

IV. Beholding Christ: How can I live with Jesus?

Aim: To show how believers live with Christ in the church, how they are sustained and nourished through the means of grace as well as personal devotion and to instruct in basics of christian living.

Review:

Last week we looked at how we belong to Christ as we are part of his Church. We had a look at what the Church is: The people of God, a holy nation, those chosen and called by God, the body of Christ and the flock of which Jesus is the Shepherd. We saw that the Church is beautiful and belongs to the new Creation.

Every believer is part of the Church. We cannot be Christians on our own. Every limb of a body needs to be connected to the rest of the body in order to live. A sheep that strays from its herd will die. In the same way, everyone who is united to Jesus is also united to other believers. We are members of the same body, sheep of the same flock.

Like a coal will quickly go cold if it is remove from the fire, so we can't live with Christ apart from the Church. Only when the coal is in the fire can it burn and retain heat. In the same way, we can only live with and for Christ when we are embedded in a Church.

Tonight is about "beholding Christ". We'll seek to answer the question "how can I live with Jesus?"

The reason I speak of "beholding" when I think about how we can live as Christians, is because we can live and grow as christians only when we have our eyes fixed on Christ. We are to be attentive to him, and to continually look to him in order to receive what we need. And this is the work of the Holy Spirit, too: He opens our eyes so that we behold the beauty of Christ.¹

If you remember what we said about faith the weeks before: It is to look away from yourself and to look wholly on Jesus. To expect and hope everything from him. The way we are saved is also how we live as Christians: by faith in him. In other words: By beholding him.

4. Beholding Christ as the Church

¹ 2 Corinthians 3.

The primary place of the Christian life is in the Church. We look at Jesus together. The Church is where God is present, where he glorifies himself and where we receive food for our souls. Every Sunday Jesus calls us to himself: “Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden. I will give you rest.”²

Every Sunday the Spirit turns our eyes on Jesus and the Father draws us into his arms of mercy to cleanse us of sin, to move us to repentance and to strengthen and comfort us. He does that not through secret rituals but through ordinary means. And when we gather on a Sunday, we don’t have to make God come down to us. He is there already and his Fatherly arms are open.

4.1. How can the Church behold Christ?

God uses means in the church to care for us. They don’t look special and yet God uses them to do his wonderful work in us by reminding us of the gospel and drawing us into communion with him. Let’s look at these means.

4.1.1. Preaching

The Bible is the word of God. That is, God speaks to us in the Bible. It’s where he shows us who he is and what he does. It’s also where he tells us who we are, what the Church is and how we are to live as Christians. The aim of the Bible is to point at Jesus. Simply put, preaching is the proclamation of Jesus from the texts of the Bible. So, a sermon should explain texts. But way more than that, a sermon should turn our eyes on Jesus from the biblical text.

Preaching is the primary means through which God evokes and sustains faith in us:

Romans 10:19-17: if you **confess** with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and **believe** in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one **believes** and is justified, and with the mouth one **confesses** and is saved. [...]. ¹³ For “everyone who **calls** on the name of the Lord will be saved.” ¹⁴ How then will they **call** on him in whom they have not **believed**? And how are they to **believe** in him of whom they have never **heard**? And how are they to **hear** without someone **preaching**? ¹⁵ And how are they to **preach** unless they are **sent**? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who **preach** the **good news**!” ¹⁶ But **they**

² Matthew 11:28

have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has **believed** what he has **heard** from us?” ¹⁷ **So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.**

In order to be saved, what must happen? One has to believe that Jesus is Lord wholeheartedly and confess it. Verse 13 says that anyone who turns to God and cries to him for salvation, will be saved. It's the wholehearted turning away from yourself and looking to Christ that we've talked about previously.

From verse 14, Paul goes into a set of rhetorical questions. If no one believes the gospel, then no one will cry out to God to be saved. If no one hears the gospel, then no one will believe it. If no one preaches it, no one can hear it. If no one is tasked by God with preaching the gospel, then no one will preach it.

Not all who hear the gospel automatically believe it. But God uses the preaching of “the word of Christ” to bring about faith in those who hear. When men get up on a Sunday and faithfully preach the gospel, God uses it to bring about faith in those who hear.

But the preaching of Scripture is not only meant to evoke faith in unbelievers, but is also vital for the life of the Church.

2 Timothy 3:16-4:2: ¹⁶ **All Scripture is breathed out by God** and profitable for **teaching**, for **reproof**, for **correction**, and for **training in righteousness**, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be **complete, equipped** for every good work. ¹ I charge you [Timothy] in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² **preach the word**; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

First, Paul reminds his friend Timothy of what a wonderful gift the Bible is: It is breathed out by God. It's his word in human word. And it's useful to energize and guide the Christians life: It's profitable for teaching in the Character and deeds of God but also for instruction in how we can live with Jesus. It's useful for reproof and correction and we stray from God's ways and for training in righteousness. By living in Scripture, we may be “equipped for every good work”. That is, to live with Christ and to follow him.

Then Paul charges Timothy, who was a Pastor, to preach the word in every season. Be it easy or hard. Be it that people are coming to faith or people are hearing it and remain unbelieving. Be it that he has to suffer and die – he must preach the Word.

And he is to do what Scripture does: “reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching”. Being exposed to the Word of God is vital to our lives as Christians and to the health of the Church. We need Christ preached to us from the entirety of the Scriptures.

Many theologians describe it this way: **The Church is a “creature of the word”**. The Church is not comparable to a football club or any other man-made organization. God speaks the Church into existence, like he spoke the universe into existence. God brings about Faith through hearing the preached Word, and he sustains his Church through that same Word. He brings the Church into existence and keeps her alive by the preaching of Scripture.

Here are two things we can learn from this:

First, the good news of Jesus is the centre of all of the Bible. Preaching should therefore always be a Christ centred exposition of the Bible.

Second, God brings about faith in unbelievers through the preaching of the gospel and he sustains the Church through it. The Church is a creature of the Word.

4.1.2. Baptism

Every believer must be baptized. There are different opinions on what exactly happens when we are baptized and what it means but at the bare minimum it's this:

We publicly confess that we believe the gospel and that Jesus Christ is Lord. In that sense, baptism is a confession that we belong to Christ and an act of obedience, because Jesus has commanded that every believer be baptized (Matthew 28:16).

We identify with Jesus in his death and resurrection. We have looked at this when we talked about our union with Christ. Our baptism expresses that union: We have died with Jesus and were raised to new life with him. Therefore, we no longer live in our old ways, but we live a new life in Jesus. In that sense, baptism is a symbol of our death and resurrection with Jesus.

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Through our baptism we become part of the Church. Acts 2:37-41:³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”³⁸ And Peter said to them, “**Repent and be baptized every one of you** in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. [...].⁴¹ So **those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.**

Again we see that to be baptized is to follow a command. And it expresses our turning away from ourselves and believing in Jesus. That’s what the word “repentance” essentially means: Turn away from your sins and trust in Jesus.

What the text describes here with “those who received his word” is what we saw earlier as coming to faith by hearing the preached word. So, everyone who responded in faith to Peter’s sermon was baptized. Being saved and being baptized are not exactly the same thing, but they belong closely together. When someone becomes a Christian, the next thing to do is to get baptized.

And then we read: ”and there were added that day about three thousand souls”. There is a pattern: **Believe, get baptized, become part of the Church.**

4.1.3. The Lord’s Supper

The Lord’s Supper is also called “Communion” or “Eucharist” by many. Like baptism, this is something that Jesus has commanded the Church to do. And, like baptism, Christians have different views on it. But here is what Scripture says:

Matthew 26:26-29:²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “**Take, eat; this is my body.**”²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “**Drink of it, all of you,**²⁸ **for this is my blood of the covenant,** which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.²⁹ I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.

Jesus takes the bread as says that it is his body. Then he takes the wine, says that it is his blood through which he establishes the new covenant and that his blood is shed for the forgiveness of sins.

Asides: What is the covenant?

The covenant is one of the most important themes in the Bible. Essentially, it's the promises that God made to Abraham and his descendants to make a great people out of them and to bless all nations. Then God established a Covenant with the Israelites through Moses, that carried promises of God but also placed the Israelites under responsibilities as God's people. They continuously failed to keep the conditions of the covenant (like us), so God had to punish them, and he promised to make a new Covenant, where he replaces the stone-like hearts of his people with hearts that are alive, to wash them clean from their sins and to enable them to walk in the will of God.³

Jesus says that he is bringing this new covenant about by his death on the cross. He fulfills all the promises of God to rescue and restore his people and to gather them from all nations.

Let's look at one more passage:

1 Corinthians 11:23-26: ²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, **“This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”** ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, **“This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”** ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, **you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.**

This passage adds that the eating of the bread and the drinking of the wine are for **remembrance** and for **proclamation**.

The Lord's Supper is a means that God uses to make us remember what Christ has done for us and to proclaim that he has died for the forgiveness of sins and will come again.

But why does Jesus identify himself as the bread and the wine? Are we actually eating and drinking Jesus?

John Calvin helps us out here. He says that Jesus does not physically become the bread and wine we consume in the Lord's Supper. Rather, it reminds us that Jesus really is the bread of life that we receive in faith (John 6:48-51). We receive eternal life from Christ in our union

³ For further study: Genesis **12:1-3.15.17:1-14.22**; Exodus **19-24.33-34**; Jeremiah **31:31-34**; Ezekiel **36:22-32**.

with him.⁴ The language of eating and drinking him is a symbol for this. So, Jesus' death on the cross is like a bread that is broken to be eaten by those sat on the table. We eat this bread, that is, receive Christ in our union with him by faith.

Now, when we partake in the Lord's Supper, we feast on Christ. Not in a physical way. We eat normal bread and drink normal wine. But as we do this in remembrance of his death, we have real fellowship with Jesus. In a sense the Lord's Supper is a continual reception of what Jesus has done once for all. We receive the promise of the gospel anew and we are comforted and strengthened in the reassurance that he does not forsake us because we are united to him.

As we have learned, the Spirit is the one who unites us to Jesus. And Jesus is present in us by his Spirit who indwells us. It's the same when we take the Lord's Supper: We have real communion with Christ by the Spirit.

That means that we do not really eat Christ's body and drink his blood. But it does mean that the Spirit works in us as we remember and proclaim the death of Jesus and he strengthens our union with Christ.

We receive Christ as spiritual food as we eat the bread and drink the wine and have communion with Jesus as we do so. So, what the bread and the wine symbolize, Christ does in us by his Spirit: He feeds us. Like the bread is nourishment for our body, so Christ is for our souls.⁵

Illustration: Maybe you could compare it to a fresh and new embrace of a husband and his wife. They never ceased to be in their union with each other as married people, but they experience the joy and blessing of their marriage anew and this strengthens their marriage-bond.

Or remember one of the quotes from the sermon this morning, about the boy that knows that he is his Father's child and yet when the Father picks him up, hugs and kisses him, that is an especially precious moments where the boy fully feels his Father's love.

It seems to me that something similar happens in the Lord's Supper.

Summary:

⁴ Calvin, *Institutio*, IV,17,4-5.

⁵ Calvin, *Institutio*, IV,17,1.

The Lord's Supper consists of three things:

- We remember and proclaim the death of Christ by which he brought about the new covenant and the forgiveness of sins.
- We have communion with Christ by his Spirit.
- We receive food for our souls and enjoy Christ.

Like a good sermon, in the Lord's Supper Christ is offered to us and we grasp him by faith. Like Baptism, the Lord's Supper expresses a mystery: We cannot fully understand it or define it perfectly. But we can thoroughly enjoy Christ in it.

4.1.4. Worship and Fellowship

In multiple places in the Bible believers are exhorted to sing. This has the function to encourage one another and to worship God. Here are a few examples:

Psalm 95:1: ¹ Oh come, **let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise** to the rock of our salvation! ² **Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise** to him with **songs of praise!**

We are exhorted to sing to God and be joyful in it because of who God is: The rock of our salvation. Our salvation in Jesus is as indestructible as a solid rock. The answer we give to this great news is that we sing and approach God with thankfulness and joy.

Ephesians 5:18-20: ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but **be filled with the Spirit,** ¹⁹ **addressing one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and **making melody to the Lord with your heart,** ²⁰ **giving thanks** always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, [...].

Paul commands us not to get drunk and instead to be filled by the Spirit. The Spirit fills us as we sing songs to one another and to God. As we sing to God, we thank him for who he is and what he has done for us.

Colossians 3:16: ¹⁶ Let the **word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing** one another in all wisdom, **singing** psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **with thankfulness** in your hearts to God.

Here too, we are commanded to continuously have the “word of Christ”, which is the gospel message, living in us. We do this through hearing the teaching, by admonishing each other and, crucially, by singing songs. In these songs we express thankfulness to God and we remind each other of the truth of the gospel.

In both these passages, Paul mentions that as we sing, we are to direct our hearts to God. What we see in these three texts is that singing is a vital part of the life of the Church and so of every Christian. Not all of us have to be musicians or great singers. But we are all called to sing about our God and praise him. We worship God by directing our hearts to him and encourage one another as we sing.

4.1.5. Prayer

The first thing we need to ask ourselves here is: **What is prayer?**

Here is a basic definition: **Prayer is talking to God.**

If we want to give this more flesh we could say: Prayer is talking to our Father to ask him to provide for all our need, to praise him for his character and deeds and to have communion with him. Prayer is first and foremost a gift that God gives us to enjoy him.

And it’s “**the chief exercise of faith**” as Calvin calls it.⁶ That means, someone who trusts in God is active in that faith first and foremost by praying. By talking to God.

Throughout the Bible we encounter many prayers from different persons at different times. And a lot of them are songs. We have prayers from people like Moses, David, Solomon, or Nehemiah.⁷ But also from many women like Miriam, Hannah and Mary.⁸ Lastly, we have an entire book in the Bible that is a collection of songs and prayers. That is the book of Psalms.

Why pray?

Firstly, because your father hears you. Simply put, we are needy and poor, and God is the source of all we need. Like a thirsty person will go to the sink where he will have access to

⁶ Calvin, Institutio, III,20,1.

⁷ Exodus 33; Psalm 51; 1 Kings 8:22-53; Nehemiah 1:4-11.

⁸ Exodus 15:20-21; 1 Samuel 1-2; Luke 1:46-55.

more water than he could possibly need, so we turn our Father to ask him to fill our lack. We get to ask our father to guide us and provide for us and he promises to hear.

Secondly, because God knows you fully and he sustains your life. We believe that God is sovereign, that is, all powerful and in control over everything. When we pray, we can pour out our hearts to the one who knows us more intimately than anyone else and experience rest and comfort in his presence.

How can we pray?⁹

Jesus taught us a prayer that we call “The Lord’s Prayer”:

Matthew 6:9-13: ⁹ Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread, ¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. (For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.)

It starts by addressing God as “**our Father**”, which expresses that he is our provider and that he knows us. When we bring our pleas to God we come as children to our father. -> union with Christ shock of addressing God as father

With the phrase “**in heaven**” we acknowledge that God is greater than his creation and that he is therefore able to help us, whatever our circumstance may be.

Three pleas follow, where God is asked to do something regarding himself. That may seem odd to us at first.

“**hallowed be your name**”: When we ask for God to hallow his name, we acknowledge that only God is worthy of all worship and reverence and ask that we may live in reverence with him. The plea is for God to make us acknowledge his holiness more and live in accordance with it.

⁹ For a helpful introduction: Michael Reeves, Enjoy your prayer life, 10 publishing.

“Your kingdom come”: This is the kingdom that God has begun through Jesus and will fully bring about when he returns in glory. When we ask God for his kingdom to come, we ask that he would bring about the renewal of the world. Asking the lord to extend his rule in my life and to others through me.

“Your will be done”: We submit to the will of God in all things. We surrender to his will. What we want is no longer of primary importance to us. We pray that God may let his will be done. That means, we pray that he would bring about whatever his plans are.

Then there are three more pleas where we ask for “us”:

“Give us this day our daily bread”: Firstly, we ask God to give us on this day the food we need to live. Secondly, we ask him to provide for any need we have. It’s daily dependence on him.

“And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors”: We all sin and do so every day, even as Christians. We need forgiveness. Though Jesus paid for our sins once for all and for sins past, present and future, in our life we need the gospel applied to us daily. Our Father invites us to ask him to forgive us our sins and this carries the promise that he will happily do so.

The second bit sounds pretty challenging: Why do I have to forgive those who sin against me? And yes, Jesus really commands us to forgive others, or we will not be forgiven (Matthew 6:14-15). But why? When we expect God to forgive us but have a resentful heart against others who wronged us, we reject the gospel. If we want forgiveness for ourselves but not for others, we have not understood the gospel.

Jesus offers us something here: When we forgive, a prisoner is set free. And when we turn around to see who that prisoner is, we find that it’s us.¹⁰

“And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil”: In this plea we ask God to defend us from our inclination towards sin and to rescue us from all evil. Be that the attacks of Satan or any other evil. What is so beautiful about this is that whilst we are tempted to sin and rebel against God, or to fall for the lies of Satan, we can ask our almighty Father to deliver us. We get to speak to him about our temptation and ask him to help us.

¹⁰ For further reading: Philipp Yancey, What’s so amazing about grace.

With this prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray for all we need and to turn our eyes on God. We turn to God and reach our empty hands out to receive from him all we need and to receive forgiveness and rescue from sin.

I encourage you to pray this daily. I often pray this in the morning and then go from there. Sometimes I just dwell on how beautiful it is to address God as Father. Or whilst I'm asking for daily bread, I bring all my needs and sorrows before God and ask him to provide, and so on. You can memorize this if you want. But we don't have to stick to these words. We can start with them and expand on each topic.

You can also pray the psalms. That's what they are there for. Often, when I don't have the words I just pray a psalm. Sometimes multiple times.

And of course you can pray in your own words. I would encourage you to do so. Just pour out your heart to God. Don't worry about having to find the correct theological terms for everything. You learn to pray by doing it. Let the Lord's prayer and the psalm teach you to pray but don't think that those are the only prayer that God will accept.

If you are in Christ, God is your Father and he hears you. He is with you as you pray to him.

J.C. Ryle: "Fear not because your prayer is stammering, your words feeble, and your language poor. Jesus can understand you."

How can I live with Jesus? Through the means of grace God plentifully provides for his Church to live in communion with him and to enjoy his blessings. In my union with Christ, I come to enjoy this by faith.

4.2. Beholding Christ daily

Living with Christ does not only happen during the Sunday service, but in every moment of our lives. Before you start to stress out, here is a wonderful thing this means: He is always with you. Wherever you are and whatever you have done, God sees you and hears you.

You can practice some of the means of grace we talked about in our day to day life, like singing, prayer and reading the Bible for yourself. I want to encourage you to do so. Not out of duty, but to enjoy God. Reading the Bible is like feasting. It's like sweet honey in the mouth.¹¹

I like to think of my Bible reading and prayer as normal-sized meals that I eat every day. And once a week at the Church Service there is huge feast that I get to enjoy. Having Communion with God on my own is great and necessary. But having Communion with God with the whole Church is the most beautiful thing on earth.

God wants us to flourish. And as Christians we learn to walk in the way of flourishing.

The ten Commandments:

For our daily life with Jesus, God gives us a framework for a good and flourishing life with the ten commandments.

Yes, they prohibit specific deeds, but they are meant to safeguard our life from destruction. Living in these commandments is the good life God wants for us. God wants us to flourish. Therefore, he commands us not to walk in the way of death.

- I. You shall have no other Gods**
- II. You shall not make an image of God**
- III. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God**
- IV. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it Holy**
- V. Honour your father and your mother**
- VI. You shall not kill**
- VII. You shall not Commit adultery**
- VIII. You shall not steal**
- IX. You shall not bear false witness**
- X. You shall not covet**

¹¹ Psalm 119:103

These commandments have two parts: Commandments I-IV teach us how we are to live with God. Commandments V-X teach us how we are to live with other humans.

The first four commandments are meant to protect us from putting anything or anyone but the true God in his place. Worship no one else but the triune God. Don't make yourself a statue or any other form of a picture of God to which you pray. Don't use his name to curse. And keep a day of rest each week.

The other six commandments are meant to protect you and all other humans. We are commanded to honour our parents. We must not murder. We must not commit adultery. To commit adultery is to sleep with a person you're not married to, but also any other sexual activity outside the marriage of one man and one woman. We must not steal. We must not speak untruly. We must not covet anything that someone else has.

Don't worship yourself by making everything about you. You are not the centre of the universe. Devote yourself to worship God by focusing all that you are on him and by loving those around you.

Jesus summarized these commandments in two:

Mark 12:30-31: ³⁰ And you **shall love the Lord your God** with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this: '**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**' There is no other commandment greater than these.

The command to love God summarizes the first four commandments: With everything you are, you are meant to love God. You are called by God to love him with your will, with your emotions, with your thoughts and with your strength. We are called to live a life dedicated to him, where he is our greatest joy and treasure.

The command to love our neighbours as ourselves summarizes commandments 6-10. This doesn't mean that you have to love yourself before you can love others. This means to do good to others as you want to be treated well. Don't harm others like you don't want to be harmed. This means to stop worshipping yourself by denying yourself. Don't just do what you want but seek to do good to others and strive to love good in your thoughts, your emotions, your desires and your deeds.

Our life in Christ is a relationship of love. To keep these commandments means to give things their correct place: I am to love God above all things. And I am to seek the good of others over doing what I want.

The thing is: None of us has kept these commandments. We all have broken the law of God and deserve punishment. These commandments show us our sinfulness. God wants us to flourish. Yet we believe we know better and destroy others and ourselves.

But remember: Jesus has fulfilled the law perfectly and bore the punishment for us in his death on the cross. Our sin is paid. We are free and forgiven in Christ. Whether you keep God's commandments or not doesn't change his love for you. You can't do anything to make God love you more. And you cannot do anything to make him love you less. Here is where this sweet word called "grace" comes into play. The love of God is never earned but freely given.

Being obedient to God is matter of responding in thankfulness and worship, not about behaving the right way so he won't be disappointed.

In our union with Christ, the Spirit enables us to actually keep the commandments. Yes, in an incomplete way. But he does transform and empower us to live in God's will. Remember, we belong to the new creation. Part of that is that we walk in newness of life and become more like Jesus. But more on that next week.

How can I live with Jesus?

By walking with him daily through prayer and Bible reading but also by being obedient to his commandments to walk in the way of God. I am called to love God with all that I am and to love my neighbour as myself. By the power of the Spirit who lives in me, I can grow in my obedience and walk with Christ.