

In Christ or, OUR UNION WITH THE LORD

A.J. Gordon (1836-1895)

"Created in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:10).

"Of Him are ye in Christ Jesus" (I Corinthians 1:30).

"He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world"
(Ephesians 1:4).

No words of Scripture hold within themselves a deeper mystery than "in Christ." Christ, in raising man into union with Himself, raises him into all that belongs to Him, into His divine life, and into partnership with His divine work – so that he dies in His death; rises in His resurrection; ascends into His ascension; is seated with Him in His session at the Father's right hand; and lives in His eternal life.

So marked is this fact, that it has led some to speak of the events of the Christian life as affording "a striking parallel to those of Christ's." Yet there is no parallel: parallels never meet. The very glory and mystery of our life is that it is one with the Savior's and inseparable from it. It is not a life running alongside His, and taking shape and direction from it. It is His life.

How we misplace our experiences when we attempt, as mere copyists, to reproduce our Master's life within us. Blessed is he who, instead of seeking to attain the likeness of Christ as something only without him, realizes that he has been planted in that likeness.

"For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection" (Romans 6:5).

CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

*"I am crucified **with Christ**: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but **Christ liveth in me**"*
(Galatians 2:20).

*"Knowing this, that our old man is **crucified with Him**, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin"* (Romans 6:6).

If I am one with my Redeemer, then that term, “*Christ crucified*” (I Corinthians 1:23), involves another: “*I am crucified with Christ.*” Hence we by no means reach the true measure of our inheritance in the Cross when we regard the death of Christ as a formal transaction, by which One, years ago, paid a debt that belongs to us; thus is secured our release from its obligation, we having no other connection with the event than that of recipients of its blessings.

Paul saw a richer heritage for the saints than this, for with that key, *in Christ*, which opens for us all the wards of Christian doctrine and life, he lets us into “*the fellowship of His sufferings*” (Philippians 3:10).

The great thought that filled his mind was his oneness with his Lord – a oneness not only of the present and the future, but equally of the past. So he utters those words, “*I am crucified with Christ.*”

That the crucifixion took place centuries ago does not separate us from it at all. While as an historical event we assign it to a specific time and place, it is just as near to us as it was to John or the Marys – touching all time with equal closeness. He is “*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (Revelation 13:8).

Spiritual union is entirely independent of all connections with time and space. In the depth of intimacy there can be no difference between us today and Paul, “*for by one Spirit are we all baptized **into one body***” (I Corinthians 12:13), and therefore *into one death*, since as “*many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into **His death***” (Romans 6:3).

We say Christ died that we might live. In a deeper sense it is true that He died that we might die. Thus we enter into oneness with His sufferings, and become partakers of His death.

“*If one died for all, then were all dead*” (II Corinthians 5:14).

As in the sin of one, that “*all sinned*” (Romans 5:12), so in the death of One, that “*all died!*” Wonderful words! With what triumphant assurance it enables us to take up the verdict of our acquittal from condemnation, “*he that is dead is freed from sin*” (Romans 6:7).

What has our death in Christ accomplished for us?

We Are Dead to the World

We are dead to the world system, whose friendship has been our deepest enmity to God, because drawing best affections and diverting our truest life from Him is at last overcome. The cross has sundered us from its enslaving bondage.

“*But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world*” (Galatians 6:14).

We Are Dead to Sin

Sin may allure us for a season, but its tyranny is over.

“How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Romans 6:2).

We Are Dead to the Flesh

This enemy, our former relationship with Adam, has received his death. Christ put a nail through him. When the Judge calls for us now as He did of old for Adam, saying, *“Where art thou?”* He will no longer seek the living among the dead. Our life is *in Christ. In Him will we find it, and not in our dead man.*

“They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Galatians 5:24).

“Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit” (Romans 8:9).

“For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3).

Recognizing now the realness of this union with Christ in His death, and the fullness of the blessings that flows therefrom, it only remains then for us to reckon the truth real to our own experience. Beholding how God has set Christ’s death to our account through our union with Him, take hold of the riches of grace and mercy which are made yours.

“For in that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:10-11).

RISEN WITH CHRIST

Being one with Christ in His dying, we must be one with Him also in His resurrection, for the bands of our union are not dissolved or weakened while the Savior lies in the tomb. Joined to us, that He might carry us with Him through the pains and penalties of death, He now in the same gracious union of being brings us up again from the dead, and so He spreads the mighty power of His own regeneration from the dead along the whole line of history.

“And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Colossians 2:13).

That forgiveness was fully accomplished is signified when He had pronounced *“It is finished”* on the cross; for then had He blotted out the dark score that was against us, having nailed it to the cross. This truly was decisive and final – a nail fastened in a sure place; but the pardon thus written in His blood waited to be sealed and attested by His resurrection. For though He had spoiled principalities and powers by His death, only by bursting the bars of the grave could He *“make a show of them, openly triumphing over them in it”* (Colossians 2:15).

If He lies yet in that dark unopened grave, you lie there yet, in your sins, because you are in Him who went down into the tomb with those sins upon Him. Now while our Lord's sufferings in the flesh were completed when He yielded up the ghost, He was not disentangled from our sin so long as He lay in the tomb. How shall we break the bands of condemnation and cast away its cords from us, if it be possible for Him to be "*holden of death*"? And yet He is so held, if a single item of the debt of sin is left uncanceled. "*The wages of sin is death;*" and those wages must be paid to the full. "*Thou shalt by no means come out thence till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing*" says an inexorable law (Matthew 5:26); and if He is held, we are held with Him, because of that faith that has linked us into indissoluble union with His destiny. Such is the certain inference from that dreary hypothesis, "*If Christ be not raised.*"

"*But now is Christ risen from the dead.*" Since we are risen with Him, we are not in our sins. In His renewal from the dead, we were lifted forever from their dark enfolding condemnation. They cannot bind a single fetter on us now; they cannot remand us for a single instant to the prison-house of despair, because "*the God of peace [has] brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus.*" (Hebrews 13:20).

That the remains of sin are still clinging to us we are only too painfully conscious. Walking with Him in the same resurrection, we are as yet like Lazarus bound hand and foot with the graveclothes – the habits of sin that still cling to us; and we wait in eager expectancy the last resurrection word that shall say, "*Loose him, and let him go*" (John 11:44). Thus not the less truly are we alive with Christ from the dead, and death, the penalty of sin, can have no more dominion over us.

This truth is most strikingly told again in those words of the apostle,

"Who was delivered for our offenses, and raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25).

Literally, "*Who was delivered **because of** our offenses, and raised **because of** our justification.*" When the justification of those in Him had been accomplished, He could not be detained by death; and so, because justification was completed, He was raised again. What an affecting emphasis is here again laid upon the doctrine of our Lord's union with us!

Opener of the prison doors to them that are bound, He yet waits until the last demand of justice has been satisfied before He comes through the gate of the grave to lead them out. The members must be with their Head. They are His fullness, and without them He cannot be made perfect. He cannot accept deliverance while they are under condemnation; but when the full acquittal has been secured, the glorious promise is fulfilled, "*The third day I shall be perfected*" (Luke 13:32). Yes, Thou mighty Captain of our salvation, Thou first-begotten from the dead, because Thou wilt then have "*perfected for ever them that are sanctified*" (Hebrews 10:14).

In His *crucifixion*, He was: In His *resurrection*, He was:

“Delivered for our offenses.” *“Raised again for our justification”* (Romans 4:25).

“Put to death in the flesh.” *“Quickened in the Spirit”* (I Peter 3:18).

“In that He died, He died unto sin once.” *“In that He liveth, He liveth unto God”* (Romans 6:10).

“He was crucified through weakness.” *“Yet He liveth by the power of God”* (II Corinthians 13:4).

Let it be marked that it is not *atoning justification* which is attributed to His resurrection, but *manifest justification*. Conscience needs this as well as the other. The wounded hands and feet, the dying cry that yields up the Spirit, and the lifeless body at last lying in the tomb are the tokens of the price paid. The empty tomb, the folded napkin and the linen clothes laid by themselves: these are the tokens of the price accepted, of the prisoner's discharge and of the loosing of the pains of death. Thus to all questionings of a timid or doubting conscience, the answer now is,

*“Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, **yea rather, that is risen again,** Who is even at the right hand of God, Who also maketh intercession for us”* (Romans 8:34).

Not only does our resurrection in Christ raise us out of condemnation, it also lifts us into a new life in Him. In *Christ crucified* we put off the old man, in *Christ risen* we put on the new man. The cross was for the destruction of the body of sin; the resurrection was for imparting to us of divine life.

We that believe are already *“risen with Him, through the faith of the operation of God”* (Colossians 2:12). The old life, with its kindredship to Adam, with its heritage of his curse, with its clinging incubus of his death, is put off at his grave. In the second Adam we now live, and *“as He is, so are we in this world”* (I John 4:17). He is *“the firstfruits of them that slept”* (I Corinthians 15:20). *“If the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy”* (Romans 11:16). He is *“declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead”* (Romans 1:4).

What a place then does the sepulcher of Jesus occupy! It is the border line and meeting place of law and grace. It is the solemn pause, the *divine ellipsis* in the work of redemption, whence we look back upon the old nature, the old sin, and the old curse, and forward upon the *“all things”* that *“are become new”* (II Corinthians 5:17). Standing here and looking either way, we see how Christ's work divides itself into what He did as the Sin-bearer, and what He did as the Life-giver.

By His death, He became the “*end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth*” (Romans 10:4); by His resurrection He became “*the beginning, the firstborn from the dead*” (Colossians 1:18). *There* the root of the first Adam died. *Here* humanity springs up anew, and from a new and incorruptible seed.

To be in Christ the risen Man, then, is to no longer trace our genealogy back to Adam. That registry has been annulled. This is our risen life – we are in Him and He in us. It is a life as far removed from that of Adam as the Heaven is from the earth. *This* is our righteousness: not the name or the credit of holiness merely, but the righteousness of God perpetually upon us, because of our identification with Him who is made unto us righteousness.

The resurrection of our Lord, then, is not merely a pledge of our own; it is our own. All that it did for Him, we may boldly say it did for us. True, in experience much of its blessing is yet embryonic to us; but because of our perfect identity with Him – with Him to whom the possible and the actual are ever the same – all is counted as present to us. With Him we are “*not in the flesh, but in the Spirit*” (Romans 8:9). That same strenuous demand which the Scriptures lay upon us for realizing our death in Christ, “*Reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed*” (Romans 6:11), they lay upon us for realizing our resurrection in Him: “*Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.*” (Colossians 3:1).

In Christ Jesus we work no longer *for* life, but *from* life. So the summons of the Gospel is not that we behold what is *possible* for us in Christ, and reach forth to it; but rather that we behold what is *accomplished* for us in Christ, and appropriate it and live in it.

ACCEPTED IN CHRIST

What we are in Christ is something that is completely detached from all the fluctuations of Christian experience. It neither rises nor falls with the tide of feeling. It knows nothing of degrees. Christ is the standard by which it is gauged, it becomes absolute and without the possibility of change, since Jesus Christ is, “*the same yesterday, and today, and for ever*” (Hebrews 13:8).

Since we are in Him and one with Him, we share His place in the Father’s heart, and we may know without a doubt that we are, “*accepted in the Beloved*” (Ephesians 1:6).

What a blessed word is this, “*in the Beloved.*” In that voice that came down from heaven, “*This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased*” (Matthew 3:17), we may now hear God’s approving sentence upon ourselves, as well as upon our Lord. For being in Christ, the beams of eternal love falling upon Him must fall upon us as included in Him. To be in Him is to be loved of the Father, because it is to be in the very focus of the divine affection.

Is not the occasion of much of our distrust and darkness to be found in the fact that we estimate ourselves by ourselves, according to the measure of a man, instead of according to the measure of Christ? He is the true example of our standing before God.

“... We may have boldness in the day of judgment: because **as He is, so are we in**

this world" (I John 4:17).

Jesus Christ not only represents God to us in His own being, "*the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person*" (Hebrews 1:3), but He represents us to God. We see God in Christ; God sees us in Christ.

We may without contradiction join the confession of a weak faith and much guilty unbelief with the triumphant confidence, "*If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself*" (II Timothy 2:13).

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