

**TRIUMPHANT LIVING**  
**Union With Christ – Part 11**  
**Taught by Bruce Bickel**  
**July 19, 2013**

Let's go before the Lord and know that he is God. Let's quietly pray together.

*[MUSIC]*

Father, in the quietness of this moment, we pray that you would just reveal yourself to us, that we might know that you are God. We come to you humbly this morning, Father, trusting that you'll be pleased to open our eyes that we might see you more clearly for Christ's sake. Amen.

We're continuing our study on the theological theme of union with Christ. What does it mean to be in Christ? We've looked at several dimensions of that so far. We're getting to the end of this study. We've looked at what does it mean to be in Christ? What does it mean that Christ is in us? We're looking, today, at what it means that we need to be like Christ.

I invite you to open your Bibles to 1 John 2. We're talking about the imitation of Christ. We are to imitate him. Paul says, "Imitate me as I imitate God." Now we need to understand when we talk about that we are to be like Christ, that does not mean that we're to be like him in his divinity, but in the way that he lived in his humanity.

When he talks about kindness, that's something that we need to exude. When he talks about compassion, that's something we need to be. What we mean by this, when we say that we need to be like Christ, one of the best summary verses is found in 1 John 2:6, "the one who says he abides in Him (there's our union with Christ thought—in Him) ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." In other words, we need to imitate Christ in the fact that we need to take on the humanity of Christ and have that be exemplified in our own lives.

Our imitation of Christ should not be thought of as a mere mimic of him, but rather it means that we're being conformed to the image of Christ. The far deeper purpose is that in imitating him, we are becoming more and more like him. If you look at a couple of passages that might help understand that before we look at 1 John 2:6. We are to act like Christ, but we become like him.

There's a certain aspect...sometimes you just need to act out who you want to be. That means that character precedes conduct because who we are determines what we do. Our character precedes our conduct because who we are determines what we do. We grow up in maturity in Christ. Look at Ephesians 4:13, 15, you'll see that we grow up in maturity. That's what we're talking about when we talk about being like Christ. We need to be like Christ. We're talking about our Christian maturity.

We've talked in previous weeks...there's a difference between spirituality and maturity. Spirituality is an absolute that is defined by the person and work of Christ. He defines spirituality. We do not do that. We do not become more spiritual in the sense that we become the definition of spirituality. We become more mature. That means we begin to express that spirituality in the person and work of Christ, and we do that as we are conformed to the image of Christ.

The final result is that we become perfectly like Christ in that God has predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son. Whole life for us is a process whereby we are conformed to the image of Christ.

As we understand this concept of union with Christ, that Christ is in us, we are in Christ, and we are to be like Christ. It's the Holy Spirit's work in us to conform us to the image of Christ.

I want to take you through and just some time looking at 1 John 2:6. Again, if you'd turn with me there in your Bibles. Let me read the first six verses of 1 John 2 to keep this in its right context. <sup>1</sup>"My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." Now notice, he doesn't say, "I'm writing these things so you do not sin. There is the understanding that you and I will sin, because everything that we do is tainted. What he's say is you don't have to sin anymore. "I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" Now that's an important thing to realize. He's saying, "Look, you don't have to sin anymore. The things that I'm writing to you puts you in a position that you don't have to sin. You may not sin. You still may sin, but when you do sin, you've got an Advocate. You've got one who is at the right hand of the Father who will represent you before the throne of grace." He's teaching us some significant truths here about the fact that we don't have to sin anymore; we can actually live a life that is exemplary of Christ and his character qualities.

Verse 2, <sup>2</sup>"and He Himself is the propitiation (or the sacrifice) for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world. <sup>3</sup>By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments." He's beginning to tell us this, "You don't have the sin anymore. You don't need to live your life like you used to. You may not sin when you are in this union with Christ. You may not sin anymore." "May" meaning you don't choose to do it. It really is the means by which you demonstrate that fact that you are in Christ is when you keep his commandments.

Verse 4, <sup>4</sup>"The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; <sup>5</sup>but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him." Now notice, several times he's saying there's an indication that you need to examine your own life. Ask yourself what is my desire to be obedient? That's an indication of whether or not I'm in Christ or not I'm not in Christ.

Then we get down to verse 5, <sup>5</sup>"but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him." Notice the number of times you see the expression, "we are in him." He's referring to our union with Christ relationship.

Then we come to verse 6, <sup>6</sup>"the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." That's what we talk about when we say that we need to imitate Christ. We're saying if I'm in Christ, I've got an Advocate that when I do sin, I've got an Advocate—Jesus Christ the righteous—who will represent me as the propitiation for my sins. He's paid for my sins. I confess my sins. That puts me in a position I can walk differently.

The word "walk" means direction and quality of your life. It's the direction and quality of your life. John means that it is clear that the Christians do not have to sin anymore. You can make the choice not to do that because you are in Christ. You've got a whole different desire to be obedient.

The secret of victory over sin is really to be found in 1 John 1:7, "but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." He's talking about this idea of walking. Let's walk through this and understand what he means by this.

To walk means to be open and to be honest. It means to be sincere. Paul prayed that his friends would be sincere and without offense. In Philippians 1:10 he says, “I want my people to be...I want them to be sincere and without offense.” That’s what we talk about walking in light. The word “sincere” has a very interesting meaning. It comes from two Latin words—the word sine and the word cera. It literally means without wax.

It seems that in Roman days, some sculptors would cover up their mistakes in their sculptures they would make with wax. They would see a crack in it, and in the clay, they would fill it in with wax. Then they would paint over it. You would never see that until the sun beat down on it. When it became subjected to heat, all of a sudden, that crack would appear because it was covered up by wax.

What John is telling us here in the use of this word is he’s saying that our lives need to be without wax. In other words, we don’t cover ourselves up. It’s without wax. The statue had been exposed to the hot sun, then you began to see the imperfection in it.

The more dependable sculptors in the Roman days would advertise their wares by saying, “Sine cera.” It means it’s without wax. It’s not being covered up. It’s honest. What you’re seeing is what you get. That’s what John is saying when he says that we need to walk as Jesus did. We need to walk without having these coverings on us to cover up our errors, our mistakes and our sin. We can be sine cera—we can be without wax because of the grace of God.

It means that when we walk in the light, as we saw in 1 John 1:7, it means to be honest with God, it means to be honest with yourself, and it means to be honest with others. That’s what it means to walk in the light. It means that when the light reveals your sin, that you confess it. You confess it to God and you claim his forgiveness because you have, as we saw in 1 John 2, an Advocate, and one who is the propitiation for our sins. If our sin injures another person, we ask their forgiveness.

What we’re saying is that to walk in the light means you walk honestly before God, before yourself and before other people. But it also means something else. It means that we are to be obeying God’s Word. Look at 1 John 2:3-4, “<sup>3</sup>By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. <sup>4</sup>The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” He’s talking about our obedience.

One of the characteristics of a person who walks as Jesus walked is obedience. Jesus defined obedience as a love response, “If you love me, you’ll obey.” When you and I obey God’s Word, we are saying that we love the Lord. Our motive is to express our love for him. That’s why we say obedience is not so much a duty, although there is a duty that we have to make sure that we live a Christian life that’s honoring to God brings glory to him. That’s a duty we have. But at the same time, it’s a desire that we have. You now have a desire to want to be obedient because you want to express your love for the Lord because you know this—he’s my Advocate and he’s my propitiation. He paid for my sins, and he’s the Advocate that I have right now in the choices I make in my life because I do not have to sin anymore. It doesn’t mean you won’t sin; it means you don’t have to make the choice to sin because you have an Advocate in the one who’s your propitiation.

By walking in the light, it also means that we need to be obedient. The Scriptures tells us in Psalm 119, “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.” The Scripture is given to us, not to give us answers; it’s to give us a picture of who God is. The Scripture is first of all given to teach us the standard, which is the word “doctrine.” 2 Timothy 3, “All Scripture is God-breathed inspired by God and

profitable for four things.” First of all, to reveal the word teaching, doctrine or standard. The Scripture is to teach us the standard.

The second thing about the Scripture is it’s given to us to reveal a rebuke, which is a correction. It means to reveal an error in the standard. The first thing the Scripture does is teach us a standard of the Christian life. The second thing it does, you might be reading the Scripture and you might be rebuked by it because it’s going to reveal an error in your thinking about the standard.

The third thing is correction. Doctrine, rebuke, correction. In other words, it’s going to give you some insight as to how do I correct the mistake in my understanding of the doctrine of the Scripture. Fourthly, training in righteousness. It means this—prevents you from making the same mistake again.

What John is saying is you don’t have to sin anymore. You don’t have to live like you used to because you have the grace of God. If you are in Christ, one of those indications of the fact that you are in Christ is this—you have a desire to be obedient. There’s this desire that you have. It doesn’t mean you’re going to be perfect about it.

John also tells us if you say you have no sin you’re a liar and there’s no truth in you. We’re not talking about sinless perfection. We’re talking about a desire that you have that you didn’t have before. That’s a desire that manifests itself in not desiring to sin and an equal desire to be obedient. What John is talking about, you walk honestly before yourself, before God and before other people.

There are several kinds of obedience. A slave obeys because he has to. A child obeys because he has to. If he doesn’t obey, he’ll be punished. An employee obeys because he needs to, because he likes the paycheck. I need to be obedient to my boss because I will be rewarded for it. For a Christian, there’s a different sense of obedience. Our obedience to the Heavenly Father is because we desire to or we want to. Are you obedient because you ought to be, because you need to be or because you desire to be? What John is saying is this—the person who is really in Christ, who wants to walk as Jesus did, has a desire to want to be obedient. It doesn’t mean that you will be absolutely perfect in your obedience, but you have this overriding desire to want to do that because you know this, “If you love me, you’ll be obedient.”

This is the way that we learned obedience when we were children. Baby Christians constantly need to be encouraged, just a children need to be encouraged in their maturity. Walking in light involves honesty, it involves obedience, and it involves love. It also involves following the examples of Christ and walking as he walked, as we just saw in 1 John 2:6.

Now, we need to understand this—nobody becomes a Christian by following the example of Christ. You reveal the fact that you are a Christian because you want to reveal the character of Christ and walk as he did, but you don’t become a Christian by following his example. He is not an example for us; he’s our Savior and he’s our Lord, he’s our Advocate, he’s our propitiation. He’s just not merely an example. Nobody comes into union with Christ and to a saving relationship with him by following his example, but you do give evidence of the fact that you are in Christ when you do follow his example. You see the difference? There’s a difference that John is talking about.

Abiding in Christ—we’ve talked about that before. Christ is not only our propitiation (we saw in verse 1—that means our sacrifice for our sins), but he’s also the Advocate who represents us before God. You’ll see that in 1 John 2:1. He’s also the perfect pattern, if you would, Jesus the Righteous. You’ll notice three things that we see there in 1 John 2:1, “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the

Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” He’s not only our Advocate, he’s not only our propitiation, but he’s also the pattern of our life. He’s the pattern of our lifestyle.

The keyword for me is this phrase, “as he is,” in 1 John 2:6, “the one who says he abides in Him ought to himself walk in the same manner as he walked.” As he is. In other words because as he is, so we are in this world. Walking in light means that living here on earth, we live the way that Jesus did to the best of our ability, trusting his grace.

Walking in light—we follow the example of Christ and we are conformed to the image of Christ, as Paul told us in Ephesians. No matter what the area of your life, it is our responsibility to do what Jesus would do. Now, don’t presume upon yourself to think that you’re going to know what Jesus would do in every situation. I’m not suggesting that. That’s why we have on our little bracelet WHJD instead of WWJD.

Remember years ago, there was “What would Jesus do?” Quite honestly, I have no I have idea what he would do. It’s presumptuous of me to think that I would know what he would do, but yet at the same time, we’ve been given the Scripture, which is the standard of our life, and we have the desire to be obedient. It is our responsibility to walk in the obedience, walk in honesty, walk in clarity and walk in love because of our relationship to Christ.

What we’re doing is we’re saying this is the standard. I want to walk in that direction. It’s kind of like this. The believer who’s in Christ walks in the direction of holiness, but is interrupted by occasional sin. At that moment, when you have occasional sin, you have what? You’ve got an Advocate. He’s your propitiation. He’s also the pattern of righteousness. That’s what you see in 1 John 2:1. You come to the Father because you have this desire to be open. Remember, walking in light means this—that when you recognize you have sin, you recognize it, you deal with it, you confess it and you ask forgiveness from those who you offended. That’s an indication that you are walking in the light. It’s an expression of your obedience.

Obedience is one of the key factors in our walking in the light, as opposed to the person who’s not in Christ will have a life of sin interrupted by occasional acts of what the world would say would be acts of goodness—good/bad works. There’s a difference. We’re not saying that you’re sinlessly perfect, but we’re saying this—the desire in your heart to be obedient—that’s an indication, brothers that you are in Christ. If you don’t have that desire, it doesn’t mean you’re perfect when you live it out. Even in your perfection, humanly, we are tainted in everything that we do. We’re tainted in everything that we do, but we have this desire.

John is saying this—if you’re really in Christ, and you have this union with him, you know that you are in Christ, that Christ is in you, you’re going to have this desire to want to walk as he did as an expression of your love by being obedient. What we have, John is summarizing for us, he says, that you become, grow in maturity. Maturity is more of Christ and less of us.

Let’s go to the book of Ephesians, chapter 4. I want you to see...a number of times, the Scriptures talk about maturity. Look at Ephesians 4:13. Well, let’s back up. Let’s back up to verse 11 of chapter 4 of Ephesians, “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service (or for the work of the ministry), to the building up of the body of Christ, until,” now notice this, “until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” In other words, what is the role of the church? It is to bring people to maturity. That’s the role of the church. How do you do that? He gives certain gifts to

the church so that the church as an entity that God has created in society will bring people to a sense of maturity. That's what we say when we talk about walking as he is in this world. We walk as Christ did because our desire is to be mature in Christ.

Let's read verses 14 and 15. As a result of that desire to be brought to maturity, which is more of Christ and less of me, verse 14 says, "As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming (thinking)." In other words, the system of this world. Paul says, "Do not be conformed to system of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

Notice, the trickery of doctrine. You see, why has the Scripture given to us? It's to teach us the standard. That's what the word doctrine means. It means standard or teaching. Then we come to verse 15, "But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ." There's the role and mission of the church. So many times people ask me, "Would you help my church create a mission statement." Right there it is—to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. That's it—to bring them to maturity. What's the role of that? To bring them to the point of helping them do the minister, it's to bring them to maturity.

Let me give you another illustration. Let's go to Colossians

***Sig:*** *Any particular place in Colossians?*

I will get there. {LAUGHTER} Okay about 28? Colossians 1:28. Now, we've got to take seriously, brothers, our desire to be obedient. That desire to be obedient is an indication that you are in Christ. If you don't have that, you're probably not in Christ. Now I can't say that unequivocally because I'm not...it's not my role to determine who's in Christ or who's not. My role is just to preach and teach and tell you this—that if you don't have that desire, you've got to look at yourself. Examine yourself. Paul tells us in Corinthians, "Examine yourself to see whether or not you're in the faith." I don't know if you're in the faith or not. One of the things that you will know, when you are honest with yourself and walk without sine cera, without wax covering up your mistakes, will be the honest evaluation that you give yourself, "Do I have a desire to be obedient?" Remember this, Jesus says, "If you love me, you'll be obedient." You see, obedience is a love response from what you know that God had done for you in the person and work of Christ.

We go to what Paul says about maturity in Colossians 1:28, "We proclaim Him." Who is Him? The person and work of Christ. There's your preaching subject. You should never run out of a subject matter because it's the person and work of Christ. You've heard me say over the years that good biblical preaching is plagiarism. You take a message that's already been given and you just re-give it. You should never run out of material to preach because it's right in the Scripture. "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom." The word "admonishment" means to warn, and "teaching" means to reveal, to encourage to the point understanding the standard. "Admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ." (Colossians 1:28)

You see, that's the word maturity. It's not talking about making everybody spiritual. It's to help people become mature. What is the role of the church? Certainly it's evangelism. That's one of the ingredients of the church, but that's not the mission of the church. That's one of the stages. It's one of the tactics. It's one of the strategies of the church. But the real mission of the church is to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry, to bring them all to maturity. That means that you proclaim him, and you

warn the congregation, you encourage the congregation, so that you bring them to Christ. What you're basically teaching them is this—you're teaching them what it means to be in Christ. You're teaching them what it means to have Christ in you. And you're teaching them this—what it means to be like Christ in the sense of growing and being conformed to the image of Christ.

Paul tells us that we are to be conformed to the image of His son. Look at Romans 8:29. "For those He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren." You see, brothers, that's what we're talking about now when we talk about we need to be like Christ. We're being conformed to the image of Christ. Not conformed in his deity, but conformed to the way that he lived his life in his humanity. We are being conformed to that. We're told in the Scripture the final result will be become perfectly like Christ, that God has predestined us to be conformed to His image.

Don't be confused by saying, when we say we need to be like Christ, we're not saying that you need to be spiritual in the sense that you take on his divinity. We're talking about living the life that he lived during his lifetime. We have that be the pattern of our life and to the best of our ability, we have a desire to be obedient. Obedience is the key. If you don't have that desire to be obedient, brothers, you've got to examine yourself. Scripture says test yourself to see whether or not you're in the faith. One of the greatest tests that you can look at yourself in the mirror and *sine cera*, without wax, covering up the flaws in your life. Be honest with yourself and admit to yourself that I don't have the desire to be obedient, or I do have a desire. That's going to be a tremendous indicator of whether or not you understand if you're in Christ or not.

Now I can't tell you if you're in Christ or not. But I would say this—if you're not sure if you're in Christ today, then come and see me. See Bishop Rodgers. See some of the other teachers. See Ted. See Don. See the brother next to you who brought you here. It's very important that you recognize whether or not you are truly honestly in Christ because you can only walk in Christ if you're honest with yourself. You've got to start with yourself say, "Am I really in Christ or do I just understand that intellectually? What do I need to do to make that a reality in my life?" Come and see one of us. We'll be glad to help you understand the significance of what it means saved by grace through faith. By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, revealed in the Scripture alone, for the glory of God alone. Brothers, you owe that to yourself.

Don't sit here and just come here and be intellectually stimulated. You've got to look at yourself, *sine cera* (without wax), and say, "Am I honest with myself that I am really am not in Christ or don't know if I am or I don't know if I'm not? I need help in understanding that." We would more than honored to help you understand. Let the Scripture teach you what that means. You've got to be honest with yourself, guys. Be honest with yourself, be honest with others and be honest with God. *Sine cera*—without wax. Don't cover up yourself. Walk in the light. Jesus says, "If you walk in the light, you're going to walk like I do." You've got to examine yourself, "Am I walking in the light or am I still in darkness?"

I'm going to let you go early today because I have an early morning, but examine yourself, brothers. That's what the Scripture says, "Examine yourself to see whether or not you're in the faith." I don't know if you are. The most important decision you'll ever make in your life is this—examine yourself. Am I in the light? Or am I still in darkness? Let's pray.

Father, if you've done a work of grace in somebody's heart today, we pray that you would remove those shackles of blindness and reveal the person and work of Christ to that person today. Father, we know that if we walk in the light, we will walk as Christ did, as he is. Father, some of us may not be in the

light. Help us be honest with ourselves, to examine ourselves, to see whether or not we are in light or are we still in darkness. And may it be so that you would fulfill act of grace in the lives of those who are here today. Father, we thank you for your mercy and your grace. In Jesus' name we pray. And all of God's brothers fellow servants said...Amen!!