

Spiritual Union

There are three possible ways to become one: physically; soulishly; and spiritually. Physical unity is achieved through marriage, where not only bodies but physical possessions are shared. Our relationship with Christ is often compared to this level of intimacy, most notably in Ephesians 5:23-32. But during earthly marriage, attitudes, opinions, and purposes can differ markedly. A higher level of oneness is a unity of souls where desires, purposes and thoughts begin to align. But even this level of unity does not allow for the life of one to flow directly into the other. That level of unity is reserved for spiritual oneness. 1 Corinthians 6:16-17 says that we can have that higher level of unity with our Lord: “Do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her? For He says, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.”

During the night of the first communion, Jesus gave one of His most important discussions about the Holy Spirit coming into our lives. John 14:16-20 describes the intimacy that will result: “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will behold Me no more; but you will behold Me; because I live, you shall live also. In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.”

A covenant is a promise, sealed with an oath and sometimes accompanied by conditions and/or pledges. The covenant does not bring union, it only promises that union. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, fulfills the promises of the covenant. The Holy Spirit unites us with God, changes us into His likeness, and causes all the manifold lesser promises of the covenant to become reality in our lives.

When we make Christ the Lord of our lives, we receive a promise that the Spirit of God will overwhelm, conquer, and as necessary, destroy our own spirit, so that the spirit within us

will be totally the Spirit of God. The fulness of the promise is not made manifest to us when we acknowledge Christ's Lordship. Rather, at that time, we receive a small down payment of the glory of the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 says, "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge." The Greek term for "pledge" here is a covenant term meaning the first down payment guaranteeing more is coming. Christ does not fully live within us until we have the full manifestation. But we have the pledge, the commitment, the covenant promise that He will.

As the Holy Spirit is being poured into our lives, we already have a portion of what will continually be coming forth within our lives. The disciples were filled initially with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, but they continued to be further filled on later occasions. Christ poured in as much of His Spirit as they could handle at one time. As the amount they could receive increased, Christ poured in more!

Christ's pouring Himself into us is the center of the message of the New Testament, or the new covenant, as Paul says in Colossians 1:25-27: "I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this *mystery* among the Gentiles, *which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*" This is our hope, this is our glory, this is our purpose – Christ in us. Yet it remains a mystery. It is something which must be dug into, explored, and incorporated into our lives.

A faith which continually digs into this mystery throws open more widely the doorway for the Spirit of Christ to penetrate our being with His glory. Everything that has been promised to us in our covenant with Christ is then poured into our spirits and lives. One of Christ's foremost topics during His final night after partaking of that first new covenant meal with His disciples, as recorded in the book of John, was the discussion about the importance of the coming Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit is the enacter of all the promises represented in

communion and provided for by the cross. Without the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives we have wonderful covenant promises, but we are like young princes who may own half the world but have not yet gone out to claim our domain. Using our faith presents our claim upon the covenant, resulting in the Holy Spirit manifesting all the awesome promises of God.

The goal of the new covenant is to make you Christ-like, “imitators of God, as beloved children (Ephesians 5:1).” This is not a goal which can be accomplished through any natural means. It is a goal which can only be achieved through a trusting submission to God and faith in His strength and His ability to accomplish that goal in our lives.

However, the person who refuses to acknowledge that this goal is attainable through God is just as proud as the person who attempts to gain the goal through his own strength and power. Though he realizes he can never follow Christ with his own abilities, or lack thereof, he still trusts only in himself, refusing to receive God’s help and God’s promises which could lift him far beyond his own inadequacy. Each walks in his own version of pride.

Faith is the ultimate humility. It acknowledges our own inabilities, but not stopping there, acknowledges and accepts the ability and power of God to recreate us into His perfect image.

Our dramatic *inability* to become even slightly like God on our own was the only problem with the law of the Old Testament. Adam’s failure was his attempt to become like God on his own, without God’s empowerment. The success of the New Testament is created by entering into a covenant with God in which *He* promises to transform us into something which we can now only *begin* to comprehend. Ephesians 3:16-21, in the midst of Paul’s prayer for us, describes the spiritual promise that awaits: “that [God] would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, *that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God.* Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or

think, *according to the power that works within us*, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”