

**SPIRITUAL UNION
AND
COMMUNION**

8. PRACTICAL UNION



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8. Practical Union

What is Divine “salvation?” It is a rescuing or deliverance. From what? From the penalty, power, and presence of sin. How is it effected? By the joint-operations of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. May a real Christian regard himself as a “saved” person? In one sense, yes; in another sense, no. What do you mean? This, that God’s salvation is presented to us in Scripture under three tenses, past, present, and future. There is a real sense in which every Christian has already been saved; there is a real sense in which every Christian is now being saved; and there is a real sense in which the salvation of every Christian on earth is yet future. Every Christian on earth has been saved from the penalty of sin, because Christ suffered it in his stead. But the sinful nature is left within, and though its complete dominion over us has been broken, it is still active and operative, and from its power and defiling effects we need saving.

Now the design of God in saving His people is to recover them from the Fall, to deliver them from its effects, to restore them to their state of happy fellowship with Him. It is true, blessedly true, that the redeemed gain far more through the last Adam than they lost by the first Adam; yet that in nowise conflicts with what we have said in the preceding sentence—the surpassing gain through Christ will come before us in the last chapter [final booklet of this series]. Before the Fall, we, in Adam, were in blissful communion with God: our nature was in tune with His, our joy lay in a ready responsiveness to His will. God and man were then of one accord, each finding delight in the other, yet the difference between the Creator and the creature being suitably sustained by the relation which was

appointed—that of Sovereign and subject.

Only as Sovereign and subject could God and man maintain their relative positions: there must be the exercise of *authority* on the part of the former, and of *submission* on the part of the latter: thereby there was a mutual indwelling of the one and the other—God ruling, man obeying. Such mutual indwelling and concord would daily become more intimate and confident: man increasingly perceiving the exceeding excellency of the commandments he was keeping (and of Him whose nature and will those commandments discovered), and God having increasing delight in the growing intelligence and love by which His subject obeyed. Thus at the beginning, holiness and happiness were made inseparable in the experience of the creature: holiness in walking in complete subjection to his Maker's revealed will, happiness in the joyous fellowship which this secured. Thus, too, were the relative positions and relations of Creator and creature perfectly sustained.

But alas, sin entered: entered by Eve's entertaining the Serpent's suggestion that God's restraints were tyrannical and irksome, and freedom from them being greatly to be desired; culminating in the overt act of rebellious disobedience. In consequence thereof a breach was made: harmony no longer existed between God and man; and happy fellowship which already obtained was broken. Henceforth, God and disobedient man must dwell apart; so Adam and Eve were driven out of paradise. Outside paradise *away from God*, were all their descendants born: "afar off" (Eph. 2:17) are the awful words written over the brow of all the first Adam's offspring, "*alienated from the life of God*" (Eph. 4:18). "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psa. 51:5) is true of all alike; and because this is so "the wicked are *estranged from the womb*" (Psa. 58:3).

How this terrible situation is counteracted by God in the saving of His people we have endeavoured to show in the

preceding chapters [booklets] of this series. Christ was made their Head, and their redemption was entrusted to Him: a union was established between them. First, a mystical union, when they were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. Second, a federal union, whereby Christ should act as their Representative and Surety. Third, a vital union: by the incarnation, when He assumed their nature; and by regeneration, when they became partakers of His nature. Fourth, a saving union, when the soul (previously quickened) exercises faith, lays hold of and cleaves unto Christ. Then is it that the trusting sinner enters into the legal benefits which the Saviour's atonement secured for him: "By Him all that believe are justified from all things" (Acts 13:39). Saving union is the personal acceptance of Christ on His own terms: the penitent heart now rests upon Christ as an all-sufficient sacrifice for all his sins.

A new relation has been entered into by the believer which radically changes the course of his life, and which is to regulate all of his future conduct. He is no longer his own: he has given himself to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5); henceforth to please and honour Him must be his paramount concern. As the wedding, when the knot is tied, is but the beginning of married life, so the soul's surrender to and acceptance of Christ as Lord, is but the commencement of the Christian life. As the bride has turned her back upon all other lovers and solemnly vowed to be faithful to and obey her husband in all things, so the believer has disowned all other lords and promised to be in subjection to Christ alone (Isa. 26:13). As the purpose of marriage is the production of offspring, so we read, "ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be *married* to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should *bring forth fruit* unto God" (Rom. 7:4).

Marriage, then, is a new beginning, the entering into a new order of things, the starting point of *a fresh life*. Before her

marriage the woman, perhaps, was alone in the world; without father or brothers to defend her. She had to look after herself and plan her own career and course.

But now she has taken upon her the marriage-yoke: she has given herself up to the one who loves her more dearly than any other creature, to the one who has won her heart, and who has now assumed the sole responsibility of being her provider and protector. It is now *for her good* to meekly submit to her husband's loving rule (1 Peter 3:1-6), to seek and promote his interests, to adorn the home he has made for her. His will is supreme; her good is his concern; and it is her welfare to act in submission to his wishes. Such is the ideal of married life: on the one hand, love's authority maintained by the head of the home; on the other, love's obedience joyously rendered by the dutiful and devoted wife—a shadowing forth of the relation which exists between the Redeemer and His redeemed, and the new order of things into which the saved soul enters.

Marriage is a means to an end, the making possible of wedded union, with its responsibilities and privileges, its duties, and joys. In like manner, saving union with Christ is a means to an end, the making possible of *the Christian life*, which is to *evidence* the new relationship that has been entered into. In other words, just as the vital union between Christ and the Christian (effected by the Spirit at the new birth) capacitates the soul for a saving union with Christ (accomplished by believing in Him), so that saving union, in turn, makes way for a *practical union* with Him. Thus, at the very outset, the Lord Jesus says to the sin-weary and conscience-burdened sinner who comes to Him for relief, “Take My *yoke* upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls!” (Matt. 11:29). Now a “yoke” is that which harnesses two oxen, that they may walk and work *together*, and the Lord employed this figure to denote the relation now obtaining between Himself

and His people.

In the preceding chapter [booklet on the saving union] we pointed out that one of the main characteristics which distinguishes the saving from the vital union is, that in the latter the soul is *active*, whereas in the former the soul was *passive*. That is to say, in regeneration something was wrought *in* us, but in connection with salvation something is required *of* us, namely, our voluntary act of surrendering to, laying hold of, and cleaving unto Christ. So is it in connection with the *practical* union which exists between the Saviour and the saved: He does not place the yoke upon us, but says “*Take My yoke upon you.*” It is a voluntary and conscious act upon *our* part. The figure is a very plain one. Previously the ox roamed at large in the fields, but now it is no longer free to please itself—it is subservient to the will of its owner and master. The “yoke,” then, speaks of *subjection*, and thus it is with the believer: he has yielded himself to the claims of Christ, bowed to His Lordship, and entered into the place of submission, to be directed and used of Him.

But, alas, we now witness very little in actual realization of what we have said above, either in the natural or the spiritual sphere. The “yoke” is looked upon as something which is objectionable. Our lot is cast in a day when the spirit of lawlessness is rife on every hand, when any restraints are regarded as irksome and repellent. The equality of the sexes, the woman’s rights, the repudiation of the man’s headship, is being proclaimed in almost every quarter. The modern wife is “willing to be led” (providing the leading suits her whims), but refuses to be ruled; the idea of meekly *obeying* her husband is altogether foreign to her disposition and ideas. And, my readers, *that* is only an adumbration on the lower plane of what now obtains so widely in the religious sphere. Multitudes profess to be resting on the finished work of Christ, but they *refuse* His “yoke;” they want to be saved from Hell, but they do

not want His commandments; and the two cannot be separated.

In days gone by preachers frequently made it plain that “No cross, no crown;” alas, the pulpit is now pandering to a self-indulging generation. But God has not changed, nor has He lowered the claims of His holiness. Christ *must be followed* if ever we are to arrive at the Place where He has gone; and to “follow” Christ is to take upon us *His* “yoke”—to enter the same position of servitude and subjection which He did. Christ “pleased not Himself” (Rom. 15:3), and His imperative word is, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matt. 16:24). Christ lived in full submission to the revealed will of God, and He left us an “example” that we should “follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). We must “suffer *with Him*” if ever we are to be “glorified *together*” (Rom. 8:17).

“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). Here again is brought before us the *practical* union which exists between Christ and His people. If there is to be true fellowship there must first be harmony, oneness of accord in mind and will. All real communion is based upon union, and as the “*walk together*” intimates, it is not the vital or the saving union which is there in view, but the practical—the actual living out of the Christian life. And the Christian life (alas that the life of the average Christian falls so far short) is summed up in one word: “For to me to live *is Christ*” (Phil. 1:21). But Christ is holy, and He will not walk with us in any of the by-paths of unrighteousness: “For what fellowship hath Righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath Light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?” (2 Cor. 6:14, 15).

Just as the ideal married life can only be maintained by the exercise of love’s authority on the one hand and love’s obedience on the other, so it is in the Christian life. “If ye love Me,” says Christ, “keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

Obedience is not only the prime condition of practical union and communion with Christ, but it is of its very essence, for only thus is restored the relation which existed between God and His creature before sin entered—love’s rule and love’s submission. Before the Fall there was perfect complacency on both sides, Creator and creature dwelling in each other with unalloyed satisfaction, as the “very good” of Genesis 1:31 clearly denotes. Yet that mutual indwelling of God in man and man in God was *not procured* by man’s keeping God’s commandments, rather was that the channel of its outgoing and conscious realization; and only thus could they maintain their relative positions of Sovereign and servant.

We repeat what was said in an earlier paragraph: the grand design in salvation is to bring us back again into communion with God in Christ: not merely into a nominal communion, but into a real, intelligent, and joyous one. But “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”—walk together in a way of holy and spiritual fellowship? No indeed, for *that* we must be of one mind and will with Christ Himself. For *that* we must receive His commandments into our hearts, be well-pleased with them, and live under their controlling influence. “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; but if we *walk in the light*, as He is in the light, *we have fellowship* one with another” (1 John 1:5-7).

“And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:21-23). Having “*turned unto the Lord*” these young converts were now exhorted to “*cleave unto the Lord:*” that is, since a saving

union with Christ had been effected, they were bidden to “with purpose of heart” maintain a practical union and communion with Him. To “cleave unto the Lord” is to live a life of dependence upon and devotedness unto Him: having “come” to Him, they are now to diligently “follow” Him, or “to walk even as He walked” (1 John 2:6). Only by the continued exercise of faith, a bold profession of His name, and obedience to His commands, can we “follow on to know the Lord” (Hosea. 6:3).

Practical union with Christ consists in the exercise of *obedience*, and that is impossible till there has been a saving union. The only kind of obedience which is acceptable to God is evangelical obedience, that is “the obedience *of faith*” (Rom. 16:26)—an obedience which springs from faith, which is animated by faith. There can be no true obedience before faith, for “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6), and therefore without faith it is impossible to obey Him. Faith is (from our side) the bond of union which unites with Christ, and obedience is the fruit of that believing union: see Romans 7:4 again—all “fruit” before marriage is bastard. Our persons must first be accepted in Christ before our services can be pleasing to God. All the good works recorded in Hebrews 11 were the fruits or obedience of faith.

Though inseparably connected, faith and obedience are quite distinct. Faith is the principle, obedience is the product; faith is the cause, obedience is the effect; faith is the root, obedience is the fruit. By faith we receive and own Christ as our rightful Lord; by obedience we regulate our conduct according to His commands. By faith a saving union with Christ is effected, by obedience a practical union with Him is maintained. “He that hath My commandments and *keepeth* them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him” (John 14:21): Christ only *manifests* Himself in the intimacies of His love to those who are treading the path of obedience. A striking

illustration of this is seen by a comparison of Genesis 18 and 19: “*the LORD* appeared unto” Abraham (Gen. 18:1) accompanied by two angels, manifesting Himself in human form. But only the “two angels” came to Lot (Gen. 19:1), who was not walking in practical union with the Lord. O how much we miss by allowing self-will to dominate and regulate us.

There is another spiritual grace which is inseparably connected with faith: “Faith which *worketh by love*” (Gal. 5:6). The reality and sincerity of faith is only evidenced by the presence and operations of love. Faith is the hand which works, but love is the power that moves it. Faith is the feet walking, but love is the energy that stirs them into action; hence we find the Psalmist declaring, “I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt *enlarge my heart*” (119:32). Now as there can be no saving union with Christ without faith, so there can be no practical union with Him without love. Love must be answered by love: “My son, give Me thine heart” (Prov. 23:26) is our loving Lord’s call. Love is the mainspring in the soul which moves every faculty and grace, and therefore is love denominated “the *fulfilling of the law*” (Rom. 13:10).

True repentance also flows from love. The warmer our love to God, the stronger will be our hatred of sin, as contrary to Him. The sweeter the fellowship of Christ to our hearts, the more bitter the realization of our offenses against Him. This is that “*godly sorrow*” which worketh repentance to salvation “not to be repented of” (2 Cor. 7:10): it is a sorrow issuing from a heart that truly loves the Lord, and which is grieved for having displeased and dishonoured Him. Love mourns the breaking of fellowship and the hiding of the Lord’s countenance. Then it is that the agonized soul cries, “The Enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead. Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed

within me; my heart within me is desolate. I remember the days of old . . . I stretch forth my hands unto Thee: my soul thirsteth after Thee, as a thirsty land. Selah. Hear me speedily, O LORD: my spirit faileth: hide not Thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit” (Psa. 143:3-7).

In what has been said above we have sought to indicate the relation between the saving and the practical union between the believer and Christ; what practical union actually consists of, and how it is to be restored when broken—by true repentance and humble confession. As this branch of our subject is so much neglected today, as it so intimately concerns the glory of Christ, and the wellbeing of our souls, some more paragraphs thereon seem called for.

Our practical union and communion with Christ grows out of our having cleaved to Him for salvation. A union to Christ by faith is designed by God to issue in a practical conformity to the image of His Son. We are “delivered out of the hand of our enemies” (sin, Satan, the world, the curse of the law, the wrath of God) in order that we might “serve (be in subjection to and obey) Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life” (Luke 1:74, 75). God does not save us in order that we may henceforth indulge in the lusts of the flesh without fear of fatal consequences; but He brings us to Christ in order that we should take His “yoke” upon us, and live for His pleasure and glory. Our initial salvation is but a means to an end: to melt our hard hearts, that out of gratitude we may gladly render Him love’s obedience, and be the monuments and witnesses of His transforming power.

The union which exists between the Redeemer and the redeemed is not a simple, but a compound one: that which binds us to Him is not a single strand, but made up of several combined together. In a previous chapter [booklet] we likened the bond of union between the believer and Christ to a golden chain, possessing a number of distinct links, yet inseparably

welded together. That chain is let down all the way from God Himself, through Christ, to each of His people on earth. As the hand of faith lays hold of each separate link, the one immediately above it is revealed in turn. We have followed that chain, link by link, as it descended from above; but in our actual experience, *we*, of necessity, apprehend them in their inverse order—grasping first the lowest link and then ascending higher. From the position we now occupy, we can only discern the higher links by means of the lower. Let us try to make this fact yet plainer.

It is only by means of our *practical* union with Christ that we have personal evidence of our *saving* union with Him—if I am not in personal subjection to Him, walking with Him in the path of obedience to God’s revealed will, then I have no Scriptural warrant for supposing that *my* sins have been pardoned. Again; it is only by means of our saving union with Christ that we obtain evidence of our vital oneness with Him—if I have not forsaken all other claimants to my heart, surrendered to Christ’s Lordship, and put my whole trust in His sacrifice for my acceptance with God, then I have no Scriptural warrant to conclude that I have ever been born again. Once more; it is only by means of our vital union with Christ that we obtain evidence of our federal and mystical oneness with Him—if I cannot clearly perceive (by means of new sensibilities, new desires, new purposes and efforts) that I have passed from death unto life spiritually, then I have no Scriptural warrant to believe that Christ acted as *my* Surety.

From what has just been pointed out it should be quite evident that we are now treating of *the most important aspect* of our many-sided subject—the most important so far as the peace of our souls is concerned, and that we were fully justified in devoting some more paragraphs to its specific consideration. To be deceived at *this* point is a most serious thing, for it is very liable to have *fatal* consequences. If it is only by means of

practical union and communion with Christ that I can rightly determine whether or not I have any *saving* union with Him, then how it behooves me to seriously and carefully inquire in to my present *practical relations* to the Lord Jesus, and make sure whether I have really taken His yoke upon me, whether I am truly in subjection to His will and am being conformed to His holy image; whether it is my natural inclinations or His exhortations which are really regulating my daily life.

Now taking them in their deepest meaning and fullest scope, all the exhortations of Christ (expressing His claims upon us and His will for us) may be summed up in two words: “*Come unto Me*” and “*Abide in Me.*” The first of these calls is what we have to comply with in order to become *savingly* united to Christ; the second is what we must heed if *practical* union with Him is to be secured and maintained. To “*come to*” Christ implies the turning of our backs upon all that is opposed to Him, the abandoning of every idol and all other dependencies, the heart going out to Him in full surrender and trustful confidence. To “*come to*” Christ denotes the turning of the whole soul to a whole Christ, as Prophet, Priest, and King: it is the mind, heart, and will being supernaturally drawn to Him so as to love, trust and serve Him.

“*Coming to*” Christ is a far, far different thing from raising your hand to be prayed for, or coming forward and taking the evangelist’s hand, or signing some “*decision*” card, or uniting with some “*church,*” or any other of the “*many inventions*” (Eccl. 7:29) of men. Before any one will or can truly come to Christ, the understanding must be supernaturally enlightened, the heart must be supernaturally changed, the stubborn will must be supernaturally broken. The things of this world have the first place in the affections of the natural man: the pleasing of self is his paramount concern. Christ is too holy to suit the natural man’s love of sin; His claims are too exacting to please his selfish heart; His terms of discipleship (Luke

14:26, 27) too severe to suit his fleshly ways. The unregenerate *will not* submit to His Lordship.

Christ must be crowned Lord of all, or He will not be Lord at all. He will brook no rival. There must be the complete heart-renunciation of all that stands in competition with Him: whatever pertains to the flesh must be renounced. The “cross” is the badge of Christian discipleship: not a golden one worn on the body, but the principle of self-denial and self-sacrifice controlling the heart. We must come to Christ as Prophet, to be instructed by Him; as Priest, whose atonement and intercession are to be relied upon; as King, to be ruled by Him. Coming to Christ is a going out of self, so as no longer to rest on anything in self. It is the will bowing to His Lordship, accepting His yoke, taking up the cross, and following Him without reserve. O how very few really do this! To the great majority Christ has to say “*Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life*” (John 5:40).

Now as a Scriptural “coming to Christ” is a vastly different thing from how it is represented from the majority of church-pulpits and mission-platforms today, so “Serving Christ” is something entirely different from the popular idea which now prevails. That we are saved to serve is a truth writ large in the Word: “Ye turned to God from idols, to *serve* the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9). But serving God *does not mean* that, primarily and mainly, we are called upon to be “*personal workers*” and “*soul winners*:” we are to serve *Christ*, not our fellows. What is a *servant*? He is one that is in subjection to a master: he is one who sinks his own desires and ideas, and carries out the orders of the one who employs him. A “servant” is one who is in the place of subjection, of obedience, regulating his conduct according to the will of another. And *that* is what Christian service consists of: submitting to the authority of Christ, doing His bidding, walking according to His commandments, seeking to please Him in all things—

whether He appoints us to plough the ground, mine coal, scrub floors, or preach the Word.

Now *that* is exactly what *practical union* with Christ consists of: it is being taken into His blessed *service*: walking together with Him in the path of obedience to God, with our hearts, minds and wills one with His. Practical union with Christ is but the *wearing of* the yoke which we *took upon us* when we came to Him for salvation. As the married life is the actual carrying out of the solemn vows by the husband and wife at the time of their wedded union, so the Christian life is the maintenance of that relationship which was entered into by the soul when it surrendered to the claims of Christ. At conversion we passed through the “strait gate” of full surrender to Christ, henceforth to tread the “narrow way” that leadeth unto Life for the rest of our earthly pilgrimage. Having come to Christ our duty and our privilege now is to “abide in Him,” for only thus will we discharge our responsibilities, promote our wellbeing, and glorify Him.

The very essence of the Christian life is *to continue as we began*: all spiritual declension, all backsliding, is due to failure at this point. “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so walk ye in Him*” (Col. 2:6). It is in His essential character as *the Lord* that the world refuses to “receive” Christ Jesus. Like Pharaoh of old, the unregenerate still say “Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?” (Exod. 5:2). Like the Jews during the days of His flesh, the unconverted declare “We *will not* have this man to *reign over us*” (Luke 19:14). But those who are drawn to Him by the Father (John 6:44) throw down the weapons of their warfare against Him, and give themselves up to be ruled by Him. Christ is “the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that *obey Him*” (Heb. 5:9). Having surrendered to His claims and received Christ Jesus as “the Lord,” the Christian is now to submit to His sceptre: just so far as we do so, is a practical union with Him maintained by

us.

“To whom coming, as unto a living Stone” (1 Peter 2:4). Let it be duly noted that this is predicated of the Lord’s people, and that it is not simply said they “came” to Christ, but “to whom *coming!*” We are to “come to Christ” not once and for all, but frequently, daily; in other words, we are *to continue as we began*. Christ is the only one who can minister to our deepest needs, and to Him we must constantly turn for the supply of them. In our felt emptiness, we must draw from “His fullness” (John 1:16); in our weakness we must turn to Him for strength; in our ignorance, we must apply to Him for wisdom. In our falls into sin, we must seek from Him a fresh cleansing. *All* that we need for time and eternity is stored up for us in Christ. If we have backslidden, let us “repent and do the *first works*” (Rev. 2:5)—cast ourselves upon Christ anew, as self-confessed sinners, seeking His mercy and forgiveness, renewing our covenant to serve and obey.

“Abide in Me, and I in you” (John 15:4): we must cultivate fellowship with Christ—by subordinating our hearts, minds and wills to Him—if He is to have fellowship with us; for a holy Christ will not commune with any who follow a course of unholiness. The same order is laid down again in the next verse, “I am the Vine, ye are the branches: he that (1). abideth in Me and (2). I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without Me ye can do nothing.” Very searching is this: we need to lay it to heart, and translate into earnest daily prayer. Then the Lord added, “If ye abide in Me and *My words abide in you*” (verse 7). Here we are told *how* our practical union with Christ is maintained, namely, by our cherishing His words in our hearts, meditating upon them in our minds, submitting to them with our wills, being regulated by them in our actions. Thus, we “abide” in Christ by being in subjection to Him, by obeying Him.

“If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love;

even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love" (John 15:10). How blessedly this illustrates His declaration "when He putteth forth His own sheep, *He goeth before them*" (John 10:4), and again, "leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps." Christ requires nought from His followers but what He first submitted to Himself. Christ subordinated Himself in all things to God: submitting Himself to God, committing Himself to God. He did not seek His own glory, do His own will, save His own life, plead His own cause, or avenge His own wrong. Self was never a consideration with Him: His only concern was obedience to the Father's commandments, the promotion of the Father's glory, abiding in the Father's love. "I delight *to do Thy will*, O My God" (Psa. 40:8) summed up His life.

Christ walked in perfect unison with God. He was of one mind and heart with Him. He had no separate interest from His Father, and no separate joy. His declaration "I and My Father are one" applied as truly to His human walk on earth as it did to the unity of the Divine nature. Whatever touched the Father, equally and in the same way affected Him. "The zeal of *Thine* house," He said, "hath eaten *Me* up." He pleased not Himself, but as it is written "The reproaches of them that reproached *Thee*, fell on *Me*." There was perfect harmony of sentiment, unity of desire, oneness in aim between Him and the Father. At the beginning it was "I must be about My Father's business." In Gethsemane it was "Father, Thy will be done." At the finish it was "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." And to His people He says, "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in *My* love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in *His* love."

It was by the keeping of God's commandments that Christ abode in the Father and the Father in Him. Of course, that mutual indwelling never could, through all His perfect lifelong obedience, become more full and complete, in principle and

essence, than it was before the incarnation. But to His human consciousness, and in His human experience, the sense of that fellowship must have grown more intense and more precious, as His doing of God's will went on and on to its terrible yet triumphant close. Among the things that the man Christ Jesus learned about obedience through the things which He suffered, must have been the fact that subjection to God carried with it a mighty power to promote and intensify the indwelling of God in man and man in God. And though He learned the griefs and pain which such obedience as He had undertaken to render involved, yet He learned too of its compensating pleasure and joy of abiding in the Father's love.

Let, then, *our* keeping of God's commandments be, in our measure (by the Spirit helping us), like Christ's. In our case, like His, submission to the Divine authority may involve a bitter cup to be drunk and a heavy cross to be borne; for, like Him, we have to learn obedience *by suffering*. But let the obedience we thus learn be of the same sort as His: the giving up of our own wills, always, everywhere. Then, and only then, shall we find how "good and perfect and acceptable is the will of God" (Rom. 12:2). We abide in Christ, then, when our will is merged in His will, when His thoughts become our thoughts, when our ways are His. It is only as we enter in a practical way into His mind and heart, that He enters, experimentally, into ours. This is the secret of rest and repose, of peace and joy, of fruitfulness and usefulness.

That our practical union with Christ, our "abiding" in Him, consists of and is maintained by *obedience*, is also clear from "And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him" (1 John 3:24). There can be no such mutual indwelling if there is on our part disobedience to the Divine commandments. A course of sinning is altogether incompatible with communion with the Holy One. To abide in Christ is to have our wills merged in His, as His was in the Father's. Thus

it is a combination of outward movement and inward repose: the feet acting, the hands busy, yet the heart resting in Him. It is to think, feel, and act as Christ does with regard to God and His Law, sin and righteousness, holiness and grace; to entertain the same sentiments with reference to all things.

It only remains for us to glance at another aspect of practical union, and that is, as it concerns *our dealings with the Lord's people*. As the mystical and spiritual union which exists between Christ and His people is evidenced by their practical communion with Him, so the mystical and spiritual union which exists between Christians is to be manifested by a *practical* communion with them. There is a blessed union existing between the saints, as saints, which nothing can sever. They have been made partakers of the same new and spiritual birth; they are partakers of the same heavenly calling (Heb. 3:1); they are partakers of like precious faith (2 Peter 1:1). One God is their Father, one Christ is their Lord, one Spirit is their Comforter. They are members of one body, and they have one hope of their calling. Therefore are they exhorted to be "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). So eminently was that unity evidenced at the beginning we read, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul" (Acts 4:32). How should it be otherwise, seeing that "They continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42).

But alas, what an entirely different state of affairs do we now behold in Christendom: we will not say among the Lord's own people, but among those bearing His name. What division, what strife, what jealousy! What sectarian walls and barriers exclude some of Christ's sheep from other members of His flock! "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7) is the Divine injunction. That does not mean "receive" into church-

fellowship (the Roman saints were already in *that* relationship: Rom. 12:4-8), but “receive” each Christian brother and sister *into your hearts*, so that you interest yourself in their welfare, and do all in your power to promote their temporal and eternal interests. But today, Baptists, for the most part, will “receive” none but a “Baptist,” the Presbyterians none but a “Presbyterian,” those known as the “Brethren” none but one who is “identified” with them. That is one reason why—as a protest against sectarianism—the writer remains unattached.

O what a lack of brotherly kindness, tender sympathy, and Christian affection now obtains. Instead of bearing each other’s burdens, some seem most pleased when they can add to them. O for grace to sink our petty differences, and seek a practical union and communion with the whole family of God; loving those whom the Lord loves, and walking in affection with those whom He has redeemed with His precious blood. But this too often calls for self-denial and self-sacrifice—*not* sacrificing God’s Truth, not sacrificing any Christian principle, but mortifying our carnal pride which loves to have the pre-eminence. O for grace to “know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary” (Isa. 50:4), to “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” (Rom. 12:15), to “lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees” (Heb. 12:12). If we do not, Christ will yet say to us, “Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye *did it not to Me*” (Matt. 25:45).

What a word is this, “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: FOR we are members one of another” (Eph. 4:25). What a *motive* is here presented for Christians being truthful toward their fellow-Christians! By lying to one another they *injure* the union and communion which the members of the mystical Body of Christ have with each other in Him! As another has said “If I lie to my brother, I do the same thing spiritually, as if I used my right hand to stab

my left, or as if I used my eye to thrust my leg into a dirty ditch.” What high and holy ground is this! O what a spirit of loving communion there should be—*manifested* in a PRACTICAL way—between those who are united to Christ their common Head, and in Him to one another. The Lord be pleased to grant all-needed grace to both writer and reader to act accordingly.

The fifth of seven booklets.

