

# Our Association with Christ.

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*Col. 2: 20-23, Col. 3: 1-4.*

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We have here three aspects of our association with our blessed Lord. We are spoken of as "dead with Christ," as "risen with Christ," and as going to "appear with him in glory" by-and-by.

Now these three aspects of our association with Christ bring before us a blessed thing. It is that God in His infinite grace cannot see us apart from Christ. If He died, we died with Him; if He is risen, we are risen with Him; and, as to His future appearing in glory to reign, we are so bound up together with Him, that, when he appears, we shall appear with Him. God cannot *look* at our blessed Lord and Saviour, but He sees us *with* Him.

Now I purpose first simply to consider these three aspects of our association with Him, and then to pass on to the responsibilities which these involve.

In the first place we read, "Wherefore, if ye have *died with Christ.*" Now is it too much to say that many of us fail to enter into this aspect of our association with Christ? Probably every one of us here tonight knows forgiveness of sins? Is it too much to ask if we all do? For, as a fact, sometimes one even meets at the Lord's table those who do *not* know the forgiveness of their sins. Assuming, however, with this word of warning, that we *do* know our sins forgiven, let me put a further question: Do we all know what it is to have "died with Christ"?

This is a marvellous thing, and one we do well to consider; for we can never know liberty of soul until we have entered into the fact of our association with Christ in His death. For in that death, not only have I forgiveness of sins, not only is my guilt gone, but *myself is* gone. Knowing identification with Him thus, I can take the place of myself being gone altogether; I can say with the apostle: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." I live, yet not I; self is gone.

Allow me to press this a little before I proceed. Let me say a word as to what we are delivered from by the truth of having died with Christ.

If you turn for a moment to Romans 6, you will find there the first aspect of what we are delivered from. I do not go into the details tonight, but simply call your attention to the scripture. We read: "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be" — not "destroyed," but — "*brought to nought [annulled]*, that henceforth we should not serve

sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin." It is *sin*, not sins, remark. So the first thing we are delivered from by the death of Christ is sin.

Many of us who know ourselves forgiven of God, are often cast down by the consciousness of indwelling sin. At first, after our conversion, there was great joy; but soon after, perhaps, the joy faded away, and inbred sin came up in such a way as even to force doubt upon the soul; in such a way indeed as to raise the question "Have I ever been saved at all?" Therefore, I say, if we do not go on beyond the mere knowledge of the forgiveness of sins, we shall never know deliverance from sin.

Now sin has no claim whatever on one who has died with Christ. If a really dead man were lying here before me, I could not by any possibility tempt him to sin. And there is no other way of resisting temptation but by reckoning ourselves to have died with Christ. Otherwise I have no vantage ground to stand on; whereas, by this means I became impervious to Satan's assaults. As I have said, how can you tempt a dead man? Is it not sadly true, that the experience of many of us has been that of successive defeats? I believe the reason of this is, that we have never known what it is to have died with Christ, and so Satan is able to entangle us with his wiles.

Beloved, let us enter into what God teaches us here as to our standing in Christ; that He counts us as having "*died with Christ*;" that He has in Christ "*condemned sin* in the flesh," so that He has in His death condemned *me* as well as my *sins*. (See Rom. 8: 3.)

On passing on to chapter 7, we find we are, secondly, delivered from the law. I am going over fundamental truth in touching on these subjects. We find the apostle here dealing with the law. If we read verse 6, it will do for our purpose. I read it from the "New Translation;" "But now we are clear from the law, *having died* in that in which we are held, so that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in oldness of letter." I need not make the familiar statement as to this, that the law has no application as a rule of life for such as are in Christ.

I pass on to the third thing from which we are delivered, which we find in Galatians 6, where we read, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." The death of Christ delivers us also from the *world*. We have first, deliverance from sin; second, deliverance from the law; and now we are dead to the world, and consequently delivered from it. It has been said that every trace of Egypt is a reproach to a Christian. If I am crucified to the world, dead to it, by the cross of Christ, by every act in which I associate myself with it, I declare, or rather I deny, in so far as I thus act, that I have died with Christ.

We need to search ourselves with respect to this in the light of that word of God, which is "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." If we took the place boldly of having died with Christ, we should be delivered from the world. You cannot pass down a street of any town without being appealed to, on every side, by the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. How am I to meet and resist these attractions? By holding myself a dead man. I have an answer to every temptation that can appeal to me, because God in His grace tells me that I have died with Christ.

Thus, and thus only, are we delivered from sin, from the law, and from the world.

Let me now return to the passage that I read from Colossians. Here we get deliverance from *man*. "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body, not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh." I will paraphrase the last part, as it is really rather different to what is given in our translation; thus: "These things are not of any value; they are only for the satisfying of the flesh."

Now, as we all know, there are before God only two men: Adam and Christ. We are taught in this scripture that we are dissociated from man, from Adam, and connected with Christ. If I do not know this truth, that I am associated with Christ, I shall not be able to escape from man. I have no right to give allegiance to any man as having authority over me, especially when he presses religious claims as here; I am subject to Christ alone. Then why, it will be asked, are wives to obey their husbands, servants their masters, children their parents? Because *the Lord puts them severally in the place of subjection*. I take up every relationship in which the *Lord* puts me, and obey Him in them. Thus I pass through this scene a free man; I am completely delivered from man with all his religious claims; I owe obedience only to Christ, and to those whom *He* tells me to obey.

Let us take up a few instances in illustration of this truth.

Men come perhaps and say: we are bound together to do a great and good thing for the world, one which will benefit humanity, will you help us? I answer, I am glad that you are going to do a great and good thing, but for myself I cannot take part with you in it unless it has the authority of Christ.

In the same way, if a politician seeks to draw me into co-operation with him, let me take the ground of having died with Christ: for then I dismiss politics, for what has a dead man to do with the government of the world? I dismiss societies and human organisations; indeed I refuse every claim, whatever its sanctity in the eyes of man, for the reason that, through association with the death of Christ, I have passed out of the sphere in which these things have their place and home.

We now pass on to the second aspect of our association with Christ. We may notice that the twentieth verse is linked with the twelfth, that is the first part of it. And the last part of the twelfth verse is linked with the first verse of chapter 3, where we read: "If ye then be risen with Christ."

Now if we are *risen* with Christ, we have lost our place in this scene. Colossians is peculiar in this respect. The Epistle to the Romans goes as far as having *died* with Christ, but no further. But when we come to the Epistle to the Colossians we have not only *died* with Christ, - but we are also *raised* with Him; though we are still left in this scene. Passing on to the Epistle to the

Ephesians we go a step further, as you know, and find ourselves seated "in *heavenly places* in Christ Jesus."

But the consequence of our being "risen with Christ" is that we do not belong to this scene at all; we are to "seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." Sometimes the question is asked, What are these things? They are all the things that characterise the place where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, the whole scene of glory of which He is the centre; and we belong to this place because He is there.

Let me use an illustration of it from the Old Testament. We sometimes say, and it is quite true, that the Psalms are not proper christian experience; yet when we come to the Psalms, can we truthfully say that we are up to some of the expressions which are used in them? Turn with me to the sixty-third. We read, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." "*No water*," says the Psalmist! Is this our experience - that there is not a single source of refreshment for us down here?

God often makes us learn this lesson. Here is a saint going on very prosperously in the world; everything succeeds with him; he thinks he is finding plenty of water; he *thinks* it, I say, for there is *none*. We have all known such cases. And what does God do? He loves them too well to let things go on thus. He brings wave after wave upon them; trouble and disappointment come in on every side; He lets death roll in upon them, that they may learn practically that there is "no water" in this scene.

But the Psalmist also says, Psalm 87, "All my springs are in thee." Not only is there nothing to refresh me here, no water in this scene, but all my refreshment is there, all my springs are in God. I apprehend that a soul who answers to the exhortation in the first part of this chapter, would be able to say this; he would know what it is to have all his springs in God.

Now can we all here tonight take this ground? Do we accept the fact that there is "no water" here? We every one of us *know* it theoretically; we know that all here is vanity, but yet the world, or something in it, has got such power over our hearts, that we often have something apart from God as a source of satisfaction and refreshment.

No one is so independent of everything here as a Christian, from the simple fact that he is dependent on *God*, and therefore he wants nothing else. Suppose that tomorrow some of us were to be shipwrecked on a desert island, just provided with food, shelter and raiment, - but unable to speak to any one, could we in such circumstances say, "All my springs are in thee"? As some one long ago said: "We often want something *and* Christ."

We are called to know that this is not our place, but that it is where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. If some one, a stranger in the land came complaining to us of the ways, the arrangements, the laws of the country, surely we should answer him: but you do not belong to it, so it cannot be of much importance to you. In like manner is the Christian delivered from things here, from all that is round about him; he is a stranger amidst it all, waiting for his Lord to return to take him to be with Himself, so that where He is there he may be also.

The second verse needs a word of explanation. It is "set your *mind* on things above," not your "affection" as we have it. One sometimes hears people pray — and certainly one should never judge the prayers of others hardly, for, as the priest separated between the precious and the vile, so the blessed Lord, our great High Priest, separates that in our prayers which is unworthy of Him from that He can accept, and offer to God — still the prayer is sometimes offered that our *affections* may be set on things above; but this is not possible. It is "where your *treasure* is, there *will* your heart be also." A husband does not pray that he may love his wife when he *does* love her. So what we desire is, that the grace and beauty and excellency of Christ may have such power over our souls, that our hearts may be drawn out towards Him in the place where He is.

Therefore it is: "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth, *for ye have died*" — the most absolute statement in the word of God as to this. As to how God sees you, you have died, and you are to have your mind set on the things which are in the place where He, with whom ye are risen, is sitting. "Ye have died and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

This links itself especially with the passage in the First Epistle of John: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." Our life is hidden with Christ in God, but the time is coming when it will be displayed. We do not belong to the scene where we are, and because we belong to that scene where He is, our thoughts are to be occupied with it.

A word more may, perhaps, be said on this third aspect of our association with Christ, before proceeding to consider the responsibility that is involved by these truths.

I therefore add, that this association with Christ as risen, puts us into a waiting attitude. We are not yet in the grace in which He has gone; the consequence is we are waiting for the time when we shall be; we are waiting for the time when He shall come, and we shall be displayed with Him in His glory. It is the passage we are considering which cleared away the difficulty of years from my mind. It taught me that I *must* be with Him before I could *appear* with Him; and hence that the proper attitude for the Christian should be that of constantly waiting for Christ to come and take him to be with Himself.

But may I just say a word or two upon this point? You will allow me, I am sure, to ask, May we not be quite clear as to the truth of the coming of Christ, and yet not be *waiting* for Him? How many of us have asked ourselves the question today, "Will the Lord return today?" Waiting, you see, implies constancy of expectation. Leave out the coming of Christ, and you rob Christianity of its completeness. If I lack this hope I must lapse into one of two things; either worldliness or Judaism. We know that there are numbers of God's people who *do* not see it, and who *will* not see it; and the result is always one of these two. There is no power for going through present things like that of waiting for Christ.

Suppose I have a servant in charge on going away from home for a time, and say I may come back any day; I cannot fix the time. If there is faithfulness to me in that servant, shall I, on returning any day, find him or her taking their own pleasure? No; they will say to themselves, I must be occupying for my master till the moment of his return. In like manner how often will a

loving wife, whose husband is, perhaps, gone to the colonies, ask herself during his absence, as she makes one arrangement or another in the house, Will he like this, or that?

So with the people of God. In the measure in which I expect Christ, I seek to have everything suitable to Him, and the more suitable all about me is to Him, the more intense will be my expectancy of His coming, and my desire to see Him. The blessed Lord Himself will not rest until He has come back to take His people to Himself; and God will not rest until He has displayed us in the same glory with our blessed Lord and Saviour: "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

I now pass on to the responsibility involved by our being thus associated with Christ in death, in resurrection, and in the glory to come.

To do this I call your attention to two verses which indicate the whole of our responsibility. We read at the ninth verse of the chapter we are considering: "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." I have put off the old man; I have put on the new. When did I put off the old man? In the death of Christ. When did I put on the new? In His resurrection.

And now let me try to indicate the *character* of this responsibility. Since we have thus put off the old man, our responsibility is never to allow it to express itself.

Now there are only three ways in which the flesh ever seeks to express itself. If we turn to Genesis 6: 11, we shall there find two of them: "The earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence." Corruption and violence. The third, which we do not get in Genesis, because the truth as to Satan was not fully brought out until our blessed Lord came to earth, is lying. The Lord says to the Jews: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."

So that the three ways in which the flesh expresses itself are: corruption, violence, and lying. In verse 3 of this third of Colossians we get corruption; in verse 8, violence; and in verse 9, lying. Unless these three forms of the expression of the flesh are seen, it seems strange why lying should be brought in here.

Of course, every saint allows the necessity of not permitting the flesh to manifest itself. But yet, whilst we thus condemn the works of the flesh, is not such a thing as covetousness, for instance, sometimes named among saints? Or anger, for example? Are there none of us who, at times say with Jonah, "I do well to be angry"? Whereas, we see here that anger is one of the works of the flesh. We must be clear of all these things. We must ask ourselves all through the list of them, Do I allow myself to be angry, to indulge in wrath, to give way to malice, to let blasphemy and filthy communication come out of my mouth? I cannot allow my will to come into activity, but that very moment I sin.

You will find very few to take the place of having no will; but *the Christian is one who has no will of his own*. Oh but, perhaps you say, none of us come up to that! Still, I answer, it is God's standard for the Christian, and unless we *accept* the full standard, we shall at once surely fall short of it.

But to pass on to the positive side of it. "Ye have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after him that created him: where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all." *Christ is all*. That is, Christ is the image of God, and He is the full expression of the responsibility of every one who has put on the new man. The Spirit of God here presents Christ as the standard of my walk.

And we are called to this as "elect, holy, and beloved," three terms that are applied to Christ Himself, so that the verse we sometimes sing is true:

"So dear, so very dear to God,

More dear I cannot be;

The love wherewith He loves the Son,

Such is His love to me."

Then we are told to put on "bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering." It is to be practical "brotherly kindness" — "forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also ye."

If we see failure in another, we often go to exhort and rebuke him about it, and afterwards tell him how much we love him. But the apostle begins here with the love first. It is the way in which God deals with us. He always shows us His love. It reminds me of one well known to many in this room, when, not long before his death, a relative saying to him, "You are safe under the shadow of His wings," he answered: "Under the shadow of His wings? I am in the very centre of the heart of the Father?" The wings were not nearly close enough to satisfy his appreciation of the Father's love.

Now every one of these characteristics in a Christian is an expression of the love of Christ. For instance, who had such bowels of compassion, such kindness, as Christ? See the story of the widow of Nain in Luke. He meets at the gate of the city a dead man being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she, a widow. It is a perfect picture of desolation. And what do we read? "When the Lord saw her, he had *compassion* on her, and said unto her, Weep not." *We* ought to have the same compassion for each other in like circumstances.

Is it humbleness of mind? meekness too, for humility and meekness are always combined. He says, "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." You remember the passage.

Then as to "forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a complaint against another." Here I make an alteration which we have in the margin. Surely I hope none of us have a *quarrel* with another; but if we have a little *complaint* against any, what do we do? Go and tell *another*, rather than forgiving *even as Christ* forgave us? *All* these things that are set before us may be traced in the life on earth of our blessed Lord and Saviour, and they ought also to characterise us.

Verses 15 and 16 are what we may term subsidiary.

Beloved, is not the time come when we must point to these practical little things as those which are needed to be brought out in the lives of the people of God? We have had so much truth. The question is, Have we lived it out? What is the use of truth, if we are not living it out? Surely we would hold the truth more tenaciously than ever, but the *living it out* is the point. The apostle James says: "I will show thee my faith by my *works*."

God has truly given us much truth in these days, but the more truth we have, the more humble should it make us, for it is simply the sovereignty of grace that has given it to us rather than to others; and the blessed Lord lays down the principle, that where He gives much, He expects the more. If I have only the truth upon my lips, and my life does not answer to it, the very truth that I proclaim will be my condemnation. Let us never forget to accept the full responsibility of every exhortation in the word of God.

We have next, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to the which ye are also called in one body: and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." It is all *Christ* in this chapter. I can only just allude to it now. His peace is to rule our hearts! He Himself said: "My peace I give it unto you." How easily we are able to meet every difficulty if we have the peace of Christ in our hearts! Go down to your shores when the storm is blowing, when the winds are raging; see the billows dashing and breaking on the surface. But go deep down below that troubled surface, and all is perfectly calm. So with the Christian whilst he passes through the storms here. "The peace of Christ," that peace which He enjoyed as a man down here, that peace is to dwell in your hearts, and keep them in perfect calm whatever the tempests around.

And His word is to "dwell in you richly in all wisdom." The word must *dwell* in me, before it can come out in teaching others. I may perhaps allude to one scripture in connection with it. If we turn to Proverbs 22, we read in verse 17: "Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge. For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips." You see the words must be "kept within," first of all; it is afterwards that they will be "fitted in the lips." I must first have made the word my own, so that it may come out from within; it is then that it flows out in teaching and admonishing others.

"In psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." I must pass on to the last verse, which is a very important word, for it supplies a test for everything.

Young believers, especially, when their hearts are getting away from God, will ask such questions as: What harm is there in going to such a place? cannot I go to a concert? to a flower show? I answer, Yes; if you can do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. This test applies to every department of life. Christ is now to be everything in my life. I am called to express Christ in my life, and He is to be the motive of all my actions, the spring of all I do. Lip and life are the only two channels by which we can express anything, and Christ is to come out in my words and my ways.

All this is very simple, but I trust the Spirit of God may lay it with freshness on our hearts. The first thing is to know our place as having died with Christ, as having risen with Him, and as being about to appear in glory with Him; and then we must not shirk the responsibility that attaches to all this. Thus, as we walk with Him down here, all the sorrows and difficulties of the way will be but occasions of thanksgiving and praise to God.