

TRIUMPHANT LIVING
Union With Christ
Taught by Ted Wood
May 17, 2013

The Lord be with you.

Audience Members: *And also with you.*

Let us pray. Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and all that is in within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all our iniquity and heals all our diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagles. The Lord has established his throne in the heavens and his kingdom rules over all. Bless the Lord, oh his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of the word. Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will. Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, oh my soul. In Christ's name. Amen.

That was Psalm 103. As many of you know, I'm a great advocate of praying the Scripture. I always find the words of God for prayer are better than mine.

The whole area of union with Christ, and I thought I would unpack some of the aspects of that, that Bruce has been talking about. I asked a number of you for some input. I am so excited about the fact that Bruce has been diving into this subject. It strikes me, and you tell me if I didn't get this right, it strikes me that this is a somewhat new area for Bruce's study, or one he's really not dug into very deeply.

I began thinking about this a number of years ago because, and some of you have heard me tell this story before, so I apologize, but I began to dig into this as I began to wrestle with 2 Corinthians 5:17. It's not on your outline here. You know this verse very well. "Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (NKJV) That's an extraordinary statement. It's kind of a thrilling statement, an inspiring statement. But I could not see how it applied to me because I did not feel that I looked anything like a new creation. I looked quite old and used up and deviant. So I didn't understand that, and that began my search. The search led me into what it means to be in Christ, in union with Christ.

I got a lot of insight into verse 17 by looking back at verse 16, which reads, "Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him thus* no longer." (NKJV) As Paul is talking about being a new creation, a new creature in Christ, the old has passed away, behold the new has come, I looked at myself and that was not the case. I did not appear to be a new creature, a new creation. The old was very much with me and had not passed away, in fact.

Then I looked at verse 16. Not at the same time I began to be agitated by verse 17, but later on. I began to see that my problem was that I was looking at it all from the perspective of man. I was looking at it from the fleshly perspective, and that's what Paul says. He says, "From now on, we no longer look at anyone from the perspective, from the viewpoint of man, from the flesh." That's what I was doing. I was looking at myself, and others, and Paul could certainly say he looked at Christ that way before his conversion, that before his conversion, he looked at Christ from a human perspective. From that human perspective, he saw Jesus as being a blasphemer, as a destroyer of the truth, and as an evil person. That

was his perspective in the flesh. But when God created in him a new person, when he regenerated Paul, he began to see Jesus as he truly was, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Alpha and Omega, beginning and the end.

That's what I knew I had to do. I knew I had to begin to look at Christ no longer from a human position, from human opinion, and myself in the same way. That leads me into union with Christ. As Bruce has said, union with Christ, as I'm following this outline, describes a relationship of the believer to Christ. He says it in four ways—we are in Christ, Christ is in us, we are like Christ and we are with Christ. As Bruce says, union with Christ has its origins in the election of God the Father before the foundation of the world, and its culmination in the glorification of the children of God, the sons of God. It starts with God's choice before time and ends with your total completion and fulfillment at the end of the age and into eternity.

As I've heard Bruce talk about this, I think this is a new understanding for many, many of us. When I first began to get into study what it means to be in Christ or in union with Christ, this was a new way of looking at everything. Just before class started, Bishop Rogers and I were chatting and he...we mentioned, we observed the fact that in the past, theologians, students of the Scripture, although they knew that these kinds of verses were there in Scripture, yet it wasn't a big part of any systematic theology that was written, or had not been for many. We were wondering why that was. Bishop Rogers said, "Well, for many people, there was kind of a mystical element to it, so they couldn't get their arms around that." What I've decided, or what I've come to, is it's just mystical, it's just not profoundly awesome, but it's essential. It's all about the essence of who we are and what God wants for us.

I began to think about you all and think about there's got to be folks in this group that have different understandings of what it means to be a Christian or a believer. Now, I want to tell you that 3A, 3B and 3C are half-baked. I get these images that come into mind as I'm lying in bed thinking and they take a while to get fully baked, so this one is a little half-baked. You may say, "Well, Ted, you didn't really get it." Okay, that's fine. I want to hear about it. I'm just saying, I'm not totally confident in these descriptions, A, B and C. I'm just suggesting that there may be three ways of understanding that people come to the table, understanding what it means to be a Christian or a believer.

The first I would call the good person understanding. God loves everybody, and this person would say, "God loves everyone and Jesus came to set an example, giving us commandments to live by. The purpose of life is ascribed to become a better person, by obeying these commandments, to pray for comfort and strength and to hope that your good deeds outweigh the bad ones so that you can go to the good place." I think that's true for many folks. They understand Jesus as having set an example for us. They do have a place for prayer. But there's no confidence that they're going to end up to be with the Lord in the end. They put a great deal of emphasis on becoming a better person.

I remember, in 1967, when I first came to believe, the fella that brought me to Christ, he asked me, "Are you a Christian?" My answer was, "Well, I think I'm as good as anyone." The idea was on my goodness and being a better person. I would say that most of us in this room have been delivered out of that understanding, because that's not an accurate understanding. That way, way underestimates how depraved and how wicked we are in our hearts. We just don't even want to think about it. It's so bad, we just...I don't want to think about it, because I know the alternative to reckoning with it is to realize that I am due to have a rope tied around my neck, and the other end of the rope tied to a millstone and dropped into the sea. That is what my sin requires. We don't want to think about it. We'd rather think about the fact that Jesus set an example. I'm going to work hard to be a better person by following his example, and when I get in a bind, I'm going to pray and ask for God's help. That's one way.

Now the second way, probably a gradation better than that, is the getting saved understanding. This person believes that God loves everyone and Jesus died for your sins if you will accept him into your heart—or however you want to say it—make him Lord of your life, accept him as your Lord and Savior. This is being born again or saved, this person understands. The purpose of life, therefore, is to strive to become a better Christian, to pray for strength, comfort and answers and to go to heaven when you die. That’s the understanding. Basically, Jesus has these benefits for you. You accept him as the Lord and he gives you these benefits and you try to be a better person, but in the end, because you accepted him, you end up with him in heaven. That would be that person. That was my understanding. I taught that for many, many years as being what Christianity was all about, what the Gospel was all about.

But then I began to wrestle with the whole issue of if anyone is in Christ, he’s a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. Even though I was striving to be a better Christian, yet, I was not, did not strike me as I looked any newer than I had been before. Now, you know, you get rid of some of the obvious bad things. Right? You don’t, as I’ve often said, you don’t cuss, smoke or chew or go with girls that do. You get rid of the obvious things. But as any of us know, the longer we’re in the faith, we begin to realize how lost we are and the blinders start to come off.

I was teaching in my adult class here at Christ Church a couple of weeks ago. I was making this point, and one of the members of the class raised his hand and said, “Ted, you just talk too much about how sinful you are. You can’t possibly be doing anything that’s sinful right now.” I said, “Yes, I am.” I had to think about it and I grasped it. Here I am, “Hey, I’m the teacher. Look at me. I’m pretty good. Hey, do you all like me?” Am I doing well?”

Audience Member: *We like you.*

Yeah, thank you. {LAUGHTER} There you go. Thank you.

Sig: *Speak for yourself.* {LAUGHTER}

Audience Member: *There are worse sinners in the room.*

You see what I’m saying? The other day, I was asked...I want to think this thing out before I say it...I was asked to go and make a hospital visit. Now, you know, I have a full-time job. When I go out on hospital visits, that’s hours I can’t charge to the client. But that’s fine. But the whole time I was there, I was feeling burdened and impinged upon by that person taking up my time. This person needed me to visit them in a very difficult situation, and all I was thinking about was myself. You begin to understand that you have a profound problem.

You need to ask yourself if indeed anyone is in Christ he’s a new creation, the old has passed away. If indeed that’s true, then I may be lost, if I’m going to be honest. I don’t want to think about. It’s too horrific. Hell is too horrific to think about, but I don’t want to think about it.

So I think perhaps there’s a better way, and that’s God’s way, and that’s the Scriptural way. I would say that is 3C, the union with Christ understanding. This is what it says, “God the Father chose those who would be born again before time and unrelated to any human choice or work.” Unrelated to any human choice or work. “At regeneration, you receive not simply salvation, but the very life of Christ and “*every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places*”, as it says in Ephesians.

Three “C” says you received salvation at regeneration and God’s help along the way. This is a whole new picture. You just don’t receive salvation; you receive everything in Christ—every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. You receive a new desire, a new mind. You receive the benefits of his death, the atonement. Yes, his blood shed for you. You also receive his resurrection and glorification. Everything that is of him now is yours because you’re in him and he’s in you. How did you get there? Because you worked at it, you strove for it, you chose it, you were sincere, you prayed hard enough. None of that. It’s an absolute mystery and miracle of God that you’ve been placed in Christ, and from now on, that your identity, regardless of your choices or work.

The purpose of the life then is to abide in him. Bruce has talked about the beautiful teaching on abiding. Make your camp with Jesus. Get settled with him. He abides in you; you abide in him. [UNCLEAR] abide in him, and from this abiding, out of this abiding, not out of your striving, but out of this abiding, to do good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them for it is God who works in you both to will and to work his good pleasure. That becomes what it means to be a new creation in Christ. Now I’m new because he’s new. Everything I am and everything I hope to be is because of him.

That’s what I began to understand. There are three ways, so...I want to say that union with Christ is true and right understanding of who we are, whether or not you understand it or experience it. I want to make that...you may be sitting there, “Gosh, I have no idea what this guy is talking about.” Well, that’s fine, because God will get you that understanding, in time. But that should not deter you from digging into this because I am telling you, this is where the mother load of the faith is, to be in Christ, to abide in him, him in you, to be one with Christ. That is where the mother load is.

Audience Member: *I get the predestination. I understand that. But we don’t say these things when we witness to people. We give them John 3:16.*

That’s excellent. The brother said...this is an excellent question. We do evangelism, we don’t say, “God only elects a few and we’re just here to find out if you’re one of the few.” {LAUGHTER} We always go to John 3:16. We understand John 3:16 to mean, “For God so love the world that he gave his only begotten Son,” that it’s often translated whosoever. Probably a better translation, the translation was found in the Geneva Bible of 1599, was “whoever,” that the ones believing. You believe and therefore you have eternal life. You already have the gift of faith.

What we’re doing...it’s interesting, I struggle with this. Being somewhat new to this thinking in the last several years, I think how do you do evangelism with this understanding? We’re so used to quid pro quo—action and a reaction. You do this and you’ll get this kind of thing. I think, I looked to George Whitfield and the great evangelists of the great awakening. George Whitfield, I looked at how he ended his sermons. He would end his sermons by saying, “All of those of you who thirst, come to me. All of those of you who are heavy laden and burdened, come to me and I will give you rest.” He ended with those Scriptures.

For the person in the audience to hear that, they would have to feel thirsty. They would have to realize that they have a thirst problem, or they have a burden problem, or they have some other problem to respond to that. That would indicate that God had given them the truth, so they understood they had that problem, because the natural man doesn’t think he has a problem, or he thinks he has a problem, but thinks it can be resolved, naively, I would say, naively and ignorantly, thinks the problem is resolved by just doing more. You know what the definition of insanity is.

I'm not afraid about talking about these things about, the harder things about election and God's choosing. I'm not afraid to talk about them because Paul talks about them. As I've often said, people will say, "Well, Ted, this is a deeper teaching. You don't want everyone to hear this. Only people who are a little more mature in the faith." I really don't agree with that. I can see...here, think about this, brothers. We have our meeting. We're at Ephesus. We have our church meeting. "Oh, brothers! Great news! We just got a letter from Paul. We'd like to read it to you all. But you know, some of you are new Christians, so you can leave the room because this is too heavy for you." I mean, they took that letter and they were eager to read it and they got into it and they started reading about God's election from time in eternity and how he had selected and how he was sovereign over the whole process.

I'm not afraid to get right into it because in the end, the person will understand, if indeed, he's one of God's elect. He will understand that his solution is not a solution, and he's looking for God's solution, whatever that solution is. Not what he feels comfortable with, but what...in a sense, to really become truly converted, you have to be truly desperate. You have to come to the end of your own resources.

Audience Member: *That's what I was saying. I don't think there's any justice, certainly, in putting man in his proper place. That's where the Gospel has been lost.*

Yes.

Audience Member: *The Gospel is lost when we say, "You do this, I do that," because it's just not about your choice, it's not about the devil's voting against you, and you get the deciding vote. That completely flies in the face of what Christ has done for his people.*

I know it.

Audience Member: *I think we need to unashamedly preach the true Gospel. Right? This is the true Gospel that you can do nothing...*

Yeah, without me...I just blanked. I'm sorry.

Don: *Without me you can do nothing.*

Do nothing. That's right.

Audience Member: In John 6, Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father draws them." Why wouldn't you tell somebody that? I've asked unbelievers, I've said, "I'm telling you what the Scriptures says" [UNCLEAR] push away.

Yeah, right.

Audience Member: *I say no, it doesn't push me away. If somebody's being drawn, they're starting to understand the truth, then what it's doing is actually making them understand that they are helpless, and that's where you want them. [UNCLEAR]...*

What I also like to say...and brothers, I'll tell you, this is evolving in my own mind, so I apologize. I often like to say what Jesus said on three occasions, and that is, "What do you want me to do? I mean, what

do you want?" You look at the person. You're sharing the Gospel, "Now you've heard it. What do you want? What do you want to do? Are you moved? Is this of any interest to you?" kind of thing.

Audience Member: [UNCLEAR] where you've evolved to, Ted, as it relates to evangelism where you're replacing normal evangelism or do you think there's no value in evangelism now because of the election process and there's no choice on man's part, it's all of God, and so are we suggesting that there's really not a value or a purpose in evangelism? Or has evangelism evolved into something different than what has been traditional?

Well maybe traditional, but wrong, I mean, the kind of evangelism that we have. No, I'm very much in favor of evangelism. Every sermon preaching must have the evangelistic element to it. I know there are a lot of hands going up. I'm only one-third of the way through this [UNCLEAR]. {LAUGHTER}.

The thing is, I read a wonderful book on the New Testament. It was called New Testament Conversion. It was by a guy named Peace. I think he's out of Fuller Seminary. I was reading it because it had a whole section on Mark's Gospel and I was looking for that. When I got into it, in that document, he says, and you've heard me say this before, that studies done by Luis Palau, by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association...they've analyzed about the behavior of people after they come forward in an evangelistic crusade. They check with them a year after they came forward. The number of people that are involved in a church a year after they come forward in a Billy Graham crusade is 5-15% of those who come forward.

Now, there are certain things that God gives at conversion. The most important thing is desire. Desire for the things of God. You desire his Word and you desire to be with his people. I don't know how it's possible, in time, not to desire and be active in both of those—active in his Word and active in his people, his body.

I'm for evangelism the New Testament way, which is just to preach it and preach and preach it and preach the hard, straightforward truth, and not seek to look for results from you guys. Bishop, go ahead.

Bishop Rogers: He already said what I was going to say, and that is Jesus said, "No one can come unto me except that the Father draw him." You're talking about the drawing.

Yes. As versus...keep going Bishop.

Bishop Rogers: Well, it's...versus just...[UNCLEAR]...choose. I don't want to suggest that you don't choose.

That's right.

Bishop Rogers: You choose in the power of the desire which is awakened [UNCLEAR]...

You choose...absolutely, everybody's got to choose Christ. They do. But where does that come from? What is that driven by? To say it's driven by the flesh, to say that your choosing is driven by what you have naturally, what you were born with, you being an enemy of God, you being a child of wrath. If it comes out of that, that is to blaspheme God. The thing is, the reason we keep, those of us who believe strongly in this, keep driving it home, it's not because we're playing some kind of theological word game where we just delight in doing theological crossword puzzles. It's because we think it has to do

with the character of God and who he is. This is not primarily about you; it's primarily about God and his character. That's why Bruce is hitting home runs because he starts with the 28 attributes of God. Let's find out about God. "Well, I have these issues. I'm depressed. I'm concerned." I mean, okay, big deal. You're like the wind. You're blown away into nothing in time. You pass away. Only God remains. If I want to remain, I've got to get connected to him somehow.

Tom: *Wouldn't you say, though, that the core of real evangelism is the love Christians show for each other?*

Well, that's an example, but the core of evangelism has got to be the Word of God. The Word of God is the only thing that when it goes out, it doesn't return void. When God speaks, things happen. "Let there be light." Boom! It happens. He didn't get down into the Babylonian creation myths and begin to work in the muck and form it out of his hands. He said it and it happened. That's what God does. The Word goes out. You're sitting there in church, or talking to a friend, and you're getting the Word, and everything else, "Yeah, whatever." I mean, before it was kind of like, "Whatever," and all at once, it's "Whoa! They're talking about me!" All of a sudden it becomes...I mean, that's what happened to me.

When Steve started to share the Gospel with me, it was kind of mental gymnastics up to the third day, and then all at once, after he left the room at college and I was sitting there with a Bible in front of me, I said, "My gosh! This is about me! This is just not some philosophical B.S. session. This is about me." When you realize that, not to act is going contrary to your own best interests. You're going to have to act when all of a sudden you realize that it's applied to you and that God is looking for you to respond to that.

Tom H.: *There are two things. One, we evangelize because we're committed to [UNCLEAR], so we do that in obedience. And two, there is the whole concept, I mean, of free will that people have, humans have the free will to choose or not to choose. I your question about your motivation for choosing, there's a big debate in Christian circles where that comes from, but I believe, I think a lot of us believe it comes from the Holy Spirit, so it comes from God.*

It comes from the new life in Christ. Listen, if you're in Christ, it comes from Christ. It's Christ himself who is choosing. Christ chooses himself.

Tom H.: *So do you really have free will?*

You have free will, but not the ability to exercise it. It's like a piece of equipment that is...yeah, it can go if it wasn't so profoundly damaged. Bishop can clarify this.

Bishop Rogers: *Of course you have free will, and you're choosing wrongly. {LAUGHTER} [UNCLEAR]... because you're a sinner. God has to change that.*

That's right.

Bishop Rogers: *[UNCLEAR]...everything you do continues that false use of your reason. Ain't somebody else choosing; it's you.*

Yeah, that's right.

Audience Member: Bruce ad mentioned before we're double-dipped sinners, so we're sinner by birth and sinners by choice.

That's right.

Audience Member: We're born into this world. That's all we know at the onset is [UNCLEAR] sin, it's our natural state.

Right. We're sinners by...

Audience Member: Sinners by birth and sinners by choice.

And by choice. Even if you were to get rid of every sin that you ever did by choice, if you had the power, the willpower...and by the way, what I'm doing, I'm also putting together a list of all the commandments, the 1,150 commandments in the New Testament, and I plan on reading that someday, just so you all, those of you who are overly optimistic about your own ability of self-improvement, you can hear this, and this ought to sober you...15 minutes, it'll probably take a couple of hours to read the whole list. Fifteen minutes is going to sober you up considerably.

Audience Member: I don't think there's a better example of salvation than the raising of Lazarus. Lazarus is dead in the cave, so dead he stinks, and that's what God sees us as.

Bishop Rogers: Dead in your trespasses and sins.

Audience Member: Christ comes and gives the commandment, "Lazarus arise!" We're dead. We can't choose to come to life. The choice he has, Lazarus, is why wouldn't I come out into life. That's a choice. Be he can't do it unless Christ says, "Come out!"

Audience Member: [UNCLEAR]...while he was dead.

Right. Or as Bill McCoy likes to say, you can sing Just As I Am a hundred verses to a corpse and it's not going to move.

So really, this begins, and I think the primary issue here, that's number five, God the Father's sovereignty. I really think, I've come to the conclusion that the differences are not Protestant, Catholic and everything else. The differences are really between those who hold to God's sovereignty as being the trump card and those who hold to man's abilities as the trump card. There are those who are in Protestant groups who would defame the Catholic church, but they end up believing practically the same thing. You say Catholics believe in salvation by faith and works. Well, there's a lot of Protestants who say you're saved by the grace of God but you stay saved because you work hard at it. To me, it's the same thing. In essence, your abilities trump God's sovereign choice, that you have the final say and not God. Once again, brothers, this is not about you; this is about character of God. That's where the problem lies.

God the Father's sovereignty, "God the Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." (Ephesians 4:6) That's a pretty inclusive statement to talk about where God's dominion lies and his purview. "He (that is God the Father), chose us in him (that is in Christ), before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love, he predestined us for adoption as

sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace.” (Ephesians 1:4-6)

We were chosen by God before creation, that is, before we could do anything about it. This is found in an amazing verse in Romans 9. Paul is talking about Rebekah and the birth of Jacob and Esau, “but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, *even* by our father Isaac ¹¹(for *the children* not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), ¹²it was said to her, ‘The older shall serve the younger.’ ¹³As it is written, ‘Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.’” (Romans 9:10-13)

Now why did God love Jacob and hate Esau? Why? Somebody says he knew their hearts. No. The heart is deceitfully wicked above all things. God looks at Jacob’s heart. He looks at Esau’s heart. What’s the difference? Jacob was a real scoundrel, but I’m just saying, he looks at both hearts, he sees the same thing. What he sees is it’s about me; it’s not about you. That’s what it’s all about. I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul. That’s what it’s about. Jacob and Esau—why was one favored over the other? Why?

Audience Member: *It was his good pleasure.*

It was his good pleasure. Well that’s not much of an answer. {LAUGHTER} Well, that’s the best you’re going to get when we’re talking about the Ruler of the Universe. I mean, that’s all we got. I don’t know what else we have. What else do you have?

Audience Member: *Paul said [UNCLEAR]...*

Yeah, “Who are you to speak back or to judge God.” I’m telling you, these verses are very disturbing. They’re very disturbing to the way most of us have been raised to think. That’s why it’s so important that you wrestle with it and begin to get into who God is and who you are in him.

His choice is based on the purpose of his will, “Having been predestined according to the purpose of him,” (Ephesians 1:5) “who works all things according to the counsel of his will.” (Ephesians 1:11) That is the only reason. What is the purpose of election? Why did God choose you? “That we should be holy and blameless before him.” (Ephesians 1:4) That’s the reason. I mean, you’re not kosher. You’re very unkosher. Your natural life is an offense to God because you’re competing with God. He is a jealous God. He has and other God besides him. You are competing with him. Therefore, he must rectify that situation, and he does it by making you holy and blameless before him. How does he do that? What is the mechanism for which God makes you holy and blameless before him? What is it?

Audience Member: *In Christ.*

Yes, it’s in Christ. It’s not simply he died for your sins. It’s that he’s put his life into you; therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. But I don’t look like it. I don’t care. That’s not the point. I don’t feel like it. Not important. You start off, “If anyone is in Christ, he’s a new creation.” That solves the blameless and holy before him. That’s the only thing that solves it. It’s his life.

Audience Member: *So you don’t look like it and you don’t feel like it, but it’s important you act like it.*

Well, you will...and I’m going to get to that. That’s good. You will act like it. Yes.

Audience Member: *This is where Paul told it's a great mystery.*

It's a great mystery. It is a great mystery. Thank you. It is a great mystery. But it's true. Whether you feel it or understand it or not.

Audience Member: *As we approach Pentecost this Sunday, Christ had to go or this wouldn't have happened.*

That's exactly right.

Audience Member: *In order for us to be in Christ, he had to send the Holy Spirit. It wasn't really all done until Pentecost.*

Well it really wasn't all done until he ascended.

Audience Member: *But Pentecost is after he ascended.*

Yes, and I just got that confused.

Audience Member: [UNCLEAR]...

Right. That's correct.

Audience Member: *He has to move in the Spirit that we might be [UNCLEAR]...*

In 5E, in Adam versus in Christ, "And you, being dead in your trespasses in the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses." (Colossians 2:13) It's not simply that you've done bad things; you have a bad problem, the uncircumcision. You're not marked off. A baby gets circumcised at the eighth day. He hasn't done anything wrong. But he still has, if he's not been circumcised in a sense, he's not part of the team in Judaism. So you who were dead in trespasses and uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him. God made you alive, in him.

We go on to read that "as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive." (1 Corinthians 15:22). In Adam, as I was born, I'm dead, but I'm going to be made alive in Christ. "*If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more ... shall we be saved by his...*" (Rom 5:10.) Cross? By his dying for us? By his life. It's the very life of Christ. That's what saves you ultimately. The cross is part of that. But only part of that.

The problem I have with the different kinds of understanding in the beginning, it's like folks are at 3B; folks who are at 3B, get as far as the cross and that's all they think there is. But there's everything. He bought everything into us.

"If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ." (Rom 5:17). That's my guarantee because, as in one man, I'm dead, and the other man, that is Jesus Christ, I have an abundance of grace, the free gift of righteousness that will reign in life. That's where my life is. "My life is hid with God in Christ," Paul says. My life is hid with God in Christ.

That's where my life is. Everything else flows from that. I don't understand that. I understand. I don't either, but that's where it all is.

The question is how union with Christ experienced, acted out and lived out? One of the fellas said, "Now we live it." How does that happen? Every part of union with Christ is supernatural in its origins and working out. That's the first thing we need to realize. Everything in the Christian life is meant to be supernatural. It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh (human ability) is no help at all," (John 6:63) Jesus said. "To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life ..." (Romans 8:6)

Everything in the Christian life is ultimately about God's supernatural working. I've worked up this, and I may be wrong in this analogy. Brother Bill and I have had some discussion back and forth about this. I believe that truth leads to desire leads to action.



That's the way we experience it in our Christian life. I'm talking about after you're in Christ, then how do you actually experience this as it works itself out? Truth leads to desire leads to action. I get that in part from this short parable that Jesus taught, "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it." (Matthew 13:45-46)

Now, you start off with the truth. That merchant looked at that pearl. He knew it wasn't a piece of plaster. He knew, in truth, that pearl had great value, because that, in truth, was the fact. Therefore, he had a desire for that pearl. Therefore, because of that desire, it drove him to sell everything and to purchase that pearl. The same thing is true in our lives. When we perceive, when God gives us the grace, when we apprehend the truth about the Gospel, not only in terms of the big ideas, but the small areas of our life, in every area, when we perceive that truth, that drives our desire. We then desire to have that, because men naturally desire what's true. Even the unregenerate man desires what's true. He just desires a lie. He believes that a lie is the truth. "I believe it's wrong to cheat on my wife, but I did." "Well, why did you do that?" "Well, I must have messed up." No, you didn't mess up. You happened to believe that indeed fidelity was less important than that affair. You believed that was true. You were lied to. You believed the lie. Your desire, that infidelity, was better than faithfulness, that truth, that apprehension of that truth, lead you to the desire for that other woman and lead you to act on it. Truth leads to desire leads to action.

Always the issue is not, "Oh gosh! I messed up and I'm a sinner and I've done some bad things." No, the problem is that you have a problem with the truth. That's fine. Just admit it. I do. I have a profound... here I am, I'm in the hospital room and I'm thinking this person needs me, they need me to talk to them and pray with them, but you know what, getting this report done for the client is more important, and this person is stealing my time. I was believing a lie. The lie is that getting that report done was more important than spending time with a brother or sister in Christ.

Bill: Two things, Ted, that I think are important here. Number one, we do not, in any way, recognize that this is [UNCLEAR]...

Right.

Bill: Secondly, we do not have a clear understanding of God's grace, and we resist [UNCLEAR] not the least of which [UNCLEAR] and it frightens us to step into Christ and live the life he wants us to live.

Right, it is frightening. But by grace, he will give us that. I would just wrap this up, and I appreciate your patience, is that what we're going to find ourselves doing, as we apprehend the truth, which leads to desire, which leads to action, where we see that that pearl is of great price and we know it and we believe it's true, and we desire to have that pearl and we sell everything to get that pearl. Or the buried treasure is a very similar parable is that we become desirous of the things of God.

The two things I want to talk about are the Word and the Church. *"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* (John 8:31-32) That's because the Word of God of living and active. It's sharper, it's piercing and it's discerning. Those are the things that Word does to us. We desire that Word. That's why we're here this morning. We desire the Word. We'd find ourselves more and more less happy with sermons and teaching that spend a lot of time on great stories, and less time on taking apart the Word of God and explaining it. I want to see that that preacher and teacher has read, marked, learned and inwardly digested the Word of God. That's what I need. Your story is inspiring. I'm excited about it. But that's not going to change me. The thing that will change me is the Word of God that is sharper, piercing and discerning. That's the thing that will make the difference.

Audience Member: *Real quick. That, to me, I guess you would say like the pictures that go [UNCLEAR] life stories, and that is off track, and not to the point. That, to me, is the same as the person who comes and studies the Word deeply and then does nothing [UNCLEAR].*

Of course. Absolutely.

Audience Member: *And that's what I think you're getting to, the signs of Christ, the signs of...?*

That's right. But I'm saying to you that if you are in him and he is in you, if he has placed you in him and put you, or whatever the opposite is, if that is true, you're going to begin to desire the Word of God. The other thing you're going to desire to get into it and act...and that's compelling...because remember, it's just not you're studying facts. The point is that you're studying the truth and the truth will drive you, whether you are born again or not. The truth will drive you. The problem with unbelievers is they believe, they exchange the truth for a lie. That's what they do. Unbelievers believe a lie. They don't believe the truth. They're still driven by that lie. We can say the lady across the street, success in the workplace, whatever they need to do, they will do it. They'll be driven by that, but that's a lie. They're living a lie.

The second thing is *"... the church, which is (Christ's) body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."* (Ephesians 1:22-23) I'm not going to go into those other verses, but I would say this about the Church. The problem is, with many of us, is that we came out of a Protestantism that denigrated the Church. We looked at Church and went, "Oh, that's where the bad...that's religion, and I don't want any part of that." Well I'm telling you, it's very clear in Scripture that's what Jesus gave us. He gave us the Church, and he didn't say, "You be part of the church as long as the church is doing a good job." I'm telling you, he's part of you, whether you're doing a good job or not. In the same way, those of us who cast aspersions and are critical of the church, the organized church, if we're...do we want the same criticisms thrown at us, because the very evil we accuse them of doing, we're doing ourselves, personally. The church is precious to God. It's his body. It's the only body that Jesus has on this earth. He says in this, he makes a statement, he says, "Which is Christ's body, the fullness of him who fills everything."

Now, get your mind wrapped around that [UNCLEAR] negative view about the church. Get your mind wrapped around that the church is the fullness of him. Now, does the church make mistakes? Absolutely. Do you make mistakes? Absolutely. But in the end, God is a sovereign God and this is what he set up.

It's been fun for me. I hope it's been fun for you. Let's pray. Lord God, we acknowledge to you today that acknowledgement and that confession that you've put in our hearts, and that is that you are the only true God. You are the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. Without you there's no life, and you as life, and that life was the light of men. We pray now you would convince us and show and work out in us that great life you've given us, which is the very life of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, for it's in his Name we pray. Amen!