

## The Christian Life (19): Sanctification (Part 4)

As Christians are sanctified by grace, we will spend the next several weeks considering the source, cause (agent), and means of grace. Grace in the broader sense refers to the kindness of God toward sinners. At times, Scripture uses it in a narrower sense to refer to God's provision for us. In this sense, grace refers to "spiritual power, help, fortitude, and blessing" (Barcellos).<sup>1</sup> "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2Cor.12:9). "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2Tim.2:1). Thus, grace refers to the spiritual power and ability necessary to live a holy life. This is in Christ. "To the church of God, which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1Cor.1:2).

The work of Christ was not finished when He had merited salvation for His people and had obtained actual possession of the blessings of salvation. In the counsel of redemption He took it upon Himself to put all His people in possession of all these blessings, and He does this through the operation of the Holy Spirit, who takes all things out of Christ, and gives them unto us. This happens through our union with Christ. This union may be defined as that intimate, vital, and spiritual union between Christ and His people, in-virtue of which He is the source of their life and strength, of their blessedness and salvation.<sup>2</sup>

That which principally differs *evangelical holiness*, with respect unto the Lord Christ, from all *natural* or *moral* habits or duties, and whereby He is made *sanctification* unto us, is, that from Him, His person as our head, the principle of *spiritual life and holiness* in believers is derived; and by virtue of their union with Him, real supplies of spiritual strength and grace, whereby their holiness is preserved, maintained, and increased, are constantly communicated unto them. On the stating and proof hereof the whole difference about *grace* and *mortality* does depend and will issue: for if that which men call *mortality* be so derived from the Lord Christ by virtue of our union with Him, it is *evangelical grace*; if it be not, it is either nothing or somewhat of another nature and kind, for grace it is not, nor holiness neither. And all that I have to prove herein is, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the *head of influence*, the spring or fountain of spiritual life, unto His church.<sup>3</sup>

### I. Sanctification: Its Source

1. *The basis of our union with Christ.* Scripture describes three unions: the union of the three persons in the Trinity, the union of the two natures in the person of Christ, and the union of Christ and His people. The latter of these (Christian union) is dependent upon the former two (Trinitarian and hypostatic union). "Though we cannot frame an exact idea of the manner of any of these three unions in our imaginations, because the depth of these mysteries is beyond our comprehension: yet we have cause to believe them all, because they are clearly revealed in Scripture, and are a necessary foundation for other points of Christian doctrine" (Marshall).<sup>4</sup> By Trinitarian union is meant the union of the three persons in the Trinity. The divine nature of Christ is eternally and essentially one with the Father and Spirit. "I am

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Barcellos, *The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace*, 23

<sup>2</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 2:449

<sup>3</sup> John Owen, *Works*, 3:513-514

<sup>4</sup> Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, 29

in the Father and the Father in Me" (Jn.14:11). This union is such that each person possesses the same numerical essence. "The Father is in Christ essentially in respect of the identity and sameness of nature and attributes, in which respect Christ is the express image of His person (Heb.1:3)" (Flavel).<sup>5</sup> By hypostatic union is meant the union of the two natures in Christ (human and divine). "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn.1:14). Within the incarnation, the second person of the Godhead assumed to Himself a real and sinless human nature. These two natures, human and divine, dwell within the single person of Christ. By Christian union is meant the union that exists between Christ and His people. This union is dependent upon the hypostatic union which is dependent upon the Trinitarian union. "There could never have been any union between the Creator and the creature but for the mediatorial union (hypostatic), whereby the Son united our nature to His own ineffable person. And the foundation of that was the Divine union (Trinitarian), the three Persons in one God" (Pink).<sup>6</sup>

The foundation of this vital union between the Person of the Son of God and the persons of believers is the personal union between His divine nature and their nature. That union of persons depends on this union of natures. If the Son of God had not graciously consented to unite the human nature to the divine in His adorable Person at His incarnation, none of the sons of Adam could ever have been united to Him at regeneration. Are any of the children of men exalted to be sons of God in union with Him who is the firstborn among many brethren? It is because He who is the Son of God became the son of man. If He had not engaged to unite natures infinitely distant from each other, the divine and human, He could not consistently with His transcendent glory unite persons to Himself who are so distant from Him as the persons of sinners are. If He had not been made flesh, none of us had ever been so united to Him as to be one spirit with Him. His having a mystical body (church) depends upon His having consented to have a human body (Ps.40:6).<sup>7</sup>

The whole Christ is united to us, God-man, and the whole believer is united to Christ, body and soul. The Whole Christ is united to us; the Godhead is the fountain, and the human nature is the pipe and conveyance. Grace comes from Him as God, and through Him as man: 'He that eats My flesh and drinks My blood dwells in Me, and I in him. As the living Father has sent Me, and I live by the Father, so he that eats Me, even he shall live by Me' (Jn.6:56-57). God is a fountain, His humanity is the pipe, so that His flesh is the food of the soul. Christ came from heaven on purpose and sanctified our flesh, that there might be one in our nature to do us good, that righteousness and life might pass from Him, as sin and death from Adam.<sup>8</sup>

On the one hand, the whole Person of Christ is united to the believer; the believers union with Christ, is neither with the divine nor human nature considered apart; but it is with the whole Person consisting of both natures; and indeed, else they could not be said to be united to Christ, for neither of the natures, considered apart, is Christ: We cannot say, that the divine nature is Christ, or that the human nature is Christ; but Christ is both the divine and human nature, God-man, in one Person. Christ is not a name of either nature,

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<sup>5</sup> John Flavel, *Works*, 2:33

<sup>6</sup> A.W. Pink, *Spiritual Union and Communion*, 31

<sup>7</sup> John Colquhoun, *Sermons on Important Doctrines*, 118

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Manton, *Works*, 11:25

but of the Person consisting of both natures, together with His office. On the other hand, the whole Person of the believer is united to Christ; not his soul only without his body, nor yet his body only without his soul, but his whole person consisting of both soul and body in conjunction: As Christ is the Savior, so He is the Head of the whole person of every believer, for He saves none but those whom He is a Head unto: And as Christ is the Head of, so He must have union with the whole person of every believer; for His being an Head implies union, and that union must extend as far as His headship doth, even to the whole Person.<sup>9</sup>

All three of these unions (Trinitarian, hypostatic, and Christian) are found in texts such as Colossians 2:9-10: "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him." That "all the fullness of the Godhead" dwells in Him refers to His eternal generation. As the Son of God, He is truly God and thus possesses all that God possesses. That all this dwells in Him "bodily" underscores the union of His two natures. He is truly man. And that we "are complete in Him" points to our union with both natures of Christ (or the whole Person). Because every Christian is in union with the whole Christ, every Christian is complete in Him. "*In Him* - in Christ, in His person as He is the Son of God by eternal generation; as He is God and man in one person; and as He is Mediator, a middle person between God and man by divine ordination. The presence of the fullness of the Godhead in Christ is such that He is abundantly able to fill all that come to Him" (Grosse).<sup>10</sup>

The sun fills all the stars with light. The sea fills all the rivers with waters. Christ fills all the creatures with a natural fullness. Christ fills all the children of God with a spiritual and heavenly fullness. And of His fullness they are said to receive—as streams from the fountain, branches from the root, and members from the head – 'grace for grace' (Jn.1:16); the grace of the New Testament for the grace of the Old; permanent for shadowy grace; or rather, *grace upon grace*, one grace of the Spirit after another, the Spirit of Christ daily pouring a new increase of grace upon us. Such is Christ's fullness that He more and more fills the souls of His servants.<sup>11</sup>

2. *The nature of our union with Christ.* (1) It's federal or legal. The elect possess a federal union with Christ from eternity past to eternity future. They were chosen in Christ and one with Him in His life, death, resurrection, and session. "This legal union is that which was formed between Christ and His people, when He was appointed their federal head. It is a union in law, in consequence of which He represented them, and was responsible for them" (Dick).<sup>12</sup> "True believers had a federal union with Christ from eternity. We cannot call this an actual and formal union because believers had then no actual existence; but it may be called an intentional union, a union in the eternal purposes of God" (Colquhoun).<sup>13</sup>

(2) It's vital or saving. This takes place at conversion when we are taken out of Adam and put into Christ. "It is through this union to Christ that the whole application of redemption is effectuated on the sinner's soul. When made one with His Redeeming Head, then all the communicable graces of that Head begin to transfer themselves to him. Thus we find that each kind of benefit which makes up redemption is, in different parts of the Scripture, deduced from this union as their source: justification, spiritual strength, life, resurrection of the body, good works, prayer and praise, sanctification, persever-

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Grosse, *The Happiness of Enjoying and Making a True and Speedy Use of Christ*, 14-16

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Grosse, *The Happiness of Enjoying and Making a True and Speedy Use of Christ*, 4-5

<sup>11</sup> Alexander Grosse, *The Happiness of Enjoying and Making a True and Speedy Use of Christ*, 21-22

<sup>12</sup> John Dick, *Lectures on Theology*, 3:294-295

<sup>13</sup> John Colquhoun, *Sermons on Important Doctrines*, 124

ance, etc." (Dabney).<sup>14</sup> (3) It's real and intimate. "It is a real union, not a mere theoretical or fantastic thing, a creature of the imagination. Though it cannot be perceived by our senses, nor visualized by the mind, it is not a mere theological fiction...As actually as the limbs of the body are united to their head, the wife to the husband, the branches to the root, so truly are the saints united to Christ and Christ to them" (Pink).<sup>15</sup> (4) It's spiritual or mystical. "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him" (1Cor.6:17). The same Spirit indwells both who creates a spiritual union between Christians and Christ. This doesn't entail any confusion of persons, as the Christian is not united essentially with Christ. "The persons of believers are so united to Him as also to be *one with Him* but it is not by an essential union, else they would be gods, possessed of every divine attribute of which He is possessed" (Colquhoun).<sup>16</sup> (5) It's eternal and indissolvable. "The oneness between Christ and His Church is such that it cannot be broken. All the powers of Satan cannot destroy that union. 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ' (Rom.8:35). Death itself, though it breaks all other unions, does not put an end to this. 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord' (Rev.14:13); 'absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord' (2Cor.5:8)" (Pink).<sup>17</sup>

3. *The bonds of our union with Christ.* Every Christian has union with Christ by way of a triple bond: Christ is in us by His Spirit (principle bond), we are in Him by faith (instrumental bond), and we are joined together by love (mutual bond). (1) The Spirit is the principle bond. The same Spirit that indwells Christ without measure (Jn.3:34), indwells every believer in measure. This refers to Christ's human nature as His divine nature is one with the Spirit (and Father). "He who is joined to the Lord is one Spirit with Him" (1Cor.6:17). We are one Spirit as we are indwelt by the same Spirit. "By virtue and in consequence of our union, God's people come to have and enjoy the same Spirit in measure, which Christ their head and Mediator has without measure" (Gill).<sup>18</sup> "The Spirit being in Him and in them makes them truly one. The distance between Christ who is in heaven, and believers who are upon earth, is no obstacle, because the Spirit is omnipresent. 'Hereby we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us' (1Jn.3:24). 'Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He is us, because He has given us of His Spirit' (1Jn.4:13)" (Dick).<sup>19</sup> "Though Christ be in heaven, and we on earth; yet He can join our souls and bodies to His at such a distance without any substantial change of either, by the same infinite Spirit dwelling in Him and us" (Marshall).<sup>20</sup> It's for this reason, we are not only in Christ but He is in us (by His Spirit). "At that day you will know that I am in My Father (essentially), and you in Me (by faith), and I in you (by the Spirit)" (Jn.14:20).

(2) Faith is the instrumental bond. Having regenerated us the Spirit gives faith whereby Christ is received. Thus, Christ indwells us by faith which is the product of the Spirit: "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Eph.3:17). "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me" (Jn.6:57). To "feed" on Christ is to exercise faith on Christ. Just as He lives because of the Father (by eternal generation), so we live because of Him (by a lively faith). "The principal bond of union between Christ and His people is the Spirit. But, as the union is mutual, something is necessary on their part to complete it; and this is faith. Hence, Christ is said to dwell

<sup>14</sup> R.L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 612

<sup>15</sup> A.W. Pink, *Spiritual Union and Communion*, 31

<sup>16</sup> John Colquhoun, *Sermons on Important Doctrines*, 124

<sup>17</sup> A.W. Pink, *Spiritual Union and Communion*, 31

<sup>18</sup> John Gill, *Commentary*, 8:639

<sup>19</sup> John Dick, *Lectures on Theology*, 3:298

<sup>20</sup> Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, 30

in our hearts by faith" (Dick).<sup>21</sup> "As a result, these two, namely, the Spirit on Christ's part, and faith, His work on our part, are the two ligaments by which we are knit to Christ" (Flavel).<sup>22</sup> "Faith unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's" (Luther).<sup>23</sup>

When the Lord Jesus apprehends and embraces the dead soul by His Spirit as a spirit of faith, the soul, thus quickened and endued with the principle of faith, embraces Him in its turn by the acting of faith, by which the union becomes mutual and complete. Saving faith is the consent of the heart to match with the Lord Jesus, the heavenly Bridegroom of the Church, and Head of the body. When therefore it is exercised, Christ and the believer are joined together as in a marriage covenant. 'Thou shalt not be for another man, so will I also be for thee' (Hos.3:3). This bond is unbreakable. For though the actings of faith are sometimes interrupted, the habit of it shall never be permitted totally to fail. 'I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.'<sup>24</sup>

(3) Love is the mutual bond. Thus this union is often portrayed as a marriage, as the two become one legally, practically, and affectionally. "My Beloved is mine, and I am His" (Song 2:16). "This union is established by love which, due to its very nature, cannot tolerate separation, but seeks the most intimate of unions. 'My Father shall love him, and We shall come unto him, and make our abode with him' (Jn.14:23); 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ'" (Brakel).<sup>25</sup> "In a marriage-relation, there is the dearest, strongest, and most intimate affection that is to be found among the children of men: It is a relation made up of love. Love is not only an attendant of marriage, but it is even a part of it, and is essential to it. In marriages, hearts must be joined as well as hands, or they are not right. So here in this spiritual-espousal, or marriage-relation between Christ and believers, there is a very dear and intimate affection each to other; their hearts are indeed knit and do intimately cleave to one another. And this love between Christ and His Spouse, is a chaste love, a virgin love, a love that is pitched upon the person of each other; Christ loves the person of the believer, and the believer loves the Person of Christ." (Pearse).<sup>26</sup>

The cementing bond of this union is love. Faith unites savingly, love experimentally. Love is as truly a uniting grace as is faith, though it does not unite in the same way. "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (1Jn.4:16). Where two persons really love each other, their mutual affection makes them to be one: they are wrapped up in each other. So there is a mutual, hearty, reciprocal love, between Christ and believers; He loves them, and they Him; and by virtue of that mutual love there is an intimate, experimental union between them. The husband and wife are one not merely by the marriage covenant – the legal tie and external relationship – but also and chiefly because of the love and affection there is between them. So it is betwixt Christ and His saints; love, stronger than death, knits them together.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> John Dick, *Lectures on Theology*, 3:299

<sup>22</sup> John Flavel, *Works*, 3:37-38

<sup>23</sup> Martin Luther, *Three Treatises*, 286

<sup>24</sup> John Colquhoun, *Sermons on Important Doctrines*, 130-131

<sup>25</sup> Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 2:89

<sup>26</sup> Edward Pearse, *The Best Match*, 13

<sup>27</sup> A.W. Pink, *Spiritual Union and Communion*, 103

4. *The imageries of our union with Christ.* "Though the union between Christ and His Church far transcends all natural analogies, the Scriptures set forth its variety and fulness, element by element, by means of several partial analogies" (Pink).<sup>28</sup> (1) Head and body. "As the members of the human body are united to the head, the source of their activity and the power that controls their movements, so all believers are members of an invisible body whose head is Christ" (Strong).<sup>29</sup> (2) Husband and wife. "Upon the conjugal relation there is a very close and intimate union. Now Christ and His people stand in this conjugal relation each to the other. He is their *husband* (Isa.54:5), they are His *wife* (Rev.19:7). They are *espoused* to Christ (2Cor.11:2), *married* to Christ (Rom.7:4), *betrothed* to Him *forever* (Hos.2:19)" (Pink).<sup>30</sup> (3) Vine and branches. "The stock is Christ, diffusing life and fructifying sap through all the branches" (Dabney).<sup>31</sup> "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" (Jn.15:5). (4) Foundation and building. "In a building all the stones and timbers being joined and fastened together upon the foundation, make but one entire structure. So it is here. The saints are *God's building* (1Cor.3:9), Christ Himself being *the Foundation* of that building" (Pink).<sup>32</sup>

5. *The benefits of our union with Christ.* (1) Participation with Christ. It's through our union with Christ that all of His becomes ours (justification, sanctification, and glorification), and all of ours becomes His (our sin and then our service). "Believers due to being united with Christ are partakers of all His benefits. The Lord Jesus says concerning His relationship to the Father, 'And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine' (Jn.17:10). How we must marvel that a believer may thus say to Christ, 'All that is mine is Yours, and all that is Yours is mine.' They are partakers of all that Christ is and has and may use it as their own" (Brakel).<sup>33</sup> "For in Christ God offers all happiness in place of our misery, all wealth in place of our neediness; in Him He opens to us the heavenly treasures that our whole faith may contemplate His beloved Son, our whole expectation depend upon Him, and our whole hope cleave to and rest in Him" (Calvin).<sup>34</sup> (2) Communion with God in Christ. Through our union with Christ, we not only partake of His benefits, but have communion with His person. "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1Cor.1:9). "As a consequence of belonging to each other and the resulting union, there will of necessity be communion; that is, the exercise and utilization of this relationship" (Brakel).<sup>35</sup> But it must be underscored, that through our union with Christ, we have fellowship with the entire Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit). It's communion with God in Christ. "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn.14:6). (3) Fellowship with the body of Christ. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal.3:28; 1Cor.12:12; Eph.4:4, 15-16).

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<sup>28</sup> A.W. Pink, *Spiritual Union and Communion*, 103

<sup>29</sup> Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 3: 796

<sup>30</sup> A.W. Pink, *Spiritual Union and Communion*, 103

<sup>31</sup> R.L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 612

<sup>32</sup> A.W. Pink, *Spiritual Union and Communion*, 103

<sup>33</sup> Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 2:91

<sup>34</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.1

<sup>35</sup> Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 2:90-91