

VITAL UNION WITH CHRIST

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Chapter 1 -

Judicial Union With CHRIST

THE first aspect of this union of the believer with CHRIST is the Judicial. This belongs first in logical order as basis of all the rest. This word, Judicial, is a legal term, having reference to the act or decision of a judge in a court of law. It is peculiar in this, that it has no necessary reference to, or connection with, the actual character or even guilt of the accused party.

A judicial decision concerns one question only, namely, the claim of the law upon him and the jurisdiction of the court over him. A man may be actually a transgressor, and yet for some reason be not amenable to a legal penalty. There may be some technicality, under cover of which he escapes, or some sovereign act of mercy removing him from the control of the court, or some interposition of a third party mediating between him and exact justice. In either case, without regard to his essential merit or the moral desert of his acts, the judge pronounces him acquitted, in effect legally innocent.

A judicial decision, therefore, refers to standing rather than state, it is a question of exposure to penalty; not of essential character or moral desert.

For example, in the former days when bankruptcy was treated as a crime and debtors were imprisoned, a man's debts were sometimes discharged by another, and he was consequently released. He might have been careless and even dishonest in the use of funds, and deserving of punishment as a moral offender, but the only question before the court would be, are his debts paid? and if so the judicial decision would be that he was a free man.

A case recently occurred in British Courts, where a man was sued for breach of promise. It was a case of flagrant wrong. The man had led the woman to believe that he would marry her, and his whole course with her justified such expectation; but no proof could be adduced that any explicit pledge had been given, and he was acquitted, although he was, in fact, a seducer and betrayer.

These two examples, respectively, illustrate the effect of the interposition of a third party, or of the absence of technical proof, in freeing an accused party from the penalty of law. As to the effect of a sovereign act of clemency, that may be seen in Pilate's release of Barabbas, or in any act of pardon issued by proper magisterial authority.

We have thus given three examples of judicial acquittal:

1. On the basis of a technicality: Breach of promise.

2. On the basis of a Sovereign Act: Pardon of State prisoners as on the accession or coronation of a King.
3. On the basis of human interposition: Bankruptcy.

Illustrations might be multiplied, were it needful, to show this principle, but these suffice to make clear that a judicial decision has reference only to a man's attitude before the law, to his legal standing and not his moral state, his liability or exposure to penalty, and not his inherent character and actual desert; and we have been thus careful to define the term judicial, because the whole system of redemption rests upon this basis, that GOD has made a provision whereby He can judicially acquit a guilty sinner. With this great fact and thought the whole of the first part of the Epistle to the Romans is mainly occupied.

First, the Apostle proves that all men, Gentiles and Jews alike, are guilty before GOD. With different degrees of light and revelation of His will, they have all alike sinned and come short of the Glory of GOD. And by an irresistible argument he reaches this conclusion, that every mouth is stopped and all the world becomes guilty before GOD (3:19).

There is no man who is not a sinner, and a sinner without excuse. And he adds, "**Therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.**"

Here we come to another legal term which it is necessary for us to understand: Justified. It is not equivalent to just, but rather in contrast with it. The word, just, refers to character; justified, to standing. If an unjust man is judicially acquitted he is, so far as the law is concerned, justified; that is, accounted and treated as just or righteous.

The Problem of Redemption was this; to justify the sinner without justifying his sin, to save him from legal penalty and yet save GOD from compromise and complicity with his guilt.

Justice demanded the exaction of penalty in the interest of law and perfect government; mercy yearned to rescue the offender in the interests of love and divine fatherhood. The problem was so perplexing that only Infinite Wisdom and grace together were equal to its solution. Now that it is solved, it may seem simple, as it is easy to unlock the most complicated lock when you have the key that belongs to it; but, if that problem had been originally submitted to the united wisdom of all human philosophers and wise men, it would still remain unsolved.

We can plainly see some of the difficulties that entered into the case. There was no question that all men were sinners, sinners against a righteous GOD and a perfect law, and it is equally evident that the sanctions of government must be maintained; for the moment that the certainty that every transgression and disobedience will receive its just recompense of reward no longer exists, good government is not only in peril - it has absolutely ceased.

If GOD would save the sinner from his just punishment, He must not do it at the expense of His own law or His own holiness. Any judge in any court that allows laxity in administering justice sets a premium upon crime. Chief Justice Hale used to say, "When I feel myself swayed by the impulses of mercy toward an offender, let me remember that there is a mercy due unto my country."

The root idea of the gospel is that, by the substitution of CHRIST for the sinner before the law, in a perfect life of obedience and a death of vicarious suffering, the ends of the law and of justice were so answered as that GOD could judicially acquit the sinner and yet not tarnish the glory of His own perfection.

To get hold of that truth is the beginning of our education in the School of CHRIST, for it is the first lesson in Redemption.

We can all see that several ends might be answered by the punishment of sin in the person of the actual transgressor. For example, it would serve:

1. To magnify the Law and make it honorable.
2. To uphold the sanctions of perfect government.
3. To visit just penalty upon transgressors.
4. To exhibit the essential guilt and ill desert of sin.
5. To warn and deter other offenders.
6. To indicate and vindicate the character of GOD.
7. To discriminate between the righteous and the wicked.

Now were not all these ends met in the atoning work of our Lord JESUS CHRIST?

Transgression was visited with a penalty which also exhibited the deformity and enormity of sin; and an eternal lesson was taught the universe which may, to an extent now inconceivable by us, warn and deter other creatures of GOD from evil-doing; and it has been shown that the Law and government of GOD will be upheld at any cost, and that in the great GOD Himself there is infinite abhorrence of sin.

Of course our point of prospect is limited; there may be other purposes answered in CHRIST's substitution of which we have now neither knowledge nor notion; but we can see enough already to feel moved like Paul himself to exclaim, "**O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of GOD! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!**" (Romans 11:33).

The fact, declared in this Epistle, whether or not we are equal to the divine philosophy of it, is, that "**now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested... even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe,**" etc. (Chapter 3:21-26).

Let us learn this by heart, for it is the very sum and substance of the whole mystery of Redemption: "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God," and therefore there is no hope of justification through the law, which can only make us more and more terribly conscious of sin and guilt. But GOD has set forth CHRIST JESUS to be a Propitiation for our sins, and we may be justified freely by His grace through faith in His Blood.

Now notice where lies the emphasis of this whole passage: GOD hath set forth His Atoning Son, not to declare His indifference to sin and His laxity in pardoning, but "**to declare His righteousness**" - even in the remission of sin. And Paul repeats this that it may more deeply engrave itself on our minds - to declare I say at this time His righteousness: that He might be just

and the Justifier of him which believeth in JESUS. In one word the purpose and perfection of this atoning work is that it makes it possible for a Just and Holy GOD to remain perfectly just and holy, and yet not only pardon a sinner but account him just, that is, judicially acquit him and give him the standing of an innocent party.

The natural and carnal heart wars against even the grace of GOD, too proud to submit to being saved in GOD's way, because all boasting is excluded. And so men find fault with the very love that seeks to find provision in atonement. The sinner dares to criticise grace and declares that it is impossible for an innocent party to take the place of the guilty, or for a judicial acquittal to be justly pronounced in the transgressor's case.

And yet the principle of vicarious substitution is not wholly unknown even in human affairs.

It is a story, told of Bronson Alcott, that, when obliged to administer a bodily chastisement upon a disobedient school-boy, his older brother who was present asked that he might receive the flogging in place of the offender. And Professor Alcott put the question to the school, whether the laws which the boys had themselves framed would be sufficiently honored by such substitution, and they consented; so that he actually whipped the older brother in place of the younger transgressor, and with a profound impression on the school-boys both as to the dignity of Law and the unselfishness of Love and Mercy. Whether or not the incident be authentic, it serves as an illustration.

Enough has been written perhaps to introduce us to the great thought first presented in this sixth chapter of Romans. When Paul asks, **Shall we continue in sin?** his first reply is, "**How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein! Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death.**"

Here three affirmations meet us: first, we have died to sin, second, so many as were baptized into JESUS CHRIST were baptized into His death; third, by such baptism we were buried with Him into death. In other words, there has been on the part of every believer, a death unto sin; and a burial with CHRIST in the sepulchre; and that death and burial are expressed, confessed and symbolized in baptism.

It is perfectly plain that these words can be understood only judicially. We are all of us conscious of no such actual identification with CHRIST in death and burial. We have never yet really died or been laid in the grave.

The only way to interpret these words is to interpret them, not as expressing a historical fact, but a judicial act, something counted or reckoned or imputed to our account by the sovereign mercy and grace of GOD. That they are so to be interpreted is plain from the whole argument preceding.

The first direct mention of a judicial righteousness found in the New Testament is in the opening chapters of this Epistle. The germ of it is in the gospels and the Acts, but the germ comes to its growth and plain exhibition here, as we have seen in Romans 3:19-28. There we are plainly taught that GOD has devised a plan for human redemption, whereby He reckons the believing

and penitent sinner so one with CHRIST that His obedience is imputed to the sinner as his own and His atoning suffering is reckoned as the sinner's own expiation or satisfaction of the legal claim and penalty.

Here we are first introduced to the full meaning of that truth of which the whole Bible is at once the miracle and the parable, that the unity of a believing sinner with an atoning Saviour is first of all a judicial one, reckoned such, apart from all our legal obedience, and our undeserving character, by the infinite grace of GOD. This is the fundamental fact and truth of redemption, and faith in it is fundamental to our salvation. The believer is in JESUS, in the sight of GOD, and is so judged and acquitted as clothed with GOD's righteousness.

Paul, moreover, shows that this doctrine of Righteousness imputed on account of faith, is no new doctrine, but pervades the old Covenant as well as the new, for he refers back to Abraham, the father of the faithful, and to that grand verse in Genesis (15:6) where for the first time in the Word of GOD we meet these three words in conjunction - believed, counted, and Righteousness.

There it is declared that Abraham believed in JEHOVAH and He counted, or imputed it unto him for righteousness.

That verse becomes the key to the Epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians, and to the Epistle of James, thus linking old and new Testaments together. (Romans 4:1-5; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23) The doctrine thus found in the "**Law**" is also found in "**the Psalms**" and the "**Prophets**." Compare Psalm 32:1, 2, and Habakkuk 2:4.

How far this acquittal of the sinner is judicial, based on the ground of imputation, not actual righteousness in the sinner, is plain from Romans 4:17 - where we are told that GOD "**quickeneth the dead and calleth those things which be not as though they were.**" GOD in justifying sinners actually counts them righteous when they are not - does not impute sin where sin actually exists, and does impute righteousness where it does not exist.

Abraham, because he had GOD's promise, counted as done what seemed impossible as well as unreal; and GOD honored such faith by in turn counting as existing in Abraham a righteousness which was not his. The believer counts GOD able to make him alive with His own life and holy with His own holiness. GOD in turn counts the sinner now dead in sin to be dead to sin and alive to GOD, counts him as righteous, and then proceeds to make him what He at first only reckons him to be. Compare Romans 4:4-8, 17, 21, 22.

This plan of salvation is further unfolded in the fifth chapter.

Being thus justified by faith we have peace with GOD - all controversy between us and Him is forever over - and all conflict with His perfect law and holy government.

- We were "**without strength**" to help ourselves but He laid help on One who is mighty to save.
- We were sinners and CHRIST died in our stead;
- We were enemies and by His death the enmity was done away in reconciliation: Chapter 5:6-8.

So that, where sin abounded and reigned unto death, grace much more abounds and reigns unto

eternal life. However we may quarrel with GOD's plan of salvation there is no doubt about the plan as here taught.

What pregnant words then are these seven!

"Buried with Him by baptism into death."

Burial implies death and death implies previous life.

"With Him" implies that all this experience of life, death and burial is through our identification with Him, our Lord JESUS.

"By baptism" implies that the act whereby this identification is both symbolized and exhibited is baptism.

It now becomes clear in what sense we have died to sin - been buried with CHRIST and baptized into His death - these become facts by a judicial construction. Faith makes us one with JESUS CHRIST, so that, in GOD's sight, what is literally and actually true of Him, becomes judicially, representatively, constructively, true of us.

We died when He died; we were buried when He was buried, and as many of us as have been baptized into CHRIST have been baptized into His death, that is, our baptism was the confession of our identity with Him, and our symbolic putting on of CHRIST.

As the mutual clasping of hands or exchange of rings in marriage is the expression and confession and symbolism of the union of holy wedlock; at the taking off of the shoe was the confession of a holy place whereon one must walk softly and reverently with GOD; as the bowing of the body and bending of the knee are the expression of worship and spiritual prostration before GOD, so, to go down into a watery grave, as CHRIST did, expresses our faith in and following of Him - in His death and burial.

Thus we touch the very heart of the gospel mystery, our identity by faith with the Son of GOD. And we touch also that kindred mystery of the Son of Man. He was the Redeemer - and a Redeemer must not only have power to redeem, by being lifted above the sin and corruption of the human race, but must have the right to redeem by being let down to the level of the race He sought to save.

And so, in redeeming man, GOD must be manifest in the flesh. He must have the right to redeem by being identified with our humanity. The Son of GOD must become Son of Man. Hence CHRIST is called the Second Man and the Last Adam. I Corinthians 15:45, 47.

Observe, not the Second Man only, as in verse 47, but the Last Man or Adam - for this excludes any succession. We can understand the last Adam only by understanding the first. Who was the first Adam but the Judicial Head of the race he represented? Whatever may be our theological definition of our relation to Adam, the practical fact is that he stood for us and when he fell, we fell. He could transmit to his descendants no higher nature than his own, and so it is significantly said, that he begat a son in his own likeness.

His own nature being fallen, he transmitted a fallen nature with its proneness to sin, and its exposure to pains and penalties. As he had lost his original estate, his children could inherit only his moral bankruptcy and ruin; and, as he had forfeited his right to the tree of life, his offspring find the cherubim with the flaming sword, still guarding the way, until we come by a new and living way, through the rent vail of CHRIST's crucified body.

CHRIST is therefore, as the Last Adam, what the first Adam was, the representative of the race. By blood and birth we were all identified with Adam; by the faith in the Blood that atones and by the new birth of the Spirit, we become identified with the Last Adam. We exchange the standing of sinners for the standing of saints, the bankruptcy of sin for the riches of holiness, and the forfeited right to the Tree of Life for the full and eternal enjoyment of all sacramental privilege. Revelation 22:1-14.

The most precious names applied to CHRIST are more or less a commentary on this most comprehensive title, the Last Adam.

- He is the Good Shepherd, so identified with the sheep that by His death He purchases their salvation from death.
- He is the Vine, so identified with the branches that by His life they receive life, strength, growth and power to bear fruit.
- He is the Foundation, the very basis, so identified with the building that every believer as a living stone both rests upon Him and is cemented to Him and built up with Him into one building or Temple of GOD and habitation of GOD through the Spirit.
- He is the Bridegroom, so one with the bride that she is reckoned part of Him, they twain being one flesh.
- He is the Head and we are members of His body and cannot be separated from Him, so identified with Him that all life, growth, sustenance, increase, depend on the union.

Hence we can understand how GOD reckons us to have died and been buried when He died and was buried.

Judicially it is true, for what happens to our Great Representative is true of all whom He represents. We are not surprised then when we find, on the careful study of the New Testament, that this conception of our Judicial Union with CHRIST not only pervades all its teaching but is the interpreting Key to His life; all that He did and suffered as the Son of Man was typical and representative of the whole body of believers. In this sixth of Romans five words are used, all of them representative: "**died**," "**buried**," "**risen**," "**planted**," "**crucified**." All are declared to be applicable to us as believers. And when we turn to the Epistle to the Colossians this same thought is further expanded. Compare Colossians 2:10-13; 3:1-4.

Here the great phrase is one of two words: **IN HIM**. He is the Head, and what is true of the Head is true of the body.

Here seven terms are used to express this unity or identity - in Him and with Him it is declared that we are circumcised, buried, risen, quickened, sealed, our life hid in GOD and to appear when He appears.

These seven phrases suggest that His whole life as Son of Man and Last Adam, was representative and typical; and that its full explanation can be found only in its representative character; that is, every great event or experience had reference to the body of which He is Head - the race of which He is the Last Adam.

In that career of CHRIST there are at least fifteen grand and salient points:

- His Birth or Incarnation,
- His Presentation and Circumcision,
- His Baptism,
- His Anointing,
- His Temptation,
- His Passion,
- His Crucifixion,
- His Burial,
- His Quickening,
- His Resurrection,
- His Forty days of Resurrection Walk,
- His Ascension,
- His Session at GOD's right hand and Hidden Life of Intercession,
- His final Reappearance.

Everyone of these is a typical fact, as will appear if we examine scripture. Hence the force of those constantly recurring phrases: **in Him, by Him, for Him, through Him, with Him**, etc.

His miraculous Birth was a type of our new birth from above whereby we enter the kingdom, not by a natural, but by a supernatural process.

- His circumcision, the type of the putting off the body of the sins of the flesh. Colossians 2:11.
- His presentation in the temple, of our self-offering to GOD. Romans 12:1.
- His Baptism, of our Confession of Him as Saviour and Lord - the answer of a good conscience toward GOD. I Peter 3:21.
- His Temptation, of our Conflict with and Conquest over Satan. James 4:7; 1 John 4:4.
- His Anointing, of our Reception of Holy Ghost indwelling and power. John 2:20, 27.
- His Passion, of our entire Surrender to the Will of GOD even unto death. Hebrews 12:4, 5.
- His Crucifixion, of our death unto the penalty and guilt of sin. Galatians 2:20.
- His Burial, of our leaving in His sepulchre all corruption of the old man. Colossians 3:9.
- His Resurrection, of our rising into newness of life. Colossians 3:1.
- His Quickening, of our being pervaded by the life and power of GOD. Colossians 2:13.
- His Forty Days of resurrection life and power correspond to our complete walk with GOD after regeneration. Romans 8:4, 5.
- His Session at GOD's Right Hand, to our present life of privilege. Colossians 3:1, 2.
- His Hidden Life, to our secret incorporation unto Him. Colossians 3:3.
- His Intercession, to our identity with Him in mediation. Hebrews 10:19-22.
- His Coming Again, to our final resurrection and revelation. Colossians 3:4.

This analogy might be indefinitely expanded and illustrated.

Note, for instance, the main incidents of His supernatural birth; "**the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.**"

And Mary's Answer: "**Behold the handmaid of the Lord! be it unto me according to thy Word.**"

In His Temptation the Prince of this World is Judged, and Satan bruised under our feet. Romans 16:20. Anointing, poured on the Head, reaching all the members and to the skirts of the robe. Psalm 133.

To sum up then: In Him the believer finds himself:

1. born anew in a supernatural birth,
2. realizes complete self-offering, and renunciation of sin,
3. confessing his faith,
4. receiving the anointing of the Spirit,
5. meeting and overcoming the Tempter,
6. bearing his sin in expiation of penalty;
7. his old man is buried and left in the grave,
8. the new man assumed,
9. the whole inner life quickened;
10. a perpetual walking with GOD,
11. an ascension above earth and a session at GOD's right hand,
12. a hidden life of privilege and intercession,
13. losing even life in unselfish ministry,
14. and a coming manifestation in glory
15. and complete vindication and reward become his.

This being the foundation truth of the whole scheme of Redemption, the two sacraments - all CHRIST left behind as memorials - both represent it:

Baptism is our entering into CHRIST (representing that which took place at salvation).

The Lord's Supper, His Entering into us (representing our fellowship as we taste continually of the Bread of Life).

~ end of chapter 1 ~
