

The Right Administration of the Ordinances: Sharing in Christ

1 Corinthians 10:14-22

Before we dive into this passage and I speak on the topic of *What is a right administration of the Lord's Supper*, let me take a few moments to explain a neglected doctrine called *Union with Christ*.

That expression – *Union with Christ* – does not appear in Scripture, so maybe that's why it's neglected, but this Biblical teaching is prominent and has to do with “the fundamental reality of salvation's benefits” according to Westminster Seminary Professor Richard Gaffin.

“[U]nion with Christ,” he states, “Refers to the believer's solidarity or association with Christ by the Holy Spirit and through faith, by...which believers partake of His saving benefits.”

Simply put, union with Jesus Christ makes the church *recipients* of all the *salvific* spiritual blessings that are found in Him.

Often, we read in the N.T. phrasing like “*in Christ*,” and “*with Him*,” and “*abiding in Him*,” and “*hidden in Him*,” and “*joined or united to Him*.” Phrases like these alert the reader to this central doctrine of redemption.

For example, listen to what Paul tells us in Romans 6:5-11: “*For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection 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.*”

Here Paul details what it means to be “in Christ,” is to have God *confer on the elect*, all the saving benefits Christ merited by His life, death, and resurrection.

The late evangelist, R.A.Torrey, communicates this glorious conferring of redemption when he said, “When Jesus died, He died as my representative, and I died in Him; when He arose, He rose as my representative, and I arose in Him; when He ascended up on high and took His place at the right hand of the Father in the glory, He ascended as my representative and I ascended in Him, and today I am seated in Christ with God in the heavenlies. I look at the cross of Christ, and I know that atonement has been made for my sins; I look at the open sepulcher and the risen and ascended Lord, and I know the atonement has been accepted. There no longer remains a single sin on me, no matter how many or how great my sins may have been.”

Think about this for a moment – Let's ponder the benefits we have been granted through our Union with Christ...listen to some verses found just in Ephesians 1.

As the elect of God, we have been granted eternal life: “*He chose us in him before the foundation of the world.*”

As slaves to sin, Christ has purchased us out of sin's debt: *"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace."*

As estranged offspring to the King, Christ has adopted us as His sons & daughters: *"In him we have obtained an inheritance."*

As guilty transgressors of God's Law, Christ's gospel has justified us before the Judge. *"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."*

As cursed creatures, Christ's Spirit has lavished us with all of God's blessings: *"In Him, we have received every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."*

All of these salvific graces, and many more, are made sure and conferred to us by union with Christ.

But if you are not *"in Him,"* you are outside of Him, you are a stranger to Him. You have no merits of Christ's life, death, and resurrection granted to you.

You remain enslaved to sin, estranged to the King, a breaker of God's Law, and cursed by God...

Jesus says to you, *"If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned."*

This is what happens to all that Christ does not abide in – *swift & sure judgment from God.*

But, you can be *"in Christ."* You can have all the blessings of salvation – all of His saving benefits can be imparted to you – if you will believe.

If you will call on Jesus Christ, He will surely rescue you from the wrath to come. If you will trust in Him alone, He will come in and abide in you.

Jesus Christ can save...simply ask! *"For there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*Please hear the words of the Lord.

Jesus said in John 15:1-5, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.⁵ 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."

He is teaching, "I am in each saint of God, dwelling in him or her...communing in them." He said, *"I abide in you...the branch abides in the Vine."*

And more than that, each saint of God is dwelling in Jesus Christ. Listen again, He says, *"Every branch in Me...it abides in the Vine...& whoever abides in Me."*

This is a *permanent* union...an *indissoluble* union, one that cannot be broken.

But even more than that, we also read in Romans 12:5 these words – *"...so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."*

Not only is Christ in union with the saint, and the saint in union with Christ, but we – the body of Christ...are in union with one another. Again, listen to Paul's words, "*We are one body, and individually members one of another.*"

Now, why am I laboring this point? Because Union with Christ communicates a *kind of participation* with Him. Union with Christ is a *sharing in Him...together we truly engage in communion with Him.*

Paul is clear on this from verse 17: "*Because there is one Bread (that is, there is one heavenly Manna – Jesus Christ), we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one Bread.*"

Our Union with Christ is a *spiritually, intimate communion with Him.* We are more than people scattered throughout a building or the city...we are one body *joined* together in an unbreakable union of abiding...we are one body *cemented* together in an indissoluble union with Christ.

Pastor Kevin DeYoung captures the thought beautifully writing: "Union with Christ is like wedlock, where we are joined to Christ in a covenant of love. It is like a body where we as members are joined to our living Head. Or you might say union with Christ is like a building, where we are the house and Christ dwells within us.

Just as a husband & wife share in the covenant love benefits of marriage conferred to them, so too we receive salvific benefits conferred to us from our communion with Jesus.

I believe the apostle Peter is emphasizing our union with Christ in 2 Peter 1:3-4 where he writes: "*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,*⁴ *by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers (that is, sharers...communers, if you like) of the divine nature...*"

All those promises...all those spiritual blessings...all those saving benefits merited by Christ's life, death, and resurrection are granted to us church, so that we may commune intimately with the Divine.

Well, in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22, the apostle is speaking to our Union with Christ. He is warning the Corinthians to "*flee from idolatry,*" in v. 14.

This admonition comes in the greater context starting back in chapter 8:1: "*Now concerning food offered to idols.*" Some weaker Corinthian church members were unsure if they could purchase meat that was used in pagan temple worship. They had been part of that life of sacrificing food to gods like *Zeus or Poseidon or Aphrodite* but now were followers of Jesus. Because of their devotion to God, not only were they convinced to steer clear of the pagan temples, but they were convinced *not to buy meat* previously sacrificed in the pagan ceremonies in the marketplace.

But some stronger Corinthian Christians were not concerned about the meat. They understood the so-called gods of Zeus, Poseidon, Aphrodite, *and others to be nothing.* They were not real gods at all. And so, they bought the meat to eat a reduced price.

Well, this didn't sit well with some of the weaker saints – their faith was being upset by more mature Christians leading Paul to say to the mature brothers in chapter 8:12-13, "*Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against*

Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”

After a lengthy discourse on not offending others by their Christian liberty in chapter 9, Paul reminds the Corinthian saints in chapter 10 to remember the idolatry of the Israelites in the wilderness. Verse 18 says, “*Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?*”

The Israelites would be joined to whatever they sacrificed to – if they sacrificed to *YHWH*, they communed with Him...if they sacrificed to *pagan idols*, they communed with them. Paul is teaching how food offerings offered by people, *even to deaf & dumb idols*, were still a participation in the altar. Israel was joining themselves to idols in the act, even if the idols were not real gods. In fact, the ones they were sharing communion with were *demons*.

For vv. 19 & 20 say, “*What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons.*”

Paul is indicating a real, spiritual *union* exists between God and His people. One that is as real as what is between a husband & wife... “*a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*” One where there is a spiritual sharing in the blood of Christ; one where there’s a spiritual communion in the body of Christ. This is what Paul means in verse 16: “*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?*”

“When we bless the cup, is there not a real *spiritual communion* taking place with the blood of Christ? When we break bread, is there not a real *union with Christ* occurring in the body of Christ,” he asks?

There is a spiritual component in the Lord’s Supper not being taken seriously...and it goes back to our union with Christ.

How can Paul say that they were committing idolatry & dining with demons if the Supper is only a memorial meal? ...It’s only a “Do this in Remembrance of Me” time of worship. If he wanted to convey that idea, then why labor for a chapter on the horrors of idolatry as seen by the Israelites joining themselves to a golden calf in worship?

Paul is teaching a spiritual aspect of the Lord’s Supper that has been overlooked or ignored - In the Supper, Christ’s church truly dines with Him. We share in His body & blood... The act of Communion is not *only* an external memorial meal – but a spiritual, worshipful participation with Christ.

This is how Paul can say in 1 Cor. 6:15-19 that when adultery is committed, it’s not only an external sin, but a sin against God: ¹⁵ *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?*

¹⁶ *Never!* ¹⁷ *Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own*

¹⁹ *body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?*

Just as there's a spiritual union that exists in marriage between husband, wife, & God, there is a spiritual union existing between church and Christ in the Lord's Supper.

When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we do so as a people joined with Jesus Christ; we are covenant-bearing saints in union with Him, who experience all the salvific benefits of that union.

So to offer false worship in Communion, is to participate with demons, and is to commit idolatry.

Just as the Israelites worshipped the golden calf, calling it the "*God who delivered them from Egypt,*" we can partake in the Supper wrongly and participate in demonic idolatry.

This idea can be difficult to grasp – because when we look at the elements of Communion – the bread & the cup – we often only see them as external symbols to be used in worship. But while they are *visible symbols*, they do represent an unbreakable *invisible reality* we share with Christ: We are joined to Him, we abide in Him, we are In Him.

I spoke last week about fencing the table – as a church we must put up certain guardrails to protect the church from error – error that takes the form of idolatry.

*As to the question of "what is a right administration of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper," we must begin with stopping any practice that allows unbelievers to participate in the meal.

From open communion that invites anyone in the building to the Table, or inviting anyone online unwilling to assemble together, or sharing of the meal with your private small group that undoubtedly has unbelievers in it...

When we do not guard the Table from unbelievers, we foolishly partake with them – thinking it's no big deal or a maybe a way to bring them to Christ...we commit idolatry.

**If we seek to rightly administer this ordinance, then we must stop ignoring the spiritual aspect of Communion – we really share in Christ's body & blood.

To say that the Supper is memorial only...to only remember our Savior's sacrifice...is to ignore our union with Him. We have received all the saving benefits of his life, death, & resurrection.

To think there is no spiritual nourishment that takes place from the Supper is like saying there is no spiritual nourishment from hearing the Word preached, or engaging in prayer, or singing songs to the Lord, or giving money for Christ's church.

Each of these are *acts of worship for sure!!*...but they are only *acts of proper worship* when we do them in spirit & truth...not in the mere mechanics of the act, *which is idolatry*.

***And if we seek to rightly administer this ordinance, we must stop ascribing more to the Supper than warranted.

Let me be frank with you. I observed in our own church for well over a year a phenomenon on the 4th Sunday of each month. Our attendance numbers went up. More people were showing up on that Sunday than any other Sunday. Why, you ask?

Because that's the Sunday we began observing the Lord's Supper together. Is it possible some Christians were treating Communion like a Lucky Charm...a spiritual rabbit's foot? "If I have to come to church then I'm gonna make it count...Communion Sunday should give me all the protection I need for a while."

Let me quote pastor John Piper here. He said, “This is how millions of Christians view the Lord's Supper today—as a grace dispenser, a sacramental antidote that immunizes against all forms of worldliness. If you show up and eat and drink, you are safe. And the rest of your life can be just as entangled in secularism and sin as all the rest of the world.” Christians can & do commit idolatry when we treat Communion like a spiritual rabbit’s foot against evil.

God help us.