

VITAL UNION WITH CHRIST

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Chapter Three -

PRACTICAL UNION WITH CHRIST

A WORD may here be said with regard to Perfection. Many have a dread of any teaching which, in their judgment, savors of encouraging the notion that sinless perfection is attainable in this world.

1. Let us remember the two senses in which the word perfect is used in scripture.
2. Let us remember that even the error of believing one's self perfect is scarcely so bad as the practical error of being contented with habits of sinning.

"Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Up to this point in the argument we have been occupied with the believer's union with CHRIST as GOD has planned and purposed it. We have seen how, in GOD's eyes and in the scheme of redemption, faith identifies us with the Lord JESUS in death, burial and resurrection; and that the purpose of all this is that we should no longer serve Sin as a master, but walk in newness of life, living in CHRIST and with CHRIST unto GOD, as those over whom Sin and Death no longer hold mastery.

And now, in one word, Paul turns our thought to the practical aspect of this union with CHRIST. What does all this mean, and how is this truth to be transmuted into life? How is the believer to reduce this theory to practice? Psalm 1; John 15.

The answer begins now to be given, and is found in one word, "**Reckon**" - the equivalent of another word, "**Count**", which occurs first in Genesis, 15:6. "**Abram believed in the Lord and it was counted unto him for righteousness.**" Just what he did which was thus counted as righteousness is plain from the exact meaning of the word - Abram "*Amened*" GOD.

When GOD said a thing, though it was humanly impossible, Abram said "Amen, it shall be so, even as God hath said." This act of faith, this saying Amen to GOD is elsewhere described thus: Romans 4:3, 17-22. See whole passage. Compare with this Hebrews 11:8-19.

In these passages occur several phrases, all throwing light on the meaning of the word Reckon. "**Who against hope believed in hope,**" "**considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb.**" "**He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and**

being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform."

Again, in Hebrews, we are told that Sarah "**judged him faithful who had promised.**" And again, of Abraham, that in offering up the Son of Promise he accounted, etc., 19.

To consider no human impossibilities when GOD promises; not to stagger in unbelief before the seemingly impassable barriers to blessing, but to be strong in faith, fully persuaded of GOD's ability and to judge Him faithful, and account Him able even to give back alive what is dead - this is what is meant by Reckoning upon GOD.

We are told in Romans 4:17 that GOD calleth those things which be not as though they were. This is exactly what faith does in reckoning GOD faithful. His word has gone forth as to a yet unaccomplished fact; He gives a promise which seems and is, humanly speaking, impossible of fulfilment. Faith, instead of looking at the difficulties, looks at the Promiser; instead of staggering in weakness before the apparent impossibility, the absolute hopelessness of the case, is strong in confidence, giving glory to GOD in advance of receiving the promise, and, against hope, believes in hope.

Thus, a word that seems to be weak is really strong. To many it is hard to see what difference it makes whether or not to reckon a thing true. If it be true, it is not such reckoning that makes it true, and if it be false, no reckoning can make it other than false. To many so-called believers, to reckon or count is simply to imagine, and implies only credulity, amusing one's self with one's own fancies.

Such entirely miss the true thought that lies behind the word reckon. So far is it from being a mere vain imagination to reckon on GOD's Word as an accomplished fact, that it is the soul and substance of faith.

Seven blessed results may be traced to such reckoning of faith.

1. First of all it is a tribute of faith to GOD's ability, willingness, love and faithfulness.
2. It is a challenge of faith, indirectly moving GOD to show Himself the faithful Promiser.
3. It is an attitude of faith, waiting in expectation of blessing.
4. It is, therefore, a removal of the limits which unbelief places upon GOD.
5. It is an opening of the heart to the full reception of promised good.
6. It is the basis of all active obedience and hearty self-surrender.
7. It is the secret of a peaceful, hopeful, courageous triumph over foes, etc.

Reckoning is, therefore, a form of faith. It counts Him faithful who promised. To a true believer GOD's Word is GOD's work; His promise is His performance. With man a word and even an oath may utterly fail, but GOD is unchangeable.

He speaks and it is done - it stands fast. Hence, in prophecy, we find the tenses of the verb used indiscriminately, an event that lies a thousand years ahead being spoken of as present or even past. Compare Isaiah 53. The Word of GOD was so accepted and counted on as certain to be accomplished, that the language of prophecy predicting coming events is the language of history recording past events.

It is easy to see that such reckoning on GOD's faithfulness is the highest possible honor that can be placed on His Word.

Indeed, without such faith it is impossible to please Him - Hebrews 11:6.

In Hebrews 3 occurs that remarkable phrase "**The provocation.**" Notice the definite article as though one form of offence was selected out of all the actual and possible sins against GOD, as the one unbearable sin. What was it? Simply unbelief which does not reckon on GOD. In the desert wanderings for forty years GOD's people constantly provoked GOD in this way.

He told them that He brought them out that He might bring them in. Deuteronomy 6:23. And referred them constantly to His miracles of interposition in their behalf in Egypt as proof and example of His power and grace, and the pledge of what He both could and would do for them in the actual possessing of the Land of Promise.

But they believed not His words, they feared the giant Anakim, they murmured against GOD and many a time they threatened to go back into Egypt. Thus their unbelief was a four-fold provocation: first it was an assault on GOD's truth and made Him a liar; upon His power, for it counted Him as weak and unable to bring them in; upon His immutability, for, although they did not say so, their course implied that He was a changeable GOD, and could not do the wonders He had once wrought.

And unbelief was also an assault upon His fatherly faithfulness, as though He would encourage an expectation He had no intention of fulfilling.

On the contrary, Caleb and Joshua honored GOD by accounting His Word absolutely true, His power infinite, His disposition unchangingly gracious, and His faithfulness such that He would never awaken any hope which He would not bring to fruition.

There are two conspicuous instances in which our Lord said "**great is thy faith**", "**I have not found so great faith; no, not in Israel**" - the instance of the Centurion, Matthew 8, and of the woman of Canaan, Matthew 15. In both cases the greatness of the faith consisted in this one thing: they reckoned upon GOD.

The Centurion besought CHRIST in behalf of his servant, sick of palsy. And when JESUS said, "**I will come and heal him,**" he replied, "**Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.**" For the first and only time in His public ministry, He found a man who, instead of insisting on some visible sign and wonder - a personal visit of the Master - preferred to rest simply on CHRIST's spoken word.

And the woman of Canaan is still more remarkable in that, having no encouraging word of promise on which to lean, herself an outcast Canaanite, met at first with silence and then with apparent refusal and even personal rebuff, she counted on CHRIST's power and grace so confidently, in the absence of all encouragements to faith, that she would not be sent away without the blessing, actually turning repulse into an argument in her favor. "Go thy way, the devil is gone out of thy daughter."

The study of the history of CHRIST's personal life among men, and, in fact, of the entire history of GOD's people, shows that to take GOD at His Word and count every promise as true, resting upon it as if it were already fulfilled, is of the very essence of faith.

When the nobleman of Capernaum sought healing for his son, who was at the point of death, CHRIST said, "**Go thy way, thy son liveth,**" and the man believed, went his way, and so counted on the word of CHRIST that he did not go home that day; but, although Cana and Capernaum were not ten miles apart, he seems to have stopped on the way till the next day. And the great lesson of that narrative is, whatsoever He saith unto you trust it.

When the ten lepers sought healing (Luke 17), CHRIST bade them go show themselves to the priest as if already whole to be pronounced clean, and released from ceremonial and social restraints and restrictions. And as they went they were cleansed - i.e., because they counted on the word of CHRIST, and proceeded as though already the blessing was theirs - they had what they sought.

If the greatness of faith then lay in this, that GOD was reckoned on as true, faithful, loving, gracious, and changeless, in all these, the littleness of faith and the greatness of unbelief must lie in the opposite course - GOD is not counted on; practically His Word is treated as a lie, or as untrustworthy. The actual work, the wonder wrought, must be seen, for only seeing is believing. While, therefore, Faith makes mighty works possible, men limit GOD by unbelief, so that He cannot do mighty works. Compare Psalm 78, 106. While faith opens the door of the heart to a promised blessing, unbelief closes it, and so shuts out GOD's gift and GOD's presence.

It is not too much to say, therefore, that to reckon on GOD is the soul of faith and the basis of all fellowship with Him. CHRIST could not do many mighty works in Nazareth because of the unbelief of His fellow-townspeople, who, remembering Him as the carpenter's son, counted Him unable to teach or work with divine power. Again, let it be said, so far as possible, reckon GOD able and willing, true and faithful, and that every word He has spoken He can and will fulfil, make possible, both for Him to impart and for myself to receive the blessing He yearns to bestow. Hence the immense, intense significance of that oft-recurring phrase, "**According to your faith be it unto you.**" Every measure of blessing is determined by the measure of faith.

We can see something quite analogous to this in our relations with our fellowmen. Harmonious and happy relations are impossible without a basis of faith. Take the credit system - the word credit is from credo, *believe*. You sell goods to a customer, counting on his ability and fidelity in paying his bills; and the whole banking system is simply counting on others' trustworthiness.

What is a promissory note but a note that is a promise? You have actually nothing but a piece of paper as to actual value - worthless - but you count on the solvency and honesty of the man

whose signature is on it - that he has means and will to pay it, and you use that worthless piece of paper as currency; it passes from hand to hand as though it were gold.

"**If thou canst believe,**" said CHRIST to him who said, "**If Thou canst do anything,**" etc.

The link between the faith that reckons GOD's Word true and the actual reception of blessing is a link that in the nature of things exists. To count on GOD's Word brings peace. Here is a lad that says to his father, "When you come home tonight bring me a penknife," and his father says, "I will." Careful not to promise a child what he does not mean to do, and careful to do all he has promised, he buys the knife and comes home with it in his pocket. And when at night he meets his boy, the child does not say, "Well, suppose you have not brought me the knife you promised," etc., but simply comes up, puts his hand in his father's pocket and takes out the knife.

GOD likes to have us confide likewise in our Father's word, and without a doubt come and lay hold of the promised blessing. This is the secret of all peace.

Mr. George Muller has been observed by his helpers to be quite as serene and joyful in GOD when there is not a shilling in the bank or a loaf of bread in the larder, wherewith to cloth and feed his 2,000 orphans as when there is a plenty, both of money and of food. And the only explanation of such a phenomenon which has confronted an unbelieving world and half believing church for a half-century, says one of those same helpers of this patriarch of Bristol, is that maxim of Mr. Muller himself, that "where anxiety begins faith ends, and where faith begins anxiety ends." For him to count on GOD is to dismiss all care. If he has no money in the bank, GOD's riches are inexhaustible; and if he has no food in the larder, his GOD has infinite supplies for all his need, and there shall be no lack.

We are especially concerned now with the bearing of this matter upon holiness - in its two great aspects: abandonment of known sin and obedience to known duty. Elsewhere in this Epistle Paul says, "**Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.**" - Romans 13:14. All our life long we are making provision, either for certainties or for uncertainties. Some things we know we shall need, such as food and raiment, a home and the like necessities; other things we may need as crises arise, such as sickness, loss of property, bereavement, etc. Today we have made provision for immediate wants.

As we expect to live, we provide for the night's lodging and to-morrow's meals. Now, if you knew that to-night, at midnight, death would certainly end your mortal career, you would at once stop making provision for living. A shroud, a coffin, a grave, would be all the clothing, house, possession, you would need.

GOD would have you count yourself dead to sin and hence living no longer therein, and reckon yourself alive unto GOD and unto holiness.

Your expectation has everything to do with your actual life. If you expect to sin you will sin, and if you expect not to sin, because you reckon yourself no longer under sin's mastery, but under GOD's, you will find that expectation itself a security. Paul says we are saved by hope, and, in the armor of GOD, the very helmet is the hope of salvation. To count on sinning is itself a form of sinning; it is reckoning the flesh, the world, the Devil, mightier than the Spirit of GOD and the

Son of GOD, whose very office it is to overcome the flesh, deliver us from this present evil age, and destroy the works of the Devil.

A veteran of Waterloo used to tell how the trained soldiers of Wellington, the night before that decisive battle that turned the destinies of Europe, took the raw recruits and told them of the skill, the capacity, the courage of their great commander and so inspired them with confidence in the Iron Duke, that, however the battle might seem to waver, the ultimate issue might be confidently expected to be victory and so those raw recruits went into battle expecting victory and reckoning defeat impossible. (See Asa Mahan's "*Out of Darkness into Light.*")

When CHRIST told the blind man, whose eyes He anointed with clay, to go to the pool of Siloam and wash, he may have had someone to guide him to the pool, but if he counted the Lord's word as faithful, he dismissed him there, even before he washed. The unbelieving man, even when he outwardly submits to GOD's command, timidly experiments on GOD. He holds fast his earthly guides and helpers - lest the Lord fail him. If he goes to the pool at all he says to his guide: "If the Lord's word is true in my case and I receive my sight, I shall not need you on the way back. Wait and see whether I receive my sight." The true believer dismisses his guide at the pool - even before he applies the waters to his eyes.

Has not his Lord spoken? He counts on seeing, and in advance casts away all other dependence. That faith not only honors GOD, it is a challenge to Him to honor His own Word. It constrains and compels Him to be faithful, if he were in need of any such constraint or compulsion. The very fact that His humble follower leans on Him, trusts in Him, reckons upon Him, makes it, if possible, the more certain of His interposition.

When Abraham had prayed for Sodom, with, do doubt, an especial thought for Lot's family, GOD remembered Abraham, though He did not spare the city, and brought out Lot; and hear Him say, as He hastened the tardy steps of Lot: - "**Haste thee... for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither!**" As though He was hindered in an act of righteous judgment by the yet unsafe position of the man for whom Abraham had besought Him.

~ end of chapter 3 ~
