

Spiritual Convictions & Heavenly Affections

by J.C. Philpot

True religion is wrought in the soul by the power of God, and we must die to the world and to our own self-righteousness in order to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Scripture: Lamentations 1:12, Luke 24:26, John 10:10, John 11:25, Acts 2:24, Romans 7:9, Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Galatians 6:14, Ephesians 2:8, Ephesians 5:30, Colossians 3:1, Colossians 3:4, 2 Timothy 1:9, Hebrews 6:20, James 1:27

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Union With Christ"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches about the vital importance of experiencing death to self, resurrection in Christ, ascension to heavenly affections, and setting our hearts on things above. He emphasizes that true religion is not about external rituals or earthly pursuits, but about a spiritual union with Christ in His death, resurrection, and ascension. Philpot urges believers to seek a hidden life with Christ in God, to be weaned from earthly idols, and to set their affections on heavenly realities, drawing strength and grace from the risen Savior at the right hand of God.

Transcript

Death and Resurrection, or

Spiritual Convictions and Heavenly Affections

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford,

on June 27, 1858, by J. C. Philpot

"If you then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Col. 3:1-3

Until the eyes of our understanding are spiritually enlightened, and our heart touched by regenerating grace, we see, we know, we feel nothing savingly or experimentally of the power of God in the salvation of the soul. We may be religious, very religious; serious, extremely serious; pious, decidedly pious; we may attend church or go to chapel, receive the sacrament or sit down to the ordinance, say our prayers or pray extempore, read the Scriptures and good books; and comparing our religious life with the profane conduct of many by whom we are surrounded, may please ourselves with the deceptive illusion that we are

recommending ourselves to the favor of God, and when death shall close the scene, shall be rewarded with eternal life. And yet all this time we may be as destitute of the power of God in saving the soul, as ignorant of law and gospel, of condemnation or salvation, of what we are as sinners or what the Lord Jesus is to those who believe in his name, as the very beasts that perish. True religion must be wrought in the soul by the power of God. We are not saved because we are religious; but we are religious because we are saved.

"Who has saved us, and called us" (2 Tim. 1:9)- saved before called, and called because saved. The grace that wrote our names in the Lamb's book of life, that gave our persons to the Son of God, that he might redeem us through the cross by his sufferings, blood shedding, and death; the grace that is now in the heart of Jesus as sitting at the right hand of the Father in glory and majesty- this same grace quickens our soul into spiritual life, convinces us of sin, gives us repentance, brings us to the foot of the cross, reveals in us a precious Savior, and raises up a faith and hope and love in his name which both save and sanctify us unto eternal life. Thus we are not saved by anything of a religious nature which we can communicate to ourselves, or others communicate to us; but we are saved by the grace of God, and by the grace of God alone. "By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." (Eph. 2:8.) If, then, that grace never visits our heart with its regenerating power and its sanctifying influences, we may have all the religion that the flesh can be possessed of, in all its high doctrine or all its low doctrine; in all its strictness or all its laxness; in all its Churchism or all its Dissent; in all its Pharisaism or all its Antinomianism; and yet die under the wrath of God and have our portion with the damned.

Compare this fleshly religion in which thousands are nursed and wrapped up, and in which thousands contentedly live and die- compare, I say, this external service, this mere bodily exercise, without life or power; without faith or repentance, without love or hope, without divine teaching or heavenly testimony, with such language as I have just read from the inspired word, and which is now all but sounding in your ears. Ask people, aye, very strict and religious people, what they know about being dead and their life being hidden with Christ in God; about being risen with Christ, and seeking those things which are above; about setting their affection on things above and not on things on the earth; and what answer can they give? What do they know for themselves of a heartfelt, experimental, and divine religion like this? Nothing, absolutely nothing.

Which, then, are we to accept as true religion- that which bears the stamp of man, or that which bears the stamp of God? that which unenlightened, unregenerated men, and even ministers, would impress on our minds and impose on our consciences, or that which the Holy Spirit has written down in the inspired word as a guide to the saints of God? I need not tell you which we should believe- whether we are to follow the true light which shines in the inspired page and guides the soul to heaven and God; or that false light which issues out of the corrupt heart of man, which leads us into, and drowns us in the bog of superstition, error, and self-righteousness.

I seem to see four things in the words before us, which I shall endeavor to bring before you as they are commended to my understanding, my heart, and my conscience.

First, Death- "You are dead."

Secondly, Resurrection- "If you are risen with Christ."

Thirdly, Ascension and Session- "Your life is hid with Christ in God."

Fourthly, Affection- "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."

I. DEATH. The spring and fountain of all true religion, of all vital godliness is union with Christ. He is the head of the body, the Church; therefore, from him, and from him alone, all spiritual life comes into his mystical members. "I have come that they might have life." (John 10:10.) "I am the resurrection and the life." (John 11:25.) If, therefore, we have union with Christ- and without union with Christ we have no saving, sanctifying, or experimental religion- we shall have union with him, not only in what he is now at the right hand of the Father, but in all that he was while he was here below. As, then, the path of the Lord Jesus Christ to the right hand of the Father in glory was a path of suffering, sorrow, and death, and as in his case the cross went before the crown, so it must be with us. If we have any hope in our soul of being with Christ in the realms of eternal day; if we have any expectation of reigning with him in the life to come, and enjoying those pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore; if we have any sweet persuasion that we shall be glorified with him and see him as he is face to face, which we never shall enjoy without vital union with him- we must first be conformed to his image as manifested here below.

I need hardly tell you that all those whom God foreknew are predestinated to the image, that is, the likeness of Christ, as the apostle so clearly testifies- "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." (Rom. 8:29.) This conformity begins below, but is completed above- "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3:18.) This image or likeness of Christ is twofold-

1. His suffering image, as seen here below when he was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."
2. His glorified image, in which he now appears at the right hand of the Father. "Ought not Christ," he himself said, "to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26.) As, then, with Christ the Head, suffering and glory were firmly bound together by the will and decree of the Father, so it is with the members. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." (2 Tim. 2:12.) "If so be we suffer with him that we may be also glorified together." (Rom. 8:17.)

A. But as this is an important subject let me endeavor to open it a little more fully and clearly. Look, then, at these two points-

1. First the ground on which our conformity to the image of Christ rests.
2. Secondly the nature of that conformity.
 1. The predestinating purposes of God are the GROUND on which our conformity to the image of Christ rests. It was the eternal purpose of God to glorify his dear Son by making him the Head of a people whose nature he should assume into union with his divine Person. This is the foundation of their conformity to him, as it is also of that union with him whereby we become "members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." (Eph. 5:30.)
 2. But this shows us also the NATURE of that conformity- that he was made to resemble us by partaking of our nature, and we made to resemble him by partaking of his Spirit. As this conformity, then, to his image is a spiritual conformity- a likeness in soul, though there will be hereafter a bodily conformity, for "as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly," both in soul and body (1 Cor. 15:49), it begins at regeneration, in the implantation of the life of God in the heart. Until then,

we are conformed to this world, we bear the image of Adam the first, Adam the fallen, the Adam who "begat a son in his own likeness after his image" (Gen. 5:3), the carnal image which God despises when he awakes to execute judgment upon those who bear it. (Psalm. 73:20.)

I have shown you that the image of Christ to which we are to be conformed is twofold- 1, First, the suffering image in which he appeared upon earth, and 2, the glorified image which he now wears in heaven. As, then, we are to be conformed hereafter to his glorified image above, for "when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2), so we must be now conformed to his suffering image below.

I may seem to you perhaps wandering from my text. But not so; for this conformity to the suffering image of Christ is intimated by the words of the apostle in it- "You are dead;" for every step of the Lord Jesus Christ from the manger to the cross was, if I may use the expression, a step of death, a step in death, and a step to death. He came to die- that was his errand. There was no mortality naturally in his flesh; but he took a nature which could die, and a life that he could lay down. Had his pure humanity been naturally mortal, it would have been a fallen, corrupt, and sinful nature, subject to corruption; but God's Holy One saw no corruption. (Psalm. 16:10.) And did not he himself say? "Therefore does my Father love me because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." (John 10:17, 18.) But he came to die. "I lay down my life for the sheep." (John 10:15.) As, then, he took that life that he might lay it down, his path, from the first assumption of that life in the womb of the virgin to the laying of it down upon the cross, with every breath, word, and act of his pure humanity, was, so to speak, an act of death, because an act of suffering; for his sufferings ended in death. Therefore every act of his blessed Majesty when here below, being an act of suffering, was so far an act of death, as leading to it, terminating in it, and to us an example of it. He died to the world, for he was not of it, and by his death judged and condemned it; he died under the law, for he bore its curse and endured its penalty; he died under the wrath of God due to us that it might be appeased and put away. He died daily under poverty, shame, persecution, and temptation, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. And his daily death ended in his actual death, closing a scene of meritorious suffering with the oblation of his body and soul on the cross, in the sacrifice which he offered up as the only propitiation for sin.

B. The beginning of this conformity to the suffering image of Christ is as I have already intimated at regeneration, when the first line of the image of Christ is traced on the soul; and this line is the line of death. For we never live until we die, and we never die until we live. So Paul found it- "For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." (Rom. 7:9.) "You are dead." But when did you begin to die? When your soul was made alive unto God by his regenerating grace.

1. Our first death is, I believe, generally to the world. Conviction of sin, trouble of mind, distress of soul, guilt of conscience bring us out of it. The wounded deer cannot run with the herd. It lies down in the shade among the ferns to bleed and die, when the antlered group bound merrily on. So a wounded conscience drops and falls, or slinks away into the shade out of the company and out of the sight of the cheerful youths and mirthful maidens, among whom once perhaps the now stricken man ran first and foremost. The new life of God in the soul, the rising fear of his great name, the budding tenderness of conscience, opening like a green leaf in spring, all shrink from the chill breath, the defiling contact of the world, wherever our lot be cast, whatever be our station in life, even where neither immorality nor profanity makes itself openly manifest.

These first strokes of conviction, this strange sense of uneasiness and unhappiness, may not only come on unexpectedly, but their cause be at the time unknown to the sufferer; and yet, like the beginning of consumption, be the beginning of death. The commencement of a work of grace is often very gradual; but it always goes on until the patient dies.

2. This is being brought under the law, for "by the law is the knowledge of sin." (Rom. 3:20.) To Christ's suffering image we are to be conformed; this death then we must die; for we must have vital union with the Lord Jesus in his dying life, if we have union with him in his risen life at the right hand of the Father. As Jesus died under the law, and by dying under the law died to the law, so we must die the same death that we may be dead with him. The law must kill us as it killed him; must curse us as it cursed him; bring condemnation and guilt into our conscience as it brought condemnation visibly and manifestly upon him as he bore our sins in his own body on the tree. Not that we can suffer to the same extent, or for the same purpose as he suffered. He could say, "Is it nothing to you, all you that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, with which the Lord has afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger." (Lamen. 1:12.) He could say, in the language of the Psalmist, "Your arrows stick fast in me, and your hand presses me sore." The law did not spare him; it exacted the uttermost farthing; nor did he give up his parting breath until he could say, "It is finished."

So if we are to know anything vitally of dying with Christ, we must know something of dying as he died. And observe it was by crucifixion, a painful and lingering death, though in the Lord's case prematurely shortened; for when the work was done, why need he suffer more? Thus under the law you die a lingering death; gradually your strength and spirit decline and fade; weaker and weaker does the flesh become until at last you die away as to all hope and help. This is dying under the law.

3. But again, Christ died under the manifested, visible anger of God. Not but what his blessed Majesty had a gleam of light in seeing his Father's countenance beaming in upon him with ineffable complacency when the cloud of wrath had passed away, for how else could he have said with such sweet filial confidence, "Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit?" (Luke 23:46.) But in appearance, in the eyes of man, of his enemies and murderers, he died under the wrath of God, for he died an accursed death according to the very language of the Law, for he was literally and truly "hanged upon a tree." His cruel foes knew nothing of those divine purposes of which they were the unconscious executors; nor did they see that when "they derided him, saying, he saved others, let him save himself," he was then offering his body and soul to his Father as a sin-atoning sacrifice.

So we in a sense must die in our experience under the wrath of God. We must feel what a holy and majestic God we have to deal with, and that we are justly doomed to die; that by our sins we have deserved eternal condemnation; and that unless he extends mercy to us, except he saves us by his grace, we never can be delivered from the wrath to come. As we thus feel or fear the terrors of the Almighty, we die to all legal hope; we are killed to our righteousness, and expire before God, sometimes in an agony of distress. When your soul was brought down within you by a sense of God's anger due to your sins; when guilt lay hard and heavy upon your conscience, you have fallen down, sometimes bodily, flat before God, feeling there was nothing in you to save you from the lowest hell, and that if God were to hurl a mighty thunderbolt from the innermost recess of heaven and launch you into the bottomless pit, you only had your desert, and must say justice had its due. This was to die under the wrath of God; this was to expire under a sense of guilt and condemnation in your conscience. Have you never felt this?

C. But death, naturally and literally, is not in all cases a rapid or instantaneous process. There is the lingering consumption and slowly advancing dropsy, as well as the rapid fever and quick-destroying inflammation. How varied in name and nature, in beginning and progress, are the diseases which thin the ranks of the living and fill the cemetery with the dead. But the end in all is the same. Long or short may be the road, but they all terminate in the same place- our last home. As in death natural, so is it in death spiritual. The apostle says, "I am crucified with Christ;" and again, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." (Gal. 6:14.) Crucifixion, we know, was a lingering death; it did not take life away instantaneously, for, with a refinement of cruelty, it avoided injuring the vital organs, that the criminal might, as a Roman emperor said of one of his enemies, "feel himself die." Instances are therefore recorded of men living as long as three days upon the cross; but they slowly got weaker and weaker, and their bodily powers suffered gradual diminishing, until pain and hunger and thirst closed the scene. So it is in grace. It is not all the people of God who, like Heman, suffer his terrors until they are in desperation; nor do all tremble over the open mouth of hell with unspeakable fear lest they be plunged headlong into it. But they die a slow and lingering death, becoming weaker and weaker until all their strength is wasted away and gone, and they die in their feelings, helpless and hopeless to save themselves. Thus they die as completely, if not so rapidly or violently, as those who fall down slain under the terrors of the law, and feel the outstretched sword of justice more pointedly and more powerfully in their very vitals.

D. Now it is by this death that we die unto the things of time and sense; to all that charms the natural mind of man; to the pleasures and pursuits of life; to that busy, restless world which once held us so fast and firm in its embrace, and whirled us round and round within its giddy dance. Let us look back. We were not always a set of poor mopes, as the world calls us. We were once as merry and as gay as the merriest and gayest of them. But what were we really and truly with all our mirth? Dead to God, alive to sin; dead to everything holy and divine, alive to everything vain and foolish, light and trifling, carnal and sensual, if not exactly vile and abominable. Our natural life was with all of us a life of gratifying our senses; with some of us, perhaps, chiefly of pleasure and worldly happiness; with others a life of covetousness, or ambition, or self-righteousness.

Men's pursuits and pleasures differ as widely as their station or disposition; but a life of selfish gratification reigns and rules in all. Now by dying with Christ, we die unto those things in which our natural life consists, for they live in us as long as we live in them; and that they may die in us we must die to them. Thus the apostle speaks of his own double crucifixion- "Whereby the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." The world, then, can only be crucified unto us as we are crucified unto it. Paul therefore says- "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." (Gal. 5:24.) Many have tried to crucify the flesh, but never could do it because they were not first crucified themselves. Now thus to crucify us is to bring a death as to earthly things into the soul. Thus under the conviction of sin we die to the world; for when suffering under the pangs of a guilty conscience, what is the world to us? What relief can it afford to a bleeding wound? What balm to a troubled mind? What salvation from death and hell? Therefore we die to the world from its inability to do us any good, as the world, the things of time and sense, the charms of nature and art, the spectators of his misery would all pass before the eyes of a man dying on a cross- he dead to them, they dead to him. So it is or should be in the crucifixion of the soul. "O, world," it says, as it hangs on the cross, "you have deceived me long enough. Where now are your promised pleasures, your mirth, your amusements, your schemes of profit and advancement? What can they all do for me a poor dying sinner? I have spent days and years greedily looking for the offered enjoyment, and what have I found but guilt and condemnation? Let me die to you and live unto God."

Similarly we die unto sin. Sin once put forth its intense power and overcame all our resolutions; sin allured us, and we followed like the fool to the stocks. Sin charmed, and we listened to its seductive wiles. Sin held out its bait, and we too greedily, too heedlessly swallowed the hook. But now we see and feel what guilt and condemnation it has brought into our conscience to have been so drawn aside, entangled, and overcome. We find and feel that the pleasures of sin are but for a season, and that it is an evil and a bitter thing to sin against the Lord. When, too, we are favored to view by faith what suffering and sorrow sin cost the Lord to put it away that we might not sink forever under its load, there is a dying to it- at least to its reigning power and dominion.

So with our own righteousness, wisdom, strength, and all the goodness of the creature. There was a time when we highly prized them all, and, like Job, "would not let them go." But by degrees, as the law, the justice, and holiness of God, the nature and evil of sin, and our own helplessness to do the things that we would, were opened up in our consciences, we died as to the power which we once thought we had in ourselves to believe, repent, and obey. Our boasted knowledge we saw to be ignorance and the worst of ignorance, as puffing us up with pride when really destitute of all true knowledge of God and his dear Son. Our once vaunted strength we found to be weakness, for it never enabled us to truly repent of sin nor savingly believe in the Lord Jesus, or kept us from the power of evil. And thus we died to them and they to us. We might call upon them to help us in the hour of need; but it was like calling to the dead to help the living.

But when a better righteousness, wisdom and strength were revealed to us in a crucified Christ, then we gladly, as well as feelingly and experimentally, died to all our own, that we might find them all in him. Thus there is a blessedness in dying with Christ, for by this death we only lose what we may well part with, and get in its stead what makes us rich forever and ever. To part with the world is to part with its condemnation; and to die to self is the very germ and beginning of not only the death of our worst enemy, but of living to Christ. Thus death becomes the basis of all vital godliness, the grand preliminary to everything holy and happy, blessed and peaceable for time and for eternity.

"You are dead." Do you not find it so by vital experience? When does religion most flourish in your heart? When have the things of time and sense least influence on your soul? When pressed down with sin and sorrow, do you not seem to be more dead to the world than when levity and frivolity possess your mind? And if ever you are favored with a glimpse of a suffering Jesus in the gloomy garden, or expiring on the ignominious cross, does it not seem, at least while the impression lasts, to put a death on everything which at other times occupies or charms your mind, while it raises up a good hope through grace in your soul?

As, then, we look to Jesus by faith, dying that we might live, the virtue of his death flowing into the soul kills us to the things of time and sense. We thus find that the more we close our arms round the Person of Jesus as crucified for us, and the more we embrace the mystery of his atoning blood and dying love, the more the power of sin, worldliness, self-righteousness, creature strength and wisdom, die in the soul. But O, the difficulty of parting with these idols! It is killing work. And yet when we are in some measure killed to them, what a deliverance it is from the miserable bondage of sin, and the hardly less miserable bondage of the world and self.

II. We have seen what death is. We have fairly looked at him in the face, and we have seen that though he is so terrible to the flesh, he is after all the Christian's friend, not his enemy. Now, then, we pass on to view his companion and successor, RESURRECTION, which was to be our second point of consideration this

morning.

"If you then be risen with Christ." We thus see that there is a rising with Christ as there is a dying with him. The Resurrection of our blessed Lord has various aspects, all which bear upon the experience of the saints of God.

1. Christ rose from the dead for himself triumphant over death and hell. But he rose not only for himself that he might sit on his throne of glory according to the promise of the Father, but as the head of the Church, of that countless multitude, which when gathered together will not only exceed the stars in number, but outshine them in glory. Now as all these died with Christ when he died upon the accursed tree, and were mystically buried with him when he lay in the sepulcher; so when the mighty Jesus rose from the dead and issued from that gloomy tomb in which he had lain for three days and three nights, they at the same moment rose with him. We read therefore that God "has quickened us together with Christ, and has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2:5, 6.) We here see the connection that there is between Christ's resurrection and our regeneration. "Has quickened us," that is, made us alive, "together with Christ." When, then, life entered into the dead body of Christ in the tomb, it was the mystical quickening of all the members of his body, the sure and earnest pledge of their regeneration. Peter, therefore, says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Pet. 1:3.) As but for the death of Christ there could have been no atonement for sin, so but for his resurrection there could have been neither justification nor regeneration; for as "he was delivered for our offences, so he was raised again for our justification." (Rom. 4:25.)

Regeneration, then, is the resurrection of the soul as the prelude to the resurrection of the body and soul together in the great day; and it is to be known in vital experience in the same way as death is made known. For as we die spiritually and experimentally with Christ under and by the law, so we rise spiritually and experimentally with him under and by the gospel. When Christ rose from the dead, the law had no more power over him. The law did all it could do in killing him. When he was upon the cross, the law discharged all its thunders and curses upon his devoted head. It condemned and slew him, and then the law could do no more; for it is with the law of God as with the law of man- when once it has inflicted its penalty and the criminal has died under that penalty, the law has done its office. It dies in killing. A criminal cannot be twice executed. Thus it was with Christ, and thus it was with the people of Christ- when the law had killed Christ, it was dead as regarding him, and never could touch him again. So when he rose from the dead, he rose free from all law charges, demands, and exactions; he rose as completely discharged from the penalties of the law as a criminal who goes out of prison when the Queen has signed his free pardon.

2. But how is this to be made experimentally known? By some manifestation or discovery of a risen Christ to the soul. We read, "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." (John 20:20.) Why? Because they saw in him their Lord and their God, as Thomas saw and confessed. Their doubts and fears, their unbelief and infidelity were all gone, and they rejoiced in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory. So when the soul is blessed with any manifestation of Jesus as risen from the dead, and with a sweet testimony of its saving interest in his death and resurrection, and the conscience is purged in any measure by the application of atoning blood so as to deliver it from the guilt of sin and the curse of the law, and bring it into the liberty with which Christ makes his people free, it rises experimentally with him; that is to say, it rises out of and from under the condemnation of the law and conscience, and enters into the

blessedness of salvation by free grace and by free grace alone.

3. But not only does it rise from under all law charges and condemnation, but it rises out of the world by rising above the world. How many there are even of those who desire to fear God, who are kept down by the world, and to whom it has not lost its attractive power; who are held fast, at least for a time, by worldly business, or entangled by worldly people or worldly engagements. Their partners in business or their partners in life; their carnal relatives or their worldly children; their numerous connections or their social habits; their strong passions or their deep-rooted prejudices, all bind and fetter them down to earth. There they grovel and lie amid, what Milton terms, "the smoke and stir of this dim spot, which men call earth," and so bound are they with the cords of their sins that they scarcely seek deliverance from them, or even desire to rise beyond the mists and fogs of this dim spot into a purer air, so as to breathe a heavenly atmosphere, and rise up with Jesus from the grave of their corruptions.

But if, as members of his mystical body, they are already risen with Christ, as it was not possible for the Head to be held by death when God loosed the pains thereof (Acts 2:24), so neither shall they ever be buried in the grave of carnality and worldliness. They must rise spiritually if they rose mystically. If savingly interested in the reality of Christ's resurrection, they must know the power of Christ's resurrection.

But how blessed it is to know a little of this power; to rise, in our feelings and affections, from the grave of carnality in which we are so often fast held; from that death and bondage, legality and self-righteousness, which so press us down. And not only so, but to rise above the smiles and frowns of the creature, above the distracting cares of daily occupation and business, far away from the company of ungodly men and dead professors. Thus to mount up is a fulfilling of the promise- "Though you have laid among the pots, yet shall you be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold." (Psalm 68:13.) O to get away from the dust and dirt of the pots; from the clay and rubbish of the potter's yard; where all foul vermin breed among the broken potsherds; and to be a dove soaring on its silver wings and golden feathers up to heaven's gate! Do we not know sometimes what it is thus to mount up in affectionate desires after living union and communion with the Lord Jesus? This is being risen with Christ.

But how many who, with all their faults and failings, we still hope fear God, seem more like Lazarus in the tomb, "bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face bound about with a napkin," than like Lazarus after the word had been spoken, "Loose him, and let him go." Alas! too many members even of Christian churches, who have made an open profession of faith in a risen and ascended Jesus, seem much more concerned about the prosperity of their shop or farm, and more anxious about their wives and families, and the poor perishing things of time and sense generally, than about the prosperity of their soul. But while thus held down in and by their grave clothes, they find it as impossible to disentangle themselves from them as Lazarus was to loosen his own bands of death. Nothing short of the same voice of love and power which called forth the sleeping Lazarus can bring them out of the tomb to see the face of a risen Christ.

You that are dead and yet alive, buried and yet risen, can you trace in your souls anything of these two points which this morning I have endeavored to open up? Can you find anything like death, and anything like resurrection? Have you ever sunk under the terrors of a broken law, under guilt of conscience, under a sense of condemnation, under fears of eternally perishing, under a solemn conviction that by no exertion of your own you could save your soul from the wrath of God; and thus have died to all your own strength, wisdom, and goodness? Can you look back to any special season when such an experience of death was wrought in your soul? Or if you cannot lay your hand upon any particular time or special season, yet can you trace that, for a longer or shorter period, you have had convictions of sin, and that they have been of

such a nature, reality, and depth as to bring your heart down with labor, and make you feel that unless Christ be revealed to your soul, you must sink into eternal misery?

Though painful at the time, and though perhaps we were then quite ignorant what the Lord was doing with and in us, yet how good it is, how strengthening and encouraging to faith to be able to look back to a season when the Lord laid judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet, so as to disannul our covenant with death and to tread down our agreement with hell. Convictions are not consolations; the law is not the gospel; bondage and imprisonment are not deliverance and liberty; but they precede them, prepare for them, and are indispensable unto them.

But has the Lord gone a step further in your soul's experience? Has the Spirit of God wrought upon your heart in any way of mercy and goodness by revealing salvation through sovereign, super-abounding grace? Has he ever given you to see the beauty and blessedness, grace and glory of the Person of a risen Christ, and thus brought into your heart a sweet acquaintance with his love and blood and salvation, as so suited to your case, as so adapted to all your wants and woes, as so meeting in every point the extremity of your desperate state by nature and practice? Has the Lord the Spirit thus raised up in your soul any measure of faith in the Son of God, any faith of adherence, if not faith of assurance, so that, as the Scripture speaks, you cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart (Acts 11:23); that is a firm resolve and fixed resolution, in his grace and strength, to hold on and out unto the end, and sooner die than part with a good hope in him?

Now this is resurrection, for this is a rising up out of the ruins of self to embrace a risen Christ! And wherever there has been death there will be this resurrection. The wicked die in their sins, but not so the righteous. Many die in the convictions of their natural conscience, as Saul, Ahithophel, and Judas. But the saint of God never dies under the weight and burden of spiritual convictions; for in them there is a heavenly life which can never die. Being risen with Christ, as a member of his mystical body, he will never die in despair nor under the wrath of God. He may fear again and again lest he should so die; and through fear of death and what comes after death may all his life-time be subject to bondage; but liberty and deliverance, however long delayed, will come at last. The resurrection of Christ is the sure pledge of this; for as Jesus must rise from the tomb and could not lie there longer than the appointed time, so the saint of God will not ever lie under a sense of wrath; will not ever groan and sigh under terror and apprehension; will not ever be in the tomb of darkness and gloom. The Lord will bring him forth and manifest his risen power in his own time and way to his soul; and then he will have in his conscience a blessed testimony of Christ's resurrection by knowing the power of it in his own heart.

III. But we come now to our third point- ASCENSION, and its consequence- SESSION, or sitting at the right hand of God.

A. ASCENSION. Jesus did not tarry upon earth long after he had risen from the dead. Forty days he spent here below to be seen of his disciples, to whom "he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3), to leave indisputable testimony that he was the same Jesus who was crucified at Calvary. But he did not tarry longer than was necessary for this purpose, and to establish their wavering faith. At the end of the forty days, he ascended from Mount Olivet in the open sight of his eleven disciples, in whose presence "he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight." (Acts. 1:9.) Thus there was a visible departure of our gracious Lord; and this was performed in the presence and sight of all the eleven apostles to confirm them in the reality and certainty of his going up on high; for, though they did not see him when he rose, they saw him when he ascended. Eye-witnesses, as has been observed by

learned divines, were not necessary unto the act of Christ's resurrection, but were necessary unto the act of his ascension; for to see him when risen was a sufficient proof of his resurrection, but he must be seen ascending for proof of his ascension. I have insisted upon this point, because I wish to lay a firm basis on which our faith may stand. But we will now consider the ascension of our gracious Lord experimentally.

As then we have union with Christ in death and in resurrection, so we have union with him in ascension. We therefore read in a passage which I have before quoted, "and has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2:6.) There were certain steps from the cross to the crown taken by our blessed Lord, in which we have union and fellowship with him-

1st--death

2nd--burial

3rd--quickenings

4th--resurrection

5th--ascension

6th--session, that is sitting down at God's right hand.

In all these points and steps the Church has union and communion with Christ. We have seen death, burial, quickening, resurrection, and now we come to ascension. We have not literally ascended any more than we have literally risen; but we ascend spiritually as we arise from the dead spiritually. Our bodies are here below, but our souls, we trust, are risen and ascended with Christ. What this ascension is experimentally we shall see more particularly when we come to our last point, for it is contained in the precept, "Set your affection on things above." Have you not every now and then heavenly affections, spiritual desires, earnest breathings, actings of faith and hope and love- those living tenants of the soul, which pant and flutter like so many imprisoned birds in their cage? It is these affections that ascend with Christ to where he is at God's right hand, when the Spirit opens the cage and the young eagles mount on high.

Bear this, then, in mind, that when Christ ascended, he ascended not only for himself, but as the great Head of the Church. "I go to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." He ascended as the Head of his mystical body, and thus took the whole of the body into heaven with him. As upon the cross all the elect of God died with him; as in the tomb they were all buried with him; as when he rose they all rose with him; so when Christ ascended into heaven they all ascended with him. He therefore said, "I go to prepare a place for you." He prepared a place by taking possession in his own Person, that where he is there his people may be also. Thus when the Lord Jesus Christ ascended up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of the Father, when all the angels sounded their golden harps and the courts of heaven were filled with glorious harmony, as the principalities and powers in heavenly places and the spirits of just men made perfect beheld the Son of God sitting down upon his throne of glory, the Church of God virtually ascended with him, and sat down with him at the right hand of the Majesty on high. This mystical sitting down in heavenly places with Christ is the foundation of our spiritual ascension; for as those divine realities are handed down into our soul by the power of God, and their sweetness and blessedness made experimentally manifest in our hearts, our affections rise and ascend until they all center in Jesus at the right hand of the Father.

Do you not thus know the ascension of Christ not only in doctrine but in experience? Have you never had a view of Christ at the right hand of God? When you thus saw him by the eye of faith your heart went up toward him, and your affections flowed out where your heart was gone, for you saw him at the right hand of the Father, as having ascended and led captivity captive. I hope I know something of this in soul experience or I could not describe it to you. O that you and I knew more of it, and that our affections were more set upon things above, and less upon things of the earth.

B. SESSION. Consequent upon the ascension of Christ is his Session, that is, in the language of our text, sitting "on the right hand of God."

Now this Session of Christ at God's right hand implies several things; first, Acceptance, that is, the approbation of his heavenly Father, and his acceptance of him as the God-man Mediator, which was manifested by his placing him at his own right hand; secondly, Exaltation to regal dignity and power; thirdly, Intercession, for he was "to sit as a priest upon his throne" (Zech, 6:13); and fourthly, Mediation, as the Church's living Head, for our life in the text is declared to "be hid with Christ in God."

But we shall find that this session with Christ is full of heavenly fruit, and like the tree which John saw in vision, its fruit and leaves are for the healing of the nations. These fruits must be experimentally known that they may be handled, tasted, and enjoyed. Thus every precious promise which was ever applied to your soul, every mark of grace, every sweet whisper, every look of love, every glimpse of the King in his beauty, are all so many testimonies that Jesus is at God's right hand. Why? Because they are so many fruits of his intercession.

Do you not find your need of a Mediator when you approach the throne of grace? Where do you direct your prayers? Do they not all ascend to where Jesus sits? And must they not be perfumed with the incense of his intercession in order that they may enter the ears of the Lord of sabbath? Do you know anything of spiritual communion with the Lord Jesus Christ? To whom do you unbosom your sorrows? Before whose face do you lay your woes? To whom do you resort in times of temptation and distress. Who can support you under them, or deliver you out of them? Are you not looking for a manifestation of the love and blood and grace of Jesus? Does not this show that your hope is anchored within the veil where the forerunner is for us already entered? (Heb. 6:20.)

C. But I just intimated that one of the fruits of the Session of Christ at the right hand of God, and to which I must now confine myself, is that he might be a living Head over all things to the Church. For this end, as Paul tells us, God "set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places." (Eph. 1:20-23.) The apostle, therefore, in our text, says, "your life is hid with Christ in God." Thus Jesus as risen, as ascended, as sitting at the right hand of the Father, is "our life." We have no other; for he is "the way, the truth, and the life." But this life is "hid with Christ in God." By the word "HID" we may understand mainly two things; 1st, that this life is concealed from the world. The spiritual life of a child of God is altogether hidden from the carnal eye. Secondly, it signifies that this life is stored up in him, deposited in his hands, and laid up safely and securely in his bosom. Out of him then, as our life, come all our daily supplies of faith and love and every grace. From him comes all my power to preach, all your power to hear. From him comes every sensation of contrition and brokenness, every feeling of humility, simplicity, and godly sincerity; from him, as "of God made unto us sanctification," is derived that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

What a bearing then has the resurrection, ascension, and session of Christ upon the experience of a Christian! Take these divine realities away or hide them out of sight, and what is there but carnality and death? It is from lack of an experimental knowledge of these divine truths that so little is known of spiritual religion. But nothing else is of any real value. An earthly religion may content a Pharisee; a carnal, formal worship may satisfy a dead professor; but it is living union with a living Lord at the right hand of God, and receiving communications out of his fullness which alone can satisfy a living soul. Can you live without Christ? If you are a real believer in the Son of God, you can no more live without Christ than without food; without prayer than without water; without faith and hope than without daily nourishment. I fully grant that we have our cold and dead seasons, and these many and long; but I am speaking now of a believer's feelings when the life of God is warm in his heart.

Now all these supplies of life and power, of grace and strength, are communicated out of the fullness of Jesus at the right hand of God, for in him it has pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell; and they are sent down by him to keep alive our dying souls, for our life is "hid with Christ in God." It is the breathings, movements, and actings of this hidden life in the soul which distinguish a real Christian from a dead professor. A dead professor is satisfied with an earthly religion, with a round of forms, with external ordinances, with the flattering applause of dying creatures like himself. But the child of God, in whose heart the Spirit dwells and whom he teaches by his own heavenly grace, is from time to time looking up unto Jesus to receive out of his fullness. His life is hid with Christ in God. In the bosom of Christ he pours out his sorrows; from that bosom he receives his joys. This is the ascension of a believing soul to where Jesus sits enthroned on high, able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him.

Do not be deceived; do not think that a mere external religion or a profession of the truth, without an experience of its life and power, will ever save you. It is the hidden life, and that hidden with Christ in the very bosom of God, that makes and manifests a living soul. If we have not this, we have nothing. I tell you plainly and faithfully that if you have not this inward and hidden life of God in your bosom you know nothing aright, you have nothing to save or sanctify your soul. Search, therefore, and see, you who desire to fear God, what you can find in your bosom of this union with Christ to death, resurrection, ascension, and sitting together with him in heavenly places. True religion is a heavenly religion. It comes down from God and ascends up to God; and be assured if you are partakers of this heavenly religion that your glorified bodies will hereafter ascend with your immortal souls; for "when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory." (Col. 3:4.)

IV. From our union with Christ in these points follows the apostle's exhortation, which I proposed to consider in the last place under the head, AFFECTION. "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."

The apostle assumes that the Colossian believers to whom he was writing were partakers of these vital realities- that they were dead, risen, ascended, and sitting with Christ in heavenly places. He, therefore, earnestly exhorts them to the performance of those living acts which manifest the reality of grace in the heart.

We may divide his exhortation into two main points- first, negative; secondly, positive; that is, first what they should not do, secondly what they should do.

1. What believers should NOT do. He bids them, then, not to "set their affection on things on the earth." Now naturally we have no affection for anything else. There is no such thing as a spiritual desire or a

heavenly affection in our soul when we are in a state of unregeneracy. So fallen are we that we love, and cannot but love the world and the things of the world. We have no heart for anything but the things of time and sense; no, rather, as our carnal mind is enmity against God, we hate everything which is spiritual, heavenly, and holy. One main part, therefore, of the work of God upon the soul is to take off our affections from these earthly things, and to fix them upon Jesus where he sits enthroned above, that we may love and hate those things which he loves and hates.

But how broad, how expressive is the exhortation, "not to set our affection on things on the earth." There is not a thing on the earth, then, according to this direction, on which we should set our affections. We love our wives, our children, our relatives; and we should do so- for husbands are bidden to love their wives even as themselves (Eph. 5:25, 33.) But we must not love them in preference to God, or inconsistently with our love and obedience to him; nor must we love them as we love him who died to save us from the wrath to come. Our affections are not to be set upon things on the earth. Business, worldly cares, the interests of our family, the things of time and sense, in whatever form they come, whatever shape they may assume, must not so entwine themselves round our affections as to bind them down to the ground. We may use them as God's creatures for the support and sustentation of our life, but we must not abuse them. We cannot in our present time-state be utterly divorced from the things of time and sense; for most of us have to gain our living by the sweat of our brow, or the harder sweat of our brain; but we are not to set our affections on them. Houses, gardens, land, property, friends, family- all these earthly things we are not to love, even if we possess them or some of them, nor set our affections on them so that they should become idols.

A main purpose of God in his rod and by a daily cross, is to wean, loosen, and divorce our heart from these natural idols, for we cannot embrace them without defilement. James speaks of one main element of pure and undefiled religion as consisting in keeping ourselves "unspotted from the world." (James 1:27.) Thus we may compare a child of God to a person dressed in clean clothes, say a very neatly appareled female who has to tread her way through some dirty alley- through one of the miserable slums of London. How carefully must she tread, how closely must she keep her garments to preserve herself from defilement.

So it is in grace- we have to walk in this world as a spotless female would walk through a narrow passage, where on every side there was nothing but filth and foulness. You cannot think perhaps that this fair and beautiful world, as it appears to our eye, can be as loathsome or as filthy as a London alley. But it is so, for everything here is defiled with the filth of sin. Thus any lovely object may be foul, because turned to an idol. It may be but a flower, and yet be an idol; it may be a darling child whom everybody admires for its beauty and attractiveness; yet it may be a defiling idol. A cherished scheme, a favorite speculation, may be an idol. A crop of wheat, a flock of sheep, a good farm, a thriving business, universal respect, may all be defiling idols; for all these things, when eagerly pursued and loved, draw the soul away from God, and by drawing it insensibly from him, bring pollution and guilt into the conscience.

2. What believers should do. Now we are, or by grace in due time shall be, through trials and afflictions and the dealings of God upon our soul, weaned and divorced from earth with all its charms and pleasures and all its polluting idols. And if we are favored with a faith's view of an ascended Jesus, and he is pleased to endear himself to our soul by some discovery of his love and grace, it will draw up our heart and affections to himself. We shall thus be enabled to perform the positive part of the precept, which is to seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God, and set our affections there. If we thus learn to love him, we shall love other things less; and if he is pleased to keep us near to himself,

we shall endeavor, as John bids us, to keep ourselves from idols, which can only bring confusing guilt into our conscience.

I am indeed well aware that all this must be wrought in our soul by the power of God. I am not laying down or enforcing these precepts as legal duties to perform, but blessed privileges which are wrought by God in the heart. I know what a wicked heart I carry in my bosom, how soon I am drawn aside and entangled by the snares of sin and Satan. But my desire is to be ever looking up to the Lord of life and glory, that he would send down the communications of his grace, that I may experience the power of his resurrection in my heart, and thus be weaned from these things of time and sense, and have my affections more singly fixed on his blessed Majesty. And I know that true religion must ever have this effect. It must purify the heart and draw out the affections. Whether you know it or not, you may depend upon it that there is a vital reality in true religion, a living power in the grace of God; and that where God works by his Spirit, something must be done, yes, and something will be done, to make a separation between us and those who are living to themselves, and setting all their affections on the earth.

May the Lord, in his infinite mercy, lay these things with greater weight and power upon our conscience; make us to feel more and more their solemn importance, and lead us more vitally and experimentally into those heavenly truths which bear upon earth such precious fruit, and which shall be "crowned with praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ," to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be ascribed equal and eternal glory!

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