

The Life Experience of Oneness

The cross in its deepest dimension

Paul's words in Romans 16:25, "Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel, [that is,] the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery," are an unveiling of the cross in its deepest dimension. He is showing us the cross from its corporate side. The Lord not only bore our sins, crucified our old man, and condemned sin in the flesh, on the individual side; but on the corporate side He abolished in His flesh all the divisions existing between the divided peoples, in order to create in Himself "one new man," making peace (Eph. 2:15). Amen! He "made peace through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20). This was the deepest accomplishment at Calvary. There was a reconciliation of all of us in one Body. Ephesians 2:16 says, "that He might reconcile them both to God in one Body through the cross." This includes all of us together.

This one Body is "the mystery of Christ" (Eph. 3:4-6). He produced it on the cross. So to be "established" is to be practically meeting as the church, receiving one another on the basis of what happened at the cross. It is having Calvary as the factor between us as we enjoy our commonness in one Body with one Spirit. This is what Paul is speaking of in Romans 16 — that the saints could be established "according to the revelation of the mystery."

The pivotal point of receiving

The revelation of the mystery of this one Body

pivots on one word — receiving. Whether or not there could be an expression of the new man pivots on all the saints' capacity and grace to receive one another the way Christ received us. This is the key to Paul's burden in the book of Romans. We need to see the nature of receiving, because it is the factor for the establishing of the church in any place. To receive one another is to simply come together without preference, without choice, with one kind of response — the obedience of faith. This response comes from the corporate revelation of the one Body produced on the cross. It is the revelation of the mystery of Christ, that on the cross the Lord destroyed all the ordinances, all the factors of division, and made us one Body in Him.

*"Receive one another, just as
Christ also received you"*

Romans 15:7 says, "Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received [you], to the glory of God." Again, this word "receive" is pivotal in Paul's burden. Chapter 14 is the context for Paul's speaking this word on receiving one another. Here in chapter 15 Paul continues to speak to those Jews and Gentiles in Rome who were keeping more to themselves than meeting with one another. He shows them that God's heart's desire for their oneness is also revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures. With this background, he further appeals to them to come and rejoice together as Gentiles and Jews, praising the Lord with one mouth, glorifying God in one accord (vv. 9-11).

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Coming together in the way Paul describes in Romans 15:9-11 pivots on our receiving one another just as Christ received us. If I am going to learn how to receive you, I must deeply immerse myself in how Christ has received me. If I know how Christ has received me and experience the Lord in my daily life under this revelation, there will be an automatic response in me to receive you. So we can see there is a connection between experiencing life and receiving one another.

Receiving is a major thing in God's economy because it reflects the very essence, or nature, of God Himself, which is love. Receiving has to do with the essence of God's person. Thus, when the church is the embodiment of the nature of God, then there is the receiving in the new creation, in the new man, with one accord and one mouth glorifying God. In this receiving, the Lord's enemy is crushed under our feet by the God of peace. Receiving plays a major part in our relationships because it has to do with our reactions, our perceptions, and our capacity for each other. So, it would behoove us to say, "Lord, I need to know how You have received me." Christ's receiving of us and our experience of life and knowing Him personally affects our relationship with one another.

The relationship between life and receiving

We all know that when Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, he did not divide it into chapters. He was flowing out a burden. So we must think of these chapters in a related way. For example, chapters 13 and 14 are to be viewed together and not in a disconnected way. And we should realize that chapter 13 leads into chapters 14 and 15 on receiving.

In Romans 13:1-2 Paul says, ¹ "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. ² Therefore whoever resists the authority [opposes God's ordination], and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves." Here Paul begins to talk about government and the existing authorities. We must realize that these authorities were part of the Roman Empire. Paul was not referring to a wonderful governmental system but a pagan empire. Nevertheless, he is saying that every person is to be subject to the authorities.

In verse 5 Paul tells us why we need to be subject: "Therefore [it is necessary to] be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake." This means that any rebellion in us toward the government is a conscience matter. Then in verses 6-7 he says, ⁶ "For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's

ministers attending continually to this very thing. ⁷ Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor." Paul touches all these practical matters of our daily life and our relationships with people in commonplace things.

Paul knows that if the saints in Rome are going to embrace one another and receive one another, that receiving will be by the growth of God and the life of God manifesting itself out of their being. Thus, receiving is rooted in their experiences of Christ in the details of their daily life — in paying their taxes, in relationships involving authority, in caring for matters of conscience. In other words, if you are not living by the Lord's life in the practical matters, you can only have a philosophy of receiving and an outward standing as the church. This is because the church is the outflow of our experience of God's life. Our receiving of one another is based upon experiencing Christ in these matters of daily life.

These verses in Romans 13 also indicate that receiving one another is related to having a sense of God's authority among us. We are under that authority. We respect that authority. Throughout the centuries, when the enemy has come into the church, it has always been through unruly persons. We know that Satan himself became unruly. He would not remain under God's authority. In the same sense, when there is unruliness, rebellion, and a lack of consciousness of God's authority in the Body, it is impossible to have the proper receiving and the proper church life. Paul is wise. Even before he touches the matter of receiving in chapter 14, he touches the practical matters of our human living in chapter 13, showing us how much our daily experience of Christ as life is related to the receiving of the saints.

At the end of chapter 13 Paul says in verses 12-14, ¹² "The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts." Here Paul is showing us that our capacity to receive all the saints is directly related to how much we do not make provision for the flesh.

How much ground you have given to the flesh will be evidenced in your receiving ability. If you make provision by an immoral life, by drunkenness, by partaking in strife and jealousy — by any of the works of darkness that are mentioned in chapter 13 — it will affect your ability to receive other saints. Making provision for the flesh can touch any area of our life, from how we spend our time, to how we handle our

money, to what magazines we look at, to what we watch on TV, to fantasies we indulge in our mind, to our habits, to whatever area. Ultimately, all of these matters influence our ability to receive one another. Whether or not we live by God in our private daily life will affect our ability to embrace all the saints.

It has been my observation from 30 years in the church life that when someone is a striving, divisive person and is damaging the church, it is often related to his not experiencing Christ in some area of his life. That person who is damaging the church is usually involved in darkness in some way. These are related.

Paul ends Romans 13 by saying, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 14). This means we experience Christ and do not make any provision for the flesh. We take care of anything in our life that is not according to God, that causes us to have a controversy with God, because it would become an avenue for the enemy to affect the church. This makes us all want to walk before the Lord, living by His life and experiencing His life.

Paul’s words in Romans 13 show us what makes the church life work, what brings in the genuine receiving of one another in Romans 14 and 15. In these later chapters he is not talking about merely an outward way of meeting. He is not saying, “Let us all be general and receive one another.” We know that this will not work. What works is all of us experiencing Christ together and knowing Him and not making provision for the flesh.

2 Corinthians 6:11—7:2

Let us look at two other passages in the New Testament that show how critical our experience of life is in relationship to receiving. The first one is 2 Corinthians 6:11—7:2. Paul is imploring the Corinthians in verses 11-13: ¹¹ “O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. ¹² You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own [inward parts]. ¹³ Now in return for the same, (I speak as to children), you also be open.” Paul is saying to them, “Open wide your inward parts. You do not receive me. You are restricted in your own inward parts. But open, receive.”

Then in verse 2 of chapter 7 Paul again speaks of receiving: “Open your hearts to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have defrauded no one.” Some versions of the Bible translate the first part of this verse as “Receive us.” Others say, “Make room for us,” “Welcome us,” or “Give place to us.” Paul’s burden is for the saints in Corinth to be enlarged to receive him.

Between these two portions of the Word about

receiving, Paul directs the Corinthians to their walk with the Lord. In verses 14-18 of chapter 6, he says, ¹⁴ “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? ¹⁵ And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For [we] are the temple of the living God. As God has said: I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ¹⁷ Therefore come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. ¹⁸ I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” Then in verse 1 of chapter 7 Paul makes a transitional statement to reveal how the Corinthians’ dealings with the Lord are directly related to their capacity to receive: “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all [defilement] of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

Why Paul puts all these verses together has perplexed many Bible scholars and teachers through the years. But in God’s light we can see their significance. They show that the genuine receiving without division in the church life — where there is the capacity to experience Christ with one another in a genuine way — is very much related to our experience of life. It is related to whether or not we touch the unclean thing, whether or not our spirit has been defiled, or polluted. So rather than just saying “Open your hearts to us” and “Enlarge yourselves to receive us,” Paul goes directly to the problem. He knew that outside of the church meetings these saints were living a life in darkness (2 Cor. 6:14). They were getting involved with lawlessness (v. 14) and with things of the devil (v. 15). They were coming to the church meetings and then going to the idol’s temple (v. 16). Because they had a deficient experience of life, their inward parts were restricted.

Again, this shows us the relationship between the experience of life and receiving one another. Consider your own experience. When you have lived in sin, in the flesh, did it not backfire and have an effect upon your relationship with your spouse or your children? Did you not experience a lack of capacity to receive others because you had reaped the effects of living in the flesh? You got angry, you got mad. Your flesh was fresh in anger because it was fresh in hidden sin. This shows us that the flesh has many departments. When you open the door to hidden sin, you have just unwittingly opened the door to anger. You do not know it at the time. But what happens is that you find yourself coping with

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The Kingdom of God

(Part 2)

(The following is a continuation from last month's issue in which we were addressing the question, "What is the kingdom?")

Moreover, Satan was defeated in the Lord's resurrection, ascension, exaltation, and enthronement. After dying on the cross, Jesus descended into Hades and spent three days there (Acts 2:27, 31-32; Rom. 10:7; Eph. 4:9-10). But after three days, He rose from the dead (1 Thess. 4:14). He walked out of that dreadful realm. Never before had a man walked out of Hades. Never before had a man walked out of death. The power of death and of Hades had simply been too strong. Countless numbers of men and women were held by the prevailing and indefatigable sway of this domain — and none had ever escaped. Of course, the Bible tells us that Satan held this power (Heb. 2:14). He was the one who possessed "the keys of death and of Hades," keeping men "locked up" in death. That is, of course, until the man Jesus Christ arrived. After three days this man did something no other man had ever done. He took the keys of death and Hades away from Satan and rose from the dead. He walked out of death. Hades was not able to hold Him or keep Him (Acts 2:24). And as a result, Jesus destroyed "him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). This is why He was able to declare to the apostle John, "I am . . . the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades" (Rev. 1:18). The power of death and Hades, represented by the keys, was taken from Satan by the Lord Jesus.

Then after His resurrection, Jesus Christ ascended to the Father and was exalted and enthroned — He sat down at the Father's right hand. Now He is Lord and Christ (Acts 2:32-36). He is far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. All things are in subjection under His feet (Eph. 1:20-22; 1 Pet. 3:22). All authority has been given to Him (Matt. 28:18). Jesus is Lord over the entire universe! How is He Lord? He is Lord as a man. Yes, Christ is the Son of God. That goes without saying. But that is not the point we need to see here. We must see that as a man He died on the cross, went into Hades, broke the power of death, rose from the dead, ascended, and sat down on the throne. Now there is a man in the glory. Hallelujah! Why is this important? Because God chose to defeat Satan through man. God's promise was that the Seed of the woman would crush Satan's head.

However, the Lord's work of death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement did not merely defeat Satan's rule, but more importantly it brought in God's rule. Satan's kingdom on this earth must be abolished and replaced with the kingdom of God. This is what Jesus did. He brought in the kingdom. Thus, today on this earth, the kingdom of God has been established in its spiritual reality. Although the kingdom is not here in outward manifestation, it is here in reality. And this kingdom exists wherever Jesus is Lord. It is the realm where His rule and authority prevail. It is where every knee bows at the name of

Jesus, and every tongue confesses that Jesus is Lord (Phil. 2:10-11). It is where the will of every creature is utterly submitted to the lordship, the kingship, of Christ. That is the kingdom!

The Church as the Kingdom

Now we must ask, where is the kingdom on this earth today? Where can the reality of the kingdom be found? The Bible tells us that "we do not yet see all things subjected to Him." Yes, Jesus is Lord. All things are in subjection under His feet, and nothing has been left unsubject to Him. But when we look at the world, it seems that all we see is rebellion toward God. It does not appear that Jesus is Lord over the earth (Heb. 2:8). However, we must realize that the Lord Jesus has accomplished His work — He has defeated the enemy and established His kingdom. His work is finished. He sat down. He is enthroned as the King of kings and Lord of lords, with all things under His feet (Eph. 1:20-21; Heb. 1:3). Now, the only thing left to do is to execute what He has already accomplished. His kingdom must now simply be carried out. Not accomplished, but carried out.

So where does this happen? Where on this earth is the kingdom carried out? It happens in one place, and one place only — the church. The execution, the carrying out, of the kingdom of God occurs only in the church. The world will never advance the kingdom. In fact, the world is diametrically opposed to the kingdom. It is only in and through the church that the kingdom of God is executed on this earth. Of course, this is not by default or by accident. This is by God's design. We must remember that God's purpose is to defeat His enemy and bring in His kingdom through man. As we have seen, God fulfilled that purpose through the man Jesus. However, God would never be satisfied with just one man. God's desire is to have many men in the kingdom. The kingdom does not consist merely of the king, but also of all the subjects under the king. In fact, we could say that the kingdom is a corporate matter. The kingdom consists of the King and all those under His rule. And the Bible tells us that today this corporate kingdom is found in the church. It is the church, comprised of redeemed men, which is to exercise the lordship of Christ on this earth, to execute the kingdom of God, to carry out Christ's victory over Satan.

This is why the church is called "a kingdom of priests" and "a holy nation" (Rev. 1:6; 1 Pet. 2:9). This is why the saints are referred to as "fellow citizens" — we are citizens of a heavenly kingdom (Eph. 2:19). This is why Paul declares that God subjected all things under the feet of Christ and "gave Him to be Head over all things *to the church*" (Eph. 1:22; emphasis added). Do we realize that His transcendent headship, which is far above all rule and authority, is now being transmitted to the church? What a great thing it is that He has given to the church authority "over all the power of the enemy"! He has given the keys of the kingdom to bind and to loose (Luke 10:19; Matt. 16:19). He has allowed us to taste "the powers of the age to come" (Heb. 6:5). This is why the New Testament says that we, as the saints, have been delivered from the dominion of Satan, the domain of darkness, and have been transferred into the kingdom of God's

Son (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13).

Therefore, God needs a people who are living in the reality of the kingdom. God needs the church to execute His accomplished victory, to bring in the reality of the kingdom, wherever they are. Too often believers divorce the church from the kingdom. We often think of the church as one thing, and the kingdom as another; the church is something present, but the kingdom is something future. But the apostles never had such a thought. Yes, the manifestation of the kingdom is a future event, but the spiritual reality of the kingdom is a present fact that can be known, experienced, and realized in the church. For instance, when Paul wrote to the saints in Rome about not judging one another concerning food, he reminded them of the essence and reality of the kingdom — “the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). Here Paul was not thinking of the kingdom as a future event. Rather, he was speaking of the kingdom as a present reality in which the church could participate. He was directly applying the kingdom to such practical matters in the church life. Thus, we must not separate the church from the kingdom. We must today, as the church, live in the reality of the kingdom and walk worthily of the kingdom (1 Thess. 2:12). We must bring in the kingdom of God wherever we are.

How the Kingdom Is Brought In

How can we do this? How can the church bring in the reality of the kingdom? First, we must understand that God does not expect us, in this age, to bring in the *manifestation* of the kingdom. Some believers make the mistake of trying to implement the outward manifestation of the kingdom in our present society. In other words, they attempt to impose the kingdom of God upon our secular political and social institutions. They want to forcibly “Christianize” the society around us. However, the Lord said, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). Moreover, the Bible reveals that the kingdom of the world will not be displaced by the kingdom of Christ until Jesus comes again in glory and power (Rev. 11:15; 12:10). In other words, it is not God’s intention for the church to transform secular society into the kingdom. No. God’s intention today is that the hidden *reality* of the kingdom would be brought in through the church.

So again we ask, how can the church bring in the reality of the kingdom? There is only one way — by life. The Lord’s way of ruling over His people is absolutely different from anything seen in the world. The world rules by outward commands and enforcement. But the Lord rules His people by His indwelling life. Hence, the Lord told Nicodemus that to enter the kingdom of God, he had to be born again (John 3:3-6). He needed to receive a life that he did not yet possess. This means that our entry into the kingdom is by receiving another life — the life of Christ. Apart from receiving His life, we cannot even see the kingdom, much less enter into it.

Then, after receiving Christ’s life, we must live and be regulated by it. It is one thing to receive the life of Christ and be

born again. It is another thing to then live by His life. We must understand that the Lord’s life that dwells within us is a very active life. The Lord has tastes, preferences, aversions, likes, and dislikes. He loves such things as the Word, prayer, fellowship, the meetings of the church, and serving. But He has a great aversion to such things as the flesh, sin, the world, and the self. So His life within us is constantly active, communicating to us how He feels about so many things in our daily life. He wants to regulate us about how we live, talk, and behave. He desires to have the say over where we go, what we do, and even when we do it. After all, He is Lord! He is the King! And if we are to live in the reality of His kingdom, then we must listen to Him. We must pay attention to the impulses of His life. Not only so — we must submit to Him and go along with Him.

Of course, the New Testament has many different ways of expressing this experience of Christ. It tells us that the anointing — the movement of the Holy Spirit within us — teaches us about all things. It also speaks of being led by the Spirit and walking by the Spirit (Rom. 8:4, 14; Gal. 5:16-18, 25), and of learning Christ and being taught in Him (Eph. 4:20-21). The New Testament refers to the Lord imparting His laws into our mind and inscribing them on our hearts so that we can all directly know the Lord (Heb. 8:10-11). It also refers to grace training us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (Titus 2:11-12). It warns us not to grieve or quench the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19). All these verses refer to one thing — the life of Christ actively regulating our daily life. He wants to rule and reign over us, not by mere outward commands, but by His inward life. And our submission to Him in all these matters is what brings in the kingdom. There is no bringing in of the reality of the kingdom apart from our submission to the Lord’s life. And properly speaking, this is what the church should be — simply a group of redeemed people living by and submitting to the life of Christ. We know that this is not going to happen anywhere else! Surely the world is not going to submit to Christ. But the church can. And wherever the saints in the church are regulated by Christ’s life, there is His actual ruling! There is the reality of “reigning in life” (Rom. 5:17). And there is the bringing in of the kingdom!

Ultimately, the Lord Jesus will come again to establish the kingdom in its outward manifestation. He will be the Head over all things, and all His enemies will be under His feet (Eph. 1:10; 1 Cor. 15:23-28). As believers, we are anticipating that day. But God’s great desire is that the church would take the lead to bring in the reality of the kingdom today. The kingdom must first happen in the church. The church must be the “stepping stone” that the Lord can use to expand the scope of the kingdom to the whole universe. Of course, the bringing in of the kingdom started with one man — Jesus Christ. In fact, He fully accomplished the work of defeating Satan and establishing the kingdom. But now the church, Christ’s Body, must exercise what He has accomplished. Now the church must bring in the reality of the kingdom. And once it happens in the church, then it can happen in the whole universe. May God do this in each one of us! May God do it in the church!

— Kirk Eland

(Continued from Page 3)

reactions. You should not be reacting, because you are a brother in the church. But the heated feelings are there. I think we all could testify to this experience.

We know how much living before God with a good conscience and with the blood cleansing us affects our relationship with everyone. When we are living in the Spirit, we do not touch the unclean thing. We cast off the works of darkness, in whatever form they may be. Some are evil practices. Some are reasonings in your mind. Maybe you are rebellious toward your boss. There is no sense of authority within you. Or maybe you are involved in cheating in financial matters. Works of darkness can be anything of this nature. But when you deal with these things and you are living before God, your conscience is good, God's life in you is satisfied, and your spirit is buoyant. It is in this life experience that we receive one another. The feelings of God are fresh. Hallelujah! The love of God is fresh within us because our life experience is fresh.

Colossians 3:1-15

When Christ is experienced by all of us in this life way, there is a spontaneous receiving of one another. In Colossians 3:4 Paul says, "Christ who is our life." He is our life. Then Paul says, ⁵ "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Here Paul mentions several immoral practices. He does not use one categorical word, but specifies different degrees of sinful things. Then after he says to put these to death, he also says to put off "anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another" (vv. 8-9). Paul presents a gradation, beginning with the baser, sinful, fleshly things. Then he progresses to dispositional reactions and related practices. This is because when we deal with the first things, God has a way to come to us on the finer things.

Then in verse 14 Paul speaks of putting on the "bond of perfection," which is love. And in verse 15 he says, "Let the peace of [Christ arbitrate] in your hearts, to which also you were called in one Body; and be thankful." To let the peace arbitrate is to give place to the feeling of God between us. It is not letting our anger, our reasonings, and our flesh override that peace between us. But if we are living in the realm of the flesh, we will view things differently. We will want to blame others and strike back. In other words, when we live from the source of our flesh, we leave the cross. We leave Calvary love, Calvary relatedness. We end up in the realm of our self and the flesh. This realm has

no regard for the peace of Christ between us.

In all these verses we can see how much our experience of life is related to receiving. So we all need to care for these life matters. Then we will enjoy the receiving, and the church will be established. The establishing is in the receiving, and the receiving is connected to the experiences of life. This is the way Paul opens up the major section on receiving in Romans 14—15. He introduces it in the dimension, or realm, of life. He shows us the direct relationship between life and receiving.

Receiving and our relationship to ourselves in justification

Our receiving of one another is also related to our understanding of the way Christ has received us. Romans 15:7 says, "Receive one another, *just as* Christ also received us, to the glory of God." Thus, if I am going to receive you the way Christ has received me, then I need to know how I am related to myself in justification. I need to know how Christ has received me. So let us consider our relationship to ourselves in justification from Romans chapter 4.

Christ has received us according to God's justification. So we need to know how we are related to ourselves as justified persons. Do you know how you are related to God in your justification? In your experience do you enjoy and live in your justification? When you have failed to live out Christ, can you still say, "Lord, I did not do so well today. But thank You, God, Christ is my righteousness"? When we as individual believers enjoy what it means to relate to ourselves in justification, it will have a corporate effect on how we relate to one another.

In Romans 4:5-8 Paul tells us what happens in justification: ⁵ "But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, ⁶ just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: ⁷ Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; ⁸ blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin." These verses show that in justification sin is no longer accounted to me. Justification means that before God my history of sins and even the present sin nature in my flesh are not counted against me. I am accounted righteous by faith. I am a justified man. Not only negatively have I been forgiven, but positively I have been clothed with Christ, who is now my righteousness.

To be justified means that before God I have fulfilled the law. I have kept it, every jot and tittle. God could not be happier with me. When Christ is my

righteousness, it means I am not only forgiven, negatively, but I also have a positive standing. I am positively admired in Christ, my robe of righteousness. Not only is nothing counted against me, but also I am in all that He is as righteousness. He obeyed the law. He fulfilled it. And now He has become my righteousness. So I really feel wonderful about myself, because Christ is my righteousness. Hallelujah!

Are you related to yourself as a justified person? Do you have wonderful feelings about yourself in Christ? Do you know what it means in your experience to stand in your justification? Maybe you are feeling horrible about yourself, and yet you cannot pinpoint anything definite that you have done to bring on those feelings of condemnation. Yet, you feel wrong. If there were something you could point to, some sin that you had committed, then you would simply say, "Lord, thank You for Your blood." But this feeling is vague, like something intangible hanging over you. In that moment do you know how to exercise your spirit and say, "Thank You, Jesus. Thank You, everything is okay. Hallelujah! Nothing is reckoned against me!" Do you know how to enjoy your justification? Or do you carry the load of those feelings? Do you take the condemnation?

If you and I do not know the joy of justification, and how to catapult ourselves immediately out of false feelings of the enemy and the flesh, and how to stand before God in the righteousness of Christ in boldness by the blood of Jesus, then our relationship with one another is going to feel the repercussions. The lie you believe about yourself is going to be projected upon others. Then, of course, there will be no receiving of one another. This shows how crucial it is to know the joy of justification.

What an enjoyment when we sing songs about our justification, about how God "saved a wretch like me." What a blessedness — to know that He saved this wretch and clothed this wretch in righteousness. When we relate to ourselves in this way, the love of God just beams out of us toward all the saints. In that love we experience the receiving of one another, just as Christ also received us. This is the justification that Paul unveils in Romans chapter 4.

Paul's main burden is that the saints would be established by receiving one another. In order that this could happen, he writes in the wisest way. He begins by bringing all of them to their common level of being sinners. Then he brings them all to the same righteousness, the same cross, the same blood — the same justification. In short, he brings them all into a marvelous feeling about themselves in their justification. Paul knows that these truths will be the solid factors between the saints.

Our relationship to ourselves in identification

After seeing how to properly relate to ourselves in justification, let us now see our relationship to ourselves in identification. In Romans 6:3-5 Paul says, ³ "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have [grown] together [with Him] in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection." Then in verses 10-11 Paul continues to show us our identification with Christ: ¹⁰ "For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but [living] to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In these verses we see how to relate to ourselves in our identification with Christ. We are absolutely identified with Him. So we reckon ourselves to be dead to sin. This means we live inwardly not identifying with condemning thoughts or those whispers of the "old man" trying to engage us in conversation. When you and I immediately shift to our real person, we are reckoning ourselves "to be dead indeed to sin."

To reckon is to count on reliable facts. Let me give an illustration. $2 + 2 = 4$. This equation always holds true. It never changes, regardless of when, where, or why you use it. In the same way, your identification with Christ never changes. Do not look at your feelings. Do not think about your history. Just reckon $2 + 2 = 4$. Your person is Christ. You have been baptized into Him. You are one with Him. So reckon yourself to be dead indeed to sin, but living to God. Inwardly you quickly make a transfer. You do not bargain. You do not reason. You do not get on that level. You shut the enemy's mouth by calling "Jesus!" You identify with Christ in death and resurrection. You are living to God in Christ Jesus.

Do you see what will happen by relating to yourself in this way? It will affect your relationships with one another. But if you do not remain in your identification with Christ, and you engage in the activity and conversation of the old man, eventually you will not be talking only with your old man. You will find yourself talking to your husband, but not according to Christ. You will find yourself talking to your wife, but not according to Christ. In other words, when we do not reckon ourselves according to our identification with Christ, we are left to the realm of the flesh and the self. Then there

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is no capacity to receive one another and to be established together in the church life.

So we see how this Christian life works — it is through justification, identification, and the resulting inward transaction of throwing off falsehood and dealing with God. Now you learn to quickly get to the spirit. You learn to quickly get through all the mire of thoughts and feelings. You go directly to your identification with Christ. You do not solve problems. You do not get answers. You do not stay on that level. You go directly to Jesus.

Satan wants to have long, drawn-out conversations. He likes to talk things out, reach a compromise — whatever allows him room to live in us, nullifying the cross. That is his realm. But God's realm is the realm of the cross. You know when you are in the reality of the cross, because the cross is always quick. It works fast. If what you are doing is prolonged, if you yourself are trying to live a crucified life, it is probably not the cross. The cross is in the Spirit, and when you touch the Spirit, there is a quick cutting off of the flesh. It just happens. A quick circumcision of the flesh takes place. When we identify with Christ's all-inclusive death in the Spirit, God's life flows out of us in resurrection. This has a tremendous effect on our receiving of one another.

*Our relationship to ourselves
under law and under grace*

Our relationship to ourselves under the law and under grace includes our relationship to the Spirit and to our human spirit. We know that in Romans 7 Paul was under the law. Of course, in my own life, if I am a person under the law, then I will bring everyone else under the law. So I need to enjoy Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." Hallelujah! When I enjoy the realm of my spirit with His Spirit, I am out of the reach of condemnation. I am "in Christ Jesus." If you can condemn my Christ, then you can condemn me, because I have no existence apart from Him. I am in Him. I am in the Beloved One. I do not have a history outside of Him. I dare not consider myself one inch outside of Him, not even a millimeter outside of Him. In relation to everything, I am in Christ. Everything that is true of Christ is true of me. Hallelujah!

We relate to ourselves in the realm of the Spirit. We know the Spirit. We know the joy of experiencing Christ and not living under condemnation. This removes any ground for the enemy to bring condemnation into the church through us. May the Holy Spirit say much more to us about these matters from the book of Romans.

Receiving one another, that is, being established

together, is not arrived at in a cheap way. Neither is it an insignificant matter. It is the most magnificent thing in the universe to have an established local church, as described in Romans, and to have churches that receive one another as Christ received us. This comes from the experiences of life. It comes from interacting with ourselves in justification, in identification, and in grace. Paul builds the whole book of Romans solidly on life.

Toward the end of Romans Paul tells the believers to receive one another the way Christ received them. But he does not say this without having first imparted into them all the receiving factors. They have been exhilarated in their justification in chapter 4, realizing that nothing is against them anymore. They are full of peace in chapter 5 because of God's reconciling work through Christ's death on the cross. They are justified now by faith and have peace with God through Jesus Christ. In chapter 6 they are fully identified with Christ. God put them so much into Christ! In chapter 8 they are enjoying being out of the reach of condemnation by being "in Christ Jesus." Then, after infusing the saints with all these factors and more, Paul says, "Receive one another, just as Christ also received [you] to the glory of God" (15:7).

Oh, may the Lord grant us much mercy and grace in these days for a deeper enjoyment of all the rich factors of our oneness as believers. Out of this enjoyment will flow the genuine receiving of one another, and the God of peace will have the way to crush Satan under our feet shortly. Amen.*

— Bill Freeman

* This article, the fourth of a series on Romans, is chapter 5 of a new book entitled *Our Common Oneness*, by Bill Freeman. The book may be ordered directly from **Ministry Publications**, P.O. Box 12222, Scottsdale, AZ 85267 (602) 948-4050. The cost is \$7.50, postpaid.

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