

Union and Communion with Christ

John 15:14-15 ESV You are my friends if you do what I command you. **15** No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

I. In our series on “comparative concepts”, we first discussed the compatibility of justification and sanctification. Last week, we talked about the weakness of assuming eternal security based on some religious action or standard, versus the powerful inner assurance of salvation that can only be given to you by the Spirit.

A. Today, we look at **union** with Christ and the resulting **communion** with Christ. To be united with Christ in his death and resurrection is the necessary prerequisite to having life-giving, heart-changing, joy and peace producing fellowship with him. So what does it look like to be united with Christ?

1. I said last week that, sadly, most Christians in the modern era look at their salvation as a **transaction** or contract that they have with God. They believe in a single truth; that Christ “died on the cross for our sins”, nothing more.

a) They assume in believing they are guaranteed eternal life (and perhaps some other benefits) because God is somehow obligated to them, having met the “legal requirement” for forgiveness through their act of belief.

b) But reading through the New Testament reveals God has a much fuller expectation of the redeemed life. He is offering so much more than a “clean rap sheet” when we come to Christ. He is offering eternal union!

2. More than just being forgiven, and admitted into heaven, God is inviting us into the perfect, eternal fellowship that has always existed between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When we understand this, it awes and humbles us. Salvation is so much more than a clean record and ticket to heaven.

B. Union with Christ is accomplished by God alone through the death of Christ. It’s not something any of us can make happen. It’s not just a simple transaction.

1. **2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. **18** All this is from God, **who through Christ reconciled us to himself** and gave us **the ministry of reconciliation**; **19** that is, **in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself**, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us **the message of reconciliation**. **20** Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, **be reconciled to God**.

a) Some form of “reconciliation” is used 5 times in 4 verses. The concept of mere forgiveness (“not counting their trespasses against them”) is mentioned only once. What is God trying to communicate to us?

b) God is more concerned with reconnecting with us relationally (Eden), even more than forgiving our sinful deeds. Because God is perfectly holy, our sin **must** be forgiven before we can have fellowship with him. But It seems he is looking past forgiveness to something more. Forgiveness is a start to something bigger; it is a means, and not an end in itself.

2. The idea of union is beautifully illustrated in the image of the church as the bride of Christ. 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Revelation all use bride

imagery to describe the church. When Christ walked the earth, it was common for a groom to pay a “bride price” for the privilege of taking a young woman as a wife. Christ paid the bride price for us with his blood.

- a) When a man and woman are married, they leave their family of origin and cleave to one another. They become one flesh, one mind, one spirit, completing each other in loving relationship.
 - b) We have been called to be in union with Christ, saying goodbye to all else that is familiar to us in this world, clinging to him only, forsaking all others, and every other selfish pursuit. We exist for him alone now.
3. The Bible also illustrates the idea of union by calling us the “body of Christ”. We are told that we are the various members of his body (hands and feet, eyes and mouths, etc.). We no longer act independently but must remain connected to the head in order to have any meaningful existence.
- a) **John 15:4 ESV** Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. **5** I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.
 - b) Union with Christ means that we don’t live as the same people with only slightly different values after accepting Christ. It means that everything changes; that we draw our life from beyond our talents and abilities, our wisdom, strength or riches. We abide in Christ as the source of our life.
- C. We often view the benefits of the gospel as what has been given to us **by** Christ. But the New Testament speaks more often of what we have “in Christ”. In other words, Christ doesn’t just hand out blessings like a new father handing out cigars, but blessings abound to us because we are in him. Instead of thinking of Christ giving life and salvation, we should realize that he is sharing his own life.
1. **Colossians 3:3 ESV** For you have died, **and your life is hidden with Christ in God.** **4** When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.
 2. The Bible says that we have redemption, eternal life, freedom from condemnation, freedom from sin and death, the love of God, fellowship in the body, sanctification, grace, wisdom, righteousness, spiritual family, triumph and victory, justification, the blessing of Abraham, encouragement, and more; all because we are in Christ. None of this comes from our own work, but from grace. It is so much more than forgiveness and heaven!
- D. Through the cross and the resurrection, God has claimed us for himself in an unbreakable eternal union. All of us who are his should strive to keep this reality at the forefront of our minds. It is the basis of Paul telling us in Romans 8 that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.
- II. This close union that was established on the cross for everyone who believes leads to the greatest benefit of all for Christians. Because we are united to God in Christ, we have the invitation to have close communion and fellowship with him.
- A. God is a personal being. He is not impersonal, like the force in Star Wars! He has a will, he loves, he thinks and plans, he responds, he feels, he communicates. And the great joy of being one of his people is that he longs to know us in a personal way. He wants to be known by those who call him Lord.

1. **John 17:3 ESV** And this is eternal life, *that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.* Eternal life isn't about having a mansion in utopia, but knowing the Father, Son and Holy Spirit forever.
 2. God wants us to be more than passively saved by him, he wants us to know him, to trust him, to love him, to pray to him and worship him. In short God wants us to enjoy him. That's what communion and fellowship means.
- B. **Luke 10:38 ESV** Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. **39** And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. **40** But ***Martha was distracted with much serving.*** And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." **41** But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, **42** but ***one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.***"
1. Have you enjoyed the sweet fellowship of Christ this week? Many of us are like Martha; "distracted with much serving". We are always fretting over our unsanctified parts, or some act of ministry. Our Christian lives are filled with anxiety and we are "troubled about many things". Does that describe you?
 2. In the Name of Christ, let me remind you: "One thing is necessary". To be in fellowship with Jesus! That is even more than prayer, and Bible study.
 - a) Some people work hard at their prayers! They get up early, set a timer, keep a journal, have reminders on their phones, etc. I'm sure some of those things can be helpful. But when was the last time you simply got alone with Jesus and spent 15 minutes telling him how much you love him and how thankful you are for all that he has done in your life?
 - b) When was the last time you opened his Word, not to check a box on a reading plan, but just to sponge up syllables and sentences that were dripping with grace, life and truth? When was the last time you lingered over a Word, or a phrase and let it burn in you throughout the day?
 3. That is the "better part" to choose! There is nothing in Heaven, earth or hell that can take that kind of fellowship away from you. Until you are feeding your soul with that kind of communion, you haven't scratched the surface of what belongs to you as someone in union with Christ! Full communion.
 - a) When you live this way, you will feel it when you pull away for a season. You will miss the sweetness of Christ's nearness, the reassurance of his place in every thought. His guidance in your every action and pursuit.
 - b) Many of us are happy just to be saved. We have either never known the depth of our union with Christ, or have just been satisfied to enjoy the gifts to the neglect of the giver. But as our text reminded us, Jesus is not so much interested in having servants, as he is in calling us friends.
- C. Serving is important. Remember that Jesus said, "**You are my friends if you do what I command you.**" A servant obeys out of duty, but a friend does because he recognizes the love, power and wisdom of his master-friend. Which are you?
1. ***"the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."***

Do you want to know the will of God? It's not a secret to be unlocked. The will of God is laid out crystal clear to his friends. **Psalm 25:14 ESV** The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.

2. Friendship with the Lord will give meaning to your suffering, and it will restrain your selfishness and madness in times of prosperity. It will give you insight to the problems that you and others face. It will illuminate the deep things in the Word. Why wouldn't we pursue communion with him?
- D. But fellowship with him also means that we desire to please him. His fellowship is offered for our growing, cleansing, and flourishing. He will not turn a blind eye to a closet full of secret sins and maintain fellowship.
1. Imagine if you invited me to dinner frequently and made liver and onions every time, knowing that I can't stand liver and onions! At some point I would clearly get the message that you really didn't want me coming over!
 - a) **1 John 1:6 ESV** If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.
 - b) Sin is offensive to God. If we confess that it's there, he will help us to be free from it. But if we embrace it and act like it's no big deal, we cannot expect to remain in close communion with Jesus.
 2. But fellowship and communion with Christ isn't achieved and maintained by being perfect (or else no one could ever have fellowship with him!), but by being truthful and open to his searching eyes and healing hand. Sanctification is the glorious benefit of our close communion to Christ.
 3. **1 John 1:7 ESV** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.
- E. Wouldn't today be a great day to be more than just "saved"? Wouldn't it be a great day to be intimately reconciled to God through true fellowship and communion? You have already been invited to the table! Come and dine!
- III. **Communion:** **1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
- IV. **Benediction:** (Ephesians 3:17-19) (May) Christ dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, **18** may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, **19** and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.