

VOTC – March 2017

#### 4. A Real Life with Christ

Hello dear listeners,

In this series of meditations we have moved from a discussion of the first Adam to the last Adam. We saw that with the fall of the first Adam, *all* humanity fell. And then we saw that the payment that needed to be made for sin was made in full by Jesus Christ. Well, that then leaves us with one burning question: if all humanity fell in Adam, is all humanity, then, saved by Christ?

Well, Christ's payment was without a doubt *sufficient* to save everyone. But not all are saved. What, then, is the only way for anyone to benefit from the payment Christ made? Yes, just how can you share in Christ? According to Scripture, you have to be *united* to Christ. How does that happen? By faith. Those who have faith in Christ benefit from his work. The apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace you have been saved *through faith*." Through believing, you are saved. And yet before the believer has any chance to boast in his faith, that he's so good to believe in Christ, Paul adds that this faith "is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." Faith, by which you become united to Christ, is a gracious gift from God.

And how is God pleased to give faith? Well, Paul talks about that as well, also in Ephesians. 1:13, he says that in Christ "you also, *when you heard the word of truth*, the gospel of your salvation, and *believed* in him, were sealed with the promised *Holy Spirit*." What is he saying here? Faith is a gift of God the Holy Spirit, and he is pleased to grant faith through the word of truth, the *preaching* of the gospel. The gospel is essential when it comes to union with Christ by faith. The gospel is...not the word of man, not human opinion, but the word of Christ. The Spirit of God uses the living word of Christ to bring the sinner to Christ and Christ to the sinner. So as you trust in Christ through hearing his word, you become united to Christ. What a precious grace of the Triune God! There is a way back from death in the first Adam, and it's found in the last Adam!

I'd like to talk now about what being united to Christ all entails. We can talk about this in two ways.

In the first place, being united to Christ affects how the Lord God looks at you. Being united to *Christ* is the only way to address the huge problem of our sin. It addresses, on the one hand, our guilt. We are now accepted by God for the sake of Christ's righteousness. Paul says in Romans 5:17, "For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ." Christ's righteousness becomes ours as a gift. And so what does that mean? Paul says in Romans 8:1 that "there is now *no condemnation* for those who are *in Christ Jesus*." If you are united to Christ by faith, yes, if you trust in Christ by a faith given by God, there's no more condemnation, no more guilt! God has reckoned to you the perfect righteousness of Christ. Your sins are forgiven.

But, there's not only the guilt of sin. There's also sin's corrupting power. Union with Christ addresses that corruption. Paul says in Romans 6:4, "We were buried with [Christ] by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too *might walk in newness of life*." The corrupting power of sin has been broken in the life of the one united to Christ by faith. And so Paul can say further in Romans 6:10, 11, "The death [Christ] died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." If you are in Christ you do not have to

sin any longer! You are *alive* to God! So when union with Christ happens, God no longer regards you as guilty and corrupt, but rather, as righteous and holy. You become right with God, and are then daily blessed by the Spirit to live in holiness.

Well this is how God looks upon the one united to Christ by faith. As forgiven, accepted, and set free from sin's enslaving power. And so in light of all this, God treats his adopted child with an everlasting love.

So already with this first aspect of union with Christ, there is so much comfort. But you see, there's even more. Understanding what union with Christ means is also going to help the believer make sense of the Christian life. Paul says in Romans 8:17 that if we are children of God, then we are heirs, "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him." Paul is writing well after the death and resurrection of Christ. But what he is saying is, the basic pattern of the Christian life is one that moves from suffering to glory, in a way that mirrors the life of Christ. For Jesus Christ, the Son of God, suffered from the moment of his conception onward, till his death on the cross. But then after three days he was raised and glorified into heaven and seated at the right hand of God. No more suffering. So the believer is called to be a cross-bearer in this age, take up his cross, deny himself, and suffer as he follows Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, wrote, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." He calls a man to follow him into suffering. But this suffering is unto glory for the one united to Christ. It's not suffering unto damnation which is what the one still united to the first Adam experiences. The believer suffers unto glory.

So, dear listeners, what comes out of all this? Well if Christ is the true human, the one who in both his suffering and glory enjoys true communion with God, then what does that mean for those, and only those who are united to Christ? They too, by the restoring and renewing work of Jesus Christ by his Spirit, may come to see again what it means to be really human! Life with Christ, union with Christ, is what makes possible a relationship with the Triune God. A relationship in which you can walk in righteousness and holiness before him. Yes, you can walk this way with him! In fellowship with God, as his renewed image-bearer!

Oh no, none of us is able in this life to reflect God perfectly again. But here is where the gospel shines through once again. Because you and I, in our fallen state, would never be able to reflect God perfectly again, God sent Jesus Christ! God sent Christ to be a true man. And as true man, this man was the image of God. The Lord Jesus lived without sin, lived as perfectly as we once were in Paradise, and he therefore reflected God perfectly. And so only for those united to Christ by faith, there is hope.

Dear listeners, what is man? What does it mean to be human? Believe in Jesus Christ, and know that your life will be transformed. Christ, the true man, becomes yours only by faith. He is the only way to the Father. Seek him, believe in him. And enjoy him and all his benefits, as you follow him from suffering into glory.

Thanks for listening!