

TRIUMPHANT LIVING
Union With Christ – Part 10
Taught by Bruce Bickel
July 12, 2013

[MUSIC]

Amen! And amen! We're continuing our study on the wonderful doctrine of the union with Christ, what it means to be in Christ. Today we want to talk about the concept of we are like Christ. We've discussed so far that we are in Christ, that Christ is in us, and today we want to talk about the theme of what it means that we are like Christ.

One of the things I would just encourage us to do, brothers, is to take our prayer requests very seriously among the body here. We need to do that very seriously. When Sig gives us these individuals, and he puts them on our web page, about praying for people, I trust that we just won't say, "That's just some little thing we're just doing, that everybody else is going to do." Don't think that somebody else is going to do that. Take on the responsibility ourselves, when we bring these needs to each other as the body, that we support each other that way. Prayer is a wonderful ingredient for us just to support each other. I just want to encourage us to take seriously the requests that we bring. Don, I appreciate your prayer so much this morning. I just encourage us, brothers, to take our prayer life and support for each other very, very seriously. It's a wonderful gift. It's a wonderful need. It's a wonderful, powerful thing that we can do for the body in just supporting each other. Don't think that somebody else is going to be the prayer warrior; become one yourself. And may it be so for Jesus' sake that he'll receive all the glory and the honor, and may it be so for his sake.

Audience Members: Amen.

The Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Be imitators of me as I am in Christ." Today we want to talk about the concept of what does it mean that we are to be like Christ. We've already talked about we are in Christ. We've talked about what it means that Christ is in us. Last week, we saw that he gives us all the power to live the Christian life. Today, we want to look at the idea, the third element of our study on the union with Christ, and that is we are to be like Christ. We are like Christ.

Rich C. sent me a note the other day, and I just want to give you a little summary. Go to 1 John 5:20 to help us understand the significance of what it means to be in Christ. Remember, we're talking about this concept of union with Christ, the idea is in the Scripture, Paul uses at least 127-129 times the phrase, "in Christ," to describe somebody who has a saving relationship the God the Father through God the Son. There are other writers in the New Testament who also use it, and Rich pointed out one, which is one of my favorite verses, 1 John 5:20. Just listen to this wonderful, wonderful thought, "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life."

Now do you see there, brothers, the reason that, if you have saving faith today, because of what the Father ordained, the Son accomplished and the Holy Spirit applied, you have eternal life? That does not mean you have more time to live. It means you have a saving relationship because you are in Christ. Why do you have eternal life? It's not because of something you've done. It's not because of something that you accomplished. It's not because of something that you applied in your own life. It's not something you decided to do. It's because of this wonderful union in Christ. You have eternal life because you are in him.

Notice these words, “we may know him who is true.” Why is it that you know God is true? You know that because you are in him, and we are in him who is true. The reason you know the truth is because you’re in Christ. It’s not because you’re so intellectual. It’s not because you’re so brilliant. It’s not because of your talent, your gifts or your anything else. It’s because of this relationship that you have, this union with Christ, this bond with Christ, that you are in him, that you know what is true. It’s because of this union with Christ. That’s why it’s so critical that you understand what it means that Christ is in me, I am in Christ.

Today we need to look at what does it mean that we are like Christ. We need to understand that the reason that you and I have the gift of eternal life is because of this union. It’s because you are in Christ and Christ is eternal. Remember our study several years ago, the 28 attributes of God? One of them is his eternality. Jesus Christ is eternal. Why is it that you have eternal life? It’s because you are in him. It’s because you’re in him. That is the union that we have with Christ. We should never take that for granted, realizing that not only are we in him, but we know who is true. Why is that you have the gift of the knowledge of God’s grace and knowing who is true? It’s because you’re in Christ. That’s the significance.

What does that mean when we talk about, when Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11, “Be imitators of me as I am in Christ”? I would call your attention to 1 John 2:6. The Apostle John says something very similar when he says, “whoever says he abides in him (in Christ) ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.” In other words, if you say that you’re in Christ, and you abide in him and he in you, then you and I ought to walk the same way that he walked.

We’re not talking about mimicking the deity of Christ. Certainly that would be presumptuous. That’s not something we can do. What we’re talking about is imitating or walking as he did. How did he live his life during his lifetime? That’s what we need to look at. There are certain things that I can do that mimic, or imitate, what he did in his lifetime. That’s why it’s so important that you study the gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—because you’ll understand how is it that he walked during his lifetime. You and I who now have union with Christ, we are now in him, he in us. We now need to have a lifestyle that mimics, if you would, that imitates what he did during his lifetime. Not dealing with the supernatural things—I’m not talking about that—but such things as compassion, mercy, tenderness, gentleness, forgiveness. The Scripture is going to tell us why do you forgive somebody. It’s because you know that have been forgiven. That’s why we need to be like Christ.

Let’s take a look at what this means. Union with Christ implies that we should imitate Christ, not in his deity, but in the human way that he lived his life. Our lives ought to reflect what his life was like, so that we bring honor to him in all that we do. Look at Philippians 1:20. I’ll give you a lot of verses today to help us understand this, and then I want to spend some time, if the Lord’s willing, to look at 1 John 2:6, meaning we ought to walk like he did. If we say we abide with him, what does that mean? But first of all, go to Philippians 1:20, “according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but *that* with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.” In other words, what we’re saying is, Paul is teaching us that whatever you go through in your life, you want your life to be a reflection of the fact that you are in union with Christ, he’s in you, you are in him, he gives you the resources to do everything you need in your life, and as a result of that, everything in your life, be it life or death, is for his honor and for his glory.

You see, that’s the mindset that he has. We need to have this mindset that says, “The way I’m going to respond to this situation, is it going to bring glory to the Lord, whether it be life or death?” Paul says an

all-inclusive statement there. He says, “Whether I die, I want to die respectfully in way that honors him. If I’m living, and I serve him, I want to do it in a way that is respectful and honoring to him” Whatever he does in his life, he wants to mimic Christ so that God receives all the glory. Our lives ought to reflect what his life was like.

How about such things as we see in Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church.” Whoa! Sometimes I wish that were not in there. {LAUGHTER} That’s a huge responsibility. You see, what he’s saying is, “Look! Look at the way that I loved the church.” You mimic that. Copy that. That’s what you want to do. Look at the way that I love the church. You want to love your wife? Look at how Jesus loved the church and he gave himself for her. That’s the model that we have. That’s what it means when it says that we are like Christ. Our wives need to see that way that we treat them, the way that we lead them, the way that we serve them, they need to see in us exactly how Jesus loved his church. If you want to know the best marriage counseling you can give a person, to a young man is say, “Study how Jesus loved his church and mimic that. Copy that. Be an imitator of that. That’s what we’re saying when we say we’re in Christ and we need to be like him.

Now that doesn’t mean that we’re going to do things supernatural. I’m not suggesting that. All I’m saying, guys, is there’s a model there. The very first thing that a baby does is it tries to mimic something. The first activity of a child is to mimic their parents. What we’re saying here is, Paul is teaching us this—the very first thing a person who’s in Christ, who has union with Christ, is to mimic our Savior. Find out the things that did, that he did at his human level and mimic those and copy those. That’s how we bring glory to God the Father and call attention to the Son.

How about Colossians 3:13. Here’s another one that I wish were not in here, “Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Why is it you forgive somebody, when they don’t deserve it? I have a right. I have a right to my pain, don’t I? How often times do you sit around in a fellowship time and you sit around and just have a pity party? Let’s see who can talk about the most pain in their life. Why don’t we talk about who can forgive the most? You see, why is it you forgive somebody? Look at Colossians 3:13. Well, let’s take a look at verse 12. Colossians 3:12-13, “¹²So, as those who have been chosen of God...” Now here’s your reason. You’ve been chosen of God. You are in union with Christ before the foundation of the world. We’ve already talked about that. “¹²So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

What are we going to mimic? We’re going to mimic books of psychology that tell you how to manage your pain? You go do these things to satisfy your own pain. Or are you going to look at a model of our Lord who says, “Look, Father forgive them for they don’t know what they do.” Now I’m not suggesting that’s what you say to your wife—I’m not saying that—“I forgive you dear, but you don’t know what you’re doing.” {LAUGHTER} I’m not saying that. All I’m saying is this. Why is it that you and I forgive someone? It’s because you know you’ve been forgiven. You know you’ve been forgiven.

Let’s go to Ephesians 4. One of the things we need to remember in the church, brothers, is this—that doctrine precedes practice. Doctrine precedes practice. Notice 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for four things.” The first thing is your happiness. It doesn’t say that. The first thing is that Scripture is given for is for doctrine. It’s the word teaching. It means standard. The Scripture is given for us to live by a standard that is reflective of the person and work of Christ. The second thing is for rebuke. That means to reveal an error in your standard. Thirdly is for correction. To correct the error in your standard. And fourthly, training in righteousness. To prevent you from making

the same error in the standard that you've been making all along. The whole issue is this—doctrine precedes our practice. If you don't understand the doctrine, you're not going to have the right practice.

Take a look at the book of Ephesians quickly. In chapters 1, 2 and 3, Paul teaches us the doctrine of the transformed life, of what it means to be transformed from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son he loves. You are transformed. That transformation process, when you have a saving relationship because you've been chosen of God before the foundation of the world, transforms your life and it reflects itself in your conduct. First of all, the first three chapters of the book of Ephesians talks about the doctrine of the transformed life. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 deal with the conduct of the transformed life.

Let me give you an illustration. Go to Ephesians 4:17. Just for those of you who are interested, this is the passage I'm going to preach at Christ Church at Grove Farm the last Sunday of August. This is the passage they've given me because I understand you're having a series on relationships in the church. This is going to kind of be a summary about how you have relationships in the church. Notice, beginning at verse 17 of Ephesians 4, "¹⁷So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; ¹⁹and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness." Now down to verse 20, "²⁰But you did not learn Christ in this way, ²¹if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus."

Now notice it goes on...he gives us three things here...in verses 22-25 he basically says this, "put off, put on and put away." Three verbs—put off the old way old way of life, put on the new way of life, and put away your bad habits." That's how you imitate Christ. That's what Paul is telling us when he says, "Imitate me as I'm an imitator of Christ." You and I are to be like Christ because we understand this—we put off the old way of life, we put on the new way of life, and we put away our bad habits.

Notice some of the things he talks about beginning in verse 25, "²⁵Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one *of you* with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. ²⁶Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and do not give the devil an opportunity." Now notice, go down to verse 32, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." That's the same thing that Paul is saying in Colossians 3:13. Why is it you and I forgive? We are mimicking Christ. You don't forgive because you necessarily want to. You don't forgive necessarily because you have to. You want to forgive, have a desire to forgive, because you know what?

Audience Member: *You were forgiven.*

You were forgiven. I have been forgiven That's the motive for our forgiveness. You want to give away to somebody else what God has given you. What do we call that? Ministry. Ministry is giving away to someone else what God has given you. If you want to minister to your family, forgive them because you know you've been forgiven.

That doesn't mean you don't hold them...have the consequences of their decisions. There's a difference between forgiveness and consequences. You can have somebody maintain the consequences of their choices. They need to understand that. But you can forgive them because of their motive and their deed, but you help them understand there are consequences to your choices. With your children, you

can say, “Yes, you’re forgiven, but you’re still grounded.” There’s a difference between paying for the consequences of their choices and forgiveness. You can forgive them, but they’re still going to pay for the consequences. There’s a difference for that. The whole motive here, brothers, is that we need to be imitators of Christ.

Let’s go to Matthew 16...

Don: *Wait a minute. Bruce, I’m sorry. The passage on anger...*

Anger and sin not.

Don: *Yeah. We know that Christ was angry.*

Yes he was.

Don: *[UNCLEAR] clear the temple. What is the difference between his righteous anger and our anger which is so sinful so much of the time, and how do we be angry and not sin?*

That’s a great question. Come to Christ church and you’ll hear that because that’s part of my message. {LAUGHTER}

Don: *Okay. Alright.*

But I’ll give you a quick overview. There’s a difference...and I will go through this in this message when I preach this in a couple of months. There’s a difference between unrighteous anger and righteous anger. Unrighteous anger is undisciplined, passionate and self-directed and self-based. The reason I’m angry is because it’s about me.

Righteous anger is about the glory of God. Righteous anger is being angry about something that denies the righteous God his rightful place in the world. In other words, you and I need to become angry about certain things. We need to be angry about the right things, at the right time, in the right way. We need to be angry...are you angry about sin in the church? We ought to be angry about that because that is denying a righteous God his rightful place in society, in the world and in the kingdom. Things that interfere with his righteous place of who he is in all of his glory, we need to be angry about those things. But we need have righteous anger, which is not self-directed, it is not undisciplined; it is directed for the glory of God, and we need to be angry about those things.

I wish, sometimes, the church would be more angry about certain things...a righteous anger about God’s rightful place in this world as the King of kings and Lord of lords. We don’t get angry about that. We get angry about things that affect me because it is undisciplined, it is passionate and it’s self-based in self-directed, rather than having a righteous anger about God’s position in the kingdom, in the glory of his name. We need to be angry about those things.

Don: *Okay. Good.*

Right anger is this—being angry at the right things. The Scripture will tell you what to be angry about. It’s things that defame the glorious name of God. Be angry about those things. Be angry about sin in the church. We need to be angry about the right things, at the right time, in the right way.

Audience Member: *With those things that [UNCLEAR] you have that [UNCLEAR] how do you then handle that in a loving way?*

I have no idea. {LAUGHTER} I can't give you a black and white answer to that. All I can say is that's where you go to the throne of grace and say, "Holy Spirit, give me the wisdom to know how to be angry and do it in a way and not sin." We need to spend more time on the not sinning than we do the anger. Most of us can be angry. We need to spend more time on the not sinning. Ask the Lord, "Lord, how do I not sin and be angry?" He'll be glad to help you understand that. I can't teach you how to do that. The Holy Spirit will be the one who will come along side and do that. That's where we need to depend upon the grace of God. He gives us all the grace that we need to know that, and we just have to trust one another.

We need to be angry about the right things, guys. Do it in the right way, at the right time and in the right manner. That's all part of righteous anger.

I want to take you to another thing we need to copy here. If we're going to mimic Christ, let's be really serious about this. Go to Matthew 16:24, "Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." We need to mimic that. We need to imitate that. If we're going to be like Christ, here's how he defines a disciple. These are his words.

Somebody is always asking me, "Will you come and disciple me?" I take them to this verse and say, "If you want to be a disciple, here's the definition. You've got to mimic this. You've got to copy that. Let's spend the rest of your life trying to figure out how to do that." That's what a disciple is. This is Jesus' definition of a disciple. It's not somebody who's memorized Scripture. That may be part of the process. But here's what we need to mimic. Here's what we need to imitate. Three character qualities—self-denial, self-sacrifice and self-submission. Self-denial, self-sacrifice and self-submission.

Notice this, "If anyone wishes to come after Me." That's self-denial. "He must deny himself." That's self-denial. Next is, "take up his cross." That's self-sacrifice. And thirdly, "follow me." That's self-submission. Who are you going to submit to? If you want to be a disciple, copy that verse. Copy that verse. That's means I've got to learn how to understand what it means to deny myself because I'm going to follow the Lord. I want to be a part of him.

Audience Member: *Bruce, that was Matthew 16 and what?*

Matthew 16:24. Got it? Three character qualities—self-denial, self-sacrifice and self-submission. The words "take up his cross" there in his culture, at that time, that meant death. The cross was the symbol of death. Now I trust in God's providence he would never have us do that, but we may be called upon to do that. The question is am I willing to mimic that? Am I willing to imitate that? Am I willing to really be a disciple and meet his standard?

Brian: *Take up your cross, is that daily dying to yourself?*

It has many applications. It could mean physical dying of your body, of your life. It may mean that. But it may also mean dying every day to the things are restricting you from being a disciple and not becoming self-denying. It has many implications. It has some every day, but there may be one that's eternal. It may be the taking of our life.

One of the great books you ought to read, just historically, is Fox's Book of Martyrs. Read that. Read Fox's Book of Martyrs. Let me just tell you a couple of examples. There was a pastor by the name of Robert Ferrar, who was burned alive at the stake by bloody Mary, who burned 672 men, women and children because they would not go along with the book of order of the Church of England, the doctrine of transubstantiation. They refused to go along with that because the Scripture denied that. She burned them alive at the stake. One of them was a gentleman by the name of Pastor Robert Ferrar. This was his dying words before they lit the torch on the fetters that he was standing on to burn him alive, he said this, as he put out his hand, something like this, "If I utter one cry in pain, you have a right to deny everything I've taught you," and then they burned him alive, and he didn't say a word. "Take up your cross, follow me. Deny yourself. Take up your cross." It may mean that, brothers. If that's the case, we need to realize that at that moment, you'll get the grace.

Now don't sit here and worry about that now. If that were to happen, God will give you the grace at the moment. Remember grace comes at the moment of application, not contemplation. But if you want to read something about what that means, read Fox's Book of Martyrs.

Tom: Going back to how you treat your wife. In Colossians, when he says, "Love your wife and don't be harsh with them," I'm thinking, that's our nature, that we're better than the, we deserve to be harsh with them, just because a woman is not up to the standards of a man, in the world. And then you look at all this grace, I mean, it goes so far from giving your life just to being a good husband.

Absolutely. You see, what we're trying to say here, guys, is we're trying to look at the life of Christ. That's why it's so important that we study the gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We study the life of Christ. Yes, we're going to get great wisdom in the pastoral epistles from the Apostle Paul giving instruction to the church, but we need to spend an awful lot of time reading the gospels and studying the gospels to see the life of Christ because that's what we are to imitate. We're to be like him.

Again, we're not talking about the supernatural things. I'm not saying you need to become a healer. I'm not suggesting that. All I'm saying is in your daily life, ask yourself, "If I really want to be a disciple, what do I need to do? How do I need to learn to be more self-denying, more self-sacrificing, and who am I really willing to submit to? Am I really willing to follow him?" That's part of the mimicking part of our imitating Christ, for his glory.

Now the motive is, as we saw in Philippians 1:20, the glory of God, whether it be during our lifetime or during our death. One of the things that I've been praying recently, I hope it's not a forerunner of things to come, is that when the Lord takes me home, I just want to die with dignity and honor, so that he is glorified in the process. I want people to see in the death, that he is glorified in that. That's what it means to be an imitator.

Another thing we can do is turn with me to the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. When you compare Matthew 5 and Luke 6, the Lucan version of the Beatitudes, you'll see wonderful comparison. In Matthew 5, when you read the Beatitudes, you're going to see a summary of these Beatitudes is basically this, "Jump for joy when you're persecuted, love those who hate you, bless those who curse you, forgive those who mistreat you and pray for those who wound you." Five things. Jump for joy when you're persecuted, love those who hate you, bless those who curse you, forgive those who mistreat you, and pray for those who wound you.

Now notice, take those five descriptions and let's set them apart. Notice the contrast in words. Jump for joy when you're persecuted. Notice these five words—persecution, hatred, cursing, wounding and

hurting. What does that describe? That describes the system of this world. That's what the world offers you. The world's going to offer you these five things—persecution, hatred, cursing, wounding and hurting. Contrast that with the kingdom—joy, love, blessing, forgiveness and what's the last one? Prayer. That's what the kingdom offers. Now contrast that. In other words, if we're going to be imitators of Christ, we need to imitate the standard of what he describes as a kingdom citizen. He describes a citizen of the kingdom as this—that when you are persecuted, you're going to jump for joy; that when you are hated, you're going to love that person; when you are cursed, you're going to bless that person; when they wound you, you're going to forgive them; and when they hurt you, you're going to pray for them. You see, there's a contrast there. This is the system of this world, this is the kingdom of God. We've got to transform the way that we think.

I gave you an illustration several years ago that I'm going to do again. Again, I only have my own life to give illustrations from so you might get some of these repeatedly. When I was the Vice President of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, I had to make a very difficult decision one day about cancelling a conference, a summer conference. I came in to my office in Kansas, and my secretary said, "Bruce, there's a rather irate coach on the phone who wants to talk to you." So I got on the phone and I said, "Hi coach. This is Bruce Bickel. Can I help you?" He said, "Are you the blankety-blank-blank-blank-blank who cancelled the conference?" Let me tell you my response. It wasn't, "Oh good." {LAUGHTER} It wasn't, "How thoughtful of you." {LAUGHTER} Here's my response. My knuckles turned white. I felt this flush start at my knees and work all the way up through my stomach and got to my jugular vein, and it was going bump-bump, bump-bump, bump-bump. And here's my first thought, "He can't do that to me." The second thought was even more juicy, "Wait until he's done." Now that happened in microseconds. Microseconds.

Now I happened to have on a 3x5 card on my desk those five contrasts. My eyes went down to the third one that said this, "Bless those though curse you." Now my first response was this—I got my Scripture and covered up the 3x5 card. {LAUGHTER} You're always more spiritual when you cover things up with the Bible. {LAUGHTER} And secondly—this happened in microseconds—he's still cussing me out. This is what I'm thinking, "Well the Lord...I need to show the Lord that I'm a great theologian," so I thought, "Lord, I realize that's for a different dispensation." I thought if used theological terms that would impress him. So I said, "Lord, this is for a different dispensation. This doesn't apply to me. It applies to a different age and time. I'm not bound by that."

Then as an act of sheer mercy, and sheer grace, the Holy Spirit said, "Zzzzz! No, that's for you, right now, at this moment, and if you want to be a follower of mine, then you've got to deny yourself, take up your cross, and imitate me." As he continued to cuss me out, accused me of all sorts of things, he says, "Who do you think you are, you Naval Academy Graduate? You think you're a little Napoleon. This isn't a military operation. Don't you have compassion for kids? You just destroyed their lives. Do you realize that people won't come to Christ because of your decision?" And all the typical things that they'll throw guilt on you. The Scripture says, "Bless those who curse you."

My next thought was, after beads of sweat were dropping down on my paper and stained the little 3x5 card, I thought, "Lord, you're going to have to be awfully creative, because I have no idea what to do. But I know this—if I'm in Christ, and you're in me, I need to imitate you. I need to be a follower. Give me the grace that when he stops, I'll say something that will bless him." Blessing means just to encourage the person.

So the guy took a breath, and the next thing that came out of my mouth, I said, "Sir, I just want to compliment you on your communication skills {LAUGHTER} and your ability to really explain what you

mean.” {LAUGHTER} I thought, “Hmmm...did I just blow it?” There was silence. He came back and said, “Well thanks.” {LAUGHTER} Then I said, “Would it be helpful to you if you understood how I had to make that decision?” He said, “Yeah, give it a shot big boy.” So I explained it to him. He said, “That must have been a tough decision.” I said, “Yes, it was very, very difficult for me to make the decision, but I trust it was the right one. Why don’t you and I talk about how we can take care of your kids because I think we’ve got some solutions to your problem? Would you be open to that?” He said, “Yeah, let’s talk about that.” So we spent the next 20 minutes resolving how we could get his kids to a conference in Southern California because we had to cancel the one in Oregon.

After about 20 minutes of his and my dialog just talking about that, it came time for us to end the conversation and he said something like, “You know, this has been a great conversation. I’ve really enjoyed it.” I said, “Well thanks, coach. I hope this help resolve...” He said, “Yeah, we resolved it. This is very good. I’ll have to call you again sometime.” {LAUGHTER} I said, “No, you don’t need to do that. We resolved this.” {LAUGHTER}

Now, that is an illustration. Bless those who curse you. That’s what the world’s going to offer you, guys. If you and I have the audacity to say that I’m in Christ, Christ is in me, then I need to be like Christ. Now that does not mean that you have the skills, the knowledge and the training to do that. All I’m saying, guys, is there comes a point where you just have to submit yourself to grace of God and say, “Lord, I know this—that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” That’s what Paul taught us about the new profile of his own life, “I used to be this and had a righteousness that came from the externals that I achieved. Now I have an external righteousness that I received. My righteousness is from God; it’s not from me anymore. I don’t have to earn that. And I know this—that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

You see, brothers, there comes a time when you and I going to need to jump for joy because of persecution. There comes a time when you’re going to need to love those though hate you. There’s going to come a time when you have to bless those who curse you. There comes a time when you have to pray for those who wound you and forgive those who hurt you.

Three kinds of obedience. A child is obedient because he must be obedient. An employee is obedient because they need to be obedient. But a follower of Christ is obedient because we have the desire to be obedient. That’s grace. Three kinds of obedience—you need to, you must or you desire to. If we’re going to be serious about our faith and the union with Christ of being in Christ, Christ is in us, he abides in us, and we abide in him, he is the one who gives us the strength to do all things through Christ Jesus. So that means, guys, that you and I can be an imitator when need to be an imitator. It doesn’t mean that you do that with a sense of ego and pride and say I’m better than somebody else. You have to realize this—in my weakness I find my strength. You’ve got to realize your weakness.

At that moment when I realized that I needed to submit myself to be a disciple of Christ, to deny myself and the right that I had to defend my reputation with that man on the phone, I had to die to that. I had to take up my cross and say, “That’s got to be sacrificed because there’s something of greater glory, and that’s the Lord’s name and my imitating him.”

And thirdly is who am I going to submit to? Submit to my feelings? Or submit to what the Lord calls me to be? That’s his disciple. That’s what it means, brothers, when we say we need to be like him. Just be an imitator of Christ. Remember, as Paul taught us last week, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

The things we're talking about here, guys, are not natural. These are all supernatural. That's why it's all about grace and not about effort. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we just are overwhelmed with what you call us to be, what you call us to do, and yet, we realize that you are the resources of both, of both who we are and what we are to do. Give us a sense of a desire to be obedient, Father, that you might receive glory for Jesus' sake. And all the Brave Men said...Amen!!