

THE DOCTRINES OF THE BIBLE: UNION WITH CHRIST AND ADOPTION



According to Thiessen (Thiessen, 1949), our union and adoption are the Biblical doctrines of the connection between Jesus Christ and the believer that is the results of the rebirth. It is impossible that the rebirth cannot lead to a very close relationship.

UNION

DEFINITION

This union is described as a relationship in a number of ways:

- a building and its foundation – Ephesians 2:20-22
- a husband and wife – Romans 7:4
- the vine and the branches – John 15:1-6
- the head and the body – 1 Corinthians 6:15
- Adam and his descendants – Romans 5:12
- the shepherd and the sheep – John 10:1-18

WHAT THE UNION IS

1. The believer is often described as being “in” Christ:

²⁰At that day ye shall know that **I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.** – **John 14:20**

This is a very effective way to describe the union and it demonstrates the incredibly close relationship we have with God through His Son. Note the three-way nature of the union.

Paul reiterates this thought:

¹⁷But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. – **1 Corinthians 6:17**

¹⁷Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. – **2 Corinthians 5:17**

We must note that this is not some mystical union. It transcends mere earthly relationships, although it still retains the recognition of the deep personal relationship that exists. You do not cease to be you, and the pronouns “you” and “I” are still applicable.

2. It is a spiritual union:

¹⁷But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. – **1 Corinthians 6:17**

Without the working and presence of the Holy Spirit, the union will be meaningless.

3. It is a very important union:

²⁰I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. – **Galatians 2:20**

You cannot be a believer if Jesus Christ does not live in you.

4. The union is complete, and nothing is excluded:

²⁷Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. – **1 Corinthians 12:27**

Note this short sentence. you are not just **in** the body; you **are** the body, and each member has a definite function.

5. It is sometimes difficult to understand. It is described as a great mystery:

³²This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. – **Ephesians 5:32**

To a large degree this is often too much for us to comprehend. There is a very unique relationship between the believer, the church and Jesus Christ. None operates without the involvement of the other. What Christ has done for us has to be accepted in faith and the realisation thereof should be left to God.

6. The union cannot be undone:

²⁸And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. – **John 10:28**

Jesus clearly states that we cannot be separated from Him. Paul is adamant that nothing can separate us from the love of God:

³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. ³⁷Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. ³⁸For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, ³⁹Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. – **Romans 8:35-39**

HOW IS THIS UNION ACCOMPLISHED?

1. The most important thing to remember is that in His wisdom, God had a plan and a purpose, long before we were born:

⁴According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁵Having

predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. – **Ephesians 1:4-6**

The union starts when we give our lives to Christ and are reborn. As we accept His death, we realise that we have to die too in the sense that the old man dies so that the new creature can become evident:

⁵For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: ⁶Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. – **Romans 6:5-6**

WHAT IS THE RESULT OF THE UNION?

1. We have eternal security:

³⁹Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. – **Romans 8:39**

Nothing can separate us from what we have been promised.

2. We bear fruit in Christ:

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, ²³Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. – **Galatians 5:22-23**

Here we are compared to trees and the tree has to bear fruit in the likeness of God. Sometimes the tree needs to be pruned so that it will produce more fruit.

3. We are prepared for service:

⁴Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. – **1 Corinthians 12:4**
(Read to verse 30.)

We each have a responsibility. Often, God will use what we already have – if you are good at a particular skill or function, then there will, or should be, an opportunity in the church to use this skill to good effect. Often God will open up opportunities that we did not know were possible, and we may feel unworthy. However, if we give Him the chance, God will allow that opportunity to be realised and be successful.

4. We have fellowship with Jesus Christ. He trusts us and reveals His plans to us.

⁸Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; ⁹Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: ¹⁰That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: ¹¹In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who

worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: ¹²That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. – **Ephesians 1:8-12** (Read further to get the full context.)

ADOPTION

Paul is the only writer to describe our adoption with Christ. He is also the only New Testament writer to make use of the term “adoption”:

¹⁵For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of **adoption**, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. – **Romans 8:15**

Paul compares a spirit of bondage (in sin) to the Spirit of adoption (in Christ) and this allows us to call out to God as **Father**.

DEFINITION

As seen in the reference above, there is mention of a **father**. This means that there also has to be a **son** or **daughter**. That we are adopted as sons and daughters is a promise:

¹⁸And **will be** a Father unto you, and ye shall be my **sons** and **daughters**, saith the Lord Almighty. – **2 Corinthians 6:18**

In the dispensation of grace we have become sons and daughters, far removed from the servants we were under the law:

³Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: ⁴But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, ⁵To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. ⁶And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. ⁷Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. – **Galatians 4:3-7**

If we take a quick look at some of the concepts we have been introduced to, we see the following:

- **Regeneration** gives us a new **life** in Christ;
- **Justification** gives us a new **standing** in Christ; and
- **Adoption** gives us a new **position** in Christ.

THE TIME OF THE ADOPTION

Our adoption consists of three time frames.

The past

First, there was the decision made in the **past**:

⁵Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. – **Ephesians 1:5-6**

The decision that you are a believer today, and thus a son or daughter of God, was made before the foundation of the Earth was laid.

The present

In the **present** time, you are now a believer and therefore a son or daughter through faith in Christ Jesus:

⁶And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. – **Galatians 4:6**

Note that while the Bible often refers to **sons**, it is obvious that our sisters in Jesus Christ are also implied. The continuous reference to sons (only) is merely a result of the culture in which the Bible narrative took place. In fact, there are many examples that show the unique relationship Jesus shared with a number of women of His time.

The future

The full realisation of our union with Jesus Christ will be manifested in the **future**, at His coming. At this time the adoption will be fully completed:

²³And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. – **Romans 8:23**

At this time, as the text indicates, we will receive the final gift – the redemption of the body, which while now still corruptible, even with the Holy Spirit in us, will then be made incorruptible. We will then become like Him:

²⁰For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: ²¹Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned **like unto his glorious body**, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. – **Philippians 3:20-21**

THE RESULTS

The results of our adoption are firstly that we are freed from the law. We are no longer servants and slaves under constant supervision. Next, we have the promise of an inheritance. After that, we have assurance.

As we grow spiritually, we conform more and more to the image of the Son of God:

²⁹For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. – **Romans 8:29**

CONCLUSION

As you continue to grow in Jesus Christ, realise that the limitations that you may now experience are nothing compared to the coming glory you will experience once that day occurs when we will see Him at His coming, the blessed hope. Look up, it is from there where your salvation comes!

¹³Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; – **Titus 2:13**

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Thiessen, H. C., 1949. *Lectures in Systematic Theology*. 3rd Edition ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company.