

VITAL UNION WITH CHRIST

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Chapter 6 -

SPIRITUAL UNION WITH CHRIST

UP to this point there has been no mention of the HOLY SPIRIT in this argument on non-continuance in sin; and, indeed, so far in this Epistle the HOLY SPIRIT has been barely referred to twice (1:4 and 5:5). But when we reach this eighth chapter we find it so full of the HOLY SPIRIT that within these thirty-nine verses He is at least twenty-eight times distinctly mentioned or obviously referred to, and His activities pervade the whole chapter.

It would seem that this must be a very important feature of this part of the great demonstration that to go on sinning is both needless and unbelieving. In the latter part of chapter 7, from verse seven to the close, occurs one of the most difficult and disputed passages in the word of GOD. Does it refer to the regenerate or unregenerate man?

What is the state of this man who delights in the law of GOD after the inward man, yet finds another law in his members warring against the law of his mind and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin; who is this that when he would do good finds evil present with him? etc., do not hesitate to say that in my own judgment this is a faithful portrait of every child of GOD, up to the point in his experience where the Spirit of GOD becomes to him a living, present indwelling and inworking SPIRIT of power and holiness.

And if this be the true interpretation we can understand why this experience of the disciple is brought into the argument at this point. Hitherto the HOLY SPIRIT has been left out of the discussion.

We have had the working of the law, the death and resurrection of CHRIST, the working of faith identifying us with Him, the refusal to yield to sin, and the positive surrender to GOD, and the believing soul wedded to the Lord JESUS in bridal union in order to bring forth fruit unto GOD. And yet it is true that, even with the apprehension of all these great facts and truths, the believing soul, feeling the awful power of inborn and inbred sin, finds an inevitable warfare before him, in which the enemy is stronger than himself.

How shall all these truths, which he has been taught in these two chapters, about his judicial, vital, practical, actual, marital union with JESUS be made so real to him as to strengthen him with courage for the encounter? How shall the image of his Master and Lord be so kept before him that he shall never lose sight of Him? How shall a new law in his spiritual life assert itself as sufficiently mighty to annul the power of the law of sin and death?

At the conclusion of that seventh chapter Paul says, in despair, "**O wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death?**"

He feels like a victim of ancient tyranny, chained to a dead carcass and compelled to drag it about with him, breathe its infection and the taint of corruption, and he despairs of self-deliverance.

But despair changes to hope, for he thanks GOD through JESUS CHRIST our Lord.

For what does he thank GOD? It seems to me it is for that next and most blessed source of deliverance of whom the eighth chapter is the supreme revelation - the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD, whom he recognizes as the Divine indwelling Power and Person who accomplishes for the believer these things.

First - He takes of CHRIST and shows to the believer.

Second - He testifies of CHRIST to the believer.

Third - He glorifies CHRIST in the believer.

We shall see what this means, but let it be now said in a word, that upon the HOLY SPIRIT depends wholly the clear, true apprehension of all the facts of Redemption - until He works in us they are fancies or, at best, theories rather than facts. So soon as He practically possesses us we become adjusted to these truths, so that they become actually effective in our daily life.

It cannot be by any accident that this eighth chapter contains a fuller revelation of the Spirit in His work in the believer than any other in the Epistles; and the bearing of all this teaching on the believer's holy living can be seen only by a careful collation and comparison of the testimony herein contained.

Let us take notice of each mention of the Spirit herein found, and of the peculiar and characteristic feature of each separate mention.

Verse 2. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

Here is Life in contrast to death; Liberty in contrast to bondage.

Verse 4. That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.

Here is a walk after the Spirit - strength in contrast to weakness; obedience in contrast to sin; ability in contrast to disability and inability.

Verse 5. They that are after the Spirit [do mind] the things of the Spirit.

Here is a mind of the Spirit in contrast to a mind of the flesh, a habit of thinking, feeling, desiring, loving, choosing spiritual things.

Verse 6. **To be spiritually minded is life and peace.**

Here is Life in contrast to death; peace in contrast to alienation; subjection in contrast to rebellion; pleasing GOD instead of enmity.

Verse 9. **Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.**

Here is a mutual abiding - the Spirit in us and we in the Spirit; language only intelligible when the Spirit is conceived as the element in which we live, move, and have our being.

Verse 9. **Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.**

Here is identity with CHRIST by partaking of His Spirit, the one test and proof of being in CHRIST and His being in us.

Verse 10. . . . **the Spirit is life because of Righteousness.**

Here is the identity of Life and righteousness, showing what the life of the Spirit is, enabling power to do the will of GOD.

Verse 11. **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.**

Here we have the Spirit of Life, the Spirit of Resurrection - imparting His quickening power even to the mortal body (note the distinction between the mortal and corruptible body, as in, Cor. 15.). The mortal body is the living body, liable to death; the corruptible body is the dead body, already under power of death. The Spirit that dwells in the body exercises even over the body a life-giving and enabling power.

Verse 13. **If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.**

Here the Spirit is the power that makes dead what ought to die, as He makes alive what ought to live.

Verse 14. **As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.**

Here the Spirit, who is life and liberty, is also the leader of the child of GOD. Notice a leader is not one who goes before simply, but who takes us by the hand and insures our following.

Verse 15. **Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.**

Here the Spirit is the secret of conscious sonship, giving us power and right to address GOD as Father in contrast to a servant, who says Master, or a subject, who says Lord - the life of privilege and possession Godwards. Here love as well as faith is traced to the Spirit.

Verse 16. . . . **the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of**

God.

Here we have assurance of sonship by the Spirit, and of heirship and expectancy. All hope, as well as faith and love, the fruit of the Spirit.

Verse 26. . . . **the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities.**

Here the reference is to our natural ignorance and incapacity to pray aright. We know not, etc. the Spirit intercedes in us and for us; our groanings are His movings.

What a body of teaching on the Spirit's relation to the believer's holiness! To Him are here traced:

- Life,
- Liberty,
- strength,
- ability,
- holy mind,
- peace,
- subjection of will,
- pleasing GOD,
- identity with CHRIST,
- participation in the nature of GOD,
- enabling power,
- bodily quickening and mortifying,
- leadership in holiness,
- conscious sonship and heirship,
- the filial spirit and the filial tongue,
- assurance of faith and love and hope,
- and help in our infirmities, especially in prayer.

These are all the direct references to the Spirit, but every verse in this sublime chapter must be read with Him in it if it is to be understood.

After examining, one by one, the references to the Spirit which this chapter contains, we cannot avoid the conviction that here is to be found the key to that rapturous shout of thanksgiving in chapter 7:25. When Paul is at the very verge of the abyss of despair of all self-help or legal sanctification, he cries out "**who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I THANK God through Jesus Christ our Lord.**" And this chapter reveals what was that new truth that was the solution of all his difficulties.

We ought to have no difficulty in locating this experience of the apostle if we judge his case by our own. After we have learned what CHRIST has done for us, and what is our standing before GOD in Him; after we have passed into the regenerate state and our will is to do the will of GOD, we still find a lack of power to perform, and are constantly brought to the verge of despair at our ineffectual efforts.

A glance at the biography of eminent saints will show this as the common experience of believers. They discover a double tendency within them - a tendency downward and a tendency upward. There are two laws - one of gravitation toward Evil, another of gravitation toward GOD and goodness: may we not say, using scientific terms, a centrifugal and a centripetal force, one of which sways at one time and the other at another. And the problem of the new life is how to ensure the constant sway of the centripetal. There is an honest effort to serve and please GOD. But the temper is unsanctified, the tongue is untamed, the disposition is tainted with envy and jealousy and malice and uncharitableness.

There is even a deeper difficulty. We notice that in the seventh chapter the Law is as prominent as the Spirit is in the eighth. In twenty-five verses we find the word law or commandment twenty-eight times and the Spirit not once. Those who construe this experience of Paul as that of an unregenerate man contend that it is unconceivable that he could thus look to the law for justification after he was converted. Just so, but may he not be here depicting the conflicts of a man who looks to the law for sanctification as the Galatians did?

There is a peril which besets the Saint exactly correspondent with that which besets the Sinner.

The sinner goes about to establish his own justification by a resort to legal works; and when he comes to utter despair of self-help he finds pardon and peace in the finished work of CHRIST on the Cross. But how often the converted soul, going about to establish his own sanctification, resorts to legal works.

After accepting CHRIST as Saviour, there is a continual temptation to a legal spirit.

Every day we are prone to measure our acceptance with GOD by our measure of faithfulness; what we have done or failed to do, and so we are tossed up and down and driven to and fro by our double mindedness; but from this state of doubt and conflict - this Doubting Castle - there is but one deliverance.

We must learn now that the law must be abandoned as our hope of sanctification just as it was previously abandoned as our ground of justification. Having found peace with GOD by looking to CHRIST's finished work on the Cross, we must now find the peace of GOD by looking to CHRIST's finished work on the throne, of which the HOLY SPIRIT is both the sign and seal.

After Paul met CHRIST on the way and learned that in being baptized into CHRIST he put on CHRIST and washed away his sins, he doubtless, like his fellow-believers, got into the snare of seeking sanctification by his own efforts, and got his eyes off JESUS, and hence needed this new lesson to learn how to serve GOD in holiness and righteousness.

He had learned how he was alive unto GOD in CHRIST; how, as a regenerate man, he had a new Master to serve, a new mould of doctrine to obey from the heart, a new husband to love and submit to as an espoused bride; and now the question arises, how and where shall I find the enabling power to do all this? Where is the divine attraction sufficiently mighty to overcome all the yearnings and longings and corrupt tendencies of the flesh in which dwelleth no good thing.

The eighth chapter of Romans is the triumphant answer.

- In JESUS CHRIST as Saviour I am justified;
- through JESUS CHRIST as Lord, am sanctified.
- Justified by His death and shed blood,
- sanctified by His life and SPIRIT shed forth from Heaven, as His blood was shed forth on earth.

As there was no solution to the problem of sanctification without the Death and Resurrection, there is no solution to the problem of justification without His Ascension and Intercession, the immediate fruit and sign of which is the coming of the HOLY SPIRIT to dwell in each believer, and become to him life, liberty, power, strength, and all else needful to victorious life.

This is the germ of thought expanded in the Eighth of Romans, and it is perhaps the greatest thought ever put before the mind of a believer, and therefore the most difficult for any carnal mind to take in. By faith I am made one with CHRIST in this supreme sense:

"He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." I Corinthians 6:17.

The HOLY SPIRIT which was in Him the Spirit of Life and holiness and resurrection and newness of life, is in me; and what He wrought in CHRIST, He will work in me just so far as my complete surrender to Him makes it possible. May it be put still more plainly? Faith in CHRIST's work is indispensable to salvation; faith in the Spirit's work is as indispensable to sanctification to holiness.

This greatest truth is here presented in many aspects-like a jewel with many faces, each reflecting the light at a new angle and with new colors - for brevity we may select the following:

Three Laws are mentioned:

1. The Law of GOD - the rule of Duty.
2. The Law of sin and death, a tendency in the carnal man.
3. The Law of the Spirit of Life in CHRIST Jesus which makes free from the law of sin and death.

The HOLY SPIRIT, a new mind or mode of apprehension; a new law or tendency; a new life or secret of power; a new element or sphere of existence.

The HOLY SPIRIT is here presented as the Complement to CHRIST's work; as the new Element in which the believer lives: as the Ligament of union with CHRIST.

He is thus the secret of Enablement. The ligament is what makes the joint perfect and holds bone to its socket, and the invisible bond between the believer and CHRIST, whereby identity is established and unity perfected and ability assured; nay, affinity or like nature and attraction is to be found only in Him.

One of these thoughts is here so conspicuous we may well tarry to consider it. The HOLY SPIRIT is the disciple's Element. We use this word, Element, of a simple substance beyond which our analysis cannot go; and because the ancients held that there were four original

elements - earth, air, fire and water - these have been commonly known as the four elements.

But the word element has been used of the state or sphere of anything, natural to it, suited to its existence; and so we talk of earth as the element of the plant and the worm; of air as the element of bird and insect; of water as the element of the fish and marine plant, and of fire as the element of the Salamander, whose cold body was supposed to be insensible to heat and to have power not only to resist, but overcome it.

The eighth and ninth verses not only suggest an element, but can be understood only as applied to an element. **"Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you."**

Of only one thing can it be said that it is in that which is also in it, viz: an element.

The earth is taken up into the plant as the plant is in the earth. The fish is in the water, yet the water is in the fish; the bird is in the air, yet the air is in the bird, and if you put the poker in the fire, the fire is also in the poker, as you find out if you touch it. So the Spirit is the element in which the believer lives, moves and has his being.

Now we observe seven facts about the elements:

1. Vastness, the element being always greater than all that lives in it, and sufficient for all.
2. Vitality, the element supplying life to that which it contains and sustains.
3. Variety and contrariety, the elements differing and even antagonizing each other.
4. Independence, the element being independent of the animal.
5. Indispensableness, the element being necessary to the animal.
6. Mutuality, the element being in the animal while the animal is in the element.
7. Individuality, each element having its own peculiar conditions, persistence, and resistance to temporary exposure to hostile influence.

All these are applicable to the Spirit of GOD.

He is infinite, while all that live in Him are finite. He is, therefore, larger and greater than all the children of GOD whom He sustains, and while all may have all there is in Him, none can absorb Him so as to rob any other or diminish aught of the supply.

Again, He is the source of all vitality, the very breath of life, and of all sufficiency to the believer.

Again, there are two elements - the flesh and the Spirit, and these are contrary the one to the other. The worldly man lives in the flesh, and, according to the kind and measure of his life, he thrives in that element. The spiritual man lives in the Spirit and can thrive only in that divine element.

Again, the HOLY SPIRIT is independent of the believer and can exist in all His fulness without him, while He is indispensable to the believer, who cannot exist as such without constant dependence on Him.

Again, there is Mutuality, for it is as true of Him that He dwells in the believer as that the breath is in the body; yet it is equally true that the believer abides in Him, as that the body must abide in the atmosphere in order that the atmosphere may supply new breath at each instant.

And, finally, the Spirit of GOD has His own conditions. In the world of nature there are amphibious creatures that can live in more than one element, but in GOD's spiritual realm there are no amphibious beings. True, there may be a temporary departure from the conditions of true life without the utter destruction of that life, as the fish may leap into the air or the bird drop into the water, and each may survive, because it returns to its own element; but to continue in the air is death to the fish, as to continue in the water is death to the bird.

Now, here, if we mistake not, is the most valuable suggestion in all this teaching, for it explains how and why we are sustained in holy living or, on the other hand, commit sin. So long as we keep in the element of the Spirit, how can we intelligently and voluntarily transgress against GOD? John writes: "**Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not,**" i.e., so long and so far as we abide in Him, we are kept from sinning; it is when, so long and so far as we drop into the lower level, and are in the other element of the flesh which stifles our true spiritual life, that we sin.

The disciple finds the element of the world, in which the carnal man lives and delights, stifling to his true life; and the worldly man finds the element of the Spirit, if by any means he gets into it, stifling to his worldly life. These are contrary the one to the other, so that ye may not in the element of the Spirit do the things that ye would in the element of the flesh. Galatians 5:17.

The thought that would impress is, that, in all victory over sin, everything depends on maintaining the vigor and vitality of spiritual life by abiding in the Spirit of GOD, and that the one peril is that we lose the blessed enablement by losing the vitalizing contact.

Here, then, are we to recognize the whole secret of enablement. There is a ligament which unites the believer to CHRIST and through which the secret of His life and power is communicated to us - our unity being assured with Him and in Him with GOD. We become partakers of His Spirit, and feel His attraction and affinity Godward working in us.

We think as He thinks and love as He loves, and are drawn as He is drawn, from above, not from beneath. Here is enablement, empowerment. The soul born of GOD hungers and thirsts after GOD.

Like birds which, hatched by an intruder, when they hear the voice of the true mother, fly to her, a soul born of GOD, hearing His voice, instinctively flies to His wings and takes refuge in His bosom.

~ end of chapter 6 ~
