

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?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *2 Corinthians 5:17*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Accepting Christ binds us together as a new humanity.

Feel: God's invitation to feel united with Him and each other.

Do: Discover ways to build up others.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Walking a New Path (*Rom. 6:4*)

A As we follow Christ we will experience the newness of life. What actions are necessary to keep this newness fresh and untarnished in our daily lives? What aspects of our lives become new?

B Which aspects of unity in Christ do you find most appealing? Which are more of a struggle?

C God brought together Jews and Gentiles. What does this tell us about working to overcome differences and worship and work together? Unity can be experienced even though we may prefer different worship styles, Bible translations, and music. Explore why it is important to maintain unity even though we may choose to experience the worship of God in different forms.

II. We Are the Body (*1 Cor. 12:13*)

What does it mean to be in the body of Christ? How can we show that we take this idea seriously? How should this impact how we live and how we act toward those who are in need?

▶ **Summary:** A new life requires new behavior. We can make these changes only with His power in our lives.

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?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Last week I went to the grocery store to purchase some items for a special meal I was to prepare for guests coming from out of town. I am familiar with this store, so I was going to run in and quickly pick up the items. For some reason the store had rearranged where they put what I was after and had substituted a different brand. All my previous plans had to be changed.

God has plans that may surprise us, yet they are always infinitely better than we could have imagined (*Eph. 3:17–20*). Discuss the concept of substitution. If you are doing a project and don't have all the right parts, what have you had to substitute?

Jesus substituted His sinless life for our broken, rebellious, fatally flawed one. Share what that means to you.

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Bible Commentary

I. Origins of Separation: Disobedience

Obedience presupposes respect and understanding of the requirements of parents or leaders and institutions. When Adam and Eve chose the serpent's lies over God's promises, their rebellion evidenced a lack of trust in their Creator. They had the clear statements of God and the clear statements of the serpent. They were totally in contrast to each other. Their choice revealed a lack of trust in God.

Consider This: In one short verse of Scripture, Paul sums up the salvation initiative, "By One man's obedience many will be made righteous" (*Rom. 5:19, NKJV*). What does that mean? What wonderful hope is found for us in those words? Whose obedience is being talked about here, and how does it benefit us?

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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*).

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

“God’s wonderful purpose of grace, the mystery of redeeming love, is the theme into which ‘angels desire to look,’ and it will be their study throughout endless ages. Both the redeemed and the unfallen beings will find in the cross of Christ their science and their song.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 19, 20.

How do we begin that study now? Invite each class member to each find and share at least one other verse from Scripture that describes how Christ has come to overcome sin and restore fallen humanity.

II. Reunion

Consider This: In a dictionary, look up the words *restoration*, *reunion*, and *reconciliation*. Discuss those definitions in light of the fall of humanity and Jesus’ saving activities.

Compare and Contrast: Now look up the words *rebellion*, *disobedience*, and *alienation*. How does the contrast between these words and those above describe the sons of men versus Christ? Which words would you like to have used to describe yourself?

Consider This: Have class members read Romans 6:3–6 and 8:9 aloud. How do they define what it means to be united to Christ? Consider your friends who have not made their commitment to Jesus through baptism. What steps is the Holy Spirit asking you to take to engage these friends in a wonderful commitment to the One who has already died for them, who has already borne the penalty of their sins, and who already offers them the hope of eternity?

III. Recapturing Hope: United to Christ

Have class members take a mental walk through their house and share what new things they encounter. What is the difference between something that is “new” compared to something that is “old”? Why do we feel more positive toward the new items in our homes?

“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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. How does it describe spiritual newness?

Compare and Contrast: Both the Old Testament and the New Testament offer hope set in real-life stories. God seeks to reclaim His children. How does this invitation voiced through the writings of Paul in Galatians 4:5–7 compare to or contrast with the invitation spoken for God by Moses? “See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you” (*Deut. 30:15, 16, NIV*).

► STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

1 What is the difference between being united *in* Christ and united *to* Christ? In church and ministry relationships, does one precede the other? Why?

2 Discuss the concept of two humanities. What does that mean to be either “in Adam” or “in Christ”? What is the difference? Are we born into Adam or Christ? When we are *born-again*, what happens to us?

Life Applications:

1 Paul invites the Colossians, and each one of us, to “put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (*Col. 3:10, NIV*). Read this passage in its context, Colossians 3:1–17. Make two lists; what does Paul invite us to “put to death” (*vs. 5, NIV*), and what does he encourage us to “clothe yourselves with” (*vs. 12, NIV*)? What does all this mean in a practical sense? How can these images be

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

made real in our lives? Why must they be made real?

2 Renew your commitment to spend time in His Word and prayer each day; ask Him to renew you in His image.

Witnessing

Build a time line of activities that would lead someone from being like fallen Adam/fallen humanity to being like Christ. Engage in the life of a person to be the agent of invitation to Jesus in their lives. Your first step might be an invitation to a meal or shared activity. Pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal to you the best time to share your conversion story, and ask that individual to accept Jesus as a personal Savior.

► STEP 4—Apply

The printed page, the airwaves, and the Internet are full of invitations to try and to buy the “new and improved” or “superior” or “latest and greatest.” They offer counterfeit avenues to happiness. God offers us true peace, purpose, and possibility. We intellectually know that what He offers is truly all that we need, but sometimes we don’t take the step to claim His offered gift as personally ours.

Today—right now—Jesus invites you to become “new” in Him again. “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (*Eph. 4:22–24, NIV*). In groups of two, recommit yourselves to Christ using these words, “Dear Jesus, I come to You today asking that You help me to put on the new self You have designed for me. Through Your Holy Spirit’s power that I invite to work in my life, make me like You in true righteousness and holiness. Amen.”

Covenant with each other and as a class to make this invitation to Jesus each morning. Allow Him to design your agenda for the day so that you are completely “in Christ” during every activity of your day.

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:

- 1 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?
- 2 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?
- 3 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?
- 4 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.