

1. **Introduction:** *“The Union of a believer with Christ is so intimate, so unalterable, so rich in privilege, so powerful in influence, that it cannot be fully represented by any description or similitude taken from earthly things.”* Quote: John Newton (author of “Amazing Grace”) ([www.monergism.com/topics./union-christ](http://www.monergism.com/topics./union-christ)).
  - Metaphors cannot fully communicate the full meaning of “Union with Christ,” but they can contribute enormously to increased understanding. Like the Holy Trinity, “Union with Christ” is inherently difficult to comprehend.
  - All believers are adopted members of God’s family. Each believer is our brother or sister in Christ. The sense in which that is true is infinitely higher than mortal human relationships.
  - Acceptance and reliance on the truth of “Union with Christ” is the only thing capable of bringing believers permanently together. All other plans for achieving unity among believers ultimately fail.
2. **Metaphors from Jesus, Paul, John, and Peter:** Each metaphor gives a somewhat different perspective. The variety of metaphors indicates Union with Christ is not easy to explain and full explanation is not possible.
  - All the metaphors are useful but, as John Newton so rightly says, even with them all, they are insufficient to provide full understanding.
3. **Two Metaphors from Jesus:** (1.) In John 15:1-17 Jesus describes union with Himself as being like the union of a vine with its branches. This powerful extended metaphor conveys the sense of a vital and necessary union between Christ and believers.
  - By prospering in the vine with the spiritual “sap” of Christ flowing through them, believers produce the good fruit God intends. Branches cut from the vine die. This extended metaphor will be covered in detail later.
  - (2.) Jesus says union with Him is in some sense like the union between Himself and His Father (Jn. 17:20-26), The differences are profound but will be less so when we are glorified. This metaphor can mislead if the similarities are emphasized and the differences are ignored.
4. **Metaphors from Paul:** Paul gave several metaphors for Union with Christ.
  - (1.) In a manner like Jesus’ metaphor of the vine and branches, Paul compares Union with Christ with the roots and stock of an olive tree diffusing life and fructifying sap through all the branches, both native and grafted (Rm. 11:16-24). The added thought of grafted branches is important.
  - (2.) Paul also compares Union with Christ to the union between the head and members of the body. Christ, as the head, is the source of vitality and volition, as well as of

sense and intelligence. The members of the body are united to the head as if by a common set of nerves and community of feeling, life, and motion (Eph. 4:15-16).

- This metaphor is very powerful and introduces factors that are missing in the vine and branches metaphor.
  - (3.) In Ephesians, Paul likens Union with Christ to the union between husband and wife. The union between spouses is established as a sacred covenant constituting them to be one legal person; the husband being the accountable authority. They are to be united by tender affection, complete community of interest and legal obligations. (Eph. 5:31–32).
  - As wonderful as is the bond between husband and wife, it falls short of the bond of union created by the Holy Spirit between believer and Christ. In Eph. 2:18-22 Paul likens union of all believers in Christ as forming a holy temple to God.
5. **Metaphors from John:** In John’s Gospel his metaphor of Christ as “the light of men” and Christ’s followers as “the sons of light,” are both related to Union With Christ.
- John adds two more-specific metaphors of union that originated with Jesus in the “I am the bread of life” and “I am the vine” declarations. The entire bread of life discourse provides necessary truth about Union, but union is specific in John 6:56: *“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.”*
  - The “vine and the branches” extended metaphor will be covered separately.
6. **Comments on Union with Christ:** Union with Christ is the umbrella under which all benefits of redemption are found. Union with Christ stands in relationship to individual benefits as salvation does to its parts.
- In Paul’s metaphor relating Union with Christ to the marriage relationship between a man and a woman, he speaks of “the two becoming one flesh.” The husband is the accountable authority for the family.
  - He then comments that the marriage relationship is a profound mystery and likewise the relationship between Christ and His church is a “profound mystery.”
  - Christ is the “husband” He is the accountable authority for believers. In that position He assumed accountability for believers’ sins and paid the penalty due those sins with His own life.
  - Since Paul calls “Union” a mystery (and it truly is), Union between Christ and a believer is often referred to as the “mystical union.”
  - The Holy Spirit is the bond between each believer and Christ. Through Christ all believers (past, present, and future) are bonded to one another. The union of all believers is called the “mystical body of Christ.”
  - The union formed between Christ and believers builds the true church (which is invisible).

- Union with Christ has many facets. Because normal human language is inadequate to fully describe the union, NT authors use a variety of other figures of speech to supplement and clarify direct description.
7. **Other Figures of Speech:** As we have seen, a figure of speech is a word or phrase used to convey a meaning separate from the literal meaning. There are many types of figures-of-speech in addition to the ones we have been discussing.
- “Personification” assigns human qualities to non-human things or ideas. Examples: (1.) The flowers nodded. (2.) Snowflakes danced. (3.) Fog crept in.
  - “Oxymoron” is a figure of speech putting two contradictory terms together. Examples: (1.) Peace force. (2.) Kosher ham. (3.) Jumbo shrimp. (4.) Sweet sorrow. (5.) Free market. (6.) Speedy snail. (7.) Truthful liar.
  - The things that can come before our physical senses are limited by our finiteness, attention span, limited time, etc. In general, most of what everyone understands is metaphorical by necessity. We have knowledge of many things that have never come before our physical senses. Our knowledge largely comes from others beginning with our mother.
  - If we have some knowledge about a new thing “B,” but “B” is not available for evaluation by our senses, we can express what we know about “B” by relating it to a known “A” by using a metaphor or simile. Examples include, that is red like an apple, blue as the sky, or valuable like time.
  - The imagination enabling us to do this is a wonderful gift from God. As far as we know, of all creatures, only people (and possibly angels) possess imagination.
  - Our imagination enables us to think about God even though, as Paul says, God is One “whom no one has ever seen or can see” (1 Tim. 6:16b).
  - God is invisible Spirit and cannot be evaluated through our senses. God’s self-revelation is the basis for all thought about Him. That revelation includes many metaphors, including metaphors of humanity (e.g., the right arm of God).
  - We experience God spiritually through our God-given capability to bring before our minds that which we cannot see, hear, smell, taste, or touch.
  - To fully experience Christian life, imagination is necessary. Realities (like angels) cannot be seen, but Scripture insists they are nonetheless real.