

## Oneness and Union

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The Lord Jesus is the true pattern of the "union" of man with God, God and man in one person. It is a common mistake to speak of union with God in the case of us His children. Scripture never uses language of the kind; it is the error of theology. The Christian never has union with God, which would really be, and only is in, the Incarnation. We are said to be one with Christ, "one spirit with the Lord," "one body," one again as the Father and the Son; but these are evidently and totally different truths. "Oneness" would suppose identification of relationship, which is true of us as the members and body of our exalted Head. But we could not be said to be one with God as such without confounding the Creator and the creature and insinuating a kind of Buddhistic absorption into deity, which is contrary to all truth or even sense. The phrase therefore is a great blunder, which not only has got nothing whatever to warrant it from the Spirit, but there is the most careful exclusion of the thought in every part of the divine word.

And here it may be of interest to say a few words of explanation as to our partaking of the divine nature, of which Peter speaks at the beginning of his Second Epistle (2 Peter 1: 4). It does not seem to be the same as oneness with Christ, which in scripture is always founded on the Spirit of God making us one with the Lord after He rose from the dead. Christ, when He was here below, compared Himself to a corn of wheat that was alone: if it died, it would bring forth much fruit. Though the Son of God was already the life of believers from the beginning, He promises more, thus indicating that union is a different thing. They must never be confounded. They are both true of the Christian; but union in the full sense of the word was that which could not be till Christ had died to put away before God our sins, yea to give us our very nature judged, so that we might stand in an entirely new position and relationship, made by the Spirit one with Christ glorified on high. This I believe to be the doctrine of scripture. Along with this, observe that the only one who brings out the body of Christ asserted dogmatically in the New Testament is the apostle Paul. Our spiritual oneness is referred to frequently in the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel of John; but this is not exactly the same thing as being one with Christ according to the figure of the head and the body, which is the proper type of oneness in scripture. Now it is by the apostle Paul alone that the Spirit sets before us the body with its head; and this it is which figures the true notion according to God of our oneness with Christ.

To be one with, or have life in, Him is not the same thing. This may be clearly illustrated by the well-known instance of Abel and Cain. They had the same life as Adam; but they were not one with Adam as Eve was. She only was one with Adam. They had his life no less than their mother. Thus the two things are never the same and need not be in the same persons. Oneness is the nearest possible relationship, which may or may not be conjoined with the possession of life. Both are in the Christian. The pattern of oneness or its proper scriptural model is found under that of the head and the body which is the more admirably expressive as the head clearly is, and of right directs all the movements, of the body. In a man of sound mind and body there is not a single thing done by the extremity of the foot which is not directed by the head. Such exactly is the pattern spiritually. The Spirit of God animates the assembly, the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the true bond of oneness between the members on earth and Christ in heaven. By and by, when we go on high, it will be represented by another figure equally apt, though also anticipatively applied while we are on the earth. We never hear of the head and the body in the day of glory, but of the Bridegroom and the bride. So we read in Rev. 19 that the

marriage of the Lamb is then come. This takes place in heaven after the translation of the saints, and before the day of Christ's appearing. Scripture avoids speaking of the marriage until the work of God is complete in His assembly, so that those who are baptized of the Spirit into that one body may be caught up to Christ together. These, between the two advents of the Lord, are all in one common position. But those before Christ came were surely quickened of Him; sons of God, they were partakers of the divine nature. So are Christians now; so will be the saints when the millennial kingdom is set up under the reign of Christ manifest to every eye. But to be one with Christ, members of His body, is only true now that He is in heaven as the glorified Man, and that the Spirit is sent down to baptize us into this new body on the earth. That one body is now being formed and perpetuated as long as the church remains on earth. The marriage of the Lamb (of course a figure of consummated union and joy) will only take place when the whole church is complete, not before, whatever may be the language inspired by hope ere then.

As to the difficulty of some minds whether Christ partook of our nature as it is here, or we partake of Him as He is in heaven, the answer seems to be that both are true; but they are not the same truth. Christ partook of human nature, but not in the condition in which we have it. This, as explained elsewhere, is essential not only to the gospel but to the Christ of God. The man who denies this denies Christ's person; he wholly overlooks the meaning of the supernatural operation of the Holy Ghost. Such was the fatal blot of Irvingism — a far deeper mischief than the folly about tongues, or the pretensions to prophesying, or the presumption of restoring the church and its ministries, or even its gross Judaizing. It made null and void the Holy Ghost's operation, which is acknowledged in the commonest creeds of both Romanists and Protestants. These all so far confess the truth; for I hold that as to this, Romanists and Protestants are sound but the Irvingites are not, although in other matters they may say a great deal that is true enough. Certainly Edward Irving saw and taught not a little neglected truth. Notwithstanding, they were, and I believe still are, fundamentally unsound in holding the human nature of Christ to be fallen and peccable through the taint of the fall, thus setting aside the object and fruit of the miraculous conception by the power of the Highest.

Hence then our being partakers of the divine nature is one thing, the gift of the Holy Ghost quite another. Both we have now. The first is the new nature that pertains to us as believers, and this in a substantial sense has been true of all believers from the beginning. But besides this there is the peculiar privilege of oneness with Christ through the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Clearly this could not be until the Holy Ghost was given to baptize the disciples of Christ into one body; as again the Holy Ghost could not be given to produce this oneness till Jesus by His blood had put away our sins and been glorified at God's right hand (Heb. 1; John 1, 7). Those who should be saved had been in every kind of impurity, and they must be washed from their sins before they could be righteously set in that position of nearness and relationship as "one new man." Esther was chosen and called to a high position; still, according to the habits due to the great king, there must needs be a great preparation before the actual consummation. I grant you this was but a natural place; still it is the type of a spiritual relationship; so that we may use it to illustrate God's mind. It is not consistent with His ways or His holiness that any should be taken out of the old things and put into the wonderful position of oneness with Christ until the work of redemption completely abolished our old state before God and brought us into a new one in Christ. Such is the order of scripture.

But there is more to come. For although we have already the Holy Ghost as well as the new nature, there is a third requisite which the glory of Christ demands for us: we shall be changed. That is, we Christians, who have now not only humanity, but this fallen, are destined at Christ's coming again for us to be changed. Christ had human nature, but not fallen. In His case alone was humanity holy,

free from every blemish and taint, and pure according to God. It was not only not fallen, but fit without blood to be the temple of God. This is far more than could be said about Adam in his pristine innocency. When Adam came from the hand of God, good as he was, it could not be said that he was holy. There was absolute absence of all evil. God made the man upright before he sought inventions. There was untainted innocence; but holiness and righteousness are more than creation goodness and innocency. Holiness implies the intrinsic power that rejects evil in separation to God: and righteousness means consistency with the relationship in which one is set. Both these qualities we see, not in Adam but, in Jesus even as to His humanity.

"That holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." He was "the Holy one of God," "Jesus Christ the righteous." Indeed He was the only one of whom it was or could be said of His human nature that it was holy, as it clearly is of humanity in His person that the expression "that holy thing" is used. The divine nature was not born of the virgin; and it was little needed to call that holy. There was the highest interest and moment in knowing the character of His humanity. Scripture as to this is most explicit. His humanity was holy from the very first, spite of being born of a fallen race.

And this agrees with all other truth. Thus, had the human nature of Christ been tainted by the fall, how could He have been the "most holy" sin-offering for sinners? There was no instance about which there was so much scrupulosity of care as the meal-offering and the sin-offering. These two are remarkable, and remarkably opposed, types of Christ: the one of His life, the other of His death.

But we shall have much more in the way of power and glory by and by. When Christ comes, human nature in us will participate in the victory of the Second Man, the last Adam, as it now shares in the weakness and ruin of the first man. Then indeed is the time when human nature will be promoted to a good degree; that is to say, it will be raised out of all the consequences of the fall of the first man, and will be placed in all the power and incorruption and glory of the Second Man as He is now in the presence of God. Never shall we be made God: this could not be, and ought not to be. It is impossible that the creature can overpass the bounds that separate the Creator from it. And more than that, the renewed creature is the very one which would most abhor the thought. No matter what the church's blessedness and glory may be, it never forgets its creature obligations to God and the reverence due to Him. For this very reason he that knows God would never desire that He should be less God than He is, and could not indulge or tolerate the self-exalting folly which the miserable illusion of Buddhism cherishes, along with many kinds of philosophy which are afloat now as of old in the west as well as the east — the dream of a final absorption into deity. This is altogether false and irreverent. All approach to such thoughts we see excluded in the word of God. In heaven the lowliness of those whom the sovereign grace of God made partakers of the divine nature will be even more perfect than now while we are on the earth. Human nature under sin is as selfish as proud. Fallen humanity always seeks its own things and glory; but the new nature, the perfection of which is seen in Christ, (that is to say, the life given to the believer, what we receive in Christ even now, and by and by when everything is conformed to it) will only make perfect without a single flaw or hindrance that which we now are in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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