

LECTURE LI.

UNION TO CHRIST.

SYLLABUS.

1. By what similitudes is the union of Christ with His people set forth in the Scripture?

2. What are the several results to believers, of this union?

3. What is the essential, and what the instrumental bond of this union?

4. Show the resemblances and differences between this union and that of the Father and the Son; between this and that of Christ's divinity and humanity; between this and that of a leader and his followers?

5. Does this union imply a literal conjunction of the substance of Christ with that of the believer's soul?

6. How does the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in this union, differ from that by which it is everywhere present?

7. Is this union indissoluble?

See on whole, Dick, Lect. 67. Ridgley, Vol. iii, Qu. 66. Calvin's Inst., bk. iii, ch. 1. Hill, bk. v, ch. 5, § 1. Conf. of Faith, ch. 26. Hodge, Theol. Vol. iii, pp. 650-661.

IT is through this union to Christ that the whole application of redemption is effectuated on the sinner's soul. Although all the fullness of the Godhead dwelleth

1. Union to Christ Effectuates Salvation. bodily in Him since His glorification, yet until the union of Christ is effected, the believer partakes of none to its completeness. When made one with His Redeeming Head, then all the communicable graces of that Head begin to transfer themselves to him. Thus we find that each kind of benefit which makes up redemption is, in different parts of the Scripture, deduced from this union as their source; justification, spiritual strength, life, resurrection of the body, good works, prayer and praise, sanctifi-

cation, perseverance, &c., &c. Eph. i : 4, 6, 11, 13; Col. i : 24; Rom. vi : 3, 4, 5, 6, 8; Col. ii : 10; Gal. ii : 20; Phil. iii : 9; Jno. xv : 1-5.

The nature of this union is to be deduced from a full comparison of all the similitudes by which the Word illustrates it. In one place it is described by Images. In another, it is described by the union of a vine with its branches; and in another, of the stock of an olive tree with its limbs. Jno. xv : 1-5; Rom. xi : 16-24. The stock is Christ, diffusing life and fructifying sap through all the branches. Second; Our Saviour briefly likens this union to that between Himself and His Father. Jno. xvii : 20, 21. Grace will bring the whole body of the elect into a sweet accord with Christ and each other, and harmony of interest and volition, bearing some small relation to that of the Father and the Son. Third: We find the union compared by Paul to that between the head and the members in the body; the head, Christ, being the seat and source of vitality and volition, as well as of sense and intelligence; the members being united to it by a common set of nerves, and community of feeling, and life, and motion. Eph. iv : 15, 16. Fourth: We find the union likened to that between husband and wife: where by the indissoluble and sacred tie, they are constituted one legal person, the husband being the ruler, but both united by a tender affection and complete community of interest, and of legal obligations. Eph. v : 31, 32; Ps. xlv : 9. Fifth: It is illustrated by the union of the stones in a house to their foundation corner-stone, where the latter sustains all the rest, and they are cemented to it and to each other, forming one whole. But stones are inanimate; and therefore the sacred writer indicates that the simile is, in its nature, inadequate to express the whole truth, by describing the corner-stone as a living thing, and the other stones as living things together composing a spiritual temple. See 1 Cor. iii : 11-16; 1 Pet. ii : 4-6.

Now, these are all professed similes or metaphors; yet they must indicate, when reduced to literal language, an exceedingly close and important union. It is hard to see how human language could be more completely exhausted, to express this idea, without running it into identity of substance or person. Its nature may be best unfolded by looking successively at its results, conditions, &c. Let it be again noted, that our union to Christ bears to all the several benefits which effectuate our redemption, the relation of whole to its parts.

The results of this union may be said to be threefold; or, in different language, it may be said that the union exists in three forms. 1st. A Legal union, in virtue of which Christ's righteousness is made ours, and we "are accepted in the beloved." See Rom. viii : 1; Phil. iii : 9. This is justification. 2d. A

2. Why Called Mystical? Three Results.

Spiritual, or mystical union, by which we participate in spiritual influences and qualities of our Head Jesus Christ; and have wrought in us, by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, which was given to Him without measure, spiritual life, with all its resultant qualities and actings. See Jno. v : 25, 26; xv : 2-5; Eph. ii : 5; Rom. vi : 11; 2 Cor. v : 17; Gal. ii : 20. This union the orthodox divines have called mystical, (*μωστικα*), borrowing the expression, most likely, from Eph. v : 32. They did not mean thereby, that in their views of this union spiritual, they adopted the views held by the ancient and mediæval Mystics, who taught an essential oneness of the human intelligence with the substance of the *Λόγος* to be developed by quietism and asceticism. Orthodox divines have rather meant thereby, what is the proper, scriptural idea of the word *μωστήριον* from *μωσ*, something hidden and secret: not something incomprehensible and incapable of being intelligibly stated. The spiritual union is indeed mysterious in that sense; but not otherwise than regeneration is mysterious. The incomprehensible feature is not only similar, but identical; it is one and the same mystery. But the tie is called mystical, because it is invisible to human eyes; it is not identical with that outward or professed union, instituted by the sacraments; it is a secret kept between the soul and its Redeemer, save as it is manifested by its fruits. The third result of the union, is the communion of saints. As the stones of the wall, overlapping the corner-stone, also overlap each other, and are cemented all into one mass, so, every soul that is united truly to Christ, is united to His brethren. Hence, follows an identity of spirit and principle, a community of aims, and a oneness of affection and sympathy.

The essential bond of this union is the indwelling influence of the Holy Ghost. This Spirit is indeed immense and omnipresent; nor is His providential agency dead or inoperative in any creature of God. But in the souls of believers, He puts forth a different agency, viz.: the same which He exerts in the man Jesus Christ, by which He fills Him with all the fullness of the Godhead. Thus the bond of union is formed. The vegetative influences of the sun are on the whole surface of the earth. In many plants those influences produce a growth, wild or useless, or noxious; but in every cultivated field, they exhibit themselves in the vegetation of the sweet and wholesome corn which is planted there. In proof of this bond, see 1 Cor. iii : 16; vi : 17 : xii : 13; 1 Jno. iii : 24 : iv : 13. To return to the Bible figure of a vine or tree, the sap which is in the branches was first in the stock, and proceeded thence to the branches. It has in them the same chemical and vital characters; and produces everywhere the same fruit. The sense and feeling of every limb are the common sense and feeling of the head. Hence we are entitled to take this pleasing view of all genuine, spiritual affections

3. Its Instrumental and Essential Bond.

in the members of Christ; each one is in its humble measure, the counterpart of similar spiritual affections in Christ. There are indeed some affections, e. g., those of penitence, which Christ cannot explicitly share, because He is sinless; but even here the tide of holy affection, of enmity to all moral impurity, and love for holiness, wells from the Saviour's bosom; in passing through the believer's sinful bosom it assumes the form of penitence, because modified by his personal sense of sin. Each gracious affection is a feeble reflex of the same affection, existing, in its glorious perfection, in our Redeemer's heart. As when we see a mimic sun in the pool of water on the earth's surface, we know that it is only there because the sun shineth in his strength in the heavens. How inexpressible the comfort and encouragement arising from this identity of affection and principle! Especially is it consoling in the assurance which it gives us of the answer to all our prayers which are conceived in the Holy Ghost. Does the believer have, for instance, a genuine and spiritual aspiration for the growth of Zion? Let him take courage; that desire was only born in his breast because it before existed in the breast of His head, that Mediator whom the Father heareth always.

The instrumental bond of the union is evidently faith—i. e., when the believer exercises faith, the union begins; and by the exercise of faith it is on his part perpetuated. See Eph. iii: 17; Jno. xiv; 23, Gal. iii: 26, 27, 28. First: God embraces us with His electing and renewing love; and we then embrace Him by the actings of our faith, so that the union is consummated on both sides. One of the results, or, if you please, forms, of the union is justification. Of this, faith is the instrument; for, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God." The other form is sanctification. Faith has the instrumental relation to this also; for He "purifieth our hearts by faith;" "faith worketh by love;" and it is the victory which overcometh the world.

Christ compares the spiritual union of His people to Himself, with that of Himself to His Father. The resemblance must be in the community of graces, of affections, and of volitions; and not in the identity of substance and nature. Our consciousness assures us that our personality and separate free-agency are as complete after as before the union; and that our being is no how merged in the substance of Christ. To this agree all the texts which address the believer as still a separate person, a responsible free agent, and a man, not a God. The idea of a personal or substantial union would imply the deification of man, which is profane and unmeaning. But when we consider Christ's relation as Mediatorial person (and not merely as *Λόγος*) to God the Father, we have a more apt representation of His union to His people. For this union is maintained by a

4. The Union Illustrated.

spiritual indwelling in Him. The union between Christ's divinity and humanity, as conceived by the Nestorians (see lecture xxxix.) would afford also a more apt representation of the believer's union. The Nestorians represented it as a *συναφεια*, not a *ένωσις*, and expressly asserted it to be generically the same with, and only higher in degree than, the mystical union of the Godhead with believers. But then, they were understood as making of Christ two persons, We, who hold with the Council of Chalcedon, cannot use the union of the two natures of the person of Christ, to illustrate the believer's union to Him; because we have shown that it does not result in a proper oneness of person. The Church with its Head is only a spiritual corporation, and not a literal person.

But on the other hand, to represent Christ's union as only that of a mere Leader and His followers a union of sentiment, interests and affections, would be entirely too feeble. In the case of the Leader admired and devotedly followed, there is only an emission of moral suasion and example, producing these results. In the case of Christ and His people, there is far more; there is the emission of a Divine and vital Substance, the Holy Ghost, who literally unites Christ and His people, by dwelling and operating identically (though far differently in degree) in both; and who establishes and maintains in the creature by supernatural power, the same peculiar condition, called spiritual life, which exists in the Head. In a word, there is truly a sap, a cement which unites the two, that is a thing, and not merely an influence, a divine, living, and Almighty Thing, viz.: Holy Ghost.

Yet, while we thus assert a proper and true indwelling of the Holy Ghost, with the believer's soul (and thus mediately of the soul and Christ), we see nothing in the Bible to warrant the belief of a literal conjunction of the substance of the Godhead in Christ, with the substance of the believer's soul; much less of a literal, local conjunction of the whole mediatorial person, including the humanity, with the soul. "Christ does dwell in our hearts by faith." "It is He that liveth in us," but it is in a multitude of other places explained to mean the indwelling of His Holy Ghost.

Now, I cannot but believe that the gross and extreme views of a real presence and *opus operatum*, in the Lord's supper, which prevailed in the Church from the patristic ages throughout the mediæval, and which infect the minds of many Protestants now, arise from an erroneous and overstrained view of the mystical union. This union effectuates redemption. We all agree that the sacraments are its signs and seals. (See 1 Cor, xii: 13: 1 Cor. x: 17, *et passim*). Now, the Fathers seem to have

Not that of Mere Leader.

5. Not a Partaking of the Substance of the Godhead.

Determines our View of Lord's Supper.

imagined that spiritual life must result from a literal and substantive intromission of Christ's person into our souls, just as corporeal nutrition can only result when the food is taken substantially into the stomach, and assimilated with our corporeal substance. In this sense they seem to have understood the eating of Jno. vi: 51, etc. (which was currently misapplied to the Lord's supper). Hence, how natural that in the Lord's supper, the sacramental sign and seal of the vitalizing union, they should imagine a real presence, not only of the God-head naturally, and of the Holy Spirit in His sanctifying influences, but of the whole Mediatorial person, and a literal feeding thereon. Hence, afterward, transubstantiation and consubstantiation, and the more refined, though equally impossible theory of Calvin, of a literal, and yet only spiritual feeding on the whole person.

The same general law of thought appears in what may be called the Pan-Christism of the "Mercersburg School," of modern semi-Pantheism. These divines having revived the old mystical idea of the substantive oneness of the human and divine spirit, through the medium of the incarnation, consistently assert a species of real-presence of the mediatorial person in the Supper. The connection is conclusive.

Let us disembarass our views of the mystical union; and these unscriptural perversions of the sacraments will fall away of themselves. We shall make them what the Word makes them—commemorative signs, and divinely appointed seals of covenant blessings; all of which blessings are summed up in our legal and spiritual union to Jesus Christ; and this union constituted solely by the blessed and ineffable indwelling of Christ's Holy Spirit in our souls, as a principle of faith and sanctification. There is, then, no other feeding on Christ's person but the actings of the soul's faith responsive to the vital motion of the Holy Ghost, embracing the benefits of Christ's redeeming work.

To one who apprehends the dignity and intimacy of this union aright, there will appear a strong *a priori* probability that it will be indissoluble.

The efficient parties to it are Christ and the Holy Ghost; parties divine, omniscient, immutable. The immediate effect on man's soul is the entrance of supernatural life, and the beginning of the exercises of new and characteristic and spiritual acts. One would hardly expect to find that these Divine and Almighty Agents intended any such child's play, as the production of a temporary faith and grace, in such transactions! When we discuss the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, we shall find this *a priori* evidence confirmed. Our purpose now is not to anticipate that argument; but to suggest at this place, the presumption.

6. The Union Indissoluble.