

# Living in Union With Christ in Dangerous Times 3 of 3

by Josef Tson

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of living in union with Christ to overcome sin and thrive in a dangerous world.*

**Duration:** 55:15

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, John 14:26, Romans 7:14-24, Romans 8:13

**Topics:** "Christ"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having a clear mental picture or worldview of the world and of life. He explains that this mental picture shapes the way we live our lives. The speaker then connects this concept to the teachings in Romans 7 and 8, highlighting the attraction of sin in contrast to the aspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's main purpose is to lead us to fall in love with Christ and transform us into His image. The speaker concludes by discussing the significance of living in union with Christ in a dangerous world, where God uses our enemies and challenges to build Christ-like character in us.

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## Transcript

On Thursday night, I started by emphasizing the importance of the worldview. I told you I don't like that word. I like the way we put it, the conception of the world and of life.

Or even simpler, the mental picture that you create about the world and of life. This last song was a mental picture. This is my father's world.

There are battles, there are enemies, but everything is in control of my father, the sovereign God. It's a mental picture. It's very important to understand that the mental picture you have of the world is actually the way you will live your life.

Because you live your life based on that mental picture. And if you believe that it's only evil spirits around and that you are under siege, if only that is in your mental picture, you are defeated. But you have to have the right mental picture, and this morning I will speak about that.

But before I speak, I remind you about the illustration I used Thursday night about my car, my new car. I learned everything about it and I made the mental picture of the car. And how important it is that that

mental picture be correspondent with what the car is.

You see, if my mental picture of that car is wrong, I even make an accident or maybe even ruin my own life. Because my mental picture of it does not correspond with the actual thing. So the scripture gives me this mental picture.

I am in Christ. There are two spheres of existence, only two, in Adam and in Christ. And you have to see yourself in that sphere.

You dwell in Christ, that's your habitat, that's your house. You live in Christ, you dwell in Christ, you exist in Christ, you function in Christ. It's a dangerous word.

But I am in Christ, hidden with Christ in God. Somebody has to go through God and through Christ to reach me. Rather difficult job.

But I have to see myself there, and if I really have that as my mental picture, if that mental picture dominates me, it's the dominant picture of my life, then I function well. We live in a dangerous world. My greatest dangers have not been the communists.

My greatest danger does not come from Muslim people who might kill me when I go back to the field. My greatest danger comes from the devil and especially from sin. And let's just put it, my greatest danger is sin.

Be it inspired by Satan or by the world or by my flesh. My greatest danger is sin. And the world, Satan and my flesh are the environment in which my God placed me.

I don't want you to take them away from the Lord, says Jesus to the Father. I only want you to strengthen them there and give them power and shelter them from the evil. So we are placed in this environment because it is this environment in which he makes us into his image.

Character traits are God's purpose for us. And character traits can be formed only in this battle with evil. And you must understand this picture and understand the purpose of God for you in this situation.

So my greatest enemy is sin. How can I be victorious over sin? For this we have to go back to Romans 5 to 8, then from there to 12, 13. And I want to just outline for you a broad picture.

Because you have to see the entire picture and build it as your mental picture. It starts in Romans 5, 1. Now we are reconciled with God. We are in a state of grace.

We are at peace with God. And Paul elaborates, he says, well, but wait a minute. Now we go into tribulations because it is the tribulations that produce our character.

And that character then produces the hope of glory. So, and then he comes back to the main issue. You have to know, he says, that by the death of Christ, he got rid of your sin.

You don't have condemnation for your sin anymore. That was wiped out. Sin was washed out by his blood.

By his death, he did all that. And then he adds the most important statement, I would say, in the New Testament. We are going to be saved by his life.

Did I say the greatest statement in the New Testament? Living in union with Christ. Living by his own life. That's the greatest thing that God has given us.

Now, this is so important that all that happens further in Romans 5, 6, 7, 8. Is nothing but an elaboration of Romans 5, 10. We are being saved by Christ's life. Everything else is simply an explanation of that.

And he starts by telling you that you may be in Adam or in Christ. And then in chapter 6, he goes on and he says, Look, you have to be aware that you were made one with Christ. When you open your life to him, he came in.

He united himself to you and united you to himself. In such a deep way that you are crucified with him. You died with him.

You are buried with him. You rose to life with him. And now you are living in union with him.

With what purpose? So that the power of the sin that is in your body may be canceled. All this union with Christ is for this purpose. That the power of sin may be destroyed in you.

How? First of all, consider yourself in Christ. Verse 11. See yourself there.

Build that mental picture in you. That's the most important thing. Because the way you think of yourself, that's how you live.

Build that in you that you are in Christ. And if you are in Christ, you are dead to sin and alive to God. Let me repeat.

Think yourself in Christ. And when you think yourself in Christ, you just think that you are dead to sin and alive to God. And from now on, you present yourself to God in his service.

And the result is a holy life. And the outcome is eternal life. You see how the progression goes? That's the entire process of our salvation.

Then he says, let me reiterate everything again. You are married to Satan. That's chapter 7. You died to that husband.

And you came to life. And you married Christ. And now in this marriage to Christ, he brings the Holy Spirit in you.

And you serve God in a new spirit, in the Holy Spirit. So that's the entire picture. And then it comes to the real problem.

The attraction of sin. And it's the famous second part of Romans 7 from 14 to 24. I accepted God's commandments.

And I love them. I am passionate for God. And I want to do God's will.

But the attraction of sin is so powerful. It's like a law of sin and death in my body. In my flesh.

Woe on me! Who liberates me from this? Answer? In union with Christ. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8 explains that. And the key is in verse 5 and 6. Romans 8. That's the key to everything actually. It all refers to the mind.

Literally what Paul says is that the mind of the flesh is death. And the mind of the spirit is life and peace. You can put it this way.

What direction my mind looks. What is the main concern of my mind? The body? The flesh? My appetites? My desires? My cravings? Or my mind is now directed to the spirit. And the things of the spirit.

Or let me put it even deeper. Who owns my mind? The mind of the flesh and the mind of the spirit. Two owners.

Possible owners. My mind may be owned by my flesh. And then my mind is the servant of my flesh.

And I say your majesty the flesh. What can I do further for you to satisfy your appetites? Or I can say Holy Spirit. You are the owner of this mind.

You are the one who brings in my mind the thoughts of God. Literally. Literally.

It is he who puts the thoughts of God in my mind. That's guidance. And he who is guided by the spirit is a child of God.

This is verse 14. So I have now to understand first of all that the Holy Spirit installed himself in my mind. That's where he dwells.

Jesus dwells in my heart. He is my bridegroom. He is my beloved.

He is my passion. He owns me. Ruling in my heart.

And the spirit is the spirit of my mind because that's where he puts God's thoughts. And that's where he gives me guidance. Now let me give you a new mental picture.

A high schooler. Senior. Still thinking what to become in life.

He's thinking of this. Doesn't ring a bell. Doesn't ring a bell.

And all of a sudden he says, What about being a medical doctor? How would I be as a medical doctor? And he starts to get warmed about that idea. And his heart is captured. And becoming a medical doctor becomes his passion.

And then he says, What does it take to become a medical doctor? Spending at least six years in the library and laboratory. No more entertainment. No more fun.

No more distractions. I want to be a medical doctor. And when the others say, why don't you come to pray with us? What? I want to be a medical doctor.

And he looks to all these trifles in the world. And he says, they're nothing. I want to be a medical doctor.

Now, Paul uses another illustration. Somebody who wants to get the gold medal at Olympics. Gold medal.

To be on the top podium. To have my country's flag there. To be given the gold medal.

To have the whole world see me. Is it difficult then to cut off all the junk food and get healthy nourishment? Have sound sleep and disciplined life because I won the gold medal? Now let me show you how that ties in with Romans 7 and 8. Romans 7 is the attraction of sin. An extraordinary, powerful magnet.

But then in chapter 8, the things of the spirit. And you have to understand what are the things of the spirit. The aspiration of the spirit.

You know the Holy Spirit has only one business. He wants me to fall in love with Christ. He wants to direct my mind towards the teaching of Christ and the person of Christ.

He wants to transform me gradually in the image of Christ. He reminds me of the teaching of Christ. He brings the love of God and of Christ in me.

He sets me on fire for Christ. And again and again he is there to say, Remember Christ. Look at Christ.

Love Him. Glorify Him. The Holy Spirit preoccupation is Christ in me.

And he says, look to Christ. You know what it is to become like Him and one day to be glorified with Him. Sitting with Him in the heaven on the throne of God.

You imagine how it is to have the glory of Christ in you. 2 Thessalonians 2.14 We are called to obtain the glory of Christ. Look at that.

Fall in love with Christ and fall in love with the idea that you are going to become like Him. Already here. Getting His thinking, His mind in you.

His kind of behavior. His kind of character. You have to have all this here.

It's possible with my guidance and with my power. And when I am captured by that, I look to the attraction of the flesh and say, John Stott uses three Latin words there. For Romans 7, the attraction.

Then Romans 8.1-10 is the aspiration. Aspiratio. Attractio.

Aspiratio. And because that aspiration for Christ and for the things of the Spirit is so strong, I can do the third thing, mortificatio. Put to death the things of the body.

It's not difficult when I am made in love with Christ. When my desire is Christ, my pleasure is Christ. You understand? It's all a question of where is your love? If you fell in love with Christ and He is your passion, and if you are on flame for Him, putting to death the things of the body is a trifle.

Because of that aspiration. Now let me illustrate in a different way. We settled about two years ago in Portland, Oregon, because our daughter lives there now.

So we joined the Romanian Baptist Church in Portland. And one day I was in the office of the pastor, and on the desk he had a globe of the earth. And I looked.

It was in the air. Actually, it was in the air. It wasn't on anything.

I could see nothing below, nothing above. They looked. I said, what's that? He smiled.

He said, we have a Romanian engineer here. He came to this country. He is an expert in magnets.

And he has now a factory of magnets. He is doing a great business. And among other things, he produces these globes.

You see this arc, like a bow. On the base it's a magnet. But on this side it's another magnet.

And they are so calculated that there is a spot where the globe is attracted equally by the one above and by the one below. And I saw that I got one myself. And I put it in my study.

And it's so funny because I have to feel that spot where the globe is equally attracted. And it floats. Now, that's an illustration for how God placed me in the world.

On one side it's God. And make this mental picture. Starting in Psalm 16, 8. I have always God in front of me.

That's God the Father. And then look to Ephesians 3. Jesus dwells in my heart. And the Holy Spirit is the spirit of my mind.

God is in front of me. He placed Christ in my heart. Placed the Holy Spirit in my mind.

A theologian, I think in the 4th century, thinking of that said, God embraces us with his two arms, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Look at that all the time. Then you turn on the other side and you see the ugly Satan there.

His world. And although the flesh is here, I want to put it there too. Just to visualize it.

So Satan, the world, and the flesh. And the Lord put me in that neutral place. Now I am not a magnet.

I am a human being. And so what I have to know is that the first of all the issue is where do I look? I can turn my face to the TV, to soap operas, to Satan and the world and the flesh. If my face is there, that magnet attracts me irresistibly.

Jump there. But if I turn my back to them and I look to my beloved God, and remember what I said last night, all my talk last night about loving God, I said last night that that was a preparation for this morning. Now that's why I gave it to you last night because he is the most beautiful being in the universe.

He is the most loving person in the universe and the most lovable. And he is madly in love with me. I mean madly in love with me.

I want to rejoice on you as a bridegroom rejoices on his bride. Come into that relationship with me. Open your eyes to see my beauty.

Fall in love with me. And I know that Christ is the passion of my heart. The Holy Spirit is the guide of my mind.

Do you see how God embraces me like that? Wow! That attraction is irresistible. So it's just a question where you look. And let me give you here another very important addition here.

Humans are creatures of pleasure. Humans are creatures of pleasure. You go where your pleasures are.

Jesus puts it, you go where your treasures are. You may change. Just like that, pleasures.

In Proverbs 23, 26, God says, Son, may your eyes capture my beauty. Find your pleasure in me and in my ways, in my kind of being. Give me your heart like that.

I go where my pleasures are. If my pleasures in God are not stronger than the pleasures of the flesh, I go towards the flesh. And here is the biggest problem we have as Christians.

We never developed our relationship with God in such a way that it is a pleasure-giving relationship. A pleasure-giving relationship, or as the Psalms put it, it's a delight-giving relationship. Unspeakable delight in the presence of God.

I delight in Him. My happiness is in Him. My joy is in Him.

So I find pleasure, joy, delight and happiness in God. If I find them there, I don't need the pleasures of the world anymore because the pleasures that I get in God are much bigger, much stronger. Now, union with Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit in my mind.

Let me ask a question. So far, I only told you that you have to put all this in your mind, that you have to build these things in you so that you can visualize them all the time. That's your side, that's your part.

What does Christ do? And what does the Holy Spirit do? Let me establish this with you. You are a person. Christ never takes over and the Holy Spirit never takes over.

Many people tell you that they take over. They never do. They are persons just as you are.

You are made in their image. And they don't want to catch you and grab you. Only the evil spirits do that.

You are never possessed by the Holy Spirit. You are possessed by evil spirits because their purpose is to choke you and disintegrate your personality. The Holy Spirit respects my personality.

He only guides me, whispers, gives me God's thoughts, directs me to look to Jesus. But I can disobey Him and that way grieve Him and even extinguish Him. So you have to understand that His purpose is to develop you as a person who knows how to live in fellowship with the persons of the Father and of Christ and of the Holy Spirit.

Their relationship with you is just a relationship of marriage. The most intimate relation between two human persons. None of them chokes the other.

Or they shouldn't. Each one should help the other flourish. That's the marriage between me and Christ.

He says, Joseph, if you love me and if you obey my teaching, the teaching of Christ, make that an objective that you soak your mind with the teaching of Christ. Because if you have my commandments and do them, that's how you love me. But if you love me and do my commandments, I live in you and I am the vine and you are the branch.

And my job is to pump my life in you and you become fruitful. But it is you who have to say, Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I want you.

I eat you. I drink you. I open myself so that you fill me.

And they do. And they give you all the power you need. And we live in that sweet communion of husband and wife.

But in that communion, I don't take over. You flourish. And my joy is to be your friend.

The friendship of my beloved, Jesus. And the Holy Spirit says exactly the same. I am here to direct your thoughts to Christ.

I am here to remind you of the teaching of Christ. I am here to bring the things of Christ in you. And if you listen to my whispers, if you listen to my guidance, you get used to recognize my voice.

As you obey me, I give you all the power of God to implement that obedience. But you have to accept to obey me. And my power comes for obedience to the will of God and to the teaching of Christ.

So it is in that communion that I become victorious over sin. You remember that the entire discussion is about how can I conquer the power of sin. Now you see, it's in that sweet, loving relationship with these three persons and in every day opening myself to them, being filled with them, and every day living in that loving communion with them.

Their magnet then is irresistible. I will go to them every day. Now, let me go back now to my experiences with the Lord.

Some of you picked up that little pamphlet and thank you for the beating. I think you will bear with me if I tell the entire story because it's another picture. It was in 1977 that I was arrested and with a group of others, we were six of us who documented persecution in Romania exactly against some international agreements that Romania just signed.

Romania committed itself to give us freedom by those international agreements, but they were breaking their own agreements. So we decided that we expose that. And we got all the facts and we showed which international agreements Romania was breaking and we sent that document to different international bodies and one evening Radio Free Europe read all that document and the six signatures.

You guess what? The next morning there were two policemen at my door and they took me. It was a Sunday morning. I was supposed to go to preach in the church.

I didn't go to preach there because they took me to Bucharest. We were charged with treason because we betrayed the country. And conspiracy to commit treason because we were six of us.

Now for treason you get 25 years, but for plot to commit treason, for conspiracy to commit treason, that's death. So we were in real trouble. And Monday morning those two interrogators started to work on me.

The others were in other six rooms in the same area. And by lunchtime a general came in. He just made a sign to the two and they understood they immediately went out.

The general just jumped on me and started to slap me and hit me and eventually he hit me with a fist in the forehead and I was close to the wall and he hit my head on the wall. It almost cracked my head. I screamed while he was beating me.

Now the others got a beating too and they heard their screamings too. So it was quite a thing. They kept us in interrogation those days on Thursday.

By lunchtime again the general came in again, made the same sign. The others went out and I grabbed the table. He saw that, he sat at the table and when he saw me like that he just smiled and said, don't

worry, this time I came to talk with you.

Now it's a very strange thing. When you are there you don't speak. It's the Holy Spirit who speaks through you.

Incidentally that doesn't apply to when you come to the pulpit. You have to prepare for that. Only when you are arrested, Jesus says don't prepare a sermon outline for there.

But anyhow, all of a sudden I heard myself say, Mr. General, because you came to talk with me, first of all I want to apologize for what happened on Monday. He couldn't understand it. It didn't make sense to him because on Monday he beat me.

Why do I apologize? Then I said, well let me explain. On Tuesday they kept me here all day without interrogation. Just sat here in this room.

And I had time to think and to pray. And all of a sudden it dawned on me, sir, this is the Holy Week and you beat me in the Holy Week. Sir, it dawned on me that this was the most beautiful thing that could happen to me.

Because for a Christian there is nothing more beautiful than to suffer when his Lord suffers. Sir, I am so sorry I screamed when you beat me. I should have thanked you for the most beautiful thing you could have ever given me.

Thank you for that beating in the Holy Week. I saw that man confounded, bewildered, choked. And eventually said, okay, well, let's talk.

Now, it was very interesting because of that talk, eventually on Friday he came and told me, you go free for Easter. Go and spend time with your church and you come back on Tuesday. And he just said, tell all your friends, the other five, so that they go with you free until Tuesday.

Now, why I told you this story at this point? You see, it came to me so naturally. The beauty of my Lord, but the desire of mine and of Paul is to know him, have the power of his resurrection in us, and then have that privilege of sharing in his sufferings. That's a privilege.

That's beauty. That's a joy. I was hurting physically.

But that didn't matter at all anymore. Somebody put it this way, when your spirit and soul is in heaven, the body doesn't feel the pain anymore. Because you are in that sweet union with the Lord.

And what seemed to be a cruel beating, it became one of the most beautiful experiences of my life. You see, that is communion. That is this intimate relationship with my Lord.

Now, that's why I told you from the beginning, the most important thing in your spiritual life is to have this clear mental picture of God, the most beautiful being in the universe, who is in love with me, and who invites me into that loving relationship. And then to see myself in Christ, where all the riches of God are placed, where all the fullness of God is, where I have everything I need. And if I see myself in that, and if I find my pleasures there, my delight there, my happiness there, I don't desire the things of the world anymore, because they are so pitiful, so insignificant compared with the beauty of this relationship.

You see, it is when you find that relationship with God, when you really actually live in that union, everything in this world becomes different. Even a beating at the secret police in Bucharest, Romania, it becomes one of the most beautiful things in the world. So, to conclude my three messages, living in union with Christ in a dangerous world.

This is my Father's world. He is sovereign. He uses all my enemies to produce in me character.

I made you this mental picture, God on one side, Jesus in me, the Holy Spirit in my mind, and the world, Satan, and the flesh on the other side. Why did He place me here? Because only in this environment can He build in me the character of Christ. The more wickedness I meet, the more He says, answer with goodness.

The more people harm me, He says, forgive as I forgave you. The more my enemies hurt me, the more He says, isn't it great to love them as I love them? You'll be like your Father in heaven. I talked with my wife this morning, and as I told her what I was going to say this morning, she said, Joseph, don't forget to tell them about the indicative and the imperative.

Do that little grammar with them. Because that helped me. You know, in the indicative, it is said, you have been hidden with Christ in God.

Whoever has been baptized into Christ, put on Christ, clothed himself in Christ. That's the reality. That's indicative mood of the verb.

But then in Romans 13, 14, when the temptations come to drink and to commit adultery, clothe yourself in Christ, the imperative. Put on Christ. Now, I am in Christ.

That's the indicative. But why do you command me to do what is already a reality? You know why? And here I remind you of those three commandments again. Ephesians 2.10 You are created in Christ in view of a holy living that God prepared for you.

Therefore, remember that you are in Christ. It's not real in your mind until you remember it. You understand? It's real spiritually, but it's not real for you until you remember it.

And then you go on to Romans 6 and say, look, you are told you are one with Christ. You are in Christ. Therefore, consider yourself in Christ.

What is the indicative now becomes the imperative, becomes the command. Think of it because then that's how you bring the reality into your thinking, into your active mind. It becomes real to you.

And that is what it means to obey Romans 13, 14. To put on Christ. How do I put on Christ? And it's obvious the context is the temptation.

When all the temptations come, remember you are in Christ. Consider yourself in Christ. And that's how you clothe yourself in Christ.

It becomes real to you. And then you can say, Sid, I have bigger treasures than that. That's the prescription for victory in Christ.

That's the key to victory in Christ. Is it complicated? It's so simple. So just take these mental pictures that I gave you and build your mind with them.

And that way your mind becomes the mind of the Spirit. And the mind of the Spirit is life and peace. And they who are guided by the Holy Spirit are the sons and daughters of God.

Let's bow our heads right now. Oh God, our Heavenly Father. How wonderful you are.

Oh Lord Jesus. My beloved bridegroom and husband. You loved me and gave yourself for me.

And you united yourself with me. I love you. Dwell in me, my beloved.

I like your teaching. I like your commandments because they only describe me what you are. Oh how I am passionate in wanting to be like you.

Holy Spirit, the Spirit of my mind. Thank you for bringing there the thoughts of God. Thank you for being there to remind me the teaching of Jesus.

Thank you for guiding my thoughts in the things of God. And thank you for bringing in the power of God when I am ready to obey Christ. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

My passion. My love. My joy.

My pleasure. My delight. My happiness.

I praise you. I glorify you. And I give you always all the praise and all the glory for whatever you do in me and through me.

Because it is all done by you. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. May you be glorified in me and in us all always.

Amen.

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