

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

## Together With Christ

### Ephesians 2:5-6

**Intro:** At the beginning of **ch2**, Paul presents to the reader a great contrast. He starts by explaining the desperate and hopeless situation of all of lost humanity before we come to Christ. Then Paul gloriously declares what God has done to remove those who believe and accept Christ from that situation. Last week we learned Who this God is, what He has done and why He has done it. Who is this God? He is the God of the Bible: sovereign, holy and full of wrath against sin. What has He done? Before, we were dead but God has made us alive. Before, we were enslaved to sin but God has raised us up out of that bondage. Before, we were the objects of God's just wrath but God has worked to make us the objects of His love, mercy, grace and kindness.

So, from one perspective, Paul explains where we were and what God's done to deliver us from our hopelessness. But there is more to this passage that goes on to explain exactly the position that God has brought us to and placed us in. This new situation was **so** new to the experience of 1<sup>st</sup> Century believers that Paul had to invent 3 new words to accurately describe it. Lest we think Paul's theological description is now questionable simply because he needed to make up 3 new Greek words to describe it; let me remind you of the sage comment from no less than Thor, god of thunder in the MCU movie Avengers: Infinity Wars.

Thor has just met up with some new allies and as they are trying to decide what to do next, Thor tells them, "Where we have to go is Nivadellir." Someone immediately derides his suggestion saying, "That's a made-up word." Thor comments flatly, "All words are made up." His response is both humorous and strangely accurate. A Linguistics expert agrees: "Words and their definitions are not inherent features of the universe. There is no objective reason, external to human culture, why "dog" should mean dog, or "rain" should mean rain, or anything else. This is a fundamental principle of linguistics: words are arbitrary. Every single word was first uttered by somebody who, consciously or otherwise, made it up.

Not many of us have had either the opportunity or even the necessity of

invention a new word but it happens all the time. English dictionaries are constantly and continually growing. Anytime something previously unknown or properly identified is discovered, the discoverer has the right to name it. In 1754, Horace Walpole coined the word serendipity, which he defined as the faculty of making happy and unexpected discoveries by accident. You can find that word in the 12-volume Oxford English Dictionary, but not in the smaller Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. Inventions and advances in science and technology also require new words to be coined to identify them. When I was in Bible School, I had never heard of email or texting or blogs or podcasts...or even the internet! All these words have been made up since that time and they all identify real, tangible things that needed a word to accurately describe them.

This was Paul's same dilemma here in this letter. He had been discussing the radical change in our situation brought about by the unmerited kindness of God. Before our conversion we were dead but now we've been made . . . alive with Christ. Before, we were dead; now we're alive. Before, we were enslaved by our sins and carnal nature; now we are emancipated. Before, we were objects of wrath; now we experience God's love. What words can adequately describe this great change? What terms can express it? Since nothing like this had been known in the history of the world before Christ, it's not surprising that in Paul's day adequate words did not yet exist to describe what happened.

So Paul invented some. He took the Greek prefix *syn*, meaning "together with," and combined it with three words used elsewhere to describe what God did with Jesus after His crucifixion: to "make alive," to "raise up," and to "sit down" by Him in heaven. The results were this: 1. *Synzœpoieœ*, which means "to make alive together with"; 2. *Synegeirœ*, which means "to raise up together with"; 3. *Synkathizœ*, which means "to sit down together with." Taken together, these words make one of the most significant statements in the Bible of what has happened to Christians as a result of their union with Jesus Christ in God's great work of salvation.

**5-7** – As with most NT teachings, the initial hints of the doctrine of the union of believers with Christ are in the recorded words of Jesus, usually as metaphors. Once, Jesus compared our union with Him to the union of branches with a vine ([Jn 15:4-5](#)). Other metaphors refer to eating Christ, as one would eat bread (Last Supper; [Jn 6:35](#)), or drinking Him, as one would

drink water (Jn 4:1-14). Another hint of this union is seen in how Christ's followers will be received or rejected by the world, for it is said to be a reception or rejection of Christ himself: He who hears you hears Me; he who rejects you rejects Me (Lk 10:16).

In the great prayer Jesus prayed for His disciples just before His arrest and crucifixion, He referred to this mystical union explicitly: And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them and You in Me... (Jn 17:22-23). This wonderful doctrine was largely developed and emphasized in the writings of Paul. At times, as in ch2, Paul coined words to express it. At other times he speaks simply of being *in Him*, *in Christ* or *in Christ Jesus*, phrases which occur 164 times in his writings. By his use of these phrases, Paul teaches that we were chosen in Him before the creation of the world (1:4), redeemed in Him (1:7), justified in [Him] (Gal 2:17), sanctified in [Him] (1 Cor 1:2), and enriched in every way by Him (1 Cor 1:5) - all because of this mystical union.

This doctrine is so important that one commentator rightly called it "the heart of Paul's religion." John Murray wrote, "Union with Christ is the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation." Arthur W. Pink is even more emphatic: "The subject of spiritual union is the most important, the most profound, and yet the most blessed of any that is set forth in sacred Scripture." But he also rightly notes that "sad to say, there is hardly any which is now more generally neglected. The very expression 'spiritual union' is unknown in most professing Christian circles, and even where it is employed it is given such a protracted meaning as to take in only a fragment of this precious truth."

Just the fact that this teaching is prominent throughout the NT doesn't mean that we properly understand it. Many cannot escape feeling that when Paul speaks of our being made . . . alive...with Christ or being raised...up together and seated . . . together in the heavenly places in Christ somehow this is all just made-up word games. What does it mean that we're made alive in Christ? In what way have I been raised up with Him or seated with Him in heaven?"

One way to understand this doctrine is to see our union with Christ as a federal union. This refers to what we might call our technical position before God as a result of Christ's work for us. It's described in detail in Rom 5:12-

21, in which we are said to have been in Adam before our salvation but to be in Christ afterward. Adam had been established by God as a representative or federal head of the human race. He was to stand for us so that, if he continued in righteousness, we would also be considered as having continued in righteousness in him. But if he fell by transgressing God's command, we would be considered as having sinned in Adam—and his judgment, death, would pass to us. Adam did sin, and this is what happened. Death passed upon the race. This is proof that God considered us to have been in Adam and to have fallen by his transgression.

By contrast, Jesus stood firm, not just demonstrating both a practical and a perfect righteousness in His own life but also dying for those who would be united to Him by faith. Thus, those who were judged to be sinners because of Adam's sin are now judged to be righteous because of Christ's righteousness. Because He's justified, we're justified. Because He's raised, we're raised. Because He's exalted to heaven, we're also exalted to heaven. Just as Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father in glory, so we are also seated at the right hand of the Father in glory.

Note the full parallelism between Christ and Adam. According to these verses, believers are now in Christ, just as they once were in Adam. That is the similarity. But there is also a contrast, since in Adam the race has experienced sin, leading to condemnation and death, while in Christ believers have experienced righteousness, leading to justification and eternal life. The two sequences are exactly parallel. Putting v12 and v18 together, we get something like this: Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—that is, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men - even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.

This teaches that there were two great acts in history: the act of Adam, which brought condemnation and death, and the act of Jesus, which brought justification and life. The results are "brought" to us by virtue of our union with Adam, on the one hand, and with Jesus Christ, on the other. This doctrine is called federalism, because it is analogous to the way an ambassador might act on behalf of his country. When he signs a document or takes an action, he does so for each of the country's citizens, and they are therefore bound by what he does. Similarly, it also reflects the way a

citizen is involved in the actions of his country or federal government. As citizens of our country, we suffer the liabilities and enjoy the benefits of actions taken by earlier generations of citizens.

In this view, the point is not that all people sin, though they do, but rather that Adam stood for them so that, when he sinned, not only was Adam judged but they were judged, too. It is because Adam sinned that death passed upon all. Here is how Lloyd-Jones puts it: “Adam’s sin is imputed to us in exactly the same way that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us. We inherit, of course, a sinful nature from Adam. . . . But that is not what condemns us. What condemns us, and makes us subject to death, is the fact that we have all sinned in Adam, and that we are all held guilty of sin. . . . It is our union with Adam that accounts for all our trouble. It is our corresponding union with Christ that accounts for our salvation.”

But this is only one way of explaining what the Bible means by our mystical union with Christ, and it’s not necessarily the most useful way of thinking of it—certainly not in our passage today. A 2nd way to describe our union with Christ is as a vital or experiential union. This refers to the actual effects in us of this relationship. The chief NT teaching in this respect is Christ’s illustration of the vine and branches, referred to earlier. When Jesus compared Himself to a vine and us to branches, He wasn’t thinking of a simple technical position acquired as a result of His work. He was thinking of an actual difference in our lives. As a result of our union with Him we are now enabled to pray to God and receive the things we pray for and to bear spiritual fruit to God’s glory (Jn 15:7-8). This is the sense in which Paul’s coined words in v5-6 must be taken and in which they yield their richest treasures.

1. Made alive together with Christ. Of the three words, this term most clearly requires an experiential interpretation over just a federal interpretation. The point is that we were once dead and that we now live, as a result of our union with Christ. A dead person is unconscious of what is around him, inactive, and in a process of bodily decay. This was true of us spiritually. We were unconscious of God, inactive in God’s service, and decaying morally. Now we are alive to God, working for God, and growing in practical righteousness. This is the most profound transformation imaginable, and it’s true of all Christians. If this change hasn’t taken place, the person involved isn’t a true Christian.

Lloyd-Jones described this change as God's giving us a new disposition, not new faculties: "The difference between the sinner and the Christian, the unbeliever and the believer, is not that the believer, the Christian, has certain faculties which the other man lacks. No, what happens is that this new disposition given to the Christian directs his faculties in an entirely different way. He is not given a new brain; he is not given a new intelligence, or anything else. He has always had these; they are his servants, his instruments, his 'members,' as Paul calls them in the sixth chapter of Romans; what is new is a new bent, a new disposition. He has turned in a different direction; there is a new power working in him and guiding his faculties. This is the thing that makes a man a Christian."

We can't explain this any other way than to say that it happens by our union with Christ. Jesus told Nicodemus, "The wind blows wherever it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit (Jn 3:8).

2. Raised up together with Christ. The words raised up are sometimes used of the resurrection, and rightly so. But here the words do not apply to the resurrection but to what we normally call the ascension. Having been raised from the dead, Jesus was taken up into heaven, and we are said to have been raised up to heavenly places in Him.

In what way? This concept is a bit more difficult to grasp, but we can explain it this way. Our being raised from the dead with Christ means that we have been given new life or, as Lloyd-Jones wrote, a new disposition. Our being taken up into heaven with Christ, our ascension, means that we have been given a new environment. We are no longer creatures of this world only, bound by what we can see and touch and smell and hear and taste. We are now creatures of the greater, heavenly realm who now, because of our union with Christ, think and work and speak in spiritual categories. Again, Lloyd-Jones says that the Christian "is lifted up into an entirely new 'thought realm.' And he judges everything now in the light of it. He has a new standard of values; he assesses things in an entirely different way. What he wants to know about anything now is, not what sort of a 'kick' he will get out of it, not what sort of pleasure will it bring him; but rather, what is its value to his soul?" –The carnal mind asks, "Will it make me happy?" the spiritual mind asks, "Will it glorify God? Does it expand His kingdom in my heart and in

this world?”

More than that, the Christian recognizes that he belongs more to heaven than he does to earth. This is derived from the key phrase in heavenly places, which relates to the kingdom of heaven as opposed to the kingdoms of this world or the kingdom of Satan. We now exist within the sphere of God's kingdom; we're under its law; we have in Christ a title to its privileges and blessings and possess its spirit, no matter how humble the measure. Though we may occupy the lowest place of this kingdom, living in the “burbs” of the heavenly city or the other side of the tracks, we are still in it! Again, this is by our union with Christ. Apart from that union we wouldn't even be aware of God's kingdom, let alone be a part of it. We would adjust our thoughts of heaven (such as they might be) to our worldly way of thinking, rather than the other way around.

3. Seated with God in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. The last of these three coined words carries the thought of what it means to be united with Christ to the highest peak, showing that we're not only raised in Him but that we have also been seated with Him in heaven next to God the Father. The verb is in an aorist or past tense. It means that we have already been made to sit with God in Christ. That is our position now. That is where we have arrived, that is where we now exist and thus, we are to live accordingly.

There are many aspects of this. The seat next to God in which we have been seated with Christ is a throne, which means that we reign with Him. We're extensions of Christ's presence and authority in the world. This is the seat described in [Ps 110:1](#), “The LORD said to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool’”. This seat speaks of victory. It involves security, privilege, rejoicing, accomplishment. Just think of the privilege and the responsibility. We, as believers, are the only ones who can show Christ to the world. If they want to see physical evidence of the love and power of Jesus Christ, they will only see it in the lives of those who claim to carry His name!

Still, it's possible that this is not what Paul chiefly had in mind. As powerful as these new words are I think Paul had an even more wonderful concept in mind when he talks about us being seated with Christ. Remember the beautiful account of the Last Supper included by the apostle John in his Gospel? Remember how he describes himself as reclining next to Jesus?

As John describes it, Jesus had announced that one of the 12 would betray him, and Peter, disturbed at this revelation, motioned to John to ask Jesus which of the disciples he was speaking about. John then wrote of himself, “Then, leaning back on Jesus’ breast, he said to Him, ‘Lord, who is it?’” (Jn 13:25). Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.” (26). He then dipped the bread and gave it to Judas Iscariot. John was seated by Jesus and was therefore the one who received the revelation.

Now read [Eph 2:6-7](#). That place, in Christ at the right hand of the Father, is the place of *intimacy* and *revelation*. It is where God opens up His heart. And notice: It is where we are *now*. We are seated with God in Christ in the heavenly realms now. Now God is speaking to us intimately. This is the great privilege Paul had chiefly in mind as he composed this portion of his letter to the Ephesians.

What are we to make of this great truth? How should we respond? First, you must ask the obvious question: have I been made alive with Christ? Has God put His new principle of life within me? Do I sense a new spiritual disposition in all I do? Am I born again? If you can’t answer these questions with a confident yes, by all means seek after God until you can. This is what Christianity truly is. Christianity is not just doctrine or a sense of having been forgiven or even believing that God will forgive you. Christianity is Christ—Christ alive in His people, Christ in us. No one who has been made alive with Christ can ever be the same afterward. No one who has been united to Christ can ever again die to God or take up with old sins as before.

2<sup>nd</sup>, have you been raised with Christ so that your orientation is now heavenly, rather than being only earthbound? If you are a Christian, you must think of things in relationship to God. You must know yourself to be a member of His kingdom and responsible to His laws. You must live for Him and represent Him wherever He sends you.

Finally, have you been seated with God in Christ in the heavenly realms? That is, have you made your true, blessed, and intimate home with God? Do you talk to Him there? Does He talk to you? That is a far more intimate place than what Adam and Eve experienced in the garden. Yes, they met with God face to face but only at certain times. We have the unique ability to be seated in His presence constantly, to have access to His wisdom and

guidance every minute of every day. The question is – do we avail ourselves of this blessing of intimacy or do we neglect it.

That's what abiding in Jesus really means. It refers to conscious decisions or choices in living the Christian life. When Jesus says: Abide in Me, He's talking about the will, about the choices, the decisions we make. We must choose to do things which expose ourselves to Him and keep ourselves in contact with Him. This is what it means to abide in Him. We've been placed in Christ by the Holy Spirit. Now we must choose to maintain a healthy relationship by the decisions we make—decisions to expose ourselves to His Word in order to learn about Him, and to relate to Him in prayer where we converse with Him. If we do that, we are fulfilling this active, necessary decision of the will to obey His Word, to do what He says, and to stay in touch with Him. 😊