

God's Plan of Reconciliation

Union with Christ

Ephesians 2:5-7

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Union with Christ

Scripture

We are currently in a series of sermons on Ephesians 2 that I am calling, “God’s Plan of Reconciliation.”

The theme of Ephesians 2:1-10 is God’s grace in saving sinners. In verses 1-3 Paul began with a devastating description of the way we were before receiving the amazing grace of God. In verse 4 Paul started to explain how God saves sinners. In verses 5-7 Paul listed some wonderful truths about our union with Christ.

Let’s read about our union with Christ in Ephesians 2:5-7. For the sake of context, let’s begin reading in verse 1:

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ 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.** (Ephesians 2:5-7)

Introduction

In her book *Because He Loves: How Christ Transforms Our*

Daily Life, author Elyse Fitzpatrick writes:

Just in case you're unaware, identity theft occurs when someone steals your name and other personal information for fraudulent use. Most of us are dismayed by this new cyber-age crime, and we wouldn't assume that the theft of another person's identity is acceptable behavior. The surprising reality, however, is that Christians are, by definition, people who have someone else's identity. They're called "Christians" because they've taken the identity of someone else: the Christ. Not only have you been given an identity that you weren't born with or that you didn't earn the right to use, but you're invited to empty the checking account and use all the benefits this identity brings! This is so much better than identity theft – it's an identity gift!¹

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians about God's plan of reconciliation. In Ephesians 2 he began by explaining the hopeless and helpless condition of Christians before receiving the amazing grace of God. In verse 4 he started explaining how God saves sinners. And then in verses 5-7 the Apostle Paul talked about our new identity in Christ.

Lesson

Our union with Christ in Ephesians 2:5-7 shows us what God has done and why he has done it.

Let's use the following outline:

1. What Has God Done? (2:5-6)
2. Why Has God Done It? (2:7)

¹ Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Because He Loves Me: How Christ Transforms Our Daily Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 51.

I. What Has God Done? (2:5-6)

First, what has God done?

In a word, God *saved* us. Paul made this assertion twice in the single Greek sentence that began in verse 1 and ended in verse 10. Paul said in verses 5 and 8: **“By grace you have been saved.”** Indeed, that is the theme of verses 1-10.

The word **“saved”** (*sesosmenoi*) is a perfect participle in the Greek text. It stresses the continuing action of God's saving action in the past. So, Paul was in effect telling Christians, “You are people who have been saved and remain saved forever.”

Then, the Apostle Paul did an astonishing thing. In fact, he made up three new words to indicate what God has done for Christians. Actually, what Paul did was to take what God had had done to Christ, and then link us to Christ in these events. And he did so by adding the prefix *syn* in the Greek, which means “together with.” We know this word *syn* because it is short for “synchronize.” We sync our phones with our computers in order to have the data on the one be available on the other. So, we sync our music and our photos, so that the data is on both devices.

So, coming back to what God has done to sync us to Christ. First, God **made us alive together with Christ** (verse 5); next, he **raised us up with him** (verse 6a); and third, he **seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus** (verse 6b). The three verbs – **“made alive,” “raised,”** and **“seated”** – refer to three successive historical events in the saving work of Jesus. It is helpful to note that **“made alive”** means “resurrection,” **“raised”** means “ascension,” and **“seated”** means “session.” We actually affirm these truths every time we say the Apostles' Creed:

The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father
Almighty.

What is so astonishing is that Paul was writing about us, that is, Christians. He was not writing about what God has done to Christ. Instead, he was writing about what God has done to us. God made alive, raised, and seated *us* with Christ.

Paul was writing about our union with Christ. This really is something staggering to consider. What is it that makes Christianity unique? Christianity is different from every other religion and philosophy in the world. John Stott explains what constitutes the distinctiveness of the members of God's new society, that is, of Christians. He says:

Not just that they admire and even worship Jesus, not just that they assent to the dogmas of the church, not even that they live by certain moral standards. No, what makes them distinctive is their new solidarity as a people who are "in Christ." By virtue of their union with Christ they have actually shared in his resurrection, ascension, and session.²

Our union with Christ is so important that one commentator rightly called it "the heart of Paul's religion."³ Theologian John Murray wrote, "Union with Christ is the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation."⁴ Commentator Arthur W. Pink was even more emphatic: "The subject of spiritual union is the most important, the most profound, and yet the most

² John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 81.

³ James S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ: The Vital Elements of St. Paul's Religion* (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), 147.

⁴ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 170.

blessed of any that is set forth in sacred Scripture.” But he also rightly noted that “sad to say, there is hardly any which is now more generally neglected. The very expression ‘spiritual union’ is unknown in most professing Christian circles, and even where it is employed it is given such a protracted meaning as to take in only a fragment of this precious truth.”⁵

So, let us examine what God has done for us in our union with Christ.

A. God Made Us Alive with Christ (2:5)

First, God made us alive with Christ.

Paul said in verse 5 that God **“made us alive together with Christ.”** As I mentioned earlier, this statement refers to the resurrection. Paul’s point is that when God resurrected Jesus on that first Resurrection Sunday, Freddy Fritz was resurrected with him! And you, if you are a Christian, you too were resurrected with him!

Just as Jesus was dead and buried in the tomb, so we too were dead in the trespasses and sins, in which we once walked. We were spiritually cut off from God. We had no awareness of God, or the things of God. Of course, we may have been aware of Christians and worship, and perhaps even interacted in some way with them. But they had no meaning for us.

But then, one day, one glorious day, God **made us alive together with Christ!** For me it happened on Easter Sunday in 1976 in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. I walked into a Sunday evening Worship Service, dead in my trespasses and sins, and walked out of that Sunday evening Worship Service, **made alive together with Christ!** What a glorious transformation

⁵ Arthur W. Pink, *Spiritual Union and Communion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1971), 7.

had taken place. I was now a new creation in Christ!

What happens when God makes us alive with Christ? Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones describes this change as God giving us a new disposition, not new faculties. He describes it this way:

So, the difference between the sinner and the Christian, the unbeliever and the believer, is not that the believer, the Christian, has certain faculties which the other man lacks. No, what happens is that this new disposition given to the Christian directs his faculties in an entirely different way. He is not given a new brain, he is not given a new intelligence, or anything else. He has always had these; they are his servants, his instruments, his “members” as Paul calls them in the sixth of Romans; what is new is a new bent, a new disposition. He has turned in a different direction, there is a new power working in him and guiding his faculties. That is the thing that makes a man a Christian.⁶

When we became Christians, God made us alive with Christ. We received a new disposition so that instead of being spiritually dead, we are now spiritually alive to God, and the things of God. Jesus explained it as follows to Nicodemus in John 3:8, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

B. God Raised Us Up with Christ (2:6a)

Second, God raised us up with Christ.

Paul said in verse 6a, “**...and raised us up with him.**” Sometimes, the words “**raised up**” speak of the resurrection.

⁶ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation: An Exposition of Ephesians 2* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 79.

In this context, however, they refer to the ascension as we were **raised us up with** Christ to the heavenly places.

What did Paul mean when he said that God **raised us up with** Christ? We can explain it this way. We were dead in our trespasses, and God then made us spiritually alive together with Christ. We became a new creation in Christ, or, as Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it, we received a “new disposition.” God then **raised us up with** Christ into the heavenly places. We ascended with Christ, and we now live in a new environment. As James Montgomery Boice said, “We are no longer creatures only of this world, bound by what we can see and touch and smell and hear and taste. We are now creatures of the greater, heavenly realm who now, because of our union with Christ, think and work and speak in spiritual categories.”⁷

Bert and Cheryl Barber moved down to Costa Rica this week for intensive language learning. Some of you may have received an email from Cheryl this week, which said, in part, “We have enjoyed getting oriented to our language school and community here in Costa Rica. God has graciously provided a wonderful host family. They speak only Spanish, but are very patient with us as we use our limited Spanish and Google translator to communicate. It is the perfect environment for us to be immersed in Spanish and our hosts are very helpful, patient, and friendly.”⁸ Bert and Cheryl are immersed in an entirely new culture, and they have to think and work and speak in Spanish. Similarly, because of our union with Christ, Christians now think and work and speak in spiritual categories. We think and work and speak like Christ.

⁷ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1988), 61.

⁸ Email received on May 4, 2017.

C. *God Seated Us with Christ (2:6b)*

And third, God seated us with Christ.

Paul said in verse 6b, “...and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” This is the pinnacle of our union with Christ. Do you understand what Paul said here? The verb “seated” is in the aorist tense, meaning that it is a past, completed action with continuing results. So, we are currently seated with Christ. That is our present position as Christians.

In Ephesians 1:20–21, Paul said that God “worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.” And then God **seated us with him!** That means that there are no powers that are ever able to overcome us. There is no temptation too great to defeat us. There is no opposition that is able to topple us from our position in Christ.

Further, Paul said that we are **in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus**. Christians are to think of our position. We are spiritually located **in the heavenly places**. Therefore, we should be heavenly-minded. Martyn Lloyd-Jones makes the following comment about heavenly-mindedness:

Heavenly-mindedness! It is a sad thing, but I have even heard evangelical people joking about this, saying of people, “They have become so heavenly-minded that they are no earthly use.” And that is thought to be a clever statement. Oh, the tragedy! You can never be too heavenly-minded. The trouble with all of us is that we are not sufficiently heavenly-minded, we do not know enough about it, we do not dwell

enough there. We have not realized what is true of us, the eyes of our understanding have not been enlightened. The Christian is of necessity a heavenly-minded man, the life of God has come into him, and his mind is changed, as we have seen. He used to be governed by the desires, the lusts of the mind and of the flesh. No longer is he governed by those – they tempt him, they try him; but he is not controlled by them because there is this other influence. He is aware of it, he knows it. The Spirit of God is dealing with him, and working in him, and moving him and drawing him and wooing him from that to this.⁹

This is our union with Christ! God made us alive with Christ. God raised us up with Christ. And God seated us with Christ. What status and privilege God has bestowed on us!

II. Why Has God Done It? (2:7)

And second, why has God done it?

Paul said in verse 7 that God united us with Christ **“so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”** **The coming ages** refers to the future, of course. Quite simply, the reason God united us with Christ was so that we might be the demonstration of his grace throughout all eternity.

One day, Jesus is coming back again for his bride. He is going to present all the redeemed of all the ages to his Father. There will be a great gathering at the final judgment. The saved and the unsaved will be there. The angels and the demons will be there. The righteous and the unrighteous will be there. Before the execution of the final judgment, the Father will display

⁹ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation: An Exposition of Ephesians 2*, 101.

to entire cosmos **the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.** The glorious saving work of Jesus will be extolled for all creation. And then God will turn to us, and show us off to all creation as trophies of his grace. He will say in effect to the entire creation, “Look at what I did with such miserable sinners, who were dead in the trespasses and sins in which they once walked. But, because of my grace, I united them to my Son, Jesus Christ.” And at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10–11).

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed our union with Christ in Ephesians 2:5-7, we should live in light of those blessings.

Let me ask several questions. *First, has God made you alive with Christ?* Are you a new creation in Christ? Do you sense a new spiritual disposition in you? Are you born again? If you cannot answer these questions affirmatively, ask God to make you alive with Christ. Ask him to give you faith in Jesus Christ. Ask him to grant you repentance of your sins.

Second, has God raised you up with Christ? Do think and work and speak in spiritual categories? Do you think and work and speak like Christ? If you are a Christian, you will increasingly conform to the image of Christ.

And third, has God seated you with Christ in the heavenly places? Are you heavenly-minded? What do you think about when you have nothing to think about?

May God encourage you as you understand what it means to be in union with Christ. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp.
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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org