

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 19, The Biblical Story

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 19, The Biblical Story, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Robert Peterson's lecture, "Union with Christ and the Biblical Story," explores the concept of believers' spiritual union with Jesus Christ throughout the narrative arc of the Bible. The lecture **traces this theme from God's eternal plan before creation**, through humanity's creation in God's image and subsequent fall, to the incarnation of Christ, his saving work culminating in Pentecost, and finally to the promise of a new creation. Peterson **examines key biblical passages** and different theological perspectives on this union, particularly in relation to divine election. Ultimately, the session **argues that union with Christ is central to God's redemptive plan** and will be fully realized in the eternal state.

2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 19 – 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
_Session19.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 19, The Biblical Story

Briefing Document: Dr. Robert A. Peterson on Union with Christ and the Biblical Story

Source: Excerpts from "Peterson_HS_Union_EN_Ses19.pdf" by Dr. Robert A. Peterson

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Overview: This document summarizes the main themes and important ideas presented by Dr. Robert A. Peterson in Session 19 of his teaching on "The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ." In this session, Dr. Peterson explores the concept of union with Christ as it unfolds throughout the biblical narrative, from eternity past to the new creation. He examines key moments in redemptive history and how they relate to God's plan for believers to be united with his Son.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. Union with Christ in Eternity Past:

- God's plan for salvation, including the choice of his people, predates creation. Peterson highlights Pauline passages in Ephesians 1:3-4 and 2 Timothy 1:8-9 as evidence.
- **Quote (Ephesians 1:4):** "...even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him."
- **Quote (2 Timothy 1:9):** "...[God] 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."
- This eternal choice was "in Christ," indicating that union with Christ was not an afterthought but a central aspect of God's pre-temporal plan.
- Peterson critiques Arminian interpretations that view "in Christ" as a condition for salvation foreseen by God (Jack Cottrell) or that God primarily chose Christ and secondarily those who would believe in him (Jerry Walls & Joseph D'Angelo).
- Peterson argues that in these specific pre-temporal contexts, "in Christ" refers to God's sovereign plan to unite believers to Christ, not actual union before creation.
- **Quote:** "Thus, when Paul writes he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, he means that prior to creation, God out of his own will and love both

chose to save his people and also planned the means to save them. He planned to bring them into spiritual union with his Son and all his spiritual benefits."

2. Union with Christ and Creation:

- While planned in eternity, union with Christ takes place in time through faith brought about by the Holy Spirit.
- Peterson argues that several preconditions were necessary for this union: Pentecost (pouring out of the Spirit), the Incarnation, and humankind's creation in God's image.
- The creation of humanity in God's image establishes a compatibility necessary for union with God and subsequently with Christ.
- **Quote (Robert Letham):** "Union with Christ rests on the basis of the creation of man and woman to be compatible with God."
- Being made in God's image includes the capacity for personal fellowship with and response to God.
- **Quote (Philip Hughes):** "...in creating man, God created a personal being, who, in a manner impossible for other animate creatures, is capable of personal fellowship with and personal response to his creator."
- Christ is presented as the "true image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4, Colossians 1:15). Humanity was made in the likeness of this true image, the second Adam.
- **Quote (Hughes):** "...the eternal Son is the image in accordance with which man was formed. The deeply intimate bond that binds man to the second person of the Godhead is thus constitutional to the very being of human beings."

3. Union with Christ and the Fall:

- The fall of humanity resulted in separation from Christ, which Peterson identifies as the most critical consequence in Ephesians 2:11-12.
- **Quote (Ephesians 2:12):** "...remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."
- This separation encompasses being alienated from Christ's person and all the benefits of salvation.
- The need for union with Christ stems directly from this separation caused by sin.

- The remedy for this separation is being "brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13), signifying union with him.

4. Union with Christ and the Incarnation:

- The incarnation of the eternal Son is crucial for enabling union with Christ.
- **Quote (Philip Hughes):** "...the doctrine of the image of God is the key to the factuality of the incarnation, no less than to the understanding of the true nature of man."
- By becoming one with humanity, Christ established the basis for believers to become one with him.
- **Quote (Robert Letham):** "The basis of our union with Christ is Christ's union with us in the incarnation. We can become one with him because he first became one with us."
- The incarnation allowed Christ to live a sinless life, die for humanity, and pour out the Spirit.

5. Union with Christ and Christ's Saving Work (Especially Pentecost):

- Christ's saving accomplishment, particularly his death, resurrection, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, is essential for bringing about union with him.
- Pentecost is presented as Christ's saving deed, fulfilling the prophecies of John the Baptist and Jesus himself (Matthew 3:11, Acts 1:4-5).
- The Holy Spirit, poured out by Christ at Pentecost, is the agent who unites believers to Christ through faith.
- **Quote (Robert Letham):** "Christ eternal Son, having united human nature in himself, now unites us with himself by the Holy Spirit as the Spirit draws us to him in faith."
- This union is not a personal union in the sense of becoming divine, but rather the Spirit entering and indwelling believers, bringing them into union with Christ.

6. Union with Christ and the New Creation:

- The ultimate goal of union with Christ is the final salvation of God's people and the deliverance of the entire cosmos from the curse of the fall.

- Christ's work has cosmic effects, reconciling all things to himself (Colossians 1:19-20) and leading to the restoration of creation (Romans 8:20-22, Revelation 21-22).
- God's plan is to ultimately "unite all things in him [Christ]" (Ephesians 1:9-10).
- Believers who are in Christ are already considered part of the new creation.
- **Quote (2 Corinthians 5:17):** "If anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come."
- Union with Christ involves divine indwelling by the Holy Spirit and participation in Christ's story (death, resurrection, future glory).
- **Quote (Colossians 2:20, 3:1, 3:3-4):** "With Christ you died... You've been raised with Christ... You've died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."
- The final outcome of union with Christ in the new creation is the resurrection and redemption of humanity and the restoration of heaven and earth, where God's people will live with the Holy Trinity for eternity.

Conclusion:

Dr. Peterson emphasizes that union with Christ is a central and unfolding theme throughout the entire biblical narrative. It was part of God's eternal plan, made possible through creation (specifically humanity's creation in God's image, prefiguring Christ the true image), necessitated by the fall (which separated humanity from Christ), secured through the incarnation and saving work of Christ (culminating in Pentecost and the gift of the Spirit), and will be fully realized in the new creation, bringing about the complete redemption of God's people and the cosmos. The concept of "in Christ" signifies this vital and multifaceted relationship that believers have with the Son of God through the work of the Holy Spirit.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 19, The Biblical Story

Union with Christ and the Biblical Story: A Study Guide

Quiz

1. According to Peterson, what two Pauline passages teach that God chose his people for salvation before creation, and what is the common element regarding Christ in these passages?
2. Describe the three approaches Peterson outlines for understanding "in Christ" in the context of pre-temporal election. Briefly explain Peterson's critique of the first two approaches.
3. What three essential steps in the biblical story does Peterson highlight as necessary preconditions for union with Christ, moving backward from faith?
4. Explain the significance of humans being created in the image of God in relation to union with Christ, referencing at least one scholar Peterson quotes.
5. According to Peterson, what is the most important consequence of the fall that highlights humanity's need for union with Christ, and where does Paul most clearly describe this?
6. How does Peterson connect the doctrine of the image of God to the incarnation of Christ? Why was the incarnation necessary for our salvation?
7. Explain the connection between Christ's incarnation and the event of Pentecost. Whose work is Pentecost considered to be, and what does it enable?
8. What is the ultimate goal of union with Christ in the context of the "new creation," and what scriptural evidence does Peterson provide for this cosmic dimension?
9. According to Paul (as cited by Peterson), what happens to an individual who is "in Christ," and what is one blessing of this faith union with Christ?
10. Summarize the overarching narrative of union with Christ throughout the biblical story as presented by Peterson in his conclusion.

Answer Key

1. The two Pauline passages are Ephesians 1:3-4 and 2 Timothy 1:8-9. Both passages state that God chose believers "in Christ" before the foundation of the world or before the ages began.
2. The three approaches are: (1) "in Christ" as a condition for salvation people must meet (Arminian view); (2) God primarily chose Christ and secondarily those he foreknew would believe (also Arminian); and (3) "in Christ" refers to God's sovereign plan to unite us to Christ before creation. Peterson critiques the first view for reading a condition (foreseen faith) into Paul's words and the second for misinterpreting Paul's emphasis, which is on God choosing us in Christ, not primarily choosing Christ.
3. Moving backward from faith, the three essential preconditions are Pentecost (Christ pouring out the Holy Spirit), the Incarnation of the Eternal Son, and humankind's creation in God's image.
4. Humans being created in the image of God establishes a compatibility between us and God, making us capable of fellowship with Him. Robert Letham states that "Union with Christ rests on the basis of the creation of man and woman to be compatible with God." This compatibility, particularly our capacity for relationship, is crucial for union.
5. The most important consequence of the fall is separation from Christ, which Paul describes most clearly in Ephesians 2:11-12. This separation means being alienated from the blessings and benefits found only in Christ.
6. Peterson, quoting Philip Hughes, states that the doctrine of the image of God is key to understanding the factuality of the incarnation because it shows a pre-existing connection between humanity and the second person of the Trinity (Christ as the true image). The incarnation was necessary for the God-man to live a sinless life, die for us, defeat our enemy, and deliver us.
7. The incarnation established Christ's union with humanity, making it possible for us to be united with him. Pentecost is Christ's saving deed, the fulfillment of prophecy where the risen and ascended Lord poured out the Holy Spirit on the church. This sending of the Spirit enables faith union with Christ by drawing believers to him.
8. The ultimate goal of union with Christ is the final salvation of God's people and the deliverance of heaven and earth, the "new creation." Peterson cites Isaiah 65-

66, Matthew 19, Romans 8, 2 Peter 3, and Revelation 21-22 as scriptural evidence for this cosmic reconciliation and uniting of all things in Christ (Ephesians 1:7-10).

9. According to Paul, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). One blessing of faith union with Christ is divine indwelling, where the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ and comes to dwell within us, allowing us to participate in Christ's story.
10. God's eternal plan included uniting his chosen people to his Son. Humans were created in God's image (the Son's likeness) for fellowship but were separated by the fall. Through the incarnation, the Son became human, enabling his sinless life, death, and resurrection for salvation. After ascending, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, joining believers to Christ in faith union, which will culminate in the complete restoration of humanity and creation at his return.

Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the significance of the phrase "in Christ" as it relates to both God's eternal plan for salvation and the believer's present experience, drawing upon Peterson's interpretation of key Pauline passages.
2. Analyze the interconnectedness of creation, the fall, and the incarnation as necessary stages in God's plan for union with Christ, according to Peterson's presentation.
3. Evaluate the role of the Holy Spirit in establishing and maintaining union with Christ, paying particular attention to the event of Pentecost and its ongoing implications for believers.
4. Explore the individual and cosmic dimensions of union with Christ as presented by Peterson, considering both the personal experience of believers and the future restoration of creation.
5. Compare and contrast Peterson's third approach to understanding pre-temporal election "in Christ" with the Arminian perspectives he outlines, explaining the key differences and Peterson's rationale for his view.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Union with Christ:** The spiritual joining of believers to Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, resulting in a deep and multifaceted relationship that includes sharing in his life, death, resurrection, and benefits.
- **Eternity Past (Pre-temporal Election):** God's sovereign choice of individuals for salvation before the creation of the world, as discussed in passages like Ephesians 1:4 and 2 Timothy 1:9.
- **Creation (Image of God):** God's act of bringing the universe and humanity into existence. Humans were created in God's image, reflecting His likeness and possessing the capacity for relationship with Him.
- **The Fall:** The historical event in which Adam and Eve disobeyed God, resulting in sin, separation from God, corruption, and the introduction of suffering and death into the world.
- **The Incarnation:** The act by which the eternal Son of God took on human nature, becoming fully God and fully man in the person of Jesus Christ.
- **Christ's Saving Work:** The entirety of Jesus Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension, through which he accomplished redemption and reconciliation for humanity.
- **Pentecost:** The event recorded in Acts 2 where the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples, marking the inauguration of the new covenant age and empowering believers for ministry and union with Christ.
- **New Creation:** The future reality of a fully restored heaven and earth, free from the effects of sin and death, where God's people will dwell with Him in perfect union.
- **Election:** God's sovereign and gracious choice of individuals or a people group for salvation and a specific purpose.
- **Justification:** God's legal declaration that a sinner is righteous in His sight, based on Christ's atoning sacrifice and received through faith.
- **Sanctification:** The ongoing process by which believers are made more like Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.
- **Redemption:** The act by which Christ paid the penalty for sin, freeing believers from its bondage and consequences.

- **Reconciliation:** The restoration of a broken relationship, specifically between God and humanity through the work of Christ.
- **Divine Indwelling:** The presence of the Holy Spirit within the believer, signifying and enabling their ongoing union with God.
- **Corporate Election:** The view that God's election is primarily directed toward a group or community (e.g., the church) rather than solely individual selection.
- **Conditional Election:** The theological view that God's election of individuals for salvation is based on his foreknowledge of their future faith or other conditions they will meet.
- **Sovereignty (of God):** God's ultimate authority and control over all things according to His will and purposes.
- **Grace:** God's unmerited favor and love extended toward humanity, particularly in the provision of salvation.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 19, The Biblical Story, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: Union with Christ in the Biblical Story

1. What does it mean that God chose believers "in Christ" before the foundation of the world?

The phrase "in Christ" in the context of God's eternal election signifies that God's plan to save humanity was intrinsically linked to his Son, Jesus Christ, from the very beginning. It doesn't mean we had actual union with Christ before creation, as we didn't yet exist. Instead, it indicates God's sovereign predetermination to unite a people to Christ, ensuring they would experience salvation through him. This choice, driven by God's own will and grace, was not based on any foreseen human action or condition but was the very means by which salvation would be accomplished and applied.

2. How does the creation of humanity in God's image relate to union with Christ?

Humanity's creation in the image and likeness of God establishes a fundamental compatibility between God and us, making fellowship possible. Importantly, the New Testament reveals that Christ is the true image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4, Colossians 1:15). Therefore, being made in God's image means we were created in the likeness of Christ. This inherent connection to the Son forms a foundational basis for the incarnation and our subsequent spiritual union with him. God created us for communion with himself, and this capacity is rooted in our being made in the image of the One with whom we are ultimately united.

3. How did the Fall impact humanity's relationship with Christ?

The Fall of humanity into sin resulted in a profound separation from Christ and all the spiritual blessings found in him. Ephesians 2:12 highlights that before coming to Christ, believers were "separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel...having no hope and without God in the world." This separation is the primary problem that necessitates union with Christ. The blessings of salvation, such as forgiveness and eternal life, are only accessible to those who are brought into union with Christ by the Holy Spirit, bridging the gap created by sin.

4. Why was the Incarnation of Jesus Christ necessary for union with humanity?

The Incarnation, the eternal Son of God becoming human, was an essential precondition for union with Christ. First, it enabled Jesus to live a sinless human life, die on the cross, and rise again, accomplishing the work of salvation. Only the God-man could serve as a mediator and effective sacrifice. Second, the Incarnation established a permanent union of divine and human nature in Christ, allowing him to become one with us so that we, in turn, could be united to him. As Letham states, "the basis of our union with Christ is Christ's union with us in the incarnation."

5. What role did Pentecost play in establishing union with Christ for believers?

Pentecost marks the pivotal event where the risen and ascended Christ poured out the Holy Spirit upon the church. This sending of the Spirit is Christ's own saving act, as crucial as his death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit is the agent who effectively joins believers to Christ in faith union. By indwelling and pervading believers, the Spirit creates a living and ongoing connection with the Son, enabling them to participate in Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Pentecost is thus the means by which the salvation accomplished by Christ is applied to believers through spiritual union.

6. What are some of the present realities and future implications of being in union with Christ?

Presently, being in union with Christ through the Holy Spirit brings numerous blessings, including divine indwelling (God's Spirit living within us), participation in Christ's story (experiencing aspects of his death and resurrection in our lives), forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and being part of the new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Looking to the future, union with Christ culminates in the final resurrection and redemption of believers and the restoration of all creation (Ephesians 1:10). God's ultimate plan is to unite all things in Christ, bringing about a new heaven and a new earth free from the curse of sin (Revelation 22:3).

7. Is union with Christ an individual or a corporate reality, or both?

Union with Christ is both an individual and a corporate reality. Each believer is personally joined to Christ through faith by the Holy Spirit. Simultaneously, all those who are in union with Christ together form the Church, the body of Christ. The Spirit unites individual believers to Christ and, in doing so, also unites them to one another in a shared life in Christ. Therefore, the experience of union is both deeply personal and intrinsically communal.

8. How does the concept of "in Christ" illuminate the entire biblical narrative?

The concept of "in Christ" serves as a central thread that weaves through the entire biblical story. From God's eternal plan to choose and save a people "in Christ" before creation, to humanity's creation in Christ's image, the separation from Christ due to the Fall, the Son's incarnation to unite with humanity, the Spirit's work at Pentecost to bring about faith union, and the ultimate goal of uniting all things in Christ in the new creation – this phrase underscores that God's redemptive purposes and actions are fundamentally centered in and accomplished through his Son. Understanding union with Christ provides a crucial framework for comprehending the unfolding of God's plan throughout history.