

TRIUMPHANT LIVING
Taught by Bruce Bickel
Union With Christ Q & A Part 1
Session: August 9, 2013

Merciful and gracious heavenly Father, we come before You this day trusting that You would be pleased to open our eyes that we might behold You more clearly. Father, as we consider Your mercy...Your mercy is beyond our comprehension but yet our need for Your mercy is beyond our own description, and Your grace is greater than all of our sins. Father, we humbly thank You that You are a better Savior than we are sinners. May it be so for Jesus' sake that You be glorified by our discussion today. Give us insight to Who You are. We do not ask for answers, we just ask for a clearer vision of Who You are in all of Your glory, Your majesty, Your honor, and Your grace. Let us sit in awe of Who You are in your majesty, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The last couple of weeks we have been studying the theme of Union **With** Christ. What does it mean to be **in** Christ? When you look at the New Testament, Paul describes a person who has a saving relationship with God the Father through God the Son, and Paul uses that phrase **in** Christ or **with** Christ. He doesn't use the word Christian per se, that is used a couple of times to refer to a group, but when he is talking about a person who has a personal saving relationship to God the Father through God the Son and is energized by God the Holy Spirit, he uses the concept of **in** Christ. I think he uses that somewhere around 129 times in the New Testament. It is rather obvious that it is an important doctrine that we have been trying to explore.

We have just been touching the surface on this concept of what we are calling Union **With** Christ. There are four major themes we studied the last couple of months, and the first one was this: we are **in** Christ; secondly, that Christ is **in** us; thirdly, that we are **like** Christ; and fourthly, we are **with** Christ.

When we are **with** Christ, that means we are **with** Him in the sense that His presence is always there. When you look on the website www.bravemen.org you will see one of the things that I would encourage you to go back and review and that would be the study we did several years ago on the study of The 28 Attributes of God. Go back and take a look at that. There is a whole series on that...The 28 Attributes of God. One of them is God's omnipresence. Sometimes in a worship service we will say, "Lord, we come into Your presence." Well, where do you think you've been? If God is omnipresent, I am not coming into His presence...I am already there. So as we come to study today, I would encourage you to go back and look at those 28 attributes. Probably one of the most significant studies we have ever done in our seventeen years may have been that two or three year study on The 28 Attributes of God because people have a picture of God in their own human imagination as opposed to the God of biblical revelation. In The 28 Attributes of God, there is nothing magical about the 28...that is just the way I broke them down to help us understand the significance of God in all of His glory.

When we talk about that, we are **with** Christ, that means several things. First of all, it means that we are in a very personal presence of Christ. Look at 2nd Corinthians 6:1. You will see that we do everything **with** Christ. He does things **with** us. We need to realize first of all that because we are **with** Christ, we are **with** Him in His presence. His omnipresence is always there; when you are on the golf course, you are **with** Him; when you are on the toilet you are with Him; when you are at K-Mart you are **with** Him; when you are driving your car, you are **with** Him; when you are with your wife, you are **with** Him. Because of His omnipresence, we do

everything **with** Him because we are **in** Christ, Christ is **in** us, we are **like** Christ; and He is **with** us. He is **with** us in everything we do.

That literally means this, men: that you and I, as believers, have nothing secular in our life any more. Everything that you do has some spiritual significance to it because you have the opportunity to be in ministry. Ministry, as we have been defining it over the years, is giving to someone else what God has given you. If you don't know what God has given you, then you have nothing to give to other people. It might just be a great pragmatistic program, unfortunately, the Church has bought into marketing in pragmatism because we have basically said this: if it works, it must be right. Where does rightness come from? It comes from the Scripture. We need to recognize that in the presence of Christ, He is always **with** us. How do we do the things that we do and why do we do the things that we do?

Next, we need to know that we "know" Him. Look at Philippians 3:8-10. We "know" Him. "Know" means to know Him by or through experience. Not just head knowledge. It means applicational knowledge. It means I know Him to the point that He is impacting and transforming my life. We also see in 2nd Thessalonians 2:1-17 that we are comforted by Him. We are in His presence, we know Him, and we are comforted by Him. Matthew 11:29: we are taught by Him. The ultimate teacher is Christ Himself, not me or Bishop Rodgers or any of our teachers. He is really the One Who is teaching us. We live our lives in His presence. 2nd Corinthians 2:10. We live our lives in His presence.

So I would encourage you brothers to go back and take a look at that study on The 28 Attributes of God. Use that as a devotional. Just take one of those every day for 28 days, focus on that, and watch what happens to your life. All of a sudden you begin to develop an understanding of Who God is in all of His glory and not the picture we create of God in our human imagination but the God of biblical revelation.

One of the things we want to do today and perhaps even next week is to look at the Book of Acts 2. It is very important that we begin to apply that which we are learning. We are not here just to get academic or theological knowledge but we are here to have our lives transformed by the grace of God through the Holy Spirit being our teacher. That has to be transformation that applies in our life. It is application. We need to talk a little bit today and the form in which we will do that is let you ask some questions on what we have learned. This is not your time to ask your greatest theological question about when the Lord is going to return and all those type of things. I want you to focus on the things that you have been learning.

Go to the Book of Acts and I want to tell you why I want to do it this way. In the Book of Acts you have one of the greatest sermons ever preached at the Day of Pentecost. You'll see Peter's sermon beginning in Acts 2:14 and it goes all the way down to verse 36. Go back and read that sermon sometime. That is the focal point of preaching. It is a wonderful sermon where the Church was formulated on the Day of Pentecost. Look at verse 37.

They heard this message, they heard this marvelous sermon and then we see this response in Acts 2:37. "Now when they heard *this*..." what does **this** refer to? *This* refers back to verses 14-36...it is referring back to the sermon...they heard *this* sermon. Now *this* sermon did not stop at their head knowledge. Notice their response: "Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart,..." Something happened to their heart that the Holy Spirit moved upon their hearts to penetrate the blackness of their own soul, removed the blinders from their heart, and something happened to them.

Now notice their response. "...and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do?" Now men, that ought to be the response to every message you ever hear. "What am I going to do about what I just learned?" You want to ask yourself that question. Notice, they did not say, "Well this is what it means to me." They were saying, "What should we do about what we heard?" In other words, what is the application, what is my response to this. We do not want you to come here every Friday and just learn theological knowledge, we want you to walk out that door asking yourself when you get in the car and drive to your home, or golf course, or to work, or to run, asking yourself this question: "What shall we do? We heard something that you taught us. What am I going to do about what I just learned?" That was the response to that sermon. That ought to be our response to every time we open the Scripture and God teaches us through the Holy Spirit through the Word. We ought to be asking that single question every time we read something, the response shouldn't be, "Well, I do not agree with that. Well, that is your opinion, or that is what they would say, or this is what they would say." The real question is this: "What am I going to do about what I just learned?"

Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself. And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation!'"

So men, we want to give you a chance today...we have in our midst, in my judgment...one of the best knowledgeable theologians in the region and that is Bishop John Rodgers. We are very, very fortunate to have this man in our midst. So I kind of prepped John Rodgers on the side and asked him if he would help me today. We want to allow you to ask questions about all the things that you have learned about this Union **With** Christ. This is so critical for us. Do you really understand how to apply the truth that you are **in** Christ? What is that going to do in your life? How is that going to transform the way that you live your life? Remember the little card we gave? You have to think right. We've been teaching you how to think. What are you going to do about the truth when it says that Christ is **in** you and you are **in** Christ? What are you going to do about that?

What are you going to do about the fact that you are to be **like** Christ? What are you going to do about the fact that we are **with** Him? We want to give you a chance to ask some questions today. Bishop Rodgers and I and Don, and Carl, and Tom, and all of us who are your teachers during this series will be here to answer your questions. Let's just ask yourself the question and ask the Holy Spirit to really put a question in your heart that you need to have some help with and that would help you apply the truths that we've learned in our study of Union **With** Christ. This is the time for us to make application. What are we going to do about what we just learned about being **in** Christ?

May the Holy Spirit direct us.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *Before we ask questions, can I remind you all that we do record these sessions so if you feel comfortable, would you please stand up and use your outdoor voice and try to make sure we all hear you and get it on tape. Thank you.*

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *When struggling with sin as a new Christian, or repeating sins, whether it is addictions or something very personal that you feel like you've been battling with for years and years, and you know your saved, you are convicted of your salvation and you know [UNCLEAR] and that sin just beats you down, how do we finally conquer it, how do we finally put it down and put it to rest forever?*

That is a great question. When you have these repeated sins that keep coming back and you know you are **in** Christ, how do you defeat that? We have to realize this: that we do not defeat it, Christ has already defeated it. That is the difference. We have to quit thinking about “I can make the difference.” We cannot fight sin. One of the great passages of Scripture is this: “Christ came to take away the sin of the world.” Because you are **in** Christ remember this: how does God view you? He views you as **in** Christ. That is how He views you, and that means this: that perennial, repeated sin has already been conquered at the Cross. Now for us to go back and say, “I need to do something about that to defeat that,” basically is saying that He did not accomplish what He accomplished at the Cross. All I am trying to say is that we need to think correctly about our sin. It has already been defeated. That does not mean that we have a license and sit back and be sloppy, I am not saying that. That is where our obedience comes in. Our obedience is a love response. John 14. “If you love me, you will obey me.” It is a love response. Our response to this repeating sin is to fight it. It is to battle with it. It is to plead God’s grace. It is when you see it coming, get help, it is to pray. It is all those things. We have those disciplines of the Christian life. We have to fight. We are in a spiritual battle, but we do need to realize this: it has already been paid for. I just now need to cooperate and I need to call upon the Holy Spirit to work in me so that I can fight that and resist it. There is a battle going on and that is what we would call “mortifying the flesh.”

You have to fight against that and one of the things we have to do is remove ourselves from the environment where that sin is stimulated. Maybe you have to listen to a different type of music, maybe you have to watch a different type of TV show, maybe you change the magazines you’re reading. I don’t know what it may be, but you have to put yourself in a position not to have that sin stimulated. That is part of our duty, that is part of our responsibility. It is part of our obedience. Yes, there is the sovereignty of God in cleansing us, but we have the responsibility to be obedient on the other side of the coin. It is a battle, it is not going to be easy. But we have to realize this: that Christ has already defeated it.

One of my preaching mentors in Scotland said, “Bruce every time you repent of a sin and that chain has been broken, just don’t resurrect it again.” That is the battle...just do not resurrect it because it has already been paid for.

Bishop Rodgers, do you want to add to that sir?

BISHOP RODGERS: I was just thinking of the text that says, “If we say we have no sin, the truth is not in us and we make God a liar, but if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.” So I think part of the process and sometimes you just do not get rid of this right away; some of us have areas of vulnerability that keep coming up, I think, if that is what you are talking about...you have to confess your sin to the Lord, acknowledge it, receive the freshness of forgiveness, keep close account to the Lord, the way you do...say in the family...you have to face into it, confess, repent and say, “I’m not going to do that again by the grace of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit” and pray for His help. Then do whatever things you can to avoid the things that trigger it.

BRUCE: One of the things that may be occurring in these issues is that it is a means of driving us to our knees to pray because you realize you cannot do it yourself. So it may be, as Paul says, there was a thorn in his side and three times he prayed to God to remove it and every time he prayed, God said what? “My grace is sufficient.” See, that was something that Paul really understood, it was driving him on his knees. And these repeated sins as we fight them and deal with them, one of the things that is a positive side is, it is drawing us to the personal work of Christ, trusting Him, confessing to Him our sin, and doing what we can through our

obedience...but it is driving us to our knees realizing that we cannot do it alone. Thank you for your question. I appreciate it, buddy. Thanks. Anybody want to add to that?

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *We feel a duty to perform acts of Christian charity, we are instructed and inspired to do this. Is it ever right, can it ever be proper to enlist in Christian charity agents who work by compulsion or threats of violence?*

Help me understand your question, give me an example.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT AGAIN. *Dwight Eisenhower said and Alan Greenspan later said this: "That at the bottom of every stack of government paperwork lays a gun." When we pray or when we Catholics sometimes pray that our civil servants [UNCLEAR] be hungry [UNCLEAR] and homes, clothed and naked, is that right and just?*

Well the Scripture says that we are to pray for those in authority so that means it is right. So, yes, we do that. We do not do it because it is going to change them, we do it why? For the glory of God because the Scripture says to do it. We do it because of our obedience. The Scripture says pray for those in authority. Now we have to realize that God is sovereign and He is the One Who is ruling all of our lives. So we have a duty to pray for those in leadership positions. We pray for those who are in authority. Now what God does with that, I have to let that rest within His sovereignty and His providence, but that does not remove my responsibility to pray for somebody even though they may be a twit. They may be a twit but I still have to pray for them, because the Scripture says to do that. So my response is: not that my prayers are changing this person and the government is being changed...that is not the issue. The issue is am I being obedient in praying for those in authority. I think if we did that more often, things might be changing.

Anybody else want to add something to that? Yes, please.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *Look at Jeremiah because he never let up in forewarning Israel and I forget the king who wavered but Jeremiah never let up trusting God and that one message, basically the message of repentance; and God dealt with him in His precious sovereignty.*

Yes. God will be sovereign. It is our responsibility. We should not worry so much about results as we should about the reasons we do something. The reason is this: it is a love response in obedience. The Scripture says pray for those in authority and that is all we need to know to do it.

Yes, Bishop.

BISHOP RODGERS: It is important to realize that God gave to the magistrates the sword. If they have the authority to use force [UNCLEAR] equity and justice [UNCLEAR] not that it is ungodly to use force if you are a magistrate. That is part of your responsibility.

BRUCE: Look at Romans 13. 1-4. "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God." We need to realize this: they are in that position of authority because God has ordained it. I don't understand that but that is what it says. My boss has a divine position in my life by God's authority, not because she is that good or that bad. That is not the issue; the issue is that she or he is there in authority by God's sovereign decree for a reason that I must

respond to that person in authority. Let's read on because I want to fill up [UNCLEAR] to what Bishop is eluding to. "Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil."

Now what we are seeing there is, God is in control. As much as we don't like what's going on in our country, who is in control? It is not Congress, they think that they are but they are not. They are there by God's sovereign decree. We need to understand that. That doesn't mean that we're sloppy, it means we ought to be praying our butt off because that is what we do...we pray for those who are in authority. Perhaps God might be pleased to do something.

Yes, Don.

DON: *What about the situation, for example, in Canada which may occur here, where Paul says that rulers of [UNCLEAR] terror not for the good but for evil, what if Congress or the Supreme Court would make a rule tomorrow saying that pastors are no longer allowed to teach that homosexuality is a sin; or to say that Christ is the only way to God...we rule that as hate speech. I think I know the answer to this question, but what do we do there?*

BRUCE: Why don't you answer it? {LAUGHTER}

DON: *At that point God overrules the government.*

BRUCE: There comes a time, and I cannot tell you when that will occur in your life, it is not up to me to tell you that, but Don's question is very, very significant. There comes a time when we have to obey God and not man. I cannot tell you when that happens or when you need to do that.

Tom, go ahead.

TOM: *I think it important to look at our case in the U. S. as different because in 1889, we set up a government that was under the people not over the people. Up until that time, governments had always been over the people. So, if there is a change required, it needs to come from us to change the government because we were allowing it to be over us and to dictate us like all the other governments.*

BRUCE: You know there is an entity that exists in our culture that was created by God for the purpose of transforming society; and that entity is a very, very creative ingenious organization known as the Church. It is the Church that should change society, not the government. Now we need to have revival inside the Church so that it spreads outside into the world, and until something happens to the Church and until we get over this, what I'm going to call the pragmatic marketing of the Church today, which basically says that if it works and draws people in, it must be right. There are churches in our country, one church who really boasts about the fact that they have 36,000 members. I inquired once and called on the webpage...you know how many people worship with them on Sunday? 12,000. My question is, where is the 24,000 others? You call that a successful church? Is numerical counting the only way that we determine a successful church? There is an entity in society by God's sovereign design and it is designed to control society...and that is the Church. We are to

transform society and until the Church starts doing that and we fulfill our responsibility as men and leaders in the Church, that is not going to happen. We need to realize that there is an entity that can make the change and that is the Church. The Church is to transform society, not be controlled by it. We need to take seriously our worship in the Church.

Yes?

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *Acts 5:27, 28, and 29. "When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. (the magistrates and the Pharisees) The high priest questioned them, saying, 'We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching (in the name of Jesus) and intend to bring this man's blood upon us' (blaming us). But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men.'"*

BRUCE: OK, now let's ask the question...remember we are talking about our union **with** Christ. This isn't a theological free for all. We are...what are we going to try to do with what we have been learning? How are your questions going to be applied to what you have learned: that you are **in** Christ, Christ is **in**, you are **with** Christ, and you are to be **like** Christ? That is how you want to answer these questions. The issue here is that there comes a time when you have to obey God and not man. I cannot tell you when that is going to be. But are you prepared to do that? What is going to give you the grace and endurance, the perseverance to do that? It is the understanding that I am **in** Christ and Christ is **in** me, and I am **like** Christ, and Christ is **with** me...I am not alone. You see that is the application: when it comes time for you to do that, if you need to do that and God is pleased to have you do that, do you understand why you can do that? Why you can obey God and not man? I cannot tell you when that is going to happen in your life or when it is going to happen, but are you prepared to do it? You have to understand why you have the grace to do that. It is because of our union **with** Christ. See how that applies?

Yes, please.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *I heard a sermon recently about the difference between familiarity with Christ and knowing Christ. What are some barometers or things that you look to in your life to know whether or not you just think [UNCLEAR] or familiarize or known?*

BRUCE: Well I would say first of all, what do I talk about? Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. My language, my topics of conversation and the words that I choose and when I choose to say them is an indication of my spiritual maturity. What do I talk about? Do I flippantly treat God as some great pirate in the sky, or do I recognize the awesomeness of His glory? One of the things I look at in my own life, is why did I say that? What do I talk about? It is a reflection of my heart and if I'm saying that Christ is **in** me and I am **in** Christ then there is going to be a transformation in the way I talk and the language that I use. I'm not going to discuss the same things I used to talk about because my heart has been transformed. That is one indication.

I think the best thing that I can really do to answer that is to go to the book of 1st John...the seven tests and the seven traits of a true believer. The book of 1st John will give you the best thing because John says this: "I write these things so that you may know you have eternal life." What are those things? There are seven of them and they all have to do with this: if you say and you don't, you are not. If you say and you do, you are. Go back and read the book of 1st John if you really want to know if I am **in** Christ. That would be one of the most convicting...don't read it if you just want to read it...sit on the toilet and have a nice little five minute

conversation. Don't read it that way, you have to look at it this way because it is going to be very, very convicting. It will be very convicting...the seven traits and seven tests of a person who has been truly born of God. You will find that in the whole book of 1st John. That is where I would go.

But it starts for me personally...what do I talk about?

Carl?

CARL: *I just wanted to add to that, the Bible says as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. And we have to recognize that our lives would be a reflection of Who God is, [UNCLEAR]. It cannot just be in what you say and come in here. You can come in here every Friday but if you are not displaying it in the character that you live outside these doors, you are only getting up early in the morning to just come and have coffee. At sometime we have got to apply what we are learning, and it has to show in the work place so that people...you do not have to say I am a Christian or wear a big old cross around your neck. It is in your conduct and your character.*

BRUCE: That is what we talked about...we are **like** Christ. Do you realize that? Now that does not mean that we are like Him in His divinity, but we are like Him in the sense of living a life that He walked. We walk as Christ walked and "walk" means the direction of your life.

CHUCK: *I think also it is important, at least for me, to realize that Christ is **in** me and I am **in** Christ but also we have to realize and we have to remember that our flesh is still alive in us also and it is a constant battle every day. It depends on who you feed: your flesh or spirit man is where you want to end up going down that road. So I think it is very important for me to stay in the Word and constantly pray, to fellowship with other Christians [UNCLEAR] if you start watching TV shows or reading magazines that are un-Christ-like or so secular, you will be easily led down that wrong road [UNCLEAR]. It is important to [UNCLEAR] each and every day.*

BRUCE: Amen. Go to Matthew 16. Jesus has a conversation with Peter beginning in Matthew 16:21. And in verse 22 Jesus is foretelling His death and Peter says, "...forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." Notice the response of Jesus in verse 23: "But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interest, but man's." Now there is a critical statement. He says you are a stumbling block because you are thinking in the world's mentality rather than in God's mentality. You are thinking incorrectly. That is why we gave you this, to help you think right.

Then notice what He says, the context of this is, Peter is saying, "I want to be a follower of Yours and You are telling me that You are going to die? No, that cannot happen, that is not what I am buying into, that is not the program I signed up for. That is not my concept of discipleship, I didn't buy into this. Your death." Jesus says, "You are not thinking correctly, Peter. You are thinking according to man's standard rather than God's standard." Then notice how he defines a disciple in verse 24.

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me.'" There He describes three character qualities of a disciple who is thinking correctly; and the three character qualities are this: self-denial, self-sacrifice, and self-submission.

First, self-denial: you must deny yourself. That is a battle that we have to do but that is a daily fight that we have to win and trust the Lord for it. We need to learn how to deny ourselves. That is not easy to do, is it? It is not something that we do not like to talk about because we're men. We want to control ourselves. We have to learn how to deny our-self. What type of discipleship did you buy into? One that comes on Friday and just sits here and learns theological knowledge, or are you going to apply it when you walk out the door? That means that you may need to deny something of yourself after you leave this session today because you learned something and your response is: "What am I going to do about what I just learned?"

The second thing is self-sacrifice. Now when the term "cross" was used in the biblical times, it meant death. It may be that the Lord may call you to give your life because you are a disciple. Self-sacrifice. I might be called to give my life. I trust that the Lord would be pleased not to have us do that but He may. If you want to read something, read *Fox's Book of Martyrs*. Read about the people who gave their lives for the cause of Christ because they understood what it meant to be self-denial, self-sacrificing, and the last one is self-submission.

Who runs your life? Am I really willing to submit to Christ and His Lordship, or have I created a Jesus of my own human imagination?

Those are the three character qualities of a disciple: self-denial, self-sacrifice, and self-submission.

Tom.

TOM: *I think it important to go back to Philippians where Paul not only says that he wants to know Christ but share in the fellowship of His sufferings," which implies a life of grace that we can't understand.*

BRUCE: Right, Amen. That is what Chuck said, the flesh is still there and it is a battle. We might be called to suffer. Paul writes that anybody who desires to live a Godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. You are going to be persecuted. That's because of who you are. It is because Christ is **in** you, you are **in** Christ, you are **like** Christ, and you are **with** Christ. The consequence...the world is not going to say, "Oh aren't you the most lovable person in the world? They're going to say you are an offense. You are an offense to me because you are setting a whole different standard, we don't like that." We should not expect that we are the greatest thing since night baseball. The world is going to be against us, even Jesus said,...they are going to be against you because they hated me."

Dick?

DICK: *I think the desire probably for all of us is to mature **in** Christ, I mean everyone would probably raise their hand to that, so we hear on Friday mornings or on Sundays or whenever else and I apply maybe 10%, maybe 5%, maybe 2% of what I have heard, OK? My heart's desire is to mature as Christ. I know the Spirit is within me and I cannot do it by myself but how do we appropriate the power of the Spirit instead of taking 2% to see that maturity and that it raises to 5 or 10 or 50%? We see a greater impact of our lives as disciples [UNCLEAR] discipline is a piece of it and how do we appropriate the power of the Spirit to do that?*

BRUCE: Anyone want to take a shot at that?

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: I think he was *asking you*.....{LAUGHTER}.

BRUCE: OK, here we go. Go to Acts 2. First of all in 2nd Peter 1, He says, “Make sure of your own election...” That is a responsibility I have, to make sure I am **in** Christ. Go to 2nd Peter 1:10. “Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble.” Now we need to make sure of our calling in our election. How do you do that? There are seven character qualities in those verses right before that, that you and I need to work on. When we work on those, the Holy Spirit works in us. It is not so much how we do things, as it is why do we do things. I am going to make sure of my calling in my election by doing the things that we see of church maturity. If you want to talk about maturity, go to the Book of Acts 2.

There is a difference and unfortunately modernism has distinguished the difference...has redefined church growth improperly. They define church growth as numbers. In the Book of Acts 2:41-42, you see a clear distinction and definition of the difference between church expansion and church growth.

Acts 2:41-42. “So then, those who had received His word” (in other words, that was the sermon they preached, they responded) “...were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.” That is church expansion, that is not church growth, that is expansion. Numbers were added. Now you want church growth? Notice what they did after they joined the church. They did four things. They gave themselves, (1) to the apostles’ teaching; (2) to fellowship; (3) to breaking of bread; and (4) to prayer. That is maturity. If you put yourself in that environment in the local church, you begin to mature. You do not create your maturity, the Holy Spirit develops that in you. You put yourself in the environment to receive God’s grace, and you do that by doing four things and they are all done in the local church.

First of all, you give yourself to the apostles’ teaching. Now Luke, who wrote the Book of Acts, doesn’t list all types of teaching, but he says to the apostles’ teaching. You give yourself to those things that God gave the apostles. What would they be? In quick summary it would be this: grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, revealing the Scripture alone, for the glory of God alone...the doctrines of grace.

Secondly, it would be this: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. That is the apostles’ teaching. Give yourself to those concepts. Now I just summarized the whole biblical data on the apostles’ teaching. The doctrines of grace and TULIP: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. That is the apostles’ teaching. Give yourself to that and you will mature. You do not have the responsibility for your maturity, the Holy Spirit does that. You cannot make yourself mature, all you can do is put yourself in the environment to become mature. That is His job to do that. We need to quit saying, “What do I do? How do I do this? Give me ten steps to do that.” You can go down to the Christian Book Store and they’ll tell you ten things to do, none of which have anything to do with the Holy Spirit working in your life. Here are the four things you need to put yourself in the environment so that it will happen supernaturally, and that is to give yourself to the apostles’ teaching, not to the latest doctrine that is coming down the pike. Stick to the doctrines of grace and TULIP and reformed faith and you will understand what it means to give yourself to the apostles’ teaching. And the Holy Spirit works in you.

Thirdly, the fellowship. We need to be around each other and to encourage each other to do good works. Why do we need each other?

Fourthly, the Lord’s Supper. What does the Lord’s Supper do? It encourages us by reminding us of what? WHJD—What Has Jesus Done? That is why we take the Lord’s Supper, it reminds you of your inadequacies and His total adequacy. That is why you have the Lord’s Supper. It is to remind you and to encourage you to realize that I am **in** Christ, and Christ is **in** me.

Last, prayer. You see everything flows out of the apostles' teaching. The apostles' teaching puts you in a position to want to be in the fellowship with other people. When you are in fellowship with other people, you need to be reminded of what the Lord's Supper does for you. It reminds you of WHJD—What Has Jesus Done? He has paid for my sin. The result of that is: you have a desire now to pray.

If you want to mature, that is church growth, not church expansion. Church expansion is verse 41, "And numbers were added." If we in the Church would give ourselves to maturity, God will take care of the expansion according to how He defines it.

I would like to take you to a church over in Wilkinsburg. It has about 50 members. Do you know how many people show up on Sunday? Fifty! They only have 50 members. Now compare that to the church that has 36,000 and only 12,000 show up. Which is the more effective church? According to modernism and marketing mentality, it is the church of 36,000. I would counter that and say it is the church with 50 and everybody is there because they are trying to mature themselves in Christ. Verse 41 deals with the expansion, verse 42 deals with growth in the Book of Acts, Chapter 2. That is the model of the Church. Put yourself in that environment.

Yes.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *Bruce, just a comment [UNCLEAR] and things; but as we talked about union **with** Christ, it seems to be that this process that we all sin and we keep sinning...this process is something that just keeps soaking into your brain and the more we hear your teaching, the more we understand the Word and are in the Word, then, I think, the more we change slowly...just a little bit at a time so that now maybe I'm more guarded about what I say with my mouth. I'm more conscience of how I spend my money, I'm more conscience of who I associate with, I'm a more aggressive responder when I see a need for something out there. So for me, your teaching here of the last several months on union **with** Christ has caused me to just, I hope, to move a little closer to being more like Him and to be the kind of person that I should be; but it is not a light bulb change for me...it is very slow.*

BRUCE: It is a life process of the Holy Spirit and that is a good summary, that is a very good summary. The Holy Spirit works in us and does that over time.

Well I'll tell you what, let's continue this next week. Think of the questions...now again, this is not a time for theological dialogue on your biggest ten questions that you struggle with. Come up with the questions that deal with the application of: what does it mean that I am **in** union **with** Christ? How is that going to transform my life? What am I going to do about what I just learned about those truths of the Scripture, part of the apostles' teaching, because we are just teaching you what the apostles taught which God gave them and that is this: you are **in** Christ, Christ is **in** you, you are **like** Christ, and we are **with** Christ. Now what are we going to do about that. Let's come back next week and we will continue our discussion. Thank you very much for your openness and your honesty. Sometimes I wish we didn't tape these things so that we could be just brutally honest with each other, but so be it.

Let's pray.

Father, there is much we can learn from one another and Father we really desire to be submissive to the apostles' teaching, to those doctrines of grace that really salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in

Christ alone, revealed in the Scripture alone, for the glory of God alone. Father, may that be our hallmark and may it be so for Jesus' sake. All the brave men said, "Amen."