

Growing in the Grace of God #11 - a Covenant of Relationship Part 1

by Bob Hoekstra

The New Covenant is a covenant of relationship with God, where we're brought near to Him through the blood of Christ, and we develop the Christian life by forgetting what's behind and pressing ahead for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Duration: 1:00:08

Scripture: Psalm 119:18, Jeremiah 33:3, Matthew 6:33, Colossians 1:28

Topics: "Personal Relationship", "Gods Grace"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by expressing their excitement and love for praising God and listening to teaching tapes. They mention a specific teaching on Psalm 1 about a tree planted by the water, but they were too tired to listen to it. The speaker then prays for God to enlighten their understanding of the new covenant and to overwhelm them with the glory of His grace. They emphasize the importance of having a personal relationship with God and being united with Him like a branch is with a vine. The speaker also shares a personal testimony of their past involvement in gambling and selfish living before they encountered God's conviction and turned their life around.

Transcript

Lord, as we enter into this outstanding biblical issue tonight, this covenant of relationship that is the New Covenant, we ask you to enlighten the eyes of our heart. Just open us up, Lord, to see who you are, what you've given us, what you've done, what is our portion in Christ. And Lord, we ask you really to overwhelm us with the glory of your grace.

Render us in awe of the riches that are ours in Christ and give us a heart to seek them out by the Spirit and to abound in them for your glory and for the touching of lives in service and ministry. We commit this time to you, Lord, with hunger and eager expectation for all that you're going to do now. Do again, Lord, would you, exceeding abundantly beyond all we could ask or think.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Study number six.

Hard to believe it, but as we conclude tonight, we're halfway through the course. Seems like we just got started. Week number six.

Study number six. The New Covenant will be viewed as a covenant of relationship. Now remember, the New Covenant is all about the grace of God.

The New Covenant is a covenant of grace. We're not talking grace here, New Covenant there, Spirit-filled life here, abundant life there. It's all the same thing, viewed just from different perspectives, different aspects, different terminology that we might get the full picture.

And the New Covenant, one of the central foundational characteristics of it is it's a covenant of relationship. This is really the heart of the New Covenant. It is the glorious goal and purpose of the New Covenant, and that is that we might develop a relationship with God in intimacy and depth.

In the introductory area, if you want to add to your scriptures, Ephesians 2.13. Ephesians 2.13. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. We were once far off. Can you remember at all how far off you were? Far off from God and far off base, far off line, far off center.

I mean far off, separated, could not communicate with God, know God, relate to God, just far off from Him. But we who were far off have been brought near. Isn't that a beautiful truth? Brought near.

How on earth could a holy God bring such as we were near? He did it by the blood of Christ. The shed blood of Jesus Christ alone was sufficient. And remember Ephesians 1.7. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

Back to 2.13. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. This redemption through His blood is all according, verse 7, chapter 1, to the riches of His grace. It is a matter of the grace of God and the great riches of His grace that could take such as we who were far off.

No relationship with God. No hope of ever securing one on our own. We who were far off have been brought near in Christ.

In Christ Jesus, you who once were far off are brought near. How near are we brought? We're brought right into Christ. That's pretty close, isn't it? How close can you get? Isn't inside close enough? We are in Christ Jesus.

We were once so far away, now we're right dwelling in the very life and person of the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, we're going to look at that phrase first of all in our study, our first heading, in Christ. 1 Corinthians 15.

1 Corinthians 15, verse 22. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. Just as everyone who was born in Adam and related to Adam, every one of them has eternal death, their portion all die.

Even so in Christ, everyone who's born again in Christ, everyone who's related to Christ, all of those shall be made alive. In Adam, death, physical death, spiritual death, alienation, separation from God. In Christ, life, resurrection life, eternal life, abundant life, abounding life.

This is the great dividing line of the ultimate categories of all humanity in Adam or in Christ. If anyone's only been born once, they're among those all who die everlastingly. They're dead now and will be dying everlastingly.

That is, existing without God who is life. But those who are in Christ, born again, related to Jesus Christ, they will live. They will be made alive, not only initially by a resurrection, new birth in Jesus Christ, but made alive daily.

This comes to my mind right now too, Romans 5.10, where it says we're saved by his life. If we were reconciled to God through the death of his son, the verse says, how much more will we be saved by his life? If God would take the death of Christ and turn enemies into friends, which is what reconciliation means, how much more, now that we're his friends, will we day by day be saved by his life? Major Ian Thomas wrote that classic devotional book, *The Saving Life of Christ*. Again, we're talking about the grace of God at work for daily living, sanctification.

Every true Christian knows they're saved by the death of Christ, but how many Christians really know they're to be saved daily, that is rescued, delivered from whatever, unto whatever, and through whatever is necessary, by his life? Sad, too many Christians don't know that. Again, my confession, I didn't know that early on as a Christian. I didn't know that for early years as a pastor.

And praise God, I knew enough about the saving death of Christ, people got saved, you know. And every now and then things got so desperate, I actually depended on the Lord personally, you know. And I was saved by his life, but I didn't know what was going on, you know.

Thought you just handled everything you could, and when you couldn't, you just hoped he somehow would, you know. I didn't know you were to be every day saved by his life. Boy, what a bigger vision than I had.

Well, that's for those who are in Christ, made alive in Christ initially, and continually, and everlastingly, made alive through a relationship with Christ, by being in Christ. Galatians 6.15, Galatians 6.15, For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything but a new creation. In Christ Jesus, which is where we now live, we now dwell in Christ.

He is our Lord, our Savior, our Master, He is our dwelling place. We dwell not only in the presence of God, we abide in the person of God, the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. As I've said on many occasions, as sure as a fish lives in and on the ocean, we live in and on Christ.

Or maybe a more personal one, as sure as an unborn baby lives in and on the life of the mother, we live in and on the person of Jesus Christ. One you can see, the mother, the baby, the ocean, the fish. The other you can't see, us in Christ.

But the one you can see is more real and more significant than the ones you can see. Those who are here today, they'll be gone someday. The one you can't see, that relationship will last forever.

Plus, according to 2 Corinthians 5.7, we walk by faith, not by sight. The flesh, what does it want to walk by? Sight. Show me, let me see it.

I'll believe it when I see it. And God says, no, you believe it, I'll let you see it. I told you the truth, you believe it, and then I'll let you see it.

You know, faith is the substance, the substantiation of things hoped for. It's trusting God that brings the unseen things into the realm of the seen, just by depending on Him, believing Him. In Christ, which is where we live, neither nor.

Notice that language, neither nor. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything. It doesn't matter if we're circumcised or uncircumcised.

No religious activity or human circumstance matters at all. It doesn't matter if you're religious or irreligious, a religious heritage or a worldly heritage. It doesn't matter if you're old or young, male or female, smart or not smart.

Those things don't avail anything in the kingdom of God. They don't let us tap into anything. They don't make any significant mark in our lives for time, certainly not for eternity.

What does avail anything in the kingdom of God? Now that we're in Christ, what does matter if these things don't matter? Circumcision, uncircumcision. What matters? See, in the world of man, these things matter so much. These human delineations.

Are you a Jew or are you a Gentile? Are you an Easterner or a Westerner? Are you from the North or the South? Are you conservative or liberal? I mean, let's get to what really counts. Okay, we haven't yet. What really counts? What avails? What matters? What changes things? What is significant? Now that we're in Christ.

Circumcision, uncircumcision doesn't mean a thing. Then what means something? Where is the significance? Here it is. But a new creation, that's what avails.

That's what accesses, what matters. That's what puts us where we need to be. That's what makes of us what God wants us to be.

A new creation, being a new spiritual being, you know, born again, new life with God, not a rehash or remake or reformation of the old, but a new life, a new spiritual life through a relationship of what you could call united intimacy, united closeness with Christ. So close that we're in him. That's what matters.

New creatures because we're in Christ. When we call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, we go from dead separation in Adam to living intimacy in Christ. And we're a different person ever after with God.

That's what avails. That's what matters. That's what changes.

That's the arena in which we want to learn and grow and develop and function. It's too easy to live by sight, live by history, live by flesh, think the things that matter are the things I've been through or the things I can do or the things I have accomplished or can accomplish. That doesn't avail anything.

Here's what matters being in Christ and therefore being a new creation, therefore having a whole new life, whole new resource. And that's all about the new covenant. Only the new covenant offers that.

The old covenant laws, rules, regulations can only deal with circumcision. Come on, are you circumcised or not? Come on, are you this or that? Did you do that or didn't you? The law cannot make us new creatures, but only new creatures have any hope of their lives measuring up increasingly to the demand of the law. What matters is a new creature.

I ignored the law early on as an unsaved one. I tried a little bit to shape my life up. I'd even went so radically far as to go to church services now and then and things like that.

I didn't change a thing what I did at night, but you know, I thought you could just kind of, you know, make a deal with God or something, you know, or at least fool people. I mean, at least you get something out of it. Doesn't avail anything.

What avails, what matters, what works, what changes, what creates is becoming a new creature by being put in Christ. I have such a passion on that subject that we as Christians spend so much vain, striving time trying to reshape, remold, remake, reform the old life. That's why all this so-called Christian counseling out there is spending most of its time digging in and back.

Why? The angels would want to say to us, why do you seek the living among the dead? You know, Jesus said you have no life in yourself. And yet Christian counselors are taking everybody inside. How do you feel about it? What are you going to do about it? What do you think this means? Who cares? What does God say about it? What does God think about it? What is God going to do about it? And he's told us if we'll just believe him and going back, where? Where? To that old life? To sins by us or sins against us? Where are we going? What are we looking for? We're new creatures and his mercies are new every day.

The Christian life is developed. Behold, today is the day of salvation. Today, now is the time to see God work.

Christian life is developed right where we stand or sit and the next step we take. That's where the life in Christ is found. And our gaze is to be, our direction is to be forward, our gaze is to be upward.

And if you wonder about that, just read and meditate on Philippians chapter three and Colossians chapter three. Could not be more obvious. Forgetting what is behind, I press ahead for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians three, 12, 13, 14. Colossians three, seek things above and then if we don't get the point, not the things that are on this earth. You know, what's inside of me is a very earthly thing.

Where I've been, the trek I've made, a very earthly trail. Why do we seek the things above? It says the next verse, because you have died and your life is hid with Christ in God. People are looking for a life and we have a life, but they're looking in all the wrong places.

Our life is hid with Christ in God. It's not hid back there. Every step I've taken for 56 years, my life, your life is hid with Christ in God.

We find it by pressing forward, looking upward and the Lord reveals himself and his portion, his resources to us for that next step, that next issue, that next day, that next opportunity, that next challenge, that next lesson, that next insight. That's where the Christian life is developed. And again, that's the grace of God.

Praise God, we don't have to go back there yet. And by the grace of God, we can forget what is behind. You can only do that by the grace of God.

That stuff is tenacious, isn't it? It's like it's just grabbing at your mind, you know, pulling you back. You haven't dealt with me yet. Well, if the Spirit convicts us of something today, no matter when it was, God's eternal, it's a matter for today.

But nowhere are we told to go digging back there. If there's someone back there we need to forgive, God will convict us. Or like he did with me, run you into him face to face.

I was heavy into gambling before I saved, you know, winning all kinds of money at poker, thinking I was Mr. Smart, you know. And then the sun would come up and I'd just, you know, go out and do it on the golf course and play golf seven days a week, never working. Oh man, I know how to live.

It's pathetic, really. So selfish, so shallow. And one guy I used to just beat for, I don't know what it was, tons of money.

Oh, it was just awful. Really, I probably should have been arrested. It was like stealing.

I mean, I was never good enough to be a professional golfer, but, you know, too good for my own good. And one day this guy, we were just gambling hundreds of dollars and it's not going well for me. I was playing quite well, actually, but it was like in that world, I would say, the golf gods are for this man, you know.

I mean, he'd hack at it and instead of going up on the it just bounced down halfway, you know. Then he'd go up and hack at it again. It bounced down and go right in the hole.

Oh, and he won big that day. And oh, I was just, you know, I was beside myself. It wasn't just the money.

I mean, it was the pride. I mean, for all, you know, when you're your own god, that stuff can really get to you. And I was so self-centered and selfish, I wouldn't give him his money.

It was like, you can't beat me. I know you did. No, you can't.

In fact, I'm not even going to give it to you. Well, you know, double wrong, twice wrong. Shouldn't have been doing it in the first place.

And soon after I was saved, I went out to play a round of golf. I had a quick run in and clean up afterwards. And I rushed into the men's restroom, almost knocked some man down.

I look up and it's him. Oh, hi, Bob. How are you doing? Still playing golf, huh? I was so smothered in conviction.

God had already told me if I ever see that guy, I need to apologize and give him whatever he, I didn't even remember what it was, give him whatever he says it was. But the moment I saw him face to face and he cut in, you know, I said, man, I have such a major apology to give you. Would you please forgive me? I shouldn't have been gambling with you in the first place.

And what I did was just no excuse. It was totally wrong. And this guy's looking at me like, you look like Bob Hoekstra.

Who are you really? And praise God, I told him, I said, you know, the Lord is my savior now. Jesus has forgiven my sins. He's told me that kind of living is so wrong and I have no excuse.

Please forgive me. That comes from being a new creation. And we've all got so many things like that back there.

We could never dig them all up, let alone find the people, you know, that's the grace of God says, forget what's behind there. You're not going to spend the rest of your life digging back in that grave where you tromped around and called it living, you know. But the Lord knows anything that needs to be dealt with

back there.

He can convict. He can raise it up. He can deal with it.

But then it's today. It's today. Okay, Lord, you showed me.

I was wrong. I'm sorry. Show me where that person is, Lord.

I know you want me to apologize. I know you want me to seek forgiveness, things like that. But what changes life? It isn't digging back there.

It's being a new creature. Why did I want to apologize to that man when before I stole his money and I could have killed him too, you know. I mean, I mean, after all, he did win and he never should have done that, you know.

What makes a difference is a new creation. Changes everything. And that's the life we want to learn to develop.

And that's the life of the grace of God at work. And it comes from being in Christ Jesus. In Christ, it doesn't matter circumcised, uncircumcised, you know, whether you play golf, don't play, whether you shoot 150 or 68, it doesn't matter.

What matters? A new creation. And look at Ephesians one, three, what God has given to new creatures. Ephesians one, verse three.

Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Bless God. In other words, eulogize him.

It's a word from which we get eulogy. Bless him, just speak so highly of him with grateful, thankful praise, because he's the God who blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. It's already happened.

It's already accomplished. Look at the tense, past tense, has blessed us already, already done. Look how comprehensive it is with every spiritual blessing.

See, we, we who were so needy and on our own still are needy. We needed this blessing and that blessing and this blessing and the other blessing. And.

Sometimes we maybe felt like or feel like now we're standing off here, crying out to God there, bless me, please just one more time. When really that's not the picture God gives us of the Christian life. He knows how needy we are, how many blessings we need and how many blessings he has.

But instead of us standing off with a kind God kind of dropping blessing packages from heaven every now and then, you know, with parachutes on him, you know, what he does is we who need every blessing and have none and can be none until he makes us one. We call upon the name of the Lord Jesus. And he takes us from deadness in Adam and puts us in Christ where all the blessings are.

He says. They're yours. See, all the blessings we need are in Christ Jesus.

Here's the staggering truth. We're there, too. And how often do we feel like we're way off somewhere crying out for just please drop one more blessing package? I know I'm over my quota this month.

I know I just hardly deserve it. Yeah, hardly. Yeah.

I mean, that's often the way we think. It's so unlike what God has said and what God has done. We had nothing and we're dead.

We called upon the name of the Lord in desperation as he was revealing himself to us as our hope and our salvation. And we were raised out of deadness in Adam to new life in Christ. We were put right in the person where all the blessings are.

That's where we live now. In Christ, where the blessings are, every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. One man in one of the classes here once raised his hand.

He said, he said, yeah, we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, but I live here in the earthly places. Well, I appreciate what he's getting at, but this verse understands that the heavenly places, heaven isn't way off there somewhere. Jesus said, repent.

The kingdom of heaven is where? A hundred yards off, an ocean away, three layers of stratosphere. I mean, where did he say it was repaired for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. I mean, you can just reach out and touch it.

That's how close it is. That's the, those are the heavenly places. It's not so much a, uh, just a, a, uh, as we'd say in time and space, a geographical location, it's a whole realm.

Plus, uh, in that sense, the kingdom of God is in us because the king is in us. The kingdom is defined by the king. You take Jesus out of the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom is gone.

It's all about the king. He lives in us. We live in him.

The heavenly places is this unseen realm of the resources of Christ, the Christ who lives in us to supply everything we need for us for every step we take in these earthly places. That's for here and now and it's past tense, already accomplished, already given to us. Every spiritual blessing, any spiritual blessing you or I could imagine or come up with God's already given it to us in Christ.

It's already ours. Our great need really is verse 18, a prayer verse 18 of chapter one Ephesians that the eyes of your understanding being enlightened. You may know what, what these things are.

What is the hope of his calling? The riches of his glory, his inheritance in the saints, exceeding greatness of his power toward us. See, it's all ours. We just need to be enlightened.

Many of us have lived the Christian life kind of blindfolded in Christ, totally provided for having received in Christ by being in him every spiritual resource we would ever need for time and eternity, you know, and we're kind of, Lord, I'm destitute. Help me. And it's the Holy Spirit comes and begins to, you know, kind of pry open the blinders and go get in the word and look around you in Christ.

See what I've promised you as already yours. Can you believe me? Can you count on that rest in that? It's in that realm that those who ask, receive and seek, find and knock and it's open to them, asking the Lord to make real in their understanding and their walk this treasury that is already ours in Christ Jesus. I heard a story one day that hit me so heavy.

I thought, oh my gosh, that's just like Ephesians 1.3 and 1.18 and kind of the regular Christian grind in much of the world. The story goes like this. There was a slave back in the days of Abraham Lincoln, a black American who developed a great affection for Abraham Lincoln for obvious reasons.

I mean, most of us, I have a great kind of affinity, affection, respect for him, the things I've read and heard about him. I can imagine if I were a black American, especially one of so many who were say kidnapped from Africa, brought over here, enslaved, I can imagine, just kind of imagine what I would have thought of this man, you know, who would stake his kind of career, even his being, his future, on being my champion, you know, seeing the wrongness of all that. So this slave just loved Abraham Lincoln.

And treasure of treasures, he had on his person a signature, actual, real, personal signature by President Abraham Lincoln. He treasured that. He took it everywhere he went.

He showed it to everybody, you know, you know, the president, you know, President Abe, you know, that godly man, you know what he did for, oh, look. But this man couldn't read. And he was laboring, not knowing what that was.

But he showed it to many, many people. And one day, another slave who could read, who had been a slave, but he showed it to many, many people. And one day, another slave who could read, who had been a slave, saw what he was caring about.

He said, oh, my friend, do you know what you have? Oh, yes, I've got the signature of President Lincoln. Oh, I love him, I respect him. And the former slave said to him, he said, oh, my friend, you've got, oh, you've got far more than that.

You're carrying around with you a document that set you free. And all his life, he still lived as a slave. You know, that is so like so many of us in the family of God.

In this document, we've been given every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. We even carried about with us. It's a word of God.

I love it. Oh, it's from my Lord. You know, it's so great.

It's so good. But do you know what it says? Oh, yes, Jesus loves me. This I know for the Bible tells me so.

Yeah, well, praise the Lord. But do you know how much he loves you? Do you know that he has already blessed you with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus? It's right there in the document you're carrying around. The one you love so much from the person you love so much, too many Christians because of biblical illiteracy really do not know what is theirs in Christ.

Again, I give my own personal testimony. I didn't have a clue what was mine in Christ when I was first saved. I knew forgiveness was mine in Christ.

And praise God, I was real happy about that, you know, and we should be. But we weren't intended to live the Christian life just out of gratitude for forgiveness. I mean, that's real and that's precious in itself.

And again, if God never did anything but forgive us, would anyone want to stop praising him forever? No. But that's just how he brought us in the family. And he wants to tell us, you know, hey, get in here and look, read what I've done, see what I've brought you, see what I've given you.

I've blessed you with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in my son. It's all ours. What we want to do is be getting in the word of God.

Getting in here and saying, Lord, open my eyes. Psalm 119, you know, open my eyes and I might see wondrous things in your law. Or is it Jeremiah 33? Call upon me and I'll show you great and mighty things.

Let's see where that is. It's such a great... Jeremiah 33, 3. Call to me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things which you do not know. See, that's what we want to do is get in the word of God, get in the word of God prayerfully, seeking the Lord, asking him to enlighten the eyes of our heart, asking the Lord to open up our eyes, give us spiritual understanding.

Psalm 119, verse 18 also comes to mind. Psalm 119, verse 18, open my eyes that I may see wondrous things from your law. See, this is what we want to do as we're doing this.

The Lord is hearing and answering our prayer. Those are prayers certainly according to the will of God. If we ask anything according to his will, we have it.

If we'll seek the Lord in his word that way, we'll see what we have in Christ. It'll change our entire lives. Instead of begging God for a periodic parachute drop, we realize it's all right there to be walked in.

You say, well, wait a minute, the fullness of the Spirit, is that blessing included there? No, I guess not because it only says every spiritual blessing. Whatever, you name it, it's already ours. That doesn't mean we see it and are walking in it yet, just like this slave is carrying around that signature.

It said he was free. He didn't know it, so he lived as though he were bound. So often that's the way Christians function.

I did for years, and I tell you, I still feel often like I do. Why? Because I'm in the Word and I have this great new illumination, insight on what God's done and how full and richly it's provided. It's like, what have I been whining and whimpering and mealy-mouthed and griping and groping about? It's all mine.

It's there to walk in. Lord, open our eyes. Show us great and wonderful things that we do not know.

Ephesians 2.10, in Christ. Ephesians 2.10, for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before and that we should walk in them. How does God create us? How does he shape and make us? He puts us in Christ Jesus, and that brings us a whole new life, lets him work on us, shape us, make of us what he wants us to be, that we might walk in the good works that he's already prepared.

This also relates to being in Christ Jesus, created in Christ Jesus. Look at this one, Colossians 1.28. I love this one. I guess I should.

It's been the theme verse of Living in Christ Ministries for like 22 years now, I think. Something like that. Maybe more.

I've lost track. Colossians 1.28. Him we preach. Who is this one we preach? The him obviously refers right back to the previous verse.

You get a pronoun like that, you've got to find its antecedent. Who is this? Who is this him? Christ in you, the hope of glory. That's the one we preach.

Christ in you, the hope of glory. Yes, we pray Jesus of Nazareth, born of a virgin, raised under the law, brought us the grace and glory of the Lord, but we don't want to forget to preach this. Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom. Our message is Jesus Christ. We send it forth with a warning and with a teaching.

Warning about things that are not of Christ, teaching about the things that are of Christ, but doing it in all wisdom. Asking God for the wisdom, when and how and how much and what to touch on and what to wait for later. Why are we doing that? Why are we preaching Christ? That we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

The only message that matures and makes lives whole, that is complete or perfect, is preaching Christ Jesus. Because that is what allows people to be presented unto the Lord, perfect in Christ Jesus. How can we walk practically in the wholeness that is ours in Christ? By learning what is ours in Christ.

Who He is, what He's done, what He offers. We have a study in our ministry, one of our tapes, it's called Proclaiming Christ to Christians. It comes right out of this verse.

This was a letter written to the church and when we're talking about perfect in Christ, maturing in Christ, we're talking about Christians growing up in Christ. Christ in you, the hope of glory, that's the testimony of a Christian. Years ago the Lord hit me heavy one day in my study when I was preparing a message back in Dallas in the 70s.

It wasn't an audible voice, but it was as real and clear and distinct and understanding as though it were. I've never heard the audible voice of God. Maybe some of you have, or maybe you just think you have.

But I'll tell you, this was so clear. The message came through like this, Bob, you need to be preaching Christ to Christians. Why that? I mean, it's like, who said that? I preached Christ to the unsaved and praise God we saw folks saved.

But what did I preach to Christians? Do this, don't do that. Rules, regulations, laws. Man, I could even do the 10 commandments well, you know.

And that's fine if it's used lawfully, but the law is for the rebellious. Not every Christian is in rebellion all the time. For their humility, their need.

What do they need to hear? The grace of God. And the ultimate message of the grace of God is who Jesus is, what he's done for us, what is provided for us in him freely. If we want to see lives presented mature in Christ, we've got to proclaim Christ.

The more we proclaim to the family of God who the Lord Jesus is. Yes, God in the flesh. But yes, our life as well.

Yes, our true vine. Yes, our head. Yes, our all in all.

If we don't proclaim that message of Christ, the Christians we're ministering to will not mature. They will not mature. They will not be presented perfect or that is whole in Christ.

Why? Because they don't know what is in Christ. They don't know what is theirs to believe in, count on, draw on, live by. So how can they mature? How can they grow into fullness of life when they don't know the life that is theirs in Christ? But again, see, this has to do with being in Christ Jesus.

We proclaim him because that's what lets people be presented mature in him. Mature because they're in him and know what is theirs in him. There are so many more.

Well, just one thought here to tie it back to verse 27. This one, we're proclaiming Christ in them the hope of glory. He's their hope of glory someday in a glorious life now and glory for God.

Now he's their hope. If we don't proclaim Christ, Christians cannot put their hope in Christ. That kind of bridges over into our next one.

We've looked so far at being in Christ. Now how about this one? Christ in us. It's kind of like the sponge in the ocean.

The ocean is Christ. We're the sponge and we're in that ocean. But what happens to the sponge when it's in the ocean? The sponge is not only in the ocean, the ocean gets in the sponge, saturates the sponge.

That's the way it's to be with us. We're not only in Christ, but the Lord wants us to know that he's in us. We're not only in the ocean of his person and grace, but he wants to fill us, flood us, just saturate us like a spiritual sponge with his presence in us, not just around us.

Just around us would be great enough, yeah, unless you're God who wants to show the exceeding riches of his grace. You know, just being around isn't enough. It's got to be, well, again, Christ wants to be our all in all.

John 6, 56, he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him. One of those verses that made the early century society accuse the believers, disciples of Christ of being secret cannibals or something, you know, when this teaching got out. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him.

Awesome statement, really worthy of meditation and consideration. Eating and drinking of Christ is simply exercising faith in him. We could know that in general, just from the whole word of God, the just shall live by faith.

Lord says, eat of me, drink of me. We know it's something to do with trusting him, something to do with trusting his flesh, what that was to us, trusting his blood, what that was to us. But right in the very context of this sermon on the bread of life, John 6, 35, and Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life.

He who comes to me shall never hunger. He who believes in me shall never thirst. Coming to Jesus with expectation, believing in him, that's just like eating and drinking of him.

And unless we do that, unless we eat and drink of the Lord, we don't have any life in us. But if we do it, he abides in us and we abide in him. We looked earlier at us abiding in him.

This adds that he abides in us. He lives in us. He dwells in us.

Eating by faith, that is partaking of, depending on the flesh of Jesus, that is the body of Jesus, that he was a sinless, acceptable, perfect sacrifice lamb. Believing that is like feeding on his flesh. Believing that is as

nourishing spiritually as eating a piece of meat is physically.

Same with the blood. He who drinks my blood abides in me and I in him. That is, the one who by faith partakes of, depends on, believes in the blood of Jesus Christ, that he not only went in our place, but he shed his blood all the way to death.

He died for us and his blood covers our sins and purchases for us a new covenant, Luke 22, 20 and elsewhere. Eating and drinking. The kingdom of God, the life in Christ, is to be understood and walked in as simply as eating and drinking.

Isn't this something the Lord left? What did it leave for us? Baptism, that is, identified with him, death, newness of life. And that, you just have to do that once because that's all it takes. Calling his name once, believe you, I died with him on the cross, you're raised with him in the newness of life, you know, baptism, that'll go once for all of us.

That covers that identification with Christ. This other one is as often as we want to do it until he comes back. Then he'll do it with us, reminding us of how it worked.

And what we do is just, we eat and drink. Not to eat, drink and be merry, philosophy of the world, but we eat of his flesh and drink of his blood. We just depend daily on who he is and what he did.

Perfect sacrifice lamb, died in our place, purchased a whole new covenant where everything we need comes not from us, but from him, 2 Corinthians 3, 5 and 6. Eating and drinking. And if we do that, we know this, we normally abide in him, but he's living in us. John 14, 20 speaks of a similar truth.

John 14, 20. How's the temperature in here? Does seem warm. Thanks, brother.

Your arms just about as long as Mark's. Thanks. John 14, 20.

At that day, you will know that I am in my father and you in me and I in you. Time and time again, Jesus taught his disciples that he was going to come to live in them. He had been with them, but he was going to come to live in them.

And certainly everyone gathered on that day of Pentecost experienced that as a spirit came upon them and Christ was seen gloriously in them. John 15, 4 and 5. Abide in me and I in you as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches.

He who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit for without me, you can do nothing. We've looked at this set of verses for other reasons. This is a good place to be reminded.

This speaks of Christ living in us, just like the life of the vine lives in and through the branches. Jesus Christ wants to live in and through us. It's not that we just were far off and came near.

We came all the way into him. God is spirit. Not only that, he came into us.

I mean, it'd be great if he just come alongside and put his arm around us, you know. Yeah, I'll be with you. I'll take care of you.

I'll see you all the way through. I've forgiven you. I'll take you home to glory.

Praise God. That'd have been a fantastic arrangement. It's better than that.

It's more intimate than that. It's not just arm in arm. It's joined in union with him as much as a branch is with a vine.

Now, see again, that's so clear to see. You can look at that vine. Yeah, that's the life.

Look, that's the life source. Look at those branches in that vine and the life of the vine in them. It's so obvious.

That's how you get fruit. That's how a vineyard is supposed to work. That's how it's supposed to work with us, too.

I mean, we are joined to him as sure as that branch is joined to that vine. And we're to live by his life flowing through us just as surely as that great branch is to live by the life of the vine. Thank God he gave us some illustrations to see, you know.

It kind of helps us go from the seen to the unseen, from the world of sight to the world you cannot see, the kingdom of God, life in Christ, Christ living in us. Well, here's another one. This one gets even more pointed and blunt.

Galatians 2.20. It's one of my favorite verses in the Bible to meditate on. Sooner or later, no matter how many times I do it, it finally just kind of short circuits my brain. But I love it.

It seems like each time I grow a little bit in it. Galatians 2.20. I have been crucified with Christ. See, we died on the cross with him.

When he died, that old Adamic life we had was crucified with him. It is no longer I who live. That independent self-life was executed there.

But Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, the ongoing existence I have in this flesh and bones body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. We're to live day by day, trusting in the one who lives in and through us.

So no longer do we have to create a life, find a life, make a life. We just draw on a life day by day. How many of us view the Christian life like this habitually? I don't.

Praise God, I do more than I used to. And praise God, when I don't, I wake up to it quicker than I used to. Oh, man, what am I doing? This is just nothing but this self-striving to the max.

What am I doing? Have I forgotten that I no longer live, but Christ lives in me? Again, it seems like sometimes when I'm the weariest, maybe you're like this, when I'm the weariest, God teaches me some of the biggest lessons. I was awakened this morning about 4:30. And except for a quick 45 minute dinner with my precious wife at home before I came here, it was nonstop all day.

And I was driving over here and just thinking, Lord, I know that we're lived by faith, but Lord, I mean, let's be reasonable. You know, I just, I'm out of it. I'm out of gas, you know? And, oh, and I knew what we're going to study.

And Lord, I've got to be able to get over there. This is too good. I don't want to miss it.

You know, this is too great. But Lord, and I love to, I love to drive with praise music on and, and teaching tapes and, and often just, you know, just wear the tapes out. And I had a great one coming over here about the tree planted by the waters, Psalm 1, but I don't know why I just had to just, I was even too tired to listen.

I just had to turn it off, you know, and just start just crying out bedrock basic help, you know, impossibility. Man, by the time we read the first scripture, I mean, I, I would, I'm excited. We do have meat to eat that the world knows not of, you know? And I'm not suggesting, you know, being foolies, fools and foolish stewards, you know? I'm not saying now here's the, here's the way you can get up at four 30 every day, you know, and sleep, you know, three hours and go for 22.

I'm not saying that at all, because God has told us more than that in his word, that would be presumption. You know, I'd make you a candidate for the word of faith movement or the word of presumption movement. I mean, I want to rename that whole movement, but I tell you when you have no other choice, that's when God does the glorious things.

You know, if you've been a fool, if you've been irresponsible, the Lord might let you collapse a little, you know, he has let me do that before. You know, there are other things to learn too. God's only a God of resurrection.

God is our master teacher. And he's taught us, you know, to be good stewards, to take care of this temple, this body that he lives in. But so many things are beyond your control.

Anyway, you know, I didn't plan on waking up at four 30, didn't plan on staying awake when I did wake up, but he does live in us. You know, it might not mean a lot to many people, but to me, it means a lot just tonight to read this. It's no longer I who live, Christ lives in me.

Lord, surely if you want me to teach tonight and you're alive in me, hey, I think, I think we can do this. If you'll be who you are, I'll just be a vessel. You know, I think we can do this.

What a fantastic verse. I think this is a great place to come in the scriptures because it's too easy to forget things like this. It's too easy to take the more elemental pictures of the Christian life.

See, the Lord does take us from birth to kindergarten and right on through. This is not necessarily a kindergarten verse. You know, it's like maybe more kindergarten is, is, is Jesus is the, is the shepherd and you're a little lamb or, uh, for responsibility and things, you know, the Lord is the master and he's looking to you to obey him.

All those give, give important aspects of the Christian life, but boy, this gets pretty big and deep here. I mean, this just leaps past a whole bunch of those at once. It doesn't annihilate those.

It doesn't eliminate them. It just includes them and gets bigger. You know, this one is our master.

The one who's a path for us to walk. He lives in me. In fact, he's not expecting me to have an independent life to develop before him.

How glorious that is. It's no longer I who live. It's kind of a thrilling, it's kind of freeing.

It's kind of, Ooh, wow. I like that. It's no longer I who live.

Life's kind of tough when you have to live it alone. But this, my word, this is a word of faith. This is a word of hope.

Dear brothers and sisters, Christ, the creator, the Redeemer, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the one who is life and resurrection. He lives in us. He wants us to live by faith in him.

Let's read one more and then take a break. Okay. Galatians 4:19.

My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you. Christ lives in us. And it's the will of the father that his son, the Lord Jesus, be formed in us.

That is, he become more and more our daily provision of life. So that our life more and more is an expression of Christ living in and through us. We begin to think more like the Lord Jesus Christ, talk more like him because he is living in us and working through us.

And see, this is what ministry is all about. We're laboring with people in birth pangs. Why? We're wanting to see Christ as it were, form birth shaped in them.

We're not just trying to get them to do the do's and don't do the don'ts. We want to see those things happen, but it's bigger than that. The more they're shaped and formed from the inside out like Christ, the more they'll be doing the things we were always trying to get them to do.

The less they'll do the things we were trying to get them to stop doing. They'll actually be a life of Christ being shaped in them until Christ is formed in you. The new covenant is all about us getting in Christ and Christ in us.

That's a covenant of relationship, and we'll examine the implications of that more fully after.

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