



ROBERT A. PETERSON

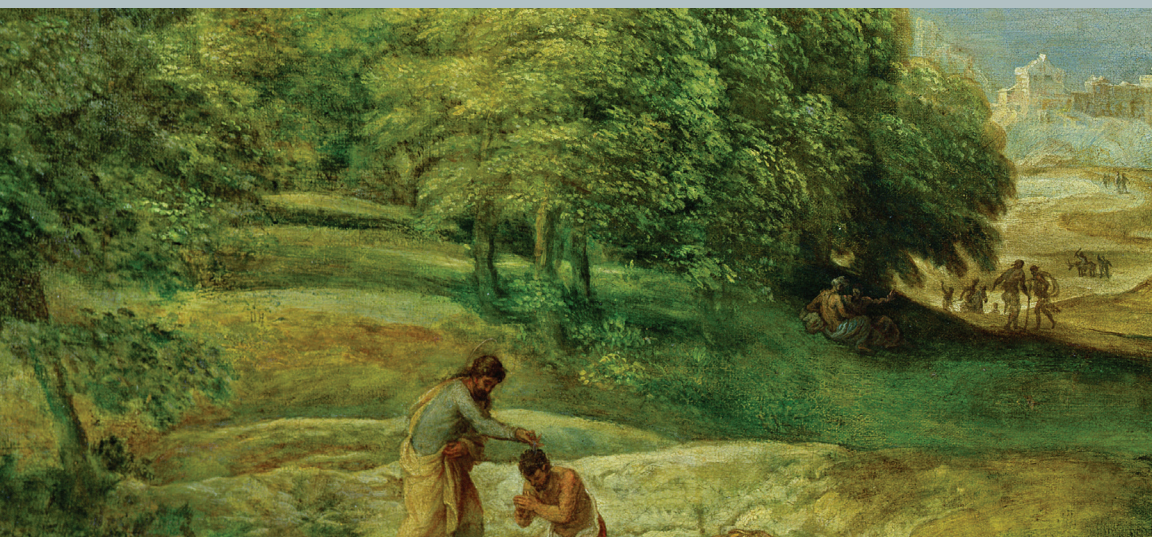


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Union with Christ



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Robert Letham, Director of Research and Senior Lecturer in Systematic and Historical Theology, Wales Evangelical School of Theology; author,
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S A L V A T I O N

APPLIED BY THE

S P I R I T

Union with Christ

ROBERT A. PETERSON

 CROSSWAY

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I warmly dedicate this book to my wife, Mary Pat,
with whom I have shared the closest human analogy
to union with Christ for forty-one wonderful years.

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Chapter 1

Foundations in the Old Testament

The Old Testament provides the foundation for every New Testament teaching, including union with Christ, because it tells so much of the biblical story. Both Testaments tell one story of God's creation, the fall, and his redemptive work in the world of saving a people for himself and ultimately recreating the cosmos. It follows, then, that the climactic movement of this redemptive story (the work of Christ) and its subsequent application (union with Christ) find their meaning in the context of God's unfolding work of redemption begun in Genesis.¹

Finding Christ in the Old Testament

Much has been made in recent years of “finding” Christ in the Old Testament. But what does that mean? The answer corresponds to the method used to find him. Using allegorical interpretation, some find Christ in the most unlikely places. However, we must tie our reading of the text to the concerns of the original author and audience. The original Old Testament authors and audiences predated Jesus by centuries. Thus, we must avoid the error of reading the Old Testament anachronistically, as though its writers had Romans open alongside the Torah.

Today we have the added benefit of reading the Old Testament in light of the New Testament. However, while our awareness of the Son's arrival on

¹ I am grateful for the help of teaching assistant Kyle Keating in the writing of this chapter.

the scene should inform our interpretation of the Old Testament, it must not overwhelm the immediate circumstances in which the text was given. We should not read the Old Testament expecting Moses or Isaiah to articulate details of union with Christ. So what are we looking for? We are not looking for a clear explanation of union with Christ, an idea that would not come for centuries, but anticipations of that union. The New Testament is replete with Old Testament language and themes, as the Gospel of Matthew demonstrates.² If the New Testament relies on the Old as the basis for its theological principles, then it makes sense that union with Christ does not emerge from a void but rather fills out concepts introduced in the Old Testament. Ultimately, if we are to avoid reading the Old Testament anachronistically, we must look for union with Christ foreshadowed in its stories and structures.

Union with Christ Foreshadowed

What qualifies as an Old Testament foreshadowing of union with Christ? It is no simple question. The primary conceptual criteria we will use are the concepts of identification, incorporation, and participation, all of which speak of a relationship between God and his people.³ Identification refers to God's identifying with his people through his presence and in this way giving them an identity. Incorporation refers to God's creating a people for himself. Participation refers to God's people sharing in the story and even the life of God by virtue of their own experiences in faithfully following him. The Old Testament foreshadows union with Christ through word and symbol. It shows God's commitment to be in personal covenantal relationship with his people—a relationship that climaxes in union with Christ. We will see how the Old Testament foreshadows union through these three main concepts fleshed out in texts:

- identification: God's covenantal presence with his people
- incorporation: membership in God's covenantal people
- participation: sharing in the covenantal story

Identification: God's Covenantal Presence with His People

From the very beginning God identifies with his people. He makes them in his image (Gen. 1:27), and the first question he asks guilt-ridden Adam after

²For many insights, see Charles L. Quarles, *A Theology of Matthew: Jesus Revealed as Deliverer, King, and Incarnate Creator*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013).

³These concepts are drawn from Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), especially 413–17.

the fall, “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:9), shows God’s ongoing desire to be present with his people despite their sin. God identifies himself with a particular family in choosing Abraham and establishing his covenant with him and his descendants. Throughout the Old Testament story God identifies with his people by being present with them. This theme becomes explicit as the story moves to God’s establishing Israel as his special people.

Exodus 25:8–9

After God delivers the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, he establishes them as a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). He gives them his law and then this command: “Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst” (25:8). God commands the people to build him a sanctuary, the tabernacle, a tent where God’s presence may dwell in their midst. God goes on to prescribe the specifications of the tabernacle. The attention to detail is noteworthy; after all, this is supposed to be God’s royal palace, and the various curtains and barriers are meant to protect God’s sinful people from his searing holiness.⁴ The purpose of the tabernacle is to be God’s dwelling place in the midst of his people. It is a tangible demonstration of God’s desire to identify with his people by being present with them.

Exodus 33

But why is God’s presence, and therefore his identification, so important for God’s people? After the incident of the golden calf, God tells Moses that the people may go on to the Promised Land, but without God’s presence: “Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people” (Ex. 33:3). How do God’s people react? “When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments” (v. 4). Then Moses intercedes before the Lord on behalf of the people: “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?” (vv. 15–16).

Note the basis of Moses’s intercession: the people need God’s presence because it is his very presence that makes them who they are. Their identity

⁴For the idea of the tabernacle as God’s royal palace, see Jay Sklar, *Leviticus*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 37.

as God's distinct people is based on the presence of the Lord with them. The primary way that God identifies with his people, uniting himself to them, is by his commitment to be present with them.

Leviticus 26:11–13

Perhaps the most explicit articulation of the concept we have been illustrating appears in Leviticus 26:11–13:

I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves. And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.

The oft-ignored book of Leviticus pinpoints the essential problem for God's desire to be present with his people: their sinfulness. How can a perfect, holy God unite himself and be present with a sinful people? How can a holy God "walk among" them and declare, "I will be your God, and you shall be my people"? Leviticus offers a number of answers.

First, it is in God's character to be holy and just as well as gracious and loving. God is holy, but he also forgives his people's transgression and through the sacrificial system makes a way for them to receive forgiveness and cleansing from sin.

Second, God is committed to his covenant relationships. God promises as part of the covenant to be "among" his people, to "walk among" them, and to "be [their] God." All three images—dwelling, walking, and being their God—speak of relationship, especially God's being Israel's God and Israel's being his people. Thus, even in the Pentateuch there is a clear sense that God desires to be united to his people in covenant relationship, a relationship characterized by God's identifying self-presence with them.

Third, Leviticus establishes that God's presence with his people is a form of union. Paul quotes this passage to make the point that God's people should not unite themselves to unclean things because they are the temple of God: "What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people'" (2 Cor. 6:16). Paul applies the concept of union with Christ to the Corinthians to tell them not to join in religious union with unbelievers, and the underly-

ing logic is that God has united himself with his people by his presence with them.

Isaiah 7:10–14

The LORD spoke to Ahaz, “Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.” And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

Fast-forwarding in the biblical story, Isaiah 7 gives a glimpse as to how this concept of God’s presence will play out in the future. Isaiah prophesies to King Ahaz, who has looked for deliverance from sources outside the Lord, and tells him that the ultimate deliverance for Israel will come from the “LORD himself” (v. 14), who will provide a son from the house of David as a sign. But a sign of what? God’s presence: he shall be called “Immanuel” or “God with us.” Matthew 1:22–23 says that these verses point to the arrival of Jesus as Israel’s Messiah. The Old Testament, then, foreshadows the apex of the ongoing theme of identification-by-presence in pointing to the coming Messiah called “Immanuel.”

Ezekiel 37:24–28

My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children’s children shall dwell there forever, and David my servant shall be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.

After the passage of the “two sticks,” in which God promises to reunite Judah and Israel (Ezek. 37:15–23), we have more magnificent promises. David, one of several Old Testament covenant mediators, prefigures the greater David, the Messiah, who will be Israel’s shepherd-king forever in the

land. Unlike in their previous history, God's people will truly obey him. He will make an everlasting covenant of peace with them and cause them to multiply. He, the Sanctifier, will put his sanctuary in the midst of them and their descendants forever. In fulfillment of covenant promises, God will dwell with them, he will be their God, and they will be his people. When all this happens, the nations will know that he is the Lord.

I interpret this as a prophecy of spiritual Israel, the people of God, obeying him and his Christ, the King, the true Mediator, in the new earth forever. God will give them peace, sanctify them, and dwell among them in complete fulfillment of his previous covenant promises. Therefore, God's presence with his people is eschatological as well, pointing forward to a future when God's presence with his people is established eternally.

Many other passages could be cited,⁵ but the point has been made. God's commitment to unite himself to his people by his identifying presence is fulfilled ultimately in his identification with them by becoming one of them, sending his Son in the likeness of human flesh (Phil. 2:7). In Christ's incarnation God dwells (tabernacles) among them (John 1:14) and reaffirms his commitment to be with them always, to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). And when Christ sends the Spirit at Pentecost to be with New Testament believers and to unite them to himself, he gives them this identity—they are “in Christ” as God's people.

Incorporation: Membership in God's Covenantal People

The Old Testament foreshadows union not only through God's identification with his people but also through his joining them together into the body of his people. When God makes his covenant with people in the Old Testament, he does so corporately, not merely individually. Often when we conceive of union, we think in individualistic terms: I am personally united to Christ. While this is true, it can overlook the reality that God relates to his people not only as individuals but also as a whole. In the Old Testament the dual emphasis of individual and corporate relationships with God is embodied in the structure of God's covenant with his people.

Covenantal Structures

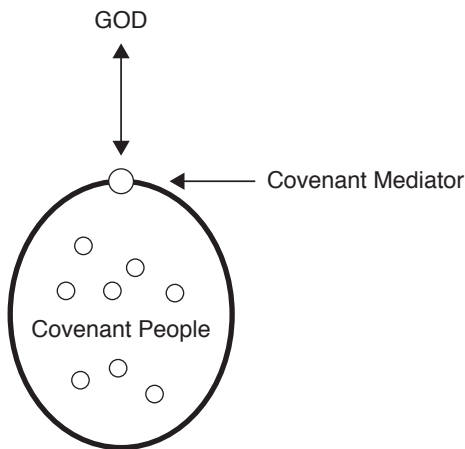
When God makes a covenant with his people, he does so primarily through a specific individual who represents the whole corporate people. Thus, when

⁵Here are three more examples: Ex. 13:21–22; Num. 14:14; Josh. 1:9.

God makes a covenant with Adam (and later Noah), Adam (and then Noah) represents all of humanity. Later, when God makes a covenant with Abraham, Abraham represents not only himself but also his entire family, including his descendants.

Subsequent covenants made with Moses and David follow suit, as Moses and David represent God's people, the nation of Israel. My colleague Jack Collins sketches a helpful diagram to describe the structure of God's covenants with his people. In figure 1, God makes a covenant with an individual (covenant mediator) who is the representative of the larger body of the covenant people. This arrangement is sometimes described as federal headship, where the federal head (covenant mediator) represents a group of people in a federation or covenant.

Figure 1. The structure of covenant relationship



How does this covenant structure pertain to union with Christ? The New Testament portrays Christ as a covenant Mediator: "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). The identification of Jesus as the Messiah from the house of David names him as a covenant Mediator in the line of other Old Testament covenant mediators, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. Paul affirms the relationship between Old Testament covenant mediators and Christ in Romans 5 when he explains how Adam and Christ are individuals who represent a corporate whole. If part of union with Christ is being joined to his body,

the church, then God's covenantal relationship in the Old Testament sheds light on what it means to be incorporated into God's people and therefore connected to God himself.

Covenant Mediators

Jesus is the "mediator of a new covenant" (Heb. 9:15), but this unique Mediator is preceded by Old Testament covenant mediators, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David.

Adam. The first man represents humanity in the covenant of creation (or covenant of works). He and Eve are stewards of the earth on behalf of God their Lord; under his dominion they exercise dominion over the other creatures (Gen. 1:26–28). Adam, the first covenant mediator, plunges the human race into condemnation and death (Rom. 5:12–19; 1 Cor. 15:22). His fall also subjects the creation to "futility" and "bondage to corruption" (Rom. 8:20–21). Paul juxtaposes Adam, the first covenant mediator, with Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant. As Adam has brought guilt and corruption to his race, so Christ brings justification and eternal life to those who "receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness" (5:17).

Noah. Noah appears in the biblical story as a sort of second Adam. Even as the first man is the father of all living, so Noah is the father of the seven other souls spared by God in the great flood. To Noah and his sons God repeats the Edenic command to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen. 9:1; cf. 9:7). As God made the covenant of creation with Adam, so he makes a covenant with Noah, his sons, and the nonhuman creatures spared in the flood. To them God promises, "I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth" (v. 11). God places the rainbow in the sky as the "sign of the covenant" (v. 12). Noah thus takes up the mantle of covenant mediator to represent all of humanity in its relationship with God. Noah's role as covenant mediator to a restored world foreshadows Christ's role as the covenant Mediator through and for whom the entire cosmos will be remade.

Abraham. While Adam and Noah represent all of humanity in their covenants with God, Abraham represents a more specific group: God's people. God calls Abraham:

Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will

bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Gen. 12:1–3)

God specifically chooses Abraham's family to be a means of blessing the whole earth. To do so, God makes a covenant with Abraham, promising to make him a great nation and bless him in order that he might be a blessing. How will Abraham's people be a blessing to the world? Ultimately through one of Abraham's descendants, Jesus himself (Matt. 1:1).

God counts Abraham righteous for his faith (Gen. 15:6) and promises to be God to him and his offspring forever (17:7–8). As God made land promises to Adam and Noah, so God gives Abraham and his offspring "all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession" (v. 8). Ultimately, Abraham looks forward to the new earth (Heb. 11:10, 16). Paul says that God's covenant with Abraham was based on grace, was received in faith, and dealt with his offspring, "Christ" (Gal. 3:16). The Abrahamic covenant is the basis of the new covenant, and New Testament believers are "Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" of eternal life (v. 29). Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant, is far greater than the great Old Testament covenant mediator Abraham (Heb. 9:15; 12:24), even as God is greater than human beings (John 8:58).

Moses. Moses, the servant of the Lord and the man to whom God speaks face to face, is mediator of the old covenant, which God makes with redeemed Israel at Mount Sinai. As God promised Abraham that he would be a great nation, so God's covenant with Moses establishes Israel as God's chosen people. God speaks to Moses after their exodus from Egypt:

You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel. (Ex. 19:4–6)

God makes a covenant with Moses, who as covenant mediator represents the entire nation of Israel. In this covenant, God calls Israel his "treasured possession" (v. 5) who will be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (v. 6). The people of God are to be the reconstituted humanity, fulfilling the purpose for which all human beings were created: loving and worshiping God.

Part of the covenant is expectation that God's people will obey him. Accordingly, they commit themselves, saying, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do" (24:7). Israel will fail to live up to this high calling. Time and again they will require their mediator to intervene for them until a greater Mediator, Jesus, comes and fulfills all the commands of the law (cf. Matt. 5:17).

Moses was the "intermediary" through whom the law was put in place (Gal. 3:19). The covenant mediated by Moses "came 430 years afterward," that is, after the one mediated by Abraham, and thus "does not annul" it (v. 17). Moses was a great Old Testament covenant mediator. But although there is thus continuity between the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and new covenants, Christ, as a son "over God's house," is far superior to Moses, a servant "in all God's house" (Heb. 3:2–6). The work of Christ, the Mediator and guarantor of the new covenant, annuls the covenant made with Moses, making it obsolete (7:18–19, 22; 8:6, 13). Indeed, Christ's work of redemption is so great that it not only avails for new covenant believers but also redeems Old Testament saints (9:15)!

David. David is the final Old Testament covenant mediator we will consider. God makes a covenant with him, God's choice to be king of the nation of Israel:

I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. . . . My steadfast love will not depart from him. . . . And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever. (2 Sam. 7:12–16)

God promises David that his line will reign over God's kingdom forever. Indeed, David's son Solomon shall be as a son to God. Of course, the ultimate Davidic King is as a son to God because he *is* the Son of God himself. The Messiah, Jesus, was David's descendant, but he was also David's Lord, a point with which Jesus confounds the Jewish leaders (Matt. 1:1; 22:41–46). Jesus is the greater David, the covenant Mediator who grants his people rest from their enemies—sin, Satan, and death—and represents his people as God's own Son.⁶

The suffering servant. While David is the last significant covenant mediator

⁶ God also calls the nation of Israel his "son." The prophet Hosea speaks the word of the Lord, saying, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (Hos. 11:1). See Robert A. Peterson, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001). The New Testament picks up on this verse as a messianic prophecy referring to Jesus's sojourn in Egypt to flee the wrath of Herod (Matt. 2:15). At various times Israel, the Davidic king, and the Messiah are all considered God's son, implying that the king who is to be as a son to God represents the nation of Israel, which is also considered to be God's son.

in the Old Testament, the prophets, specifically Isaiah, foreshadow a coming covenant Mediator who will be both a Davidic King (Isa. 9:6–7) and—surprisingly—a suffering servant. This servant is to be a light to all nations, functioning as one who will represent not only God’s Israel but all the peoples of the earth (Isa. 49:6). Thus the covenant Mediator who is to fulfill this role of “servant” will be a representative not just of ethnic Israel (like Abraham) but of all peoples (like Adam).

However, this servant will come initially not as a reigning King. Instead he will be

despised and rejected by men;
 a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief . . .
 . . . stricken,
 smitten by God, and afflicted. (53:3–4)

Why does he suffer? The following verses provide the answer:

He was pierced for our transgressions;
 he was crushed for our iniquities;
 upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
 and with his wounds we are healed. . . .
 and the LORD has laid on him
 the iniquity of us all. (vv. 5–6)

In his humiliation the servant functions as a covenant Mediator, taking the punishment his people deserve for their sin, so that “many might be accounted righteous” (v. 11). Who is this suffering servant, this covenant Mediator who makes atonement for his people’s sins? The apostle Peter tells us: “Christ also suffered for you. . . . He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Pet. 2:21, 24). Peter quotes Isaiah 53, telling us that it speaks of Christ himself, who suffered on the cross that we might be spiritually healed. The servant songs in Isaiah foreshadow the work of Christ as the covenant Mediator who will represent his people by dying in their place.

Participation: Sharing in the Covenantal Story

We not only are united to Christ as members of his body, incorporated in him as the ultimate covenant Mediator, but we also participate in him. Paul

says that by God's grace through faith believers participate in Jesus's story. We died with Christ, were raised with him (Col. 2:20; 3:1), and sat down with him in heaven (Eph. 2:6). The Old Testament does not speak in these terms. But a similar concept of participating in God's story occurs throughout the Old Testament when God includes his people in his covenantal story. While this idea of participation becomes more explicit in the New Testament, the Old Testament invites us to see God's people as those who participate in the narrative God writes by being in relationship with him through covenants.

This principle of participation pertains to the concepts we already studied. When God's covenantal presence with his people identifies them, they experience his presence and thereby participate in his story. So, for example, when God promises to dwell among his people, walk among them, and be their God (Lev. 26:11–12), by grace through faith they know God and enjoy his presence as his people. And when God makes a covenant with Abraham and his seed, thereby incorporating them into his people, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob know God and love him as they walk in faith and obedience.

I repeat: these examples are not identical to Christians' dying and rising with Christ (Rom. 6:3–11). But they are a part of the storyline that culminates in God's sending his Son to be Savior of the world, who in turn sends the Spirit at Pentecost to unite his people to Christ in salvation. In a sense, then, the Old Testament saints experience God's presence and belonging to his people as a foretaste of union with Christ enjoyed by New Testament saints.

And there is more. The Old Testament also contains passages in which God promises to put his Spirit within his people. We will consider two of them.

Ezekiel 36:24–28

I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

God promises to bring scattered Israel back to its land. Why? To vindicate his holy reputation and demonstrate to surrounding nations that he is

the Lord (vv. 22–23, 36). He will do more than regather Israel; he will also purify the people from their sins (vv. 25, 29, 33). He will accomplish this by granting them a new heart and spirit. Ezekiel's words approximate the New Testament doctrine of regeneration: "I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (v. 26). This will result in renewed obedience to the Lord (v. 27). Our chief interest lies here: "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules" (v. 27). This is important Old Testament background for God's corporate indwelling of his people, a New Testament theme connected to union with Christ.⁷

Ezekiel 37:11–14

Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off." Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD.

Ezekiel 37 continues the theme begun in the previous chapter. To answer how these things will come about, the prophet replies: by God's supernatural life-giving power. Ezekiel sees a valley of dry bones and in obedience to God prophesies to them. At the prophet's word the bones rattle and come together and are covered with sinews and flesh. Again at Ezekiel's word, breath comes into the corpses and they come alive and stand up, constituting a great army (vv. 1–10). This pictures God's re-creating his scattered people and bringing them back to their land (vv. 12, 14). Once more Ezekiel's words prefigure New Testament teaching: "I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land" (v. 14). God will vivify dead (scattered) Israel by putting his Spirit within them. At Pentecost God vivifies his New Testament saints by putting his Holy Spirit within them.

⁷David J. Reimer is correct, "The physical return was only the beginning of the fulfillment of these prophecies," *ESV Study Bible*, note on Ezek. 36:22–32. Their complete fulfillment occurs in the new covenant, of which Ezekiel's fellow prophet Jeremiah also spoke (Jer. 31:31–34).

Conclusion

It would be anachronistic to say that the Old Testament teaches union with Christ. Instead, it foreshadows union with Christ. In this chapter, we have seen three main ways this is so.

First, God identifies with his people in the Old Testament through his covenant presence. By doing so, he bestows on them an identity—he is their God, and they are his people. This identification foreshadows the way in which union with Christ in the new covenant is God’s covenant presence par excellence. It also foreshadows the identity of New Testament saints as those “in Christ.”

Second, God incorporates a chosen nation into a covenant people. This covenant people relates to God through a covenant mediator. The Old Testament gives us covenant mediators, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. However, the covenant Mediator par excellence comes in the form of one who is both Davidic King and suffering servant, Jesus Christ. By his mediation in his death he makes atonement for his people’s sins and in his resurrection makes them alive to God. He will come a second time, not to suffer but to reign as the son of David par excellence.

Third, God’s people participate in the covenantal story, foreshadowing the way in which the church in the New Testament will participate in Christ’s death and resurrection. This will happen when Old Testament prophecies concerning the Holy Spirit are fulfilled in Jesus and his ministry, including Pentecost.

Ultimately, the Old Testament lays the foundation to understand the New Testament teaching of union with Christ. Our understanding of union will be enriched by understanding the story, imagery, and concepts upon which that union is built.

Chapter 5

Union with Christ in Romans

“One of the most significant elements of Paul’s Christology is his teaching about being ‘in Christ.’ Union with Christ or participation with Christ is surely one of the fundamental themes of his theology.”¹ Thomas Schreiner is correct: union with Christ is a key theme of Pauline theology. Furthermore, Paul is the main teacher in all Scripture of this important theme. Paul’s teaching is so extensive that it will be divided into ten chapters. We begin with Romans.

Romans 1:1–6

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

Paul includes the believers at Rome among those for whom he received “grace and apostleship” to bring about the “obedience of faith” for the sake

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 314.

of Christ's name. The focus of Paul's ministry is "all the nations." Thus, when he next writes "including you," he implies that the church in Rome comprises predominately Gentiles. Paul describes his readers as "among whom you yourselves also are called of Jesus Christ" (v. 6, literal translation). Douglas Moo translates it, as does the ESV, "called to belong to Jesus Christ" and explains in a note that this translation means "taking the genitive Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ with predicate force."²

This is, then, a reference to believers' belonging to Jesus Christ. Belonging is an entailment of union with Christ. Because we have been spiritually joined to Christ by faith, we are his. This theme of belonging occurs nine times in Paul's epistles. In eight references—Romans 1:6; 7:4; 8:9; 14:8; 1 Corinthians 3:21–23; 15:23; 2 Corinthians 10:7; and Galatians 5:24—Christians are said to belong to Christ. In one—1 Corinthians 12:15–16—the use of this theme in the body metaphor implies that Christians belong to each other.

This first reference to union does double duty. It introduces the theme of belonging to Christ and also occurs in a greeting of one of Paul's epistles. Romans, the first of Paul's letters canonically, includes union with Christ in both initial and final greetings. This usage recurs in Romans 16:3–13, 22; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 16:19, 24; Ephesians 1:1; 6:21; Philippians 1:1; 4:21; Colossians 1:2; 4:7, 17; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 5:18; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1; and Philemon 23. Union is in Paul's mind when he begins and finishes his epistles.

Romans 3:23–24

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Some comments concerning the study of Paul's use of the prepositional phrase "in Christ" are in order. Linguists do not agree on the exact meaning of "in Christ" language and have made many suggestions. Its meaning remains elusive because it shows great range and flexibility. This creates problems for studying union with Christ in Paul, because the "in Christ" formula and its variants ("in the Lord," "in him," and "in whom") play such a significant role in that study. I regard Constantine Campbell's methodology, analysis, and conclusions to be exemplary. He is aware of the issues and problems, engages in a thorough inductive study of the evidence in Paul, and reaches balanced

²Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 54n81.

and nuanced conclusions. I gratefully build on his work. He regards the usage of the preposition ἐν (*en*, “in”) as “flexible,” the role of its context to be of “utmost importance,” the spatial sense to be primary, the notion of “sphere” as key in figurative uses, and the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ [*en Christō*, “in Christ”] as denoting “personal relatedness.”³

This is the first of many passages where Paul affixes the words “in Christ Jesus” to a synonym for salvation or uses “in him we have [some benefit of grace]” as a synonym for salvation. Various aspects of salvation come readily to the apostle’s mind when he thinks of union with Christ. Here salvation is called “redemption,” which “depicts lost persons in various states of bondage and presents Christ as Redeemer, who through his death . . . claims people as his own and sets them free.”⁴ Believers’ redemption is not apart from Christ; it is “in Christ,” that is, in association with him.⁵

Romans 5:5

Hope does put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

God assures us of salvation by making gospel promises to us, by working in our lives, and by the Holy Spirit’s witnessing within. Here the Father comforts us by pouring his love “into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

This is the first of many passages that teach that believers are indwelt by God—Father, Son, and, most often, Holy Spirit. We are indwelt by the Spirit, are given the Spirit (as here in Rom. 5:5), have the Spirit, receive the Spirit, and have the Spirit sent into our hearts. Six times Paul attributes indwelling to the Son. Christ is in us, lives in us, and dwells in our hearts. And two times Paul attributes indwelling to the Father. Believers are a dwelling place for God and are a temple for God, who dwells among them.

Indwelling is a corollary to union with Christ for two reasons. First, the same Holy Spirit both unites us to Christ and indwells us. The Spirit creates continuity between initial union with Christ and indwelling. Second, union involves God’s presence in and with his people. Not only are we brought into a positive relation to God; he also comes to live in us. He takes up residence

³Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 73.

⁴Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son: The Work of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 353.

⁵So Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 94.

in our lives and bodies. He indwells his people individually and corporately. In fact, indwelling *is* the dynamic and ongoing aspect of union with Christ. The Spirit joins us to the living Christ once and for all, but not only so. He continues to join us to Christ and his eternal life, and that vital, continuing aspect of union is indwelling.

Romans 5:12–19

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.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

A few preliminaries are in order. First, though this passage does not specifically address union with Christ, it is a major source for understanding Christ as new covenant Mediator. Second, this is the *textus classicus* for the doctrine of original sin. I agree with that assessment but note that Romans says much about actual sins before it deals with original sin. After announcing his theme—the revelation of God's saving righteousness in the gospel (1:16–17)—Paul launches into another topic—the revelation of God's wrath against sinners (v. 18). He pursues this topic until returning to the main theme in 3:21. In between he stresses humanity's need for the gospel due to its actual sins. Thus Paul says a lot about actual sin before he treats original sin, so both are important.

Third, Romans 5:12–19 is rightly regarded as the main text on original sin.

But in its context it chiefly concerns justification, not sin. Paul surrounds his discussion of the means of justification—faith in Christ in chapter 4—with discussions of the basis of justification—Christ’s work. In 3:25–26 the basis is Christ’s propitiation of God’s justice, and in 5:18–19 it is his “one act of righteousness” on the cross and his “obedience” unto death that counter the disobedience of the first Adam.

In 5:12 Paul begins by a comparison between the two Adams: “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—.” The dash shows that Paul interrupts his flow of thought. His goal is to compare Adam’s devastating effects on humankind with Christ’s wonderful effects on his people. But Paul does not complete the comparison. Rather, he immediately shows that only Adam’s sin can explain sin’s tyranny over humanity from the fall to the giving of the Mosaic law (vv. 13–14).

Paul lays the foundation for the completion of the unfinished comparison (of v. 12) when he says, “Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come” (v. 14). In some ways Adam is a type, an acted prophecy or prefiguring, of the Christ to come. Both have cataclysmic effects on others. The destinies of the whole human race are tied to the two Adams because Adam is the mediator of the covenant of creation and Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant.

There are basic similarities between Adam and Christ. But before presenting these, Paul underlines their differences. Adam’s one sin brings death; Christ brings grace and eternal life (v. 15). Adam’s one sin brings condemnation; Christ’s grace brings justification (v. 16). Adam’s one sin brings the reign of death; Christ brings a reign of life to believers (v. 17).

Having contrasted the two Adams, Paul builds upon their fundamental similarity to finish the comparison of verse 12. “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men” (v. 18). Adam’s original sin warrants God’s verdict of condemnation to humankind. His one sin makes all guilty before God. In other places in this passage, Paul says that the outcome of Adam’s sin is physical and spiritual death (vv. 12, 14–15, 17). He means that Adam’s primal sin brings condemnation, which in turn brings death to men and women.

Christ, the second Adam, also has colossal effects upon his race, his people, but unlike Adam’s effects, Christ’s are positive: “One act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men” (v. 18). The second Adam stands in contrast to the first Adam. Christ’s “one act of righteousness” refers to his

death on the cross. His death generates the opposite of the condemnation caused by Adam's first sin, namely "justification," God's verdict of righteousness. Paul unbalances the equation when he adds to justification "and life for all men," thereby emphasizing the magnitude of Christ's accomplishment. Christ's cross brings God's declaration of righteousness, which in turn produces eternal life. He means Christ's one act of righteousness brings justification, which in turn brings life.

In verse 19 Paul essentially repeats the idea of verse 18. "As by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." Adam's disobedience, his original sin, caused his race to become sinners. By contrast, Christ's obedience will cause his race (all who believe in him, v. 17) to become righteous in God's sight. Paul's emphasis is on Christ's "becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8). Here is a diagram of the great consequences of the two Adams upon their respective races:

Adam's disobedience → Many were made sinners.

Christ's obedience → Many will be made righteous.

To summarize: Paul presents Christ as the second and last Adam, the Mediator of the new covenant, whose "one act of righteousness," his "obedience" unto death on the cross, is the ground for God's declaring righteous (justifying) sinners who trust Christ for salvation and eternal life. So while this passage does not deal with an actual faith union with Christ, it lays a foundation for that doctrine in presenting the momentous accomplishment of Christ, the second Adam and Mediator of the new covenant, juxtaposed to the momentous deed of the first Adam and mediator of the covenant of creation. James Dunn traces the apostle's train of thought:

At this point the features of Adam Christology are most sharply drawn, with Christ's work described precisely as an antithesis to Adam's—the deed which accords with God's will set against the trespass which marked humanity's wrong turning, the act defined as obedience precisely because it is the reversal of Adam's disobedience. The inaugurating act of the new epoch is thus presented as a counter to and cancellation of the inaugurating act of the old, Christ's right turn undoing Adam's wrong turn.⁶

⁶James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1988), 297.

Romans 6:1–14

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Paul previously blasted enemies who attributed antinomianism to him: “Why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just” (Rom. 3:8). Here he returns to this false charge. He just wrote, “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more”—the worse our sins look, the better God’s grace in justification looks (5:20). Now his enemies accuse: “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” (6:1). Paul recoils at this suggestion and responds with incredulity: “How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (v. 2).

Moo accurately summarizes Paul’s argument by working backward:

Christ died to sin (vv. 8–10)

We died with Christ (vv. 3–7)

Therefore: we died to sin (v. 2)⁷

⁷ Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 354n12.

But when did we die to sin? Paul explains that this occurred when we were baptized: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (v. 3). It is as if Paul said, “Don’t you know that Christian baptism denotes union with Christ in his death (and resurrection)?” Our baptism is baptism into Christ; it means we participate in his story. So just as he died, in union with him we too died to sin. Christ’s atonement broke the stranglehold of sin over our lives; we no longer have to do the bidding of that cruel master. Instead, we belong to another Master, who bought us in his death and resurrection, even Christ Jesus our Lord. He is the one we now obey.

“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (v. 4). The apostle laments that Christians would continue to live in sin after baptism (v. 2). To do so is a fundamental misunderstanding. In baptism God promises to identify us with Christ in his death and resurrection. Baptism does not automatically effect that which it represents. But for those who believe, God delivers what he promised. We must live, then, as those who died to sin with Christ and who live to God, because we participated in Christ’s death and resurrection.

The apostle teaches that Christians participate in Jesus’s narrative. Here we are crucified with him (v. 6), share in his death (vv. 5, 8) and resurrection (v. 5), and “will also live with him” (v. 8). Our union with him in his death and resurrection is the basis for victorious Christian living now (vv. 4, 6–7, 11–13). Indeed, Paul urges, “Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness” (v. 13). Our participation in Christ’s story is also the basis for our final salvation—the resurrection of the body (vv. 5, 8). I agree with Dunn concerning verses 5 and 8:

More likely Paul has in mind the full outworking of that epoch-introducing event [Christ’s resurrection] in the resurrection of the dead . . . a resurrection just like his.⁸

“We shall also live with him.” It is almost impossible to take the future here as merely logical (it follows from the fact that we died with Christ

⁸Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 318.

that we have also risen with him); it must refer to a still future sharing in Christ's resurrected life.⁹

Verse 11 is one of many places where Paul adds the words "in Christ" to an adjective to speak of it in relation to Christ: "You also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." The foundation of this statement is found in Christ's death and resurrection: "Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God" (vv. 9–10). When we are joined to him by grace through faith, we move, just as Christ our Vicar did, from the realm of sin and death to the realm of life and God. Campbell has taught me that Paul frequently uses "in Christ" language to "express the locative notion of being within the realm or sphere of Christ."¹⁰ I take "in" here to indicate realm or sphere and the whole expression to mean being alive to Christ by virtue of union with him in his death and resurrection. Paul speaks of two spheres: being "dead to sin" and being "alive to God." He describes the second sphere as "in Christ."

Romans 6:23

The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Again Paul speaks of salvation—here as "eternal life"—"in Christ Jesus our Lord." Everlasting spiritual life is found only through the Mediator's person and work.

Romans 7:4

You also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

The apostle says that Christians take part in Jesus's narrative. Here we "have died to the law through the body of Christ." Paul means that our co-crucifixion with Christ has freed us from the tyranny (and condemnation) of the law that characterizes this age. When he died, we died, and we now are

⁹Ibid., 322.

¹⁰Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 115–16. I follow him and identify many such uses of "in Christ" language in Paul's epistles.

not enslaved to the law but belong to the risen one. In his death and resurrection he has inaugurated a new era, and by our participating in his story, we too are “released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code” (v. 6).

Paul speaks of believers as “belong[ing] to another, to him who has been raised from the dead” (v. 4), that is, Christ. Here, as elsewhere in Paul, union includes belonging to Christ.

Romans 8:1–2

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

I understand “those who are in Christ Jesus” (v. 1) to mean those in the sphere of Christ Jesus. Paul contrasts that sphere with the one “of sin and death.” People who are in Christ’s realm are justified and will not be condemned at the last judgment. They are in Christ’s domain and will be declared righteous in the judgment.

The use of “in Christ Jesus” in verse 2 is complicated by the difficulty of determining which words in the verse the phrase modifies. Owing to this ambiguity I follow the Greek word order, put the phrase with “the law of the Spirit of life,” and understand it to speak of sphere. The dominion of the Holy Spirit—who brings life in the realm of Christ Jesus—has liberated Christians from the dominion of sin and death. Both uses of “in Christ Jesus” in these two verses relate believers to him. Though they use local language to speak figuratively of realm, they imply a personal relationship with him.

Romans 8:9–11

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

This is a powerful passage on indwelling. Four times it speaks of believers' being indwelt by the Spirit, and once by Christ himself—"if Christ is in you." Paul connects indwelling with our being in the realm of the Spirit, not of the flesh (v. 9), with our having eternal life now (v. 10), and with our future resurrection from the dead (v. 11).

Furthermore, Paul teaches that having the Holy Spirit is an indispensable condition, a *sine qua non*, of belonging to Christ. Therefore, it follows that "anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."

Romans 8:14–17

All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Paul celebrates our adoption by God. "The Spirit of adoption" has enabled us to call God "Father" in truth. As a result, we are no longer slaves of sin but children of God. The Spirit assures us within of our sonship. And with placement into God's family comes inheritance: "If children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (v. 17). But all this is true only for genuine sons, those who bear a family resemblance to the Father and the Son. For this reason Paul adds a proviso: "provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him." He means that only those who are joined to Christ in his death and resurrection are the true sons of God. Union in his saving events means salvation in all of its aspects: from sin's penalty (justification), power (progressive sanctification), and presence (final sanctification). But union with him in his death also means suffering with him now, just as union with him in his resurrection means being glorified with him later.

Romans 8:38–39

I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

These verses appear at the end of a passage that, as strongly as any in Scripture, affirms God's preservation of his people. Those whom God has saved he will keep unto the end. Paul argues for preservation based on God's plan (vv. 28–30), his very deity (vv. 31–32), his justice (vv. 33–34), and his love (vv. 35–39). I follow Campbell, who follows BDAG,¹¹ in understanding this use of “in Christ” to signify that “by which something is recognized,” and the idea here to be the “love of God that is seen in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Nothing can separate believers from God's love, which is “direct and personal and is recognized through Christ.”¹²

Romans 9:1

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit.

Here is one of many places where Paul speaks of believers' actions being performed “in Christ.” What does it mean that Paul speaks the “truth in Christ”? The key seems to be the parallelism with the expression “my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit.” “Both phrases are used in connection to the utterance of testimony . . . which suggests that they could profitably be understood the same way.” Campbell follows BDAG in understanding both uses under the category “marker of close association,” and more particularly, “under the control of.”¹³ Thus Paul means he is not lying but telling the truth under Christ's control or influence; his conscience under the Spirit's control or influence confirms this fact. Paul speaks, then, in relation to Christ and dependent on him, and as such, he speaks only the truth.

Romans 12:4–5

As in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Shortly after beginning the mainly practical section of Romans (chaps. 12–16) in 12:1–2 (built on the mainly doctrinal chaps. 1–11), Paul urges his

¹¹ Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); hereafter, BDAG in this or a 2nd (1979) edition.

¹² Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 131.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 96.

readers to humility (12:3). For the basis of his appeal he points to our bodies: “As in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function . . .” (v. 4). Our bodies are characterized by diversity of members and functions. He completes his appeal by comparing our bodies to the church: “so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (v. 5).

Even as a human body, although having many members with various functions, is still one body, so it is with Christ’s church. But Paul does not mention “the church.” Instead, he introduces his favorite picture of the church—the body of Christ. Helpfully, though the apostle does not usually use the words “in Christ” with the metaphor of the church as Christ’s body, here, when he first mentions the concept, he does. Believers “are one body in Christ” (v. 5). He means they are in Christ’s domain and consequently have a new identity—they are “in Christ,” members of his spiritual body, the church. He thus signals that the body of Christ is a picture of the church in union with Christ.

Herman Ridderbos rightly maintains that the idea of the body of Christ speaks of incorporation into Christ.¹⁴ Just as our bodily members are each a part of us, so believers belong to Christ. And to each other! This metaphor is ideal for teaching not only the relationship of believers, the members, to Christ, their Head, but also that of believers to one another. So Paul writes, “We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” Next he encourages various members of Christ’s body with different gifts to serve the Lord appropriately: “If prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness” (vv. 6–8).

Romans 13:14

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

After exhortations to “love each other” and so fulfill the law, to “put on the armor of light” in light of the eschatological times, and to avoid a sinful lifestyle (vv. 8–13), Paul makes a summary ethical statement: “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 14). The apostle uses the imagery of getting dressed, of put-

¹⁴ See Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard de Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 362.

ting on clothing, to urge his readers to live for Christ and as he lived. In verse 12 Paul has encouraged the Romans to put on a moral suit of armor. Now he commands them to put on Christ himself.

We are made one with Christ at conversion, “but our relationship to Christ, the new man, while established at conversion, needs constantly to be appropriated and lived out.” Paul speaks here not of initial union with Christ but of believers’ need “consciously to embrace Christ in such a way that his character is manifested in all that we do and say.”¹⁵

This is a positive point. The negative counterpoint follows: “Make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (v. 14). “Flesh” here has the negative meaning of the principle within us that turns us outwardly to the world system opposed to God and inwardly to our selfish desires. We are to “make no provision for the flesh” and its lusts; that is, we are not to indulge our evil desires.

Romans 14:7–9

None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

Paul exhorts Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome to accept each other and live in harmony in the observance of religious days. We live and die not for ourselves, but for him who lived and died for us to be our Lord. Equally important to his ruling over us is the fact that we belong to him. This belonging is a feature of union with Christ.

Romans 14:14

I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.

Paul addresses divisions in the Roman church along Jewish and Gentile ethnic lines. He acknowledges the abolishment of the Old Testament dietary code; no longer are there unclean foods. He introduces this principle with the words “I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus.” Paul is swayed by the Lord Jesus, God’s agent leading Paul to his conclusion.

¹⁵ Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 825–26.

Romans 15:17–19

In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ.

Here again Paul speaks of believers' actions done "in Christ," this time his own action of boasting of his "work for God." The next two verses reveal what that work is—preaching the gospel successfully to Gentiles across the Roman Empire. It seems that "in Christ" functions adverbially to modify "I have reason to be proud." Thus Paul's boasting is appropriate because he boasts in this manner—"in Christ."¹⁶

Romans 16:3–13

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well.

This is the prime example of Paul's practice of including references to union with Christ in the opening and closing greetings of his epistles, showing how pervasive union is in his thought. These verses contain ten occurrences of "in Christ Jesus" or the like ("in Christ," "in the Lord"). Paul instructs the Romans to welcome Phoebe "in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints"

¹⁶ So Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 96–97. He taught me to recognize many times "in Christ" is used as an adverb of manner in Paul.

(v. 2). “In the Lord” expresses manner, as the words immediately following confirm—“in a way worthy of the saints.”

In seven instances here Paul uses “in Christ” “as a label to indicate that people are Christian. . . . In Christ might be regarded as roughly equivalent to the modern label ‘Christian.’”¹⁷

- “Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus” (v. 3)
- “Andronicus and Junia . . . in Christ before me” (v. 7)
- “Ampliatius, my beloved in the Lord” (v. 8)
- “Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ” (v. 9)
- “those in the Lord” (v. 11)
- “those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa” (v. 12)
- “Rufus, chosen in the Lord” (v. 13)

Prisca and Aquila, then, are Paul’s *Christian* fellow workers, Andronicus and Junia were *Christians* before Paul, and so forth.

When Paul refers to Apelles as “approved in Christ” (v. 10), he describes him as possessing the characteristic of being approved, that is, as worthy of approval.¹⁸ When the apostle refers to “beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord” (v. 12), he uses “in Christ” language to depict cause. Persis labored because of the Lord, showing the kind of work he was doing—the Lord’s work.¹⁹

Romans 16:22

I, Tertius, who wrote this letter in the Lord, greet you. [my translation]

The words “in the Lord” go either with “wrote this letter” or with “greet you.” Many commentators and translations adopt the latter alternative, as does the ESV: “I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.” Nevertheless, I favor the former because of word order. I assume that where the Greek is ambiguous, Greek writers use word order to communicate their intentions. If that is correct in this instance, then the translation is, “I, Tertius, who wrote this letter in the Lord, greet you.” Because Tertius is Paul’s scribe and not the author of Romans, the meaning probably is that the “letter concerns the Lord, whose person and work form its substance.”²⁰ Tertius, then, greets the Romans as Paul’s amanuensis of this letter having to do with Christ.

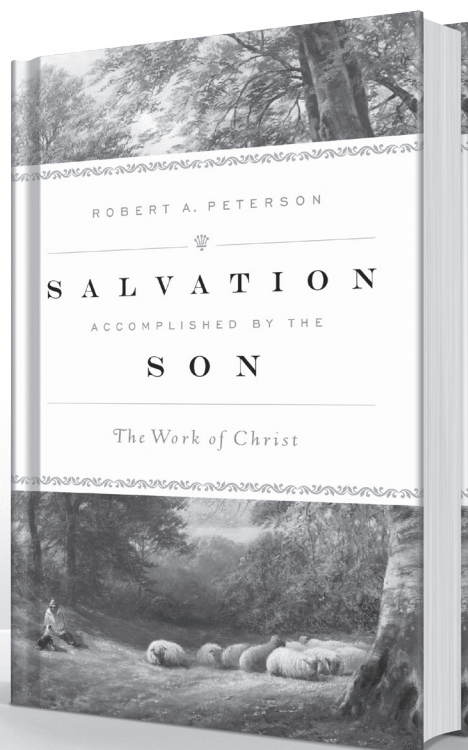
¹⁷ Ibid., 120. Campbell instructed me to classify this frequent Pauline usage as a periphrasis for believers.

¹⁸ Ibid., 101–2.

¹⁹ Ibid., 155–56. Once more, I learned from Campbell to recognize this category (cause) in Paul’s uses of “in Christ.”

²⁰ Ibid., 156–57. Campbell cites BDAG’s category of “specification or substance” as appropriate.

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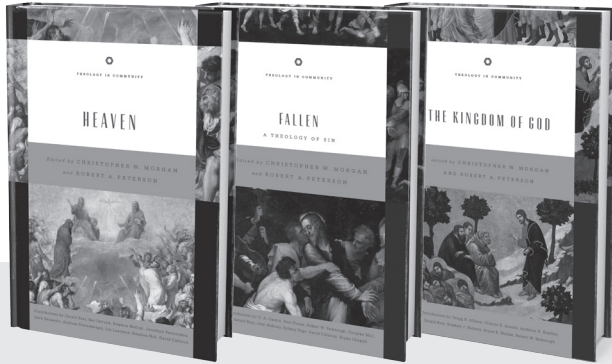
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ROBERT A. PETERSON (PhD, Drew University) is professor of systematic theology at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. He is the author of numerous books and articles, including *Salvation Accomplished by the Son*, and the coeditor (with Christopher W. Morgan) of the Theology in Community series.

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