

Our Association with Christ.

JOHN X. II 24.

Second Edition.

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LONDON :
THE CENTRAL BIBLE TRUTH DEPOT,
5, Rose Street, Paternoster Square, E.C. 4

Price 1½d.

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"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth ALONE, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit."—John xii. 24.

IT is one thing to enjoy in peace with God the fruit of the work of Christ for us, but quite another to begin in any measure to enter into the way the love of Christ is engaged in it. Yet it is just this that gives its special character to our blessing as Christians, and enhances the enjoyment of it infinitely. Take the word *alone* in this central verse, that is like the pivot upon which all Christianity turns; and what a revelation it is of the springs and motives in the heart of Christ of what He came into the world to accomplish. Have we thought of it thus? It tells that He who was the perfect object of

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the Father's love in the place He took as man, felt alone in that place, and that His heart went out to take others up into it with Himself, even though to do so He must go through death, to enter into it in a wholly new way in resurrection. How much is often contained in a single word of scripture, making us conscious of unfathomable depths below what is expressed! And so it is here.

But thus we are led into the thoughts of God and what occupies Him, instead of being taken up with our own blessing only to cramp and limit the apprehension of it. Nor was what is thus in such touching words presented to us, any afterthought of sin and consequent need of ours. In a wonderful passage where we might have little looked to find it, in the Book of Proverbs (chap viii.), we are let into the knowledge of our place in the divine thoughts and counsels before ever the earth was. We are carried back into the past eternity, where infinitely sufficing to

each other, Wisdom was with Jehovah, the Son with the Father: "the Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting. . . . When he appointed the foundations of the earth, then I was by him, as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him." What perfect mutuality of divine joy, but in which the Son was absolutely *alone* with the Father, none else to know, much less to enter into it. Yet we are given to understand what occupied their thoughts in this communion "Before him, rejoicing in the habitable parts of his earth [while as yet He had not made the earth]; and my delights were with the sons of men." Who could have conceived it, that in the ineffable joy of such divine communion, we should find the intimation of our place in the comprehension of the purposes of God as the objects of His delight.

Still remained the question; How,

and by whom, these wondrous counsels were to find their fulfilment. Once again (if only once) in the old Testament the veil of the eternal past is lifted, that the volume of the book may disclose the words, "Then said I, Lo I come ; I delight to do thy will, O my God." In and from the everlasting glory He had with the Father, the Son of God gave Himself to the work. And in the body prepared for Him (as the Holy Ghost interprets, "mine ear hast thou digged," of the Psalm) we see Him in the Gospels enter the lowly path of the accomplishment of the divine will. In the first public steps of it He goes to identify Himself with those who by grace, taking sinful man's only true place in the confession of their sins, are thereby declared to be the saints, the excellent of the earth, in whom was all His delight, according to Psalm xvi. For Him it was but fulfilling righteousness, carrying out the will in infinite grace, He had come to do. How significant that at that

moment the heavens (now presented, if for the first time, with a worthy object upon earth) were opened to Him, and the Holy Ghost descends in the form of a dove, and abode upon Him, with a voice from heaven, which said "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. iii. 13-17). But why that voice? It altered in nothing the place He had with the Father to declare it thus? Was it not that the Father would have others enter into His thoughts about His Son, that, if in ever so feeble measure, He should become to us what He was to the Father, His beloved Son our Saviour, and ours too the perfect object of *His* pleasure?

But what rest to turn from our poor thoughts of Him, to see that path open out under the eye and heart of the only One who could enter into it; "No man knoweth the Son but the Father." The Gospels present to us the path of Jesus according to the Father's appreciation of all its varied perfection—one solitary track of light across the

darkness of this world, alone as He was in the very perfection of it.

At the opening of His ministry in John, with the woman of Samaria, we see the blessed principle of it. The disciples had left Him, in want of rest and drink and food. He had had none, and they return and find Him wonderfully refreshed and satisfied, if the sources of it were too deep for them to enter into: "I have meat to eat that ye know not of . . . my meat* is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."

In chapter v., finding the resource of His heart, in presence of the already surging enmity of men, in His known place in the Father's love (ver. 20), and in the communion of every thought that belonged to it, we find that He acts with divine title, but as suited to the place He has taken on earth, not as an independent source of power, but

* He says nothing of His drink, connected as that would be with the yet deeper springs of His life in communion with His Father.

in dependence upon the Father, so as in everything to be the expression of the Father. "The Son can do nothing from himself but what he seeth the Father do; for whatsoever things he doeth these also doeth the Son likewise;" adding even as to His sense and judgment of things, "As I hear, I judge and my judgment is just; because I *seek not my own will*, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." Again, in John vi., He *lived* on account of the Father. (Ver. 57.) How total the contrast to our poor miserable independence and self-seeking.

The more with adoring hearts we contemplate Him, the more we must feel how utterly alone He was in such a path, as Man amongst men, the motive, object, and whole principle of it, the absolute opposite of every other man's. Nothing that governs the human heart naturally ever entered into His. And what governed, and gave its whole character to His life, never for a moment affected ours.

“He that speaketh from himself seeketh his own glory [such are we]; but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him”—such the blessed Lord. Again, “I honour my Father . . . and seek not my own glory.” (Chap. viii. 49, 50.) In lowliness, purity, devotedness, total absence of self-love, obedience, separation to God, grace and faithfulness to men, in every aspect of what He was, He shines out in contrast with all He found in man here. There was no one that He could raise to His own level as Man, walking here before God. *He was alone.*

But if thus alone and isolated amongst men, by His very perfection as Man, He could say, “He that sent me is with me; the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.” (John viii.) The blessed consciousness of the Father’s presence was the perfect light and joy in which He walked amid the deep surrounding gloom: sustained by the

sense that if men knew Him not, there was One that did, and to whom He could give even new ground for His delight in Him. "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again." Only in the exercise of divine power could He do this, but as ever using His power only in obedience—"This commandment have I received of my Father." In His case the prince of this world might come but in vain, he had nothing in Him—"But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do." (John xiv. 30, 31.) Love and obedience made up all that life from the deepest springs of it within to the minutest detail of it outwardly.

No wonder that a voice from the excellent glory proclaims again in the hearing of the chosen witnesses what He is to the Father, if unknown and rejected of men:—"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." It was on the Mount of Transfiguration.

None could have disputed His title to take His place, in right of all His proved perfection, perfect object of the Father's delight, then and there in that glory. But He must have been *alone* in it. And it was not for that He had become man. He comes down to die. The precious word that we are considering declares His object in so doing. If Greeks desire to see Him, was it not an anticipation of the glory of the kingdom when the Gentiles should be blessed with Israel? But He puts it from Him now. Something lay nearer to His heart. "Except a corn of wheat fall in to the ground and die it abideth alone." There were those whom first He would take up into association with Himself—an object dearer than the glory of the kingdom—that when He reigns (and in all else) they may share His position. They had been given Him out of the world. They had been drawn to Him by the Father; He would give them eternal life, and bring them into all His own place in that life as risen Man, and

raise them up at the last day of that dispensation to have them with Himself for ever. How little they knew—how little we can enter into—what that involved for Him? He must die, not only to meet the necessities of their ruined condition according to the glory of God, but to make that new place and state for man in divine righteousness in that glory, in which He could have them with Himself, and thus be no longer alone, according to the yearning and purpose of His love.

It was too much for their poor hearts to learn it, not able to rise above Jewish hopes. "The hour cometh, yea, is now come that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me *alone*"—deserted even by the little company gathered round Him in such privileged nearness on earth. It must be so. No man could follow Him whither He went till Jordan's depths were dry. Into these depths of divine judgment due to sin, He must pass alone, that death with Him, divested

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of all fear for us, might be known to faith as but the wondrous passage to life with Him in power of His resurrection.

But still, for a moment, if His own whom He loved to the end, were scattered from Him, He could say, "Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." Gethsemane, with all its unutterable weight of woe, was but the anticipation of what yet lay before Him, and was passed through in the unclouded sense of that presence with Him still, that had been His light, His joy, His all, in despisal, rejection, desertion and betrayal, in the accumulated sorrow that pressed around and upon Him in His path of life.

But deeper depths lay before Him. That presence must be withdrawn from Him, when He who knew no sin had to be made sin for us. All other character of sorrow was distanced now. He was to be *alone*, as He never was before. This is what filled that dreadful cup, the last crucial test, that if it shewed out on the one hand what man was in

sin, on the other, brought out the absolute perfection of man in obedience and devotedness. He who only knew divine love as infinitely the object of it, was now to know the forsaking of God. In His very perfection He shrank from it, "Father; if it be possible let this cup pass from me." In presenting the sorrow before the Father in communion, it only made more intolerable the thought of passing out of that communion, into the experience of being abandoned of God. Yet He gives Himself to the full accomplishment of the divine will—"Not my will but thine be done."

He had tasted what it was to be alone to the full—He came, and there was no man; He called, and there was none to answer; He looked for comforters, and found none—but it was ever with God before: now, He was to be alone and without Him.

No heart can enter into what that forsaking was to Him; He entered into and endured it that we might never.

For Him it served only to bring out fresh aspects of His perfection, as He was never more perfectly the object of His Father's delight. From Gethsemane He turns away to face it: "The cup which my Father hath given me shall I not drink it?"

The realization of the total change of His position from this point, alone brings out what sin is. We know what that change was, as far as it can ever be known, by the expression of His sense of it in the cry: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Ps. xxii).

But what unwavering confidence in God, even when forsaken! "*My God.*" No cloud upon that; no hesitation in owning and confessing it, even when He has to add that He had forsaken Him. Nay, He vindicates God even in doing it, "But thou art holy," in the moment when He contrasts Himself with all that ever trusted in Him before and were delivered, He the only One whose trust was perfect and yet aban-

doned. What perfection! Who can estimate it?

We must pass on from what is beyond all thought, but that must linger in the memory of our hearts for ever, where all divine love was expressed to us in His drinking that dreadful cup, to some of the glorious results. He was—oh how infinitely!—*alone*, but accomplishing in it all that was needed to make good the whole glory of God in holiness and righteousness and majesty against sin, and in love to the sinner. So that there, where we find the only measure of what sin is, we find the work that has put it away for ever, and closed for faith the history and existence morally of the man that sinned. Thus God was glorified, and salvation is ours who believe in Him. But it is the character of that salvation, as satisfying the heart of Christ and not the mere fact of it, that occupies us now. And this comes out as we see Him raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, and now glorified in God, to be

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alone no longer in this His, for man, new place. The psalm prepares us for it. First, full, precious announcement of it through Mary of Magdala, as He forbids her attempt to renew her relations with Him as Messiah after the flesh, on the ground of far richer ones that He was about to introduce. "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended unto my Father." In anticipation of that moment when He was to take His full counselled place as man in the glory of God, He sends her to the disciples with the revelation of it, "I ascend* unto my Father and your Father, unto my God and your God." All the place He was about to take, as man, with God and with the Father, He has won in divine righteousness for us.

Alone in the impenetrable darkness—He is no longer alone in the light into which He has entered; alone in the unfathomable sorrow, He is not alone in joy. His first thought in coming out of the darkness and sorrow

into the light and joy, to declare our association with Him in it; "I will declare thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." (Heb. ii. 12). For it is not only that in joy He sings: it was no new thing to Him to be in light and joy before the Father, and that too as man, though for a moment all had been totally eclipsed in darkness. But then He was alone. Now on the ground of redemption He enters into man's place in a new way in which He can have us associated with Him; in the midst of the assembly He sings. The song suits us; His place is ours; in it He will never be alone again. Do we thus sing? How can we ever cease to sing? Alas! that our poor hearts should take up so feebly the note of such a redemption, leading into such consequences for us!

But when we examine more closely the character of the association into which we have been brought, in the light of the word, we find it is both in-

dividual and corporate ; there is what is possessed and known now, and what lies yet before us.

John's writings do not carry us beyond what is individual in our association with Christ. But this is largely developed on the precious side of eternal life, and the divine nature and relationship of children we have been brought into, to be displayed in us as a present thing, and carried on into the glory. In Paul the association is traced to the full height of Christ's position in the heavenly glory now, brought out as the fruit of God's eternal counsels, and presented in all its individual and corporate aspects, present and to come, save that with him eternal life is always the full state, yet future. The starting-point of all is the Son of man ascending up, where He was before indeed, but now as man on the ground of redemption so gloriously accomplished. "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, unto my God and your God." This is the more remarkable in

John, as the ascension is not historically found there; and the general subject is the manifestation of eternal life, in Him as the revealer of the Father here on earth, and now in those who are His; not taking Him or us to heaven save in an exceptional way. But another thing was needed that this life should be possessed in its full christian character of known relationship, liberty and power; namely, that the Holy Ghost should dwell in us. This great fact depended on the exaltation of Jesus in glory; "the Holy Ghost was not yet because Jesus was not yet glorified." Thus, as, ever founded on the work of the cross, in which God had been so glorified, we have already in the Gospel of John the two great truths that constitute and characterise Christianity—though not carrying us beyond the individual believer's place and state; namely, Jesus ascended and glorified, and, consequent upon this, the coming of the Holy Ghost to dwell in us. Indeed, there is no such development in

scripture of this last truth as in the Gospel of John, in the way of promise, so intimately and necessarily bound up as His presence in the believer is with the present enjoyment of eternal life. Thus, if we find in the Epistle that God hath given to us eternal life and this life is in His Son, God dwelling in us by His Spirit is the power of the manifestation of the essential traits of that life in love and obedience (1 John iii. 24, iv. 12), and the merest babe in that life possesses the Spirit. (1 John ii. 27.)

Now let us return from these great principles to notice, in the light of them, what is connected with the first announcement of our association with the ascended Christ. For before He takes His full place, as such, it has pleased the wisdom of God to present Him to us on earth for forty days, after having accomplished all that entitled Him perfectly to man's place in glory according to the counsels of God. Surely it was to bring near to our eyes and hearts, in that risen Man, what was

morally suited to the place—ever Himself perfectly so, as we have seen, but necessarily by His very perfection alone in it, until the corn of wheat fell into the ground and died. But here we are permitted to see in the risen One the manifestation of a new place and state for man, that we have part in—of the Son of God in power, past death and the judgment of God, and the power of Satan, of death to sin and life to God. Lest dazzled by the greatness and glory of the new position when possessed in Him in power by the Holy Ghost, we should fail to trace and become acquainted with the moral traits, condition, and perfection of the blessedness of it, before He enters into it, these are displayed before us for a little moment in the risen Christ.

We behold the One that gave Himself for us, with adoring affections, and know that "He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one;" that all that He is we are now, "as he is so are we in this world." (1 John iv.

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17). For this Epistle is but the moral continuation in us of that wonderful scene of John xx. 17-23. In keeping with the position in which the Lord was thus manifested, we see Him breathe on the disciples, and say, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." In figure this looks on to the gift of the Holy Ghost when Jesus should be glorified; till then it was in fact connected with life, as the power of it in its new condition, in Christ risen. He had *come* that they might have life; this breathing was that they might have it *more abundantly* (John x. 10), have it in the risen Christ, a condition, in which it never existed before, with an accession of power never before connected with it. Hence it is not "receive ye life," nor the "Holy Spirit," but "Holy Spirit," as the breath of the life in power of the risen Son.

It was a transition state of things, man manifested morally fit for the full place of God's counsels, but not yet in it, not yet glorified, but

already taking His place as head of a new spiritual race, in the power of the life in which He rose, the last Adam, a quickening Spirit. He is no longer alone. First character of our association with Him, the blessed one of the family of God, "He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one, for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren; saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren;" His Father our Father, His God our God.

But there is another. Through Paul, the full light of the glory in which He has now taken His place, falls upon our hearts—we look up and see Him in His full position, and learn that all that position is ours. The transition state of things of the forty days has passed away, but only that man in Christ may take His full place in glory, and send down the Holy Ghost to dwell in the believer, from which the Spirit, as the power of life, cannot now be separated, although the truths can be looked at separately. (Rom. viii. 1-13,

14, &c.) In Ephesians we find this place presented as the fruit of the eternal counsels of God: chapter ii. giving us the work in time that has so far accomplished them. From a scene of death, where all men were found alike by sin, and where Christ came for the glory of God and in love to the sinner, God has come in and quickened us together with Him, and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Him. All the place of Christ, therefore, opens out before us in chapter i., and we are seen in Him holy and without blame, and in love before the eye and heart of God, and in relationship as sons, and this as the eternal thought of God about us—not one thing that Christ was before Him as man in the counsels of eternity that we are not in Him—the sons of men, with whom were His delights, now revealed and set in their place as such.

The words of Ephesians ii. lead us on into another element of this associa-

tion, that gives a very intimate character to it. It is no longer merely as individuals we are thus blessed; we were "*quickened together with Christ.*" This fully involves the union with Him in this wonderful position of all who are His, from Pentecost till He comes. From the common death in sins in which we were found, we are looked at as each one quickened together by the same activity of divine power, that wrought in Christ when it raised Him from the grave—raised together, and made to sit together in the heavenlies, in Him—thus forming His body the church, the fulness of Him that fills all in all with the glory and power of redemption. It was a mystery of love and glory hid from all other ages, hid in God, but now revealed to us that we may know and enjoy this marvellous position of union with Christ.

Nor is it merely what will be true of us when Christ takes His place in power as Head over all things, accord-

ing to the counsels of Ephesians i. For in every other passage where the body is spoken of, it is the existing company on earth at any given moment since Pentecost, before that day. But, as if this were not enough, and lest we should fail to seize all the nearness and blessedness such a relationship to Christ involves, another aspect of it is given us in Ephesians v., where we find that His body is His spouse—the church He loved and gave Himself for, and still serves in that love, till love is satisfied in presenting it to Himself in glory. True, we await the day of the glorious espousals (Rev. xix.), but meanwhile, the Spirit is the power of our enjoyment of the relationship and of the production of the answering affections of the bride: “The Spirit and the bride say Come.”

Surely, “this mystery is a great one.” But it is revealed that we may know the Church’s place in the heart of Christ, and walk here with the unutterably wonderful knowledge that

with all saints we are united to Christ glorified at the right hand of God.

What depths of His heart that precious word, "It abideth alone," has disclosed to us! Alone no longer now, nor ever again, as having the family of God identified with Him in life, nature, and relationship, set consciously and in power by the Holy Ghost in His own place in that life as the risen Man with the Father and God; and I have dwelt much upon this because of its primary importance, establishing the soul in the unclouded light of our individual place and relationships. But the mystery of the Church's union with Him had to be added to all this to give us the full place of our association with Him in heavenly glory, according to the counsels of the heart of God. These both are present aspects of our association. There remains what is future. He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied, but when and how! "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me,

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be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the 'world.'" (John xvii. 24.) What a thought that He has loved us for nothing short of that—to be His own companions in the everlasting glory! Nothing less than this will satisfy Him, and He comes—we know not the moment—to receive us thus to be with Himself. And when He appears we know we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. Perfectly conformed to His image, He will be seen as the firstborn among many brethren; and displaying us in His glory, the glory that has been given Him (John xvii. 22, 23), the world will know that the Father sent the Son and loved us as He loved Him.

What love it is, past all our thought, that has chosen and sought and redeemed us for such present and eternal associations with Himself, revealed now that we may know our place in His heart. But with what proper effect

if it be not to lead us to seek practical nearness of heart to Him as a present thing? Shall He seek our company, and that for ever, and we not in some little and deepening measure care for above everything, and seek His?

May the effect of the marvellous place we have been brought into, and the love revealed in it, and known to our hearts by faith, be to make our life one of more simple realized nearness to the Lord, leading us to watch diligently against all that would practically dissociate us in the springs of it from Him. Thus only in the power of an ungrieved Spirit shall we enjoy now what is our eternal blessedness; till we see His face, and know no more to hinder the realization of it for ever.
