

Union and Communion with Christ

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[0 : 00] So we're reading from Romans chapter 6, beginning at the first verse. We too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like this, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like this, like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again.

Death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died, he died to sin once for all. But the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body. To make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness. But present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life.

[1 : 38] And your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you. Since you are no longer under, not under law, but under grace. Well, today is the last in a series of four sermons on key words in the Bible on salvation.

So let me recap just quickly. And we've heard a lot about what we've been saved from. So we've spent three weeks really talking about what we've been saved from.

We've been saved from our sins. And we've been saved from our enslavement to sin. There's a problem at the heart level that we just want to live for ourselves.

And then we've heard that we've been redeemed. We've been set free from this captivity. And that came at a great price.

The cost of Jesus' blood. And then we've heard we've been saved from all the anger of God. All the condemnation that we deserve for our sin and the way we've treated God and treated people made in his image.

[2 : 49] We've been saved from all that. We are declared righteous before God. Not because of anything we have done. Nothing in ourselves. But as a gift. All our sin is transferred to Christ.

All his righteousness transferred to us. Heaven guaranteed. All the things we've been saved from. I want to ask then, what have we been saved for?

Because what we've been saved from is only half the story. What have we, if you're a believer, what have you been saved for? We need to understand this.

I'm not sure where your mind is going right now. Is it we've been saved for relationship with God? Praying, singing. Reading his word.

So relating to God. Is that what we've been saved for? Have we been saved for a new life of obedience? Or have we been saved for becoming the person God made us to be?

[3 : 57] So change within us. Have we been saved for belonging to a local church? Have we been saved for witnessing for him? Wanting the gospel to get out? I'm going to suggest that if any of those were your answers, I think there's truth in them.

I think they're partly right. But none of them go deep enough. At worst, they could be confused for something you must do.

Something you must muster up. Now that God has done so much for you, you better repay him in a sense. It could be confused for that. So what have we been saved for?

I just want to give two quick quotes from my reading in preparation for this week. John Murray said, Without this, and I'm going to leave it blank, although the sermon title gives it away, our view of the Christian life would be gravely distorted.

Without this, which we're going to cover today, your view of the Christian life would be gravely distorted. Not just missing a bit. Or Bruce Milne said, All Christian experience can be focused in this one gift of God to us through his spirit.

[5 : 22] I hope you want to know what this is. What are we saved for? We're saved for union with Christ. Fellowship.

Communion. Communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Not union in the sense of trade union. Not in the sense of rugby union.

We don't use the term union a lot. It's more like a marriage union. Where two become one. We're saved to become one with God.

Anyway, that's crazy. We're going to... Not crazy in that it's not untrue. It's just mind-boggling that we're going to look into this today. And really, we're going to scratch the surface only.

There's so much to what we've been saved for. You'd be forgiven if you haven't heard of this term, union with Christ.

[6 : 23] We don't seem to talk about it in churches as much as justification or election even. So you'd be forgiven for that. But while you won't find the phrase union with Christ explicitly, as we saw last term in Colossians, once you see it in Scripture, you can't help but not see it.

It's just everywhere. So we heard it in Colossians. How does Paul describe what the message of Christianity is? Christ in you. The hope of glory.

What's Paul's goal in serving the church? To present everyone mature in Christ. And how does he go about this? He works with all the power that's working in Paul.

His power. Not Paul's, but Christ's power. He even claims, I'm filling up the sufferings of Christ. Paul uses the phrase, in Christ, in the Lord Jesus, with Christ over 160 times in his writings.

And it's all throughout the New Testament. And the Old Testament prepares for this understanding as well. Or think about when Paul got converted. What was he confronted with when he met the Lord Jesus Christ, the risen, ascended Lord Jesus Christ, came to him in a brilliant light.

[7 : 47] What did the Lord say to him? He said, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? That must have been a profound moment for Paul in understanding what the Christian life was about.

He was attacking the church. And the Lord is saying, why are you persecuting me? The Lord sees himself so united to his people.

So to go deeper in this, in understanding this, we're going to look at four biblical pictures at the end of the sermon. But first we're going to start in Romans 6, if you want to turn with me there, or otherwise just listen along.

Here in Romans, our question of what have we been saved for is answered in the negative. So we are not saved to go on living in sin.

And you can understand why someone might object. Okay, so if salvation is totally free, if all your sin is definitely dealt with, and you are definitely going to heaven all because of Jesus, that just motivates you to do whatever you want, to just keep on living in sin.

[9 : 07] That can't be right, Paul. There's no fear of punishment. The promise of reward is guaranteed. That's just going to motivate people to do what they want.

What's stopping a person doing what they want, living in sin? In fact, why not sin all the more? Because that will show how great Jesus is.

He will forgive and conquer even more sin. How would you answer that question? Paul's instinctive, just gut response, he doesn't have to think.

He just goes, by no means. Now, that's not a throwaway line. The truth of the gospel has gotten into Paul so deep that his just instinctive response is, no way would you keep on living in sin.

And then he goes on to explain why. Why is that the case? And surprisingly, he talks about baptism, which is fitting for today. He uses the picture of baptism.

[10 : 16] Don't you understand what your baptism symbolises? Baptism isn't about your parents, what they did when you were a baby.

It's not essentially about what you did in making a decision to follow Christ. Water baptism pictures the spiritual, internal baptism that the Holy Spirit has already done.

Verse 3, Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? In effect, he's saying, don't you understand your baptism?

Don't you understand what it means to be a Christian? Baptism is a naming ceremony. It's a declaration that your fundamental identity has changed.

You now belong to God the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. You are a new person. By the work of the Spirit in you, by your faith in Christ, you have now been inseparably joined to Jesus.

[11 : 33] All that has happened to him is now true of you as well. Because he died, we've seen these verses, because he died, pictured in going down in the water, he died, you died.

He was buried, you were buried. Your sin-orientated rather than God-orientated old self, which all of us were born with, that self was crucified with Christ.

You were in him. You were buried. The sin we were so enslaved by, that enslaved self is dead and buried.

And verse 4, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. Spiritually, if you're a believer in Christ, you have been raised to new life.

Totally new desires inside of you now. As 2 Corinthians 5 says, anyone in Christ is a new creation.

[12 : 47] Verse 5, So verse 11, here's the implication of it all.

Christian, you must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

What have I been saved for? What have I been saved for? Shall I do what I like because I'm justified as a free gift by faith?

Well, yes, I will do what I like now. Because I'm so joined to Jesus that what I want to do, what I used to want to do is dead.

And now what I want to do, because God has made me alive in Christ, is I want to live for God. Now, sin is still in our body. Sin is still attacking this new nature the rest of our life until Christ returns.

[14 : 00] But you are in Christ. Christian, know who you are. You are dead and now you're alive. So the motivation for not sinning isn't fear of punishment or promise of reward.

It's know who you are. And so be who you are. That's the Christian motivation. Know who you are and be who you are.

Here's an insight into how Paul viewed himself in Galatians 2.20. You might have heard it before. An example of how this way of thinking motivates us to pursue holiness is found in 1 Corinthians 3.20.

In 1 Corinthians 6. Some of the Christians in that church in Corinthians, they thought it didn't matter what you did. They were unashamedly sleeping with prostitutes.

Unashamedly. And in 1 Corinthians 6, notice how Paul motivates the Christians. He doesn't motivate them by saying you might lose your salvation.

[15 : 31] He doesn't dismiss it as okay. But he says in verse 15 of 1 Corinthians 6, Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?

Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Do you see how thinking of yourself in Christ just, It is motivation to live differently.

It's like saying to Jesus, Come Jesus, sit next to me. Let's watch pornography together. Help me craft this text message in flirting with this man that isn't my husband.

Thinking that way just makes you, It motivates you to pursue holiness if you know how joined you are to Christ.

Complete forgiveness. Like sin is waging war. Like we will still give in to the sinful nature time and again. But complete forgiveness.

[16 : 39] But knowing we abound in Christ, That not only doesn't permit sin, It is the very power to fight sin. Knowing you are united to Christ.

I can do what I want now. And what I want has totally changed. Because I am in Christ, And he is in me by his spirit. Now if all this hasn't blown your mind yet, And I hope it has.

If it hasn't, that could be my fault. But it's already gobsmacking. But I want to step back and look at all of salvation. Because scripture says more than what I've said so far.

It says that all of salvation is received. In Christ. So, Some of you will know Romans 8.30. It's a wonderfully reassuring verse.

People call it the golden chain of salvation. Those who God chose To set his love upon in eternity past, He also called to himself in real time.

[17 : 49] Those he called, He also justified, Declared righteous. And those he justified, He glorified. Those he chose, Will make it to glory.

There is no broken link in the chain. Because it's all of God. It's a wonderful verse. But if this is the only way we think of salvation, There's something missing in that.

There's been no mention of the person, Jesus Christ. Now, of course, Romans, The context of Romans makes that clear. But I'm talking about the way us as Christians think about the process of salvation.

So, I think we are in danger of thinking of it mechanically. We can know all the steps and the doctrines, And yet, Not see them all as being received in Christ, In the person of Christ.

So, for instance, When we think of our justification, All our sin becomes Christ, And all his righteousness, His obedience, Becomes ours. Now, That great exchange Is a wonderful truth.

[19 : 02] But if we picture it, Separate from Christ, It can almost seem like God is playing. As if he's going, Let's just imagine that all your sin is his, And all his righteousness is yours.

It can seem like he's playing. But if you see justification as united with Christ, It's more like a prince, Marrying a common woman who is burdened with debt.

Because of their marriage union, All the debt, Becomes his, And he pays for it. All his riches becomes hers, Because of that union. If you are in Christ, All the blessings of salvation are yours.

Even our election in eternity past, We're told in Ephesians 1.4, The Father chose us in him. He chose us in the Son, Before the foundation of the world.

Now, To just help us feel the pastoral implications of this, I'm just going to read from an author and teacher, Sinclair Ferguson. Listen, Our union with Christ, Which we experience through faith, Is not first of all grounded on my faith.

[20 : 25] And this is a tremendous encouragement to us. Our faith falters. But that doesn't mean our union with Christ falters. Because our union with Christ is grounded in God's eternal purpose, To think that before the foundation of the world, He set his heart upon me, That whenever he, The Father, Saw the coming work of the Lord Jesus Christ, In some way beyond my imagination, He saw that I was united to Jesus Christ.

He would never think of Jesus Christ without thinking of me. He would never think of me without thinking, That one belongs to my Son, Jesus Christ. All of salvation is received in Jesus Christ.

Isn't it wonderful to see little Geordie Running around the church And just talking so much, Just to see her to go from strength to strength.

Now, Sam and Beth can tell you themselves Of the agony of the process of legally adopting Geordie. But do you think that their goal is just a legal change?

Of course not. That legal side Is for the sake of the full relational change. They want Geordie to know who she is now.

[22 : 02] She is their little girl. They want Geordie to call Beth mama, Sam dadda, And experience the full relationship.

It's awe-inspiring enough That God would pardon our sins. But Words fail us to talk about That God wants to adopt us, We're told.

That's the goal. The spirit given to us Is Christ's spirit, The son of God's spirit. Who calls God father, Abba, Daddy.

That's whose spirit resides in us. The same way the son can relate to the father, So can you, Christian. You are such a legitimate child Because of your union with Christ That scripture says you're an heir.

You will get the inheritance. You are co-heir with Christ. God wants you to know You are in his son.

[23 : 14] You are his You are his little girl. You are his You are his boy. He wants you to relate. Abba, Dada. And a child who knows unconditional love, They don't do what the father says Because they're afraid.

They do it because they They want to please their dad. Jesus said himself in John 14, If anyone loves me, He will keep my word And my father will love him And we will come to him And make our home with him.

Again, if that's not enough To disfloor you, Let's finish by looking at Four pictures in scripture Of how we're meant to live out this union.

We get four pictures. We've got a husband and wife. We've got the temple. We've got the human body. And we've got the vine And its branches producing fruit.

Now I want us to notice three things About all these pictures. First, the individual believer Is so connected That the identity Doesn't make sense If you don't understand it In connection With the head, with the whole.

[24 : 54] So you can't be a hand or a foot In isolation. That only makes sense If you're part of the body And connected to the head. So notice that Your very identity Is in connection.

It's in union with Christ And all who are with him. But also notice That this integration Is not like the Buddhist And Hindu idea Where it's like I think it's Hinduism That talks as if The human soul is like a spark That returns to the great bonfire.

But then it's just lost. It's absorbed into that great bonfire. That's not Christianity. You remain a distinguishable person. It's just that Who you are now Is just part of something So much bigger than yourself.

You can't even think of yourself Without thinking of who you're connected to. And the third thing I want us to notice Is that most important of all While this mystery of being united to God Is profound So much so that the Apostle Peter can say That we are partakers of the divine nature.

It's not symmetrical. Christ is uniquely God And the source of life. You are a creature.

[26 : 12] We are still a creature Who rests entirely on God Providing life. The temple would collapse Without the cornerstone.

A branch cannot produce fruit On its own. It needs the life of the vine Flowing through it. So How are we to think and live in this union?

First It's like a husband and wife. A husband and wife. Now I think If I was to ask you Where does it talk about marriage In The New Testament?

Everyone would think of Ephesians 5 That's the marriage bit. But Talking about A husband and wife Are so connected now That they are one flesh. One flesh.

You're not two anymore But one. And then But Paul Reaches the climax of his teaching In verse 32 of Ephesians 5 Saying This mystery is profound This one flesh mystery And I am saying That it refers to Christ And his church It's not primarily The marriage chapter It's primarily The union with Christ Chapter Where marriage is meant To reflect that I think we can think of this As if Relating as the church To Jesus We need to look at a married couple And take our cues From the married couple But that's the wrong way around Paul is saying Married people Look at how Christ Relates to the church And how the church Relates to Christ Marriage I've heard it described It's like It's the analogy Pointing forward To the real thing Which is our Marriage with Christ

[28 : 02] If I can just use that term Christ knows nothing Of a cold Transactional Arms length Relationship Marriage unites Two people At every level He doesn't see himself As independent But he sees himself With us As one flesh He is the faithful husband Who cherishes And nourishes And protects And never forsakes Never divorce Never abandon His people So we're to think of ourselves As one flesh With this This loving husband We take on his name Our identity changes We should be totally devoted To our husband Receiving his strong care And joyfully following his lead And we should forsake All other men We should think of I'm going to use that As a metaphor for idols Everything else That tries to capture our heart We should forsake

So that's one picture Of how we're to live out Our union with Christ But no one picture Captures all of it So we're given lots of pictures Another picture is the temple Our union with Christ Is like a temple And we see that In Ephesians 2 And 1 Peter But let me just talk About Ephesians If you are in Christ All that is Christ Is yours Which includes All the believers In Christ So verse 20 Of Ephesians 2 You are built You are built on the foundation Of the apostles And prophets Christ Jesus Himself Being the cornerstone In whom the whole structure Being joined together Grows into a holy temple In the Lord In him You also Are being built together Into a dwelling place For God By the Spirit God has a grand Building project The goal is a home

A place for his name His spirit to dwell Not just live next door But to live in His people His church Is this great Building project Each of us As believers Are like a brick Like a stone In that building Incorporated Into it Where Christ Is the cornerstone He underpins it all If he was removed It would fall down Fortunately he doesn't change So it won't be removed He is the cornerstone And we also hear it In whom the whole structure grows So here It's kind of Mixing metaphors But In whom the whole building grows So I think we talk a lot About the body Being the temple As if it's got to be The picture of health Physically That's This is not talking about that This is more talking about Our relationships as Christians Should be The picture of health

The church should be so united The context here is Jew and Gentile Who had such hatred for each other Now in Christ Are one It should Our relationships in the church Should be the picture of health And there's one foundation The authority of Christ's word Through the apostles and prophets We don't have the freedom To make some modern architectural Monstrosity We get our building of the church Based on the pattern Of the apostles' teaching And this building Is permanent Because Christ is permanent While the world cares about Building the tallest tower And the greatest organisations The company apple Will crumble one day It will fall to the ground The church is forever He's building this great temple

To dwell in The third picture is our union Like a human body We see this in a few places But 1 Corinthians 12 Is a detailed one For just as the body One body Is one And has many members Fingers, toes I can't describe it all Many members And all the members of the body Though many are one body So it is with Christ We are all filled with the same one spirit Uniting us to Christ's body He is the head There's only one head It's not you It's not me He is the head All the members Get their instruction And their power From the head And verse 18 says God arranged the members In the body Picture the local church Each one of them As he chose You can't look at someone else

[33 : 10] And go Would be better off If they weren't here You You can't do that He He assembled our body This church Every part of the body Is needed To be actively Functioning Healthily We are totally Interdependent But taking our cues From the head Jesus considers How we treat Any and all Of the members Of this church Is how we treat Him Because it's His body Like our head We are to be patient With each other's faults And determine Like the head Of the body To see us Grow up Into maturity To be healthy And when one Suffers We all suffer When one is Honoured We all are honoured This one spirit

The spirit of Christ Animates Should animate This body This local church And the fourth picture We've got Is Like the vineyard A branch Abiding in the vine This is Christ Speaking to his Disciples From verse 4 Of John Chapter 15 Abide in me And I In you And we're told In verse 7 How to abide It's his It's his word It's his word Abiding And dwelling in us He says As the branch Cannot bear fruit By itself Unless it abides In the vine Neither can you Unless you abide In me I am the vine You are the branches Whoever abides In me And I in him He it is That bears much fruit For apart from me You can do nothing I think so often We can get caught up With what we're doing To serve Jesus

Whereas Do you grasp The point of this passage Stop focusing on What you're doing For Jesus Worry about Abiding in him He will produce The fruit In a sense It's the vine's Responsibility To produce the fruit Where to stay Connected to the vine Having his word Richly dwelling in us In this picture The father God the father Is included in this Picture This analogy He is so committed To our fruitfulness That he will prune us And there's two reasons To prune One is to cut off Anything that is Dead and unhealthy The other is To make us More fruitful It actually Stimulates more fruit I heard A good quote That captures this By Amy Carmichael What prodigal waste

It appears to be To see scattered On the floor The bright green leaves And the bare stem Bleeding in a hundred Places From the sharp knife But with a tried And trusted husbandman There is not a random Stroke in it all Nothing cut away Which it would not Have been a loss To keep And gain to lose It's the Christian It's the local church That remains focused On abiding in Christ Being filled with his word And trusting the father To cut us And make us bleed That That Is Will produce Much fruit Much living That honours Honours God So they're the four pictures Of how we can Live out this union Now if you're hearing This today You might be realising

You are only Very loosely Associated With this Jesus Maybe through This organisation Called Grace Evangelical Or maybe through A family member You've only got A pretty loose Association With Jesus You need a vital Connection to Jesus You need his life Flowing in you By his spirit You need to be Baptised Into Christ To be dead And born anew You need a vital Connection That's what God Wants with you He wants to make A home In your heart By his spirit And Christian We are so I think in our Culture We're so Individually Minded I hope today Somewhere The spirit Is

[38 : 15] Is Challenging Cutting you Where you Are thinking And acting So individually Let the spirit Cut you And take Confidence That Christ Is fully Committed To you Fully Enjoying This union With him And his people He is so Committed to it We need to Know who we Are We are United to Him And so We are united To everyone In him Jesus Is the one Who will Make sure We will Live out This union Just before He died On the cross This is the Purpose For which He died Do you Remember What he Prays In John 17 What does He pray For He prays To the Father For all Believers That they May all Be one Just as You

Father Are in Me And I In you That they May be In us God Wants You To be In him So that The world May believe That you Have sent Me The glory That you Have given Me I have Given Them That they May be One Even as We Are one I In them And you In me That they May become Perfectly One So that The world May know That you Have sent Me And love Them Even as You Have loved Me I'm so Shocked By the Phrase That they May be One Even as We Are one That's Pretty One And I Just want To finish By asking

A question I almost Have no Idea How to Answer Why Would the Lord Want To be So United To us Forever Considering How One The Father Son And Holy Spirit Is For all Eternity Fully Sufficient In themselves Enjoying That love No need Of anything Else What kind Of God Pursues Sinners That are So Determined To reject Him What kind Of a God Would Redeem Us At the Cost Of his Son But what Kind Of a God Would Satisfy His Justice Totally As a Gift And what Kind Of a God Would Do That To Unite

Himself To Us Forever Adopting Us So that We Can Call Him Abba What Kind Of a God Would Do That I Don't Know How To Answer That Why Would He Want That It Can't Be Because We Are Lovely It Can't It Must Be Because That's The Kind Of God He Is And He Is Worthy Of All Our Worship