

United to Christ



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 5:19, 6:3–6, 8:9, 2 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 4:5–7, 6:15, Eph. 4:24, Col. 3:10.*

Memory Text: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (*2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV*).

Key Thought: To demonstrate that Christ's work of reconciliation continues as He calls us to become members of the new humanity instituted by Him in His own person.

The sacrifice of Christ provides all that we need for salvation. This includes the possibility of union and permanent attachment to Him as Savior and Lord. This incorporation into Christ, through the ritual of baptism, is our participation in His death and resurrection; it's our recognition that His death is our death because He died as our Substitute. Thus, we become united to Him. In this unity, we not only appropriate all the infinite benefits of His sacrifice but also become members of the new humanity instituted by Him in His own person. This union with Christ is, through the work of the Spirit, embodied in our incorporation into the church as the body of Christ. Thus, to be incorporated into Christ is to have a personal communion with Him and to be united to one another in the mystery of His church.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 20.*

The Two Humanities

Study the parallels and contrasts below and summarize the nature of the humanity made sinful by Adam and the new humanity made by Christ:

ADAM	CHRIST
1. Son of God (<i>Luke 3:38</i>)	1. Son of God (<i>Luke 3:22</i>)
2. Was disobedient (<i>Rom. 5:19</i>)	2. Was obedient (<i>Rom. 5:19</i>)
3. Introduced sin (<i>Rom. 5:12</i>)	3. Brought grace for all (<i>Rom. 5:20–22</i>)
4. Introduced reign of death (<i>Rom. 5:17</i>)	4. Made possible the reign of life (<i>Rom. 5:17</i>)
5. All his descendants are sinners (<i>Rom. 5:19</i>)	5. Through Him many will be made righteous (<i>Rom. 5:19</i>)
6. Brought condemnation (<i>Rom. 5:18</i>)	6. Brought justification (<i>Rom. 5:18</i>)
7. In him all die (<i>1 Cor. 15:21</i>)	7. In Him all will be made alive (<i>1 Cor. 15:21</i>)

The fall of Adam resulted in his spiritual death and separation from God. All of his descendants found themselves in the same situation as Adam, unable to overcome sin and death. Humans are, by natural birth, part of the humanity that belongs to Adam, a sinful humanity separated from God.

How then does one become part of the new humanity instituted by God through Christ? There's only one way, and that is through the new birth. The new humanity is formed by those who were born from above and not from the flesh (*John 3:3, 5, 6*). These are those who saw in Christ God's only means of salvation, believed in Him, and now have eternal life (*vs. 15*). They now belong to the new creation, liberated from the enslaving power of sin (*2 Cor. 5:17*). They have become children of God, members of the heavenly family. Paul describes this as adoption into God's family (*Gal. 4:5–7*). Jesus was pronounced Son of God at His baptism, and we participate in His Sonship through adoption at baptism. Adoption does not suggest that we are less than children; on the contrary, "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (*Rom. 8:16*).

How should our lives in this new humanity differ from how they were in the old one? What tangible differences can you find? What does your answer tell you about yourself?

Making All Things New: A New Humanity

The ultimate goal of Christ's work of salvation is to make all things new, thus permanently undoing the damage caused by sin. This hope for the "new" was announced by the prophets of the Old Testament, particularly by Isaiah, who talked about the creation of a new heaven and a new earth (*Isa. 65:17*). The Old Testament concept of newness is developed more fully in the New Testament, now from the perspective of the work of redemption through Jesus. Consequently, the "new" is not only what we anticipate through our hope in Christ but also what we are already experiencing now, as Christians. For instance, we have already entered into a new covenant with Christ (*Mark 14:24*); we are already walking in *newness* of life (*Rom. 6:4*). The new is here because Christ initiated it through the power of His death and resurrection.

The work of redemption is essentially one of re-creation, one so radical that it will result in a new heaven and a new earth. Yet, this work of re-creation does not begin with the new literal heaven and earth, or even with the re-creation of our old physical bodies. It begins with the creation of a new humanity. We must remember that the problem of sin is primarily and directly related to the fall of humans. The resolution of the problem begins with the eradication of its controlling power in the human heart. This has been possible through the work of Christ for us. This new humanity was initiated by Christ, in whom the divine and the human were permanently united. The new humanity is, therefore, the participation of humans in the humanity inaugurated by Christ.

This new humanity is not an invisible abstract phenomenon that lacks a concrete expression in history. It expresses itself in the church as the body of Christ. This new humanity is determined not by ethnic or social differences but only by the power of Christ to make us one in Him. Paul states that through Christ God brought together into the church Jews and Gentiles, and that it is His purpose "to create in [Christ] himself one new man out of the two" (*Eph. 2:15, NIV*). This new "man" or humanity is created in Christ in the sense that it participates in the unity with God made possible through Christ.

Read Galatians 6:15, Ephesians 4:24, and Colossians 3:10. What do these verses mean to you? How have you experienced the promises in them? What can you do to help see these promises brought to fruition in your own life?

Union With Christ

How does Paul describe the incorporation of humans into Christ?

Rom. 6:3–6, 2 Cor. 5:17.

No one is automatically in Christ apart from a personal faith commitment to Him. Our incorporation by faith into Christ expresses itself in baptism. The importance of this rite is vast.

First, it is a public declaration that the death of Christ was our death and that through His resurrection we are part of a new creation, a new humanity. Second, we did not die “in Christ,” but we were “baptized into his death.” Through baptism we joined Him in His sacrificial death, thus establishing a permanent relationship with Him. Third, the phrase “baptized into Christ” is interpreted by Paul to mean that we died “with Christ” (*Rom. 6:3, 8, NIV*) and that we were made alive “with Christ” (*Col. 2:13, NIV*). This is participatory language, indicating that our death to sin and our new life take place only and exclusively in union with Christ and never apart from Him.

In other words, the full benefits of Christ’s death are appropriated by us *only* when we by faith join Him in His death and resurrection. *Dying* with Him means recognizing Him as our Savior. To recognize Him as Savior means that we see in Him the Son of God dying on the cross for our sins and rebellion and that we experience repentance, baptism, and the forgiveness of sin (*Acts 2:38*). True conversion requires more than recognizing and accepting biblical truth. It calls for an acknowledgment of our true condition as sinners in order to help us realize that, separated from Christ, we are destined to a life of total slavery to sin and death and that our desperate condition can be radically changed only by coming to Jesus. This happens as we are united to Christ’s death.

Finally, our incorporation in the *resurrection* of Christ means that He has become our only Lord. Our participation in the power of His resurrection indicates that sin no longer rules over us. Paul asked, “We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (*Rom. 6:2, NIV*). For him it is inconceivable that Christians will be controlled by the power of sin. Yet, he is aware of the fact that sin, though dethroned in our lives, is still attempting to rule over us again. Hence he writes, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires” (*Rom. 6:12, NIV*). This is possible through the power of the Holy Spirit received at our baptism. Our participation by faith in His death and resurrection are inseparable and testify to the fact that we belong to Him (*Gal. 3:27, 29; Col. 2:12*).

“In Christ”

From the following texts, how do we understand the phrase “in Christ”? *Rom. 16:7, Gal. 3:28, Eph. 1:1, Col. 1:28, 1 Thess. 4:16.*

The expression “in Christ” is used by Paul in a variety of ways. In some instances Paul uses “in Christ” to refer to something that God does in Christ. For instance, “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ” (*2 Cor. 5:19, NIV*). Here the phrase conveys two main ideas; namely, that Christ is God’s exclusive instrument of reconciliation and that reconciliation is located in the person and work of Christ. The implication is that we can enjoy it only in union with Him. In fact, all the benefits of salvation found in the sacrifice of Christ are available to us only in Him. These include grace (*Eph. 1:2*), the gift of eternal life (*Rom. 6:23*), God’s call to a holy life (*Phil. 3:14*), election (*Eph. 1:4*), redemption (*Col. 1:14*), justification (*Gal. 2:17*), forgiveness (*Eph. 4:32*), and sanctification (*1 Cor. 1:2*). In Him we were created for good works (*Eph. 2:10*), we have access to God (*Eph. 3:12*), we are now seated in heavenly places (*Eph. 2:6*), we have an inheritance (*Eph. 1:10, 11*), we are triumphant (*2 Cor. 2:14*), we can do all things (*Phil. 4:13*), we are rooted and built up (*Col. 2:7*). All of these and much more are ours only in union with Christ.

The phrase is also used to indicate that everything the Christian does is done in union with Him: We rejoice in Him (*Phil. 3:1*), boast and glory in Him (*Rom. 15:17*), stand firm in Him (*Phil. 4:1*), are strong in Him (*Eph. 6:10*), and do works of faith in Him (*Gal. 5:6*).

The phrase “in Christ” also addresses one of the most damaging effects of sin. Sin decentralized and disoriented us, placing us under the controlling influence of evil. Christ is now our original center of existence and orients everything that we are and do. That center is now located outside us, in Christ, and it is in Him that we come to know ourselves and the glorious destiny prepared for us. Everything we do is to be determined by our union with Him, not by selfish concerns.

Go back and look over all those things that we have been given in Christ and then ask yourself, Am I availing myself of all that we have been promised through Christ? If not, why not?

In Christ: The Spirit and the Church

Study Romans 8:9, read the following comments, and then try to explain in your own words the meaning of the passage.

There is a very close connection between the Spirit and Christ. Several ideas in Romans 8:9 deserve some attention. First, there is a contrast between being in the flesh and being in the Spirit. Believers are not in the flesh; that is, they are not controlled by their fallen nature, not in a state of rebellion against God and unable to submit to the divine will (*vss. 6–8*). They are, rather, in the Spirit; that is, they are spiritually alive (*vs. 10*) and have become children of God (*vs. 14*), and sin does not rule over them. The passage describes two incompatible ways of life: One belongs to the old creature and the other to the new creation, the new humanity in Christ.

Second, being in the Spirit means that one belongs to Christ. This indicates that to be in union with Christ is synonymous with being in the Spirit. The Spirit and Christ are not being equated, but it is suggested that Christ relates to believers through the Spirit. Union with Him is union with the Spirit. The gifts that are ours in Christ are also said to be in the Spirit. For instance, we are justified and sanctified by the Spirit (*1 Cor. 6:11*), we have “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (*Rom. 14:17, NIV*), and we have fellowship in both the Spirit and Christ (*1 Cor. 1:9, Phil. 2:1*).

It’s also crucial to remember that union with Christ through baptism cannot be separated from union to the body of Christ, the church. To be baptized into Christ is at the same time to be “baptized by one Spirit into one body”—namely, the church (*1 Cor. 12:13, NIV*). The image of the church as the body of Christ designates the unity and the interdependence of believers with one another and with Christ. Such union is reflected or manifested in a life lived in Christ/in the Spirit. The members of the church often are identified as those who are “in Christ,” indicating that sometimes the phrase simply means “to be a Christian” in the sense of living a life totally determined by what Christ has done for them.

Look at your life in the past 24 hours. What practical evidence exists that you are living “in Christ”? How is your union with Christ reflected in the way you relate to other church members who are also part of the body of Christ?

Further Study: “Christ gave to humanity an existence out of Himself. To bring humanity into Christ, to bring the fallen race into oneness with divinity, is the work of redemption. Christ took human nature that men might be one with Him as He is one with the Father, that God may love man as He loves His only-begotten Son, that men may be partakers of the divine nature, and be complete in Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 251.

Are you in Christ? Not if you do not acknowledge yourselves erring, helpless, condemned sinners. Not if you are exalting and glorifying self. If there is any good in you, it is wholly attributable to the mercy of a compassionate Saviour. Your birth, your reputation, your wealth, your talents, your virtues, your piety, your philanthropy, or anything else in you or connected with you, will not form a bond of union between your soul and Christ. Your connection with the church . . . will be of no avail unless you believe in Christ. It is not enough to believe about Him; you must believe in Him. You must rely wholly upon His saving grace.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 48, 49.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ At the present time the new and the old creations coexist in us. How do you, day by day, experience the reality of these two creations? Which one comes most naturally and easily to the surface, and why?
- ❷ Scripture promises a new heaven and a new earth; that is, all that’s here is going to be swept away, gone forever. How should the awareness of the temporality of all things help us set priorities in our lives?
- ❸ Describe in practical terms what it means for you to be “in Christ.” How does that experience impinge on the way you relate to God and to others?
- ❹ How should the image of the church as the body of Christ impact the quality of the life of the church? What is it that keeps the members together as one body in Christ? *Col. 3:14*. How can you better contribute to the unity of the church in its message and mission?

Summary: Adam, through his sin, initiated a humanity separated from God. Christ came in union with God, overcame the enemy, died for our sins, and instituted a new humanity, one in union with God free from the enslaving powers of sin and death. We are by nature part of the old humanity but become members of the new through faith in Him. Thus, we begin a new life in union with Jesus and His church.

Power of Forgiveness

by MEENAL THIRUPDUVANAM

I grew up in a traditional Indian home and was married when I was 15. We had three children when my husband decided to leave India and work abroad. He said he could earn more money in a month than he could earn in India in a year, so I agreed. But he stayed away for 12 years and never once sent us money. I struggled to feed the children. Then I learned that my husband was wasting his money on gambling, drinking, and lavish living.

I visited every temple in the area asking the gods to send my husband home, but nothing worked. My mind wasn't at peace as I watched my children suffer for lack of food. They attended school and worked hard, but still we lacked money.

I moved to a larger town where wages were higher, for the children's tuition had increased, and they needed school supplies and books. After years of struggle, my children completed their education and married. At last life became a little easier.

Then I learned that my husband had returned to India and was living in my former town. People there knew where we were, but he did not look for me. I went to his home and offered him money to return home and unite with the family once more. He came to live in my home, but he drank heavily and worked little.

Some lay people held evangelistic meetings near my home, and I went. I was impressed by the message I heard and by the love I saw in the eyes of the young couple who led the meetings.

My husband did not want me to attend the meetings and even hid my Bible from me. This irritated me, but I was learning to be patient and calm with him in spite of his criticism.

I started attending the Adventist church, but I wanted to wait to be baptized until my husband was ready. He told me he might become an Adventist someday, but I should not wait. So I was baptized.



I know my husband watches my life and sees the difference Jesus makes. He stopped drinking and chewing betel nut, and sometimes he attends church with me. My neighbors tell me that since I have become a Christian I am more loving and kind than I was before.

I thank God for giving me a new heart, a heart that can love my husband and share my faith with others. And I thank the believers who give their mission offerings every week so that people like me can hear the message of God's love.

MEENAL THIRUPDUVANAM lives near Madurai, India.