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SESSION 1 | THE FOUNDATION OF THIS GREAT SALVATION: UNION WITH CHRIST

I. INTRODUCTION

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion 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 also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:3-11)

“There is no truth, therefore, more suited to impart confidence and strength, comfort and joy in the Lord than this one of union with Christ.” (John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 181)

“Once you have your eyes opened to this concept of union with Christ, you will find it almost everywhere in the New Testament” (Anthony Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 64)

II. FOUNDATIONAL REALITY

- “It [union with Christ] is not simply a phase of the application of redemption; it underlies every aspect of redemption both in its accomplishment and in its application.” (Murray, 175)

- “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” (Colossians 3:3-4)

- Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ.” (Murray, 171)

- “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.” (Ephesians 1:3-4)
 - “We thus see that union with Christ has its source in the election of God the Father before the foundation of the world and it has its fruition in the glorification of the sons of God. The perspective of God’s people is not narrow; it is broad and it is long. It is not confined to space and time; it has the expanse of eternity.” (Murray, 174)

- “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits” (Psalm 103:2)
 - We are initially united with Christ in *regeneration* (Eph. 2:4-5, 10).

 - We appropriate and continue to live out of this union through *faith* (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:16-17).

 - We are *justified* in union with Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:8-9).

 - We are *sanctified* through union with Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; John 15:4-5; Eph. 4:16; 2 Cor. 5:17).

 - We *persevere* in the life of faith in union with Christ (John 10:27-28; Rom. 8:38-39).

 - We are even said to *die* in Christ (Rom. 14:8; 1 Thess. 4:16; Rev. 14:13).

- We shall be *raised* with Christ (Col. 3:1; 1 Cor. 15:22).

- We shall be eternally *glorified* with Christ (Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:16-17).

- “Union with Christ is the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation.”
(Murray, 180)

III. ANALOGOUS REALITY

- Stones & the Cornerstone
 - “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”
(Ephesians 2:19-22)

 - “As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:4-5)

- Vine & Branches
 - “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:4-5)

- Head & its Members
 - “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body,

joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” (Ephesians 4:15-16)

- “and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.” (Colossians 2:19)

- Husband & Wife
 - “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.” (Ephesians 5:22-23)

III. TRINITARIAN REALITY

“It is obvious that we must not reduce the nature and the mode of union with Christ to the measure of the kind of union that exists between the chief corner stone and the other stones in the building, nor to the measure of the kind of union that exists between the vine and the branches, nor to that of the head and the other members of the body, nor even to that of husband and wife. The mode, nature, and kind of union differ in the different cases. There is similitude but not identity. But just as we may not reduce the union between Christ and his people to the level of the union that exists on these other strata of being, so we must not raise it to the level of the union that exists within the Godhead. Similitude here again does not mean identity. Union with Christ does not mean that we are incorporated into the life of the Godhead...analogy does not mean identity.” (Murray, 179)

- God the Father
 - “Jesus answered him, ‘If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.’” (John 14:23)

 - “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in

me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.” (John 17:20-23)

- “That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:3)
- “This is one of the wonderful things brought about by the work of redemption, that thereby our separation from God, is made an occasion of a greater union than was before, or otherwise would have been.” (Jonathan Edwards, *Works*, Volume II, 150)
- God the Holy Spirit
 - “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” (John 14:15-16)
 - “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” (Romans 8:9-11)

IV. FUNCTIONAL REALITY

- “This, then, is the foundation of sanctification in Reformed theology. It is rooted, not in humanity and their achievement of holiness or sanctification, but in what God has done in Christ, and for us in union with him. Rather than view Christians first and foremost in the microcosmic context of their own progress, the Reformed doctrine first of all sets them in the macrocosm of

God's activity in redemptive history. It is seeing oneself in this context that enables the individual Christian to grow in true holiness." (Sinclair Ferguson, *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, 58)

- "But whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." (1 John 2:5-6)

- "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, *in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him*, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (Philemon 3:9)
 - "Nothing cuts the nerve of the desire to pursue holiness as much as a sense of guilt. On the contrary, nothing so motivates us to deal with sin in our lives as does the understanding and application of the two truths that our sins are forgiven and the dominion of sin is broken because of our union with Christ." (Jerry Bridges, *Disciplines of Grace*)

- I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge." (1 Corinthians 1:4–5)