

# Mystic Union between Christ and the Saints

by Thomas Watson

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"My beloved is mine, and I am his." (Song 2:16)

In this Song of Songs we see the love of Christ and his church running towards each other in a full torrent.

The text contains three general parts:

1. A symbol of affection: "My beloved."
2. A term of appropriation: "is mine."
3. A holy resignation: "I am his."

*Doctrine: That there is a conjugal union between Christ and believers.* The apostle, having treated at large of marriage, winds up the whole chapter thus: "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:32). What is closer than union? What sweeter? There is a twofold union with Christ:

1. *A natural union.* This all men have, Christ having taken their nature on him and not that of the angels (Heb. 2:16). But if there is no more than this natural union, it will give little comfort. Thousands are damned though Christ is united to their nature.

2. *A sacred union.* By this we are mystically united to Christ. The union with Christ is not personal. If Christ's essence were transfused into the person of a believer, then it would follow that all that a believer does should be meritorious.

But the union between Christ and a saint is:

(a) Federal: "My beloved is mine." God the Father gives the bride; God the Son receives the bride; God the Holy Ghost ties the knot in marriage - he knits our wills to Christ and Christ's love to us.

(b) Effectual. Christ unites himself to his spouse by his graces and influences: "of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). Christ makes himself one with the spouse by conveying his image and stamping the impress of his own holiness upon her.

This union with Christ may well be called mystic. It is hard to describe the manner of it. It is hard to show how the soul is united to the body, and how Christ is united to the soul. But though this union is spiritual, it is real. Things in nature often work insensibly, yet really (Eccles. 11:5). We do not see the hand move on the dial, yet it moves. The sun exhales and draws up the vapours of the earth insensibly yet really. So the union between Christ and the soul, though it is imperceptible to the eye of reason, is still real (I Cor. 6:17).

Before this union with Christ there must be a separation. The heart must be separated from all other lovers, as in marriage there is a leaving of father and mother: "Forget your own people, and your father's house." (Psa. 45:10). So there must be a leaving of our former sins, a breaking off the old league with hell before we can be united to Christ. "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?" (Hos. 14:8), or as it is in the Hebrew, "with sorrows." Those sins which were looked on before as lovers, are now sorrows. There must be a divorce before a union.

The purpose of our conjugal union with Christ is twofold:

1. *Co-habitation*. This is one purpose of marriage, to live together: "that Christ may dwell in your hearts" (Eph. 2:17). It is not enough to pay Christ a few complimentary visits in his ordinances - hypocrites may do so - but there must be a mutual associating. We must dwell upon the thoughts of Christ: "he that abides in God" (cf. I John 3:24). Married persons should not live apart.

2. *Fruit bearing*: "That you may be married to another; to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God." (Rom. 7:4). The spouse bears the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness (Gal. 5:22). Barrenness is a shame in Christ's spouse.

This marriage union with Christ is the most noble and excellent union:

(a) Christ unites himself to many. In other marriages only one person is taken, but here millions are taken. Otherwise, poor souls might cry out, "Alas! Christ has married So-and-so, but what is that to me? I am left out." No, Christ marries thousands. It is a holy and chaste polygamy. Multitudes of people do not defile this marriage bed. Any poor sinner who brings a humble, believing heart may be married to Christ.

(b) There is a closer union in this holy marriage than there can be in any other. In other marriages, two make one flesh, but Christ and the believer make one spirit: "But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him." (I Cor. 6:17). Now as the soul is more excellent than the body, and admits of far greater joy, so this spiritual union brings in more astonishing delights and ravishments than

any other marriage relationship is capable of. The joy that flows from the mystic union is unspeakable and full of glory (I Peter 1:8).

(c) This union with Christ never ceases. "Thrice happy they whom an unbroken bond unites" (Horace). Other marriages are soon at an end. Death cuts asunder the marriage knot, but this conjugal union is eternal. You who are once Christ's spouse shall never again be a widow: "I will betroth you to me forever" (Hosea 2:19). To speak properly, our marriage with Christ begins where other marriages end, at death.

In this life there is only the contract. The Jews had a time set between their engagement and marriage, sometimes a year or more. In this life there is only the engagement and contract; promises are made on both sides, and love passes secretly between Christ and the soul. He gives some smiles of his face, and the soul sends up her sighs and drops tears of love. But all this is only a preliminary work, and something leading up to the marriage. The glorious completing and solemnizing of the marriage is reserved for heaven. There is the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9) and the bed of glory perfumed with love where the souls of the elect shall be perpetually consoling themselves. "Then shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thess. 4:17). So death merely begins our marriage with Christ.

*Application 1:* If Christ is the head of the mystic body (Eph. 1:22), then this doctrine beheads the Pope, that man of sin who usurps this prerogative of being the head of the church, and so would defile Christ's marriage bed. What blasphemy this is! Two heads are monstrous. Christ is Head, as he is Husband. There is no vice-husband, no deputy in his place. The Pope is the beast in Revelation (Rev. 13:11). To make him head of the church, what would this be but to set the head of a beast upon the body of a man?

*Application 2:* If there is such a conjugal union, let us test whether we are united to Christ:

1. Have we chosen Christ to set our love upon, and is this choice founded on knowledge?
2. Have we consented to the match? It is not enough that Christ is willing to have us, but are we willing to have him? God does not so force salvation upon us that we shall have Christ whether we want to or not. We must consent to have him. Many approve of Christ, but do not give their consent. And this consent must be:

(a) Pure and genuine. We consent to have him for his own worth and excellence: "You are fairer than the sons of men" (Psa. 45:2).

(b) A present consent: "now is the acceptable time" (2 Cor. 6:2). If we put Christ off with delays and excuses, perhaps he will stop coming. He will leave off wooing. "His spirit shall no longer strive," and then, poor sinner, what will you do? When God's wooing ends, your woes begin.

3. Have we taken Christ? Faith is the bond of the union. Christ is joined to us by his Spirit, and we are joined to him by faith. Faith ties the marriage knot.

4. Have we given ourselves up to Christ? Thus the spouse in the text says, "I am his," as if she had said, "All I have is for the use and service of Christ." Have we made a surrender? Have we given up our name and will to Christ? When the devil solicits by a temptation, do we say, "We are not our own, we are Christ's; our tongues are his, we must not defile them with oaths; our bodies are his temple, we must not pollute them with sin?" If it is so, it is a sign that the Holy Ghost has produced this blessed union between Christ and us.

*Application 3:* Is there this mystic union? Then from that we may draw many inferences:

1. *See the dignity of all true believers.* They are joined in marriage with Christ. There is not only assimilation but union; they are not only like Christ but one with Christ. All the saints have this honour. When a king marries a beggar, by virtue of the union she is ennobled and made of the blood royal. As wicked men are united to the prince of darkness, and he settles hell upon them as their inheritance, so the godly are divinely united to Christ, who is King of kings, and Lord of Lords (Rev. 19:16). By virtue of this sacred union the saints are dignified above the angels. Christ is the Lord of the angels, but not their husband.

2. *See how happily all the saints are married.* They are united to Christ, who is the best Husband, "the Chiefest among ten thousand" (Song 5:10). Christ is a Husband that cannot be paralleled:

(a) For tender care. The spouse cannot be as considerate of her own soul and credit as Christ is considerate of her: "He cares for you" (I Pet. 5:7). Christ has a debate with himself, consulting and projecting how to carry on the work of our salvation. He transacts all our affairs, he attends to our business as his own. Indeed, he himself is concerned in it. He brings fresh supplies to his spouse. If she wanders out of the way, he guides her. If she stumbles, he holds her by the hand. If she falls, he raises her. If she is dull, he quickens her by his Spirit. If she is perverse, he draws her with cords of love. If she is sad, he comforts her with promises.

(b) For ardent affection. No husband loves like Christ. The Lord says to the people, "I have loved you," and they say, "In what way have you loved us?"

(Mal. 1:2). But we cannot say to Christ, "In what way have you loved us?" Christ has given real demonstrations of his love to his spouse. He has sent her his Word, which is a love-letter, and he has given her his Spirit, which is a love-token. Christ loves more than any other husband:

- Christ puts a richer robe on his bride: "For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." (Isa. 61:10). In this robe, God looks on us as if we had not sinned. This robe is as truly ours to justify us, as it is Christ's to bestow on us. This robe not only covers but adorns. Having on this robe, we are reputed righteous, not only as righteous as angels, but as righteous as Christ: "that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21).
- Christ gives his bride not only his golden garments but his image. He loves her into his own likeness. A husband may have a dear affection for his wife, but he cannot stamp his own image on her. If she is deformed, he may give her a veil to hide it, but he cannot put his beauty on her. But Christ imparts "the beauty of holiness" to his spouse: "Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you," (Ezek. 16:14). When Christ marries a soul, he makes it fair: "You are all fair, my love" (Song 4:7). Christ never thinks he has loved his spouse enough till he can see his own face in her.
- Christ discharges those debts which no other husband can. Our sins are the worst debts we owe. If all the angels should contribute money, they could not pay one of these debts, but Christ frees us from these. He is both a Husband and a Surety. He says to justice what Paul said concerning Onesimus, "But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account." (Philem. 1:18).
- Christ has suffered more for his spouse than ever any husband did for a wife. He suffered poverty and ignominy. He who crowned the heavens with stars was himself crowned with thorns. He was called a companion of sinners, so that we might be made companions of angels. He was regardless of his life; he leaped into the sea of his Father's wrath to save his spouse from drowning.
- Christ's love does not end with his life. He loves his spouse for ever: "I will betroth you to me forever" (Hos. 2:19). Well may the apostle call it "a love which passes knowledge" (Eph. 3:19).

3. *See how rich believers are.* They have married into the crown of heaven, and by virtue of the conjugal union all Christ's riches go to believers: "communion is founded in union." Christ communicates his graces (John 1:16 ). As long as Christ has them, believers shall not be in want. And he communicates his

privileges - justification, glorification. He settles a kingdom on his spouse as her inheritance (Heb. 12:28). This is a key to the apostle's riddle, "as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. 6:10). By virtue of the marriage union, the saints have an interest in all Christ's riches.

4. *See how fearful a sin it is to abuse the saints.* It is an injury done to Christ, for believers are mystically one with him: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4). When the body was wounded, the Head, being in heaven, cried out. In this sense, men crucify Christ afresh (Heb. 6:6), because what is done to his members is done to him. If Gideon was avenged upon those who slew his brethren, will not Christ much more be avenged on those that wrong his spouse (Judges 8:21)? Will a king tolerate having his treasure rifled, his crown thrown in the dust, his queen beheaded? Will Christ bear with the affronts and injuries done to his bride? The saints are the apple of Christ's eye (Zech. 2:8), and let those who strike at his eye answer for it. Isa 49:26 "I will feed those who oppress you with their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with sweet wine" (Isa. 49:26).

5. *See the reason why the saints so rejoice in the Word and sacrament,* because here they meet with their Husband, Christ. The wife desires to be in the presence of her husband. The ordinances are the chariot in which Christ rides, the lattice through which he looks forth and shows his smiling face. Here Christ displays the banner of love (Song 2:4). The Lord's Supper is nothing other than a pledge and earnest of that eternal communion which the saints shall have with Christ in heaven. Then he will take the spouse into his bosom. If Christ is so sweet in an ordinance, when we have only short glances and dark glimpses of him by faith, oh then, how delightful and ravishing will his presence be in heaven when we see him face to face and are for ever in his loving embraces!

*Application 4:* This mystic union affords much comfort to believers in several cases:

1. *In the case of the disrespect and unkindness of the world:* "in wrath they hate me" (Psa. 55:3). But though we live in an unkind world, we have a kind Husband: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you" (John 15:9). What angel can tell how God the Father loves Christ? Yet the Father's love to Christ is made the copy and pattern of Christ's love to his spouse. This love of Christ as far exceeds all created love as the sun outshines the light of a torch. And is not this a matter of comfort? Though the world hates me, Christ still loves me.

2. *In the case of weakness of grace.* The believer cannot lay hold on Christ, except with a trembling hand. There is a "spirit of infirmity" on him, but oh, weak Christian, here is strong consolation: there is a conjugal union. You are the spouse of Christ, and he will bear with you as the weaker vessel. Will a husband

divorce his wife because she is weak and sickly? No, he will be the more tender with her. Christ hates treachery, but he will pity infirmity. When the spouse is faint and ready to be discouraged, Christ puts his left hand under her head (Song 2:6). This is the spouse's comfort when she is weak. Her Husband can infuse strength into her: "My God shall be my strength" (Isa. 49:5).

3. *In the case of death.* When believers die, they go to their Husband. Who would not be willing to cross the gulf of death that they might meet with their Husband, Christ? "I desire to loosen anchor" (Phil. 1:23), and be with Christ. What though the way is dirty? We are going to our friend. When a woman is engaged, she longs for the day of marriage. After the saints' funeral, their marriage begins. The body is a prison to the soul. Who would not desire to exchange a prison for a marriage bed? How glad Joseph was to go out of prison to the king's court! God is wise; he lets us meet with changes and troubles here, so that he may wean us from the world and make us long for death. When the soul is divorced from the body, it is married to Christ.

4. *In the case of passing sentence at the day of judgment.* There is a marriage union and, oh Christian, your Husband shall be your judge. A wife would not fear appearing at the bar if her husband was sitting as judge. What though the devil should bring in many indictments against you? Christ will expunge your sins in his blood. Could he possibly say, "I shall condemn my spouse?" Oh, what a comfort this is! The Husband is judge. Christ cannot pass sentence against his spouse without passing it against himself. For Christ and believers are one.

5. *In the case of the saints' suffering.* The church of God is exposed in this life to many injuries, but she has a Husband in heaven who is mindful of her and will "turn water into wine" for her. Now it is a time of mourning with the spouse because the Bridegroom is absent (Matt. 9:15). But shortly she shall put off her mourning. Christ will wipe the tears of blood off the cheeks of his spouse: "He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces" (Isa. 25:8). Christ will comfort his spouse for as much time as she has been afflicted. He will solace her with his love; he will take away the cup of trembling and give her the cup of consolation. And now she shall forget all her sorrows, being called into the banqueting house of heaven and having the banner of Christ's love displayed over her.

*Application 5:* Let me press several duties upon those who have this marriage union with Christ:

1. *Make use of this relationship in two cases:*

(a) When the law brings in its indictments against you. The law says, "Here there are so many debts to be paid," and it demands satisfaction. Acknowledge the

debt, but turn it all over to your Husband, Christ. It is a maxim in law that the suit must not go against the wife, as long as the husband is living. Tell Satan when he accuses you, "It is true that the debt is mine, but go to my Husband, Christ; he will discharge it." If we took this course, we might relieve ourselves of much trouble. By faith we turn over the debt to our Husband. Believers are not in a state of widowhood but of marriage. Satan will never go to Christ - he knows that justice is satisfied and the debt book cancelled - but he comes to us for the debt so that he may perplex us. We should send him to Christ and then all lawsuits would cease. This is a believer's triumph. When he is guilty in himself, he is worthy in Christ. When he is spotted in himself, he is pure in his Head.

(b) In the case of desertion. Christ may (for reasons best known to himself) step aside for a time: "my beloved had withdrawn himself" (Song 5:6). Do not say, therefore, that Christ has gone for good. It is a fruit of jealousy in a wife, when her husband has left her a while, to think that he has gone from her for good. Every time Christ removes himself out of sight, it is wrong for us to say (like Zion), "The Lord has forsaken me" (Isa. 49:14). This is jealousy, and it is a wrong done to the love of Christ and the sweetness of this marriage relationship. Christ may forsake his spouse in regard of comfort, but he will not forsake her in regard of union. A husband may be a thousand miles distant from his wife, but he is still a husband. Christ may leave his spouse, but the marriage knot still holds.

2. *Rejoice in your Husband, Christ.* Has Christ honoured you by taking you into the marriage relationship and making you one with himself? This calls for joy. By virtue of the union, believers are sharers with Christ in his riches. It was a custom among the Romans, when the wife was brought home, for her to receive the keys of her husband's house, intimating that the treasure and custody of the house was now committed to her. When Christ brings his bride home to those glorious mansions which he has gone ahead to prepare for her (John 14:2), he will hand over the keys of his treasure to her, and she shall be as rich as heaven can make her. And shall not the spouse rejoice and sing aloud upon her bed (Psa. 149:5)? Christians, let the times be ever so sad, you may rejoice in your spiritual espousals (Hab. 3:17,18). Let me tell you, it is a sin not to rejoice. You disparage your Husband, Christ. When a wife is always sighing and weeping, what will others say? "This woman has a bad husband." Is this the fruit of Christ's love to you, to reflect dishonour upon him? A melancholy spouse saddens Christ's heart. I do not deny that Christians should grieve for sins of daily occurrence, but to be always weeping (as if they mourned without hope) is dishonourable to the marriage relationship. "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil. 4:4). Rejoicing brings credit to your husband. Christ loves a cheerful bride, and indeed the very purpose of God's making us sad is to make us rejoice. We sow in tears, so that we may reap in joy. The excessive sadness and contrition of the

godly will make others afraid to embrace Christ. They will begin to question whether there is that satisfactory joy in religion which is claimed. Oh, you saints of God, do not forget consolation; let others see that you do not repent of your choice. It is joy that puts liveliness and activity into a Christian: "the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10). The soul is swiftest in duty when it is carried on the wings of joy.

3. *Adorn this marriage relationship*, so that you may be a crown to your husband.

(a) Wear a veil. We read of the spouse's veil (Song 5:7). This veil is humility.

(b) Put on your jewels. These are the graces which for their lustre are compared to rows of pearl and chains of gold (Song 1:10). These precious jewels distinguish Christ's bride from strangers.

(c) Behave as becomes Christ's spouse:

- In chastity. Be chaste in your judgments; do not defile yourselves with error. Error adulterates the mind (1 Tim. 6:5). It is one of Satan's artifices first to defile the judgment, then the conscience.
- In sanctity. It is not for Christ's spouse to behave like harlots. A naked breast and a wanton tongue do not become a saint. Christ's bride must shine forth in gospel purity, so that she may make her husband fall in love with her. A woman was asked what dowry she brought her husband. She answered that she had no dowry, but she promised to keep herself chaste. So though we can bring Christ no dowry, yet he expects us to keep ourselves pure, not spotting the breasts of our virginity by contagious and scandalous sins.

4. *Love your Husband, Christ* (Song 2:5). Love him though he is reproached and persecuted. A wife loves her husband when in prison. To inflame your love towards Christ, consider:

(a) Nothing else is fit for you to love. If Christ is your Husband, it is not fit to have other lovers who would make Christ grow jealous.

(b) He is worthy of your love. He is of unparalleled beauty: "altogether lovely" (Song 5:16).

(c) How fervent is Christ's love towards you! He loves you in your worst condition, he loves you in affliction. The goldsmith loves his gold in the furnace. He loves you notwithstanding your fears and blemishes. The saints' infirmities cannot wholly remove Christ's love from them (Jer. 3:1). Oh then, how the

spouse should be endeared in her love to Christ! This will be the excellence of heaven. Our love will then be like the sun in its full strength.

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