

ETERNAL VITAL UNION

By

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In the recent discussions which have agitated some sections of our beloved Zion, on the subject of Eternal Union, or the vital relationship of Christ and His Church, perhaps some brethren have not been as clear and lucid in the statement of their respective positions and application of arguments, as the importance of the subject demands. All our preaching, writing and conversation on the subject of salvation by grace, certainly ought, so far as possible, to be conducted so as to be edifying and instructive to the saints of God. Little children and babes in the kingdom of our Lord have a relish for the Truth as it is in Jesus, so far as they can understand or comprehend it. They desire the sincere milk of the Word, that they may grow thereby. The presentation therefore of the doctrine of God our Savior, should be in Gospel simplicity and not in strife for mastery, or a spirit of vain-glory.

On the subject of the Eternal Vital Union of our Lord Jesus Christ and His blessed Church, much has been said perhaps which has only been calculated to darken counsel, by words without knowledge; and we can scarcely doubt that while there may be some who claim to be sound in the faith, and who are sound in many other respects, are radically in error in regard to the nature, origin, and eternity of this union; there are others who seem to oppose the doctrine, while in reality they have only a different way of setting forth the same Truth. For instance, when we speak of *Eternal Union*, some have seemed to understand **us** as speaking of the *manifestation of union*, as experimentally felt and realized by Christians after they have passed from death unto life. Hence they have viewed the union as being eternal *only in prospect*, and they have objected to the idea of an *actual union* absolutely existing from everlasting between Christ, as the Head of His Church, and His people, as members of His body. We have not understood any of the brethren to contend that the children of God, born of God, or any of them are experimentally reconciled to God, and united to Christ, until "Christ is formed in them, the hope of glory." So far as our knowledge, experience, and personal enjoyment of a vital union with Christ is considered, it was prospective in the purpose and decree of God; for He "has chosen us **in** Christ Jesus, before the foundation of the world, that we *should be* holy and without blame before Him in love." God has predestinated, or destined us before hand, to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He (the Son) might be the first-born among many brethren. But it should be observed that the Eternal Vital Union contended for, is a *union of life*, not that that life was eternally *manifested* in those whom God has predestinated to the adoption of children by

Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will; for in many of them, as we hope, it is not yet brought into manifestation. Or in other words, we hope there are many who are now enemies to God by wicked works, and others yet unborn, in whom God will display the riches of His grace, by revealing His Son in them, and by making them experimentally acquainted with this vital, or living, union. But the spiritual life of the Church is but *one* life, and that one life is *eternal*. Jesus says of His sheep, “I give unto them *eternal* life, and they shall never perish. John says, “And this is the record, that God hath given to us *eternal life*, and this *life* is in His Son.” We are not told that God hath given to us eternal *lives* – or a plurality of life. The life given to the Church is but one life, and that one life which He hath given to us, is *in His Son*; and we are further told that it is “*hid with Christ in God*;” and it is so hidden in God, that when He who is our life shall appear, we shall appear with Him in glory. One life in Christ is enough; for there is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling. What use would one body have for more than one life? We feel sure that these two propositions are self-evident to all the saints, namely; first, that the life is but one; and secondly, that it is *eternal*. Neither of them can be successfully controverted, for Christ *is* our Life, and He is One, and He “only hath immortality, or eternal life, and He only is the life and immortality of His Church, which is His body, and the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.

Taking for granted that the two propositions are admitted, we will now state as our third proposition, that the Eternal Vital Union of Christ and His Church is in this life and immortality, which John says was with the Father, and was manifested to us in Him who is called the Word of **life**; (I John 1:1,2); or of whom it was said, “This is the true God, and Eternal Life.” (I John 5:20).

Before we proceed farther to demonstrate this proposition, we pause to inquire if any of our readers have any knowledge or idea of any other vital union existing between Christ and His Church, than this union of life? Until this eternal life, this spiritual immortal life was communicated to us experimentally, had we any *experimental union* with Him, or with His people? Certainly not. Every child of God will readily admit this; but as soon as we were born again, and in our new birth made the happy recipients of this immortal life; did not this communication make us cry, “Abba, Father,” and hail all the members of Christ as our brethren and sisters in the Lord? Vitality is *life*, then if our union is not *vital*, or life union, it is only nominal, and can be of no lasting benefit to us.

But, says the objector, while we admit the foregoing propositions, we deny that this Eternal Vital Union embraced the Church of God *actually*, but only in purpose, until they were brought into the experience of it. Well let us see.

Remember it is admitted that this Eternal Vital Union is all embraced in that *eternal life* which was with the Father, and was manifested to us. Now then, we ask, When? Where? And in whom was this eternal life given to the saints? Let us examine the record: “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is

in His Son. He that hath the Son of God hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God **hath not life**" (I John 5:11,12). "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings." Where? "In heavenly places." In whom? "In Christ Jesus." How? "According as He hath chosen us *in Him*." When? "Before the foundation of the world." For what purpose? "That we should be holy and without blame before Him in love."- (Ephesians 1:3-4). This testimony will not admit of any evasion. It does not read that life was given to Christ for us, or that life was provided for us in purpose; but "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life." Now, it is either true that God gave eternal life **to us**, or the record has failed to declare the Truth. But, do we hear the objector say, He have it to us in purpose, but not actually? Let such as feel disposed to cavil thus, beware. It was either **actually** given **to us**, or it was **not actually** given to us in Christ Jesus, before the world began; and the record presents the actual conveyance **to us**. But we are told that what is *actually* involves an act. But we ask, would it require any less action on the part of God to **give it** to us *in purpose* than it does in the way that He has recorded the gift? There seems to be an evident design to evade the force of divine testimony, on the part of those who thus cavil.

Once more: we have proved, as we believe, to the entire satisfaction of all honest enquirers after Truth, that eternal life or the immortality of the Church of God was given to her *in* Jesus Christ, her Head, before the world began. Could this gift have been given to us in Christ before the world began, if Christ Himself did not exist in a Mediatorial relation to us before the world began? We believe not. Could eternal life have been given *to us* in Christ Jesus before the world began, and we have had no *existence in* Him until regenerated in time? No one, we think, will attempt to establish the affirmative. But the question still may arise, how, or in what sense, we the saints in Christ Jesus before the world began?

As the seed of Abraham existed in him before any of them were born; and being thus *in* him, unto them God gave the land of Canaan, **before** any of them were manifested by generation. God made Abraham the father of many nations, long before any of these nations were developed. Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living; and that too, **before** any of her children were born. But the life of all the posterity of which Abraham was the father was *in* him, and though not manifested to men, they were personally identified by God; for Levi paid tithes unto Melchisedec, when he was yet in the loins of his great-grandfather Abraham. If the life of all the human family had not been in Adam, how could their development by generation and birth be regarded as a multiplication of Adam? God blessed Adam and bade him be fruitful, and multiply and replenish the earth. And in this, Adam is the "**figure of Him that was to come**," which is Christ. And in covenant with Abraham, God said, "Surely blessing I will bless thee; and multiplying I will multiply thee."

The life which our God gave to us in common with all the rest of mankind, is earthly, natural, and mortal; but that life which He gave us in His Son, is heavenly, spiritual, and immortal. In the former, we stand related to the earth, which is our mother,

and to her bosom we shall shortly return; but in the latter we stand related to God, to heaven and to immortal glory; into which we shall be eventually admitted, with all the sons of God. Our being born into the natural world did not make us the sons and daughters of Adam; but our original creation in him as his posterity, is that which constitutes the relationship, and our birth is but the *manifestation* of it. Our generation is the manifestation of that life which was given us in Christ, and makes us manifest as the children of God.

What are the views of Vital Union and relationship to Christ which are held by our brethren who object to our views? They say that when a sinner is regenerated, and has received a spiritual life by their spiritual birth, they become thereby reconciled to God; they are made to love God supremely, and to love His word, His ordinances, and His people; that the new heart which God has given them, and the new spirit which He has put within them, binds them together in the unity of the spirit and in the bonds of peace. To this we cordially subscribe, for it is true; but we inquire, were not all those spiritual blessings of life, love, joy, union, fellowship and spirituality given us *in Christ*, according as we were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, according to Ephesians 1:3,4? Most certainly they were; for there is no spiritual blessings added in the new birth, to the “*all spiritual blessings,*” which were given us in Christ before the foundation of the world. All these blessings then did exist, and in Christ they belonged to us, by virtue of the gift of the Father, long before we had any experimental knowledge of them. Although we were in our old earthly nature dead to all spiritual things, and destitute of spiritual and immortal life, and destitute of anything like union to Christ, so far as our old nature is concerned; and we were enemies to God by wicked works, and were by nature children of wrath, even as others, still the communication of these things to us and our knowledge of them, was not the origination of them. The life which was communicated to us by the new birth, was emphatically eternal life; it was with the Father, and hid with Christ in God. So also all the blessings of relationship to God, union with Christ, sonship and heirship included, were just as eternal as the life in which they were and are all embraced. Hence, if this life when experimentally possessed and enjoyed, brings us into experimental union and fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ, it must have possessed the same blessed properties before we individually knew anything about it by experience.

How gloriously sublime, how God honoring, and creature abasing is the Scriptural doctrine of Eternal Vital Union! Christ and His Church are one, even as Christ and the Eternal Father are one. As the Father, with all the fullness of the Godhead, dwells bodily in Christ, so Christ in all the glory of His divine nature and Mediatorial glory, dwells in His Church. Who shall say that the Father loved the Son only *in prospect*, or with a *purposed* love, when Christ declares that the world shall know that the Father has loved His people as He has loved Him; and that He loved Him before the foundation of the world?

If we view Christ as the First Born among many brethren, and all His members

predestinated to be conformed to His image- Christ's Sonship did not commence with His advent to our world. Neither did our relationship to God as sons in Jesus, begin with our earthly existence in an earthly Adam. "*Forasmuch then as the children are partakers (not composed of) flesh and blood, He (Christ) also Himself likewise (or in a like manner) took part of the same.*" (Hebrews 2:14). In that flesh He was put to death, and in it He arose from the dead, and ascended up on high, even so these mortal **bodies** must die, and our dust return to dust; but from the graves shall they all be raised up again at the last day. They shall be **changed** and fashioned like His glorious body, made spiritual, glorious and immortal; and that too by the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead, which now dwells in His regenerated children who are now "*waiting for the adoption, to wit, for the redemption of our body: for He who raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken our mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in us.*" If we have not the Spirit of Christ, we are none of His; but if we have His Spirit, then we are His, and He is our life; for His spirit is life, and this is the true God and eternal life.

Dear brethren, having all this in view, what manner of persons ought we to be, in all godliness and holy conversation? What is earth when contrasted with heaven? What our mortal, when compared with our immortal life? What are the interests of this earthly state in comparison with the glory that shall be revealed in us? "*Our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, do work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not on the things which are seen, but on the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*"