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with  
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UPDATED TO MODERN ENGLISH

THOMAS BOSTON



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# **Union with Christ**

**by Thomas Boston**

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## **Introduction**

I am the vine; you are the branches.—JOHN 15:5.

After discussing the change brought about by regeneration in those who will inherit eternal life, as opposed to their natural state of degeneracy, I will now address the transformation that occurs when they unite with the Lord Jesus Christ, in contrast to their natural state of misery. The doctrine of the saints' union with Christ is clearly and extensively elaborated upon in this chapter's first eight verses, as part of our Lord's farewell sermon to his disciples. Their hearts were filled with sorrow, and they were likely wondering what would become of them once their Master was gone. Who would instruct them, resolve their doubts, support them through difficulties and discouragements, and how would they live without their usual interaction with him? Thus, our Lord Jesus Christ fittingly introduces them to the mystery of their union with him, comparing himself to a vine and them to its branches.

He makes two comparisons:

1. Himself to a vine. "I am the vine." He had just celebrated the sacrament of his supper with his disciples—a symbol and confirmation of their union with him—and informed them that he would no longer drink the fruit of the vine until he did so anew with them in his Father's kingdom. He then reveals himself as the vine from which the wine of their consolation would flow. The vine may lack the beauty of other trees, but it is incredibly fruitful, aptly symbolising our Lord's humble state while leading many to glory. His main goal in likening himself to a vine is to portray himself as the supporter and nourisher of his people, through whom they live and bear fruit.

2. He compares them to branches; they are the branches of that vine. They are connected to and growing from this source, drawing life and sustenance from it. It is an elegant analogy, as if he were saying, "I am like a vine, and you are like the branches of that vine." There are two types of branches: 1. Natural branches that initially sprout from the trunk. These branches have always been part of the tree. 2. Grafted branches, which are detached from the tree that first

nurtured them and then inserted into another to grow upon it. This process results in branches being part of a tree that they did not originally belong to. The branches mentioned in the text are of the latter type; they are separated from the tree that initially sustained them, as the original language implies. None of humankind's offspring are natural branches of the second Adam, Jesus Christ, the true vine; they are the natural branches of the first Adam, the degenerate vine. However, all of the elect are eventually broken away from their natural source and grafted into Christ, the true vine.

**DOCTRINE:** Those who are in a state of grace are grafted onto and united with the Lord Jesus Christ. They are removed from their natural origin and are now grafted into Christ as their new source.

In general, to understand the union between the Lord Jesus Christ and his elect, who believe in and rely on him, I observe:

1. It is a spiritual union. In marriage, a man and woman become one flesh through their union; Christ and true believers become one spirit through this union, as stated in 1 Corinthians 6:17. Just as one soul or spirit animates both the head and the members in a natural body, the one Spirit of God dwells in Christ and the Christian. For "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to him," Romans 8:9. Earthly unions are formed through contact, like the stones in a building, but this is a union of a different nature. If it were possible for us to physically eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ, it would not benefit us, as mentioned in John 6:63. It was not Mary's physical act of bearing him in her womb but her faith in him that made her a saint, as seen in Luke 11:27-28.
2. It is a real union. Due to our weaknesses in our current state and our immersion in sin, we tend to create mental images of everything presented to us, and whatever is denied to us, we are inclined to suspect as mere fiction. However, nothing is more real than what is spiritual, as it closely resembles the nature of

God, the source of all reality. We cannot see the union between our own soul and body with our eyes, nor can we accurately imagine it as we do with tangible things, but the reality of it is undeniable. Faith is not a fantasy but "the substance of things hoped for," Hebrews 11:1. The union between Christ and believers, established through faith, is not imaginary but highly real: "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones," Ephesians 5:30.

3. It is a close and intimate union. Believers, those who are regenerated and rely on Christ, have put on Christ, as stated in Galatians 3:27. If that is not enough, he is in them, as mentioned in John 17:23, and is formed within them like a child in the womb, according to Galatians 4:19. He is the foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11), and they are the living stones built upon him (1 Peter 2:5). He is the head, and they are the body (Ephesians 1:22-23). Furthermore, he lives in them, as their very souls live in their bodies (Galatians 2:20). And most significantly, they are one with the Father and the Son, just as the Father is in Christ and Christ is in the Father (John 17:21).
4. Although it is not merely a legal union, it is a union supported by law. Christ, as the guarantor, and Christians as the principal debtors, are one in the eyes of the law. When the elect incurred a debt to God's justice along with the rest of humanity, Christ became their guarantor and paid the debt. When they believe in him, they are united to him in a spiritual marriage union. This union is so effective that what Christ did and suffered for them is considered, in a legal sense, as if they had done and suffered it themselves. Hence, they are said to be crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20), buried with him (Colossians 2:12), and even raised up together with Christ and made to sit with him in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), which can only be understood in a legal context.

5. It is an indissoluble union. Once united with Christ, the bond remains forever. He never leaves the heart where he has taken residence. Nobody can break this blessed connection. Will Christ himself dissolve it? No, he will not, as he says in Jeremiah 32:40, "I will not turn away from them." Can sinners sever the bond? No, they cannot, for God declares, "they shall not depart from me." Can devils do it? No, unless they are stronger than Christ and his Father, for Christ declares in John 10:28-30, "neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand," and "none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." Even death, which separates husband and wife and the soul from the body, cannot dissolve this union. As seen in Romans 8:38-39, the Apostle Paul is convinced that neither death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future, nor any powers, height nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Just as death separated Christ's soul from his body but could not separate either from his divine nature, so too will the saints remain united to Christ in both life and death, for they "sleep in Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 4:14) and "he keeps all their bones" (Psalm 34:20). Union with Christ is the grace in which we stand, firm and stable like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved.
  
6. It is a mysterious union. The gospel is a doctrine of mysteries. It reveals to us the substantial union of the three persons in one Godhead (1 John 5:7), "These three are one;" the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 3:16), "God was manifest in the flesh;" and the mystical union between Christ and believers, which is also a great mystery (Ephesians 5:32). Oh, what mysteries are here! The head in heaven, the members on earth, yet truly united! "Christ in the believer, living in him, walking in him:" and "the believer dwelling in God, putting on the Lord Jesus, eating his flesh, and drinking his blood!" This makes the saints a mystery to the world and even to themselves.

I now come to speak more specifically about this union with, and grafting into, Jesus Christ.

I. I will consider the natural stock from which the branches are taken.

II. The supernatural stock they are grafted into.

III. Which branches are cut off from the old stock and placed into the new.

IV. How this process occurs.

V. The benefits that flow from this union and grafting.

## **I. The Natural Stock:**

### **An Examination of the Roots from Which the Branches Are Taken**

I. Let's examine the stock from which the branches are taken. The two Adams, that is, Adam and Christ, are the two stocks. The Scripture speaks of these two as if there were no other people in the world (1 Corinthians 15:45), "The first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a life-giving spirit;" (verse 47) "The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven." The reason is that everyone has been a branch of one of these two, with all people belonging to either one stock or the other. In these two categories, all humankind is divided (verse 48), "As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly." The first Adam, then, is the natural stock on which the branches are initially found growing, which are later cut off and grafted into Christ. The fallen angels, having no relation to the first Adam, have none to the second.



There are four things to remember here. (1) All of humanity, except for the man Christ, are naturally branches of the first Adam (Romans 5:12), "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin: and so death passed upon all men." (2) The bond that connected us to the natural stock was the covenant of works. Adam, being our natural root, was also our moral root, representing all his descendants in the covenant of works. "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (Romans 5:19). There had to be a unique relationship between that one man and the many to provide a basis for imputing his sin to them. This relationship did not arise from the natural bond between him and us, as a father to his children. Our immediate parents' sins are not imputed to us as Adam's sin is. Instead, it arose from a moral bond between Adam and us, the bond of a covenant – the covenant of works – where we are united to him as branches to a stock. Consequently, Jesus Christ, though a descendant of Adam (Luke 3:23-38), was not one of these branches. Since he did not come from Adam in virtue of the blessing of marriage given before the fall (Genesis 1:28), "Be fruitful, and multiply," but in virtue of a special promise made after the fall (Genesis 3:15), "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head," he could not be represented by Adam in a covenant made before his fall. (3) As it is impossible for a branch to be in two stocks at once, no person can be in both the first and second Adam simultaneously. (4) Hence, it is evident that all who are not grafted into Jesus Christ are still branches of the old stock and partake of its nature. Now, regarding the first Adam, our natural stock, consider:

First, consider what a stock he was originally. He was a vine planted by the Lord, a choice vine, a noble vine, wholly good. There was a consultation of the Trinity at the planting of this vine (Genesis 1:26), "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." There was no decay at the core of it. It had enough sap and nourishment to support all its branches, enabling them to bear fruit for God. In other words, Adam was created capable of perfectly keeping God's commandments, which would have secured eternal life for himself and all his descendants. As all die due to Adam's disobedience, all

would have had life through his obedience if he had remained steadfast. Consider,

Secondly, what that stock is now. Alas! It is most unlike what it was when planted by the Author of all good. A blast from hell and a bite from the venomous teeth of the old serpent have made it a degenerate stock; a dead stock; even a killing stock.

1. It is a degenerate, evil stock. Therefore, the Lord God said to Adam on that fateful day, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9). In what condition are you now? "How have you turned into a degenerate plant of a strange vine for me?" Or, "Where were you?" Why not in the place of meeting with me? Why so long in coming? What does this fearful change, this hiding from me, mean? Unfortunately, the stock has degenerated, become completely ruined, and now produces wild grapes. Communion with the devil is preferred over communion with God. Satan is believed, while God, who is truth itself, is disbelieved. He who was once God's friend now conspires against Him. Darkness has replaced light; ignorance prevails in the mind where divine knowledge once shone; the will, once righteous and regular, has become a rebel against its Lord, and the whole person is in dreadful disorder.

Before I go further, let me pause and observe: Here is a mirror for both saints and sinners. Sinners, stand here and consider what you are; and saints, learn what you once were. You, sinners, are branches of a degenerate stock. You may indeed bear fruit, but now that your vine is the vine of Sodom, your grapes must be bitter (Deuteronomy 32:32). Scripture speaks of two types of fruit that grow on the branches of the natural stock, and it is evident that they share the nature of their degenerate stock. (1) The wild grapes of wickedness (Isaiah 5:2). These grow in abundance, influenced by hell. See Galatians 5:19-21. At its gates are all kinds of these fruits, both new and old. Storms come from heaven to check them, but still, they grow. They are struck at with the sword of the Spirit, the word of

God; conscience gives them many a secret blow, yet they thrive. (2) Fruit for themselves (Hosea 10:1). What else are all the unrenewed person's acts of obedience, reformation, sober behaviour, prayers, and good works? They are all done chiefly for themselves, not for the glory of God. These fruits are like the apples of Sodom, fair to look at but full of ashes when handled and tested. You may think you have not only the leaves of a profession but also the fruits of a holy practice; however, if you are not separated from the old stock and grafted into Christ Jesus, God neither accepts nor regards your fruits.

Here, I must take the opportunity to tell you that there are five flaws that will be found in your best fruits in heaven. 1. Their bitterness; your "clusters are bitter" (Deuteronomy 32:32). There is a spirit of bitterness with which some people approach the Lord in religious duties, living in malice and envy; and which some believers harbour against others because they outshine them in holiness of life or because they hold different opinions. This, wherever it reigns, is a frightening sign of an unregenerate state. However, I'm referring more to the common issue among all branches of the old stock, namely, the leaves of hypocrisy (Luke 12:1), which sour and embitter every duty they perform. Wisdom, full of good fruits, is without hypocrisy (James 3:17). 2. Their unpleasant odour. Their works are abominable because they are corrupt themselves (Psalm 14:1). All of their actions have the scent of the old stock, not the new. It is the unique privilege of the saints that they are to God a sweet aroma of Christ (2 Corinthians 2:15). The unregenerate person's fruits do not have the scent of love for Christ, nor of Christ's blood, nor of the incense of His intercession, and therefore will never be accepted in heaven. 3. Their unripeness. Their grapes are unripe (Job 15:33). There is no influence from the Sun of Righteousness to bring them to perfection. They have the appearance of fruit, but nothing more. The substance of duty is in them, but they lack the right principles and goals: their works are not in God (John 3:21). Their prayers fall from their lips before their hearts are imbued with the vital sap of the Spirit of supplication; their tears fall from their eyes before their

hearts are genuinely softened; their feet turn to new paths and their ways change, while their nature remains unaltered. 4. Their lightness. When weighed in the balances, they are found lacking (Daniel 5:27). As evidence, note that they do not humble the soul but instead lift it up in pride. The good fruits of holiness weigh down the branches they grow on, causing them to bow down to the ground (1 Corinthians 15:19), "I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." But the blighted fruits of unrenewed people's performances hang lightly on branches soaring up to heaven (Judges 17:13), "Now I know that the Lord will do me good since I have a Levite as my priest." They look too high for God to see them: "Why have we fasted, they say, and you do not see?" (Isaiah 58:3). The more duties they perform, and the better they seem to carry them out, the less they are humbled, and the more they are lifted up. This disposition of the sinner is the exact opposite of what is found in the saint. For those who are not in Christ and are not concerned about being found in Him, their duties are like floating buoys with which they think they can swim ashore to Immanuel's land; but these will inevitably burst, and they will sink because they do not take Christ as the lifter of their heads (Psalm 3:3, 5). They do not provide all manner of pleasant fruits (Song of Solomon 7:13). Christ, as a king, must be served with variety. When God makes the heart His garden, He plants it with trees bearing all kinds of fruits (Ecclesiastes 2:5). As a result, it produces the fruit of the Spirit in all goodness (Ephesians 5:9). However, the ungodly are not like this; their obedience is never universal; there is always some aspect or another that is lacking. In short, their fruits are the products of a bad tree that cannot be accepted in heaven.

2. Our natural stock is a dead stock, according to the threat in Genesis 2:17, "In the day you eat of it, you will surely die." Our root is now rotten; it's no wonder the blossom turns to dust. The blow has struck the heart, the sap has drained, and the tree has withered. The curse of the first covenant, like a fiery bolt from heaven, has struck it, and ruined it. It is now cursed like the fig tree in Matthew 21:19, "Let no fruit grow on you ever again."

Now it is good for nothing but to clutter the ground and provide fuel for hellfire.

Let me elaborate a little here as well. Every unrenewed person is a branch of a dead stock. When you see, O sinner, a dead tree trunk, devoid of all its sap, with branches in the same condition, consider it a vivid representation of your soul's state. 1. Where the stock is dead, the branches must be barren. Unfortunately, the barrenness of many professed believers reveals the stock on which they are growing. It is easy to claim faith, but "show me your faith without your works!" if you can (James 2:18). 2. A dead stock can't supply sap to the branches to help them produce fruit. The covenant of works was the bond of our union with the natural stock; but now it has become weak through human depravity (Romans 8:3). It is strong enough to command and to impose heavy burdens on those not in Christ, but it provides no strength to bear them. The sap that was once in the root is now gone: the law, like a merciless creditor, apprehends Adam's heirs, demanding payment when their resources are already squandered. 3. All efforts and expenses are wasted on a tree whose life is gone. In vain do people try to get fruit on the branches when there is no sap in the root. The gardener's efforts are lost: ministers waste their time on the branches of the old stock while they remain on it. Many sermons are preached to no effect because there is no life to give sensation. Sleeping people can be awakened, but the dead cannot be raised without a miracle; likewise, the dead sinner must remain if not restored to life by a miracle of grace. The influences of heaven are wasted on such a tree: in vain does the rain fall on it, and in vain is it exposed to winter cold and frost. The Lord of the vineyard digs around many a dead soul, but it does not improve. "Though a fool is beaten in a mortar, his folly will not depart." Even though he encounters many difficulties, he still clings to his vices: let him be confined to a sick bed, and he will lie there like a sick animal, groaning in pain but not mourning for or turning away from his sin. Let death itself stare him in the face, and he will presumptuously maintain his hope, as if he could intimidate the grim messenger. Sometimes there are common operations of the divine Spirit

performed on him: he is sent home with a trembling heart and with arrows of conviction piercing his soul. But in the end, he overcomes these things and becomes as secure as ever. Summer and winter are alike to the branches on the dead stock. When others around them are budding, blossoming, and bearing fruit, there is no change in them: the dead stock has no growing season at all. It might be difficult to tell, in winter, which trees are dead and which are alive, but spring reveals the truth. There are some seasons in which there is little life to be perceived even among the saints; yet times of revival eventually come. But even when "the vine flourishes, and the pomegranates bud forth," when saving grace is revealing itself through its lively actions wherever it exists, the branches on the old stock remain withered. When the dry bones are coming together, bone to bone among the saints, the sinner's bones still lie near the grave's entrance. They are trees that clutter the ground, ready to be cut down, and will be cut down for the fire if God's mercy does not intervene by removing them from that stock and grafting them into another.

3. Our natural stock is a deadly stock. If the stock dies, how can the branches live? If the sap is gone from the root and core, the branches must inevitably wither. "In Adam all die," 1 Cor. 15:22. The root died in Paradise, and all the branches within it and along with it. The root is poisoned, and from it, the branches become infected; "death is in the pot," and all who taste the pulse or pottage are killed.

Understand, then, that every natural person is a branch of a deadly stock. Our natural root not only fails to provide life, but it has a lethal power that extends to all its branches. There are four things the first Adam passes on to all his branches, and they remain in those branches that are not grafted into Christ: 1. A corrupt nature. Adam sinned, and his nature became corrupted and depraved, and this corruption is passed down to all his descendants. He was infected, and the contagion spread throughout his offspring. 2. Guilt, which is an obligation to punishment, Rom. 5:12, "By one man, sin entered

into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned." The threats of the law, like cords of death, are wrapped around the branches of the old stock to pull them over the hedge and into the fire. Until they are cut off from this stock by the pruning knife, the sword of vengeance hangs over their heads, ready to cut them down. 3. This deadly stock transmits the curse to the branches. The stock, as the stock (for I am not speaking of Adam in his personal and private capacity), being cursed, so are the branches, Gal. 3:10, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." The curse affects the whole person and everything they possess, working in three ways: 1. As poison, infecting; thus, their blessings are cursed, Mal. 2:2. Whatever a person enjoys can only bring harm, not good, as it is poisoned by the curse. Their worldly prosperity destroys them, Prov. 1:32. The ministry of the gospel becomes a savour of death unto death for them, 2 Cor. 2:16. Their apparent achievements in religion are cursed; their knowledge serves only to inflate them, and their duties keep them away from Christ. 2. It works as a moth, consuming and wasting little by little, Hos. 5:12, "Therefore, I will be to Ephraim as a moth." There is a worm at the root, slowly consuming them. The curse pursued Saul until it wormed him out of all his enjoyments and even the semblance of religion he had. Sometimes they decay like the fat of lambs and melt away like snow in the sunshine. 3. It acts as a rampant lion, Hos. 5:14, "I will be to Ephraim as a lion." The Lord "rains on them snares, fire and brimstone, and a terrible tempest," in such a manner that they are swept away by the current. He tears their enjoyments from them in his wrath, pursues them with terrors, rips their souls from their bodies, and throws the dead branch into the fire. Thus, the curse devours like fire, which none can extinguish. 4. This deadly stock transmits death to the branches upon it. Adam took the poisonous cup and drank it off, resulting in death for himself and for us. We entered the world spiritually dead, thereby exposed to eternal death and absolutely subject to temporal death. This root is like the Scythian river, which, they say, produces small bladders every day, out of which emerge tiny flies that are born in the morning, develop

wings by noon, and die at night – a striking metaphor for our mortal state.

Now, is it not absolutely necessary to be detached from our natural stock? What will our seemingly impressive profession or our performance of duties amount to if we remain branches of the degenerate, dead, and destructive stock? Unfortunately, few among us are concerned with questions like, "Have I been separated from the old stock or not? Am I grafted into Christ or not?" Why is there so much unnecessary commotion surrounding religion among many who cannot give a good account of having laid a solid foundation, being entirely unfamiliar with experiential religion? I fear that if God does not mercifully undermine the religion of many of us and let us see that we have none at all, our root will be found rotten, and our blossom will turn to dust in our dying hours. Therefore, let us examine our state so that we are not discovered to be fools in the end.

## **II. The Supernatural Stock:**

An Exploration of the New Roots in Which the Branches Are  
Ingrafted

Now let us consider the supernatural stock into which the branches are grafted after being cut off from the natural stock. Jesus Christ is sometimes called "The Branch" (Zechariah 3:8). He is so in respect to his human nature, being a branch and the leading branch of the house of David. Sometimes he is called a Root (Isaiah 11:10). We find both of these titles in Revelation 21:16, "I am the root and the offspring of David;" David's root as God and his offspring as man. The text tells us that he is the vine, meaning that he, as a mediator, is the vine stock of which believers are the branches. As the sap flows from the earth into the root and stock, and from there is spread throughout the branches, so through Christ as mediator, divine life is conveyed from the source to those united to him by faith (John 6:57).



By Christ as mediator – not as God only, as some have claimed, nor as man only, as the papists generally maintain – but as mediator, God and man (Acts 20:28, Hebrews 9:14). The divine and human natures have their distinct actions but a joint operation in his performance of the mediator's role. This is illustrated by the metaphor of a fiery sword that both cuts and burns simultaneously: cutting while burning and burning while cutting; the steel cuts, and the fire burns. Therefore, Christ, God-man, is the stock of which believers are the branches, and they are united to a whole Christ. They are united to him in his human nature, as being "members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (Ephesians 5:30). And they are united to him in his divine nature, as the apostle speaks of this union (Colossians 1:27). Those who belong to Christ have the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9), and through him, they are united to the Father and the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:15). Faith, the bond of this union, accepts a whole Christ, God-man, and so unites us to him as such.

Observe here, O believers, your elevated privilege. You were once branches of a degenerate stock, just like others, but through grace, you have become branches of the true vine (John 15:1). You have been cut from a dead and destructive stock and grafted into the last Adam, who was made a life-giving spirit (1 Corinthians 15:45). Your loss through the first Adam is compensated, with considerable advantage, by your union with the second. Adam, at his best, was only a shrub compared to Christ, the tree of life. He was merely a servant, while Christ is the Son, the Heir, and Lord of all things, "the Lord from heaven." It is undeniable that grace was demonstrated in the first covenant, but it is far surpassed by the grace of the second covenant, as the twilight is by the brightness of midday.

What branches are taken from the natural stock and grafted into this vine? The answer is the elect, and no one else. They, and only they, are grafted into Christ, and as a result, only they are cut off from the destructive stock. For them alone he intercedes, "That they may be one in him and his Father" (John 17:9-23). Faith, the bond of this

union, is given to no one else; it is the faith of God's elect (Titus 1:1). The Lord overlooks many branches growing on the natural stock, cutting off only specific ones and grafting them into the true vine, according to the determination of free love. He often chooses the most unlikely branch, leaving the topmost boughs, bypassing the mighty and noble, and calling the weak, base, and despised (1 Corinthians 1:26-27). Moreover, he frequently leaves the fair and smooth branches, taking the rugged and knotty ones instead; "and such were some of you, but you are washed," &c. (1 Corinthians 6:11). If we inquire why this is the case, we find no other reason but that they were chosen in him (Ephesians 1:4) and "predestined to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ" (verse 5). Thus, they are gathered together in Christ, while the rest are left growing on their natural stock, to be later bound up in bundles for the fire. Therefore, to whomever the Gospel may come in vain, it will have a blessed effect on God's elect (Acts 13:48), "as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed." Where the Lord has many people, the Gospel will have much success, sooner or later. Those who are to be saved will be added to the mystical body of Christ.

### **III. Cutting Ties with the Old Stock:**

#### Which Branches Are Selected for the New Stock

I will now explain how branches are cut off from the natural stock, the first Adam, and grafted into the true vine, the Lord Jesus Christ. We should be grateful to the Gardener, not the branch, for being cut off from its natural stock and grafted into a new one. The sinner, in his departure from the first stock, is passive and cannot and will not leave it on his own accord, but clings to it until almighty power causes him to fall off (John 6:44), "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them." And in John 5:40, "You are unwilling to come to me so that you may have life." The grafted branches are "God's field" (1 Corinthians 3:9) and "The planting of the Lord" (Isaiah 61:3). The usual means God employs in this work is

the ministry of the word (1 Corinthians 3:9), "We are co-workers with God." However, the effectiveness of it is entirely from Him, regardless of the minister's abilities or piety (verse 7), "Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow." The apostles preached to the Jews, yet the majority of that people remained in unbelief (Romans 10:16), "Who has believed our message?" Even Christ himself, who spoke like no one else, said about the success of his own ministry, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing" (Isaiah 49:4). Branches may be pruned by the preaching of the word, but the cut will never be complete until it is driven home by the omnipotent arm. Nevertheless, God's usual method is "to save those who believe through the foolishness of preaching" (1 Corinthians 1:21).

The cutting of the branch from the natural stock is performed by the pruning knife of the law in the hand of the Spirit of God (Galatians 2:19), "For through the law, I died to the law." As I mentioned earlier, we are connected to our natural stock through the bond of the covenant of works. Therefore, as a wife who is unwilling to be separated clings to the marriage tie, so do people cling to the covenant of works. They hold on to it like a man who held a ship with his hands; when one hand was cut off, he held it with the other; and when both were cut off, he held it with his teeth. This becomes apparent when we examine the Lord's work on people in bringing them away from the old stock, which I will outline in the following points:

1. When the Spirit of the Lord comes to deal with a person, to bring them to Christ, it finds them in Laodicea's situation, in a deep sleep of security, dreaming of heaven and God's favour, despite being full of sin against the Holy One of Israel (Revelation 3:17), "You do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." Therefore, the Spirit shines some light into the dark soul and lets the person see that they are lost if they do not change their ways and embrace a new course of life. By the Spirit of the Lord acting as a spirit of bondage, a

personal court of conscience is established within them, where they are arraigned, accused, and condemned for breaking God's law, "convicted of sin and judgment" (John 16:8). Now they can no longer sleep securely in their former way of life. This is the first cut that the branch receives in order to be severed.

2. As a result, the person abandons their previous sinful ways, such as lying, swearing, breaking the Sabbath, stealing, and other similar practices. Though these habits are dear to them, they would rather give them up than risk their soul's ruin. They start to feel better about themselves, thinking they are a better servant to God than many others (Luke 18:11), "God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers," and so on. But they soon receive another cut from the law's axe, showing them that only those who do what is written in the law can be saved by it, and that their negative holiness is an insufficient shield from God's wrath. Now, their sins of omission join their sins of commission in weighing heavily on their conscience, accompanied by a host of law curses and vengeance. Each of the Ten Commandments unleashes a storm of wrath against them for their failure to carry out required duties.
3. At this point, the person turns to a positively holy way of life. They not only abandon their sinful ways but also perform religious duties: they pray, seek knowledge of religious principles, strictly observe the Lord's Day, and, like Herod, do many things and gladly listen to sermons. In a nutshell, there is a significant outward change in their behaviour, which aligns with both tables of the law. This transformation is noticeable to their neighbours, who readily accept them into their religious circle as a praying person. They can discuss religious matters and even soul exercises with them, which some are not familiar with, and the good opinion of others reinforces their self-esteem. Many people stumble at this stage in their spiritual journey and never progress further. But for the elect branch, the Lord delivers another blow. Their conscience torments them for some

missteps in their conduct, the neglect of some duty, or the commission of some sin that mars their behaviour. Then the fiery sword of the law appears again over their head, and the curse resounds in their ears, because they "do not continue to do everything written in the law" (Galatians 3:10).

4. Because of this, the person is compelled to seek another solution for their spiritual ailment. They turn to God, confess their sins, seek forgiveness, and promise to guard against future transgressions. They find relief and believe they are justified in doing so, considering the scripture states, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9). They fail to realize that they are claiming a privilege that belongs only to those grafted into Christ and under the covenant of grace, which branches still growing on the old stock cannot claim. Sometimes, there are formal and explicit vows made against specific sins and obligations to certain duties. Many people continue this way throughout their lives, knowing no other religion than to perform duties, confess, and pray for forgiveness, promising themselves eternal happiness even though they are complete strangers to Christ. Many chosen individuals have been brought low, and many non-elect have been defeated in this state, but the wounds of neither are deep enough to sever them from their natural stock. However, the Spirit of the Lord delivers a deeper cut to the branch that is to be removed, revealing to the person that they are merely an outwardly religious individual and exposing the hidden vices that reside in their heart, which they had not previously noticed (Romans 7:9), "When the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died." They then see their heart filled with sinful desires, covetousness, pride, malice, impurity, and more. As soon as they are made aware of the secret chambers of their heart and the darkness within, their outward religion is exposed as insufficient, and they learn a new religious lesson: "A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly" (Romans 2:28).

5. Upon this revelation, the person delves deeper into their faith, embracing inner spirituality. They redouble their efforts, mourn the evils of their heart, and strive to suppress the weeds growing in their previously neglected spiritual garden. They work to curb their pride and anger and to banish impure thoughts. They pray more fervently, listen attentively, and endeavour to have their heart affected by every religious duty they perform. Consequently, they come to view themselves as not only an outwardly religious person but also an inwardly spiritual one. This should not be surprising, as there is nothing beyond the power of human nature or what someone may achieve under the strong influence of the covenant of works. Therefore, another, even deeper cut is given. The law confronts the person's conscience, reminding them that they have been a transgressor since birth, that they entered the world as a guilty being, and that they have committed numerous sins during their time of ignorance and even after their eyes were opened. These sins have either been entirely overlooked or not adequately mourned over, and their spiritual wounds have not been healed by the blood of Christ but merely superficially covered. Thus, the law seizes them by the throat, demanding, "Pay what you owe."
  
6. In response, the sinner pleads in their heart, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you all," and sets to work to appease an offended God and atone for their sins. They renew their repentance, bear the afflictions placed upon them, and even deny themselves the use of their lawful comforts. They sigh deeply, mourn bitterly, and cry with tears for forgiveness until they convince themselves they have obtained it. Having done penance for their past, they resolve to be a devoted servant to God, committing to both outward and inward obedience. However, the cut must go even closer to the heart before the branch can fall off. The Lord reveals to them through the law how they sin in everything they do, even when they are doing their best, and thus the dreadful sound of the curse returns (Galatians 3:10). The Lord questions the sincerity of their fasts,

their wandering thoughts during duties, and their flawed affections. They realize that they cannot satisfy the demands of the law.

7. Feeling defeated, the sinner tries to negotiate with their creditor. Desperate for ease and comfort, they do what they can to fulfill the law, and when they fail, they trust that God will accept their intentions as sufficient. Through doing their duty and wishing to do better, they deceive themselves into believing in the goodness of their state, and this leads to the downfall of many. The chosen, however, receive another blow that weakens their resolve in this matter. The law demands perfect obedience, and wishing to do better will not suffice. The curse sounds again, emphasizing that only actions, not wishes, will be accepted.
8. Having lost all hope of negotiating with the law, the sinner resorts to borrowing. They realize that their efforts to obey the law and their desire to improve will not save their soul. Consequently, they turn to Christ, asking that his righteousness compensate for their shortcomings and cover the flaws in their actions and sufferings so that God may accept them and be reconciled. By doing their best to fulfill the law and relying on Christ to make up for their deficiencies, they eventually find security again. Many people are lost in this way, as seen in the error of the Galatians, which Paul addresses in his letter to them. The Spirit of God also breaks the sinner's grip on this belief by revealing the truth (Galatians 3:12) that the law and faith cannot be combined in this matter. The sinner must choose one and let go of the other. The ways of the law and faith are so different that it is impossible for the sinner to walk in one without abandoning the other. If they choose to do, they must do everything alone, as Christ will not do a part for them if they do not do it all. A garment made from different types of righteousness is not suitable for the heavenly court. Thus, the person is like one in a dream who thought they were eating but, upon being awakened by a blow, finds their soul faint and their

heart sinking, unable to bear the burden alone or find help under it.

9. What can a person do when they must pay a debt but lack the means, cannot borrow enough, and are too ashamed to beg? They might try to sell themselves, as a man would under the law when facing poverty (Leviticus 25:47). Therefore, the sinner, having been beaten from so many positions, attempts to make a bargain with Christ and metaphorically sell themselves to the Son of God. They solemnly promise and vow to serve Christ as long as they live if He will save their soul. They often make a personal covenant with Christ on these terms and participate in sacraments to secure the agreement. The individual's primary concern is obeying Christ and keeping His commandments to fulfill their bargain. For a while, their soul finds false and unstable peace until the Spirit of the Lord intervenes to cut them off from this deceptive refuge. When they fail to uphold their duties and fall into the sin they had covenanted against, their conscience reminds them that their covenant is broken, leading to the loss of comfort and a resurgence of terror, as one who has broken their covenant with Christ. Typically, the person renews their covenant but breaks it again, as before. This cycle of making and breaking covenants continues throughout their lives because they remain on the same flawed path.

Objection: Some might argue that everyone sins and fails to uphold their duties. If this method is considered unsound, then who can be saved? Answer: True believers will be saved, namely, all who have faith in God's covenant. The kind of covenant described here is one created by people themselves, not the covenant revealed in God's gospel of grace. Making such a covenant is equivalent to making a covenant of works with Christ, which confuses the law and the gospel. Christ will never endorse this covenant, no matter how sincerely we sign it. According to Romans 4:14, 16, and 11:6, faith and grace are necessary for the promise to be sure for everyone. God's covenant is everlasting, and its mercies are unwavering (Isaiah



55:3). In contrast, the previously mentioned covenant is unstable and prone to being broken daily. It is a servile covenant that offers service in exchange for salvation, while God's covenant is filial, freely offering Christ and salvation, making the recipient a child of God (John 1:12). As a child of God, they serve their Father not to obtain the inheritance but because it is already theirs through Jesus Christ (Galatians 4:24).

Entering the false covenant is like buying from Christ with money, while taking hold of God's covenant is buying without money and without price (Isaiah 55:1), which is to say, begging. In the false covenant, individuals work for life; in God's covenant, they come to Christ for life and work from life. When a person under the false covenant fails in their duty, everything is lost, and the covenant must be remade. Under God's covenant, although someone may fail in their duty and face the consequences, the righteousness of Christ remains intact, and the covenant is secure (Romans 7:24-25; 8:1).

Although some individuals spend their lives repeatedly making and breaking their own covenants, the terror of breaking them gradually weakens until it causes little or no distress. However, a person who experiences genuine growth and is cut off from their old ways will find these covenants to be like fragile ropes that snap with every touch. The terror of God intensifies on their spirit, and as they repeatedly fail, they are forced to abandon such covenants and seek help in other ways.

10. Ultimately, the person turns to Christ's mercy, but they remain a proud beggar, relying on their personal worth. Like the way Catholics use mediators to plead on their behalf with the one true Mediator, these individuals still cling to something they believe may commend them to Christ and persuade Him to take up their cause. They cannot fathom approaching the spiritual marketplace empty-handed. They resemble individuals who have lost their wealth but still carry the pride of their former status. As a result, they believe they deserve special

consideration and become resentful when they are treated like ordinary beggars.

Despite receiving many common blessings from God, the unhumbled sinner remains unsatisfied unless they are seated at the table with God's children. They have yet to accept that God is justified in condemning them according to their true deserving (Psalm 51:4). The person may consider their reformation, repentance, grief, and tears, as well as their earnest desires for Christ and their prayers for mercy, as worthy of earning mercy. However, the Spirit of the Lord exposes the inadequacy of these beliefs and forces the individual to recognize that they are no better than anyone else.

The person's faults in their reformation are revealed, and their repentance appears no better than Judas's or Esau's tears. Their desires for Christ seem selfish and repulsive, resembling those who sought Christ only for the loaves (John 6:26). God's response appears to be, "Away, proud beggar, how can I place you among the children?" The individual is now confronted with the severity of their unbelief and the sin of disregarding Jesus Christ. They become acutely aware of their ignorance and the way they have trampled upon the blood of the Son of God throughout their life. Consequently, they see themselves as a miserable object of both legal and gospel vengeance.

11. When the person is humbled to this extent, they no longer argue that they are deserving of Christ's help. Instead, they see themselves as unworthy of Christ and God's favour. This can be compared to the young man in Mark 14:51-52, who followed Christ with only a linen cloth wrapped around him. When others grabbed him, he left the cloth behind and fled naked. Similarly, the individual had been pursuing Christ, trusting in their own worthiness as a thin and inadequate covering. The law captures them through their own self-reliance, and they flee naked, not towards Christ but away from him. If you tell them they are welcome to Christ, they might reply, "How can a vile and

unworthy wretch like me be welcome to the holy Jesus?" When offered comfort, they reject it, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8).

No one needs to remind them of their repentance or tears, as they are well aware of their imperfections. They argue against themselves, believing that they cannot, will not, and should not come to Christ. They feel they must improve their situation before believing. Consequently, they pray more fervently, mourn more bitterly, fight sin more vigorously, and watch more closely in hopes of eventually being fit to approach Christ.

It may seem like the person is now humbled, but deep pride still hides beneath this apparent humility. They remain unwilling to submit to God's righteousness (Romans 10:3) and refuse to approach the market of free grace without something to offer. They are invited to the wedding feast of the King's Son, where the bridegroom provides all guests with wedding garments, stripping them of their own. Yet, they will not attend because they lack a wedding garment, even though they are busily trying to prepare one. This situation is dire, and they need a more profound awakening, or they will be lost.

This awakening comes from the law's provocative power. As the law binds the soul with the cords of death and demands obedience under the threat of a curse, God withdraws His restraining grace. As a result, corruption intensifies, and sinful desires become more violent. The more they are resisted, the more they rage. Previously unseen corruptions surface, and the person experiences thoughts of atheism, blasphemy, and other horrors concerning God and faith. Their heart becomes like hell itself. In attempting to cleanse their heart without gospel grace, previously unnoticed corruptions are stirred up like dust.

The person's efforts to repair the breaches in their life are like trying to mend a riverbank while a massive flood sweeps away both their new and old efforts. Read Romans 7:8-13. This experience cuts

deeply, and their hope of making themselves more fit to approach Christ is shattered.

12. The moment arrives when the individual, caught between hope and despair, decides to approach Christ as they are. Like a dying person drawing their last breath, they gather the shattered pieces of their soul, attempt to believe, and in some way grasp onto Jesus Christ. Now, the person's faith barely clings to the old foundation through a single thread of natural belief, born from their own determination under extreme duress (Psalm 78:34-35; Hosea 8:2). However, the Lord consistently completes His work, and another revelation comes, severing the last connection. The Holy Spirit powerfully reveals the sinner's utter inability to do anything good, and they die to themselves (Romans 7:9). They hear the words, "How can you believe?" (John 5:44) and realise that they can no more believe than reach up to heaven and bring Christ down. Finally, they see that they can neither help themselves by working nor by believing, and with no remaining attachment to the old foundation, they fall away. As they find themselves on the brink of being swept away by God's wrath, unable to even grasp a branch from the tree of life, they are taken up and grafted into the true vine—Jesus Christ, who gives them the Spirit of faith.

I do not intend to distress or torment tender consciences with this discussion. Although there are few such people today, I would not wish to offend any of Christ's little ones. Regrettably, a deep slumber has enveloped this generation, and they refuse to awaken no matter how close we come to the core of the issue. I fear that a different type of awakening awaits this sermon-resistant generation, one that will make the ears of those who hear it tingle. Nevertheless, I do not present this as the sole method God uses to separate sinners from their old foundations. What I maintain as a certain truth is that all who are in Christ have been detached from these various confidences, and those who have never been separated from them remain in their natural state. However, if the house is demolished

and the old foundation is destroyed, it matters little whether it was taken down piece by piece or whether it crumbled all at once.

## **IV. The Ingrafting Process:**

### How the Branches Are Transplanted to the New Stock

Now the individual is grafted into Jesus Christ. Just as the law, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, was the instrument used to sever the person from their natural foundation, so the Gospel, guided by the same Spirit, is the instrument employed to graft them into the supernatural foundation (1 John 1:3; see Isaiah 61:1-3). The Gospel is the silver cord sent down from heaven to rescue perishing sinners. Although the preaching of the law prepares the way for the Lord, it is through the word of the Gospel that Christ and a sinner meet. In the spiritual grafting process, just as in the natural one, the individual is united with Christ, becoming one with Him (Philippians 3:12).

First, Christ, through His Spirit, captures the sinner and draws them close (1 Corinthians 12:13). The same Spirit that resides in the Mediator is shared with the chosen at the appropriate time, never leaving them but remaining as a source of life. Now in the hands of the Lord of life and filled with the Spirit of life, the soul cannot help but live. The individual gains a captivating view of Christ's excellence through the lens of the Gospel, recognizing Him as a complete, fitting, and willing Saviour. They are given a heart to accept Christ as the ultimate substitute. The Spirit of faith provides the means to approach and receive Christ. What was once impossible by nature, they can now achieve through grace, as the Holy Spirit powerfully works within them to develop their faith.

Secondly, the sinner, once captured, grasps Christ through faith and unites with the blessed foundation (Ephesians 3:17). The soul that

previously tried many escape routes but failed now looks with the eye of faith, which provides healing. Just as Aaron's rod, stored in the tabernacle, sprouted and produced buds (Numbers 17:8), the lifeless individual, captured by the Lord of life and joined to the glorious, life-giving foundation through the Spirit of life, blossoms in actual belief in Jesus Christ. This union is then completed. "Having the same Spirit of faith, we believe" (2 Corinthians 4:13). In this way, the foundation and the graft are united, Christ and the believer are married, with faith being the soul's acceptance of the spiritual marriage covenant. This covenant, proposed in the Gospel to all sinners indiscriminately, is demonstrated, confirmed, and personally brought to the individual by the Holy Spirit. Thus, they are joined to the Lord and become one spirit with Him.

Through this union, believers live in and for Christ, and Christ lives in and for the believer (Galatians 2:20). The bonds of this blessed union are the Spirit on Christ's part and faith on the believer's part.

Both the souls and bodies of believers are united with Christ. "Whoever is united with the Lord becomes one with him in spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:17). The bodies of believers are honoured as "the temple of the Holy Spirit" (verse 19) and "the members of Christ" (verse 15). When they sleep in the dust, they sleep in Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:14), and it is through this union that they will be resurrected from the dust (Romans 8:11). In recognition of this mystical union, the church of believers is called by the name of its Head and Husband (1 Corinthians 12:12).

From what is said, we may draw the following conclusions:

1. The preaching of the law is essential. Whoever wants to graft must use a pruning knife. Sinners have many ways to keep them from Christ and many things by which they maintain their connection to the natural foundation. Therefore, they need to be closely pursued and driven out of their hiding places and refuges of lies.

2. However, it is the Gospel that completes the work. "The law makes nothing perfect." The law exposes the wound, but it is the Gospel that heals it. The law "strips a person, wounds them, and leaves them half dead," while the Gospel "binds up their wounds, pouring in wine and oil" to heal them. The law breaks us off, but it is through the Gospel that we are taken up and implanted in Christ.
3. "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to him" (Romans 8:9). We are told of a natural anomaly, having two bodies with different emotions, but so united that they were served by the same limbs. Similarly, people may cling to Christ, "calling themselves citizens of the holy city and relying on the God of Israel" (Isaiah 48:2), and may be bound as branches in him (John 15:2) through the outward ties of sacraments. However, if the Spirit dwelling in Christ does not dwell in them, they are not one with him. There is a significant difference between adhesion and grafting. The ivy wraps and twists around the oak, but it is not one with it, as it continues to grow on its own root. Similarly, as Isaiah 4:1 suggests, many believers "take hold" of Christ, "eating their own bread and wearing their own clothes, only they are called by his name." They rely on him but grow on their own root; they turn to him for support, but their desires lie elsewhere.
4. The union between Christ and his mystical members is strong and unbreakable. If it were the case that the believer only grasped Christ, but Christ did not grasp them, we could promise little about the stability of such a union; it might quickly dissolve. But as the believer grasps Christ by faith, Christ grasps them by his Spirit, and no one shall take them from his hand. If a child only held onto their caregiver, they might eventually grow weary, let go, and fall away. However, if the caregiver has their arms around the child, there is no risk of falling away, even if the child is not actively holding on. So, whatever sinful interruptions may occur in the exercise of faith, the union

remains secure due to the constant indwelling of the Spirit. Blessed Jesus! "All your saints are in your hand" (Deuteronomy 33:3). It is observed by some that the word "Abba" is the same whether read forwards or backwards; whatever the believer's situation, the Lord is still their Abba, Father.

5. Those who have not been grasped by Christ through his Spirit have an unstable connection to him. Many half-hearted relationships exist, where the soul grasps Christ, but is not grasped by him. Consequently, many fall away and never rise again; they lose their grip on Christ, and when that is gone, everything is lost. These are "the branches in Christ that do not bear fruit, which the gardener removes" (John 15:2). Question: How can that be? Answer: These branches are attached to the foundation through a profession or an insincere, hypocritical faith; they are tied to it through the external use of the sacraments, but they never truly unite with the foundation, and therefore cannot bear fruit. They do not need to be cut off or broken off; they are merely removed, or as the primary meaning of the word suggests, lifted up and taken away because there is nothing holding them; they are indeed tied to the foundation but were never united with it.

Question: How can I know if I am grasped by Christ? Answer: You can find satisfaction in this inquiry if you consider and apply these two things:

1. When Christ connects with a person through his Spirit, they are so drawn that they come to Christ with their whole heart, as true believing involves believing with all the heart (Acts 8:37). The Lord's followers are like those who initially followed Saul, people whose hearts God had touched (1 Samuel 10:26). When the Spirit pours in powerful grace, they pour out their hearts before him (Psalm 62:8). They flow towards him like a river (Isaiah 2:2), signifying not only the abundance of converts but also their disposition in coming to Christ. They come willingly and freely,



drawn by love (Jeremiah 31:3). They are willing in the day of his power (Psalm 110:3), meaning they are free, ready, open-hearted, and devoted to him. When the bridegroom has the bride's heart, it is a true marriage. However, some give their hand to Christ without giving their heart. Those driven to Christ by fear alone will certainly leave him when the fear subsides. Fear may break a heart of stone, but the shattered pieces remain stone; fear cannot soften it into a heart of flesh. Nevertheless, fear may begin the work that love completes. The strong wind, earthquake, and fire may precede the still, small voice in which the Lord is present.

When Jesus seeks sinners to join him, they are resistant and stubborn, not engaging with him until he has wounded them, made them captives, and bound them with the cords of death. Once this is done, he comes to them and wins their hearts. The Lord tells us (Hosea 2:16-20) that chosen Israel will be married to him. To win the bride's consent, he will first bring her into the wilderness, as he did with the Israelites when he brought them out of Egypt (verse 14). There, she will face hardships, thirst, and snake bites before he comforts her, speaking to her heart. The sinner is first driven and then drawn to Christ. This is similar to Noah's dove, which returned to the ark as it had nowhere else to rest. It would have remained outside the ark if Noah had not pulled it in (Genesis 8:9). The Lord sends his avenger of blood to pursue the criminal, who, with a heavy heart, leaves their city and parts with old friends because they cannot stay with them. They flee for their life to the city of refuge. This choice is not entirely their own, as necessity takes precedence. However, upon arriving at the gates and seeing the beauty and loveliness of the place, they are charmed and enter willingly, declaring, "This is my rest, and here I will stay." In another context, it was said, "I would have perished if I hadn't perished."

1. When Christ grasps a soul, the heart is disengaged from and turned against sin. In cutting off the branch from the old foundation, the idol of self is brought down, and the person

learns to deny themselves. Similarly, in grasping the sinner by the Spirit, the union between the person and their sinful desires is dissolved (Romans 7:5). Their heart is detached from them, although they were once as dear as body parts, and instead of taking pleasure in sin, they long to be free of it. When Jesus comes to a soul during the conversion process, he finds it drawing its nourishment and satisfaction from sin. However, he severs this connection so he can impart his own consolations and give the soul rest in himself. In this way, the Lord wounds the head and heart of sin, and the soul turns to him, saying, "Surely our ancestors inherited falsehood, futility, and things that bring no benefit" (Jeremiah 16:19).

## **V. The Benefits of Union:**

### **The Advantages and Blessings That Flow from the Branches' Connection to the New Stock**

I now discuss the benefits that true believers gain from their union with Christ. The primary benefits they receive include justification, peace, adoption, sanctification, growth in grace, fruitfulness in good works, acceptance of these works, establishment in the state of grace, support, and special guidance from providence. Communion with Christ is an immediate consequence of union with him, encompassing all other benefits. As a branch connected to its source shares in all that it contains, a believer united with Christ shares in his abundance, launching into a sea of happiness and discovering a paradise of pleasures. They gain a saving interest in the hidden treasures of the Gospel and the unsearchable riches of Christ. As soon as a believer unites with Christ, they possess him, with all his fullness (Song of Solomon 2:16), "My beloved is mine, and I am his." And "how shall he not with him freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or

death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours" (1 Corinthians 3:22). This communion with Christ is the overarching blessing that flows from our union with him. Now, let's consider the specific benefits mentioned earlier.

The first specific benefit a sinner receives through union with Christ is justification. Being united to Christ, they share in his righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30), "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness." They are no longer condemned but justified before God, as they are in Christ (Romans 8:1), "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." The aspects of this benefit are the pardon of sin and personal acceptance.

1. A believer's sins are pardoned, and the guilt removed. The obligation to repay their debt is cancelled. God the Father, using his Son's blood, crosses out the sinner's accounts and erases them from his record. A sinner without Christ is subject to God's wrath; they are legally required to enter the hellish prison and remain there until their debt is fully paid. This comes from the severe consequence of breaking the law, which is nothing less than death (Genesis 2:17). So, the sinner is like Shimei in another case, deserving of death (1 Kings 2:42). However, when united with Christ, God says, "Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom" (Job 33:24). The sentence of condemnation is overturned, the believer is absolved, and they are placed beyond the reach of the condemning law. Their sins, once visible to the Lord (Psalm 90:8), are now taken and thrown behind his back (Isaiah 38:17), and even cast into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19). What falls into a stream may be retrieved, but what is cast into the sea cannot be recovered.

Even if there are shallow places in the sea, their sins are not cast there but into the depths, where they will never resurface. Their sins will be forcefully sunk, like lead in the mighty waters of the Redeemer's blood. Not only are their sins forgiven, but they are also

forgotten (Jeremiah 31:34). Though their future sins may still deserve punishment and make them subject to temporary consequences and fatherly discipline according to the covenant of grace (Psalm 89:30-33), they can never be actually liable to eternal wrath or the law's curse, for they are dead to the law in Christ (Romans 7:4). They can never fall away from their union with Christ, nor can they be in Christ and under condemnation at the same time (Romans 8:1). This concept is based on the doctrine of a believer being dead to the law, as explained by the Apostle in Romans 7:1-6, which is evident from the second, third, and fourth verses of the eighth chapter. In this regard, the justified person is blessed, as the Lord does not hold their iniquity against them (Psalm 32:2), just as someone who has no intention of charging a debt does not record it in their account book.

2. The believer is accepted as righteous in God's sight (2 Corinthians 5:21). They are "found in Christ, not having their own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Philippians 3:9). A believer could never be accepted by God as righteous based on their own righteousness because, at best, it is imperfect. True righteousness, which can withstand judgement before God's throne, must be perfect. The term righteousness implies perfection, as only works that are entirely in line with the law can be considered right. Thus, imperfect works cannot make a person righteous before God, whose judgement is based on truth. Yet, if justice demands righteousness for one in Christ, they can confidently say, "In the Lord, I have righteousness" (Isaiah 45:24). The law is fulfilled, its commands obeyed, and its sanctions satisfied. The believer's surety has paid the debt, and it was exacted and answered for.

Thus, the person united with Christ is justified. The entire process can be understood as follows: Christ, as the Saviour of lost sinners, captures the criminal through the Spirit and draws them to Himself. The sinner, in turn, clings to Christ through faith. As a result, the

Lord our righteousness unites with the unrighteous individual. This union with Christ leads to communion in His unsearchable riches and, consequently, His righteousness – the white garments provided to clothe the naked (Revelation 3:18). Christ's righteousness becomes the believer's, and because it is rightfully theirs, it is imputed to them. God's judgement, which is always true, considers it as belonging to the believer. The believing sinner, having a righteousness that fully satisfies the law's demands, is pardoned and accepted as righteous (see Isaiah 45:22-24; Romans 3:24; and Romans 5:1). Now, they are free. Who can accuse those whom God justifies? Neither justice nor the law can, as they have been satisfied and have obtained their demands in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:20).

The believer's sins, once recorded as a debt, have been blotted out by Christ (Colossians 2:14). Even if justice were to look for the record again, Christ has removed it. The believer may wish for the record to be torn apart, and indeed, it has been pierced by the nails that drove through Christ's hands and feet. The torn record cannot be reassembled, for it was nailed to the cross, which was buried with Christ and will never rise again, as Christ dies no more. The condemned person's veil has been destroyed (Isaiah 25:7). Death, which once threatened the sinner, has been swallowed up in victory (Isaiah 25:8). Glory be to Him who "loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood."

The second benefit that arises from union with Christ, and comes through justification, is peace; peace with God and peace of conscience, according to the level of awareness the justified have of their peace with God (Romans 5:1). "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God." (Romans 14:17), "For the kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." Whereas God was their enemy before, now He is reconciled to them in Christ: they have a covenant of peace with Him; and, like Abraham, they are friends of God. He is well pleased with them in His beloved Son. His word, which previously spoke terror to them, now speaks peace if they correctly understand the

language. Love is present in all aspects of their lives, working together for their good. Their consciences are cleansed of the guilt and filthiness that burdened them: the conscience-purifying blood of Christ flows through their souls due to their union with Him (Hebrews 9:14), "How much more shall the blood of Christ—purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God!" The bonds placed on their consciences by the Spirit of God, acting as the Spirit of bondage, are removed, never to be imposed again (Romans 8:5), "For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear." The conscience finds peace as soon as the soul becomes aware of the application of that blood, which occurs sooner or later, depending on the level of faith and the timing God deems appropriate.

Unbelievers may have troubled consciences, which they may temporarily ease: but, unfortunately, their consciences become peaceful before they become pure, so their peace is merely a seed for greater horror and confusion. Neglect may provide temporary relief to a tormented conscience; people ignoring its wounds, which close on their own before the impurities are removed. Many bury their guilt in the grave of a poor memory: conscience stings for a moment; eventually, the person forgets their sin, and that is the end of it; but this is only a temporary reprieve. Business or life's affairs often provide relief in such cases. When Cain is banished from the presence of the Lord, he starts building cities. When the evil spirit comes upon Saul, he does not call for his Bible or the priests to discuss his situation; instead, he calls for music to play it away. Many, when their consciences begin to feel uneasy, fill their minds and hands with business, seeking to distract themselves and regain peace at any cost. Some will sin against their convictions and thus gain some relief for their consciences, as Hazael eased his master by smothering him. The performance of duties may also provide some relief to troubled consciences; and this is all that legalistic believers resort to for calming their consciences. When their conscience is wounded, they will pray, confess, mourn, and resolve not to do it again: and so they become whole again, without applying the blood of Christ through faith. But those whose consciences are rightly

calmed come to the blood of sprinkling for peace and purification. Sin leaves a sting behind it, which will, at one time or another, cause them significant pain.

Elihu shows us both the situation and the solution in Job 33. Consider the situation a person may be in, to whom God has thoughts of love. He sends convictions into their conscience, making them stick so firmly that they cannot free themselves (verse 16), "He opens the ears of people and seals their instruction." Their very body becomes sick (verse 19), "They are chastened with pain on their bed, and with constant distress in their bones." They lose their appetite (verse 20), "Their life loathes bread, and their soul dainty food." Their body wastes away, leaving only skin and bones (verse 21), "Their flesh is so wasted away that it cannot be seen, and their bones, once invisible, now stick out." Though they are not prepared for death, they have no hope of life (verse 22), "Their soul draws near to the pit, and their life to the messengers of death." They are expecting every moment for devils, these destroyers (Revelation 9:11), these murderers (John 8:44), to come and carry their soul to hell. What a dreadful situation! Is there any hope for such people? Yes, there is hope. God will "restrain their soul from the pit" (Job 33:18), even if He brings them to the brink of it.

Now, observe how the sick person is healed. The physician's skill is insufficient here; the illness lies deeper than their medicine can reach. It is soul trouble that has brought the body into this disorder; therefore, the remedies must be applied to the person's soul and conscience. The physician for this case must be a spiritual physician, using spiritual remedies such as righteousness, ransom, and atonement. Upon applying these, the soul is healed, the conscience is quieted, and the body recovers (verses 23-26), "If there is an angel at their side, a mediator, one out of a thousand, to tell a person what is right for them, to be gracious to them and say, 'Spare them from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom for them'—then their flesh is renewed like a child's; it is restored as in the days of their

youth. They pray to God and find favour with Him; they see God's face and shout for joy."

The appropriate physician for this patient is a messenger, a mediator (verse 23), which some interpreters, not without reason, understand to be the great physician, Jesus Christ, whom Job had called his Redeemer (Job 19:25). He is a messenger, the "messenger of the covenant of peace" (Malachi 3:1), who comes at the right time to the sick person. He is a mediator, the great mediator of God's plans of love for sinners (Job 33:23), "one in a thousand," even "the foremost among ten thousand" (Song of Solomon 5:10). "One chosen from the people" (Psalm 89:19). One to whom "the Lord has given the tongue of the learned—to speak a word in season to the weary" (Isaiah 50:4). It is He who is with them, by His Spirit, now, to "convince them of righteousness" (John 16:8), as He was with them before, to "convince them of sin and of judgment." His work now is to show them their uprightness or righteousness, that is, the mediator Christ's righteousness, which is the only righteousness arising from the payment of a ransom, and upon which a sinner is delivered from going down to the pit (verse 24). Thus, Christ is said to declare God's name (Psalm 22:22) and to preach righteousness (Psalm 40:9). The phrase is remarkable: it is not to show the person, but to show humanity, their righteousness. This subtly suggests that He is more than just a human being, who reveals or declares this righteousness. Compare Amos 4:13, "He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals to humanity what their thoughts are." There seems to be a sweet allusion to the first declaration of this righteousness to humanity or, as the word is, to Adam after the fall, while he lay under terror from the wrath of God. This declaration was made by the messenger, the mediator, namely, the eternal Word, the Son of God, called the voice of the Lord God (Genesis 3:8), and likely appearing in a human form.

Now, while He, through His Spirit, preaches righteousness to the individual, it is assumed that the person accepts the offered righteousness. As a result, the ransom is applied to them, and they



are delivered from going down to the pit, for God has a ransom for them. This is indicated by the words, "Deliver them" (Job 33:24). Thus, their conscience, purified by the blood of atonement, is pacified and gently quieted. "They shall pray to God... and see His face with joy" (verse 26), which they had previously beheld with horror. In New Testament terms, this means "having a high priest over the house of God, they shall draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having their heart sprinkled from an evil conscience" (Hebrews 10:21-22). But then, what happens to the body, the weak and weary flesh? "Their flesh shall be fresher than a child's, they shall return to the days of their youth" (Job 33:25). Indeed, "all their bones," which were chastened with strong pain (verse 19), "shall say, 'Lord, who is like you?'" (Psalm 35:10).

A third benefit stemming from union with Christ is adoption. Believers, being united to Christ, become children of God and members of the heavenly family. Through their union with Him, who is the Son of God by nature, they become the sons of God by grace (John 1:12). Just as when a branch is cut off from one tree and grafted onto another, the grafted branch, through its union with the adopting branch, becomes a part of the same stock into which it is grafted. So, sinners, being grafted into Jesus Christ, whose name is the Branch, have His Father as their Father, His God as their God (John 20:17). This way, those who are by nature children of the devil become children of God. They receive the Spirit of adoption (Romans 8:15), namely, the Spirit of His Son, which brings them to God, as children to a Father, to pour out their complaints in His embrace and seek necessary supplies (Galatians 4:6). Under all their weaknesses, they receive fatherly pity and compassion (Psalm 103:13).

Though they were once abandoned, they are now cherished as "the apple of His eye" (Deuteronomy 32:10). Whoever pursues them, they have a refuge (Proverbs 14:26). In times of common calamity, they have protective chambers where they can hide until the danger has passed (Isaiah 26:20). He is not only their refuge for protection but also their portion for provision within that refuge (Psalm 142:5).

They are provided for in eternity (Hebrews 11:16), and whatever they need for the present, they shall not lack (Matthew 6:31-32). Timely correction is also their privilege as children, so they are not allowed to continue in their faults like others who are not children, but servants of the family, who will eventually be turned away for their misdeeds (Hebrews 12:7). They are heirs of, and shall inherit the promises (Hebrews 6:12). They are heirs of God, who Himself is the portion of their inheritance (Psalm 16:5), and joint-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). Since they are children of the great King and heirs of glory, they have angels as their attendants, sent forth to minister to those who will be heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14). The angels serve as their guardians and protectors, ensuring their well-being and assisting them on their journey towards eternal life. This privilege further emphasizes the remarkable benefits that come from being united with Christ and adopted as children of God.

A fourth benefit is sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:30), "But of him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification." Being united to Christ, they partake of His Spirit, which is the Spirit of holiness. There is a fullness of the Spirit in Christ, and it is not like the fullness of a container that only holds what is poured into it; rather, it is the fullness of a fountain for diffusion and communication, which is always sending forth its waters and yet remains full.

The Spirit of Christ, the spiritual sap in the stock that is communicated to the branches, is the Spirit of grace (Zechariah 12:10). Where the Spirit of grace resides, a confluence of all graces will be found. Holiness is not just one grace, but all the graces of the Spirit; it is a constellation of graces, the essence of all graces in their seed and root. As the sap conveyed from the stock into the branch flows through every part of it, the Spirit of Christ sanctifies the whole person. The poison of sin spread throughout the spirit, soul, and body of a person, and sanctifying grace pursues it into every corner (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Every part of the person is sanctified, although no part is perfectly so.

The truth by which we are sanctified is not confined to the head, but runs with its sanctifying influences through the heart and life. While there are some graces in every believer that stand out above the rest, such as meekness in Moses and patience in Job, every child of God possesses a holy principle that aligns with the holy law, loving and approving of it. This is evident from their universal respect for God's commands. It is clear that they are endowed with all the graces of the Spirit because there cannot be less in the effect than there was in the cause.

Now, this sanctifying Spirit, which believers partake, serves two purposes for them. Firstly, it is a spirit of mortification; "through the Spirit, they mortify the deeds of the body" (Romans 8:13). Sin is crucified in them (Galatians 5:24). They are united with Christ in the likeness of his death, which was a lingering death (Romans 6:5). Sin in a saint, though not entirely dead, is dying. If it were dead, it would be removed from sight, but it still hangs there, working and struggling under its mortal wounds. When a tree receives a strike that reaches its core, all the leaves and branches begin to fade and decay. Similarly, when the sanctifying Spirit comes and breaks the power of sin, there is a gradual ceasing from it and dying to it in the whole person, so they "no longer live in the flesh to the lusts of men." They do not make sin their trade and business; their main goal is not to seek themselves and satisfy their corrupt inclinations. Instead, they are seeking Immanuel's land and walking in the highway to it, the path known as the way of holiness, even though the wind from hell, which was on their back before, now blows directly in their face, making their journey difficult and often driving them off the highway.

Secondly, this Spirit is a Spirit of vivification for them; it is the Spirit of life, making them live unto righteousness (Ezekiel 36:27), "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes." Those who have been "united" with Christ "in the likeness of his death shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection" (Romans 6:5). At Christ's resurrection, when his soul was reunited with his body,

every member of that blessed body was enabled to perform the actions of life. Likewise, the soul, influenced by the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, becomes more and more capable of performing all the actions of spiritual life. As the entirety of the law, not just fragments of it, is inscribed on the holy heart, believers are enabled to transcribe that law in their lives. Although they cannot write a single line of it without blemishes, God, for Christ's sake, accepts their performance in terms of sanctification; they are disciples of his own Son and led by his own Spirit.

This sanctified Spirit, communicated by Jesus to his followers, is the spiritual nourishment that branches receive from the source they are grafted into. This nourishment preserves, continues, and activates the life of grace given to them in regeneration. It is the nourishment by which the new being lives and grows towards perfection. Spiritual life needs to be fed and must receive a supply of nourishment. Believers obtain this from Christ, their head, whom the Father has appointed as the source of influence for all his followers (Colossians 2:19). This supply is "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:19).

Saints feed richly on Christ's flesh and blood for their spiritual nourishment, yet the Lord himself teaches us that "it is the Spirit that gives life" (John 6:63). The human nature is united with the divine nature in the person of the Son, and, like the bowl in Zechariah's candlestick (Zechariah 4), it lies at the fountainhead as the glorious means of conveying influences from the fountain of Deity. Christ receives the Spirit without measure, having a fullness of the Spirit due to that personal union. Hence, believers, being united to the man Christ, partake more and more of that Spirit for their spiritual nourishment by effectively applying Christ to their souls through faith.

God's holiness cannot admit an immediate union with a sinful creature, nor can it have immediate communion with it. Yet, the creature cannot live the life of grace without communion with the source of life. To provide for both God's holiness and the salvation of sinners, the second person of the Holy Trinity took a sinless human nature into personal union with himself. This holy, harmless, and undefiled humanity could immediately receive the fullness of the Spirit, which Christ could then communicate to his followers by his divine power and efficacy.

Imagine a tree with its roots in the earth and its branches reaching to heaven. The vast distance between the root and the branches would not interrupt the communication between them. Likewise, the distance between Christ in heaven and his followers on earth cannot hinder their communication. Although the parts of the mystical Christ, namely the head and the members, are not physically joined, the union is still real and effective. Our Lord himself shows us that even if we were to consume his flesh in a physical and carnal way, it would not benefit us (John 6:63).

The followers of Christ on earth are united with their head in heaven through the invisible bond of the same Spirit dwelling in both. In Christ, the Spirit dwells as the head, and in his followers, as the members. The wheels in Ezekiel's vision were not contiguous to the living creatures, yet they were united by an invisible bond of one Spirit in both. When the living creatures moved, the wheels moved with them. When the living creatures were lifted up, the wheels were lifted up as well (Ezekiel 1:19-20).

We can see the difference between true sanctification and the mere semblance of it, found among some strict followers of Christianity who are not genuine Christians and have not been regenerated by Christ's Spirit. This false sanctification is similar to what has appeared in many morally upright non-Christians. True sanctification results from the soul's union with the holy Jesus, the first and immediate recipient of the sanctifying Spirit. Through their

union with Jesus, his followers receive sanctifying influences. In contrast, false sanctification is a product of a person's own spirit, which may appear to possess elements of true holiness but does not arise from supernatural principles or aim towards the high goals of genuine holiness. Instead, it originates from and returns to the self, lying as far from true holiness as nature does from grace.

Those who possess this false holiness are like common boatmen who rely on their own efforts to move forward, while the ship bound for Immanuel's land sails with the divine Spirit's guidance. How can there be true sanctification without Christ? Can we achieve true sanctification without partaking of the Spirit of holiness? Can we partake of that Spirit except through Jesus Christ, "the way, the truth, and the life?" The falling dew has as much chance of penetrating a solid rock as the influences of grace have of reaching sinners in any way other than through Jesus, whom the Father has appointed as the source of influence (Colossians 1:19; 2:19).

This is why many people fall away from their apparent sanctification and never recover: they are not genuinely connected to the true vine. In contrast, others recover from their setbacks due to their union with the life-giving source and the revitalizing Spirit (1 John 2:19).

A fifth benefit is growth in grace. "Receiving nourishment, they grow with God's growth" (Colossians 2:19). "The righteous will flourish like a palm tree; they will grow like a cedar in Lebanon" (Psalm 92:12). Grace has a growing nature; on the way to Zion, they progress from strength to strength. Although the holy person may initially be a child in grace, they eventually become a young adult and then a parent (1 John 2:13). Sometimes they may only crawl towards heaven, but later they walk, run, and soar with wings like eagles (Isaiah 40:31). If a branch grafted into a stock never grows, it is evident that it has not connected with the stock.

Some may ask, "If all true Christians are growing, what about those who seem to be regressing instead of growing?" I reply that there is a

significant difference between a Christian growing continuously and growing at all times. All true Christians do grow, but they do not necessarily grow constantly. A tree that has life and nourishment grows to its full potential, but it does not always grow – it doesn't grow during winter. Christians also have their winters when the influences of grace, necessary for their growth, cease (Song of Solomon 5:2).

It is through faith that the believer receives gracious influences from Jesus Christ, as each lamp in the candlestick gets oil from the bowl through the connecting pipe (Zechariah 4:2). If the pipe is blocked or the believer's faith is dormant and inactive, other graces will dim and appear ready to be extinguished. As a result, the depraved nature will gain strength and become active. What then will become of the soul? There is still one sure ground of hope. The believer's faith is not like the hypocrite's, which is like a pipe disconnected from the fountain. The faith still serves as a bond between Christ and the soul, and because Christ lives, the believer will also live (John 14:19). The Lord Jesus clears the means of conveyance, and then influences for growth flow, and the believer's graces look fresh and green again (Hosea 14:7). Even in the worst of times, saints have a principle of growth within them (1 John 3:9), and they will revive again after their declines when the winter is over and the Sun of Righteousness returns with warm influences.

Mud thrown into a pool may settle there, but if it is thrown into a fountain, the spring will eventually clear it out and run as clear as before. Secondly, Christians may misunderstand their growth in two ways: 1) By judging their situation based on their current feelings. They may not perceive themselves to be growing, but that is no reason to conclude they are not growing (Mark 4:27). If a person were to stare at a growing tree, they would not see it grow, but if they compare the tree's present state to its past state, they will see the growth. Similarly, Christians can determine whether they are growing or declining by comparing their current and former conditions. 2) Christians may misunderstand their growth by

measuring it only by the advances of the top, not the root. Even if a person is not growing taller, they may be growing stronger. If a tree is connecting with the ground, establishing itself in the earth, and spreading its roots, it is growing even if it is not taller than before. Likewise, even if a Christian lacks the sweet consolations and strong affections they once had, if they are growing in humility, self-denial, and dependence on Jesus Christ, they are a growing Christian Hos. 14:5, "I will be as the dew unto Israel, he shall cast forth his roots as Lebanon."

Question: "Do hypocrites grow at all? And if so, how can we distinguish between their growth and true Christian growth?"

Answer: To the first part of the question, hypocrites do grow. Tares have their growth, as well as wheat: the seed that fell among thorns did spring up (Luke 8:7). However, it brought no fruit to perfection (Luke 8:14). Indeed, a true Christian may have a false growth. James and John seemed to grow in the grace of holy zeal when their spirits grew so fervent for Christ's cause that they wanted to set fire to an entire village for not receiving their Lord and Master (Luke 9:54). But it was not genuine growth; hence, Jesus rebuked them (Luke 9:55), saying, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of."

To the second part of the question, true Christian growth has a unique beauty that distinguishes it from all false growth: it is universal, regular, and proportional. It is a "growing up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Ephesians 4:15). The growing Christian grows proportionally in all aspects of the new self. Under the kind influences of the Sun of Righteousness, believers "grow up like calves of the stall" (Malachi 4:2). It would be considered a monstrous growth if a creature's head grew without its body or if one leg grew while another did not; if all parts did not grow proportionally. Yet, such is the growth of many in religion. They grow like rickety children with large heads and slender bodies; they gain more knowledge but no more holiness in their hearts and lives.



They grow very active outwardly but remain cold inwardly, like someone experiencing an ague. They are more concerned with the externals of religion than ever before, yet remain as ignorant of the power of godliness as ever. If a garden is watered by hand, some plants will receive much water, some little, and some none at all; therefore, some will wither while others flourish. However, after rain from the clouds, all plants grow together. Similarly, all the graces of the Spirit grow proportionally by the special influences of divine grace.

Branches grafted into Christ, growing correctly, grow in all aspects of growth simultaneously. They grow inward, becoming more closely united with Christ (Ephesians 4:15) and clinging more firmly to Him as the source of all influences, which is the foundation of all other true Christian growth. They grow outward in good works, in their life and conduct. Like Naphtali, they give goodly words, and like Joseph, they are fruitful boughs. They grow upward in heavenly-mindedness and contempt for the world, as their conversation is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). Finally, they grow downward in humility and self-loathing. The branches of the most significant growth in Christ, in their own eyes, are "less than the least of all saints" (Ephesians 3:8), "the worst of sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15), and "more brutish than any man" (Proverbs 30:2). They recognize that they can do nothing, not even "think anything as of themselves" (2 Corinthians 3:5), that they deserve nothing, being "unworthy of the least of all the mercies shown unto them" (Genesis 32:10), and that they are nothing (2 Corinthians 12:11).

A sixth benefit is fruitfulness. The branch grafted into Christ is not barren but bears fruit (John 15:5): "Whoever abides in me, and I in them, bears much fruit." Souls are united to Christ so that they may bear fruit for God (Romans 7:4). Those who are barren may be branches in Christ by profession, but not by true implantation. Whoever is united to Christ bears the fruit of gospel obedience and genuine holiness. Faith is always accompanied by good works. The believer not only emerges from the grave of their natural state but

also sheds their grave-clothes, the dominating lusts in which they walked like a ghost, dead while living in them (Colossians 3:7-8). For Christ has said of them, as of Lazarus, "Unbind them and let them go."

Now that the believer has put on Christ, they embody Him, so to speak, like an actor in borrowed robes portraying a king on stage, walking as Christ also walked. Now the fruit of the Spirit in them is found in all goodness (Ephesians 5:9). The fruits of holiness will be evident in the hearts, speech, and lives of those who are united to Christ. The hidden person of the heart is not only a temple built for God and consecrated to Him but also used and employed for Him, where love, fear, trust, and all other aspects of unseen religion are exercised (Philippians 3:3). The heart is no longer the devil's common ground, where thoughts roam free; even vain thoughts are detested (Psalm 119:113). Instead, it is God's enclosure, a garden protected for Him (Song of Solomon 4:16). It is true that there are still weeds of corruption because the ground is not yet perfectly cleared, but the person, on the day of their new creation, is set to tend and maintain it.

A live coal from the altar has touched their lips, and they are purified (Psalm 15:1-3). There may indeed be a smooth tongue where there is a false heart. The voice may resemble Jacob's, while the hands belong to Esau. But, "If anyone among you thinks they are religious and does not bridle their tongue but deceives their heart, their religion is in vain" (James 1:26). The power of godliness will govern the tongue, even if it is a world of iniquity. If someone is a follower of Christ, their speech will reveal it; they will speak the language of Canaan, not the language of Ashdod. They will neither be silent in their religion nor let their tongue run unchecked, given that grace has added a third guard to the tongue's natural double guard.

The fruits of holiness will be evident in their outward behaviour, for they have clean hands and a pure heart (Psalm 24:4). They are a godly person, dutifully observing the commandments of the first

table of the law, and a righteous person, honestly fulfilling the duties of the second table. In their conduct, they are both a good Christian and a good neighbour. They act towards God as if people's eyes are upon them, and towards others, believing that God's eyes are upon them. They dare not separate in their practice what God has joined in His law.

Thus, the branches in Christ are full of good fruits. These fruits are a collection of vital actions for which Jesus Christ is both the source and the goal. He is the source because He lives in them, and "the life they live is by faith in the Son of God" (Galatians 2:20). He is the goal because they live for Him, and "for them, to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21). Religious duties are like orphaned children in rags; some people will not accept them because they never loved them nor their Father; some take them in because they might be useful to them. However, the saints accept them for their Father's sake, that is, for Christ's sake, and they are lovely in their eyes because they resemble Him. This new life of the saints could never have been shaped from the natural abilities of their souls by any combined force of all created power. They would have remained eternally barren if they had not been "married to Christ, bringing forth fruit unto God" (Romans 7:4).

If you ask me, "How can your nourishment, growth, and fruitfulness be advanced?" I offer these few suggestions:

1. Ensure your genuine connection with the foundation through unfeigned faith and beware of hypocrisy: a branch that is not sound at its core will certainly wither. The Lord's trees are trees of righteousness (Isaiah 61:3). So, when others fade, they bear fruit. Hypocrisy is a disease in the core of religion that will eventually consume everything. It is a leak in the ship that will surely sink it. Sincerity of grace will make it lasting, however weak; just as the smallest twig that is sound at its core will draw nourishment from the foundation and grow, while the most

massive branch that is rotten can never recover because it receives no nourishment.

2. Strive to be steadfast in the truths and ways of God. An unsettled and wavering judgment is a great enemy of Christian growth and fruitfulness, as the apostle teaches (Ephesians 4:14-15). A rolling stone gathers no moss, and a wavering judgment makes for a fruitless life. Although a tree may be sound, how can it grow or bear fruit if you are continually moving it from one soil to another?
3. Endeavour to remove the suckers, as gardeners do, to help their trees thrive. These are unmortified lusts; therefore, "mortify your members that are upon the earth" (Colossians 3:5). When the Israelites obtained meat for their lusts, they brought leanness to their souls. Those who have many hungry children to feed will struggle to feed themselves. To prosper, one must resist the cravings of excessive desires.
4. Utilise the ordinances of God for these purposes. The trees of righteousness flourish in the courts of our God (Psalm 92:13). The waters of the sanctuary are the means appointed by God to help His people grow like willows by the watercourses. Therefore, "long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up" (1 Peter 2:2). Approach these wells of salvation not just to look at them, but to draw water from them. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is specially appointed for these ends. It is not only a solemn public declaration and a seal of our union and communion with Christ, but also a means of intimate communion with Him, strengthening our union with Him, our faith, love, repentance, and other graces (1 Corinthians 10:16, 12:13). Dedicate yourself to prayer; open your mouths wide, and He will fill them. By using these means, the branches in Christ may be further nourished, grow, and bear much fruit.

A seventh benefit is the acceptance of their acts of holiness before the Lord. Even though they may be quite imperfect, they are accepted because they are connected to Christ, the blessed foundation on which the branches grow. In contrast, the acts of others are rejected by God, as seen in Genesis 4:4-5 and Hebrews 11:3. The believer sees many faults in their best performances, but the Lord graciously accepts them.

There is no grace in the heart without a corresponding weakness of corruption. Even their sincerity has a mixture of duplicity or hypocrisy, as seen in Galatians 2:13. Hence, there are shortcomings in the exercise of every grace and the performance of every duty. Yet, this does not hinder their acceptance, as described in Song of Solomon 6:10. The dawning of grace and goodwill to Christ is pleasant and acceptable to Him.

Despite the remnants of unbelief causing the hand of faith to shake, the Lord is so pleased with it that He employs it to obtain pardons and supplies of grace. The faith of the man who cried out, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief!" in Mark 9:24 was effective. Although the remnants of worldly affections make their love's flame weak and smoky, He focuses on the beauty of the flame, as seen in Song of Solomon 4:10.

Their good works are accepted, and even the smallest acts done in faith and from faith are considered significant. If they cannot offer gold, silver, or precious stones, their smaller contributions will not be rejected, as they are dipped in faith and the Mediator's blood. Even a cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple will be rewarded (Matthew 10:42). Not a single good word or tear shed for Christ will go unnoticed (Malachi 3:16, Psalm 56:8).

Their intentions are accepted for the actions, and their sorrow for the lack of intention is accepted as intention itself, as seen in 2 Corinthians 8:12. Their groanings are heard in heaven, and their meaning is well understood there. Their small contributions are

more valuable than other people's large offerings. Their stammering and broken sentences are more pleasant to their Father in heaven than the most eloquent speeches of those not in Christ.

The Mediator takes their petitions, adjusts them, and presents them to the Father, resulting in their acceptance in the heavenly court.

Every true Christian is a temple for God. If you look for sacrifices, they are present; they offer the sacrifice of praise and do good deeds. With such sacrifices, God is well pleased, as stated in Hebrews 13:15-16. Christ himself is the altar that sanctifies the gift (verse 10). If we look for incense, it is there too. The graces of the Spirit are found in their hearts, and the Spirit of the crucified Christ fuels them and puts them into action. As the fire was brought from the altar of burnt offering to set the incense alight, their graces ascend heavenward like pillars of smoke (Song of Solomon 3:6). However, even the best of incense will leave ashes behind; our great High Priest takes away the ashes and refuse of all the saints' services through his mediation on their behalf.

An eighth benefit of union with Christ is stability. The Christian cannot fall away but must persevere until the end, as stated in John 10:28. Indeed, if a branch does not connect with the trunk, it will fall away when strong winds blow. However, the branch connected to the trunk stands firm regardless of the wind. Sometimes a stormy wind of temptation blows from hell and shakes the branches in Christ, the true vine. Still, their union with him is their security; they may be shaken but never removed. The Lord will provide a way of escape along with the temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Calm periods are rarely prolonged; there is almost always some wind blowing, so branches are rarely entirely at rest. However, sometimes violent winds arise, threatening to tear them from their trunk. Similarly, saints face daily temptations, and sometimes the wind from hell rises so high and blows so fiercely that it makes even the strongest branches touch the ground. Yet, being connected to Christ,

they rise again, despite the most violent efforts of the prince of the power of the air (Psalm 94:18).

The Christian grows through these trials, benefiting from them as they reveal the soul's connection to Christ and Christ's connection to the soul. Just as the wind in the bellows, which could extinguish a candle, instead fuels a fire, such temptations often invigorate the true Christian, awakening the graces of the Spirit within them. This reveals both the reality and the strength of grace in them. As Martin Luther, that great man of God, said, "One Christian who has had experience of temptation is worth a thousand others."

Sometimes a stormy wind of trouble and persecution from people in the world blows upon the vine, which is Christ in a mystical sense. However, union with the trunk provides sufficient security for the branches. During times of peace and outward prosperity for the church, while the angels hold back the winds, many branches are attached to the trunk without truly connecting or drawing life from it, even though they are bound by external ordinances. These branches may remain on the trunk for a while and stand with ease during calm periods. But when storms arise and winds blow, they will begin to fall off one after another. The stronger the wind, the greater the number of branches that will fall. Some large branches, when they fall, may even drag others down with them and bruise or press down some true branches. These true branches would also fall if it weren't for the strong grip the trunk has on them.

In these situations, many branches that were once high and prominent are found lying on the ground, withered and ready to be gathered up and thrown into the fire (Matthew 13:6; John 15:6). However, no matter how violently the winds blow, none of the truly grafted branches that are connected with the trunk are missing when the storm turns into a calm (John 17:12). The smallest twig growing in Christ will endure and survive when the tallest cedars growing on their own roots are knocked down (Romans 8:35, 36-39). However severely Israel is "sifted," not even the smallest grain or "little stone"

will fall to the ground (Amos 9:9). This is an allusion to the sifting of fine pebble stones from heaps of dust and sand. Though the sand and dust fall to the ground or are blown away by the wind and trampled underfoot, not even a small stone will fall, reflecting the precision of the sieve and the care of the sifter.

There is nothing more prone to fall to the ground than a stone. Yet, if people professing religion are living stones built on Christ, the cornerstone, even if they are small stones, they will not fall to the ground, whatever storm beats upon them (1 Peter 2:4-6). All the good grain in the church of Christ is of this kind: they are stones in terms of solidity and living stones in terms of activity. If people are solid, substantial Christians, they will not be like chaff tossed about by every wind, having so much liveliness that they have nothing of the stone. And if they are active Christians, whose spirits stir within them, as Paul's did when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry (Acts 17:16), they will not lie like stones, to be turned over, cut, and carved according to the whims of others, having so much of the stone that there is no liveliness left in them.

Our God's house is vast, containing not only vessels of gold, but also of earth, as mentioned in 2 Timothy 2:20. Both kinds of vessels are susceptible to becoming dirty. Therefore, when God brings affliction upon the church, He has regard for both. The vessels of gold are not destroyed but instead, refined by the fiery trials of affliction, much like goldsmiths refine gold. As stated in Isaiah 1:25, "And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross." Conversely, vessels of earth are destroyed, being broken into pieces, as if they were pottery. As Isaiah 1:28 declares, "And the destruction," or breaking "of the transgressors, and of the sinners, shall be together." This passage may allude to the law that required the breaking of vessels of earth when unclean, whereas vessels of wood and gold only needed to be rinsed (Leviticus 15:12).

The ninth benefit of being grafted into Christ is support. If you are a branch grafted into Christ, the root supports you. The believer leans



on Christ as a weak woman on her beloved husband during a journey, as expressed in Canticles 8:5. He relies on Him as a feeble old man relies on his staff, as described in Isaiah 50:10. He rolls his burdens onto Him, much like a person unloads a weight that is too heavy to carry alone, onto another who can bear it, as noted in Psalm 22:8. Many weights can hang upon and press down the branches in Christ, the true vine. Nevertheless, no matter what weight the branches bear, the stock supports both the branch and the weight upon it.

1. Christ supports believers in Him under the weight of outward troubles. This is a large promise found in Isaiah 43:2, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you." Look at how David was supported under a heavy load in 1 Samuel 30:6. His city Ziklag was burnt, his wives were taken captive, and his men spoke of stoning him. Nothing was left him but his God and his faith. By his faith, he encouraged himself in his God. The Lord comes and lays His cross on His people's shoulders. It presses them down, and they are likely to sink under it, and therefore cry, "Master, save us, we perish." But He supports them under their burden. He bears them up, and they bear their cross. Thus the Christian, with a weight of outward troubles upon him, goes lightly under his burden, having the everlasting arms underneath him. The Christian has a spring of comfort that he cannot lose, and therefore never lacks something to support him. If a man has all his riches in money, robbers may take it away. Then what does he have left? But even though a landed proprietor may be robbed of his money, his lands remain for his support. Those who build their comfort on worldly goods may quickly be comfortless, but those who are united to Christ shall find comfort when all the streams of worldly enjoyments are dried up. In Job 6:13, he asks, "Is not my help in me? And is wisdom driven quite from me?" That is, though his substance is gone, his servants, children, health, and soundness of body are all gone, yet his grace is not gone too. Though the Sabeans have driven

away his oxen and asses, and the Chaldeans have driven away his camels, they have not driven away his faith and his hope too. These are yet in him. They are not driven from him. So by them, he can fetch comfort from heaven when he can have none from earth.

2. Christ supports his people under a weight of inward troubles and discouragements. Often, their "heart and flesh fail them," but then "God is the strength of their heart," as in Psalm 73:26. They may have a weight of guilt pressing them down, making their backs bend, and their spirits sink, but Christ takes it off and gives them a pardon as they cast their burden upon Him. It is as if He takes the soul, as one marries a widow under a burden of debt, and pays it all off. When creditors come to Christ's spouse, she carries them to her husband, confesses the debt, declares she is unable to pay, and lays it all upon Him. Sometimes, due to carelessness, the Christian may lose their discharge, and when the law takes the opportunity to proceed against them for a debt already paid, and they cannot find their discharge, they are distressed. Many arrows go through the heart now, and they read and acknowledge the long accounts laid before them. Often, they see the officers coming to apprehend them, and the prison door open to receive them. Yet, the everlasting arms of the Mediator are underneath them, and they rely on the great Surety, which keeps them from sinking utterly under discouragements. They may also have a weight of strong lusts pressing upon them, and a body of death upon them. A leg or an arm of death, if I may so speak, would be a terrible load, and sometimes one lively lust lies so heavy on a child of God that they can no more remove it than a child could throw a giant from off him. Yet, their support is from that root which bears them, from the everlasting arm that is underneath them, and "His grace is sufficient for them," as in 2 Cor. 12:9. The great stay of the believer is not the grace of God within them, which is a well whose streams sometimes run dry, but it is the grace of God without them, the grace that is in Jesus Christ,

which is an ever-flowing fountain to which the believer can never come amiss. The apostle tells us in the same verse that it is "the power of Christ." In this combat, the believer, like the eagle, first flies aloft by faith and then comes down on the prey. Lastly, they have a weight of weakness and wants upon them, but they "cast over that burden on the Lord," their strength, "and he sustains them," Psalm 55:22. With all their wants and weakness, they are cast upon Him, as the poor, weak, and naked babe coming out of the womb is cast into the lap of one appointed to take care of it, Psalm 22:10. Though they may be destitute, like a shrub in the wilderness, which the foot of every beast may tread down, the Lord will regard them, Psalm 102:17. It is not surprising that the weakest plant should be safe in a garden, but our Lord Jesus Christ is a hedge for protection to His weak and destitute ones, even in a wilderness.

Objection: "But if the saints are so supported, how is it that they often fall under temptation and discouragements?"

Answer: 1. However low they may fall, they never fall off, and that is a significant matter. They "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation," 1 Pet. 1:5. Hypocrites may fall so that they fall off and fall into the pit, like a bucket falling into a well when the chain breaks. But even if a child of God falls so low that the waters go over their head, there is still a bond of union between Christ and them; the chain is not broken, and they will not go to the ground. They will be drawn up again, as Jesus said to Simon in Luke 22:31-32: "And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.'"

Answer 2. The falls of the saints come from their failure to utilize their union with Christ, their failure to use Him by faith to stay or bear them up. Psalm 27:13 says, "I had fainted, unless I had believed." Just as a nurse holds a child in her arms so that it cannot fall to the ground, yet if the unwary child does not hold onto her, it

may fall backward in her arms and be hurt. David's fall broke his bones, Psalm 2:8, but it did not break the bond of union between Christ and him; the Holy Spirit, the bond of that union, was not taken from him, verse 11.

I shall list the final benefit of being united with Christ, which is the special care of the Husbandman, as mentioned in John 15:1-2, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit." By virtue of their union with Christ, believers are the objects of God's special care and providence. Christ is God's vine, and the saints are His vineyard that He has a special interest in and concern for, as stated in Song of Solomon 8:12, "My vineyard, my very own, is for myself." The Keeper of the vineyard does not slumber nor sleep and watches over it day and night. He waters it with the dew of heaven, as mentioned in Isaiah 27:3, and dresses and weeds it to increase its fruitfulness, as stated in John 15:2. The luxuriant twigs that hinder fruitfulness are cut off, mainly through the ministry of the Word and cross or afflictions. Believers require the ministry of the Word, as emphasized in 1 Corinthians 3:9, "For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building," as well as the cross, as mentioned in 1 Peter 1:6.

Therefore, if we were to consider the cross as one of the benefits that flow to believers from their union with Christ, I believe that we would not be wrong. Surely, in their sufferings, they "suffer with him," Rom. 8:17. The assurances they have of the cross have more the nature of a promise than a threat, Psalm 89:30-33, "If his children forsake my law...then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail." This looks like a tutor's promise to a dying father to take care of the children left with him, and to give them both nurture and admonition for their good. The covenant of grace truly turns the spears of affliction into pruning hooks for those in Christ, Isa. 28:9,

"By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin." So why should we be angry with our cross? Why should we be frightened by it? The believer must take up his cross and follow his leader, the Lord Jesus Christ. He must take up his cross every day, Luke 9:23, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily." Yes, he must also take up his cross on special days, Lam. 2:22, "Thou hast called, as in a solemn day, my terrors round about." For a long time, the Jewish church had many pleasant meetings at the temple on solemn days for the worship of God, but they experienced a solemnity of a different nature when God called the Chaldean army to burn the temple and lay Jerusalem in ruins. And since the church of God is still militant in this lower realm, how can it be that the clouds will not return after the rain? But the cross of Christ, which is the name given to the saint's troubles, is a kindly name to the believer. It is a cross indeed, not to the believer's graces, but to his corruptions. The hypocrite's seeming grace may indeed breathe its last on a cross, as the grace of the stony-ground hearers did in Matthew 13:6, "When the sun" of persecution, verse 21, "was up, they were scorched, and because they had no root, they withered away," but never has one of the real graces in a believer died on the cross. In fact, as the candle shines brightest at night, and the fire burns most fiercely in intense frost, so the believer's graces are usually most vigorous in times of trouble.

The cross has a certain pleasure and sweetness for those who can discern and find it. It is pleasant for a Christian to be tried for heaven and stand as a candidate for glory. It is a joy to travel over mountains where the Christian can see the footprints of Christ and the flock who have gone before them. It is sweet for a saint to exercise their grace and see how a good God crosses their corrupt inclinations and prevents their folly. It is refined pleasure to observe how God pinches unruly lusts, taking away their provision, so that the Christian can govern them. Truly, there is a paradise within this thorn-hedge. Often the people of God are in bondage, which is not loosed until they are bound with cords of affliction. God throws them into a fiery

furnace, which burns off their bonds, and then, like the three children, they are loose, walking in the midst of the fire. God gives His children a potion with one bitter ingredient, and if that does not work, He puts in a second, a third, and so on, as needed, to work together for their good. With cross winds, He hastens them to their labour. They are often found in such ways that the cross is the happiest thing that they can meet with. Worldly things often slow the Christian down on their way to heaven. God sends a wind of trouble that blows the burden off the Christian's back, allowing them to walk more speedily on their way. After God has drawn some gilded earth from the Christian's heart that was drawing them away from God, they can trust in the name of the Lord. It has been observed that "no history makes mention of any man who has been made better by riches." I doubt whether modern histories can supply the defect of ancient histories in this point. But many have been worse off for riches: thousands have been hugged to death in the embraces of a smiling world, and many good men have been wounded by outward prosperity, wounds that must be cured by the cross. Sometimes, spiritual imposthumes gather in the breasts of God's people in times of outward prosperity and are broken and dispersed by the cross. It is kind for believers to be healed by stripes, although they are usually so weak as to cry out for fear at the sight of the pruning-hook, as if it were the destroying axe. They think that the Lord is coming to kill them, when He is actually coming to cure them.

## **Final Words to Saints and Sinners**

I will now conclude by addressing a few words, first to believers, and then to sinners.

To those of you who are believers, I say:

First, strive to obtain and maintain a continuous relationship and fellowship with Jesus Christ, which means continually drawing fresh grace from Him by faith and making a suitable return of exercising

grace and holy obedience. Be cautious of creating a divide between Christ and your soul. If it has already happened, which appears to be the case with many today, make every effort to remove it. Many people in the world disregard Christ, even though you must not. Many who seemed destined for heaven have turned away from Him. The warmth of outward peace and prosperity has caused some to abandon their faith, even though they clung to it when the wind of hardship was blowing upon them. "Do you want to go away too?" (John 6:67). By slighting communion with Christ, you show the basest ingratitude, as Jeremiah 2:31 attests, "Have I been a desert to Israel, a land of darkness? Why do my people say, 'We are free to roam; we will come to you no more?'" Beloved, is this how you treat your friend? It is inappropriate for any wife to disregard conversation with her husband, but especially for you, who was taken from a prison or a dunghill by your Lord. This is not the time for you to be outside your chambers (Isaiah 26:20). Those who are closest to God now may have a hard time standing when the trial comes, so how difficult will it be for others who are caught off guard by troubles while guilt remains unremoved from their conscience? It is a terrifying trial to be awakened from a deep sleep and thrown into a raging sea like Jonah. Feeling the trouble before we see it coming, and being past hope before we experience any fear, is a sad situation. Therefore, tear down your idols of jealousy, put to death those lusts, unruly appetites, and desires that have stolen your hearts away, leaving you like Samson without his hair, and say, "I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than it is now" (Hosea 2:7).

Secondly, walk in a manner that befits your union with Christ. Demonstrate your connection with Him by "walking as He also walked," 1 John 2:6. If you have been delivered from the power of darkness, let your light shine before others. "Shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life," just as a lantern holds a candle, which then shines through it, Philippians 2:15-16. Now that you profess Christ to be in you, let His image shine through your actions.

Remember that the purpose of your life is to prove, by practical evidence, what you profess.

1. You are aware of the character of a wife: "She that is married cares how she may please her husband." Therefore, you should "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing," Colossians 1:10. This is the chief objective of life; you must please Him, even if it displeases the entire world. What He hates must be hateful to you, since He hates it. Deny any lust that seeks to win your heart, for you are joined to the Lord, and the grace of God has instructed you to do so. Let Him be a covering to your eyes, for your choice has already been made, and you must not dishonor your head. A man cares for his feet because if he catches a cold there, it moves up to his head. "Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them the members of a harlot? God forbid," says the apostle in 1 Corinthians 6:14. Will you take that heart of yours, which is the dwelling-place of Christ, and give lodging to His enemies there? Will you take that body, which is His temple, and defile it by using its members as instruments of sin?
2. Strive to bring forth much fruit. A branch that is well-laden with fruit is the glory of the vine and the husbandman. Jesus said in John 15:8, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." A barren tree is safer in a forest than in an orchard. Branches in Christ that do not bear fruit will be taken away and cast into the fire.
3. Keep your mind focused on heavenly things and have contempt for the world. You are united to Christ, who is your head and husband and is in heaven. Therefore, your hearts should be there also. Colossians 3:1 says, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." Let the descendants of the serpent continue to crawl on their bellies and eat the dust of the earth, but let the members of Christ be ashamed to bow down and feed with them.



4. Live and act with dependence on Jesus Christ. That which grows on its own root is a tree, not a branch. It is the nature of a branch to depend on the stock for everything and to derive all its sap from there. Depend on Jesus for life, light, strength, and all spiritual benefits. Galatians 2:20 says, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I live now in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." In the mystical union, strength is united to weakness, so that death and earth may mount up on borrowed wings. Depend on Him for temporal benefits also; Matthew 6:11 says, "Give us this day our daily bread." If we have trusted Him with our eternal concerns, we should be ashamed to distrust Him in the matter of our provision in the world.
  
5. Be of a meek disposition, and strive to unite with your fellow members of Christ's body, as you are united to the meek Jesus, the blessed center of union. There is a prophecy to this purpose concerning the kingdom of Christ in Isaiah 11:6, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb; and the leopard shall lie down with the kid." This alludes to the beasts in Noah's ark. The beasts of prey that were used to kill and devour others, when they came into the ark, lay down in peace with them. The lamb was not in danger from the wolf there, nor the kid from the leopard. There was a beautiful fulfillment of it in the early church, Acts 4:32, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." And this unity prevails in all the members of Christ according to the measure of the grace of God in them.

Man is born naked: he comes naked into this world, as if God designed him for the picture of peace. And surely, when he is born again, he does not come into the new world of grace with claws to tear, a sword to wound, and fire in his hand to burn up his fellow members in Christ, because they cannot see with his light. It is sad to see Christ's lilies as thorns in one another's sides, Christ's lambs devouring one another like lions, and God's diamonds cutting one another. Sin is not a proper cement for the members of Christ,

though Herod and Pontius Pilate may be made friends that way. The apostle's rule is plain, Heb. 12:14, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness." Pursue peace not only to the extent of your own interests and preferences, but beyond them if it conforms to the Divine will. Do not pursue peace beyond holiness, which is conformity to the Divine will. Peace is precious, but it may be bought too dearly. Therefore, it is better to lack peace than to obtain it at the expense of truth or holiness. Otherwise, it cannot be bought too dearly, and it will always be precious in the eyes of the sons of peace.

And now to sinners, (those who are not yet in the state of grace), what can I say? I have shown you some of the privileges that belong to those who are united to Christ, but unfortunately, they are not yours because you are not His. The sinfulness of an unregenerate state belongs to you, as well as the misery that comes with it. You do not share in the righteousness of Christ, and therefore, there is no true peace for you - no peace with God or peace of conscience. You are not a part of God's family, and you do not have the adoption that was spoken of earlier. The Spirit of sanctification is not within you, and, in short, you have no inheritance among the sanctified.

All I can say to you is that the situation is not hopeless. You can still have a share in these privileges. As it says in Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will j sup with him, and be with me." Heaven is still offering a union with earth; the Potter is still making a plea to His own clay, and the gates of the city of refuge are still open. Oh, if only we could compel you to come in! This concludes what I have to say about the state of grace.

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