

## UNDERSTANDING UNION WITH CHRIST - Why It Isn't Just Religious Pretending - Part two

Teaching #1924 - Sunday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016 - 10:00 a.m.

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### WHAT KIND OF UNION DO WE HAVE WITH CHRIST AND HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?

We closed last week's teaching looking at Paul's shocking words in 1 Corinthians 6:13-17 - "...The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. [14] And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. [15] Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! [16] Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." [17] But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him."

It doesn't seem possible that Paul is saying what he's saying in that fifteenth verse. The believer is never divisible from his or her union with Christ. Paul doesn't mean Christ becomes *guilty* of sexual sin. But he *does* mean we are never *separated* from our oneness with Christ. My union with Christ isn't an *intermittent* union. I can't turn it on and off. It is a *constant* oneness. The fact that we are "*members of Christ*" (14) is such an actual reality that it is just as real as the *unitedness* our physical bodies would be experiencing with sexual relations with a prostitute (16). My *unitedness* with Christ is no less an actual reality than my *unitedness* with that prostitute. Unbelievable!

This is miles removed from the common picture of Christianity in the media and also much of the church. Christians are people who are forgiving of others and follow the teachings of Jesus as best they can. They are admirers of the Golden Rule and hope to go to heaven when they die. They are against bad people and bad deeds. And they don't judge others, lest they end up judged. We do the best we can. We go to church. We say our prayers. We read our Bibles. We are, as they say, "*people of faith*," which means we hold to certain ideas about God and, hopefully, morality.

Now there is nothing wrong with any of those things. But they are all *external religious practices*. We read. We think. We try to do and obey. But none of that even comes close to what Paul describes in his letters. He's constantly writing - along with Apostles John, Peter, and the recorded words of Jesus Himself - constantly writing about being *united with Christ - being hidden in Christ - about being inside Christ - and about Christ being inside the Christian*.

In other words, the emphasis in the whole New Testament isn't first of all about *doing* something. It's about *being* something you weren't before and couldn't possibly be on your own.

Now, it's one thing to acknowledge this is what the New Testament *says*. That's the easy part. But what *kind* of union is this and *how* does it happen? That's the heavy lifting part. And there's only one proper starting point to unwrap Paul's words. Here's where we're beginning today - union with Christ begins with the *incarnation*.

#### 1) OUR PARTICIPATION IN THE INCARNATE CHRIST - THE SECOND ADAM - IS LIKENED TO OUR PARTICIPATION IN THE FIRST ADAM

1 Corinthians 15:45-49 - "Thus it is written, 'The *first man Adam* became a living being'; the *last Adam* became a life-giving spirit. [46] But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then

the spiritual. [47] The *first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.* [48] As was the man of dust, *so also are those who are of the dust*, and as is the man of heaven, *so also are those who are of heaven.* [49] *Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.*"

The *first Adam* was the first man created out of the dust in a specific, historic act of creation by God Himself. The *last Adam* is God the Son, Jesus, our Messiah and Redeemer. And the fact He is called the last *Adam* means we're being pointed to the *incarnation*. He is *another* Adam in the sense of being a living *fully human person*. That's why He is specifically and very intentionally called the *man* of heaven (48). We're being pointed to the *full humanity* of Jesus of Nazareth. He was as fully human, in *every sense of that term*, as the first Adam was fully human.

But why this link to *Adam*? We call our Lord by many titles. Sometimes not that precisely. We call Him Jesus. We call Him Jesus Christ, which in our English speaking makes it look like Christ is Jesus' second name. We call Him Lord. We call Him the Son of God. My favorite term by far is God the Son. But no one I know ever calls him *Adam number two*.

So what's going on here? Here's my thinking. Paul (in our First Corinthians text) is helping me understand my *union with Christ* by calling me back to my *union with Adam*. And if there's one thing I know deep in my bones it is this - *I'm affected by my union with Adam*. There's nothing pretend about it. I *feel the weight* of it constantly. I know beyond a shadow of a doubt I'm not the Don Horban I would be if I *weren't* tied to Adam and his sin. And every time I drive past the cemetery on Main street as I go home I'm reminded I really am - *just like my ancestor Adam* - a creature of the *dust*.

Now comes the really important point. I'm being constrained by Paul to behold the effects of being *in Adam*. It's not make-believe. It's hard core reality. It changes everything about this whole fallen world. You can just look around and you can see the stamp of our oneness with Adam.

But what shall be done about this? We are locked in with Adam. We are *in* Adam and chained to his failure to obey God. We all die just like he died and for the very same reason. So any solution must come from *outside* ourselves.

## 2) THE POWER OF THE INCARNATION WORKS IN TWO DIRECTIONS AT THE SAME TIME

It's at this point we are ready to feel the weight of the Incarnation of God the Son. The Incarnation penetrates deep into time itself in *two directions* at the very same time. The Incarnation works *backwards* and then works *forwards*.

- a) First, *the Incarnation works backwards*. God comes all the way down into all that we are in Adam and his sin. He comes all the way back - right into that original Genesis *undoing point* of God's creation. By that I mean the sinless Son becomes *fully what we all are in Adam*. He assumes everything about our fallen nature. Jesus takes my fallen nature - all that I am in the *first Adam* - into His *sinless self* and fully sanctifies and restores it by uniting everything about my fallen self into his perfectly obedient life. Please get this. Jesus' full manhood works right back into the fabric of the Fall and starts to *undo* it in His holy, perfect Person.

Again, we should be grateful to Paul for daring to say the unthinkable - 2 Corinthians 5:20-21 - "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore

you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. [21] For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Notice again that nothing of Christ's life and death has any effect by *external appreciation or admiration*. No. Christ ties a very tight knot with each of our fallen selves. He *pulls us into His own real humanity*. Paul is emphatic - “...so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”(21).

Again, Christ doesn't just offer *empathy* for our sinful selves. He doesn't just come as a *sacrifice for our sins external to His own being*. This is not paying our debt like we would write a check. The real truth goes even deeper than that. He becomes *fully united with our sinful selves*. Paul can dare say He (God the Son) was made “to be sin”(21).

God the Son *unites our sinful selves to Himself*. That's the staggering truth. We are not *purified* - like being *washed off* - and then offered a *divine hug*. Our most wretchedly wicked selves are taken into Christ *first, before we do anything*. He becomes fully what we are. And *then* these fallen selves of ours are, in words we say more easily than we understand, *crucified with Christ*. That crucifixion isn't imaginary. We are *in Christ* when He's nailed to that cross because He became *one with us* in His complete incarnate humanity.

*Jesus became everything God hates as He took my sinful self in His complete humanity to the cross. And He verbally expressed that complete forsakenness* - “My God, My God! Why have you forsaken me?” - *because it was real*. This is the only place in the New Testament where Jesus *doesn't* address God as “Father.” That's how much He is *united to me* in His death.

We tend to picture and describe the Incarnation from only one perspective. We can easily miss the fact that Jesus, God the Son, isn't just the mediator between *God and man*. He is, just as importantly, the mediator between *man and God*. This isn't just semantics. His work isn't just from *God down*. His work is from *man up*. He is the one righteous man who, being *one with me* in all my sin, is also *one with God* in all His purity.

This is so important. Jesus doesn't just *accomplish* my redemption externally, like a great Olympic accomplishment. He doesn't just *accomplish* my redemption. He is the *substance* of my redemption. Through His full *oneness* with me in all my sin He, in His full assumption of all I am, heals and purifies and restores the worst of sinners by His perfect obedience in His life and His fully bearing all the judgment of my guilt.

This is why Paul doesn't just describe our forgiveness and justification as *an external possession from Christ*. It can never come as a *present*. It is only to be had in *relationship*. It is only to be had “in Christ Jesus” - Romans 8:1 - “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Perhaps this becomes clearer when we compare our union with Christ in our sin and the sacrifices for sin under the Old Covenant. There is the priest. He is coming to the Holy Place on behalf of the sins of the people. There are two lambs (or goats) with him. One will be sent away into the wilderness. The other will die. But before the unlucky lamb has its throat slit the priest will lay his hand on the lamb's head. He is *symbolically imparting the sins of the people*.

But the **nature** of that lamb can't actually **receive** or be **united with** the sins of the people because it's just a **lamb** after all. There is only a **lamb's nature** present in that lamb. There is no meaningful **connection** between the lamb and those sinful human beings.

But God will, for a while, **overlook** the sins of those people because that lamb is going to be considered in the light of the **actual bearer of our sin**. There is One coming - **one so fully human - so fully one with the first Adam - that Adam's sins - and yours and mine as well - can be divinely owned by this second Adam**. And, here it comes, we will be **one** - we will be so totally **united** with this second Adam - that we will be crucified **with Him**.

Don't just think of it at Christmas. The Incarnation **defines** the Christian's existence. The meaning of the Incarnation is the **Word took on human flesh in order to incorporate us into His life**.

I said earlier the Incarnation works in **two directions**. Backwards and then forwards. It reaches right back, uniting the sinless God the Son with the full weight of the Fall. But it reaches forwards as well. And there is something too precious to be missed here:

- b) Second, **the Incarnation works forwards**. We've seen the Incarnational reach extending all the way back to the assumption of mankind in all of his sin and brokenness. This is the only way we could be **crucified with Christ while we still needed grace and salvation**. The sinless God the Son bears - actually carries - in His own sinless self fully what we are at our worst.

But He doesn't leave us where we were. And He doesn't even stop after taking our wicked selves to the cross. We will be considering this more slowly in weeks to come. But for now, please remember it is the **Creator Himself** who assumes this **broken creation**.

Hear it clearly. God the Son didn't come in full humanity just to provide **forgiveness**. That's a very precious step on the way, but He came to begin a **new** creation out of the **old**.

Yes, He is the Lamb of God who came to bear the sins of the world. But He's also much more than that - **Colossians 1:15-16** - **"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16] For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him."**

The greatest work of creation isn't in Genesis 1. There is another project already begun. The Creator came to pull the old creation fully into Himself. He has defanged the original Fall. And, more than that, **much** more than that, He is **healing and remaking** all that was lost.

Never let anyone tell you the Trinity can be eliminated from Christianity. It's not just a difficult, abstract doctrine. There is no such thing as Christianity without it. Remember, **the Creator** has united us fully to Himself. He didn't just come and **die**. He **rose from the dead**, conquering death itself and physically ascended, united us with Him at the right hand of the Father. He has already carried each one of us in His own fully human self into heaven and there is nothing in this world that can undo that accomplished reality!