

THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

Charles G. Finney:

"Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" --Romans 7:4. Marriage is set forth in the Bible as describing the relationship between Christ and the Church. Jesus is often spoken of as the husband of the Church: "Thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name" (Isaiah 54:5). "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you" (Jeremiah 3:14).

The Church is spoken of as the bride, the Lamb's wife: "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come" (Revelation 22:17). That is, Christ and the Church say, "Come." The apostle Paul says, "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2).

FAITHFUL HUSBANDS AND DEVOTED WIVES

In most marriages, the wife gives up her own name and assumes that of her husband. And the Church assumes the name of Christ and is baptized into His name. A married woman has no separate interest. So the Church has no right to have a separate interest from the Lord Jesus Christ. If a wife has property, it joins with her husband's.

The reputation of the wife is united to that of her husband; his reputation is hers, and her reputation is his. What affects her character affects his; and what affects his character affects hers. Their reputation is one, and their interests are one. Whatever concerns the Church is just as much the interest of Christ as if it were personally His own matter. As the husband of the Church, He is as responsible to do everything necessary to promote the interest of the Church as a husband is responsible to promote the welfare of his wife.

A faithful husband gives up his time, his labor, and his talents to promote the interest and happiness of his wife. Jesus Christ gives Himself up to promote the welfare of His Church. He is as jealous of the reputation of His Church as any husband ever was of the reputation of his wife. Never was a human being as committed and devoted to the interest of his wife as Jesus Christ feels when His Church has her reputation or her feelings injured. He declares that it would be better for a man to hang a millstone around his neck and be cast into the sea than to offend one of His little ones. (See Matthew 18:6.)

Jesus feels all the sufferings of the Church, and the Church feels all the sufferings of Jesus. When a believer has any understanding of the sufferings of Christ, nothing in the universe so affects and dissolves his mind with sorrow. No wife ever felt such distress and brokenhearted grief than when she has caused the death of her husband. The Christian feels this remorse when he views his sins as the occasion of the death of Jesus Christ. How would you feel if your husband or wife volunteered to suffer and die for you to save your life? Just to be reminded of it would melt you in brokenhearted grief!

Have you ever understood that your sins caused the death of Christ, and that He died for you just as absolutely as if you had been the only sinner in God's world? He suffered pain, contempt, and death for you. He loved His Church and gave Himself for it. He purchased it with His own blood.

In Christians marriages, the wife pledges to yield to the will of her husband. She has no separate interest and should have no conflicting will. The Bible makes it a Christian duty for the wife to conform in all things to the will of her husband. The will of the husband becomes to the faithful wife the mainspring of her activity. Her entire life is only carrying out the will of her husband.

The relationship of the Church to Jesus is precisely the same. The Church is governed by His will. When believers exercise faith, the Lord's will becomes the moving cause of all their conduct. The wife recognizes her husband as her head, and the Bible declares that he is so. The Head governs the Church.

LORD OF THE CHURCH

Every believer places himself as absolutely under the protection of Christ as a married woman is under the protection of her husband. The woman naturally looks to her husband to preserve her from injury, insult, and want. She hangs her happiness on him and expects him to protect her, and he is bound to do it.

Jesus is pledged to protect His Church from every foe. Often the powers of hell have tried to put down the

Church, but He has never abandoned it. No weapon formed against the Church has ever been allowed to prosper, and none ever will. Never will the Lord forget His relationship to the Church and leave His bride unprotected. Let all earth and all hell conspire against the Church, and she will be safe.

Every individual believer is as safe as if he were the only believer on earth and has Jesus truly pledged for his preservation. The devil can no more destroy a single believer than he can put down God Almighty. He may murder them, but that is no injury. Overcoming a believer by taking his life gives Satan no triumph. Neither the grave nor hell has any more power to injure one of the Lord's little ones than they have to injure Jesus Himself.

Jesus says, "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19). And "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26). No power in the universe can destroy a single believer. Jesus Christ is Lord over all things, and the Church is safe.

Jesus Christ is Lord over His Church, and if He does not restrain His Church from sin, He is brought into great trouble and reproach by the misconduct of His people. by human laws, the husband is not liable for capital crimes committed by the wife, and the law recognized her separate existence.

But Jesus has assumed responsibility for all the Church's conduct. He took the place of His people when they were convicted and sentenced to eternal damnation. And now it is His business to take care of the Church and keep her from sin. Jesus Christ is responsible and must answer for every sin of every member.

And He does answer for them. He has made an atonement to cover all this, and He lives to make intercession for His people. He holds himself responsible before God for all the conduct of the Church. Every believer is so perfectly united to Him that whatever any of them may be guilty of Jesus takes upon Himself. This is abundantly taught in the Bible.

What an amazing relationship! The Lord has assumed the responsibility for all the civil and capital crimes of rebellion against God. There is a sense, therefore, in which the Church is lost in Christ and has no separate existence known in law. God has so given up the Church to Christ, by the covenant of grace, that the Church is not known in law. I do not mean that crimes committed by believers against the moral law are not sin, but the law cannot get hold of them for condemnation. There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. (See Romans 8:1.)

The penalty of the law is forever remitted. The crimes of the believer are not taken into account. Whatever is done falls upon Christ. He has assumed the responsibility of bringing Christians out from under the power of sin, as well as from under the law. He stands pledged to give His children all the assistance they need to gain a complete victory.

BRINGING FORTH FRUIT

A principal design of the institution of marriage is the propagation of the species. The same is true in regard to the Church. Through the instrumentality of the Church, children are born to Christ, and He is to see His seed multiplied as the drops of morning dew. Through both the travail of the Redeemer's soul and through the travail of the Church, believers are born to Jesus Christ. As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth children.

Another object of the marriage institution is the protection and support of those who are naturally helpless and dependent. If the law of power prevailed in society, females would be universally enslaved. The institution of marriage secures protection and support of those who are more frail. Jesus upholds His Church and affords her all the protection against the powers of hell that she needs.

The mutual happiness of the parties is another reason for marriage. Perhaps you will think it strange if I tell you that the happiness of Christ is increased by the love of the Church. But what does the Bible say? "Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2). What was the joy set before Him if the love of the Church was not a part of it? It would be strange to hear of a husband contributing to the happiness of his wife without enjoying it himself. Jesus Christ enjoys the happiness of His Church as much as He loves her--which is infinitely greater than any husband loves his wife.

Sharing each other's sorrow is a great relief. Jesus Christ and His Church share each other's sorrows. The apostle Paul says he was always bearing about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus: "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:5). And he declared that one end of all his toils and self-denials was that he might "know . . . the fellowship of his sufferings"

(Philippians 3:10). Paul rejoiced in all his sufferings. The Church keenly feels every reproach cast upon Christ, and He feels every injury inflicted on the Church.

WHITE ROBES AND ADULTERY

The principal reason for this union between Jesus and His church is that He may sanctify her: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christhead of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their won husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 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" (Ephesians 5:22-27).

This is the design of Christ in marrying the Church--that He might sanctify and cleanse it, and that it should be perfectly holy and without blemish. In Revelation, John informs us that he saw those who had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. How beautifully the Lamb's wife is described in the twenty-first chapter, coming down from God out of heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Vast multitudes of those who profess to be a part of the Bride of Christ are hypocrites. They pretend to merge their self-interest with Christ's but obviously keep a separate interest. Any attempt to make them understand that they have no separate interest will plainly show that they have so such design.

Everybody knows what an abominable thing it is for a wife not to be satisfied with the love of her husband but continually seeking other lovers. Yet the Church is not satisfied with the love of Christ and always seeks after other lovers. What are we to think of members of the Church who are not satisfied with the love of Christ but must have the riches and honors of the world to make them happy?

Still more horrible would be a wife who chose her lovers from the enemies of her husband and made them her chosen friends. Yet how many professing Christians give their affections to Christ's enemies? Some will even marry those whom they know are haters of God! Is that the way a bride should act?

Everyone knows that it is a disgraceful think for a wife to play the harlot. Yet God often speaks of His Church as going astray and committing spiritual whoredom! And it is true! He doesn't make this charge unjustly. But He makes it with tender grief and pleads with her to return.

What would you think of a married woman who expected, at the very time of her marriage, to get tired of her husband, leave him, and play the harlot?

Many "Christians," when they made a profession, had no more expectation of living without sin than they expected to have wings and fly. They have come into God's house, pledged themselves to live entirely for Him, and married Him in this public manner. They promised to forsake all sin, to live alone for Christ, to be satisfied with His love, and to have no other lovers--yet the whole time they are doing it, in their minds they expect to commit sin and dishonor Christ.

What are we to think of a woman who, at the very time of her marriage, expected to continue in adultery as long as she lives, in spite of all the commands and protests of her husband? Then what are we to think of "Christians" who deliberately expect to commit spiritual adultery and continue in it as long as they live?

But the most abominable part of such a wife's wickedness is when she turns around and blames her conduct upon her faithful husband! The Church does this. Although Christ has done all that He could do, short of absolute force, to keep His Church from sinning, the Church charges her sin upon Him. They act as if He hasn't made adequate provisions for preserving His people against temptation.

They are horrified at the very name of Christian perfection, as if it were dishonoring Christ to believe that He is able to keep His people from committing sin and falling into the snare of the devil. And so for hundreds of years the greater part of the Church has not taught that Jesus Christ really has provided a way for His people to live free from sin. People wonder that anybody teaches that the Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ is expected to do as she is commanded to do. Has He married a Bride and made no provision to protect her against the arts and seductions of the devil!

JESUS' LOVING PATIENCE

The reputation of husband and wife are one. Whatever dishonors one, dishonors the other. The Church, instead of avoiding every appearance of evil, continually opens opportunities for the enemies of God to blaspheme the Lord.

What other husband, in such circumstances, could suffer to remain and bear what Jesus bears? Yet he still offers to be reconciled and strives to regain the affection of His Bride. Sometimes a husband loses his affection toward his wife and treats her like a brute, and she loses her love for him. But where can anything be found in the character and conduct of Jesus to justify the treatment He receives? He has laid Himself out to capture the affections of the Church.

What more could He have done? Can any fault or any deficiency be found in Him? After everything the Church has done against Him, what is he doing now? Suppose a husband should for years follow his wandering, guilty wife from city to city beseeching her with tears to return home, and she persists after her lovers while he continues to cry after her and bid her to come back. Is there any such forbearance and humility known among men?

Your sins dishonor, grieve, and injure Christ--and then you make Him responsible for them. You sustain such a relationship to Him, and you ought to know the effect of your sin.

How does a wife feel when she has disgraced her husband? Blushes cover her face and tears fill her eyes! When her offended husband comes into her presence, she falls down with a full heart, confesses her guilt, and pours tears onto his shoulder. She is grieved and humbled; and, although she loves him, his very presence is a grief until she breaks down and feels he has forgiven her.

How can a Christian fail to recognize this? When he is betrayed into sin and has injured Jesus, how can he sleep? How can you not know that your sins take hold of Jesus Christ and wound Him!

If an individual expect to live in sin, of course he will live in sin. Many professing Christians never really meant to live without sin. Paul insists that believers should consider themselves dead to sin. (See Romans 6:11.) They should from now on no more expect to sin than a dead man should expect to walk. They should throw themselves upon Christ, receive Him in all His functions, and expect to be preserved, sanctified, and saved by Him. If they would do this, they would be kept from sin just as certainly as they believe in Christ for it!

To believe that Jesus will keep them insures that He will. The reason many Christians do not receive preserving grace at all times is that they do not expect it or trust Jesus to preserve them in perfect love. The man tries to preserve himself. Instead of throwing himself upon Christ, he throws himself upon his own resources. Then in his weakness he expects to sin--of course he sins! If he knew his own emptiness and would throw himself upon Christ, he would rest confidently for holiness and justification.

JESUS IS OUR HOLINESS

No one who trusted God for anything He has promised has ever failed to receive, according to his faith, the very thing for which he trusted. If you trust God for what He has not promised, this is tempting God.

If Peter had not been called to come out on the water, it would have been tempting God for him to get out of the ship. He would have lost his life for his presumption and folly. But as soon as Christ told him to come, it was merely an act of sound and rational faith for him to do it. It was a pledge on the part of Christ that Peter would be sustained--and he was sustained, as long as he had faith.

If the Bible has promised that those who receive Christ as their sanctification will be sanctified, then you who believe in Him for this have just as much reason to expect it as Peter had to expect to walk on water. We do not expect miracles to sustain the believer. But it is promised that he will be sustained, and God would move the universe and turn the course of nature upside down before one of His promises should fail those who trust Him.

Has God promised holiness to them that trust Him for it? If He has not, then to go to Him in faith for preservation from temptation and sin is tempting God. It is fanaticism. If God has left us to get along on our own watchfulness, firmness, and strength, then we must submit and do the best we can. But if He has made any promises, He will redeem them to the uttermost, although all earth and hell oppose Him.

This is true in regard to the mistakes and errors that Christians fall into. If there is no promise that they will be

guided and led into truth and peace, then for a Christian to look to God for knowledge, wisdom, guidance, and direction is tempting God. But if there are promises on this subject, depend on it--they will be fulfilled in the believer who trusts in them and exercises confidence in the Word of God.

I believe that the great difficulty of the Church on the subject of Christian perfection lies here--she has not fully understood how the Lord Jesus Christ is wholly pledged in all these relationships. The Church has as much reason and is as bound to trust in Him for holiness as for justification.

What do the Scriptures say? "Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Plainly, Jesus is promised and pledged for wisdom and for sanctification to all that receive Him. Has He promised that if any man lack wisdom, he may ask God, and if he asks in faith, God will give it to him? What then? Is there then no such thing as being preserved by Christ from falling into this and that delusion and error? God has made this broad promise, and Jesus is as much pledged for our wisdom and our sanctification, if we only trust in Him, as He is for our justification.

SURRENDERING TO THE KING

The Church must renounce any expectation from herself and die as absolutely to her own wisdom and strength as she does to her own righteousness. Jesus Christ is pledged for one as much as for the other. The only reason why the Church does not realize the same results is that Christ is trusted for justification, but for wisdom and sanctification He is not trusted!

The truth is that most believers, having begun in the Spirit, are now trying to be made perfect by the flesh. We have thrown ourselves on Christ for justification but have been attempting to make ourselves holy. If it is true, as Paul affirms, that Christ is to the Church both wisdom and sanctification, what excuse do Christians have for not being sanctified?

If individuals do not expect to live without sin against Christ, it must be for one of three reasons:

We love our fellow men better than we do Christ and are less willing to do them any injury.

We are restrained by a regard to our own reputation--and this proves that we love reputation more than Christ.

We think we can preserve ourselves from these crimes.

Suppose I were to ask any of you if you expect to commit murder or adultery? Horrible! you say. But why not? Are you so virtuous that you can resist any temptation that the devil can offer? If you say yes, you do not know yourself. If you have real power to abstain from openly disgraceful sins, in your own strength, you have power to abstain from all sins. But if your only reliance is on Jesus Christ to keep you from committing murder and adultery, why do you think that He is not equally able to keep you from all sins?

What a horrible reproach the Church is to Jesus Christ! She is in such a state that it is no wonder those who are brought in, with few exceptions, are a disgrace to Christianity. How can it be otherwise? How can the Church, living in such a manner, bring forth offspring that will honor Christ? The Church does not, and individual believers generally do not, receive Christ in all His offices as He is offered in the Bible. If they did, it would be impossible for them to live like such loathsome harlots.

If believers would only throw themselves wholly on Christ and make Him responsible by placing themselves entirely at His control, then they would know His power to save and would live without sin.

Jesus loves His Church. He loves you and will do anything for you. Place yourself in His hands and let Him make you transparent, loving, and holy. He will not fail you.