

Christ the Husband of the Church

Charles G. Finney:

TEXT.--"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, vii 4.

IN the discussion of this subject, the following is the order in which I shall direct your thoughts:

I. Show that the marriage state is abundantly set forth in the Bible, as describing the relation between Christ and the church.

II. Show what is implied in this relation.

III. The reason for the existence of this relation.

IV. Show the great guilt of the church, in conducting towards Christ as she does.

V. The forbearance of Christ towards the church.

I. I am to show that the marriage state is abundantly set forth in the Bible, as describing the relation between Christ and the church.

Christ is often spoken of as the husband of the church. "Thy Maker is thy husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name." "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you." The church is spoken of as the bride, the Lamb's wife. "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come." That is, Christ and the church say, "Come." In 2 Cor. xi. 2, 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." I can merely refer to these passages. You that are acquainted with your Bibles, will not need that I should take up time to show that this relation is often adverted to in the Bible, in a great variety of forms.

II. I am to show what is implied in this relation.

1. The wife gives up her own name, and assumes that of her husband.

This is universally true in the marriage state. And the church assumes the name of Christ, and when united with him is baptized into his name.

2. The wife's separate interest is merged in that of her husband.

A married woman has no separate interest, and no right to have any. So the church has no right to have a separate interest from the Lord Jesus Christ. If a wife has property, it goes to her husband. If it is real estate, the life interest passes to him, and if it is personal estate, the whole merges in him.

The reputation of the wife is wholly united to that of her husband, so that 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, their interests are one. So with the church, whatever concerns the church is just as much the interest of Christ, as if it was personally his own matter. As the husband of the church, he is just as much pledged to do every thing that is needful to promote the interest of the church, as the husband is pledged to promote the welfare of his wife. As a faithful husband gives up his time, his labor, his talents, to promote the interest and happiness of his wife; so Jesus Christ gives himself up to promote the welfare of his church. He is as jealous of the reputation of his church, as ever a husband was of the reputation of his wife. Never was a human being so pledged, so devoted to the interest of his wife, or felt so keenly an injury, as Jesus Christ feels when his church has her reputation or her feelings injured. He declares that it were better a man had a mill-stone hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the depths of the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones that believe in him.

3. The relation between husband and wife is such, that if anything is the matter with one, the other is full of sympathy.

So Christ feels for all the sufferings of the church, and the church feels for all the sufferings of Christ. When a believer has any realizing view of the sufferings of Christ, there is nothing in the universe so affects and

dissolves the mind with sorrow. Never did a wife feel such distress, such broken-hearted grief, if she has occasioned suffering or death to her husband, as the Christian feels when he views his sins as the occasion of the death of Jesus Christ. Let me ask some of these married women present, how you would feel, if your husband, to redeem you from merited ignominy and death, had volunteered the greatest suffering and pain, and even death for you? When you saw his face, how would it affect you? To be reminded of it by any circumstance, how would it melt you down in broken-hearted grief? Now, have you never 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 all God's world? He suffered pain and contempt and death for you. He loved his church, and gave himself for it. It is called the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.

4. The wife pledges herself to yield her will to the will of her husband, and to yield obedience to his will.

She has no separate interest, and ought to have no separate will. The Bible enjoins this, and 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 relation of the church to Christ is precisely the same. The church is governed by Christ's will.--When believers exercise faith, they are so, absolutely, and the will of Christ becomes the moving cause of all their conduct.

5. The wife recognises her husband as her head.

The Bible declares that he is so. In like manner, as from the head proceed those influences that govern the body, so from Christ proceed those influences that govern the church.

6. The wife looks to her husband as her support, her protector and her guide.

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, from insult, and from want. She hangs her happiness on him, and expects he will protect her; and he is bound to do it.

So Christ is pledged to protect his church from every foe. How often have the powers of hell tried to put down the church, but her husband has never abandoned her. No weapon formed against the church has ever been allowed to prosper, or ever shall. Never will the Lord Jesus Christ so far forget his relation to the church, as to have his bride unprotected. No. Let all earth and all hell conspire against the church, and just as certain as Christ has power to do it, his church is safe. And every individual believer is just as safe, as if he were the only believer on earth, and has Christ as truly pledged for his preservation. The devil can no more put down a single believer, to final destruction, than he can put down God Almighty. He may murder them, but that is no injury. Overcoming a believer by taking his life, affords Satan no triumph. He put Christ to death, but what did he gain by it? The grave had no power over him, to retain him. So with a believer; neither the grave nor hell has any more power to injure one of Christ's little ones, that believe in him, than they have to injure Christ himself. He says, "Because I live, ye shall live also." And, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die."--There is no power in the universe, that can prevail against a single believer, to destroy him. Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, and Head over all things to the church, and the church is safe.

7. The legal existence of the wife is so merged in that of her husband, that she is not known in law as a separate person.

If any actions or civil liability come against the wife, the husband is responsible. If the wife has committed a trespass, the husband is answerable. It is his business to guide and govern her, and her business to obey; and if he does not restrain her from breaking the laws, he is responsible. And if the wife does not obey her husband, she has it in her power to bring him into great trouble, disgrace, and expense. In like manner, Jesus Christ is Lord over his church, and if he does not actually restrain his church from sin, he has it to answer for, and 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, but the law so far recognizes her separate existence, as to punish her. But Christ has assumed the responsibility for his church, of all her conduct. He took the place of his people, when they were convicted of capital crimes, and sentenced to eternal damnation. This is answering in good earnest. And now it is his business to take care of the church, and control her, and keep her from sin; and for every sin of every member, Jesus Christ is responsible, and must answer. And he does answer for them. He has made an atonement to cover all this, and ever liveth to make intercession for his people. So that he holds himself responsible before God for all the conduct of his church. Every believer is so a part of Jesus Christ, and so perfectly united to him, that whatever any of them may be guilty of, Jesus Christ takes upon himself to

answer for. This is abundantly taught in the Bible.

What an amazing relation! Christ has here assumed the responsibility, not only for the civil conduct of his church, but even for the capital crime 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 strictly speaking, the church is not known in law. I do not mean that crimes, committed by believers against the moral law, are not sin, but that the law cannot get hold of them, for condemnation. There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. The penalty of the law is for ever remitted. The crimes of the believer are not taken into account so as to bring him under condemnation; no, in no case whatever. Whatever is to be done falls upon Christ. He has assumed the responsibility of bringing them off from under the power of sin, as well as from under the law, and stands pledged to give them all the assistance they need to gain a complete victory.

III. I am to explain the reason why this relation is constituted between Christ and his church.

1. The first reason is assigned in the text, "that we should bring forth fruit unto God." A principal design of the institution of marriage is the propagation of the species. So it is in regard to the church. Through the instrumentality of the church, children are to be born to Christ, and he is to see his seed, and to see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied, by converts multiplied as the drops of morning dew. It is not only through the travail of the Redeemer's soul, but through the travail of the church, that believers are born unto Jesus Christ. As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth children.

2. 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, everybody knows that females, being the weaker sex, would be universally enslaved. And the design of the institution of marriage is to secure protection and support to those who are so much more frail, that by the law of force they would be continually enslaved. So Jesus Christ upholds his church, and affords her all the protection against her enemies, and all the powers of hell, that she needs.

3. The mutual happiness of the parties is another end of the marriage institution.

The same is true of the relation between Christ and his church. 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." What was the joy set before him, if the love of the church was not a part of it? It would be very strange to hear of a husband contributing to the happiness of his wife, that should not enjoy it himself. Jesus Christ enjoys the happiness of his church as much more, as he loves his church better than any husbands love their wives.

4. The alleviation of mutual sufferings and sorrows is one end of marriage.

Sharing each other's sorrow is a great alleviation. Who does not know this? In like manner do 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." And he declared that one end of all his toils and self-denials was that he might know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings." And he rejoiced in all his sufferings, that he might fill up that which was behind of the afflictions of Christ. The church feels, keenly, every reproach cast upon Christ, and Christ feels keenly every injury inflicted on the church.

5. The principal reason for this union of Christ with his church, is that he may sanctify the church.

Read what is said in Ephesians, v. 22-27. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and he is the Savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own 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."

Here then is set forth the great design of Christ in marrying the church. It is that he might sanctify it, and cleanse it, or that it should be perfectly holy and without blemish. John in the Revelation informs us that he saw those who had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. See how beautifully the Bride, the Lamb's wife, is described in the 21st chapter, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a

bride adorned for her husband.

IV. I will make a few remarks on the wickedness of the church, in conducting towards Christ as she does.

1. Vast multitudes of those who profess to be a part of the church, the bride of Christ, really set up a separate interest.

They have pretended to merge their self-interest in the interest of Christ, but manifestly keep up a separate interest. And if you attempt to make them act on the principle that they have no separate interest, they will plainly show, that they have no such design. What would you think of a wife, keeping up a separate interest from her husband? You would say it was plain that she did not love her husband, as she ought.

2. The church is not satisfied with Christ's love.

Every body 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, and always associating with other men. Yet, how plain it is that the church is not satisfied with the love of Christ, but is always seeking after other lovers. What are we to think of those members of the church, who are not satisfied with the love of Christ for happiness, but must have the riches and pleasures and honors of the world to make them happy?

Still more horrible would be the conduct of a wife, who should select her lovers from the enemies of her husband, and should bring them home with her, and make them her chosen friends. Yet how many who profess to belong to Christ go away, and give their affections to Christ's enemies. Some will even marry those whom they know to be haters of God and religion. Horrible! Is that the way a bride should do?

3. Every one knows that it is a disgraceful thing for the wife to play the harlot.

Yet God often speaks of his church as going astray and committing spiritual whoredom. And it is true. He does not make this charge, as a man makes it against his wife, when he is determined to leave her and cast her off. But he makes it with grief and tenderness, and accompanies it with the moving expostulations, and the most melting entreaties that she would return.

4. What would you think of a married woman, who should expect, at the very time of her marriage, that she should get tired of her husband, and leave him and play the harlot?

Yet, how many there are, professors of religion, who 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 his house, and pledged themselves to live entirely for him, and married him in this public manner, covenanting to forsake all sin, and to live alone for Christ, and be satisfied with his love, and have no other lovers; and yet all the while they are doing it, they expect in their minds that they shall scatter their ways to strangers upon every high hill, and commit sin and dishonor Christ.

5. What are we to think of a woman, who at the very time of her marriage, expected to continue in her course of adultery as long as she lives, in spite of all the commands and expostulations of her husband?

Then what are we to think of professors of religion, who deliberately expect to commit spiritual adultery, and continue in it as long as they live?

6. But the most abominable part of such a wife's wickedness is, when she turns round and charges the blame of her conduct upon her faithful husband.

Now the church does this. Notwithstanding Christ has done all that he could do, short of absolute force, to keep his church from sinning, yet the church charges her sin upon him, as if he had laid her under an absolute necessity of sinning, by not making any adequate provision for preserving his people against temptation. And they are horrified now at the very name of Christian Perfection, as if it was really 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 it has been, for hundreds of years, that with the greater part of the church it has not been orthodox to teach that Jesus Christ really has made such provision that his people may live free from sin. And it is really considered a wonder, that any body should teach that the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ is expected to do as she pretends to do. Has he married a bride, and made no provision adequate to protect her against the arts and seductions of the devil? Well done! That must be the ridicule of hell.

7. Suppose a wife should refuse to obey her husband and then make him responsible for her conduct.

Yet the church refuses to obey Jesus Christ, and then makes him answer for her sins. This is the great difficulty with the church, that she is continually bringing in her Head for her delinquencies.

8. The church is continually dishonoring Christ.

The reputation of husband and wife is one. Whatever dishonors one, dishonors the other. Now, the church, instead of avoiding every appearance of evil, is continually causing the enemies of God to blaspheme by her conduct.

V. I will say a few words on the forbearance of Christ towards the church.

What other husband, in such circumstances, would suffer the connection to remain, and bear what Christ bears? Yet he still offers to be reconciled, and lays himself out to regain the affections of his bride. Sometimes a husband really loses his affection towards his wife, and treats her so like a brute that, although she once loved him, she loves him no more. But where can any thing be found in the character and conduct of Christ, to justify the treatment he receives? He has laid himself out to the utmost, to engross the affections of the church. What could he have done more? Where can any fault or any deficiency be found in him. And even after all that 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 and entreating her, with tears, to return to his house and be reconciled; and after all, she should persist in going after her lovers, and yet he continues to cry after her and beg her to come back and live with him, and he will forgive and love her still. Is there any such forbearance and condescension known among men?

REMARKS.

I. Christians ought to understand the bearing of their sins.

Your sins dishonor Christ, and grieve Christ, and injure Christ, and then you make Christ responsible for them. You sustain such a relation to him, and you ought to know what is the effect of your sin. How does a wife feel, when she has disgraced her husband? How blushes cover her face, and tears fill her eyes! When her guilty offended husband comes into her presence, how she falls down at his feet, with a full heart, and confesses her fault, and pours her penitential tears into his bosom. She is grieved and humbled, and though she loves him, his very presence is a grief, until she breaks down before him, and feels that he has forgiven her.

Now how can a Christian fail to recognise this; and when he is betrayed into sin and has injured Christ, how can he sleep? How can you help realizing that your sins take hold of Jesus Christ, and injure him, in all these tender relations?

II. One great difficulty of Christians is their expecting to live in sin, and this expectation insures their continuance in sin.

If an individual expects to live in sin, he in fact means to live in sin, and of course he will live in sin. It is very much to be feared, that many professors of religion never really meant to live without sin. The apostle insists that believers should reckon themselves dead to sin, that they should henceforth have no more to do with it than if they were dead, and no more expect to sin than a dead man should expect to walk. They should throw themselves upon Christ, and receive him in all his relations, and expect to be preserved and sanctified and saved by him. If they would do this, do you not suppose they would be kept from sin? Just as certainly as they believe in Christ for it. To believe in Christ that he will keep them, insures the result that he will. And the reason why they do not receive preserving grace at all times, as they need and all they need, is that they do not expect it, and do not trust in Christ 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, and then in his weakness expects to sin, and of course he does sin. If he knew his own entire emptiness, and would throw himself upon Christ as absolutely, and rest on Christ as confidently, for sanctification, as for justification, the one is just as certain as the other.

No one that trusted in God for any thing he has promised, ever failed to receive according to his faith, the very thing for which he trusted. If you trust in God for what he has not promised, that is tempting God. If Peter had not been called by Christ to come to him on the water, it would have been tempting God for him to get down out

of the ship into the water, and 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 he should be sustained; and so he was sustained, as long as he had faith. Now, if the Bible has promised that those who receive Christ as their sanctification shall be sanctified, then you who believe in him for this end have just as much reason to expect it, as Peter had to expect he should walk on the waves. It is true, we do not expect a miracle to be wrought to sustain the believer, as it was to sustain Peter. But it is promised that he shall be sustained, and if miracles were necessary, no doubt they would be performed, for God would move the universe, and turn the course of nature upside down, sooner than one of his promises should fail, to them that put their trust in him. If God is pledged to any thing, a person that venture[s], on that pledge will find it redeemed, just as certainly as God possesses almighty power. Has God promised sanctification 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 the dire necessity of getting along with our own watchfulness and our own firmness and strength, we must submit to it, and do the best we can. But if he has made any promises, he will redeem them to the uttermost, though all earth and all hell should oppose. And so it is in regard to the mistakes and errors which Christians fall into. If there is no promise that they shall be guided just so far as they need, and led into the truth, and in the way of duty and of peace; then for a Christian to look to God for knowledge, and wisdom, and guidance, and direction, without any promises, is tempting God. But if there are promises on this subject, depend on it, they will be fulfilled to the very last mite to the believer who trusts in them; and exercising confidence in such promises is only a sober and rational faith in the word of God.

I believe the great difficulty of the church on the subject of Christian perfection lies here, that she has not fully understood how the Lord Jesus Christ is wholly pledged in all these relations, and that the church has just as much reason and is just as much bound to trust in him for sanctification as for justification. What saith the scripture? "Who of God is made unto us Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption." How came the idea to be taken up in the church, that Jesus Christ is our Redemption, and has made himself responsible for the meanest individual who throws himself on him for justification shall infallibly obtain it? This has been universally admitted in the church, in all ages. But it is no more plainly or more abundantly taught, than it is, that Jesus Christ is promised and pledged for Wisdom and for Sanctification to all that receive him in these relations. Has he promised that if any man lack wisdom, he may ask of 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 Christ is as much pledged for our wisdom and our sanctification, if we only trust in him, as he is for our justification. If the church would only renounce any expectation from herself, and die as absolutely to her own wisdom and strength, as she does to her own righteousness, or the expectation of being saved by her own works, Jesus Christ is as much pledged for one as for the other. The only reason why the church does not realise the same results, is that Christ is trusted for justification, and as for wisdom and sanctification he is not trusted.

The truth is, the great body of believers, having begun in the Spirit, are now trying to be made perfect by the flesh. We have thrown ourselves on Christ for justification, and then have been attempting to sanctify ourselves. If it is true, as the apostle affirms, that Christ is to the church both wisdom and sanctification, what excuse have Christians for not being sanctified?

III. If individuals do not as much expect to live without sin against Christ, as they expect to live without open sins against men, such as murder or adultery, it must be for one of three reasons:

1. Either we love our fellow men better than we do Christ, and so are less willing to do them an injury.
2. Or we are restrained by a regard to our own reputation; and this proves that we love reputation more than Christ.
3. Or we think we can preserve ourselves better from these disgraceful crimes than we can from less heinous sins.

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 which the devil can offer? If you say so, you do not know yourself. If you have real power to keep yourself, so as 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, how is it, that you should get the idea, that he is not equally able to keep you from all sin? O, if believers would only throw themselves wholly on Christ, and make him responsible, by placing themselves entirely at his control, they would know his power to save, and would live without sin.

Christ the Husband of the Church

IV. What a horrible reproach is the church to Jesus Christ.

V. You see why it is that converts are what they are.

Degenerate plants of a strange vine, sure enough! The church is in such a state, that it is no wonder those who are brought in, with few exceptions, prove a disgrace to religion. How can it be otherwise? How can the church, living in such a manner, bring forth offspring that shall do honor to Christ? The church does not, and individual believers do not, in general, receive Christ in all his offices, as he is offered in the Bible. If they did, it would be impossible they should live like such loathsome harlots.