

Testamentum Imperium
An International Theological Journal

www.PreciousHeart.net/ti

Volume 1 – 2005-2007

**14 – The Pauline Concept of Union with Christ and
the Security of the Believer**

Dr. “Piff” Gregory C. Pereira
Lecturer in Pastoral & Biblical Studies
Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa,
Randburg, South Africa¹

Introduction

A. Salvation Is More than Preventing Hell.

1. Personally—Righteousness through Christ on the Cross
2. Corporeally—As People of God “In Christ”
3. Cosmologically Jesus Is Lord Over All

B. Life in Christ

C. Crucified with Christ

D. Dying with Christ

E. Seated with Christ in the Heavens

Conclusion

Bibliography

Introduction

In the expression of his love and grace, God revealed himself to man in many different ways (Heb. 1:1). He revealed himself primarily in his Word, and ultimately in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. God, in Christ, reconciled us to himself by the cross (2 Cor. 5:19). It was this reconciliation that made communion between God and man possible. There is no communion without reconciliation; and there is no reconciliation without the cross of Christ. The cross of Christ is the demonstration of God’s love, and the cross of Christ is only meaningful in the light of the resurrection.

¹ See www.btc.co.za, 260 Oak Avenue, Randburg, 2125, South Africa. He is the Senior Pastor of New Life Baptist Church, Bosmont, South Africa, for ten years, and serves on the boards of both international and local Christian missionary groups.

If God is in Christ (2 Cor. 5:19) and the believer is in Christ, then it follows that this is the place where God and man meet—in Christ. This idea may be demonstrated in various ways in the Pauline writings. Union with Christ is at the very heart of Paul’s Christianity. Being “in Christ” is what characterizes our whole existence as Christians. The concept of being “in Christ” is thus of prime importance in understanding our security as believers.

Our salvation is really only possible through Jesus Christ, and it is because of him alone that we may speak of our salvation as being secure. It is because of the Father’s faithfulness to the Son, and the Son’s faithfulness to the Father, that we are secure. In fact, we are, as it were, “riding on the back” of the Son.

We are reckoned by *his* righteousness. By *him* we have been reconciled to God. We are part of *his* Body. *His* death and resurrection have provided for us a new sphere of existence. *He* makes us participate in the new creation. It is with *him* that we are identified. We are hid in *him*. Our inheritance is bound up in *him*. Our relationship to God is characterized *in*, and *with*, and *through* Jesus Christ. All the privileges we have are *his* and they belong to us through *him*. *He* secures our salvation. Now we shall demonstrate these facts below.

A. Salvation Is More than Preventing Hell.

1. Personally—Righteousness through Christ on the Cross
2. Corporeally—As People of God “In Christ”
3. Cosmologically Jesus Is Lord Over All

Jesus Christ is Lord of all. Therefore the implications of the salvation he offers may be seen on personal, corporate, and cosmological levels. Our relationship to Christ (and our security) is demonstrated on all three levels.

1. Personally—Righteousness through Christ on the Cross

Because of what Christ has done on the cross, the believer has been declared righteous. Not that he is righteous, but his righteousness is really Christ’s (Phil. 3:9). In Christ, the believer has come into a righteous relationship with God. This righteous declaration of God comes to him through faith, and by it he is saved. Our justification is both a present and a future reality. In Christ, God justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5). In Christ the believer does not stand

condemned (Rom. 8:1), both now and in the future. Our salvation is really secure because of his unfailing righteousness.

Our acquittal from guilt before God comes entirely apart from any good works or works of the Law, but by faith in Christ (Gal. 2:16, Gal. 3:11). Righteousness through the Law was completely outside man's reach. Since they have been made righteous through faith in Christ, believers have peace with God (Rom. 5:1). Justification does not happen by faith apart from Christ, as though faith is the means of justification. It is faith in Christ, so that through Christ we are justified.²

The paradox of 2 Cor. 5:21 may be appropriately mentioned at this point: "for our sake he (God) made him (Christ) to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Christ became sin even though he knew no sin; so that we might become righteous even though we knew no righteousness. Ladd reminds us: "God made the (ethically) sinless one to be a sinner (forensically). Thus, the man in Christ is actually righteous, not ethically, but forensically" (1974, 446). That means that we will be exonerated on the Day of Judgement.

The two parties (God and man) are at variance, and the restoration of that relationship is called reconciliation. Without the God-man, Christ, there can be no reconciliation between God and man. The incarnation of Christ was therefore necessary in facilitating reconciliation. Jesus had to become a man so that he could represent man before God, and God before man. Reconciliation is the restoration of the justified person to fellowship with God. Therefore in Christ, we have access to God (Rom. 5:2).

Since man was estranged from God because of sin, it was man that needed to be reconciled. Paul never speaks of God reconciling himself to man.³ God is always the subject of reconciliation and man

² Thus E.P. Sanders himself, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 502: "righteousness by faith and participation in Christ ultimately amount to the same thing."

³ The Apostle in his theology on the one hand gives no space to the ideas of guilt and repentance, and on the other hand takes no account of the efficacy of the whole expiatory system of Judaism. This is because his point of departure is not so much anthropological as it is kerygmatic; the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the faith that in him God has come to humanity with a gracious deed, which actually passes over previous sin and renders every other system useless. E.P. Sanders also indicates that forensic justification leads to pneumatic fellowship with Christ (p.500), *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.

or the world the object. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). Man’s active hostility toward God or his passive state of hostility made him incapable of initiating any sort of reconciliation. All that man has to do is accept what Christ has done (2 Cor. 5:20). This can only be done on an individual level. Each one must believe for himself. It is personal. The results of reconciliation are peace and fellowship with God.

2. Corporeally—As People of God “In Christ”

Corporately or ecclesiologically, the people of God are his because they are in Christ. They have been bought with a price and are God’s possession. As God’s building, their foundation is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11) and he is the corner-stone, joining together Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14ff). It is noteworthy that, for Paul, the people of God are defined as finding their form and unity in “the foundation” and “corner stone,” the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in this way that we, the universal church, are corporately identified with Christ (Eph. 2:19-22). We belong to him.

It should be noticed that Paul never just speaks of the church as a body per se, it is always the body in Christ (Rom. 12:15) or the body of Christ (e.g. 1 Cor. 12:27). This metaphor is used to express the oneness of the church with Christ. The church is not a body or a society of believers, but it is *the* body of Christ. The metaphor also shows a unity in diversity – one body, many members. Participation in the body of Christ is the believer’s privilege through faith. Because God places us in the church such placement is secure. Baptism with the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13) is the placement of the believer in the body. Believers are baptized “into Christ” (Rom. 6:3, Gal. 3:27). At the same time baptism is identifying with Christ in his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-4, Col. 2:12).

The idea of fellowship is a reality because the church shares a common relationship with Christ (1 Cor. 1:9). The church is the fellowship of the elect (Eph. 1:4, 1 Thes. 1:4) regardless of social status, race or gender. The elect are called “saints,” “holy ones,” or the “sanctified.” The Greek word translated “saints” is almost never used in the singular. They are the ones sanctified in Christ and called to be saints (1 Cor. 1:2).

3. Cosmologically Jesus Is Lord Over All

Cosmologically, Jesus is expressed as Lord over all creation; first over the new creation and then over principalities and powers. The church is the expression of the new creation in this world. The church is the heavenly colony in this present evil world. The new creation is eschatological in character. This is so because Christ himself is the *eschatos*.

Christ, as the last Adam, is put into a position where he can fulfill God's purpose precisely where Adam failed. Adam was supposed to be the ruler over all the earth. When Paul speaks of Jesus as the last Adam, this is a Christology with representative significance. This is otherwise referred to as Paul's Adam-Christology (Dunn 1998:200). The first Adam is representative of humanity in its fall, and Christ is the eschatological representative of the new humanity.

In sin, we all belong to the first epoch, that is, we are "in Adam." All who belong to the eschatological epoch are "in Christ." In his Adamic role Jesus first shared the actual destiny of the first Adam (death) before he achieved the intended goal for Adam (dominion over all things). In this highly symbolic Christology, Jesus first represented the first Adam before he became the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45) (Dunn 1998, 202). The relationship with the last Adam is something that comes with the resurrection of Christ.

The Adam-Christ interplay is the interplay of death and life (1 Cor. 15:22); or to be more precise, the interplay of a life which ends only in death, and a life which dies but also conquers death in the resurrected life. If Jesus dies, then all are dead. Therefore death has no more dominion over those who are in Christ. Through Christ's death and resurrection all heavenly powers have lost any effective power over those who belong to Christ, and any effective say in their destiny. Our eternal destiny is with Christ.

Because of the resurrection, Christ is spoken of as the "firstfruits from the dead" (1 Cor. 15:20). Also, he is the "first-born among many brethren," as they are to conform to the image of God's dear son (Rom. 8:29). There is a correlation between Christ and the brethren; they find their identity in him. The church is one new man created in Christ. We thus see ourselves as God's act of creation in Christ; as his workmanship (Eph. 2:10). We are created in the image of our Creator

(Eph. 4:24). In Thompson's words: "the goal of the new life, is the image of Christ" (1991, 151).

Even in the imagery of "head of the Body," Christ is understood both as creator and cosmological ruler (Pelser 1973, 158). Christ is the beginning of everything. Cosmologically, therefore, Christ represents the fullness of life, for death has no power whatsoever over him nor over those who are in him. The sting of death has been removed (1 Cor. 15:54-57). Therefore, through his victory over death, not even death can separate the believer from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:37).

B. Life in Christ

Being "in Christ" expresses the most intimate possible fellowship of the Christian with the living spiritual Christ. Deissmann speaks of the phrase "in Christ" as a kind of atmosphere in which Christians live. "Just as the air of life, which we breath, is "in" us and fills us, yet we at the same time live in this air and breathe it, so it is also with the Christ-intimacy of the Apostle Paul: Christ in him, he in Christ" (1926, 140). The formula "*in Christ*" occurs about 170 times in all its variations, and is characteristic of Paul. We are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28). Though it includes the idea, this cannot be reduced to the mere meaning that we are all Christians.

Paul's "in Christ" is union in the sense of fellowship and identification with Christ; not the deification of the believer. When he refers to this kind of fellowship with Christ, Paul seldom uses "with." He uses "in", to characterize the fellowship we have with the exalted Lord. Generally Paul uses "with" to denote the future status of Christians in Christ (Col. 3:4) (Kourie 1987, 34). There are however verses using "with" referring to the present status of the believer in Christ; e.g. "quickenened with Christ," "raised with Christ," and "seated with Christ." It is therefore accurate to say that our participation and fellowship with Christ is pivotal for an understanding of Paul's "in Christ" phrase and of the security of our salvation.

The sheer numerical frequency of the "in Christ" formula, shows its significance in the mind of Paul. He uses it in varied ways, for example: "one body in Christ" (Rom. 12:5), "babes in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1), "new creation in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17), "justified in Christ" (Gal. 2:17), "God was in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:19), and "spiritual blessings in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). So too one can enumerate some of the cognate

phrases like “in the Lord” or “in him,” to show the variety of uses of the same sense in Paul.

Stewart reminded us that no such phrase has ever been used, or indeed could ever be used, of any of the sons of men. The fact is that when we speak of being in Christ, we are consciously or unconsciously making a confession of faith. Not only are we showing the privilege we have, but we are showing by it that Christ is a living and present Spirit, whose nature is the very nature of God (1935, 154). He continues by saying that the key to the phrase is that Christ is the redeemed man’s new environment.⁴ He has been lifted out of his earthly lot into a totally different sphere; the sphere of Christ (p157). Certainly, this is not the meaning in every occurrence of the phrase.

Paul uses the phrase with a certain flexibility, and it does not always carry the same depth of meaning. It is used sometimes simply to denote “Christian” (e.g. 1 Cor. 4:10, Gal. 1:22). Each occurrence should therefore be carefully examined within its own particular context. However, it includes the following meanings; to be a Christian; to be joined to the living person of Christ; to participate with Christ; to be enveloped by Christ; to have Christ resident in the believer; faith in Christ; being clothed with Christ; being baptized into Christ; being under Christ’s dominion; etc. Every case is expressive of our salvation and the benefits we have in Christ. It shows that our salvation does not depend upon us, but upon Christ, in whom we are.

Neugebauer makes an important observation; that the distinction between “in Christ” and “in the Lord,” is that the former has indicative connotations, and the latter has imperative connotations (1957, 128). That means that in the former, it is about what we *are*, and in the case of the latter, what we *do*. “In Christ” nevertheless has the notion of belonging to Christ and it illustrates the union we have with him.

Believers can only be *sons of God* through union with Christ⁵, the only Son of God. By the Holy Spirit they cry “Abba, Father.” The Spirit makes them children of God. Thus they are in Christ and Christ

⁴ This idea is also well illustrated in Deismann previously quoted.

⁵ That is why one would see the concept of being baptized into Christ as being very prominent in Paul.

is in them through the Spirit. Put in a different way, they are sons of God because they are in the Son of God; they are “in Christ.” As sons of God, they are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17).

Their *union* with Christ also expresses their union with one another as believers because they are in Christ.⁶ Paul exhorts Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind “in the Lord” (Phil. 4:2). Here, “in the Lord” must be given full weight, and in the way that Neugebauer indicated, as the imperative demonstrating our being in Christ. By it they must remember their common union with Christ. For Paul there is no union with Christ that does not have far-reaching effects in the ethical and moral spheres, because union with the eternal was not a human achievement; it was a gift of God. Therefore we can speak of both an indicative union with Christ and an imperative union with all who are in Christ.

There is no doubt that in Paul’s mind, the metaphor of being “clothed with Christ” is another way of saying that we are “in Christ.” He speaks in the sense of “putting on” the Lord Jesus Christ.⁷ Those who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27). The idea is that of being clothed with Christ. Again, it comes out in a locative sense; that the believer is covered or enveloped with Christ, so that the believer is not seen, but him with whom he is clothed.

This idea comes out in another way. Paul exhorts the believer to “put on the new man” (Eph. 4:24, Col. 3:10). This new man, he says, is created after the image of Christ. There is, or has to be, some correlation between the so-called “new man” and the “last man” or the “last Adam.”⁸ On the one hand, in Christ both Jew and Gentiles have been made “one new man,” that is, in the Church, the Body of Christ (Eph. 2:14f). On the other hand, the Church consists of those individuals who have been made alive in Christ and who bear the image of the heavenly man (1 Cor. 15:49).

Putting on the new man, is in the second place, the ethical imperative of being in Christ and being like Christ, for the new man is created in his image. Dunn mentions an important consideration in

⁶ This has in mind the concept of the Church.

⁷ E.g. Rom. 13:14 and Col. 3:10 where we are told to “put on the new man.”

⁸ Christ being the ‘last man’ is not a new man per sé, but the believer becomes that because he is being conformed in the image of Christ. Therefore the believer is a new man individually, and ‘one new man’ corporately.

that, what is envisaged by Romans 13:14, for instance, is something which can be repeated. It is putting on the character of Christ that is envisaged. However, in Galatians 3:27 Paul uses it for the “once-for-all” becoming a Christian or being in Christ. He asserts that it is not necessarily baptismal in its imagery (1998, 454). We cannot entirely agree with him, because Paul speaks in the context of sonship, which is necessarily ours in Christ, the Son. Baptism, here, sets forth the union between the believer and Christ, not as the initiation of that union, but as the signification of that union. Stott puts it like this: “thus in Christ, by faith inwardly (v26) and baptism outwardly (v27), we are all sons of God” (1968, 99).

The phrase “in Christ” is also the imagery of the believer’s *participation* in Christ. This has in mind his becoming part of Christ’s experiences. Believers come to share in Christ’s deeds and benefits. It can be said that the believer is crucified and resurrected in Christ. The believer is seated with Christ in the heavenlies. Such is the participation of the believer with Christ.

“*Christ in me*” seems to have practical implications. It also seems that most scholars treat the “Christ in me” texts as synonymous with the “in Christ” phrase. The main sense is that of Christ’s indwelling the believer (Rom. 8:10, 2 Cor. 13:5, Gal. 2:20, Col. 1:27). It is a present reality with future realization still maintained (“Christ in you ... the hope of glory”⁹ and “Christ who is our life”¹⁰). Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (Eph. 3:17). Here Galatians 2:20 illuminates our understanding of the “Christ in me” aspect. The union described is not such as to cancel out the individual personality¹¹ of the Christian. First of all, it is a relationship of faith (“I live in the faith of the Son of God”). By faith the believer accepts God’s love and the gift of Christ. Secondly, there is connection with the mortal life, that is “life which I now live in the flesh” so that it has to do with the task of living the Christian life.

The use of the motif “*with Christ*” is a striking feature in Paul. It is used often with future reference, and speaks of being in the

⁹ Col. 1:27

¹⁰ Col. 3:4

¹¹ Celia Kourie finds here the distinction between the so-called Pauline mysticism and that of the mystery religions of his day. She says that there is no concept analogous to ‘in Christ’ in the mystery religions and the literature of the ancient Greek world (1987, 34).

company of Christ in heaven or at the parousia. There are however passages that speak of our dying or being raised with Christ (Rom. 6:8; Col. 2:20, 3:3; 2 Cor. 4:14). Together with Colossians 2:13, it speaks of believers as already having died or being made alive “with him.” Dunn warns that to focus on the “with Christ” or “with him” motifs in Paul, would be a mistake as more than half of the forty New Testament occurrences of *with-compounds* appear only in Paul, and that these compounds carry varied meanings that contribute to the overall motif (1998, 402). In most cases he describes our common privileges, tasks and experiences with Christ. The death-resurrection motif shows prominently in these compounds, uniting the believer with Christ, particularly Romans 6:4-8 and 8:16-29.

The matter of *being Christ's*, stems from Paul's frequent use of the genitive *Christou*. In 1 Corinthians 15:23, those who are Christ's, will participate in his resurrection. In Galatians 3:29, “you are Christ's” clearly picks up on the “you all are one in Christ Jesus.” Therefore to be Christ's, or to belong to him, is to be “in Christ” (cf. 1 Cor. 3:23 and Rom. 14:8).

We need also to consider Paul's usage of the phrase “*through Christ*.” He uses it in two ways:

1. To express the action of God mediated by Christ. In Rom.2.16 final judgment comes through Christ. We have redemption through Christ (Rom. 3:24). The grace and life that God gives reigns through Christ (Rom. 5:17). The believer has victory through Christ (1 Cor. 15:57). God reconciles us to himself through Christ (2 Cor. 5:18). We have the adoption of sons through Christ (Eph. 1:5), and the Holy Spirit was poured on the believers through Christ (Tit. 3:6). It can be said that God expresses his goodness and faithfulness to us through Christ. All these benefits come to those who are in Christ.
2. It expresses what the believer does for, or towards God. The believer gives thanks to God through Christ (Rom. 1:8, Col. 3:17, Rom. 7:25). We are able to approach God through Christ. We may praise God through Christ (Rom. 16:27). The believer has confidence towards God through Christ (2 Cor. 3:4).

With all the many privileges of being “in Christ” or of being “united with Christ”, or having “put on Christ”, or “belonging to Christ”, all expressed in the various forms given above, we conclude with Penna, that the only reason Paul seemingly speaks of lower or higher orders of believers, is because the believers he addressed did not all

correspond to the true status conferred on them. For Paul, perfection is not only the goal, but also the status of every believer. To the Christian it means to be perfect in this way (1996, 245). We cannot however accept his stance that this begins with baptism (1996, 246); rather with faith in Christ. Perfection naturally denounces communion with sin in general, for that is incompatible with our union with Christ (1 Cor. 6:12-20).

In summary, to quote M. Bouttier here is appropriate: “In Christ” can be understood only in relation to history (what Jesus has done for us), to eschatology (what the Lord will do with us), and finally to mysticism, if by that we mean what God accomplishes in us, the communion that unites the Lord and those who belong to the Lord, which finds its expression in the communion of these among themselves” (1962, 133).

C. Crucified with Christ

While other historical aspects of Christ’s life do not feature much in Paul’s writings the death and resurrection is central to all of his theology of life. He speaks of Christ’s death in various ways. He refers to it as “the cross of Christ,” “Christ crucified,” that he “gave himself,” as an “atonement,” a “sacrifice,” and so forth. Yet in its historical setting, Paul had to work through the fact that the Messiah died on a cross; two things (Messiah and dying on a cross) that were difficult to reconcile in the Jewish mind. For most Jews it would constitute a contradiction in terms that the Messiah should become accursed.¹²

As to the centrality of the death of Christ in Paul; this can be easily established. The only Christ Paul knew or cared about was “Christ crucified” (1 Cor. 1:23 and 2:2).¹³ According to Käsemann, Paul’s theology is fixed here (1970, 165). He says that the sign that distinguishes his lordship from that of other founders of religion is undoubtedly only the cross (1970, 172). The reason for this is precisely because Paul understood the death of Christ to operate redemptively (Gal. 4:4-5). In his death, Christ expressed his utmost

¹² Gal. 3:13, cf. De. 21:23.

¹³ He claimed that the only message he was willing to preach, was “Christ crucified.”

obedience to the Father (Phil. 2:6f). The death of Christ was for Paul most expressive of God's love for man (Rom. 8:32, cf. 8:39).

No doubt death was for him a cosmological tyrant; a lord over all until Christ rose from the dead. Therefore Jesus had to die in order to conquer death's tyrannical hold over man. He certainly did so by rising again to life. But how could death be removed without the removal of sin? It made perfect sense that when Christ died, he died for sins. In order to do that, he had to come "in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin so that he might set us free from sin and death" (Rom. 8:2-3). Therefore, the first meaning of the death of Christ is that it was intended to set mankind free from sin and by that, from death.

The death of Christ did certain things for mankind. It functioned as a *sacrifice* for sin; more precisely, he was "a sin-offering" (Rom.8.7). It functioned as an expiation and atonement. In Romans 3:25, the word *hilastērion* is used. The word exclusively refers to the "mercy seat" in the Greek Old Testament (LXX). This was where the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled; on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). It is our belief that propitiation is what Paul has in mind since it has the idea of appeasing God. How can God need appeasing when God himself provided the *hilastērion*? The sacrifice acted on sin, rather than on God (Dunn,1998:214)¹⁴.

In 1 Cor. 5:7, Paul refers to Christ as our "Passover Lamb" which has been sacrificed for us. Here, however, it functions redemptively by way of atonement, especially when connected with the Lord's Supper. Moreover, the idea of "a lamb without spot or blemish" concurs with Paul's understanding of a sinless Christ, who "became sin for our sake" (2 Cor. 5:21). The blood of Christ can only be adequately understood in the light of his being a sacrifice or sin offering (Rom. 3:25, 5:9; Eph. 1:7, 2:13; and Col. 1:20).

In conclusion, "all this serves to underline the centrality of the death of Jesus in Paul's gospel and decisively undercuts any attempt to derive an alternative scheme of salvation from Paul.... Paul gave this gospel its focus in the death of Jesus." (Dunn 1998, 232). The basic Pauline belief is that Christ died for our sins according to the

¹⁴ Therefore the word 'expiation' is preferred.

Scriptures. This was the Church's message from its very birth. "Christ died for our sins." In Stewart's words, "the cross was a mirror held up to the sins of all the world" (1935, 232). Paul saw in the cross a supreme revelation of love. It was the gift of salvation expressing God's unlimited love. Now we turn to aspects of our identifying with Christ in his death.

D. Dying with Christ

The formulae dying and rising with Christ are expressions of the consequences of our union with Christ. Even though, in most cases, Paul speaks of dying and rising together, we will first discuss the aspect of dying with Christ separately from that of rising with him. A characteristic of dying with Christ is that it is often mentioned with baptism (Rom. 6:1-11). Other references like 2 Corinthians 4:10-11 and 5:14-15 bring them (the elect) already into the resurrection of Christ by virtue of their "being in Christ" (1937, 110). The resurrection is therefore the departure point for the believer's hope. Käsemann states it best: "Only the Creator saves, never the creature. Salvation is always resurrection of the dead because that is God's work for us" (1970, 159). How can anyone lose their salvation if it depends entirely upon God?

Another point that needs brief mention, is that the death of Christ is shown to be acceptable to God by the resurrection of our Lord. By his resurrection he has conquered death. Death has lost its power and its sting, which is sin (1 Cor. 15:55-57). By his resurrection Christians have been given the victory that he had. They were reconciled as enemies by his death, therefore the more shall they be saved through his life (Rom. 5:10). If in his weakness (his death) Christ could reconcile us at our worst (as enemies) to God, how much more is he able to keep us who are at our best (reconciled to God) by his strength (his glorious resurrected life)? How, then, can anyone lose their salvation when it all depends upon Christ?

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). This verse is popularly interpreted in terms of subjective experience. The old unregenerate man has passed away so that his desires and appetites are replaced by new desires and appetites. Ethically applied, this is correct, but for those "in Christ." Yet, there is the eschatological newness that comes to the fore. Renewal has already happened to

those who are in Christ. Because the believer is in Christ, he belongs to the new age. How and why? It is because of his participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. “As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22). Natural men are in Adam, the representative of the old age. The new humanity are those who are in Christ, and they belong to the new age.

Because believers are incorporated into Christ and are identified with him in his resurrection, they are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17 and Gal. 6:15). The believer has put on the new man which is being renewed after the image of him who created him (Col. 3:11). The last Adam is therefore the life-giver, giving new life to all who are in him.¹⁵ Ridderbos is correct in saying that the new life works itself out and find its application in the individual believer (1975, 205). The “new creature” participates in the “new creation” represented in Christ. As Adam stands for death, so Christ stands for resurrection. Death has no power over those who are in Christ.

The Church’s participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, is in essence participation in his life. Because it is *his* life, it is for us new life. What has taken place in Christ must now be actualized in a new way of life in the believer in particular and in the Church in general. Grossouw states it succinctly: “Jesus lives spiritually (pneumatically) in his followers. This was not possible before his death and resurrection” (1965, 54). The effect is that all in the Church are united to Christ and in Christ.

The fact that Christ lives in us through his Spirit has far-reaching implications for the believer. The Spirit explicates the work of Christ in such a way that the believer himself experiences the death and resurrection of our Lord. Paul shows the closest affinity between the risen Christ and the Spirit. For Paul, to have the Spirit of Christ, is to have Christ in you. The “Spirit in you” is impossible apart from “Christ in you.” They are distinguishable, but inseparable (Moo 1991, 523). To be “in the Spirit” depends on being “in Christ.” Though we cannot agree with Moltmann’s universalistic application, of his statement, “The Spirit, the giver of life, “fills” the creation with eternal life by “coming upon” all and “dwelling in” them” (1979, 518), we agree that eternal life belongs only to those upon whom the

¹⁵ Cf. 1 Cor. 15:45

Holy Spirit came to indwell and fill. His indwelling is characterized by eternal life. Thus, all those who have the Holy Spirit have eternal life, and those who do not have the Holy Spirit, do not have eternal life. How can anyone lose their salvation when it depends upon the Holy Spirit and not upon them?

We have been raised with Christ. The use of the aorist, in most instances, denotes the redemptive moment of Christ's rising. The new life of the Church has not only been grounded, but has also been given and begun, in the resurrection of Christ. Thus also, we may assert that the general resurrection has already begun. The new life of believers is that which comes forth with Christ out of the grave, has gone into heaven with him, is there hidden ("your life is hid with Christ in God"¹⁶) with him, and will once more appear from there with him in the parousia ("when Christ who is our life, shall appear, then you also will appear with him"¹⁷). What has taken place and will take place with Christ, from dying to coming again in glory, has also happened to the Church and will happen to it by virtue of its corporate unity with him (Ridderbos 1975, 212).

The resurrection is the beginning of the ontological renewal of creation (Dunn 1998, 240). The idea of Christ's resurrection as the "firstfruits" carries over into the expectation of the general resurrection of all believers at his parousia. Because Christ was raised, the Christian shall be raised. His resurrection is the hope for the future resurrection, when "mortality will put on immortality"; (1 Cor. 15:42), when what is "sown (buried) as corruptible is raised incorruptible"; when what is "sown a natural body is raised a spiritual body" (v43-44). Then they shall be like him for they shall see him as he is. That is the ultimate level of the believer's identification with the Lord in his resurrection and likeness.

When Paul speaks of being "in Christ", he speaks of being in the risen and triumphant Lord. Christ had become for Paul, not so much the person from the historical past that he could contemplate, but a living person with whom he had fellowship. Believers share in the relationship that Christ has with his Father so that righteousness and glory become part of their inheritance. By virtue of the believers'

¹⁶ Cf. Col. 3:3

¹⁷ Cf. Col. 3:4

resurrection with Christ, they have become as Christ, and are thus children of God and of Abraham (Gal. 3:28-29). When God re-creates man, it is in the pattern of the resurrected Christ. Christ is their life (Col. 3:4). How? Because they have been raised with Christ and are seated with him in the heavenly realm (Col. 3:1).

So, how does the believer rise with Christ? Is Paul expressing the idea that the believer dies and rises as Christ did, or is it by becoming one with Christ that the believer dies and rises? Newman and Nida conclude that “with him” is to be taken with the Greek verb *symphytoi gegōnamen* (have grown together) as a means of indicating unity with Christ, of becoming one with him (1973, 114). The idea is to join up with him and to become close companions with him as though we were one person. It gives expression to the motif of participation in Christ or partaking in his death and resurrection and its benefits. It is a union between Christ and the believer, established by Christ and experienced through faith by the believer. This union allows the believer to die and rise with Christ.

E. Seated with Christ in the Heavens

Often the believer thinks of his salvation merely in terms of the forgiveness of sins. It is infinitely more than that, and to stop at that is a down-right pity. Salvation means to participate in the Lord Jesus Christ. His union with Christ is that which allows him also to be seated *with Christ in the heavens*.

Ephesians chapter two speaks of the believer as being made to sit in the heavens in Christ Jesus (v6). In Ephesians 1:3, Paul said that God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places. Now he says more specifically that our life is enthroned with Christ. Though not explicitly stated elsewhere in the Pauline letters, the meaning is implicit in passages like Colossians 3:1-3, Philippians 3:20, Ephesians 2:19, and Galations 4:26. Humanity, by virtue of Christ’s conquest of sin and death and by his exaltation, is lifted from the deepest hell to heaven itself (Foulkes 1989, 82). The believer’s citizenship is now in heaven.

The idea of citizenship is taken further by the Apostle in Ephesians 2:19. The believer is a fellow-citizen with the saints, that is, with every other believer including those who have gone before. The real sense cannot be missed; that the believer has a common citizenship, and therefore destiny, with those who are now already in

the company of angels in the presence of God in heaven. Though the believer is still in the flesh, he is a member of a new humanity, whose citizenship is in heaven. Our security is assured by our citizenship.

Being of the household of God, the believer “has communion with God; he is in tune with the Eternal, and has been awakened to something infinite and absolute” (Lloyd-Jones 1972, 120). The Christian can now draw nearer to God; his new nature cries out to God. Being alive unto God, he is sensitive to God, desiring God, loving God, seeking God and living for God. It is for this reason, that Paul exhorts the believers to seek the things from above (Col. 3:1-3).

Our Lord, after he had risen from the dead, did not remain indefinitely upon earth. He ascended into heaven, and he is seated at the right hand of God in glory. So the Apostle goes on to say that this also has happened to the believer. The doctrine of the believer’s union with Christ insists that it should happen to him.

The believer has been seated: it is something that has taken place, and the believer is passive in all of this. God is the one who is active, and these benefits come to the believer through Christ. Lloyd-Jones states it most succinctly: “there are two senses in which we are joined to Christ; in a federal sense—what was true of Adam is true of us because he is the head and representative of the human race—he is the federal head. So also, Christ is our federal head, so that what is true of him is true of us because we are in him. The second sense is a mystical or vital sense; as there is a union between the branches and the vine; not mechanical but vital and organic. It is like the union between husband and wife; the union between Christ and his Church” (1972, 103-104). Our participation in Christ’s heavenly position is a fact because of our being in Christ. He is a citizen of heaven and so are we. FOREVER!

Conclusion

Now we understand how Paul can say that there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ. There can be no condemnation because we are justified so that before God we are forensically without fault. It is not that we are really without fault, but being in Christ, his faultlessness is seen rather than our culpability. For as long as we are united to Christ, we cannot be condemned.

Our union with Christ happens in many different areas. We are united with him in his Body, the church. In so being united to him, we

are united to other believers too. Our corporate identity secures our position and our salvation. Christ will do what is necessary to present a Bride (or a Temple, etc.) spotless and complete for himself. Our salvation is secure because he will not fail.

The death and resurrection of Christ provide the foundation for the eternal relationship with God by faith in Christ. We have been reconciled and have peace with God because of his love as it is expressed through the death and resurrection of Christ. The dead Christ has reconciled us; and the living Christ will keep us. Christ is our security; not our performance.

We have identified with Christ. We are partakers with him of his death, resurrection, heavenly position, glorification and coming. The benefits of our salvation are really glories that are due to Christ, and are ours only because they are his and we are united to him. We are co-heirs with Christ.

We, as the new humanity of the new creation, have a new destiny in Christ. That destiny is secured. As the old humanity has the certain destiny of death, so the new humanity has the certain destiny of life. We are part of this new creation because we are in Christ, the last Adam, and he will take us to that destiny without fail. Death has no power over us. Death is a category known only to the old humanity through the first Adam. Salvation is secure for the new creation. For this reason we are destined for the new heaven and the new earth. PRAISE GOD!

Bibliography

- Black, C.C.II. "Pauline Perspectives on Death in Romans 5-8." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103:3 (1984): 413-433.
- Bouttier, M. *En Christ*. Paris: University of France Press, 1962.
- Deissmann, A. *The New Testament Formula: In Christ Jesus*. Marburg, 1926.
- Dunn, J.D.G. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998.
- Foulkes, F. *Ephesians*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989.
- Grossouw, W. *In Christ*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965.
- Käsemann, E. "The Pauline Theology of the Cross." *A Journal of Bible & Theology – Interpretation* 24:2 (1970): 151-177.

- Kourie, C.E. "In Christ and Related Expressions in Paul." *Theologia Evangelica* 20:2 (1987): 33-43.
- Ladd, G.E. *A Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1974.
- Lloyd-Jones, D.M. *God's Way of Reconciliation*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972.
- Moltmann, J. "Theology of Mystical Experience." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 32:6 (1979): 501-520.
- Moo, D. *Romans 1-8 in Wycliffe Exegetical Commentaries*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1991.
- Neugebauer, F. The Pauline "In Christ." *New Testament Studies* 4 (1957): 522-539.
- Newman & Nida. *A Translator's Handbook on Paul – Romans*. Stuttgart: United Bible Society, 1973.
- Pelser, G.M.M. "Die Verhouding Liggaam en Hoof by Paulus." *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 30:3 (1973): 150-162.
- Pelser, G.M.M. "Could the 'formulas' Dying and Rising with Christ be Expressions of Pauline Mysticism?" *Neotestamentica* 32:1 (1998): 115-134.
- Penna, R. *Paul the Apostle: Wisdom and Folly of the Cross*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996.
- Ridderbos, H. *Paul*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1975.
- Sanders, E.P. *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. London: Philadelphia Press, 1977.
- Schweitzer, A. *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*. London: A&C Black, 1937.
- Segal, A.F. "Paul's Thinking About Resurrection in its Jewish Context." *New Testament Studies* 44 (1998): 400-419.
- Stewart, J.S. *A Man in Christ*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1935.
- Stott, J.R. *The Message of Galatians*. Leicester: IVP, 1968.
- Thompson, M. *Clothed With Christ: The Example and Teaching of Jesus in Romans 12:1-15:13*. Sheffield: JSOT, 1991.