

TRIUMPHANT LIVING
Union With Christ – Part 2
Taught by Bruce Bickel
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Father, once again we have been exposed. Have mercy upon us, the sinner. Father, we know that nothing of eternal consequence will happen during these hours, or these moments, unless you are pleased in your sovereign grace and providence to go before us. May your Holy Spirit be among us, be our Teacher and guide us into all truth that we might behold the verities of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ foremost in our mind. Reveal yourself to us. May we have a clear picture of who you are in all of your glory. For Jesus' sake, we pray. Amen.

I want to thank you, brothers, for your prayers for my recent surgeries. They're minor surgeries. You're in one day and out the same afternoon. I've had four in the last six weeks—one on each eye. By the way, I can see you rather well now. I had cataract and astigmatism surgery and have new lenses. All of a sudden, things are rather bright. It's really quite nice. I'm back to 20/20 and put me on flight status. {LAUGHTER} And then the melanoma surgery on the head. As you know, I had it done about five weeks ago. It was a pre-melanoma. It's what you call a squamous. It can metastasize and spread, so it's not cancerous yet. It's a pre-cancer surgery is what it is. The only thing that happened was it came back five weeks after they had done it the first time. They felt they got it all the first time. When I went back to see him, I said, "Yeah, right." {LAUGHTER} So they did a second version. He was a little concerned as to why it came back. I have a nice, 50-cent piece hole in my head, underneath this bandage.

The only thing that hurts, now get this, the Lord has a great sense of humor. The only time it hurts is when I talk. {LAUGHTER} So I'm trying, you know, you've heard me, I always say, "What am I going to do about what I just learned," so I don't know if I should just shut up or if I should keep talking. Yesterday, after the Bible study downtown at the bank, my head really hurt, and I realized that I was just talking for 45 minutes and my head just vibrated. My skull vibrates when I talk, so we'll see what happens today. Thank you for your prayers. This isn't anything that is a major concern, just something I'm going to have to watch and about every 60 days go back to the surgeon just to see how things are going. But thank you very much for your prayers.

We engaged a couple of weeks ago on a wonderful subject, which is going to take us some time and in-depth. I want you to know how much I, personally, am enjoying studying this theme. It's one that I've not studied a whole lot of over my Christian pilgrimage. I've touched on it a little bit, but I've never really isolated and said I'm going to do an in-depth study on this particular theme. That theme is our union with Christ. We flippantly say that we're in Christ and we're with Christ on all those things, but what does that really mean? I'm having a great time studying all of this, and I trust that I'm communicating it well.

When we talk about union with Christ, what does that mean? Well, really, the word union with Christ, the phrase, is a phrase that summarizes the different relationships that we have with the Lord Jesus Christ, where we receive every benefit of salvation that he accomplished. That's the general theme. It's the assuring of the believers in the life of Christ, by faith, allowing us to share in all the benefits and all the riches that result from the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Essentially, there are four main issues which we're going to be looking at. We touched on this a couple of weeks ago as part of our introduction. The Scripture's going to teach us, and we'll examine each of these more in-depth, first of all, that we are in Christ. The Scripture says that you are in Christ. That's

the primary theme, or the primary phrase, that the Scriptures use to describe this union. In fact, the Apostle Paul uses that phrase, in Christ, 129 times to describe a person who has a saving relationship to God the Father through God the Son.

He doesn't refer to them as a believer. He doesn't refer to them as a Christian or a follower of Christ. Those are some of the other synonyms that certainly would be comparable to be used. He says "in Christ." That's got to be very, very interesting. What does he mean when he says that you are in Christ? That's what this union in Christ is all about.

Now there are other phrases that also talk about that concept of our union with Christ, that apply to this union, such as the vine and the branches. There's another picture of what it means to be in Christ. The husband and wife is a picture of a union that we have with Christ. The mystical union of a husband and wife is a description of the mystical union that a believer has with the Lord Jesus. Another phrase would be a building and the cornerstone. There's a building and there's a cornerstone. They're merged together. They're unified. They're in union together. Those are some of the other things.

It's really contrasted by the phrase in Christ or in Adam. In other words, when you look at the positive side, you'll see the vine and the branches. You'll see the building and the cornerstone, the husband and the wife, in Christ, with Christ. If you want to see the contrasting side of it, you're either in Adam (Romans 5) or you're in Christ. We'll explore some of that.

Essentially, we want to look at what does it mean to be in union with Christ. There are four major areas in which we're going to examine. You have this on your notes in lesson five. First of all, we want to explore in-depth what does it mean when we say we are in Christ? We are in Christ. We can also say that Christ is in us. What is the overwhelming thought to me is the realization that I had some idea of what it means to be in Christ, just from my years of studying the Scriptures, but there's this amazing, amazing thought that Christ is in us. Do we really understand what that means and the implications of that? Or do we just flippantly say I'm a follower of Christ? There's much more to this, men, when you realize that Christ is in us.

Now what does that mean? What are we going to do about that? How does that transform the way that we live? These are all transformational thoughts as we understand that we are in Christ. Christ is in us. We are like Christ. Now what does it mean when you say like Christ? That certainly does not mean that we take on his Divinity. That's not what we're saying. When we say that we are like Christ, we are saying we are like Christ in his humanity in the way that we live our lives is a reflection of who he is. We'll explore that in more depth. Then lastly, we are with Christ. What does it mean to say that we are with Christ? Those are the four areas we're going to look at.

When we talk about being in union with Christ, this is not a confusion of the person of being lost or blending of the person into the mystics. Now, the mystics would say, which they call Nirvana, they would say that when you have a union with the spiritual, that your personality is merged into this being, this supernatural being, this spiritual person, whomever that may be, and you lose yourself because you're translated into the mystic and you become merged into this person, into the eternal essence, or you're lost in the eternal essence is the way say it.

Now we're not talking about that. That's what the mystics, the Eastern religionists would say is Nirvana, that this union you have with the spiritual world, you lose yourself you become something other and you get lost in the eternal. We're not talking about that. We're not talking about that at all. That is not what the Scripture says.

We will exist as individuals and do not become merged into the eternal essence. In other words, you're still going to be you. I'm still going to be me. With all of your personality traits. With all your nuances. With all the things that God was pleased before the foundation of the world when he created you in Christ Jesus. He made you highly specific for a specific reason. You don't lose any of that. You don't lose any of that human personality. You're still going to have that. You're going to have a temperament. You're going to have a personality. And you're going to have a character that is uniquely yours. That is not impacted by what the mystics would say, the merging into the eternal. We're not talking about that at all.

You're going to be you. The real difference is how do I understand who God has really made me to be because of this union? What does it mean that I'm in Christ? That's going to be transformational. My life is going to be transformed when we understand these truths. We will exist as individuals. We're not fused into the materialistic sense of just something of a union of people who get together because they have commonalities. You form a group of union people who are musicians. People who are compassionate—you form unions. We're not talking about a union of compassionate, tender people. That's not what we're talking about.

We're talking about a living, vital relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ in a union that is described by our being in Christ, Christ is in us, we are like Christ and we will be with Christ. We're not talking about a group of people who form a union in the sense they have commonalities, common beliefs, common interests. Just like a group of musicians form the union of musicians, or guitar players. We're not talking about that either. We're talking about something that is far more significant because of this union.

First of all, let me give you the nature of this. We'll spend some time today, and then I want to spend more time next week going through the four indications of we are in Christ, Christ is in us, we are like Christ and we are with Christ. What do those four things mean to us and how it translates into our daily lives. First of all, let me give you sort of an overview of the nature of this union, spiritually, sort for a summary from 1,000 feet.

First of all, it's a spiritual union. The union that we have it's a spiritual union. Go to 1 Corinthians 6:17. This is a spiritual union; this is not a merging of you unto the eternal essence into some Nirvana situation. This is a merging of who are you and a union with the living Lord Jesus Christ in a spiritual relationship. 1 Corinthians 6:17, "But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*." There's your union. It's a spiritual relationship. When you and I are joined to God in this union, it's a union in which we are joined to him, we are one Spirit.

Union with Christ has its source in the electing love of God the Father before the foundation of the world. This union began in the electing love, the compassionate, merciful doctrine of election, when God chose you before the foundation of the world in Christ. You were not chosen separately from Christ; you were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. That's where this union begins, and it culminates in the glorification of the children of God.

It starts with our election and ends with our glorification. The electing love of God the Father occurred in the counsels of eternity. In Ephesians 1, "1Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and *who are* faithful in Christ Jesus." That's one of the 129 times Paul uses that phrase. To whom is he writing this letter? He's writing to people who are in union with Christ. This is not just for the whole world to read. He's writing to a specific group of people, and he defines them by being faithful in Christ Jesus. "2Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus

Christ. ³Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ.”

Where are you are blessings? They’re in Christ. You see, that’s what Jesus talks about in the Beatitudes when he uses the word “blessed.” He uses that eight times in describing the characteristics of a kingdom citizen. The word “blessed” is the Greek word “makarios.” It means happiness in spite of circumstances. Happiness is based upon happenings. Blessedness is based upon the fact that you know how to manage through God’s grace the happenings in which you’re involved in. You are happy in spite of the circumstances. You’re not a slave to the circumstances in which you find yourself. That’s the difference of being in union with Christ and not being in union with Christ. You have these heavenly blessings that are in Christ Jesus. In this union, all the blessings that Christ has accomplished for us are ours, not because of anything we’ve done; it’s because of what he’s accomplished. We receive the benefits of all that Christ has accomplished because of this union of our being in Christ.

“³Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ. , ⁴“just as He chose us,” because you were good before the foundation of the world.” It doesn’t say that. Where were you chosen? “⁴Just as He chose us in Him.” In other words, God chose you in Christ before you were born, “before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.” In other words, our electing love of the Father, the compassionate doctrine of election, starts in the deep counsels of God himself.

This is just hard for us to understand. Do you realize that when God thought of you before you were born, he thought of you as being in Christ? You’ve always been that way in his mind. You’ve never been apart from him. You’ve always been...he’s looked at you, personally, by name. He’s looked at you and sees you as being in Christ. Before the foundation of the world, he viewed you as being in Christ, and he chose us to be in Christ. That’s what Paul is saying.

This is just beyond our human comprehension. This is one of the inscrutable things of this union. It’s hard for us to understand. If God the Holy Spirit has not opened your eyes to understand these truths, there’s no way we, in our humanity, are going to be able to figure this out, let alone believe it. If somebody would hear what I just said, they would think that that guy’s a zealot or an idiot. How can you talk about that? That God chose me in Christ before the foundation of the world? You see, this union is so impactful and so transforming when you understand the magnificence of it, that God has never seen you apart from Christ at any time in his own thoughts. He chose you in him before the foundation of the world. You’ve never been a part of God’s mindset in the counsel of his own will apart from being in Christ. That’s what it means to be in union with him.

Guys, I would think the more we ponder this, the more it’s going to radically transform our lives. It ought to do that because the realization that God has always thought of me as being in Christ. Why me? Why me? When Jesus was on the cross, you, by name, if you’re in Christ, were on his mind. Do you realize that? You were on his mind at the cross because he chose you before the foundation of the world in Christ. All the blessings that you and I receive right now are a result of that union that existed in the counsel of God’s will before the foundation of the world. All the blessings that you and I now receive are expressions and manifestations of that magnificence doctrine of the electing love of the Father.

Audience Member: How would you communicate that to a non-believer?

I probably wouldn't. {LAUGHTER} I would talk about repentance and faith. I'm not going to talk about this to a non-believer. They're going to walk out of the room. Charles Spurgeon says this in his lectures to his students, "You don't start with a non-believer talking about predestination and election. You talk about repentance and faith." You don't take them to the university of predestination and election until you've taken them the college of repentance and faith. I wouldn't talk about this to anybody who's a non-believer. I would talk to them, "What are you doing about the person and work of Christ? Who do you say Jesus Christ is?" I would go back to that because until that happens, they're going to have no understanding of what we're talking about. They're going to have no understanding.

Bishop Rogers: *Well, I was just the various confessions, they actually warn that this will drive a non-believer nuts, I mean, absolutely to despair, if he takes it seriously.*

Absolutely! It's probably driving most of us nuts just listening to this. {LAUGHTER} But really...

Don: *But shouldn't the believer be driven to despair...a non-believer is driven to despair?*

Don has a great point. Should not a non-believer be driven to despair?

Bishop Rogers: *Not despair, but to repent [UNCLEAR]...*

To repentance.

Don: *Right, but he needs to know that [UNCLEAR] [OVERLAPPING]...*

They need to understand to bad news before they understand the good news.

Don: *There's nothing he can do about his lost condition.*

That's correct. Now hopefully, that would bring them to repentance.

Don: *Right.*

The despair, this feeling of being lost, "I'm lost without Christ." If you want to call that despair, that's a feeling. Yes, they need to come to that before they come to repentance. All I'm saying is when you're dealing with non-believers, you deal with one central issue—the person and work of Christ. The real issue is what are you doing with the person and work of Christ? "Well, I don't know anything about Christ." There's your point of entry. You talk about Christ and his work. This is what we're dealing with... we've been here 17 years and this is the first time we're talking about this. It's rather obvious that revelation is progressive; it's not instantaneous. It's taken us 17 years to get to this point. I'm not going to talk about this with a non-believer. I want to talk about Christ with the non-believer.

Ted: *But being in Christ, with Christ, Christ in all those four, it really has to do with the centrality of Christ as you're saying. So I think what we say, is we say, really, it's all about Jesus. It is all about Jesus from beginning to end.*

Amen.

Ted: *And how we fit into him. I think that we don't talk about this because we think of Jesus as being out there. You were talking about the mystic, and he sees about the eradication of the self and being*

absorbed into the vine. But there's another side [UNCLEAR] a lot Evangelical Protestantism talks about being Jesus kind of being out there and giving me the blessing from a distance. In essence, he's out there dying on the cross and I'm getting the blood at a distance. I'm really not hooked into him. So there's another side. It seems to me the human mind deals with one or the other. There is a third option, which you're talking about, about this union with Christ. It's different than being absorbed and different than having Christ at a distance kind of giving you stuff.

The Deists would say, "Yes, there's a God, but he's not involved in me personally, nor am I involved in him personally. He just sort of superintends all the stuff that's going on." That's what we call Deism, "I believe in a higher being, but there's no personal relationship" there's no union like we're talking about right now. Nor is it like the mystics who say you get lost and you're merged into the eternal essence into nirvana. We're not talk about either one of those.

We're talking about something that is so significant. Reflect on this for a moment, brothers. If you're in Christ today, God has never viewed you any other way. He's never seen you any other way. In the counsel of his own will, he's always viewed you as being in Christ. Now go back and take a look at your life. If you really want to see what God's will is down the road, look backwards and see where you've come from. That's how you're going to understand God's will. We're always looking for the sign that says, "What should I do?" We need to look back and say, "What has he done?" What has he done? What has Christ done?

You see, if you want to understand your future, go back and look at your past and say my past began in eternity past and eons before the foundation of the world when I was viewed as being in Christ. Now I look at my life and I see that translation of all that has worked itself up to me right where I am today. Now I can anticipate the future blessings because I've understood all the blessings that I've already received in the heavenlies in Christ.

The reason you and I can anticipate future blessings, Paul will teach us, is because you have a litany and a whole history of past blessings. We don't think enough about the past blessings that are incorporated in us because we are in Christ. We're always looking for the next one because our life is based upon happenings rather than based upon being controlled by God's grace in spite of our happenings.

Bob: *Bruce, a question that I ponder on occasion. Let's suppose I'm talking to a believer and I talk about the person and work of Christ. The non-believer turns it right around to me at that point and says, "Really? Well tell me about person and work of Christ?" What in your opinion should be the entry point in that discussion for the believer talking to the non-believer when asked that question?*

Well, first of all, I can't give you...

Bob: *We've been through 17 years of this, but I want to...is there a starting point that you would suggest?*

Go back 17 years ago and read our notes. {LAUGHTER} I can't give a carte blanche step-by-step. You've got to be careful of that. You just can't go say "do this" with everybody. You have to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Now basically look at this way. You and I are going to say the identical same thing today, next week or next year to a person who says, "Tell me about the person and work of Christ." That truth is not going to change. The only thing that's going to change is the receptivity of the hearer. My truth, my message is never going to change. I have to be very, very sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit to say where is this person. Are they receptive to what I'm going to say and some

degree of sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit? Unless the Holy Spirit goes before us, nothing of eternal consequence is going to happen.

All I'm trying to say is I can't give you a carte blanche do this, do this, do this; it's a clone for everybody. You can't do it that way. My point of entry would be this. Somehow I would get in the conversation of giving the Gospel, and that would include these elements. First of all, the holiness of God. I would start with the holiness of God. That's where you've got to start. Secondly, the sinfulness of man. They've got to see the contrast between, as Don would say, their discouragement, their understanding of their depravity. They've got to understand. The only way they're going to understand that is they've got to realize, first of all, that God is holy. You start with the holiness of God, then you talk about the sinfulness of man.

Then you talk about repentance and faith. The response of a sinful man to the holiness of God. That's repentance and faith. The person and work of Christ. Then you get into the person and work of Christ. This is what Christ, who he is, this is what he did. And then you talk about repentance and faith. My point of entry would be somehow in this litany of the discussion, starting with the holiness of God, then the sinfulness of man, then the person of Christ, the work of Christ. His person is his sinless perfection and his work is his perfect obedience.

You talk about the sinless perfection of the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ and then you talk about the absolute perfect obedience that he had, that he fulfilled the law. All those things. You get into his perfect obedience. Then you talk about repentance and faith. Somehow that would be the point of entry. I'm certainly not going to talk about chose you before the foundation of the world in him, and that's how he views you. Hopefully, it will come to that point, but that's not the point of entry. The point of entry has got to be the person and work of Christ. That's what I would offer for your consideration.

Audience Member: [UNCLEAR]...my comment, Bruce, would be to show that you care and welcome them to share their journey so far. You learn so much by hearing people's spiritual journey and what their experiences have been.

Absolutely.

Justin: And you hear that laundry list, you start to hear those hurts or joys it gives you such sensitivity, and they understand that you're not doing a formula; you actually want to learn the person, [UNCLEAR] ...

Justin's got a great point. Real leadership is not having the right answer; it's knowing what question to ask. A leader knows what question to ask. You can ask one question, "Tell me, who do you say the Lord Jesus Christ is?" Ask that question, "Who do you say Christ is?" Now, you listen to that question and that's going to take you to know the next question to ask. Then their answer to that question will give you the next one. You don't go in with a script and say I've got to go one, two, three, four, five. If you just basically ask the question, "Tell me, who do you say the Lord Jesus Christ is?" and listen to that, and then you go from that because they're going to give you some indication and it might be they'll talk about their spiritual journey. Who knows what it'll be. That's going to give some way that you'll know what next question to ask. Real leadership, brothers, is not having all the answers. It's really knowing what question to ask. That's when we become an aggressive responder to the Holy Spirit's work.

Audience Member: Bruce, you started off with the holiness of God. One of the things [UNCLEAR] recently in our culture because they don't know God at all is how much God also loves them. I agree, holiness is important, but wouldn't you also say that the unbelieving world also needs to know that God loves them [UNCLEAR]...

That's true, but you've got to be careful with that. You don't start with the love of God. You start with the character of God, of which love is one of the characters. If you start with the love of God, they're going to say, "Oh, I'm okay." The tendency is our concept of love is I'm the good guy. Why do bad things happen to good people? Well, it really is why do good things happen to bad people? That's the real issue. You've got to be careful. When you start too much of the love of God, people are going to fall into that trap of saying, "This is my concept of love. My concept of love is this; therefore I'm going to get all these things."

Yes, you talk about that love of God, but you do it in the context of something bigger, and that is his character and his holiness. You can get into that, but I would not lead off what the love of God because that will take people...often times it can go [UNCLEAR] their own concept of what that means. We need to help them understand this; that the love of God is this—that Christ died for you at the cross. Why did he die for you? Let's talk about that rather than the fact that he loves you. Why did he do it? You can talk about the love that way, but just be cautious that you don't lead too much with God's love. That can be somewhat defrauding and deceiving. Bishop Rogers, would you agree?

Bishop Rogers: I was thinking that one of the ways that got my attention is, that somebody said to me, "Sooner or later, every human being is going to have to stand before God and be judged."

Amen.

Bishop Rogers: That's inevitable.

Inevitable.

Bishop Rogers: That kind of went to my heart. That was a frightening thought.

For me, I told you Romans 5:10 was the thing that got me. It wasn't God's love, it was the fact that, "If while you were God's enemy..." I went to my dad and I said, "Dad, am I God's enemy?" I was 12 years old. I went to my dad and I said, "Dad, am I an enemy of God." I'll be so grateful for my father. He had the courage and the love to say, "Yes, you are, in your unregenerate state."

Let's read the rest of the verse. I had to...what pricked my heart was not God's love for me; it was the fact that I was an antagonist, I was a man committing cosmic treason against the holiness of God. That's when I understood what I needed to do, that I was open to listening to God's love for me at the cross. But it wasn't his love that got my attention; it was the fact that I realized that I was his enemy, as the Scripture says.

Audience Member: That brings you to the point that you had asked, "Why me?" And then it leads you to, "Why not me?"

Yeah, absolutely.

Audience Member: Because of him.

All I'm saying is you can't come up with a formula. I'm not formula oriented. Now I'll tell you what, I'm not knocking organizations who do that, so please understand what I'm not saying. I remember some of the things...I just look back on my life, guys, and I think how in the world could God have used me then and what I did. I mean, some of the things that I thought were so profound, they were so much about me that I thought aren't I the greatest thing since sliced bread and night baseball. {LAUGHTER}

I'll just give you a crass example. When I went to Vietnam in my in country tour with the Army, the Forward Controller, who better to win the Vietnam war than me? {LAUGHTER} A Naval Academy graduate, cut one vein it's blue, cut the other one it's gold. A believer. White man. Hey...single handedly, I can win this whole thing because of who I am. You know what happened? God put at the front of a Vietnamese pastor who taught me what it meant to worship God. We couldn't even speak the same language. That's the whole story of the orphanage, the whole story of Tin, which you've been a part of.

You see, we have this warped idea that what we do makes a difference. It is the truth that makes the difference, not me that makes the difference. I remember with FCA, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, we used to train professional athletes to witness for Christ. We said, "Here's your script. You go to the airport. When somebody gets off the plane, you go up and go 1, 2, 3, 4 5." They would come back, "Tell us your story." "Oh, it sucked! {LAUGHTER} It was terrible!" Well of course it was terrible. I mean, how many times do you just walk up to somebody off a plane and say, "Do you know that God loves and has a wonderful plan for your life?"

Now, God may use it. I'm not knocking that. Yes, I am knocking it. {LAUGHTER} All I'm saying is I'm not sure that's the most effective way. God will use any amount of truth that he wants. We've got to realize that. It's not about us. It's not about having to a formula. It's not about not having a formula. It's neither one of those. The real issue is God alone will make the difference. All I'm saying is, guys, be sensitive when you're talking to somebody about the person and work of Christ. Ask the question, "What do you know about the person and work of Christ?" and go from there. And who knows, you might start with the love of Christ. That may be where you need to go. If that's it, then pursue that. All I'm saying is you don't necessarily start with the same thing with everybody.

Audience Member: Bruce, [UNCLEAR] at the point of entry, Jesus had compassion. So it's not even what are you going to say, what are you think, what is your motive, even when you're talking are you [UNCLEAR] saw the crowd and had compassion on them. Are we having compassion when we see them or do we want to tell them about Scripture? Are we having compassion that they'll be saved, if they're hungry and feeding them, [UNCLEAR] compassion if they're thirsty and we're giving them water. Are we even at that entry [UNCLEAR]...

It's a great point. That's why you can't legislate a formula. You just can't do that. Who was it, General Booth of the Salvation Army, he said, "Here's the point of entry—soup, soap, salvation." Soup. Sometimes you've just got to feed people. Then you clean them up. Then you talk about Christ. His point of entry was let's feed people who are hungry. You take care of that. That's compassion. Let them see that compassion. Let them see that mercy. Then you give them a bath. Clean them up so they can take care of themselves, feel better about themselves, and then you offer them the salvation work of Christ. That's not a bad idea. When you take it in its big scope, it's talking about you've got to be sensitive to the person. His theory was soup, soap, salvation. It's not a bad thought.

Audience Member: *On that sensitivity, Bruce, as I look at Christ, when he was with a Pharisees, rich young ruler, I mean, he set bar really high. When he was with the woman who was caught in adultery...*

Oh absolutely.

Audience Member: *...he gave her forgiveness. I think, based on the need, so many, we work with broken kids who are hurting, so they want, they need to know that someone cares.*

That's right.

Audience Member: *Someone who's proud and arrogant and whatever, they need to have their standards [UNCLEAR] showing God's standards [UNCLEAR] that sensitivity.*

Absolutely. That's why you've got to really be trusting the Holy Spirit, guys. This is not a formula.

Carl: *Bruce, you have to also look at Jesus said he was going to take them from being fishermen to being fishers of men. We have to look at the bait that we use. The bait has got to be Christ. It just depends on who you're talking. It's never going to be a cookie cutter, like you said. It's not going to be a cookie cutter. You've got to, whatever that situation dictates at that particular point in time, is what you've got to use through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.*

Amen.

Carl: *And teaching truth.*

Remember John 5 and John 8. I've referred to this several times, where Jesus says, "I do nothing on my own initiative. I only do those things that see the Father doing." Now that's basically saying, Guys, be discerning." Be discerning. It's not your role, it's not your job description to initiate something per se. What we need to be is an aggressive responder to what we see the Lord doing around us. That's the sensitivity, the point of entry, in our evangelism with people, is that you're sensitive to what's going on in their lives, and you become an aggressive responder to what they're doing.

Now I told you how the Bible study started at PNC 20-some years ago. I'd been at the bank about six months and a young woman walked into my office. What I was doing, as I came into the office every day, coming through the Ft. Pitt Tunnel, and I still do that. As soon as I go through the tunnel, I say, "Lord, give me the discernment to see what you're going to do in my life today so I can respond to it." People say, "How do you plan your day?" I don't. I don't. I don't have a plan for it. I know what I'm supposed to do, but I'm trying to be discerning about, "Lord, what are you going to do around me?" I want to join those things because I know if I'm joining what you've already initiated, it's going to be blessed, as opposed to my initiating something and saying now bless it." There's a difference.

I'm sitting in my office one day and this young woman walks in and says, "Can I ask you a question?" I said, "Well, as long as it's not about banking." {LAUGHTER} She said, "No." I said, "What's your question?" She said, "Why do I need to be saved from my sins?" Bingo! Right there I became an aggressive responder. My question was, "Well who said you did?" You see, I'm going to ask questions because I'm going to find out a little bit more about her. I know what I need to do, but I don't know what I need to do. You see, I know what I need to do, but I don't know what I need to do, so I'm asking questions.

“Who said you did?” “Well, I was listening to the radio coming in and changed the dial and some man was talking about repentance and faith.” Alright, I’ve got a point of entry. So I said, “Well, why are you asking me?” Still doing research. “Why are you asking me?” She said, “Well I don’t know. There’s just something different about you from the other people around here, and I thought maybe you could help.” That told me right away she’s going to be willing to listen to what I say, because there was something there that made her come to me that she doesn’t know, that now she’s going to be receptive. That gave me a lot of information in asking those three questions. Now I knew what I needed to do. I said, “Why don’t you come on into my office.”

We sat down and we went through the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ and repentance and faith. Her response was, “You know, I’ve got a lot of friends who’d like to talk about this.” I said, “Why don’t you bring them back next Thursday.” We’ve been meeting every Thursday since. Now did I start a Bible study? No. All I was trying to do is be an aggressive responder to what Lord was doing around me so that I could participate in something that he was doing.

Now he’s still been doing that now 25 years later. We met yesterday over at First Presbyterian Church. I still am in touch with the young girl who asked me that question 25 years ago. I had the privilege about 15 years ago of performing her wedding. She’s now down in Florida and I still hear from her periodically.

My point of illustration, guys, is not to call attention to myself. Please understand that. All I’m try to say is this—be discerning. Have the mindset of your life be this, “Lord, just give me the discernment to see what you’re doing around me so I can become an aggressive responder and jump in and participate in the things that you’re doing around me, because I know this. Those are the ones that will be blessed.” Take the pressure off yourself of having to create something to make yourself feel good. Why do you create things in ministry? Because you want to make yourself feel good. Sometimes that’s our motive. If I do this, I get to talk about it.

***Sig:** That’s what I wanted to comment on. You changed my perspective 180 degrees one day when you said you shouldn’t be trying to create a ministry and ask God to bless it. We should find out where God is and go there. I was thinking worldly like [UNCLEAR] give me some accolade and give me some comfort and give my ego something. I would do it for my sake. Like Dean was saying earlier, “What’s your motivation.” I [UNCLEAR] bring Christ anybody. Because you know something about it and they don’t and you have power over them. Let’s go where God is.*

Amen. It’s so liberating when you realize that when we join what he’s doing, that’s what’s going to be blessed, as opposed to thinking I’ve got to create it myself and do it for myself.

Here’s just another expression. I was talking with somebody the other day at my church, and she said, “Bruce, have you ever thought about going to the mission field?” I said, “I beg your pardon?” She said, “Have you ever thought about going to the mission field? I’m going to go to Kenya for two weeks.” I said, “With all due respect, dear sister, where do you think I’ve been the last 25 years?” “Oh, you’re just at PNC.” What does the book of Acts say? You begin your witness where? Jerusalem. It’s right in your own house. It’s right in your own spot. That’s where it begins. Then it spreads to Judea, and then to Samaria to all the parts of the world. It starts wherever you are. That’s why ministry is who you are where you are.

You see, my great joy has been this. I’ve been in the mission field for 25 years. The nice thing about it is I get paid to do it. But really, your mission field is where you are. It’s who you are where you are. We’ve

got this mindset that I need to go out there and do it rather than be right here and have it happen. Become an aggressive responder. The great transforming understanding is this—that I'm in Christ, and Christ is in me. That means something can happen today that is for the glory of God and for the furtherance of the kingdom. Why is that? Because Christ is in me. Do I think that way? Do I act that way? Is that my mindset? Do I understand what that means? That the Lord Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world viewed me only in one way, and that was this—that Bruce, you are in me. You look back upon your life and you say, "My goodness, I see why all those things have happened because I've been in Christ." Do I understand what that means now? You see, brothers, Christ is in you if you're in Christ. Who you are where you are is your mission field. Just give them heaven. Give them heaven. Let's pray.

Father, this is so overwhelming, so inscrutable, beyond our own human comprehension. Lord, if we're saying things that are inconsistent with your revealed truth in the Word. If we are saying thoughts that have come from ourselves and our own motives, would you forgive us. Our desire, Father, is to really know you more and understand what this means. But yet in our human frailty and in our inadequacy, we sometimes have presuppositions that are just erroneous. Father, remove any of those thoughts that aren't consistent with your glory, that we might reflect solely upon those things that reveal you and your truth, and may it be so that we will become, today, aggressive responders to what you're doing around us because we understand at least a glimmer of a thought of what it means to be in Christ before the foundation of the world, and may it be so for Jesus' sake. And all the Brave Men said... Amen!