

## VITAL UNION WITH CHRIST

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### Chapter 7 -

## ETERNAL UNION WITH CHRIST

Romans 8:18-39.

Here we reach the fitting climax of this sublime argument, and get the crowning point of prospect. Paul begins at this point to lead his readers to take a wider outlook both into the eternal past and future. Time, with its sufferings and struggles, its temptations and trials, is forgotten in the boundless horizon of GOD's eternal purpose in JESUS CHRIST.

The transition is not abrupt, but natural; for he has just been referring to the Spirit's co-witness to our sonship and heirship; and, as the heir looks forward to an inheritance, a new conception is now introduced.

"**This present time**" has occupied our attention hitherto: our present identification with CHRIST by faith as the ground of our resistance to sin and yielding to GOD, and our present relations to Him as SAVIOUR, SUBSTITUTE, MASTER, LORD, BRIDEGROOM, as a preventive against sin, as an incentive to holiness.

But now the inspired apostle says: "**I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us,**" and from this point the key words are "**expectation,**" "**hope,**" "**shall be,**" "**waiting,**" "**to be conformed,**" "**redemption,**" all of which look toward an eternal future or such words as "**His purpose,**" "**foreknow,**" "**predestinate,**" "**loved us,**" which turn our thought back to the eternal past.

And thus looking back to that love and purpose which had no beginning because before all things; and forward to that final consummation which knows no after disaster, Paul completes his great argument by the rapturous persuasion, that, as there is now no condemnation, there shall be no separation.

When we apply to this aspect of our union with CHRIST, the word eternal, we must first understand the meaning of that grand word. It differs from the words "unending" and "immortal" and "perpetual," for they refer only to the future. For instance, an immortal life is a life that, being begun, has no end, but an eternal life is one which has neither beginning nor end.

How, then, can it be said that the believer has "eternal life," or that his union with CHRIST is "eternal," when we all have a definite hour of birth, and so of beginning?

Here lies one of GOD's deep mysteries. When by faith we become united to the Lord, we are considered as sharing His eternal life, as partakers of the Divine nature, and as heirs of GOD's entire glory - past, present and future.

Human illustrations do not reach to the grandeur of this theme, but we may get a glimpse of this mystery through other forms and facts.

For example, when you set a scion in a mature tree, and the graft becomes thoroughly incorporated with the new stock, it becomes part of the whole tree, inseparable from it, and in a storm or time of frost or drought, all the strength that is in the tree by reason of age and growth sustains and nourishes the young and feeble graft. The graft shares not the future of that tree's life alone, but all the accumulations of its past also; it becomes identified with the whole history of that tree.

When a child is adopted, or, especially, is born into a family, is made or becomes a son and heir, that child becomes also one with the whole history of the family, all its dignity, property, history, its fame and fortune, as well as its name and social standing.

It is impossible to draw a line at the point where the new son enters the family, whether by birth or adoption, and separate the previous from the coming history. As far back as the family lineage is traceable, the beginnings of the accumulation of wealth, the starting point in culture and character - from that remote point whatever the family is and represents has been developing, and the new son comes into the inheritance of it all.

There is a law of heredity that looks back, as well as another law of inheritance, that looks forward.

The child born by the Spirit into GOD's family has not only his inheritance, but his heredity. Whatever the family of GOD means, or includes, it belongs to every child of GOD.

The believer, new born, born from above, made a partaker of the divine nature, becomes also a partaker of the divine history, dignity, possessions, glory. The life before him has no end, and is immortal, but more than this, it has a new quality and character, for immortality is not necessarily a blessing.

Eternal life partakes of GOD's own eternal and unchangeable perfection; it knows neither death nor decay, but is perpetually young, knowing no advance of age, which is a form of decay. Whatever there is in GOD's eternal past that is beautiful, victorious, glorious, becomes part of every believer's right and privilege and possession.

This part of the Epistle can be apprehended only when this sublime idea possesses the mind. Here the august mystery of GOD's Eternal Purpose in our salvation, sanctification, glorification, is unveiled to our astonished eyes. Believers are described as "**the called according to His purpose,**" and this thought is further expanded till it is unmistakable: "**For whom He did foreknow He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son that He might be the first born among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called, and whom He called, them He also justified, and whom He justified, them He**

**also glorified."**

Even a child of GOD may stumble at this mystery of Election, but that it is taught here is unmistakable. Every saved soul must trace salvation, back of all human choice of GOD, to GOD's choice of us. There was in GOD both a foreknowing and a forechoosing, and consequently a foreworking. His was the whole scheme and plan of our salvation.

He devised it in the solitudes of eternity, and He wrought it out and is still working it out through the ages.

Five distinct stages in the development of this plan of salvation are here named:

Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate.

He also called.

He also justified.

He also glorified.

One important step seems here omitted - He also sanctified - which in the complete series belongs between the last two, but it is implied in the preceding phrase "**to be conformed to the image of his Son.**"

Now let it be noticed that, from the foreknowing and forechoosing of saved souls, every step, calling, justifying, sanctifying, glorifying, is a step taken by GOD, rather than by man. What we call saving faith is not an original movement toward GOD but a responsive movement to His.

- Faith chooses GOD, but in response to His choice of us,
- faith calls on GOD, but in response to His calling of us;
- faith justifies because it accepts His justifying work;
- faith sanctifies because it surrenders us to His sanctifying spirit;
- faith brings us to glory, but because it follows Him who prepares the glory for us and leads the way in person to that glory.

The one comprehensive thought is that my salvation from first to last is the work of GOD, and yet this does not alleviate man's responsibility to respond.

It is for me a present salvation having a definite moment of beginning in my acceptance of CHRIST as Saviour. But for Him it is an eternal salvation: its roots reach down and back to the eternal past of His purpose, and its branches reach up and forward to the flower and fruit of perfection in glory in the future.

Such is the grand conception, and if we seek to know its practical bearing on holiness we have only to follow the apostolic argument. Paul himself asks, "**What shall we then say to these things,**" which is equivalent to asking, What bearing has this truth on noncontinuance in sin? We have only to note the phrases he uses, to see what GOD's eternal purpose has to do with our holiness.

We select the following conspicuous expressions:

The glory which shall be revealed in us.  
The glorious liberty of the children of GOD.  
The adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.  
We are saved by hope.  
All things work together for good, etc.  
Predestinate to be conformed.  
More than conquerors, etc.

Here are seven emphatic phrases, but they can only hints of a truth too deep and broad and high for our measurement. The one impression from the whole of the latter half of this chapter is to our salvation, with all that pertains to it, justification, sanctification, glorification, is provided for the changeless purpose of GOD. And, therefore, important as are my will and faith and obedience - all conformity, the grand assurance of my present holiness and final perfection is found in another Will back of mine, prior to it and supreme over it - the Will of GOD.

To yield myself to GOD therefore to yoke my impotence to His omnipotence, and to make possible for Him to work me as only He can work. The more fully, that I foretrust and entrust myself to Him, the more absolutely and fully will He work in me and through me His perfect work.

This, then, is the grand central thought: Every believer's Life is a plan of GOD, the Father, at hence part of a larger, all-embracing plan of the Trinity.

A careful study of the verses, from the sixteenth verse to the thirty-ninth will show that at least seven features of this plan are here exhibited, all of them bearing on the question of noncontinuance in sin.

I. ETERNITY - This plan embraces past, present, and future, and we find here the tenses that correspond to this threefold fact - retrospect, aspect, prospect.

There is the past: "**Whom He did foreknow He also did predestinate... called... justified.**"

There is the present: We are the children of GOD; now no condemnation. We suffer with Him the sufferings of this present time; the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together. We ourselves groan within ourselves. the Spirit helpeth our infirmities, maketh intercession for us. We are more than conquerors.

There is also the future - if children, then heirs that we may be glorified together. The glory which shall be revealed in us; the creature itself, also shall be delivered. Waiting for the adoption, to wit: the redemption of our body. What shall separate us? etc.

What a help and joy to know that GOD loved and chose me long before I loved and chose Him; that He began the good work in me and will continue it until the day of JESUS CHRIST, and that the perseverance of the saints is the perseverance of GOD!

This suggests a second prominent feature of GOD's plan in human salvation:

2. CERTAINTY - Throughout this chapter there is an air of confident assurance. It begins, "**There is therefore now no condemnation;**" it ends, There shall be no separation. It is not a may be, but a shall be, throughout. Man's plans are always uncertain, for man's will is vacillating and his energy, human, and his power to carry out his own will, finite.

But GOD's Will moves on its changeless course through the ages. Perfect from the beginning, it admits no change, and infinite power assures its execution.

3. UNITY AND UNIVERSALITY - GOD's plan is all comprehensive. It embraces all the persons of the Godhead, and all are distinctly mentioned here. We are declared to be sons of GOD and heirs of GOD; sons with CHRIST and heirs with CHRIST, and both CHRIST and the Spirit are represented as our Intercessors with the Father.

All believers are embraced in this plan. As many as are led by the SPIRIT of GOD are here embraced in the sons of GOD: "**Them that love God... who are the called according to his purpose.**"

"**All things**" are embraced in GOD's plan, and this phrase is used here in two widely different senses.

- In verse 28 it means all the varied occurrences and experiences of life.
- In verse 32 it refers to the varied bestowments and endowments of grace.

GOD's plan leaves nothing out. All things work, and work together for good - all things, even trials, at which we murmur and complain. The storms which threaten to uproot the trees really root them more firmly and deeply in the soil. The blows which one might think would make the cast-iron brittle, really cause it to undergo a sort of cold annealing and increase its strength and tenacity.

The enforced rest of sorrow and pain, sickness and disappointment, John Ruskin compares to the rest in which there is no music, but the making of music; not the end of the tune, but a pause in the choral hymn of our lives, during which the divine musician beats the time with unvarying count, catching up the next note as if no breaking-place had come between.

GOD's plan includes all our temptations. There is a divine philosophy of evil, and it is made to work good. Temptation has its holy office, its benign purpose. It tests us, and so attests us; it strengthens by revealing our weakness and so the source of our true strength, and it actually uplifts and sanctifies by teaching us how to resist and overcome. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried and proved, he shall receive the crown of life, the prize of the victorious soul.

GOD's plan includes the whole creation which shared the curse of the fall and must share the blessing of the Redemption; and hence the whole material creation is represented as groaning and travailing in pain, like a woman with child, waiting for that new creature that is brought forth only through such travail.

GOD's plan is like a vast universal mechanism that fills the universe and embraces all things. He who loves GOD, and is led by His Spirit, comes into that plan as a wheel into a perfect machine, and henceforth he is a part of GOD's universal harmony and system, all circumstances to being embraced.

4. SAFETY AND SECURITY - If GOD be for us who can be against us. There can be no successful opposition. What shall separate us? There can be no real separation. When once in such a system, there can be no collision, for every part of this perfect mechanism has its definite place and sphere of revolution, and interference cannot be imagined, for divine forethought and wisdom are behind all things. Nor can there be any separation, for that would imply breakage and disaster.

S. SANCTITY - We are predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son. However strong and whole hearted my purpose to be the Lord's, my dependence is on a Higher will. We have seen how the apostle depicts the heroic but unsuccessful conflict of the regenerate man, with the old man of sin, before he appreciates the power of the indwelling, inworking SPIRIT of GOD, but now we see the will of GOD reinforcing and strengthening the will of man.

Let us borrow an illustration from common life.

A man in New England has a mill, whose wheel depends for motion on a small and irregular water supply; but he tapped a river near by, and so got an unfailing stream at his disposal. We need to tap the river of GOD and have His will energize our own.

6. VICTORY - We are more than conquerors.

How is that possible? That expression is used only here, and where can be found a more significant one. What is this more than conquest?

- (a) He is more than conqueror who organizes victory, not out of conquest but out of defeat.
- (b) He is more than conqueror who not only vanquishes the foe but makes foes his tributaries and allies.
- (c) He is more than conqueror who is not only victor in the fight, but who conquers without fighting.
- (d) He is more than conqueror who never knows even the fear of the foe, but whose hope and faith are victors in advance.

A true child of GOD is thus, in every sense, a more than conqueror. GOD is with him and none can be against him and succeed. He organizes victory out of defeat. As CHRIST died, but in dying brought deliverance from death, the child of GOD dies to live, and in death triumphs over death.

Hear Paul: "**For thy sake we are killed all the day long**" - a perpetual dying, and that dying a victory over self and Satan. He loses life to find it; he is buried as a seed, but the harvest comes up from the burial.

The disciple turns his foes into his friends. The trials and temptations that seem to threaten his

peace and his power and even his final perfection, are the means of promoting them.

What the Devil means to use as a messenger of Satan to buffet him, becomes the means of a revelation of the infinite strength made perfect in weakness. The circumstances which, when they come between us and GOD, eclipse Him, when they are seen in the light of GOD's plan become an additional cause of our thanksgiving, luminous with his purpose.

The disciple conquers without fighting. He stands still to see the salvation of GOD. He abandons effort to rest on the finished work of GOD. And so confident is he of victory that he gives thanks in advance for a triumph that is so sure that before the battle the song of victory is in his mouth.

This eighth chapter of Romans has a sweet word for the Christian disciple on this subject of victory.

Who shall lay anything to the charge of GOD's Elect? Verses 33-39. We too often pass carelessly over these words, without noticing their comprehensiveness.

Three great questions are asked and each has reference to a different class of foes:

**"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?"**

**"Who is he that condemneth?"**

**"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"**

In all these questions the pronoun is masculine, implying a person or at least a personification.

The Person who brings charge against GOD's Elect is Satan, the accuser of the brethren. But we are not to be afraid of his accusation, however founded upon the facts of our unbelief and unfaithfulness. For we have in GOD our Justifier.

He that condemns is the Law, which is in this passage personified, as compelled to accuse and condemn. But, while justly condemned by the law, there is an atonement all-sufficient to expiate guilt of past sin and an advocate all-sufficient to meet the present and future needs of a forgiven soul.

The separating barriers between us and GOD are here personified and enumerated, and they are, first seven and then ten, making seventeen in all - tribulation, distress, etc. - study the seventeen and you will find nothing left out. Love triumphs over all.

- Tribulation, love uses to refine and purify;
- distress, love uses to bring us closer;
- persecution becomes by love a test of love, and its witness;
- famine and nakedness, peril and sword only teach us our true satisfaction and security in GOD.
- Death only brings the beloved together

Even the demons, from the fallen archangel down, are under control of Him who is exalted above every name that is named.

7. GLORY, which shall be revealed, includes:

1. Partaking of the Divine Nature - sympathy with holiness, antipathy against evil.
2. Divine perfection.
3. Divine bliss - character and condition harmonious.

We have thus outlined this great argument, but it is only an outline. GOD is challenging every believer not to go on sinning, and the challenge is based upon the believer's union with CHRIST, which is manifold in its aspects, and almighty in its power.

We can only say, as we conclude, that it is a master device of Satan to blind our eyes to the true nature and possibilities of our identification with the son of GOD, and so to prevent our knowing, claiming, and enjoying all its benefits.

John Huss, when talking to his friend in prison at Constance, about a dream he had, of the Pope and his bishops trying to efface an image of CHRIST on the walls of his cell, being advised to let alone his dreams and prepare for his defence, replied - "I am no dreamer: that image of CHRIST will never be effaced; it will be painted afresh in all hearts by much better preachers than myself, and I, awaking from the dead and rising from the grave, shall leap with great joy." Even Pope Adrian, the only really earnest Pope of that day, said to the Diet of Nuremberg (1523), "The heretics Huss and Jerome are now alive again in the person of Martin Luther."

What if the image of CHRIST as the Believer's Substitute and Surety could be ineffaceably impressed on the very tablets of our being! How would He who rose from the dead, live again in the person of the believing saint, and a new triumph over sin, death, and Hell!

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