
The Plan for our Union with Christ

Ephesians 1:3-14; 2 Timothy 1:8-10

Series Introduction

Modern craving for preaching that is primarily application...

Biblical focus on truths, "the faith" and godly life style "manner of life" ...

We have talked in the past about the connection between doctrine and duty or as is often called, indicatives and imperatives...

We will be taking up a study in the truth of our **Union with Christ**...

This study is not an exposition through a book. But it will still be exposition as we study the topic.

The Bible is wonderfully varied and complex...

Many different truths and analogies to help us learn and grow...

Much of the purpose of the Old Testament was to prepare us for understand the Lord Jesus and the church...

Much of the New Testament is interpreting what the Old Testament meant in a way that puts Christ at the center...

These sometimes can both make it easier and harder to understand all that the Bible is teaching us about Jesus and His people...

The Bible is also very clear and uses simple words and phrases to help us.

We are a church, a gathered assembly...

We are a flock, sheep with shepherds...

We are part of a body, the body of Christ...

In the New Testament, there is a phrase that is most often used to describe us as Christians. It occurs mostly in the Apostle Paul's writings. This is the phrase "in Christ". Paul says that we are "in Christ". He uses this primarily as a way to identify believers. All true believers are "in Christ".

This is a very important subject for us. Over the next few weeks we will explore different aspects of what it means to be "in Christ"

The Design of our Salvation in Christ - Ephesians 1:3-14

³ 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 to himself 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.

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Some different blessings and provisions as a result of being in Christ...

Chosen in Christ (v.3-6)

³ 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 to himself 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.

All the good that God has purposed for us rests in Christ in heaven. This is a way of saying that every spiritual blessing we will receive comes from Jesus seated in heaven as the resurrected Lord whose redemptive work is completed. The flow of spiritual good to us comes to us from heaven and Christ.

These blessings come to those who have been chosen by God. We were chosen in Christ before the world was created. I note several things about this elective work:

It is God who chooses - make no mistake: God is the subject of the verb choose and we are the objects.

It is personal - God choose us. It is not general, national, or service related. It is an election of individuals.

It is eternal - before the foundation of the world.

It is final - it is not going on now. It is a completed act of God that is moving forward in redemptive history.

It is purposeful - God has chosen the individuals whom He will make holy and blameless. God has an objective as well as objects of His electing love.

Please understand: if you reject the truth of election as it is set forth in Ephesians, you may be cutting the ground out from under your enjoying the blessings that come through these truths.

The word *predestined* simply means that God is working in redemptive history to accomplish His eternal purpose and plan. It means that God will accomplish what he has purposed. This is not just theory, but a reality being lived out in each passing moment of time.

So, in love for us, God has destined that each of those chosen will reach the full standing as sons (adoption).

What God has done is motivated by the pleasure (kind intention) He takes in the praising and prizing of the bright glory of His grace. Freely giving this grace magnifies the worth of Christ by displaying God's great love for His Son.

Redeemed in Christ (v.7-10)

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Grace lavished upon us provides a trespass forgiving and blood bought redemption. The emphasis is on the lavishness of God's grace that actually deals with our sin. Notice the language does not speak of potentiality but reality. It is not that we might or may have redemption; rather, we do have it in Christ. It is an emphatic statement of our present possession because of the lavishness of God's grace.

God has shown us what has been hidden in the past about His will. The will of God that is now being revealed is what it pleased Him to purpose to accomplish in Christ. God has disclosed to us that it pleases Him to make Christ the center of all His purposes. This truth is not just theory, but it is "wisdom and insight." In both the Old and New Covenants, the way each is administered is determined by God's purpose in Jesus.

The present ordering of the household (the church) is shaped by the future; that is, the purpose of God in the fullness of time to make Christ the supreme sum and substance all life. Here is the satisfying supremacy of Christ. And that which God will do in that time shapes the realities and practical living of today.

An Inheritance in Christ (v.11-12)

¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

God is working in time and history to carry out his purpose to give to His people a share in Christ's inheritance. The idea of an inheritance for the saints fills the New Covenant. Consider:

Ephesians 5:5 (ESV) — 5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Colossians 1:12 (ESV) — 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Colossians 3:24 (ESV) — 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

1 Peter 1:3–4 (ESV) — 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, **4** to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,

Once again Paul is teaching that God is working out His will so that His ordained end will be reached. What an amazing thing this is: God will make sure that Jesus will be praised in those who have hoped in Him, especially those who were the first to hope in Him (early Jewish Christian.)

Sealed in Christ (v.13-14)

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Here is the core sentence: In Christ you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was promised in the Old Testament. He was promised to us by the Lord Jesus. He has now been granted to us.

At the time the Spirit was given to us and did this work of sealing, two things also happened.

We heard the gospel which is the truth in human words. There is no salvation without the hearing of the truth of the gospel. It is not just the events of the gospel that save us. What Jesus did must be communicated to us as well.

We believed the gospel we heard. This is faith. When the Spirit came into our lives through the means of hearing the Word, then we were able to believe. No one is saved or sealed by the Spirit without believing the gospel.

It is necessary to hear the true words of the gospel. There is an objective message that is believed by those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells.

The Holy Spirit seals us, placing on us God's mark of ownership. He is placed in us as the down payment guaranteeing that we will receive the inheritance God has purposed, promised and predestined us for. Because we have been chosen in Christ and because we have been placed in Christ, then the Spirit is the seal of ownership and down payment guaranteeing the God will retrieve His purchased possession.

The Delivery of our Salvation in Christ- 2 Timothy 1:8-10

God designed this wonderful salvation from eternity past. He designed it to be Christ centered. He designed it to be located in Christ. But this wonderful salvation had been delivered to us in Christ.

⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Paul's "in Christ" language...

The "In Christ" language is focused on our union with Jesus. So as we study this we will be called often to remember and to reflect on...

- Redeemer - As risen from the dead, we are reminded that Christ's work is not only accomplished, but also has been accepted by God. The redemption we have in Christ involves our own resurrection from spiritual death.
- Ruler - As the son of David, we are reminded that in Christ we have a ruler, a king, a shepherd, a master. We have been placed in Him and therefore are subject to Him.

In Christ, we have Jesus as our redeemer and our ruler.

Paul's "in Christ" people...

In Christ is the language of those who are chosen by God to receive that salvation. We are a chosen people. To be in Christ is a result of having been chosen in eternity past. All who are chosen to salvation will be united with and placed into Christ. Those chosen, in Christ, individuals are "a people". We will see this more clearly in future texts.

For many people, this great truth of God's choosing who He would save is a real problem. I understand that this may be new to many of you. But recognize this: The Bible clearly asserts this truth. Whatever problem it creates for your thinking needs to be submitted to the Word. God chose us. He chose us in Christ. He chose us to be saved. He delivered that salvation to those whom He had chosen.

Paul's "in Christ" ministry...

Notice though that Paul still sees a role for the messenger and the message. The salvation in Christ is delivered through ministry in Christ.

The preacher may be bound. The Apostle Paul is in chains. He is not freed to travel and teach and preach.

The Word of God is not bound. It is unleashed. God will send it to His elect so that they will have the salvation delivered to them. So the going and success of the gospel is through people, but it is not limited to a person.

Paul's "in Christ" glory...

In Christ, there is a glory that is offered to Christ as praise and worship. His praise the purpose of all things.

In Christ, there is a glory that is obtained with Christ. We will have a glorified body and will dwell forever in the presence of His glory.

Reflect and Respond

The Bible is radically Christ-centered. The New Testament explains and expounds on that.

The church is to be radically Christ-centered. Yet we often are not. Our doctrine becomes academic and divorced from reality and relationships.

Not all good and necessary truth for us is “practical”. Many things that the Bible says are true of us do not have commands for us. That we are in Christ has no command to you. I cannot command you to be “in Christ”. However, as we will see, being in Christ will have huge ramifications for how we live.

God has planned for our union with Christ from before the foundation of the world.

All the blessings that God has planned for us come to Jesus first, and then to us. How? Because we are placed in Him and therefore blessed with Him.

Our salvation is in Christ. There is no other name nor any other one nor any other sphere where our salvation is delivered.

The elect receive their salvation through faith when the Spirit sanctifies, regenerates and seals us.

We are charged to take the gospel into the world as a means whereby God delivers His saving grace to those He has chosen.

We can be messengers. We ought to be carrying the message. And the gospel is not bound but runs to the places and persons God sends it to.

Those who hear the gospel and believe the gospel are “in Christ”.