

We're in the middle of a short series of sermons on the theme of Putting on Christ. I've suggested that putting on Christ is a very broad activity that fundamentally entails three things: reckoning, obtaining, and imitating. We come this week to the second of these, and in many ways the most important, as we shall see, to put on Christ is to benefit from our union with Christ. It's to obtain (receive) resources from Christ.

I. Explained

II. Expanded

I. Explained

1. Here I simply want to explain what exactly I mean by the phrase: improving our union with Christ (let me do so with three questions).
2. (1) What is meant by our union with Christ? As most of you know, Scripture speaks of our union with Christ in different stages.
3. There's what we could call eternal union, which refers to the fact that we were chosen from eternity in Christ.
4. There's what we could call historical union, which refers to the fact that we were in Christ as He lived, died, and rose again.
5. But then there's a saving union that takes in time by faith—this is when we are savingly joined to Christ.
6. At times this aspect of our union with Christ is referred to as a vital union—which means essential or necessary.
7. Now, there's one thing I want to point out about this saving or vital union and that is it's a mutual union.
8. Christ and His people have a mutual union with each other—the two are joined together in the closest way.
9. We are in Christ by faith and Christ is in us by His Spirit—the two have become one—we are joined together.
10. (2) What is meant by improving our union with Christ? To improve means to benefit or take advantage of.
11. Obviously, there's a sense in which it's impossible to improve our union with Christ, as it's already perfect.
12. Christ is in us by His Spirit and we are in Him by faith, and He's promised never to leave nor forsake us.
13. But when I speak of improving our union with Christ, I mean benefiting and profiting from our union.
14. This is fundamentally what Paul means in when he says "put on Christ"—improve upon your union with Christ.
15. Put on Christ so as to benefit from your union with Him—put on Christ so as to make use of your union.
16. Now, usually you hear preachers talk about improving your baptism, which doesn't mean you get rebaptized.
17. It simply means to think about your baptism in such a way, that it brings present benefit to your soul.
18. And this is what I mean by improving your union with Christ—act in such a way that it brings present benefit to your soul.
19. Our union with Christ is not merely something to study or affirm; it's something that must be benefited from.

20. We must daily be mindful of and benefit from it; we must daily, even hourly, put on the Lord Jesus Christ.
21. (3) What imageries does Scripture use to describe our union with Christ? Because union with Christ is central to the Christian faith, Scripture uses a variety of imageries to describe it.
22. For example, Scripture describes Christ as the Head and the church to His body; Christ is the Branch and we the vine; Christ is the foundation and we the building; and Christ is the Groom and we the Bride.
23. These are several of the most common imageries Scripture uses to describe the union that exists between Christ and His people.
24. But there's another imagery that may not be as popular or well-known, and that's the imagery of putting on Christ.
25. When you put on a garment you become one with that garment; there's an intimate union between the garment and the person.
26. Thus, at this point I want to briefly examine two passages that uses the imagery of clothing to describe our union with Christ.
27. Isa.61:10—"I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."
28. Salvation is likened to a garment and righteousness to a robe, but we must remember, our salvation and righteousness are in Christ.
29. To be clothed with the garments of salvation and covered with the robe of righteousness, is to be clothed or covered with Christ.
30. Gal.3:27—"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ"—now if you remember, water baptism is the public declaration of union with Christ.
31. While we actually put on Christ in our conversion (when we became Christians), we publicly put Him on in our baptism.
32. And what does it mean that we put on Christ, but that we became one with Him—to put on Christ is to become one with Christ.
33. To be baptized into Christ and putting on Christ are one and the same thing; they both speak about union with Christ.
34. Thus, while every Christian has put on Christ, it's also essential that every Christian daily put on Christ.
35. This simple means (in no small part), that we have to improve upon that which happened in our conversion.
36. Put another way—while we were joined to Christ at our conversion, we must improve upon that union in our sanctification.
37. Let me put it this way—if putting on Christ (Gal.3:27) refers to our union with Christ, then what does Paul mean by telling us (as Christians) to put on Christ, but improve upon that union.
38. When we are commanded to put on Christ (Rom.13:14), Paul isn't telling us to get into union with Christ (but to make use of that union).
39. This principle, of putting on daily what we put in our conversion, is found in another passage I want to briefly turn to.
40. Col.3:9-10—"Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him."
41. This refers to our conversion, or what I've called initial sanctification—we have put off the old man and put on the new man (recreated in the image of Christ).
42. Col.3:12-14—"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering...but above all these things put on love."

43. Because we have put off the old man and put on the new man, we need to daily put various virtues.
44. This is similar to Gal.3:27 and Rom.13:14—we have put on Christ and we need to daily put on Christ.
45. Thus, in part, to put on Christ means, we avail ourselves of the many resources we are given in Christ.
46. MLJ—"Putting on the Lord Jesus Christ means we must deliberately partake of Him. We put on the Lord Jesus Christ when we rely on Him. Like the soldier putting on his armor. We put on Christ when we look to Him for strength and power. We put on Christ when we hide ourselves in Him as our refuge."
47. John Calvin—"To put on Christ, means here to be on every side fortified by the power of His Spirit, and be thereby prepared to discharge all the duties of holiness. For Paul had in view the end of our calling; inasmuch as God, by adopting us, unites us to the body of His only-begotten Son, and for this purpose—that we, renouncing our former life, may become new men in Him."

II. Expanded

1. Here I want to expand upon our theme by pointing out three ways we improve upon our union with Christ.
2. Keep in mind the bigger picture—to put on Christ is to make use of the union every Christians has with Christ.
3. When you think of our union with Christ, what are some of the benefits that come to mind? What are ways these can be improved?
4. Well, obviously, every saving benefit we receive from God, comes to us through our union with Christ.
5. Put another way—four ways we are to put on Christ (take refuge in His name, be strong in His grace, and walk by His Spirit).
6. (1) Take refuge in His name—this is obviously one of the many benefits of our union with Christ—we have access to God as our Refuge.
7. What a blessed privilege! To take shelter in God in Christ as our safe haven. To hide in Him from our enemies.
8. Ps.18:2—"The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."
9. Ps.61:3-4—"For You have been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings."
10. Prov.18:10—"The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it (or into it) and are safe."
11. (a) Where do we take refuge? Simply put, we are to take refuge in the LORD and in the name of the LORD.
12. "The name of the LORD is a strong tower"—by name is meant the LORD Himself—the sum total of His divine perfections.
13. Each attribute is like a chamber, into which we take refuge—His mercy, grace, justice, patience, and love.
14. It's only in Christ that all of God's attributes are for us; it's only because we are in Christ that we have access to each chamber.
15. For example, do you remember when Moses asked God to behold His glory (Ex.33:18), and God allowed it, but He first hid Moses in the cleft of the rock (Ex.33:22).
16. He then let all of His glory pass by, that was nothing more than a revelation of His divine perfections (Ex.34:6-7).

17. The cleft in the rock was a picture of Christ, as it's only in Him we have a full and saving knowledge of God (access to all the rooms).
18. Thus, we can run to His mercy and compassion when we need pity; grace when we need strength; justice when we need justice.
19. But we mustn't think that God's attributes merely parts of God—as if there's God and then His attributes.
20. No, historically we understand God and His attributes are one—each attribute is merely another way of describing God.
21. Ralph Erskine (Scottish Presbyterian preached a sermon in 1723 entitled, The Harmony of the Divine Attributes, from Ps.85:10 – 'Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other').
22. Ralph Erskine—"Let me caution you of imagining these various perfections of God (Mercy, Truth, Righteousness, Peace), as if they were really distinct and different parties; for God is one, and cannot be divided; He is one infinite, eternal, and unchangeable Being. There are not distinct and different things in His nature and essence, however His perfections be thus represented to our weak, finite capacities, which cannot understand the perfections of God, but in several parts, as it were. By Mercy, then, here we are to understand God Himself, as He is a merciful and gracious God. By Truth we are to understand the same God, as He is a true and faithful God. By Righteousness we may understand His justice, or God Himself, as He is a just and righteous God; and by Peace the same God, as He is the God of peace."
23. Jn.15:9—"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love"—to abide means to remain.
24. Our Savior exhorted His disciples to remain in His love; He has shown them His love, and they are to abide in it.
25. Here of course I need to clarify—our Savior is not teaching we must keep ourselves worthy of His love.
26. We did nothing to deserve His love in the first place, and we can do nothing to remain worthy of it.
27. But when our Savior tells us to remain in His love, He means, to remain in the perception of His love for us.
28. It's as if the knowledge (or awareness) of His love is like a fort; and Christians are to remain within it.
29. (b) How do we take refuge? "My God, my strength, in whom I will trust" "I will trust in the shelter of Your wings" "the righteous run into it and are safe."
30. (c) Why do we take refuge? Ps.61:3—"For You have been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy."
31. (2) Be strong in His grace—this is at the very heart of putting on Christ—deriving strength from Him.
32. Eph.6:10—"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" 2Tim.2:1—"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."
33. (a) Know your weakness—this is where we must begin—we must be thoroughly convinced of our native weakness.
34. In fact—how much strength we find in Christ will be in direct proportion to how much weakness we find in ourselves.
35. No one will ever be strong in the Lord, when they believe there's some measure of strength remaining in us.
36. Isa.40:29-31—"He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail, but those

- who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary."
37. Jn.15:5—"I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."
 38. 2Cor.12:9—"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness...v10 For when I am weak, then I am strong."
 39. John Calvin—"We must feel our faintness and poverty, that the saying of Paul, *The power of God is made perfect in our weakness* may be fulfilled; for if our hearts are not deeply moved by a conviction of our weakness, we cannot receive seasonable assistance from God."
 40. MLJ—"If you feel you are a very strong Christian, let me ask you why you have failed so much and why you still fail? What happens to your resolutions and resolves? Why do you often find yourself in the place of repentance? Why are you sometimes attacked with feelings of utter hopelessness and almost despair? To what is it due? It is all due to the plain fact of our weakness, it is because we are insufficient and fallible."
 41. (b) Know Christ's strength—we must not only know our native weakness; we need to know Christ's strength.
 42. Thomas Manton—"A Christian is to have a double eye, one upon God and the other upon Himself; upon himself in order to be reminded of his own weakness, and upon God in order to be convinced of His all-sufficient power."
 43. To be merely convinced of our weakness without equally beholding His mighty power would simply lead to despair.
 44. Ps.24:8—"Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle"
Ps.29:1—"Give unto the LORD glory and strength."
 45. Thus—we need to study Christ—being convinced of His infinite power and ability—His strong back, legs, and biceps.
 46. This was precisely what the church collectively does in the Song of Solomon, Song 5:15—"His legs are pillars of marble set on bases of fine gold."
 47. That is—He is strong and glorious—His legs are powerful and sturdy as if they were constructed of marble.
 48. Let me illustrate—many years ago I used to work in a warehouse and often had to move large and heavy pallets.
 49. Well—the pallets were far too heavy for me to move in my own strength—thankfully a forklift was provided.
 50. Thus—I not only needed to be convinced of my own weakness and inability—but also of the forklift's strength and ability.
 51. (c) Know Christ's heart—that is—we must not only be convinced of His ability but will willingness to give us strength.
 52. We mustn't only be convinced of His mighty power but also of His loving heart—that He delights in giving strength to His needy people.
 53. Think of the intimate relationship He sustains to them—this will convince us of His willingness to give us strength.
 54. They are His bride—and if we are to love our brides by providing for their needs—how much more so will He provide for His seeing that His love for her is infinitely beyond all comparison.
 55. They are His creation—as the Lord delights to care for the beast of the field, how much more will Christ care for the needs of His new Creation.
 56. They are His body—if as the apostle said, "No man hates his own body, but cherishes it" is true with reference to us and our physical bodies—how much more so concerning Christ and His spiritual body—the church.

57. They are His brethren—does not an elder brother desire to protect and provide for a weaker and helpless sibling.
58. They are His Father's joy—love for His own Father motivates and fosters love for His Father's children—who are the apple of His Father's eye.
59. Think of the many promises He has made to them—these promises are intended to remove all doubt of His love.
60. Josh.1:9—"Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed [now wait a minute, here's Joshua about to lead this mighty army of Hebrews into the land of Canaan, which just happened to be filled with hostile Canaanites, and he's told not to tremble or be dismayed—well notice the reason], for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."
61. Matt.28:20—as Christ sends out His weak and needy church like sheep in the midst of wolves, He promises them—"and lo, I [the mighty and all-powerful God] am with you [the absolutely weak and needy church] all the days, even to the end of the age."
62. (d) Cry to God for strength—prayer is a primary means through which strength is conveyed to a needy soul.
63. A.N. Martin—"God has ordained that prayer be the means in which we exchange our weakness for His strength."
64. A.W. Pink—"Prayer is not so much an act as it is an attitude—an attitude of dependency, dependency upon God. Prayer is a confession of creature weakness, yea, of helplessness. Prayer is the acknowledgement of our need and the spreading it out before God."
65. Ps.86:16—"Turn to me, and be gracious to me; Oh grant Thy strength to Thy servant" Ps.105:4—"Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face continually" Ps.138:3—"On the day I called Thou didst answer me; Thou didst make me bold with strength in my soul."
66. (e) Work dependent on grace—it's here that we come full circle—we must work knowing our weakness, His strength and heart, crying to Him for strength.
67. Go back to the illustration of the warehouse and forklift—you can stare at the forklift all day but that's not moving one pallet.
68. You must climb up into the machine and get to work—not trusting in yourself but in the strength of the forklift.
69. So too—every morning you must come from your bed to your knees and acknowledge your native weakness.
70. Then you must look to Christ and His mighty power and strength—then you must remember His many promises.
71. Then you must plead to Him that He would give you strength and wisdom—AND then—you must diligently work while trusting Him.
72. Isa.26:3-4—"You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *Whose* mind *is* stayed *on* *You*, Because he trusts in *You*. Trust in the LORD forever, For in YAH, the LORD, *is* everlasting strength" (Ps.16:8; Prov.3:5-6).
73. (3) Walk by His Spirit—I suggest without doubt, this is the least thought about benefit of our union with Christ.
74. Every person joined to Christ by faith, is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who leads, guides, and protects us.
75. Gal.5:16—"I say then: Walk in (by) the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh"—to walk by the Spirit and put on Christ are basically the same thing.