



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 17:20-26

“The Goal and the Application of Redemption: Union”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] As I mentioned last week, for this relatively short series of messages we are not following any particular section of the New Testament, and in fact are not even giving what I would call a strictly expository messages. John chapter 17 contains some words with reference to the topic today, the topic of “Union with Christ,” and we’re going to read this as our Scripture reading. John 17 verse 20 through 26, and you’ll recognize that this is a part of our Lord’s high priestly prayer.

I should also mention this now, rather than in the message, that this particular prayer of our Lord is by all most all commentators, remarkably they seem to agree, divided into three parts, that is our Lord prays for himself in verse 1 through verse 5, then in verse 6 through verse 19 his vision moves out to encompass the apostles who are with him, and finally in verse 20 through verse 26 the viewpoint of our Lord broadens out to include the whole of the church. And so we are reading that third portion, verse 20 through verse 26. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.” Incidentally that expression translated, “Shall believe” in the Authorized Version from which I’m reading is a construction in the original text that is in the present tense and so strictly speaking it means something like, “For them also which are believing on me through their word.” It might be taken in a timeless fashion, but the

point is simply that it encompasses those who at that time were beginning to believe in him and evidently encompasses all who believe from that time on. Verse 21,

“That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me. And the glory which Thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which Thou hast given me: for Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee: but I have known Thee, and these have known that Thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. We bow together now for a time of prayer.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for the ministry of the word of God to us. And as we reflect, Lord, upon this great petition which the Lord Jesus Christ uttered, we want to thank Thee, first of all, that we are able to read this and reflect upon it. We thank Thee for the purpose of the triune God to preserve the word of God for us and to preserve our Lord's Prayer. What a blessing. And we give Thee thanks.

We thank Thee for the way in which Thou hast ministered to and strengthened and encouraged the Apostle John to give us this gospel and to give us this account of this marvelous petition. We thank Thee and praise Thee for the ministry that it has had in so many lives, in our lives, and in the lives of many of those who belong to the church, the

people of God. We pray, Lord, that as we read and study today and as we reflect upon these great truths that we may be strengthened and edified and built up in our faith.

We pray for the whole church of Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the assurance that these petitions of our Lord shall be answered, and so we look forward to the day when we all who have believed in him shall behold his glory which Thou hast given to him before the foundation of the world. What a glorious future, Lord, Thou hast planned for us, the people of God. We are grateful and thankful.

We're thankful for the work of the Holy Spirit who has illuminated us, caused us to see our sin, caused us to see Christ as the savior of sinners, and brought us in marvelous grace to rest ourselves upon him for time and for eternity. We thank Thee, Lord.

And we thank Thee for the whole church and pray Thy blessing upon all of its members wherever they may be today. We thank Thee especially Lord for the way in which Thou hast blessed the chapel and its ministry, and we pray for the elders and deacons and the members. And the friends who are visiting with us today, we ask Thy blessing upon them.

We especially Lord ask for those whose names are listed in our Calendar of Concern. We know there are many, many needs that we have, and we ask, Lord, that through the marvelous manifestation of the power and grace of our triune God, they may be strengthened and edified and helped and given healing in accordance with Thy will.

We thank Thee for this country of which we're a part. We pray for our President, particularly in these days. May, Lord, he be given wisdom and guidance as important issues are discussed.

Now we ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon us as we sing together, then as we reflect upon Thy word. Build us up in our faith. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] As a brief interlude we are studying “The Method of Grace in Our Redemption.” And last week we looked at the subject, “The Method of Grace in Our Redemption, the Effectual Application” of it. And today we are looking at the next step in our study of “The Method of Grace, Divine Union, The Goal.” So we’re turning to John chapter 17 not to expound these verses, these verses have been expounded more than once in your presence through the exposition of the Gospel of John, but simply to call attention to the fact that the doctrine of Union with Christ is found very, very significantly in this high priestly prayer that our Lord prayed, and then we will be looking at also other passages in the New Testament in which the Apostle Paul lays stress upon this doctrine.

When we think about God’s method, his gracious method, of bringing redemption to us, we begin properly in its effectual application. That’s what we looked at last week, and we simply used the one text in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 30 in order to set that forth where the apostle says, “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, whom has made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” We laid stress upon the fact that we have been united with Christ. We laid stress upon the benefits that are ours as set out in that text, wisdom which we said was to be understood as a word comprehending righteousness, sanctification and redemption. That was necessary because of the construction of the Greek text that underlies the statement that we read in our English version.

And then finally as we concluded the message we laid great stress upon those opening two little words, “But ‘of him’ are ye in Christ Jesus.” In other words, the experience of Christian salvation begins with God. He is the one who initiates it. He is the one who initiates those first positive responses toward the Lord God. That’s why we say salvation is “of the Lord” because it is the Lord God who initiates salvation. It does not arise from the heart of man as if the fundamental decision is made by man and then blessed by God or helped by God, but it begins with God, “of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who has been made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.”

Now, today we are coming to the next step in the method of grace in our redemption, and we are talking about divine union because that's the goal of salvation by grace to bring us into union with the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore possessed of the benefits that flow from that. The goal of the Lord God in the work of redemption is to bring us to the possession of spiritual benefits. And these spiritual benefits are, by their very nature, they imply communion with the Lord God. If we share in benefits that come from the Lord to that extent, we have communion with him. And in having communion or fellowship with him in these benefits, we enjoy to that extent a union with him. So we're going to treat now of the great doctrine of “union with Christ” which had its formulation in the councils of the Trinity in eternity past.

You know when we think about the Bible as having come to us through the course of the centuries, the Holy Spirit moving in the hearts of individual to write the word of God from Moses on down through the Apostle John who was by the Lord God given the privilege of writing, it seems, the last few books of the sixty-six, we sometimes forget that all they are writing is the account of what the Trinity had formulated in the ages of eternity past, in those great councils between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the plan of redemption was made, and now in history the details of it are being carried out. So when we talk about our redemption and when we talk about the method of grace in our redemption, in our thoughts we must go back to the ages before the creation when the Trinity formulated the plan.

This plan reached its ratification when the Lord Jesus came and offered the sacrifice upon which our salvation was based. So that the councils of the Trinity in eternity laid the foundation of “union with Christ”, it was consummated so far as ratified and made possible by the blood that was shed on Calvary's cross. We speak of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ and we mean simply that he accomplished the sacrifice upon which the whole of the program of God rested, and now having

accomplished that the Lord Jesus lives at the right hand of God to secure the blessings for which he has paid in his death.

What does it mean to be “in Christ Jesus?” Well, you don't have to read the Bible much to realize that this is one of the great expressions of the New Testament. Even if we don't understand precisely what it means, we know it's important if we read the Bible. In fact, it's one of the things that might be called “the heart” of New Testament teaching. It has often been called “the heart” of Paul's teaching who probably if you had to pick a theologian of all of the Apostles, you probably would say he was the greatest of the theologians. And to say that “in Christ” or “union with Christ” is “the heart” of Pauline theology is to say it's “the heart” of the mature theology of the word of God.

One other well known Scottish theologian said a couple of generations ago, “Union with Christ” is a brief name for all that the apostles mean by “salvation.” It's not a whole lot different from the things that were said in the Old Testament except that now we speak of it as a completed thing rather than a hoped for thing. For example, when the Psalmist cried, ““Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations,” he was expressing what was essentially the relationship of saved individuals in Old Testament times in which they enjoyed the blessings of the Lord God and felt themselves “HOMED” in God. Wordsworth has a wonderful expression, “God who is our HOME.” Well, that's what Paul spells out in his theology of the New Testament. He spells out what it means to be or to have a God in whom is our HOME! And he does it by this expression “in Christ Jesus.”

Now when we talk about “union with Christ” that raises a lot of questions, usually questions of the kind, “What does that mean? I'm not sure I've really experienced that.” What does it mean to say we are united to Christ spiritually? Does that suggest that we are like the Mystics? Now we must distinguish between Christian mysticism and Mysticism. Mysticism has characterized certain movements within professing Christianity. What is generally meant by that kind of mysticism is the belief that it is possible for us to

have special revelation from the Lord God at any particular time. It's particularly associated with people like the Quakers who in their meetings often sat around and waited for God to speak to one of them. Without reference to the word of God, and so individuals would give certain responses and they would say, “This is what God has said to me.” Another would say, “This is what God has said to me.” Various, closely associated with what exists today in some movements in which an individual says, “I have been given a prophecy by God.” It's not related to the word of God or in some cases it may be broadly related but not specially a revelation from the Lord God. That kind of mysticism, orthodox Christianity has never held. In other words, they have felt that the idea that God speaks indiscriminately and in that random way is contrary to the teaching of Scripture.

On the other hand, if we rule out that kind of mysticism, and I think it's proper to rule out that kind of mysticism because there is not kind of test for that which would enable us to be sure that it is the word of God, then we are still faced however with the fact the New Testament speaks about people being “in Christ,” “in Christ Jesus,” “in him,” “in whom,” all of these expressions suggestive of “union with Christ.” What is meant by that? Well we can say it has to do with a spiritual relationship with him, and we're going to say something more about that. And I want simply to point this out. There is such a thing as Christian mysticism. Now it's not the view that we may be given new revelation at any particular moment if we sit down with the Bible and we reflect upon what has happened to us, and as we read the Scriptures and as we reflect upon the meanings of things in the Scriptures we are not to give forth words of revelation. The revelation is complete.

On the other hand, we are “in Christ,” and being “in Christ” there is a relationship. It's a relationship of union, as expressed by that little word “in.” So we are Christian mystics in the sense that there is a spiritual union between every believer and the Lord Jesus Christ. The depths of the meaning of that expression can only come out through

the study of the word of God and through Christian experience. And many Christian can give testimony to the experience of “union with Christ.” In fact, I think it’s fair to say all Christians ought to ultimately have some maturity in the experience of “union with Jesus Christ.”

Now I know you might think, “Well now this is just a theological point, and therefore it doesn't really have a whole lot of practical value as far as I’m concerned. How is it going to help me when I work at my computer tomorrow? Is it going to enable me to understand MS DOS a little bit better,” or something like that? But, and it won't help you as far as that’s concerned, you have to apply yourselves to the manuals and to your experience, but let me say this, that “union with Christ” has the deepest practical significance.

Let me give you just a simple little illustration. An unbeliever and a rather simple minded woman were discussing the doctrine of eternal security or the perseverance of the saints. And in the course of the discussion the lady was attempting to show the unbeliever that in the case of our Lord’s promises there was assurance of eternal security, assurance of the perseverance of the saints, and so she cited John chapter 10 verses 28 and 29 to him. “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.” Well, the unbeliever in characteristic fashion thought that he could win this argument, and so he said, “Well yes that’s true. Jesus said that evidently, but suppose you slipped between his fingers?” And the simple minded woman who was following the word of God says, “I can never do that. The Apostle Paul says, ‘Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular.’ Halleluiah, I’m one of the fingers.” So the doctrine of “union with Christ” won one argument at least, or at least temporarily. It’s one of the great truths of the word of God that we do belong to the Lord Jesus and there is an inseparable union between every believer and him.

Now let's take a look at a few of the things that have to do with this. First of all, I'd like for you to look at John 17 and verse 23 for just a moment or so. I'm not going to spend any more time on that. But remember when you come to John chapter 17, you come to one of the great passages in the word of God. John Knox, the Scottish reformer, said on his death bed after he had asked someone to read John 17, he says, “This is the place where I cast my first anchor.” In other words, this is the place where I came to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus as my savior. It's the Lord's Prayer preeminently. It's the high priestly prayer. It's the prayer in which the Lord Jesus offers up a petition, not only for himself that he may be restored to the glory that he had before the world was, but also for the apostles and for the whole church of Jesus Christ, and it glows, literally glows with the unity of the God head in love for one another and also with the eternal distinguishing love and care for the given ones. What a blessing my dear friends it is to be one of the given ones. Listen to the emphasis that Jesus places upon this. Verse 2, “As Thou hast given him (that is the Son) power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given him;” verse 6, “I have manifested Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest me out of the world: Thine they were, and Thou gavest them me; and they have kept Thy word.”

Now I say this is distinguishing grace for the simple reason that not everybody is given by the Father to the Son. That's very evident because if it were so every one of them would have eternal life because he has said, “Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given him.” Do you think there will ever be anyone in heaven who stands before the Lord God's throne and says, “You gave me to the Son but he didn't give me the power to come?” No, those who have been given to the Son have been given eternal life by the Son. Verse 9, “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given me; for they are Thine.”

Now in verse 24 we read, “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am.” And I want you to know my Christian friend that I believe that I

and all of the saints given by the Lord God to the Son will one day be where he is. The reason we will be there is because the Son has accomplished the redeeming work and the word of God is a word that will not fail to accomplish its purposes. So, here we have a marvelous picture of the love of the Trinity for one another and the love of the Trinity for those who are to be “in Christ.”

Now we are in that part in which we have the third ring of this circle, his prayer for the whole family of God. And in verse 23 in the opening clauses there is a threefold union. Look at it carefully. First of all, there is a union between the Father and the Son in the second clause, “Thou in me.” What kind of union is that? Well I wish I could explain it to you. I don't have the power to explain it to you. Who can explain the precise nature of the unity that exists between the Father and the Son? I can only say it's an ineffable union. It's something that is too big for us who are creatures to understand. I know it is fundamental because it's a union of the participation in the divine essence. So we can say it's an essential union. The Father and the Son possess the same nature. The Christian church has always believed that God is a Trinity, a Trinity of persons, that is there are three persons who subsist in one essence. So the essential union, the essence, the essential union is a union of participation in the divine essence.

But furthermore as you read this chapter it's quite evident that it's a union of divine affection as well. There is an affection that the Son has for the Father, and that the Father has for the Son, and that the Spirit has for both and that both have for the Spirit. There's a marvelous unity of affection in the God head. And further there is also a union in the accomplishment of the atoning work. What you might call a union in the federal activity of the Son. In other words, the Father is joined with the Son in essential unity in the accomplishment of the covenantal work, of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. So the union that he speaks of as a union between the Father and the Son, but there is a second union. Notice the first clause, “I in them.” That's a union between the Son and the saints. Now this is not an essential union such as the previous essential

union. It's a mystical union, not in the sense of the mystics, as I said, but it's a mystical union in the sense that it's a spiritual union. It comes and is made real by the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Remember Paul says, “Because your sons, God has sent forth the spirit of his Son into your hearts crying, ‘Abba, Father.’” So there is a union between the believers and our Lord that is a mystical union. We are united to the Lord Christ through the activity of the Holy Spirit.

And finally, in verse 23 he says, “That they may be made perfect in one.” There is a common unity between the believers who are the recipients of the blessings of the Lord. In case that doesn't appear so clearly to you at first, look at verse 21. “That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me.” So here we have then a threefold union.

What kind of union is this? Well, we could, first of all, say perhaps we can understand it by thinking of the figures that the writers of the New Testament used to describe this union, the illustrations. One of the illustrations is the illustration of glue. Believe it or not, glue. When we join two things together we frequently use glue. In fact when we break something that often is the first thing we think about, or even the first thing we say, “Where's the glue?” Now that kind of adhesion is used in the New Testament to describe the union of the believer in the Lord. For example, Paul says, “He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.” So there is an expression of being “joined to the Lord.” That's simply an illustration of course, and we're not to think that the Holy Spirit is like our glue which will ultimately fail.

There is another figure that is often used and that is the figure of grafting. Now many of you are not acquainted with the figure of grafting. It doesn't speak definitely to you because you are not gardeners. And some of you are gardeners and maybe you've not gone into it quite as seriously as others who are gardeners. But if you know what it means to graft a scion onto a root or stock you will understand something about union so Paul says because he uses this figure in Romans 11. You take a cultivated scion and you

graft it onto wild stock as a general rule; almost all of your plants that you buy over at Wolf's or wherever, for example, camellia plants or something like that, they're grafted plants. And when the scion is put into the stock or if the graft is into a cultivated stock it's bound together and ultimately the life of the stock becomes the life of the scion, although the scion bears the flowers of the scion. Strange, isn't it? Marvelous illustration of spiritual truth, we don't have time to develop so far as the details are concerned. But you can see that the sap of the stock becomes the life of the scion. And we are like scions. We're like wild ones grafted into the Lord Jesus Christ and the life of the stock, the Lord Jesus, becomes our life. We are joined together so that we possess the life of Christ.

There is also the figure of marriage used in the New Testament. And, of course, in marriage in the New Testament is presented as two people being united, “For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh,” marvelous figure of the significance of marriage. Now, we likewise have been joined to the Lord Jesus.

And finally, there is the figure of the human body which Paul seems to love to use in the later writings, Ephesians, Colossians. He talks about Christ as the head. We are the members. We receive life from the head. We receive direction from the head, the intimacy, the authority, and the other things that characterize that kind of relationship are true of our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you were to describe the union just in random words, ones that I've picked out, I would say this union with the Lord is personal. It's supernatural. “Of him are ye in Christ Jesus.” It's efficacious because once united to him the life of the God head begins to work in us and never ceases to work until we are glorified and in fact does not cease even then. It's honorable because we are united to the Lord Jesus Christ. It's comforting. It's enriching. And it's an indissoluble union. “Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?”

When I went through theological seminary Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, many years ago, loved to say a few things about those seven words in John 14 in which the Lord Jesus said, “At that day this shall be true, ye in me, and I in you.” He loved to ring the changes on that expression because it expressed our position and also our relationship in activity. “Ye in me, and I in you,” and then Dr. Chafer used to, before modern medicine, it’s interesting I can now speak about before modern medicine and I was living then, he would say, “Surgery has never yet been able to take a limb from one person and graft it into another person.”

Now, of course, that has happened. Twenty-five years ago, there was a man who lost an arm. It was grafted back into him. Twenty-two years later, I don't know his condition now, this was about three years ago, that arm was still working wonderfully. Many marvelous things have been done in recent days.

But Dr. Chafer used to like to say, “Let’s just imagine that the hand of a criminal,” and then he would say, “Well wait why don't we just imagine this? Why don't we imagine that an important man, a king or a president, has lost a hand and the word goes out to our penitentiary anyone who would be willing to spare a hand for the president or the king will receive certain benefits from doing it.” Now he said, “Surgery has never been able to do this, but the hand of the criminal is attached to the hand of the king.” And then he would say, “Now that hand which was stained by the murder or whatever crime, all of the sense of disfavor because of association with a criminal is now associated with a king or president, and therefore all of the favor, the authority, the intimacy, is now associated with the hand that formerly was joined to a criminal.” And he would make the application and say, “That’s what you were. You were in Adam, but now by the grace of God you have been placed in Christ. And because you’ve been placed in Christ you share the intimacy of an individual in Christ. You share also the authority that rests with those who are the sons of God and all of the other blessings that flow out of a relationship to him.” This union is an indissoluble union.

But I'd like to close by mentioning what I call the implications of this because some of these things I think are rather important. You know the Puritans like to say after they developed a particular topic and when they came to the implications, they would say, “Now we shall improve it.” I don't know how they came upon the use of the term, “improve” for that. To me it means simply to apply it, to give the implications, the deductions that you may reasonably draw from spiritual truth. But we'll call it improving it. We will apply it.

What are the things that flow out of union? Well, the transcendent dignity of believers. In our age you know we have so much false teaching, so much shallow teaching, and so much careless teaching in the evangelical church that you often have as a center piece of evangelical doctrine “the dignity of man.” Now there is a sense in which we can say man has dignity because he was created in the image of God, but we forget when we lay great stress upon the dignity of man that man is a fallen being. That the dignity that man has, while not lost, is corrupted. And so it's only in that sense that we can speak of the dignity of man. But we can truly speak of the dignity of believers because believers have been united to the Lord Jesus Christ, and they share the dignity of union with him. They are the children of God. They are sons of God. They have been adopted into the divine family. In that sense we possess a transcendental dignity. Angels are dignified beings but they are like nobles in the kingdom of God. But we are closer to God than nobles. We are the spouse and wife of his bosom. We are that close to our Lord Jesus Christ. What a marvelous thing it is to be united to Jesus Christ, first implication, first improvement.

Secondly, this inseparable union that we have means eternal life as long as the sap flows through a plant, the branches shall live. And so as long as the life of God flows in our Lord's person and being, we who are united to him shall have life. And since he's an eternal being, his life knows no end, we possess eternal life. “Because I live, ye shall live

also,” Jesus said. We have the promise and the hope of eternal living, being united to him.

Thirdly, that means very practically that there has to be liberality to the saints. If it is true that we are in Christ and all of us are in Christ, then our relationship to our fellow believers is the relationship to individuals who are united to Christ. When our Lord told the parable, I guess I should call this a parable because he describes it really as an event of the future, the judgment of the nations, he spoke about the way in which the judgment should be made as determined by the way in which individual treated him. For example, he said, “I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me,” and the Lord said but these people are going to reply to him and they’re going to say,

“Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

Now that had to do with the judgment of the Gentiles, but that principle is a principle that pertains to the Christian family. That means in Believers Chapel when we have individuals who are in need, it’s our privilege, it’s our responsibility to minister to them. I’m grateful for that which the elders have done through the years. They have sought to do this. Occasionally they don’t know of individuals who may be suffering, but I think it’s fair to say that if you know and you come to the elders and you let them know, our elders are men of compassion, and they will minister to us, and they will minister to us as possessors of the same life in our Lord Jesus Christ. As true believers we

can never be anything but merciful and helpful to fellow believers because they are united to the Lord to whom we are united.

Fourthly, how unnatural for Christians to grieve their head. He's the head and the body. We are members of his body. How foolish for my hand to attack my head. How foolish for one part of my body to be opposed to another part of my body. And so how foolish it is for a believer to grieve the Lord Jesus Christ who is our head.

Fifthly, how great a sin it is to wrong the saints then. You remember the Lord Jesus met Saul on the Damascus road and he said, “Saul, Saul why persecutes thou me?” That's what Paul was doing. He was really persecuting him. In Zachariah the Lord spoke of the people of God as being the “apple of his eye.” And we have other indications in the word of God to the effect that the saints of God are very precious to the Lord God, and in fact the Scriptures in the Old Testament say that God persecutes those who persecute the saints. So, how great a sin it is to wrong the saints.

And sixthly, what a comfort it is in facing death to realize that we are united to the Lord God. He's the first fruits of them that have risen from the dead. That's a marvelous expression. Think of it for a moment. “First fruits,” that means that others are going to be raised too.” Jesus is the only one who has come forth from the grave in glorified form. That's why he's the first and only one to have been resurrected in the biblical sense to this present moment. People have come from the dead, like Lazarus, but they came with their same old body, so far as we know, and died a second time. But Jesus is the “first fruits” from the dead. Now if the Lord Jesus is united to the saints, if he's the “first fruits,” we're going to be resurrected. He cannot perish in the grave, and he cannot allow a part of himself to perish in the grave much less burn in hell.

This past week I was reading something in a magazine. It was about Robert E. Lee. When I saw it was about Robert E. Lee, I read it. [Laughter] And it was a few words written by someone about Lee's death. I've often mentioned this, of course, I wrote a paper once on Robert E. Lee as a Christian. I never could really make up my mind that

he an evangelical Christian. Many think that he was. He was a very godly man in the sense that he was a religious man. And I've been in Lexington and seen the place, and Washington and Lee University where he sat every morning when chapel took place right up near the front. And he was a man of dignity, but whether he was an evangelical Christian I'm not really sure.

But I was reading a few things about his life and his last days and in his last days he was on his death bed from heart disease, and he was beginning to lose contact with the earth. And he spoke, and he said, “Traveler has been standing so long in the stable, he needs exercise.” Traveler was his horse. He began to think back. His mind went back, and then in a moment he said, “Tell Hill he must come up.” He's talking about General Hill, one of his subordinate officers in a particular part of one of his campaigns. And finally his last words that he gasped were, “Strike the tent.” And it is striking, of course, that that's really a biblical expression. It's an expression that is used of a person's death. And Lee used that term. I don't know whether he was a Christian or not, but I know this, that when a person comes to the experience of death, we have an assurance that even General Lee gave no indication of having.

William Saroyan, a writer that many of you are familiar with died not long ago. And he, before he died, he wrote some things that were to be published only after he died. And this was what he gave men the authority to say. This was his final statement. And he said you may publish this after my death. He said, “Everybody has got to die, but I've always believed an exception would be made in my case, now what?” Well, we know what. We know even if we should fail on our death bed and say things that we don't really realize we're saying, as so many people do when they are sick that our union with Christ, our relationship to him assures us of the life that is to come in the presence of the Lord Jesus. As Mr. Whitefield said in one of his sermons on Christ Our Righteousness, he said, “The great Stoddard or Northampton in New England, has therefore well entitled a book which he wrote (and which I would take this opportunity to recommend) *The*

Safety of Appearing in the Righteousness of Christ.” If you have the righteousness of Christ, that gives you safety before the throne of the Lord God.

What a comfort in facing death is union with Christ, and how important, my Christian friends, finally, that proper affects should flow from this union. For the sake of time, only cite one text. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God hath before prepared that we should walk in them.” How comfortable and contented should we be to whom Christ with all his treasures and benefits is effectually applied in mystical union. He is ours. As one of the Puritans said, “Oh how great, how glorious, a person do these little weak arms of your faith embrace.” Do you know what has really happened to you in believing in Christ? You have embraced this person who guarantees all of these blessings to you.

Now I think I understand why he’s so concerned about these believers. He wants us to be kept, so he prays the Father that we may be kept. He wants us to be perfected, so he prays the Father that we may be perfected. And he also wants and wishes and wills that we be eternally present with him. Listen, verse 24, “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which Thou hast given me: for Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.” Richard Hooper said, “The Lord Jesus is, if I may so say, so fond of their presence and, therefore, is not willing to be in heaven unless they may be with Him, as though heaven were no heaven unless the saints should take up their abode there with Him.” What a blessing it is to be united to Christ and uniting to Christ is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in grace by which we are brought to the knowledge of ourselves, to the knowledge of the cross and how it meets our needs in redemption. May God in his wonderful grace bring each of us to that knowledge.

“The Goal and the Application of Redemption: Union” by S. Lewis Johnson
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If you're here today and you've never believed in him, we remind you of the one who gave himself a sacrifice for sinners, and we're all qualified. Come to Christ. Believe in him. Rest yourself upon him, and enjoy the blessing of eternal life and union with Christ. May God help you to come; for those of you who have come, rejoice in the comfort and contentment that he gives to his saints. Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father, how wonderful it is to realize the union that we enjoy with the Lord Jesus Christ. Words could never express the significance of all that Thou hast accomplished. Thy ways are higher than our ways and beyond our understanding. We thank Thee for the little insights that have been given us into the glorious future that lies ahead for the saints of God. O Father if there should be someone in this...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]