

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Video Lecture Series

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

STUDY GUIDE

Module 5:
**SOTERIOLOGY—
THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION**

Lecture 2:
**THE DOCTRINE OF
UNION WITH CHRIST**



The John Knox Institute
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Module 5

Soteriology—the Doctrine of Salvation

1. Introduction to Soteriology
- 2. The Doctrine of Union with Christ**
3. The Doctrines of Effectual Calling & Regeneration
4. The Doctrine of Saving Faith
5. The Doctrine of Repentance
6. The Doctrine of Justification
7. The Doctrine of Adoption
8. The Doctrine of Sanctification
9. The Doctrine of Good Works
10. The Doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints
11. The Doctrine of Assurance of Grace and Salvation

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Module 5:

SOTERIOLOGY—THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lecture 2:

The Doctrine of Union with Christ

Introduction

In Ezekiel 16, verse 8, we read, “Behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine.” This is a picture of a destitute orphan, who ends up marrying a wealthy prince. The true believer is not like a beggar, who finds himself separated from Christ, and calling out from a distance for some benefit. No, he’s like a hopeless person who is married to a prince with limitless resources. In being united to Christ, all that belongs to Christ becomes the Christian’s. Our debts are cancelled, and Christ provides every benefit and blessing that we will ever need. The crucial point *is Union with Christ*.

Theme: *The doctrine of Union with Christ.*

I. Scriptural Basis

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” (Ephesians 1:3)

1. All spiritual blessings in Christ.
2. All benefits are found in Christ.
 - a. Everything from election, to redemption, to the Holy Spirit, to heavenly inheritance.
3. The believer’s union with Christ extends from eternity past to eternity future.
4. The connection between union with Christ and the various aspects of the application of redemption.
5. How is redemption applied to the sinner?
 - a. By uniting the sinner to Christ.
 - b. *Westminster Larger Catechism*, question #69.

Questions:

1. What is included in the phrase, “all spiritual blessings” stated in Ephesians 1:3?

2. Which prepositions are often used in Scripture to describe the reality of union with Christ?

3. How do verses 3 through 14 in the first chapter of Ephesians teach us that the believer’s union with Christ extends from eternity past to eternity future?

4. How do other Scriptures show this important connection between a union with Christ and the various aspects of the application of redemption?

5. How is redemption applied to the sinner? How is this question answered in Scripture, and also in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*?

II. Doctrinal Overview

As summarized in *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question #30:

“How does the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?”

Answer: “*The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.*”

1. The Spirit applies the redemption that is accomplished by Christ, by uniting the believer to Christ.

2. This doctrine is important for understanding salvation.
 - a. “The highest degree of importance”—John Calvin.
 - b. “Fundamental constitution of a Christian”—Thomas Goodwin.
 - c. Union with Christ lies at the heart of the gospel, something basic and central to all of salvation.
3. Two phrases from the New Testament:
 - a. The believer is in Christ.
 - b. Christ is in the believer.
4. The nature of this union.
 - a. As pictured in Scripture:
 - 1) Christ is the head of the church
 - 2) Christ is married to his people.
 - 3) Believers are living stones, joined to Christ and built on him as the foundation.
 - 4) Believers are branches grafted into Christ who is the vine.
 - 5) Christ is the bread of life and we feed on him.
 - a. It’s a spiritual union, not a physical union—1 Corinthians 6:17.
 - b. It’s a mysterious and glorious union—Ephesians 5:32; Colossians 1:27.
 - c. It’s an intimate union;
 - 1) Christ is in the believer, and the believer is in Christ.
 - d. It’s an indissoluble union.
5. Union with Christ must be connected with Christ’s ministry.
 - a. The believer is united to Christ in all points of his activity.
 - b. The believer is crucified with Christ—Galatians 2:20.
 - c. The believer is baptized into Christ’s death—Romans 6:6.
 - d. The believer is resurrected with Christ—Romans 6:5.
 - e. The believer has been ascended with Christ—Colossians 3:1.
 - f. The believer sits with Christ in heavenly places.
 - g. The believer’s life is hid with Christ in God—Ephesians 2:6.
 - h. When Christ returns, the believer will appear with him in glory—Romans 6.

6. How do believers become united to Christ?

a. From Christ's side, the union is accomplished by the Holy Spirit.

b. From man's side, we are united to Christ by faith, a gift of God given by the Spirit.

Questions

1. How does the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* answer the question, "How does the Spirit apply the redemption purchased by Christ?"

2. Why is this doctrine of Union with Christ important for understanding salvation? How does Scripture show this importance? What do godly theologians say about this topic?

3. What two New Testament phrases are often used to describe this Union with Christ? What are the implications of each of the two phrases?

4. What five images are given in the Bible to illustrate the believer's union with Christ?

5. What is the nature of this union with Christ? How do we see it described in Scripture?

6. How does the doctrine of Union with Christ connect with Christ's ministry? What are the implications for believers?

7. How does this Union with Christ happen? Please explain the two sides of this and give Bible references for support.

III. Polemical Exposition

1. Overlooking or neglecting the doctrine of Union with Christ destroys the link between redemption and the application of that redemption to the believing soul.
 - a. It is needed to understand how Christ's work is appropriated to the soul.
 - b. It is needed to keep Christ at the center of salvation.
2. Christ should not be separated from his benefits, or from the benefits that flow from Christ to the saved soul.
 - a. No one can have forgiveness and heaven without Union with Christ.

Questions:

1. What are the consequences of neglecting the doctrine of Union with Christ?

2. Why must we not separate Christ from his benefits? What are the implications of this truth?

IV. Practical Exposition

1. Union with Christ provides the basis for unity or union within the church.
2. Union with Christ provides the basis for communion with Christ, and fellowship with him.
3. The two sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper portray the reality of this blessed union and communion.

Questions:

1. How is unity among believers within the church reinforced in Scripture? What is the basis of union within the church?

2. What does it mean when we say that believers can only grow in grace by growing together?

3. How should we understand the phrase, "communion with Christ"? How can the believer commune with the Lord Jesus Christ?

4. How do the two sacraments signify the believer's Union with Christ?

V. Self-Reflection

How does a person know whether he or she is united with Christ? Read and meditate on the biblical images of Union with Christ that are given in this lecture. Are you united to Christ by the Holy Spirit already? If not, will you be seeking that union for your salvation soon?

Please read and think about this verse, “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” in Ephesians 4:3. How can this unity happen in your church family?
