

The Church of the Servant King
Soteriology Series

**SO_5_What Christ Accomplished in His Death-Part 5 – Identification
With Christ and Positional Sanctification**

Definition & Description

The doctrine of *Identification with Christ* is a doctrine unique to the Pauline corpus of revelation. It results from the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit which incorporates the believer into the *Body of Christ*, a spiritual entity that consists of believers of the Church Age. Scripture attests to the fact that we are identified with Christ in His death (Rom 6:6), burial (Rom 6:4) and resurrection (Eph 2:6). As a result of identification with Christ, we are said to be “*in Christ*” (Eph 2:6).

The doctrine of *Positional Sanctification* is a derivative of the doctrine of *Identification with Christ*. Scripture teaches the concept of sanctification of the believer in three different categories – positional (our subject – Phase 1 or soteriological), experiential (Phase 2 – the Christian life) and ultimate (Phase 3 – eternity). Our focus in this study is upon *Positional Sanctification* which relates to that which has been accomplished by Christ on the believer’s behalf and is true of the believer from the moment of faith in Christ until the moment the believer passes into eternity. *Positional Sanctification* refers to the fact that the believer is set apart from the remainder of the human race which is condemned to eternal separation from God.

Identification With Christ

This truth is established in Scripture by a number of different passages. Some of these passages use words that are prefixed with the preposition *sun* (♦◆■) – *together with* to describe what Christ has accomplished. These compound words carry a meaning of a joint relationship.¹ For instance:

- Joint heirs (*sun + kleronomoi*)
 - Romans 8:17 – “joint heirs with Christ”
 - Ephesians 3:6 – “that the Gentiles should be *fellow-heirs*, and of the *same body*, and *partakers* of His promise in Christ by the gospel.”
- Jointly crucified with Christ (*sunstauroo*):
 - Romans 6:6 – “knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him”
 - Galatians 2:20 – “I have been crucified with Christ”
- Jointly buried with Christ (*sunthapto*):
 - Romans 6:4 – “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”
 - Colossians 2:12 – “buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith”
- Jointly raised with Christ (*sunegeiro*):
 - Colossians 3:1 – “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.”
- To have been made to jointly live with Christ (*sunezoopoiesen*):
 - Ephesians 2:5 – “even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ”
- To be jointly seated with Christ at present in the heavenly places (*sunekathisen*)
 - Ephesians 2:6 – “and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”
- In the future, to be jointly glorified with Christ (*sundoxasthomen*)

¹ Charles F. Baker, *A Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Publications, 1994), 440.

- Romans 8:17 – “that we may also be glorified together”

Thus, it can be seen from Scripture that the believer is spiritually identified with Christ through the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit. This baptizing work is a spiritual phenomena – unseen and unfelt which incorporates the believer into the body of Christ. Yet, once the reality of these spiritual truths dawn in the soul of the yielded believer,² he or she experiences a joy and appreciation in the soul prompted by the ministry of the Holy Spirit that is akin to Paul’s statement in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6.

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ (Rom 8:15)

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ (Gal 4:6)

Identification with Christ therefore provides us with the basis for understanding how we are viewed from a spiritual standpoint by God based upon our acceptance of the work of Christ. From the divine viewpoint, God saw every believer die on the Cross with Christ, be buried in Joseph’s tomb, and be raised from the dead to live jointly with Christ in a new creation. In addition, God sees every believer seated in the heavenlies at His Own right hand. The doctrine of identification with Christ is the basis for such doctrines as sanctification and eternal security. Only as the believer appropriates an understanding of all that is included in the concept of this doctrine will the believer experience true victory over sin in the daily life (Rom 6:1-2).

Identification is Expressed by the Phrase “In Christ”

The expression “in Christ” occurs some seventy times in Paul’s epistles and only twice elsewhere (1 Peter 3:16 and 5:14).³ There is no thought of a physical union with Christ – only a spiritual union that is unseen and not demonstrable to the human senses. We are identified with Christ because we are seen as having been “in Christ” in His death, burial and resurrection with the result that we are seen as a new spiritual creation through which the spiritual reality of other Soteriological truths are realized in the believer.

Therefore, if anyone is *in Christ*, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Cor 5:17)

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are *in Christ Jesus* (Rom 8:1)

He hath chosen us *in Him* before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4)

And you are complete *in Him*, who is the head of all principality and power (Col 2:10)

But now *in Christ Jesus* you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Eph 2:13)

“In Christ” Redemptively Verses In the Body of Christ Dispensationally

Only believers of the present dispensation of the Church Age are members of the Body of Christ; however, in John 14:20, Jesus states that by reason of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer He would be in the believer and the believer in Him. “Thus, in this sense, every believer from Pentecost to the end of time is in Christ, and all of the saints who lived before

² The yielded believer is one who has surrendered his will or who has an unconditional desire to know and to do the will of God.

³ Baker, 438.

Pentecost will be raised from the dead in an 'in Christ' relationship."⁴ However, not all believers of all dispensations are said to be part of the body of Christ. When the last member of the Church Age is added to the body of Christ, that Body will be raptured to be with Christ as a perfect and complete body. In the Messianic kingdom, there will be millions of saints "in Christ" redemptively who will not be in the Body of Christ. While the church as a unique entity began with the Apostle Paul's ministry in turning to the Gentiles, Paul acknowledges that some were in Christ before him (Rom 16:7). Also, resurrected believers of all dispensations will be present in the New Jerusalem (heaven) from which our Lord and those resurrected believing saints of all dispensations will rule and reign with Christ during the Millennial Messianic Kingdom.

Sanctification or Positional Truth

Our position in Christ set us apart or sanctifies us in God's sight. This sanctification or being set apart has three dimensions to it. Our focus in this study is upon that dimension that relates to soteriology, i.e. Phase 1 truth in the believer's life. The other two dimensions relate to the categories of doctrine known as pneumatology (i.e. the spiritual life of the believer through the ministry of the Holy Spirit) and eschatology (i.e. future things).⁵

The Hebrew adjective for holy is *qadosh* and derives from a verb meaning "to cut off" or "to separate".⁶ While Israel functioned under the Law, *qadosh* and its related terms are used to describe particular places (i.e. the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies), objects (e.g. Aaron's garments), and persons (e.g. the priests and the Levites) as set apart or sanctified to the Lord. This sense of being sanctified or set apart by being holy is used of Church Age believers as well. Peter refers to his readers as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" in 1 Peter 2:9. This setting apart occurs at the very beginning of the Christian life, at the point of conversion, along with regeneration and justification. "It is in this sense that the New Testament so frequently refers to Christians as 'saints' (ἁγιοὶ ἡμετέροις), even when they are far from perfect."⁷ This is why Paul could address the believers in Corinth as "sanctified" in spite of the numerous spiritual problems he had to address with those believers (see 1 Cor 1:2). Nevertheless, "saints" is the most frequently used title for Christians in the Bible.⁸

The words sanctify, sanctification, sanctuary, saint, and holy all come from the same root word in the Greek. The verb is *hagiazō* (ἁγιάζω) and is translated *sanctify*, *hallow*, and *let be holy*. The noun *hagiasmos* (ἁγιασμός) is translated *holiness* and *sanctification*. The adjective *hagios* (ἅγιος) is translated *holy* and *saints*.⁹

Conclusion

The soteriological category of truths are a very interwoven set of truths in Scripture. Each doctrine in this category views a different aspect of the same phenomenon, i.e. what Christ accomplished in His death on the Cross. When we place our trust in Christ's work on the Cross, we are set apart or sanctified and identified with Christ in His death, burial, resurrection and

⁴ Ibid., 436.

⁵ These three different aspects of sanctification are described by the terms positional, experiential, and ultimate (glorification). See Baker, 455 and Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 905, 968-69.

⁶ Erickson, 968.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Baker, 454.

⁹ Ibid.

session. Thus, we are in union with Christ. We are seen by the Father to have been placed in the same position with Christ in a retroactive sense (death, burial, resurrection), a current sense (session) and even a future sense (our eternal inheritance). Therefore, there is a certain degree of overlap between sanctification, identification, union with Christ, adoption, sealing, eternal security and a number of other soteriological doctrines. This just illustrates how doctrine is built upon doctrine to form an interlocking web of truth in one's soul. The objective in the Christian life is to become like Christ; however, we cannot become like Christ if we don't have an interlocking web of truth formed in our soul so that we have a clear picture of Who He is and what He accomplished. That picture is our motivation.