



**SPIRITUAL UNION
AND
COMMUNION**

- 5. FEDERAL UNION,
6. VITAL UNION AND
7. SAVING UNION**

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5. Federal Union.

Once more we would point out that *the origin* of that union which subsists between the Church and Christ was the everlasting love of God: this it was which cemented Head and members together. The loving purpose of God gave the Church an election-union to Christ, which (for the want of a better term) we have styled the “mystical.” Inseparably connected with the election-standing of the Church before God, was its marriage to Christ, and upon that marital relationship we have dwelt at length. We are now to consider further what branched out of the mystical union in view of the Church’s fall in its nature-head. Having in His high sovereignty predetermined the apostasy of Adam, upon His foreviews of the same, God engaged in an everlasting covenant with Christ, the spiritual Head of the elect, to raise them up from the ruins of their fall. What that involved and included it will now be our joy to consider.

In contemplating the Covenant of Grace [the Everlasting Covenant] which was made between God and the Mediator, it is very necessary to recognise that Christ acted therein as *the Head* of the Church. This it is which determined the title of “federal union.” The elect had not only a mystical union with Christ in the womb of God’s decrees, but they had an actual oneness together in the sight of the Divine Law. That oneness has been variously designated by different writers: “covenant union,” “legal union,” “representative union,” “federal union,” all which signify much the same. The grand point to be apprehended here is, that Christ and His people were one in Divine election, He the Head and they the members of the mystical Body, and so likewise they are to be regarded in the Everlasting Covenant. The Covenant was made with Christ, not as a single person, but as a common Head, representing all the elect who

were given to Him in a federal way; so that what He promised in the covenant, He promised for them and on their account; and what He was promised, He received on their behalf.

This federal oneness which exists between Christ and the elect from everlasting, means that they are one in a legal sense: or to state it yet more simply, Christ and His people are looked at as one by the eyes of the law, as surety and debtor are one. The bond of this union is Christ's *suretyship*. "A relation is formed between a surety and the person for whom he engages, by which they are thus far considered as one, that the surety is liable for the debt which the other has contracted, and his payment is held as the payment of the debtor, who is *ipso facto* absolved from all obligation to the creditor. A similar connection is established between our Redeemer and those who are given to Him by His Father. He became answerable for them to the justice of God; and it was stipulated that, on account of His satisfaction to its demands, they should receive the pardon of their sins" (John Dick).

The federal union between Christ and the elect gave them a covenant-subsistence in Him, for it was as their Head and Representative that He contracted to serve. The Everlasting Covenant flowed from and was the fruit of the love and grace of God. The ordering thereof pre-supposed *sin*, for its provisions had respect to the Fall, and its effects upon the Church. It was made with Christ not as a private or single person, but as a public and common Person. As the Covenant of Works was made with the first Adam as the federal head of his posterity—so that he was "the figure of Him that was to come" (Rom. 5:14)—so the Covenant of Grace was made with Christ as the last Adam as the federal Head of His spiritual offspring. The elect, then, had a representative union to Christ in the Covenant, for all that He engaged to do, He engaged in their name and on their account; and when *He* performed its stipulations it was the same with God as if it had been done by *them*.

The bond, then, of the federal, legal and representative union between Christ and His people, is suretyship for them. Christ's entering upon that office on their behalf gave full proof of His deep and unchangeable affection to them. He loved them "with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3), and as Song of Solomon 8:7 declares,

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.” So it was here: not even His foreviews of the Church’s apostasy in Adam, its fall into a state of degradation and defilement could change the heart of Christ toward His Bride. Her defection in Adam and her alienation from God only provided opportunity unto her eternal Lover to manifest the infinite affection He bore to her. Christ drew nigh unto God on the behalf of His Church, gave His bond, and placed Himself under obligation to pay all the debts of His people and satisfy for their sins.

Though the Church fell in Adam from her state of native innocence, she did not fall from the heart or arms of her heavenly Bridegroom. “Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it” (Eph. 5:25): note “loved” *before* “gave Himself for it.” And when did He first love the Church? Hear His own answer: “I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:26). That declaration establishes two points: the eternality and the nature of Christ’s love for His Church. Christ has been loved by the Father “before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24), and He had been loved with a love which delighted in the excellency of His Person. Such was Christ’s love toward His Church: it was not a love of compassion in view of the wretchedness occasioned by her fall in Adam, but a love of *complacency*, when He first viewed her as “all glorious within” (Psa. 45:13). His “delights” with the sons of men (Prov. 8:31) were precisely the same as the Father’s “delight” in Him (Prov. 8:30). Blessedly did He display that love when, in foreviews of the Fall, He presented Himself to the Father to serve as “Surety” on behalf of His Church, who was immersed in debt which she could never discharge.

Then it was that the Father said, “Who is this that *engaged* (or, as the Hebrew word is rendered, “be surety for” in Psa. 119:122; Prov. 11:15) His heart to approach unto Me?” (Jer. 30:21). That the reference here is to Christ Himself, and that His undertaking to serve as Surety was infinitely wellpleasing to God, is clear from the first part of the verse: “their Governor shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause Him to draw near, and He shall approach unto Me.” It was then that Christ became “a Surety of a better

testament” (Heb. 7:22), substituting Himself in the place and stead of His fallen people, placing Himself under obligation to fully discharge their legal responsibility, pay their debts, satisfy for their sins, and procure for them all the blessings of grace and glory. It was then that Christ offered to “finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness” (Dan. 9:24). This being accepted of by God, henceforth Christ and His elect were looked upon by the law as one person.

What was then transacted in the secret councils of eternity was, “when the fullness of the time was come” (Gal. 4:4), openly manifested on earth. In order to discharge His suretyship, it was necessary for there to be a natural union (a union in human nature), between Christ and His people, for “both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all *of one*”—one nature (Heb. 2:11). Before the Son of God could take upon Him the sins of the elect, He must first assume their nature. It was meet that the Divine Law should be magnified and made honourable by One in the same nature as those by whom it had been disobeyed and dishonoured. Moreover, it was only by becoming incarnate that the second Person in the Trinity could be “made under the law.” Therefore do we read, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14).

The incarnation of Christ may therefore be called “manifestative union,” for at His birth there was *openly displayed* the oneness which existed between Him and His Church. “Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the *sins of the people*” (Heb. 2:17). The elect, who had fallen in Adam, could not be conformed unto the image of Christ until He had—by amazing grace—been conformed to their image. The nature which Christ assumed was the same as that which we have, for it was the “seed” of the woman—save that it was entirely free of sin’s taint. Though this union was supernaturally affected in time, yet it was the fruit of Christ’s love for the Church and the fulfilment of His covenant-engagements on

her behalf before time began. Though the nature Christ assumed is one that is common to all mankind, yet as Hebrews 2 so plainly intimates, it was taken by Him with a peculiar regard to the elect—His “brethren,”—the “children,” the seed “of Abraham.”

Before proceeding further, let it be pointed out that the election union, the marital union, the federal union which the Church had with Christ, and the manifest union which the incarnation gave Him to the Church, are only so many branches of and all take their rise from the everlasting *love union*. Everything is founded upon and grows out of the eternal love of the Triune God unto the elect: *this* is the grand original, the strong and firm bond of union between the Head and His members, and is the spring of all that communion and fellowship which the Church has with Christ (and God in Him) in time, and shall have to all eternity. All is antecedent to our faith union with Christ. It is from hence that the Holy Spirit is sent down into their hearts to renew them and work faith in their souls. Faith does not give them a being in Christ, but is only one of the fruits, effects, and evidences of their being in Christ and of their union to Him.

It is true that the elect do not, and cannot, *know of* their being eternally in Christ, nor of their union to Him before the foundation of the world, until they are given to savingly believe in Him; and that, by Christ’s sending the quickening Spirit into their hearts. Only then is that which before was concealed from them, revealed to them. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17): but being made a “new creature,” does not put a man into Christ, rather is it *the evidence of* his being there, and without which he cannot know it. “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom. 8:9): nevertheless, I may be one of Christ’s chosen and redeemed ones, though I have not yet the Spirit indwelling me. The *full* manifestation of our union to Christ will only appear in heaven itself, when His prayer in John 17:20-24 is fulfilled. But to return unto the present aspect of our subject.

Christ is the Friend who “*sticketh closer than a brother*” (Prov. 18:24) to His people. Nothing could dissolve the tie which had been established between them ere the world began. Nothing could quench His love to them, for “having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end” (John 13:1). Therefore,

when He viewed the Church in its fallen estate, He willingly became incarnate, entered the office of Surety on their behalf, and engaged to put away all their sins and bring in a perfect righteousness for them. Christ undertook to conquer Satan, death, and Hell for His Church, and to present her before the high throne of God holy and without spot, as though she had never been defiled. This is a greater work than His making all things out of nothing, or the upholding of all things by the Word of His power. This work is the admiration and marvel of angels, and the theme of Heaven's new song.

Jehovah Jesus, the God-man, with all the love of the Godhead in His heart, in His incarnate state, stood in the law-place, room and stead of, His sinful people as their Sponsor, lived and obeyed the law for them. He was here as their Representative, and His perfect fulfilment of the law in thought and word and deed, constitutes their everlasting righteousness. When Christ had magnified the law and made it honourable, the Lord caused to meet on Him the iniquities of all His people, so that He was, imputatively, "made sin" (2 Cor. 5:21) for them. Jehovah the Father alone could dispose of iniquity, and gather all the sins of all the elect and place them on Christ: He "the Judge of all" (Heb. 12:23) was the One immediately sinned against, and therefore the only One who could provide and accept an atoning sacrifice. "*God was in Christ* reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor. 5:19).

As "the Lamb of God" Christ was appointed and prepared from eternity as is clear from Revelation 13:8 and 1 Peter 1:19, 20. The atoning death of Christ, then, was a grand article of the Everlasting Covenant between the Father and the Son. This was decreed by God, agreed upon by the Mediator, and published by the Spirit in the Scriptures. The transferring of sin from the persons of the elect to the Person of Christ was shadowed forth under the Old Testament sacrifices, they being substituted in the room of sinners and offered for sin—the sins of the offenders being laid upon them in a typical way: see Leviticus 4:4 and 16:21. The curse and vengeance of God's wrath which was to fall upon Christ when He should have the sins of His people laid upon Him, and be borne by Him in His own body to and on the Tree, was set forth by the fire which lighted upon and consumed the sacrifices under the law.

The covenant oneness of Christ and His Church was adumbrated by the relation which obtained between Adam and the human race, for though Christ's actual discharge of His suretyship was historically afterwards, yet in the order of God's decrees it was before it. This is clear from Romans 5:18, 19, "Therefore *as* by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; *even* so by the righteousness of One the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For *as* by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, *so* by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous." Believers are made righteous through the obedience of Christ on precisely the same principles of all of Adam's posterity were made sinners by the disobedience of their natural head: there was an identity of legal relations and reciprocal obligations and rights. In each case it was the one that was acting on the behalf of many, and doing so because of his federal union with the many.

When God accepted Christ as the federal Head of His people, they were henceforth considered as legally one: this, and this alone, being the foundation for the imputation of their sins to Him and of His righteousness to them. *This* was the foundation of all which Christ did and suffered for them, and for them alone; and for all the blessings of grace which are or shall be bestowed on them; which blessings are denied all others. To discharge their legal liabilities, Christ entered upon the office of Surety, in consequence of which He became responsible to the law for His people: so truly so, that the benefit of His transactions redounds to them. As Adam's transgression was imputed to us because we were legally one with him, so our iniquities were imputed to Christ because He stood before the law as our Sponsor; and in like manner, His obedience and its reward is reckoned to our account: "For He (God) hath made Him (Christ) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

It is of vast importance to perceive that the saving-work of Christ was performed not only *for* His people, but that He did it as *in union with* them, so that the Church has such an interest in all her Head did and suffered for her sake, that she was one with Him, yea, *in Him*, in all His actions and sufferings. He loved *them*, was born for them, lived for them, died for them, rose from the grave for them, and ascended into Heaven for them. But more: they were one with

Him at every point. They were crucified “*with Christ*” (Gal. 2:20), “buried with Him” (Col. 2:12), “and hath raised us up *together*, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). These expressions indicate not only the *intimacy* of the federal union, but the efficacy of the same, for the validity and virtue of His actions are reckoned to her. In Christ the Church is holy and righteous, pure and spotless: “ye are complete *in Him*” (Col. 2:10).

In the grand fact of federal union, and nowhere else, do we obtain an adequate answer to the age-long question of infidels, “How could Christ, a perfectly innocent person, *justly* suffer the curse of the law? If he were guiltless in Himself, then how could the Judge of all the earth *righteously* cause His sword to smite Him?” This objection loses its air of plausibility once the clear light of Christ’s Covenant Headship is thrown upon it. Christ *voluntarily* suffered in the room and stead of others. If it be asked, What righteous principle justified His dying as a *Substitute*? “the just for the unjust?” the answer is, That gracious substituting of Himself as a victim for His people was the discharge of His *Suretyship*. If the inquiry be pressed further back still, And what justified Christ’s entering upon His office of Surety? the answer is, *His Covenant-oneness* with His people. And what moved Him to enter into His covenant engagement? LOVE, love to His Bride as He foresaw her fallen into sin.

In view of what has just been pointed out, must we not join the Apostle in exclaiming “O *the depth* of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Rom. 11:33). Contrariwise, are we not also obliged to lament “O the dreadful *superficiality* of present day preaching (?) of the Cross!” It was by a voluntary act on Christ’s part, out of love to God and His people, that He offered to serve as the Surety of His elect, substitute Himself in their fallen stead, and bear the full punishment due their sins. Because their guilt was imputed to Him, the Father, without the slightest impeachment of His holiness and justice, exacted satisfaction from the Sponsor. In like manner, in perfect righteousness, God imputes Christ’s merits to them. Therefore, no one considered as innocent, suffered; and none, considered guilty, escaped. The blood shed by Christ was “the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Heb. 13:20), and therefore has God promised Christ “By the blood of Thy covenant I have sent forth *Thy* prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water” (Zech. 9:11).

The *effect* of this federal union is the Church's *communion* with Christ in all the benefits which His infinitely-meritorious work as Surety procured. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are *in* Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1); "In the LORD have I righteousness and strength" (Isa. 45:24); "And of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). The elect have a community with their Head in His covenant standing and rights: *His* God and Father is *their* God and Father (John 20:17). The one Spirit who sanctified, anointed, sealed, and graced Him, does the same (according to their measure) for them. They have fellowship with Him now in His sufferings, and shall have fellowship with Him in His glory throughout eternity. May writer and reader be enabled to "mix faith" with this blessed truth to the praise and glory of Him "who loved us and gave Himself for us."

6. Vital Union.

God established a legal or federal union between the Redeemer and those who were to be redeemed by Him, so that He became answerable for them to the Divine justice. But something more was necessary in order to *their actual enjoyment* of the benefits of Christ's representation. God not only determined that His Son should sustain the character of their Surety, but also that a vital and spiritual relation should take place between them, through which there should be *conveyed to them* the benefits of His purchase. God ordained that as Christ and the Church were one in the law, so also they should be one experimentally: that not only should His righteousness be imputed to His members, but that His very life should also be imparted to them.

Though the elect were federally united to Christ in the Everlasting Covenant, yet until they are regenerated they are personally and experimentally *far from* God and Christ, so far as their actual state is concerned. This is abundantly clear from, "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh . . . that at that time ye were *without Christ*, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:11, 12). But at the new birth, Christ unites them to Himself in a vital way: this He does by sending His Spirit to take possession of them and communicate to

them a principle of spiritual life, namely, His *own* life, whereby they are made *living* members of His Body, the Church. Previously we were “in Christ” mystically (Eph. 1:4) and representatively (1 Cor. 15:22), now we are “in Christ” vitally (2 Cor. 5:17; 12:2; Rom. 16:7).

As we were not the actual possessors of Adam’s guilt until we were conceived by our mothers and thereby united to him by carnal generation, neither are we the actual possessors of Christ’s merits until we are quickened by His Spirit and thereby united to Him by regeneration. While there was a legal union between Adam and us in Eden, yet not until we are born into this world do we enter into personal communion with what his conduct entailed. In like manner, though there was a federal union between Christ and us when He served as our Sponsor, yet not until we are born again do we begin to enjoy that which the discharge of His Surety-engagement obtained for us. Though there was a mystical and federal union between Christ and His people, not until their regeneration can they have any *communion* with Him.

The human race was inseparably linked to Adam in a *double* way—federally and naturally, as he was both the legal representative and father of his posterity. So too the elect are related to Christ in a double way—federally and vitally, as He is both their legal Representative and their spiritual Quickener: “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous” (Rom. 5:19). Those whom Adam represented (the first “many”) were “made sinners” judicially the moment he fell, but they were only “made sinners” experimentally when they were “shapen in iniquity” (Psa. 51:5). Those whom Christ represented (the second “many,” which is *not* co-extensive with the first) were “made righteous” judicially when He rose again from the dead, but they are only “made righteous” experimentally when they are born again and believe.

This is only another way of saying that Christ’s *Headship* is of a twofold character: He is unto His mystical Body both a Head of government and a Head of influence. The term “head” has a twofold extension in our common speech: it is that by which we name the highest part of our physical organism, and it is also that by which we describe the chief ruler, be he over a family, a corporation, or a

nation. Such is its significance as applied to Christ: He is both the Life and the Lord of His people. Remarkably has God caused this to be adumbrated in the natural realm: sever the head from the physical organism, and all its members are at once reduced to a state of lifelessness? Likewise, if the brain were removed, the members become incapable of action—they are regulated and dominated by the mind.

In the natural body the head is the seat of sensation, and from it feelings and motions are communicated to all of its members by means of the nerves which have their origin in the brain. Here again the natural supplies an object-lesson of the spiritual. It is from Christ, the Head, there flows that life and grace by which the members of His mystical Body are enabled to perform the various functions of the Christian life. “May grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: *from whom* the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:15, 16). It is from the Head there proceeds that which causes “the effectual working in the measure of every part” of His Body.

The same blessed truth is set before us again in, “And not holding the Head, *from which* all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (Col. 2:19). Here the Apostle was setting forth the evil tendency of one of the errors of Gnosticism, which now occupies a prominent place in the vile system of Romanism. Under the pretence of honouring Christ and abasing man, the Gnostic taught that He was so far above us in the scale of being that access could only be obtained to Him via the angels (verse 18). In like manner, Romanism introduces various mediators between Christ and the sinner. But this is failing to hold fast the doctrine of the Head. It is only by *immediate* union and communion with Christ Himself that His members are nourished and strengthened.

Christ, then, is not only the Head of authority, the Lord and Ruler of His Church, but He is also the Head of influence—its Quickener and Nourisher. In God’s appointed time, the Lord Jesus sends down the Holy Spirit into the hearts of His people when they are dead in

trespasses and sins, imparting spiritual life to their souls, and thus making them one with Himself in a *vital* way; and this He does by virtue of the prior mystical and federal union existing between them. It is our *eternal* union with, interest in, and relation to the Person of Christ in the Everlasting Covenant, which is the foundation of the Spirit's work in our souls during the time-state. It is by communicating His own life into the members of His Body, the Church, that their mystical and legal union with Him is then made real and actual to them in their own experience.

As Adam is the root of generation, so Christ is the root of regeneration; note "His seed" and "the travail of His soul" in Isaiah 53:10, 11. If we had not been in Adam by Divine creation, we would not have been produced from him by generation; and had we not been given a super-creation being in Christ by Divine election, we had never been manifested in Him by regeneration. Had there been no *oneness with* Christ, there could be no *life from* Him; and if no life, then no justification, salvation, or glorification. And in order to our having life from Christ, we must receive His Spirit; for as our physical bodies are lifeless without the natural spirit (James 2:26), so the soul is spiritually dead without the Spirit of God. At regeneration the Holy Spirit becomes to the soul—though in a far more excellent manner—what the soul is to the body with respect to its animal and rational life.

The vital union which is effected between Christ and His people is a work of God by which His elect are made spiritually one with their Head, for the same Spirit which indwells Him now takes up His abode within them. Herein we may perceive how each Person in the Holy Trinity is distinctively honoured, and endeared unto us. God the Father gave us a mystical union to Christ when He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. God the Son gave us a legal union to Himself when He took upon Him the office of Surety. And God the Spirit gives us a vital union to Christ by imparting to us His life and making us living members of His Church. It is only by means of this third union that the first and second are made manifest to us: "*Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit*" (1 John 4:13).

This union has also been variously designated by different writers. It has been called the "new-creation" union, because it is

effected by our being born again. It has been called the “influential” union; because only through it do we receive the virtues of the mystical and federal unions. It has been called the “manifestive” union, because by it is revealed to us our eternal oneness with Christ. We have called it the “vital” union because it is that which gives us a living relation with Christ. This it is which capacitates the Christian to know Christ, to receive Him, to have communion with Him, to live upon and enjoy Him. The Spirit unites us to Christ at the very first moment the “good work” of God is “begun” (Phil. 1:6) in the heart. Then it is that we are “delivered from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of God’s dear Son” (Col. 1:13), so that we are brought into open and actual fellowship with Him.

Then also it is that we are “made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col. 1:12). It was Christ’s work *for* us which secured our *title* to the heavenly inheritance, but it is the Spirit’s work *in* us which supplies the *fitness* or capacity to enjoy the same. This is confirmed by what we read in 2 Corinthians 5:5: “Now He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.” The context here is also speaking of the heavenly inheritance of the saints, when “mortality shall be swallowed up of life.” And “for” that inheritance (the “selfsame thing”) God hath “wrought us” or fashioned and fitted us, for we are “His workmanship created in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:10). In addition to the *evidence* which His work in our souls gives us, that we are vessels of mercy “prepared unto glory,” the Spirit Himself indwells us as an *earnest* or guaranty of our future bliss.

Christ has a threefold union with the Church, and the Church has a threefold union with Him. First, He had a mystical union, when God elected Him to be the Head of His Church. Second, He had a legal union, when He agreed to serve as our Representative and Sponsor. Third, this began to be *openly effected* when He became incarnate, entering into a natural union with us by being made flesh. In like manner, our mystical and federal union with Christ becomes manifest and efficacious when we are vitally joined to Him by the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. The entrance of Christ into our nature capacitated Him to discharge His office-work of Surety, and

fitted Him to be a merciful High Priest who could be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. The communication of Christ's nature unto us qualifies us for communion with Him and fits unto the discharge of our Christian duties "he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17).

As in our natural bodies, the members receive life (the animal spirits) from their head, so in the mystical Body of Christ the members receive the life-giving Spirit from their Head. This, we believe, is the meaning of John 1:16, "And of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace." What is signified *here* by Christ's "fullness?" Let it be noted that in John 1:16 Christ is not presented absolutely as the second Person in the Godhead, but as incarnate (verse 14), as the God-man Mediator, as the next verse shows. What then, was His "fullness" as Mediator, *furnishing Him* for the discharge of that office? Was it not His being "anointed with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 10:38)? Is not the key to this word "fullness" in John 1:16 found in John 3:34, "For God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him?"—Christ as God-man was capacitated to receive the Spirit *without* "measure," to receive Him in all His fullness.

Therefore it is that Christ is represented as "He that *hath* the seven Spirits of God" (Rev. 3:1), that is, the Spirit in His plenitude or fullness—compare with that sevenfold reference to the Spirit as given in Isaiah 11:1, 2! Thus Christ's *Mediatorial* "fullness" is the Holy Spirit indwelling Him *without* "measure." But let it be observed that Christ received the Spirit not for Himself alone, but also for and in order to communicate Him to His people. This is clear from Acts 2:33, "having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He hath shed forth this (at Pentecost), which ye now see and hear." Thus "out of (Greek) His fullness have all we received" signifies that Christ has communicated to us the same Spirit He received—called "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom. 8:9) and "the Spirit of His Son" (Gal 4:6). A beautiful illustration of this is found in John 20:22, "He breathed on them, and saith unto them, *Receive ye* the Holy Spirit."

Perhaps a word should be given upon the last clause of John 1:16, for we have never seen any interpretation of it which quite satisfied us: "and grace for grace." Just as the same life which is in the vine

is in each of its branches producing “after its *own* kind,” so the same “grace” (the same in nature, though not in degree) which the Spirit produced in Christ (*see* Luke 2:40 and 52!) He reproduces in His people. Was the lovely “fruit” of Galatians 5:22, 23 found in it *fullness* in Christ?—then the Spirit works the same in us *in measure*. “Grace for grace,” then, means grace *answerable to* grace: the same spiritual excellency which abides in the Head, is communicated to the members of His Body; and thus are they being “conformed” unto His “image.”

“The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45). It is as such that He sends forth the Holy Spirit into the hearts of His own. “He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit; which He shed on us abundantly *through Jesus Christ* our Saviour” (Titus 3:5, 6). “But ye have an Unction from the Holy One” (1 John 2:20): the “Unction” (the Greek word for which is rendered “anointing” in 2 Cor. 1:21 and 1 John 2:27) is the Holy Spirit and He comes to us from “the Holy One,” that is, Christ (Psa. 16:10, Mark 1:24). A blessed type of this is seen in Psalm 133:2, “The precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments.” Here we behold the high priest of Israel anointed unto his holy office, and the “precious ointment”—emblem of the Holy Spirit—proceeding from his head to that part of his vestments which touched the earth!

“There is one Body, and one Spirit” (Eph. 4:4) which animates it: “For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). As the soul and body of man are so united as to form one entire person, so God’s elect and their Head are so united as to form one mystical and spiritual Body, the Church. Just as the human soul gives a living union between the most widely separated members—the head and the feet—so the Divine Spirit livingly unites together the Head in Heaven and His members on earth. “If a man were never so tall that his head should reach the stars, yet having but one soul, he would be but one man still. Though Christ in His nature be exceedingly distanced from us, yet there being but one and the selfsame Spirit in Him and in us, we are one mystical Christ” (John Owen).

The distance between Christ in Heaven and believers on earth is no obstacle to their vital union, for being God, the Spirit is *Omni-present*, and therefore does He indwell both Head and members. A very striking proof of the Spirit's being the living bond of union between Christ and the Church is found in Romans 8:11: "But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall *also* quicken your mortal bodies *by His Spirit* that dwelleth in you." The saints will not be raised from the dead by the naked power of God *without* them, but by virtue of their risen Head sending forth the quickening influences of His Spirit *within* their bodies. This is wonderfully adumbrated in the natural: when awakening out of sleep, the animal spirits arouse the *head* first, and then the senses are awakened throughout the whole body!

A real living union is effected between Christ and His members, not (as it were) by soldering two souls together, but by the Spirit anointing and indwelling *both*, for He being *infinite* is able to conjoin those who, in themselves, are so far apart. The whole person of the Christian (1 Cor. 6:15) is united to the whole Person of Christ: "At that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you" (John 14:20). The same Spirit who lives in our exalted Redeemer, lives in His people on earth. By this spiritual union a far more blessed relation is established than which obtains between a king and his subjects, or even between a husband and wife: the tie connecting Him with His people is so intimate that He indwells them—"Christ liveth in me" (Gal 2:20).

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14). Let it be duly noted that as "grace" is predicated of Christ and "love" of God (the Father), so "communion" is as expressly ascribed to the Holy Spirit; and, as we said so often before, there can be no "communion" unless there first be *union*. It is by the Spirit there is union and communion between Christ and the Church. "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. 8:9), that is, he is not yet grafted as a *living* member into His mystical Body. Let it be pointed out in conclusion that, blessed and glorious as is this vital union, yet it falls far below the "Mediatorial union:" that was two distinct natures (the Divine and the human) forming

together *one Person*; this is of different persons being joined together so as to make *one Body*, the Church.

7. Saving Union.

That which unites the believer to Christ may (for the purpose of simplification) be likened to a golden chain, a chain possessing a number of distinct links, yet inseparably welded together. The first of these links we denominated “mystical,” having reference to our original uniting to Christ, when the Father chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. The second link we denominated “federal,” having reference to our covenant-oneness with Christ, wherein He served as our Surety, we having a representative or legal being in Him. The third link we denominated “vital,” having reference to the Spirit’s quickening us, whereby we became livingly united to our Head in Heaven. Now, this wondrous chain is let down still lower, for the fourth link in it is formed by our personally cleaving unto Christ. This is a union *unto* Christ, as the previous ones were *in* Him.

We have pointed out that it is by means of the vital union that our mystical and federal oneness with Christ is made manifest. Not until the Holy Spirit has brought us from death unto life can we have any experimental knowledge of the Father’s love and the Son’s work for us. In like manner, it is not until we have a *saving* union with Christ by our believing in Him, that we have any personal evidence we have been vitally joined to Him. In other words, we are only able to apprehend the outworking of God’s eternal purpose *in the inverse order* to His execution of it: He proceeds from cause to effect, but we have to work back from effect to cause. Or, to use the terms of our illustration: as we grasp the lowest link in the chain *that* brings into our view the one next above it.

Thus, the whole of this section will supply answer to a question which may have been raised in exercised readers by the last one, namely, *How* may I ascertain whether or not spiritual life has actually been communicated to *my* soul? O how urgently it behooves each one of us to earnestly and prayerfully examine ourselves on this all-important matter. Before developing the distinctive theme of “saving union,” and as a suitable introduction thereto, let us offer one or two observations by way of determining

the above matter. First, where there is spiritual life, there is spiritual *sensibility*: “senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14). Just as our natural senses recognize and feel the difference between cold and heat, so the spiritual senses of a quickened soul perceive and feel the difference between good and evil, sin and holiness. If there be spiritual life within, the soul cannot but be sensible of and groan under the burden of sin.

What we have just alluded to is something radically different from those prickings of conscience and pangs of fear which the unregenerate are sometimes conscious of. They may be alarmed at the condemnation of sin, but they are not grieved and horror-stricken at its pollution. They may be terrified of Hell, yet never horrified at displeasing God. They are mortified if a fellow-creature discovers them in a lie, but they make no conscience of it Godwards. Second, where there is spiritual life, there is spiritual *hunger and thirst*: “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word” (1 Peter 2:2). Those who have been born again have a strong intuition that none but Christ can meet their deep need. Third, if there be spiritual life, there must be spiritual *activity*. This will be enlarged upon as we proceed.

It may surprise some of the more critical readers that we have drawn a sharp distinction between vital union and saving union, for many suppose they are one and the same, that the moment a sinner is born again he is actually saved. Not so: regeneration and salvation are quite distinct, though the one necessarily makes way for the other. We are not “saved” until we personally “*believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:31). But as saving faith is a spiritual act, one who is spiritually dead cannot perform it. The Spirit quickens the soul in order to capacitate it unto a saving faith in Christ. Note carefully the order in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, “God hath from the beginning chosen you *to* salvation *through* sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the Truth:” the “sanctification of the Spirit” is His impartation of life, whereby He separates us from those who are dead in sins, and this *precedes* our “belief of the Truth.”

It is the Spirit’s quickening of us into newness of life which lays the foundation for feeling our deep need of Christ and casting ourselves upon Him. Until the sinner be regenerated, there can be

no repentance unto life, no believing unto salvation, no hope which maketh not ashamed. As the union which exists between a man's soul and his body is absolutely necessary in order for him to think and reason, speak and perform such actions as are in keeping with his natural life; so a vital union between the soul and Christ is indispensable in order to enable us to perform any spiritual functions. No vital act of faith can be put forth by us until a vital principle has been communicated to us: notice the order in "whosoever (1) liveth and (2) believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou *this*?" (John 11:26)—how few *do* believe that the impartation of spiritual life precedes faith.

"Except a man be born again, he *cannot see* the kingdom of God" (John 3:3), still less is he capable of entering it. Until a supernatural work of grace has been wrought upon his heart, fallen man is utterly incapable of discerning the nature of God's kingdom, the superlative excellency of it, or the way of entrance into it. "No man can come to Me," said Christ, "except the Father which hath sent Me draw him" (John 6:44), and that Divine "drawing" consists first in his being brought out of spiritual death and made "a new creature" in Christ. When that miracle of grace takes place, the subject of it is still *the same person* he was before, but he has been "renewed" by a principle of spiritual life being infused into him from above, and now he has new desires and aspirations, which issue in a new experience and conduct.

"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power (the right) to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name" (John 1:11, 12). When Christ appeared unto the Jewish nation, the great majority in it "despised and rejected" Him. But here and there was one who "received Him:" received Him as the Sent One of God, received Him as the Lord of their hearts and lives, received Him as the all-sufficient Saviour. And why *did* those "receive" Christ? Was it because *their* wills were less stubborn than their fellows? Not at all. Our question is answered in the explanatory verse which immediately follows: "Which (those who "received Him") *were born*, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but *of God*." What could be clearer: those who receive Christ are *previously* born of God.

No sinner believes savingly in Christ until he has been convicted of his lost condition and made to feel his dire need of a Saviour, and that is not until God has “begun a good work *in* him” (Phil. 1:6). No man will truly come to Christ until he has been quickened by Christ. Nor does that statement conflict in anywise with his own words “Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life” (John 5:40). If the unregenerate *would* come to Christ, there is life for them. They ought to come: they are freely invited to come: but they “will not,” and no argument or persuasion of man can induce them to do so. Were God to do nothing more than send the Gospel to the unsaved, in every instance it would fall on deaf ears and unresponsive hearts. “Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned” (Jer. 31:18): we had to be turned *by* God before ever we turn *to* Him.

The trouble with so many today is that their theology is derived from their experiences, instead of from the Scriptures. They prefer to follow the testimony of their senses, instead of the teaching of God’s Word. The first thing of which the Christian became conscious was *his* sense of need, *his* realization that he was a lost sinner, *his* crying unto God for mercy, *his* turning to Christ. And because he was *not conscious* of the quickening work of the Spirit within him *before* he was ever awakened and convicted, he is very slow to allow the reality of it. But this ought not to be: “to the Law and to the Testimony” must be the final court of appeal. Were we not alive physically (in the antenatal state) long before we had any consciousness of our existence? So it is spiritually: there must be life, before there can be the consciousness of that life.

A supernatural Object requires a supernatural faith, and this the natural man is utterly incapable of putting forth. He must, then, have imparted to him a spiritual life ere he can savingly believe on the Lord Jesus. “This faith is not merely a natural act of the mind, assenting to the truth of the Gospel, as it assents to any other truth upon reliable testimony; but it is a supernatural act, an effect produced by the power of the Spirit of grace, and is *such* a persuasion of the truth as calls forth exercises suitable to the nature of its object. It is a cordial approbation of the Saviour, heartily consenting to His offers, an acceptance of Him in His entire character, as Prophet, Priest, and King” (J. Dick). Saving faith is the heart going off all others and cleaving to Christ alone.

Now Christ's design in quickening us is that we should turn to and put our trust in Him, for we are not *saved* until we do so. "For by grace are ye saved *through faith*" (Eph. 2:8). True, we are not saved because of our faith; yet, we cannot be saved without it. Rightly did Thomas Brooks, the Puritan, affirm, "Faith in its place is as necessary as the blood of Christ is in its place." "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever *believeth* in Him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43). The righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ is "unto all and upon all them that *believe*" (Rom. 3:22), and it is not upon them until they do. Christ is a "propitiation through *faith* in His blood" (Rom. 3:25), for His blood avails none but those who *plead* it. To the Hebrew Christians Paul wrote, We are "of them that *believe to the saving of the soul*" (Heb. 10:39).

Let us not confuse things that differ. Though it be true that the elect were saved in the purpose of God before the world began (2 Tim. 1:9), and that they were saved representatively when their Head rose again from the dead (Eph. 2:6), yet they are not saved personally and actually until they "come unto the knowledge of the Truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). Trusting in Christ obtains something more than a *knowledge* of our salvation: it brings salvation itself to us. Surely there is no salvation actually bestowed where an individual's sins have not yet been "remitted," and no one's sins are remitted until he has believed (Acts 10:43). Nor is this making a saviour of faith: Christ is the Saviour, but faith must lay hold of Him for salvation. Nothing but food will save a starving man from death, yet food untouched will serve him nothing. It is not his *eating* which saves him, yet the food *must* be eaten if he is to be saved!

While it be true, on the one hand, that faith does not give us a being in Christ, but rather is our cleaving to Him an evidence and effect *of* our being in Him; yet, on the other hand, faith does *unite* us to Christ, as is clear from His own words: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall *believe* on Me through their word; *that they all may be one*; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us" (John 17:20, 21). Moreover, do we not read, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts *by faith*" (Eph. 3:17): it is faith which gives Him a real subsistence in the soul. Here, then, is the principal difference between what was

said on the “vital union” and the present aspect of our subject: in the forming of the vital union we were *passive*, but in the making of the saving union we are *active*. Here is the order: “That I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12).

Having been “apprehended” or “laid hold of” by Christ (through His quickening Spirit), we now apprehend Him. We cannot lay hold of Him, until He has first laid hold of us. But having been laid hold of by Christ, the soul now draws near to Him, joins itself to Him, appropriates Him by faith as its very own. And from *this* union there follows our justification, sanctification, preservation, and glorification. The *federal* union was necessary so that the demands of the law might be met by our Surety. The *vital* union was necessary so that a principle of life, grace, holiness, might be imparted to the soul, qualifying its recipient to perform spiritual acts and live a spiritual life. The *believing* union is necessary so that we may personally receive the salvation of God and have His receipt for it written in our own hearts.

Our believing in Christ is the sequel to His “I will betroth thee unto Me for ever” (Hosea 2:19), for faith is it which ties the marriage-knot between us, for there must be a personal consent on our part. In the Gospel Christ offers Himself to us, and saving faith is our acceptance of Him. Saving faith, therefore, presupposes a turning from all others—from the seductions of the world and from trusting in my own righteousness—and yielding myself to Christ as my only Lord. It is a willingness to receive Christ on His own terms. It is turning our backs upon our idols, and saying with Ruth, “Entreat me not to leave Thee, or to return from following after Thee: for whither Thou goest, I will go; and where Thou lodgest, I will lodge: Thy people shall be my people, and Thy God my God” (Ruth 1:16). Since a mediator is not a mediator of one, but requires the mutual consent of both parties, so there must be a personal acceptance of Christ as Mediator on our part. This makes the union *reciprocal*. As a woman, by her free consent, accepts a man for her husband, so the believer accepts Christ as his only Lord and Saviour.

This union also has been variously designated by the older writers—for alas! Most modern writers seem to know little or

nothing of this wondrous and blessed subject. Some of them call it the “voluntary” union, in order to distinguish it from the previous ones, which are quite involuntary on our part; and because this one is consummated by an act of our own wills. Some call it the “fiducial” or “believing” union, because it is brought about by faith, defining more definitely the nature of our voluntary act. Others call it the “conjugal” union, because it signifies our acceptance of Christ as our loving Lord or Husband. We have preferred to designate it the *saving* union, because a section of our readers need to have this aspect of the Truth pressed upon their notice; and also because it seems to express more than the other terms do.

The manner in which this saving union is brought about may be illustrated from the meaning of the names borne by the first three sons of Jacob. Reuben signifies “See! The Son.” It is as such the Gospel sets forth Christ, and its call is, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), for it is only as we are favoured with spiritual and believing views of Him that spiritual blessings flow into the soul. Simeon signifies “Hearing,” and it is only as we hear the voice of Christ Himself speaking to us through the Gospel that peace comes to our conscience and joy fills the heart. Levi signifies “Joined:” as we see the Son responsively and hear Him believably, we become *connected with Him*. It was well put by Witsuis when he said, “Faith in its actings is the echo or repercussion of the Divine voice speaking to the soul.”

It is only the quickened soul which sees, hears, and receives Christ in a spiritual way. A distressed child’s cleaving to and hanging upon its beloved father with entreaties and expectations of succour, are in consequence of a relation and union between them *prior* to those actings. So it is with the elect sinner: having been joined to Him by the Spirit, he now looks to Christ, lays hold of, embraces, and cleaves unto Him; and thus his saving union is effected. As a woman accepts the marriage proposal of her wooer by yielding herself and all her future interests into his care, so the believer is able to say, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have *committed unto Him* against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12). And again, “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (Song. 2:16)—His by my own consent and acceptance.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom. 8:35). Separation necessarily implies a joining together, for nothing can be “separated” but what was first united. Union with Christ is by the Spirit on His part, and by faith on our part; and both of them are made known *by love*, and this it is which makes the union indissoluble. The Spirit is given to us as the great proof and fruit of Christ’s love to us, and He sheds abroad God’s love in our hearts. The faith which lays hold of Christ for salvation is a “faith which worketh *by love*” (Gal. 5:6), for it is “with the *heart* man believeth unto righteousness” (Rom. 10:10). And nothing can unclasp those mutual embraces. The believer is now united to Christ by his affections, for he loves what Christ loves and hates what He hates. “A Christian is held by his heart rather than by his head” (Thomas Manton).

Vital union takes place at regeneration: in it we were entirely passive, and at the time thereof had no knowledge at all of it. Saving union takes place when the awakened sinner receives Christ as He is offered to him in the Gospel: in it he is active, and has a definite consciousness of what he is doing. As the Israelite of old gave a personal consent to God’s gracious provision by laying his hand on the head of his sacrifice (Lev. 1:4), so the believer rests upon Christ as an all-sufficient Sacrifice for all his sins. Saving union takes place when the returning prodigal falls into the arms of his loving Father in Christ (Luke 15:20); when the fugitive, chased by the avenging law (Num. 35:11, 12) crosses the threshold of the City of Refuge (Heb. 6:18); when the sin-sick soul is able to stretch forth the hand of faith and receive healing from Christ by personal contact with Him (Mark 5:27-29).

The fourth of seven booklets.

