

Union Life Has A Goal

by John Whittle

Union life is not an end in itself, any more than the initial incarnation of God in Christ was an end in itself. God was not merely being demonstrated in Christ, in an attempt to show what a true human was — a human knowing inner union with the Father. No! It was God going somewhere. We all know where He was going.

The ultimate issue of God-in-a-human is not a saved soul, but a lost life. It is not life-in-union demonstrated, but life-in-union offered for the world — for others. Christ is, as we are now, The Man for others. In reality, this *is* the demonstration — a poured out life. The grain of wheat which Jesus said was to “*fall into the ground*” in order to bring forth a harvest, is the picture, not of our old life, but of the new man in Christ, given for the world. “*So then death works in us and life in you*” (2 Cor. 4:12).

The reason for union with Christ is that God may have a body in every age in which He can continue to be given for the world. Christ is called “*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*” Paul makes a very clear statement of this fact when he refers to his bodily life as being “*the dying of the Lord Jesus*” — not Paul’s dying for the world, but the continuation of the self-giving Spirit of Christ who now was Paul’s life. By no means then is this a matter of self-effort, but “*of God who works in me mightily.*” to quote Paul again. It is just God being God in me, in His special way for me as a result of the union.

The stage of spiritual adolescence in which I joyously discover where and what my resources are, and discover who I am the true and new “I” being Christ — gives place to the ultimate purpose of life, which is to forget my redeemed self and become redemptive. Union at this point tends to become the background consciousness of life; the foreground is filled with a total concern for others. The one time “consumer” of the grace, love and wisdom of God, now becomes the “consumed.” We are not merely called to a feast; rather, we become the feast for others. “*The zeal of Your house has consumed me*” was said of Jesus in a prophetic scripture.

Jesus shocked His early disciples when He said “*except you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you.*” This was devastating to those who had hardly begun their spiritual journey. He knew they must be alerted to the revolutionary life that He was talking about, to which He was inviting them in fellowship with Himself. The result of His strong words, in John 6:53-66, was that many left Him, for they said, “*This is an hard saying, who can hear it?*” It is striking how frequently Jesus spoke in these strong terms of the ultimate purpose and outcome of following Him.

Why were they so disturbed at His sayings? They did not want a teacher — leader — messiah who intended to become a sacrifice! — a sacrifice to be consumed! They wanted a messiah who would conquer and fulfill all the majestic prophecies upon which they hoped to build the future. They also recognized the cost of their involvement if they followed Him, sensing that they too would become part of this human sacrifice.

Christ’s summation after some had left Him was, “*He that loses his life shall save it*” — an invitation to lostness, not just to salvation and union. This, of course, is the heart of true missionary concern. There is something to be done to “*fill up that which is behind in the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body’s sake,*” as Paul said in Colossians 1:24.

Although Jesus always had an abounding sense of union with the Father, He was mainly occupied with the direction in which this union was taking Him. The goal and purpose of this incarnational union came through to Him by way of the intimate fellowship He had with the Father. And it will be the same for us. Each comes to know for himself the direction and goal of God in his own flesh and blood. Again, as Paul said, *"the life I now live in the flesh"* is lived by the faith of the One whose essence is self-giving, for Paul and for the world. This is ever the goal of union life.

Looked at naturally, it appears as my sacrifice; but in the perspective of union life and its inner glory, it is seen as *"the fellowship of His sufferings"* (Phil. 3:10). It is our privilege and only real fulfillment.

*Thou art the love that leads the way,
The faith that nothing can dismay,
The hope no disappointments tire,
The passion that consumes like fire:*

*I shall not sink to be a clod —
I am Thy fuel, flame of God.*

Matter is to be sacrificed to Spirit and become its fuel. Both Christ and Paul described it in their own special terms: *"a lost life"* and *"the dying of the Lord Jesus."* John delineates it as the "father" stage of spiritual awareness in 1 John 2; not merely a redeemed life, but a redemptive one. *"I write unto you fathers because you have known Him who is from the beginning."* What can this mean? Peter has already told us, and I have quoted it before — from the beginning He was *"the Lamb, slain."* Here then is the well-spring of the reproductiveness of spiritual fathers. They are drawn into an intimate fellowship with the Lamb the Lamb which is *"on the throne."* The only power in the universe worthy of the name is self-giving love. Thank God He is exactly that in us through union life.