

# Union with Christ: The Prospect of Our Union with Christ

Genesis 1:26-28 and II Chronicles 6:12-21

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## Introduction

As we have learned already, our union with Christ is a far more central concern than is often presented in our teaching about salvation and our purposes for life. We have salvation because we are “in Christ” as we have read in Ephesians. Our destiny and purpose are wrapped up in our identity and relationship with Christ. This is not isolated to the New Testament although it becomes much more visible because of the New Covenant. In this era of redemptive history, the focus on the person and work of Christ comes to the forefront.

We are going to look at two ideas found in the Old Testament scriptures and see how they anticipate fulfillment in Jesus. These are ‘the importance of identity with’ and ‘the relational dependence upon God himself.’ The Old Testament has many figures that foreshadow the union with Christ theme but we will focus on these two this morning. Our purpose, as human beings, was never to live autonomously, but in “identity” with our creator and our “independence” was always to be “dependent” with our existence found in our relationship with God himself. We will read many texts today, trying to let the Scripture speak for itself this morning. We will see if our premise of the importance of identity and relationship appears to be so from the Scripture.

## **“In Our Image, After Our Likeness”** (*Genesis 1:26-28 and 5:1-3*)

Let us begin by reading the first five verses of our Bibles in Genesis chapter one.

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*

The opening of Sacred Scripture is loaded with powerful assertions. God has purpose, plan, and intention. He also has wisdom, artistry and power to carry out these goals. After five full days of display of creative energy we come to day six, where the narrative reaches a summit. In the middle of this sixth day of creation, we read this account, beginning in verse twenty-six and finishing at verse 31.

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."*

*So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.*

*And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*

The Divine contemplation found in verse 26 followed by the poetic couplet in verse 27 is the keynote of the creation account, indicated by the uniqueness of the presentation. Mankind was made specifically for a particular purpose. This was to be God's "image" The task set before humankind was to be accomplished because they were "in the image." They were created with the qualities and responsibilities that would represent the Godhead in the wonders of the world order. Not apart from God himself, but in relationship and as an extension of God in this material, physical existence.

And indeed, this image motif was not to end with Adam himself but was to extend to all of his progeny as indicated later in the narrative of Genesis in the first three verses of chapter 5.

*This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.*

Here we read that God's creative activity "in his likeness" now extended to Seth as the "in his own likeness and after his image" of Adam. Now this image has been adulterated. But the concept remains. In fact this Adamic image is carried into Paul's understanding of the world order when he elaborates on our need to be identified with Jesus, standing apart from our previous identification with Adam (continued through many generations just like Seth). Let us hear Paul's words in his letter to the Romans, chapter five from verses 12-21.

*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.*

*Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

There is this continued necessity to be identified with the Sovereign Lord that was compromised in Eden. The "in his image" motif that began in Genesis 1 can only be restored because the true image has come and our destiny, our "righteousness leading to eternal life," depends upon the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

That is what Colossians 1 and Philippians 2 (and other passages) are asserting about Jesus. It is not merely that Jesus is divine but that he, as a man, is the true image of God that is able to restore the original creation order and mandate. Lets read both Colossians 1:13-17 and Philippians 2:5-11 and listen for this idea.

*He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should 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.*

“In His Image”, “In Christ,” is our intended identity. What began as God’s creative design in the beginning, is now a reality in our lives through Jesus Christ. We are nothing and have nothing without this identity. Jesus brings our real selves to the forefront.

### **“Will God Dwell With Man?”** *(II Chronicles 6:12-21, 7:1-3)*

But Genesis 1 also indicated a means to the exercise of this image. Mankind was to be the designated governor of the creation, the vice-regent so to speak. They were to exercise God’s dominion as his image. When specifically placed in the garden, the language of care and keeping are the same words used to describe the priestly work in the tabernacle/temple. The creation, the garden, the tabernacle and temple, all contained specific pictures of God’s presence “with” his image. Man was not intended to live alone, his “dependent reality” that we mentioned previously is to be a relational dependence. This is elaborated in the temple dedication passage found in II Chronicles. Lets read in chapter six from verses twelve to twenty one.

*Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands. Solomon had made a bronze platform five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high, and had set it in the court, and he stood on it. Then he knelt on his knees in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven, and said, “O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart, who have kept with your servant David my father what you declared to him. You spoke with your mouth, and with your hand have fulfilled it this day. Now therefore, O Lord, God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father what you have promised him, saying, ‘You shall not lack a man to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk in my law as you have walked before me.’ Now therefore, O Lord, God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you have spoken to your servant David. “But will God indeed dwell with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built! Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O Lord my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you, that your eyes may be open day and night toward this house, the place where you have promised to set your name, that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. And listen to the pleas of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen from heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.*

Solomon asked the rhetorical question, “Will God dwell with man on the earth?” I think Solomon expected his hearers, and we, as readers, to assume, “of course not!” But then we read farther in the narrative in 7:1-3.

*As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord’s house. When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.”*

His presence does arrive. Now, Solomon could have been affirming that God is too “big” for a human temple or even the earth for that matter and expected just a “show” of God’s glory. But I think the narrative is to cause us to fear and worship in a bigger way. God is with us. His filling the temple is not just a show; he is in a real sense coming to be present in the temple. And as an aside, notice that he is described as good and having saving mercy and grace (another way of understanding the idea of “steadfast love”) that will carry us forever.

Now Solomon should have understood God’s presence in the temple. Surely he had read about Moses’ experience at the tent of meeting. In Exodus 33:7-11 we find an account that reads:

*Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. <sup>8</sup> Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. <sup>9</sup> When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses. <sup>10</sup> And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. <sup>11</sup> Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.*

Solomon surely knew that God’s presence was overshadowing the tabernacle in cloud and fire. God met and was present with his people in the tabernacle and now the temple. Indeed there were obstacles and limitations to this relationship because of sin and rebellion, but nonetheless this relationship was real. It not only affirmed their identity, but gave direction and guidance for living. But our purpose is not to serve in or around a tent/temple that is but a shadow or a picture of ultimate reality. The only way we can accomplish this is because of our connection to the true priest and temple that brings God to us. Let us see what the author of the book of Hebrews says in chapter 8, verses one to seven.

*Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.*

Indeed we are to be this "temple" as we live out the "same" life as our Lord. This is what we read a few weeks back from I Peter 2:4-10. Notice as we read this passage the connections between "who Jesus is and what he has done" to "who we are and how we are to live" in relationship to him.

*As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture:*

*"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."*

*So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,*

*"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"*

*and*

*"A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense."*

*They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

Our ability to accomplish our purpose of worship and service only occurs if we are in relationship to the true temple and its priest. It is only as we are "His people" that allows this function. We must be in an obedient relationship to proclaim his excellencies and experience his mercy, his steadfast love we read about in II Chronicles.

## Conclusion

How do we respond to this?

We need to remind ourselves frequently that who we are in this life is not about what we accomplish but who we are. The intention of man's existence was not to be about being their best selves in and of themselves. Adam and Eve were not "self-made men (or women)". They were God-made individuals intended to be His image. That image can now be restored through the work of Jesus. It is only "in Him" that the true, intended purpose can be found.

And we need to affirm that this image is only truly established in a relationship with God himself. We cannot live this image outside of a viable, flourishing dynamic with God. And that comes only through life that flows from the Gospel.

We must recognize our inability, failure and sin. We must trust in the work of Jesus Christ; his perfect life, death and resurrection to substitute for our failure and pay for our sins. This must be real, not just at some time in the past of our lives but daily, hourly, moment-by-moment. If this is not true of you, don't leave today without speaking to someone about the Gospel. To be "out of Christ" is to be lost, both now and for eternity.