

UNION WITH CHRIST

- I. Biblical references to “union with Christ”
- A. There are no Biblical usages of the phrase “union with Christ”
- B. The New Testament employs numerous concepts in attempting to explain and illustrate the relationship between Christ and the Christian.
1. Reception
Jn. 1:12 - “to as many as received Him, He gave right to become children of God”
Gal. 3:2 - “you received the Spirit...by hearing with faith”
Col. 2:6 - “as you received Christ Jesus, so walk in Him”
 2. Partaking
Heb. 3:14 - “we have become partakers of Christ”
Heb. 6:4 - “have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit”
II Pet. 1:4 - “partakers of the divine nature”
 3. Encompassing
I Cor. 1:30 - “by His doing you are in Christ Jesus”
II Cor. 5:17 - “if any man is in Christ...”
I Jn. 2:5 - “we know that we are in Him”
 4. Enclothing
Eph. 4:24 - “you have put on the new man”
Col. 3:10 - “you have put on the new man”
 5. Indwelling
II Cor. 13:5 - “Jesus Christ is in you”
Gal. 2:20 - “Christ lives in me”
Col. 1:27 - “Christ in you, the hope of glory”
 6. Union
I Cor. 6:17 - “one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him”
 7. Vitality
Phil. 1:21 - “for me to live is Christ”
Col. 3:4 - “Christ, who is our life”
I Jn. 5:12 - “He who has the Son has life”
 8. Identity
Acts 11:26 - “first called Christians in Antioch”
I Cor. 15:10 - “by the grace of God I am what I am”
 9. New creation
II Cor. 5:17 - “a new creature; old things passed away, all things become new”
Gal. 6:15 - “a new creation”
 10. Reign of Christ as Lord
Rom. 5:17 - “reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ”
Rom. 10:9 - “Jesus as Lord”
 11. Empowered
Eph. 3:20 - “the power that works within us”
Col. 1:29 - “His power which mightily works within me”
 12. Manifestation
II Cor. 4:10,11 - “life of Jesus manifested in our body...mortal flesh”
Col. 1:10 - “bearing fruit in every good work”
- II. Biblical analogies are employed to illustrate “union with Christ”
- A. Analogies
1. Triune God - Jn. 14:23; Jn. 17:21-23
 2. Adam and human race - Rom. 5:12-19; I Cor. 15:19-49

3. Head and body - Eph. 4:15,16
 4. Temple and its god - I Cor. 3:16; 6:19; II Cor. 6:16
 5. Husband and wife - Eph. 5:22-33
 6. Container and contents - II Cor. 4:7
 7. Vine and branches - Jn. 15:1-8
 8. Building and cornerstone - Eph. 2:19-22; I Pet. 2:4,5
- B. All analogies are limited and inadequate
1. They provide similitude and comparison
 2. Cannot provide exact expression

III. Factors to consider concerning "union with Christ"

- A. Deity/Humanity
1. Deity
 - a. The Christian does not become deified or divinized
 - b. Christians are not made into "little gods"
 - c. Christians are not elevated to the "God-level"
 - d. Christians are not transformed into Christ
 - e. Christians are not supernaturalized
 - f. The Christian is united with Christ, who is God.
 2. Humanity
 - a. Christians retain and remain human
 - b. Christians do not rise above their humanity
 - c. Christians do not escape into the metaphysical
 - d. The humanity of the Christian individual is not obliterated, displaced, dissolved, replaced, subsumed, substituted or exchanged.
- B. Objectivity/Subjectivity
1. Objectivity
 - a. The Christian was positionally identified with the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.
 - b. The Christian was historically "in Christ" as Jesus served as our representative
 - c. The Christian is theologically "in Christ" as his placement of status and standing before God.
 - d. These historical and theological foundations must be maintained, but not to the exclusion or diminishing of the subjective realities.
 2. Subjectivity
 - a. The Christian's union with Christ is also an internal and actual reality
 - (1) affecting our spiritual condition and identity
 - (2) affecting our behavioral expression
 - b. Our union with Christ is not exclusively a subjective experience
 - (1) merely existential impact
 - (2) mystical expansion of consciousness
 - (3) ecstatic feelings of rapture or communion
- C. Diversity/Unity
1. Diversity
 - a. The distinction of Creator and creature always remains
 - b. Christ and the Christian are always distinguishable; not identical
 - c. The Christian is not depersonalized
 - d. "The container never becomes the contents"

2. Unity
 - a. The union of Christ and the Christian is a unique reality that is most difficult to explain in human language.
 - b. It is more than assent to an ideology
 - c. It is sometimes explained as a “relationship”
 - d. It is a real spiritual unification; not a mere abstraction
 - e. Older theologians defined it as “consubstantiation”
 - f. It is not a fusion, coalescence, or syncretism
 - g. It does not create an equivalence making us identical with Christ

D. Ontological/Operational

1. Ontological

- a. The very Being of God in Christ is united with the Christian
- b. This is more than just receiving the “benefits” of Christ
- c. This is more than just an objective status or standing with God
- d. Christ in the Christian is more than an inert entity or commodity; a static possession
- e. Christ in the Christian is more than a potential or ideal reality
- f. Christ in the Christian is not just a future hope

2. Operational

- a. Christ in the Christian desires to express Himself through the Christian.
- b. This is not...
 - (1) imitation of Christ’s example
 - (2) legalistic conformity to moralistic and ethical rules
 - (3) self-generated “works”
- c. It is a manifestation of Christ’s life in Christian behavior
 - (1) energized and empowered by the divine dynamic of Christ
 - (2) not passively, but in active submission and subordination to the Lordship of Christ
 - (3) visibly expressing the character of God in the behavior of the Christian to the glory of God

E. Individual/Collective

1. Individual

- a. Each individual is responsible to respond to who Christ is and what Christ has done
- b. Individually we allow for the receptivity of His activity in faith
- c. Our union with Christ is often called a “personal relationship”
- d. We must beware of excessive individualism

2. Collective

- a. When we are united with Christ we are part of the collective whole of Christians
- b. Every Christian is a member of the Body of Christ, the Church
- c. We must beware of excessive corporateness and institutionalism

IV. Alternatives of response to “union with Christ”

- A. Reject as unreasonable - absurdity
- B. Reduce to human reason - mechanical transactionalism

- C. Accept the revelation of God - "mystery"
 - 1. Natural reason will never explain the union with Christ
 - a. It is beyond all human logic, language and words
 - b. It can never be fully figured out and explained
 - c. All attempts at definition, description and depiction will inevitably be inadequate.
 - 2. Failure to accept the paradoxical antinomy of this union
 - a. is a rejection of God's intent for man
 - b. is a deification of human reason
 - 3. Must allow latitude and variation of imprecise expression
- V. Importance of attempting to understand and explain "union with Christ"
 - A. Integral to understanding all God has done and is doing in Christ for man
 - 1. Redemption
 - 2. Justification
 - 3. Sanctification
 - 4. Glorification
 - 5. Ecclesiology
 - B. Essential to understanding the teleological purpose of God for man
 - 1. How man can "do all to the glory of God" - I Cor.
 - 2. By manifesting the character of God