

TRIUMPHANT LIVING
Taught by Bruce Bickel
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Gracious and merciful heavenly Father, we stand on the promises of God revealed to us in Your Word. We know that Your Holy Spirit is our teacher and we pray that You would be pleased to open our eyes as once again we might behold Your glory in the personal work of Jesus Christ. For His glory, we pray. Amen.

We passed out a new handout for you; it is Lesson No. 5 and is entitled “Union With Christ.” We started this a couple of weeks ago and I want to make sure that we give ourselves ample time to discuss this very, very important issue in the Church. Most people in the Church in America today would have no idea of what we are talking about. And that is tragic but it is probably one of the most important doctrines we can ever look at and that is the understanding of our union **with** Christ. This started a couple of weeks ago when we began to look at John 15 about what it means to abide. If you remember, abide means to “pitch your tent and feel at home with.”

You do not be obedient to abide, you abide to be obedient. Jesus says, “Abide in me and you will bear much fruit.” The most natural thing for a believer who is in union **with** Christ is that they bear fruit. That is not something that you and I necessarily work at but it is the consequence of this union. To the degree to which we understand the union that we have **with** Christ helps us to understand the possibility of our becoming more fruitful in our ministry with Christ. It backs up with realizing that abiding means, you pitch your tent and you feel at home **with** Christ. Now, we need to understand this union so that we begin to develop more of an attitude of feeling at home with Christ, wherever we are—at work, at play, at home, in the car or where ever it may be. It really shapes everything about us and the emphasis in John 15:7 is, “If you abide in Me, you will bear much fruit, because apart from Me you can do nothing.” That is really highlighting for us the need for us to understand very clearly this concept of the union **with** Christ. That is why we want to take our time; I have created a handout and bring this with you over the next several weeks because I am sure we will not exhaust this in a matter of a couple weeks. We want to take our time because it is so critically important.

Look at your handout; first of all we need to understand that union **with** Christ really is defined...it is a phrase used to summarize the different relationships that believers have with the Lord Jesus through which believers receive every benefit of salvation. One of those benefits is that you bear fruit. It is basically saying that it is based upon our understanding of our union **with** Christ that we receive all the benefits of salvation. The salvation that Christ accomplished. We have been saying now for 17 years that Christ did not make your salvation possible; He accomplished it at the cross. There is a difference. He did not make it possible so that you could decide; He accomplished it so you did decide. There is a difference. That is all part of our understanding of what it means to be in union **with** Christ. It is the sharing of believers in the life of Jesus Christ.

Do we really understand what it means to share in Christ’s life? I would say the Church does not teach that, because we are more oriented towards teaching people to have an experience. What we are talking about is having a relationship that is deeply imbedded into a union of two people who come together and have a relationship of abiding. He abides **in** us and we abide **in** Him. If you look at John 15, there is another abiding portion and He says, “I abide **in** you.” What does that mean? If we say that abiding **in** Christ means to pitch your tent and feel at home **with** Christ, what does it mean when it says, “He abides **in** us?” It means this: that

He pitches His tent with you and feels at home **in** you. Do we understand the implications of that? We really do not and that is why we are going to take our time and go through this concept of union **with** Christ.

It is the sharing of believers in the life of Christ by faith, allowing us to share all the benefits and the riches that result from the person and work of Christ and there are four areas that we are going to look at.

(1) We are **in** Christ. What does it mean that we are **in** Christ? Paul uses the phrase about 127 times to describe a person who has a saving relationship to God the Father through God the Son; He does not refer to them as Christians. He says you are **in** Christ. If you were to walk down the streets of Pittsburgh and say to somebody, “Are you a Christian or are you **in** Christ?” You are either going to be thought of as a zealot or they are going to understand what you mean. It is going to be one of those two concepts. Some people say, “I’m a Christian because I was born here, because I did this, because my parents are, because I do these things.” You will get as many answers to that question, “Are you a Christian?” as the number of people you would ask; but if you ask somebody this, “Are you **in** Christ?” They are either going to know what you mean or they are going to look at you like you are some sort of weirdo zealot, because they have no concept as we have never taught that in the Church.

(2) We do not teach people what it means to abide **in** Christ and have Christ abide **in** me. You see, that is where you develop your spirit of feeling comfortable. Do you really feel comfortable **with** Christ when you go to work? Do you feel comfortable **with** Christ when you are at home? That is the implication here; that is what it means to abide. When you do have that comfort zone based upon your understanding of this union you have of His abiding **in** you and you abiding **in** Him, that is when you become a fruit bearer. Because the natural consequence of the understanding of that comfortableness of our relationship to Christ is the consequence of our bearing fruit. Apple trees do not grunt to bear fruit. The most natural thing for an apple tree is to bear fruit, you do not see them grunt—they do not work at it. It is a consequence of a relationship they have to the soil. That is what Jesus is teaching us here in abiding. It is our relationship to the soil of the life of the Holy Spirit in the person and work of Christ Who produces the fruit. It is a natural consequence. It is not something of productivity. You and I do not produce fruit, we are the fruit.

Tom, show us your [UNCLEAR] again; you know, the little handout that you made for us. You know, ministry is who we are, where we are. The most natural thing in the world for us is to bear fruit when we understand what it means to abide.

We need to look at what it means that we are **in** Christ. We also need to understand what it means that Christ is **in** us. Do you have any concept of what that means? Just think about it. The Creator of the universe is sharing His life **with** you. A cross-reference for us would be 2nd Corinthians 4:7. We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show how good you are—no, it does not say that. It says, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels; clay pots, jars of clay to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God and not from you.” That is what it means. God has taken the most precious commodity in the universe, the life of His Son, His Own very life and He implants it in the weakest vessel He ever created—that is mankind—so that when you and I go through the situations and the hassles of life, what comes out of us is the life that is **in** us. That is what it means to “have the treasure in the earthen vessel.” By design, you and I are weak because it is in the weakness that our strength comes out; and the idea is this: it is in our weakness that the life of God comes out. You see this union of Christ—do we really understand what it means that Christ is **in** me? We need to talk about that in as much depth as we can in our meager efforts.

(3) We need to look at this—this Scripture also says as part of our union, “We are **like** Christ.” What does it mean when it says we are **like** Christ? That does not mean that we take on all the supernatural powers that Jesus Christ has. That is not what I’m saying. We need to understand, what does it mean when the Scripture says, “We are **like** Christ?” It means we are being conformed to His image. What does that mean, as it relates to our union **with** Christ?

(4) Lastly, we are **with** Christ for eternity. What does that mean; do you really understand what it means to be **with** Christ? You’re **with** Him now—you are going to be **with** Him for eternity. That is why in the Christian world we have glorification funerals. It is a time of glorification. Yes, there is a time of tremendous mourning and grieving when we lose a loved one, but that person is at no loss anymore. The loss is with us because of our pain and our sorrow; but they are no longer at loss because they are **with** Christ. That is why we celebrate the resurrection of the body at a funeral. It is a time of rejoicing. The world doesn’t understand that, they don’t understand that. We go to light our candles, and light our crosses, and do our thing—whatever it is. It is really a time of celebration; yes, it’s a combination, it’s a mystery—at one time you are grieving and your mourning and you’re in such sorrow—but at the same time there is rejoicing and glorification. Why is that? Do we really understand that? That’s what it means to be **with** Christ. We need to look at four major things over the next several weeks. We are **in** Christ, Christ is **in** us, we are **like** Christ, and we are **with** Christ.

Union **with** Christ takes the source and the electing have its beginning source in the electing love of the Father before the foundation of the world, and has its culmination in the glorification of the saints when we receive the resurrected body. We need to look at two things: union **with** Christ started before the foundation of the world and we’re going to get into that today, and it ends with no ending because of our culmination in glory as we take on our resurrected body. That is the scope of our union **with** Christ. Do we really understand the implications of all that? We need to begin to see if we can dissect some of this over the next couple of weeks.

Let me give you a couple of statements...I’ve done some research and I think they are very, very helpful to understand this concept. One is from a dear saint, a Baptist theologian by the name of A. H. Strong. This is what he says...just listen to these words, “The New Testament imagery of the believer in Christ and Christ in the believer is a profound relationship of fellowship in life. Union with Christ constitutes a union of life in which the human spirit, which most truly possesses its own individuality and personal distinctiveness is interpenetrated and energized by the Spirit of Christ, it’s made inscrutably and dissolvedly one with Him; and so becomes a member and a partaker of that regenerated believing and justified humanity of which He is the head.” That’s what it means to be in union **with** Christ.

As I look at some of his statements, I would break it down as this: There are several different relationships that he is describing here. Let me give them to you.

I would say, first of all, that union **with** Christ is an organic union...we’re talking about the word “union.” It is an organic union meaning that believers become members of Jesus Christ. It is an organic union in which we become members of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, it is a vital union in which Christ’s life becomes the believer’s life principle. It is a vital union where His life becomes your life principle. It means you think differently than you did. You don’t act the way you did because you have a completely different life principle in you. Not only is it an organic union but it is a vital union.

Thirdly, I would say it is a spiritual union; a union where the relationship is affected and maintained by the Holy Spirit. It is a spiritual union. There is something mysterious about it and we need to allow that mystery to be there. So it is not only an organic union, it is a vital union, and it's a spiritual union.

Fourthly, I would say it is an in-dissolvable union. Indissolvable, by which God's grace can never be severed. It is indissolvable; once you are **in** Christ, you are **in** Christ. You don't come in grace and out of grace, you are either in it or you are not. It is an indissolvable union. Do you understand what confidence that ought to give us as we take on the world?

Look at this stuff that is going on in Boston. I grieve over that and I have great anxiety over that; but I'm not fearful of what is happening in the world because I know I am in an indissolvable union **with** the person and work of Christ. His providences are always good. God's providence by nature is good. I don't understand all of that and I don't have to, but I'm basing my life upon the fact that I am in an indissolvable union **with** the person and work of Christ. That's what gives us the ability not to be fearful.

Let me just take you to a cross reference—go to Isaiah 43:1. A lot of people would say, "Bruce are you fearful over what is going on in the world?" I have concern but not fear. Concern but not fear. Let me tell you why I don't have fear of what is going on. Are the terrorists going to win? No! Who is going to win? The Lord Jesus is going to win! It is not America that is going to win! Christ is going to win! That's part of our indissolvable union we have.

Isaiah 43:1. Listen to these wonderful words. "But now, thus says the Lord, your Creator, O Jacob, And He Who formed you, O Israel, Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!" Notice there are three verbs that He says: (1) He created you; (2) He formed you; and (3) He redeemed you. See that? God formed you—we're going to talk about that, it is part of our understanding of the union **with** Christ. He formed you before the foundation of the world. He created you before the foundation of the world. He formed you into the person you are right now physically; you may not be physically what you want to be compared to somebody else but that is irrelevant. You've got to understand this: God created you, He formed you and then one more thing—notice the third verb, He redeemed you. He bought you with the payment of a price. Therefore, what is the consequence of those three understandings? Do not fear. Why is it that you and I do not fear—it's not because we've got the greatest weaponry in the world, it is not because we've got the greatest arsenal of combat facilities in the world, that is not it. Understand this, God created me, God formed me, and God redeemed me. And, Brothers, He formed you, He created you, and He redeemed you if you are **in** Christ.

The result is this: "Do not fear for I have called you by name. Go to John 10. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they know me, I call them by name." God formed you; God created you; and God redeemed you. Know this: He called you by name and that means this...as you have heard me say many times...there is a beautiful little hymn but it penetrates my heart every time I think about it, "When I was on the cross, you were on My mind." That's part of union **with** Christ. Do you understand the implications of that?

How can you and I not have our lives radically transformed when we understand these truths? Your life is transformed because of a whole new principle of life because of this union that we have **with** Christ. He says, "I call you by name..." Now many people will say, "Well, I know Jesus." But the real issue is this: does Jesus know me? Do you understand the difference? People say, "I know Jesus, I went forward when I was 12, I know Jesus." Well, that may be true and I cannot fault that—it is not my role to judge that. But which Jesus do

they know? Is it the Jesus of human imagination? The great pirate in the sky? The master coach? All those wonderful little marketing phrases we use to describe the person and work of Jesus Christ that diminish His glory? “I know Jesus.” But the issue is this folks: if you understand the union **with** Christ, you are going to understand the bigger issue is this: that Jesus knows you and He knows you by name.

Guys when you understand the depths of that, it has to transform your life and, if it doesn't, you are not regenerate, you are not **in** Christ. Paul is saying, it is not about being a Christian. It is about being **in** Christ. It is in this organic union, it is in this vital union, it is in this Spiritual union, it is in this indissoluble union and there is one more union that I suggest we consider. It is an inscrutable union, which means it translates the limits of our human understanding. Let it be a mystery. Let it be a mystery. We have taken the mysteriousness of Christianity out of our life because we now approach it with such logic—but if you do this, then you'll get that; if you give your money, then you'll get ten-fold back—that is why we call it “looping”, In our wonderful verses on Sunday where we have stewardship: give, pressed down, and He'll give it back to you. Basically, I've had people tell me, “I gave \$10 and I'm expecting \$100 back...” {LAUGHTER} Isn't that what the verse says, “If I give mine, He owes me something.” Or, “The reason I'm giving something is that I'll get something back.” That has nothing to do with stewardship, it has to do with mercy. The context of that is mercy. If you give mercy away, you're going to get mercy back. Yet we have the audacity to say things like, “Let me just figure this out...I've got to know everything and until I know everything...I'm not going to believe it.” Woe, to that person who says that. They have no understanding of what it means to be **in** union **with** Christ if they make a statement like that. You see there is a mystery to this. It is inscrutable.

Yes, Don.

DON: *I think I alluded to it a little bit last week...Ephesians 5. The analogy of marriage to the relationship that Christ has to the Church when He says, “This is a profound mystery.” I think we need to relish that word or revel in that [UNCLEAR], boy, I love the confessions, I love the creeds, but there is a certain... “well I know I have it all figured out now” but no we don't and I don't think we ever will. I think we will spend all of eternity learning and loving and appreciating God and the mystery of it.*

Yes, Amen.

Yes, Bill.

BILL: *I'll let you finish up.*

OK. Thank you. {LAUGHTER} Bill is always one-step ahead of me. I appreciate that about Bill.

Remember John 3? Jesus said to Nicodemus, unless something supernatural happens in your life, you cannot even see the Kingdom of God let alone enter it and enjoy its benefits. We need to remember to never remove the mystery, the mysterious, super naturalality of salvation. Salvation is not something I do, it is something that God works **in** me. It is something He does **to** me. That's what salvation is. He does it **to** me and my life is radically transformed because I'm in this union **with** Christ and I'm figuring out how to abide **with** Him as a responsibility of my obedience. My obedience is to abide, to feel comfortable with Christ. That means we need to understand what this union is about. God is so right and we should never remove the mystery of Christ **in** us. That is the hope of glory. That is a mystery and the world is not going to understand that.

OK, Bill, you've got the floor.

BILL: *Well, that's a scary thought. Union in Christ is natural, union in Christ is eternal...I'm not arguing those facts. I guess my concern is if one looks at Peter's teachings in 2nd Peter 1:10...what do we do there with that where he talks about making our life [UNCLEAR] because clearly as [UNCLEAR] about what we are talking about here.*

We don't make our election sure of God, God makes it sure in us. We recognize it. We understand that by—we'll get into that because one of the things we're going to talk about—about making our election sure and what that means. But that is not something I do, that is something that is wrought in me by the Holy Spirit because He is our righteousness. You'll recognize that...if you want to know how to make your election sure, I would say read the Book of 1st John, the seven tests and seven traits of a true believer. Ask yourself, go take the test. Paul tells us in Corinthians to test yourself and see if you are in the faith. If you want to make your election sure—it is not what you do with your duties—it is that you understand what you believe. Am I committed to the personal work of Christ? Take the test. There are seven tests in the Book of 1st John. Seven tests of a true believer, go take the test. That will help you understand if you are going to make your election sure. You'll know because of the work of the Holy Spirit...if you are or if you're not. Remember the work of the Holy Spirit is what? Convict us of our sin, convince us of our sin, convert us from our sin, control us in our life by the work of the Holy Spirit, and be our Guide as we live a Christian life. That is His role and He will do that when you test yourself up against the Scripture standard, not the worldly standard of what Christianity is, but go take the seven tests of a true believer in 1st John and see what happens. Take the test. That will help you understand whether or not you understand that your election is sure.

BILL: *Actually, what 2nd Peter is saying, it is not anything you do but you go back and look...are you producing the fruit of the Spirit that he mentions earlier....*

What does the evidence say? There has to be evidence in your election. Evidence is in your election. We'll get into that as we talk about it in a moment.

I also want to read another thing here for you. This is from a marvelous work and if you ever have a chance to get this book by John Murray called "Redemption Accomplished and Applied." It is a wonderful book...just let me read part of his understanding about the union with Christ. "The foundation of salvation itself is in the eternal election of the Father in Christ. Paul says, 'Blessed be the God, and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ' (notice **in** Christ), 'even as He chose us **in** Him' (**in** Christ) 'before the foundation of the world.'" You were not chosen by yourself, you were chosen **in** Christ and that has to mean something.

We have to understand that and it is in Ephesians 1:3, 4. The Father elected from all eternity...but notice... elected us **in** Christ. We are not able to understand all that is involved. But the fact is plain enough that there was no election of the Father in eternity apart from being **in** Christ. That means those who will be saved were not even contemplated by the Father in the ultimate counsel of His Own predestinating love apart from union **with** Christ, chosen **in** Him before the foundation of the world.

When God began to deal with you in eternity past, He began to deal with you **in** Christ, not alone but **in** Christ. They were chosen **in** Christ. As far back as we can go in tracing salvation, it is [UNCLEAR] that we find union **with** Christ, it is not something that is tacked on, it is there from the outset. What John Murray is saying,

friends, is this: when you consider your salvation, it starts with union **with** Christ. That's where it starts, it doesn't start with your response to something, it started as something that God in His predestinating love chose to do before the foundation of the world, and that was He began to view you **in** Christ before you were ever born. Do you understand that? You are **in** Christ. Everything that has happened to you is because God views you as **in** Christ.

We'll try to take this apart a little bit when we can but those are some wonderful thoughts. Do you realize this? God has never thought of you as apart from you being **in** Christ. You weren't here by yourself and all of a sudden you accepted Christ and invited Christ into your life and trusted Him as your Savior and **now** you are **in** Christ. That happened a long time ago! He has never viewed you as apart from this union of being **in** Christ. That is where it starts. The biggest question for me is this: Why me? Why me?

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *Can you speak to what union in Christ is like in terms of having...like an emotional [UNCLEAR] experience... having an emotional connection to God before maybe receiving messages from God and [UNCLEAR]?*

I cannot do that today but I will do that. It won't be today because that will be a part of what we're going to talk about.

Yes, Bishop Rodgers.

BISHOP RODGERS: *If we are chosen in Christ, elected to Christ from before the foundation of the world, does that mean then that we are also created **in** Christ?*

Absolutely, yes, we're created...that is why I took you to Isaiah 43. God never looked at you apart from this union **with** Christ. So, He created you conceptionally **in** Christ. He formed you conceptionally **in** Christ. He redeemed you personally **in** Christ, before the foundation of the world. He has never viewed you and me apart from this union **with** Christ. That is what John Murray is saying. God never viewed you apart from that. The question for me is: Why me? Why me? Most of the time we say, "Why isn't God doing this?" We need to sit back and say, "Why did God do anything? Why me?"

We have this treasure in the earthen vessel to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God and not from us.

Yes, Don.

DON: *We say, "Why me?" when bad things happen. But when good things happen or the best thing that could ever happen [UNCLEAR] regenerated in faith, we often do not say "Why me?"*

There you go. That's correct, good point. When things go awry, we say "Why me? I shouldn't deserve that." You have all gone through that, I've gone through that. I still do...I went through it the other day, but I had to stop myself and say: "Stop that." Go from my feeling to my thinking and I said, "Lord, remind me of my union **with** you." Remind me of my union **with** you. It is not about **why** me; it is about why **me**...not why is this happening to me...but why do I have this union? It is so powerful. Guys, the degree to which we understand this is going to transform our lives. That is why the Church is powerless because we have made union **with** Christ as an experience, rather than organic spiritual union. It is indissolvable and indiscrutable. We have made

it an experience. We even talk about: did you have a good worship experience in the Lord's Day? We have lowered worship to be an experience because we don't understand what union **with** Christ is. It is not giving people a good worship experience. Worship is a verb, worship is something that you do. You come to give, you don't come to get. Normally in our getting we give, and our giving we get. But you don't go to Church on the Lord's Day to have a worship experience. So what do we do? We want to make sure that the congregation has the right experience by having this kind of music at this service and we should have this kind of music at this service because this group won't like this and that group won't like that, so let's make sure they have a good experience and we'll have two kinds of worship.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *Preach it, preach it.*

So what do we do? We have relegated worship to be what the popular demands wants rather than sing. Let's create an environment where people come and celebrate the union they have **with** Christ that is mystery. Worship needs to be a mystery. Worship needs to be something that you cannot explain because you are celebrating this union **with** Christ. Do you understand the significance of this. This has tremendous implications of everything we do in the Church.

Yes, Bill.

BILL: *Awhile back we [UNCLEAR] views with regard to instruction and teaching [UNCLEAR] and this whole experience with regard to separate worship was, by definition, in violation of [UNCLEAR]. It doesn't mean that the requirements of God to worship has changed over time...*

Correct. It sure would. Remember the 28 Attributes of God? Go back and settle on that guys, because you have to take a look at that. How many of you get on the web page Bravemen.org where we have the summary of the presentation that we created for the 28 Attributes of God? Go back and take a look at that.

Bill has got a great point. Have you ever wandered about the glory of God...go back and take a look at those 28 Attributes. We have a whole series on that. If you need the power point presentation, it is on the web page and you can download it. Ian Davis was very kind enough...I summarized it for us...and he put it on the web page in a power point presentation. Just go back and dwell on this. That is what begins to shape our decisions. It's the glory of God and all of His attributes.

Yes, Ted.

TED: *If some of the Brothers are having a difficult time getting their arms around what you're teaching, I think that is fine because it just takes time to get this. And I came to this understanding, not that I have my arms around it yet, but out of desperation from my own situation. When I looked at myself,...it had to be in Christ...or there was no hope. My only hope is in Him. We say "Amen" but really our only hope is in Him.*

Yes. We need to understand that revelation is progressive. That's why we are going to take our time going through this. Today is just the introduction to the first paragraph {LAUGHTER}, because I'm not going to be able to explain it. First of all, in my human inadequacies...to be able to communicate and I'm trusting that I'm doing it to the point of understanding, not your agreement. I just want you to understand what the Scripture is saying. Now, what you do with it is your responsibility. That is why we always say, when you leave this

Throne of Grace on a Friday morning, this assemblage of grace, ask yourself the question: “What am I going to do about what I just learned?” Not, “What does it mean to me?” But “What am I going to do about it?” That’s what we need to do. Don’t worry about it if you do not grasp this the first day. None of us will. Remember it is a mystery. We’re exploring the depths of God’s...we are trusting the Holy Spirit to be our teacher. We’re going to, in our human frailties, not do this very well; so our only hope is really trusting Christ to do that. Understand this, guys, as we go through this you are not going to get it all at once. We are still learning and that’s good. It may expand our horizons and stretch the envelope a little bit, but that’s good because we need to dissect some of the presuppositions that we have from our own cultural background of Christianity and replace it with Biblical Theology of Union With Christ. That’s what we are trying to do.

Yes, please.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *The first time I started [UNCLEAR] talking about [UNCLEAR] I’m sorry [UNCLEAR]. It wasn’t a Christian context but I thought it was very helpful conceptually. [UNCLEAR].*

Yes, that’s right. You see, there is no answer to the question “Why?” is there? There is no answer to it. So don’t ask it.

Yes, Bob.

BOB: *Can I go back to something you said earlier that is curious to me? You said we don’t go to church on Sunday for a worship experience. My question to you is, as a pastor, what should be your objective for your role in determining the so-called agenda for the hour?*

The Glory of Christ. That’s it. Is everything I’m doing...is it going to bring glory to Christ? The way we take the collection, does that bring glory to Christ? The way we have our music, does that bring glory to Christ? I would say that everything must be run through that lens of the glory of Christ. That is everything we do in worship. That’s why we need to teach people that worship is a verb. They come to give glory to Christ, not to receive something and I’m not down playing that. Please understand that. The Scripture says, “Do not forsake the assembling of the saints.” We come together to stimulate each other to do good works. That’s part of our corporate worship experience. Now, I’m using the word “experience” to say, meaning to gathering. But I’m using the word majoritively here when I use the experiences...we’ve relegated worship to an experience now, rather than to an act of abiding. When you worship, you abide because you pitch your tent and feel at home.

Yes.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *I was going to ask you if you have a specific example in mind when... [UNCLEAR].*

What statement?

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *That we have relegated worship toward being an experience...*

Well, I would say first of all, take a look at your church bulletins. What do we do? “Praise and Worship.” We sing songs, we do whatever we do. But we call the first part of it Praise and Worship. Then we come to the bottom of the page and it says, “Sermon.” Now what that does is marginalize the preaching of the Word, by

saying the sermon isn't praise and worship. We've already done the "Praise and Worship," now I have to listen to a "Sermon." So what have we done just in our bulletins? We've made it...let's separate worship as what I do and worship is not what He says. What is the most important thing about a worship service? It is God speaking to us through the preached Word. And yet we have relegated it, we have marginalized it by saying it is an after-thought because that is not praise and worship; it is just another thing we do. So what do we do? We have our Praise Teams, our Worship Teams because they are the ones who are doing it, I'm just the audience listening and having an experience because they are doing it. And now I have to listen to a sermon, and the Steelers are going to kick off here in about 15 minutes. I've done my duty, I've done my worship because I've sung my songs, I've done all my things, I've done all I wanted to do and now I have to listen to a sermon. See, even in our bulletins we have relegated sermons as not active worship, it's not praise, it's not worship but it is an after-thought. We have marginalized the preaching of the Word...just in our experience because we are trying to put it into the Church to give them an experience so that they will come back.

We need to give them an experience that says God was glorified. He was uplifted. His attributes were put on display, and they heard about the personal work of Christ and Him crucified.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *Well, that's almost everywhere now.*

Well, I know some place it is not, but you're right, it is the majority. I would have to say that. Yes, Bill.

BILL: *We are not talking about a reason to debate among Christians [UNCLEAR] over this particular topic [UNCLEAR].*

That has got to be a serious detection in our future. But that is why we are trying to talk about the union **with** Christ. Maybe, just maybe, there are little meager efforts called the Brave Men on Friday. Maybe we can just plant some seeds in our churches—maybe just a little bit. Maybe we just might bear fruit. We might just bear fruit by asking what can we do in our church? Maybe I can be salt and light where I am. That doesn't mean that you are going to be a radical and go change things. That's not what I'm saying. Remember this: the most natural thing about your life is this: you bear fruit. How that fruit is going to transpire in your church, I have no idea and I don't have any presupposition of what that would look like. Only the Lord knows what that is going to look like. All I'm saying is, let's just position ourselves personally, individually, to understand this union so that the consequence will be I'm abiding and the result of that will be where ever I am, fruit appears. Because I am abiding **in** Christ and Christ is abiding **in** me. I cannot get my hands around that thought, but the Lord Jesus Christ is abiding **in** me.

When I look at my life, how could He feel comfortable **in** me? How is that possible? But the righteous, holy, perfect, Lord of the Universe, how does He have the audacity to say, "Bruce I feel comfortable **in** you." When you just had that rotten thought. "I'm comfortable with you because I redeemed that thought before you were ever born." I don't grab that.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *You are righteous.*

I am. That is what He says, "You are my saint. I knew you by name. Get off this kick of saying you're sinful; yes, you are sinful. That's why I died for you." I have one friend who says, "God is mad at me." And I say, "Of course He is." {LAUGHTER} "and you are saying He's mad at you...but that is why He died for you. If He weren't mad at you, He would not have died for you...of course in your condition...but He died for you. He

loves you because He died for you.” Do you understand...I’m going to have a lot of trouble when we get to this topic of Christ abiding **in** us. So, Bishop Rodgers, you are going to need to rescue me.

BISHOP RODGERS: *OK, it’s a deal. {LAUGHTER}.*

OK, I can’t grasp that because some of the things that I think about and the things that I do, and the attitudes that I have...and yet the Scripture says, “I knew you by name, I created you **in** Christ, I formed you **in** Christ, I redeemed you **in** Christ, I feel at home **in** you.”

Yes, Bishop Rodgers.

BISHOP RODGERS: *Maybe this is the first time this is clear in my mind, listening to you, is that worship has different postures. If we are glorifying Christ during the sermon, we are glorifying Him by giving attention to the Word and the preacher is trying to bring forth the Word or serve the Word, so that serious attendance to the Word as we are doing now in this meeting is, in itself, an act of worship.*

Absolutely, Amen to that. Did you hear that? Give attention to the preached Word. When I was at Memorial Park several years ago when they had to identify the new pastor who was coming on board, I spent my last four weeks preparing the congregation to receive the gift of this man who was appointed to the church. Ephesians 5. He is a gift of the [UNCLEAR] teacher. He is a gift. So I said, “I want to teach you your responsibilities of church worship. First, do you realize what it is? The first responsibility is to show up. {LAUGHTER} Be there, that is your responsibility...to show up for worship. Because this is the gift that God has given; Christ has given this man as a gift to you and when you do not show up, you are showing an offense to God because you are saying, “I reject the gift.” Your first responsibility of church membership is to be there and then you give attention to the preached Word. It is not an experience you go to so you get riled up. It is not that at all. It is something...you understand this: Christ abiding **in** me and I abide **in** Him. What can I do to go [UNCLEAR]. So you go and when the sermon comes you realize that now we are coming to the real praise and worship. Now the real praise and worship is what is He going to say to us today. That is your real praise and worship. It is not what the Praise Team does, it is not what the musicians do, it is what God teaches us.

What is more important: that we speak to God or that God speaks to us? See, what we are basically saying is that the first part of our worship experience is that we are speaking to God through our praise and our worship; then we relegate His speaking to us as a secondary thought, because it is not worship any more but it is just a sermon. You need to give yourself attentive worship to the sermon...be there and listen. This is introductory, guys. {LAUGHTER}. We’re just getting started.

May God be pleased to open our eyes that we might see Him more clearly.

Bring these notes back because, Brothers, there is so much that we need to look at and pray for me and the other Brothers who will be teaching because this is something that is so far beyond our human comprehension. Remember those five unions that I gave you...I’ll give them to you again in summary.

- (1) Organic union
- (2) Vital union
- (3) Spiritual union
- (4) Indissolvable union, never to be severed
- (5) Inscrutable union, which transcends the limits of human knowledge, understanding and experience.

Let it be a mystery, don't come here every Friday thinking I'm going to get this nailed down. You'll never get it nailed down and that is by design and that is good for us. It is always going to make us be on our knees saying, Lord, teach me.

Let's pray.

Lord, we're probing the depths of things that many of us have never even considered before. Father, we're just like babes and eager to learn. Thank You, Father, that You have given us a paracet — the Holy Spirit— Whose sole description in His job priorities is to guide us into all truth. Lord, we just plead for that, we beg for that, we desire that...that Your Holy Spirit would be our Teacher, not us. So Father, if I have said anything that is contrary to Your attributes, Your glory, to Your Scripture, to Your revealed Word, would you just remove that and would You protect us from ourselves of developing presuppositions of what we think You should be doing and should be saying, and what we think You should be and replace that with Who you are in actuality as revealed strictly in Your Word. And may it be so, Father, that You would develop humility in us. Our greatest asset in this world is our humility because it realizes that we are members of grace and that we are saints and no longer sinners because You have formed us in eternity **in** Christ, You created us in eternity **with** Christ, You redeemed us personally **in** Christ and, therefore, we do not fear. Father, give us courage, give us strength, be our source of endurance as we take on the system of this world. And lastly Father, I would just say this—I don't know how this is going to all work out—but I would just say, "Lord, come Lord Jesus and come quickly" for His sake. And all God's men said, "Amen."