

## An Illustration

Two stand before an altar. An authority asks formal questions. They speak solemn oaths before assembled witnesses. They exchange symbols of the covenant. Names are changed; papers reviewed, signed. A short time later, they enact another ancient form of the ceremony: they feed each other and then drink from their cups, arms intertwined. They have received a new identity. They have become one.

The covenant of marriage is similar to a covenant of blood. Both covenants have similar purposes and ceremonies. Both covenants bring about the union of two persons. Marriage brings about a union of flesh (Genesis 2:24); a blood covenant promises a union of soul, and in the case of our covenant with God, a divine union of spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17).

A union of flesh is more than just the union of two bodies. It is the union and commonality of everything physical. One cannot say to the other, “this is *my* child,” or “that one is *yours!*” Homes, land, and possessions are held in common. Even their bodies are no longer their own but possessed jointly. 1 Corinthians 7:4 says, “The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.” In one sense, there is no longer “mine” or “yours,” only “ours.”

A union of spirit is a union of nature, attitudes, and character. With God, we share in His attributes. This is the only way we change. This union makes the New Testament work, whereas the Old Testament only foretold what had to happen, with little power to bring it about. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross brings about an intersection of God with us. God’s spirit permeates our being. His life and power infiltrate and conquer our old natures.

In Ephesians 5:28-32, Paul describes the attitude that is necessary in order for husbands to love their wives. In so doing, he uses for His example the way that Christ loves the church:

Husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves *himself*; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

Christ loves us in the optimal way that a husband should love his wife – as if she were his own flesh and blood. Christ loves us as an actual part of Himself. When we suffer, Christ suffers. When we rejoice, Christ rejoices.

Christ now identifies with us. Do we identify with Him? Do we live in our new identity, or do we put it on for Sundays and hang it in the closet the rest of the week? We expect, or at least hope for, the supernatural life-changing power of Christ to operate in our lives when we are in trouble and need help badly. But at that time, do we struggle to find our new identities in Christ, having to search through the closet for what we are unaccustomed to wearing?

Christ identifies with us! Can we then be ashamed to identify with Him?

A wife takes the name of her husband. If she was unwilling, at times, to use his name, would that call into serious question her commitment to the relationship? Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me . . . But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven (Matthew 16:24 and Matthew 10:33).’” If we deny His name, can we expect to operate with His authority?

We have a choice: deny Christ and live for ourselves, or live brand new and identify with Christ. We have already experienced the “blessings” of living for ourselves. However, the blessings that come from living in Christ are infinite.

There is one other difference between the union created during marriage and the union created when we are united with Christ. When two are married, they share all physical things. Their beings are not changed, however, since the essence of who they are is not in their possessions or even in their bodies. But when we are united with Christ, we become united spirits, the essence of our nature becoming one with His. The essence of who we are shares in the substance of who Christ is, intermingling, becoming one, until differences become obscure, and we begin to become virtually indistinguishable from Christ as we receive of His Nature.