

The Central Secret of Union

by Norman P. Grubb

The central secret of all history is the union of the creature and the Creator. Not just the Creator. Certainly not just the creature. But the union. We've found the whole meaning of life in time and eternity when we've found that.

It's probably beyond apprehension by the finite mind, as well as beyond description. But if our minds cannot completely compass this infinite glory, thank God our hearts can experience it.

And yet, if we think around it, to some extent our minds can compass this great fact of union. We know, for instance, that this is what eternal life is all about. There is only one eternal life, that of God. But God is three, dwelling in each other, which is union. So original life is not one person, or still less one thing; it's three living in each other and proceeding out from each other in their several offices.

Original life, then, is union. But not just union: unity. That which proceeds from union, in a balance which is so hard for us to apprehend, is a unity which still leaves us a separate person. There is such an intimate union that there is never again a sense of division between myself and the living God. We've become one person, for "*he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.*" Not two, but one. And yet within that mystery there is a unity that allows us to retain our individuality. That's where a major difficulty comes.

The first point that we need to get clearly in mind is the union that we've become one person. We've got so used to the curse of the fall, which is separation, that it's a long time before we fully realize the fact of our union with God. And who of us does entirely attain to a continuous recognition of this union?

The great cry of the hearts of the saints of the ages was union. They expressed it in a certain terminology (which is impressive to some of us), describing the way to union as purgation, illumination, and finally union — three phases which to some extent resemble the little children, young men and fathers of John's first letter. It doesn't exactly correspond, but it's somewhere near.

If you read the lives of saints you always find that when they came to union they experienced liberation. As soon as they grasped union, out came a great humanity, a great love, a great power, a great service. They had found the liberating secret.

It is when a crisis comes to you and me — a sudden sorrow, a sudden disaster — that we realize how separatist we are in our thinking.

The usual thing we say when a crisis hits us is, "God permitted it." That means that God is up there and we are underneath. But God isn't up there at all! He is within. I never lift my eyes one single time to heaven to try to find Him up there, do you? I don't waste my breath, my sight, or anything else. Why should I waste my time trying to get a Person to come down when He lives within me? I can see Him where He is, in a common bit of human flesh redeemed in His precious blood, packed full of the Holy Spirit.

This makes my whole attitude to life different. Once I recognize that God is joined as one with me, I no longer try to find Him or get Him to come and rescue me.

A crisis comes to me. No, no — it doesn't! It comes to us. Not to me, but to us. And I'm a mighty little part in the us, while He's a mighty big part.

It comes to Him. And if it comes to Him, He doesn't just permit it, He means it to come. Well, if He means it to come, He's going to turn it out for His own purposes. So what is my attitude? "*Come on Lord, handle it now. Praise the Lord, it's perfect! Carry it out now — I'll watch You.*" And it's a great watching life. We sit on the side lines and clap when the goals are kicked.

We're caught out ninety nine times out of a hundred. We say, "*Why did God allow that? He's up there, and poor me down here.*" No, I'm not. I'm in the heavenly places, if I could but recognize it. But I'm caught out almost every time. I'm so familiar with the separated outlook, I can hardly look upon life from the union point of view.

That is where my shocks and my sorrows come. I look at life from separation. I begin wondering: was it God? was it the devil? What is this? What is that? Instead of seeing that it happened to us, and that He meant it to be. When I see that, it changes everything.

"*We speak that we do know,*" said Jesus. "*We testify that we have seen.*" But He meant the Father also. "*I've got a shared life,*" He was saying. Well, if Jesus had a shared life, we have a shared life. A united life. Christ in us, we in Him. I can't say this moment that my mind can compass it. I've spent years trying to compass it — perhaps I haven't sufficient light yet. But thank God, I know that I know it — or rather, know Him.

Friends, the cross is not the objective. Union is the objective. The cross is the gateway. It's not the end. The Christ is the end, and He is joined to me forever and I joined to Him forever.

There are astounding statements in Scripture.

I was struck when I was reading in Colossians 3 about our relationship with Christ — the fact that we are ascended with Him, and so on. It speaks there about the "new man." It says there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither bond nor free, neither Barbarian, Greek nor Scythian. Then it says, "*Christ is all, and in all.*"

If Christ is all in me, and all in you — what's left? Pretty extreme, isn't it! Even in eternity, when the Son Himself becomes subject to the Father and hands everything over to Him that He may be all in all, is there anything more we can have of God than we have now if Christ is "all, and in all"? We are complete in Him!

I like to emphasize the Bible as an extreme book. It entitles us to live an extreme life and preach an extreme message. Praise His name! It certainly is extreme. If we wrote what Paul did, that Christ is all in each one of us, they'd say we were pantheists. But God said it!

Now if a common, horrible little piece of clay like me can say "*Christ is all in me,*" it doesn't leave me with much to bother about myself. I just say, "All right God, carry on then." He is in everything that happens in my life; He is totally involved.

If a disease comes to me, it comes to Him as well as to me. It's His business then. Oh, the burdens go off! You'll find all our burdens are upon us because we have this separate instinct instead of the united instinct. Every sorrow we carry, every burden we bear, every tear of self-pity we shed (and there's an awful lot of self-pity in our tears), comes out of separation instead of union.

Every weakness we feel comes out of separation. Oh, I share them with you. No one feels more weak than I do when I've got to speak! I have such an easy life, I'm always glad God has given me one cross to bear, which is the hatred and horror of speaking. Yes, I feel weak — but it's all nonsense. Weak? Of course I'm weak; but there's somebody inside me who isn't.

What we are after is a fixed life, a natural life. By God's grace I learn to live naturally in a continuous Christ-consciousness, so that it's natural to me to live this way. It's Fixed in me. The Word of God abides in me, not comes into me from outside. It may have started by coming to me, but now it abides in me.

The psalmist once wrote, "*Oh, God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise.*" That's the point we are aiming at. As Paul expressed it: "*That Christ may dwell in your heart,*" not visit it occasionally. He has taken up a permanent residence. That was Paul's prayer for the Ephesians.

It wasn't the first prayer he prayed for them. It was further along the way, perhaps even his deepest prayer. He prayed the highest things he could pray in Ephesians because he talked the highest language. He put a unique emphasis on the fact of Christ dwelling in their hearts by faith. He didn't really mention the cross here. Not that he belittled the cross, because the only way into this is by the cross. But sometimes we can even give the cross the wrong place. It's the Christ of the cross who must have the center place.

Now you would call Galatians more of an objective rather than a subjective letter. It's defending the Christian faith from the outer assaults of the circumcisers and legalists. That's the general message of this mighty letter. But I was very struck with how Paul every now and then, right in the midst of this great apologetic of how God rescued us through justification by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ alone, flashed in a word of his own testimony and went clean out of the objective into the subjective.

There is a striking instance in chapter one (verses 14-16). He is giving us insights into his conversion. Perhaps it was written 15 or 20 years after his regeneration on the road to Damascus.

He writes: "*It pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen.*"

I remember how I was caught out in such a simple way when I did a translation of the New Testament in my early days. It was into an easy language of Africa.] found that I had translated "to reveal His Son to me," instead of "in." It isn't to reveal His Son to me, but in me.

But what struck me — and we all have different insights strike us, so that we can preach sermons to each other — is the fact that regeneration is a first revelation of an indwelling Person.

Right at the beginning, although it may have taken him some years to compass it, we see this central secret of union in Paul's life. A union which is also a unity, just as God is a union which is a unity. This is what real life, eternal life, is. And we live it flow!

The realization of the indwelling Christ — the central secret of union — is the only basis for life -which has total meaning. Christ “all, and in all” — I in Him, and He in me. What a glorious way to live!