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Union
with
Christ

PROFESSOR JOHN MURRAY
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JOHN MURRAY

The fountain of salvation itself in the eternal election of the Father is "in Christ." Paul says: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:3, 4).

The Father elected from eternity, but he elected in Christ. We are not able to understand all that is involved, but the fact is plain enough that there was no election of the Father in eternity apart from Christ. And that means that those who will be saved were not even contemplated by the Father in the ultimate counsel of his predestinating love apart from union with Christ—they were *chosen* in Christ. As far back as we can go in tracing salvation to its fountain we find "union with Christ"; it is not something tacked on; it is there from the outset.

Redemption in Christ

It is also because the people of God were in Christ when he gave his life a ransom and redeemed by his blood that salvation has been secured for them. They are represented as united to Christ in his death, resurrection, and exaltation to heaven (Romans 6:2-11; Ephesians 2:4-6; Colossians 3:3, 4). "In the beloved," Paul says, "we have redemption through his blood" (Ephesians 1:7).

Hence we may never think of the work of redemption wrought once for all by Christ apart from the union with his people which was effected in the election of the Father before the foundation of the world. In other words, we may never think of redemption in abstraction from the mysterious arrangements of God's love and wisdom and grace by which Christ was united to his people and his people were united to him when he died upon the accursed tree and rose again from the dead. That is but another way of say-

ing that the church is the body of Christ and "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25).

New life in Christ

It is in Christ that the people of God are created anew. "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Ephesians 2:10). Here Paul is insisting upon the great truth that by grace, not works, we are saved. Salvation has its inception in God's grace. And this is certified by the fact that we are saved by a new creation in Christ.

It should not surprise us that the beginning of salvation in actual possession should be in union with Christ, because we have found already that it is in Christ that salvation had its origin in the eternal election of the Father and that it is in Christ that salvation was once for all secured by Jesus' ransom blood. We could not think of such union with Christ as suspended when the people of God became the actual partakers of redemption—they are created anew *in Christ*.

But not only does the new life have its inception in Christ; it is also continued by virtue of the same relationship to him. It is in Christ that Christian life and behavior are conducted (Romans 6:4; 1 Corinthians 1:4, 5; cf. 1 Corinthians 6:15-17). The new life believers live they live in the fellowship of Jesus' resurrection; in everything they are made rich in him in all utterance and in all knowledge.

Death and glory in Christ

It is in Christ that believers die. They have fallen asleep in Christ or through Christ and they are dead in Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16). Could anything illustrate the indissolubility of union with Christ more plainly than the fact that this union is not severed even in death? Death, of course, is real—spirit and body are

rent asunder. But the separated elements of the person are still united to Christ. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Finally, it is in Christ that the people of God will be resurrected and glorified. It is in Christ they will be made alive when the last trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible (1 Corinthians 15:22). It is with Christ they will be glorified (Romans 8:17).

We thus see that union with Christ has its source in the election of God the Father before the foundation of the world, and it has its fruition in the glorification of the sons of God. The perspective of God's people is not narrow; it is broad and it is long. It is not confined to space and time; it has the expanse of eternity. Its orbit has two foci, one the electing love of God the Father in the counsels of eternity, the other glorification with Christ in the manifestation of his glory. The former has no beginning, the latter has no end.

Glorification with Christ at his coming will be but the beginning of a consummation that will encompass the ages of the ages. "So shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). It is a perspective with a past and with a future, but neither the past nor the future is bounded by what we know as our temporal history. And because temporal history falls within such a perspective it has meaning and hope.

What is it that binds past and present and future together in the life of faith and in the hope of glory? Why does the believer entertain the thought of God's determinate counsel with such joy? Why can he have patience in the perplexities and adversities of the present? Why can he have confident assurance with reference to the future and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God?

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It is in Christ that believers die. They have fallen asleep in Christ or through Christ and they are dead in Christ. . . . "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

It is because he cannot think of past, present, or future apart from union with Christ. It is union with Christ now in the virtue of his death and the power of his resurrection that certifies to him the reality of his election in Christ before the foundation of the world—he is blessed by the Father with all spiritual blessings in the heavens in Christ just as he was chosen in Christ from eternal ages (cf. Ephesians 1:3, 4).

And the believer has the seal of an eternal inheritance because it is in Christ that he is sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise as the earnest of his inheritance unto the redemption of the purchased possession (cf. Ephesians 1:

13, 14). Apart from union with Christ we cannot view past, present, or future with anything but dismay and Christless dread. By union with Christ the whole complexion of time and eternity is changed and the people of God may rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

"Union with Christ" was the very heart of the Christian faith as Professor Murray taught it and as he himself lived it. This brief summary is from an article appearing in the Guardian of April 15, 1954, part of a series that was later published as Redemption Accomplished and Applied by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Born in northwestern Scotland in 1898, John Murray was gifted by his Lord to be one of his generation's greatest theological minds. He came of the staunchly loyal stock of Scottish Presbyterianism that still rejoices in the doctrines of sovereign grace.

After service in World War I, during which he lost one eye, John Murray set out to prepare himself for the gospel ministry. He received the M.A. from Glasgow University in 1923 and came to Princeton Seminary to continue his studies. He received the Th.B. and Th.M. degrees from Princeton in 1927 and returned to Scotland for further graduate study in Edinburgh University.

In the fall of 1929, John Murray returned to Princeton to begin his life's work as a teacher of theology. He moved to Westminster Seminary the next year and continued there as an instructor in systematic theology, becoming a full professor in 1937. He continued to teach until his retirement in 1966.

After his retirement, Professor Murray returned to his home in Scotland. Soon afterward, he persuaded Miss Valerie Knowlton to join him there in a marriage that has since been blessed by a son and a daughter.

Just a few months ago, after exploratory surgery, John Murray was informed that he had an incurable cancer. The progress of the malignancy was causing him severe pain when the Lord mercifully called him

home on May 8, 1975.

In addition to his wife Valerie, and a sister who lives nearby, Professor Murray is survived by his son, Logan Young, age 6, and daughter, Ann Margaret, now almost four years old.

To attempt any assessment of the impact of Professor Murray's faithful service to his Lord in teaching, preaching, counseling, and simply living as nearly conformed to the image of Christ as any humble saint within recent memory, is more than space and ability permits. Perhaps it all may best be summed up in the concluding sentence of a memorial scroll presented to Mr. Murray at his last attendance on a General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1966: "We thank God on every remembrance of you."

— J. J. M.



The Kyles of Sutherland were enveloped in mist, and the day was damp and cold, as though in sympathy with the many mourners who gathered from North, South, East and West, yea, and from across the Atlantic, to pay their last respects to the memory of Professor John Murray of Badbea, Bonar Bridge in Scotland. Some 500 people were congregated there in the historic Free Church of Creich, the church of the revered Dr. Aird, for the funeral service of this saintly scholar on Tuesday, May 13, 1975.

The impressive silence that pervaded this large representative company of ministers from all denominations and people from all walks of life, indicated their consciousness that a prince in Israel had fallen.

The service was conducted by the Rev. M. MacDonald, minister of the Creich congregation, with the assistance of Dr. David Freeman, U. S. A., Rev. John MacSween, Isle of Lewis, Rev. D. Lamont, Edinburgh and Rev. H. Cameron, Dornoch, the Praise being led by Mr. Hector MacLeod, Bonar Bridge.

The dignity and simplicity of the service, in true Reformation style, was just as Professor Murray would have desired. John Murray had gone forth from this small community to become one of the world's leading theologians. Having finished his course and kept the faith, it now seemed fitting that the small cemetery on the shores of the Kyles of Scotland should contain the remains of this worthy servant of Christ until the day break and the shadows flee away.

At the graveside the Rev. D.B. MacLeod Laing reminded us all of the truths that Professor Murray held so dear and so ably taught and preached. He urged sinners to flee the wrath to come and seek refuge in a crucified, risen and exalted Christ, while mercy lasted.

K. J. MacLeay,
Courtesy of the Banner of Truth
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