

การเป็นหนึ่งเดียวกับพระคริสต์และพระคุณทวีภาค
ในเทววิทยาของจอห์น คาลวิน

**The Union with Christ and the Twofold Grace
in John Calvin's Theology**

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Abstract

Believers in Christ still have some disagreements on the nature of union with Christ and the relationship between this union and the twofold grace of God. Some argue that union with Christ is a fusion of human and divine essence while others view this as a spiritual union. This study, therefore, intends to explore the concept of union with Christ in John Calvin's theology from his *Institute of the Christian Religion*. The finding from Calvin's perspective is that believers are united with Christ by the bond of the Holy Spirit in a mystic union (*unio mystica*) by faith in Christ, which is the work of the Spirit. The twofold grace that they receive are the grace of justification and that of sanctification. Justification is the status granted to sinners on this union, while sanctification is the life-long process. Hence, sinners are made righteous by the grace of God and not their own human works. Therefore, we should turn from contemplating on our works and look solely to our gracious Lord. Then we will always have the real peace of mind and tranquility of the soul.

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บทคัดย่อ

ผู้เชื่อในพระคริสต์ยังคงมีความเห็นที่แตกต่างกันในเรื่องการเป็นหนึ่งเดียวกันกับพระคริสต์และความสัมพันธ์กับพระคุณทวิภาค บางคนเข้าใจว่าเป็นการรวมกันของสาระของมนุษย์กับสาระของพระเจ้า แต่บางคนโต้แย้งว่าเป็นการรวมกันฝ่ายวิญญาณ การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่ออธิบายการเป็นหนึ่งเดียวกันกับพระคริสต์ในทัศนะของจอห์น คาลวิน โดยมีหนังสือหลักคำสอนในคริสต์ศาสนาเป็นแหล่งปฐมภูมิ ผลการศึกษาพบว่า ตามทัศนะของคาลวิน การรวมกับพระคริสต์อย่างเป็นหนึ่งเดียวกันนั้นเป็นไปอย่างเ็นลับ

โดยพันธะแห่งพระวิญญาณบริสุทธิ์ผ่านทางความเชื่อ พระคุณทวิภาคได้แก่การถูกนับว่าชอบธรรมและการชำระให้บริสุทธิ์ การถูกนับว่าเป็นผู้ชอบธรรมนั้นเป็นสถานะภาพที่พระเจ้าประทานให้เมื่อผู้เชื่อเป็นหนึ่งเดียวกับพระคริสต์ ส่วนการชำระให้บริสุทธิ์เป็นกระบวนการตลอดชีวิต ด้วยเหตุนี้ คนบาปสามารถกลับมาเป็นคนชอบธรรมได้โดยพระคุณของพระเจ้า และไม่ใช่โดยการกระทำความดีใดๆ ของมนุษย์เอง การเสนอแนะคือ เราควรเลิกที่จะจดจ่อที่มนุษย์และการงานของมนุษย์ แต่หันมาจดจ่อที่พระเจ้าและพระคุณของพระองค์

Introduction

As the theology of John Calvin (1509–1564) is based on the conviction that the people of God are united with Christ (Partee, 2008: xv–xvi), one of the Reformer's most important doctrines, therefore, is the doctrine of union with Christ. This doctrine permeates through Calvin's commentaries, sermons, and theological works, and becomes the main focus for Christian faith and practice. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the nature of the union with Christ in Calvin's thought to better explain the concept of salvation, which is the most crucial doctrine in terms of the eternal destiny of humankind. The significance of this union is that it is the only channel through which believers can receive the twofold grace of God and all his blessings into their lives.

The Concept of 'Union with Christ' in Calvin's theology

In its broadest sense, 'union with Christ' refers to the relationship between the believer and Jesus Christ. In this sense, John Murray (1955:161) states, union with Christ is "the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation." The expression "in Christ" (*en Christo*) occurs 216 times in the epistles of Paul, and 26 times in the Johannine literature (Demarest, 1997:313). Hence, 'union with Christ' is the prime enigma of Paul's teaching that gives the clue to the whole plan of salvation. However, the redemptive work of Christ is meaningless to us unless we are united with him. Calvin asserts that union with Christ is the only way through which the blessings of God flow to us. Calvin (1960:3.1.1) affirms that in order to be enriched by these benefits, the first thing to be grasped is the understanding that "as long as Christ

remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. “Such a union is possible because Christ took on human nature and filled it with his virtue. He had to become man in order “to be among us” and “to dwell in us.” Calvin stresses that this happens only through faith: “[A]ll that he [Christ] possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him. It is true that we obtain this by faith” (1960:3.1.1). Faith is the principal work of the Holy Spirit. It is a supernatural gift from God that is granted to us to lead us into the light of the gospel. Faith is “the privilege of becoming the children of God, who are born not of flesh and blood, but of God” (John 1:12–13).

In his doctrine of essential righteousness, Andreas Osiander (1498–1552) argues that we are one with Christ, and in this union with Christ, the essence of God is infused into us in “a mixture of substances by which God—transfusing himself into us, as it were—makes us part of himself” (Osiander’s Confession A 4b; G 1a, cited in Calvin, 1960:3.11.5). Osiander claims that we are not justified by the grace of Christ the Mediator alone, nor is righteousness offered to us in his person, but that we are made partakers in God’s righteousness when God is united to us in essence. This means that Christ’s essence is mingled with ours

(3.11.5). Yet Calvin denies Osiander’s argument that Christ’s essence is mixed with our own essence and explains that the union with Christ is a mystical union (*unio mystica*): “We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed into us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body—in short, because he deigns to make us one with him” (1960:3.11.10). Calvin argues that union with Christ is the mystical union, and not the fusion of essence, so Osiander’s argument is refuted.

Joel R. Beeke insists that union with Christ in his humanity is historical, ethical, and personal, but not essential. There is no crass mixture (*crassa mixture*) of human substance between Christ and us. We are not absorbed into Christ nor united to him in such a way that our human personalities are annulled even in the slightest degree. Union with him is not a mixture of essence; rather, it is aspiritual union by the bond of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, this spiritual union that the Holy Spirit forges within us is even greater than physical union (Beeke, 2008: 272). T. H. L. Parker (1995: 79) agrees with Beeke that the nature of this union is a spiritual union: “[W]e are led on to consider the union affected by the secret activity of the Spirit.” This secret activity of the Holy Spirit involves the work of redemption by making the saving

work of the Mediator efficacious to men: "He [the Spirit] testifies inwardly to the meaning of the death of Christ: he applies the sacrificial obedience of Christ to men's hearts and so cleanses them from sin" (Parker, 1995: 79). Nevertheless, this does not mean that the Spirit brings these blessings down to us from Christ who is in heaven who is distant from us, but from Christ who is united within us. Calvin affirms, "[T]he Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually binds us to himself" (1960: 3.1.1). Bernard McGinn (1996:122, cited in Chin, 2003:184) argues that Calvin's use of the term *unio mystica* in the *Institutes* (3.11.10) does constitute a mystical element suggesting a spiritual marriage between Christ and the believer (2.8.18). McGinn then characterizes this union as an experience of faith. However, he does not elaborate on its nature.

Parker (1995: 79) states that this mystical union has two aspects: on Christ's side and on our side. On Christ's side, Christ united himself with men by becoming a man and lives within him, which is the more intimate union. On our side, we must be engrafted to him like a wild olive shoot that is grafted into the olive tree to share the rich root (Romans 11:17). By union with him, we can grow into one body with him. He is our 'Head' and we are his body (Ephesians 4: 15). In communion with Christ and encountering the secret energy of the Spirit, we grow into one body with him and we share all

his benefits. This is the mystical union, one of the gospel's greatest mysteries, as Calvin (3.2.24) writes, "Not only does he [Christ] cleave to us by an indivisible bond of fellowship, but with a wonderful communion, day by day, he grows more and more into one body with us, until he becomes completely one with us." Therefore, we should not separate Christ from ourselves because he is not outside us but dwells within us in this wonderful communion.

Union with Christ is always the result of the Spirit's work. The Spirit is the bond that binds the believer to Christ and the channel through which Christ is communicated to us by faith. Without the Spirit's initiative work in us, all our knowledge will be worthless, for only by the Spirit's faith-creating work can we come to know Christ, our Redeemer. Calvin exalts the power of faith because faith can rise from flesh of Christ to his divinity to penetrate above all heavens and all mysteries. As Beeke (2008: 276) states, "The Holy Spirit uses faith to bring the heavenly graces of Christ down into the human soul and to raise our souls up to heaven in return." Union with Christ through faith is so profound that even though Christ remains in heaven, he is firmly grasped by faith and is fully possessed by believers on earth.

The Twofold Grace of God (*Duplex Gratia Dei*)

Throughout all his writing, Calvin consistently refers to the twofold grace

of God (*duplex gratia dei*), which is a pivotal concept that brings together dissonant themes in his theology. According to Calvin (1960:3.11.1), the twofold grace consists of justification and sanctification: "By partaking of him, we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness. . . ; and secondly, that sanctified by Christ's Spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life."

Justification. The concept of justification is *aforensic* concept because it is about the judge and the law court. However, this is the court that can be found nowhere else in the world because it is where the Judge is also the Accuser, and later, the Judge becomes the Father! This court is the confrontation of man before God, not by judgment or punishment, but by God's grace, because in this confrontation, the guilty man is justified righteous (Parker, 1995: 97). Righteousness here is simply set in the opposite of guilt. The purpose of the gospel message is to reconcile us to God through the redemptive work of Christ and not to count our sins as guilt. When we are justified righteous, all our sins and trespasses are forgiven. This is a wonderful exchange between Christ and sinners because Christ, who was free of guilt, took our sins to himself and died in our place so that we can be reconciled to God.

Calvin encourages his readers to carefully ponder when he refers to Paul's

explanation: "Christ, who was without sin, was made sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Thus we, as sinners, are justified righteous by faith alone and not by works. Calvin (3.11.2) stresses that we take up Christ's righteousness as ours and God accepts us as righteous men: "Therefore, we explain justification simply as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as righteous men. And we say that it consists in the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness." In other words, we are justified righteous because God has imputed Christ's righteousness to us. The Scripture tells us that justification is the act of God and not the act of man; therefore, we should turn aside from contemplation of our own works and look solely upon God's mercy and Christ's perfection. Justification not only serves God's honor by satisfying the conditions for salvation but it also offers a peaceful rest and tranquility to us (Beeke, 2008:130). As Paul writes, "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

Sanctification. Calvin (1960:3.3.5) defines the term "repentance" this way: "[I]t is the true turning of our life to God, a turning that arises from a pure and earnest fear of him; and it consists in the mortification of our flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit." According to Calvin, there are three obvious points here: First, repentance is *turning of life to God, or transformation*.

This transformation happens not only in outward works but in the soul itself. When the soul put off its old nature, it brings forth the fruit of works in harmony with its renewal (3.3.6). Second, repentance proceeds from an earnest fear of God. Before a sinner repents, his mind will be aroused by the fear of the divine judgment. This thought will be deeply fixed in his mind until he cannot rest nor breathe freely even for a moment (3.3.7). The third point that Calvin raises is that repentance consists of two parts: the mortification of our flesh and the vivification of the Spirit. Mortification of our flesh means that we have to deny our own nature first and then be renewed by the fruits that flow from it--namely, righteousness, judgment, and mercy. The vivification of the Spirit means that the Spirit deeply imbues our souls with his holiness, renewing us with new thoughts and feelings.

Calvin objects to the idea that sanctification comes from our work to complement the free grace of God, namely, justification, because only Christ himself is the sole source of our purity and righteousness. More importantly, both justification and sanctification are granted to us by faith as the free gifts from Christ. Upon conversion, Christ becomes our living Lord and Savior as we are incorporated into his body. The consequence is that we live a new life through his Spirit. When the Holy God grasps us to have fellowship with him through Christ, Christ unites himself with

us. It is an event that needs repercussion on our sinful way of life. As Niesel (1956:126-127) says, "The life which pleased us when we were estranged from God must be renounced." So sanctification, which flows from our communion with Christ, is the second gift that we are endowed from the Spirit. As Calvin (1960:3.3.9) states, "Both things [justification and sanctification] happen to us by participation in Christ. . . If we share in his resurrection, through it we are raised up into newness of life to correspond with the righteousness of God."

Based on Calvin's understanding, Cornelis P. Venema (2007:77) distinguishes justification from sanctification both in conceptions and natures: "Whereas justification refers to our status as forgiven sinners, sanctification refers to the process by which our sinful condition is transformed through the work of the Spirit of Christ." Venema makes a clear contrast between the two: Justification signifies 'the status' of being righteous before God and sanctification signifies 'the process' in which the righteous are transformed from sinful actions to piety through the work of the Spirit.

Calvin (1960:3.11.11) proposes that sanctification is a process throughout one's life: "For God so begins this second point in his elect, and progresses in it gradually, and sometimes slowly, throughout life." J. Todd Billings adds that sanctification is a process in which

believers receive moral transformation through the Spirit of God: “In Christ, through the Spirit, believers begin the slow process of moral transformation” (Billings, 2007:107). The final goal of sanctification is the restoration of the image of God that had been disfigured since Adam’s transgression. Calvin explains that by regeneration, believers are restored through the benefit of Christ into the righteousness of God. The Lord is pleased to restore his adopted children into the inheritance of life:

[T] his restoration does not take place in one moment one day one year; but through continual and sometimes even slow advances God wipes out in his elect the corruptions of the flesh, cleanses them of guilt, consecrates them to himself as temples renewing all their minds to true purity that they may practice repentance throughout their lives and know that this warfare will end only at death (Calvin, 1960:3.3.9).

Thus sanctification is not a sudden event: rather, it is an ongoing one, which begins after our union with Christ and continues until the last day of our lives. Its goal is to change us, step by step, into true holiness. Calvin states that the closer any man comes to the likeness of God, the more the image of God shines in him (Calvin, 1960:3.3.9). In order to accomplish this goal, we have to continue the process of repentance throughout our lives. As such, sanctification

is the process that the righteous grow under the re-direction of the Spirit to receive alteration of life.

The Relationship between justification and sanctification

Although it is true that the two gifts of grace, justification and sanctification, are distinctive from each other, both are inseparable. Consequently, we receive the two gifts of justification and sanctification simultaneously and together (*simul et coniunctim in ipso*) (Niesel, 1956:137). As Christ confers both of them to us, simultaneously and not only one without the other, justification and sanctification are the reality in Christ and form in him “a living unity” (Calvin, 1960:3.16.1). So if we attempt to separate them, we are trying to break up the unity of Christ. Like that in Chalcedonian Christology where the two natures in the person of Christ--the divine nature and the human nature--cannot be divided, but are united without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the grace of justification and sanctification cannot be divided as well (Billings, 2007:107).

Figuratively, Calvin compares the nature of the union of the two graces as sunlight, in which its brightness cannot be separated from its heat. The heat quickens and fertilizes the earth, while its ray enlightens and illumines it. Here is a mutual and indivisible connection between the two. However, this should

not result in confusion or mixing of the two. Therefore, Calvin objects to Osiander, who contends that these two gifts of grace are one and the same (Calvin, 1960:3.6.6.).

However, justification and sanctification have to be distinguished from each other. For Calvin, the formal relationship between justification and sanctification is crucial because though they are distinct from each other, they are inseparable. Nevertheless, although we may distinguish them, Christ contains both of them inseparably within himself. Calvin, therefore, decisively reasons that we are justified by faith and we are also sanctified at the same time: "Because by faith we grasp Christ's righteousness, by which alone we are reconciled to God. Yet you cannot grasp this without at the same time grasping sanctification also" (Calvin, 1960:3.16.1).

Justification and sanctification are two aspects of the same process in our lives, which are deeply grounded in the spiritual experience of each individual. Niesel (1956:139) states that the relation of justification and sanctification is not only the relation between God and man but also between man and Christ--the God revealed in flesh. Calvin then invites those

who want to attain the righteousness of Christ to possess Christ first, and then be made partakers in his sanctification.

Conclusion

In this study, I explored the concept of union with Christ and the twofold grace of God in Calvin's theology. The finding is that through the spiritual union with Christ, we can receive the twofold grace of God--justification and sanctification. Such a union is possible because Christ took on human nature and became man in order to be among us and to dwell in us. However, this is a mystical union and not a union in essence. The Spirit is the bond that binds believers to Christ and the channel through which Christ is communicated to us by faith. Whereas justification refers to our status as forgiven sinners, sanctification refers to the process by which our sinful condition is transformed through the work of the Spirit in a life-long process. The final goal of sanctification is to attain the holiness of life as the image of God. The relationship between justification and sanctification is that, even though both are distinct from each other, yet they are inseparable.

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