

Title: **MATCHLESS MYSTERY**

Text: John 14:15-20

Subject: *The Believer's Union with Christ*

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Reading: *Pastor Todd Nibert*

Introduction:

God the Holy Spirit declares in this Book that there are two things revealed in the gospel that are great mysteries, just two. There are many mysteries revealed in the gospel; but only two are singled out with special emphasis by the Spirit of God as “*great*” mysteries. The first is the mystery of the incarnation.

(1 Timothy 3:16) “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”

The union of deity and humanity is a mystery no mortal can comprehend. We believe it. We rejoice in it. We hang our souls upon it. — “*The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us!*” But no man can fully understand, let alone explain the great mystery of godliness.

Turn with me to Ephesians 5, and I will show you the second great mystery of the gospel.

(Ephesians 5:25-32) “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; (26) That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, (27) That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. (28) So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. (29) For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: (30) For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. (31) For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one

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flesh. (32) This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

This is truly a great mystery! Like the mystery of the incarnation, it is a mystery no mortal can comprehend. We believe it. We rejoice in it. We hang our souls upon it. — “*We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones,*” spiritually bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh! But no man can fully understand, let alone explain the great mystery of the union of God’s elect with Christ.

This matchless mystery is my subject. I have no hope of expounding it. Its depths are utterly unfathomable. The most brilliant, the most well-taught, the most spiritual mind can never find the bottom of this great ocean. All I can hope to do is wade around the shores of this vast expanse. May God the Holy Spirit take us by the hand and lead us as we wade around in these sweet, refreshing waters of grace. Paul tells us in Colossians 1:27 that this is a mystery that is both rich and glorious. There is a world of glorious riches in this matchless mystery!

Now, let’s turn to my text — John 14:15-20. Here our Lord Jesus declares that this great mystery is the thing that God the Holy Spirit reveals in us and to us, by which he gives us the comfort and assurance of grace and salvation.

(John 14:15-20) “If ye love me, keep my commandments. (16) And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; (17) *Even* the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. (18) I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. (19) Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. (20) At that day ye shall know that I *am* in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.”

Let me direct your attention to verse 20 particularly. — “*At that day*” at that day when God the Holy Spirit is given to you, on the day he creates faith in you, at the time he comes into you as the Spirit of life, to abide in you forever and comfort you — “*At that day,*” the Son of God says, “*ye shall know*” these three things:

MATCHLESS MYSTERY**THREE GREAT UNIONS**

1. “**I am in my Father.**” — All who are taught of God the Holy Spirit understand by divine revelation that there is a union between the man Christ Jesus and God the Father, between our humanity and the Son of God, that that man who is our Savior and the eternal God are one. Sweet comfort that is to our souls! That is the foundation of all comfort to our souls.
2. “**Ye (are) in me.**” — Every sinner taught of God, all who are given life and faith in Christ, are made to understand that Christ is their Representative and Substitute. We rejoice to know, by divine illumination, that God the Father made his Son a public person, the Representative, Surety and Substitute of our souls from everlasting (Proverbs 8). — That means that he stood in our room and place, he stood in our stead from eternity!
3. “**And I (am) in you.**” — You shall know, in the very day that I give my Spirit to you, that I am in you.

The Puritan, Thomas Goodwin, wrote that this “union of Jesus Christ and his saints is a great and eminent mystery of the gospel, and the greatest hope of glory.” — *“At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.”*

Proposition: As God is in Christ and Christ is in him, so, my brothers and sisters, we who are born of God are in Christ and Christ is in us. — That is the one thing I want to communicate to you in this message. If you trust the Lord Jesus Christ, if you are born of God, **you and Christ are one!**

Imagine that. — You and Christ are one! — I and Christ are one! — Not two, one!

By God’s sov’ reign grace united
 To His Son eternally,
 I can never be divided
 From my cov’nant Surety.
 God’s free love, from everlasting,
 Made me one with His dear Son.
 Blessed union, strong, unchanging,

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I am with my Savior one!

Once in Christ, in Christ forever.
Thus His promise ever stands.
Life and death and hell together
Cannot tear me from His hands!
Oft I fall, but God unchanging,
Faithful to His cov'nant stands.
He will never charge with sinning
Those for whom His Son was slain.

One with Jesus, one with Jesus,
By eternal union one!
One with Jesus, one with Jesus,
O what wonders grace has done!
One with Christ from everlasting!
One with Him upon the tree!
One with Him on high ascending!
One with Him eternally!

In the New Testament the nature of the union between Christ and his church is set before us everywhere. It is so constantly and so clearly set forth that it cannot be missed, except by those who choose not to see it. Every act of Christ on earth is set forth in the Scriptures of truth as being, in some way, connected with his union with the us and our union with him.

- Was he circumcised? — We are circumcised in him (Colossians 2:11).
- Was he crucified? — We were crucified with him (Galatians 2:20).
- Did he die? — We died with him (Romans 6:8).
- Was buried in the tomb? — We are buried with him (Romans 6:4).
- Was raised up from the dead? — We risen together with him (Colossians 2:12).
- Did he ascend on high and sit down in glory? — God has made us sit together in heavenly places in him (Ephesians 2:6).
- Does he live? — He lives in me (Galatians 2:20).

In the Book of God this union of Christ and his members is traced out in everything our Lord did, in every act of obedience, and in everything he suffered during his transitory abode upon earth, and in everything he has received in his glory because of his obedience to the Father as our Surety and Substitute. The Scriptures show us, in the clearest and most prominent

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light, that there is an eternal union between Christ and his beloved people.

“Twixt Jesus and the chosen race
Subsists a bond of sovereign grace,
That hell, with its infernal train,
Shall ne'er dissolve nor rend in vain

Hail! sacred union, firm and strong,
How great the grace, how sweet the song,
That worms of earth should ever be
One with incarnate Deity!

One in the tomb, one when He rose,
One when He triumphed o'er His foes,
One when in heaven He took His seat,
While seraphs sang all hell's defeat.

This sacred tie forbids their fears,
For all He is or has is theirs;
With Him, their Head, they stand or fall,
Their life, their surety, and their all.”

— John Kent – 1827

ETERNAL UNION

1st. This union that exists between you and your Savior, my brother, is an eternal union. It is a union of pure, free grace, established in the beginning, before ever God made the heavens and the earth, when the Lord Jesus stood forth and was accepted as your Surety in the covenant of grace (Ephesians 1:3-6).

(Ephesians 1:3-6) “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: (4) According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: (5) Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, (6) To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”

MATCHLESS MYSTERY**VITAL UNION**

2nd. The old writers used to refer to this union as “a vital union;” and they were right in doing so. It is a union that is vital both to Christ and to us. It is vital to us because we cannot exist apart from him, any more than branches severed from the vine can exist apart from the vine (John 15:1-6). Yet, this union is vital to Christ as the God-man Mediator (Ephesians 1:22-23).

(Ephesians 1:22-23) “And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, (23) Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”

“This is the highest honor of the Church, that, until He is united to us, the Son of God reckons himself in some measure imperfect. What consolation is it for us to learn, that, not until we are with him, does he possess all his parts, or wish to be regarded as complete!”

— *John Calvin*

“Christ, who having voluntarily subjected himself to be our Head, accounts not himself complete without his members. In which respect we have the honour of making Christ perfect as the members do the body.”

— *John Trapp*

God’s elect are the fulness of him in whom is all fulness! As the Triune God could not be complete without him, he cannot be complete without you!

LIFE UNION

3rd. This union of Christ and our souls is a union of life, life in Christ, life with Christ and life by Christ, by the mysterious, wondrous extraction of life from Christ (Genesis 2:18-24).

(Genesis 2:18) “And the LORD God said, *It is* not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. ——— (21) And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; (22) And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. (23) And Adam said, This *is* now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of

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Man. (24) Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

Whether Adam fully understood the implications of his words or not I cannot say. But our Lord Jesus Christ knows perfectly well the origin of his spouse. He knows where his church came from. He still wears the mark in his side and the memorial in the palms of his hands and on his feet. Whence came this new Eve, this new mother of all living? Whence came this spouse of the second Adam? She came of the second Adam. She was taken from his side, from his very heart! Have you never read, “*Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit*”? Had the Lord Jesus never died, he would have abode forever alone, with no help-meet for him, no spouse upon whom to pour out his love. But, since he died, he has brought forth much fruit and his church, taken from his side has her life from him, in him, and with him. She is truly bone of his bones, and flesh of his flesh! We sprang of Christ, even as Levi sprang from the loins of Abraham. We live because we receive life from him.

As bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, we are the possession of our Husband, the purchase of his blood, the property of his love, and the object of his relentless devotion and care. Wondrous thought! — We belong to the Son of God. We are his peculiar possession! – The property of his heart! I belong to Christ alone. He bought me with his blood. I am a member “*of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones!*”

“‘Tis, done, the great transaction’s, done:
 I am my Lord’s and he is mine.
 He drew me, and I followed on,
 Charmed to confess the voice divine.
 High heaven, that heard the solemn vow,
 That vow renewed shall daily hear,
 Till in life’s latest hour I bow,
 And bless in death a bond so dear.”

MANIFEST UNION

4th. This vital union is an eternal union of life, life extracted from him who is Life. Yet, it is a secret union until God the Holy Spirit is given to the chosen, redeemed sinner in the saving operations of his omnipotent grace.

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So, next, I want you to see that this union of life with Christ is a union that is made manifest in the new birth.

The birth of a child is not the beginning of life, but the manifestation of life. So, too, the birth of soul in regeneration is not the beginning of life, but life and immortality brought to light by the gospel (2 Timothy 1:9-10).

(2 Timothy 1:9-10) “Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, (10) But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

Let me camp here for a little while. Do you remember what our Lord told us in our text? — “*At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.*” A few weeks ago, **Bro. Chris Cunningham** wrote in his bulletin, “I believe men will argue about the new nature up until the time that they have one, and then they will just be grateful to the God of all grace, who makes all things new.”

That is exactly what our Savior says in John 14:20. — When a sinner has a new nature, in the very day he is born of God, he knows it. You may not have known what to call it, or how to describe it, but you knew from the beginning of your new life in Christ that it was a new life, that Christ had come into you!

THE WARFARE

It is this impartation of Christ, the new creation in us, that begins the warfare inside with which all God’s people struggle in this world.

How beastly we are by nature! How often God’s saints in this world are compelled, like Newton of old, to sigh...

“If I love, why am I thus?
Why this dull and lifeless frame?
Hardly sure can they be worse,
Who have never heard His name.”

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Many of the doubts and fears God's people experience regarding their saving interest in Christ, arise from a failure to realize that every heaven-born soul lives in this world with two natures. In Scripture these two natures are referred to as "*the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts*" and "*the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*" (Ephesians 4:22-24), "*flesh*" and "*spirit*" (Galatians 5:16-17). These two natures are constantly at war, the flesh lusting against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh.

RE-GENERATION NOT RE-FORMATION

It is commonly assumed that in the new birth man (the natural, carnal man) is changed. That the old man is sanctified, that he who once loved sin is made to love holiness, that the enmity of the heart is slain, and that the old man renewed by grace grows more and more holy in progressive sanctification, until he is ripe for Glory and the Lord takes him home.

That fanciful dream deludes multitudes, until, after being born again, they suddenly discover that the old lusts are still there. The discovery is sometimes shocking, simply because we have been taught that they would not be there any longer. **How many there are who live in constant turmoil, knowing the abiding evil of their nature, but never daring to acknowledge it, lest they be scorned by others who pretend to be holy.**

The new birth is not a re-formation, but a re-generation. The new birth is not reforming the old nature of fallen man, but a re-creation of life in man by the Spirit of God. The new birth is not transforming that which is sinful into that which is righteous, but the imparting of a new, righteous nature. In the new birth Christ is formed in us, and we are made new in him (Colossians 1:27; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

TWO NATURES

In every believer there are two natures (sin and righteousness), two men (the old man Adam and the new man Christ), two principles (sin and holiness); and these two constantly oppose one another. This fact is plainly declared in Scripture (Romans 7:14-24; Galatians 5:16-22; Colossians 3:9-10; Ephesians 4:22-24). The old man, Adam, can never be sanctified; and

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the new man created in righteousness and true holiness, “*Christ in you the hope of glory,*” cannot sin (1 John 3:9).

Adam lives in us by birth. By natural generation we are made partakers of Adam’s nature. Christ lives in us by the new birth. By regeneration we are made “*partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:4).

CREATION AND NEW CREATION

God created man in his own image and after his own likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). When the Lord God had formed a body for Adam from the dust of the ground, he then “*breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul*” (Genesis 2:7). Genesis 5:1-2 tell us that all men were created at one time in the creation of Adam. That is to say, every living soul descends by natural generation from Adam, partaking of his nature. All his sons and daughters are begotten in the image of their father, generation after generation (Genesis 5:3; Psalm 51:5; 58:3; Romans 5:12).

Every living soul was created in and simultaneously with “the first man Adam.” Being born of Adam, we are all partakers of his nature; and we are called by his name, “Adam” (Genesis 5:1-2). As it was in the original creation, so it is in the new creation.

As “*the first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening Spirit*” (1 Corinthians 15:45). **All “quickened spirits” were created in and simultaneously with the “last Adam” — Christ.** No, Christ is not a creature of God. He is God the eternal Son. Yet, he was made our Mediator and covenant Surety. And all, being born of him, “*born of God,*” are made partakers of his nature, as the Holy Spirit declares (2 Peter 1:4).

- The children of the “*first Adam*” are born of the flesh and are earthy in all their feelings and affections. — The children of the “*last Adam*” are born of the Spirit and are heavenly, or spiritual, in their feelings and affections.
- The children of the first Adam are born for the earth. — The children of the last Adam are born for heaven.
- Those of the first are born of corruptible seed. — Those of the last are born of incorruptible seed.

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In the original creation we were made partakers of Adam's nature, humanity. In the new creation of grace we are made partakers of the last Adam's nature, "*the divine nature.*" That is the cause of the warfare within! These two are contrary the one to the other.

- We wear our Savior's name. He has given it to us in free justification.
- And we have his nature. He gives that to us in free sanctification, regeneration.
- Christ is the Lord our Righteousness in justification (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16), and the Lord our Holiness in sanctification (Hebrews 12:14).

JUST AS NECESSARY

In Hebrews 12:14 the Spirit of God tells us that there is a "*holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.*" In Ephesians 4:24 he declares that all who are born of God are born new creatures in Christ Jesus, "*created in righteousness and true holiness.*" **That holiness without which none can enter into heaven is the righteousness of God imparted to the heaven-born soul in regeneration, the divine nature of which we are partakers by grace** (2 Peter 2:4). This is the experience of the new birth; and it is just as necessary to the salvation of our souls as the righteousness of Christ imparted to us in justification.

Without question, the new birth is the certain result of our Savior's accomplishments in his death as our Substitute; but if we have no living union with Christ, his mediatorial accomplishments at Calvary cannot effect our deliverance from the wrath to come. **Be sure you understand my meaning.** — You cannot go to heaven without a righteous nature (imparted righteousness in sanctification) any more than you can a righteous record (imputed righteousness in justification). I know some have said, "If you believe that you're a lunatic." If that is so, call me, the Apostle Paul (Ephesians 4:24; Hebrews 12:14), the Apostle Peter (2 Peter 1:4), the Apostle John (1 John 3:9; Revelation 21:27) and the Son of God (John 14:20) lunatics!

BORN OF THE SPIRIT

Though the obedience of Christ unto death met all the claims of the law and satisfied divine justice for all the chosen seed, that obedience does not impart to the redeemed a qualification for the enjoyment of heaven. For that we must be born again. — "*Except a man be born of water and of the*

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Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:5-6).

Here we are presented with two distinct births from two distinct elements, necessarily producing two distinct beings. **The flesh produces beings incapable of entering into the kingdom of God.** The flesh cannot enter into, understand, or enjoy that which is spiritual, let alone that which is heavenly. **As one old writer put it,** “If the unregenerate man could enter heaven, he would be so unhappy in heaven that he would ask God to let him run down to hell for shelter.”

But **the Spirit, produces beings capable of entering into the kingdom of God,** capable of entering, understanding and enjoying that which is spiritual, making all who are born of the Spirit “*meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light*” (Colossians 1:12). **By the new birth, being given faith in Christ, God’s elect are brought into an open and manifest union with Christ; but our experience of it is not the beginning of this union.**

The believer’s vital union with Christ the Mediator is an everlasting union of grace. This union between Christ and our souls is, as **Spurgeon** put it, “the nearest, dearest, closest, most intense and most enduring relationship that can be imagined.” We live because Christ lives, and our lives are hid with Christ in God. This is a relationship that is closer than that of a husband and wife, or children and their parents.

MYSTICAL UNION

This union of Christ and his people is one of the greatest mysteries revealed in the Book of God. — “*We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones*” (Ephesians 5:30). It is a mystical union of grace. We are members of Christ. We form his mystical body. This is the closest relationship imaginable. It is such a close relationship, such a close union, that the Lord Jesus Christ would be as incomplete without us as we would be without him (Ephesians 1:23; Colossians 2:9-10). We are identified with him; and he is identified with us. He has made us essential to himself, just as he has made himself essential to us! He is the head of the body and we are the members of that body. That is a truly vital union! — “*We are members of his body.*”

PARTAKERS OF CHRIST

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As Eve derived her life from the Adam (Genesis 2:18-25), so we derive our life from Christ. As Eve was made partaker of Adam's nature, so we are made partakers of Christ's nature. As Eve's life was but an extension of Adam's life, so our life is but an extension of Christ's life. He is eternal life; and we have eternal life by the gift of God. That eternal life is "*Christ in you*" (Colossians 1:27). We are partakers his life. Our spiritual life proceeds from and is sustained by Christ. It is the source of our present spiritual life, and of our eternal life in glory with Christ.

Let us never diminish one aspect of our Savior's work to make another appear more glorious. All that Christ is made to us and all that he does for us is vital. We cannot be saved without his work for us; and we cannot be saved without his work in us. Both are vital.

ASTONISHING BUT REAL

5th. This union of Christ and our souls is real. Yes, it is a mystical, spiritual union, a union that is indescribably beyond the scope of our puny brains; but it is a real union. There are three great mystical unions revealed in Holy Scripture.

- The union of the three persons of the Godhead, being one God, is the doctrine of the Trinity (1 John 5:7).
- The Scriptures also reveal the union of divinity and humanity in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. — "*The Word was made flesh*" (John 1:14).
- And the Book of God reveals this vital union of God's elect with Christ. Nothing can be more astonishing; but nothing is more real than our union with Christ.

Believer, try to grasp the reality of this union of you and your Savior. — You are one with the Christ of God! You were "*buried in him in baptism unto death,*" wherein also you have risen with him. You were crucified with him upon the cursed tree. You have gone up into heaven with him. God has raised us up together, and made us to sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. You are one with Christ! I am one with Christ!

Be astonished, O my soul! **Being one with him, the Lord Jesus himself assures us that the Lord God our Father loves us as he loves him!** He loves me to the same degree, with the same love, and for the same reason he

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loves his Son as my Mediator. He loves me and his Son with an everlasting love (John 17:23).

Since we are members of his body, he will one day present us to himself without spot or wrinkle or blemish. We will be perfect even as he is perfect. We will enter into the eternal joy in the Lord. We are joint heirs with Christ; therefore whatever he has we shall have.

FAITH UNION

6th. There is one more thing I want you to see. Go back to our text (John 14:15-20). — This is a union that is ours by faith in Christ.

(John 14:15-20) “If ye love me, keep my commandments. (16) And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; (17) *Even* the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. — (20) At that day ye shall know that I *am* in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.”

Do you ask, “Pastor, how can I keep his commandments?” The answer is found in 1 John 3:23.

(1 John 3:23) “And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.”

We keep his commandments by faith in Christ. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and go home rejoicing in this sweet assurance — “*I am my Beloved’s and my Beloved is mine!*” As Christ is in the Father, I am in him and he is in me! And nothing can separate me from him!”

“*Because I live,*” my Savior says,
“*You, too, shall live.*” So, I’m secure.
His Word this blest foundation gives—
Immutable, forever sure!

Here, O my soul, unshaken dwell,
Though vexed by sin, God’s promise stands—

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Not all the p'wers of earth and hell
Can tear me from my Savior's hands!

I'm one with Christ! Whate'er oppose,
Still, I am His and He is mine!
Not sin, nor hell, nor all my foes
Can make His love for me decline!

O let me never doubt You, Lord!
Faith must upon Your Word rely—
Immutable, eternal Word!
The Word that built both earth and sky!

Dead to the law and sin I am,
With Christ Who bought me with His blood,
And risen with the risen Lamb,
My life is hid with Him in God!

Amen.