



## **God Reverses Our Status** **The Doctrine of Justification**

What we're going to talk about from this point on...track with me here, this is important. What we've talked about now is everything that leads up...the cross, the Spirit, realizing our need, having our hearts awakened, born again, trusting in Christ at the point of salvation. All that leading to that point of salvation...born again, where we turn from sin, ourselves, and we trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord, and what we're going to talk about next...justification, adoption, union with Christ...this is what flows from that. We turn from ourselves, trust in Christ, and God declares us justified. That's what we're going to talk about, and this is where on justification, even when we were just talking about a conversion, there was something we do in that.

Obviously, we talk about repentance and faith are gifts, but we repent, we believe. What we're about to look at in justification is not something we do. It is something God does all of. We are entirely passive in justification. We are justified. We do not justify ourselves before God. We are justified before God. God justifies us, and so that's key.

### **Justification Anticipated...**

We're going to dive into justification. Let me set the stage here. Justification is, basically, to be declared right before God, to be accepted before God. Anticipated in the Old Testament, this part we'll fly through. In Abraham, you look at Abraham, and what you'll see is the New Testament explaining justification through the lens of Abraham, Moses, and David in different ways.

Abraham: God's promise shows us the necessity of faith. God's promise shows us the necessity of faith. I've got some places there from Paul talking about justification in Romans 4, but you get down to Genesis 12, and the picture we see in Abraham is that by grace alone, God blesses His people. God calls Abraham to Himself, not because of anything in Abraham, but sheer, unadulterated mercy from God.

He calls Abraham to Himself by grace alone, and through faith alone, God's people receive His blessing. Look at, read Genesis 15:1-6 with me.

*"After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward will be very great.' But Abram said, 'O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.' And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: 'This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.' And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' And he... (this is a key verse) ...believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness."*

Through faith alone, Abraham believes the promise of God, and it is credited to him, counted to him, as righteousness. This is a picture we see in Abraham: by grace alone, God's people receive His blessing. By grace alone, God blessed His people; through faith alone God's people received that blessing. That's Abraham.

Now, Moses: God's law shows us the futility of the flesh. Paul in the New Testament refers to Moses. Talks about God's law, and the way salvation relates to God's law. See a quote there from Galatians 3:10-11. The picture is...God gave His law to His people through Moses on Mount Sinai, and as He did, and we see the history of the people of God after that. What we discover in Moses...the life of Moses and the people of God...is that the law exposes our sin. What God's law does is expose the wickedness of the people. In Exodus 32...I've got it written down there...before Moses even comes down the mountain from receiving the law of God, the people are worshiping a golden calf, rebelling against God.

I put Romans 7 there. *"I would not have known what coveting was if the law had not said do not covet."* I think about my children. There is a natural...everybody is born with it...an inclination to sin, born in our hearts. My children...so, they've done a couple of wrong things; just a couple, and what happens is that comes out when I give them a command. I say, "Do this" and then every once in a while they say, "No, I'm not going to do that."

What happens is that the law exposes the sinful heart that's under the surface there. That's what the law does; God's Word exposes our inability...that's why Joshua said in Joshua 24, *"You are not able to serve the Lord."* The law exposes our sin, and—not just exposes it—the law intensifies our sin. Romans 5 says, *"The law came in to increase the trespass."*

So, the more we see the law of God, the more we see our inability to live it out, and as a result, we all deserve the wrath of God. We've talked about this. We stand cursed beneath the law. *"Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them." All the people shall say 'Amen,'"* Deuteronomy 27:26. By saying "Amen," they're declaring their own condemnation. We stand cursed beneath the law, and we stand condemned before God. God's law says over every single one of us, "Guilty," because none of us is able to fully obey it. That's the picture in Abraham and Moses.

Then, David. In David, God's grace shows us the beauty of forgiveness. You read Psalm 32, and it's a powerful, powerful chapter there that Paul quotes in the New Testament to talk about how we confess our sin, and God carries our sin. Psalm 32, Leviticus 16, Isaiah 53, He bears our griefs, He carries our sorrows, He covers our sins, makes them become like wool, white as snow. He cancels our sin. He doesn't count it against us. Psalm 103:12 says, *"As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us."* So, these are the pictures we saw in the Old Testament: Abraham believing in God; it's credited to him as righteousness. Moses showing us we can't obey the law, and then David showing us that God is gracious.

That leads us to the New Testament where we see justification defined. You might put a star next to these two paragraphs, Romans 3:21-26 and Galatians 2:15-21. Two of the greatest paragraphs in all of Scripture, right there, talking about justification, and this definition of justification we're about to dive into springs from these two paragraphs. Justification is the gracious act of God by which He declares a sinner righteous only through faith in Jesus. So, let's unpack that: justification. Let me pause here. Justification is one of the most important doctrines in all of Christianity. John Calvin says, "It's the hinge upon which everything turns," and if we miss justification, we'll miss the whole gospel.

So, pay close attention here to what justification is: the gracious act of God. *"If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities...who could stand?"* (Psalm 130:3). *"Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my pleas for mercy!...Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you,"* (Psalm 143:1-2). God justifies us not because of anything in us, because of grace in Him. We talked about this. God gives faith...we've talked about that, and as God gives faith, God grants justification.

We're passive in this thing. We are justified by God. So, this is something He does by His grace. A gracious act of God by which He declares. Justification is a declaration. This is important because justification is an act, not a process. It's a once for all declaration. Once you've been justified, you're not more justified the next day and more justified ten years from now. It's justified once for all. A declaration. He declares.

It's a legal declaration, that's the word picture in Scripture of justification. It's a legal declaration. It's a pronouncement that God says, "Not guilty." It's an eternal declaration. It's once for all. It's a completed decision. You have this picture in Luke 23 of the thief on the cross being guaranteed he will enter into heaven. Romans 8, awesome picture that says, *"Those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."* Those who are justified will be glorified, guaranteed. Nothing can separate us from His love. Your justification...once justified, your justification is sure.

It's the gracious act of God by which He declares once for all that a sinner...so this is key. Obviously, we've covered this but it's important to remember. Martin Luther said, "Here is a problem which needs God to solve it." Sinfulness of man, righteousness of God, the demands of the law. You put those three things together in a courtroom of law, someone who has broken the law with a just judge, then things don't look good for us. The result of that setup: we're condemned by our immorality, our actions that break God's law. We've all broken God's law, and we're condemned by that.

However, not just by our immorality...the Bible teaches that we're condemned by our morality, our attempts to keep God's law. The Bible talks about all our efforts to obey God's law to do good, our righteous deeds, they all fall short. They're *"like a polluted garment,"* Isaiah 64 says. *"By works...no human being will be justified in his sight,"* (Romans 3:20). One Puritan Pastor said, "Even our tears of repentance need to be washed in the blood of the Lamb."

We have no case before a Holy God. Guilty, can't earn His favor. So, God declares a sinner righteous. That is amazing. The holy judge of the universe looks upon a guilty sinner, and by all that we've talked about, by the grace of God in salvation, says, "Not guilty anymore." Righteous: God declares that we are forgiven of sin. He has *"forgiven us all our trespasses, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross,"* Colossians 2.

It's a great word here: propitiation. We are free from all guilt. Propitiation means that Christ has taken our guilt upon Himself, so that that guilt is turned away from us. It's what Romans 3 and 1 John 2 is talking about. Romans 8 says, *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* Not guilty, but that's not all. As if that's not enough, but to be declared righteous is not just to be declared not guilty.

If we're declared before a judge that we are not guilty, haven't done anything wrong, then that would make us morally neutral before that judge, but it would not make us righteous before that judge. We haven't done anything right. Now, this is where it gets even deeper.

Righteous means, not just declared forgiven of our sin; righteous means that God declares we are clothed in holiness. The whole picture is, and you see 1 Corinthians 1:30, "*you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption...*" This is what it means to be justified.

We have propitiation and imputation. That word means we are credited with His righteousness. God imputes to us; He credits to us His righteousness, the righteousness of Christ. "*He made him who had no sin to be sin for us in order that we might become the righteousness of God,*" (2 Corinthians 5:21). So that...now catch this...now, you turn from your sin and yourself, and you trust in Christ for what He's done on the cross, God not only looks at your life and says, "Not guilty," He looks at your life, and He says, "I see the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and it clothes you." He sees you as right before Him. Not morally neutral, right before Him. How is that possible? Only through faith in Jesus.

What can you do? How can you earn that kind of status before God? You cannot. Christ is the basis of our justification. In order for you and I to be righteous before God, we need someone else's righteousness. If I were to ask you the question, "How do you know you're right before God?" If the first words out of your mouth are, "Because I..." "How do you know you're right before God?" "Well, because I did this or because I did this." If the first words out of your mouth are "Because I," you may be in danger of missing the whole point of your salvation. How are you right before God? "Because Christ...because Christ lived a righteous life and died in my place, and the only way I could be right before God is through Him." "Because Christ..." He's the basis of justification.

He's everything, and you look at the tie from what we saw in the Old Testament, Christ is the one who fulfills the promise to Abraham. Romans 4...Christ is the only one who obeys the law of Moses. No other religious teacher in the world has a record of perfect obedience to God; Christ does. He fulfilled the law, obeys the law of Moses, and Christ makes possible the grace given to David. It's why Paul quotes from Psalm 32 when he gets to Romans 4. Christ is the basis of our justification.

Christ the basis, then our faith is the means of our justification. We have been justified by faith, and we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Why faith? Why is faith God's chosen means for justifying us? Why not love? Why not humility or joy or wisdom? Here's why: because faith is the anti-work. Faith is the desperate acknowledgment that there's nothing you can do, and you have to trust in what somebody else has done. Faith is coming to the end of yourself and saying, "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling." It's faith...the means of justification. When you come to God in faith, what you're basically saying is, "I give up. I can't do it. I'm not going to try to do it anymore. I need Christ to do it for me."

We've got to avoid here...beware of dangerous legalism. Thinking that our work before God can make us right before Him. This is what Paul's addressing in the whole book of Galatians. Legalism is working in our own power. This is a word that's thrown around a lot in our day: legalism. What does it mean? Working in our own power to try and to obey God's commands in our own power. Legalism is working according to our own laws, basically, adding rules to God's commands. It would be legalistic, for example, to say that, as a Christian, you should not eat McDonald's hamburgers. That would be, maybe wise, but not biblical. Okay? I think about India when I was there a few weeks ago, and we were, obviously, praying for India tonight. No hamburgers in India because the cow is sacred in Hinduism, and so, instead of hamburgers, they have lamb burgers. Creative huh? Lamb burgers, so anyway, to say, "Don't eat lamb burgers" in India would be legalistic.

So, there are all kinds of things that we do in our traditions that we exalt to the Word of God. We say, "Well, don't do this, don't do this, we should do this." Got to be careful. That's legalism. Working according to our own laws. Third, it's working to earn God's favor. Thinking that, in our actions, we are meriting favor before God. Thinking, "I need to read the Bible; I need to pray; I need to go to church. I need to do these things in order to be accepted before God." That kind of thinking. This is the whole point of salvation...thinking that in reading the Bible and praying, you're earning credits before God. You've already been credited with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. What will you add to that? What can you add to that tomorrow when you wake up? Nothing. You have righteousness credited to you. So, you don't work to earn His favor, and it ends up working to steal God's glory because you're undercutting the beauty of what He's done for you.

So, you move from dangerous legalism to divine love. Galatians 2:20, "*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*" Oh, feel that verse. Jesus is passionate about you. He loves you. He gave Himself for you, for you, for you. Just let that soak in right where you're sitting, for you. He's paid a price for you...His life, His death...for you. Take heart, God's pleasure in you is not based on your performance for Him. Oh, but we think it is. It's how all religions of the world operate, and it's smuggled into Christianity. "Do this, do this, do this, and you'll be right before God."

Let me give you two scenarios. Imagine you wake up in the morning, and your alarm clock goes off. You pop out of bed, you grab your Bible, you get on your knees, and you just spend an hour in prayer and in the Word, just a wonderful time with the Lord. You get up, you tell your family goodbye, and you're off for the day. You've got a skip in your step, you're kind, you're smiling to everybody around you, speaking blessings on everyone you see. You have an opportunity to share the gospel with someone. You come home, you have a good time with your family, you read the Bible some more, and you pray, and you go lay down to go to sleep.

That's day one. Okay? Another scenario: alarm clock goes off, you hit it, hit it, hit it, hit it, you're having quiet time, but not the kind of quiet time that you probably were planning on having. So, no time, you run past the Word, don't even pay attention to it in the morning. You're off, you're out the door, there's anything but a skip in your step, anything but kindness on your face. You're short with everybody you see. There's cursing, not blessing in your demeanor. You come home, you're short with your family at night, and you just fall into bed, and you're lying there.

Okay, in both situations, lying there at the end of the day...in which situation is God more pleased with you? Our inclination is, "Well, of course the first one," but this is where we begin to realize that we think God's pleasure in us is based on our performance for Him, when the reality is in both situations, when you're lying in bed at the end of the night, you are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. You're saying, "Well, does that mean that I have all these kind of days all the time?" We're going to get to that. We're going to get to sanctification. We're going to get to that. No, it's not what that means, but justification reminds us that, at any moment, the only reason that you're right before God is the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross, and His righteousness that has clothed you. So, don't forget it. God's pleasure in you is not based on your performance for Him. God's pleasure in you is based on Christ's performance for you.

It's why...this is why Luther said of the article of justification, another word for doctrine. He said,

"The law is divine and holy. Let the law have its glory, but yet no law, be it never so divine and holy, ought to teach me that I am justified, and shall live through it. I grant it may teach me that I ought to love God and my neighbor; also to live and love, soberness, patience, etc., but it will not show me how I should be delivered from sin, the devil, death, and hell. Here I must take counsel of the gospel. I must hearken to the gospel, which teaches me, not what I ought to do but what Jesus Christ the Son of God hath done for me: that He suffered and died to deliver me from sin and death. The gospel wills me to receive this, and to believe it. And this is the truth of the gospel. Most necessary it is, therefore, that we should know this article well, teach it unto others, and beat it into their heads continually."

So, beat it into your head. You're righteous before God in Christ alone.

Now, how does that affect works? Well, I'll give you a taste here. We're going to talk about it more later. Works are the evidence of our justification, so, we'll skip past those quotes there. Justification defined, recap: the gracious act of God by which He declares a sinner righteous only through faith in Jesus.

### **Justification Debated...**

Now, here's the deal. I've got justification debated here because this doctrine has led to one of the greatest theological divides in Christian history. The whole Protestant Reformation revolved around this article, this doctrine. It divides Catholics and Evangelicals on doctrinal lines, and some say, "Oh, it's not that big of a debate. It's just semantics." I've heard someone say this even recently. Ladies and gentlemen, this is what people were persecuted for in the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. People were burned at the stake for believing in this doctrine. People had their heads chopped off for clinging to the doctrine of justification. They didn't have their heads chopped off because of semantics. They had their heads chopped off because the gospel was at stake and for holding fast to this doctrine.

Now, I want to be careful, because what I've got here is...I want to show the differences between official Catholic teaching...and I mention that, and I want to emphasize that because, obviously, there are different strands, streams of Catholicism, and so I don't want to presume that everything is just monolithic. At the same time, in Catholic doctrine tradition, what the church says is elevated to the level of Scripture. So, there is a level of official teaching in Scripture, in Catholicism, that would look to it and say this is officially what the Catholic church has taught and elevate it to the level of Scripture, where we would say, I would say, "No, Scripture alone is authoritative."

Tradition and the Pope speak "*ex cathedra*" on those things. This is...I spent five years of my life in New Orleans, which is a heavily Catholic city. I know we've got a variety of folks from New Orleans with us tonight, and I dove into Catholicism and the gospel and wanting to share the gospel with other people in learning Catholicism. I spent time with priests and talking to different people, the Catholic church right down the street from where I was serving on staff at a church. So, this is kind of something that's been close to my heart. So, I want to walk through this using some of the official teaching from councils and catechisms in the Catholic Church. I want to be careful. I don't want to imply that all Catholics are non-Christians. That's not what I want to imply at all. In fact, the reality is there are a variety of Baptists and Presbyterians that I don't want to be handcuffed to when Jesus comes back, if you know what I mean. So, I'm just saying...just saying.

All right, enough said. I want to show significant differences on a few different levels. Okay. Agreement between Catholics and Evangelicals. Both Catholics and Evangelicals...talking on

an official basis...and "Evangelicals" is even hard to define. So, all right, just dive in. "We are justified by grace through faith because of Christ." Here's where the disagreement will come in. "We are justified by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone." That word "alone" changes everything. Here's the Council of Trent. This was a response to what the Reformers were teaching. Council of Trent, Catholic Church: "If anyone says that by faith alone the sinner is justified, so as to mean that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification...let him be anathema (let him be condemned)." That's, basically, saying that what we just said is wrong. That's why Luther said justification by faith alone is "the doctrine upon which the church stands or falls." Calvin says "the hinge upon which everything turns."

### ***Works or Faith?***

So, three main areas of disagreement here: Works or faith? Inherent or credited? Possibility or guaranteed? Follow with me...works or faith...in Catholicism, faith and works both lead to justification. This is the Council of Trent: "If anyone says that the faith which justifies is nothing else but trust in the Divine mercy, which pardons sins because of Christ, or that is trust alone by which we are justified, let him be anathema." Catechism of the Catholic Church. "The grace of the Holy Spirit has the power to justify us, that is, to cleanse us from our sins and to communicate to us the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ," key word, "and through baptism." "If anyone says that the righteousness received is not preserved and also not increased before God by good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not a cause of its increase, let him be anathema," (Council of Trent).

So, Catholicism: faith and works both lead to salvation. Evangelicalism: faith alone leads to justification and works. Scripture is clear that we are justified apart from works. That is foundational. As soon as we add anything to the work of Christ on the cross, we are undercutting the whole gospel.

### ***Inherent or Credited?***

So, works or faith. Inherent or credited? Catholicism, a word here: infusion, infusion. Grace is "infused" into you supernaturally. Begins at baptism, carries on with other sacraments in the church...attending mass, participate in Eucharist. Justification progresses based upon what you do with "infused" grace, i.e. the righteousness that's inherent in you. So, there are degrees of justification. You can be more justified or less justified "through the observance of the commandments of God in the church, faith cooperating with good works," believers "increase in that justice received through the grace of Christ and are further justified," (Council of Trent).

You see language there. Evangelicalism, we talked about this word: imputation. Imputation, an instantaneous declaration. No penalty to pay for your sin. The righteousness of Christ credited to you. Turn from your sin, trust in Christ, then boom, declared right before God. "If anyone says..." Council of Trent Session 6, Canon 11. "If anyone says that men are justified either by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ alone, or by the remission of sins alone, to the exclusion of the grace and love that is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Spirit and is inherent in them...let him be anathema."

Justification is not an inherent process of earned righteousness but a legal declaration of credited righteousness. Is this legal fiction? That's what some have said. Some said in the Reformation, "This is just fiction that you would treat sinners as if they had not sinned, basically, pretending that they're something when they're not. It's legal fiction." No, this is gracious truth. It's truth because the penalty for our sin has been paid and the righteousness of Christ is real, credited to us.

This is an illustration I've used numerous times before, so forgive me if you've heard it, but it's so key here. It talks about how when Heather and I were about to get married, and she had finished up school...I married an older woman. She had graduated a year ahead of me, and so, she had a job, and I was still doing school. So, for the year before we got married, she had a job, working, paycheck, cash flow. I was not working, just going to school, no paycheck, no cash flow. Ramen noodles were my life for a year. So, after that year, we stand together at our wedding, and we unite our lives together, and on that day, I received the most wonderful things. Most importantly being a beautiful, godly wife, but what else I received on that day? As soon as I said, "I do," and she said, "I do," I received cash flow. At the moment we said, "I do," I didn't have to do anything, but everything that was hers, praise God, became mine! I didn't have to go teach her kids. I didn't have to go teach her kids, do this or that. Simply by the fact that my life was united with hers, everything that belonged to her belonged to me, and it was real. This isn't fiction because we were united together, and that's the beauty. You unite your life with Christ, everything He has...His righteousness, His holiness, His redemption...it's yours, belongs to you, really belongs to you. Imputation is a great word.

### ***Possibility or Guarantee?***

Possibility or guarantee? Catholicism: in Catholicism, you're anxious about future justification. The reality is, as long as works play into your justification, then that leads to anxiousness. Most everybody I would ask in New Orleans who is entrenched in Catholicism, when I asked about heaven, I'd say, "Do you know for sure you're going to heaven?" They would say, "I hope so, maybe." One priest described Catholic theology to me as a theology of covering bases, and the more bases you cover the better your chances are. "If one considers his own weakness and his defective disposition, he may well be fearful and anxious as to the state of grace, as nobody knows with the certainty of faith, which permits of no error, that he has achieved..." oh, what a statement, "...he has achieved the grace of God," (Council of Trent). "If anyone says that the guilt is remitted to every penitent sinner after the grace of justification has been received, and that the debt of eternal punishment is so blotted out that there remains no debt of temporal punishment to be discharged either in this world or in the next or in Purgatory, before the entrance of the kingdom of heaven can be opened – let him be anathema," (Council of Trent).

Evangelicalism: assured of future justification. If justification is based on me, no assurance. If justification is based completely on Christ, total assurance. It's why John could write, "*I write these things to you who believe the name of Son of God that you may know you have eternal life,*" (1 John 5:13). You've been "*Sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory,*" (Ephesians 1:13-14). We'll dive into that one more later.

### ***How can I be justified?***

So, how can I be justified? Insufficient answer to say, "We are justified by grace through faith because of Christ." All-satisfying answer: "We are justified by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone." Heidelberg Catechism, listen to this, oh I love this.

"How are you righteous before God? Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. In spite of the fact that my conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God, and have not kept any one of them, and that I am still ever prone to all that is evil, nevertheless, God, without any merit of my own, out of pure grace, grants me the benefits of the perfect (sacrifice) of Christ, imputing to me his righteousness and holiness as if I had never committed a single sin or had ever been sinful, having fulfilled myself



all the obedience which Christ has carried out for me, if only I accept such favor with a trusting heart.”

You cling to that. You live in that. You just...for everyone working to try to earn the favor of God, rest in the blood-bought righteousness of Jesus Christ. Rest there and live there. You are right before God, not based on anything you've done, but everything He has done. Forgiven of sin, clothed in righteousness. Is that not good? The great thing is it gets better.

## **God Reverses Our Status The Doctrine of Adoption**

### **Justification and Adoption...**

Check this out, God reverses our status. Now, the doctrine of adoption can...all this is happening at the same time, okay? Justified, adopted as children of God. So, when you see your need, God awakens your heart, you repent and believe, and you're justified before God, and you're made a child of God. Oh, this gets good. All right, a whole other level. We're not just right before God the judge, justification. Doctrine of adoption...we're loved by God the Father.

In justification, we stand condemned in our sin before a holy judge, and He says, "By the blood of Christ, not guilty," and that's great. That is indescribably great, but it's not all of the gospel because the language there is legal...standing before a judge who makes a pronouncement. In adoption, the judge just doesn't look at you and say "Not guilty," but He gets up off the bench, He comes down to you, takes your chains off, and He says, "Come to my home and be my son, daughter." Oh, and you'll see "son" mentioned here more than "daughter," and the reason is not chauvinistic. The reason is, when you look in Scripture, you'll see places where "son" is emphasized because, in first century culture, the inheritance from the family would go to the sons. So, ladies, you want to be referenced as a son in these texts because you want the full inheritance. So, just kind of keep that in mind.

I love this quote from J.I. Packer. No forget it; we don't have time to read it. It's a great quote. J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, one of the best books in the world. So, anyway, God could have justified us and just left it at that without giving us the privileges of being in His family, but He brings us into His family, He adopts us, and oh, this is a tender issue for me. Our first son we adopted from Kazakhstan. We're in the process of adoption right now of a special needs child from China, hopefully, later this year. Been a huge issue in our church here, and adoption is not always easy for people to understand.

This is certainly something I've learned along the way. I remember when Caleb first came home to be with us and many people knew our story, or they'd see Caleb, and they would notice that he looks a little different than Heather and me. They'd say, "Oh, that's nice that you adopted. Now, do you also have children of your own?" I'll tell you phrase number one not to say to an adoptive parent, "Do you have children of your own?" So, I lean in and say, "Can I tell you a secret? He's ours." They say, "Well you know what I mean." Well, yeah, yeah I know what you mean. That he doesn't count as ours; like no, he's ours, and I remember when we were about to go to Kazakhstan, and we were telling somebody we knew that we were going to go adopt a child from Kazakhstan, and they said, "A real one?" A real one? No, we're going to get a plastic one and put it on the mantle just to look at. Then, they'll ask, people will ask, "Well, have you ever met his real mother?" "Well, yes, in fact I have. Her name is Heather." They say, "You know what I mean." "Well no, what do

you mean? Like, is she a fake mother? No, she's real. She's a real mother." I'm getting riled up. I need to stop.

All right one more. I'm doing this to serve you, and yeah. People will ask, "Well are you going to tell him about his family or his cultural heritage?" "Oh yes, in fact we are. In fact he knows a lot about his family heritage. Knows about his granddad, that he unfortunately is not able to meet in this life because my dad passed away a few years ago, but he knows all about his other granddad and two grandmoms and aunts and uncles and brothers and sisters. He knows about all of everybody in the family." "And so what about his cultural heritage?" "Well yeah, he's got good culture heritage, he knows all about food in his culture like fried chicken, mac and cheese. He reads books in his culture. You know, runs around the house saying 'Run, run fast as you can, you can't catch me I'm the...' Oh, you have a similar culture here, yes, very interesting. I don't know if he knows any Kazak songs, but he can sing LaCrae. He doesn't know the Kazak national anthem, but by golly he knows 'Sweet Home Alabama.' So, he is a part of our family. All Platt, not part Platt, but all Platt."

So, here's the deal. I share that with you not just to go off, but I share that with you just to say that I think we have a hard time understanding adoption in some ways because we've not thought deeply about what it means that all of us, as followers of Christ, have been adopted into a real family that is...we're all in. Just because it's not biological, this is...anyway...

### **Adoption Defined...**

So let's define this. Doctrine of adoption: adoption is the gracious act of God in which He confers upon sinners the position of sons and the privileges of sonship.

Two facets here: position of sons, privileges of sonship. God sent His Son that we might receive the position of sons. "*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so we might receive adoption as sons,*" (Galatians 4:4-5). Here's the deal: adoption requires someone who comes at the right time, when the time had fully come. This is same picture in adoption on earth but in a greater way. Jesus came at the right time, theologically. We saw how everything in the Old Testament pointed to this. Right time religiously, right time culturally, right time politically...we could dive into each of those, just don't have time to, but He came at the right time.

Adoption requires someone who comes with the right qualifications, right qualifications. In order to adopt someone domestically or internationally in our day, you have to go through all kinds of red tape, this or that. You have to get fingerprinted by every civic organization there is. The Rotary Club has to sign off that you are okay, too. You have to go through an intensive home study, into all the good and not so good in marriage and family, this and that, everything. Everything. You've got to have a perfect physical. I remember, we were going to get our physical, and it was just like pressure, added pressure because we wanted to adopt, and we were standing in this hall. It came time for the eye test, and I maintain it was a dark hall, but I'm standing there, and I see the eye chart at the end, and she says, "All right, cover one eye and start to read it," and I mean, I got like the top letter and then a couple, and then I started struggling. I started sweating like, "Oh, I can't pass. I've got to pass the test!"

So, she could tell I was getting kind of frazzled, and she said, "Why don't you try again, instead why don't you try the other eye." Well, the problem was I'd been so nervous I was mashing this eye in, and so I take my hand off and everything is blurry. I can't even see my hand. I can't see. She's like, "Sir, why don't you just step aside. Let your wife go, and then

we'll try you again." So, I'm over here, like doing this, trying to get my eyes back, and then, I get my eyes back while Heather is still taking the test, and so, I look down with both eyes, and I memorized the chart. So, I step back up, and I was like, "E-F-P-L, look, I can do it with both eyes closed, E-F-P-L." Okay, so here's the deal. I've got to have the right qualifications.

Same picture spiritually. We've talked about this. Jesus is fully divine, fully human, fully righteous from God, born of woman, born under the law. That's what Galatians 4 is talking about. Adoption requires someone comes at the right time, right qualifications, who has the right resolve. You don't adopt accidentally, you adopt purposely. One of the most poignant moments for us in that adoption process is when we're standing in the courtroom with this judge before us and what happens is, different people from the orphanages and other places are testifying. They have to establish that no one in Kazakhstan wants to adopt him. So, testimony after testimony is saying, "Yes, no one wants, no one wants, no one wants to adopt him." The whole time Heather and I just want to stand up and scream, "That's why we're here! We want him!" This is the beauty in a much greater way; the Son of God has stood up and said, "I desire you." The Father has said, "I want you to be my child." *"In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ...according to praise of his glorious grace,"* (Ephesians 1:3-10).

He determined to redeem us. He died to rescue us. God sent His Son so that we might receive the position of sons, and God sent His Spirit so we might experience the privileges of sonship. Galatians 4:6-7 then said, *"Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, than an heir through God."* You can receive the Spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" Here's the beauty.

So, we're there in Kazakhstan, the judge finally says, "Okay, he's yours." So, the pronouncement is made, and Heather and I look at each other, parents of this precious little boy, but the story, obviously, doesn't end there. The story of adoption begins there. Not just when Caleb received the position as a son with a mom and a dad, this is the beginning of a relationship that thrives this morning in our home when we're wrestling around with each other.

That day when he is declared our son, that's when the flood gates opened and love now poured out on him in a way never experienced before, we'd never shown before. Like, this is the beauty of adoption, not just when we're declared to be a son, daughter of God, but when we live as sons and daughters of God, in relationship, privileges of sonship, where it's really good that we have God as our Father.

He's our Father. We pray, "Father in heaven." You know what's interesting? That title for God, "Father," is only used 15 times in the entire Old Testament, and none of those references are praying to God as Father. You get to the New Testament and 165 times alone in the Gospels, Jesus refers to God as Father, and it's when He's talking to His disciples. He's showing there's a relationship between those who follow Christ and God as Father. So, when we pray, we don't pray, "Dreadful Creator and ground of all being." We come to God, and we say, "Father, dad."

Think about the contrast with earthly fathers. Luke 11 says, *"What father among you, if his son ask for fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he ask for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"* You ever prayed for something and things didn't work out quite like you had hoped? You ask God for

something and didn't receive what you had asked for? I think Jesus understands we might struggle with this, and so He says, "You can trust the Father." When you ask for a fish, He's not going to give you a snake. You know this from your own fathers who care for their children. You've seen that. Well, they're evil. We're evil; He is good. Even the best father on this earth still has a sinful nature, and they're not right 100 percent of the time, but your heavenly Father is always right. We have limited wisdom; He has infinite wisdom. He's wise. Our Father knows what is best. We have imperfect love; He has perfect love.

I think about my dad. I mentioned that he had passed away a few years ago unexpectedly from a heart attack. I remember receiving a call from my younger brother telling me that Dad had been rushed to the hospital, and I just fell on my knees and face. We got off the phone; I fell on my knees and just started crying out to God, "Save him, save him, save him." I get the call 45 minutes later that dad had passed away. Those moments are a good reminder: my Father in heaven doesn't give snakes. He's giving what is good. He always gives what is good, and it doesn't make sense to us all the time. I've got a quote here from George Mueller, praying machine. He wrote down and recorded 50,000 specific answers to prayers as he cared for children in an orphanage, and yet he experienced some real pain in his own life. Buried two stillborn children, saw his one year old son die, his adult daughter die, and this is what he said when he preached his wife's funeral. He said,

"Were we happy? Verily we were. With every year our happiness increased more and more. I never saw my beloved wife at any time, when I met her unexpectedly anywhere in Bristol, without being delighted so to do. I never met her even in the Orphan Houses, without my heart being delighted so to do. Day by day, as we met in our dressing room, at the Orphan Houses, to wash our hands before dinner and tea, I was delighted to meet her, and she was equally pleased to see me. Thousands of times I told her - 'My darling, I never saw you at any time, since you became my wife, without my being delighted to see you.'

"When I heard what Mr. Prichard's judgment was, viz., that the malady was rheumatic fever, I naturally expected the worst...My heart was nigh to be broken on account of the depth of my affection.

"The last portion of Scripture which I read to my precious wife was this: 'The Lord God is a sun and shield, the Lord will give grace and glory, no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.' Now, if we have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have received grace, we are partakers of grace, and to all such he will give glory also. I said to myself, with regard to the latter part, 'no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly' - I am in myself a poor worthless sinner, but I have been saved by the blood of Christ; and I do not live in sin, I walk uprightly before God. Therefore, if it is really good for me, my darling wife will be raised up again; sick as she is. God will restore her again. But if she is not restored again, then it would not be a good thing for me. And so my heart was at rest. I was satisfied with God. And all this springs, as I have often said before, from taking God at his word, believing what he says."

Brothers and sisters, we have a good Father. See His care. "*See what kind of love the Father has given us,*" (1 John 3:1). He loves us. We were once held captive by His law, now we are captivated by His love. He loves us. He understands us. Your Father understands you. Your Father understands what you're going through. He provides for us. We have no reason to worry, Mathew 6, no reason to worry. He forgives us. Do we still sin against Him?

Oh, dreadfully, the answer is yes, but He forgives. We have a Father who forgives, and He disciplines us and this is good, right? It's good for me to tell my children not to run out in the road, and when they do run out in the road to discipline them, so they learn what is good for them. It's good for the Father to discipline us, our heavenly Father. Hebrews 12:5-11, great text. He leads us.

He is our Father, and we are His children. We have a new name. We're His children. We have a new spirit. We have access to the Father's presence. We are no longer afraid of God, the way Exodus 19...they had to run from the mountain and stay away from the mountain. Now, we come to God. We cry out, "Abba! Father!" No longer afraid of God, and we are now friends of God. We obey, not out of fear, but we obey out of friendship. Oh, feel this. Listen to John Wesley. Follow this. Before you read this quote, Wesley...honor graduate at Oxford, ordained clergyman, good theology, active in good works, regularly visiting inmates in prisons, workhouses in London, distributing food and clothing to slum children, orphans, studied the Bible diligently, attended numerous Sunday services. He generously gave offerings to the church and alms to the poor, prayed and fasted, lived an exemplary moral life, and he even spent several years as a missionary. Yet, upon returning to England after all that, he confessed in his journal, "I who went to America to convert others was never myself converted to God." He was unsaved. After all that, and later, reflecting on his pre-conversion condition, he said, "I who went to America to convert others was never myself converted to God...I had even then the faith of a servant, though not that of a son."

You're a son. You're a daughter. You're a child of God. So, this changes the way we obey, not out of obligation but out of love, relationship. To know intimacy with your Father, to have access to the Father's presence. We have an inheritance in the Father's kingdom. Romans 8, "*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we also be glorified with him.*"

Why do you need to run after the pleasures and pursuits and possessions of this world when you have a kingdom waiting for you from a Father in heaven? So, what do we do? We worship Him. "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name,*" (Matthew 6:9). We glorify Him. We want glory for our Father in heaven, we imitate Him. "*Be imitators of God, as beloved children,*" (Ephesians 5:1). We obey Him as children of God.

We reflect Him. We reflect Him. We reflect the Father to the fatherless. That's why we care for the orphan and the widow, right? Because of how we have been cared for as children. You know adoption, this whole picture; it's, in a sense, a bit trendy in our day, not just in church but outside, in Hollywood, different things, different trends for adoption. It's almost seen as an altruistic, nice thing to do. The reason we adopt...care for foster care children...the reason we adopt children is not out of mere altruism. It's not because we have a desire for a nice, cute Christmas card to send out to our families.

The reality is, you dive into adoption...we've seen this in our church...you dive into adoption and foster care, and there are going to be some rocky roads along the way, and there are a lot of children...I don't want to paint a bleak picture here, but I do want to paint a realistic picture. There are a variety of children who need to be adopted, a variety of children who are in foster care because they have been through very, very difficult conditions, and because they have parents who have done drugs when they were conceived or as the mom was pregnant. As a result, there are deficiencies and struggles, and as a result, there are many families within our church who have wrestled with adoption, having children who are even sometimes a physical threat to other children in their home, who resist love at every turn.

What do you do when you're having to call the police, or this, or that, to deal with struggles in your own home you hadn't envisioned? Mere altruism is not going to help you then. The desire for a cute Christmas card picture is out the window. What drives you, then, is the reality that you were once a child of wrath rebelling against a Father, and everything in you is running from Him, and He reached down His hand of grace into your heart and your life, and He drew you to Himself, and He didn't give up on you.

He loved you; He adopted you as a son. That's the gospel empowering care for children. We reflect Him. We care for orphans not because we are rescuers. We are not a group of good, altruistic people out to be saviors for orphans of the world. It's not what drives orphan ministry. We are not rescuers, brothers and sisters; we care for orphans because we are the rescued; because we're the rescued; because we've been adopted, we reflect the Father in heaven to the fatherless on earth. This is a picture of the gospel.

### **Adoption Celebrated...**

We have an eternal Father. We have an eternal Father. Some of you have never had a father. Some of you have had good fathers, but see this: you have an eternal Father who is good. You have an eternal family. Jesus is our brother, not in a sense that He became like us, not in the sense that we're divine by any means. We are brothers and sisters, which obviously changes the way we relate to one another.

We have an eternal Father, we have an eternal family, and we have an eternal home. We have an eternal home. I'll tell you this one last story from Kazakhstan really, really quick. When we were leaving...well, when we got to the city where Caleb lived, we were picked up by our translator, and as soon as we were picked up, we get in the car with our translator. The translator, she asks, now this is former Soviet Union, "What do you do?" I said, "I'm a pastor." She said, "Well God is not real, and anyone who believes in God is just weak." I said, "It's nice to meet you. What was your name again?"

So, this was how our relationship began with our translator, and that began a process for the next four weeks that we were in this city. Day in and day out, conversations about the gospel, conversations over and over again just question after question, conversation after conversation. At the end of our time there, the night we were leaving, we were at the airport about to leave, and she pulls me aside. She says, "I need to tell you something." I said, "What?" She said, "I just want you to know that last night I believed in Jesus for my salvation, and now I know that He is real, He loves me, He cares for me and He saved me."

So, as we walked out to the plane holding our adopted son in our hands, we turned around and waved goodbye to God's adopted child in His hands. This is eternal adoption. I told you it gets better. "*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God,*" (1 John 3:1-2).

## **God Reverses our Status The Doctrine of Union With Christ**

### **Overview**

All right, one more facet of God reversing our steps. We're going to...I think...fly through this one. God reverses our status. Doctrine of union with Christ. Okay, now some would say the doctrine of union with Christ sums up the whole doctrine of salvation, and probably does in some ways, but here's the overview.

John 15, Galatians 2:20, "*Crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*" What does that mean, "Christ lives in me?" Our union with Christ is supernatural. It's not just Christ involved here but Father, Spirit, Son. We're in the Father. There are verses there. We're in the Holy Spirit. There are verses there. The Father is in us, the Holy Spirit is in us. We have...see, we're flying...we have fellowship with the Father. We have fellowship with the Holy Spirit. That's supernatural union.

Our union with Christ, second, is spiritual. God, by His spirit, unites our spirit with His. Oh, you look at Luke 11...we quoted this a second ago..."*If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give?*" Then, He says in Matthew, "God gives good gifts to those who ask him." In Luke, it says, God will "*give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.*" I used to read Luke 11 and think, "Well, what if I wasn't asking for the Holy Spirit? Or what if I was asking for this, what good is it to receive the Holy Spirit?" This is the beauty; this is the beauty of what's happening here when you think about it, that God has chosen to give us Himself. You ask for wisdom in a certain situation. He doesn't just tell you the answer. He gives you a spirit of wisdom.

You ask for help; He gives you the helper. You ask for truth; He gives you the truth-teacher. You ask for guidance; He gives you the guide. We ask for gifts; He gives us the Giver. We ask for supply; He gives us the Source. It's like asking for money, and God doesn't say, "Here's some money," He gives us the Bank. Everything flows from the Spirit of God. John Calvin said,

"We must examine this question. How do we receive these benefits which the Father bestowed on his only-begotten Son – not for Christ's own private use but that he might enrich poor and needy men? First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us...All that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him...(And) the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself."

Oh, yes, our union with Christ is unusual and kind of mysterious. We talked about, in a sense, mystical to our finite minds. Our union with Christ is vital to this life here. Our union with Christ brings us life. Our union with Christ is personal. You, personally, where you're sitting, Christian, found in Christ, sharing in the life of Christ, but our union with Christ is also communal. Oftentimes, Scripture talks about how we're united as one body in Christ. Our union with Christ is eternal, from eternity past to eternity future.

So, here's the doctrine of union with Christ, the definition here: union with Christ means that as believers saved by God's grace, Christ is in us, we are in Christ, we are with Christ,

and Christ is with us. So, those four phrases: Christ in us; we're in Christ; we're with Christ; Christ is with us.

### **Christ is IN US.**

Christ is in us. *"To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory,"* (Colossians 1:27). Christ - the empowered life. Oh, you think about this. Remember, who Christ is? He's the image of God, Colossians 1:15. He is the author of creation, Colossians 1:16-17. He sustains all things by His hand. He's the Head of the Church. He's the Savior of the World. Suffice to say, at this point, before we go any further, if this Christ is anywhere near you, your life is radically different. The mammoth reality of salvation is that this Christ lives in you. The image of the invisible God, Author of creation, Head of the Church, Savior of the World dwells in you, Christian.

Empowered life. Christ in you - the transformed life. All throughout the Old Testament, God is making promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, "I will be with you." Moses, "I will be with you." Joshua, "I will be with you." Isaiah, "I will be with you." Jesus comes on the scene, and His name is God with us. God with us, and then Jesus says, *"I will be with you a little longer, then I am going to him who sent me,"* (John 7:33). He's going. Where's He going? He promises, *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you,"* (John 14:18-20). "The Helper will come to you. I'm going send Him to you." Jesus sends His Spirit so that we can say, "Christ lives in me."

This transforms how we view the Christian life. Most of us believe that Christ died for the forgiveness of our sins, but we stop there. We believe, "Okay, I'm going to go to heaven when I die." We have no clue how to live the Christian life between here and there, and many of us live defeated Christian lives as a result. Maybe the reason is because we've not grasped the mammoth reality that Jesus died for you so that He might live in you. Jesus is not just our Savior, ladies and gentlemen, He's our life. Read Hudson Taylor, Ian Thomas...great quotes. Don't miss this; Christianity is nothing less than the outliving of the indwelling Christ.

Christ in you, the hope of glory. That's a secured life. Hope of glory because Christ is in you. No reason to fear. Christ in you now means Christ in you forever, forever. Secured life in the triumphant church. Christ is in you, and Christ is in us. You look at Ephesians 1. Oh, we don't have time. Okay, Ephesians 1. Here's the deal. What Ephesians 1 teaches...New Testament teaches...Jesus possesses all authority in heaven and on earth. All authority belongs to Christ. He has authority over all things. You look at the very end, it says, *"He put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things,"* listen to this, *"to the church, which is his body, the fullness of them who fills all in all."*

So, He gives Christ authority over all things, and He gives Christ to the church. So, Jesus possesses all authority on heaven and earth. Now, follow this, the church possesses the fullness of Christ, because He has been given to the church where the fullness of Him and the fullness of Christ...Colossians 2:9-10 says the same thing. You put those together. Christ has all authority, and the church possesses the fullness of Christ; all the authority in heaven and earth belongs to the church! Are you catching this? Christ shares His authority with us. You believe this? Not making this stuff up. Look at 1 Corinthians 3, *"Let no one boast in men. For all things are yours."* All are yours, you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. Oh, contrary to beliefs in various cultures in the world, including our own, I remind you brothers and sisters, the church is not weak. The church is not frail, fragile, stagnant or struggling. The church has the fullness of Jesus Christ. We're not victims of sin; we're victors over sin. Not powerless in any pagan culture; we have power over pagan culture. We



demolish spiritual strongholds, and we do not shrink back from anything in our mission. Okay, we'll get to that later.

### **We are IN CHRIST.**

Second, we are in Christ. Christ in us; we're in Christ. We live in Christ. This is just a list of things in Scripture that talk about us being in Christ. We live in Christ. We rejoice in Christ. We find encouragement in Christ. We find strength in Christ. We find confidence in Christ. We have freedom in Christ. Our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus. We have peace in Christ. We have wisdom in Christ. We have victory in Christ. We have hope in Christ. We obey our parents in Christ. Wives submit to husbands in Christ. We agree in Christ. We stand in Christ. We work in Christ, and we're blessed in Christ. We're blessed in Christ. That's the last one. We're blessed in Christ.

### **We are WITH CHRIST.**

All of these things we have in Christ...Christ in us, us in Christ, and we are with Christ. We have been crucified with Christ. We've died to sin with Him. Buried with Christ, Romans 6 says. We've been resurrected with Christ. Resurrected with Him. Ephesians 2:4-7 "God...made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Do you see your position in Christ, Christian? We now fellowship with Christ; we work with Christ; we suffer with Christ. This is what our brothers and sisters are doing in India and other contexts around the world. Suffering, sharing in the sufferings of Christ. We will reign with Christ. Brothers and sisters who are suffering, hold fast. You will reign with Christ.

### **Christ is WITH US.**

We are with Christ, and Christ is with us. He is with us in the church. He is with us in the church. He is with us in the world. He is with us forever. This is a promise we cling to. Look at 1 Thessalonians 4 about a third of the way through,

*"We declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."*

Underline it, "*and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.*" It is good to be justified before God. It is good to be adopted by God, and it is good to be united with Christ.

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