

FBC POWELL, 6-24-18 AM NOTES
"Union with Christ – A New Pursuit (Holiness)
Various Scriptures
4 in Series, "The Christian's Union with Christ"

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NASB) "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

Colossians 1:27 (NASB) "To whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

2 Corinthians 7:1 (NASB) "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Ephesians 1:6 (NKJV) "To the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved."

Ephesians 1:7 (NASB) "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace."

Ephesians 1:10b-11 (NASB) "In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will."

Psalms 29:2 (NKJV) "Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

"How little people know who think that holiness is dull. When one meets the real thing, it is irresistible! If even 10 percent of the world's population had it, would not the whole world be converted and happy before a year's end?" – C. S. Lewis

Positional Holiness – **Ephesians 1:4 (NASB)** "Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him."

Ephesians 4:24 (NASB) "And put on the new self, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."

Practical Holiness – **Romans 6:22 (NIV)** "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life."

Philippians 3:20 (NASB) "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."

I. Holiness Is Essential to Come to God

Revelation 4:8 (NASB) "And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, 'Holy, holy, holy *is* the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.'"

Psalms 89:35a (NASB) "Once I have sworn by My holiness..."

Exodus 15:11a (NASB) "Who is like You among the gods, O Lord? Who is like You, majestic in holiness..."

A. God's Holiness Is Seen in His Attitude Toward Sin

Psalms 5:4 (NASB) "For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; no evil dwells with You."

B. God's Holiness Is Seen in Our Approach Under the Law

Leviticus 10:1-3 (NASB) ¹“Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. ²And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. ³Then Moses said to Aaron, ‘It is what the Lord spoke, saying, ‘By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.’ So, Aaron, therefore, kept silent.”

1 Peter 1:14-16 (NASB) ¹⁴“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, ¹⁵but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; ¹⁶because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”

II. Union with Christ Is the Only Means of Holiness

Matthew 27:46 (NASB) “About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’”

Psalms 22:3a (NASB) “Yet You are holy ...”

III. Union with Christ Enables Our Growth in Holiness

1 Thessalonians 4:7 (NIV) “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.”

Colossians 2:6 (NASB) “Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.”

Psalms 32:3-4 (NASB) ³“When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away *as with the fever heat of summer*. Selah.”

Romans 7:15 (NASB) “For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate.”

“Where does the strength come from to move out in joy and peace? It begins with the assurance that God is for you – that’s your anchor! And the knowledge that God is in you [in the person of the Holy Spirit] – that is your engine! And the confidence that God is with you and not disappointed in you – that’s the hand on your back. These can only come from laying hold of your union with Christ.”
- Rankin Wilbourne

Sermon 4: Union with Christ – A New Pursuit (Holiness)

Various Scriptures

Of all the major doctrines in Scripture, the least known and least understood (in my opinion) is the doctrine of the Christian’s union with Christ. As we have focused on in the first three messages in this series, union with Christ is broken down into two amazing truths. Those who have repented of sin and savingly believed on Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sin are both *in Christ* and *Christ is in them*. One of the verses where we see that glorious truth that the Christian is “in Christ” is 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore if anyone is *in Christ*, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” One of the many verses that Christ is in us is Colossians 1:27: “to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is *Christ in you*, the hope of glory.” We

emphasize the sacrifice of Christ (as well we should), we emphasize our salvation through Christ alone (as well we should), we emphasize our joy and hope in Christ (as well we should), but we almost never hear a testimony or teaching that emphasizes our union with Christ! That is what led me to this series. In the last message, we looked at the fact that when we are in union with Christ, we have a new identity. In this message we will see that in our union with Christ, we have a new pursuit – the pursuit of holiness.

2 Corinthians 7:1: “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

The victorious Christian life is living out in daily life who we are in union with Christ. Allow me to explain by giving some examples. In our union with Christ, we are accepted by God. Ephesians 1:6 (NKJV): “to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.” Victory comes when we accept our acceptance by God because we are in union with Christ.

In our union with Christ we are forgiven. Ephesians 1:7: “*In Him* we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.” Living out the Christian life involves saying “no” to the enemy’s temptation to continually beat ourselves up over sin that has been forgiven. In our union with Christ we have redemption – the price for our sin has been paid. Ephesians 1:10b, 11: “In Him, also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.” In our union with Christ, we have an inheritance that God has determined that nothing can steal it away. That is just a small sampling of what we have because of our union with Christ (we are in Him and He is in us). Living out these riches that are ours involves believing and confessing (agreeing with God) that this is what is true about us no matter what we feel and live in light of our true identity that is found in Christ. As believers, we are to walk by faith believing that what God says in His Word is true and then acting as though it is true because it is true. We accept our acceptance in Christ and come boldly before God’s throne as an accepted child. We come before our God with boldness and expectancy that we are redeemed, forgiven for sin because that is what Ephesians 1:7 says.

When you approach everyday life, living in the truth of Scriptures like these (there are scores of them), you are living out the victorious Christian life. Let me say once again that the Christian life is simply living out by faith what God says is true about us because we are in union with Christ.

In this message, we are going to see that those who are in Christ pursue holiness. Holiness has gotten an undeserved bad reputation. For many, holiness brings forth images of women with their hair in a bun, no makeup, no jewelry, and certainly no smile. It brings to mind the famous painting, *American Gothic* by Grant Wood. The focus of the painting is an old farm couple standing in front of their house dressed in mostly black, looking stern, and he has a pitch fork in his hand. Holiness in the mind of many is a life set apart from anything enjoyable or pleasant. Yet Psalms 29:2 (NKJV) says, ‘Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the *beauty* of holiness.’ C. S. Lewis wrote, “How little people know who think that holiness is dull. When one meets the real thing, it is irresistible! If even 10 percent of the world’s population had it, would not the whole world be converted and happy before a year’s end?” [Bruce Wilkinson, *Set Apart*, page 12]

Let’s make sure that we understand what the word “holy” or “holiness” means. Some form of the word “holy” is used in the Bible over 600 times. The command, “Be holy for I am holy” appears

in the Bible five times. The word “holy” means “set apart” or “separated”. When we apply the word “holy” to God, we mean totally set apart from sin – moral perfection.

I don’t want to get too complicated, but when a truth is referenced 600 times in the Bible, it is worth spending time to make sure we understand it. When we apply the word “holy” to man it can have one of two meanings depending on the context.

Positional Holiness

At the moment of salvation, we are set apart or separated to God. Ephesians 1:4: “just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.” Ephesians 4:24: “and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” If you have savingly believed on Christ, there is a sense that you are holy – set apart to God and set apart from a world that has not savingly believed on Him.

Practical Holiness

Here, we are talking about our behavior – what it looks like when our practice matches our position. We are to be separate from the world system in our acts, our deeds, and our lifestyle. A holy life is a life lived in moral purity, integrity in every area. An example would be Romans 6:22 (NIV): “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.”

Let’s make sure we’ve got that. When holiness is referring to God, it means that He is totally set apart from sin and dwells in moral perfection. When it refers to saved people, it means that at salvation we were set apart to God, bought with a price (the shed blood of Christ), and no longer “of this world”. We are told in Philippians 3:20: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

With that lengthy introduction, let’s see how union with Christ leads us to pursuing holiness.

I. Holiness Is Essential to Come to God

The one attribute of God above all others is His holiness. In one sense, His holiness is an attribute of His attributes. His love is a holy love, His wrath is a holy wrath, His mercy is a holy mercy, and his justice is a holy justice, etc. To say that God is holy is to say that He is totally separated from sin and dwells in unending sinless perfection. In Heaven we see in Revelation 4:8: “And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.’” Twenty-two times in the Old Testament the Scripture speaks of His “holy name”. God is more often called “holy” than “almighty”. In Psalm 89:35 God swears by His holiness. Psalms 89:35a: “Once I have sworn by My holiness...” His holiness is the fullest expression on Himself. In Exodus 15:11a - He is “... majestic in holiness...”

Look at how God’s holiness is seen.

A. God’s Holiness Is Seen in His Attitude Toward Sin

Psalms 5:4: “For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; no evil dwells with You.” God hates sin; God is offended by sin. Sin is completely opposite from His character. For one sin, Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden. For one sin, Moses was forbidden to

enter the Promised Land. For one sin, Ananias and Sapphira were killed in a church meeting. God hates sin – all sin. There is no such thing as a small sin in God’s eyes. Sin offends, angers, and grieves God.

B. God’s Holiness Is Seen in Our Approach under the Law

If you’ve ever set out to read through the whole Bible, you likely wondered why all those details were given in the last part of Exodus, and in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Why does the Lord deal so much with the priest’s garment and their preparation to offer sacrifices for the people? One of the main reasons is that God is demonstrating to us His holiness! Sinful man cannot saunter into God’s presence any time or any way he desires. Sinners come to God the way God chooses.

Let me give you one instance from the book of Leviticus. Aaron (Moses’ brother) had two sons named Nadab and Abihu. God had given very specific instructions about how the incense was to be offered to the Lord. The incense symbolized the prayers of the people ascending to God and the whole process was important to God. Nadab and Abihu decided they were going to do it their way. It didn’t turn out well. Leviticus 10:1-3:

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said to Aaron, “It is what the Lord spoke, saying, ‘By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored.’” So, Aaron, therefore, kept silent.

God is holy! Those who would come to God must be holy. 1 Peter 1:14-16: “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” But there is a problem. We cannot be holy. We do not have the capacity to be holy. Even if we could live a sinless life from this point forward, it could not pay for the sins already committed.

II. Union with Christ is the Only Means of Holiness

Hallelujah, what God requires, He provides. On the cross, Jesus who knew no sin took the sin on Himself of all who would come to Him in repentance and total trust. In that act of trust, we are put in union with Christ. Union with Christ is the only way that His sacrifice could be ours. Union with the crucified Christ is the only means of our salvation. Oh, the high cost of this salvation Christ procured for us! The greatest agony associated with the cross was not the beatings or the nails in Christ’s hands and feet. The greatest agony was when the sinless, perfect Son of God took our sin, He experienced the full wrath of God against sin. That wrath was separation from the Father. We see it in Matthew 27:46: “About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’”

But don’t forget the agony of the Father who said of His Son, “This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased”, and yet made Him suffer unspeakable agony that we might come to the Father and be accepted by Him. Why this drastic action? The answer is found in Psalms 22:3a: “Yet You are holy...” If God was ever going to slack off on His holiness, it would have been here at the

cross of Christ, but there was no slacking off, no backing down. Had He lowered the standard of holiness, He would not have been a just and holy God. God is Holy and could never lower the standard that we must be holy to come to Him. It was in the suffering of God the Son on the cross that God the Father could be merciful to all who come to Jesus and yet not compromise His holiness.

III. Union with Christ Enables Our Growth in Holiness

Not only are we saved by His holiness, we continue walking in holiness through our union with Christ. 1 Thessalonians 4:7 (NIV): “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.” Union with Christ is the way to salvation and it is the way to growth in our walk with him. Colossians 2:6: “Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.”

Our union with Christ enables our spiritual growth by never allowing us to be comfortable in our sin. Psalms 32:3-4: “When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away *as with the fever heat of summer*.” When we are in union with Christ, we still have the capacity to sin, but we no longer have the capacity to live in sin and enjoy it – Hallelujah!

Our union with Christ won't allow us to continually live in despair over our sin. As we grow in Christ and pursue a deeper holiness, we will still fail. We can all relate to the Apostle Paul in Romans 7:15: “For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate.” However, because we are in union with Christ, He draws us back to Himself and we repent and confess that we were not living out of our union with Christ.

I ran across this great quote I want to share with you.

Where does the strength come from to move out in joy and peace? It begins with the assurance that God is for you – that's your anchor! And the knowledge that God is in you [in the person of the Holy Spirit] – that is your engine! And the confidence that God is with you and not disappointed in you – that's the hand on your back. These can only come from laying hold of your union with Christ.

[Rankin Wilbourne, *Union with Christ*, page 189]

Conclusion

Oh, how glorious is the truth that if we are in union with Christ (we are in Christ and he is in us) there is a lifelong quest of growing in holiness and we are enabled to get up when we fall and move on in his strength to deeper and deeper holiness. To God be the glory!

NASB (New American Standard Bible)

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