OUR UNION WITH CHRIST

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." —JOHN 15:5

For many years following the Reformation of the 16th century, Protestant theology concentrated on Paul's doctrine of "justification by faith" and understandably so. The rediscovery of this cardinal truth of the New Testament opened the floodgate for the Reformation, led by Martin Luther, and represented a liberation from the tyranny of "justification by works" to which the church had succumbed for centuries.

More recent scholarship in the past century, however, has shown that as valuable and vital as the theme of justification by faith is in the writings of Paul, the heart of Paul's teaching about the Christian life is "union with Christ". To be in union with Christ is for Christ to be in us and for us to be in Him. It is the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to His disciples when He said, "On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you" (John 14:20).

The term 'in Christ' or 'in Him' or the combination of 'in' with a type of designation for Christ is used some 200 times by Paul, and is the most characteristic phrase of his terminology. This term does not originate with Paul, but with Jesus who said, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you." (John 15:4) Some translations use the word

‘abide’. “If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.” The source of fruit is the life released by our abiding in Christ and His abiding in us. Jesus did not teach His disciples foolproof methods for living, but spiritual principles which enabled Him to work in them so that the explanation for their lives would be God at work.

Just as Jesus lived on earth in a relationship of love, trust, obedience and dependence on His Father, we are to live in the same relationship with Him. As God the Father lived in Jesus, Jesus lives in us. In fact, the only thing God has to give us is Jesus, for “apart from him you can do nothing”. God is committed to His agenda for us and for the world, which can only be carried out and accomplished in union with Christ.

There are two invitations Jesus gives in which all of the Christian life is encompassed. His first invitation is “Come to me” (Matthew 11:28), and His second invitation, “Remain or abide in Me”. If we understand and respond to both these invitations we are on track to enjoying the full orb of all Christ has to give us in union with Him.

PRAYER: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for the ultimate privilege and blessing of living in union with You. I am humbled by it. Your grace is overwhelming.

TO REFLECT UPON: Am I perpetually aware of Christ’s presence in me?