

This Great Salvation

Session 2—Union with Christ and Election

Union with Christ

“Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ.... This can be readily seen if we remember that brief expression which is so common in the New Testament, namely, “in Christ.”¹

- Union with Christ is not a “step” in our salvation but the reality that underlies every “step” that is, every aspect of it.
 - “Union with Christ is crucial to, and at the heart of, the biblical teaching of salvation.”²
- I. Our union with Christ has its roots in election. “... even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world ...” (Ephesians 1.4)
 - II. Our union with Christ is based on Christ’s redemptive work (cross work). “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses ...” Ephesians 1.7
 - III. Our union with Christ is effected (comes into actual effect) in time. “God ... made us alive together with Christ ...” Ephesians 2.5
 - A. Through the work of the Holy Spirit (John 14.15-20)
 - B. Through our faith (Ephesians 2.8)

Ephesians 1.15-2.10

¹ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1955, p. 201.

² Robert Letham, *Union with Christ*, P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, 2011, p. 3. This is the most thorough recent treatment of the topic.

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when **he raised him from the dead and seated him** at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But **God** being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ**—by grace you have been saved—and **raised us up with him** and **seated us with him** in the heavenly places **in Christ Jesus**, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us **in Christ Jesus**. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created **in Christ Jesus** for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

- *archégos*—author, leader, captain, founder, pioneer (Acts 3.15; 5.31; Hebrews 2.10; 12.2). Sinclair Ferguson has used this word in describing Jesus as the lead climber of a team scaling a mountain. We are roped to him. And just as surely as he has triumphed, so shall we.³

³ Sinclair Ferguson, *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, D.L. Alexander, ed., InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 1988, p. 49.

- Mind the prepositions; they show association.
- What does the Father think of the Son? You are in the Son, united with him in the deepest spiritual union imaginable!
- You are no longer alone! John 14.15-18; Colossians 3.1-4.

Review—*Ordo Salutis*

Election

Gospel Call (general and effective)

Regeneration (being born again)

Conversion (faith and repentance)

Justification (and adoption)

Sanctification (definite and progressive)

Perseverance (preservation)

Glorification

Election

I. Introduction

- J.I Packer calls it “the family secret of the children of God.”⁴
- “Election is an act of God before creation in which he chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of his sovereign good pleasure.”⁵
- This teaching of Scripture finds its basis in the decree of God who is purposeful in all that he does.

⁴ J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology*, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, 1993, p. 150.

⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Zondervan Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1994, p. 670.

- “God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.”⁶

II. **Biblical Testimony**

- “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 7.7-8)
- “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit ...” (John 15.16)
- “And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed (ordained) to eternal life believed.” (Acts 13.48)
- “For those whom he (God) foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn of many brothers.” (Romans 8.29)
- “Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call—she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ As it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’” (Romans 9.11-13)

⁶ *Westminster Confession*, Chapter III, ¶ 1.

- “... even as he (God, the Father) chose us in him (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.” (Ephesians 1.4-5)

III. A Difficult Doctrine

- A. Are we then puppets? (The will of God and the will of man; sovereignty of God and responsibility of man; purpose of God and free agency of man).
 1. Willful inability (John 6.44, 65); (Anselm)
 2. Limited freedom
 3. Complementary concepts
- B. Fatalism (a mechanistic universe)
- C. “Is there injustice on God’s part?” (Romans 9.14 ff.)
 1. Our limited frame of reference
 2. Oriental hyperbole (Romans 9.13)

IV. Benefits

- A. God’s grace magnified (Ephesians 2.8)
- B. Our holiness emphasized (Ephesians 1.4)
- C. Our comfort and assurance prioritized (Ephesians 1.5)
- D. Encouragement in evangelism (Acts 18.9-10)
- E. Promotion of diligence (2 Peter 1.10)
- F. God’s glory (Ephesians 1.11-12)

V. Reprobation

- Not parallel with election:
- In Romans 9 Paul says that God’s grace in salvation is completely due to his mercy, without condition, entirely gratuitous. But with regard to the reprobate, they are so because of their sin and unbelief. God saves, out of the mass of fallen humanity, a multitude that no man can number, but passes by others in his inscrutable wisdom. If we imagine that mankind is somehow morally neutral, this seems totally unfair. But that is *not* the case. We are *all* worthy of eternal judgment. The fact that God saves *any* should surprise us. “The elect receive mercy. The non-elect receive justice. But no one receives injustice at the hands of God.”⁷

VI. Conclusion

- The pastoral implications radiating from the doctrine of election are many, especially the comfort it brings to those of us who so easily lapse back into thinking God’s loving choice of us depends on our performance.
- It is a family doctrine for God’s children. It is easy to misunderstand since it conflicts so very much with the mind of the natural man. It requires patient consideration and sober reflection. Everyone who wishes to grow in the knowledge of God must grapple with this.
- We become secure in Christ, not first of all by studying this doctrine, but by considering the fact of our union with Christ. “Even as he chose us **in him** before the foundation of the world ...” (Ephesians 1.4; Colossians 3.3)

⁷ R.C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 1986, p. 26.