. This is from his valuable tool, Richard A. Muller *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, drawn principally from Protestant scholastic theology, another way of speaking of the Lutheran and Reformed Orthodox theologians, that is, the second generation after Luther and Calvin and Zwingli who built upon their work and systematized their work more than the original Reformers had done.

Muller wrote that "The Orthodox thus define the unio mystica, mystical union or union with Christ as the spiritual conjunction, conjunctio spiritualis, of the triune God with the believer in and following justification. It is a substantial and graciously effective indwelling." One more time. "The Orthodox thus define the mystical union as the spiritual conjunction of the triune God, of the triune God with the believer in and following justification. It's a substantial and graciously effective indwelling."

Notice both triune God and indwelling. Being united to Christ by grace through faith in the gospel means being indwelt by the Holy Trinity.

From the beginning, God dwelt with his people in the Garden of Eden, the tabernacle, the temple, the incarnation of Christ, the Son of God, and now the church. Indeed, as God's presence defines the tabernacle and temple, so the spirit's indwelling defines the church, universal in every particular church. In a word, it is the indwelling of God that makes a church a church.

Marvelously, he indwells every believer individually and dwells within believers corporately as they gather to worship him. I'm going to set us up for our next lecture by just introducing union with Christ and the biblical story. Union with Christ is understood properly only if viewed within the broad sweep of the biblical story.

Here are the highlights of that story. Union and eternity past. Union and creation.

Union and the fall. Union and the incarnation. Union and Christ's work.

Union and the new creation. I'll just do a brief overview to prepare us for what's going to come—union and eternity past.

In two passages, Paul teaches that God chose his people for salvation in Christ. That is, from the very beginning of God's planning for their salvation, God not only chose a people to belong to himself, but he also planned to actually save them by joining them to his son. Now, in this summary, the good Lord is skipping over certain steps.

When God chooses a people, he also plans to send his son, who will do his saving work, especially die and rise, who will then send the Spirit at Pentecost, who will then unite the people of God to the Lord. So even in eternity past, union with Christ was on God's mind because a chosen people were on his mind, and he then ordained his means of bringing his chosen people, whom he contemplates as fallen, to himself in salvation. And that means union with Christ.

Union at creation, the high point, of course, is our being made in the image of God, and it is in the New Testament that we learn that the true image of God is Christ. So already at creation, God prepared the structures, if you will, necessary for him to join us to his son in redemption by creating us in his image, that is, in the true image, the image of Christ, who was to come. Union and the fall, the fall involves many things.

Biblically, condemnation and corruption, but in terms of union with Christ, if we focus on the fall, the main thrust is the fall-produced separation between our first parents and God. They who only knew God from the very beginning of their creation until the fall now find themselves adrift, severed from union and fellowship with him, if you will. It is union with Christ, planned in eternity, prepared by our being made in the image of the true image, which is the image of Christ himself, the son.

It is union with Christ, which is God's means of redemption of overcoming, bridging that separation so that we're no longer separate from Christ and God but joined. Union and the incarnation. Seen from this perspective, the incarnation of the eternal son is absolutely indispensable for there to be union with Christ.

There can be no union with Christ until the son becomes the God-man. Our Lord's humanity is thus the bridge between God and us, and so it's no surprise. In 1 Timothy 2:5, Paul says there's one God and one mediator between God and man, God and men, or human beings.

There's one God and one mediator between God and humanity, the man, Christ Jesus. God underscores the humanness of our Lord, who's both divine and human, in order to emphasize that it is his humanity that provides the path, if you will, for the spirit to use to join us to Christ. We're not joined to God, the son pre-incarnate in heaven.

We're joined to the Son incarnate, who did his work on earth and who has ascended to heaven by the Holy Spirit, we're joined. Christ had to do his work of dying and rising again and even more, ascending and pouring out the spirit, for example, for us to be joined to him. So it's not only his person that is essential, but also his saving work because it's the work of Christ that the Spirit applies to us when he joins us with the Savior in the union.

Union and the new creation begin now in regeneration because Jesus is alive. We would not be born again if we were not joined to Christ. We would not be joined to Christ if God had not become if the Holy Spirit didn't join us to Christ.

We would not be joined to Christ if Christ had not become a human being. We would not be joined to Christ unless we were created in his image, and we would not be joined to Christ going as far back as we can if God had given us grace in Christ Jesus before eternal ages, 2 Timothy 1:9. Lastly, union and a new creation not only involves regeneration now on the basis of the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit making his life, applying his life to us in union and regeneration, but the ultimate manifestation of union with Christ is a new creation of the cosmos, the heavens and the earth, and also of the people of God in resurrection and transformation is the operative word with from bodies and persons suited for life in this age to bodies and persons suited for life in the age to come. In our next lecture, we will pursue in detail exactly this outline of union with Christ and the biblical story.

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