

# Union with Christ

*A study of Christian teaching on "union with Christ," focusing on the subjective interpretation of this union..*

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## UNION WITH CHRIST

### Seeking a Balanced Understanding

Did you ever play the children's game where one person whispers a phrase to another, and that person to another, and the whispering action continues down the line or around the circle? What the last person hears (or thinks he hears) seldom resembles the statement that was originally made.

The Christian expressions concerning "union with Christ" are complicated even more by the fact that the original Biblical statements about the Christian life did not refer directly or explicitly to the phrase, "union with Christ." Centuries after Christ's historical incarnation, Latin Christian writers began to refer to *unio cum Christo*, "union with Christ." As that phrase was passed down the line in Christian circles through the subsequent centuries of Christian thought, it has become very convoluted with many accretions of doctrinal and devotional understanding. This study will seek to discover a Biblically balanced understanding of the Christian's "union with Christ."

It will be instructive to commence with a brief mention of the definition of "union." "Union" is to be differentiated from "unity." A "unity" is something that exists as one. A "union" is the bringing together, or uniting, of multiple (two or more) distinct, disparate or separate entities, not previously conjoined, but now brought together, joined, formed, unified, and united into a singular entity.

Using this distinction of definition, it would not be proper to speak of *Trinitarian union*, for the divine Trinity is a tri-unity wherein the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have existed in eternal unity and oneness. Despite the contention of Arius that "there was a time when the Son was not," the orthodox Christian understanding denies that there was a time when particular persons of the Godhead did not exist or were brought into being, and subsequently a time or occasion when the separate persons of the Godhead were conjoined in a "union." The Trinity of God has always existed as a Tri-unity of divine oneness. **1**

At the heart of Christian teaching, however, is the unique and singular historical act of the Son of God being united with humanity in the “union” of the God-man. This *Christological union* was the union of deity and humanity in a particular historical individual, Jesus Christ. The functional objective of the *Christological union* is also expressed as the *Mediatorial union*, for Jesus Christ as the God-man was “the one mediator between God and man” (I Tim. 2:5).

The particular means of the uniting of God and man in the historic person of Jesus Christ is referred to as the *incarnational union*. The Apostle John explained that the divine *Logos*, the eternal Son of God who “was God” (Jn. 1:1) was incarnated in physical flesh as a man. “The Word became flesh” (Jn. 1:14). This *incarnational union* was a singularly unique union. There was only one Son of God, the divine Word (*Logos*), and the historical singularity of His being incarnated as a man was “once and for all.” The reason this emphasis is necessary is due to the common usage of *incarnational union* among some Christians in reference to the union of the Christian with Christ. If the phrase incarnational union is to be used to explain the Christian’s subjective union with Christ, adequate clarification must continually be made between the singular historic event of the Son of God becoming a man when “the Word became flesh” (Jn. 1:14) and the generalized or generic use of the word “incarnational” to refer to the embodiment or enfleshment of the life of Jesus in the Christian.

Christian theology has traditionally explained the Christological union of incarnational union as the *hypostatic union* of deity and humanity in the person of Jesus. Since the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451, Christian theology has sought to explain that the two natures, or substances, or essences, or essential properties of deity and humanity were united in the union of a distinct individual or person (Greek *hypostasis*), i.e. Jesus. Again, we must point out that this was a singularly unique *hypostatic union*, an unrepeatability of divine action, because some have attempted to use *hypostatic union* to explain a substantial, essential union of two natures (deity and humanity) in the Christian when the Christian is united with Christ.

### **Historical and Theological Review**

When we begin to consider the Christian’s “union with Christ,” which is contingent upon the historic foundation of the *Christological union* of the person of Jesus Christ, we find a quagmire of semantic and interpretive confusion throughout the literature of Christian history. What we discover is that the term “union” has been employed in a multitude of different ways. The first major differentiation in explaining “union with Christ” is between the attempts to explain “union with Christ” in terms of an *objective union*, a union effected outside of and external to the person and experience of the individual Christian, and those explanations of “union with Christ” as a *subjective union* that takes place internally within the person and experience of the Christian individual.

#### **Objective Union**

Concepts of *objective union* with Christ sometimes begin with the *race union* of Christ with mankind. As the Son of Man, Jesus was united with humanity as the federal head of the human race. This race union is explained as a *federal union* or a *judicial union* or a *legal union* of Christ’s *representative union* or *solidarity union* with mankind. In the predestined plan of God, and by the predetermined decrees of God, it is alleged that those who were predestined, elected, and called of God are united with Christ in *election union*, and that often in the context of a *covenantal union* of

God's people. This *objective union* of Christ's *identification union* or *vicarious union* with mankind is often referred to as the *vital union* of Christ with man in an objectified *positional union*.

Both Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians proceed to explain the objective union of Christians with Christ in the *collective union* or *corporate union* that all Christians have with Christ in the Body of Christ, the Church. This *ecclesial union*, *ecclesiastical union*, or *church union* is usually closely aligned with the *sacramental union* that Christians are said to have with Christ as the church administers the sacraments that are alleged to establish *baptismal union* and *eucharistic union* with Christ. The *collective church union* that Christians have with Christ in the Body of Christ is often called an *organic union* with Christ based on the fact that the church is not just an institution or organization, but an organism, a Body united to Christ as Head (Eph. 1:22,23; Col. 1:18; Rom. 12:15; I Cor. 12:27).

The *historic co-active union* with Christ is often explained by the *crucifixion union*, *resurrection union*, and *ascension union* of the Christian's being united with Christ in co-crucifixion (cf. Gal. 2:20; Rom. 6:5,6; Col. 2:12; 3:1) and identification with the historic acts of Jesus Christ. This is also referred to as the *positional union* of *identification union* with Christ. The Christian has been united "in Christ," so that when He died we died, when He was raised we were raised, and when He ascended we ascended in *historic co-active union* with Christ.

Theological concepts of objective union with Christ also include the expected *eschatological union* with Christ in the *final-state union* or *heavenly union* – the *consummation union* of the *eternal union* of *glory union* when Christians hope to be involved in *reigning union* with Christ. The theologians sum up all of the above-mentioned concepts of objective union with Christ as *mystical union*, for they are regarded as the great mysteries of Christian thought and theology.

## **Subjective Union**

Others who want to focus on the subjective union of Christ with Christians would prefer to reserve the phrase *mystical union* for the internal "mystery ... which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). If ever there was a phrase that has become "all things to all people," it is this phrase *unio mystica*, or *mystical union*. It is even employed in the *kabbalist* teachings of Judaism, as well as in Islamic and Buddhist teaching. Its extensive usage has rendered it a rather inane and meaningless phrase for the discussion of "union with Christ."

The Christian's subjective union with Christ is often identified as a *spiritual union* based on the Pauline statement that "the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him" (I Cor. 6:17). When an individual is "born of the Spirit" (Jn. 3:5,6), a spiritual union of the Spirit of Christ and the spirit of that person is established (Rom. 8:9,16). This has been called *regenerative union*, *saving union*, or *new-creation union*, although distinction in these terms can and should be made. Evangelical theology has often referred to the *faith union* effected between Christ and the Christian when the supplied life of God's grace in Christ is received in the derivation of faith-receptivity. In this *fiduciary union* a *personal union* is established. It is a *relational union* that is likened to the *conjugal union* of *marital union* (Eph. 5:28-30) between husband and wife. This *personal union* of the Christian with Christ is more than a union of alliance or mere personal relationship, for it

involves the deepest intimacy of oneness in spiritual union and relational union.

*Spiritual life union* with Christ is to be expressed in the *practical union* of Christian living. This functional and operational union with the dynamic life of Christ has been termed *experimental union*, *experiential union*, and *existential union*. In many cases this has been regarded as a progressive union of behavioral ideals that are to be attained or achieved through various spiritual disciplines of meditation, prayer, Bible reading, liturgical exercises, dying to self, etc. Such religious “works” are regarded as developmental for attaining *confessional union*, *obedience union*, *transformational union*, and myriad forms of *moral union* with Christ by confessing, obeying, and keeping His commands. A more Biblical perspective realizes that a *real spiritual union* with Christ has been established in *regenerative union* with the indwelling Spirit of Christ. This *new-creature union* (II Cor. 5:17) has created such oneness of spirit between Christ and the Christian (I Cor. 6:17) that the spirit of man has no capacity or capability to function apart from the Spirit of Christ. The living Lord Jesus within us has become the basis of a *vital union* whereby a Christ-one, a Christian, lives out Christ’s life in a *manifestational union* or an *evidentiary union*, which others have called a *life union* or *sanctification union*. Reference to *incarnational union* (referred to above) and the enfleshment of Christ’s life in Christian behavior, finds some Biblical justification in Paul’s statement of the “life of Jesus manifested in our mortal flesh (or body)” (II Cor. 4:10,11). As we “abide in Christ” (Jn. 6:56; 15:4-7; I Jn. 2:24) in *abiding union*, such a fellowship union allows for union to become communion, even to the extent of *intercessory union* that allows the life of Christ to be laid down and lived out for others through us.

### **Misleading Union**

We must beware, however, of allowing the subjective union of spiritual union with Christ to be cast as a *metaphorical union* that is nothing more than a figure of speech rather than an actual spiritual union. Neither is “union with Christ” to be portrayed as merely a *psychological union* that causes one to attempt to think, feel and will in accord with Christ’s example, as the separated Spirit seeks to induce such by influential union. The objective of union with Christ is not to experience a *consciousness union* that is continually conscious of Jesus, or an ecstatic union that gets “high” on sensate emotions. Caution must also be observed in allowing spiritual union with Christ to be formulated into the varying forms of *metaphysical union* that postulate an *essential union* or a *consubstantial union* whereby man becomes substantially fused, merged, or commingled with God in a *deification union*. References to *hypostatic union* or *organic union* of the Christian individual with Christ lend themselves to concepts of *coalescence union* or *virtual union* that can depersonalize and deify the human individual. This is also present in the monistic and pantheistic emphases of oneness with God that promote a *universalistic union* of all men with God, wherein “God is all in all.”

### **“Union Life”**

In this review of how Christian theology has addressed the concept of “union with Christ,” we have observed the objective and subjective senses of Christ’s union with man through Christian history. But specifically within the subjective interpretations of “union with Christ” where Christ’s presence affects us internally, there is a void in the history of Christian teaching, an absence of explanation, of how “union with Christ” affects who we are, our identity. That particular emphasis of *identity union*

was the focus of Norman P. Grubb, and others who followed him.

In the twentieth century there was a movement called “union life.” Via the teachings and writings of Norman Grubb, there was an emphasis on the Christian’s *spiritual union* with Christ. A periodical magazine entitled “Union Life” was published for many years. It heralded the Christian’s union identity with Christ, as did Grubb’s last two books, *Who Am I?* and *Yes I Am*. Regrettably, the “union life” movement fractured and splintered in the latter part of the twentieth century, prior to the death of Norman Grubb, and much to his chagrin and sorrow. Failing to maintain a balance of emphasis on regenerative union identity with Christ, the various splinter groups developed divergent emphases: (1) one group taught that “union life” is *contained* in all men in monistic universalism. (2) one fellow taught that “union life” is *ordained* for all in inevitable predetermined fatalism. (3) one group taught that “union life” is *retained* through identification, repudiation, and suppression of sin in group accountability. (4) one group taught that “union life” is *attained* experientially through the discipline of “centering prayer.” Somewhere along the chain of whispers, they all heard and expressed a distorted message, leaving only scattered remnants who understand that “union life” is *obtained* by receiving the Spirit of Christ into one’s spirit by faith and continuing to derive all from the One who is Life – Jesus Christ.

### Dialectic

This study will attempt to illustrate in the graphic form of a chart, the necessary balance and tension that must be maintained if we are to have a Biblical and theological tenable teaching of “union with Christ.” The format we will employ to seek this balanced understanding will be the context of dialectic. Our first order of business will be to differentiate dialectic from other forms of divided thinking.

A *dichotomy* is a division of elements into two parts. Etymologically the word means, “to cut in two.” A dichotomy is a bifurcation of elements, separated and distinguished. The constitution of man is often explained as a dichotomy of body and soul, or alternatively as a trichotomy of body, soul, and spirit. Man, however, is not “cut in two” or “cut in three,” but is a functional whole with physical, psychological and spiritual function.

*Dualism* in its most generic meaning simply refers to two elements or substances. As a classic philosophical concept it refers to two opposing principles or powers, often regarded as being equal and counterbalanced. One power is identified with good, and the other with evil. The *yin-yang* dualism of oriental philosophy is an example where good and evil are equally balanced. The Platonic dualism of spirit and matter presented a constant conflict of good and evil: spirit being identified with good, and matter with evil. One approach to avoiding the conflict was to give in to the evil of physical matter, and indulge oneself in hedonism and Epicureanism. Another approach was to avoid the evil of the material by denial in asceticism and monasticism. Neither approach solved the dualism.

Sometimes opposites are cast as *antinomies*, meaning “against the law” of reason. When opposing principles or tenets form an unreasonable and irresolvable contradiction this is an antinomy.

A *paradox* is very similar to an antinomy. It involves opposing truths that do not have an apparent

logical solution. They are juxtaposed alongside of each other in order to note their distinction.

*Dialectic* is a process of thought where a concept is preserved and fulfilled by its opposite. Opposite tenets are held in tensioned balance, creating a logical dialogue of how they relate to each other. This is not necessarily the Socratic method of thesis and antithesis seeking a logical synthesis. Rather, it involves living with the contradictory opposites and finding completeness and totality only in the counterbalance of the two, allowing a dynamic interchange and interplay of two concepts to challenge and balance each other. The Western mind, steeped as it is in the linear cause and effect of Aristotelian logic has a difficult time with dialectic. Western thought wants to get everything figured out, systematized, organized, categorized, and boxed up in the absoluteness of an airtight system with no loose ends. The Eastern mind, on the other hand, seems more able to maintain opposites in tension, perhaps because there has often been a dualistic base to their thinking.

By way of personal testimony, I can admit that I was a product of my Western world, even to the extent of being a religious fundamentalist with absolutist thinking of right and wrong, good and evil, orthodoxy and heresy. I came to understand philosophical dialectic through the writings of the Danish author, Soren Kierkegaard. Theological dialectic was learned through the writings of the Swiss theologian, Karl Barth. The writings of the French sociologist, Jacques Ellul, provided me with sociological dialectic. In personal and spiritual matters the writings of the British missionary, Norman Grubb, provided a perspective of spiritual dialectic. Together these mentors have taught me to view everything in terms of dialectic – to see the other side of everything, in the Bible, in theology, in sociology, and in spiritual matters.

There is such polarity and one-sidedness in Christian thinking today. Calvinism is set against Arminianism, and they both need to see the dialectic of divine sovereignty balanced with human responsibility. In eschatological matters preterism is on the far side of futurism, and they both need to see the dialectic of the “already” and the “not yet.” Dispensationalism battles against Covenant Theology, and they both need to recognize the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity. Creationism opposes scientism, and they both need to find balance in the dialectic of the supernatural alongside of the natural. The Biblicists and the charismatics need to see the dialectic of objectivity and subjectivity. The polarized extremes can only find common ground in an understanding of dialectic.

Having already noted the dialectic of objective and subjective interpretations of “union with Christ,” we shall proceed to consider the dialectic of *union* and *distinction* within the subjective understanding of “union with Christ.” This is not to deny or deprecate the objective interpretations of “union with Christ,” but our intent is to emphasize the subjective “union with Christ.” Within this graphic formatting of subjective union we shall observe the sequence of the “union of being” and the “union of doing”. These can also be referred to as “ontological union” and “operational union,” and can also be seen in the tension of dialectic.

### **Union of Being** [Chart](#)

The subjective union of Christ and the Christian is referred to throughout the New Testament literature, and was expressed by early Latin Christian writers in the phrase, *unio cum Christo*. Others used the phrase *unio mystica* or “mystical union,” but (as we have previously indicated) this phrase

has been so broadly employed in Christian teaching that it is basically meaningless.

## Spiritual Union

The Apostle Paul wrote, “The one who is joined to the Lord is one spirit (with Him)” (I Cor. 6:17). This “*one spirit*” union of the Christian with Christ is contextualized by the *distinction* of “the one” being joined to “the Lord.” In the preceding verse, I Cor. 6:16, which quotes from Genesis 2:24, the oneness of the “one flesh” marital union of husband and wife establishes the basis of contrast with the “one spirit” union of Christ and the Christian. The joining in “one flesh” in marriage and the joining in “one spirit” in Christian relationship are both real unions, but the *distinction* is evident in that they are relational unions, neither party being diminished or lost in the union of the two.

Writing to the Romans, Paul makes the *distinction* of the *spirit-union*, explaining, “the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16). The Spirit of Christ relates to the human spirit by the assuring witness that we have an *identity-union* with Christ as “children of God.” This requires, of course, the indwelling presence of the Spirit of Christ, for Paul wrote earlier, “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom. 8:9), i.e. that person is not a Christian if the Spirit of Christ does not dwell in him.

In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul wrote, “I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me...” (Gal. 2:20a). Some have interpreted the words, “it is no longer I who lives,” to mean Paul’s individuality and personality have been annihilated or absorbed into the Christ who lives in him or as him. The latter part of the same verse disallows such, for it states the remaining distinction, “...and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20b). The *distinctions* between the Christian “I” and the “Son of God...Himself” reveal the relationalism of this *spiritual union* between Christ and the Christian.

In the second epistle of Peter we read, “His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence, and granted to us His precious and magnificent promises..., in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature” (II Pet. 1:3,4). There is a union of the Christian with the “divine nature” of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but this does not imply that the Christian implicitly or inherently becomes “divine nature” in any kind of fused merging or coalescence. The Christian can never declare, “I am divine nature.” Rather, this verse indicates that we are “*partakers* of the divine nature” of the Godhead, and the Greek word *koinonoi* means that we “take part in, share in, and have commonality with” the divine nature of God. *Distinction* is preserved in the *union* with “divine nature,” and this is certainly evident in the preceding part of the sentence in the triple distinction of “Him” and “us.”

The epistle to the Hebrews also indicates that Christians are “*partakers* of Christ” (Heb. 3:14) and “*partakers* of the Holy Spirit” (Heb. 6:4). A different Greek word, *metochoi*, is used in these verses, meaning, “to participate in as recipients” (cf. Heb. 3:1; 12:8). In vital union with the persons of the Godhead, Christians are recipient participants with Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but the word “partakers” implies that *distinction* is maintained.

It is the privilege of the Christian to participate and have fellowship with God in intimate communion (common union). “We are called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ” (I Cor. 1:9), and “our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ” (I Jn. 1:3), as well as “fellowship of the Spirit” (Phil. 2:1). The Greek word in all of these verses is *koinonia*, which indicates a commonality of participant relationalism, but does not allow for essential equivalence.

The most used New Testament phrase for the Christian’s union with Christ is the simple phrase, “in Christ,” or “in Christ Jesus,” or simply “in Him.” These prepositional phrases are used several hundred times in the New Testament writings. Whenever we read this “in Christ” phrase, we can legitimately interpret it as “in union with Christ.” For example: “By His doing you are *in Christ Jesus* (in union with Christ Jesus), who became to us wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification and redemption” (I Cor. 1:30). “If any man is *in Christ* (in union with Christ), he is a new creature” (II Cor. 5:17).

We have such a spiritual union with the Triune God that “our life is hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3), and “Christ is our life” (Col. 3:4). “*In Him* (in union with Him) we have been made complete” (Col. 2:10). “Every spiritual blessing in heavenly places is ours *in Christ Jesus* (in union with Christ Jesus)” (Eph. 1:3) – “all things belong to you” (I Cor. 2:21,22) – “everything pertaining to life and godliness” (II Pet. 1:3). Our union with Christ is such that “we are seated in the heavenly places *in Christ Jesus* (in union with Christ Jesus)” (Eph. 2:6).

### **Analogies**

There are a number of analogies employed by the New Testament writers to illustrate “union with Christ.” Every analogy is such that it simultaneously presents *distinction* within the *union*.

The *vessel/contents* analogy. “We (Christians) have this treasure (Christ) in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves” (II Cor. 4:7). The Christian is the vessel. Christ is the spiritual content. Though distinct, there is a vital union that allows the dynamic of our action to be the power of God.

The *branch/vine* analogy. “Every branch in Me (in union with Me)” (Jn. 15:2), “cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine” (Jn. 15:4). Jesus clearly states, “I am the vine; you are the branches; he who abides *in Me* (in union with Me), and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me, you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5). The analogy obviously pictures a union between the vine, Christ, and the branch, a Christian. At the same time there is a distinction between the “Me” and “he” with the responsibility of the Christian’s “abiding” in Christ.

The *house/occupant* analogy. Paul refers to “the earthly tent that is our house” (II Cor. 5:1). The occupant of our physical house is intended to be God, allowing for an indwelling union that allows God to control everything that takes place in our house. Though intimately united, the house and the occupant remain distinct.

The *temple/god* analogy. “Do you not now that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (I Cor. 3:16). “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, . . . and that you are not your own?” (I Cor. 6:19). This analogy is has both individual and

collective connotations (cf. II Cor. 6:16). Individually and collectively we are the temple in which God is to dwell and reign.

The *body/head* analogy. This analogy is specifically collective, but maintains the distinction of the individual also. “You are Christ’s body, and individually members of it” (I Cor. 12:27). “We are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Rom. 12:5). “God gave Him (Christ) as Head over all things to the church, which is His body” (Eph. 1:22,23). “He is the head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:18). Head and body obviously form a living union, but are not to be indistinguishably synthesized.

The *wife/husband* analogy. “As the church is to Christ, so ought wives to be to their husbands. Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church...” (Eph. 5:24,25). “This mystery is great: I am speaking in reference to Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:32). The relational union of the marital union between husband and wife is the analogous pattern for the spiritual union between Christ and Christians. The “one flesh” union (Gen. 2:24; I Cor. 6:16; Eph. 5:31) is the physical picture of the “one spirit” union (I Cor. 6:17). Distinction between the relational parties is always recognized in the union.

### **“Christ in you”**

These union analogies all retain *distinction* in the elements being *united*. The vessel is not the contents, and the content is not the vessel. The branch is not the vine, and the vine is not the branch. The house is not the occupant, and the occupant is not the house. The temple is not the god, and the god is not the temple. The body is not the head, and the head is not the body. The wife is not the husband, and the husband is not the wife. *Distinction* exists within the *union* of the two.

Some of these analogies (vessel, house, temple) picture the indwelling of Christ in the Christian. Not only is the Christian “in Christ” (in union with Christ), and this is the predominant New Testament phrase, but there are clear Biblical statements that the living Lord Jesus, the Spirit of Christ, dwells “in us” as Christians. “It is no longer I who lives, but *Christ lives in me*” (Gal. 2:20). “This is the mystery... *Christ in you*, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). “Do you not recognize this about yourselves, that *Jesus Christ is in you?*” (II Cor. 13:5). The entire Trinitarian God dwells in the Christian. “God abides in us” (I Jn. 4:12,15,16). “If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, He will give life through His Spirit who indwells you” (Rom. 8:11). “By the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, guard the treasure which has been entrusted to you” (II Tim. 1:14).

### **Identity Union**

We must remember, however, that “union with Christ” goes beyond the *distinction* of Father, Son and Holy Spirit located within and indwelling the Christian. The location of God in man must be kept balanced by the emphasis on a real union of Being with God. By the reception of the living God into our spirit in spiritual regeneration, the Christian, the Christ-one, becomes something/someone that he was not before. There is a change of identity, and that by an *identity-union* with Jesus Christ.

The Christian becomes a “new creature *in Christ* (in union with Christ); ...old things have passed away, and all things have becomes new (spiritually)” (II Cor. 5:17). The Christian becomes a “new

man.” The “old man was crucified with Christ” (Rom. 6:6). The “old man was laid aside” (Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9) when we became a Christian. The Christian “has put on the new man... created in righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24), and “renewed in accord with the image of God” (Col. 3:10). The identity of this “new creature” and “new man” is only “in Christ” (in union with Christ).

The New Testament uses many designations for the new *identity-union* of the Christian. The Christian is a “child of God” (Rom. 8:16; Jn. 1:12; I Jn. 3:1,2). The Christian is an adopted “son of God” (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:16). Christians are referred to as “saints” (Eph. 1:18; 4:12) or “holy ones.”

Christians are designated by character traits that can only be understood as a result of our union of being with Christ, and are not contingent on our doing. The Christian is identified as “holy and blameless” (Col. 1:22). The Christian is also called “righteous.” “Through the obedience of the One (Christ) the many (Christians) are made righteous” (Rom. 5:19). “We become the righteousness of God *in Christ* (in union with Christ)” (II Cor. 5:21). “Christ Jesus has become to us righteousness” (I Cor. 1:30). Despite the protestations of the reformers that Christians are only “declared righteous” in a legal and juridical pronouncement from the divine Judge, the scriptural record indicates that we are “made righteous.” In fact, Christians “are perfect” (Phil. 3:15), “perfected” (Heb. 10:14) and regarded as “the spirits of righteous men made perfect” (Heb. 12:23).

Christians need to realize that “in Christ” (in union with Christ) they are acceptable to God. “Christ accepted us to the glory of God” (Rom. 15:7). “There is, therefore, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (in union with Christ Jesus)” (Rom. 8:1). The world employs an abundance of self-talk about self-image, self-worth, self-value, self-concept, etc., but the Christian can have an assurance of a secure identity that is far greater than the criteria that the world relies on. The Christian can have a “positive personal concept” of who he is “in Christ” (in union with Christ).

Collectively, in the church of Jesus Christ, we also have a *union-identity*. We are the “people of God” (I Pet. 2:10). We are a “royal priesthood” (I Pet. 2:9) of “kings and priests” (Rev. 1:6). Together we are a covenant community (Heb. 8:10,11), comprising the “Body of Christ” (I Cor. 12:13; Rom. 12:15).

It is so important for Christians to be aware that their *union-identity*, individually and collectively, is a result of a real “union with Christ.” The Christian life is not a charade of play-acting or role-playing, trying to live like Jesus and love like Jesus. The Christian is so spiritually united with Christ, as a Christ-one deriving being and identity from Christ, that it can be said, “There is no explanation for me apart from Him.”

## **Derivation**

We are forced to observe *distinction*, though, in the recognition that the Christian is not any of these things “in and of himself,” i.e. intrinsically, inherently, self-existent, or self-generatively. Our union of identity is “in Christ” (in union with Christ). It is a derived identity, derived from our “union with Christ.” We are holy ones because the Holy One, Jesus Christ, lives in us (Acts 3:14; 4:27,30). We are righteous ones because the Righteous One, Jesus Christ, lives in us (Acts 3:14; 7:52). We are perfect ones because the Perfect One, Jesus Christ, lives in us (Heb. 7:28).

*Distinction* must be noted in the Christian's derivation from Christ to be who we are, and do what we do. God created us as derivative creatures. As derivative man, we always derive from another, a spirit source beyond ourselves. We are not the quality, the virtue, the character, the identity, the action in ourselves. We are not gods, and never become gods or God. There is always the distinction of the divine Supplier and the human receiver or deriver. The basic human function is derivation, dependency, receptivity, i.e. faith. We are responsible choosers, and faith is a choice to receive from, depend on, and derive from another.

Deriving our life, being, and identity from "union with Christ" does not mean that we are "no longer human," as some have claimed. It does not mean that we are no longer a distinct individual with a particular personality. Though identity is formed in our spirit by "union with Christ," we retain individuality within the function of our soul. There is always a distinct "me" that relates to and derives from "He;" even though there is no explanation for "me" apart from "He."

### **Evangelical Detachment**

Modern evangelicalism has not placed much emphasis on "being," much less "union of being in Christ." American evangelicalism, in particular, has emphasized pragmatic productivity in precepts, procedures and programs for "doing" God's work. Success in the accomplishment of "doing" has become the basis for significance and identity.

The *distinction* of Christ and the Christian has been pushed to the extreme of an objectified and separated concept of the Christian's relationship with Christ. The vast majority of those who call themselves "Christians" today are essentially deistic in their understanding of God. God is a detached and separated deity. "God is up in heaven, and I am down here on earth." In addition, this disjointed deity is regarded as an offended deity who is angry and judgmental about the sinfulness of man. God is viewed as opposed to and against man. Jesus is likewise regarded as far removed in His transcendence, seated at the right hand of God the Father. There is very little sense of the immanence or internal presence of Jesus in the Christ, much less any sense of "union with Christ." Jesus is usually considered to be interceding for Christians, acting as the legal advocate who is trying to convince the Father to accept us. Such an outlook severs the essential unity of the Trinity.

This detachment of God and man has been fostered by a theological paradigm that has over-objectified the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Their perspective is that Jesus died vicariously in our place on the cross, and then went to heaven before the Father to convince Him to impute certain benefits to those who would assent to His redemptive efficacy. On the basis of Christ's substitutional work, God is then alleged to be willing to grant a new standing, a new status, a new position to those who identify with Jesus, and He will declare them righteous.

Instead of an indwelling presence of the Spirit of Christ allowing for a new spiritual identity, evangelicalism has offered identification with the historical and theological Jesus, and more tangibly with the church organization. The one who would become a Christian is encouraged to walk the aisle, raise their hand, and join the group. They must assent to the veracity of the historical and theological Jesus, go to catechism, agree with the creed, and sign the "statement of faith." Having thus become a "member," they must consent to serve on a committee that promotes what the church is "doing." This offers no real indwelling union-identity with the living Lord Jesus, but only a social association in

alliance with Jesus. One's casual "personal relationship" with Jesus is assumed because they now have the "wet passport" of a baptismal certificate. The new church member is assured that they have received a static deposit of impersonal "eternal life" which will serve as a "ticket to heaven" for future union and intimacy with God. Their only sense of identity is that they are identified and denominated as a Methodist, a Presbyterian, an Episcopalian, a Baptist, etc., or polarized as a Calvinist or Arminian, a fundamentalist or a charismatic, a dispensationalist or a covenantist, a liberal or a conservative, mainline or non-denominational. There is no sense of a spiritual union-identity with the living Lord, only a sense of identification with a belief-system cause or an institutional entity.

In like manner, instead of an awareness of "union with Christ" as "partakers of the divine nature" (II Pet. 1:4), evangelicalism has fostered the double-minded duality of the Christian having two internal natures that are in conflict. This is illustrated by the hypothetical presence of a "black dog" and a "white dog" dwelling within the Christian, and these are involved in a life and death struggle to determine who will win. This produces a schizophrenic understanding of identity that results in a paranoid uncertainty of whether one is being motivated by "self" or Jesus. "Is this me, or is this Jesus?" The confused Christian can then engage in the "denial" of being able to win the behavioral battle, and resign themselves to antinomian sinfulness. Alternatively, they may conscientiously have doubts about their salvation that are relieved through periodical emotional and ecstatic religious experiences or ritual observances.

When evangelicals do attempt to consider who they are, they usually develop a negative sense of "self" that is self-denigrating and self-deprecating. Their self-talk goes something like this: "Jesus died for such a worm as me. I am nothing. I am just a sinner saved by grace. I am still a dirty old man inside. If you knew the real me, you would not want anything to do with me. Neither would Jesus. So, what I have to *do* in order to *be* what God wants me to be is to engage in self-denial and suppression of the real 'me' and my sin. I have to put myself down in self-surrender and brokenness. I have to 'die to self' in masochistic self-crucifixion. Basically I am bad, evil, and sinful, but 'praise the Lord,' my past is forgiven, the future is assured, even though the present is the 'pits'."

If that is all the typical evangelical Christian knows, and a "deeper life" teacher comes to explain that you as a Christian have "Christ in you, the hope of glory," that is "good news" indeed. It's almost like being "born again" again! And if someone comes to tell you that "Christ in you" means that you are "one spirit" with Jesus, and that you have a new spiritual identity in "union with Christ" – WOW – a whole new world of life and freedom opens up in understanding our *union identity* of being by the indwelling Jesus. In my own personal experience, it was the writings of W. Ian Thomas who first introduced me to the awareness of the indwelling Spirit of Christ, and it was Norman P. Grubb who filled out the dialectic understanding of an *identity-union* with Christ.

### **Monistic Merging**

In fairness, we must explain that there is another extreme in the opposite direction, when one fails to take into account the distinction of Christ and the Christian and over-emphasizes union to the point that it is no longer a "union" of two brought together but is regarded as a monistic oneness. Distinction is denied. Union is preempted. The resultant premise of unitarian oneness posits that "God only" exists in all things and as all things. When God is viewed in such singularity as the only

reality or person in the universe, the Christian understanding of the Trinitarian God is often sacrificed, and replaced with a God who is alleged to “be all in all.” This premise of monistic and unitarian oneness is inevitably aligned with pantheistic concepts and the variant theses of panentheism. It is very similar to the foundational premises of many Eastern religions, as well as the teaching of Christian Science and the New Age Movement. If God “is all in all,” then all is one with God. This monistic pantheism implies a universalism wherein God is contained in all things and persons, and the “light” or “seed” of Christ is intrinsically present in all humanity. Such monistic universalism produces a divine determinism that denies human responsibility and the consequences of human choices, effectively denying Christian faith.

Those who have moved out of the dialectic of the tensioned balance of *distinction* and *union* with Christ often mistakenly attempt to portray their “God only” oneness in “union” terms. They may refer to an “*organic union*” between God and man, which they inaccurately liken to Christ’s analogy of vine and branch. They may refer to “*hypostatic union*” of deity and humanity in the Christian, utilizing the terminology of the singularly unique Christological union of the God-man, Jesus. They often seek to explain that there is an “essential union” between the cosmic Christ and the Christian. The Gnostic “knower” of God alleges himself to be mixed, merged, fused, or absorbed into coalescence with God. It is claimed that God and man are now equivalent and indistinguishable, united in the oneness of consubstantiation, i.e. of the same substance. Man is thus deified, divinized, or supernaturalized into godness, and regarded as intrinsically divine. Some within these circles blatantly declare, “I am God” or “I am Christ” or “I am the Spirit,” and claim that everything Jesus said about Himself, they can now declare about themselves.

What does this do to the concept of humanity? If humanity is absorbed into deity, then humanity is essentially displaced, replaced, abandoned, dissolved, annihilated or obliterated. This reductionist depersonalizing of humanity within the absorption of the deification of humanity causes some to proclaim, “I am no longer human.” “I am not; only He is.” In such a thesis of obliteration and replacement, the “union of being” with Christ has been eschewed and jettisoned by failure to give due emphasis to the dialectic of *distinction* and *union* between Christ and the Christian. The loss of tensioned dialectic facilitates a return to the Greek dualism that fostered the first heresy of the early church. Docetism asserted that Jesus was not really human, but only “appeared” to be human, thus destroying the dialectic of deity and humanity in the Christological union. Those who advocate monistic merging perpetuate a variation of the docetic heresy in the claim that the Christian is “no longer human,” but just “appears” to be human, while essentially divine.

As noted previously, Norman P. Grubb often reiterated the dialectic balance of distinction and union in his teaching and writing. Some representative quotations from his writings are contained in an addendum to this article.

### **Union of Doing** [Chart](#)

The “union of being” that recognizes the *distinction* of Christ’s indwelling the Christian and the *union* of the Christian’s identity with Christ must, of necessity, find actuation and experiential expression in the “union of doing” whereby the living Lord Jesus dynamically lives out His life in Christian behavior. The “union of being” and the “union of doing,” or more technically “ontological

union” and “operational union,” can be considered as another dialectic, but this study will only observe them as the sequential follow-through from being to doing. In previous writings I have often used the phrase, “ontological dynamic.” My intent in employing that phrase is to express that the Being (ontology) of God must find functional expression in the dynamic of His operational activity within and through the Christian’s behavior.

God is an active God. It is the deistic perspective of God that views Him as a distant and detached deity not actively involved in the universe and in His people. The inherent attributes of God demand that He actively express Himself as the Love, Justice, Holiness, Savior, etc. that He is. God *does* what He *does*, because He *is* who He *is*. When the very Being of the Triune God has joined Himself to a receptive individual to become the basis of that person’s Christian identity of “being,” then He must be allowed to act as the God that He is in that Christian’s behavior. In other words, it is imperative that the Christian behave like who he has become “in Christ” (in union with Christ). This Christian behavior, however, is not a self-produced, self-generated, self-actuated activity whereby a Christian strives to succeed at the project of Christian living in accord with some proceduralized “how-to” formulas for doing what God expects. Just as our “union of being” was divinely initiated, the “union of doing” is also divinely actuated by the grace of God.

You cannot live the Christian life. I cannot live the Christian life. The Christian life is impossible, if conceived as the actions that a Christian must self-generate to “live like Jesus” and “love like Jesus.” But God is not interested in our “works” by which we might try to “measure up” and please Him (cf. Isa. 64:6; Phil. 3:8). It was not our “works” which effected our “union of being” with Christ (Eph. 2:9; Rom. 3:28), and it will not be our “works” that facilitate the doing of Christian living. The only One who can live the Christian life is Jesus. He lived out the divine life perfectly in history, and now He wants to live out His life in, as, and through us.<sup>2</sup> All “good works” in the Christian life are the outworking of His life and character. “We are created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). God “equips us in every good thing to do His will, *working in us* that which is pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ” (Heb. 13:21).

The Christian life is the “supplied life.” The active provision for living the Christian life is supplied by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. The Christian, therefore, lacks nothing required to be and do all that God desires in him. Some have labeled this as “triumphalism,” going so far as to declare that, “It is too good to be true.” On the contrary, God revealed Himself to Paul, saying, “My grace is sufficient for you” (II Cor. 12:9), and Paul asserted, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). When Paul wrote, “God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed” (II Cor. 9:8), his statement was valid not only for Christian giving, but for the entirety of Christian living as well. We have what is required to live the Christian life in the “union of doing” with the living Lord Jesus.

### **Trinitarian Action**

The dynamic for the “union of doing” is provided in every Christian by the presence and provision of the entire Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. “God is at work in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13), Paul advised the Philippians, but that was directly following the admonition to, “work out your own salvation in fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12), which emphasizes

the *distinction* of personal responsibility. Paul gave a list of admonitions to the Thessalonians (I Thess. 5:11-22), but followed it up with the assurance, “Faithful is He who calls you, and He will also bring it to pass” (I Thess. 5:24). God the Father is the dynamic for our “union of doing” in the Christian life. “Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God” (II Cor. 3:5).

In like manner, God the Son, is operating in the Christians as the energizer and expresser of His life. “It is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20), Paul explained to the Galatians. It is not just that “Christ resides as an occupant in me,” but that “Christ *lives* in me, as the dynamic expression of His life,” that Paul is proclaiming. “Having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:10), Paul wrote to the Romans, and this “saving life of Christ” is the means by which we are “made safe” from dysfunction in order to function as God intends, “reigning in life through Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:17). The very “life of Jesus is manifested in our mortal bodies” (II Cor. 4:10,11), because we have “the treasure (which is Christ) in these earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God, and not of ourselves” (II Cor. 4:7). The living Lord Jesus is the dynamic of our “union of doing” in the Christian life.

Since “the Lord is the Spirit” (II Cor. 3:17), the “union of doing” is also attributable to the Christian’s being “filled (or controlled) by the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18), in order that we might “walk by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16,25) and “live by the Spirit” (Rom. 8:13). The Holy Spirit even serves as the pray-er in the Christian,<sup>3</sup> for “we do not know how to pray as we should” (Rom. 8:26). Likewise, we “worship in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:24), as the Spirit of Christ is the worshipper<sup>4</sup> expressing the worthship of God’s character in the “union of doing.”

It is not necessary or advisable for the Christian to attempt to analyze or evaluate how the Triune God is expressing His life in the “union of doing.” Believing that we have a “union of being” with Christ, the Christian can spontaneously behave like who he has become as a Christ-one. That is part of the “freedom for which Christ has set us free” (Gal. 5:1). We are free to *be* and *do* whatever Christ wants to *be* and *do* in, as, and through us.

### **Response-ability**

In our Christian freedom we are also responsible to allow for the divine dynamic of the “union of doing.” It is here that we commence to observe the necessary *distinction* that balances the *union* of divine action. God created humans as choosing creatures, and since our humanness is not displaced or dissolved when we are joined in “union of being” with Christ as Christians, the Christian remains responsible for his choices. If we view our responsibility as the “*response-ability*” to make behavioral choices of faith that allow Christ to live His life and energize the “union of doing” in our behavioral expression, we can avoid falling into a “works” oriented system of religion performance.

Jesus’ discourse about the vine and the branch in John 15 is often used to explain the Christian’s “union with Christ.” It is not “organic union” that Jesus is teaching, but a balanced perspective of *union* and *distinction* in the “union of doing.” “Apart from Me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5), Jesus declared. Legitimate exegesis does not allow us to isolate the phrase, “you can do nothing,” and emphasize a totally divine expression. The entire analogy of vine and branches refers, not to essential “union of being,” but to the functional expression of divine activity in the Christian. Observe the

*distinction* of pronouns in the complete verse: “I am the vine, *you* are the branches; *he* who abides in *Me*, and *I* in *him*, *he* bears much fruit, for apart from *Me you* can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5). What is the Christian’s responsibility? To “abide in Christ” (Jn. 15:5-7). What does it mean to “abide?” The word means “to reside, to settle in, to make yourself at home.” The Christian is to make himself at home *in Christ* (in union with Christ), to settle in and live there. That does not involve any “works” of performance, but it does involve a responsible decision of abiding faith. In his first epistle John wrote, “If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father” (I Jn. 2:24).

The response-ability of the Christian is the choice of faith. Faith is not just believing or assenting to correct data. Nor is faith the conjuring up of enough trust to rely on Christ. Faith is a constant choosing of receptivity to God’s activity, a continuous availability to God’s ability. As noted earlier, our “union of being” is a derived identity, and in the “union of doing” we continue our human function of derivative, dependent, and contingent faith. Paul explained to the Colossians, “As you received Christ Jesus the Lord (by faith), so walk in Him, ... established in your faith” (Col. 2:6,7). The Christian life is lived only by the grace-dynamic of God’s action received by faith. Paul’s references to the “obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26) seem to indicate that Christian obedience is comprised of faith. Christian obedience is not to be viewed within the legal paradigm of strenuous striving to keep the rules and regulations of the Law, but is simply to be understood as “listening under” (Greek word *hupakouo*) God to ascertain the next situation where one can be receptive to His activity in and through us.

James’ statements become all the more meaningful when we understand faith as Christian receptivity to divine activity. “Faith without works is useless” (James 2:20) and “dead” (James 2:17,26), James writes. If there is no consequent outworking of divine activity, then it can safely be surmised that there was not faith-receptivity to God’s activity, i.e. whatever “faith” was alleged, it was useless, dead, non-existent or false because it did not allow for the receptivity of the outworking of divine activity. Grace is “God in action,” *doing* what He *does* because He *is* who He *is*, and our responsibility is to be receptive in faith to allow Him to *be* and *do* what He wants to *be* and *do* in us in the “union of doing.”

## **Imperative Commands**

What about all of the imperative action-commands that are stated throughout the New Testament? Someone counted more than one thousand (1000) imperative verbs in the New Testament. The *distinction* between Christ and the Christian seems to loom so large when we consider the concept of “commandments.” Didn’t Jesus say, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me” (Jn. 14:21)? Yes, but Jesus did not command anything that He is not willing to keep and perform in our “union of doing.” He is the *dynamic* of all of His own *demands*. Within the new covenant concept of grace, *imperatives* are always based on *indicatives*. The indicative statements of God’s presence and sufficiency are always the foundation for the fulfillment of the imperative action verbs. Christ does not ask anything of us that he is not willing to fulfill in our “union of doing.”

As noted previously, Paul’s admonition to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12) is an *imperative*. The *indicative* statement is, “God is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Another *imperative* is, “Do not worry about anything”

(Phil. 4:6). The following *indicative* is, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, ... abstain from every form of evil” (I Thess. 5:16,17,22) are the *imperatives*. “Faithful is He who calls you, and He will bring it to pass” (I Thess. 5:24) is the foundational *indicative*. “Love one another” (Jn. 13:34,35) was Jesus’ command. The supply for such is indicated in that “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5). The *imperative* is, “Be strong in the Lord” (Eph. 6:12), but the *indicative* awareness is that this is “in the strength of His might” (Eph. 6:12), for we are strong only “by the strength which God supplies” (I Pet. 4:11). “Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5), Paul commanded the Philippians, and to the Colossians he wrote, “Set your minds on things above” (Col. 3:2), but he advised the Corinthians, “we have the mind of Christ” (I Cor. 2:16). “Discipline yourself unto godliness” (I Tim. 4:7) was the admonition to Timothy, but Peter indicates, “His divine power has granted us everything pertaining to life and godliness” (II Pet. 1:3). The *imperatives* are always based on the *indicatives* of God’s grace in Christ, and are never commands for self-produced behavioral “works” of righteousness.

Many of the imperative verbs demand action that cannot possibly be construed as “work,” but only as a faith-choice. As noted above, “to abide” is simply to “settle in, stay put, and make oneself at home” in Christ Jesus (in union with Christ Jesus). To “reckon yourselves dead unto sin” (Rom. 6:11) is to “count it as a fact” that you were crucified with Christ and are “alive unto God in Christ Jesus (in union with Christ Jesus)” (Rom. 6:11). To “present your bodies a living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1) and “your members as members of righteousness” (Rom. 6:13) is simply to hand yourself over to God in surrender. These imperatives simply reveal that the Christian is obliged to be receptive in faith to the union-activity of Christ in the Christian.

When we are receptive in faith to allow the living Christ to be the ontological dynamic whereby He manifests His own life in our behavior, there are two general areas of Christian expression. We must emphasize again that these are not to be regarded as criteria by which one might measure Christian maturity or success. As we spontaneously allow Jesus Christ to re-present His life in us, He will inevitably manifest His *character* and His *ministry* in the “union of doing” that we call the “Christian life.” In other words, Christ will be and do what he desires to uniquely be and do in each of us.

## **Character**

The divine character of Christ is expressed as the “fruit of the Spirit.” “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and godly control of oneself” (Gal. 5:22,23). These always come in one cluster, for together they are the character of Christ, and should not be severed from one another for independent acquisition or development. When a Christian says, “What I need is more patience...or more kindness,...” one might respond, “Do you not have Christ? He is our patience. He is our kindness. He is our joy. He is our peace. Etc.” We do not need something more than Jesus. He is everything to us in the Christian life. Our only need and responsibility is to allow Him to experientially express Himself in the “union of doing.” As we “abide” and “make ourselves at home” in Christ, we “bear much fruit” (Jn. 15:5). Notice, the verse does not say, “we *produce* much fruit,” but rather, that we “*bear*” the “fruit of goodness and righteousness” (Phil. 1:11; Heb. 12:11) and “truth” (Eph. 5:9), and in so doing we “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work” (Col. 1:10).

The character fruit of Christ that is inclusive of all other expressions is divine love. Love is the first character trait mentioned as “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22), and Paul explained that “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6) fulfills the entire intent of the law (Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:8-10). “God is love” (Jn. 4:8,16), the apostle John twice states, and when we express His character of love in the union-doing of our Christian lives, we are manifesting the intimate heart of God for *others*. Love is always *other*-oriented, in contrast to the natural self-orientation of man. The divine character of love can only be derived from God by faith, which is why John wrote, “Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God” (I Jn. 4:7). “If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us” (I Jn. 4:12).

“Having all things pertaining to life and godliness” (II Pet. 1:3), the “mystery of godliness” (I Tim. 3:16) is revealed as we “desire to live godly in Christ Jesus” (II Tim. 3:12). Godliness cannot be generated by man’s performance, but is always and exclusively the expression of the character of God in man. The holy character of God that is set apart from all others has come to dwell in the Christian in Christ Jesus (I Cor. 1:30). “God is holy” (Isa. 6:3) and Jesus is the “Holy One of God” (Lk. 4:34; Acts 2:27), having “called us with a holy calling” (II Tim. 1:9) “that we might share His holiness” (Heb. 12:10). “God has called us for the purpose of sanctification” (II Thess. 4:7) that we should be “set apart” to function as He intended in the manifestation of His holy character unto His own glory.

## **Ministry**

In like manner as the *character of Christ* is expressed in the “fruit of the Spirit,” so the *ministry of Christ* is expressed by the grace-gifts of the Spirit. The *charismata*,<sup>5</sup> the grace-expressions of the Spirit of Christ in the Christian (Rom. 12:6-8; I Cor. 12:1-31) are the means of Christian ministry (Eph. 4:11-13). These so-called “spiritual gifts” are not specialized job descriptions or trophies of spirituality. They are just the expressive means by which the Spirit of Christ serves others in the new covenant “ministry of the Spirit” (II Cor. 3:6,8), the “ministry of reconciliation” (II Cor. 5:18). Christian ministry is not the actions we engage in to “serve Jesus,” since “God is not served by human hands, as though He needed anything” (Acts 17:25). Rather, Christian ministry is the outflow and overflow of Jesus’ actions for others in the Christian “union of doing.” Barnabas and Paul returned to Jerusalem to report what “*God had done through them among the Gentiles*” (Acts 15:12). To the Romans, Paul explained, “I do not presume to speak of anything except what *Christ has accomplished through me* ...in the power of the Spirit” (Rom. 15:18,19). In his epistle to the Ephesians, he writes, “I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me according to *the working of His power*” (Eph. 3:7). In the context of ministry giftedness, Peter exhorts Christians, “whoever serves, let him do so by *the strength which God supplies*; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 4:10,11).

Legitimate Christian ministry must be Christ’s action in the “union of doing” of our Christian lives. Thus we serve as “ambassadors for Christ” (II Cor. 5:20) desirous that people be reconciled to God and to one another. As priests (I Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6), we minister to others and re-present God. As witnesses (Acts 1:8), we lay down our lives for others. (The Greek word for “witness” is *marture*, the etymological root of the English word “martyr.”) The Christians becomes a praying and living intercessor for others, for Christ “always lives to make intercession” (Heb. 7:25) before God and for others. As we minister in the “union of doing” with Christ, evangelism is not a propagational task we

perform in order to win the world to Christ, but is the spontaneous expression of Christ shared “as you are going” (Matt. 28:19) through life, thereby allowing the living Christ to “draw all men to Himself” (Jn. 12:32), that they, too, might become disciples and Christ-expressers. St. Francis of Assisi is reported to have said, “Share Christ wherever you go, and if you have to – use words.”

## **Collective Union**

Much of Christian ministry is within and in conjunction with the collective Body of Christ, the Church (I Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:22,23; Col. 1:18,24). Christians must not engage in a “lone ranger” individualism that fails to recognize the corporate church union that we have with Christ, the Head of the Body (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22). Many who have emphasized personal and subjective “union with Christ” through the ages have lacked a meaningful understanding of ecclesiology, the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ. Christians are “in Christ” (in union with Christ) together with one another, and must be “united in spirit” (Phil. 2:2) in a “one spirit” (Phil. 1:27) “unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:3) that recognizes their mutual oneness (Jn. 17:21,22). The “unity of doing” expression of our “union with Christ” encompasses our interactive function as “members” (Rom. 12:5; I Cor. 12:12-27) of the Body of Christ. In the church community we appreciate our “common unity” in Christ and enjoy the fellowship and communion (common union) with Christ together, allowing the interpersonal and relational oneness of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to produce harmony and unity as we “love one another” (Jn. 13:34,35; I Thess. 4:9; Heb. 13:1; I Pet. 1:22; I Jn. 3:23; 4:7-21). In our “unity of doing” with Christ, we need each other! Christ in me desires to love and cooperate with Christ in you!

Mutual encouragement (Heb. 10:24,25) is particularly important when we experience the testing (Jn. 6:6; Heb. 11:17; James 1:3) and temptations (I Cor. 10:13; I Thess. 3:5; II Pet. 2:9) of the trials (James 1:2) of life. Our “union with Christ” is tested when we are tempted to doubt that we are who we are in the “union of being” with Christ. In like manner, we are tempted to question that our actions in the “union of doing” are of any consequence or significance, rather than “seeing through” the situation to recognize God’s opportunities to manifest the life of Jesus, regardless of how tough the going gets. God’s opportunities may even involve the privilege of “suffering with Christ” (Rom. 8:17) in the “fellowship of His sufferings” (Phil. 3:10), whereby we “fill up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (Col. 1:24), allowing the living Lord Jesus to continue to experience the pain and sufferings of the world’s assaults in our bodies and in His Body.

## **Sinful Misrepresentation**

In the midst of the temptations and trials of life, Christians may lose perspective of their union sufficiency in Christ. Despite our knowing that we are “new creatures” (II Cor. 5:17) who are “complete in Christ” (Col. 2:10) and “one spirit with Him” (I Cor. 6:17), failure to spiritually appraise (I Cor. 2:11-16) our “union with Christ” can result in an operational distinction that chooses to act in a manner that misrepresents who we are “in Christ” (in union with Christ). When we do so, we are “not acting like ourselves,” not manifesting the character of Christ, and thus “missing the mark” of God’s intent and desire to express Himself in us, and as us, and through us at all times; i.e. we have sinned. “Whatever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23) – whatever is not receptive of God’s activity is sinful misrepresentation. Was it Christ in us who sinned? May it never be! Christ cannot and does not sin in our “union of doing,” so sinful expression evidences that in the *distinction* of our

*union* we exercised our freedom of choice to act contrary to our spiritual identity and Christ's character. Does this alter who we are in our spiritual "union of being" with Christ? Definitely not! The privilege of the Christian is that he knows how to respond to sinful misrepresentation: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I Jn. 1:9).

An understanding of "union with Christ" should not produce a perfectionism that asserts, "Christians cannot sin." Let it be clearly stated, though, that this is not to maintain that Christians must sin, or will inevitably sin. In our "union of being" and "union of doing" with Christ, we have everything necessary to manifest righteousness and avoid sinfulness. Again, Jesus Christ in us does not sin! This is not to say that the Christian "cannot sin," but that the Christian "can...not sin" as he remains receptive to Christ's expression of His righteous character in our Christian behavior. The assertion that we are making is that it is "possible not to sin" as the Christian operates by faith and manifests the Christ-life, but we must not claim that it is "not possible for the Christian to sin." The apostle John addressed this issue in his first epistle, stating, "If we say (as they, the Gnostic perfectionists, say) that 'we have no sin,' we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (I Jn. 1:8). "If we say (as they, the Gnostic elitists, say) that 'we have not sinned' ('because we have union with Christ'), we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (I Jn. 3:10). "But if (when) anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous..." (I Jn. 2:1).

When the Christian is joined to the Lord at regeneration in a "new creature" union, "old things passed away, and all things became new" (II Cor. 5:17) spiritually. *Distinction* becomes evident, though, when the Christian recognizes and admits that there are idiosyncratic patterns of selfishness and sinfulness within the desires of his soul. Paul refers to these patterned desires of the soul as "the desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 2:3), and urges Christians to "make no provision for the flesh in regard to its desires" (Rom. 13:14). A functional antagonism of behavioral conflict is staged in the soul as "the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, for these are in opposition to one another" (Gal. 5:17). The Christian must remember that his *union-identity* with Christ is a spiritual reality in the spirit of man. *Distinction* is experienced in our soul and body – the psychological and physiological function – when the Christian fails to "set his mind on the Spirit" (Rom. 8:5,6), and instead "sets his mind on the flesh" (Rom. 8:5,6,7) in response to temptation. This need not be! The Christian is no longer "in the flesh" (in union with the evil one who patterned those selfish and sinful patterns of fleshly desires), but "in the Spirit" (in union with the Spirit of Christ), as Paul states in Romans 8:8,9. "Walking according to the flesh" (Rom. 8:4), and "living according to the flesh" (Rom. 8:12,13) are a misrepresentation of who we are in Christ.

### **Evangelical Performance**

When the Christian's "union of doing" in Christ is neglected or denied, and the distinction of faithful responsibility is over-emphasized, the resultant extremism of human potentiality creates an emphasis on man's doing and performance of religious "works." Failing to take into account that the Christian's "adequacy is from God" (II Cor. 3:5), and Jesus' statement, "Apart from Me, you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5); much of contemporary evangelical Christian religion has reverted to the fallacious thesis of self-generated righteous behavior in accord with codified behavioral standards (cf. Gal. 2:21). They employ such phrases as, "Do your best, and God will do the rest," or "God helps those who help themselves," often thinking that these are Biblical injunctions. These are not Biblical

concepts, but are contrary to the new covenant concept of God's grace in Jesus Christ functioning as the dynamic of the Christian's "union of doing" with Christ.

Performance incentives have become the motivational focus of most evangelical preaching. Christians are urged to act in ways that are acceptable and pleasing to God, despite the fact that "Christ accepted us to the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7), and we are "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6 – KJV). Active striving to be perfect is often encouraged, whereas Christians have been made perfect (Phil. 3:15; Heb. 12:23), and need only be receptive in faith to the expression of God's perfect character in their Christian behavior. Trying to "be like Jesus" in a conformational Christlikeness that imitates Jesus' example is a common theme in popular evangelical teaching. It is not copycat imitation of Jesus that God desires, but that the "life of Jesus might be manifested in our mortal bodies" (II Cor. 4:10) – manifestation, rather than imitation! The issue is not "what would Jesus do," but "wanting/watching what Jesus does." Calls for commitment, consecration, and dedication are laced throughout most contemporary exhortations in the churches today. It is not personal commitment to performance that God desires of Christians, but that they might "submit themselves to God" (James 4:7) and thus to all that He is committed to be and do in, as, and through them. Seeking to discover and do the "will of God," is another performance pursuit of popular religion, as they fail to understand that the "will of God" is always Jesus – His life lived out in His people in every situation.

The treadmill of performance is never-ending. Christians are admonished to pray more, to read their Bibles more, to be more involved in church activities. Churches employ guilt-producing incentives to manipulate people to behave in such a way as to have a "good testimony" and to engage in the pressurized evangelistic procedures of active witnessing for Jesus. People are even encouraged to "serve the Lord" in the ecclesiastical programs of church ministry until they "burn-out for Jesus." "God is not served by human hands, as though He needed anything" (Acts 17:25), Paul said in Athens. Operating by the inexhaustible grace of God, the Christian will never "burn-out." Whereas religion advocates "performance service," the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ recognizes that Christians are "available servants" of Christ who function by the "union of doing" with Christ.

When the dynamic "union of doing" in Christ is turned into performance expectations, then Christianity (Christ-in-you-ity) has degenerated into religious exercise. Christianity is not religion!<sup>6</sup> The word "religion" is etymologically derived from the Latin words *religare* and *religio*, meaning "to bind, tie, or attach." Religion ties people to the believe-right doctrines and teachings of fundamentalistic belief-systems.<sup>7</sup> Religion attaches people to social organizations and denominations with hierarchical control.<sup>8</sup> Religion binds people to the legalistic keeping of rules and regulations of behavioral laws and codes of conduct. Many have been deceived into thinking that the Christian religion is the advocacy of morality,<sup>9</sup> that educates people in character values so they might behave in ethical conformity. This is another denial of the Christian's "union of doing" in Christ by which the life and character of Christ is lived out in Christian behavior to the glory of God. But the evangelical do-right religion persists in the utopian dream that social activism for the purpose of ethical consensus will solve the problems of the society in which we live.<sup>10</sup>

The religion of performance does not foster "the peace that passes understanding" (Phil. 4:7) in an "assurance of understanding" (Col. 2:2), "faith" (Heb. 10:22), and "hope" (Heb. 6:11). The freedom (Gal. 5:1,13) and liberty (II Cor. 3:17) of spontaneous expression of Christ's life and action are

quenched in the performance expectations that produce fear, insecurity, paranoia, and resignation. Never sure that they have done enough for Jesus, work-oriented Christians are always fearful (cf. I Jn. 4:18) that their performance is inadequate. “Not that we are adequate to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is of God” (II Cor. 3:5). Despite the “once saved, always saved” eternal security doctrines in some evangelical churches, the majority of Christians experience an inevitable insecurity about the performance of their behavior and service, which often leads to doubts concerning their regeneration. Some Christians become paranoid about what they are supposed to do, engaging in an equivocating questioning, “Is it me, or is it Jesus, that wants to do this?” Others just resign themselves to misrepresentation, declaring, “I can’t help but sin. I’m only human,” effectively denying their union of being and doing in Christ.

Genuine Christians, however, cannot sin with indifference or impunity. The living Christ within them will not let them get away with it. Granted, there are those who engage in the hypocrisy of attempting to *impress* others of their “spirituality,” but most performance-oriented Christians are seeking to *repress* or *suppress* their sin inclinations and propensities by pushing them below the surface of their behavioral “acting out.” Many *obsess* in a sin-consciousness that focuses more on their sinfulness than on the living Christ whom they have received (cf. Heb. 12:2). Via navel-gazing introspection, these Christians seek to *assess* their progress of performance as gauged by the religious standards of spiritual success, but they continue to be overwhelmed by guilt, shame, and condemnation for their sin. In many churches, they repeatedly run to the so-called “altar” to *confess* their sins, and seek God’s forgiveness for a failure to perform what God never expected them to perform in the first place. God’s desire is simply that the Christian be receptive and available to spontaneously *express* the character of Christ.

The institutional church, meanwhile, is guilty of keeping Christians on the treadmill of do-right religion. Guilt and condemnation are intense psychological motivators that keep people involved and attending the church services, where they continue to confess their sins, plead for God’s forgiveness and help in prayer, and give generously to “the Lord’s work.” In return, they experience an emotional and sensate ecstasy, which they call “worship,” which temporarily masks the sin-consciousness of their inadequate performance, and induces them to dedicate and commit themselves to better performance. A cyclical pattern of mutually self-serving activity, indeed!

### **Deterministic Inevitability**

Though less common, the opposite extreme of denying the *distinction* of Christian responsibility and pushing *union* with Christ’s action to the point of a unified inevitability of divine action also destroys the tensioned balance of the Christian “union of doing.” The misemphasis of a “monistic merging” in the Christian’s “union of being” becomes a “deterministic inevitability” when applied to the Christian’s “union of doing.” The dynamic of the divine activity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, without the distinction of human responsibility, disallows any real sense of union and results in a mechanistic oneness that loses or repudiates the personal relationalism of the Christian’s “union with Christ.”

If the essential equivalence of deification is advocated as the explanation of Christian union, and “He is me, and I am He,” then it follows that “whatever I do is what He does,” and “everything I do is Christ in action, even though it may not appear to be so to others.” Such a deterministic expression of

divine action within the Christian produces a fatalistic denial of responsibility which has led some to declare, “God doesn’t mean for man to have faith, but just to be the inevitable God-expresser that he is.” According to this thesis, the Christian, as a passive instrument of automatic divine action, just “goes with the flow” of divine inevitability, and the Christian life becomes a non-participatory autopilot experience of just being the channel or conduit of Christ’s action.

Consistently, the thesis of absorption into God and the obliteration of humanness should lead to the nirvanic nihilism of nothingness, but such is not the case for those who tout their acquiescence to the direct-drive of divine expression. They are prone to well up with the pride of Gnostic elitism, claiming to be spiritual “knowers” and “see-ers” that have advanced spiritual perception and God-consciousness. Despite their claims of a consubstantial coalescence with Christ, their distinct egocentricity is revealed in their assertions, “I do what I will, for what I will is what He wills, since He is my willed activity.” On this assumption (or presumption) of deity-identity, such spiritualizers claim to speak the “word of faith” and creatively “call into being what was not, or call what is not, ‘is’.” Contrary to the Biblical concept of faith as “our receptivity of God’s activity,” they indicate that “faith is just speaking your word” as the God-person that you are, and thus functioning as co-creator, co-god, co-redeemer, co-savior in fused oneness with the divine. This is no longer the “union of doing” of a relational “union with Christ,” but is the presumptive arrogance of an indistinguishable deity expression.

Unconcerned about the *distinction* of sinful misrepresentation, the extreme oneness advocates argue, “Christ cannot sin. Christ is the ‘new man’ in me. Therefore, I cannot sin.” In direct parallel with the nascent Gnostic thinking of Asia Minor towards the end of the first century, they declare, “we have no sin” (I Jn. 3:8), and “we have no sinned” (I Jn. 3:10). Behavioral incongruities are justified and explained away as mere “appearances” (trace of docetism) incorrectly perceived by those who are not pure God-see-ers who can “see God in everything.” “What appears to be sin is but an illusion; sin is nothing,” is their mantra. What is this, but the delusion of libertine antinomianism that disregards the divine expression of God’s holy behavior, and flaunts their alleged liberty to sin by becoming a “law unto themselves”? The apostle Paul was aghast at such thinking, “Shall we sin to our heart’s content and see how far we can exploit the grace of God? What a ghastly thought” (Rom. 6:1 – JBP).

Collective union with Christ in the Body of Christ, the Church, is eschewed by the individualistic spiritualists. Prayer and worship are regarded as irrelevant and unnecessary. “Since we are one with God, why pray to ourselves? Why worship ourselves?”, is their reasoning. What they call “ministry” is often a condescending (and sometimes deceitful) attempt to raise others’ awareness and consciousness of the cosmic and universal monistic oneness.

### **Conclusion**

Neither deistic detachment nor monistic merging allow for the balanced dialectic tension of *union* and *distinction* that are required in a Biblical understanding of “union with Christ.” It is of utmost importance that Christians in every age understand both their “union of being” and “union of doing” in Christ in accord with the Biblical data and Jesus’ declaration, “I am the vine. You are the branches. ...Apart from Me, you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5).

In commencing our study of both the “union of being” and the “union of doing” we presented careful

and thorough Biblical documentation for the ontological and operational “union with Christ.” It is always important to note the Biblical documentation for the *distinction* involved in “union with Christ,” for it is we, human creatures, who are joined in a real union to the Lord, Jesus Christ, and apart from the *distinction* of the two being joined together there is no real *union*. But the more one emphasizes the *distinction* of man’s responsibility, the more there begins to be a shift away from the Christocentric focus towards a more anthropocentric perspective. If the emphasis on *distinction* is pushed to concepts of separation and detachment that abandon the recognition of union, then the anthropocentric becomes humanism – humanism dressed in the garb of Christian religion – “evangelical humanism.”<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, any concept of “union with Christ” that loses sight of the Biblical balance of *distinction* can cause *union* to be lost in the monistic merging of Gnosticism and pantheism. The Biblical balance must be maintained, and we must maintain the dialectic tension of “union with Christ.”

If our theology does not begin with and maintain a focus on who Christ is and what Christ does, then it soon degenerates into thoughts and practices that glorify man rather than God. The starting point must be the divine action of *union* with Christ. The popular evangelicalism that pervades the Western expression of Christian religion today has such a minimal understanding of union and such a deistic emphasis on the detached separation of Christ and the Christian, that they do not even appear to be “in the ballpark” of a balanced Biblical understanding of “union with Christ” which comprises the gospel of Jesus Christ. At the same time, Eastern philosophical concepts are gaining popularity in the West, and the resultant monistic unitarianism, often referred to as “New Age spirituality, is equally outside of the Biblical balance of “union with Christ.”

It is important to remember that the Western mind chafes at the balanced tension of dialectic. Western man seeks to push his thought into categories that end up being static systems of closed extremism. Rare is the Christian who will respond to the constant direction of the Spirit of Christ and open-mindedly allow for the tension of *union* and *distinction*. When one emphasis is made, he says, “Yes, but...” When the other emphasis is made, he says, “Yes, but...” The “Yes, but...” exchanges are healthy within the tensioning balance of dialectic. The problem comes when people want to push the “Yes, but...” outside of the interaction of *union* and *distinction*, and thus advocate what is not Biblical and not Christian, but rather an aberrant construct of man.

Allow me to conclude with this warning: The Christian who attempts to maintain a tensioned balance of *union* and *distinction*, refusing to “camp out” on one side or the other, will constantly be accused of dancing the “spiritual two-step” in a wishy-washy waffling that refuses to take a static stand in one camp or the other. The dynamic of the dialectic balance of “union with Christ” will always be impossible to “pin down” in a system of thought, for Jesus Christ lives in each Christian as the unique and novel expression of Himself. We must allow Him to so live in the “union of being” and the “union of doing” of our “union with Christ.”

### Footnotes

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All of these writings are available for free downloading on the Christ in You website:  
<http://www.christinyou.net/>

### **Addendum**

Quotations from the writings of Norman P. Grubb on Union and Distinction.

*The Liberating Secret* - ©1955

14 – The Father and the Son dwell in us. Union, yet distinctiveness, joined in one.

16 - It is the life of union, the one with The Other, distinct from each other, yet one in each other, interpenetrating.

22 - ..spirits unite. They interpenetrate. One dwells in another. ...Both a union and a distinction between them at the same time.

39 - 'his human spirit had one marvelous potentiality; it could be the container of the Divine Spirit via the tree of life, and yet not lose its own individuality in being so; but that the two can dwell together, each in the other, in an eternal fruitful bond of union, the human being the delighted and loving bond slave of the Divine.

*The Deep Things of God* - ©1958

9 - Creatures are created to contain the life, not to be it in themselves: the essence of idolatry is to claim to be what only God is. ...God can never give His own godhead to another. ...Containers are not the thing in itself.

10 - ...man can freely, intelligently, delightedly contain the living God, so that God lives His own divine life out through the living agency and co-operation of a human personality; but the human being never advances one iota beyond being a mere container of God for time and eternity.

11 - ..the human self is for ever a container, a co-operator, a manifestor, but never the One in Himself.

36 - “the new I is Christ in me.” ... He can only make creatures to contain Him. He cannot make other gods who are self-existent, ...for then He would cease to be God alone.”

*The Key to Everything* - ©1960

23 - Now get this clear: the vessel never becomes the liquid, nor the liquid the vessel. I add this because we humans are so proud that there creeps into us the idea that we can be deified. That is blasphemy. There is no such thing as self-deification, except that of Satan, the pseudo-God, and what we share with him. The divine can dwell in the human, but forever the human is the human and the

divine the divine. God has said, "I will not give my glory to another."

24,25 - That is the vital importance of the vessel illustration: we are forever the container; He is that which we contain. That relationship never changes.

"Jesus gave us the vine and branches illustration. Through this our eyes are opened to the secret of the universe: union – the mystery of the universe: how two can be one and yet remain two. ... The living God, the living Christ, and I actually become one person and function as one person. Separation is impossible. It has disappeared. We function entirely and forever and naturally as one person. And yet we remain two!"

*God Unlimited* - ©1962

87 - ...being real humans, we must accept our humanity. We are God's means of entry into the human situation, even as Jesus in the flesh was.

158 - ...carefully preserve the fact that neither Christ nor we lose our distinct identity through eternity, He God, we man; it is never a relationship of total absorption where man ceases to be redeemed man, or Christ ceases to be God the Son.

*The Spontaneous You* - ©1966

54 - ..we are vessels forever, we the creature, He the Creator, neither one every becoming the other, nor mixing in that sense.

*Who Am I?* - ©1974

95 - ...normal Christian living...is this 'mysterious' combination of the duality in the unity, the Positive and negative which alone makes manifestation of the Positive possible. It forever remains a duality in the unity, the Positive remains the Positive, the negative remains the negative; the one never becomes the other, the creature never becomes the Creator, or the son the Father, or the human the Deity.

*Yes I Am* - ©1982

90 - "we are called "vessels." A vessel is there only to contain. It does not become what it contains. The cup does not become the coffee, nor the coffee the cup.

97 - This does not mean that we are like two people separate within myself. No, we are one. I am "joined to the Lord—one spirit" (I Cor. 6:17); we are two, yet we are one. He is the One living in me, yet not as separate from me, but reproducing Himself by me—as vine through branch, head through body, husband through wife.

In our conscious union relationship: though each Christian is the two united in one, we don't see ourselves as thinking, speaking, acting, but it is He expressed through our forms... not I, but He living in me. That is the union-duality! We are two, but no, we are one...

132 - ...we are human selves, and our oneness with Christ does not alter our two-ness in being He and I. God's whole purpose is to express Himself through our fully human selves, just as He did with Jesus.

## Charts

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["Union of Doing"](#)

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