

ahead of the lessons, but it's not necessary. You'll be able to understand what we're talking about even if you haven't read the book, but you'll understand more of what we're talking about if you've read the book. So, just an FYI. With that, the way Ferguson kind of begins talking about this, he talks about the word Christian. Like talking about what it means to be a Christian.

What would the people, particularly of the New Testament, have called themselves? Would they have called themselves Christians? And sometimes they do. Sometimes they refer to themselves in that way. But it wasn't a title that Christians gave themselves. It wasn't like Paul, as soon as he believed the gospel, said, I'm a Christian now. In fact, in Acts, we see the first time that Christians are called Christians is in Antioch. And most likely, it was a pejorative term. Sort of like, if you're familiar with the history of the Puritans, the word Puritan was not something that the Puritans gave themselves.

It was something that others labeled them as in order to essentially try to demean them. Oh, they're the Puritans. They want to be pure. They're all about that purity stuff. And eventually the historians kind of just embraced it. That's sort of the history of the term Christian. So if you were to ask Paul or one of the other Christians of the time, what would you call yourself? Ferguson makes the case that fundamentally, Paul as well as all the early church would say, we are people in Christ, in Christ.

You know, so often we talk about, when we talk about evangelism, we talk about inviting Jesus into your heart, which there's nothing wrong with that per se. Scripture definitely speaks in that way about our salvation, that Jesus by the Holy Spirit comes and lives in us.

We are the temple of the Holy Spirit. But that's not what he says the majority of the time. The majority of the time, it's the opposite. It is us getting in to Christ. How many of you have heard that phrase like getting into Christ or being in Christ before? Most of us probably have. Have you thought about what that actually means? What does it mean to be in Christ? Why do we talk about it that way? It seems like sort of an odd way to talk about salvation, being in Christ. Well, that is really capturing this idea of union with Christ.

So after all that being said, I wanna give y'all a brief definition to start with, just to start with. Obviously, the whole class is gonna be answering this question, what is union with Christ? But I wanna start us off with just a baseline definition, and we can fill that out as we go. So our sort of baseline definition for union with Christ is, Union with Christ is defining our relationship with God in terms of our relation to Christ. I'll say that again. Union with Christ is defining our relationship with God in terms of our relation to Christ. Again, we're going to fill that out as we go.

And there's three main principles about union with Christ that I really want to instill in us as we embark on this journey. First, union with Christ is a biblical principle. Union with Christ is a unifying principle. And union with Christ is a foundational principle. A biblical principle, a unifying principle, a foundational principle. So first, union with Christ is a unifying principle. No, a biblical principle, excuse me.

If you all have your Bibles with you, I encourage you to turn to Ephesians chapter one, beginning at verse three. This, of course, is a very famous passage as Paul lays out how God is ultimately sovereign in our salvation. All of salvation is ultimately God's work, and it is to His glory. But there's another aspect, something else that's brought

out in this section, and that is union with Christ, being in Christ, being in Him, in the Beloved. Now as we read this text, I want you guys to be counting. How many times in these verses three through 14 of Ephesians chapter one, how many times Paul references union with Christ, being in Christ, being in him, in the beloved. Let's read this.

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. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glory, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him, who works all things according to the counsel of His will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also, when you heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, believed in Him. We're sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory.

How many times do y'all count? 10's close, I count at eight. But depending on how you count it, whether all wisdom and insight, obviously Jesus is wisdom from God, you can make a case, there's another example there. But depending on how you count it, I got about eight times that Paul references in these 14 verses our union with Christ, being in Christ.

This is a biblical principle. It's all over the teachings of Paul. Understanding union with Christ is not just going to help you understand doctrine better. It's really going to help you understand your Bible better. Once you see this idea of being in Christ, and see it's a reference to this doctrine of union with Christ, this Pauline doctrine, this biblical doctrine, You're never gonna read your Bible the same way. You're going to see that really, that is one of the major themes of the Bible, and not just in Paul.

We see this also in the Apostle John. How many times does Jesus talk to his disciples about abiding in him? Jesus says, he who abides in me bears much fruit. That's union with Christ. I pray that they might be one, even as we are one. Union with Christ. All of these ideas throughout the scriptures are all coming together to form this very biblical doctrine, union with Christ.

This is crucial for understanding our Bibles. And in fact, if you read through the epistles of Paul, you'll find that this idea of being in Christ throughout Paul's epistles is mentioned over 80 times. by name. And if you include things like in the beloved, in him, and in the Lord being a reference to Christ, you get up to 150 times in the letters of Paul. This is a big principle, especially for Paul, but throughout the New Testament.

So this is a biblical principle. It is also a unifying principle. A unifying principle. It's fitting. It's called union with Christ. It makes sense. It's a unifying principle. Now, what do I mean by a unifying principle? Well, I'll show you what I mean here.

How many of y'all are familiar with something like the order of salvation? You know, justification. We talk about sanctification. How many of y'all have heard words like that before? Most of y'all probably have. I'll start writing a few of those down. Y'all can shout out a few more of the elements of the order of salvation. I'll put down, for starters, justification. Anyone got another one for me? Adoption. We can put that down. I already said sanctification. Anything else? Regeneration. Thank you. Regeneration. Anything else? Glorification. Thank you very much.

So these are all aspects of what is called the order of salvation. It's sort of describing how salvation happens. First, well, one we forgot to put on, I'll just put it on really quick here, predestination. So first, God for the foundation of the world. predestined someone to salvation, and those whom he predestined, these he regenerates, he justifies them, he sanctifies them, he adopts them, and he glorifies them. There's an order to it. There is a series to it. This is all describing how salvation happens, this order of salvation.

Now the reason we talk about union with Christ as a unifying principle is because all of these aspects really find their unity in the doctrine of union with Christ. Union with Christ stands in the middle of all these doctrines and unifies them. We'll talk more about this as we go, but for example, why is it that we can talk about justification and sanctification as two very different things, where we say, as Protestants, we are not saved by our good works, right? And yet we would say that no Christian is saved who does not produce good works. And the reason we talk about that is because we have distinction between justification and sanctification. Justification is being declared righteous in God's sight. Sanctification is the work of the Spirit to make us more like Christ as we proceed in our salvation. Now, we would say these are distinct.

We are not justified on the basis of our sanctification. Neither is our sanctification perfect like our justification. Our sanctification is in progress. Yet at the same time, we would say that no one is justified who is not also sanctified, right? You don't have someone walking around who's justified, who does not have the Holy Spirit working in them to make them more like Jesus.

Why is that? Why do those two distinct ideas have to be present in the Christian? And the answer is, they are both aspects of our union with Christ. Ultimately, they find their unity in our union with Christ. Our justification is our receiving Christ's righteousness and Him receiving our sin, our sin guilt, paying the price for it, giving us His perfect righteousness. Union with Christ. And our sanctification is Christ in us, being made in the image of Christ, being more like Christ. Ultimately, we are justified Because we're in union with Christ. And we are sanctified because we're in union with Christ. That's what we mean when we say that union with Christ is this unifying principle. Why are we adopted? Because we're in union with Christ. We're his brothers. Why are we regenerated? We experience the new life of Christ. Why are we glorified? We share in his glory. Why are we saved? Why do we have this hope of the resurrection?

Because Christ was raised. And see, you can keep going with a lot of other doctrines. We could talk about the doctrine of the church. We could talk about the resurrection. All of these also find their union with union with Christ. Why are we in union with one another? Why must we love each other? Why does Paul, why does Jesus say they will know that you are my disciples by your love for one another? Because all of us are one. All of us are members of one another. We are all members of the body of Christ. It's all about this union with Christ. This is a unifying principle.

So if we can understand union with Christ, we can understand the whole doctrine of salvation. It's sort of like looking at the doctrine of covenant. I'm sure that's something that we've had Sunday school classes on here. We talk about the doctrine of covenant and how it explains original sin, it explains the new heavens and new earth, it explains the redemption of Jesus Christ. All of those things find their union in this doctrine of the covenant.

So covenant is also a unifying principle. Union with Christ is like that. It is this unifying principle. So, union with Christ, what is it? Well, it's a biblical principle. It's something found all throughout scripture, especially in the writings of Paul. It is a unifying principle. It is something that draws all the doctrine of salvation together. Third and finally, it is a foundational principle. It is a foundational principle.

The way Ferguson sort of tries to get at this, he talks about the history of this doctrine in the life of the Apostle Paul. I'm sure most of y'all are probably familiar with Paul's conversion story, at least generally. You have Paul, or Saul, as he's called at that point, who is this Pharisee of Pharisees. He's highly regarded by all the Jewish people.

And he begins persecuting the church, right? We read about that in Galatians 2, where Paul says, I persecuted the church to death. He was seeking down Christians, trying to kill them. In fact, and when he was about to be converted, he was taking that persecution beyond just the walls of Jerusalem, all the way to Damascus, which was actually almost a Gentile city, quite a ways away. This man was zealous against the church. Now, something Ferguson asks that I thought was an interesting question is, why? Why was it that Paul was so filled with animosity towards the church?

You may answer, well, because he's a Pharisee. That's what Pharisees did, right? Actually, no. Just because you were a Pharisee didn't mean you were hostile to the church. One of the most famous Pharisees, one of the most high up Pharisees was Gamaliel, Paul's teacher.

And Gamaliel, far from being hostile to the church, he actually convinced the Sanhedrin to not persecute the church at first. He said, guys, if this group is from God, then we might find ourselves fighting against God. If it's not from God, they'll go away on their own. We don't have to persecute them. So why was it that Paul was filled with this rage against the church? Why the animosity?

Well, Ferguson finds his answer in Romans chapter seven. So if y'all wanna turn there in your Bibles, Romans chapter seven, sort of the beginnings of an answer to this question. I promise this will lead back into our foundational principle in a moment, but we're building up to it. Romans chapter seven, beginning at verse seven, Paul is talking about the role of the law here. And as he talks about the law, he moves now from talking about the law in the abstract, to applying it personally. Talking about the experience of the law in his own life. Look at verse seven. What then shall we say?

That the law is sin? By no means. Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said you shall not covet. But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive

apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. Now, what is Paul talking about here when he says that the commandment came alive, that sin came alive in here, and why does he particularly bring out this sin of coveting?

Seems like an odd sin to bring out. If we were to list out the sins in the Ten Commandments, coveting probably wouldn't be the first one we talk about. I mean, it's the last one to list. Why is he talking about this? Well, Like I said, Ferguson views this as a look at Paul's own life, his own heart, his own conversion story.

So remember for a moment where Paul's from. Paul was not born in Jerusalem. He was born in a city called Tarsus. And Tarsus was a prominent city in the area of Cilicia. Cilicia, this will become important in a moment. Now, the whole persecution by Paul against the Christians began with Stephen, remember? Stephen, this great man of God, this deacon, he's preaching the gospel in Jerusalem, and no one's able to stand against him. Let's turn back for a moment, one more time, to Acts chapter six. I promise this will be the last time I have you turn to a passage. It's important, we're building towards something. Acts chapter six, beginning at verse nine. Remember, here Stephen is preaching in Jerusalem, the gospel of Christ.

Then some who belong to the synagogue of the freemen, as it was called, and the Cyrenians and the Alexandrians of those from Cilicia and Asia rose up and disputed with Stephen. Now look at verse 10. but they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he was speaking. So you got these guys, they're from this local synagogue, but the synagogue was populated by people from Cilicia. And these people, they try to dispute with Stephen about Christ, and they are unable to stand up against his wisdom.

Now think back for a moment to Paul. Paul was from Tarsus, a city in Cilicia. This is most likely his home synagogue. This is the synagogue he went where he got teaching. And remember, Saul was no novice. If we look at Galatians 2, we don't have time to look at that right now, but Paul talks about how advanced he was. He advanced beyond all his peers in terms of wisdom, in terms of knowing the scriptures, in terms of knowing the law, doing the law. He was a Pharisee of Pharisees. He was practically a teacher. He was Gamaliel's star pupil.

And yet when he met a man in Christ, when he met a man with Christ alive in him, He could not withstand his wisdom. He could not withstand the spirit. Stephen had something Paul didn't have. And if we read throughout the story of Stephen, you'll see again and again, Stephen's reflecting Christ. He is truly a man in Christ.

He, like Jesus, is arrested in Jerusalem. He's tried before the Sanhedrin. And like Jesus, they cannot withstand his wisdom, but they nevertheless execute him. Not on a cross, but outside in the city. And what does Stephen do as he's about to die? The same thing Jesus did.

Father, forgive them of this sin. That was truly a man in Christ, a man who reflected Christ in his life. When Paul saw that, sin came alive. All of a sudden, Paul was exposed. He didn't have what Stephen had. He may not have been fully conscious of it at the time, but looking back on it in Romans, he's like, that was covetousness. I wanted that. In other words, Paul's inciting incident, what drove him towards the gospel eventually began because someone was reflecting Christ.

Someone was in union with Christ. Now carrying that along, Paul is persecuting the church. Paul is killing Christians. And he's on his way to Damascus to continue doing it. And while he's on his way, a light shines from heaven. What are the first words that Paul hears from this voice? Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Why are you persecuting me? Now, Jesus had already died and rose again. He was ascended into heaven. Paul wasn't persecuting Jesus literally. Why does Jesus say, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Exactly. Because the church is his body. Because to persecute the church, to persecute Christ. Why? Because of union with Christ. The church is in union with him. The church is his body.

Thus, when Paul persecuted the church, he was persecuting Jesus Christ. All that to say, the first doctrine, the foundational doctrine that Paul encounters in his salvation experience. The first thing Jesus teaches Paul is the doctrine of union with Christ. You persecute my church, Paul, you persecute me.

I am one with my church. Union with Christ is not an advanced doctrine for only the advanced Christians to find out. It's not a doctrine that, you know, if you learn it, great, if not, you know, it's sort of like super lapsarianism or something. There are a lot of good Christians that don't know about that. No, union with Christ is a foundational doctrine.

It is the soil from which grows our entire doctrine of salvation. So union with Christ, what is union with Christ? We're going back to our major definition. Union with Christ is defining our relationship with God in terms of our relation to Christ. And union with Christ is a biblical principle.

It's not something that was drawn out of the air. It is something all over the Bible. And if you understand union with Christ, you'll be able to better read your Bible. Union with Christ, it's a unifying principle. It's something where you can take all these different doctrines that seem like separate things, things that almost you wonder how they're related. And it relates all of them to one thing. They're all because of our union with Christ. And union with Christ is a foundational principle. It is fundamental to our faith. It is something, it's not advanced knowledge, it's something we all need to know. Any questions as we conclude our first lecture here?

We're doing really well on time. Look at that. I'm getting you guys out a little early. All of you who read those two chapters and thought, how is Hunter going to get through all of this? And I get you out early. Oh yeah. Cherish this moment. Any further questions? If not, let's close with a time of prayer.

Father in heaven, thank you for your word that teaches us so much. Thank you, Lord, for the gift of union with Jesus Christ. That we are one with Christ. Lord, forgive us for for taking that for granted. Help us, Lord, as we continue to look at this doctrine, as we strive to define our relation to You in terms of our relation to Jesus Christ. For He is our life, He is our adoption, He is our justification, and He is our glorification. For all this, in Jesus' name, Amen.