

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

QUESTION # 66.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #66. *What is that union which the elect have with Christ?*

A. The union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God's grace,¹ whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband;² which is done in their effectual calling.³

Question 1—*What is the cause of the union of the elect with Christ?*

Answer—The cause of this union is more than is implied than one of nature whereby Christ is said to have the same kind of nature as that of his people and is thereby allied to us, Heb. 2:14. This union with Christ also includes more than the mutual love which is between Christ and believers, in the sense in which there is a union of affection between those who love one another, 1 Sam. 18:1. It is true, in such a union of affection, believers are united to one another, Col. 2:2; Phil. 2:2. However, this is rather the fruit and consequences of that union, than the matter in which it principally consists, Phil. 2:5.

There are two senses in which this union between Christ and believers is understood in Scripture: 1.) That union which results from Christ being the federal head, representative and surety of his elect people, 1 Cor. 15:22, 23. 2.) That union which is a *vital union*, as all spiritual life is derived from it, Eph. 1:22; or a *conjugal union*, as it is founded in consent, and said to be by faith, Acts 16:31; Gal. 3:27. It is this second union which is here in view and it is a union wrought through the working of God's grace, Eph. 2:6, 7. This union is the spring and fountain from whence come all acts of grace, for God confers those blessings which accompany salvation in this union, 2 Thess. 1:12. So, Christ is thereby pleased to dwell in and with his people as a pledge and earnest of their being for ever with him in heaven, 2 Cor. 6:16; Gal. 2:20. This working of God's grace effecting and blessing this union of greatest intimacy with Christ ought to bring a becoming humility and admiration, John 14:22.

Question 2—*Wherein does this union consist?*

Answer—This union, between Christ and believers, is a union neither natural or corporeal but spiritual and mystical, Eph. 5:23, 30. Nonetheless, it is altogether both real and inseparable, John 10:28.

It is called a *spiritual union*, in opposition to those gross and carnal conceptions which persons may entertain concerning things being joined together in a natural way, John 6:63. After all, all that respects salvation is of a spiritual nature, 1 Cor. 6:17. Spiritual in the New Testament refers to that which is produced in and by the working of the Holy Spirit, 1 Cor. 12:1, 4; Eph. 5:18, 19; thus, the spiritual man is one who is indwelt by and under the control of the Holy Spirit, 1 Cor. 2:14, 15. Therefore, when we call that union spiritual, which the elect have with Christ, we must understand that the bond of that union

¹ Eph. 1:22; 2:6, 7.

² 1 Cor. 6:17; John 10:28; Eph. 5:23, 30.

³ 1 Pet. 5:10; 1 Cor. 1:9.

is the Holy Spirit himself, 1 Cor. 12:13. Christ dwells in us if his Spirit dwells in us, and he dwells in us by the Spirit, Rom. 8:9-11. This indwelling of the Spirit is the work of God's grace whereby his children are also made to know that they have this spiritual union with Christ, 1 John 4:13. Thus, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, Rom. 8:9; the Spirit is the Spirit of the Lord, 2 Cor. 3:18; and Christ is the Lord of the Spirit, 1 Pet. 1:11.

This union is also called a *mystical union*, which is held forth under the similitude of that union between man and wife, Eph. 5:23. This is called a great mystery because: 1.) It was kept secret from eternity as something that was hidden in the mind and counsel of God, Matt. 13:17, 35. 2.) Yet, it was not kept hidden but was made known in accordance with the will and commandment of God, Tit. 1:2, 3. 3.) This revelation on God's part was mediated through and deposited in the Scriptures, being revealed unto all nations and is no longer a secret, Eph. 3:3-5. 4.) This revelation is directed to the end that all nations may come to the obedience of the faith, Rom. 16:25, 26.

That this union with Christ is a mystery is apparent in its comparison to the union of man and wife, Eph. 5:32. Union with Christ is *mystical* because it is a *mystery*—a mystery which underlines the preciousness of it and the intimacy it entails, Col. 1:26, 27. It is a mystery because it could never be known without divine revelation, 1 Tim. 3:16; and because, as Christ's condescension, expressed in it, can never be sufficiently admired, so it cannot be fully comprehended by us, Eph. 3:19.

This mystical union is expressed under several different similitudes designed to hold forth and illustrate the nature of the union: 1.) In order to hold forth the life, nourishment, growth and fruitfulness conveyed to believers via this union, and to show that the exercise and increase of grace depends upon this union, it is described as the like the union between a vine and the branches, John 15:1, 2, 5. 2.) To emphasize that the head is the fountain of life and motion to the whole body, so that if the communication between them stopped the members would be useless and dead, the union with Christ is compared to the union between the head and members of a body, Col. 2:19. 3.) To show that this union is structural and yet, not only a matter of support and upholding but a foundation that enables living actions, it is portrayed as the union between foundation and building wherein Christ is the chief cornerstone and his members the living stones built up, Eph. 2:20; Isa. 28:16; 1 Pet. 2:4, 5. 4.) Again, holding forth the union as one that is nourishing, this union is compared to the body and its use of food, John 6:48-56. 5.) Finally, to illustrate the nearness of the relation and its affection, it is compared to that conjugal union of husband and wife, Isa. 54:5; Eph. 5:30-32. Thus, when God formed Eve, brought her to Adam, and thereby joined them in a conjugal relation, Adam said, Gen. 2:23. This union is founded upon a mutual consent, wherein we see our uniting to Christ by faith, Deut. 26:17, 18.

Question 3—*How is this union brought to pass?*

Answer—This union is brought to pass by an effectual calling unto the glory and fellowship of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, 1 Pet. 5:10; 1 Cor. 1:9. This union with Christ, being the central truth of the whole doctrine of our salvation, all those who are elect shall actually become partakers of the grace of God so that, in the state of glory, the elect shall be embraced in the compass of this union and communion with Christ, Eph. 1:4, 5; 1 Cor. 3:22, 23.