

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

May 2018

Dear Friends,

I write these letters, for the most part, to people who want to have a richer life with God. (A richer life period, which we know only flows out of a richer life with God.)

We want to draw closer and closer; it is the yearning and inclination of the soul that loves God. For “When Jesus is near,” wrote à Kempis, “all is well and nothing seems difficult. When He is absent, all is hard. When Jesus does not speak within, all other comfort is empty, but if He says only a word, it brings great consolation.” Thus our soul yearns for nearness.

But I think it yearns for something more—we yearn for *union* with God.

He is the Vine, the source of all our life, and we are but branches aching and thirsting to be united with the Vine, so that Life itself might flow through us. In the introduction to Albert Magnus’ medieval classic, *Union with God*, the editor begins, “Surely the most deeply-rooted need of the human soul, its purest aspiration, is for the closest possible union with God.” My soul says, *Yes and amen. The closest possible union.*

Now, when I look at the popular books, podcasts, sermons and conferences being offered right now in Christendom, I’m struck by how infrequently the topic is union with God. Either they are things to *do*: “This is how to help your kids grow in their faith,” or, “Do this for your community to share the love of Christ,” or, “Take action to bring justice to the world.” Or they are *inspiration*: “Be a better you! Live a braver life! You too can overcome!” There is a place for these things, of course, but I think they are misleading, because something else is needed first. Our energy and vitality, our strength and endurance, all the virtues like patience, loving-kindness, and forgiveness—these all flow out of our union with God. When the soul tries to produce any of these things on its own, it tires very easily. “We are vessels of life,” wrote MacDonald, “not yet full of the wine of life; where the wine does not reach, there the clay cracks, and aches, and is distressed.”

So you would think our primary goal—and thus topic of conversation—would be union with God.

“I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you...one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me.” (John 17:20-23)

This is not quite the same thing as saying we believe in God, or that we are listening to God; not even that we are obeying God. Union, oneness, is something far higher and richer. I realize that in this abused age any sexual metaphor is potentially troubling, but the scripture uses it and therefore we should not abandon it. Referring directly to marriage Paul says,

For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies...she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined

to another man...you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be *joined to another*, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. (Romans 7:2-4 NASB)

And now you are *united with the one* who was raised from the dead. (NLT)

It's simply helpful to differentiate: believing in God is not the same thing as union with God, doing various God-activities is not the same as union with God, obeying God isn't necessarily union with God. These things can all be done while there is a kind of distance between our soul and God. You can read all about Italy but that is very different from actually living there. You can do things for your spouse but that's not the same as being united with them.

Okay then. What I want to suggest is, that the basic things we do, the things that are at the top of our "To Do" lists, are things that help us find union with God. Step 1 is understanding that God *wants* union with you, that union is the purpose of your creation, and that it is the priority. That's a good starting point. It is a massive re-orientation. Because it leads quickly to Step 2, which is presenting ourselves to God for union. I do this every day: "I present myself to You, God, for union with You." We pray for union; we ask for it.

Step 3 (and this is not science, folks, it's poetry; these "steps" are simply for clarity's sake) is to release everything else that is taking up room in your soul. "I give everything and everyone to You for union with You." And then, I have found it very important to ask God to *heal* my union with him: "Father—I pray you would heal our union. I pray your glory would fill our union." This is critical because the enemy is always trying to harm our union with God, and it needs healing and repairing on a regular basis.

Jesus, Father, Holy Spirit—I give myself to you to be one with you in everything. I pray for union and I pray for oneness. I pray to be one heart and one mind, one will, one life. Restore me in you; restore our union. I give everything and everyone to you in order to have union with you. Heal our union, God; restore and renew our union. I pray your glory fills our union. I pray for a deeper union with you, a deeper and more complete oneness.

It is a very quiet and gentle thing. Sometimes dramatic, but maybe only about 5% of the time. Most of the time the union of our soul with God is something that is very gentle and life-giving. And therefore you have to be gentle and tuned-in to be aware of it. But I think you will love the fruit of this. So I thought it would be good to put this back in front of us as the priority for each day.

Offered in love,


John

PS We are airing a two-part podcast series on union with God in June! Make sure you tune in!