

S T U D Y G U I D E



UNION
WITH
CHRIST

SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON

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Union with Christ

Sinclair B. Ferguson



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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Printed in the United States of America.

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Introduction

What does it mean to be a Christian? Common answers to this question can be contradictory and confusing. Is Christianity simply an ethical system or a set of doctrinal beliefs? In *Union with Christ*, Dr. Sinclair Ferguson surveys one of the Apostle Paul's favorite phrases to describe the essence of the Christian life: being "in Christ." This twelve-part teaching series explores what it means to be "in Christ" and how these two simple words can reshape our entire existence.

This study guide is a companion to the video teaching series. Whether you are using the DVDs, streaming the videos on Ligonier.org, or going through the course in Ligonier Connect, this resource is designed to help you make the most of the learning experience. For each message in the series, there is a corresponding lesson in this guide. Here is what you will find in each lesson:

INTRODUCTION	<p>The introduction is a brief paragraph that summarizes the content covered in the lecture and considered in the study guide lesson.</p> <p>How to use: Use the introduction to each lesson to get a sense of the big picture before watching the video. Refer to these statements as you work through the study guide to remind yourself of what you have already covered and where you are headed.</p>
LEARNING GOALS	<p>The learning goals are the knowledge and skills the study guide lesson will endeavor to equip you with as you work through the lecture content.</p> <p>How to use: Familiarize yourself with the goals of each lesson before engaging with its contents. Keeping the overall purpose in mind as you watch each video and reflect on or discuss the questions will help you get the most out of each lesson.</p>
KEY IDEAS	<p>The key ideas are the major points or takeaways from the lecture.</p> <p>How to use: Use these ideas to prepare yourself for each lesson and to review previous lessons. They describe specifically the knowledge each lecture is communicating.</p>

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	<p>The questions are the guided reflection and/or discussion component of the lesson that are intended to help you prepare for, process, and organize what you are learning.</p> <p>How to use: Reflect on individually or discuss in a group the questions in the order in which they appear in the lesson. The time stamps in the right margin indicate where the answers to questions during the video can be found.</p>
PRAYER	<p>The prayer section offers suggestions for how to close the lesson in prayer with respect to what was taught in the lecture.</p> <p>How to use: Consider using each lesson's prayer section as a guide to personal or group prayer. These sections follow the ACTS prayer model, which you can learn more about in R.C. Sproul's Crucial Questions booklet <i>Does Prayer Change Things?</i> This helpful guide is available as a free e-book at Ligonier.org.</p>
REVIEW QUIZ	<p>The review quiz is a set of six multiple-choice questions that appears at the end of each lesson.</p> <p>How to use: Use each quiz to check your comprehension and memory of the major points covered in each lecture. It will be most beneficial to your learning if you take a lesson's quiz either sometime between lessons or just before you begin the next lesson in the study guide.</p>
ANSWER KEY	<p>The answer key provides explanations for the reflection and discussion questions and answers to the multiple-choice questions in the review quiz.</p> <p>How to use: Use the answer key to check your own answers or when you do not know the answer. Note: Do not give in too quickly; struggling for a few moments to recall an answer reinforces it in your mind.</p>

Study Schedules

The following table suggests four plans for working through the *Union with Christ* video teaching series and this companion study guide. Whether you are going through this series on your own or with a group, these schedules should help you plan your study path.

	Extended 14-Week Plan	Standard 12-Week Plan	Abbreviated 6-Week Plan	Intensive 4-Week Plan
Week	Lesson			
1	*	1	1 & 2	1–3
2	1	2	3 & 4	4–6
3	2	3	5 & 6	7–9
4	3	4	7 & 8	10–12
5	4	5	9 & 10	
6	5	6	11 & 12	
7	6	7		
8	7	8		
9	8	9		
10	9	10		
11	10	11		
12	11	12		
13	12			
14	*			

* For these weeks, rather than completing lessons, spend your time discussing and praying about your learning goals for the study (the first week) and the most valuable takeaways from the study (the last week).

“In Christ”

INTRODUCTION

Some of the ways in which evangelicals self-identify today were not part of the vernacular of early believers. The first Christians thought of themselves as followers of “the Way” and as being “in Christ.” In this lesson, Dr. Ferguson reasserts this ancient way of thinking about the Christian life, and he demonstrates how the doctrine of union with Christ, which is often overlooked today, actually resides at the heart of Christian faith and life.

LEARNING GOALS

When you have finished this lesson, you should be able to:

- Describe why the idea of being “in Christ” is important
- Summarize some effects of being united to Christ described in the book of Ephesians

KEY IDEAS

- The expression “in Christ” is an overlooked yet crucial way in which Scripture describes the Christian life.
- By being united to Jesus Christ, believers become citizens of a new kingdom.
- It is through union with Christ that believers experience the riches of the gospel.

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Before the Video

What Do You Think?

Take a moment to answer the following questions. They will prepare you for the lecture.

- What words do you use most frequently to describe your religious affiliation? Why do you gravitate toward those particular words?
- When you think about the idea of union with Christ, what comes to your mind? What would you like to learn in this teaching series on the subject?

Scripture Reading

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

—Ephesians 1:3–14

- What are the spiritual realities “in Christ” that Paul presents in this passage?

During the Video

Answer the following questions while you watch the video. They will guide you through the lecture.

Little Preposition, Great Noun

0:00–14:13

- How many times does the word *Christian* appear in the New Testament? In what contexts does this word appear?
- How does Paul suggest that Christians are citizens of two different worlds in Ephesians 1?

Effects of Being in Christ

14:13–22:59

- What are some of the benefits and implications of a believer's union with Christ that Paul describes in Ephesians 2–6?
- Why can life often seem to become more difficult after someone becomes a Christian?

After the Video

Answer the following questions after you have finished the lecture. They will help you identify and summarize the major points.

- What connotation did the term *Christian* originally carry? What are some examples of this kind of usage today?

If you are in a group, have the members discuss how Christians are perceived in our culture today. In what ways do you think Christians are most commonly misunderstood?

- The reality of spiritual warfare can make life seem harder for a Christian than a non-Christian. In this warfare, what is Satan able to accomplish and not able to accomplish against Christians?

If you are in a group, have the members read Ephesians 6:10–20. What great assurances can be drawn from this passage for our encouragement?

- What language does the New Testament use to describe a person's coming to faith in Christ? How does this language compare to the language that dominates today's evangelical subculture?

If you are in a group, have the members discuss which of these descriptions they consider most accurate and why. What other descriptions of our new life in Christ have you found helpful?

PRAYER

Commit what you have learned from God's Word in this lesson to prayer.

- Praise God for two or three specific blessings that are yours in Christ.
- Confess ways that you have underappreciated your relationship with Jesus or taken it for granted.

- Thank God for giving you a new spiritual life and a new identity in Jesus Christ.
- Ask God to help you grow in both knowledge and praise during this study.

REVIEW QUIZ

Use these multiple-choice questions to measure what you learned from this lesson.

1. The word *Christian* most likely originated as a pejorative term.
 - a. True
 - b. False
2. Which of the following phrases did members of the early church use most frequently to describe themselves?
 - a. Apostles
 - b. Believers
 - c. Christians
 - d. Followers of the Way
3. According to Dr. Ferguson, who is the "man in Christ" mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12:2?
 - a. Barnabas
 - b. Paul
 - c. Peter
 - d. Timothy
4. How many times does Paul use language such as "in Christ" to describe Christians?
 - a. 5 or fewer
 - b. 25
 - c. 63
 - d. 80 or more
5. The statement "Ephesians 1 should never be read in church; it should always be sung" is attributed to which of the following theologians?
 - a. B.B. Warfield
 - b. John Calvin
 - c. Jonathan Edwards
 - d. Robert Murray M'Cheyne
6. Which of the following is in the power of Satan and his minions to accomplish?
 - a. Defeating the church
 - b. Destroying the salvation of believers
 - c. Eroding a Christian's assurance of salvation and enjoyment of salvation
 - d. Ruining God's purpose for a Christian's life

Answer Key—“In Christ”

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Before the Video

What Do You Think?

These are personal questions. The answers should be based on your own knowledge and experience.

Scripture Reading

- What are the spiritual realities “in Christ” that Paul presents in this passage?
Ephesians 1:3–14 offers a detailed summary of the benefits that believers share “in Christ.” According to this passage, it is in Him that believers experience every spiritual blessing. In Christ, believers were chosen before the foundation of the world, and they have been redeemed through His blood. God’s purpose to unite all things in Christ has been set forth in Him and enacted in the fullness of time. In Christ, believers have placed their hope and have obtained their inheritance. Moreover, in Christ, believers have been sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of that eternal inheritance. From beginning to end, it is in Christ that believers experience all the benefits of redemption both in this life and in the life of the world to come.

During the Video

Little Preposition, Great Noun

- How many times does the word *Christian* appear in the New Testament? In what contexts does this word appear?
The word Christian appears only three times in the New Testament. The first appearance is in Acts 11:26, which notes that followers of Jesus were first called Christians in the city of Antioch. The term appears again several chapters later in Acts 26:28, when Agrippa asks Paul if he thought he could persuade him so quickly to become a Christian. The third appearance of this term is in 1 Peter 4:16, when Peter deals with the topic of suffering as a Christian.
- How does Paul suggest that Christians are citizens of two different worlds in Ephesians 1?
In the opening verse of his letter to the Ephesians, Paul refers to the dual citizenship of Christians. He addresses this epistle “to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus” (1:1). The first half of this description recognizes the physical, earthly location and citizenship of his readers. The second half reveals

the spiritual allegiance that unites all believers, regardless of their physical surroundings. Consequently, Christians who dwell in different earthly cities belong to the same heavenly city. All who are in Christ serve the same King.

Effects of Being in Christ

- What are some of the benefits and implications of a believer's union with Christ that Paul describes in Ephesians 2–6?

In Ephesians 2, Paul celebrates the reality that believers who were once dead in trespasses are now raised up to new life in Christ. Ephesians 3 discusses the wonder of having one's eyes opened to the eternal purposes of God that have been made known in the church, the assembly of those who are in Christ. In Ephesians 4, Paul elaborates on the union with one another that occurs as a result of being united with Christ. In Ephesians 5, he examines the clash of worlds that takes place as the implications of being in Christ are applied to Christians' relationships with their family members and others around them. Finally, Ephesians 6 concludes with instructions on how to engage in the spiritual warfare that results from one's new identity in Christ.

- Why can life often seem to become more difficult after someone becomes a Christian?

Dr. Ferguson noted that many Christians find life to be laden with new difficulties after they receive Christ as Savior. This is true because the powers of darkness that once reigned over believers when they were dead in their sins now actively wage war against them. Those who follow Christ will find that all the power of hell is let loose against them because of their allegiance to Him.

After the Video

- What connotation did the term *Christian* originally carry? What are some examples of this kind of usage today?

*Christian was originally a pejorative term that people in the first century used to express their disdain for the early church. Dr. Ferguson cited the contemporary word *fundamentalist* as an example of how descriptions of certain groups of Christians today are sometimes derogatory. Additional examples may come to mind based on your own experience.*

- The reality of spiritual warfare can make life seem harder for a Christian than a non-Christian. In this warfare, what is Satan able to accomplish and not able to accomplish against Christians?

Satan and his minions are now unable to attack Jesus directly, so they actively wage war against His followers. No matter how fierce their spiritual onslaughts may be, they are unable to destroy the salvation of believers. Nevertheless, they will attempt everything in their power to undermine a Christian's assurance of salvation and enjoyment of that salvation in this life.

- What language does the New Testament use to describe a person's coming to faith in Christ? How does this language compare to the language that dominates today's evangelical subculture?

References in the New Testament to Christ's "coming in" to a person's life are limited. The New Testament primarily uses language about sinners' needing to get out of themselves and get into the riches of Christ. Rather than conceiving of Christ as entering into sinners, Scripture describes conversion as sinners' entering into Christ. On the other hand, today's evangelical subculture relies heavily on language of Jesus' entering the lives of sinners. Many Christians can recall being encouraged at the time of their conversion to "let Jesus in," a notion that does not explicitly appear in Scripture.

REVIEW QUIZ

Lesson 1

1. **A.**
The term Christian first appears not on the lips of believers to describe themselves, but on the lips of nonbelievers to describe followers of Jesus (Acts 11:26; 26:28). In all likelihood, this was a pejorative term used to express disdain for the early church.
2. **D.**
The primary phrase used by Christians to describe their faith throughout the book of Acts is "the Way." This term appears as the early name for the Christian faith in Acts 9:2; 16:17; 18:25–26; 19:9; 19:23; 22:4; 24:14; and 24:22.
3. **B.**
Dr. Ferguson argues that the "man in Christ" mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12:2–4 who "was caught up into paradise . . . and . . . heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter" is actually Paul himself. Paul's detailed description of this event suggests that he was intimately familiar with this man's experience. By attributing it to "a man in Christ," Paul is able to describe this event in order to make a point to his readers without coming across as boasting about what he had experienced.
4. **D.**
Based on the number of uses, language such as "in Christ" appears to be Paul's preferred way of talking about followers of Jesus. In his letters, he often speaks of himself as being "in the Lord," "in Him," or "in the Lord Jesus Christ." In all, he employs such phrases more than eighty times.

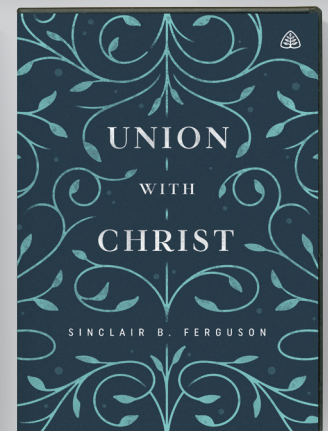
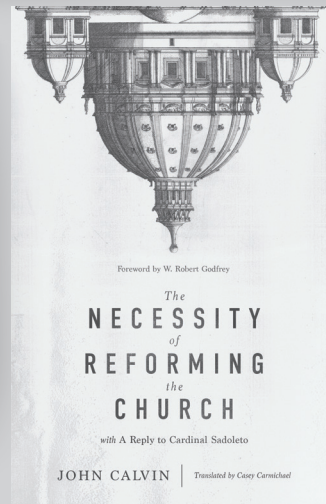
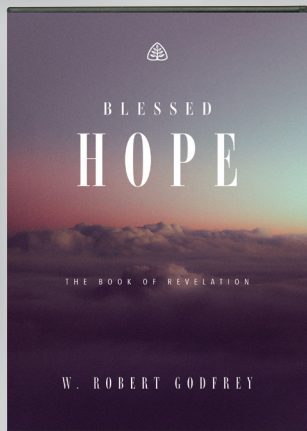
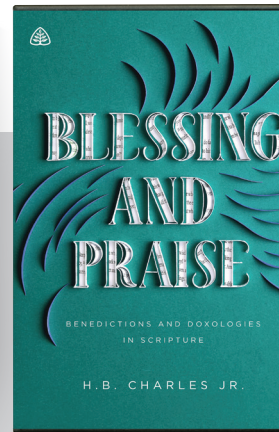
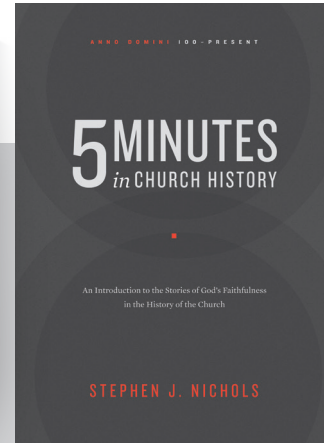
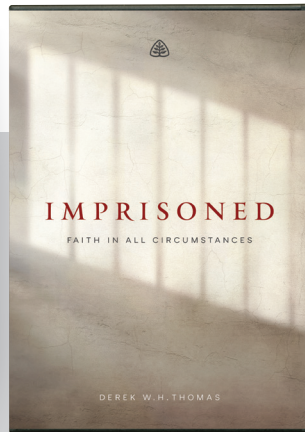
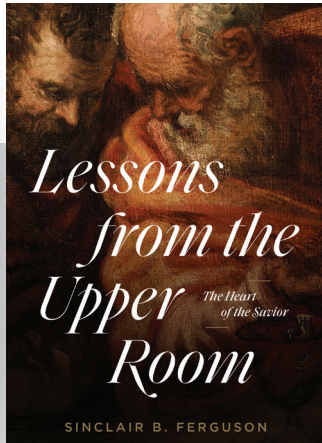
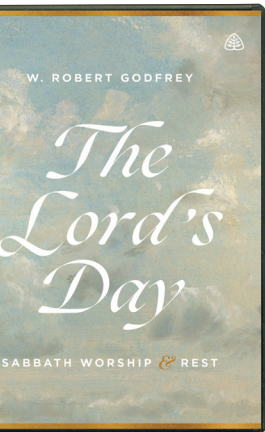
5. **A.**

The great Princeton theologian B.B. Warfield once remarked that Ephesians 1 should never be read in church but should instead be sung. This statement highlights the abundant joy that the message of this chapter can produce in the hearts of believers as they begin to fathom the incredible riches that are theirs in Christ Jesus.

6. **C.**

While Satan and his minions can never defeat Christ or His church, destroy a believer's salvation, or ruin God's plans for a Christian's life, the forces of darkness can and often do destroy a Christian's assurance of salvation and enjoyment of salvation.

We want to see men and women around the world connect
the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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