

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

SOTERIOLOGY

The Doctrine of Salvation

By Grace Alone, Through Faith Alone, In Christ Alone, To the Glory of God Alone

UNIT 3: UNION WITH CHRIST

The Ground of All Saving Benefits

Lesson 9

The Holy Spirit as the Bond of Union

How the Spirit Unites Believers to Christ

Without the Spirit There Is No Union; Without Union There Is No Salvation

“If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him”

Key Texts: Romans 8:9–11; 1 Corinthians 6:17; 12:12–13; Ephesians 3:16–17; John 14:16–20; 1 John 3:24

“The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.”

1 Corinthians 6:17, NASB 1995

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Introduction

Lesson 8 established that union with Christ is the organizing center of the entire doctrine of salvation, the meta-category within which every saving benefit is received and every element of the *ordo salutis* finds its proper relation. It traced the four dimensions of that union (federal, mystical, vital, and experiential), developed the believer's participation in Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, and showed from 1 Corinthians 1:30 that everything the believer has, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption, she has in Christ, and in Christ alone. But a question of the first importance was left for this lesson to answer: how does the union happen? By what agency and through what instruments is a dead, blind, enslaved sinner actually joined to the living, risen, ascended Christ? The answer is the doctrine of this lesson: the Holy Spirit is the bond of union, the divine Person who establishes, maintains, and will ultimately consummate the believer's connection to Christ.

Without the Spirit, there is no union; without union, there is no salvation. This is not merely a logical inference drawn from the structure of the *ordo salutis*; it is the explicit teaching of Romans 8:9: "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him" (NASB 1995). The Spirit's indwelling is not an optional enhancement for the spiritually ambitious believer who wants something more than ordinary Christianity; it is the *sine qua non* of belonging to Christ at all. Those who have the Spirit are in Christ; those who do not have the Spirit are not His. The mark of union with Christ is precisely and exclusively the presence of the Spirit of Christ within. This means that the study of the Holy Spirit's role as the bond of union is not a Pneumatological specialty topic peripheral to soteriology; it is the answer to the most fundamental question in the whole of the doctrine of salvation: how do the benefits Christ accomplished in history reach the individual sinner in her personal experience?

This lesson will develop six major areas: the Spirit as the efficient cause of union (how the Spirit accomplishes the union); the Spirit's indwelling as the mark and means of belonging to Christ (Romans 8:9–11); the relationship between the Spirit and faith (the Spirit as the efficient cause of the faith that is the instrument of union); the Spirit and the Word as the ordinarily appointed instruments through which the union is effected; the corporate dimension of the Spirit's uniting work (how the Spirit's union with Christ necessarily creates union with all who are in Christ, forming the body); and the eschatological completion of the union (the Spirit as the down payment whose presence guarantees the consummation of everything the union has begun). Throughout, the governing conviction is that the Spirit's role in union with Christ is not secondary or auxiliary but absolutely indispensable, the direct, sovereign, life-giving work of the third Person of the Trinity without which the Father's election and the Son's atonement would never reach a single human soul.

A note about the Trinitarian architecture of this lesson in relation to the preceding ones. Lesson 4 traced the covenant of redemption, in which each Person of the Trinity assumed distinct covenantal obligations: the Father to elect and send, the Son to accomplish redemption, the Spirit to apply it. Lessons 5–7 unpacked the Father's eternal election and its missionary implications. Lesson 8 explored the nature and dimensions of the union with Christ that the Son accomplished and into which the Spirit brings every elect believer. This lesson completes the Trinitarian account by focusing on the Spirit's specific role as the one who executes the covenant's application: who takes what the Father planned and the Son purchased and actually delivers it, with sovereign effectiveness, to the specific souls for whom it was ordained. The study of the Spirit as the bond of union is the study of the Trinitarian application of salvation reaching its most personal and most intimate expression.

One further orientation: the relationship between this lesson and Lessons 10 and 11 (the external and internal call; regeneration) is important to understand from the outset. The Spirit's work as the bond of union is the meta-category that encompasses all three of those subsequent topics. The Spirit's uniting of the believer to Christ occurs through effectual calling (Lesson 10) and is inseparable from regeneration (Lesson 11); faith is the Spirit-given instrument through which the union is personally received and experienced. This lesson establishes the agency (the Spirit) and the broad mechanics (through the Word, producing faith); the next unit will trace the specific operations of that agency in greater detail.

I. The Spirit as the Efficient Cause of Union

The Third Person Who Makes the Accomplished Redemption Personally Ours

A. *The Distinction Between Efficient and Instrumental Cause*

Reformed theology has consistently employed the philosophical categories of efficient cause and instrumental cause to clarify the precise role of the Spirit in union with Christ, and the distinction is of significant pastoral and theological importance. The efficient cause of union is the agent who produces the union by sovereign action, the Holy Spirit, who moves sovereignly to establish the bond between the sinner and the risen Christ. The instrumental cause of union is the means through which the union is personally received and experienced, faith, which the Spirit Himself produces in the sinner's heart and through which the sinner consciously and personally lays hold of Christ as He is offered in the gospel. The Spirit acts; faith receives what the Spirit's action makes possible; and the union is the result of both together, with the Spirit as the primary agent and faith as the Spirit-given instrument.

This distinction has profound implications for how the Christian life is understood and experienced. The person who has understood the Spirit's role as the efficient cause of union knows that the union she enjoys with Christ is not primarily the achievement of her own faith but the sovereign gift of the Spirit who gave her the faith through which the union is received. Her faith is real, her receiving is genuine, and the union is truly hers in the full sense of personal ownership and experience, but the faith itself is the Spirit's gift (Ephesians 2:8–9; Philippians 1:29), and the union it appropriates is the Spirit's work. This means that the ground of her confidence in the union's stability is not the quality of her own faith but the faithfulness of the Spirit who both gave the faith and established the union through it. The union is secure not because her faith is strong enough to maintain it but because the Spirit who initiated it is committed to completing what He began.

Calvin, in a passage of Institutes III.1.1 that is directly relevant here, writes: "First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us. For this reason, he is called 'our Head'... and we are said to be 'ingrafted into him'... But all these things are obtained by faith. Yet since we see that not all indiscriminately embrace that communion with Christ which is offered through the gospel, reason itself teaches us to climb higher and to examine into the secret energy of the Spirit, by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits." The "secret energy of the Spirit", the sovereign, invisible, effectual work of the third Person of the Trinity, is precisely what this lesson examines. It is this energy that makes the difference between a Christ who is offered to all and a Christ who is received by some; between a redemption accomplished in history and a redemption applied in the heart; between election in eternity and salvation in time.

The distinction between efficient and instrumental cause also guards against two opposite errors in the theology of union with Christ. The first error is that of making faith the efficient cause of union, treating the union as the product of the sinner's faith, as if the sinner's believing brought Christ into her life in a way that was not previously possible. This error places the decisive causal act with the creature rather than with the Spirit and is, at its root, the Arminian confusion of the *ordo salutis*: as if faith preceded and produced regeneration, rather than regeneration preceding and producing faith. The second error is that of treating union with Christ as an automatic

or impersonal process, as if the Spirit were merely a mechanical force that operates without reference to the personal faith that is its instrument. The biblical account requires both: the Spirit's sovereign efficiency and the believer's genuine, personal, Spirit-produced faith.

B. The Spirit as the Agent of the Pactum's Application

The Spirit's role as the efficient cause of union with Christ is, in the broader context of this series, the execution of the covenantal commission He accepted in the pactum salutis (Lesson 4). In the eternal covenant of redemption, the Father elected a people, the Son undertook to redeem them, and the Spirit undertook to apply that redemption to each specific individual in the appointed time and through the appointed means. The union the Spirit establishes in the heart of each believer is the Spirit's fulfillment of his covenantal commitment, the personal, effective delivery of what the Father planned and the Son purchased to the specific person for whom it was ordained.

Titus 3:4–6 provides the most compressed Pauline account of this Trinitarian movement of grace in which the Spirit's applying role is most clearly visible: "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior" (NASB 1995). The structure is unmistakably Trinitarian: the kindness and love of God (the Father's compassion in the revealed will), the saving that was accomplished not by human deeds but by divine mercy, the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit (the Spirit's applying work), and the Spirit poured out richly through Jesus Christ (the Son as the one through whose accomplished redemption the Spirit is given). The Spirit is the instrument of the Father's mercy and the agent of the Son's applied redemption, and the specific form of His applying work is the regeneration and renewing that bring the sinner into union with Christ.

John 3:5–8 adds the dimension of the Spirit's sovereign unpredictability in the accomplishment of this work: "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (vv. 6–8, NASB 1995). The Spirit moves as He wills, not randomly or capriciously, but sovereignly, according to His own purposes and the covenantal commission He has accepted, unconstrained by human prediction, religious preparation, or social expectation. The new birth comes when the Spirit acts. Its occurrence cannot be forced by human methods, predicted by human wisdom, or reversed by human sin. It is the sovereign gift of the One who moves as He wills, and those who are born of the Spirit are those upon whom the Spirit's sovereign mercy has been pleased to move.

II. The Spirit's Indwelling as the Mark and Means of Union

Romans 8:9–11 and the Defining Condition of Belonging to Christ

A. The Indispensable Condition: Romans 8:9

Romans 8:9 is the most direct and most decisive statement in the New Testament about the relationship between the Spirit's indwelling and union with Christ: "However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the

Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him” (NASB 1995). The verse divides the entire human race into two categories with absolute precision: those in whom the Spirit dwells and those in whom He does not. The first category belongs to Christ; the second does not. There is no third category, no gradations of partial belonging, no provisional membership contingent on future spiritual development. You have the Spirit and belong to Christ, or you do not have the Spirit and do not belong to Him.

The pastoral weight of this verse cuts both ways, and both directions deserve attention. On the side of assurance: if the Spirit dwells in you, you belong to Christ, not tentatively, not provisionally, not subject to review depending on the consistency of your subsequent performance, but actually and definitively. The condition is the Spirit’s indwelling, not the quality of the indwelt person’s spiritual life. The most inconsistent, struggling, imperfect, doubt-ridden believer who nevertheless has the Spirit of God dwelling in her belongs to Christ as surely as the most mature, assured, fruitful saint. On the side of warning: those who have no Spirit have no Christ. The nominal Christianity of religious profession without the Spirit’s indwelling is not a less healthy form of genuine belonging; it is the absence of belonging entirely. Romans 8:9 is both the most comforting text in the New Testament for those who genuinely have the Spirit and one of the most searching for those who must ask whether they do.

The question that verse 9’s diagnostic naturally raises is: how does one know whether the Spirit dwells within? Paul’s answer in Romans 8:9–16 is comprehensive and pastorally precise. Those in whom the Spirit dwells have their minds set on the things of the Spirit rather than the things of the flesh (v. 5–6); they experience the Spirit bearing witness with their spirit that they are children of God (v. 16); they cry out “Abba, Father”, the intimate address of genuine adoption (v. 15). John’s letters add further evidences: love for the brethren (1 John 3:14), confession of Christ (1 John 4:2), obedience to God’s commands (1 John 3:24), and the overcoming of the world through faith (1 John 5:4). The evidences are not a checklist for earning assurance; they are the natural and necessary fruits of the Spirit’s indwelling, signs that the tree is alive, not conditions that make it alive.

The interchangeability of language in Romans 8:9–10 between “the Spirit of God,” “the Spirit of Christ,” and “Christ in you” is theologically significant and requires careful handling. Paul moves in these verses from “if the Spirit of God dwells in you” (v. 9a) to “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him” (v. 9b) to “if Christ is in you” (v. 10) without apparent awareness of any inconsistency. The Reformed account of this fluidity is not that Paul identifies the Spirit and Christ as the same divine Person, the Trinitarian distinction between the Son and the Spirit is maintained throughout the New Testament and is presupposed by Paul’s own prayers (e.g., Ephesians 3:14–17, where the Father, Christ, and the Spirit are distinguished). Rather, Paul’s language reflects the organic intimacy of the Trinitarian indwelling: where the Spirit is, Christ is; where Christ dwells, He dwells through and with and in the Spirit. The Spirit is the bond through which Christ indwells, and to say that the Spirit dwells in you is to say that Christ dwells in you, because the Spirit’s presence is the presence of the Trinitarian God and specifically the presence of Christ mediated through the Spirit.

B. The Spirit and the Resurrection of the Body, Romans 8:11

Romans 8:11 extends the significance of the Spirit’s indwelling from the present spiritual reality of belonging to Christ to the future physical reality of the body’s resurrection: “But 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” (NASB 1995). The argument is a *fortiori*: if the Spirit who raised Christ from the dead dwells in you, then the very power that reversed the death of the Son of God is resident within you, and that

power will not leave your mortal body permanently dead. The same Spirit who is the present bond of your union with the risen Christ is the guarantee and the agent of your own bodily resurrection.

The theological significance of this verse for the doctrine of union with Christ is profound. The union with Christ is not a merely spiritual reality that will be dissolved at death and reconstituted as a purely immaterial existence in eternity; it is a union that encompasses the whole person, including the body, and whose consummation includes the resurrection and glorification of the body that currently houses the Spirit. The Christian's hope is not the escape of an immortal soul from a mortal body but the resurrection and transformation of the whole person, body and soul, into the image of the glorified, risen Christ. And the ground of that hope is precisely the Spirit who is already dwelling in the body, already animating the mortal flesh with a life that comes from beyond itself, and who will on that final day complete the work He has already begun by bringing the mortal body into the likeness of the resurrection body of Christ (Philippians 3:21).

III. The Spirit, Faith, and the Word

The Triad Through Which Union with Christ Is Effected

A. The Spirit as the Efficient Cause; Faith as the Instrument

The Reformed theological tradition has developed, with considerable precision, the relationship between the Spirit, faith, and union with Christ in terms of efficient and instrumental causation. The Spirit is the efficient cause of union, the sovereign agent who acts to establish the connection between the believer and the risen Christ. Faith is the instrumental cause of union, the means through which the Spirit's establishing work is personally received and consciously appropriated by the believer. The Spirit acts sovereignly; faith receives what the Spirit makes available; and the union is the result of both together. This distinction preserves both the sovereignty of grace (the union is the Spirit's work, not the sinner's achievement) and the genuine personal character of the union (it is appropriated through the sinner's own genuine, Spirit-given faith).

The phrase "through faith" appears repeatedly in the New Testament in connection with union with Christ: "So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Ephesians 3:17, NASB 1995). This text is particularly instructive because it presents faith as the instrument through which the indwelling of Christ, the very reality that Romans 8:10 describes as the consequence of the Spirit's indwelling, is experienced in the believer's heart. The Spirit effects the union; faith is the faculty through which the union is personally received and lived. The same Spirit who produces the faith (Ephesians 2:8–9) also effects the union through the faith He produces, so that the entire process, from the production of faith to the establishment of the union through faith, is the Spirit's sovereign work from beginning to end, received through the genuinely personal instrument of the believer's own believing.

The relationship between the Spirit and faith has further implications for the question of the *ordo salutis*. In the Reformed ordering, the Spirit's work of regeneration logically precedes the faith through which the union with Christ is consciously received. The Spirit first makes the dead sinner alive (regeneration), producing in her the capacity and desire for faith; the regenerate sinner then exercises the Spirit's gift of faith; and through that faith the union with Christ is personally received and experienced. The union with Christ in its deepest ontological sense, the Spirit's establishing of the connection between the believer's person and the person of the risen Christ, is therefore logically prior to the believer's conscious faith, which is the instrument through which the union is

received into conscious experience. The Spirit's uniting work precedes and produces the faith; the faith receives and appropriates the union. Both are the Spirit's sovereign gift.

This account of the relationship between the Spirit and faith also explains why the New Testament can speak of union with Christ both as something that is established by sovereign divine act (the Spirit joining the sinner to Christ in regeneration) and as something that is maintained and deepened through ongoing faith, prayer, and the use of the means of grace (John 15:4–5, the abiding in which the Spirit-established union is personally and experientially inhabited). The union is established by the Spirit's sovereign initiative; it is experienced, deepened, and expressed through the ongoing, Spirit-enabled response of faith. Neither the establishment nor the experience is the whole story; both together describe the full reality of what it means to be in Christ through the Spirit's bond.

B. The Spirit and the Word as Ordinarily Appointed Instruments

The Holy Spirit does not ordinarily unite sinners to Christ in a vacuum of pure spiritual immediacy, apart from any external instrument. He works “by and with the Word”, to use the Westminster Confession's language, using the gospel proclamation as the ordinary means through which He effectually calls, regenerates, and joins sinners to Christ. This is the teaching of Romans 10:17 (“faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ”), of 1 Peter 1:23 (“you have been born again... through the living and enduring word of God”), of James 1:18 (“In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth”), and of John 17:17 (“Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth”). The Word is not merely the content of what the Spirit's work is about; it is the ordinarily appointed instrument through which the Spirit accomplishes that work.

The relationship between the Spirit and the Word in the effecting of union with Christ may be described as follows: the Word of God, specifically, the gospel proclaimed and received, is the instrument that the Spirit uses to produce the faith through which union with Christ is personally received. The Word presents Christ and His saving work to the hearing sinner; the Spirit illuminates the Word so that the sinner sees it not merely as information but as the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6); the Spirit simultaneously works in the sinner's heart to produce the regeneration and faith that make the reception of what the Word presents possible; and through that Word-produced, Spirit-given faith, the sinner is personally united to Christ. The Spirit is the power; the Word is the instrument; faith is the response; and union with Christ is the result.

This Word-Spirit nexus in the effecting of union has significant implications for the church's ministry. The preaching of the gospel is not merely an informational activity in which human beings are provided with the data they need to make an informed spiritual decision; it is the Spirit's ordinary instrument for uniting sinners to Christ. When the gospel is faithfully proclaimed, the Spirit is at work in and through the proclamation, using it as the means of effectual calling, regeneration, and the gift of the faith through which union with Christ is received. This is why Paul can write in 1 Corinthians 1:21 that “it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe”, the proclaimed message, however foolish it appears to the wisdom of the world, is the Spirit's chosen instrument for the work that only sovereign grace can accomplish.

The Word-Spirit nexus also guards against two opposite errors in the theology of the Christian life. The first is the error of Word without Spirit, the intellectualist reduction of Christianity to the correct understanding of doctrinal propositions, in which the human intellect becomes the primary instrument of the spiritual life and the sovereign, personal, transforming work of the Spirit is marginalized. The second is the error of Spirit without Word, the

charismatic or mystical reduction of Christianity to immediate spiritual experience, in which the objective content of the gospel is bypassed in favor of a private, subjective connection with the divine. The Reformed tradition has consistently maintained both together: the Spirit always works through the Word, and the Word is always efficacious only as the Spirit attends it with sovereign power. Neither alone is sufficient; together they constitute the full account of how the Spirit unites sinners to Christ through the ministry of the gospel.

IV. One Spirit with Him, 1 Corinthians 6:17

The Intimacy of the Union That the Spirit Establishes

A. The Most Intimate Statement of Union in Paul

First Corinthians 6:17 contains what is arguably the most concentrated and most intimate statement of the Spirit's role in union with Christ in the entire Pauline corpus: "The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him" (NASB 1995). The verse appears in the context of Paul's argument against sexual immorality, specifically, against the Corinthian practice of visiting prostitutes, and the argument he makes is precisely an argument from union with Christ: because the believer's body is a member of Christ's body (v. 15) and the believer is one spirit with the Lord, to join one's body to a prostitute is an act of profound theological incongruity, a violation of the union that defines the believer's most essential identity.

The phrase "one spirit" (*hen pneuma*) has been interpreted in several ways. Some commentators understand "spirit" as referring to the human spirit, suggesting that the union consists in a spiritual unity of disposition and orientation between the believer and Christ. Others understand it as a reference to the Holy Spirit, suggesting that the believer and Christ are united in and by the one Spirit who indwells both, the Spirit being the common bond through which the union is established and maintained. The most theologically satisfying reading combines both dimensions: the Spirit unites the believer to Christ in a bond so intimate that the resulting relationship can only be described as a spiritual oneness, a union of spirit with Spirit that exceeds the categories of ordinary relational description. The language of "one spirit" pushes beyond all lesser analogies to the most intimate form of personal union available in the New Testament's theological vocabulary.

The contrast Paul draws in verses 16–17 is illuminating. Joining oneself to a prostitute produces a "one flesh" union, a physical union of the most intimate bodily kind. Joining oneself to the Lord produces a "one spirit" union, a spiritual union that is even more intimate, more defining, and more comprehensive than the physical. The physical union of one flesh is real but temporary, pertaining to the body which will perish; the spiritual union of one spirit with the Lord is real, eternal, and pertaining to the deepest dimension of the believer's personal identity. This is the union the Spirit establishes: not a formal legal relationship, not a moral association, not a contractual arrangement, but a oneness of spirit that defines who the believer most fundamentally is and that no subsequent act of sin or failure can dissolve, because it is grounded not in the believer's faithfulness but in the Spirit's sovereign bond.

The pastoral use of this verse against sexual immorality also illuminates the broader pastoral function of the doctrine of union with Christ in the Reformed account of sanctification. Paul does not argue against sexual immorality by appealing to legal prohibition alone, or by invoking the threat of divine punishment, or by making a philosophical argument about the harm of such behavior. He argues against it by appealing to who the believer

already is in Christ, one spirit with the Lord, a member of Christ's body, a temple of the Holy Spirit (vv. 19–20). The identity established by the Spirit's union is the ground from which the sanctified life is to be lived; the imperative flows from the indicative; and the power to live the imperative comes from the same Spirit who established the identity. This is the Reformed account of sanctification as the expression of the life of union rather than the achievement of moral self-improvement.

B. Ephesians 3:16–17, Strengthened by the Spirit for Christ's Indwelling

Ephesians 3:16–17 provides Paul's most fully developed prayer for the ongoing deepening of the Spirit's uniting work in the believer's heart: "...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (NASB 1995). The prayer moves from the Father (the source of the glory from which the granting comes) through the Spirit (the agent of the strengthening) to Christ (the One who, through the Spirit's strengthening work, dwells in the believer's heart through faith). The Trinitarian structure of the prayer, Father grants, Spirit strengthens, Christ indwells, is the structure of the Spirit's uniting work described in its dynamic, ongoing, deepening dimension.

The phrase "strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man" describes not the initial establishment of the union (which was accomplished in regeneration by the Spirit's sovereign act) but the ongoing deepening of the union through the Spirit's progressive work of strengthening the believer's inner person. The union with Christ is not a static condition that, once established, requires no further attention or development; it is a living, dynamic relationship that deepens, grows, and becomes more fully experienced as the Spirit continues His sanctifying and strengthening work in the believer's heart. The prayer of Ephesians 3:16–17 is therefore not a prayer for the union to be established for the first time, Paul is addressing people who are already in Christ, but for the union's reality to be more fully inhabited, more deeply experienced, and more completely expressive of the fullness of Christ (v. 19).

The goal of this deepening is stated in verses 18–19: that the believers would be able to comprehend with all the saints the breadth, length, height, and depth of the love of Christ, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, so that they might be filled up to all the fullness of God. The union with Christ is, in Paul's vision, an infinite space whose dimensions exceed the capacity of finite minds to fully comprehend and finite hearts to fully experience. The Spirit's strengthening work is the progressive expansion of the believer's capacity to know and experience what is already available in the union, a lifelong, indeed an eternal, exploration of a love that is wider, longer, higher, and deeper than anything that can be fully grasped in a single lifetime or a single eternity.

V. The Corporate Dimension

Union with Christ Necessarily Creates Union with All Who Are in Christ

A. The Body of Christ, 1 Corinthians 12:12–27

The Spirit's work of uniting individual believers to Christ does not produce a collection of isolated individual-Christ relationships existing in parallel without connection to each other. It produces a body, a single organic corporate entity in which every member is joined to every other member precisely because all are joined to the same Head. First Corinthians 12:12–13 states the principle with unmistakable clarity: "For even as the body is one and yet has

many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (NASB 1995). The one Spirit who unites each individual to Christ is the same Spirit who, in doing so, unites all those individuals to one another in the one body of Christ.

The corporate dimension of union with Christ is not a secondary implication that can be received or set aside according to personal preference; it is intrinsic to the nature of the union itself. To be united to the Head is to be joined to the body; there is no version of union with Christ that does not simultaneously entail union with all others who are in Christ. The independent, churchless Christianity that is a pervasive feature of contemporary evangelicalism, the individual who regards herself as deeply committed to Christ while remaining functionally disconnected from the corporate body of His people, is, from the perspective of this doctrine, a self-contradiction. The Spirit who unites to Christ unites to the church; to be in Christ is to be in His body; and the body cannot be personally inhabited while being corporately rejected.

First Corinthians 12:14–27 develops the organic unity of the body with an extended argument from the diversity of its members’ functions: the eye cannot say to the hand “I have no need of you” (v. 21), and the members that seem weaker or less honorable are not thereby unnecessary or dispensable (vv. 22–24). The Spirit’s placement of each member in the body, “God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired” (v. 18, NASB 1995), is as sovereign and purposeful as His election of each member to salvation. The diversity of the body’s gifts and functions reflects the richness of the Spirit’s distributing work (12:4–11); the unity of the body despite its diversity reflects the Spirit’s uniting work (12:12–13); and both together reflect the corporate expression of the union with Christ that the Spirit has established in every member.

The practical implications for ecclesiology are significant. If the corporate dimension of union with Christ is intrinsic to the union itself, then the church is not a voluntary association of like-minded individuals who have independently come to Christ and subsequently chosen to gather together; it is the corporate body that the Spirit’s uniting work has created, the visible expression of the union with Christ that every member shares. This means that the health, vitality, and integrity of the body, its genuine love, its mutual care, its shared mission, its corporate worship, are not optional features of an institution that exists for the benefit of individual consumers; they are the necessary expressions of a corporate reality that the Spirit has established through His work of uniting each member to the one Head and therefore to each other.

B. John 14:16–20, The Indwelling Spirit as the Continued Presence of Christ

John 14:16–20 provides the Johannine account of the Spirit’s role as the bond of union from the perspective of Jesus’ own promise to His disciples on the night of His betrayal: “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (vv. 16–18, NASB 1995). The promise is breathtaking in its combination of distinction and identification: Jesus promises another Paraclete, a different Person from Himself, the Spirit of truth, and in the same breath promises “I will come to you.” The Spirit’s coming is Jesus’ coming; the Spirit’s presence is the presence of Christ; and the union with Christ that the Spirit establishes is genuinely the union with the Christ who said “I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20, NASB 1995).

Verse 20 ties the promise of the Spirit's indwelling to the structure of the mutual indwelling that Lesson 8 identified as the mystical union's deepest expression: "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." The "that day" is the day of Pentecost, the day when the Spirit is poured out and the disciples enter into the full experience of what the union with Christ means. And the content of what they will know on that day is not primarily a doctrinal proposition but a relational reality: the mutual indwelling of Christ and the disciples in the pattern of the Father's mutual indwelling with the Son. The Spirit's coming is the opening of the believer's experience to participate in the most intimate relationship in the universe, the relationship between the Father and the Son, through the mediating bond of the Spirit who is the Spirit of both.

First John 3:24 and 4:13 provide the Johannine epistolary parallel: "The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us" (3:24, NASB 1995); and "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit" (4:13, NASB 1995). The Spirit is the evidence of the union (He is given to those who are in Christ), the means of the union (He establishes and maintains the bond), and the assurance of the union (His presence is the believer's confidence that she abides in Christ and Christ abides in her). Three roles in one Person: evidence, means, and assurance, a comprehensiveness that reflects the Spirit's indispensable centrality in the whole doctrine of union with Christ.

VI. The Eschatological Completion of Union

What Is Begun in Regeneration Will Be Consummated in Glorification

A. Union as an Eschatological Reality Already and Not Yet

The union with Christ that the Spirit establishes in regeneration is not complete in the present age. It is genuinely real, the believer is genuinely in Christ, genuinely indwelt by the Spirit, genuinely raised and seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:5–6). But it is not yet fully expressed or fully experienced; there is a dimension of the union that awaits the consummation of all things for its final and irreversible realization. This is the eschatological tension that characterizes the whole of the Christian life in the New Testament: the "already" of the union's establishment by the Spirit and the "not yet" of the union's full consummation in glorification. The believer lives in the already of the Spirit's indwelling and the not yet of the body's redemption (Romans 8:23), in the already of adoption as a child of God and the not yet of the full revelation of that sonship in the new creation (1 John 3:2).

The "already" dimensions of the union are fully real and deeply significant. The believer already has the Spirit as the *arrabōn*, the binding down payment of the inheritance to come (Ephesians 1:13–14). She is already one spirit with the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:17). She is already being transformed from glory to glory into the image of Christ by the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18). She already has the Spirit bearing witness with her spirit that she is a child of God (Romans 8:16). She already experiences something of the love of God poured out through the Spirit in her heart (Romans 5:5). These present realities are not incomplete versions of something that will only truly begin in the age to come; they are genuine foretastes of the consummation, real participation in the union that will one day be complete.

The "not yet" dimensions are equally real and equally significant for the believer's hope. The body still bears the marks of the fall, weakness, disease, decay, and ultimately death. The inner person still struggles with the

remnants of indwelling sin. The vision of God is still mediated, not immediate; seen through a glass darkly rather than face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12). The full experience of the union's intimacy, the unhindered, unmediated, face-to-face communion with the triune God in the full glory of the new creation, awaits the resurrection, the final judgment, and the consummation of all things. The Spirit who is the bond of union is the guarantee that the not yet will certainly become the already; His presence is the pledge of a completion that the faithfulness of God makes absolutely certain.

B. We Shall Be Like Him, 1 John 3:2

The most compressed and most luminous statement of the eschatological completion of union with Christ in the New Testament is 1 John 3:2: "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (NASB 1995). The verse moves with characteristic Johannine economy from the present reality of the union ("now we are children of God", a present, certain, indicative reality) through the honest acknowledgment of the union's present incompleteness ("it has not appeared as yet what we will be") to the certain eschatological promise of its consummation ("we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is").

The phrase "we will be like Him" is the eschatological goal of the entire saving work of the triune God, the point toward which the whole of the *ordo salutis* has been moving from the Father's election ("predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son," Romans 8:29) through the Spirit's progressive sanctification ("being transformed into the same image from glory to glory," 2 Corinthians 3:18) to the final glorification of the resurrection ("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," Philippians 3:20–21). The endpoint of the union is Christlikeness in the fullest and most literal sense: not a metaphorical or moral resemblance but a genuine transformation of the whole person into conformity with the image of the glorified Son of God.

The mechanism of this final transformation is, according to 1 John 3:2, the beatific vision: "we will see Him just as He is." The sight of Christ in His full, unveiled, glorious reality, not as He appears in the mediated, indirect ways in which He makes Himself known in this age, but as He actually is in the fullness of His glory, will be the transforming event that completes the union's work. The sight of the glorified Christ will transform those who see Him into His likeness, in the same way that looking into a mirror transforms the reflection to match the original. The Spirit who has been working toward this end in every act of sanctification, every prayer answered, every trial endured, and every promise received, will accomplish in that moment what He has been pursuing across the whole of the Christian life: the full conformity of the redeemed person to the image of the eternal Son.

First John 3:3 draws the practical conclusion that this eschatological hope directly informs the present pursuit of holiness: "And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (NASB 1995). The certain eschatological completion of the union, the confidence that we will be like Him when we see Him, is not a counsel to present passivity but the most powerful motivation available for present sanctification. The person who is certain of where she is going, who knows that the Spirit who indwells her now is moving her toward the Christlikeness that will be hers at the consummation, purifies herself in the present, not to earn the consummation but to live consistently with the trajectory on which the Spirit has placed her and the destiny toward which He is moving her. Eschatological hope, in the Johannine account, is the fuel of present holiness; and the Spirit who is the bond of the union is the power of both.

“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

1 John 3:2–3, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Efficient Cause	In classical philosophy and Reformed theology, the agent who produces an effect by sovereign action. The Holy Spirit is the efficient cause of union with Christ, the divine Person who acts sovereignly to establish the bond between the sinner and the risen Christ. Distinguished from the instrumental cause (faith), which is the means through which the Spirit's establishing work is personally received by the sinner. The Spirit's role as efficient cause establishes that union with Christ is fundamentally the Spirit's work, grounded in sovereign grace rather than human achievement, while the instrumental cause (faith) preserves the genuine personal character of the union.
Instrumental Cause	In classical philosophy and Reformed theology, the means through which an agent accomplishes an effect. Faith is the instrumental cause of union with Christ, the means through which the Spirit's uniting work is personally received and consciously appropriated by the sinner. Faith is itself the gift of the Spirit (Ephesians 2:8–9; Philippians 1:29), so the instrumental cause is produced by the same Spirit who is the efficient cause. This preserves both the sovereignty of grace (the union is established by the Spirit) and the genuine personal character of the union (it is appropriated through the sinner's own, genuinely personal, Spirit-given faith).
Hen Pneuma	Greek: "one spirit." The phrase in 1 Corinthians 6:17 ("the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him") describing the intimacy of the union between the believer and Christ established by the Holy Spirit. Most theologically satisfying when interpreted as referring both to the oneness of spiritual disposition and orientation between Christ and the believer and to the Holy Spirit as the common bond through which the union is established and maintained. The phrase describes the most intimate form of personal union available in the New Testament's vocabulary, exceeding even the "one flesh" union of marriage (1 Corinthians 6:16) in its depth, comprehensiveness, and permanence.
Paraclete	Greek: parakletos, "one called alongside to help", translated in the NASB as "Helper." Jesus' designation for the Holy Spirit in the Farewell Discourse (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The Spirit is promised as "another Paraclete" (allon paraklēton), distinct from Jesus Himself, who is also a Paraclete (1 John 2:1), but of the same kind. The Spirit as Paraclete continues and completes Christ's presence among the disciples: His coming is Christ's coming (John 14:18), His indwelling is Christ's indwelling (v. 20), and His ministry, teaching, convicting, guiding, glorifying Christ (John 14:26; 16:8–14), is the continuation of Christ's ministry through a different divine Person.
Baptism in the Spirit	The Spirit's incorporation of the believer into the body of Christ, described in 1 Corinthians 12:13: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." Distinguished from (though related to) water baptism, which is the outward sign of the same reality. Spirit baptism is the act by which the Spirit joins the individual to the corporate body of Christ, establishing both personal union with the Head and communal union with all the members. The aorist tense ("were all baptized") indicates a completed past event, not an ongoing experience or a second blessing subsequent to conversion.
Beatific Vision	Latin: visio beatifica, "blissful vision." The direct, unmediated, face-to-face vision of God that constitutes the final consummation of the believer's union with Christ and the ultimate happiness of the redeemed in the age to come. Grounded in 1 John 3:2 ("we will see Him just as He is"), 1 Corinthians 13:12 ("face to face"), and Revelation 22:4 ("they will see His face"). The beatific vision is simultaneously the transforming event that completes the believer's conformity to Christ ("we will be like Him, because we will see Him", 1 John 3:2) and the

	eternal enjoyment of the triune God in the fullness of His glory, toward which the Spirit's entire sanctifying work has been moving.
Already / Not Yet	The eschatological tension that characterizes the whole of the New Testament's presentation of salvation: the "already" of what God has accomplished and applied in the present age (the Spirit's indwelling, adoption, justification, the resurrection begun in regeneration) and the "not yet" of what awaits full realization at the consummation (the redemption of the body, the beatific vision, the full manifestation of the children of God). First developed systematically by Geerhardus Vos and Oscar Cullmann. The "already/not yet" framework is indispensable for understanding the eschatological character of union with Christ: the union is genuinely established now by the Spirit, but its full consummation awaits the resurrection and glorification of the whole person.
Word-Spirit Nexus	The Reformed theological principle that the Holy Spirit ordinarily works by and with the Word of God to accomplish His saving purposes, rather than operating apart from or independently of the divinely inspired Scripture. Grounded in Romans 10:17 ("faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ"), 1 Peter 1:23 ("born again... through the living and enduring word of God"), and James 1:18 ("brought us forth by the word of truth"). The Word is the instrument; the Spirit is the power. Both together constitute the ordinary means by which the Spirit effects union with Christ, guarding against both the intellectualist error (Word without Spirit) and the mystical error (Spirit without Word).
Adoption	The gracious act of God by which those who are united to Christ by the Spirit are brought into the family of God as sons and daughters, sharing in the filial relationship between the eternal Son and the Father. Romans 8:14–17 grounds adoption in the Spirit's indwelling: those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God; and the Spirit of adoption causes the believer to cry "Abba, Father" as the Spirit Himself bears witness with the believer's spirit that she is a child of God. Adoption is the relational dimension of union with Christ: to be united to the Son is to be adopted into the Son's family; to have the Spirit of the Son is to have the Spirit of adoption who enacts and authenticates that family membership.
Sanctification, Progressive	The ongoing, Spirit-empowered transformation of the believer in thought, affection, and conduct toward increasing conformity to the image of Christ, described in 2 Corinthians 3:18 as the Spirit's work of transforming "from glory to glory." Distinguished from glorification (the eschatological completion of sanctification at the resurrection). Progressive sanctification is the "not yet" dimension of union with Christ in its present expression: the Spirit who has established the union is now working to bring the believer's character and conduct into consistency with the identity the union has established. It is always real and directional (moving toward Christlikeness) but never complete in this age (1 John 1:8), pointing toward the beatific vision and glorification as its ultimate terminus.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the Holy Spirit is not a theological afterthought or a supplementary spiritual accessory for believers who want something more than ordinary Christianity. He is the indispensable bond of the union that makes salvation personally ours; without Him there is no union, and without union there is no salvation. This belief has practical implications that reach into every dimension of the Christian life. It means that prayer is not an act of attempting to reach a distant God but the address of a person who is already united to the Son by the Spirit who cries within her “Abba, Father.” It means that the struggle against sin is not a lonely moral effort but the Spirit-empowered participation in the death to sin that the union with Christ in His crucifixion has already accomplished. And it means that the Christian life’s moments of greatest fruitfulness, deepest joy, and most sincere worship are not the products of the believer’s own spiritual talent but the overflow of the life of the Spirit who is the living bond of the union with Christ.

We must believe, with equal conviction, that the corporate dimension of the Spirit’s uniting work is not an optional addition to the individual’s private relationship with Christ. The Spirit who unites to Christ unites to the body; to be in Christ by the Spirit is to be in the church by the Spirit; and the member of Christ’s body who lives in functional isolation from the corporate expression of that body has not understood what the Spirit has done in making her a member. The church is not a human institution that Christians may choose to participate in or not according to personal preference; it is the body of Christ that the Spirit has created through His uniting work, and to belong to the Head is to belong to the body. Believe this, and the church will not be a religious service to attend but a family to belong to, a body to serve, and a community whose shared union with Christ is the deepest truth about what you are together.

We must also believe that the eschatological promise of 1 John 3:2, that we will be like Him because we will see Him, is the ultimate horizon of everything the Spirit is presently doing in us. Every moment of sanctification, every answered prayer, every growth in love and holiness and wisdom, is a movement toward that consummation. The Spirit who is the bond of the union now is the same Spirit who will be the agent of the glorification then; and the trajectory from regeneration to glorification is as certain and as unbroken as the faithfulness of the divine Person who began it. This is not a distant hope that has little bearing on the present; it is the eschatological anchor that gives present suffering its proper context (Romans 8:18), present sanctification its proper motivation (1 John 3:3), and present union its proper perspective.

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

The emotional register that the doctrine of the Spirit as the bond of union should produce is one of intimate, personal, Spirit-specific gratitude, the gratitude of a soul that has recognized that everything she is in Christ, she is because the Spirit has been at work in her in ways that are prior to, larger than, and more comprehensive than any spiritual experience she can consciously identify. The Spirit was at work in the preaching she heard before she believed, drawing her toward the Christ who would claim her. He was at work in the regeneration that preceded her conscious faith, making her willing to receive what she could not have desired on her own. He is at work in the sanctification that she may be tempted to attribute to her own spiritual discipline. And He will be at work in the glorification that will complete what He began. The appropriate response to this comprehensive, sovereign,

intimate, and persevering work is not self-congratulation on the quality of one's spiritual life but the specific, personal, joyful adoration of the Spirit who has been and is and will be the bond of the union that makes everything else possible.

Desire the experiential reality of 1 Corinthians 6:17, the awareness of being one spirit with the Lord. This is not primarily an emotional experience, though it may express itself in emotional experience; it is the conscious, faith-based inhabitation of the reality that the Spirit has already established. It is the daily return, through prayer and the Word and the corporate life of the body, to the truth that the risen, ascended, glorified Lord is not distant but intimate, not merely historically related to you through the events of the gospel but personally present in your life through the Spirit who is His living bond with you. Desire this, not as a spiritual experience to be chased after but as the living reality to be received more fully and inhabited more consciously, in the ordinary means of grace through which the Spirit deepens and expresses the union He has already established.

Desire, above all, the eschatological hope of 1 John 3:2 as the governing horizon of the present life. Not the morbid other-worldliness that uses the hope of heaven to escape the responsibilities of the present, but the forward-looking, Spirit-fueled expectation of a consummation that gives the present its proper weight and its proper lightness, its proper weight, because what happens in the present is genuinely moving toward a real and glorious end; its proper lightness, because the worst that the present age can do to the child of God cannot undo the union with Christ whose consummation the Spirit has guaranteed. Desire to live in the light of what you will be, so that the trajectory toward which the Spirit is moving you becomes the governing orientation of everything you do and desire in the present.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Read Romans 8:9–17 carefully as a single argument about the Spirit's indwelling and its consequences. Note the movement from the diagnostic of verse 9 ("if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him") through the life-in-the-Spirit of verses 10–11, to the obligation to put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit (v. 13), to the adoption and assurance of verses 14–17. Ask: in your own experience, which of the evidences of the Spirit's indwelling described in this passage are most clearly present? Which are least clearly present? And what does the Spirit's bearing witness with your spirit that you are a child of God (v. 16) feel like, what is its specific character in your experience, and how does it differ from the self-generated assurance of someone who is simply convinced of her own religious sincerity?
- Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 as a theological account of the church rather than primarily as a practical argument about spiritual gifts. Note that Paul grounds the church's unity in the Spirit's uniting work (v. 13) rather than in human agreement, shared values, or organizational structure. Ask: how does understanding the church as the Spirit's corporate creation, the body that the Spirit has made by uniting each member to the Head and therefore to each other, change the way you relate to your own congregation? Specifically: which members of the body do you find most difficult to honor and serve, and how does the knowledge that they have been placed in the body by the Spirit 'just as He desired' (v. 18) address that difficulty?
- Study Ephesians 3:14–21 as a model for prayer that specifically asks for the deepening of the Spirit's uniting work. Note the Trinitarian structure of the prayer (Father grants, Spirit strengthens, Christ indwells), the specific request (to be strengthened in the inner man so that Christ may dwell in the heart through faith), and the goal (to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge and to be filled up to all the fullness of God). Then use this passage as the template for a specific prayer for yourself and for three other people in your spiritual community: ask the Father to grant, according to the riches of His glory, that they would be

strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith.

- Memorize 1 John 3:2–3 and use it as the eschatological anchor for your present sanctification for one month. Each morning, read the verse and ask: what specific dimension of my present life is most clearly moving in the direction of the Christlikeness to which this verse points? What is most clearly not moving in that direction? And how does the certainty of the consummation (“we will be like Him”) function as the motivation for the present purification (“every one who has this hope fixes it on Him purifies himself”, v. 3)? Report to your study group at the end of the month what you have discovered about the relationship between eschatological hope and present sanctification in your own experience.
- Pray specifically for the Spirit’s work in someone you know who is not yet a Christian. Pray with the specific theological content of this lesson: that the Spirit would use the Word of the gospel, perhaps through your own witness, to produce in that person the regeneration, the faith, and ultimately the union with Christ that only the Spirit’s sovereign, efficient work can accomplish. Notice how this prayer changes your posture toward your own evangelistic responsibility: you are not trying to talk someone into a decision, but asking the sovereign, efficient cause of union to do the work that only He can do, through the means He has ordained, in the life of someone He may have appointed to eternal life.

Key Texts: *Romans 8:9–11, 14–17; 1 Corinthians 6:17; 12:12–27; Ephesians 3:16–17; John 14:16–20; 1 John 3:2–3, 24; 4:13; Titus 3:4–6; John 3:5–8*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Before studying this lesson, how central was the Holy Spirit's specific role in your understanding of your relationship with Christ? Did you have a clear sense of the Spirit as the agent who established the union, or did you primarily think of your relationship with Christ in terms of your own faith, decision, or experience? How does the lesson's claim that "without the Spirit there is no union, and without union there is no salvation" either confirm or reorient your prior understanding?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Romans 8:9–11. In verse 9, Paul uses three different designations for the divine presence being described: "the Spirit of God," "the Spirit of Christ," and by implication in verse 10 "Christ" (in "if Christ is in you"). What does this fluidity of designation reveal about the relationship between the Spirit's indwelling and Christ's presence in the believer? What is the condition stated in verse 9 for "belonging to Christ," and how absolute is the condition (is there any intermediate category between having the Spirit and not having the Spirit)? What is the consequence for the body described in verse 10, and what hope for the body is given in verse 11 and on what grounds?
- Read 1 Corinthians 6:15–20. What is the argument structure Paul uses against sexual immorality in these verses? How does the concept of "members of Christ" (v. 15) ground the moral argument? What contrast does Paul draw between joining oneself to a prostitute (v. 16, "one flesh") and joining oneself to the Lord (v. 17, "one spirit")? In verse 19, what additional dimension of the Spirit's presence does Paul introduce, and how does it reinforce the argument? What is the conclusion of the argument in verse 20, and what does it imply about the relationship between the Spirit's indwelling and the moral accountability of the believer's body?
- Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–13. What claim does Paul make about the relationship between the body of Christ and the Spirit in verse 13? Note the two expressions describing the Spirit's work: "baptized into one body" and "made to drink of one Spirit." What does each expression contribute to the picture of the Spirit's corporate uniting work? What is the scope of the Spirit's uniting work in verse 13 (what groups does Paul say are included in the "all")? How does the corporate dimension of the Spirit's uniting work described in verse 13 relate to the diversity of the body described in verses 14–27?
- Read John 14:16–20. What does Jesus promise in verse 16, and what are the characteristics of the promised Helper (vv. 16–17)? What does Jesus say in verse 18 that directly connects the Spirit's coming to His own coming? In verse 20, what will the disciples know on "that day," and what is the structure of the mutual indwelling described there? How does verse 20's description of the mutual indwelling relate to the larger account of the union between the Father and the Son in John's Gospel (see John 10:38; 17:21)?
- Read 1 John 3:2–3. What is the present reality described in verse 2a ("now we are...")? What is the honest acknowledgment of present incompleteness in verse 2b ("it has not appeared...")? What is the certain future promise in verse 2c ("we know that when He appears..."), and what mechanism of transformation does John identify (the sight of Christ as He is)? What practical consequence does John draw from this eschatological hope in verse 3, and what does the present tense of "purifies himself" suggest about the ongoing, progressive character of the purification motivated by the eschatological hope?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson distinguishes the Spirit as the efficient cause of union with Christ and faith as the instrumental cause. Evaluate this distinction. Does it accurately capture the New Testament's account of the relationship between the Spirit's work and the believer's faith? How does Ephesians 3:17 ("so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith") support the distinction? And how does the fact that the Spirit is also the efficient cause of faith (Ephesians 2:8–9; Philippians 1:29) establish that even the instrumental cause is ultimately grounded in the efficient cause?
- The lesson argues that the fluidity of language in Romans 8:9–10 (moving between "the Spirit of God," "the Spirit of Christ," and "Christ in you") does not reflect Trinitarian confusion on Paul's part but rather the organic intimacy of the Trinitarian indwelling, that where the Spirit is, Christ is, because the Spirit's presence is the presence of Christ mediated through the Spirit. Evaluate this interpretation. Is it exegetically defensible? Does it preserve the Trinitarian distinction between the Son and the Spirit? And how does it illuminate the specific character of the Christian's relationship to both the Spirit and Christ?
- The lesson presents the Word-Spirit nexus, the principle that the Spirit ordinarily works by and with the Word to effect union with Christ, as a guard against both the intellectualist error (Word without Spirit) and the mystical error (Spirit without Word). Which of these two errors do you think is most prevalent in contemporary evangelicalism, and why? What specific pastoral or ecclesiological consequences does each error produce? And how does the Word-Spirit nexus, properly understood, address both without collapsing into either?
- The lesson's treatment of 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 argues that the corporate dimension of union with Christ is intrinsic to the union itself, that to be united to the Head is necessarily to be joined to the body, and that therefore the individualistic, churchless Christianity of much contemporary evangelicalism is a theological self-contradiction. Evaluate this argument. Is it exegetically grounded in the specific claims of 1 Corinthians 12:13? How does the "baptized into one body" of verse 13 establish the corporate character of the Spirit's uniting work rather than treating the corporate dimension as a subsequent, optional implication of the individual union?
- The lesson describes the eschatological tension of the union (already/not yet) and argues that the certain future consummation (we will be like Him, 1 John 3:2) motivates present sanctification (everyone who has this hope purifies himself, v. 3). How does this eschatological motivation for sanctification differ from the motivations that law-based sanctification provides (fear of punishment, desire for reward)? Is the eschatological motivation more or less powerful than legal motivation? And how does the Spirit's role as the bond of union, both in its present "already" dimension and its future "not yet" completion, provide a more comprehensive and more stable motivation for holiness than either law alone or eschatology alone?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- Romans 8:9 provides a diagnostic: those who have the Spirit belong to Christ; those who do not have the Spirit do not belong to Him. Using the evidences that the lesson identifies (Romans 8:5–6, 15–16; 1 John 3:14; 4:2; 3:24; 5:4), conduct an honest self-examination of your own spiritual life. Not the morbid introspection that looks for grounds for doubt, but the honest, Spirit-assisted assessment that looks for the genuine evidence of the Spirit's presence. Which of the evidences are most clearly present in your life? Which are least clear? And what does the specific evidence of the Spirit bearing witness with your spirit (Romans 8:16) feel like, can you identify it as a specific dimension of your experience?

- The lesson argues that the corporate dimension of the Spirit's uniting work makes independent, churchless Christianity a theological self-contradiction. How does this claim land in your specific context? Are you personally tempted toward a form of Christianity that is more individual than corporate? If so, what is driving that temptation (negative experiences with church, preference for private spirituality, cultural individualism, something else)? And how does understanding the church as the body that the Spirit has created through His uniting work, rather than as a voluntary association of like-minded individuals, address the specific root of that temptation?
- The lesson's treatment of 1 Corinthians 6:17 ("one spirit with Him") argues that the identity established by the Spirit's union is the ground from which the sanctified life is to be lived, that the imperative flows from the indicative, and that the power to live the imperative comes from the same Spirit who established the identity. In the specific area of your life where the struggle against sin is most intense, are you fighting from the position of one who is already one spirit with the Lord (fighting from the identity the Spirit has established), or from the position of one who is trying to become worthy of that identity through moral effort? What practical difference does the former posture make to the character and energy of the struggle?
- The prayer of Ephesians 3:16–17 is a prayer for the deepening of the Spirit's uniting work, specifically, for the inner strengthening that allows Christ to dwell more fully and more experientially in the heart through faith. Is this the kind of prayer you regularly pray for yourself and for others? What would it mean to make Ephesians 3:16–19 a regular structure for your intercessory prayers for the people in your spiritual community, praying specifically that the Spirit would strengthen them in the inner person, that Christ would dwell more fully in their hearts through faith, and that they would know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge?

Prayer Focus

Begin this lesson's prayer time with a slow reading of Ephesians 3:14–21, Paul's great prayer for the deepening of the Spirit's uniting work in the church at Ephesus. Read it as what it is: not a theological description of spiritual ideals but a specific, earnest, theologically grounded petition that the apostle brings to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of people he loves. Let the Trinitarian architecture of the prayer orient your own prayer: the Father as the source from whose riches all strengthening comes; the Spirit as the agent of the inner strengthening; Christ as the One who, through the Spirit's strengthening work, comes to dwell more fully in the heart through faith; and the immeasurable fullness of God as the goal toward which the entire movement of grace is directed. Then offer this prayer for yourself and for your congregation.

Pray with specific thanksgiving for the Spirit as the bond of your own union with Christ. Thank Him not in general terms but in the specific terms of what this lesson has developed: that He is the efficient cause of the union that makes you belong to Christ; that His indwelling is the mark that you are His; that He is the One who produced in you the faith through which the union is personally yours; that He has been working by and with the Word to establish and maintain the connection between your soul and the risen Lord; and that He is, at this moment, the living bond between your person and the person of the ascended Christ. Let the specificity of the thanksgiving reflect the specificity of what the Spirit has done.

Pray for the corporate dimension of the Spirit's uniting work, specifically, for the health and vitality of the body that the Spirit has created through His work of joining individual members to the one Head. Pray for your own congregation: that the Spirit who placed each member in the body "just as He desired" (1 Corinthians 12:18) would make each member's sense of belonging to the body as real and as practically expressed as their sense of belonging to Christ. Pray for the specific members of the body whose gifts are least honored, whose burdens are least shared, and whose connection to the rest of the body is most tenuous. Ask the Spirit to deepen the corporate expression of the union that He has already established in every member.

Pray with the eschatological hope of 1 John 3:2 as the governing horizon. Bring before God the people in your life who are struggling most, whose present circumstances are most painful, whose sanctification seems most stalled, whose connection to Christ feels most distant. Remind them, and yourself, that the Spirit who is the bond of their union with Christ is the same Spirit who is moving them toward the consummation of that union in the likeness of Christ at the resurrection. The worst the present age can offer them is not the end of the story; it is one chapter in a story whose final chapter has already been written by the sovereign Spirit who will not leave incomplete what He has begun. Pray for perseverance, for patience, for the eyes to see the present in the light of the eternal, and for the eschatological hope to do in their hearts what John says it always does: fuel the present pursuit of the purity that reflects the One to whom they are moving.

Close with a declaration of Romans 8:15–16 as a corporate expression of the assurance that the Spirit provides: "For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God" (NASB 1995). Speak this not as a theology to be believed in the abstract but as the present, experiential reality of those who have the Spirit bearing witness within them that they belong to God. Let the cry of "Abba, Father" be both the content and the tone of the prayer's close, the intimate, confident, Spirit-borne address of children who know whose they are, because the Spirit who is the bond of their union with the Son has made them children of

the Father in the Son, and they shall be with Him where He is, and they shall see His glory, and they shall be like Him. To the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the God who planned the union, the God who accomplished it, and the God who is the bond of it, be the glory forever. Amen.

“The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.”

Romans 8:16–17, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Romans 8:9–17; 1 Corinthians 6:17; 12:12–27; Ephesians 3:14–21; John 14:16–20; 1 John 3:2–3, 24; 4:13; Titus 3:4–6; 2 Corinthians 3:18

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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