

## VITAL UNION WITH CHRIST

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### Chapter Four -

## ACTUAL UNION WITH CHRIST

**"LET not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members, as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; But yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead; and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God; For sin shall not have dominion over you, For ye are not under the law but under grace."** (Verses 12 to 23).

Here we touch the point in this great argument where the believer's union with CHRIST actually affects his daily life, and effects the one grand result, definite holy living. This is a distinct advance on any previous step or stage of the argument.

We reach here the supreme point of application. The judicial union shows us how GOD construes our relation to CHRIST as one with Him before the Law; the vital presents that oneness as implying also a sharing of His Life, and its SPIRIT of power; the practical union teaches how we are to construe our union with Him as to the confidence it inspires.

And, now, all that has been said reaches its grand application: what is to be the actual effect on my life? If the whole passage be carefully examined it will be found again that at least seven answers are given, for in every part of this argument we find a complete seven-foldness, which strangely marks it and stamps it.

As in the previous section the great word was RECKON, in this, the great word is YIELD.

First, Negative - Yield not allegiance to sin, the old master. Yield not your members as instruments of sin.

Second, Positive - Yield yourself and your members unto GOD. Yield in faith, to the enablement of Grace. Yield, by practical surrender to CHRIST as Master. Yield by receiving from the heart His teaching.

And so claim, possess, enjoy, the full gift of eternal life.

It is also plain and emphatic that the true way not to yield to sin is to yield unto GOD. Man would naturally say: Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body, neither yield ye your members unto sin; but resist sin, and fight desperately at every point. But the Spirit says not so: the most successful fight against Sin and Satan is the actual surrender of faith and obedience to the new Master. The soul is never strong in the attitude of simple resistance. Overcome evil with

good. Occupy yourself with GOD, and displace evil by good. This is the idea of Chalmers in his "*Expulsive Power of a New Affection.*"

1. I am to disown henceforth all allegiance to sin as my master.
2. To withhold my members from all service of sin as his instruments.
3. To yield myself unto GOD and my members as instruments.
4. To trust myself to the enabling power of Grace.
5. To accept CHRIST as my Master and practically obey Him.
6. To receive from the heart the mould of GOD's teaching.
7. To claim and enjoy in all its fulness the gift of Eternal Life.

At every step here it is plain that actual victory over sin is contemplated, and positive holiness, exhibited in character and conduct. I am to think of myself as GOD thinks of me, and make the judicial and vital union with CHRIST a reality, by practically counting upon GOD's power and love, and actually exchanging the Sovereignty of sin for the Mastership of CHRIST.

This point in the argument can best be understood by the change from standing to state. Standing represents our judicial position before GOD, condemnation exchanged for justification, and alienation for reconciliation. GOD counts us no longer sinners and enemies, but gives us a new standing as sons and heirs.

Our state must correspond with our standing. Being sons we must exhibit His image and likeness; being heirs, we must be prepared for our inheritance. We saw that a judicial acquittal implies no necessary actual change in character: it is simply an act of sovereign mercy and grace - a declarative act. But GOD cannot compromise with sin or tolerate evil in us, and justification would be a bargain with evil doing if it did not contemplate and eventuate in sanctification as an actual state.

GOD never, therefore, justifies without sanctifying. He first counts or reckons us holy in CHRIST and then proceeds to make us holy, until at last we are presented before the presence of His glory, without rebuke, or spot, or wrinkle, blame or blemish, unrebukable and perfect. We must remember, therefore, the calling of sons and the destiny of heirs and keep before us that great injunction and invitation: "**Be ye Holy, for, I am holy.**"

Let not sin therefore reign; this implies both a privilege and a power to resist the further sovereignty of sin. Do not longer allow sin to rule over you; this would be a mockery of my helplessness if I am impotent to resist.

Sin is here impersonated as a tyrannical master, once obeyed and served, but whose reign is now at an end and his power broken.

How am I to meet his demands and maintain my position of resistance? That is the first practical question.

The answer is:

By my identification with CHRIST. We have seen how the whole life of CHRIST as the Last Adam was representative, and how every great crisis in that life has its encouraging lesson for us. Let us consider His Temptation in its bearing on this subject. Forty days at the beginning of CHRIST's public life strangely correspond with another forty days at its close. One represents the complete victory over the Devil and the other the glorious conquest over death.

Why was CHRIST tempted? not, surely, for His own sake, but that, having suffered being tempted, He might be able to succor them that are now tempted; so that every tempted soul may now come boldly unto the Throne of Grace, knowing that we have a great High Priest, who knows our infirmities, and has compassion on the ignorant and them that are out of the way, etc.

To compare Adam's Temptation with CHRIST's will show that they were strangely identical. Each was an appeal to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. And it is plain that our Lord met the Tempter, not on His own account, but as our representative, the Last Adam. Therefore, everything about that experience has a significance for us: the methods of Satanic approach, the methods of Messianic resistance, and the final complete victorious issue, are all on record for our learning and encouragement.

For example, we learn how subtle are Satan's wiles. He suggested to CHRIST unlawful ways of gratifying and satisfying natural and sinless cravings. Having no sinful propensities to appeal to, in the perfect man, he addressed such innocent desires as hunger, and the yearning for self-vindication, for the speedy accomplishment of His mission, etc. But the ways he suggested to attain these lawful ends would have compromised faith, dependence on GOD and self-surrender; they would have exhibited a lack of confidence in GOD's Fatherhood and Providence, or presumption in an unwarranted exposure to danger, or an attempt to fight GOD's war with the Devil's weapons.

Whatever the exact character of CHRIST's temptation, it is enough to know that He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin, and that, having suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted.

It is particularly to be noticed that He successfully resisted the Devil and finally actually repulsed him by the simple use of the Word of GOD.

His sole attitude was resistance: He stood firm, and never came into close quarters with the Tempter as in a deadly grapple or violent wrestle. He calmly stood like a man with folded arms who fearlessly looks a foe in the face and defies him; and the only weapon He used was a text of Scripture - the sword of the Spirit which He thrust at Satan, and by which He at last drove him back.

Moreover, CHRIST's conquest was representative. In His victory every believer is a victor, and for him also, so far as he is in CHRIST, Satan is a vanquished foe. He knows that no temptation ever befalls him but such as is common to man, such as for him CHRIST underwent, such as, in

CHRIST, saints of all ages have met and resisted.

The believer is to meet Satan, therefore, as CHRIST did - folding his arms, take his stand, look him in the face, defy him, and answer all his subtleties with a word of Scripture. He is to be perfectly assured in advance that Satan's power is forever broken. One of the Spirit's convictions wrought in men is that the Prince of this world is judged, not is to be judged, but is already judged.

CHRIST met him, defeated him, drove him back, put him to rout, and Satan knows that his sceptre is wrested from his grasp by a mightier than he and his empire shattered. He will boast and seek to intimidate us by his threats, but we are to understand that his power over us is only so far as we concede him control. We may allow ourselves to be taken captive of him at his will, and so fall into his snare; but if we put on the whole armor of GOD and simply stand, we shall withstand in the evil day and, having done all, still stand unmoved, using only the same sword of the Spirit as CHRIST used.

This we emphasize because of a common notion, most misleading and unscriptural, that Satan is practically omnipotent, and that, like some giant, he holds and carries us as helpless babes - that, like some resistless lion, he prowls about seeking whom he may devour, and if we come into contact with him he will tear us in pieces and there will be none to deliver; or, again, men talk of tidal-waves of temptation that sweep them off their feet and carry them whither they will. All this is, I believe, a devil's lie, invented to put us more helplessly at Satan's mercy.

It is a remarkable fact that, in three cases of New Testament reference to Satan, beside the two accounts of our Lord's temptation, we are distinctly taught that all we have to do is to stand. James, who has so much to say about temptation, writes, "**Submit yourselves therefore to God: Resist the Devil and he will flee from you,**" 4:7.

Notice this language: Resist and he will flee. How does this comport with current notions about Satan's irresistible power over men. Can a weak and puny babe resist a giant, and drive him back by simple resistance? If you resist a tidal-wave, will it flee? will it not rather be you that flee?

Turn now to the testimony of Peter: "**Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world**" (I Peter 5:8, 9).

Here the Devil is represented as a lion, prowling about, roaring, and looking for his prey; but so far from hinting that any saint is absolutely at his mercy, how positive is the teaching that all we have to do is to keep watchful, maintain a holy sobriety, and take the attitude of resistance. We are to keep vigilant lest we be taken unawares in subtle snares; we are to keep sober, lest we lose power to stand firm and maintain the attitude of resistance; but here again we are plainly taught that Satan can do nothing with a child of GOD who watches his movements, keeps prayerful, and stands firm and strong in CHRIST.

And we are encouraged to remember that other tempted saints are daily meeting and, by the same grace, resisting this great adversary. If such scriptures teach anything, it is that Satan has

no power over us against our will to compel us to sin. He can do nothing with us except as we concede to him power over us.

The apostle John is no less explicit. In a part of his first Epistle, which is given to the warning against the power of evil spirits, and especially the arch enemy of GOD and man, he uses language as remarkable as any in the New Testament (I John 4:4). Here the victory is represented as an accomplished fact, and every disciple is taught that in himself there dwells One who is greater than all these evil spirits that are in the world. The saint is a fortress, held and commanded by the Divine SPIRIT, and no enemy can prevail against Him. **"Ye are of God little children and have overcome them - the spirits of evil; because greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world."**

There is one passage in Paul's writings which at first seems to give color to the idea that in defeating Satan we must at least consent to a deadly hand-to-hand grapple (Ephesians 6:10-18). Here we are told that our wrestling is not against flesh and blood only, but against the whole hierarchy of fallen angels.

But let us read further and see how we are to meet these foes. **"Strong in the Lord and in the power of His might**, we have only to **"withstand"** - notice the repetition of this word **"that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil... able to withstand in the evil day... having done all, to stand."** And so he concludes: **"Stand therefore."** GOD has provided an armor of resistance, covering the disciple from head to foot; and clothed in that panoply he cannot be overcome. When Satan hurls his most terrible weapons, his fiery darts, the shield of faith needs only to be held up to receive them, and they are quenched, and the one and only offensive weapon represented as to be employed is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of GOD.

I am, therefore, not to yield to Satan, but calmly, resolutely, to resist and dispute at every point his claims and advances.

But in the Word of GOD we are never left to the negative; the positive is always added. We are to withhold our tongues from filthiness and foolish talking and jesting, and use them for ministering grace to the hearer. We are to put off all that ill becomes a child of GOD, but put on whatsoever is holy and beautiful in temper and conduct.

Let us look now at the positive teaching of the Word. We are not to be content with resistance; there is a positive persistence - a persevering endeavor, a running a race, etc.

**"Present your bodies a living sacrifice . . . Be not conformed . . . but be ye transformed"** (Romans 12). The only hope of not being conformed to this world is that I am transformed. I shall vainly seek not to yield to Satan if I do not actually yield to GOD. I must have a service of some sort to employ me, and if it be not GOD's it will be the Devil's. If no man can serve two masters, neither can any man serve none. Idleness is service to the Devil. The only way to know that I am strong is to use my strength; the use of it both makes one conscious of it and increases it.

This lesson is taught here and elsewhere so beautifully that we may well stop to learn it. Let us

look at it, first, in its relations to obedience to GOD; second, as to soundness of doctrine, and third, as to consistency of life.

Here we meet a very emphatic command: "**Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.**"

Here is a command, a motive, an encouragement. We are not under law, but under grace. Law enjoins, but does not enable. It puts before us a standard, but gives no power to obey and overcome. Grace still puts before us a high and holy standard, abating not a jot or tittle of the high claims of obedience, but it adds gracious energy, strength, enabling power. To that enabling power we are to entrust ourselves to do and bear the whole will of GOD.

We are to accept this grace as the guaranty for obedience and conformity to GOD. And while it makes us strong to resist Satan and sin, it is to make us equally strong to receive and obey the known will of GOD. Our body is the temple of GOD. Let Him occupy and consecrate His own Temple, and let every part of it be sacredly given up to his inhabitation.

Again, the Apostle teaches us to yield ourselves to GOD's holy teaching (v. 17). "**But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine [teaching] which was delivered you.**" The figure or form seems to be that of a matrix or mould, such as is used to give plastic clay or wax, or molten metal, a desired shape. GOD has a definite mould of teaching and so has the Devil, and we are carefully to distinguish between them, and beware to what sort of doctrine we submit ourselves.

GOD's great matrix of character is His Word. If we get thoroughly acquainted with that, and fully yield ourselves to its influence, we shall take on its whole impression until we grow to be scriptural believers. That Word is to be the final arbiter in every controversy: To the law and to the Testimony.

One of the subtlest devices of the devil is to offer us a type of teaching that is plausible and pleasing to the natural heart, and recommends itself by the fact that many professed believers accept it - nay, it is even outwardly and in some things conformed to the Word of GOD, but is really unscriptural in its essence; it leaves out, if it does not contradict - vital truths.

Dr. A. J. Gordon used to say that a certain popular preacher was a first-class preacher of the secondary truths of our holy faith, but that his preaching entirely lacked the primary truths, such as atonement by blood, Regeneration by the Spirit, etc.

If you submit yourself to unscriptural teaching, however recommended by illustrious names, you will take its impress and begin to doubt the verities of religion. One of the marks by which you may know Satan's mould of doctrine is that it leaves doubt instead of faith. He leads men to think the Gospel mould is narrow and cramped, that it may do for women and children and small men, for ignorance, superstition and credulity, but not for the intelligent and wise and great. And so people, who once believed, learn to doubt their beliefs and believe their doubts, if they do not go further and hold beliefs positively opposed to the divine teaching.

Now, the one rule for a disciple is to devoutly study his Bible and yield himself to its teaching.

In other departments men know in order to believe; in GOD's school we must believe and obey in order fully to know, for it is only as we practically test this mould of teaching by conformity to it, that we actually learn its perfection. But to all who thus test it, by daily conformity and prayerful obedience, it becomes supremely satisfactory. One becomes more and more eager to know what it teaches and obey all its commands. Obedience is found to be delight and the organ of clearer vision.

GOD's Word is found and eaten and, like food, gives both joy and strength.

In the Epistle to the Colossians Paul very beautifully shows us how much the consistency and beauty of a Godly life depends on this perpetual and prayerful subjection to GOD - Chapter 3.

The Epistle is a sort of commentary on these three chapters in Romans. In the first two chapters the union of the Believer with CHRIST is presented in its judicial and vital aspects; and then, at the third chapter, the practical and actual begin to be put before us: "**If ye then be risen with Christ,**" etc.

Note the following injunctions, all based upon the fact that we are one with CHRIST in death and resurrection life:

1. **Seek those things which are above;** i.e., look up to your risen Lord.
2. **Set your affection on things above;** i.e., mount up and look down on earth from Heaven.
3. **Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth;** i.e., live there and let what is down here die.
4. **Put off all these:**
5. **Put on therefore... above all these things put on charity.**
6. **Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.**
7. **Let the peace of God rule.**
8. **Be ye thankful.**
9. **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.**
10. **Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.**

Here we have ten general exhortations, all based on the argument in chapters 1 and 2.

Upon two of these exhortations we may fix our thought: "**Put off.**" "**Put on.**"

At first we meet a seeming paradox: Paul says ye have put off the old man and yet he says put off all these; and again ye have put on the new man, and yet adds put on, etc., and, stranger still, he makes the fact that we have put off and put on the reason for putting off and putting on. But now ye also put off all these, seeing that ye have put off; ye have put on, therefore put on.

How shall we reconcile these contradictions?

1. We must make actually true what is judicially true and let our state correspond with our standing. Ye have died judicially, mortify therefore your members - be dead actually. Judicially ye have put off the old man and put on the new man, now practically and actually put off and put on.

2. But it is, perhaps, a fuller and clearer explanation to note just what we are said to have put off and put on, and what we are bidden to put off and put on. Ye have put off the old man, now put off all these also which belong to the old man; ye have put on the new man, now put on all that belongs to the new man.

Life must be consistent to be complete and beautiful. When CHRIST rose and came out of the sepulchre He could not leave corruption behind, for His flesh never saw corruption. From His birth that "**holy thing**," born of the virgin, was immaculate and, with no taint of sin, could not decay. Hence, even the body of CHRIST is called in Psalm 16 - Thy Holy One - incapable of corruption.

But CHRIST did leave behind the only thing that savored of corruption - His grave clothes, and this is particularly noted in the Gospel according to John. Compare 19:40, 20:5-7. The narrative is very specific. John himself saw the linen clothes lying there, and both he and Peter, on closer examination, saw the linen clothes that wrapped His body lying in the sepulchre, and the cloth that wrapped His head, not lying with the rest, but in a separate place.

When our Lord arose and came out of the tomb, He had no further use for grave clothes, and they were conspicuously left behind. They would have been both unbecoming and cumbersome to a risen and active REDEEMER; and as they belonged to death and the grave, they were all, even the cloth that wrapped His thorn-crowned head, all deposited and left behind in the place of death.

And yet CHRIST went not forth naked. Whence came those resurrection robes we know not, but they were not the same as He wore before crucifixion, for those had been parted among the mocking soldiers.

How clear the lesson. Have you been buried with CHRIST? Leave in His grave all that belongs to the old man, for all this belongs to death and corruption. Have you risen with CHRIST? Put on all the garments of glory and beauty that belong to the new man. You were clad in pride, be clothed with humility; you were invested in your own righteousness, which you see to be filthy rags; now put on CHRIST, and in Him the righteousness of GOD.

The grave clothes that belonged to the old man have about them the association and infection of

sin, the contagion of Evil. Hence Jude bids us, even when pulling sinners out of the fire, to hate even the garment spotted by the flesh. I heard, from a friend, of a most malignant case of disease in which, after the death of certain victims, everything which had been associated with the disease was ordered to be burned; subsequently the same disease attacked another member of the family, and was due to the preservation, from the fire, of a beautiful sofa cushion which had been used as a pillow by those who had first fallen a prey to the destroyer. Whatever is associated with a life of sin should be cast off and renounced, if we are to be safe from the infection and contagion of this soul-destroying disease. Every garment spotted by the flesh is to be hated.

A friend in Newport told me of his early history and how he was enabled to meet and defeat every temptation by a simple resort to scripture. When tempted to marry an ungodly woman, because of personal attractions and wealth, he read in the word, "**only in the Lord.**" When tempted to crowd out a neighboring tradesman, whose premises he wanted to add to his own, he read "

**Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee,**" etc. In every crisis of temptation a word of scripture sufficed.

But let the Word of GOD further instruct us. We are told what to put off and put on. "**Put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth; lie not one to another... Put on... bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, And above (or outside) all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.**

To the old, unrenewed, carnal man, anger, wrath and malice - sins of temper - blasphemy and filthy talking and lying - sins of tongue - were natural and befitting corruption. To the new man, renewed in knowledge and image of GOD, mercy, kindness and humility, meekness, longsuffering and forgiveness are the only appropriate belongings; and the very girdle that, outside of all these, binds them together and keeps them in place is that love that is the bond of perfectness.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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