

Articles and Sermons :: Victory over Sin by Andrew Bonar

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by Andrew Bonar

THERE is a plant called Samphire, which grows only on cliffs near the sea. But though it grows near the salt waves, yet it is never found on any part of a cliff which is not above the reach of the tide. On one occasion, a party of ship wrecked sailors, flung ashore, were struggling up the face of precipitous rocks, afraid of the advancing tide overtaking them, when one of their number lighted upon a plant of samphire, growing luxuriantly. Instantly he raised a shout of joy, assuring his companions by this token that they were now in safety. The sea might come near this spot, and perhaps cast up its spray, but would never be found reaching it. Such is the position of a soul in Christ; justified and united to Him, the person may be in full sight still of the world's threatening and angry waves; but he is perfectly safe, and cannot be overwhelmed. Paul says of all Christians: "Ye are risen with Christ" (Colossians iii. 1). We are not only at peace with God; but besides, "He hath raised us up together with Christ, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians ii. 6).

Any one who understands this union to Christ will see at once what a blessed plan it is, formed by the God of holiness, for giving a sinner victory over sin. If Lazarus be raised out of his tomb, he shall certainly be found no longer lying amid worms and rottenness, and the cold damps of the sepulchre, but walking in Bethany, in converse with living men. And so, says Paul in Colossians iii. 1-4: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, 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. MORTIFY THEREFORE YOUR MEMBERS WHICH ARE UPON THE EARTH;" fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry! What resolutions cannot do, what vows and prayers have failed to accomplish, what self-denial and mortification and crosses have never succeeded in giving you, this plan of God at once attains, this union to Christ. The sinner is led by the Holy Spirit to know and believe in the Lord Jesus, and, in the very moment of believing on Him, becomes one with Him. Forthwith begins a heavenly partnership: Christ and the soul share together; Christ giving to the soul out of His fulness all manner of grace, as occasion requires.

But, fellow-sinner, you must not suppose that the mere assenting to this truth as a doctrine will give you the results. You must have real experience in regard to believing in Jesus. Come and try the personal application of it to your soul. Lean on Christ for yourself, and thus be you yourself united to Him. Doctrine must be turned into experience. Have you read of the process by which iron is turned into steel? You will see a great crucible, with its enormous mass of iron, subjected to intense heat, till it seems a mass of glowing fire. But all that might cool down, and would be only iron after all, if there were not poured into it a small quantity of a liquid, which alters every particle of its chemical constitution, and then it becomes steel. Has such a change taken place in your case: the turning the iron into steel? doctrine into experience?

We speak much of Christianity and Christians; but union to Christ by faith is the root of all; and faith is as much Christ's hold of us, as ours of Him. It implies our hold of the truth; but it also implies that the Spirit of truth from Christ has taken hold of us. Baptism speaks, in a figure, of souls being saved in this way of union to the Lord: for the baptized one is represented as "baptized into Him." The Lord's Supper proclaims in another form this great truth of union to the Lord. And thus we are brought to ask all who profess to be Christ's such questions as the following:

I. To what does union to Christ call you?

It calls you to make heavenly things your business. "If ye be risen with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God" (Colossians iii. 1). Seek such things, pursue after them, make a business of them. The word is one that implies the soul's fixed aim and employment, even as, Matthew vi. 33, "Seek the kingdom of God." "The moment Christ rose," says Bengel, "He was thinking of going upward" (John xx. 17); and so it should be with us who have risen with Him. The risen believer now carries on traffic with Him, seeking spiritual gains. He trades for an absent Lord as eagerly as ever he once traded for worldly gain. He is grieved at spiritual losses as deeply as he once was at losses in his business, when a ship was lost at sea, or a bank failed, or some speculation proved ruinous. On

the other hand, he rejoices in spiritual gains: when, for example, the mist is cleared away from a truth, or when the excellency of some Scripture doctrine shines into his soul, or when he gets some fresh view of Christ, and some increase of faith, love, and hope. More specially still, he fixes his attention habitually upon Christ sitting at the right hand; for His being there tells so much about acceptance. His "sitting" declares that He has finished all His undertaking, and has no more toil to undergo. His sitting "at the right hand" declares the Father's high approval, and delight, and honour. And so to this point he ever turns his eye, to this mountain of myrrh. And in truth he finds yet more there: he finds that by virtue of union to Christ he is himself, in a sense, there also, "sitting in heavenly places," his toil done, his trials over, his victory won, himself altogether well-pleasing to the Father, and loved by the Father. The realization of this privilege has mighty power upon his soul; giving him wondrous liberty, helping his near communion, sending him forth to ever new and grateful service for One who so loves him.

It calls on you to disentangle your affection from earth. "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians iii. 2). Make the things above your care; they are to be "the things which you mind," in opposition to such men as those spoken of (Philippians iii. 19), who mind earthly things. You will not be content with making these things your business; you will have a taste and relish for them, a real delight in them. Many men pursue business with little liking for the thing itself, and are glad when it is over. Many an industrious and eager trader longs for rest and retirement. But the believer risen with Christ loves his business, his whole heart is in it. He "minds," &#8213;cares for, has affection for &#8213;"not things on earth," such as to be rich, great, noble, enjoy pleasure, nor even domestic comfort and personal ease. His chief end is not earthly prosperity, nor is his highest bliss a few more acres than other men; but it is things above which he relishes so heartily and unfeignedly. He is at home among "things above." He is like the patriarchs, who left all they had in their native land, "seeking a better, that is, a heavenly country." Such men mind God's favour, God's glory, God's love. And hence, their children's salvation is more to them than their aggrandisement in the world, and the conversion of souls than the news of mines of gold discovered and secured.

Do you bear the name of Christian? Is this, then, a fair account of you? Speak not of difficulties; for of course there are such in all pursuits; and here all alleged hindrances are swept out of the way by that word: "If ye be risen with Christ." This word cuts the string, and the balloon ascends.

## II. What does union to Christ ensure to you?

It ensures many things; but here are some. It ensures your getting life from Christ. "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians iii. 3). You who are Christ's died with Him, and in that hour your former life passed away. You had lived it out; it was for ever over, and you were loosed from all former things. You died. It was as if you had been carried to the New Earth at once, to live ever more there amidst its holy scenes; as if to you that day had come in which Christ says, "Behold I make all things new." You became a "new creature," part of a new creation, one with Christ, so that you lost your former separateness. And you found that, while you had lost your old life, there was new life laid up for you. "Life was hid for you with Christ in God." You got the beginnings of a far better life than even unfallen Adam had, for you got life from Christ. Christ's very life is yours; the very sap of the vine-tree for you the branch; the same resurrection-life, which the Spirit poured into the man Christ Jesus, was now yours also.

That holy power to love God and man, which was in Christ, you began to receive. That holy joy and full energy of delight in God's favour, which on earth was Christ's endowment, and ever is, became your portion. And you go on claiming every day a share in His stores of grace, a share in His holiness, a share in the Spirit's manifold blessings. Light, life, likeness, all are yours, by gift.

The moment you believed, you were united to Christ; and that moment the stone was rolled off the mouth of the well; you began to get the new life, and you had it more or less ever since. But you have as yet only the beginnings of it. As when a father leaves for his son, while yet a minor, only a portion of the property, which is given out by some trustee; so you at present receive only in measure. "The life," in all its fulness, "is hid with Christ;" that is, Christ has it, and Christ who has it is hid, or concealed like a hid treasure; but hid in God, in the bosom of the Father, so that all is safe and sure. It is hid, like the manna in the golden pot, within the holy of holies. It is there for safety, "as men lay up jewels in a place where the short arms of children cannot reach them," says Samuel Rutherford; "for if it was in our keeping, it would soon be lost." But all is kept for us, as 1 Peter i. 4 declares. It is "our life" (Colossians iii. 4), life which we have a claim to, stored up for us, intended for us. Yes, Christ is "our Life;" Christ is, so to speak, keeping Himself for us, and keeping for us the life abundantly which He purchased for us.

But again, this union to Christ ensures your appearing with Christ in glory. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory" (Colossians iii. 4). At present the believer, though one with Christ, lives out

wardly as other men do: eating, drinking, sleeping, trading: he sows, he sails, he travels on railways, he goes to buy and sell, he reads news, he talks with his friends and children, &#8213;all as other men. But all the while he has an interior life; he has a strong taste for spiritual things; he has desires toward God, which other men know not of; he yearns after God in Christ amid earth's fairest scenes; he loves God in Christ beyond wife, or children, or parents, or possessions. "None of us liveth to himself" (Romans xiv. 7). And this life is preparing to bud forth fully into flower and fruit, whenever the present winter of earth has passed, and the Sun of righteousness arisen.

On the day when God's time arrives for giving the larger fulness of the life to all who are members of Christ's body &#8213;on that day "Christ our life, shall appear." The golden pot of manna, hidden long, shall be brought out of the Holy Place. He shall be fully in us, and we fully in Him. He shall appear who is "our Life" &#8213;He on whom we nourish our souls &#8213;who has life for us &#8213;who is Himself the substance of that life; for (as one said) "Christ is a Christian's life." He shall appear, bringing this life to us; and this life, which He brings shall, at the same time, be the secret cause of "glory" to us; or, perhaps we should rather say, this life shall manifest its presence in us by our being forth with invested with glory. As when a fountain gushes over, its waters make all round the margin green and flourishing; so, when our Life gushes into us our very bodies shall beam with glory. It was thus on the Transfiguration-hill with Christ Himself. The life in Him that evening &#8213;the secret well of life &#8213;suddenly overflowed, rising up to the brim; and see! what a body! yea, what garments even! And who could tell the joy of His soul in that hour, though He knew that sorrow was to return again to its channel, and fill up all its banks? Now, thus it shall be with us, &#8213;ay, thus it shall be with us without any after return to sorrow, without any risk of the waters abating. Some weary day draws to its evening; we have wiped the sweat from our brow, and sighed over earth; we have groaned within ourselves, "Oh, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" when lo! the sudden flash! It is the coming of the Son of man.

You may at times have envied Moses and Elias their blessed position, on either side of Jesus, appearing in glory (Luke ix. 31). But you yourself shall be as they: "Then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." Yes, as truly "with Him" as they were; as bright as they "in glory;" seeing Christ, talking with Christ, hearing the voice that proclaims, "This is My beloved Son!" O Master, O King of glory, our Life, appear! Come forth from that light inaccessible, to be ever with us! No need of three tabernacles; for Thy tabernacle shall be there, and all shall ever say, as the ages roll, "It is good to be here." That will be the day, which accomplishes what many in the church of God have often sung:

"One look of Jesus as He is,  
Shall strike all sin for ever dead."

### III. What does union to Christ ensure to you even now?

It enables us to overcome the world, and to renounce all sin; for the Spirit dwells in every believer. "MORTIFY THEREFORE your members which are upon the earth" (Colossians iii. 5). We do not yet and now overcome self, and the world, and Satan, in the manner we shall do when Christ appears, when (as old Sibbes triumphantly exclaims) "we shall trample down foes in glorious confusion!" But we, nevertheless, do overcome; for that strain is a true one:

"Neither passion nor pride thy cross can abide,  
But melt in the fountain that flows from thy side."

"MORTIFY therefore," that is, make dead, reduce to a state of death as regards your practice of them, and care for them, &#8213;"members which are on the earth;" your hands, eyes, feet, are not to meddle with "fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness." Whatever is yours belongs now to Christ, and is instant with Christ's Spirit; not merely ought to be, but really is so. Therefore, as men who are possessed of the power so to do &#8213;as men who have the life within you, ready to be used &#8213;control your members though they be still on the earth and in the presence of its objects. The fire is around you; but you have the supply of water beside you: make it play upon these flames, that they may not even singe a hair of your head. With your eye on things above, with your heart realizing your union to Christ, trample down the world and sin. In the power of your union to Christ, reckoning yourselves as one with Him, go forth and conquer. It is He that conquers. You go forth appealing to Him: "Lord, I am one with Thee: canst Thou be overcome?" In so doing, believers find lust sinks away, and passions grow cool, and covetousness relaxes its grasp; all tempting sin gives up its struggle for victory.

We might bring forward thousands of witnesses. Let us give the experience of one as a sample, &#8213;the experience of one man who had yielded himself to sin and lust freely, and for long years. This man was led to listen to the gospel plan, under the preaching of Joseph Milner, the writer of the Church History. The text explained was 2 Corinthians v. 20, 21 &#8213;reconciliation to God over Him who "was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in

n Him.â John Howard heard it &#8213;was overcome; all the happiness he ever enjoyed before was felt by him to be no more like it than midnight darkness to the noonday sun. From that moment all his strong passions died away. The man who used to be shunned by all who cared for chastity and purity, felt himself suddenly delivered from the power of his lusts, so remarkably indeed that from that hour, he was no more overcome; nay, from that hour all was soberness and calmness of spirit. He used to say, that his enjoyment of God dried up the streams of sinful concupiscence, as it did long ago in the case of Augustine. And this is Godâs way of holiness. Legalists, and moralists, and philosophers, all fail in reaching the seat of the evil &#8213;the will and the desire; they lop the branches, but do not reach the root; they imprison the felon, but do not change his nature. To overcome evil within, St. Benedict rolled himself on thorns; St. Martin burnt his flesh with hot irons; St. Francis tumbled in snow; St. Bernard plunged himself in pools of freezing water. Even the great Pascal wore an iron girdle, full of sharp points, next his skin. All these overlooked, or understood not, the apostleâs inspired words, âMortify THEREFORE;â that is, conscious of your union to Christ, set about the mortifying of your members in the strength of this union, and in no other way. Think of union to Christ, and how it involves partnership with Him in His grace. Believing thus in Him is our victory: doing, resolving, suffering, give us no victory at all. The fear of hell and wrath will scarcely keep a man from one sin, and will never touch the heart.

Who of you then have, in time past, failed to triumph over your corruptions, and evil propensities? Who of you has never been able to master covetousness? or the world in any shape? Take the way of believing in Christ, and being thus in partnership with Him. Understand the blessed mystery of ârising with Christ,â and being seated with Him above; be grafted into the vine, and get its sap. You have tried other means of health and strength; but now use this inspired direction, which has never failed. As Daniel and his fellows asked to be proved whether the water and the pulse they were nourished on would not turn out far more strengthening than all the kingâs finest food and rarest wines, so we say to you, Prove it now for yourselves. And do not say, âI will wait for the Spirit;â for by that you mean, âI will wait on till I feel the Spirit at work.â This is a device of Satan to get you to go on in sin, and die in sin; for no man ever felt the Spirit at work directly. The Spirit works in silence. The soul learns the gospel way, and ponders it; muses on Christ, who died, and rose, and who calls on sinners, every one, to come and use his death and resurrection. And it is while the sinner is thus engaged before the cross, that the Holy Spirit works effectually, &#8213;uniting him to Christ in the same moment that He leads him to Christ. And so the believing man becomes at once a conqueror!