

VITAL UNION WITH CHRIST

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Chapter 5 -

MARITAL UNION WITH CHRIST

HERE we may well take shoes off our feet as on holy ground. The next aspect of the believer's union with JESUS CHRIST is taken from Marriage, and hence is called Marital. Here it is the figure of a second marriage, the obligation and relation involved in the former being dissolved by death, so that the woman, thus left free by the decease of her husband, marries another man.

"Know ye not... how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?" etc.
"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." That, and the following verse constitute the key of this part of the argument.

One difficulty confronts us - what seems a hopeless mixture of figures.

In the first part of the representation it is the party that is under the dominion of the law which is personified as husband, that is supposed to live, while the husband dies; but in the latter it is the party married to the law that becomes dead to the law, so that for a consistent figure it must now be the law that survives and enters into a second union.

We may solve the difficulty by saying, as is often done, that no figure is adequate to represent such truth, and so, dismissing it as an analogy, accept it simply as a parable, applicable at a single point of resemblance. If we adopt such method of interpretation, it is plain that the vital matter is this: a previous and binding relation is somehow dissolved, released by death, and the surviving party is free to enter into a new relation. As a matter of fact the believing penitent sinner has in CHRIST found such release from a previous legal relation and has become CHRIST's own bride.

But there is a deeper solution, for we are touching a deeper mystery. CHRIST died, but it was not possible that he should be holden of death; hence He who died also lives forevermore. And so the believer who in Him died also in Him lives. Both things are, therefore, true.

In one aspect of the believer's experience he is dead! and so cannot enter into any new union; in another he lives from the dead and is, therefore, open to a new marital relation. In a sense it is the law that survives, while the sinner dies under its penalty.

In another sense it is the law that dies as a rule of Justification and as a controlling and

Condemning Power over the sinner, while the sinner lives as a believer, to be free to be married unto Him on whom all his desire is now centered.

We begin now to see why Paul refers to that first marriage in Eden as a Mystery concerning CHRIST and the Church. Adam slept, and during his sleep GOD took a rib from his side and from it made woman, and the woman became wife:

Adam's sleep was the type and prophecy of CHRIST's death, which is at once the death of the sinner and the birth of the believer. Adam's reawaking was the type and prophecy of CHRIST's resurrection, making possible the wedlock of the believer with his Lord.

In this figure of husband and wife we touch the most complete and wonderful figure, thus far found in Scripture, to present the union of the believer with CHRIST. And it is found in the Old and New Testaments alike, perhaps the one ideal that most pervades the Scripture.

It meets us first, in Genesis, in the typical wedlock of Adam and Eve, and last, in the Revelation, in the marriage of the LAMB and His Bride. Most wonderful, perhaps, is the fact that the controlling conception is that of a marriage with one who has been the wife - nay the cast - off, adulterous wife of another.

Nothing is more moving and melting in point of pathos of love, the poetry of tenderness, than some of these Old Testament portrayals of Redeeming Grace. For example, Ezekiel 16, where we reach the lowest point in the degradation of the adulterous woman, and the highest point of grace in her restoration and reconciliation.

The great central point whence we must survey the marriage relation as the chosen symbol and parable of the Believer's union with CHRIST is this - the IDENTITY OF LIFE FOUNDED UPON LOVE.

It will be seen that we have constantly been mounting higher and higher in the study of this great argument. In the Judicial union it was the identity of the last Adam with those whom he represented as Head of a Race; in the vital union it was the identity of the Lord of Life with those whom, by His Spirit, He quickens. In the practical union, it was the identity of a Leader and Champion with those who follow him; and in the actual union it was the identity of a Sovereign and Master with those who yield to Him in holy subjection. But now it is the identity of Husband with the Wife who is to him bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh.

Partnership indeed, but the highest of which we know.

Let us stop to notice the closeness of this unity and the perfection of this identity.

The wife loses herself and her separate entity and identity in her husband. Originally drawn from his side she was called woman, because taken out of man; and in marriage she is counted as in a sense returning to her place within him, nearest his heart, to be again part of his very personality.

Hence she leaves even father and mother to cleave unto him; she gives up her family name and takes his; forsakes her family home to make her home with him; her property and even herself she surrenders to his control, and even her own will and way become henceforth subordinate - no

longer twain, but one flesh. And a greater mystery is the result of this - for the two lives thus made one, become the united source of life; marriage is the secret of parentage, and through it Adam begat a son in his own likeness, another type of the holy fruitfulness of true believers.

What shall we say, then, of the exceeding riches of the unsearchable grace here presented to our thought? We can only stand in awe before such a truth and look up as before a mountain whose top is lost in clouds, as to something that is high, so that we cannot attain unto it. That the great GOD in CHRIST should stoop so low and lift us so high, that He should actually take us out of the filth of our lusts and raise us to the dignity of a bride that shares the ecstasy and purity of holy love! This is incredible but for the fact that He himself so declares it to be.

And if you are ever tempted to bring down the word of GOD to a human level, and doubt its inspiration, turn to the fifth chapter of the Ephesians and ask yourself what but a divinely taught pen could ever have represented the wife as exalted to so sublime a plane. Read the seven-fold description of CHRIST's Husbandly Devotion to His own Church;

- He loved her and gave Himself for her.
- He sanctified her and cleansed her.
- He nourishes and cherishes her. He will present her to Himself.

Now this marvellous picture of the Divine Husband's lavish love for His believing Bride is professedly drawn from marriage, and yet earthly wedlock at its best furnished no model for such a picture.

In Paul's day there was not a husband on earth who thus thought of or treated his wife, even among the chosen nation, GOD's peculiar people, or even where there was true love and tender attachment.

What husband ever so lost himself in his wife as to sacrifice himself for her, loving her not for her purity and innocence, but despite her impurity and guilt; instead of being dependent for his love upon her virtuous loyalty, consecrating himself to her sanctification and cleansing, overcoming her weakness and alienation by a nourishing care and a cherishing tenderness, and finally presenting her to himself, made all that she is by his own unselfish transforming Love?

Most marital love is a love of complacency, answering to the attraction of beautiful character; here it is a love of benevolence, bestowed notwithstanding the repulsion of wickedness and abomination, and persistently holding on until perfection takes the place of deformity and depravity.

Tell us, ye who count the Bible a human book, whence Paul drew his artist's model for this fairest portrait of wedlock to be found in all literature? Could he have penned this description had he not been taught of GOD?

This relation is one of the highest power and privilege, and hence it is here presented in its bearing on our noncontinuance in sin.

Marriage is the sphere of blessing:

1, identity. 2, blessed possession, etc. If the wife surrenders herself, she meets in a high sense a surrender of Love to herself; she gives, and in giving gets. She says "**I am his**," but she can add "**my beloved is mine**." It is a mutual possession. So the believer can say in CHRIST, My Lord and My GOD.

Marriage is the sphere of privilege.

It brings the wife into the intimacies of her husband's life. There is a sharing of thoughts and love and purpose, so that in a true wedlock there comes to be a unity found nowhere else. Discord there cannot be, because two hearts with all their desires and hopes are made one. So of CHRIST and the believer.

Marriage is the sphere of parentage.

Eve was the mother of all the living, because Adam was the father of all the living and she was his wife. "**Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it**," was the command GOD addressed to the first wedded pair. Dominion over the lower sphere of nature depended on multiplication of the higher orders of life, and only so can be understood the typical force of that formal and ideal marriage which forecast the wedlock between CHRIST and His church.

Mary the virgin could become the mother of the Messiah only as the power of the Highest overshadowed her and the HOLY SPIRIT came upon her. Then that Holy thing was born of her which was called the SON of GOD.

Would you bring forth fruit unto GOD, who once brought forth fruit only unto death? You must become the Bride of CHRIST. In union with Him holy fruitfulness becomes possible. No holy thing can be born of you that is not begotten of Him. But in union with Him everything holy becomes as natural and as necessary as in union with sin evil fruitfulness becomes inevitable.

This marital union involves also corresponding exclusiveness.

In all our human relations duty and delight keep pace - the higher the privilege and the closer the intimacy the stronger the debt we owe to love and the more exclusive the bond.

For example, there are three terms we apply to our relations to others whom we know: acquaintance, friendship, wedded love. Acquaintance is not intimate, and it has no bounds; one may have thousands and tens of thousands of acquaintances. But when acquaintance passes into friendship, the circle narrows and includes fewer persons; and in proportion as the intimacy is closer the number is fewer.

But again the obligation is correspondingly binding. A man owes little to his acquaintances beyond the courtesies of common life. But to his best friends he owes much, for intimacy and unity are purchased at a costly price. My friend has a right to expect of me and exact from me a peculiar jealousy for his reputation, peculiar devotion to his welfare and happiness, and a peculiar sacredness in guarding what he entrusts to me.

But when we come to marriage the union is so close that it narrows down the circle so that it embraces only two within it and can admit no more. Nay, the thought of admitting another is destructive of its purity and perfection. Here the obligation is such that either one would die for the other, interposing the body between the other and any threatened danger.

Now, let us remember that the believer's relation to the Lord JESUS is marital, and its obligations, like its privileges, are marital - the relation is so close it is exclusive - it closes in two parties and closes out all others.

No man can serve two masters; but much less can one wife yield herself to two husbands. Any love for another is disloyalty to the lawful spouse, and is known by one of the most offensive words in human language - adultery.

This word when used in Scripture and applied to the believer has generally no reference to violations of the seventh commandment as such, but of the first. When James rebukes adulterers and adulteresses he is referring to those who, while married to CHRIST, are coquetting with the world that is His enemy; and he says "**the friendship of the world is enmity with God.**"

This passage of Scripture, which lifts us to the very summit of exalted privilege, confronts us with the thunders and lightnings of Divine warning. You are permitted to regard yourself as the Bride of CHRIST. But remember that because you are thus admitted to Bridal union, every act of sin strikes at the very foundation of this union, as adultery strikes at the very basis of marriage.

What would you think of a wife who, while calling a man her husband, ventures to see how far she can trifle and flirt and coquette with a betrayer, and yet not lose her husband altogether? and what shall be thought of a believer who ventures to see how far he can dally with the forbidden pleasures of this world and the desires of the flesh, and not altogether forfeit His Saviour?

"**Do ye think,**" adds James, "**that the Scripture speaketh in vain: the Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?**", suppose that somewhat obscure passage means that the Heavenly Bridegroom, now seated on His Father's throne, claims His Bride for Himself and jealously desireth her altogether for Himself. Think of it! GOD claims and desires you exclusively for His own love, use and delight.

That thought ought to make sin impossible, and, so far as it possesses and really controls, it will make sin as unnatural as impurity is to a loyal wife.

The warning may explain what follows in this chapter. We have two unions contrasted here: one with the law, which leaves us to the working of lust and which brings forth only sin; and the other with CHRIST, which makes love the controlling passion and brings forth fruit in newness of Life. Now, if we mistake not, this much-disputed passage, Romans 7:7-25, shows us the believer in his experience of the two conflicting principles at work - Love of GOD on one hand, lust of flesh on the other hand, contrary the one to the other.

Yet even the regenerate will is not strong enough to overcome, and Paul cries out, "**the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good... [and] spiritual**"; but he is not practically delivered from the Power of Evil; and whenever he thinks of his still existing

bondage to the old habits and tendencies of the carnal nature, he can only cry out, "**O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death.**" But it is not a hopeless cry. He answers, "**I thank God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord!**" We all have uttered his cry of despair. How many of us can as confidently use his shout of victory?

The bearing of all this on holiness is perfectly plain. Marriage is the secret of parentage - union with JESUS will in all cases be the secret of holy fruitfulness. While, and so far as, united vitally to CHRIST, we have power to love and serve and obey GOD.

A curious illustration of this truth in another sphere was given to me by Mr. Devins. At Northfield, at the Auditorium, the reporter of the New York Tribune was seeking to transmit, by telegraph, to the paper, one of the addresses there delivered. He found that for some unknown cause the current and circuit were broken - the wire would not work, and this made it necessary to send over to South Vernon and transmit from a new station. The linemen found that the wire at one point near the operator's table had lost its insulation and was touching the ground and discharging its electric power into the earth. What a parable of life!

There were men and women in that audience who were in such contact with the world that they could neither contain, retain, nor transmit blessing.

If you want Christ-life to become Christ-power, you must maintain separation unto GOD. The touch of sin is fatal to power.

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