**Shelter-In-Grace**

**Part 1**

**Finding Refuge in UNION**

**1 Corinthians 1:30**

Over the past few weeks, during this global health crisis, millions of Americans have been ordered to shelter-in-place. This has become a new buzzword, along with phrases such as “flatten the curve” and “social distancing.”

Shelter-in-place is an aggressive measure to attempt to control the spread of an aggressive virus. When we shelter-in-place, we commit to confine ourselves to our homes, only leaving for essential errands like medical appointments and getting groceries.

What if in our confinement we also commit to shelter-in-grace? In this 5-week series, Shelter-In-Grace, we’re searching Scripture for what it means to move beyond simply recognizing God's grace to taking refuge in it. We’re learning how to shift from surviving to thriving when life closes in. We’re seeing that grace isn’t a place we hide in but a person we abide in. We’re discovering that as we shelter-in-grace we never have to leave for essentials because in him we already have everything we need and more. We’re finding out that we never have to wait for Him to “reopen” because His arms are always open wide for us!

In this series we’re…

* Finding refuge in UNION
* Finding refuge in FORGIVENESS
* Finding refuge in RIGHTEOUSNESS
* Finding refuge in ACCEPTANCE
* Finding refuge in REST

Let me quickly say, I’m thrilled to be kicking off this brand new series here at Calvary Church…and the reason I’m excited is because this series is the result of a partnership of over 40 GCCM churches from coast to coast, who are united in our declaration and demonstration of the Gospel of amazing grace. It’s amazing to be part of not just a *revival* but of a new *reformation*. The first Reformation 500 years ago pointed us back to the truth of salvation by grace through faith. And in this New Reformation, God’s pointing us back to the truth of living daily life by grace through faith. Saving grace and empowering grace. Saved from and saved for. So, let’s open our Bibles to **1 Corinthians 1:30** and find refuge in our union with Christ. Paul writes: **“But God has brought you into union with Christ Jesus…”**

Kim and I got married Saturday, November 27th, 1993 at 11am. Check this out. [SHOW PICTURE] It’s hard to believe that this year we’re celebrating 27 years of marriage!

After so many years of marriage I’ve learned a few things:

* Marriage is a three-ring circus: The engagement ring, the wedding ring and the sufferING!
* What’s the difference between love and marriage? Love is blind, and marriage is an eye-opener!
* I was standing in front of the bathroom mirror the other morning admiring my reflection, when I posed this question to Kim: “Will you still love me when I’m old, fat, and gray?” She answered, “I do.”

So, Kim and I got married at 11am. Our wedding reception kicked off at 1pm. The two hours between the “I do” and “Let’s party” were two of the sweetest, yet most surreal, hours of my life. During the photo taking and guest-greeting I kept looking at this beautiful 19-year-old girl next to me in amazement thinking: “This girl is my wife. I have a wife? I didn’t have a wife this morning. How did this happen? All I said was ‘I do.’”

I think I know why they have parties at weddings. It’s to give the startled bride and groom a chance to process the shock and the wonder of what just happened. “This is for real. I thought I was dreaming but look at all these happy people. They seem pretty convinced we’re married, so we must be married.”

In Luke 15, Jesus spoke of the joy that erupts in heaven when a sinner repents and comes to believe in the good news of God’s grace. I always imagined they have something like a birthday party to celebrate the new birth, but in reality, it’s the rejoicing that accompanies a wedding. It’s a celebration of a new life wedded in union with Christ.

Many Christians are looking forward to a wedding ceremony yet to come, but Jesus is returning for his bride, not his fiancée. Believer, you’re already married to him! Your union with Christ isn’t a future event but a present reality that began the moment you first said “I do” to Jesus. You’re now living in the two hours between the “I do” and “Let’s party.” It’s sweet, a bit surreal, but you’re most definitely married. A lot of Christians still need to be convinced of it!

Think about it. You’re either married or you aren’t. You aren’t kind of married and kind of single. Just like you aren’t somewhat a saint and somewhat a sinner, slightly found and slightly lost, a little holy and a little unholy, a bit light and a bit dark. Jesus and the devil aren’t roommates living inside you.

You’re married to Jesus, period.

Consider three wonderful truths about your union with Christ. Without question, you can find refuge in these things:

1. **No more STRIVING to live the Christian life.**

In **John 15:5**, Jesus used a powerful illustration to explain this, **“I am the vine, you are the branches.”** This is one of the most wonderful affirmations of our union, and yet I’ve heard confused preachers and church people draw terrifying lessons about being cut off and thrown into the fire. Whoa!! Slow your roll!! Calm down!! Relax!! That’s like worrying about divorce in the middle of your honeymoon. Jesus doesn’t believe in divorce. In fact, he hates it.

The Gospel is the scandalously good news that you’re stuck with him for good. What God’s joined together, let no man separate. Thanks to Jesus you’re absolutely one with God. There’s no separation. The two have become one. You’re flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone – one spirit with the Lord. You aren’t getting Him in increments, He’s already given you all of himself!

* You don’t need to “press in” to God anymore. You’ve been pressed into!
* You don’t need to be a “God chaser” anymore. He chased you down!
* You don’t need to strive to “get closer” to Him. How can the branch get closer to the vine!

Good news! All has been accomplished, everything formerly lacking has now been supplied. The wound has been healed. The obligation has been met. The debt has been completely satisfied. When Jesus said “It is finished” he was declaring an end to your Tower-of-Babel religious striving to build a ladder back to heaven. God Himself has come down and done what you could NEVER do.

Listen to Jesus’ words again: “I am the vine; you are the branches.” Your union with Christ isn’t a far-off event but an accomplished fact. It isn’t something only for the sweet by and by. But also, for the sour here and now. It isn’t something only for paradise. But also, for a pandemic. You’re already in Christ. Since there’s no part of the branch that isn’t also part of the vine, anyone who touches you touches Jesus.

**1 John 4:17** says it this way: **“As Jesus is so also are you in this world.”**

* When you place your hands on the sick, you’re placing his hands on the sick.
* When you open your mouth to declare the good news, you’re declaring his words with his mouth.
* When you step into the room, it’s his feet stepping into the room.

Does this sound strange to you? As I said, I’ve been married to Kim for nearly 27 years, so I don’t find this strange at all. I’m accustomed to thinking in terms of a one-flesh team. As a matter of fact, I’ve got to remind Kim about this every time a meeting or an event comes up that I don’t particularly want to go to. I’ll say, “But Kim, we don’t need to both go. If you’re there, we’re there. We’re a one-flesh team.” And she usually responds by giving me a crazy look.

I’m only kidding to make an important point. Our one-flesh union is only a natural picture of the spiritual union all believers have with Jesus.

1. **No more TRYING to get close to God.**

Jesus said in **John 14:20**, **“You will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”**

Check it out! He’s in you and you’re in him. Wherever you go, he goes. I can hear it now. “Wait a second, Pastor Ben. How can Jesus be here with us if he’ up there with the Father?” That’s a great question. “How can Jesus be in two places at once? And how can he be present within every believer at the same time?”

Today is Pentecost Sunday…and these questions are exactly what this weekend is all about. Pentecost Sunday marks the birthday of Jesus’s Church…when He made good on a promise to send His own Spirit to the Believers. In fact, this is what Jesus told His disciples….

Before He went to the cross, he said to his disciples in **John 16:7, “It is best for you that I go away, for if I don’t, the Comforter won’t come. If I do, he will—for I will send him to you.”** Jesus said the Comforter, aka the Holy Spirit, would come after he left, and we’d be better off with him than we were with Jesus being physically present. Think about that. If Jesus was only physically present and showed up at the AA Center, you better hope you could get in. If not, you missed him. Better luck next time. Jesus was saying, “I’ve been with you, and that’s been good, but soon I’ll be in you, and that’ll be better.” At one time you were in the garden, but now the garden will be in you!

The Holy Spirit is the answer to the question, “How can Jesus leave us and be with us at the same time?” Since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, to be filled with the Spirit is to be filled with Jesus. And since he who has the Son also has the Father, to be filled with Jesus is to be filled with the Father as well. He who has the Spirit also has the Son and the Father. They’re an inseparable team. Believer, you’re filled with the entire Godhead! Let that reality sink in for a second! If you really believed that, you wouldn’t be afraid…you wouldn’t be anxious…you wouldn’t be intimidated…you wouldn’t be tightfisted.

Right after promising the Holy Spirit, Jesus said in **John 14:18, “I will not leave you as orphans.”** An orphan is a fatherless child. Jesus was saying you won’t be that person. Believer, you aren’t an orphan, you’re a son!

Consider the contrast of these two identities this way:

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| --- | --- |
| **The Spirit of Sonship** | **The Orphan Spirit** |
| Secure | Insecure |
| Trusting | Mistrustful |
| Relationship-oriented | Performance-oriented |
| Transparent | Ashamed |
| Supply-oriented | Demand-oriented |
| Self-accepting | Self-rejecting |
| God-centered | Self-centered |
| Practices dominion | Practices manipulation |
| Faith-based | Fear-based |
| Work creatively | Toil in bondage |
| Live with purpose & destiny | Live with conflicting passions |
| Have a sense of belonging | Have a sense of alienation |
| Are blessed-conscious | Are cursed-conscious |
| Givers | Takers |

How are you relating to God? As a son or as an orphan?

Jesus went on to say in **verse 23 of John 14, “My Father and I will come to you and make our home with you.”** You haven’t been filled with one-third of God, but all of him; Father, Son, and Spirit. Many Christians say they understand this, but only halfway. “Sure, God’s with us, but sometimes he isn’t. He comes and he goes.” Learning to rightly dividing the word is vitally important! It’s true that in the Old Testament the Holy Spirit came upon certain people at certain times, but that was then, and this is now. Jesus said in verses 16-17 of John 14 that the Holy Spirit abides with us and makes his home with us. By home he means home. You aren’t a motel room for the Lord, and he doesn’t come and go like a transient. You’re a walking, talking, living, breathing temple of the Holy Spirit. He was pleased to make you his home address. And good news! He isn’t going anywhere. He said in Hebrews 13:5, “I will never abandon you or leave you or fail you or forsake you or divorce you.”

To see how well you’re grasping this, ask yourself a simple question: Where’s God? When you think of God being some place, where’s that place? Is he up there or over there or who knows where? I suppose God can be anywhere and everywhere, but the gospel declares he’s in you and you’re in him. This is one of the most magnificent, mysterious truths about the new birth. We’re simultaneously in Jesus even as He’s in us. Any concept of distance and delay is totally demolished by this revelation. He isn’t far away in the past and he isn’t hiding behind a cloud in the future. How can we be sure? Because Jesus said so! He said in **Matthew 28:20, “Surely I am with you always.”** And by the way, always means always.

Church, intimacy isn’t something we ever need long for. God’s already with us. We don’t have to beg God to split the heavens and come down. He already did! And we never have to fear that he might abandon us as orphans. He promised he wouldn’t! Now and forever more, we’re in perfect union with the Lord. Bride, it’s time for you to believe it!

The Holy Spirit is the key to understanding the mystery of our union. Tragically, in most churches, the Spirit of Christ has been painted as a tormentor, a tyrant or a bully, when in truth he’s the one pouring out the love of God in our hearts. Listen to **Romans 5:5: “For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.”**

Pause for just a moment. Look back at the movie of your life with Jesus and you’ll find the Spirit’s directing influence behind every scene.

* Who do you think was the One who first revealed Jesus to you?

* Who opened your heart to believe and your mouth to confess that Jesus is Lord?
* Who ordered your steps?
* Who opened the doors for you that no man can shut?

The Holy Spirit is the reason you’re here today, and he’s the one encouraging you to believe all this good stuff I’m telling you about Jesus. If you’ve been in the habit, like many Christians, of praying prays and singing songs of loneliness and longing, today he’s giving you new prayers and new songs of intimacy and fulfillment. In short, the Spirit of Christ is the best friend you ever had! And without him you can do nothing, but you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.

1. **No more DYING to self.**

Check out this powerful verse of scripture:

**Romans 6:3, “Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”**

Before I had a revelation of the New Covenant, I thought this was a verse about water baptism, but it isn’t. This verse is describing the real baptism of which water baptism is but a reenactment. You’ve been baptized into Christ.

To baptize means to dip, in the sense of dipping a t-shirt into dye. The white t-shirt goes in; a purple or blue or red t-shirt comes out. Something like that happened to you when you were dipped into Christ by the Holy Spirit. You went in looking like Adam; you came out looking like Jesus. You went in an orphan; you came out a son. You went in flawed; you came out faultless. You went in a victim; you came out a victor. You went in broken; you came out complete. You went in dirty and distant; you came out clean and close. Before you were baptized you were alienated from the life of God; afterwards you were connected to the life-giving vine. How did this happen? Honestly, I don’t know. Ask the Holy Spirit. He’s the one who did it.  You don’t need to have it all figured out to benefit from it. Just like you don’t need to have a degree in chemistry to benefit from the oxygen you’re breathing right now. You’re just enjoying it – and it’s keeping you alive. You just need to start saying, “Thank you, Holy Spirit!”  “Thank you” is the greatest statement of faith you can make.

Jump two verses. **Verse 5 of Romans 6 says, “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.”**

Did you know there’s a word in this verse that appears nowhere else in the Bible? It’s a word that should excite all of us as believers. It’s the Greek word (sumphutos) translated as “planted together.” This is just about the strongest word for union you could possibly think of. It means being “born together with” or “of joint origin.” The closest English word is connate which means individual parts that are united to from a single whole. Are you ready for this? The best illustration of connate union is the one Jesus gave us – a vine and a branch, two parts that combine to make an indivisible whole. Vines and branches cannot be understood in isolation. A vine that has no branches isn’t much of a vine, and a branch that isn’t part of a vine isn’t a branch. It’s just a stick. Sadly, churches are filled with sticks! Not connected to the vine and other branches and not bearing any fruit. That’s why I think so many Christians hurt a lot of people. The only thing you can do with a stick is beat people with it.

So, what does this connate union mean for us? It means our lives can’t be understood in isolation from Jesus. Apart from him we can do nothing. We can’t bear fruit, we can’t grow, and we can’t live. Conversely, united with him we can do all things! We can bear much fruit, we can grow healthy and strong, and we can live life to the full and overflowing!

What was humanity’s experience in the beginning? When our first parents decided to walk out on God, they automatically cut themselves and their unborn descendants off from the tree of life. They severed the tie that sustained us, and humanity became the broken branch that withered and died. But through his death and resurrection, Jesus made a way for us to be raised from the dead to new life. That life now flows as the natural result of being connected in vital union with the Living Vine.

So, here’s the gospel. We don’t need to do a thing to make this new life happen, we just need to receive it. To partake in his divine nature requires only that we live in union that’s already ours.

This is where many of us say, “But I don’t feel it. I don’t feel connected. I don’t feel blessed. I don’t feel righteous.” As a matter of fact…with everything going on in the world right now, I feel afraid, I feel lonely, and I feel anxious. Well, don’t put your faith in feelings. We aren’t to live by feelings, we’re to live by faith. The Bible says that the just live by faith. Believe the One who declares, “You’re a branch.” His eternal word is truer than your temporary feelings. I can hear it now. “But I’m struggling to produce fruit, Pastor Ben.” Ok. Here’s a word for you. Stop struggling! Chill out! Take a deep breath! Let your racing heart slow down. It’s not the job of the branch to produce fruit but to bear the fruit that the vine produces in you, like love, joy, and peace.

He’s the vine. Quit trying to be a little vine on your own. You can resign as the vine! Jesus does it all. Your part is to trust him and depend on him for everything. The fact is you’re in union, so live in union. In other words, act like you’re married, because you are. People who are married, but act like they aren’t, are committing adultery. How many of us are committing spiritual adultery? Supposed to be married to Jesus, but keep going back to our ex-husband, the law or do it yourself living. Don’t ever forget that flirting with Moses is cheating on Jesus.

**Colossians 2:6** says, **“Since you have accepted Christ Jesus** (not Moses) **as Lord, live in union with him.”**

A married person who continues to act like they’re unmarried is going to miss out on the blessings of marriage. Similarly, Christians who fail to draw from their union with Christ are missing out on the blessings of their union. That’s where many of you are right now. You’re missing out on the benefits of your union. New life is meant to be lived; it’s meant to be expressed and enjoyed and worked out to such a degree that the world sees it and is amazed.

So how do we bear his fruit in our lives? Are you ready? By not trying. Fruit grow naturally. And here’s a word for many of you today! Many of you may be hindering the process by trying to make things happen in your own strength and understanding. That’s why so many of you are producing Ishmaels in your life. The birth of Ishmael was natural; the birth of Isaac was supernatural. Remember: Whatever’s birthed in the flesh must be maintained in the flesh. Whatever’s birthed in the spirit will be maintained by the Spirit. When you learn to simply rely on (abide, remain in) his love and trust in the Father’s pruning, you’ll supernaturally bear his fruit effortlessly.

Paul confronted this attitude in **Galatians 3:3** when he said, **“Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?”**

I hear the Spirit of God saying, “Expect a supernatural harvest!” As you abide in Christ, confidently expect to bear much fruit. I declare Jeremiah 17:8 over you: You’re like a tree planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such a tree isn’t bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Its leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit.” It doesn’t matter what season you’re in right now—even in a global pandemic, you’re leaves will stay green, they won’t wither (Your life’s fresh; your future isn’t brown, dead, and stale!), and you’ll never stop bearing fruit (You’ll thrive!), so expect a supernatural harvest! May you shelter in grace and find refuge in your union with Christ. In fact, let’s make that confession together:

**Today’s Confession: Today I choose to find refuge in my union with Christ.**