

# **Dr. Robert A. Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 17, Union with Christ in Paul, Pictures and Themes**

## **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 17, Union with Christ in Paul, Pictures and Themes, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

**Dr. Robert Peterson's lecture**, part of a series on the Holy Spirit and union with Christ, specifically addresses **Paul's understanding of this union** as presented in his letters. Peterson examines **Paul's unique phrasing** in the Thessalonian letters regarding being "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," highlighting the significance of union with both. The lecture further explores **Paul's concept of believers participating in Jesus' narrative**, emphasizing shared redemptive experiences but also noting distinctions. Finally, Peterson analyzes several **key metaphors used by Paul** to illustrate union with Christ, including the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the marriage relationship between Christ and the church.

### **2. 20 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 17 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Theology → Theology, Peterson → Holy Spirit and Union with Christ).**



**Peterson\_HolySpirit  
\_Session17.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document: Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 17, Union with Christ in Paul, Pictures and Themes

#### Briefing Document: Union with Christ in Paul

**Overview:** This briefing document summarizes Dr. Robert Peterson's lecture on the concept of "union with Christ" as presented in the writings of the Apostle Paul. The session explores various facets of this union, including its expression as "being in the Father and Son," the idea of "participation in Jesus' narrative," and several key "pictures and themes" used by Paul to illustrate this profound relationship.

#### Main Themes and Important Ideas:

##### 1. Being in the Father and the Son:

- **Unique Pauline Expression:** Peterson highlights Paul's unique phrasing in the opening verses of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, where believers are described as being **"in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"** (1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2).
- **Union with Both:** Unlike the more common "in Christ" language, this construction explicitly links believers to both the Father and the Son through the preposition "in."
- **Scholarly Consensus:** Peterson cites F.F. Bruce, Gene Green, Gordon Fee, and Leon Morris who agree that if **"in the Lord Jesus Christ"** here denotes union with Christ, then **"in God the Father"** must be understood in the same way.
- **Parallel to John 17:** This Pauline expression resonates with Jesus' prayer in John 17:21 that believers **"also may be in us."** Both emphasize a deep and exalted union with the Godhead.
- **Humbling and Amazing:** Peterson underscores the astounding nature of God's love in joining believers to the Father and the Son.

##### 2. Participation in Jesus' Narrative:

- **Distinctive Pauline Teaching:** Paul uniquely teaches that Christians actively **"take part in Jesus' story."**

- **Selective Participation:** This participation is not in every aspect of Christ's life (e.g., incarnation, sinless life, pouring out the Spirit, intercession), which are unique to him.
- **Shared Redemptive Experiences:** Believers share in key redemptive events of Jesus' life:
  - **Death:** "Specifically, they die with him..."
  - **Burial:** "...are buried with him..."
  - **Resurrection:** "...are raised with him..."
  - **Ascension:** "...ascend with him..."
  - **Session in Heaven:** "...sit down with him in heaven..." (Ephesians 2:6)
  - **Second Coming:** "...in a sense, they will even come again with him."
- **Extensive Scriptural Basis:** Peterson provides a comprehensive list of at least 12 texts across Paul's letters that illustrate this theme.
- **Overlapping Language:** Paul uses overlapping terms (e.g., suffering, death, burial all relate to co-crucifixion) to communicate different facets of Christ's story in which believers participate.
- **Transformation of Identity:** Through spiritual union, "His story, as it were, becomes our story."
- **Suffering with Christ:** While believers suffer, their suffering is not redemptive like Christ's but is a consequence of being united to him in his death. Peterson references Colossians 1:24.
- **Future Revelation and Reign:** Believers' true identity in Christ will be fully revealed at his return, and they will share in his glory and reign (Romans 8:18-19, Colossians 3:4, 2 Timothy 2:12).

### 3. Pictures and Themes of Union with Christ:

- **Body of Christ: Headship of Christ:** Christ is the head, the source of life and authority for the church (Colossians 1:18, Ephesians 5:23).
- **Incorporation:** The concept expresses believers' incorporation into Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27, Ephesians 4:4).

- **One Church:** The phrase "one body" signifies the unity of God's people organically connected to Christ.
- **Spiritual Reality:** The metaphor is more than symbolic; believers are truly and spiritually joined to Christ.
- **Role of the Holy Spirit:** Baptism and drinking of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13) are essential to this union and link believers to Christ and each other.
- **Corporate and Individual Aspects:** The body imagery highlights both the corporate unity of believers and their individual connection to Christ.
- **Interdependence and Harmony:** Different members with various gifts serve together in the body (Romans 12:4-26).
- **Supremacy of Christ:** The picture underscores Christ's preeminence in creation and redemption as the source of life for the church.
- **Christological Mode of Existence:** Ritterbaugh is quoted: "The most typical description of the church in Paul is that of the body of Christ. It describes the Christological mode of existence of the church as the people of God."
- **Temple of the Holy Spirit: Audacious Claim:** Paul's assertion that believers are God's temple (1 Corinthians 3:16-17) is presented as audacious, especially considering the grandeur of Solomon's temple.
- **Presence of God:** What makes a temple a temple is the presence of God, now residing in believers through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:22).
- **Corporate Emphasis:** While individual believers are temples, the emphasis in Paul is on God dwelling in them communally as His temple (2 Corinthians 6:16).
- **Building and Worship:** The Holy Spirit builds this living temple where the Trinity is worshipped.
- **Marriage: Intimate Union:** Paul uses the marriage union between husband and wife as a powerful picture of the intimate union between Christ and His church (1 Corinthians 6:15-20, 2 Corinthians 11:1-5, Ephesians 5:22-32).
- **Purity and Fidelity:** The analogy calls for faithfulness and purity from believers towards Christ, their betrothed (2 Corinthians 11:2-3). Spiritual adultery (flirting with false gospels) is to be avoided.

- **Christ as Groom, Church as Bride:** Paul portrays Christ as the loving groom who has betrothed the church as his bride.
- **Model for Husband-Wife Relations:** In Ephesians 5, the marriage between Christ and the church serves as a model for proper relationships within human marriage.
- **Distinction Preserved:** The marriage metaphor does not erase the distinct identities of Christ and the church.
- **Submission and Love:** The church submits to Christ as her loving head, and Christ loves and cares for his bride.
- **Christ's Initiative and Grace:** Christ initiates, prepares, and sustains this union, highlighting God's marvelous grace towards the church.

#### 4. Christ's Redemptive Deeds and Union with Christ:

- **Antidote to Sin:** Christ's redemptive deeds are the only solution to the problem of sin in all its dimensions (past, present, and future).
- **Centrality of Death and Resurrection:** Jesus' death and resurrection are the core of his saving accomplishment.
- **Union as Application of Salvation:** Union with Christ is presented as the means by which Christ's saving work is applied to believers.
- **Subsets of Union:** Justification (salvation from sin's penalty), progressive sanctification (salvation from sin's power), and glorification/final sanctification (salvation from sin's presence) are all subsets of union with Christ.

#### Conclusion:

Dr. Peterson's lecture provides a detailed overview of Paul's rich teaching on union with Christ. Through various expressions, narratives of participation, and powerful metaphors, Paul communicates the profound and multifaceted relationship between believers and their Lord. This union encompasses being in the Father and the Son, sharing in Christ's redemptive story, and being intimately connected to him as his body, the temple of the Holy Spirit, and his bride. This understanding underscores the centrality of Christ's saving work and the complete dependence of believers on him for salvation and life.

## 4. Study Guide: Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 17, Union with Christ in Paul, Pictures and Themes

### Study Guide: Union with Christ in Paul

#### Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. According to Peterson, where does Paul uniquely describe believers as being "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"? What is the significance of Paul using the preposition "in" with both the Father and the Son in these instances?
2. What does Peterson explain are some of the redemptive experiences in Jesus' narrative that believers participate in through their union with Christ? Provide at least three examples from the provided text.
3. Peterson outlines nine redemptive deeds of Christ. What are the two essential preconditions and the central heart and soul of Christ's redemptive accomplishment among these nine deeds?
4. How do Christ's death and resurrection serve as the "antidote to the poison of sin" according to Peterson? Explain how this antidote addresses the past, present, and future dimensions of sin.
5. What are some of the key theological and practical ways the "body of Christ" picture communicates union with Christ? Mention at least two distinct aspects discussed by Peterson.
6. Why do Ciampa and Rosner consider Paul's claim that believers are the "temple of God" to be audacious? What key element makes a temple a temple, according to Peterson?
7. In 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, what is the main point Paul is making about union with Christ through the analogy of physical union with a prostitute? How does this contrast with the union believers have with the Lord?
8. In 2 Corinthians 11:1-5, how does Paul use the metaphor of betrothal to describe the relationship between Christ and the Corinthian believers? What is Paul's concern for them in this passage?

9. According to Peterson, what is a key takeaway from Ephesians 5:22-32 regarding the nature of the union between Christ and the church as depicted through the marriage metaphor?
10. What is the significance of believers participating in Christ's narrative, according to Peterson? What does it communicate about the relationship between Christ's redemptive deeds and believers?

### **Quiz Answer Key**

1. Paul uniquely describes believers as being "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" in the opening verses of 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians. The significance of using "in" with both the Father and the Son suggests a parallel and intimate union with both, indicating that believers exist within the sphere of both divine persons.
2. Believers participate in many of Jesus' redemptive experiences, including his death, burial, and resurrection. They also share in being made alive with Christ, being seated with him in heaven, and ultimately returning and reigning with him in glory.
3. The two essential preconditions of Christ's redemptive deeds are his incarnation and sinless life. The heart and soul of his redemptive accomplishment are his death and resurrection, which form the central act of salvation.
4. Christ's death and resurrection are the antidote to sin by addressing its penalty (justification), its power (progressive sanctification), and its presence (glorification and final sanctification). Through union with Christ in his death and resurrection, believers are saved from all dimensions of sin's destructive effects.
5. The "body of Christ" picture communicates the headship of Christ as the source of life and authority for the church, emphasizing an organic union between Christ and believers. It also highlights the corporate nature of the church, where individual believers are interconnected as members of one body in Christ.
6. Ciampa and Rosner consider Paul's claim audacious because the early Christians were a small, seemingly insignificant group compared to the grandeur of Solomon's temple. The key element that makes a temple a temple is the presence of God; in this case, it is the indwelling Holy Spirit within the believers.
7. Paul argues that physical union with a prostitute creates a bodily oneness that defiles the believer who is spiritually united to Christ. This contrasts with the

union believers have with the Lord, where they become one spirit with him, highlighting the exclusive and spiritual nature of their bond with Christ.

8. Paul uses the metaphor of betrothal to portray himself as the spiritual father who has promised the Corinthian believers in marriage to Christ, their one husband. His concern is that they might be led astray from their pure devotion to Christ by false teachings, akin to how Eve was deceived by the serpent.
9. A key takeaway from Ephesians 5:22-32 is that the marriage of Christ and his church, while signifying intimate union, does not erase the distinct roles and identities of Christ as the loving head and the church as his submissive bride. Christ's love initiates, sustains, and sanctifies the church.
10. Believers' participation in Christ's narrative powerfully communicates that Christ's redemptive deeds are the only effective solution to the problem of sin. By being united to him, his story of suffering, death, resurrection, and glory becomes their story, signifying their complete dependence on and incorporation into his saving work.



## Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze and discuss the significance of Paul's unique "in Christ" language in the Thessalonian letters, particularly his description of believers as being "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." How does this contribute to our understanding of union with the Triune God?
2. Explain in detail Paul's teaching on believers' participation in Jesus' narrative. What specific events do believers participate in, and what are the theological implications of this participation for their identity and salvation? Be sure to address the qualifications Peterson makes regarding this participation.
3. Compare and contrast two of the Pauline pictures of union with Christ discussed by Peterson (e.g., body of Christ, temple, marriage). How does each metaphor illuminate different aspects of the believer's relationship with Christ and with other believers?
4. Discuss the relationship between union with Christ and the application of salvation (justification, progressive sanctification, glorification) as presented by Peterson. How does union with Christ serve as the foundation or context for these saving benefits?
5. Evaluate the strengths and significance of Paul's use of metaphors (body, temple, marriage) to describe union with Christ. How do these images enhance our comprehension of this vital theological concept, and what unique insights does each offer?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Union with Christ:** A central theological concept in Pauline theology describing the believer's spiritual and vital connection to Jesus Christ, resulting in shared life, identity, and participation in his saving work.
- **Redemptive Narrative:** The unfolding story of God's saving work in history, culminating in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Believers, through union with Christ, participate in this narrative.
- **Justification:** God's declaration of righteousness upon those who believe in Jesus Christ, based on Christ's atoning sacrifice and imputed righteousness. Peterson identifies this as a subset of union with Christ that addresses sin's past penalty.
- **Progressive Sanctification:** The ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives, conforming them to the image of Christ and delivering them from the power of sin. Peterson describes this as a present benefit of union with Christ rooted in Christ's death and resurrection.
- **Glorification:** The future and final aspect of salvation, in which believers will be fully conformed to Christ, experiencing the complete removal of sin and the fullness of God's glory. Peterson views this as a future dimension of union with Christ that overcomes sin's presence.
- **Body of Christ:** A key Pauline metaphor for the church, emphasizing the unity and interdependence of believers as members connected to Christ as their head. It highlights Christ as the source of life and authority for the church.
- **Temple of the Holy Spirit:** Another Pauline image depicting believers, individually and corporately, as the dwelling place of God through the Holy Spirit. This metaphor underscores God's presence among and within his people.
- **Marriage (as a metaphor):** Paul's use of the marital relationship between husband and wife to illustrate the intimate, exclusive, and committed union between Christ (the groom) and the church (the bride).
- **Headship (of Christ):** The biblical teaching that Christ is the supreme authority and source of life for the church, his body.
- **Indwelling:** The theological concept that the Holy Spirit resides within believers, signifying God's intimate presence and empowering them for godly living and service.

## 5. FAQs on Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 17, Union with Christ in Paul, Pictures and Themes, [Biblicalelearning.org](http://Biblicalelearning.org) (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions: Union with Christ in Paul

**1. What is the significance of Paul describing believers as being "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" in his Thessalonian letters?** This unique phrasing, found only in the opening verses of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, indicates a profound union that believers share not only with Christ but also with God the Father. Just as being "in Christ" denotes a close relationship and participation in his saving benefits, being "in God the Father" in the same context suggests a parallel union with the Father. This highlights an exalted view of the Christian's connection to the entire Godhead, overlapping with John's teaching in John 17 where Jesus prays for believers to be in the Father and the Son. It underscores the astounding love of God in joining humanity to himself and his Son.

**2. What does Paul mean by believers "participating in Jesus' narrative," and what are some examples of this participation?** Paul uniquely teaches that through union with Christ by faith, believers share in key events of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, ascension, and future return. This doesn't mean we experience these events in the same way Christ did (e.g., incarnation, sinless life, atoning death), but rather that we are spiritually united to him in these realities. Examples include dying with Christ, being buried with him, being raised with him, ascending with him, being seated with him in heaven, and the anticipation of returning and reigning with him. This participation signifies that Christ's story becomes our story through our spiritual connection to him.

**3. While believers participate in many aspects of Christ's narrative, are there any events in his life that are uniquely his and not shared?** Yes, Paul clarifies that certain aspects of Jesus' life are unique and unrepeatable, and therefore not shared by believers. These include his incarnation (becoming the Son of Man), his sinless life (though its benefits are imputed to us through justification), his pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and his ongoing intercession for us in the Father's presence. These are singular redemptive acts performed by Christ alone.

**4. How do Christ's death and resurrection serve as the "antidote to the poison of sin" according to Paul?** Paul presents Christ's death and resurrection as the central saving act that addresses all dimensions of sin: past, present, and future. In relation to the past, his death and resurrection provide the basis for justification, freeing us from sin's penalty. In the present, they overcome sin's power in our lives through progressive sanctification. Looking to the future, they guarantee our deliverance from sin's presence in glorification and final sanctification. These three aspects – justification, progressive sanctification, and glorification – are all considered subsets of our union with Christ, emphasizing that it is through this union with his redemptive acts that we are saved from sin.

**5. What does the metaphor of the "body of Christ" reveal about union with Christ and the church?** The "body of Christ" is a powerful image Paul uses to illustrate several key aspects of union. Firstly, it highlights Christ's headship and authority over the church, as well as him being the source of life for it. Secondly, it emphasizes the incorporation of believers into Christ; through faith, we become members of his body. Thirdly, it underscores the corporate unity of the church, showing how believers are interconnected and interdependent, much like the different parts of a human body. Finally, it links individual salvation to belonging to the church, as union with Christ simultaneously joins a person to the community of believers.

**6. How does Paul use the imagery of the "temple of God" or "temple of the Holy Spirit" to explain union with Christ?** By referring to believers and the church as the temple, Paul makes the audacious claim that God's presence now dwells within his people through the Holy Spirit. This imagery contrasts with the magnificence of the Old Testament temples, suggesting that God's true dwelling place is now among the community of believers joined to Christ. The Holy Spirit is the active agent in building this living temple, and God's presence within it signifies the temple's sanctity and purpose. While individual believers are also temples, the emphasis in Paul's usage often leans towards the corporate reality of the church as God's unified temple.

**7. In what ways does Paul depict union with Christ through the metaphor of marriage?**

Paul employs the marriage metaphor in several ways to illustrate the intimate and exclusive relationship between Christ and his church (believers). In 1 Corinthians 6, he uses the concept of "becoming one flesh" in marriage to highlight the seriousness of sexual sin, contrasting it with the spiritual oneness believers have with Christ ("becoming one spirit"). In 2 Corinthians 11, he portrays himself as a spiritual father who has betrothed the Corinthians to Christ as their one husband, emphasizing the need for pure devotion and faithfulness. Finally, in Ephesians 5, he explicitly states that the mystery of human marriage reflects the profound union between Christ (the groom) and the church (the bride), using it as a model for the relationship between husbands and wives, underscoring Christ's love, care, and the church's submission.

**8. Beyond the body, temple, and marriage, are there other pictures or themes Paul uses to describe union with Christ?** Yes, Paul employs other evocative images and themes to further illuminate the concept of union with Christ. These include the idea of believers being clothed with Christ (new clothing), the theme of being "filled to all the fullness of God," and the concept of the Holy Spirit "indwelling" believers. These various metaphors and themes collectively paint a rich and multifaceted picture of the deep, life-transforming, and intimate connection that believers have with Christ through the Holy Spirit.