

The Starting Point of Sanctification

Scripture: Galatians 4:19

Code: 48-25

And now we come to the Word of God and again back to the book of Galatians, Galatians chapter 4. We have come to a screeching halt at verse 19 of Galatians 4, because this verse is so critical to understanding the great truth of sanctification. Verse 19 says, "My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you."

Paul's imagery here is very vivid. He uses the analogy of a woman who is in labor until a fully formed child emerges. And that's how he feels about the believers in his care, about all believers, for that matter. He has birth pain until Christ is formed in them. This is what sanctification is. It is becoming like Christ.

Yes, as a believer, Christ is in you; but that's the reality of redemption or salvation in its first phase. That's justification or new birth, being born again. Christ comes and takes up residence in you almost in an undeveloped way, fully present, but not fully manifest through the believer. Sanctification then is the process by which the believer in whom Christ dwells becomes more like Christ. Christ begins to shape the believer's life; and a fully formed Christ in the life of a believer is then a sanctified believer who manifests the character of Christ, who thinks the way Christ thinks, who speaks the way Christ speaks, who acts the way Christ acts. And this is Paul's great painful desire for his people, and it is really the passion of any faithful pastor, to see Christ fully formed in those who are in His care.

Now, I want to spend one more Sunday, and that's this one, stopping long enough to talk about this issue of sanctification. I told you in the past several messages that we've gone through – three of them, to be exact – that this is an era in the history of the church, when the church when the church seems to me to be indifferent towards sanctification. The church does show some interest in the truth of election, that great doctrine of election. The church does show interest in the doctrine of redemption or justification. It spends a lot of time even sort of defining and expanding the understanding of both election and justification. The church has a small interest in glorification; it seems to be caught up in the world. But there are books that come periodically on the issue of heaven and what's coming in future glory.

But I think the church has the least interest in the doctrine which is the most important one for the church, and that is the doctrine of sanctification, becoming like Christ. And that we have discussed in previous messages. I won't go over it again, except to say that if you're going to make the church as much like the world as possible, you can't introduce a biblical doctrine of sanctification without chasing away all the people you just tried to get in. The doctrine of sanctification would literally evacuate many so called churches. Any real interest in godliness and holiness would send people out the back door who came in the front door on false pretenses, that is, to be entertained or feel good about themselves or gain something for themselves from God.

So sanctification is not on the priority list, but in fact, sanctification is the issue. It is the work of the Spirit of God in the life of believers here and now. What's going on in the life of a true believer between justification and glorification is sanctification. It is the work of the Spirit of God separating the believer from sin, and it is a process that goes on all our lifelong. We're talking about the importance of sanctification, Christ formed in you; and that is the aching burden of the apostle Paul.

It's not enough that people are justified. It's not enough that they have come to salvation in the fact that they have come to know Christ, their sins are forgiven; that the burden of this true and faithful apostle is that the people would be sanctified. And that was Paul's passion himself: "I press toward the mark."

And what is the mark? Christlikeness, Christlikeness. That should be the passion of every believer. And of every legitimate pastor, that is the passion; and not only for the people he serves, but for his own life. A faithful pastor must be saying, "I want to be like Christ. I want to be more like Christ. I want to be increasingly like Christ. I want to always think and speak and act and relate to life and to people the way Christ would." That's the Christian life.

Now, to help us understand how essential and definitive this is, I want to talk a little bit about being in Christ and having Christ in us. What I want to do this morning is pull together some things along the line of Christ in us and us in Christ as the foundation for your understanding of sanctification. And I'm going to do this by using a lot of Scriptures and pull together some things with which you're familiar, but perhaps not in this accumulated fashion. So stay with me.

We understand that if we are believers, Christ is in us, Christ is in us. We also understand that the New Testament says, "We are in Christ." This is simply defining both ways of this union. We are in Him; He is in us. That is to say, we are literally engulfed in one another in an inseparable union. The Son of God, not as an infant as He was in the womb of Mary, but the Son of God in His full presence indwells every true believer.

Colossians 3:11 says, "Christ is all, and in all." First Corinthians 3:16 says, "You are the temple of God." So not only is Christ in you, but God is in you. And 1 Corinthians 6 says, "You're the temple of the Holy Spirit." Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all indwell every true believer. Consequently, Ephesians 3:20 says, "The power of God" – as well as the presence of God – "works in you." The presence of God brings along the power of God – the presence of God, the power of God, sufficient for your increasing sanctification. This is amazing language.

I think when we think about a Christian we think about someone who believes in God, who believes in Christ, who believes in the Spirit of God. But the language of Scripture is far more intimate and personal than that. It is not simply something that we believe, it is someone who lives in us; not in partial representation, but in complete fullness. The true Christian is the dwelling place of God. We are the temple. We are the Holy of Holies. And Paul's prayer for the believer is that Christ who is in us would become fully formed, that there would be no limit to the expression of Christ in His fullness that comes through our lives.

Now as we've been saying in the other messages and this particular theme, sanctification is a core doctrine in Christianity. We can talk about the doctrine of election. God planned redemption and

chose who He would save before the foundation of the world. We can talk about the doctrine of justification, the actual act of God by which He imputes the righteousness of Christ to a believing sinner, and that sinner is permanently justified, fully forgiven, and promised heaven. And then glorification, a future event that occurs as well in a moment, when God takes the believer into glory and that believer is then forever perfected.

So you have the act of God in election in eternity past, the act of God in justification in time present, and the act of God in the future in glorification. And in between justification and glorification is this long process that lasts our entire lives called sanctification, the process of being increasingly separated from sin and made more like Jesus Christ. And just as there is no doubt about the election of God, nor the justification of God, nor the glorification of God, there need be no doubt about the sanctifying work of God. He is doing that work in every true believer. He's not doing it in false believers – and we'll say more about that later.

But in a true believer, this work is the work of God that is going on. It is going on by means of the Word. It is going on by means of prayer. It is going on by means of fellowship. It is going on by means of worship. All the means of grace are contributing to the work of the Spirit in the increasing holiness and godliness and Christlikeness of a true believer.

Now, I showed you a verse last time, and I'll ask you to return to it, 2 Corinthians 3:18, because it declares what I've just said. "We all," – 2 Corinthians 3:18 – "we all," – that is all believers – "with unveiled face," – the veil is off. In the Old Testament the veil was on. What was revealed in the Old Testament was veiled. It was shadowy. It wasn't full, it wasn't complete; and that was illustrated even in Moses' experience on the mountain, as Paul lays it out earlier in the chapter.

But in the New Testament the veil is off, and we now look in a mirror. Literally, a mirror was metal, beaten smooth, polished very shiny so that you could see a clear image there. We now see not shadows, but we look at the New Testament and we see with clarity – what? – the glory of the Lord. The New Testament reveals the glory of the Lord in full clarity. It's shadowy in the Old Testament; it's crystal clear in the new.

Now, as we gaze at the glory of the Lord, seeing His glory revealed on the pages of the New Testament, we are being transformed into the same image, the same glory from one level of glory to the next, to the next; and you can string those out. That's the intent here. We go from glory, to glory, to glory, to glory, simply becoming increasingly more conformed to the glory of Christ. This is the work of the Lord the Spirit. That's how sanctification works. We look at the glory of Christ. We see a clear revelation of it in the New, which makes even the Old more clear. We see that glory, we're changed into that very glory by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Remember now, in the previous verses in 2 Corinthians 3, Moses saw the veiled glory of God, just a little afterglow; got it on his face, and it began to fade away. And the longer Moses stood and spoke and covered his face, the more the glory faded. The opposite is true for us. We see the glory in the Scripture of the Lord, and it goes from glory, to glory, to glory, to glory, increasing by the work of the Holy Spirit. That is sanctification.

So what is every faithful pastor's desire for his people? That they would go from glory, to glory, to glory, being evermore conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the faithful pastor's

desire; not content that people are interested in Jesus, not content that even they were born again or justified, not content that someday they'll go to heaven, but desirous even to the point of pain that they would be sanctified, that they would go from glory, to glory, to glory, for the glory of the Lord, and for the blessedness of that believer, the well-being of the church, and the power of the testimony of the gospel.

Now, let's look at the prayer of Paul in Ephesians 1. We stopped at verse 14 and I want to pick it up at verse 15. Here is Paul's prayer for believers: "For this reason too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ which exists among you and your love for all the saints," – in other words, I know you're true believers – "I don't cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers;" – and here is Paul's prayer – "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him."

In other words, "I want you to know the Lord better. I want the revelation, the wisdom that comes from God the Father concerning the Son to become ever-increasingly clear to you. I want you to know Christ better," – verse 18 – "that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, gave Him as head over all things to the church," – and then this – "which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

What is the church? It is the body of Christ filled with God, filled with the fullness of God. "My prayer" – Paul says – "is that you may understand what it is to be filled with the fullness of God, that you would be given a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, that the eyes of your heart would be enlightened, that you would understand, that you would understand His presence and His power, and experience His fullness." Paul is not a minimalist. He doesn't want people who just do the bare minimum of believing in Jesus Christ and languish in some kind of perpetual spiritual weakness, he wants them to flourish in the full knowledge and power of God who fills them.

Then again in chapter 3 – if you go down to verse 14 – here's another prayer, and it's the same kind of prayer: "For this reason I bow my knees" – verse 14, chapter 3 – "before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His grace, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man."

Again, this is the desire: "I want your inner man to be strengthened. I want the Holy Spirit who is in you in full divine presence and in full power to strengthen your inner man, so that Christ may literally settle down in your heart," – again, this is like a prayer for the fullness of Christ, "that you could know Christ in such a way as to be rooted and grounded in love, as to be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge. I want you literally to be so filled up with Christ – top to bottom, side to side – that the love of Christ pervades your life, your love for Him, that you would be" – and here it is at the end of verse 19 – "filled up to all the fullness of God." This is his prayer.

Again, Paul is no minimalist. He's not content that somebody makes some kind of tacit, superficial commitment to Jesus Christ. He will never be content. He will be in pain until believers are filled up to

all the fullness of God, until Christ is formed in them.

The power is there to do that, verse 20: “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all we can ask or think, according to the power that works within us,” – you have the power within you to be filled with all the fullness of God, so that – “to God will be glory in the church, and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

The testimony of the church is at stake. The criticism that comes against Christianity, superficial Christianity, against churches with superficial Christians is legitimate, because there’s no real corporate manifestation of the fullness of Christ. This is the cry of every true pastor.

The popular, pervasive indifference to sanctification is a betrayal of the superficiality of people in ministry today. It’s the evidence of the triumph of sin, and the triumph of worldliness, and the triumph of false gospels. We must understand this. We are defined as believers by the fullness of the presence of God in us.

Second Peter chapter 1. I want to call to your attention, verse 3 of 2 Peter 1: “Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge,” – the *epignosis* – “the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.”

Just take that phrase, “that you might become partakers of the divine nature,” – in other words – “that you might more manifestly and fully share in the indwelling divine nature.” This is profound, profound truth. Christ lives in every believer: Christ in us, God the Father in us, the Holy Spirit in us; and we in God, and we in Christ, and we in the Spirit. It goes both ways. It is both Christ in us, and we in Him; the Father in us, and we in the Father; the Spirit in us, and we in the Spirit. Why this dramatic two-sided emphasis? To show this union in its most powerful way.

About seventy times in the New Testament it says in some way, “We are in Christ, in Christ, in Christ.” And it also says, “Christ is in us, in us.” Now, I want us to look carefully at this this morning in a comprehensive enough way; and we’ll say some things that you have heard many times, but put it together in a way that may make it fresh.

Colossians 3:4 says, “Christ, who is our life. Christ, who is our life.” If you believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, you received eternal life. “Christ” – 1 John 5 says – “is that eternal life.” So when you talk about your eternal life you’re talking about Christ. He is that eternal life. “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” The possession of eternal life is the same as the possession of Christ. You have eternal life because you have the eternal living Christ, the eternal living God in you.

Now, Scripture makes it clear that your union with Christ is pervasive from eternity to eternity. And I don’t know that you’ve thought it that way, but you will this morning. Now let’s go back to Ephesians 1; I want to use that as kind of a starting point for the several points that I want to make. Chapter 1, verse 3: “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.”

All spiritual blessing comes to us, all heavenly spiritual blessing comes to us in Christ. That's the general truth. When you are in Christ and Christ is in you, the entire panoply of heavenly spiritual blessing is available to you. It's all yours in Christ. Now let's break this down a little bit.

When did it start? It started when you were chosen before the foundation of the world. It started, let's say, with the doctrine of election. Come to verse 4: "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." And I don't know if you've ever thought of that with the clarity that I want you to think about it this morning.

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. That means that before God had created anything, when all that existed was the triune God and there was no creation, in the mind of God He had already identified those who He would place in union with His Son. When God was putting together the plan in that timeless eternity, when the momentary reality was completely put together with its majestic perfection in the mind of God, it encompassed not just the creation of the universe, not just the creation of those who occupy the universe, not just the creation of angelic beings, not just the sending of His Son into the world; not just His life, death, resurrection, and ascension and all of that; not just the final glory of the believers. It encompassed the very people whom God would bring to eternal glory in His mind when He made the plan; and in His mind at that very moment they were in Christ.

It's a staggering reality. They were in Christ. God had His elect in His infinite, eternal mind. When He designed the plan to save them He would save them in His Son. He set His love on them. He knew who they were. He wrote their names in a book, and He then set in motion the plan to bring those who in His eternal mind were chosen to be in His Son to the fulfillment of that through their redemption and their glorification.

The truth of election established the union of the Savior with believers. You were joined to Him in the mind of God in eternity past before anything was ever created. The truth of election then establishes the union of the Savior and believers. "He predestined us" – verse 5 – "to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself." He predestined, He chose before the foundation of the world those who were to be in Christ as His sons, who would be receiving the eternal blessing of union with Christ forever in His presence.

It's a stunning thing to realize. All the elect were present in the mind of God and the mind of the Son and the mind of the Holy Spirit when the plan of redemption was laid out, and all of them were in the mind of God when the plan of redemption was executed and accomplished in history, so that when Jesus lived His holy life He knew exactly for whom He was living it. When He died His substitutionary death, He knew exactly for whom He was dying. When He rose, He knew exactly for whom He was rising. And when He ascended, He knew exactly for whom He was ascending. And when He was seated at the right hand of the Father, He knew exactly who was to be seated with Him on His throne.

The divinely ordained bond of union between the Redeemer and those He redeemed was established in eternity past and worked out in redemptive history. The benefits of the work of redemption are actually secured for those who were placed into union with Christ in the mind of God before the world began. So we were in Christ, in God's mind in eternity past. Paul makes that clear in Ephesians 1.

And then He looks to time and redemption. If you drop down into verse 7, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.” Here is the work of redemption, the work of redemption. In Him we have redemption. We were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world; we were redeemed in Him. Literally, our redemption took place in Him.

In His life our redemption was being accomplished. God considered the elect to be in union with Christ – listen – through every single act of redemption. And what were the acts of redemption? Every act in the life of Christ was an expression of redemption, because redemption grants to us an imputed righteousness, right?

In redemption we are given the righteousness of Christ through faith, not our own righteousness. Therefore every righteous act that Christ ever did – and that’s all He did His entire life – every one that He ever did we did in Him. When He was a child, when He was a teenager, when He was a young adult, throughout His life and ministry when life was oppressive and He was rejected and when He was mistreated and was perfectly righteous and obedient to the Father, every act of righteousness, every thought of righteousness, every virtue, every expression of His perfect holiness, we were in Him; and it was for us that this would be credited. In Him we have redemption. We’re united to Him in His life of perfect obedience. Every act, every word, every thought that was perfect, He knew for whom that perfection would be given as a gift.

Galatians 3:27 says that, “We have clothed ourselves with Christ.” First Corinthians 1:30 says, “He has become to us righteousness. He has become to us righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.”

We were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. When He came into the world in His incarnation we were in Him in every act of obedience. We were in Him in every righteous thought, every righteous word. Every righteous deed, we were in Him. We’re united to Him in His perfect obedience, we’re united to Him in His perfect righteousness, and we were united to Him in His death. The Father considers the elect to have lived Christ’s life, and the Father considers the elect to have died Christ’s death. We died with Him. We were crucified with Him. “I am crucified with Christ,” Paul says in Galatians 2:20.

Peter expresses it this way in 1 Peter 2:24, “He Himself bore our sin in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.” He had no sin, but He was paying the penalty for our sins. We lived in Him and we died in Him. The most central reality of our union with the Son of God is this atonement. This is the most central reality by which God, on the one hand, inflicted undeserved suffering on the Lord Jesus Christ, and then bestowed undeserved blessing on sinners.

Let me say that again. This is the nature of the atonement of Christ. God inflicted undeserved suffering on the Lord Jesus Christ, and bestowed undeserved blessing on sinners. Or to say it another way: the Lord Jesus was so treated other than He deserved, in order that sinners could be treated other than they deserve. The undeserved suffering of the one in God’s eyes became the sufficient ground for the unmerited blessing of the other. God saw us in His living and saw us in His dying.

You say, "Well, for someone who dies but doesn't deserve death, isn't that a miscarriage of justice?" Remember this, that this is the plan of God. This is designed and sanctioned by the holy and divine Judge who is the supreme source of truth and justice.

Well, this seems, somebody might say, unjust toward Jesus Christ. Remember this: His substitution was deliberate and totally voluntary. "Nobody takes My life from Me, I lay it down of Myself." No law was violated and no rights were denied. All the atonement realities originated in the love of God for the Son and for sinners, and to bring Himself glory.

So listen: the main aspect of the atonement, the main aspect of redemption is the intimate, personal, eternal union between the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect sinners for whom He lived and for whom He died. We were there in His living and there in His dying. And the deity of the substitution, the deity of the one who is the substitute, the deity of Christ gives the substitution the character of personal homage to the broken law, personal recognition of the guilt wrought by sin, personal experience of offensive sin in the face of God. And all of that is experienced by the Lord Himself, whose satisfaction in the penalty was a joy to Him. He did it for the joy set before Him. And so in offering Himself, the Lord Jesus took our penalty. We were all there. He was punished for us.

Not only did we live His life in the view of God, we died His death, we died with Christ. Romans 6:8, "If we have died with Christ, we believe we'll also live with Him." Colossians 2: 20, "You have died with Christ." Colossians 3:3, "You've died; your life is hidden with Christ in God." Second Timothy 2:11, "If we died with Him, we'll live with Him." Romans 6:6, "knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him." We died with Him.

Scripture also says, "We were buried with Him." Romans 6:4, "We've been buried with Him." Colossians 2:12, "having been buried with Him." Are you understanding this? We're in Christ in eternity past. We're in Christ in the living of His life and in the dying of His death. We're in Christ when He's buried.

And then we're raised with Him. Colossians 2:12, "You also were raised with Him." Colossians 3:1, "You've been raised up with Christ." Ephesians 2:6, "raised with Him." And then He ascended into heaven. And Ephesians 2:6 says, "He seated us in heavenly places with Him."

I want you to understand this. I want you to grasp the breadth and length and height and depth of this incredible reality. His life is our life. His punishment is our punishment. His death is our death. His burial is our burial. His resurrection is our resurrection. His ascension is our ascension. His exaltation is our exaltation. And that is summed up in, "We are blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus."

When all this redemptive work was done, we weren't alive; we weren't even around. But God knew who we were; and in His mind, placed us in union with His Son and our Savior, not only at the time He planned redemption, but through its entire accomplishment. The Lord Jesus did not live and die and rise and ascend to the throne for an unknown group. Did you hear that? He did not do that for an unknown group yet to be decided. He did it for those chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. We were on His heart through it all. We were there in the planning; we were there in the accomplishment; we are there in the application. We are there.

In Ephesians 2, verse 5, “Even when we were dead in our transgressions, He made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” We were there. We were there. Every step that Christ took we were there. Now we’re in Christ, and Christ is in us. That’s what defines us.

I don’t know any doctrine that has more underlying motivation than the doctrine of the indwelling union between the believer and Christ. Christ has become to us sanctification. How can I live my life any other way than to give Him glory. I have been connected to Him from eternity past and throughout His life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and now His intercession and future exaltation. It’s all about me. I’ve been on His heart, in His mind, along with every other believer. I am His, as the hymnwriter put it, He is mine.

That has tremendous implications about how I live. I’m not my own, I’ve been bought with a price. I am the temple of God. The only that I can bear any fruit in life is because I’m connected to Him. He’s the vine and I’m a branch. And Ephesians 4:15 reminds me, “We are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ.” Again, this is the same idea. You need to keep increasing, grow into Christlikeness. And what is the motivation? The union you have with Him; and you’ve had it eternally.

How can I disappoint Him? How can I ignore Him? How can I dishonor Him? That’s why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6, “How could you join yourself to a harlot? How could you engage in anything that dishonored the one with whom you have been joined since eternity?”

“Even when you die,” – Paul says in 1 Thessalonians – “you will be among the dead in Christ.” You’ll always be in Christ. When your body’s lying in a grave, your spirit will be with the Lord. Your body will be in the grave decaying until the time the Lord comes to raise believers. Even your body lying there is dead in Christ. That’s the dead in Christ who will one day rise. Even your corpse at Forest Lawn in the ground is in Christ and will one day be given life.

“When we rise” – 1 Corinthians 15:22 – “we are made alive in Christ.” Our bodies will be made alive in Christ. We’ve been in Christ since before the foundation of the world and we always will be. How did we receive this gift? By faith; that’s what Paul’s been saying all through Galatians, right? Not by works. This didn’t happen to you by works, this happened to you by faith, faith, and faith alone.

Now let’s go back to Ephesians 1 – just pulling it together. So election, we were in Him. Redemption, we were in Him, and now sanctification, we are jointed to Him: “Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” That’s sanctification. I live for Christ. I desire to see Christ formed in me. I desire the fullness of God, to be filled with all the fullness of God. I desire to grow up in Him, as we just read in Ephesians 4.

But where’s it all heading? It’s heading toward glorification. All of this is, verse 9, with a purpose. God has a purpose at the end of the verse: “He purposed in Him.” The purpose has to do with verse 10: “the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens, things on the earth. In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end” – and here’s the end – “that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.” This is glorification. This is, verse 14, when we receive our

inheritance, which will be the redemption of the body, and the full possession that belongs to God, to the praise of His glory.

So glorification: verses 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 focus on glorification. We will be in Him in glorification. “We will be in Him,” – verse 10, the end – “in Him obtaining an inheritance.” We will be in Him fulfilling the divine purpose. We were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit who’s the guarantee of our future glory. All of this, that God may be glorified and praised.

I don’t see how a believer can say, “Well, it really doesn’t matter how I live.” Are you kidding? That is ludicrous to say, “Well, I don’t have to worry about sin in my life; I don’t have to pay any attention to that. I don’t need to be a legalist, I can be an antinomian, I can ignore the law. Christ fulfilled the law for me. He did everything that needed to be done; He accomplished it all. I’m not under law; I’m free to do whatever I want.” So you would then drag Christ with whom you have been joined in the mind of God forever into sin?

Let me sum up this union with Christ in five ways just to kind of pull the definition together. First, it’s an organic unity: one body. Second, it’s a legal unity: He is our representative head; He acts for us on our behalf. Thirdly, it’s a vital unity: all life flows from Him. Fourthly, it’s a spiritual unity by the very indwelling presence of the divine Spirit. And, fifth, it is a permanent unity; nothing can ever alter it or break it.

So what does it mean to be a Christian? Somebody might say, “Well, a Christian is someone who has an unusual commitment to Jesus.” That’s true, but that’s not really the way to define a Christian. There are all kinds of people who have some kind of interest in Jesus.

Somebody else might say, “Well, I’m a Christian because I have a mission connection with Jesus Christ.” You hear people say that a lot today. “I like His attitude toward the poor and the downcast and the depressed and the outsiders and the outcasts. And I think if you’re going to call yourself a Christian you’ve got to feed the poor, and you’ve got to take care of those that have trouble. I identify with Jesus in a mission connection, that’s why I’m a Christian.”

Somebody else might say, “Well, look, I think I’m a Christian because I have a moral relation to Jesus. I connect with Him morally.”

I remember meeting with leaders of the Mormon church up at BYU telling me they were concerned about Mormon young people having no interest in Jesus Christ from the standpoint of Jesus’ standards of morality. They asked me if I would come up and speak at BYU, and help the students to be drawn to Christ. And I said, “Well, I can’t do that, because the Christ you’re talking about isn’t the true Christ. The Christ that you’re talking about is the spirit brother of Lucifer created by another being, and that’s not the Christ of Scripture.” But they were concerned that students were not interested in the morals that Jesus advocated.

There are people who think that they’re Christians because they have a mission connection to Jesus, or they have a morality connection to Jesus, or they have some kind of unusual interest in His life. And then there are those who think Christianity is having a sacramental relationship to Jesus. They’ve gone to the Mass. They’ve gone through infant baptism or a confirmation or some other baptism, and they go through certain rituals, and they’re Christians because of some sacramental

identity.

And I guess you could just broaden that and say, “And then there’s those people who are – they’re Christians because they have a religious connection to Jesus. They’re not Muslims.” Sometimes you hear that in the Arabic world: “Well, I’m not a Muslim Arab, I’m a Christian Arab, which means that I come out of a non-Muslim Christian tradition. That’s been my religion, family speaking.” Those are inadequate definitions of a Christian.

For a Christian, when somebody says, “What does it mean to be a Christian?” it means this – you can give this answer: “Jesus Christ is my life. I am His, He is mine. He lives in me, I live in Him. We are joined together in a union that began in the mind of God in eternity past before anything was ever created, and will consummate in eternal glory in the world to come when I will be united with my Savior in perfection, and I will be made as much like Him, as a glorified human can be like Him, forever. My Christianity is simply defined as being in Christ and having Christ in me. He lives in me: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the whole Trinity, because They’re indivisible, live in me and I in Them.” First John 4:15 – you might say it this way: “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God abides in Him, and he in God.”

Paul writing to the Thessalonian church: “Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in god the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Now the prayer is that Christ would be fully formed in you. He’s there, but you need to be filled with all the fullness.

I want to close with going back to 2 Peter. And we looked at the fact that we have become partakers of the divine nature. The very nature that belongs to God lives in us. This has some immediate implications.

You say, “Well, what do I do? Do I just express thanks?” No. I’ll tell you one thing you do: you reject antinomianism; you reject indifference toward the law of God; you reject indifference toward spiritual duty, toward obedience. Here’s what you do, 2 Peter chapter 1. Because you have all of this, verse 3, “seeing that His divine power has granted everything pertaining to life and godliness.” And that all comes in the form of the divine person living in you. You now have become a partaker of the divine nature.

Here’s what you do, verse 5: “Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence,” – there’s no indifference here, there’s no “let go and let God,” there’s no sit back and see what happens – “applying all diligence, in your faith supply” – you add – “moral excellence,” – in your moral excellence – “knowledge,” – that means a deep knowledge of the Lord revealed in His Word – “and in your knowledge, add self-control; and in your self-control, perseverance,” – or endurance, or faithfulness – “and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness; in your brotherly kindness, love.”

You want to know what your part is in sanctification? Get busy, become diligent, supply moral excellence, sound knowledge of the truth, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. And if these qualities are yours – and here’s the sanctifying element – and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. “If you are seeing these things in your life increasing, then you know you have the true knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ,” and you’re neither useless nor unfruitful.

On the other hand, “For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins,” whatever that was. If these don’t exist in your life, whatever happened to you is only something from the past. “Therefore, brethren,” – you want to be sure you’re the real thing – “be all the more diligent” – already all diligence in verse 5, now all the more diligent – “to make certain that you are genuinely called chosen.”

How do you know if you’re elect? How do you know if you’re called by God? It’s in your hands to be certain about it, as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble over that issue.

Look at your life. If you’re indifferent toward holiness – I don’t know what happened in the past in your supposed purification, but you’re blind and short-sighted. This is so wonderful, because there’s no doctrine that lays out a stronger view of sovereign election than being in Christ before the foundation of the world. And yet our responsibility is to make certain of that calling and choosing.

And how do we do that? By adding these virtues and seeing them increase in our life. And then verse 11 says, “For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you,” that you’re going to go to heaven if you see these things in your life.

What is it saying? True believers are in the process of being sanctified. And you want to make sure you’re being sanctified, and it takes diligence. It takes all diligence. It takes all the more diligence. As long as you practice these things you’re never going to wonder whether you were chosen.

May Christ be formed in you. May you be filled with all the fullness of God. Let’s pray.

Lord, again we feel the force of heaven coming through the pages here of our Bibles. We feel the power of conviction; at the same time, the joy of grace. May we, Lord, worship You not only when we come together as we do on Sunday, but may we worship You every day, knowing that we are the temple. We’re the temple. We’re never away from the Holy of Holies, we are the Holy of Holies. We’re the tent in which You dwell; You live in us.

So, Lord, may we glorify You. How can we not honor You, to whom we are so everlastingly joined. We desire to do nothing that dishonors You, so that we might be both useful and fruitful for our joy and Your glory. We look forward to that day when we will enter into Your presence abundantly supplied with all the blessings that await those who truly belong to You.

Thank You for our time together. Thank You for the presence of the Spirit of God who is our true Teacher. And we ask, Lord, that You will bind these things to our hearts. May they be much on our minds as we continue to walk in Your will, we pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2018 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).