

A Body of Divinity:

Vol. 3 (of 4)

A BODY OF DIVINITY:
WHEREIN THE DOCTRINES OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION ARE EXPLAINED
AND DEFENDED.
BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF SEVERAL
LECTURES ON THE ASSEMBLY'S LARGER
CATECHISM.

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THE *DOCTRINES* OF THE CHRISTIAN
RELIGION EXPLAINED AND DEFENDED.

Quest. LXV., LXVI.

QUEST. LXV. What special benefits do the members of the invisible church enjoy by Christ?

ANSW. The members of the invisible church, by Christ, enjoy union and communion with him in grace and glory.

QUEST. LXVI. What is that union which the elect have with Christ?

ANSW. The union which the elect have with Christ, is the work of God's grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably joined to Christ, as their head and husband, which is done in their effectual calling.

We have, in the foregoing part of this work, considered man as made upright at first; but not continuing in that state, plunged into those depths of sin and misery, which would have rendered his state altogether desperate, without the interposition of a Mediator; whose designation to this work, his fitness for, and faithful discharge thereof, have been particularly considered in several foregoing answers, wherein we have had an account of his Person as God-man; his offices of Prophet, Priest, and King, his twofold estate, to wit, of humiliation and exaltation; and the benefits which accrue to the church thereby. This church has also been considered as *visible* or *invisible*; and the former of these, as enjoying many privileges which respect, more especially, the ordinary means of salvation.

We are now led to consider the benefits which the members of the *invisible* church, to wit, the whole number of the elect, who have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ, their head, enjoy by him. And these are contained in two general heads; namely, union and communion with him in grace and glory; which comprise in them the blessings of both worlds, as the result of their relation to, and interest in him. First, they are united to him, and then made partakers of his benefits. All grace imparted to us here, is the result thereof; as the apostle says, *Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption*, 1 Cor. i. 30. And elsewhere our Saviour says, *He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit*, John xv. 5. And the contrary hereunto is inconsistent with the exercise of any grace: *Without me ye can do nothing*.

Moreover, that communion which the saints have with Christ in glory, whereby they who are brought to a state of perfection, participate of those graces and comforts which flow from their continued union with him; and the first fruits, or foretastes of glory, which they have in this world, are also founded on it. Thus the apostle calls Christ in his people, *The hope of glory*, Colos. i. 27. and speaking of his giving eternal life to them, he considers them as being *in his hand*, from whence *none shall pluck them out*, John x. 28. or separate them from him. So that they shall enjoy everlasting happiness with him, inasmuch as they shall *be found in him*, Phil. iii. 9. which leads us more particularly to consider,

What this union with Christ is. The scripture often speaks of Christ's being, or abiding in his people, and they in him; and assigns it as an evidence of their interest in the blessings he has

purchased for them: and, indeed, it is from hence that all internal and practical godliness is derived.

This privilege argues infinite condescension in him, and tends to the highest advancement of those who are the subjects thereof. Now that we may understand what is intended thereby, let us take heed that we do not include in it any thing that tends to extenuate it on the one hand; or to exalt those who are made partakers of it above the station or condition into which they are brought thereby, on the other.

It is not sufficient to suppose that this union contains in it no more than that his people have the same kind of nature with him, as being made *partakers of flesh and blood*; he having *himself taken part of the same*, Heb. ii. 14. He is indeed allied to us, as having all the essential perfections of our nature: and this was an instance of infinite condescension in him, and absolutely necessary to our redemption: nevertheless, this similitude of nature; abstracted from other considerations, accompanying or flowing from his incarnation, contains in it no other idea of union, between Christ and his people, than that which they have with one another; nor is it a privilege peculiar to believers, since Christ took on him the same human nature that all men have, though with a peculiar design of grace to those whom he came to redeem. This I the rather take notice of, because the Socinians, and others, that speak of this privilege, inasmuch as it is often mentioned in scripture, appear to have very low thoughts of it, when they suppose nothing more than this to be intended thereby.

Again, this union includes in it more than what is contained in that mutual love that is between Christ and believers, in that sense in which there is an union of affection between those who love one

another; as it is said, *The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David; and Jonathan loved him as his own soul*, 1 Sam. xviii. 1. In which respect believers are united to one another; or, as the apostle expresses it, their hearts are *knit together in love*, Col. ii. 2. *being like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind*, Phil. ii. 2. or, as he adds, *Let this mind also be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*, ver. 5. I say it includes more than this, which is rather the fruit and consequence of our union with Christ, than that wherein it principally consists.

Moreover we must take heed that we do not, in explaining this union between Christ and believers, include more in it than what belongs to creatures infinitely below him, to whom they are said to be united: therefore we cannot but abhor the blasphemy of those who speak of an essential union of creatures with God; or, as though they had hereby something derived to them in common with Christ the great Mediator.^[4]

But passing by this method of accounting for the union between Christ and believers, there are two senses in which it is taken in scripture; one is, that which results from Christ's being their federal head, representative, or surety; having undertaken to deal with the justice of God in their behalf, so that what he should do, as standing in this relation to them, should be placed to their account, as much as though it had been done by them in their own persons: this is what contains in it their concern in the covenant of grace, made with him in their behalf; of which something has been said under a foregoing answer;^[2] and it is the foundation of their sins being imputed to him, and his righteousness to them; which will be farther considered, when we treat of the doctrine of justification under a following answer.^[3]

Therefore this union with Christ, which is mentioned in the answer we are now explaining, is of another nature, and, in some respects, may be properly styled a *vital union*, as all spiritual life is derived from it; or a *conjugal union*, as it is founded in consent, and said to be by faith. Now there are two things observed concerning it.

1. It is expressed by our being spiritually and mystically joined to Christ: it is styled a *spiritual union*, in opposition to those gross and carnal conceptions which persons may entertain concerning things being joined together in a natural way; and, indeed, whatever respects salvation is of a spiritual nature.

It is moreover called a *mystical union*, which is the word most used by those who treat on this subject; and the reason is, because the apostle calls it *a great mystery*, Eph. v. 32. by which we are not to understand the union there is between man and wife, as contained in the similitude by which he had before illustrated this doctrine, as the Papists pretend,^[4] but the union that there is between Christ and his church. And it is probably styled *a mystery*, because it could never have been known without divine revelation: and as Christ's condescension, expressed herein, can never be sufficiently admired; so it cannot be fully comprehended by us. This is such a nearness to him, and such a display of love in him *as passeth knowledge*. However, there are some similitudes used in scripture to illustrate it. As,

(1.) The union that there is between the *vine* and the *branches*, John xv. 1, 2, 5. whereby life, nourishment, growth and fruitfulness are conveyed to them: in like manner all our spiritual life together, with the exercise and increase of grace, depend on our union with, abiding in, and deriving what is necessary thereunto, from him.

(2.) It is also compared to the union there is between the *head* and *members*, as the apostle farther illustrates it, when he styles *him the head, from which all the body, by joints and bands, having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God*, Col. ii. 19. which is a very beautiful similitude, whereby we are given to understand, that as the head is the fountain of life and motion to the whole body, as the nerves and animal spirits take their rise from thence, so that if the communication that there is between them and it, be stopped, the members would be useless, dead, and insignificant: so Christ is the fountain of spiritual life and motion, to all those who are united to him.

(3.) This union is farther illustrated, by a similitude taken from that union which there is between the foundation and the building; and accordingly Christ is styled, in scripture, *the chief corner stone*, Eph. ii. 20. and a *sure foundation*, Isa. xxviii. 16. And there is something peculiar in that phrase which the apostle uses, which is more than any similitude can express; when he speaks of Christ as the *living stone*, or rock, on which the church is built; and of believers, as *lively stones*, 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5. to denote, that they are not only supported and upheld by him, as the building is by the foundation, but enabled to put forth living actions, as those whose life is derived from this union with him.

(4.) There is another similitude taken from that nourishment which the body receives, by the use of food; and therefore our Saviour styles himself the *bread of life*, or the *bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die*; and proceeds to speak of his *giving his flesh for the life of the world*; and adds, *he that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him*, John vi. 48-56.

(5.) There is another similitude, by which our being united to Christ by faith, is more especially illustrated, taken from the union which there is between man and wife; accordingly this is generally styled, a conjugal union, between Christ and believers. Thus the prophet says, *Thy Maker is thine Husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer, the holy One of Israel*, Isa. liv. 5. And the apostle, speaking of a man's *leaving his father and mother, and being joined unto his wife, and they two being one flesh*, Eph. v. 31, 32. applies it, as was before observed, to the union that there is between Christ and the church; and adds, that *we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones*, ver. 30. which expression, if not compared with other scriptures, would be very hard to be understood; but it may be explained by the like phraseology, used elsewhere. Thus, when God formed Eve at first, and brought her to Adam, and thereby joined them together in a conjugal relation: he says upon this occasion, *This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh*, Gen. ii. 23. And we find also, that other relations, which are more remote than this, are expressed by the same mode of speaking. Thus Laban says to Jacob, *Surely thou art my bone and my flesh*, Gen. xxix. 14. And Abimelech pleading the relation he stood in to the men of Shechem, as a pretence of his right to reign over them, tells them, *I am your bone and your flesh*, Judges ix. 2. Therefore the apostle makes use of the same expression, agreeably to the common mode of speaking used in scripture, to set forth the conjugal relation which there is between Christ and believers.

The apostle, indeed, elsewhere alters the phrase, when he says, *He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit*, 1 Cor. vi. 17. which is so difficult an expression, that some who treat on this subject, though concluding that there is in it something that denotes the intimacy and nearness of this union, and more than what is contained in the

other phrase, of their *being one flesh*, nevertheless, reckon it among those expressions which are inexplicable; though I cannot but give into the sense in which some understand it; namely, that inasmuch as the same Spirit dwells in believers that dwelt in Christ, though with different views and designs, they are hereby wrought up, in their measure, to the same temper and disposition; or as it is expressed elsewhere, *The same mind* is in them *that was in Christ*, Phil. ii. 5. which is such an effect of this conjugal relation that there is between him and them, as is not always the result of the same relation amongst men. The reason why I call this our being united to Christ, by faith, is because it is founded in a mutual consent; as *the Lord avouches them* on the one hand, *to be his people*, so they, on the other hand, *avouch him to be their God*, Deut. xxvi. 17, 18. the latter of which is, properly speaking, an act of faith; whereby they give up themselves to be his servants, to all intents and purposes, and that for ever.

It is farther observed in this answer. That union with Christ is a work of God's grace: this it must certainly be, since it is the spring and fountain from whence all acts of grace proceed; and indeed, from the nature of the thing, it cannot be otherwise: for if there be a wonderful instance of condescending grace in God's conferring those blessings that accompany salvation; this may much more be deemed so. If Christ be pleased to *dwell* with, and *in his people*, and to *walk in* them, 2 Cor. vi. 16. or as it is said elsewhere, to *live in them*, Gal. ii. 20. as a pledge and earnest of their being forever with him in heaven; and if, as the result hereof, they be admitted to the greatest intimacy with him; we may from hence take occasion to apply what was spoken by one of Christ's disciples, to him, with becoming humility and admiration; *how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?* John xiv. 22. Is it not a

great instance of grace, that the Son of God should make choice of so mean an habitation, as that of the souls of sinful men; and not only be present with, but united to them in those instances which have been before considered?

2. It is farther observed in this answer, that we are united to Christ in effectual calling; which leads us to consider what is contained in the two following answers.

Quest. LXVII., LXVIII.

QUEST. LXVII. What is effectual calling?

ANSW. Effectual calling is the work of God's almighty power and grace; whereby, out of his free and special love to his elect, and from nothing in them moving him thereunto, he doth, in his accepted time, invite and draw them to Jesus Christ by his word and Spirit, savingly enlightening their minds, renewing, and powerfully determining their wills; so as they, although in themselves dead in sin, are hereby made willing and able, freely to answer his call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein.

QUEST. LXVIII. Are the elect effectually called?

ANSW. All the elect, and they only, are effectually called; although others may be, and often are, outwardly called by the ministry of the word, and have some common operations of the Spirit; who, for their wilful neglect and contempt of the grace offered to them, being justly left in their unbelief, do never truly come to Jesus Christ.

We have, in these answers, an account of the first step that God takes, in applying the redemption purchased by Christ; which is expressed, in general, by the word *calling*; whereby sinners are invited, commanded, encouraged, and enabled, to come to Christ, in order to their being made partakers of his benefits: the apostle styles it an *high, holy, and heavenly calling*, Phil. iii. 14. 2 Tim. i. 9. Heb. iii. 1. and a being *called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord*, 1 Cor. i. 8. Herein we are *called out of darkness*

into his marvellous light, 1 Pet. ii. 9. and *to his eternal glory by Jesus Christ*, chap. v. 10. And, indeed, the word is very emphatical: For,

1. A call supposes a person to be separate, or at a distance from him that calls him; and it contains an intimation of leave to come into his presence. Thus, in effectual calling, he who was departed from God, is brought nigh to him. God, as it were, says to him, as he did to Adam, when flying from him, and dreading nothing so much as his presence, when apprehending himself exposed to the stroke of his vindictive justice, *Where art thou?* Gen. iii. 9. which is styled, *God's calling unto him*. Or, it is like as when a traveller is taking a wrong way, and in danger of falling into some pit, or snare; and a kind friend calls after him to return, and sets him in the right way: thus God calls to sinners, or says, as the prophet expresses it; *Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it; when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.*

2. Herein God deals with men as reasonable creatures; which is by no means to be excluded from our ideas of the work of grace; though this work contain in it some superior, or supernatural methods of acting, in order to bring it about; yet we may be under a divine influence, as turning to God, or effectually called by him, and accordingly acted by a supernatural principle; and at the same time our understandings, or reasoning powers, not rendered useless, but enlightened or improved thereby; by which means, every thing that we do, in obedience to the call of God, appears to be most just and reasonable. This gives no ground for any one to conclude, that, according to our method of explaining this doctrine, we lay ourselves open to the absurd consequence fastened upon it; as

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