

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 16, Foundations Union, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, Greetings

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 16, Foundations Union, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, Greetings, [Biblicalelearning.org](https://www.biblicalelearning.org), BeL

This excerpt from Dr. Robert Peterson's session on "The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ" examines the concept of **union with Christ** in Paul's letters, specifically Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, and 2 Timothy. Peterson analyzes the **foundations for this union**, noting Paul's application of believers dying and rising with Christ to their present lives and communal harmony. The session also investigates Paul's frequent use of "**in Christ**" language in greetings and throughout his writings, categorizing its various nuances while emphasizing its underlying sense of personal relatedness to Christ. Ultimately, Peterson argues that **union with Christ is a central theme** in Paul's theology, encompassing individual, corporate, and even cosmic dimensions of salvation.

2. 14 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 16 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the [Biblicalelearning.org](https://www.biblicalelearning.org) [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Theology → Theology, Peterson → Holy Spirit and Union with Christ).



Peterson_HolySpirit
_Session16.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 16, Foundations Union, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, Greetings

Briefing Document: Dr. Robert A. Peterson on the Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 16

Overview

This briefing document summarizes the main themes and important ideas presented by Dr. Robert A. Peterson in Session 16 of his teaching on "The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ." This session focuses on the foundational aspects of union with Christ as found in Paul's letters, specifically Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and 2 Timothy, as well as an initial exploration of the language and literary expressions Paul uses to convey this concept, particularly in his greetings and the phrase "in Christ" and its equivalents.

Main Themes and Important Ideas

1. Application of Union with Christ in Colossians:

- Paul applies the concept of believers having died and been raised with Christ (Colossians 2:20, 3:1, 3:3) to the practical life of the church.
- **Dying with Christ:** This entails putting to death sinful practices (Colossians 3:5-11).
- **Being raised with Christ:** This involves putting on godly qualities and actions (Colossians 3:12-17).
- Peterson highlights the communal aspect of this, noting that "Christians are to put on godly qualities and actions, verses 12-17, because they've been raised with Christ."
- Letting the peace of Christ rule in their hearts is linked to being called "in one body" (Colossians 3:15), emphasizing communal peace and unity within the church.
- Peterson emphasizes the interplay between individual hearts and the singular body of Christ: "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."

2. Union with Christ and the Second Coming in 1 Thessalonians:

- Paul addresses the Thessalonians' confusion regarding believers who died before the second coming.
- He reassures them that deceased believers ("those who have fallen asleep") will not miss out on Christ's return.
- "The dead in Christ will rise first," followed by living believers being "caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).
- Peterson clarifies that "being dead in Christ refers to the status that describes all who die as believers in Christ." It's not about the manner of death but the sphere under which they are situated.
- This passage demonstrates that even death does not break the union with Christ: "Even death does not break the union. We are still in him. Union with Christ is definitive."
- Union with Christ defines the people of God.

3. Pre-Temporal Election in Christ in 2 Timothy:

- Paul speaks of God choosing believers "in Christ before the creation of the world" (2 Timothy 1:9), a concept also found in Ephesians 1:4.
- This highlights a pre-temporal aspect of God's plan for salvation through union with Christ.
- Peterson emphasizes that God's saving grace was "given us in Christ Jesus before the ages began" (2 Timothy 1:9).
- He clarifies that this "in Christ" language regarding election does not refer to God foreseeing who would believe, but rather to God planning the means of saving them *in union with Christ*.
- "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..."

4. Strength and Salvation "in Christ Jesus" in 2 Timothy:

- Paul encourages Timothy to "be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:1), describing "in Christ Jesus" as a locative indicating the sphere of Christ's rule.
- He endures suffering so that the elect may "obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Timothy 2:10).
- Peterson notes that here, "in Christ Jesus...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."

5. The Centrality of Union with Christ in Paul's Theology:

- Peterson quotes Lewis Smedes, who states that while "Paul's message was Christ crucified," he was also "the apostle of our union with Christ."
- Paul's preaching connected saved persons with Jesus' death and resurrection through "Union with Christ."

6. Union in Paul's Language and Literature:

- Peterson identifies four key themes in Paul's language related to union with Christ:
- **Union in Greetings:** The frequent appearance of union-related language in the opening and closing greetings of Paul's letters.
- **"In Christ" Language:** The pervasive use of phrases like "in Christ," "in the Lord," "in him," and "in whom."
- **Being in the Father and the Son:** A unique emphasis in 1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2.
- **Participation in Jesus' Narrative:** (To be explored in later lectures).

7. Union in Epistolary Greetings:

- Peterson highlights that union is referenced in "fully one-half of Paul's epistolary greetings at the beginning and end of his letters."

- He provides numerous examples from Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon where individuals and churches are described as being "in Christ Jesus," "in the Lord," "faithful in Christ Jesus," etc.
- He notes that out of a potential 26 greeting slots across 13 epistles, Paul refers to union 18 times (15 different instances). This underscores how central union with Christ was to Paul's thinking.

8. The Significance of "In Christ" Language:

- Peterson acknowledges Constantine Campbell's work, "Paul in Union with Christ," and agrees with his conclusions regarding the flexibility of the preposition "in," the importance of context, the primary spatial sense, the figurative use denoting sphere or realm, and crucially, that "the phrase in Christ as denoting a personal relatedness."
- He introduces the distinction between a **broad sense** and a **narrow sense** of "in Christ" language.
- **Broad Sense:** Primarily has another nuance besides direct union with Christ, but still conveys a connection between believers and Christ.
- **Narrow Sense:** Refers directly to union with Christ.
- Peterson outlines eight major nuances of "in Christ" language (agency, association, cause, instrument, manner, object of faith, periphrasis for Christian, and realm/sphere/domain), noting that there are many minor nuances as well.
- He emphasizes that while these nuances are important, every use of "in Christ" always communicates a "personal relatedness," a "broad sense" of union with Christ.

9. "In Christ" Language Indicating Direct Union:

- Peterson identifies at least nine occurrences where "in Christ" language speaks of union in a narrow, direct sense.
- Examples include:
- Christ becoming "wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption" *to them* in Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:30).

- Believers being declared righteous "in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21), where Christ was made sin for us so that "in him we might become the righteousness of God."
- The statement "Jesus Christ is in you" (2 Corinthians 13:5) as a defining characteristic of Christians.
- Believers participating in Christ's death and resurrection (2 Corinthians 13:4), noting "we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you, we will live with him by the power of God."
- Paul's desire "to be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, but that which comes through faith in Christ" (Philippians 3:8-9), where "to be found in him" expresses union with Christ.
- Believers being "filled in him" (Colossians 2:10), where the fullness of deity dwells bodily in Christ (Colossians 2:9).

10. The Individual, Corporate, and Cosmic Dimensions of Union with Christ:

- Peterson stresses that union with Christ is not only individual but also corporate (union with other believers) and cosmic (God's plan to unite all things in Christ, Ephesians 1:10).
- He cautions against American individualism obscuring these broader dimensions.
- He connects the idea of putting on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:11-12) with union with Christ, suggesting believers "put on the Lord's armor," evoking a sense of union in spiritual warfare.

Conclusion

Dr. Peterson's Session 16 lays a crucial foundation for understanding the doctrine of union with Christ in Paul's writings. He demonstrates the pervasive nature of this concept through its application in ethical living (Colossians), its implications for the afterlife and Christ's return (1 Thessalonians), and its grounding in God's eternal plan (2 Timothy). Furthermore, the session begins to unpack the significance of Paul's language, particularly the frequent use of "in Christ" and related phrases in his greetings and throughout his letters, highlighting both the broad sense of personal relatedness to Christ and the narrower, direct references to the profound reality of our union with Him. The introduction of the corporate and cosmic dimensions of this union sets the stage for further exploration in subsequent sessions.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 16, Foundations Union, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, Greetings

Study Guide: Dr. Robert A. Peterson on Union with Christ in Paul's Letters

Key Concepts:

- **Union with Christ:** A central theme in Paul's writings describing the believer's intimate and vital connection with Jesus Christ.
- **Foundations for Union:** Peterson focuses on Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, and 2 Timothy to identify key aspects of this union.
- **Dying and Rising with Christ:** In Colossians, Paul teaches that believers have died to sin and been raised to new life with Christ, impacting their behavior and character.
- **Communal Aspect of Union:** Union with Christ incorporates believers into the body of Christ, the church, fostering unity and harmony.
- **Permanence of Union:** Death does not break the union between a believer and Christ, as seen in 1 Thessalonians regarding those who have "fallen asleep in Christ."
- **Pre-temporal Election in Christ:** Paul mentions in 2 Timothy and Ephesians that God chose believers "in Christ" before the creation of the world, highlighting God's plan for salvation through union.
- **Grace in Christ:** Believers are strengthened by the grace that is found "in Christ Jesus," signifying Christ's realm as the source of this grace.
- **Salvation in Christ:** Paul emphasizes that salvation is obtained "in Christ Jesus," indicating that Christ is the sphere and condition of salvation.
- **"In Christ" Language:** Paul frequently uses phrases like "in Christ," "in the Lord," "in him," and "in whom," which generally denote a personal relatedness and connection to Christ.
- **Broad vs. Narrow Senses of "In Christ":** **Broad Sense:** "In Christ" language conveys a connection to Christ alongside other nuances like agency, association, cause, instrument, manner, object of faith, periphrasis for Christian, and realm.

- **Narrow Sense:** "In Christ" language directly refers to the believer's union with Christ.
- **Union in Greetings:** Paul's frequent use of "in Christ" and similar phrases in the opening and closing greetings of his letters underscores the pervasiveness of this concept in his thinking.
- **Participation in Jesus' Narrative:** Union with Christ involves participating in Christ's death and resurrection, shaping the believer's life.
- **Corporate and Cosmic Dimensions of Union:** Union with Christ extends beyond the individual to encompass the church (corporate) and God's plan to unite all things in Christ (cosmic).
- **Gaining Christ and His Righteousness:** For Paul, knowing Christ and being found "in him" with his righteousness is of supreme value.
- **Fullness in Christ:** Believers are made complete or filled in Christ, possessing all they need for eternal life and godliness.

Quiz:

1. According to Peterson, how do Paul's teachings in Colossians 3:5-17 connect the believer's actions to their union with Christ?
2. Explain the significance of Paul's use of "in Christ" when referring to believers who have died, as discussed in the context of 1 Thessalonians 4.
3. In what two Pauline letters does Peterson highlight the concept of God's pre-temporal election "in Christ," and what does this emphasize about salvation?
4. What does Peterson mean by the "locative" use of "in Christ Jesus" in 2 Timothy 2:1, and how does it relate to the grace believers receive?
5. Why does Paul persevere through hardships, as mentioned in 2 Timothy 2:10, and how does this connect to the elect obtaining salvation?
6. Briefly describe the difference between the "broad" and "narrow" senses of Paul's "in Christ" language, according to Peterson.
7. Provide two examples from the greetings in Paul's letters where the apostle uses "in Christ" or a similar phrase, and explain the significance Peterson attributes to this practice.

8. How does Peterson explain the corporate dimension of union with Christ, and what scripture does he reference?
9. In Philippians 3:8-9, what does Paul mean by "to gain Christ and to be found in him," and how does this relate to righteousness?
10. According to Peterson's interpretation of Colossians 2:9-10, what is the relationship between Christ's fullness of deity and the believer's fullness?

Answer Key:

1. Paul teaches that because believers have died with Christ, they are to put to death sinful practices. Conversely, because they have been raised with Christ, they are to put on godly qualities and actions, demonstrating the practical implications of their union.
2. Paul's use of "in Christ" when referring to deceased believers in 1 Thessalonians indicates the sphere or status under which they exist, even in death. It emphasizes that death does not break their union with Christ, highlighting the definitive nature of this bond.
3. Peterson highlights Ephesians 1:4 and 2 Timothy 1:9 as the two places where Paul speaks of God's pre-temporal election "in Christ." This emphasizes that God's plan for salvation, including the means of saving believers, was established in union with Christ before the world began.
4. The "locative" use of "in Christ Jesus" in 2 Timothy 2:1 signifies the sphere or realm of Christ, his kingdom, as the location where grace exists. Paul encourages Timothy to draw strength from the grace that is found within Christ's dominion.
5. Paul perseveres through hardships for the sake of the elect so that they may also obtain the salvation that is "in Christ Jesus." This illustrates that while God has chosen people for salvation, they still need to believe the gospel to realize and experience that salvation within the sphere of Christ.
6. The "broad" sense of "in Christ" language refers to instances where the phrase indicates a general connection or relatedness to Christ alongside other nuances like agency or association. The "narrow" sense refers to instances where "in Christ" directly denotes the believer's intimate and spiritual union with Christ himself.
7. Examples include "Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus" (Romans 16:3) and "To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ"

Jesus" (Ephesians 1:1). Peterson argues that the frequency of such greetings demonstrates that union with Christ was a pervasive and fundamental aspect of Paul's thinking, always present in his mind.

8. Peterson explains the corporate dimension of union by noting that God joins individuals to his Son in order to form the church, the body of Christ. He references Ephesians 1:10, where Paul speaks of God's plan to unite all things in Christ, highlighting a broader communal aspect beyond individual believers.
9. By "to gain Christ and to be found in him," Paul means to enter into a personal relationship and union with Christ. The subsequent phrase, "not having a righteousness of my own, but that which comes through faith in Christ," indicates that being "in him" means sharing in Christ's righteousness, which is received through faith.
10. Peterson explains that just as the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily in Christ, believers have been filled in him. This signifies that through their union with the divine Christ, believers are made complete and possess all that they need for eternal life and godliness.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Analyze the significance of Paul's "in Christ" language in his epistolary greetings, and discuss how this practice reflects the centrality of union with Christ in his theology as presented by Peterson.
2. Compare and contrast Peterson's concepts of the "broad" and "narrow" senses of Paul's "in Christ" language, providing scriptural examples discussed in the source material to illustrate each.
3. Discuss how the theme of union with Christ, as presented by Peterson in his analysis of Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, and 2 Timothy, impacts the believer's understanding of their identity, behavior, and future hope.
4. Evaluate Peterson's argument that union with Christ has individual, corporate, and cosmic dimensions based on the Pauline texts he examines.
5. Explore the connection between God's pre-temporal election "in Christ," as discussed by Peterson with reference to Ephesians and 2 Timothy, and the believer's present experience of salvation and union with Christ.

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Union with Christ:** The spiritual and vital connection between a believer and Jesus Christ, encompassing their shared life, death, and resurrection.
- **Pre-temporal Election:** God's choosing of individuals for salvation before the creation of the world.
- **Locative:** Indicating a place or sphere of existence, as Peterson describes the use of "in Christ Jesus" regarding grace.
- **Apposition:** A grammatical construction where a noun or noun phrase is placed next to another noun or noun phrase to identify or explain it, as seen in Peterson's analysis of "salvation that is in Christ Jesus."
- **Nuance:** A subtle difference in or shade of meaning, feeling, or tone, referring to the various ways Paul uses "in Christ" language.
- **Lexical Semantics:** The branch of linguistics concerned with the meaning of words.
- **Exegesis:** The critical interpretation and explanation of a text, particularly of scripture.
- **Epistolary:** Relating to letters or letter-writing.
- **Periphrasis:** The use of indirect and circumlocutory speech or writing, such as when "in Christ" functions as another way of saying "Christian."
- **Cosmic:** Relating to the universe or cosmos, referring to the scope of God's plan to unite all things in Christ.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 16, Foundations Union, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, Greetings, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Union with Christ in Paul's Letters

1. How does Paul connect the concept of "dying and rising with Christ" to the practical life of believers in Colossians?

Paul explains that because believers have died with Christ (Colossians 2:20, 3:1, 3:3), they are to actively "put to death" sinful practices (Colossians 3:5-11). Conversely, their being raised with Christ compels them to "put on" godly qualities and actions (Colossians 3:12-17). This union with Christ provides the foundation and the power for believers to transform their lives, moving away from sin and towards Christ-like behavior. This is seen communally as well, as they are called to let the peace of Christ rule in their congregation and to be grateful.

2. What does Paul mean when he refers to believers who have died as "the dead in Christ" in 1 Thessalonians? Does death break the union with Christ?

When Paul uses the phrase "the dead in Christ," he is not describing the manner of their death but rather their status as believers who have died while being united with Christ. This designation emphasizes that even death does not sever the bond between believers and Christ. Their union with him is definitive and permanent, extending beyond physical life. The resurrection of the dead in Christ at the Lord's return further underscores the enduring nature of this union.

3. In 2 Timothy 1:9, Paul speaks of grace given "in Christ Jesus before the ages began." How does this pre-temporal aspect relate to the believer's present union with Christ?

Paul's mention of God's grace given "in Christ Jesus before the ages began" highlights God's eternal plan for salvation, which was conceived and purposed in union with Christ before creation. This pre-temporal election in Christ signifies that God not only chose a people for himself but also planned the very means of their salvation through union with his Son. This foundational act in eternity is realized in history through the Holy Spirit, bringing believers into a present, active union with Christ.

4. How does Paul's use of the phrase "in Christ Jesus" encourage Timothy in his ministry, as seen in 2 Timothy 2:1?

When Paul tells Timothy to "be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus," he uses "in Christ Jesus" as a locative, indicating the sphere or realm of Christ's rule and power. This encourages Timothy to find his strength not in his own abilities but in the grace that is available within Christ's domain. Union with Christ, in this context, signifies a relationship to Christ and the realm in which God has freely saved believers by his grace.

5. Why does Paul endure suffering for the sake of the elect so that they may obtain "the salvation that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:10)? Does election negate the need for obtaining salvation?

Paul's suffering for the elect to obtain "the salvation that is in Christ Jesus" illustrates the relationship between God's sovereign election and the necessity of hearing and believing the gospel. Election means God has chosen people for salvation, but they do not automatically possess it. They obtain this salvation by believing the gospel, which brings them into union with Christ, where salvation is found. Paul's missionary zeal stems from his desire for God's chosen people to come to faith and experience this salvation in Christ.

6. Dr. Peterson highlights that Paul frequently uses "in Christ" and similar phrases in his greetings. What is the significance of this recurring language in his letters?

The frequent use of "in Christ," "in the Lord," "in him," and similar expressions in Paul's initial and final greetings emphasizes that union with Christ is a pervasive and fundamental aspect of his thought and theology. It indicates that he consistently views believers and the church as being defined by their relationship and connection to Christ. This language is not merely formulaic but reflects a deep-seated understanding that believers' identity, blessings, and life are rooted in their union with Christ.

7. While "in Christ" and its equivalents have various nuances, what is the underlying common meaning that Dr. Peterson emphasizes?

Despite the multiple shades of meaning in Paul's use of "in Christ" language (such as agency, association, realm, etc.), Dr. Peterson underscores that every instance conveys a sense of **personal relatedness** and **connectedness to the person of Christ**. He distinguishes between a broad sense, where "in Christ" might have another primary nuance besides direct union, and a narrow sense, which directly refers to union. However, even in the broad sense, this language always implies a relationship and link between believers and Christ that pertains to their union with him.

8. According to Dr. Peterson, what are some key aspects of union with Christ in a narrow, direct sense, and how does it relate to individual, corporate, and cosmic dimensions?

In a narrow, direct sense, union with Christ signifies that believers are corporately and individually joined to Christ, sharing in his blessings, including righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30). This union provides a secure status before God and a new manner of life in common with other believers. Furthermore, Paul views this union not only as individual and corporate (within the church) but also as having a cosmic dimension, as God plans to unite all things in heaven and on earth in Christ (Ephesians 1:10). This perspective cautions against an overly individualistic understanding of the Christian faith, highlighting its broader implications for the church and the entire created order.