

UNION WITH CHRIST – COMMUNION WITH GOD

Two critical concepts that keep us from pursuing this as the heart of the gospel:

1 | OUR NOTION THAT GOING TO HEAVEN IS THE REWARD OF THE GOSPEL.

Salvation is not mostly a matter of relocation; it is a matter of transformation. It does not consist primarily of ending up in the right place – but being made into the right person.
John Ortberg

Qualifying for heaven
evokes performance (DO)

Union with God
evokes praise (DONE)

Christianity and the gospel, is not primarily about achieving a distant reward of heaven after death.

Instead, it is about awakening to a deep and transformative communion with God through our union with Christ that can be experienced in the present moment.

John 14:6 ESV
I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

This is a state of being where we live in an awareness of a relationship of union with Jesus Christ, and a full and conscious communion with God as our Father, through the work of his son.

John 14:19-20
*A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day **you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.***

Eph 2:12-13, 18 & 22
*remember that at that time you were **separate from Christ, ...***

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ...For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

...And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Christianity, in this view, is an invitation to wake up to this union, to live in harmony with God here and now, rather than only waiting for an afterlife reward. Eternity is not just an endless timeframe, but a deep present where God is fully accessible. By living fully in the present and becoming aware of God's presence, we begin to taste heaven on earth. We can engage with eternal life in this life now.

John 17:3

*And this is **eternal life**, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*

1John 1:2

*the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that **eternal life** which was with the Father and was manifested to us –*

1John 5:11

*And this is the testimony: that God has given us **eternal life**, and this life is in His Son.*

1John 5:13

*These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have **eternal life**,*

Christianity's goal is not about reaching a destination but about **experiencing communion** with God now. This communion is available to us now. It invites believers to seek God in the mundane, and to foster a deep awareness of God's presence in our daily lives. This is the ongoing, present reality of living in **Communion with God** – through the discovery of **Union with Christ** facilitated **by the Holy Spirit** into a life-giving relationship that begins now and continues into eternity.

The Eastern fathers of the church called this transformation '**theosis**', or the process resulting from the awareness of Union with God. They saw it as the whole point of the incarnation and the very meaning of the gospel and salvation. The much more practical and rational church in the West seldom engaged with the concept of Union. It was just too daring for us, despite the rather direct teachings from Peter

(1 Peter 1:4-5; 2 Peter 1:4) and Jesus in John's Gospel: "*I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may **all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me***" (John 17:20-21)

2 | CHRISTIANS BEING MORE IN LOVE WITH THE BIBLE THAN SEEKING UNION WITH JESUS.

Christians face the subtle but significant risk of elevating their love for the Bible above their appreciation and union with Jesus Himself. While all of the Scripture is inspired and vital for knowing God, history reveals how misinterpretations and rigid adherence to text divorced from the Spirit of Christ have fueled misunderstanding, heresies and divisions.

The Bible, apart from its ultimate purpose of pointing us to a living relationship and union with Jesus, can become an idol that leads to pride, legalism, and a fragmented faith. While the Scriptures are inspired and essential for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, their ultimate purpose is to reveal Jesus Christ, who is the Word made flesh (John 1:14). That is why the best translation is the incarnation. (-:

We don't adhere to a **biblical worldview**; we adhere to a **Christ-Centered worldview**.

However, when the Bible is approached apart from a living relationship with Him, it can lead to misinterpretation and the rise of divisive and destructive posturing. History provides sobering examples of this. Starting with the Pharisees in Jesus' time were deeply devoted to the Scriptures, yet they missed the Messiah they had been waiting for because their hearts were hardened.

John 5:39-40

You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

Similarly, during the Reformation, some factions misused Scripture to justify oppressive practices, such as persecution of dissenters. Even today, rigid literalism or selective emphasis on certain passages over the holistic message of the Gospel can fuel legalism, divisiveness, and exclusionary doctrines that misrepresent the character of Christ. In South Africa, apartheid was justified by the church using the Bible.

The danger lies in substituting knowledge about God for intimate communion with Him.

As A.W. Tozer wisely noted: *'The Bible is not an end in itself but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into communion with Him, that they may delight in His presence.'* Our love for Scripture must always lead us to the living Word, Jesus, or we risk turning the Bible into an idol that divides rather than unites, burdens rather than liberates, and obscures rather than reveals the truth."

THE KEY TO THE GOSPEL STARTS WITH A DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF THE PRIVILEGE OF UNION WITH CHRIST.

Union with Christ – not only is it in the Bible, but it’s what the Bible is all about.

Not only is *Union with Christ* in the Bible, but perhaps the *best lens with which to read the whole Bible*.

The same spirit that inspired the words of scripture long ago now lives in you, and speaks through the same words, and illuminates them as you read today. The one spoken of on the pages is the same one who speaks through them so you can come to the Bible expecting to hear from and commune with the one who stands at the center of it; Jesus Christ.

Union with Christ - A radical idea that those who believe in Christ are actually united to him.

Union with Christ means that **you are in Christ**, and that **Christ, the living word is in you**.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ, who lives in me. The life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the son of God.

‘I have been’

The verb tense is ‘present perfect’ – something that happened in the past with continuing present effect.

‘I no longer live’

this implies the person I was before I knew Christ is no longer the person that I am. The Christian life is not a self-improvement project. It’s not about reforming the old self. We’re talking about becoming a new creation. (2Cor 5:17) we’re not fixing Adam, we’re embracing the new Christ life.

‘The life that I now live’

... I live by faith in the son of God – your life, your story becomes enfolded by another story – another’s story - the very life of Christ. His Glory Becomes Your Story.

We are not wearing a false costume to masquerade in a false identity. Being ‘in Christ’ is to discover your true God-given identity. You are alive in him, moving with him through this world. You are in Christ.

Ephesians 2:15-22.

that he might create in himself one new man ... and might reconcile us to God in one body through the cross, ... For through him we have access in one Spirit to the Father...

In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

- Q1 | Discuss the challenge of people seeing the gospel as believing in Jesus to go to heaven, rather than discovering the glorious privilege of Union with Christ, and Communion with the Father.**
- Q2 | Discuss the challenge of people being more in love with the Bible than the glorious privilege of Union with Christ, and Communion with the Father.**
- Q3 | Discuss your understanding of Union with Christ, and Communion with the Father.**

FURTHER STUDY OF THE 'IN CHRIST' REALITY.

Paul's two-word phrase is so common place in his letters that its significance can easily be overlooked and often has been. We might be accustomed to reading past **'in Christ'** as just part of a greeting:

"To the Saints **in Christ**" Philippians 1:1

But for Paul, being in Christ changes everything about you

"if anyone is **in Christ**, he is a new creation" Corinthians 5:17.

Paul uses the phrase **'in Christ'** (or 'in him' or closely related phrases) over 160 times in letters attributed to him. This is the linchpin on which everything hangs.

For example, Paul uses the phrase **in Christ** 11 times in the single Greek sentence that corresponds to Ephesians 1:3-13

*3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us **in Christ** with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,*

*4 even as he chose us **in him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love*

*5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons **through Jesus Christ**, according to the purpose of his will,*

*6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us **in the Beloved**.*

*7 **In him** we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,*

8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight

*9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth **in Christ***

10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things **in him**, things in heaven and things on earth.

11 **In him** we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

12 so that we who were the first to hope **in Christ** might be to the praise of his glory.

13 **In him** you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,...

**THIS IS FREEDOM. THIS IS CONFIDENCE. THIS IS GOOD NEWS.
YOU ARE IN CHRIST, AND CHRIST IS IN YOU.**

Ephesians 2:4-22

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

5 even when we were dead in trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved),

6 and **raised us up together**, and made us **sit together** in the heavenly places **in Christ Jesus**,

7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us **in Christ Jesus**.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

10 For we are His workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus for good works**, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—

12 that at that time **you were without Christ**, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

13 But **now in Christ Jesus** you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Christ Our Peace

14 For **He Himself is our peace**, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,

15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as **to create in Himself one new man** from the two, thus making peace,

16 and that He might reconcile them both to God **in one body through the cross**, thereby putting to death the enmity.

17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.

18 For **through Him** we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, **Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone**,

21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, **grows into a holy temple in the Lord**,

22 **in whom you also are being built together** for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

THE GLORY OF GOD MUST BE REVEALED TO US – AND THEN THROUGH US. | WE EMBRACE IN ORDER TO EXHIBIT.

2 Corinthians 4:6 NKJV

*For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, **who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.***

CHRIST IS THE KEY | AS WE DISCOVER CHRIST, WE ENGAGE IN EMBRACING GLORY.

- Eph 3:4 you may understand my knowledge in the **mystery of Christ**
- Eph 3:6 partakers of His **promise in Christ**
- Eph 3:8 the unsearchable **riches of Christ**
- Eph 3:9 who created **all things through Jesus Christ**
- Eph 3:11 the eternal purpose which He **accomplished in Christ Jesus**
- Eph 3:12 **in whom** we have boldness and access with confidence

Experiencing the living presence of Christ is integral to your salvation. Christ joins his life to yours in such an intimate and comprehensive way, that the prevailing metaphor for this union in the Bible is marriage.

Ephesians 5:31-32 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

This radical idea that Christ is in us, and we are in him, is established by Jesus who appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus and said "*why are you persecuting me*". Saul came to the realization that by persecuting Jesus's followers he was persecuting Jesus himself – they were vitally connected.

Jesus wanted his disciples to understand this:

John 15:4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me." **Abide** is John's word to describe our union with Christ.

To know Christ is to be connected to him, personally vitally, and organically like branches to a vine. And the life of abiding in Christ – living out our union with him – is the abundant life of (John 10:10)

While Matthew, Mark and Luke don't use the language of **abiding** or **in Christ**, they repeatedly talk about the '**Kingdom of God**' – and these realities are inseparably related.

The kingdom life is the life Jesus himself embodied and inaugurated. Our union with Christ, Jesus's abiding presence in us, is what makes life in the kingdom of God possible for us to live, here and now.