

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

Teaching #1926 - Sunday, November 20th, 2016 - 10:00 a.m.

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WHY DO I FEEL MORE UNITED TO ADAM THAN TO CHRIST?

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."

Romans 8:18-25 - "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. [19] For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. [20] For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope [21] that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. [22] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. [23] And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. [24] For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? [25] But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

I have a long pre-amble to this teaching and only two quick points toward the very end. I took quite a bit of time in the last teaching in this series underscoring the fact that the Incarnation of God the Son in the man, Jesus of Nazareth, was an event that extends powerful effects of our union with Christ in **two directions**. **First, it unites the sinless Incarnate Messiah with the total reality of Adam, his sin, and the corporate fallenness of all of humanity.** The Incarnation works **backwards**, linking up with the beginning of human history.

Jesus doesn't come as just a picture of what we **ought** to be - though He is that for sure. But He comes assuming the nature - the broken personhood - of each one of us **in our sin**. Though absolutely sinless He assumes our total fallenness and carries it in the perfect obedience we **failed** to give, all the way to the cross. The humanity Jesus took to the cross was **exactly** the humanity of Don Horban. Don Horban at his **worst**. Jesus wasn't just **pretending** to be **like** me. He **was** me in His humanity. That's the only reason Paul (and Don Horban) can say **"I was crucified with Christ...."** He tied Himself to all I was in Adam.

The saving work of God the Son doesn't **begin** on the cross. It climaxes there, to be sure. But it has its visible beginning in the physical humanity of the second Adam, God the Son. This is where we are united, tied to the man, Jesus Christ. His work **for** us has its roots in our nature **in** Him. If this isn't accomplished **first** in the Incarnation then Jesus just died unjustly, **by Himself - for no one else at all.**

I said the Incarnation of Christ extends the effects of our union with Christ in **two** directions. **First**, it works backwards in real history to the Fall in Adam. Here's the **second**. **Because the Incarnate Christ is also the Creator of the universe, His mission extends beyond mere forgiveness. In our union with Him we are carried with Him into the beginning of His new creation.** The original Creator is now **re-creating**. There is, at this exact moment, **one place**, and one place only, where the promised new creation is a physical reality. That is in

the risen, exalted body of the *man* Christ Jesus. And just as He took the real Don Horban to the cross, He takes the real Don Horban with Him into that new creation reality.

His death provides pardon for our guilt. He dies a real death and because we are one with Christ we die with Him. This is what Paul means when he boldly says he was "***crucified with Christ.***" And the Bible makes it plain that Father God has eternally ***pre-determined - predestined*** - that mankind's pardon would be accomplished in no other way than this:

Ephesians 1:3-6 - "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 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."

God ***blesses*** us in Christ (3). God ***chooses*** us in Christ (4). God ***predestines*** us in Christ (5). God ***adopts*** us in Christ (5). God has no other plan for redeeming or recreating except through our ***union*** with Christ, which has its beginning in the Incarnation. All who will be redeemed will be so in no other way. God has predestined it to be so. We ***believe*** in New Testament predestination.

But the point here is we are not just united to Christ in His death. His ***resurrection*** and ***ascension*** pull us into the new creation. This was always the ***goal*** of the Incarnation from the beginning. And the New Testament delights in ***shifting our gaze upward and forward***:

1 Corinthians 15:20-22 - "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. [21] For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. [22] For as ***in Adam*** all die, so also ***in Christ*** shall all be made alive."

Ephesians 2:4-7 - "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, ***made us alive together with Christ***—by grace you have been saved— [6] and ***raised us up with him*** and ***seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus***, [7] so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us ***in Christ Jesus.***"

Colossians 3:1-4 - "If then you have been ***raised with Christ***, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. [2] Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. [3] 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."

All of these references - and many more could be piled on top - emphasize the inseparability of our union with Christ. That union isn't ***finished at the cross***. Notice all the ***unity*** words - "***in Him,***" "***in Christ,***" "***in God,***" "***with Him,***" "***with Christ.***" The point is just as surely as our ***connection with Adam in the Fall*** is actual and affecting so our ***union with Christ in His exaltation*** is actual and affecting. My future at the right hand of God in glory is just as actual and certain as God the Son's place in that same glory. Because the Incarnation has never been ***undone*** I am still firmly in Him.

This is why Paul can erase all of the tenses of ***past, present, and future*** when considering the accomplishments of Christ on our behalf - **Romans 8:29-30** - "For those whom he foreknew he also ***predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son***, in order that he might be the firstborn among many

brothers. [30] **And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.**” Each aspect of my union with Christ is as certain as any other. Tenses are irrelevant.

Let me make it as unbelievably stunning as it really is. The *“man Christ Jesus”* is just as much *me* at the right hand of the Father as He is God the Son at the right hand of the Father. O, how we need to meditate on this!

All of this great doctrine brings us to the question raised in the title of this teaching:

1) **WHY DON'T I FEEL AS TIED TO CHRIST AS I FEEL STILL TIED TO ADAM?**

The answer is found in our opening text: **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 important words for our consideration now are those closing words of **verse 49** - “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.”

Paul’s point seems to be the effects of our unity with Adam are already *complete*. There is nothing else to unfold. The fruit of Adam’s original sin has already sprouted and bloomed in our lives. It’s a *past* reality with all of its present consequences now revealed. This is why Paul says “...we have borne the image of the man of dust...”

Not so with the full fruit of our union with Christ. This reality has only fully sprouted in the risen body of Christ Jesus, God the Son. That’s why, in highly intentional words, Paul calls the risen Christ the *“first fruits”* of God’s resurrection work. The full harvest of the new creation is still awaiting its manifestation. So the *seed* of the new creation - all that we actually *have* in union with Christ - seem, at times, less weighty than the fully grown downward drag of our union with Adam.

Our second opening text describes with precise honesty what this present conflict feels like:

Romans 8:18-25 - “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. [19] For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. [20] For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope [21] that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. [22] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. [23] And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. [24] For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? [25] But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

Just to be clear. There is a *present* new creation and a *not yet* new creation. We *wait*. But we don’t wait *without hope*. And that leads to my closing point.

2) HOW I READ A WELL-LOVED PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE DIFFERENTLY FROM THE WAY I ONCE DID

Here is one of the best-loved Bible verses - perhaps next to **John 3:16** - in the whole Christian Church. And here's how I don't think I properly understood it:

Romans 8:35-39 - "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [36] As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." [37] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. [38] For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We love the certainty in Paul's words. There's no doubt in this text. And it helps purge doubt from our hearts as well. So far so good. Nothing can ever separate me from God's love.

But that's not all there is in this text. The words are very careful, theological words. Nothing in all creation will be able to "...*separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*." It's those last five words that carry all the freight. The reason Paul is so certain nothing can separate us from the love of God is that love of God is all tied up so firmly with the doctrine of union with Christ.

In other words, consider how much Father God loves the Son. How committed is the Father to the Son - the Son who perfectly fulfilled the Father's will - the only man who was a **covenant keeper** before a holy God - the Son who came all the way down, taking on Himself the full reality of a broken humanity - the Son who lived a perfect earthly life, fully aligned with the Father's will at every point - the Son who could not be held by death because death had no legitimate hold on Him?

And I am now in that Son. He is still united to Don Horban as the man Christ Jesus. And because the Incarnation can't be undone or diluted in any way I am eternally inseparable from Christ Jesus. Nothing in all creation can ever change the depth of the Father's love for the Son and nothing in all creation can ever change the depth of the Father's love for Don Horban who is one with the Son.

So here's how my understanding of this text has changed. I used to think nothing could separate me from the God's love the way nothing could pull a child from a mother's hug. And that's fine. I have no problem with that picture. But I have come to think of a better one. I now think that ***because of my real union with Christ*** nothing can separate me from God's love for the same reason nothing can ***separate the poured milk from the cup of tea***. They're now one. So Christ is the tea. I am the milk. I am ***actually in Him***. And no power on earth can ever undo that union.