

## Union With Christ

Trevor Faggotter — 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2023. Coro Studies.

*Dear Father, **as we meet** together, we do so for many good reasons: to hear your Word, to worship the Triune God, whom we know in Christ Jesus, to encourage one another in the faith, to pray for families, friends, and the global community, **may we** also meet to be equipped by the Holy Spirit, to share in the mission of Christ Jesus. May his Word bring grace and peace where there is anguish and hatred. May his Word make known the redemption Jesus has accomplished in his cross and resurrection. And may we await the Father's final regeneration of the human race, and of all creation, living in God's holy, mighty love. Amen.*

This lovely photo was on the internet this week: Two boys—an Arab and a Jew, arm in arm. The caption beneath are the words of Rabbi Michael Adam Latz.



My hope is that one day the children of Isaac and the children of Ishmael will come together and tell the extremists to take a hike so we can eat dates and watch our children frolic together.

**Rabbi Michael Adam Latz**

Today's study is written with the hope that it may help us to more fully, and helpfully share the good news of God's gracious reconciling love in Christ Jesus, in a weary, war-torn world.

In our thinking, I hope we can explore, or at least touch upon, the following questions:

- How is it that God's love really does change everything?
- What does it mean to be in Union with Christ?
- How might that Union with Christ affect the world in which we live?
- What does it mean to be Crucified with Christ?
- What does it mean to participate in the mission of Christ?
- What does it mean to be participants in the Divine Nature?

In Galatians, and Ephesians, Paul argues that human distinctions that have been a catalyst for friction, tension, enmity, bitterness, and hatred, are no longer a valid reason for notions of superiority. or inferiority. All our sins are forgiven. That rancour is over. Now, in Christ Jesus, Jews by birth and Gentile sinners (Gal. 2:15) are recreated as one new humanity (Eph. 2:15).

<sup>26</sup> So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, <sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is **neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female**, for you are **all one** in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:26-29).

<sup>20</sup> **I have been crucified with Christ** and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20, NIV).

### ASPECTS OF UNION WITH CHRIST

For theological purposes, people often speak of **Union with Christ** in these 5 categories:

- (1) **Incarnational Union**—*the Word became Flesh* (John 1:14). He came '*in the likeness of sinful flesh*' (Romans 8:3). *Like us in every respect* (Hebrews 2:17); *except without sin* (Hebrews 4:15).
- (2) **Covenantal Union**—Genesis 17:8; Jeremiah 30:22; Ephesians 5:32; Revelation 21:3
- (3) **Sacramental Union** —Baptised into Christ (Romans 6:3); Feeding on him (John 6:53)
- (4) **Experiential Union**— Conformed to his Image (Rom. 8:29); transformed (Rom. 12:2)
- (5) **Spiritual Union**—'anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him' (1Cor. 6:17).

We come into *union with Christ*, as God's grace and forgiveness, hope and love is revealed to us, by the Holy Spirit, who also inspires, imparts and evokes God's gifts of **faith** and **repentance** (Acts 11:18).

In my view it is most helpful to understand our union with Christ through the lens of Spirit-Baptism. Our **Baptismal Union**—by water and the Holy Spirit—incorporates us into God's redeemed humanity. By the action of the Holy Spirit, we are joined with Christ **through faith**—taken up into Jesus Christ in his life, death, crucifixion, burial, resurrection, and ascended life. We are united with Christ, through the activity of God's grace, and the human response of Christ's faith, life, work, and his gospel.

<sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who were **baptized into Christ Jesus** were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4).

<sup>5</sup> For if **we have been united with him** in a death like his, we will certainly be **united with him** in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup> We know that our old self was **crucified with him** so that the body of sin might be destroyed, so we might no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup> For whoever has died is freed<sup>[a]</sup> from sin. <sup>8</sup> But if we died with Christ, we believe

that we will also live with him. <sup>9</sup> We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. <sup>10</sup> The death he died, he died to sin once for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God. <sup>11</sup> So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:5-11).

As we see that we have come into union with Christ, we are also in a place where we can more fully understand the significant matter of co-crucifixion, co-resurrection, and co-participation in the Divine Nature. That seems to be what Paul is encapsulating in that great claim of Galatians 2:20.

<sup>20</sup> **I have been crucified with Christ** and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20, NIV).

We shall ponder these sentences a phrase at a time:

1. **I have been crucified with Christ.** This statement points us to Paul's apostolic conviction that 'We are convinced that if one died for all, then did all die' (2Corinthians 5:14). Paul's conviction is that sinful Adamic humanity, has been crucified with Christ. It is also true that through union with Christ, Paul himself has been *taken up into the cross, and crucified*. It is a pity that it is somewhat uncommon for theologians and preachers to expound for long, upon the notion of Co-crucifixion. It is surely one of the richest.
2. **And I no longer live.** Of course Paul lives, he can work, and write and speak. So what does he mean? He means that the big self-focussed *ego-centric* Paul is finished. It is no longer "I" the *religious* Pharisaic Paul, with his decrees of law, which he thinks he obeys, that is central in his life. That ugly, Jesus-rejecting, truly Christ-hating man, has been crucified with Christ in the cross.
3. **But Christ lives in me.** Paul now finds that his entire being is swayed, directed, re-oriented, inspired and refocussed by the Living Risen Christ Jesus, who by the Holy Spirit's indwelling brings all of Christ into Paul's whole life.
4. **The Life I now live in the body.** All of Paul's daily embodied life as a human person of faith, before God, is **now** still in his body, but is deeply influenced by the presence and power of Jesus. Jesus is present by the Holy Spirit. And Paul does have a life! It is lived differently now, it is other than it was beforehand. It is in union with Christ. It is also in union with the Father and Spirit. It is the outcome that Jesus had prayed for in John 17:20-21. It relates directly to the photograph at the beginning of this study.

<sup>20</sup> "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, <sup>21</sup> that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

5. **I live by Faith in the Son of God** (or by *the faith of the Son of God*). Both translations are acceptable. That is, *I rely on Christ's righteous life of faith*. I do not lean upon my relationship to the law, but to Jesus Christ.
6. **Who loved me and gave himself for me.** Paul sees the necessity of Jesus' crucifixion, for his relationship of faith with the Father, and for his relationships with others. *Jesus was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification* (Romans 4:25).

### CO-CRUCIFIXION

#### Crucified With Christ—Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:6

#### "Not I, but Christ"

The doctrine of Co-Crucifixion warrants further exposition and exploration, particularly as it relates to **the law of God**, and the role of the law in our lives, for good and for ill.

One of the reasons we were crucified with Christ Jesus is '*so that the body of sin might be destroyed and we might no longer be enslaved to sin*' (Romans 6:6). We thus become slaves to a new Master, Christ Jesus. And we become '*slaves of righteousness*' (Romans 6:18).

Another of the reasons we were crucified with him is so that we might no longer fear death in the way that we once did. '*For if we have been **united** with him in a death like his, we will certainly be **united** with him in a resurrection like his* (Romans 6:5).

Further to this, we would benefit from seeing what co-crucifixion is not. People known to be adherents of *Gnosticism*, and *Asceticism*, and *Antinomianism* all take up an incorrect view of what it means to be crucified with Christ.

Other aspects of co-crucifixion to be considered in the next study, include:

- How Christ deals with the penalty of death for sin, for us all
- That Christ deals with legal, or forensic elements of law, in his crucifixion (contrary to much teaching today).
- How co-crucifixion disarms the power of evil, the lure and power of the world
- How co-crucifixion relates to the cleansing of the human heart and the life of freedom.
- How union with Christ relates to our participation in God's plan now.
- How union with Christ points us to the future, and *theosis*, as participants *in the Divine Nature* (2Peter 1:4).