

VITAL UNION WITH CHRIST

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Chapter Two -

VITAL UNION WITH CHRIST

"That like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Romans chapter 6:4-11. Compare II Corinthians 13:4.

From identification with JESUS in Death and Burial, we pass now rapidly to identification with him by Quickening and Resurrection. In this section of the argument, again we meet certain significant phrases on which the argument turns; the meaning of which we need to apprehend and master, even to the nicest shades of difference and distinction, for the Divine Artist used no colors, or shades of color, without discrimination:

- 1. Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father.**
- 2. Planted together in the likeness of His resurrection.**
- 3. Our old man is crucified with Him that the body of sin might be destroyed.**
- 4. That henceforth we should not serve sin.**
- 5. We believe that we shall also live with Him.**
- 6. Death hath no more dominion over Him.**
- 7. In that He liveth, He liveth unto God.**

Here are six or seven phrases, no two alike, all expressing some new phase of our oneness with the Risen Lord, as before with the Crucified CHRIST. As nearly as we can discern the nice distinctions, they may be indicated as follows:

1. The believer is in CHRIST divinely quickened, or made alive;
2. He is permitted to share in the likeness of His Resurrection.
3. The Body of Sin is to be regarded as destroyed in His grave.
4. Henceforth the believer is not to be the slave of sin.
5. Out of CHRIST's grave is to come a new Life with Him.
6. Resurrection implies deliverance from the dominion of death.
7. Our new Life is to be a Life unto GOD.

Taken together, these thoughts constitute a body of truth that is so wondrously complete, that nothing can be added to it, and so divinely uplifting that it should make continuance in sinning impossible. Let us seek to get at least a glimpse of the meaning of some of these marvellous expressions.

I. CHRIST was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father

The grandeur of CHRIST's Resurrection, both in itself and as a type of the believer's new life, no mortal mind has ever yet conceived. It is made in the New Testament, both the crowning miracle of all miracles and the crowning proof of CHRIST's deity, while it becomes henceforth GOD's new unit of measurement as to what He can and will accomplish in and for the believer.

It is the crowning miracle, for it embraces in itself all others. We see Him giving sight to blind eyes, hearing to deaf ears, speech to the dumb, power to palsied limbs and withered members: have we ever thought how in His own Resurrection all these were included? The eyes that were blind, the ears that were deaf, the limbs that were palsied and withered in death, received respectively sight, hearing, strength, and health in one simultaneous and supreme act. It was the crowning proof, sign, and seal of His Messiahship, in which He was declared to be the SON of GOD, with power by the Spirit of Holiness. Romans 1:4.

Consider how He was thrice dead - dead by crucifixion, with pierced hands and feet; dead by the spear thrust, which cleft His heart in twain; dead by the temporary enswathement, which wrapped even His head and excluded breath even had He not otherwise been dead. Was there ever a more stupendous exhibition of divine power, attesting GOD's own direct working, than when that dead body awoke, arose, emerged from the embalming cloths - leaving them behind as a butterfly sloughs off its cocoon - got up from its bed of stone, and stood and walked, and went forth from the sepulchre?

And now, henceforth, whenever the believer would know how much GOD is able and willing to accomplish for him, in answer to the prayer of faith, and because of his identification by faith with the crucified and risen Saviour, he has only to consider what GOD wrought in CHRIST when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenlies.

In the Old Testament GOD's unit of measurement is what He did for his people in bringing them out of the land of Egypt. Micah 7:15. That deliverance included at least three things, all miracles of power and grace: first, the exemption from death, of the bloodstained houses; second, the defiance of the law of gravitation, in making the waters a wall; and third, the overthrow of all foes in the Red Sea. In the New Testament, the unit of measurement is a new one, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in CHRIST when He raised Him from the dead, etc. Ephesians 1:20.

This again includes three things, singularly correspondent to the other three - exemption from wrath on the part of every blood-sprinkled soul; defiance of gravitation in the ascension of CHRIST, and overthrow of all hostile principalities and powers, in CHRIST's session at GOD's Right Hand.

When we look at the power of sin over us and ask how it can be broken; when, in despair of all self-help and self-conquest, we cry out, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? the answer is, Trust in the living GOD who raised Him from the dead. The same power that wrought in CHRIST works in every new born soul. The struggles of the unbeliever against sin are comparatively fruitless and hopeless, and the efforts even of the regenerate man are unsuccessful, so long as he attempts to vanquish sin by his own resolve or power. But the believer must remember that in the Resurrection of CHRIST he receives life, and life stands for vitality, ability, energy, power. Before, he was dead in trespasses and sins, and death means

helplessness, powerlessness, despair.

In CHRIST he can do all things, while without CHRIST he can do nothing. The moment he understands and realizes his new gift of life in CHRIST's Resurrection he knows that, while so one with JESUS, the same works which were possible to CHRIST become possible to himself. This is the wonderful truth taught throughout the New Testament.

An illustration of this may be found in the familiar fact about the magnet. It has a mysterious life, the power of which can be communicated.

For example, if you take a piece of common iron and allow it to be attracted to the magnet, it becomes attached to it, becomes itself magnetic, and while so held fast by the magnet attracts the iron or steel filings as the magnet does, but when severed from the magnet has no such attractive power. "**Without me,**" says CHRIST, "**ye can do nothing.**" But the moment CHRIST lays hold upon you, and His life is imparted to you, His works become possible to you.

We have found a second phrase here which teaches us that the believer shares in the likeness of his resurrection. This, of course, finds its completeness only in the final resurrection of saints. Yet, as Paul is here treating of our noncontinuance in sin, there must be a larger sense in which we are now permitted to share in the similitude of His resurrection.

Paul, writing to the Philippians, expresses his willingness to renounce all gains as losses, and all advantage as refuse, that he may know the power of CHRIST's resurrection. What is that power, but the power over death, the power that defies corruption, that releases from the bondage of death, and sets the dead free to live and move and have being? And what is the power of CHRIST's resurrection, as now enjoyed by the true believer, but the power over sin, which is death, the power that defies corruption longer to hold us in bondage, and makes us free men in CHRIST JESUS, with capacity to serve GOD in newness of life?

Resurrection was to CHRIST deliverance from all further liability or possibility of death; death hath no more dominion over Him. And this constitutes our Risen Saviour the first begotten from the dead, and the first fruits of them that slept.

There had been other revivals, resuscitations or restorations of the dead, but never a resurrection proper till He rose; for all others, such as Jairus' daughter, the son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus, rose to die again - but CHRIST, being raised from the dead, dieth no more.

We ought to get hold of this great thought, for the thought itself is a deliverance, that by faith united to CHRIST, now partake in the power and privilege of His resurrection. The Spirit of Holiness who raised Him from the dead, henceforth to be free of all dominion of death, dwells in and works in me as a believer, and assures to me deliverance from the power of the sin that works death and is death.

How strongly does the Apostle state the purpose and effect of such identity with the Risen Lord, that the body of sin should be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. This language cannot well be mistaken. We are to regard the Body of Sin as destroyed in the grave of CHRIST, and left behind there, that henceforth we should be free from its dominion, delivered from the

bondage of corruption, no more to be slaves of sin.

We are therefore to think of CHRIST's death as our death, His burial as our burial, His rising as our rising. We go into the grave with Him but not to stay there. His grave is the place of our burial, as the ground is the grave of the seed; but burial is in order to resurrection, as the burial of the seed is in order to germination and harvest.

Andrew Murray has beautifully said that the believer is to remember that the very roots of his being are in CHRIST's grave. The oldest oak stands in the grave of the acorn from which it sprang, and to remove it is to destroy it. However massive the tree, it never loses its connection with that buried seed. In the field of wheat, with its millions of blades, every waving stem, with its full grown ear, is rooted in the grave of the kernel of wheat that was buried, that fell into the ground and died that it should not abide alone, but bring forth much fruit. And the whole process of tilling the soil, what is it but making ready the grave by the plough - then burying the seed in the sowing, and then by the harrow filling in the grave?

But the grain of wheat, or the acorn, does not fall into its grave simply to die, but to bring forth fruit, to live anew in the oak or the wheat crop.

And we are buried with CHRIST in order that we may live with him. The literal burial comes after the literal death, and the literal resurrection of the body waits for CHRIST's coming. But the more important spiritual fact here set forth, is the present participation with CHRIST in the power of His rising, that even now, we, by the same Spirit, come forth in resurrection power, to walk with Him in newness of life.

This new life by the power of GOD is to be a new life unto GOD. Hitherto, the life was self-centered, now God-centered.

There is a remarkable expression used elsewhere by Paul: "**for of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things**" (Romans 11:36), i.e., GOD, the source of all, the goal of all, the channel of all. That is the law of the new life - but, of all unrenewed life we must say, of self and to self and through self are all things. Self is the source whence it springs, the great sea into which it finally empties, and the channel through which it flows. The new life will never be unto GOD, except so far as it is of GOD; nor will it ever be through GOD, except so far as it is both of Him and to Him.

Holy living becomes possible to us only in proportion, therefore, as we keep constantly in mind that the power to live a new life of holiness is wholly of GOD: that it is not found in self culture, in education and training, in the most honest purpose or effort, in the most helpful and healthful surroundings, but solely in an impartation from GOD, in the gift of the Spirit of Life, power, holiness, the same that raised up the Lord JESUS; and, that until that SPIRIT animates and vitalizes us, we are as helpless to live a holy life as CHRIST's dead body was to move. Not until we realize this can we ever find the power of CHRIST's Resurrection in ourselves.

And so we must keep as constantly before us the thought that only as this divinely given life finds its one final object and goal in GOD, can it find its true direction or develop its true energy.

You cannot turn a stream of water whither you will. Water flows freely only in its natural channel. Run it into desert sands and it may be absorbed and sink out of sight. Run it into the midst of a bog and it stagnates in a swamp. Run it among rocks and stones and it winds in and out divided into many streams, perhaps diverted into many channels. The new life, turned into the quicksands of selfish gratification, or the swamp of religious stagnation, or the rocks and stones of a divided and worldly heart, is perverted, sacrificed, lost. But give it GOD as its one supreme aim and end, and it moves like a mighty and accumulating river.

A holy life comes from GOD, rests in GOD, and flows through Him as its divine channel. Everything about it is holy - its source, its course, its direction, its end.

There are a few thoughts suggested, most practical and pertinent, such as these:

Our vital connection with CHRIST is an endowment of Power.

Our vital union with Him demands perpetual watchfulness, lest it be hindered or injured. The Endowment is also an Entrustment.

II. This vital union with CHRIST implies and is the Endowment of Power

Holy Living is a supernatural art and cannot be understood by the natural man, nor enjoyed by the carnal man. We are to think of ourselves as the subjects of miraculous working, as much as when the blind received sight, the deaf, hearing; the lepers, cleansing; the lame, power to walk; or the dead, life. It seems incredible to the unconverted man that, in a moment of time, and simply by turning unto GOD, and receiving JESUS as a Saviour, he, may not only be forgiven, but enabled to live a new life.

It often seems to him like mockery, because he does not understand that all his previous efforts to live a better life have been the vain struggles of a man without power, as though a palsied man should attempt to walk and carry his bed.

Peter's walking on the water illustrates both man's weakness and strength. Our Lord appeared walking the waves of a stormy sea, far enough off for it to seem a ghostly illusion, yet near enough to be heard by those in the boat, perhaps two or three hundred yards away. When he bade Peter "**come**" unto Him; on the water, the disciple boldly stepped out of the boat and actually walked on the water, and must have gone within arm's length of JESUS, when, beginning to sink, he cried, Lord save, I perish. For JESUS had only to put forth His hand, to catch the sinking man, and they walked back to the boat together.

Now observe, while Peter kept his eye on the Lord JESUS, he did just what JESUS did, he walked on the water. But the moment he got his eye off from Him, and thought of the boisterous wind and tossing waves, he lost power and began to sink.

Holy living is as much a miracle to the natural man as is walking on the water, which presents no proper foundation for our feet, having neither stability nor equilibrium, and especially when tossed up and down and driven to and fro by the wind. The secret of Peter's power to triumph over what was otherwise impossible was this, that he was in touch with JESUS by faith and had

CHRIST's power in him: and the secret of his sinking is equally plain - he lost touch with JESUS and became as any other impotent mortal, unable to cope with the difficulties of his situation. But what we need now to emphasize is that one moment he was strong to do the impossible, and the next moment utterly weak and sinking. So a human soul can be strong one moment and weak the next, omnipotent or impotent, and it all depends on the touch of faith which brings virtue out of CHRIST.

An incident in my own pastorate occurs to my mind. A young man, a plumber by trade, came into my house early one morning, to beg my intervention in persuading his wife not to leave him, as she threatened to do, on account of drink. I knew something of her trials, and did not believe such mediation would effect any result; in fact, I doubted whether I ought to attempt to dissuade her from her purpose, for, when drunk, her husband was a brute and her life was sometimes in peril.

Even when he sought me, he was but half sober, just recovering from a debauch. I begged him to make separation unnecessary by letting drink alone - but he answered that he could not do it - that he had made trial again and again, succeeding for a few days, but in every case returning again to his cups. He was a church member, but I told him frankly that I felt convinced he knew nothing of the grace and power of GOD; that the troubles that drive a true child of GOD to his knees, only drove him to his cups; and set before him the great truth and fact, that the moment a penitent sinner truly lays hold of CHRIST, all things are possible to him that believeth.

This Endowment of Life is, however, to be esteemed as a delicate and precious gift to be guarded from injury - an entrustment.

Here we strike one of the most important and awful truths of scripture, generally overlooked. In this chapter we find frequent warnings against continuance in sin, as destructive not only of the power of the new life, but of its existence. And Paul is writing not to, or of, unbelievers; he is addressing Saints.

Yet hearken to his words of warning:

"Neither yield ye your members, as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin," and hear his reason: **"Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?"** That is - if a disciple yields his members as instruments of unrighteousness, he is yielding to sin, and sin is unto death. Again, he says, the fruit and **"end of those things is death,"** and again **"the wages of sin is death."**

Here is a threefold warning addressed to the disciple against going on in sin - sin leads to death, ends in death, and is paid its wages in death. Further on, in chapter 8, he adds that the carnal mind is death.

Life has its laws and conditions, and being the most precious gift of GOD, must be correspondingly cherished, nourished and guarded. The most precious things are the most susceptible of injury always; worthless weeds it is virtually impossible to exterminate - valuable plants it requires constant care to keep alive.

GOD gives us life - it must be fed, and in many ways protected. Food and sleep, air and exercise, rest and recreation are conditions of health. Neglect your life for a day and you may fatally harm it. If you have a very rare exotic in your nursery, how you protect it from the ravages of insects, from wintry cold, and from direct violence. Suppose you found some careless boy cutting into its stock with a mischievous hatchet, would you stand by and let such injury go forward?

Every sin tends to death and if persisted in ends in Death as its goal and fruit. What is death? It means, in the new Testament, separation from GOD, loss of fellowship, conscious condemnation and decay of spiritual sensibility.

You may have been for years a professing disciple, and have walked with GOD, but I defy you to commit any deliberate sin against GOD without at once finding death at work in you. The moment you sin you fall, you lose the sense of GOD's favor, you interrupt your fellowship with Him; you come into conscious condemnation, and you dull and deaden your own sensibilities to the truth and the touch of GOD.

It is impossible to sin with immunity from spiritual decay and decline, or impunity as to natural penalties.

~ end of chapter 2 ~
