

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

CHRISTOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ

UNIT 8: THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Lesson 27

Union with the Risen Christ

Dead, Buried, and Raised with Him

The Believer's Participation in Christ's Resurrection

Key Texts: Romans 6:3–11; Ephesians 2:4–6; Colossians 3:1–4; Philippians 3:10–11, 20–21

“That I May Know Him and the Power of His Resurrection” — The Most Personal Expression of the Resurrection's Significance

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SERIES VERSE

*“For we do not preach ourselves
but Christ Jesus as Lord,
and ourselves as your bond-servants
on account of Jesus.”*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:5, NASB 1995

INTRODUCTION

The move from Lesson 26 to Lesson 27 is the move from the objective to the subjective, from what the resurrection means in the comprehensive theological and cosmic sense to what it means for the individual believer in the most personal and existential sense. Lesson 26 established the resurrection's significance as vindicating the Son's identity, confirming the atonement's acceptance, grounding the believer's justification, defeating death, inaugurating the new creation, and guaranteeing the future bodily resurrection. These are realities of immense theological weight, and the congregation that understands them will have a deeper appreciation of the resurrection than most. But there is a dimension of the resurrection's significance that is even more intimate, more personally transforming, and more immediately practical in the daily life of the believer: the union with the risen Christ through which the believer participates in the resurrection not merely as a future hope but as a present reality.

The doctrine of union with Christ is, in the judgment of many Reformed theologians, the most comprehensive and the most central of all the benefits of the gospel. Calvin called it the 'principal hinge on which religion turns.' John Murray described it as the 'central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation.' It is the reality that makes the gospel not merely an offer to be accepted but a life to be lived, the reality that makes the benefits of Christ's work not merely legal credits to be received but participatory realities to be inhabited. When the New Testament says that the believer is united to Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, it is not speaking metaphorically about an attitude of identification; it is declaring the most real and most consequential fact about the believer's existence: they are, by the Spirit, genuinely and personally united to the one who died and rose, and the history of that death and resurrection has become, in the most theologically precise sense, their own history.

This lesson develops the doctrine of union with the risen Christ under six headings: the nature and the ground of union with Christ; the believer's death and burial with Christ (Romans 6:3–6); the believer's resurrection with Christ and its present reality (Romans 6:11; Ephesians 2:4–6; Colossians 3:1–4); the ethical implications of the resurrection union (Colossians 3:1–17); the experiential dimension of the resurrection union in Paul's own account (Philippians 3:10–11); and the eschatological completion of the union in the transformation of the resurrection body (Philippians 3:20–21). The lesson closes with the doxological observation that union with the risen Christ is not a peripheral theological specialty but the most personally transforming and the most comprehensively life-shaping reality in the entire gospel.

I. THE NATURE AND GROUND OF UNION WITH CHRIST

What Union with Christ Is, How It Is Established, and Why It Is the Center of the Ordo Salutis

A. The Meaning of Union with Christ

Union with Christ is the reality by which the believer is genuinely, personally, and spiritually united to Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit through faith, a union so real that the history of Christ becomes the believer's history, the righteousness of Christ becomes the believer's standing, the death of Christ becomes the believer's death, and the resurrection of Christ becomes the ground and the beginning of the believer's new life. The union is not a metaphor for sympathetic identification or moral imitation; it is the most real description of the believer's spiritual existence available in the New Testament's vocabulary. When Paul says 'I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me' (Galatians 2:20, NASB 1995), he is not describing an attitude he has adopted; he is declaring the most fundamental fact about his own existence as a believer.

The union with Christ has several dimensions that must be distinguished to avoid both understatement and over-statement. It is federal (Christ as the representative Head of the covenant, His actions counted for those He represents), vital (a genuine living connection established by the Spirit, not merely a legal fiction), personal (the union is with the Person of Christ, not merely with the benefits of His work), and transformative (the union progressively shapes the believer into the image of the one with whom they are united). None of these dimensions exhausts the mystery; all of them are present in the New Testament's account. The union is as objective as the legal standing of the justified and as subjective as the personal experience of the indwelling Christ; as permanent as the completed atonement and as progressive as the ongoing sanctification.

B. The Ground of the Union: The Spirit and Faith

The union with Christ is established by the Holy Spirit through faith. 1 Corinthians 6:17 declares: "the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him" (NASB 1995). The Spirit is the bond of the union, it is by the Spirit that the believer is united to Christ, and it is by the Spirit that the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection are applied to the believer personally. Ephesians 1:13–14 identifies the Spirit as the seal and the down payment of the full inheritance: "in Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance" (NASB 1995). The Spirit's sealing in Christ is the instrument of the union; faith is the means by which the union is received and appropriated. The union is not produced by faith (as if faith created the union) but received through faith (as if faith were the hand that grasps the living reality of union that the Spirit has established).

II. DEAD AND BURIED WITH HIM: ROMANS 6:3–6

The Baptismal Identification with the Death and Burial of Christ and What It Means for Sin's Dominion

A. The Baptismal Union and Its Meaning

Romans 6:1–11 is the most sustained and the most theologically precise account of the believer's union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection in all of the New Testament. Paul's argument begins with a rhetorical question that the doctrine of justification by grace alone provokes: "Shall we continue in sin so that grace may increase?" (v. 1, NASB 1995). The answer is not merely 'no, that would be immoral' but something far more theologically penetrating: 'no, that would be impossible for someone who has genuinely died to sin.' "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3–4, NASB 1995).

The baptismal language of Romans 6:3–4 does not refer to a saving power in the water of baptism but to the spiritual reality that baptism signifies and seals: the union of the believer with Christ in His death and burial. The phrase 'baptized into Christ Jesus' (εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐβαπτίσθημεν, eis Christon Iēsoun ebaptisthēmen) designates the union itself, the incorporation into Christ that is the reality of which baptism is the visible sign. And the incorporation into Christ includes the incorporation into His history: the believer who is united to Christ is united to the Christ who died, was buried, and rose. The death and burial of Christ become the believer's death and burial in the most real sense that the doctrine of federal representation and vital union can express.

B. The Old Self and the Breaking of Sin's Dominion

Romans 6:6 provides the theological account of what the union with Christ in His death accomplishes for the believer's relationship to sin: "knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin" (NASB 1995). The 'old self' (ὁ παλαιὸς ἄνθρωπος, ho palaios anthrōpos) is the person as constituted in Adam, under sin's dominion, bound to the old creation order of death and condemnation. The crucifixion of the old self with Christ is not the gradual improvement of the old person but the definitive judicial termination of the old person's identity and standing, the old self dies with Christ so that the new self may rise with Christ.

The purpose clause is critical: 'in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.' The union with Christ in His death is the ground of the believer's freedom from the enslaving dominion of sin. Sin's dominion over the human creature was rooted in the legal claim of guilt: the person who owes the penalty of sin is subject to sin's continuing claim. The cross removes the legal claim; the union with Christ in the cross removes it for the believer specifically and personally. The justified believer is no longer 'under sin' in the legal sense that makes sin the master and the person the slave. The dominion has been broken, not the presence of sin (which persists in the present age), but its ruling power, its legal authority, its claim to mastery.

III. RAISED AND SEATED WITH HIM: EPHESIANS 2:4–6 AND COLOSSIANS 3:1–4

The Present Reality of the Resurrection Union and Its Cosmic Dimension

A. Ephesians 2:4–6: Already Raised and Seated

The resurrection dimension of the union with Christ is expressed with stunning boldness in Ephesians 2:4–6: “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (NASB 1995). The three verbs are compound forms constructed with the preposition σύν (syn, ‘together with’): συνεζωοποίησεν (made alive together), συνήγειρεν (raised together), συνεκάθισεν (seated together). Each describes the believer’s participation in the corresponding act of Christ: made alive with the one who was made alive, raised with the one who was raised, seated with the one who was seated at the Father’s right hand.

The most theologically striking element of Ephesians 2:4–6 is the use of past-tense verbs for realities that are not yet experientially complete for the believer. The believer is not yet physically raised and seated in the heavenly places in the bodily, visible sense; but the apostle uses aorist verbs (completed past action) for these realities. The explanation is the union itself: because the believer is united to Christ, the history of Christ is the history of the believer. The one who is united to the risen, ascended, seated Christ is described as already risen and seated, not in the experiential or eschatological sense (that awaits the full harvest at the last day) but in the covenantal, representational, and spiritual sense that is the present reality of union. The believer’s identity is already located in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus; their ultimate destiny is already determined by the position of the one with whom they are united.

B. Colossians 3:1–4: The Imperative Built on the Indicative

Colossians 3:1–4 provides the explicit bridge from the indicative of the resurrection union to the imperative of the resurrection life: “If you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory” (NASB 1995). The structure is characteristic of Pauline ethics: the imperative (‘keep seeking’, ‘set your mind on’) is grounded in and flows from the indicative (‘if you have been raised up with Christ,’ ‘for you have died,’ ‘your life is hidden with Christ’).

The phrase ‘your life is hidden with Christ in God’ is among the most personally profound descriptions of the believer’s present existence in all of the New Testament. The believer’s true life,

the life that is most real, most permanent, and most determinative of who they are, is not the life visible to the world or even fully visible to themselves but the life that is hidden with Christ in God, secure in the one who is seated at the Father's right hand, awaiting the revelation that will come when Christ is revealed. The present life of the believer is, in the most theologically real sense, the life of the risen Christ being lived in and through them, a life that is real now but not yet fully manifest, hidden now but to be revealed in glory.

"For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." | "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings."

COLOSSIANS 3:3; PHILIPPIANS 3:10, NASB 1995

IV. WALKING IN NEWNESS OF LIFE: THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESURRECTION UNION

Romans 6:11–14 and Colossians 3:5–17, The Resurrection Life Expressed in Resurrection Ethics

A. The Reckoning of Romans 6:11

Romans 6:11 provides the hinge between the indicative of the resurrection union and the imperative of the resurrection life: "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (NASB 1995). The word 'consider' (λογίζεσθε, logizesthe) is the same accounting/reckoning vocabulary used in Romans 4 for the imputation of righteousness: 'consider,' 'reckon,' 'count as true.' Paul is not instructing the believer to conjure a feeling or to discipline themselves into a new attitude; he is instructing the believer to reckon as true the reality of what the union with Christ has accomplished. You have died to sin in your union with Christ's death; reckon it so. You are alive to God in your union with Christ's resurrection; reckon it so. The ethical imperative of the resurrection life begins not with renewed effort but with a renewed reckoning, a mental and spiritual taking-account of what the union with Christ has already made true.

Romans 6:12–14 develops the ethical consequence: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (NASB 1995). The ethical instruction is framed by the resurrection reality: 'present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead.' The resurrection is not merely a doctrine to believe but a reality to inhabit, the basis on which the members of the body are offered to God as instruments of righteousness rather than to sin as instruments of unrighteousness.

B. The Resurrection Ethics of Colossians 3

Colossians 3:5–17 develops the most extended account of resurrection ethics in all of the New Testament, building directly on the resurrection union of 3:1–4. The structure is explicit: because your life is hidden with Christ in God (3:3), therefore ‘consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed’ (3:5, NASB 1995). The same ‘consider as dead’ that the resurrection union of the indicative demands becomes the ‘consider as dead’ of the practical resurrection ethics of the imperative. The vices to be put off (3:5–9) are the life of the old self, the life of the person as constituted in Adam and in the present age; the virtues to be put on (3:10–17) are the life of the new self, the life of the person as constituted in Christ and in the new creation.

The clothing metaphor of Colossians 3:9–14 (‘having laid aside the old self... and having put on the new self’) is the most vivid expression of the resurrection ethics: the believer is not working on improving the old self but has put it aside entirely (it died with Christ) and is putting on the new self that is ‘being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him’ (v. 10, NASB 1995). The renewal of the image, the restoration of the image of God that sin had defaced, is the positive ethical content of the resurrection life. And the culminating virtue of Colossians 3:14 (‘beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity’) identifies love as the garment that holds all the others together, the resurrection life, like the life of the risen Christ Himself, is characterized above all by self-giving love.

V. THAT I MAY KNOW HIM: THE EXPERIENTIAL DIMENSION OF THE RESURRECTION UNION

Philippians 3:10–11, Paul’s Most Personal Expression of the Resurrection’s Significance

A. The Goal of All Paul’s Striving

Philippians 3:10–11 provides the most personally intimate and the most experientially searching expression of the resurrection’s significance in all of Paul’s letters: “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (NASB 1995). The verse appears in the context of Paul’s great renunciation of all his previous credentials (his Pharisaic pedigree, his legal righteousness, his zeal) in favor of the surpassing value of knowing Christ (vv. 7–8). Everything Paul has counted as gain he has counted as rubbish in order that he might gain Christ and be found in Him, and the goal of this gaining and being-found-in is expressed in verse 10: ‘that I may know Him.

The phrase ‘that I may know Him’ (τοῦ γινῶναι αὐτόν, tou gnōnai auton) is remarkable because Paul already knows Christ, he has met the risen Lord on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1–9), been caught up to the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2–4), and received extraordinary direct revelations of the divine purpose. And yet he speaks of knowing Christ as a goal still being pursued, still being desired, still beckoning him forward. The knowing he speaks of is not propositional knowledge about Christ but

the progressive, deepening, personal, experiential communion with the risen Christ that is the ultimate goal of the Christian life and that will be finally consummated in the resurrection at the last day. It is the knowing of 1 John 3:2, ‘we will see Him just as He is’, begun now in the resurrection union and completed then in the beatific vision.

B. The Power of the Resurrection and the Fellowship of Sufferings

The three elements Paul names as the content of the knowing he seeks, ‘the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death’, are not three separate experiences to be pursued sequentially but a single integrated experience of resurrection-shaped existence. The power of the resurrection (δύναμιν τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ, *dynamin tēs anastaseōs autou*) is the transformative energy of the risen Christ working in and through the believer, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead (Ephesians 1:19–20) working in the believer for sanctification, for witness, and for the sustaining of faith through suffering. The fellowship of sufferings (κοινωνία παθημάτων αὐτοῦ, *koinōnian pathēmatōn autou*) is the participation in the pattern of Christ’s suffering that characterizes the life of all who are united to the crucified and risen One. The resurrection power is not experienced apart from the fellowship of sufferings; the two belong together in the experience of those who are united to a Christ who both died and rose.

Paul’s yearning in Philippians 3:10–11 is the most personal and the most searching expression of what union with the risen Christ looks like in the experience of the one who is most deeply formed by it. It is not the yearning of the spiritual beginner for their first encounter with the divine; it is the yearning of the mature apostle, after decades of the most extraordinary experience of Christ available to any human being, for deeper, more personal, more intimate, more transforming participation in the life of the one who rose from the dead. The resurrection union is not a static possession but a dynamic and progressive reality, always more than what has been experienced, always drawing the believer forward into a deeper conformity with the one who died and rose.

VI. DOXOLOGICAL CONCLUSION: THE ESCHATOLOGICAL COMPLETION OF THE UNION

Philippians 3:20–21, The Body of Humble State Transformed Into Conformity with the Body of His Glory

The resurrection union is not completed in the present age. The believer is already united to the risen Christ, already raised and seated with Him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), already dead to sin and alive to God (Romans 6:11), and already living the hidden life that will be revealed with Him in glory (Colossians 3:3–4). But the union is not yet experientially and bodily complete. The resurrection that has already occurred in the Spirit will be completed at the last day in the body; the hidden life that is already real will be revealed in glory; the conformity to the image of the Son that is already being worked out in sanctification will be perfectly accomplished in glorification.

Philippians 3:20–21 provides the eschatological completion: “Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself” (NASB 1995). The transformation is specific: not the absorption of the believer into the divine being (the Creator-creature distinction remains eternal) but the conformity of the believer’s body to the glory-body of the risen Christ. The resurrection union, which is spiritual and invisible in the present age, will be expressed bodily and visibly in the age to come when the one who is already united to Christ in His resurrection receives the resurrection body that conformity to His glory requires.

Romans 8:29–30 places the bodily resurrection within the golden chain of the divine purpose: “those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren” (NASB 1995). The final conformity to the image of the Son, what Philippians 3:21 describes as the transformation into conformity with the body of His glory, is the eschatological completion of the union that began at regeneration and has been progressively expressed in sanctification. The firstborn among many brethren is the risen Christ; the brethren who bear His image in their bodies are the community of the resurrection, the full harvest of the firstfruits, the new humanity of the new creation.

This is the most personal, the most comprehensive, and the most doxologically exalting account of what the resurrection of Jesus Christ means for the individual believer: not merely that a man rose from the dead two thousand years ago, but that the one who rose has united every one of His people to Himself in His death and resurrection, has already raised them and seated them with Him in the heavenly places, is even now forming them into His image through the power of the resurrection, and will complete the work at His return by transforming the body of their humble state into conformity with the body of His glory. The believer is not merely saved from sin; they are united to the risen Lord. The resurrection is not merely a historical fact to be affirmed and an apologetic credential to be deployed; it is the living, personal, progressively transforming reality at the center of every believer’s existence. ‘That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection’ (Philippians 3:10, NASB 1995), this is the goal, the hope, and the daily grace of those who are united to the one who rose. To Him who raises the dead and who will raise those who are His at His coming, to Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Key Texts: *Romans 6:3–14; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 1:13–14; Ephesians 2:4–6; Colossians 3:1–17; Philippians 3:7–11, 20–21; Romans 8:29–30; 1 Corinthians 6:17; Romans 5:10*

THEOLOGICAL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Union with Christ	The comprehensive theological reality by which believers are genuinely, personally, and spiritually united to Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit through faith, so real that the history of Christ (death, burial, resurrection) becomes the believer's history, the righteousness of Christ becomes the believer's standing, and the life of Christ becomes the principle of the believer's new existence. Described by Calvin as 'the principal hinge on which religion turns' and by John Murray as 'the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation.' Its dimensions: federal (Christ as representative Head), vital (a genuine living connection by the Spirit), personal (union with the Person, not merely the benefits), and transformative (progressively conforming the believer to the image of Christ). Not a metaphor for sympathetic identification but the most real description of the believer's spiritual existence.
Baptized into His Death (Romans 6:3)	Paul's formulation in Romans 6:3 for the union with Christ in His death that baptism signifies: 'all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death.' The phrase 'baptized into Christ Jesus' designates the union itself, the incorporation into Christ in whom the believer shares His history. The baptismal language does not teach saving power in the water of baptism but uses the sacramental sign to describe the spiritual reality it signifies: the believer's genuine incorporation into the death and burial of Christ such that Christ's death becomes the believer's death, Christ's burial becomes the believer's burial, and Christ's resurrection becomes the ground and the beginning of the believer's new life.
Old Self (Ho Palaios Anthrōpos)	Greek: 'the old person,' 'the old man' (Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9). The person as constituted in Adam, under sin's dominion, belonging to the old creation order of death and condemnation. Paul declares that the old self 'was crucified with Him' (Romans 6:6), not is being crucified gradually but was crucified, definitively and completely, in the union with Christ's death. The crucifixion of the old self is not the gradual improvement of the old person but the definitive judicial termination of the old person's identity and standing, so that the new self may arise. The new self (Colossians 3:10: 'the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him') is the person as constituted in Christ, bearing the restored divine image.
Syn- Compound Verbs (Ephesians 2:5–6)	Three compound verbs in Ephesians 2:5–6 constructed with the Greek preposition syn ('together with'), each expressing the believer's participation in a corresponding act of Christ: synezōpoiesen ('made alive together with'), synēgeiren ('raised together with'), and synekathisen ('seated together with'). The use of past-tense (aorist) verbs for these realities establishes their present covenantal and spiritual actuality: the believer is already, in the most real theological sense, raised and seated with Christ in the heavenly places, not yet

Term	Definition
	in the bodily, eschatological sense that awaits the last day, but in the union-with-Christ sense that makes Christ's history the believer's history.
Logizesthe (Romans 6:11)	Greek: 'reckon,' 'count,' 'consider as true' (second person plural present imperative of <i>logizomai</i>). Used in Romans 6:11 for the ethical implication of the resurrection union: 'consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.' The same accounting vocabulary used in Romans 4 for the imputation of righteousness. Paul is not commanding a feeling or an attitude to be manufactured; he is commanding the believers to reckon as objectively true the reality of what the union with Christ has accomplished. The ethical imperative of the resurrection life begins with this reckoning: count true what is already true, you have died to sin in your union with Christ's death; you are alive to God in your union with Christ's resurrection.
Hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3)	Paul's description of the believer's present existence in Colossians 3:3: 'your life is hidden with Christ in God.' The believer's true life, the life that is most real, most permanent, and most determinative, is not the life visible to the world or fully experienced in the present age but the life that is secure in the risen, seated Christ, awaiting the revelation of glory at His return. Hidden (<i>ἀποκεκρυμμένη</i> , <i>apokekrymmenē</i>) does not mean absent or unreal; it means present and secure but not yet fully manifest. The revelation of this hidden life awaits the appearing of Christ (v. 4: 'When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory').
Fellowship of Sufferings (Philippians 3:10)	The participation in the suffering-pattern of Christ (<i>κοινωνίαν παθημάτων αὐτοῦ</i> , <i>koinōnian pathēmatōn autou</i>) that Paul names alongside 'the power of His resurrection' as an integrated dimension of the knowing of Christ. Not masochistic suffering for its own sake but the pattern of Christ-shaped existence in the present age: the one who is united to the crucified and risen Christ participates in both the power of the resurrection and the fellowship of the suffering. The two belong together in the present age: the resurrection power is the sustaining energy through the fellowship of sufferings; the fellowship of sufferings is the context in which the resurrection power is most clearly expressed. Being conformed to His death is not an end in itself but the means toward attaining the resurrection from the dead.
Power of His Resurrection (Philippians 3:10)	The transformative energy of the risen Christ working in and through the believer (<i>δύναμιν τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ</i> , <i>dynamin tēs anastaseōs autou</i>), the same power that raised Jesus from the dead (Ephesians 1:19–20) working in the believer for sanctification, witness, and the sustaining of faith through suffering. Not merely an impersonal energy but the personal, dynamic work of the risen Christ through the indwelling Spirit. The power of the resurrection is the experiential dimension of the union with the risen Christ: the believer who is united to the one who conquered death participates in the conquering power,

Term	Definition
	receiving the energy of the resurrection life for the demands of the resurrection ethics.
Conformity to the Body of His Glory (Philippians 3:21)	The eschatological completion of the resurrection union described in Philippians 3:21: Christ ‘will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory.’ The transformation (μετασχηματίζει, metaschēmatizei, ‘transform,’ ‘transfigure’) is specific: conformity with the body of Christ’s glory, the resurrection body He already possesses. The believer’s future resurrection is not absorption into the divine being (the Creator-creature distinction remains) but bodily transformation into the image of the risen Christ. Romans 8:29: predestined to be conformed (συμμόρφους, symmorphous) to the image of the Son. The completion of the union is the completion of the image: the believer bearing in body the likeness of the firstborn from the dead.
Indicative and Imperative	The grammatical-theological structure of Pauline resurrection ethics: the imperative (moral command) is always grounded in and flows from the indicative (statement of objective reality). In Romans 6: the indicative (‘you have died to sin,’ ‘you are alive to God’) grounds and generates the imperative (‘do not let sin reign,’ ‘present yourselves to God’). In Colossians 3: the indicative (‘you have been raised with Christ,’ ‘you have died,’ ‘your life is hidden with Christ’) grounds the imperative (‘seek the things above,’ ‘set your mind,’ ‘consider the members as dead’). The resurrection ethic is not achieved by disciplined effort imposed on the old self but expressed through the reckoning of what the union with Christ has already made true. Effort follows identity; obedience follows grace.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that union with Christ is not a theological specialty for advanced students but the foundational reality of every believer’s existence, the reality that makes all other salvific benefits real and personally applicable. The justification is not merely a legal transaction with a distant God but the standing of one who is united to the Son in whom the Father is well-pleased. The sanctification is not merely moral improvement but the resurrection power of the risen Christ working in and through one who is united to Him. The future glorification is not merely a hoped-for reward but the inevitable eschatological completion of a union that has already begun and that the Spirit has already sealed. Every dimension of the believer’s salvation is shaped by and expressed through the union with Christ.

We must also believe that the ethical implications of the resurrection union are grounded in the objective reality of the union rather than in renewed moral effort applied to the unreformed old self. Romans 6:11's 'consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God' is the most important ethical instruction in the entire New Testament, precisely because it grounds the ethical life in the indicative of the resurrection union before it makes any imperative demand. The congregation that understands that they are already dead to sin in their union with Christ's death, and already alive to God in their union with Christ's resurrection, will live ethically from a fundamentally different posture than the congregation that is trying to improve themselves by disciplined moral effort alone.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

Let Philippians 3:10 become the governing desire of your devotional life: 'that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.' Paul's desire after decades of the most extraordinary experience of Christ is not satisfaction with what he has but an ever-deepening yearning for more of the risen Christ. The resurrection union is not a static possession but a dynamic and progressive reality. The believer who knows most about Christ is most aware of how much more there is to know; the believer who has experienced most of the resurrection power is most hungry for more. Let this be the mark of a genuine resurrection life: not contentment with the present level of union but a holy restlessness for the fullness of the knowing that awaits the resurrection.

Desire a congregation whose self-understanding is shaped not by their failures and their sin but by the reality that their life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3) and that they are already seated with Him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). The congregation that knows where its true life is, hidden with the risen Christ in God, secure from every accusation, awaiting the revelation of glory, will face the present age with a fundamentally different posture than the congregation that understands itself primarily in terms of its failures, its struggles, and its need to try harder. Identity determines ethics; and the identity of the believer is the identity of the one who is united to the risen Lord.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Preach Romans 6:1–14 as the foundational text for the congregation's understanding of the Christian life. The question 'shall we continue in sin so that grace may increase?' is the question that every serious congregation will eventually ask in one form or another; Paul's answer, not 'no, that would be immoral' but 'no, that would be impossible for one who has genuinely died with Christ', is the most theologically profound and the most practically liberating answer available. The congregation that understands Romans 6 will understand the Christian life not as a disciplinary program to be endured but as the outworking of a resurrection reality to be inhabited.
- Use the indicative-imperative structure of Pauline resurrection ethics as the governing framework for your pastoral counseling and your preaching on sanctification. The most

common failure in evangelical sanctification preaching is to move directly to the imperative without establishing the indicative: to tell people what they must do without first declaring what God has already made true in their union with Christ. The Romans 6:11 pattern, reckon first, then present yourselves, is the pattern of resurrection ethics: the imperative flows from the indicative, and the reckoning of the indicative is itself the most important ethical act.

- Teach Colossians 3:1–17 as a systematic curriculum for resurrection ethics in a small group or Sunday school setting. The passage provides the most complete account of resurrection ethics in all of the New Testament: the resurrection indicative (3:1–4), the putting off of the old self (3:5–9), the putting on of the new self (3:10–17), and the crown virtue of love (3:14) that holds everything together. A teaching series that works through this passage verse by verse, with sustained attention to the indicative that grounds each imperative, will give the congregation a comprehensive and christologically grounded account of what the resurrection life looks like in practice.
- Preach Philippians 3:7–11 as Paul’s most personal and most searching account of the resurrection union and its progressive, experiential character. The sermon’s central pastoral aim: the congregation should leave knowing that ‘that I may know Him’ is not the desire of the spiritual novice but the governing aspiration of the most mature apostle, and that the resurrection union is not a destination to be reached and rested at but a dynamic, progressive, ever-deepening reality that beckons the believer forward into greater conformity with the risen Christ until the transformation is complete at the last day.
- Connect the resurrection union explicitly to the observance of the Lord’s Supper. The Supper ‘proclaims the Lord’s death until He comes’ (1 Corinthians 11:26), but the proclamation of His death is inseparable from the proclamation of His resurrection, and the sharing in the bread and the cup is a visible expression of the union with Christ through which the believer participates in His death and resurrection. A brief preparatory teaching before the Supper that grounds the observance in the reality of union with Christ, ‘we are doing this as those who have died with Him and risen with Him, whose life is hidden with Him, and who await His return when we shall be revealed with Him in glory’, will transform the Supper from a memorial into a participation.

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OPENING QUESTION

1. Calvin called union with Christ ‘the principal hinge on which religion turns,’ and John Murray described it as ‘the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation.’ Before studying this lesson, how

central was the doctrine of union with Christ in your own theological understanding and in your preaching? Had you ever explicitly taught or preached on the believer's union with Christ in His death and resurrection as a distinct doctrinal topic? If not, what was the primary framework through which you understood and communicated the Christian life, and how might the resurrection union framework enrich or correct it?

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DO THE TEXTS SAY?)

2. Read Romans 6:1–14 carefully. Identify the specific rhetorical question Paul begins with (v. 1), and the specific theological ground on which he refuses the conclusion implied by the question (vv. 2–6, not 'that would be immoral' but 'that would be impossible for one who has died'). Identify the three acts of Christ's passion narrative with which the believer is united in this passage (death, burial, resurrection) and the specific verb forms Paul uses for each. What is the specific purpose of the union with Christ in His death stated in verse 6 ('in order that...')?
3. Read Ephesians 2:1–10. Identify the condition of the believer before the saving act of God (vv. 1–3: dead, following the prince of the air, children of wrath). Identify the three syn- compound verbs of verses 5–6 and what each declares about the believer's union with the specific acts of Christ. Why does Paul use past-tense (aorist) verbs for these realities when the believer is not yet experientially or bodily raised and seated? What does the phrase 'in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus' (v. 6) describe about the believer's present spiritual location?
4. Read Colossians 3:1–17. Identify the indicative statements in verses 1–4 that ground the imperatives that follow (at least three distinct indicative claims). Identify the things to be 'put off' (vv. 5–9) and the things to be 'put on' (vv. 10–17). What is the relationship between the 'old self' and the 'new self' in verses 9–10, and what is the new self 'being renewed' toward? What is the crown virtue of verse 14, and how does Paul describe its function in the community?
5. Read Philippians 3:4–14. Identify all the credentials Paul counts as 'loss' and 'rubbish' in verses 4–8 and explain why he makes this valuation. In verse 10, identify the three dimensions of the knowing of Christ that Paul names. What is the specific grammar of verse 11 ('in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead'), is Paul expressing uncertainty about whether he will be raised, or is he expressing the direction and the goal of his present striving? How does verse 12 ('Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect') characterize the knowing of Christ as an ongoing progressive pursuit?

INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT MEAN?)

6. The lesson distinguishes between the federal, vital, personal, and transformative dimensions of union with Christ. How do each of these four dimensions appear in the specific texts examined in this lesson (Romans 6:3–6; Ephesians 2:4–6; Colossians 3:1–4; Philippians 3:10–11)? Which dimension

is most prominent in each text? And which dimension of the union is most underdeveloped in your congregation's understanding of the Christian life, and what specific text would most effectively address that underdevelopment?

7. The lesson presents Ephesians 2:5–6's past-tense (aorist) verbs for being raised and seated with Christ as describing the present covenantal and spiritual reality of the union, not the future bodily and eschatological reality. How does this reading navigate between two errors: (a) over-realized eschatology (the believer is already fully raised in every sense, with no remaining future resurrection awaiting); and (b) under-realized eschatology (the resurrection is entirely future, with no present spiritual reality of being raised with Christ)? How do Ephesians 2:6 and Colossians 3:3–4 together hold the present and the future dimensions in proper balance?

8. The lesson presents Colossians 3's 'putting off / putting on' language as describing not the gradual improvement of the old self but the decisive termination of the old self's identity (it died with Christ) and the progressive expression of the new self. How does this theological account of sanctification differ from: (a) a purely moralistic account (try harder to be better); (b) a purely antinomian account (the Christian has no obligations because they are under grace)? What is the specific role of the 'reckoning' of Romans 6:11 in the process of sanctification, and why is this reckoning the first and most important ethical act?

9. The lesson presents Philippians 3:10's 'fellowship of sufferings' as inseparable from 'the power of His resurrection' in the experience of the resurrection union. How does the pairing of resurrection power and suffering fellowship in this verse challenge both the prosperity gospel (power without suffering) and a resignation-to-suffering approach (suffering without the resurrection power)? What does the integrated experience of resurrection power and suffering fellowship look like in the specific pastoral context of the congregation you serve?

10. The lesson identifies union with Christ as 'the most comprehensive and the most central' of all the benefits of the gospel. Do you agree? Could you argue that another doctrine, justification by faith alone, for example, or the indwelling of the Spirit, deserves to be called more central? Or does the doctrine of union with Christ actually encompass and ground those other benefits in a way that makes it genuinely central? What is the relationship between union with Christ and each of the following: justification, sanctification, adoption, glorification?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT DEMAND OF US?)

11. The lesson recommends preaching Romans 6:1–14 as the foundational text for the congregation's understanding of the Christian life. Design the outline of such a sermon: what is the main point, what are two to three major moves, and what is the pastoral aim? How would you communicate the theological depth of the indicative-imperative structure (especially the reckoning of Romans 6:11) in

a way that is accessible and personally engaging for a non-theologically trained congregation? What specific pastoral needs in your congregation make this sermon most urgently needed right now?

12. The lesson recommends teaching Colossians 3:1–17 as a systematic curriculum for resurrection ethics. Design the outline of a four-week small group or Sunday school series on this passage: what does each week cover, what is the main point of each session, and what is the arc of the series from week one to week four? How would you ensure that the indicative (vv. 1–4) is thoroughly established before moving to the imperative (vv. 5–17), that the congregation understands what is already true about them before they are told what to do about it?

13. Philippians 3:10's desire, 'that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection', is described in this lesson as the governing desire of a mature apostle rather than the yearning of a spiritual beginner. What does this characterization reveal about the nature of spiritual maturity in the resurrection union? In your own experience, has the desire to know Christ deepened or become more routine as your ministry has progressed? What specific practices, disciplines, or postures most effectively sustain and deepen the desire for the experiential knowing of the risen Christ that Philippians 3:10 describes?

14. This lesson completes Unit 8 on the Resurrection of Christ and with it the second major arc of the Christology series (Units 6–8: the Threefold Office, the Atoning Work, and the Resurrection). Looking ahead to Units 9–11 (the Ascension, Session, and Intercession; the Return of Christ; and the Conclusion), what dimensions of the resurrection's significance do you anticipate will be most directly relevant to the ascension and session (Unit 9)? And how does the doctrine of union with the risen Christ, the most personal dimension of the resurrection's significance, prepare the ground for the corporate and eschatological dimensions of the series' remaining lessons?

PRAYER FOCUS

Open this lesson's prayer time with a slow, personal reading of Galatians 2:20, the most compressed and the most personally intimate statement of union with Christ in all of the New Testament: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (NASB 1995). Read it slowly, attending to each clause as a personal reality rather than a doctrinal proposition: 'I have been crucified with Christ', my old self is dead, terminated, no longer the ruling identity. 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me', the life I now live is the life of the risen Christ lived in and through me. 'I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me', the one whose death I died and whose life I live is the one who loved me specifically, personally, and gave Himself for me specifically, personally. Let the group sit with this verse long enough for it to become personal rather than merely theological.

Spend time in worship structured around the four dimensions of the resurrection union explored in this lesson. Adore Christ for the union with His death: for the crucifixion of the old self, the breaking of sin's dominion, and the freedom that the death-union provides. Adore Christ for the union with His resurrection: for the already-present reality of being raised and seated with Him in the heavenly places, for the hidden life that is real and permanent and awaiting its revelation in glory. Adore Christ for the union with His resurrection power: for the energy of the risen life working in and through the body for sanctification, witness, and the sustaining of faith through suffering. And adore Christ for the promise of the eschatological completion: for the certainty that the body of humble state will be transformed into conformity with the body of His glory at His return.

Pray through the resurrection union's specific pastoral implications for your congregation. Bring before the Father those in your congregation who are struggling with the dominion of sin, who feel enslaved to patterns of thought and behavior that they cannot break, and bring for them the Romans 6:11 liberating truth: they have died to sin in their union with Christ's death, and the dominion of sin over them has been broken. Pray that the Spirit would enable the reckoning that Paul commands. Bring before the Father those whose self-understanding is governed by their failures and their shame, and bring for them the Colossians 3:3 identity: their life is hidden with Christ in God, secure and permanent and glorious, awaiting the revelation at His return. And bring before the Father the corporate yearning of the congregation for the deeper knowing of the risen Christ that Philippians 3:10 describes.

Close with Philippians 3:10–11 spoken together as the corporate yearning of a community united to the risen Christ, not the satisfaction of those who have arrived but the desire of those who know how much further there is to go:

"That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."

PHILIPPIANS 3:10–11, NASB 1995

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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