

I. **Union with Christ** - a theological concept which in many respects forms the foundation of all other concepts that deal our salvation. It is by nature of our union with him that we share in the blessings of new birth, justification, sanctification, and glorification. The concept is expressed in various forms throughout Paul's letters, using phrases such as "in Christ," "with Christ," "Christ in you," and so on. Often, Paul's use of the phrase "in Christ" is simply synonymous with being a Christian, but as we'll see, even then it carries this sense of union. It would be impossible for us to exhaustively treat all of the expressions of this concept in such a short time. Instead, I've picked out three ways in which it is expressed and we'll touch briefly on each of those. As with all theological constructions in Paul's letters, this concept of union with Christ has practical significance for the life of the believer.

a. Baptized into Christ – Paul speaks of believers being united with Christ in his death and sharing in his resurrection. Paul describes Christ as having died to sin, and us with him, so that we may now walk as those who have been raised from the dead – living to God.

i. **Romans 6:1-11**

What shall we say then? Are we to remain in sin so that grace may increase? Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may live a new life.

For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be united in the likeness of his resurrection. We know that our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin would no longer dominate us, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. (For someone who has died has been freed from sin.)

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that since Christ has been raised from the dead, he is never going to die again; death no longer has mastery over him. For the death he died, he died to sin once for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you too consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

1. **Practical significance:**

Romans 6:12-13 – Don't let sin reign by obeying it's passions

ii. **Colossians 2:11-13; 3:1-4**

In him you also were circumcised – not, however, with a circumcision performed by human hands, but by the removal of the fleshly body, that is, through the circumcision done by Christ. Having been buried with him in baptism, you also have been raised with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead. And even though you were dead in your transgressions and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he nevertheless made you alive with him, having forgiven all your transgressions....Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Keep thinking about things above, not things on the earth, for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ (who is your life) appears, then you too will be revealed in glory with him.

1. **Practical significance:**

Colossians 2:16 – Don't let anyone pass judgment on you regarding food and drink, or lead you astray with false teaching. You died with Christ and need not submit to those regulations

Colossians 3:5-8 – Since you have died with Christ, put to death what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, covetousness, anger, etc

iii. What are some other practical implications of being united with Christ in his death?

b. United as one body in Christ – all believers are united with Christ and with each other

i. **Romans 12:4-5**

For just as in one body we have many members, and not all the members serve the same function, so we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually we are members who belong to one another.

1. **Practical significance:**

Romans 12:6 – Having different gifts in this body, let us use them

ii. **1 Corinthians 6:14-17**

Now God indeed raised the Lord and he will raise us by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that anyone who is united with a prostitute is one body with her? For it is said, *“The two will become one flesh.”* But the one united with the Lord is one spirit with him.

1. **Practical significance:**

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 – Flee sexual immorality and glorify God in your body

iii. **Ephesians 5:31-32**

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This mystery is great – but I am actually speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

1. **Practical significance:**

Ephesians 5:22-32 – As the church submits to Christ, so the wife should submit to her husband, and as Christ loved the church and died for her, so the husband should love his wife and give himself for her

iv. We see marriage, spiritual gifts, and sexual purity as practical implications of the unity in one body of Christ and believers. What other implications exist?

c. Heirs with him - as the true Israel, Christ has become heir to the promises that God made to Abraham. By nature of our union with him, we share in the inheritance as co-heirs with him.

i. **Galatians 3:27-29**

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female – for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to the promise.

1. **Practical significance:**

Galatians 4 – you are heirs to Abraham’s promise through Christ, so do not submit yourselves to the bondage of the law

ii. **Romans 8:16-17**

The Spirit himself bears witness to our spirit that we are God’s children. And if children, then heirs (namely, heirs of God and also fellow heirs with Christ) – if indeed we suffer with him so we may also be glorified with him.

1. **Practical significance:**

Romans 8:18ff – We have hope in the face of suffering because we

know that as we suffer with him, we will be glorified with him and inherit the promises with him

iii. What are some other implications of this concept of being heirs with Christ?

II. **Suffering** – this concept of suffering with Christ and because of Christ is a pervasive theme in Paul’s letters. This can be attributed to the apostle’s own experiences with suffering, as well as the experiences of Christians he shepherded.

a. Jesus and Suffering - In many ways, Paul seems to have viewed his circumstances in much the same light as Jesus described for his followers on various occasions.

i. **Luke 14:25-27**

Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

ii. **Luke 6:22-23**

“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

iii. **Matthew 10:24-25**

“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.

b. Suffering as an apostle

i. **2 Corinthians 11:23-28**

Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

1. This is part of a larger passage filled with stinging sarcasm, where Paul boasts in his weaknesses and sufferings against those who would promote themselves as apostles because of their strengths. This segment gives us a glimpse into the types of struggles with which Paul had to deal.

ii. **2 Corinthians 4:7-18**

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always

being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

1. Our weakness and suffering demonstrates the power of God, and our being given over to death demonstrates the life of Jesus.
2. Through this God's grace is extending to more and more people
3. Through our suffering our inner self is being renewed day by day
4. Because of this we do not lose heart
5. We also do not lost heart because:
 - a. This affliction is light
 - b. This affliction is momentary
 - c. This affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory

iii. **Colossians 1:24-28**

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

1. John Piper regarding this verse: "the context...suggests that Paul's sufferings fill up Christ's not by adding anything to their worth, but by extending them to the people they were meant to bless. What is lacking in the afflictions of Christ is not that they are deficient in worth or merit, as though they could not sufficiently cover the sins of all who believe. What is lacking is that the infinite value of Christ's afflictions are not known in the world....This is confirmed by the use of similar words in Philippians 2:30 [speaking of Epaphroditus bringing the church's gift to Paul... "complete what was lacking in your service to me"]... The gift to Paul was a gift of the church as a body. It was a sacrificial offering of love. What was lacking, and what would have been grateful to Paul and to the church alike, was the church's presentation of this offering in person. This was impossible, and Paul represents Epaphroditus as supplying this lack by his affectionate and zealous ministry... Christ has prepared a love offering for the world by suffering and dying for sinners. It is full and lacking in nothing—except one thing, a personal

presentation by Christ himself to the nations of the world and the people of your workplace. God's answer to this lack is to call the people of Christ (people like Paul) to present the afflictions of Christ to the world—to carry them from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. In doing this we "fill up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ."... Christ wills to have a personal presentation of his sufferings to the world. And the way he means to offer himself as a sufferer for the world to the world is through his people who, like him, are willing to suffer for the world. His sufferings are completed in our sufferings because in ours the world sees his, and they have their appointed effect. The suffering love of Christ for sinners is seen in the suffering love of his people for sinners."

2. He then provides an example of an indigenous missionary who "walked barefoot from village to village preaching the gospel in India. His hardships were many. After a long day of many miles and much discouragement he came to a certain village and tried to speak the gospel but was driven out of town and rejected. So he went to the edge of the village dejected and lay down under a tree and slept from exhaustion.

When he awoke, people were hovering over him, and the whole town was gathered around to hear him speak. The head man of the village explained that they came to look him over while he was sleeping. When they saw his blistered feet, they concluded that he must be a holy man, and that they had been evil to reject him. They were sorry and wanted to hear the message that he was willing to suffer so much to bring them.

So the evangelist filled up the afflictions of Jesus with his beautiful blistered feet. "¹

c. Suffering as a Christian

i. **Romans 5:2-5**

Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

1. We can rejoice in our suffering because we know that our suffering is developing us and strengthening our hope in Christ.

d. Suffering of creation and the promise of final redemption

i. **Romans 8:18-23**

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole

¹http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TopicIndex/32_Suffering/806_Called_to_Suffer_and_Rejoice_To_Finish_the_Aim_of_Christ's_Afflictions/

creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

1. Creation itself was subject to futility
2. This futility is readily apparent in the world around us
3. It is in bondage to corruption
4. It was subjected by God in hope
5. The redemption accomplished in Christ will result in not only the restoring of the children of God, but also the restoration of the entire creation
6. The current misery is like labor pains that will end in new life
7. We await this final redemption with hope, groaning inwardly, and we can have confidence that the Spirit intercedes for us (v26-27), and that in spite of the apparent futility and much suffering, for those in Christ he is working all things together for good (v28).