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**Justification through Union with Christ
with His Faith Becoming Our Own
into New Creation**

Dr. John DelHousaye
Associate Professor, New Testament
Phoenix Seminary, USA¹

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Introduction

I remember as a child taking in a mosaic and discovering, to my fascination, that many of the shards came from the same plate. The colors and lines of the plate, now broken apart and cemented at different angles, still contributed to the new form of art. Many of us get the same impression from Paul's letters. We see behind his occasional writings a unified vision of God's salvation in Jesus Christ—an icon of the crucified yet resurrected Lord. But this way of seeing comes to us in fragments, albeit as parts of letters with their own coherent structure and beauty.

What follows is my attempt to correlate three shards of this vision—justification, faith, and new creation—with the “mystery” of being in Christ. Without confusing one shard with another, I hope to show that all three are part of God's singular act of redemption. Jesus Messiah is the head of this plan, whose faith and justification are confirmed by God at his resurrection, the beginning of new creation. The Spirit of Christ comes to us in the hearing of faith, so that we no longer live outside of him. We die with him in baptism, and, enlivened by the Spirit, continue to perform his mission of reconciliation, as members of his body, the church. Who we are in Christ, which is presently hidden from us, is already justified and glorified at the right hand of the Father; but until we are found in him at our resurrection, the consummation of new creation, our saving faith in Christ should become the faith of Christ, as we pick up our own crosses and follow him. We shall focus on Paul's argument in Galatians, with some referencing to other letters.

A. Justification

The Hebrew Prophets warn that God will judge nations and individuals at the end of the present age.² God will justify (“declare righteous”) or condemn (“declare guilty”) in response to human righteousness or wickedness.³ The “righteous one” (Hebrew, *tsadik*)

² See, e.g., Isa 3:10-11; 24—27; Zech 14; Joel 3; Mal 4. Ezekiel emphasizes individual accountability (ch. 18). Peter Stuhlmacher provides a good summation of the evidence: *Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective*. With an essay by Donald A. Hagner. Translated by Daniel P. Bailey. Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity Press, 2001, 14-16.

³ This was the basis for the salvation of Noah and his family from the flood (Gen 6:9; 7:1). Abraham makes it the basis for assuaging God's judgment of Sodom (Gen 18:23, 24). See, e.g., Gen 18:25; Exod [Footnote continued on next page ...]

obeys the will of God, thereby demonstrating “faith” or “faithfulness.”⁴ Daniel relates this judgment to a resurrection of the dead:

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (12:2 ESV)

He also introduces a mysterious “son of man,” who shares in the judgment of God:

As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat...the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. [...] with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. (Dan 7:9-14, ESV)

Jesus appropriates, but also universalizes Daniel’s vision:

Amen, amen I say to you that the hour is coming and now is when those who are dead will hear the voice of the son of God. And the ones who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, in the same way he also gave life to the Son to have in himself. And he gave authority to him to practice judgment, because he is the son of man. Do not be astonished by this. For an hour is coming in which all who are in tombs will hear his voice, and will come out—those who did good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who practiced evil deeds to the resurrection of judgment. (John 5:25-29, my translation)

The first Christian hermeneutic allowed Jesus himself to determine the meaning of Scripture.⁵ Whereas Daniel may have had a partial resurrection in view,⁶ now “all who are in tombs” will be judged by the “son of man.” Their justification or condemnation is based on their behavior.

23:7; Ps 1:5, 6; 7:9; 11:5; 37:17. God is “a righteous judge” (Ps 7:11). Note also human judges who are to justify the righteous and condemn the wicked (Deut 25:1; Prov 17:15).

⁴ See Ezek 18:5-9; Gen 38:26. The Torah is righteous (Deut 4:8). On the correlation between righteous and faithful, see Neh 9:33. On the correlation between obedience and righteousness, see Deut 28:1. In contrast, the Exodus generation habitually disobeyed and died in the wilderness because of their faithlessness (Num 14:33; Deut 32:20; 32:51).

⁵ See, e.g., Luke 24:27.

⁶ John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: an introduction to Jewish apocalyptic literature*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 112-13. We find a parallel vision in *1 Enoch* (ch. 104).

1. The Messianic basis of Justification

Paul assumes the necessity of righteousness for justification, but attributes it to faith, not “works of the Torah,” using Genesis 15:6 as a proof text: “Abraham *believed in God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness*” (3:6; see also Rom 4:3).⁷ The apostle reads the verse through the lens of God’s promise to bless all people in Abraham’s seed, Jesus, the Messiah. He maintains that Abraham did nothing to earn this righteousness, except to trust that God would keep his promise.

From this messianic presupposition, the apostle maintains that Jesus “gave himself (over to death) in place of (Greek, *huper*) our sins” (1:3).⁸ The claim would have been meaningful to both a Hellenistic and Jewish mindset.⁹ Greeks and Romans venerated the “good death”—the noble performance of actions for the sake of others, which transcends selfishness.¹⁰ Hyperides notes that Athenian soldiers “gave their lives in exchange for (*huper*) the freedom of the Greeks.”¹¹ Paul claims Jesus’ death provides “freedom” from the enslavement of sin (2:4; 5:1, 13). The Hellenistic-Jewish work, *4 Maccabees* (AD 19-72), presumes that a righteous individual, who suffers undeservedly, merits righteousness for others in his community by suffering the consequences of their sin. Eleazar, one of the martyrs, prays:

You have known, God, [that] while being able to save myself I am dying with burning tortures because of the Torah. Be merciful to your people. Let our punishment suffice on behalf of them. Make my blood their purification, and take my life in exchange [or as a ransom] for theirs. (16:27-29, my translation)¹²

⁷ Wright 2009, 116.

⁸ The Greek preposition *huper* should be translated “in the place of,” with the sense of “representation”: Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond The Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 383-89).

⁹ See Jarvis J. Williams, *Maccabean Martyr Traditions in Paul’s Theology of Atonement: Did Martyr Theology Shape Paul’s Conception of Jesus’ Death?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010).

¹⁰ Theon, *Prosgymnata* 9.25.

¹¹ *Funeral Speech* 9, 16.

¹² The author adds: “They, having become, as it were, a ransom for the sin of our nation. And through the blood of those devout ones and their death as an atoning sacrifice, divine Providence preserved Israel that previously had been mistreated” (17:21-22). See also *1 Macc.* 6:44; 9:10; 13:4; 2 *Macc.* 8:21.

The prayer appears to be ultimately grounded in Isaiah’s song of the Suffering Servant (52:13—53:12):

He bears our sins, and because of us he suffers greatly... He was wounded because of our acts of lawlessness... The Lord gave him over for our sins... He did not practice lawlessness, nor was guile found in his mouth... And the Lord wants to remove [him] from the suffering of [his] soul and to show him the light and to form [him] with understanding, to justify the just one, who serves many well. And he will bear their sins. (3-11 LXX, my translation)

The prophet claims the chosen servant of God helps the “many” to obtain a new right to their existence before God through his innocent, vicarious suffering.¹³ Jesus correlates the visions of Isaiah and Daniel: “The son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give up his life as a ransom in exchange for many (Greek, *lutron anti pollōn*)” (Mark 10:45). As the Suffering Servant-Son of man, Jesus associates himself with a sinful people, and dies in their place, thereby securing their forgiveness. Yet we find in the Jesus Tradition and Paul’s letters the same universalism as with the resurrection: the Messiah’s people are both Jews and the Nations (Gentiles).

2. The Act of Justification

As Jesus unites resurrection with justification, so does Paul: Jesus Messiah was “delivered over (to death) because of our wrongful actions, and was raised from death because of our justification” (Rom 4:25).¹⁴ Jesus came from death, the judgment of sin, into the presence of God the Father, who bestows life to the righteous. The Father resurrects and justifies through his word—a divine “speech act” or “performative utterance” to appropriate the work of J. L. Austin (1911-1960).

3. Already / Not Yet

The resurrection and justification of Jesus Christ is a past event. He is presently glorified at the right hand of God the Father. The early church, including Paul, is therefore able to understand justification as *already* realized in Jesus Christ. Yet G. E. Ladd (1911 - 1982) notes:

¹³ Stuhlmacher *Revisiting Paul’s Doctrine of Justification*, 17.

¹⁴ J. V. Fesko, *Justification: Understanding The Classic Reformed Doctrine* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 264; J. R. Daniel Kirk, *Unlocking Romans: Resurrection and The Justification of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 222; Eberhard Jüngel, *Justification: The Heart of the Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 210-11.

“the resurrection of Christ is the beginning of *the* resurrection as such, and not an isolated event” (1997, 408, emphasis his).¹⁵

Paul and the Galatians had yet to follow Jesus in what we may call “embodied resurrection.”¹⁶ The apostle presupposes the empty tomb in his restatement of an earlier confession (“that he was buried, that he was raised,” 1 Cor 15:4), and goes on to affirm that, like a sown seed, our buried bodies will be raised as “spiritual bodies” (15:35-44).

The extended stay of our bodies in a tomb, in contrast to Jesus’ resurrection on the third day, requires a *not yet* to Paul’s vision of salvation (2:17; see also 6:5, 8). Defending his table fellowship with Gentile sinners, the apostle rhetorically asks: “But if *while seeking to be justified* (Gr. *zētountes dikaiōthēnai*) in Christ we ourselves are also found to be sinners (by some other Jews), then is Christ a servant of sin?” (2:17). In Philippians, he uses the verb “found” in reference to his resurrection:

And I regard [all things to be]¹⁷ excrement, so that I might gain Christ and be found¹⁸ in him not having my righteousness, the (kind) by the Torah, but the (righteousness) through the faith of Christ,¹⁹ the righteousness (granted) by God because of faith, so that I might know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, so that, if possible, I might attain to the resurrecting-out from those who are dead. (Phil 3:8-11, my translation)

It would seem that Paul is contrasting the human court of his opponents in Galatians with the divine court of his future. He later speaks of “the hope of righteousness” (Gr. *elpida dikaiosunē*, 5:5).²⁰ If justification is part of resurrection, it makes sense that Paul would look forward to a future verdict.

¹⁵ Fesko, *Justification*, 264.

¹⁶ Consistent with biblical and contemporary Jewish thought, the apostle appears to have held to a “psycho-somatic” view of human nature. The body does not merely house a soul, but is essential to the nature of a person, who is part of creation.

¹⁷ Several MSS, including the most likely reading of papyrus 61, provide the infinitive.

¹⁸ We find the same verb with an eschatological sense in Epictetus’ teachings (*Discourses* 4.10.11-12). But the philosopher hopes to be justified before the divine because of his faithfulness to reason (14-15). Closer yet still importantly different are anecdotes about rabbis and desert fathers approaching death fearful of God’s displeasure.

¹⁹ For this reading, see below.

²⁰ The substantive shares the same root as the verb “to justify” in Greek, which occurs in the previous verse.

Yet Paul can speak of already being justified (Rom 5:1; 8:30). This is so because Jesus Messiah has gone ahead of his people to save them from their sins. *Paul does not look forward to his own justification, apart from Christ, but hopes to share in the very justification and resurrection of Christ.* From a human perspective, this may appear like two different events. But from a divine point of view there is only one resurrection and justification, with Christ at the beginning of the activity.²¹

B. Faith(fullness) of/in Christ

New Testament scholarship is trending toward reading *pistis Christou* as a subjective or plenary²² genitive.²³ The faith of Christ, expressed in obedience to the will of God the Father, makes salvation for his people possible. Unlike his sinful community, Jesus Messiah is righteous. He is the righteous one, who trusts God for his vindication. He is able to accomplish what all previous (and subsequent) generations of God’s people could not—a good death before a righteous God. Jesus did not force God’s will; but God’s very righteousness would not tolerate the injustice. Death could not win. Jesus dies trusting the righteousness of God.

The main argument against this reading is that Paul does not explicitly mention Jesus’ faith.²⁴ But this ignores the correlations with obedience and righteousness, and is ultimately question-begging: the

²¹ The present righteousness of the believer is “an *eschatological* reality,” notes N. T. Wright, “inaugurated indeed in the Messiah but awaiting its full consummation” (emphasis his): *Justification: God’s Plan & Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 138.

²² There is also the possibility of a “full” or “Plenary” genitive, which convey both an objective and subjective sense. See Mark Reasoner, *Romans in Full Circle: A History of Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 31. My argument allows either sense.

²³ See Gal 2:16 [x2], 20; 3:22; Rom 3:22, 26; Phil 3:9. The same ambiguity persists in the Apostolic Fathers (Ignatius, *To The Romans* Greeting). The subjective reading goes back to at least Origen (Reasoner, *Romans in Full Circle*, 24). Richard B. Hays is largely responsible for stirring up the present debate: *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*. Second Edition (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: Eerdmans; Dearborn: Dove Booksellers, 2002 [1983]). He claims Paul presents Jesus as the subject of our salvation—specifically, his *pistis*, “the power or quality which enables him to carry out his mandate” (115). He summarizes his position: “God is the sender whose purpose to convey blessing to humanity is carried out through the action of a single ‘Subject,’ Jesus Christ” (160). The faithful obedience of Christians continues the story of Jesus’ faithfulness. Yet Faith itself is not a human work (120).

²⁴ Moisés Silva claims the subjunctive reading “faces the insuperable linguistic objection that Paul never speaks unambiguously of Jesus as faithful”: *Philippians*. Second Edition (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic 2005 [orig. pub. 1992]), 161.

phrase under discussion could be an *explicit* reference to Jesus' faith. Paul's expression "the message of faith" may refer to Jesus' fidelity to God's will by dying on the cross.²⁵ Paul uses the same Greek to describe "the faith of our father Abraham" (Rom 4:12; see also 4:5).²⁶ Some also miss the semantic force of *pistis* as trust.²⁷

We are justified by the faith of Jesus Messiah. If we appropriate the subjective or plenary reading, Paul claims:

Knowing that a human is not justified (before God) from works of the Torah, except through the faith of Jesus Christ, we believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified (before God) by the faith of Christ and not from works of the Torah, because from works of the Torah *no* flesh²⁸ *will be justified*. (2:16, my translation)²⁹

Jesus obeys the will of God by dying in the place of Paul and the Galatians (1:4; 2:21). He "became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). As Luke makes clear, he dies with faith: "Father, *into your hands I entrust my spirit*" (Luke 23:46). God responded to his obedience by resurrecting, justifying, and glorifying him (v. 9).

From Faith to Faith

While the Messiah's faith makes justification possible, the hearer of the gospel must also believe "in Christ Jesus."³⁰ Indeed, the faith of Jesus Christ has become the apostle's mode of being: "what I now live in flesh, I live in faith—the (faith) of the son of God" (2:21). Paul extends this reality to all "those who are faithful" (3:22, 26). The Galatians believed after seeing the faith of Jesus Christ displayed on the cross: "O you foolish Galatians! Who cast the evil eye on you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly depicted crucified?" (3:1; see also 1 Cor 1:23). This conforms to the biblical pattern of salvation: people witness God's righteous activity and believe. God

²⁵ For this translation, see Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 129.

²⁶ Many scholars have noted this: see Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 149. Paul also mentions the "the faithfulness of God" (Rom 3:3; see also Col 2:12).

²⁷ For example, Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) argues Jesus did not have faith, because faith involves divine reality beyond human sight, and Jesus could see everything (*Summa Theologiae* 3a.7.3).

²⁸ The Psalm as we have it reads "living thing." Jesus was not justified in the flesh, but in the Spirit—following his resurrection. "No flesh" is justified because all flesh is under the curse.

²⁹ See also Rom 3:21-26.

³⁰ The Greek clearly makes "Christ Jesus" the object of faith.

demonstrated his righteousness at the cross (Rom 1:17; 3:21-26). We learn what faith before God must look like in Jesus Christ.

Immediately after the question, Paul rhetorically asks: “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the Torah or by the message of faith?” (3:2). The Spirit comes in the proclamation of the gospel, and inhabits those who believe the message.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) maintains “Christ is present in the faith itself,” *in ipsa fide Christus adest*.³¹ In *The Liberty of a Christian* (1520), the Reformer writes: “Faith does not merely mean that the soul realizes that the divine word is full of all grace, free and holy: it also unites the soul with Christ.” Paul later refers to “the Spirit of Christ” (4:6), lending credibility to the reformer’s insight. Yet Jesus teaches that Father and Son are also present in the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-31), so that, despite the notional distinction the Lutheran tradition makes between justification and regeneration, with Christ comes the author and another agent of new creation.

C. New Creation

Paul claims Jesus “gave himself” over to death in our place, “so that he might deliver us out from the present evil age (or realm)” (1:3-4; see Col 1:13). He recapitulates the exodus at the end of the letter:

But may it not be that I would boast, except because of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I (through him) to the world. For neither circumcision is anything nor un-circumcision, but new creation. (6:14-15, my translation)

We find numerous claims in Scripture and Second Temple literature that “the present evil age” would transition into “the age to come” (Heb 6:5), when God’s righteousness would prevail.³² Reality would return to ideal, primeval conditions.³³

³¹ Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jensen, eds., *Union with Christ: the new Finnish interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), viii; Tuomo Mannerma, *Christ Present In Faith: Luther’s View of Justification* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2005), 27.

³² Paul’s most immediate influence is the final vision of the Prophet Isaiah (65:8-25 LXX). See also *1 En.* 91.15-17; *2 Esd.* 7.50, 113; *Jub.* 23:23-31.

³³ In a Jewish context, see *Jub.* 1.29; 4:26; *1 Enoch* 72.1; *1QS* 4.25; *2 Bar.* 32.6; 44.12; *4 Ezra* 7.75; for the broader motif, Virgil’s “Fourth *Eclogue*” and the Sumerian myth of Dilmun.

The need for new creation goes back to a curse imposed because of Adam's sin: "Cursed³⁴ is the ground (or earth) because of you (Adam); in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life" (Gen 3:17). After presenting Jesus as the antitype of Adam (ch.5), Paul writes:

For I consider that the sufferings of the present season are not worthy (in comparison) to the coming glory to be revealed to us. For the yearning of creation waits for the revelation of the sons of God (at the resurrection). For creation was subjected to futility—not of its own free will, but through the one who subjected (it) in hope. For the creation itself also will be set free from the slavery of decay into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation is groaning and is co-suffering until now—but not only (creation), but also we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit—we ourselves also are groaning within ourselves, waiting our adoption, the redemption of our body. (Rom 8:18-23, my translation)

The apostle presents the human body as part of suffering creation, awaiting its redemption at the resurrection. While believers are resurrected with Christ in Spirit, our bodies still suffer under the curse. This is not to equate the pre-resurrection body or creation with evil. It frames evil, suffering, and death as a contamination of the good.

The grounding for Paul's gospel is not simply hope in what God might or will do in the future, but follows on what God has already done in Jesus Christ—raising, justifying, and glorifying. *Jesus, the last Adam, went ahead of us into new creation.* Yet Christ unites himself to us in faith, so that "if anyone is in Christ, (he is) new creation. The old things passed away; new things have come into being" (2 Cor 5:17, my translation). The apostle understands Jesus' resurrection as a metamorphosis, the transition from one mode of being to another. Both the inner and outer dimensions of Jesus, the God-man, were resurrected, as evidenced by the empty tomb. Paul hopes that while he is already in union with the inner dimension of the resurrected Christ, enjoying "newness of life" in fellowship through the Spirit of Christ, he may also someday share in the outer dimension of the resurrection, thereby entering fully into new creation.

³⁴ The LXX as we have it employs *epikataratos*. Paul uses the same word at 3:10, citing Deut (27:26; 28:58).

Birth Pains

If the resurrection of Jesus Christ marks the beginning of new creation, his crucifixion reflects the “birth pains” at the end of the present age. The maternal image is common in Jewish apocalyptic literature for the sufferings accompanying the new creation.³⁵ The divine judgment is an expression of the curse, directed towards the woman: “I will greatly multiply your sufferings and groaning. With sufferings you will bear children” (Gen 3:16 LXX, my translation). Jesus describes these birth pains in the Olivet Discourse: There will be earthquakes in various places. There will be famines. These things are the beginning of the birth pains” (Mark 13:44, my translation). The Messiah underwent these sufferings himself, becoming a curse in our place.³⁶ Yet these contractions will continue until new creation.

D. Union with Christ

The realities of resurrection, justification, and new creation impact the believer through union with Christ. John Calvin (1509-1564) provides this context for his discussion of justification and sanctification in the *Institutes*:

How do we receive those benefits which the Father bestowed upon his only-begotten Son—not for Christ’s own private use, but that he might enrich poor and needy men? 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 to us. (3.1.1)³⁷

Through the obedience (faith) of Jesus Christ, many “will be made righteous” (Rom 5:19; see 1 Cor 1:30). Paul claims: “On our behalf, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God *in him*” (2 Cor 5:21, emphasis mine). We are so because of our union with Christ. Yet To be outside Christ, the embodiment of new creation, is to remain under the curse of the present order (1:8, 9).

³⁵ See Isa 13:8; 26:17; Mic 4:9f.; Hos 13:13; Jer 4:31; *1 En.* 62.4; *4 Ezra* [= *2 Esdras*] 4:42; *Targum Psalms* 18.14; *2 Apocalypse of Baruch* 56.6; Rev 12:2; 1 Thess 5:3.

³⁶ See Brant Pitre, *Jesus, The Tribulation, And The End of The Exile* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

³⁷ Commentators rightly point out that this claim undergirds the reformer’s discussion of justification and sanctification: See, e.g., Lewis Smedes, *Union With Christ: A Biblical View of The New Life in Jesus Christ*. Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983 [orig. pub. 1970]), 10.

Paul often uses the phrase “in Christ” (Gr. *en Christō*).³⁸ Scholarship appears to be moving toward the interpretation of being incorporated “into Christ,” which is another metaphor for entering the Kingdom of God.³⁹ Yet Paul seems to make an ontological claim: “I am crucified together with Christ. Now I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (2:19-20). He interprets the union between a husband and wife, when the two “become one flesh” as a type of Jesus and the church (Eph 5:31-32). Calvin refers to a *unio mystica*, but never defines it (3.11.10). He probably shares the concept of a union of wills, with Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 – 1153).⁴⁰ In Sermon 74 on the Song of Songs, the abbot gives a first-person account of experiencing Christ’s presence:

When the Word and Bridegroom entered into me from time to time, his coming was never made known by any signs—by word, or appearance, or footstep. I was never made aware by any action on his part, nor by any kinds of motions sent down to my most inward parts. As I have said, it was only from the motion of my heart that understood he was present. I recognized the power of his might from the way vices were banished and how carnal desires were repressed.⁴¹

Like most Christian mystics, Bernard stops short of a union of essence. We are not absorbed into God or become God, just as a wife is not absorbed into her husband. But we can share the will and power of God, through a union of Spirit (*unitas spiritus*), which Bernard McGinn defines as “a uniting of willing and loving in which the infinite Divine Spirit and the finite created spirit nonetheless always maintain their ontological distinction” (2006, 428). To use Paul’s words, in Christ we are able to “walk by” his Spirit (5:16).

³⁸ The phrase occurs 13 times in Rom, 13 times in 1 Cor, 7 times in 2 Cor, 7 times in Gal, 10 times in Phil, and 3 times in 1 Thess. The phrase plays a major role in Eph, occurring 13 times—more than any other Pauline letter close to its size. Yet the phrase and concept is not unique to Paul. We find it in 1 Peter (3:16; 5:10, 14) and 1 John (5:20). John also relates the call of Jesus to “abide” in him (John 15:4, 6, 7, 9, 10; see 1 Jn 2:27, 28; 4:13).

³⁹ See, e.g., Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians* (Paideia; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 44. We are combined into one body or unit, like an incorporated town.

⁴⁰ Dennis E. Tamburello, *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 103-106.

⁴¹ *Sancti Bernardi Sermones in Cantica*, Sermo LXXIV, in PL 183:1141-42. I follow the translation of Bernard McGinn: *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*. New York: The Modern Library, 2006), 223-24.

1. Faith and Love

Jesus expressed his faith through love—dying on the cross in our place (2:21; see 1 Cor 13:2). Paul writes: “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor un-circumcision is able to accomplish anything, but faith working through love” (5:6). This fulfills what the apostle calls the “Torah of Christ” (6:2). For Paul, love is not a merit, but a divine manifestation—a fruit of the Spirit (5:22). If love is the ground of Christian living, then the ultimate agent behind every good work is God. The pattern is Jesus Christ.

2. Love and Suffering

To be filled with the love of God is to suffer with Christ. Before Paul’s calling (conversion), he played the role of the antagonistic Pharisee, attempting to destroy Christ’s body, the church (1:13-14). Yet now his opponents from Jerusalem have taken that role against him! Before, Paul was zealous about preserving national purity. Now he eats with Gentiles. The Gospels relate that Jesus became friends with “sinners and tax collectors,” sharing his meals with them,⁴² and was persecuted by Pharisees who had come down from Jerusalem. Paul came to the Galatians suffering, and they received him as Jesus Christ (4:12-20). He bears the “stigmata of Christ” (6:17).

Suffering with Christ is not restricted to the apostle. Mentioning their reception of the Spirit, Paul writes: “Did you suffer so much without reason, if indeed (it was) without reason?” (3:4; see 2 Cor 1:5). God sent out his Spirit into our hearts crying “Abba” (Father) (4:6). The Aramaic “abba” evokes Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane, where the Son asks the Father for an alternative to suffering and death. Paul seems to be aware of this context—here and in the parallel in Romans (8:15). Jesus says: “Whoever does not receive his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. The one who finds his life will lose it, and the one who loses his life because of me will find it” (Matt 10:38-39). To find life in Christ is to join his mission.

Conclusion

Like shards from the same plate in a mosaic, I propose that justification, faith, new creation, and being in Christ are all part of a unified vision of salvation in the crucified yet resurrected Lord. Jesus

⁴² Mark 3:22; Mark 7:1 par.; Matt 11:19 par.

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and Paul view justification as part of the general resurrection of the dead, which is part of new creation. The resurrection and justification of Jesus Christ is the beginning of new creation. We are brought into this singular divine activity through faith in Christ. We are already justified in Christ, but have yet to enter fully into his resurrection. Although forgiven, our bodies are not yet free of the curse. Paul grounds our justification in the faith of Jesus Messiah, which, through the sharing of the Spirit, becomes our own. We find ourselves loving with God, which leads to suffering with Christ.



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