
The Problem Necessitating our Union with Christ

Romans 5:12-14; Ephesians 2:1-10; Ephesians 4:17-19

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Introduction David Powlison, Executive Director of the Christian Counseling Education Foundation (CCEF), went home to be with the Lord last week after a battle with pancreatic cancer. He had just written a graduation address to the graduates of Westminster Theological Seminary titled, Weakness: The Doorway to True Strength. Dr. Powlison was too weak to make it to the graduation but the letter was read to the graduates by CCEF's Dean of Faculty. A paragraph in that address caught my eye; *"Weakness" singular is a comprehensive description of our human condition. We are perishable. We are mortal. We face a multitude of afflictions in our lives. And we are sinful, bent from the heart towards pride, self-righteousness, fear of man, and a multitude of desires and fears that beset us. The mercies of God meet us in this comprehensive condition of weakness.*" He went on to say that although we often think of ourselves as having multiple weaknesses, that idea doesn't really go far enough in describing who we really are. We are weak through and through; we are weak by nature, by creation; it's who we are. We are weak! Dr. Powlison continued, *"weakness is a most unusual door into all the ways God enables us to be strong."*

When Dr. Powlison wrote that letter to the students, he knew his time on earth was short, and he was living in the jaws of weakness and death. God called him home less than a month after he wrote that address to the students of Westminster. And although Dr. Powlison's work for Christ and the Church has produced amazing fruit, it still highlights the reality of man's weakness and frailty as God's creatures, and even as God's children. God meets us in our weakness and makes us strong through grace, and even though we are united with Christ after we are saved, weakness and suffering is still the reality of life on earth.

Unbelievers know a far greater weakness...complete spiritual death. Dead men have no hope of life without Christ's complete and full Salvation initiated and fulfilled completely by Christ.

R.C. Sproul in his article for "Modern Reformation Magazine" titled, The Pelagian Captivity of the Church, (2001 May/June issue, Vol 10:3) writes about man's inability to choose salvation without God's intervention,

"Now, if we're going to use analogies, let's be accurate. (This is in reference to the attempts to use less than accurate analogies to prove that man has some responsibility in the completion of his salvation), ...Man is stone cold dead at the bottom of the ocean. That's where you once were when you were dead in sin and trespasses and walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air. And while you were dead hath God quickened you together with Christ. God dove to the bottom of the sea and took that drowned corpse and breathed into it the breath of his life and raised you from the dead. And it's not that you were dying in a hospital bed of a certain illness, but rather, when you were born you were born D.O.A. That's what the Bible says: that we are morally stillborn."

When a person becomes saved, they are united to Christ and the life of God. This union is a spiritual, mystical union. This truth is fundamental for our salvation and for our transformation, but I believe many (if not most) believers don't understand or give much thought to this reality. We might cringe when we hear someone telling a child that in order to be saved you must ask Jesus to come into your heart. So, when we are talking about unity with Christ, the idea of Jesus living in a saved person's heart is not wrong, especially from a child's perspective. Focusing on that simple idea alone does not fully represent the depth of Christ's work for us in salvation, but it does represent one aspect of unity with God.

What does prevent most people from accepting Christ? Can a person seek God of their own accord? Can someone accept Christ without God first intervening? Why is a union with Christ necessary? And what is causing man's separation from God?

Sin separates all people from God, so we have no hope of eternal life outside this union with Christ. We are spiritually dead, separated from the life and the presence of God. Union with Christ is necessary and will restore both our separation from God's life and His presence.

The Progression of Sin and Death (Romans 5:12-14)

God created man and placed him in the Garden to manage and work it. God created man to be fully free; Adam was created with the freedom to choose to sin or choose to remain free. Man did not have to sin as God created him. Unlike us, Adam was created with the ability to choose not to sin.

Romans 5 is largely about the restoration of our relationship with God because of Christ's obedience on earth as the second Adam, which overcame Adam's rebellion towards God. Jesus obeyed where Adam did not.

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.

Sin Through Adam (v. 12a)

Sin entered the world through the one man, Adam. Adam was created with the ability not to sin but chose to rebel against God. Therefore, sin came into the world through Adam's decision to sin against God. Because Adam is the father of humanity, after Adam's sin, man no longer had the ability not to sin. Sin was permanently passed down through each generation. And even worse, the result of Adam's sin is death for all men.

Death Through Sin (v. 12b)

Death entered the world through Adam's sin, because death is the ultimate consequence for sin. Therefore, since sin entered the world through Adam, death also became our inheritance from Adam. Death is not an option where there is sin, it is the natural consequence of sin. Sin kills. Romans tells us that death spread along with sin to all men, because all men sin. Our inheritance from Adam is not only a life of sin, but also death through sin. No man born is excluded (except Christ, who was conceived through the Holy Spirit) from sin and death.

Verse 12 in the NLT reads, *When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.*

Death to All (v. 13-14a)

During the time of Adam to Moses, sin was not called sin because the Law had not been given yet, but we know that people still sinned because they all died. We didn't need the Law to recognize sin, because when people died before the Law was given, we know it was because of sin. The argument here is that all men have sinned since Adam even though the Law was not written until the time of Moses.

People died before Moses and the Law, not because they committed the same sin as Adam, but because we are born of Adam, and Adam is the head of the human race. Therefore, sin is man's natural birthright. In other words, our sin does not have to perfectly imitate Adam's sin, but we sin because we are born in sin. In this way, we are considered, "in Adam", because sin is passed from generation to generation through Adam's headship.

However, we also cannot shift the blame of our sin to Adam. We share in Adam's guilt because we are human, and we are born into sin, and we are each personally responsible for our own sin against God.

Adam, A Type of One to Come (v. 14b)

There are only two people who had the ability NOT to sin. Adam and Christ. Understanding how Adam's sin caused all people to sin helps us understand how Christ's obedience makes the many have restoration with God. In this way, Adam is a "type". Adam is the father and representative of humans. Adam's sin caused sin and death to all, and Christ's obedience causes life to all who believe. Christ's death broke the curse of sin and death for His people. Christ brings life where Adam brought death.

Verse 14 in The New Living Translation says, *Still, everyone died—from the time of Adam to the time of Moses—even those who did not disobey an explicit commandment of God, as Adam did. Now Adam is a symbol, a representation of Christ, who was yet to come.*

Summary

Romans shows us that union with Christ is necessary because Adam's sin and the resulting death separated us from God.

From Death to Life (Ephesians 2:1-10)

While we were dead in our sin Jesus died for us so that we could be united with Christ in his life. Remember R.C. Sproul's illustration of being stone cold dead on the bottom of the ocean floor. We were spiritually dead when Christ chose us, pulled us off of the ocean floor and breathed new life in us, and united us with him while we were his enemies.

The Walking Dead (v.1-3)

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons

of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

The idea of being dead cannot be emphasized enough. We were all dead in our trespasses and sin by nature. This is who we were born to be without Christ. We were following the natural course of the world and the natural order of man, following Satan and his spirit, along with an inherited sin nature from Adam.

Before Christ we lived in the passions of our flesh, only obeying our natural pagan instincts in both body and mind. We were by birth children of wrath like the rest of mankind. Without union with Christ man is doomed for eternal damnation without any hope of a life with God.

The Great Love (v. 4-5a)

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—

Even though Adam rebelled against God, and as a result, all men are rebellious towards God; and even though we are sinful from birth, and without God we are all dead men walking; God was merciful and loving with such a great love, that he chose to die for his children, even when we were completely dead in our sin. Being dead in our sins means we do not have the ability to seek God or reach out to God without his direct intervention through grace.

By dying, Christ made us alive together with himself. When Christ was raised from the dead, those of us who are saved are made alive with Christ. When Christ was raised from the dead, God also gave us life!

The Immeasurable Riches of His Grace (v. 5b-9)

by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

If you are saved, your salvation is purely a gift from God. Salvation is solely and completely God's action. There is nothing we can do to merit salvation apart from God's single transaction on our behalf. We were dead and incapable of reaching out to God in any capacity without his grace towards us.

Not only does God raise us up with Christ, but God also places us in the heavenly places with Christ. It is also in this way that we are joined with Christ and seated where Christ is seated. This does not take away from the reality that we struggle with sin on this earth, (remember David Powlison's weakness), but our future hope (our full and final salvation), is completely secure in, with and through Christ. Through Christ we are no longer separated from God, but instead invited into fellowship with the Godhead.

A human example and a biblical reality, which should help us understand our union with Christ is marriage, referenced in both Old Covenant in Genesis 2:24, and in Ephesians 5:22-33 in the New. The marriage union is both a reality and an illustration to help us understand our union with Christ better. For us it is a mystery as to how husband and wife are one flesh, but it is also a biblical reality. Marriage at least gives us a human example of the unity we experience with Christ, seated with him in heaven even while we are still on earth. Marriage helps us understand how Christ and the Church are one.

Joe Rigney in his book, The Things of Earth, (p.44), describes unity with the Godhead in this way (from Jesus prayer in John 17),

...The triune glory of the Father, Son, and Spirit is being extended to us so that we participate in their knowledge, love, and joy. We are being invited into the fellowship of the Godhead so that we have the same union with God that the Father and Son have with each other. Of course, as finite creatures, we will never and can never achieve the exact same relationship as the Father and Son. We never cease to be creatures; we never become God. However, the great promise, if Jesus's prayer is fulfilled, is that we will approach such a union of knowledge, love, and joy for all eternity, with ever-increasing speed. We finite beings are chasing the infinite, and therefore we'll never catch it (him!). But the increase of our knowledge of God and love for God and joy in God will continue, world without end, amen.

Our Created Purpose (v.10)

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

We are completely God's workmanship (or creation). We are created in Christ for the purpose of good works. Being created in Christ shows that we are united with Christ, and the good works that we are created to do were prepared for us before our salvation. We are united with Christ to share in His works and grace.

All of this is prepared by God before any of it comes to pass. God is completely sovereign in our lives, in salvation and even in the good works that God has prepared for us as part of the fruit of that salvation, that we enjoy by being united with Christ.

We are saved in order that we walk a life of works that glorify God. God prepared us to bear fruit after salvation that is lasting, honoring and pleasing to God. God receives glory for salvation from the beginning to the end. We are saved and bear fruit through God's grace alone and our union with Christ.

Summary

Ephesians 2 tells us that we were living out worldly desires and ungodly passions in our body and mind, and we had no ability or intention of ever turning to God. We were destined for God's judgment and wrath, making our union with Christ necessary. Our union with Christ is a gift from God through faith, and there was nothing we did or could do to merit any part of our salvation. God showed us the riches of his grace by saving us and unifying us to Christ.

Life Without Christ (Ephesians 4:17-19)

If we are unified with Christ, then our life should reflect something different than the lives we lived before receiving Christ. Should we have to be told to no longer live life as we did before we were saved? Ephesians 4 also re-emphasizes the reality of life without Christ.

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

A Clear Contrast (v.17a)

Believers should no longer live like those who are lost. There should be a clear contrast between the person you were before you received Christ and the person you are after receiving Christ. You must no longer walk as unbelievers, hopelessly confused and having closed minds that actively stand against God.

Empty Thinking (v. 17b)

The idea of futility in their thinking is the same idea as the word vanity in Ecclesiastes. The state of all men without Christ is empty and vain and an idea that Jewish people would have understood because of the Old Covenant wisdom literature. This is the idea of uselessness or emptiness in thought. If you have ever seen the TV show The Walking Dead, one of the reasons for the long success of the show, was their development of the characters. But the backdrop of the show is set among a seemingly endless cast of Zombies, who have no thought (they are dead), only a lust and instinct for more death. Therefore, the dichotomy between the walking dead and those still alive is stark.

Unbelievers are darkened in their understanding of God; there is no light of understanding. Unbelievers are full of darkness and deeply confused when it comes to understanding God. They cannot understand God because they are completely alienated from God and separated from God, they are The Walking Dead.

Alienated from God (v. 18)

Not only are unbeliever's incapable of thinking clearly about God, but they are completely separated and alienated from the life of God.

All humans without Christ are alienated from (or hostile towards) the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them because of the hardness of their heart. Hardness of heart is a condition that man received as result of Adam's sin, but each person is individually responsible for that ignorance and hardness.

Without God's intervention man is not capable of reconciling himself with God nor can man make himself have a clear understanding of God without God first revealing himself to man. Without God man is completely lost, depraved and completely separated from the life of God.

Greedy for Sin and Impurity (v. 19)

The progression of futile thinking, ignorance, and a hardened heart leads to a hardened calloused life pursuing every kind of sin and impurity. Paul says they are greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

We are united with Christ; therefore, believers should not pursue the life they lived before they were saved. The idea here is to separate from the life you lived before Christ, because unbelievers have no choice other than to lead a life of sin as Paul writes. These are conditions of the mind and will; something that stands in the way of any of us choosing to pursue Christ without his intervening in our lives first.

Dead men don't make decisions and knowing the depth and reality of the sin and death we are saved from should cause us to appreciate even more the immeasurable riches of God's grace towards us as his children. While we were his enemies, Christ chose to die for us. Because salvation is God's work alone, it is God alone who receives the glory.

Summary

Ephesians 4 tells us that because of our union with Christ we should no longer live as we did before we were saved. Unbelievers are separated from God because of the ignorance in them due to their hard, calloused hearts. Unbelievers do not seek God, rather they crave sensuality and every kind of impurity. It is only because of our union with Christ that we can live a godly life, no longer separated from the life of God.

Conclusion

Union with Christ is necessary because Adam's sin and the resulting death separated us from God.

Our union with Christ is necessary, because we were dead in our sin and separated from the life of God, destined for God's wrath. We had no ability or intention of ever turning to God.

Our union with Christ is a gift from God through faith. There was nothing we did or could do to merit any part of our salvation. God showed us the riches of his grace by saving us and unifying us to Christ.

Because of our unity with Christ we should no longer live as we did before we were saved. We are no longer separated from the life of God, and because of his grace we can live a godly life in unity with Christ and the Godhead.

Sin, weakness and death can be an on-going distraction from the things in life that really matter. Our life should be full of joy and the pursuit of ministry opportunities because of our union with Christ. While we were sinners; enemies of God, He reached down into the cold, dark ocean floor and breathed new life into us. An eternal life of union with Christ and the Church. What is more exciting than that? What is better than that? Now determine to live out that truth every day that God gives you breath! Be full of joy and bear much fruit for God's kingdom as you were created to do!

