



OUR VITAL UNION WITH CHRIST

The Application of Christ's Redemption in its Actual Beginning

Excerpted from A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*,
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Under this head we treat of Union with Christ, Regeneration, Conversion, (embracing Repentance and Faith), and Justification. Much confusion and error have arisen from conceiving these as occurring in chronological order. The order is logical, not chronological. As it is only "in Christ" that man is "a new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17) or is "justified" (Acts 13:39), union with Christ logically precedes both regeneration and justification; and yet, chronologically, the moment of our union with Christ is also the moment when we are regenerated and justified. So, too, regeneration and conversion are but the divine and human sides or aspects of the same fact, although regeneration has logical precedence, and man turns only as God turns him.

In general the Holy Spirit's work presupposes the historical work of Christ, and prepares the way for Christ's return. "As the Holy Spirit is the principle of union between the Father and the Son, so he is the principle of union between God and man. Only through the Holy Spirit does Christ secure for himself those who will love him as distinct and free personalities." Regeneration and conversion are not chronologically separate . . .

The soul that is born again will show in it faith and hope and love and holy living. Regeneration will involve repentance, faith, justification, and sanctification. But the one life, which makes regeneration and all these consequent blessings possible, is the life of Christ who joins himself to us in order that we may join ourselves to him. . . .

Union with Christ, says Dr. A. A. Hodge, "is effected by the Holy Ghost in effectual calling. Of this calling the parts are two: (a) the offering of Christ to the sinner, *externally* by the gospel, and *internally* by the illumination of the Holy Ghost; (b) the reception of Christ, which on our part is both passive and active. The passive reception is that whereby a spiritual principle is ingenerated into the human will, whence issues the active reception, which is an act of faith with which repentance is always conjoined. The communion of benefits which results from this union involves: (a) a change of state or relation, called justification; and (b) a change of subjective moral character, commenced in regeneration and completed through sanctification."

H. B. Smith, however, in his *System of Christian Theology*, is clearer in the putting of Union with Christ before Regeneration. He begins his treatment of the Application of Redemption with the title: "The Union between Christ and the individual believer as effected by the Holy Spirit. This embraces the subjects of Justification, Regeneration, and Sanctification, with the underlying topic, which comes first to be considered. Election." He therefore treats Union with Christ before Regeneration. He says Calvin defines

Our Vital Union with Christ: The Application of Christ's Redemption treats Union with Christ before Regen-eration. He says Calvin defines regeneration as coming to us by participation in Christ, and apparently agrees with this view.

"This union [with Christ] is at the ground of regeneration and justification."
"The great difference of theological systems comes out here. Since Christianity is redemption through Christ, our mode of conceiving that will determine the character of our whole theological system. "The union with Christ is mediated by His Spirit, whence we are both renewed and justified. The great fact of objective Christianity is incarnation in order to atonement; the great fact of objective Christianity is union with Christ, whereby we receive the atonement. We may add that this union with Christ, in view of which God elects and to which God calls the sinner, is begun in regeneration, completed in conversion, declared in justification, and proved in sanctification and perseverance.

I. Union with Christ.

The Scriptures declare that, through the operation of God, there is con-stituted a union of the soul with Christ different in kind from God's natural and providential concursus with all spirits, as well as from all unions of mere association or sympathy, moral likeness, or moral influence, a union of life, in which the human spirit, while then most truly possessing its own individuality and personal distinctness, is interpenetrated and energized by the Spirit of Christ, is made inscrutably but indissolubly one with him, and so becomes a member and partaker of that regenerated, believing, and justified humanity of which he is the head.

Union with Christ is not union with a system of doctrine, nor with external religious influences, nor with an organized church, nor with an ideal man –but rather, with a personal, risen, living, omnipresent Lord (J. W. A. Stewart). Dr. J. W. Alexander well calls this doctrine of the Union of the Believer with Christ "the central truth of all theology and of all religion." Yet, it receives little of formal recognition, either in dogmatic treatises or in common religious experience. . . .

The majority . . . of Christians much more frequently think of Christ as a Savior outside of them, than as a Savior who dwells within. This compara-tive neglect of the doctrine is doubtless a reaction from the exaggerations of a false mysticism. But there is great need of rescuing the doctrine from neglect. For this we rely wholly upon Scripture. Doctrines, which reason can neither discover nor prove, need large support from the Bible. It is a mark of divine wisdom that the doctrine of the Trinity, for example, is so inwoven with the whole fabric of the New Testament, that the rejection of the former is the virtual rejection of the latter. The doctrine of Union with Christ, in like manner, is taught so variously and abundantly, that to deny it is to deny inspiration itself.

1. Scripture Representation of this Union

A. Figurative teaching. It is illustrated:

(a) From the union of a building and its foundation.

Eph. 2:20-22 "being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone; in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit"; Col. 2:7 "built up in him" grounded in Christ as our foundation; I Pet. 2:4, 5 "unto whom coming, a living stone, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect, precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house" each living stone in the Christian temple is kept in proper relation to every other, and is made to do its part in furnishing a habitation for God, only by being built upon and permanently connected with Christ, the chief corner stone. Cf. Psa. 118:22 "The stone which the builders rejected Is become the head of the corner"; Isa. 28:16 "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone of sure foundation: he that believeth shall not be in haste."

(b) From the union between husband and wife.

Rom. 7:4 "ye also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ; that ye should be joined to another, even to him who was raised from the dead, that we might bring forth fruit unto God" here union with Christ is illustrated by the indissoluble bond that connects husband and wife, and makes them legally and organically one; 2 Cor. 11:2 "I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy: for I espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ"; Eph. 5:31, 32 "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church" ...

Rev. 19:7 "the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready"; 22:17 "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come"; cf. Isa. 54:5 "For thy Maker is thine husband"; Jer. 3:20 "Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith Jehovah"; Hos. 2:1-5 "for their mother hath played the harlot" departure from God is adultery; the song of Solomon, as Jewish interpreters have always maintained, is an allegorical poem describing, under the figure of marriage, the union between Jehovah and his people: Paul only adopts the Old Testament figure, and applies it more precisely to the union of God with the church in Jesus Christ.

(c) From the union between the vine and its branches.

John 15:1-10 "I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for apart from me ye can do nothing" as God's natural life is in the vine, that it may give life to its natural branches, so God's spiritual life is in the vine, Christ, that he may give life to his spiritual branches. The roots of this new vine are planted in heaven, not on earth; and into it the half withered branches of the old humanity are to be grafted, that they may have life divine. Yet our Lord does not say "I am the root." The branch is not something *outside*, which has to get nourishment out of the root, it is rather a *part* of the vine. Rom. 6:5 "if we have become united with him. . . in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection"; 11:24 "thou wast cut out of that which is by nature a wild olive tree, and wast grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree"; Col. 2:6, 7 "As therefore ye received Christ Jesus the lord, so, walk in him, rooted and builded up in him" not only grounded in Christ as our foundation but thrusting down roots into him as the deep, rich, all sustaining soil. This union with Christ is consistent with individuality: for the graft brings forth fruit after its kind, though modified by the tree into which it is grafted.

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Bishop H. W. Warren, The lessons of the vine are Intimacy, likeness of nature, continuous impartation of life, fruit. Between friends, there is intimacy by means of media, such as food, present care, words, soul looking from the eyes. The mother gives her liquid flesh to the babe, but such intimacy soon ceases. The mother is not rich enough in life continuously to feed the ever enlarging nature of the growing man. Not so with the vine. It continuously feeds. Its rivers crowd all the banks. They burst out in leaf, blossom, clinging tendrils, and fruit, everywhere. In nature a thorn grafted on a pear tree bears only thorn. There is not pear life enough to compel change of its nature. But a wild olive, typical of depraved nature, grafted on a good olive tree finds, contrary to nature, that there is force enough in the growing stock to change the nature of the wild scion."

(d) From the union between the members and the head of the body.

1 Cor. 6:15,19 "Know ye not that your bodies are members of Christ? ... know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God?" 12:12 "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ" here Christ is identified with the church of which he is the head; Eph. 1:22-23 "he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all" as the members of the human body are united to the head, the source of their activity and the power that controls their movements, so all believers are members of an invisible body whose head is Christ. Shall we tie a string round the finger to keep for it its own blood? No, for all the blood of the body is needed to nourish one finger. So Christ is "head over all things to [for the benefit of] the church." "The church is the fullness of Christ; as it was not good for the first man, Adam, to be alone, no more was it good for the second man, Christ" (C. H. M.). Eph. 4:15, 16 "grow up in all things into him, who is the head, even Christ; from whom all the body ... maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love" ; 5:29, 30 "for no man ever hated his own" flesh; but nourisheth and cherishes it, even as Christ also the church; because we are members of his body. "

(e) From the union of the race with the source of its life in Adam.

Rom. 5:12, 21 "as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through ... that, as sin reigned in death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"; I Cor. 15:22, 45, 49 "as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive... The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life giving Spirit. . . . as we have born. the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" as the whole race is one with the first man Adam, in whom it fell and from whom it has derived a corrupted and guilty nature, so the whole race of believers constitutes a new and restored humanity, whose justified and purified nature is derived from Christ, the second Adam. Cf. Gen. 2:23 "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" here C. H. M. remarks that, as man is first created and then woman is viewed in and formed out of him, so it is with Christ and the church. "We are members of Christ's body, because in Christ we have the principle of our origin; from him our life arose, just as the life of Eve was derived from Adam. . . The church is Christ's helpmeet, formed out of Christ in his deep sleep of death, as Eve out of AdamThe church will be nearest to Christ, as Eve was to Adam." Because Christ is the source of all spiritual life for his people, he is called, in Isa. 9:6, "Everlasting Father," and it is said, in Isa. 53:10, that "he shall see his seed."

B. Direct statements.

(a) The believer is said to be in Christ.

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Lest we should regard the figures mentioned above as merely Oriental metaphors, the fact of the believer's union with Christ is asserted in the most direct and prosaic manner. John 14:20 "ye in me"; Rom. 6:11 "alive unto God in Christ Jesus"; 8:1 "no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus"; 2 Cor. 5:17 "if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature"; Eph. 1:4 "whose us in him before the foundation of the world"; 2:13 "now in Christ Jesus ye that once were far off are made nigh in the blood of Christ." Thus the believer is said to be "in Christ," as the element or atmosphere which surrounds him with its perpetual presence and which constitutes his vital breath: In fact, this phrase "in Christ," always meaning "In union with Christ," is the very key to Paul's epistles, and to the whole New Testament. The fact that the believer is in Christ is symbolized in baptism: we are "baptized into Christ" (Gal. 3:27).

(b) Christ is said to be in the believer.

John 14:20 "In you"; Rom. 8:9 "ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" that this Spirit of Christ is Christ Himself, is shown from verse 10 "And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness" Gal. 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me. Here Christ is said to be in the believer, and so to live his life within the believer, that the latter can point to this as the dominating fact of his experience, it is not so much he that lives, as it is Christ that lives in him. The fact that Christ is in the believer is symbolized in the Lord's Supper: "The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16).

(c) The Father and the Son dwell in the believer.

John 14:23 "If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him"; cf. 10 "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I say unto you I speak not from myself: but the Father abiding in me doeth his works" — the Father and the Son dwell in the believer; for where the Son is, there always the Father must be also. If the union between the believer and Christ in John 14:23 is to be interpreted as one of mere moral influence, then the union of Christ and the Father in John 14:10 must also be interpreted as a union of mere moral influence. Eph. 3:17 "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith"; I John 4:18 "he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him."

(d) The believer has life by partaking of Christ, as Christ has life by partaking of the Father.

John 6:53, 56, 57 "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me, and I in him, As the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so he that eateth me, he also shall live because of me" the believer has life by partaking of Christ in a way that may not inappropriately be compared with Christ's having life by partaking of the Father. 1 Cor. 10:16, 17 "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the holy Christ?" here it is intimated what the Lord's Supper sets forth, in the language of symbol, the soul's actual participation in the life of Christ; and the margin properly translates the word *koinonia*, not "communion," but "participation" Cf. I John 1:3 "our fellowship (*koinonia*) is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." Foster, *Christian Life and Theology*, "In John 6, the phrases call to mind the ancient form of sacrifice, and the participation therein by the offerer at the sacrificial meal, as at the Passover."

(e) From the union of the race with the source of its life in Adam.

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death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"; I Cor. 15:22, 45, 49 —as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. . . . The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life giving Spirit. . . . as we have born the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" as the whole race is one with the first man Adam, in whom it fell and from whom it has derived a corrupted and guilty nature, so the whole race of believers constitutes a new and restored humanity, whose justified and purified nature is derived from Christ, the second Adam. Cf. Gen. 2:23 "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" here C. H. M. remarks that, as man is first created and then woman is viewed in and formed out of him, so it is with Christ and the church. "We are members of Christ's body, because in Christ we have the principle of our origin; from him our life arose, just as the life of Eve was derived from Adam. . . . The church is Christ's helpmeet, formed out of Christ in his deep sleep of death, as Eve out of Adam. . . . The church will be nearest to Christ, as Eve was to Adam." Because Christ is the source of all spiritual life for his people, he is called, in Isa. 9:6, "Everlasting Father," and it is said, in Isa. 53:10, that "he shall see his seed."

2. Nature of this Union.

We have here to do not only with a fact of life, but with a unique relation between the finite and the infinite. Our descriptions must therefore be inadequate. Yet in many respects we know what this union is not; in certain respects we can positively characterize it. . . .

A. *Negatively. – It is not:*

(a) A merely natural union, like that of God with all human spirits, as held by rationalists.

. . . Paul urges us to work out our salvation, upon the very ground that "it is God that worketh" in us, both to will and to work, for his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12, 13). This life of God in the soul is the life of Christ.

. . . We need a spiritual Christ to explain the spiritual activity of the Christian. Christ is invisible. Faith comes to believe where it cannot see. It joins itself to this invisible Christ, and knows him as its very life.

(b) A merely moral union, or union of love and sympathy, like that between teacher and scholar, friend and friend, as held by Socinians and Arminians.

There is a moral union between different souls. . . . But in John 17:21, 26, Christ's union with his people is distinguished from any mere union of love and sympathy: "that they may all be one; even is Thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us; . . . that the love wherewith thou lovest me may be in them, and I in them." Jesus' aim, in the whole of his last discourse, is to show that no mere union of love and sympathy will be sufficient: "apart from me," he says, "ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). That His disciples may be vitally joined to Himself, is therefore the subject of his last prayer.

. . . The living Christ is the present spiritual life of the believer. "This union to his person, as to its contents, is nothing else than adherence to the message of the kingdom of God brought by him." It is not enough for me to be merely in *touch* with Christ. He must come to be "not so far as even to be near."

(c) A union of essence, which destroys the distinct personality and subsistence of either Christ or the human spirit, as held by many of the mystics.

Many of the mystics . . . held to an *essential* union between Christ and the believer. One of Welgel's followers, therefore, could say to another: "I am Christ Jesus, the living Word of God; I have redeemed thee by my sinless sufferings." We are ever to remember that the indwelling of Christ only puts the believer more

by my sinless sufferings." We are ever to remember that the indwelling of Christ only puts the believer more completely in possession of himself, and makes him more conscious of his own personality and power. Union with Christ must be taken in connection with the other truth of the personality and activity of the Christian; otherwise it tends to pantheism.

. . . The union of the believer with Christ as a vital union, surpassing in its intimacy any union of souls that we know. The union of a child with father, or of wife with husband, is only a pointer which hints very imperfectly at the interpenetrating and energizing of the human spirit by the divine.

(d) A union mediated and conditioned by participation of the sacraments of the church, —as held by Romanists, Lutherans, and High Church, Episcopalians.

Perhaps the most pernicious misinterpretation of the nature of this union is that which conceives of it as a physical and material one, and which rears upon this basis the fabric of a sacramental and external Christianity. It is sufficient here to say that this union cannot be mediated by sacraments, since sacraments presuppose it as already existing; both Baptism and the Lord's Supper are designed only for believers. Only faith receives and retains Christ; and faith is the act of the soul grasping what is purely invisible and supersensible: not the act of the body, submitting to Baptism or partaking of the Supper.

William Lincoln: "The only way for the believer, if he wants to go rightly, is to remember that truth is always two sided. If there is any truth that the Holy Spirit has specially pressed upon your heart, If you do not want to push it to the extreme, ask what is the counter truth, and lean a little of your weight upon that; otherwise, if you bear so very much on one side of the truth, there is a danger of pushing it into a heresy. Heresy means selected truth; it does not mean error: heresy and error are very different things. Heresy is truth, but truth pushed into undue importance, to the disparagement of the truth upon the other side." Heresy is an act of choice, the picking and choosing of a part, instead of comprehensively embracing the whole of truth. Sacramentarians substitute the symbol for the thing symbolized.

B. Positively.—It is:

(a) An organic union, —in which we become members of Christ and partakers of his humanity.

. . . The body is an organism; since the limbs exist for the heart, and the heart for the limbs. So each member of Christ's body lives for Him who is the head; and Christ the head equally lives for His members. Eph. 5:29, 30 —no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth as Christ also the church; because we are members of His body. . .

(b) A vital union, in which Christ's life becomes the dominating principle within us.

This union is a vital one, in distinction from any union of mere Juxtaposition or external influence. Christ does not work upon us from without, as one separated from us, but from within, as the very heart from which the life blood of our spirits flows. See Gal. 2:20 —"it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me;" Col. 3:3, 4 —"For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with Him be manifested in glory." Christ's life is not corrupted by the corruption of his members, any more than the ray of light is defiled by the filth with which it comes in contact, We may be unconscious of this union with Christ, as we often are of the circulation of the blood, yet it may be the very source and condition of our life.

(c) A spiritual union, —that is, a union whose source and author is the Holy Spirit.

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By a spiritual union we mean a union not of body but of spirit, —a union, therefore, which only the Holy Spirit originates and maintains. Rom. 8:9, 10 "ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness." The indwelling of Christ involves a continual exercise of efficient power. In Eph. 3:16, 17, "strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man" is immediately followed by "that Christ may dwell in jour hearts through faith."

(d) An indissoluble union, —that is, a union which, consistently with Christ's promise and grace, can never be dissolved.

Matt. 28:20 "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" ; John 10:28 "they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand" ; Rom. 8: 35, 39 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? . . . nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"; I Thess. 4:14, 17 "them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him. . then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

Christ's omnipresence makes it possible for him no be united to, and to be present in, each believer, as perfectly and fully as if that believer were the only one to receive Christ's fullness. As Christ's omnipresence makes the whole Christ present in every place, each believer has the whole Christ with him, as his source of strength, purity, life; so that each may say: Christ gives all His time and wisdom and care to me. Such a union as this lacks every element of instability. Once formed, the union is indis-soluble. Many of the ties of earth are rudely broken, —not so with our union with Christ, —that endures forever.

Since there is now an unchangeable and divine element in us, our salvation depends no longer upon our unstable wills, but upon Christ's purpose and power. By temporary declension from duty, or by our causeless unbelief, we may banish Christ to the barest and most remote room of the soul's house; but He does not suffer us wholly to exclude Him; and when we are willing to unbar the doors, He is still there, ready to fill the whole mansion with his light and love.

(e) An inscrutable union, mystical, however, only in the sense of surpassing in its intimacy and value any other union of souls which we know.

This union is inscrutable, in the intimacy of its communion and in the transforming power of its influence, it surpasses any other union of souls that we know, and so cannot be fully described or understood by earthly analogies. Eph. 5:32 —"This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church"; Col. 1:27 — "the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

. . . . Christ's life is not something sporadic and individual, having its source in the personal conviction of each disciple; it implies a real connection with Christ, the head. Behind all nature there is one force; behind all varieties of Christian life and character there is one spiritual power. All nature is not inert matter, —it is pervaded by a living presence. So all the body of believers live by virtue of the all working Spirit of Christ, the Holy Ghost."

Such is the nature of union with Christ, —such I mean, is the nature of every believer's union with Christ. For, whether he knows it or not every Christian has entered into just such a partnership as this. It is this and this only which constitutes him a Christian, and which makes possible a Christian church. We may, indeed, be thus united to Christ, without being fully conscious of the real nature of our relation to him. We may

be thus united to Christ, without being fully conscious of the real nature of our relation to him. We may actually possess the kernel, while as yet we have regard only to the shell; we may seem to ourselves to be united to Christ only by an external bond, while after all it is an inward and spiritual bond that makes us His. God often reveals to the Christian the mystery of the gospel, which is Christ *in* him the hope of glory, at the very time that he is seeking only some nearer access to a Redeemer outside of him. Trying to find a union of cooperation or of sympathy, he is amazed to learn that there is already established a union with Christ more glorious and blessed, namely, a union of life . . . Christ and the believer have the same life. They are not separate persons linked together by some temporary bond of friendship, —they are united by a tie as close and indissoluble as if the same blood ran in their veins. Yet the Christian may never have suspected how intimate a union he has with his Savior; and the first understanding of this truth may be the gateway through which he passes into a holier and happier stage of the Christian life.

So the Way leads, through the Truth, to the Life (John 14:6). Apprehension of an external Savior prepares for the reception and experience of the internal Savior. Christ is first the Door of the sheep, but in him, after they have once entered in, they find pasture (John 10:7-9).

3. Consequences of this Union as respects the Believer.

We have seen that Christ's union with humanity, at the incarnation, involved him in all the legal liabilities of the race to which he united himself, and enabled him so to assume the penalty of its sin as to make for all men a full satisfaction to the divine justice, and to remove all external obstacles to man's return to God. An internal obstacle, however, still remains —the evil affections and will, and the consequent guilt, of the individual soul. This last obstacle also Christ removes, in the case of all his people, by uniting himself to them in a closer and more perfect manner than that in which He is united to humanity at large. As Christ's union with the race secures the objective reconciliation of the race to God, so Christ's union with believers secures the subjective reconciliation of believers to God.

. . . . Humanity in Christ is justified, and every member of the race who joins himself to Christ by faith participates in Christ's justification. . . . Justification in Christ is the birthright of humanity; but, in order to possess and enjoy it, each of us must claim and appropriate it by faith.

R. W. Dale wrote, “. . . His fellowship with us is the foundation of our fellowship with him. . . . When I have discovered that by the very constitution of my nature I am to achieve perfection in the power of the life of Another who is yet not Another, — but the very ground of my being —it ceases to be incredible to me that Another —who is yet not Another —should be the Atonement for my sin, and that His relation to God should determine mine. ”

The Seven Togethers

The Seven Togethers —sums up the Scripture testimony with regard to the Consequences of the believer's Union with Christ: 1. Crucified together with Christ —Gal. 2:20. 2. Died together with Christ —Col. 2:20. 3. Buried together with Christ —Rom. 6:4. 4. Quickened together with Christ —Eph. 2:5. 5. Raised together with Christ —Col. 3:1. 6. Suffers together with Christ —Rom. 8:17. 7. Glorified together with Christ —Rom. 8:17. Union with Christ results in common sonship, relation to God, character, influence and destiny.

Imperfect apprehension of the believer's union with Christ works to the great injury of Christian doctrine. An experience of union with Christ first enables us to understand the death of sin and separation from God which has befallen the race sprung from the first Adam. The life and liberty of the children of God in Christ Jesus shows us by contrast how far astray we had gone. The vital and organic unity of the new race spring from the second Adam reveals the depravity and disintegration which we had inherited from our first father.

from the second Adam reveals the depravity and disintegration which we had inherited from our first father. We see that as there is one source of spiritual life in Christ, so there was one source of corrupt life in Adam; and that as we are justified by reason of our oneness with the justified Christ, so we are condemned by reason of our oneness with the condemned Adam.

(a) **Union with Christ involves a change in the dominant affection of the soul.** Christ's entrance into the soul makes it a new creature, in the sense that the ruling disposition, which before was sinful, now becomes holy. This change we call *Regeneration*.

Rom. 8:2 "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death"; 2 Cor, 5:17 "if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature" (marg. "there is a new creation"); Gal 1:15, 16 — "it was the good pleasure of God . . . to reveal his Son in me"; Eph. 2:10 "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." As we derive our old nature from the first man Adam, by birth, so we derive a new nature from the second man Christ, by the new birth. Union with Christ is the true "transfusion of blood." "The death-struck sinner, like the anemic, dying invalid, is saved by having poured into his veins the healthier blood of Christ" (Drummond). God regenerates the soul by uniting it to Jesus Christ. . . . Our baptism into Christ is the outward picture of an inward immersion of the soul not only into His love and fellowship, but into his very life, so that in Him we become new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17). . . .

(b) **Union with Christ involves a new exercise of the soul's powers in repentance and faith; faith, indeed, is the act of the soul by which, under the operation of God, Christ is received.** This new exercise of the soul's powers we call Conversion (Repentance and Faith). It is the obverse or human side of Regeneration.

Eph. 3:17 "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith"; 2 Tim. 3:15 "the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Faith is the soul's laying hold of Christ as its only source of life, pardon, and salvation. And so we see what true religion is. It is not a moral life; it is not a determination to be religious; it is not faith, if by faith we mean an external trust that somehow Christ will save us; it is nothing less than the life of the soul in God through Christ His Son. To Christ then we are to look for the origin, continuance and increase of our faith (Luke 17:5 "said unto the Lord, Increase our faith"). Our faith is but a part of "his fullness" of which "we all received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16).

Christianity is summed up in the two facts: Christ *for* us, and Christ *in* us — Christ *for* us upon the Cross, revealing the eternal opposition of holiness to sin, and yet, through God's eternal suffering for sin making objective atonement for us; and Christ *in* us by his Spirit renewing in us the lost image of God, and abiding in us as the all-sufficient source of purity and power. Here are the two foci of the Christian ellipse: Christ *for* us, who redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us, and Christ *in* us, the hope of glory, whom the apostle calls the mystery of the gospel.

"We need Christ *in* us as well as Christ *for* us. How shall I, how shall society, find healing and purification within? . . . No human soul can purge itself of its sin; and what the individual cannot do, humanity at large is powerless to accomplish. Sin has dominion over us, and we are foul to the very depths of our being, until with the help of God we break through the barrier of our self-will, and let the floods of Christ's purifying life flow into us. Then, in an hour, more is done to renew, than all our efforts for years had effected. Thus humanity is saved, individual by individual, not by philosophy, or philanthropy, or self-development, or self-reformation, but simply by joining itself to Jesus Christ, and by being filled in Him with all the fullness of God."

(c) **Union with Christ gives to the believer the legal standing and rights of Christ.** As Christ's union with the race involves atonement, so the believer's union with Christ involves *Justification*. The believer is entitled to take for his own all that Christ is, and all that Christ has done; and this because he has within him

Our Vital Union with Christ: The Application of Christ's Redemption

entitled to take for his own all that Christ is, and all that Christ has done; and this because he has within him that new life of humanity which suffered in Christ's death and rose from the grave in Christ's resurrection, in other words, because he is virtually one person with the Redeemer. In Christ the believer is prophet, priest, and king.

Acts 13:39 "by him [lit.: 'in him' = in union with him) every one that believeth is justified"; Rom. 6:7-8, "he that hath died is justified from sin . . . we died with Christ"; 7:4 "dead to the law through the body of Christ"; 8:1 "no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus"; 17 "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ"; I Cor. 1:30 "But of him ye are in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness [justification]"; 3:21, 23 "all things are yours . . . and ye are Christ's"; 6:11 "ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God"; 2 Cor. 5:14 "we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died"; 21 "Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness [justification] of God in Him" = God's justified persons, in union with Christ.

Gal. 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me"; Eph. 1:4 "chosen in Him. . . to the praise of the glory of his grace, which He freely bestowed on "us in the Beloved"; 2:5, 6 "even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ . . . made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus"; Phil. 3:8, 9 "that I may gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith"; 2 Tim. 2:11 "Faithful is the saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him," Prophet: Luke 12:12 "the Holy Spirit shall teach you in that very hour what ye ought to say"; 1 John 2:20 "ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye know all things." Priest: I Pet. 2:5 "a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"; Rev. 20:8 "they shall be priests of God and of Christ"; I Pet. 2:9 "a royal priesthood." King: Rev. 3:21 "He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne"; 5:10 "made them to be unto our God a kingdom and priest." The connection of justification and union with Christ delivers the former from the charge of being a mechanical and arbitrary procedure. As Jonathan Edwards has said: "The justification of the believer is no other than his being admitted to communion in, or participation of, this head and surety of all believers."

(d) [Union with Christ secures to the believer the continuously transforming, assimilating power of Christ's life](#), —first, for the soul; secondly, for the body, —consecrating it in the present, and in the future raising it up in the likeness of Christ's glorified body. This continuous influence, so far as it is exerted in the present life, we call *Sanctification*, the human side or aspect of which is *Perseverance*.

For the soul: John 1:16 "of his fullness we all received, and grace for grace" —successive and increasing measures of grace, corresponding to the soul's successive and increasing needs; Rom. 8:10 "if Christ is in you, the body is death because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness. 1 Cor. 15:45 "The last Adam became a life giving spirit"; Phil. 2:5 "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus"; 1 John 3:2 "if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him. "Can Christ let the believer fall out of his hands? No, for the believer is his hands."

For the body: I Cor. 6:17-20 "he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit . . . know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you . . . glorify God therefore in your body"; 1 Thess. 5:23 "And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"; Rom. 8:11 "shall give life also to your mortal bodies through His Spirit that dwelleth in you"; I Cor. 15:49 "as we have borne the image of the earthy [man], we shall also bear the image of the heavenly [man]"; Phil. 3:20, 21 "For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able

humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto himself."

. . . . "Christ in the soul fashions the germinal man into his own likeness, —this is the embryology of the new life. The cardinal error in religious life is the attempt to live without proper environment." Human life from Adam does not stand the test, —only divine human life in Christ can secure us from falling. This is the work of Christ, now that He has ascended and taken to Himself his power, namely, to give His life more and more fully to the church, until it shall grow up in all things into him, the Head, and shall fitly express His glory to the world.

As the accomplished organist discloses unsuspected capabilities of his instrument, so Christ brings into activity all the latent powers of the human soul. "I was five years in the ministry," said an American preacher, "before I realized that my Savior is alive." Dr. R. W. Dale has left on record the almost unutterable feelings that stirred his soul when he first realized this truth. Many have struggled in vain against sin until they have admitted Christ to their hearts, —then they could say: "this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). Only in Christ can we find our pardon, peace, purity, and power. He is "made unto us wisdom from God, and justification and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). There is no safety in simply expelling sin; we need also to bring in Christ; in fact only He can enable us to expel not only actual sin but the love of it.

Alexander McLaren: "If we are 'in Christ,' we are like a diver in his crystal bell, and have a solid though invisible wall around us, which keeps all sea monsters off us, and communicates with the upper air, whence we draw the breath of calm life and can work in security though in the ocean depths." . . . How do we know that Christ has not departed from the world? Because he imparts to the soul that trusts him a power, a purity, a peace, which are beyond all that nature can give."

(e) Union with Christ brings about a fellowship of Christ with the believer, —Christ takes part in all the labors, temptations, and sufferings of his people; a fellowship of the believer with Christ, —so that Christ's whole experience on earth is in some measure reproduced in Him; a fellowship of the believers with one another, —furnishing a basis for the spiritual unity of Christ's people on earth, and for the eternal communion of heaven. The doctrine of Union with Christ is therefore the indispensable preparation for *Ecclesiology*, and for *Eschatology*.

Fellowship of Christ with the believer: Phil. 4:13 —"I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me"; Heb. 4:15 —"For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities"; cf. Isa. 63:9 —"In all their affliction he was afflicted." Heb. 2:18 —"in that He himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted" = are being tempted, are under temptation. Wordsworth: "By his *passion* He acquired *compassion*" 2 Cor. 2:14 —"thanks be unto God, who always leadeth us in triumph in Christ" = Christ leads us in triumph, but His triumph is ours, even if it be a triumph over us. One with Him, we participate in His joy and in His sovereignty. Rev. 3:21 "He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne." W. F. Taylor on Rom. 8:9 —"The Spirit of God dwelleth in you . . . if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" —Christ dwells in us, says the apostle. But do we accept Him as a resident, or as a ruler? . . . Christ does not consent to be represented by a mere resident. He must Himself dwell within the soul, and He must reign." . . .

Of the believer with Christ: Phil. 3:10 —"that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed unto his death"; Col. 1:24 —"fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church"; 1 Pet. 4:13 —"partakers of Christ's sufferings." The Christian reproduces Christ's life in miniature, and, in a true sense, lives it over again. Only upon the principle of union with Christ can we explain how the Christian instinctively

it over again. Only upon the principle of union with Christ can we explain how the Christian instinctively applies to himself the prophecies and promises which originally and primarily were uttered with reference to Christ: "thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol; neither wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption" (Ps. 16:10). This fellowship is the ground of the promises made to believing prayer: John 14:13 —"whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do"; Wescott: "The meaning of the phrase ['in my name'] is 'as being one with me even as I am revealed to you.' Its two correlatives are 'in me' and the Pauline 'in Christ.' "All things are yours. (1 Cor. 3 : 21), because Christ is universal King, and all believers are exalted to fellowship with him. Phil. 1: 21 —"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Paul indeed uses the words 'Christ' and 'church' as interchangeable terms: 1 Cor 12: 12 —"as the body is one, and hath many members, so also is Christ." Denney, "There is not in the N. T. from beginning to end, in the record of the original and genuine Christian life, a single word of despondency or gloom. It is the most buoyant, exhilarating and joyful book in the world." This is due to the fact that the writers believe in a living and exalted Christ, and know themselves to be one with Him. They descend crowned into the arena. In the Sudan, every morning for half an hour before General Gordon's tent there lay a white handkerchief. The most pressing message, even on matters of life and death, waited till that handkerchief was withdrawn. It was the signal that Christ and Gordon were in communion with each other.

Of all believers with one another: John 17:21 —"that they may all be one"; 1 Cor. 10:17 —"we, who are many, are one bread, one body: for we all partake of the one bread"; Eph. 2:15 —"create in himself of the two one new man, so making peace"; I John 1:3 —"that ye also may have fellowship with us: yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" —here the word *koinonia* is used. Fellowship with each other is the effect and result of the fellowship of each with God in Christ. Compare John 10:16 —"they shall become one flock, one shepherd"; Westcott: "The bond of fellowship is shown to lie in the common relation to one Lord. Nothing is said of one 'fold' under the new dispensation." Here is a unity, not of external organization, but of common life. Of this the visible church is the consequence and expression. But this communion is not limited to earth, —it is perpetuated beyond death: 1 Thess. 4:17 —"so shall we ever be with the Lord"; Heb. 12:23 —"to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect"; Rev. 21 and 22 —the city of God, the new Jerusalem, is the image of perfect society, as well as of intensity and fullness of life in Christ. The ordinances express the essence of Ecclesiology —union with Christ —for Baptism symbolizes the incorporation of the believer in Christ, while the Lord's Supper symbolizes the incorporation of Christ in the believer. Christianity is a social matter, and the true Christian feels the need of being with and among his brethren. The Romans could not understand why "this new sect" must be holding meetings all the time — even daily meetings. Why could they not go singly, or in families, to the temples, and make offerings to their God, and then come away, as the pagans did? It was this meeting together which exposed them to persecution and martyrdom. It was the natural and inevitable expression of their union with Christ, and so of their union with one another.

The consciousness of union with Christ gives assurance of salvation. It is a great stimulus to believing prayer and to patient labor. It is a duty to "know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power to us ward who believe" (Eph. 1:18, 19). Christ's command, "Abide in me and I in you" (John 15: 4), implies that we are both to realize and to confirm this union, by active exertion of our own wills. We are to abide in him by an entire consecration, and to let him abide in us by an appropriating faith. We are to give ourselves to Christ, and to take in return the Christ who gives himself to us, —in other words, we are to believe Christ's promises and to act upon them. All sin consists in the sundering of man's life from God, and most systems of falsehood in religion are attempts to save man without merging his life in God's once more. The only religion that can save mankind is the religion that fills the whole heart and the whole life with God, and that aims to interpenetrate universal humanity with that same living Christ who has already made Himself one with the believer. This consciousness of union with Christ gives "boldness" (Acts 4:13; I John 5:14) toward men and toward God.

Our Vital Union with Christ: The Application of Christ's Redemption

consciousness of union with Christ gives "boldness" (Acts 4:13; I John 5:14) toward men and toward God. The word belongs to the Greek democracies. Freemen are bold. Demosthenes boasts of his frankness. Christ frees us from the hide bound, introspective, self conscious spirit. In Him we become free, demonstrative, outspoken. So we find, in John's epistles, that boldness in prayer is spoken of as a virtue, and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews urges us to "draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16). An engagement of marriage is not the same as marriage. The parties may be still distant from each other. Many Christians get just near enough to Christ to be engaged to him. This seems to be the experience of Christian in the Pilgrim's Progress. But our privilege is to have a present Christ, and to do our work not only for Him, but in Him. "Since Christ and we are one, Why should we doubt or fear?" "We two are so joined, He'll not be in heaven, And leave me behind."

We append a few statements with regard to this union and its consequences, from noted names in theology and the church. Luther: "By faith thou art so glued to Christ that of thee and him there becomes as it were one person, so that with confidence thou canst say: 'I am Christ, —that is, Christ's righteousness, victory, etc., are mine; and Christ in turn can say: 'I am that sinner, —that is, his sins, his death, *etc.*, are mine, because he clings to me and I to him, for we have been joined through faith into one flesh and bone.'" Calvin: "I attribute the highest importance to the connection between the head and the members; to the inhabitation of Christ in our hearts; in a word, to the mystical union by which we enjoy Him, so that, being made ours, He makes us partakers of the blessings with which He is furnished." John Bunyan: "The Lord led me into the knowledge of the mystery of union with Christ, that I was joined to him, that I was bone of His bone and flesh of his flesh. By this also my faith in Him as my righteousness was the more confirmed; for if He and I were one, then His righteousness was mine, His merits mine, His victory also mine. Now could I see myself in heaven and on earth at once —in heaven by my Christ, my risen head, my righteousness and life, though on earth by my body or person." Jonathan Edwards: "Faith is the soul's active uniting with Christ. God sees fit that, in order to a union's being established between two intelligent active beings, there should be the mutual act of both, that each should receive the other, as entirely joining themselves to one another." Andrew Fuller: "I have no doubt that the imputation of Christ's righteousness presupposes a union with Him; since there is no perceivable fitness in bestowing benefits on one for another's sake, where there is no union or relation between."

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