

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 20, Systematic Theology [Church, Sacraments, Christian Life]

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 20, Systematic Theology [Church, Sacraments, Christian Life], Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Robert Peterson's lecture explores the theological concept of **union with Christ** and its significance within systematic theology. The session specifically examines **union with Christ** in relation to the church as a living temple and the body/bride of Christ. It further discusses the **sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper)** as visible words ordained by Christ, emphasizing their role in portraying the gospel and facilitating ongoing union. Finally, the lecture outlines the profound impact of **union with Christ on the Christian life**, highlighting its implications for identity, suffering, perseverance, and ultimate glory, before concluding with an examination of this concept in Hebrews through Revelation.

2. 20 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 20 – 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
_Session20.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 20, Systematic Theology [Church, Sacraments, Christian Life]

Briefing Document: Dr. Robert A. Peterson on Union with Christ and Systematic Theology

Overview: This document summarizes the key themes and important ideas presented by Dr. Robert A. Peterson in Session 20 of his teaching on the Holy Spirit and Union with Christ. This session focuses on the relationship between union with Christ and various aspects of systematic theology, specifically the church, sacraments (or ordinances), Christian life, and the theme of union with Christ as it appears in Hebrews through Revelation. Dr. Peterson aims to conclude the study of union with Christ by considering its systematic theological implications.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. Union with Christ and the Church:

- Dr. Peterson emphasizes that Paul is the primary New Testament theologian of union with Christ, and consequently, we expect him to have the most to say about its connection to the church. However, he notes that Peter and John also offer significant insights.
- He reiterates previously established understandings of the church as a living temple, abiding in the Father and the Son, being "in Christ," participating in Jesus' story, and being the body and bride of Christ.
- These Pauline pictures, the body and bride of Christ, are highlighted as major metaphors for the church, underscoring the intimate and vital connection believers share with Christ.

2. Union with Christ and the Sacraments (Ordinances):

- Peterson clarifies that the terms "ordinances" and "sacraments" are used because these practices (Baptism and the Lord's Supper) were ordained by Christ and are holy signs through which God gives grace.
- He argues for a sacramental theology where God actively works in the lives of his people through these visible words, paralleling the efficacy of the preached Word.

- **Baptism and the Lord's Supper as Visible Words:** These ordinances "portray the gospel in ceremony" and were instituted by Jesus to ensure the church never forgets the gospel message. The Lord's Supper, explicitly in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, proclaims the Lord's death until he comes.
- Quote: "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (referring to 1 Corinthians 11:26)
- **Efficacy of Sacraments:** While sacraments do not save *in and of themselves* (mere performance doesn't guarantee salvation), God works through them to make promises to which believers must respond in faith. This is similar to the preached Word, where hearing alone does not save, but faith in Christ communicated through the word does.
- Quote: "The sacraments do not save in and of themselves any more than the word does. Merely hearing the word does not save. People are saved not merely by hearing the word, but by putting their faith in the Christ who comes to them in the word, preached or read."
- **Necessity of Word vs. Sacraments:** Peterson makes a crucial distinction: the Word is necessary for salvation, while the sacraments are not absolutely necessary. He uses Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 1:14-17 (thanking God he baptized few in Corinth) to support this.
- Quote: "The word is necessary for salvation, while the ordinances are not."
- **God as the Main Worker:** God is the primary minister in both preaching and administering sacraments. Human ministers are spokespersons, and God works through the visible word to make promises that are fulfilled when met with faith.
- **Rejection of Catholic and Lutheran Views of Eucharist:** Peterson rejects the focus on the bread and wine in these traditions, emphasizing that the focus should be on Christ and the grace He grants through the Holy Spirit.
- Quote (citing Sinclair Ferguson): "...it is not by the Church's administration or merely by the activity of our memories, but through the Spirit that we enjoy communion with Christ, crucified, risen, and now exalted."
- **Baptism (Initial Union) vs. Lord's Supper (Ongoing Union):** The core meaning of both ordinances is union with Christ. Baptism signifies the believer's initial, once-for-all union, while the Lord's Supper strengthens and invigorates this ongoing union through faithful participation. This is likened to receiving initial forgiveness

at conversion and daily forgiveness through confession, and the initial commitment of marriage versus the growth of the relationship.

- Quote (summarizing Calvin): "The Sacrament of Baptism is connected with the believer's initial union with Christ. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is connected with the believer's ongoing union with Christ. In the Lord's Supper, the believer is nourished and sustained, and his communion and union with Christ is strengthened and increased."

3. Union with Christ and the Christian Life:

- Union with Christ is presented as both a general term for the entire plan of salvation and a specific term for its application to individuals. It acts as an "umbrella" over all aspects of salvation and the "glue" holding them together.
- Its impact on the Christian life is "enormous," constituting Christian identity. Believers are "in Christ," intimately and permanently related to Him through the Holy Spirit.
- This union involves mutual indwelling with the Trinity, participation in Jesus' story, belonging to Christ (with Christ belonging to us), and intimate fellowship akin to marriage.
- Union with Christ entails both present suffering (identification with His death) and the promise of future glory (sharing in His resurrection).
- Perseverance in faith is also tied to union with Christ, enabled by God's grace, leading to eventual participation in Christ's eternal reign.

4. Union with Christ in Hebrews through Revelation:

- **Hebrews:** Peterson interprets Hebrews 3:14 ("we have come to share in Christ") as pertaining to union, emphasizing the idea of partaking in Christ's person and work, offering encouragement to persevere.
- Quote: "He is saying that we share in Christ. We partake of him."
- **1 and 2 Peter:** Peter depicts believers as "living stones" united to Christ, the "living stone." This union brings resurrection life and enables them to be part of a spiritual temple, worshipping God through Christ. Believers also participate in Christ's suffering and will share in his glory. Peter concludes 1 Peter with "peace to all of you who are in Christ" (5:14), highlighting the new relationship and spiritual bond. 2 Peter 1:4 speaks of becoming "partakers of the divine nature,"

understood as sharing in God's moral excellence, enabled by escaping worldly corruption.

- Quote: "peace to all of you who are in Christ." (1 Peter 5:14)
- **1 John:** John uses metaphors of "God or Christ being in us and of our being in Christ" and "abiding in Christ or God and Christ or God abiding in us" to describe union. The indwelling Christ ensures victory over spiritual enemies. Being "in him" is equivalent to having eternal life and knowing the Son. Abiding in Christ has moral ramifications, requiring followers to live like Jesus. Mutual abiding between God and believers is emphasized, facilitated by the Holy Spirit, and carries ethical obligations.
- Quote (citing Robert Yarbrough): "to be in Christ or God as 1 John depicts the state is to know God the Father fully through relationship to him via the son."
- **Revelation:** In the context of warnings about eternal punishment and a call for endurance (Revelation 14:9-12), John offers comfort by stating, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on" (14:13). Peterson interprets "in the Lord" similarly to Paul's "in Christ," signifying spiritual union with Christ at the time of death, where death has lost its terror due to Christ's victory.
- Quote: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." (Revelation 14:13)

Conclusion:

Dr. Peterson concludes by expressing thanksgiving for the profound salvation that includes union with Christ, facilitated by the Holy Spirit, and resulting in a people belonging to God. He prays for grace to live lives worthy of this union, marked by gratitude, holiness, and love. The session serves as a comprehensive overview of the systematic theological implications of union with Christ, drawing connections to key doctrines and biblical texts across the New Testament.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 20, Systematic Theology [Church, Sacraments, Christian Life]

Union with Christ: A Study Guide

Quiz

1. According to Peterson, why are baptism and the Lord's Supper referred to as "ordinances"? Why are they also called "sacraments"?
2. Explain the parallel Peterson draws between the preached word and the sacraments in relation to the gospel. How do both function in communicating God's grace?
3. What qualification does Peterson make regarding the necessity of the word and the sacraments for salvation? Why does he make this distinction, referencing Paul's writings?
4. Summarize Peterson's understanding of the Lord's Supper, contrasting it with Roman Catholic and "memorialist" views. What role does the Holy Spirit play in his understanding?
5. What is the fundamental meaning that Peterson argues baptism and the Lord's Supper share? How does he differentiate between the significance of these two ordinances?
6. According to Peterson, what does union with Christ encompass in relation to the Christian life? Provide two specific ways this union impacts a believer.
7. How does Peterson interpret Hebrews 3:14 in relation to union with Christ? What encouragement does this verse offer to believers?
8. Describe Peter's use of the "living stone" imagery in 1 Peter 2:4-5 and how it relates to believers' union with Christ and the church.
9. What are the two primary metaphors John uses in 1 John to describe union with Christ? Provide a brief explanation of one of these metaphors.
10. How does John's use of the phrase "die in the Lord" in Revelation 14:13 relate to the concept of union with Christ, according to Peterson?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Peterson states that baptism and the Lord's Supper are called "ordinances" because Christ Himself ordered and gave them. They are also called "sacraments" because they are holy signs that God uses to give grace to His people.
2. Peterson explains that both the preached word and the sacraments are forms of the word of God. They both portray the gospel: the preached word audibly, and the sacraments as "visible words" in ceremony. Through both, Jesus graciously ministers the gospel to His church.
3. Peterson qualifies that the word is necessary for salvation, while the sacraments are not absolutely necessary. He points to Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 1:14-17 where Paul is glad he didn't baptize many, arguing it's inconceivable Paul would say he was glad he didn't preach.
4. Peterson rejects the Roman Catholic view focusing on the bread and wine and the Lutheran understanding of the Eucharist. He also disagrees with the "memorialist" view that the Supper is merely a symbol. Instead, he believes the focus should be on Christ, with the Holy Spirit as the nexus connecting believers to the benefits of Christ's atonement.
5. Peterson argues that the most basic and profound meaning shared by both baptism and the Lord's Supper is union with Christ. He differentiates them by stating that baptism signifies the initial, once-for-all union with Christ, while communion signifies the ongoing strengthening and invigoration of that union.
6. According to Peterson, union with Christ is both a general term for the plan of salvation and a specific term for its application, impacting all aspects of the Christian life. It constitutes Christian identity, intimately relating believers to Christ in salvation, and it means believers belong to Christ, having fellowship with Him.
7. Peterson interprets Hebrews 3:14, "we have come to share in Christ," as indicating a deep participation in who Christ is and what He has accomplished. This verse encourages believers facing trials to persevere, reminding them of their vital union with Christ.
8. Peter depicts believers as "living stones" who, by coming to Christ, the "living stone," receive eternal life through union with Him. These living stones are then used to build a spiritual house (the church) where believers worship God through Christ, conveying both individual and communal union.

9. The two primary metaphors John uses are: first, God or Christ being in us and us being in Christ; and second, abiding in Christ or God and Christ or God abiding in us. The metaphor of abiding emphasizes a habitual, personal attachment to Christ and the presence of God's saving truth in believers, often carrying moral implications.
10. Peterson explains that John's phrase "die in the Lord" uses "in the Lord" similarly to Paul's "in Christ." It signifies that death has lost its terror for believers who die in a state of spiritual union with Christ, who conquered death through His own death and resurrection.

Essay Format Questions

1. Explore the significance of the sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper) in relation to union with Christ, according to Dr. Peterson. How do these ordinances function as "visible words," and what distinguishes their respective roles in the believer's life in union with Christ?
2. Analyze Dr. Peterson's understanding of the believer's union with Christ and its implications for the Christian life. Discuss at least three specific ways this union shapes a believer's identity, experience, and ultimate destiny.
3. Compare and contrast the ways in which the biblical authors Paul, Peter, and John address the concept of union with Christ in the passages discussed by Dr. Peterson. Identify key themes and unique perspectives presented by each author.
4. Evaluate Dr. Peterson's engagement with different theological traditions (e.g., Roman Catholic, Lutheran, memorialist) regarding the Lord's Supper. Articulate his own position on the sacrament in light of union with Christ and the role of the Holy Spirit.
5. Discuss the theme of perseverance in the passages from Hebrews and Revelation examined by Dr. Peterson. How does the concept of union with Christ provide encouragement and assurance for believers facing trials and the reality of death?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Union with Christ:** A central theological concept referring to the believer's vital and intimate connection with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, encompassing their participation in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension.
- **Ordinances:** Practices instituted by Christ for the church to observe; in this context, referring to baptism and the Lord's Supper.
- **Ex opere operato:** A Latin phrase meaning "from the work done," often used in Catholic theology to describe the view that the sacraments confer grace by the very fact of their valid administration, regardless of the recipient's faith.
- **Memorialist View:** A view of the Lord's Supper that emphasizes it primarily as a symbolic act of remembrance of Christ's sacrifice, with no real spiritual presence or grace communicated.
- **Biblical Theology:** A discipline of Christian theology that seeks to understand and articulate the theology of the Bible as it unfolds historically through its various books and authors.
- **Atonement:** Christ's work of reconciliation between God and humanity through His sinless life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection.
- **Justification:** God's act of declaring a sinner righteous in His sight through faith in Jesus Christ.
- **Sanctification:** The ongoing process by which believers are made holy and conformed to the image of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- **Perseverance of the Saints:** The doctrine that all those who are truly born of God will be kept by God's power and will persevere as Christians until the end.
- **Metaphor:** A figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable.
- **Abiding:** A term used in John's writings to describe the believer's continuous and intimate dwelling in Christ and Christ's dwelling in the believer, signifying a deep and ongoing relationship.
- **Perichoresis:** A theological term, often used in relation to the Trinity, describing the mutual indwelling and interpenetration of the divine persons.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, The Holy Spirit and Union with Christ, Session 20, Systematic Theology [Church, Sacraments, Christian Life], Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Union with Christ

1. Why is "union with Christ" a significant concept in Christian theology? Union with Christ is a foundational concept because it describes the intimate and comprehensive relationship believers have with Jesus Christ. It's not merely an association but a vital, spiritual joining where believers participate in Christ's story, from his crucifixion to his future glory. This union is central to understanding salvation, Christian identity, and the believer's ongoing life in Christ, serving as both the overarching framework and the cohesive element for all aspects of the application of salvation.

2. How does the Bible, particularly Paul's writings, describe the church in relation to union with Christ? The Apostle Paul is the primary biblical theologian of union with Christ, and he portrays the church through powerful metaphors that illustrate this union. He describes the church as the *body of Christ*, emphasizing our interconnectedness and dependence on Christ as the head. Additionally, he depicts the church as the *bride of Christ*, highlighting the intimate, loving, and covenantal relationship between Christ and his people. Other New Testament writers like Peter and John also contribute to this understanding by describing the church as a living temple abiding in Christ.

3. What is the theological significance of the ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper) in the context of union with Christ? Baptism and the Lord's Supper, instituted by Christ himself, are not merely symbolic acts but "visible words" that portray the gospel in ceremonial form. They are holy signs through which God ministers grace to his people. Baptism signifies the believer's initial union with Christ, a once-for-all identification with his death and resurrection. The Lord's Supper, on the other hand, signifies and strengthens the believer's ongoing union with Christ, nourishing and sustaining their communion with him through faith-filled participation in the elements.

4. Do the sacraments (ordinances) guarantee salvation? Why or why not? No, the sacraments (ordinances) do not guarantee salvation in and of themselves. The mere performance of baptism or partaking in the Lord's Supper does not automatically confer salvation or eternal life. Just as hearing the preached word alone does not save, it is faith in the Christ presented through these means that brings salvation. God works through both the preached word and the ordinances, but a genuine response of faith is essential for receiving the grace offered.

5. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing about and maintaining union with Christ? The Holy Spirit plays the crucial role of uniting believers to Jesus Christ. He is the agent through whom this comprehensive, vital, and permanent union is brought about. The Spirit is the "nexus" or connection between the ascended Christ and faithful believers, conveying the benefits of Christ's atonement to them. Furthermore, the Spirit enables believers to recognize and experience their abiding in Christ, assuring them of God's presence and the truth of the gospel message.

6. How does the concept of union with Christ impact the Christian life, including suffering and future glory? Union with Christ profoundly shapes the Christian life. It forms the core of Christian identity, as believers are "in Christ," intimately related to him. This union entails fellowship with Christ, akin to a marriage relationship, and the indwelling of the Holy Trinity. Because believers are united with Christ in his death, they also share in his sufferings in the present. However, this present suffering is accompanied by the promise of future glory, as those who share in his sufferings will also reign with him. Perseverance in faith, enabled by God's grace, is a mark of this union, leading to ultimate participation in Christ's resurrection glory.

7. How do the books of Hebrews, 1 & 2 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation illustrate the theme of union with Christ? These New Testament books, beyond Paul's writings, offer further insights into union with Christ. Hebrews emphasizes believers "sharing in Christ" and partaking in his person and work, encouraging perseverance through this union. Peter portrays believers as "living stones" built upon Christ, the living stone, sharing in his suffering and glory. 1 John uses metaphors of God/Christ being "in us" and we being "in Christ," as well as "abiding" in each other, highlighting both the intimacy and the ethical implications of this union. Revelation speaks of the blessedness of those who "die in the Lord," signifying a state of spiritual union with Christ that conquers death and leads to eternal rest.

8. What is the difference between the initial union with Christ (signified in baptism) and the ongoing union (signified in the Lord's Supper)? Baptism signifies the believer's once-for-all initial union with Christ, marking their entrance into the Christian life and identification with Christ's death and resurrection. The Lord's Supper, on the other hand, signifies and strengthens the believer's ongoing union with Christ. It is a means by which believers are nourished and sustained in their communion with Christ, allowing their relationship with him to deepen and grow over time, similar to how a marriage relationship develops after the wedding day.