

# The Best Match; Or, the Incomparable Marriage Between the Creator and the Creature

by Ralph Erskine

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*The sermon explores the marriage relation between Christ and believers, highlighting the nature, terms, and effects of this spiritual union.*

**Topics:** "Spiritual Marriage", "Christian Devotion"

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## Description

Ralph Erskine preaches about the spiritual marriage between Christ and believers, emphasizing the profound love and beauty of Christ as the Bridegroom and the believer as the bride. He urges the congregation to surrender to Christ as their Husband, to trust in His infinite love, and to long for His second coming. Erskine highlights the need for believers to love, trust, and zealously glorify Christ, to live in communion with Him, and to bear fruit as His bride. He encourages those already married to Christ to continue living wholly on Him, taking all spiritual blessings from Him freely.

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## Transcript

"Thy Maker is thy Husband." -- Isaiah 54:5

The prophet Isaiah having largely discoursed of the sufferings of Christ, and the blessed fruits and effects of them; among which one is, that he should have a numerous seed to believe on him; and that, when the Jews reject him, the Gentiles should gladly receive him: and thus foreseeing, by the spirit of prophecy, the glorious state of the Gentile church, he breaks forth into a song of triumph in the beginning of this chapter; where the prophet directs his speech to the church and spouse of God in these words, "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing; and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate, than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord." Where we have a magnificent promise of the fertility and the felicity of the Gentile church; and this is enlarged to the fifth verse, which contains the words of our text; where we have the reason of her happiness and fruitfulness who was formerly a barren widow, for "Thy Maker is thy Husband:" he who made thee out of nothing, and therefore can easily fulfil all these promises, how unlikely soever they seem to be; he who made thee a people, yea, which is more, who made thee his people, he will take possession of thee as his spouse, and act the part of an husband to thee.

I shall defer my further introduction and exposition, and also whatever might be said concerning the external relation betwixt Christ and the visible church, my chief design being at this time, only to speak a

little to that internal spiritual marriage-relation betwixt Christ and the invisible church, or Christ and the believer, as it is represented under the picture of a marriage: and what I would offer upon this subject I lay before you in this doctrinal proposition.

That there is a marriage-relation betwixt Christ and believers, wherein he supplies the place of a husband unto them, and they the place of a bride and spouse to him.

In prosecuting whereof, I would essay these three things.

I. Prove, that there is such a marriage-relation betwixt Christ and believers.

II. Speak to the nature of this marriage.

III. Give the reasons, why Christ comes under such a relation to his people.

IV. Make some application of the subject.

I. To confirm the doctrine, that there is a marriage-relation betwixt Christ and believers. This will appear from these two considerations.

1. From the compellations given to Christ with relation to believers. How frequently doth the spouse call him her husband in the book of the Song? "As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. My beloved is mine, and I am his," Song 2:3,16. And, says the apostle, 2 Cor. 11:2 -- "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin unto Christ."

2. The marriage relation betwixt Christ and believers appears from the designation given to believers in scripture with respect to Christ. How frequently calls he her his love, his spouse, in the book of the Song of Songs? "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my SPOUSE. How fair is thy love, my sister, my SPOUSE!" Song 4:9,10. In Rev. 19:7, there the church, (or believers in the collective capacity) is called the bride, the Lamb's wife: "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and the bride hath made herself ready." We need not stand to prove that which is so evident, we need say no more to confirm it, than to repeat the text, "thy maker is thy husband." Therefore I come,

II. To speak of the nature of this marriage: and here we would briefly consider, 1. The parties married. 2. The terms of the marriage. 3. The properties of the marriage. 4. The effects of it. 5. How the match is carried on. 6. How it is concluded.

(1.) I say, let us consider the parties married; who is the Bridegroom, and who is the Bride.

1. Then, the bridegroom is the wisdom of God; and all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in him: he knows all the needs of the bride, and is ready to supply them.--On the other hand, the bride, before her matching with him, is the most notorious fool out of hell: her folly is shown by continuing to refuse to match with him; to refuse to give her consent to this heavenly bridegroom.

2. The bridegroom is the eternal Son of God; the King's only Son: "The King made a marriage for his Son:" He is the blood-royal of heaven.--On the other hand, What is the bride's pedigree? She needs not boast of her descent; "Thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite," Ezek. 16:3. There is a vast difference here.

3. The bridegroom is the heir of all things: he hath all riches, "the unsearchable riches of Christ."--But what is the bride worth before he match with her? She is worse than nothing, poverty itself; and not only a beggar, but in debt, and Christ is willing to pay her debt.

4. The bridegroom is comely and glorious. All the seraphims and cherubims above, all the sons of men in the world, all the crowned heads on earth, in all the circumstances of glory, are but like black pieces of earth compared with this glorious bridegroom.--On the other hand, What is the bride before he match with her. Even as black as the devil can make her. Not only a leopard, spotted here and there, but wholly black and ugly. When she is cast forth in the open field to the loathing of her person, she is a spectacle of horror and misery; yet then it is a marriage-day and a time of love.

(2.) What are the terms of the marriage: the articles of it on his part and her part? The terms on her part, though the whole belong to Christ, yet, to speak of terms in an improper sense, he requires of her what he worketh in her; namely,

1. That she be divorced from all other husbands, and give up with all other lovers and idols; particularly, that she be divorced from the law, that she may be married unto Christ: she must not obey the law from a principle of her own strength; nor as a covenant of works, that, by obedience, she may purchase a title to heaven; nor to gratify a natural conscience; nor merely to escape hell, and make a righteousness of her obedience. She must be divorced from that husband.

2. Upon her part it was required, that she be satisfied with this husband alone as the great portion of the soul, that he may have no rival, no competitor in her affections, none to sit on the throne with him: she must keep the chief room for the son of God. Again, on his part, he contracts,

1. That he will make over himself to her; all he is, all he hath, all he hath purchased, all he hath promised; he will make over to her all the blessings of the everlasting covenant. O this is a sweet article! And a large charter indeed!

2. He contracts to perform all the glorious offices of a husband to her; to provide for her, protect her, direct her, pity her, clothe her, to encourage and comfort her; and to do all for her she needs; this is the sum of the contract; for, to speak properly, Christ is all, and does all in this matter; and our part is done by him in us, Hos. 2:19,20. "I will betroth thee unto me for ever: yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies; I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord." Christ signs the contract for him and her both. "I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness;" I will fulfill the law, and satisfy God's justice. "I will betroth thee unto me in loving-kindness:" though there be nothing in thee to invite my love, but much to challenge my aversion, yet I will overcome all my imperfections, and set my love upon thee. "I will betroth thee unto me in mercies;" in pardoning mercy, sanctifying mercy, supporting mercy, comforting mercy. But lest the bride think, that whenever she sins there may be a divorce, she may break up and go away, therefore it follows, "I will betroth thee unto me in faithfulness." He pledges his veracity for fulfilling the articles on her part and his both. But then,

(3.) What are the properties of this marriage?

1. It is a very mysterious marriage, that the Creator should take the work out of his hands for a bride; not only when in its original and virgin integrity, as it dropt out of his creating hands, but when polluted with the poison of the devil, the venom of the serpent, that he should take her for his bride; "Thy maker is thy

husband." This is an astonishing union. If a glorious angel should be matched with a creeping worm, and a king with a beggar, it would not be such a wonder; but the maker to join himself to the work of his hands; there cannot be a greater distance conceived betwixt any thing, than betwixt a Creator, and that which is brought out from the barren womb of nothing, a creature; and yet they are in a marriage-relation; "Thy maker is thy husband."

2. This marriage is very difficult and hard. It is true, there is nothing too hard for Omnipotence; yet the human nature of Christ had much to do with it; though he was supported by the divine nature, yet he behoved to swim through the river of his own blood, before he could get his bride. He satisfied the justice of God, established a new covenant. All this must be done in order to this marriage.

3. This marriage is an indissoluble marriage; death dissolves other relations, but it increases this intimate union: Nothing shall separate Christ and the believer: "I am persuaded, saith Paul, that neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," Rom. 8:38,39.

(4.) What are the effects of this marriage?

1. The first and immediate effect is a most close union betwixt Christ and the believer. This union, though less than a personal union, although it be in some respect, yet it is more than a political union, more than a moral union; it is a very close union. The bridegroom, Christ, he gives his bride his own spirit; communicates vital influences, from the glorious head, to her: and she cleaves, by faith and love, close to him; and God promises that he will make the house of Israel cleave close to him, as a girdle to the loins of a man, Jer. 13:11. He makes his spouse in spite of all her folly, in spite of all her enmity, in spite of all her enemies and temptations, to cleave close to him.

2. Another effect of this union, is sweet communion, mutual fellowship: he feasts with them and they with him: he blows upon her garden, quickens and animates her graces; and then he comes and eats his pleasant fruits.

3. Another effect is, familiarity, which is coincident with the former: he treats them not as strangers, but as friends; and not as friends only, but as his own spouse: he communicates to her, and speaks comfortably and kindly to her. It is a wonder what condescension God will make sometimes: and the believer again can be more familiar with God, than with the whole world; and can tell to God what he can tell to none else.--Thus you see some of the effects of this marriage.

(5.) How was the match carried on?

I answer in a word. On his part it was carried on thus:

1. He gave the Father his hand, and engaged to him in the covenant of redemption, from eternity, that he would do all things necessary for accomplishing the marriage.

2. Because there must be an union of natures betwixt the bridegroom and the bride; (it was not possible that we could be matched with the divine nature;) therefore he becomes a man, and takes on our nature, that there might be an union of natures.

3. Because the bride is a slave, he pays her ransom, substitutes himself in her room, takes on her debt, and pays all that she owed to justice, and then takes on with her. But, on our part, just nothing at all; we had no hand in the covenant of redemption; no hand in the contrivance of salvation; we knew nothing about the business; we had no thoughts of a Redeemer; deserved nothing but pure wrath; we were lying, with full contentment, in the devil's territories when Christ was carrying on the match.

(6.) How is the marriage concluded upon his part?

1. He sends forth his ambassadors to court for him, as Abraham did his servant for Isaac: and there is a great work, indeed, to make her give her consent. Let angels in heaven unite their powers of persuasion, they could not prevail with one soul, if a converting day were not come: but they must always speak fair to her. How rhetorical was Abraham's servant for his master? He hath but one child, and that child hath great riches; he seeks no portion with Rebecca, only her consent. Thus he rhetorizes and flourishes exceedingly, and persuades with the greatest motives. But yet the ambassadors of Christ have a larger commission, if our eyes were opened to see it; they are sent forth to make love to the bride, and in his name to commend Christ.

2. He concludes the marriage thus. The bride being wretchedly ignorant of her true happiness, therefore his father distresses her with the debt which she owes to him; and the wretched person is forced, for some time, to mount Sinai; and there God descends in all the circumstances of terrible majesty; he thunders against her, curses; "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," Gal. 3:10. God exacts all the debt, conscience roars, and the devils are let loose; she fears hell and wrath; and God declares, in the gospel, that the wretched bankrupt shall go to prison, and lie eternally in hell, if she do not take on with his son, marry him, and believe on him. Thus the bride is forced to an extremity: some have more, some have less of this law-work; but all are humbled and broken in some measure, who are married to Christ: he sends forth his spirit and convinces the world of sin. But this would not do either; and therefore,

3. The bridegroom sees that nothing but condescension will do it; and so he appear in all his glory: when the bride is full of fears, perplexities, and anxieties; when the terrors of God are surrounding her, and the arrows of the Almighty drinking up her spirits, and when she is crying out, What shall I do? Whether shall I go? Then the bridegroom appears in all his excellency and glory, and says, "Behold me, behold me;" and she gets a view of him that ravishes her heart, and enlarges her soul; then it is that the spirit is sent to determine her to consent. The manifestation of his glory does enlighten her mind and spirit; and immediately grace, upon the will, draws out the whole heart after him: so that if the bride could be grieved and pained upon the marriage day, it would be for her folly in refusing him so long. --But what is done upon the bride's part, for concluding the match; Nothing at all; but the whole soul is enabled to acquiesce in a redeemer: and the believer is ready, at such a time, to say, he is my Lord, my God, my strength, my all, and shall be for ever. Thus you have a brief scheme of the nature and way of this marriage.

Having spoken but very briefly to the former heads I shall here, before I proceed to the reasons of the doctrine, offer a few remarks upon the time of this marriage-union betwixt Christ and believers. We told you how this marriage was concluded and completed by Christ, and now we say, there is a stated day and time for the concluding thereof: and upon this head we may remark,

1st, That there is a two-fold day we are to consider in this marriage, namely, the day of espousals on earth, and the day of consummation in heaven; and we may compare these two together in a few words.

1. The day of espousals here is ushered in with a very dark morning or rather an evening, upon the bride's part, with the wrath of God, and the law: as it was said, "The evening and the morning was the day:" so, in this contract, the evening of legal terrors, at least some humiliation, ushers in the morning: But as to the consummation, there is a great deal of glory before its the soul being taken to heaven already, and the body sleeping sweetly in the grave, a bed where the bridegroom lay three days before her.

2. In the day of espousals, when the person gets a victory, over corruption, and finds little stirring of it, no sensible working of it, yet there is a party within, at the same time, that opposes the match, and which will afterwards get out its head, and will be still assaulting the believer, while he is on earth: but in the day of consummation, there is no such thing; no enemy, no sin, no corruption; but the whole soul goes out wholly upon the bridegroom.

3. The espousals are carried on secretly; it may be the person is sitting at your side, and you do not see, nor know when Christ is making up the match; or, perhaps, on his knees at home, there is a secret transaction: But the consummation will be before millions of angels, millions of saints, and millions of spectators. Here is a great difference: after the day of espousals is over, the bride may give many squint looks to her old lovers, looking back to Egypt, departing from her husband, doubting of his love, distrusting his word, fearing his dispensations: But after the consummation, no shadow of sin, no shadow of jealousy, no shadow of mistakes, or fears, can overtake her for ever; no cloud can intervene, for the sun of righteousness shall never be eclipsed any more. But then,

2. A second remark is, that the precise time of the espousals is condescended on by the Bridegroom and his Father, from all eternity; the very moment when the bride shall be made to sign the contract, and flee to Christ, and pour out her whole soul upon him; that precise moment is agreed upon betwixt the Father and the Son, in the covenant of redemption, from eternity.

3. We remark, that the Bridegroom waits patiently for that moment that is agreed upon betwixt the Father and the Son: he longs for it, he desires it. The believer many times is ready to think, O, Christ is not willing! I have set days apart, I have gone to my knees, I have sought him in and about this and the other ordinance, and yet I could not close with him: I have been almost dipt in hell with affliction, yet my heart was never melted; surely Christ is not willing. O let us flee the borders of blasphemy! The Lord Jesus is willing; but the fulness of the time is not yet come; there is a set moment for his coming to his people, and for this they are to wait: yea, for this he waits himself, according to that scripture, which I shall read to them that cannot get that in duties and ordinances which they have been long looking for; Isa. 30:18,-- "Therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you; and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you; for, the Lord is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for him." He will wait upon the very moment of time, for the day of salvation; he knows the proper season. The crane, the swallow, and the stork know their seasons, by the natural instinct God hath given them; and will he not know his own season? Yea, he waits to be gracious.

4th Remark, That when the time comes, then there is a sweet coming together of all circumstances to conclude the work; all things work pleasantly together to complete the match; conscience goes right to work, the word is made lively, the Spirit acts powerfully and sweetly in the soul: there is an auspicious conjunction of all favourable circumstances, for determining the bride, and drawing out her heart.

5th Remark, That there are several signs and characters of this day, by which it may be known. What are the signs of it? you shall say. I shall not insist on this, only it is a day of light; great light breaks in upon the

mind; it is a day of love; much love is let in upon the heart; it is a day of power, wherein the bride is persuaded and overcome; difficulties are surmounted enemies conquered, and the bride's will is moulded into a compliance; it is a day of amazement. O what an ecstasy of wonder is raised in the person's heart! I was blind, now I see; I was dead, now I live; I was weak, now I am strong; this morning, perhaps, I was under affliction, and under the terrors of God, and now he hath ravished me with the consolations of his Spirit: I was afraid of hell, now I have the hope of heaven and eternal life. O what a day of wonder is it! Lastly, it is a day of vows; the soul will be ready to break forth in such a day crying, What shall I speak for him? What shall I suffer for him?

A sixth and last remark on this head is, that in this stated day of espousals, the bridegroom manifests his glory to the bride; when he intimates to the soul "thy Maker is thy Husband" he shews his glory; his absolute glory, his comparative glory, his relative glory; they are all one upon the matter, yet there is a formal different consideration of them.

1. His absolute glory is manifested. What does the soul see, that is matched and married to Christ? Alas! Some see nothing but dreams and fantasies; but when the believer is matched with Christ, so he deals with him as with Moses, he makes all his glory to pass before him; the person gets a view of the glorious attributes of the Son of God.

2. He manifests his comparative glory; "Thou art more excellent than hills of prey: fairer than the sons of men;" the bride, the believer sees him as the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, every way incomparable. Whatever he be compared to he excels it; if he be a lily, he is the lily of the valley; if he be a rose, he is the rose of Sharon; if he be a plant, he is the plant of renown; if he be a physician, he is the physician of value; if an advocate, he is an advocate with the Father; he is represented without any parallel.

3. His relative glory is manifested: he is discovered as a glorious priest, a glorious prophet, a glorious king, a glorious husband, a glorious redeemer and Saviour! And there will be a sight of his glorious fulness in all these relations, and the glorious fitness of that sufficiency and fulness, all suited for the soul: and thus revealing himself, he removes all jealousies and mistakes from the bride, supplies all her needs, heals all her diseases, and out-bids all her rivals, who can offer nothing to allure the soul, while he can, and doth say, I am all-sufficient to help thee.

III. I come now to the third thing proposed; namely, To offer some reasons of the doctrine, why Christ comes under a married-relation to believers. I answer,

1. His own sovereign will is the best reason why he comes under a marriage-relation in this case; "Even so, Father, for so it seems good in thy sight," Matth. 11:28. His actions are not to be examined at the bar of our reason: "He hath mercy because he will have mercy."

2. His love to them makes him come under such a relation to them; "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with everlasting kindness have I drawn thee." Love is the motive that engages him; love brought him out of heaven for them; love nailed him to the cross for them; love laid him in a grave for them; and love engages him to a marriage-relation with them.

3. He does it for the glory of his own free grace, mercy, and love. As love and mercy was his motive, so it was his purpose, that he might display and reveal it to the utmost. This attribute is at its utmost degree. Infinite wisdom could have contrived a thousand worlds, and infinite power could have made them, but the

love of God hath gone to its utmost height; it is not possible for Christ to give a greater, demonstration of his love than he hath done, in giving his life for the bride, and entering into a marriage-relation with her.

4. He does it, that he may furnish work for the blessed company in the higher house; for on the earth the contract is only drawn up: this is only the day of espousals; heaven will be the day of the consummation of the marriage: this is only a courting and wooing time; but the day will come when the nuptial solemnity shall be celebrated, and that shall continue while the day of eternity lasts,--This shall suffice for the reasons of the doctrine.

IV. The fourth thing was, To make some application; and it may be, 1. For Information. 2. Lamentation. 3. Examination. 4. Exhortation. Now of these in their order.

(1.) For Information. Is it so, that there is a marriage-relation betwixt Christ and believers?

1. This informs us of the infinite love of God towards lost sinners, in giving his own Son to be a husband and redeemer unto them: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have everlasting life," John 3:16. God so loved the world, as neither angels nor men can tell.

2. This informs us of the infinite love of Christ, in condescending to be a husband to such a bride. It could never have entered into the heart of the wisest angel in heaven, that Christ the eternal Son of God, should become man; and far less that he should take such a filthy and deformed creature and bride by the hand, as sinners are: if he had given us our deserving, he would have made his justice to ride in triumph over us, and hell to resound with eternal shouts of praise to incensed justice; but, to the quite contrary, he hath so ordered, that heaven shall resound with eternal hallelujahs of praise to his gracious mercy and free grace, in choosing those that were enemies, and admitting them to his blessed bosom.

3. This doctrine informs us of the believer's safety. Having Christ for her husband, who can hurt her? It is the duty of a husband, you know, to protect and defend his spouse; and to be sure Christ will not be lacking in this to his bride: "He will hide them in the secret of his presence from the pride of men: he will keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues," Psalm 31:20. "About all the glory he makes a defence," Isaiah 4:5. He covers them with the mantle of his Spirit; sure then, the bride of Christ is in absolute safety: he hath retiring chambers for her, to hide her in till the day of indignation be overpast.

4. This doctrine lets us see that believers are no such lowly and wretched persons as the world generally takes them to be; they are Christ's bride, and he is their husband: and, O what an honour is it to be married to the Son of God! Having him for an husband, they come to be related to all Christ's relations; God is their Father, because he is his Father; angels are their servants, because they are his servants; saints are their fellow-brethren, because they are his members; heaven is their inheritance, because it is the kingdom of their husband. In a word, whatever is his, is theirs; "And all things are yours, for ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's," 2 Cor. 3:22,23.

(2.) For Lamentation. Is it so, that there is a marriage-relation betwixt Christ and believers? This calls for deep lamentation in these two particulars.

1. It calls us to lament that Christ should have so few brides among us, though he be wooing and courting us, by the gospel, crying, "Behold me, behold me," Isa. 65:1. Yet where is the man or woman that is prevailed with to enter a match with this glorious bridegroom? Though he be fairer than the sons of men,

and condescends to offer marriage with sinners, who are as black and ugly as hell itself, yet they set him at nought, and give him just ground for that melancholy complaint, "My people would not hearken to my voice, Israel would have none of me," Psalm 81:11. And may he not appeal to the very immaterial creation, to judge of our folly as he did of old to Israel? Jer. 2:12,13,-- "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; yea, be astonished and horribly afraid, for my people have committed two great evils: they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

2. This doctrine may afford us matter of lamentation also, That believers, who are espoused to him, should walk so unworthily of such a husband. You know a wife should conduct herself conform to the character of her husband; and where her carriage is base and shameful, it reflects a dishonour on him. O how unsuitable is it to see Christ's bride blackened with the filth of hell! To see those who, have stricken hands with Christ, in a marriage-covenant, joining hands with lusts and idols, and defiling themselves with them!

(3) For Examination. Let us try if we be thus married and related to Christ; whether he be our husband, and we his bride and spouse.

I shall offer a few marks whereby we may know whether or not we be married unto this glorious Husband; and they may be drawn from the consideration of the antecedents, the constituents, and the consequents of this marriage.

1st. Try by the antecedents to the marriage-contract. Before ever Christ did contract with thee, didst thou observe him courting thy soul before this contract? Here is a courting. Now, how did Christ court you.

1. Did he court you by the austerity of the law, as with fire and sword? Did he court you by such a word as that, Thou art a cursed wretch: for, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them?" Gal. 2:16. Did he court you by such a word as that, Cursed is every one that doth the work of the Lord negligently? Did he court you thus, by the spirit of bondage, with the terrors of God, as clothed with vengeance, telling thee thou art an heir of hell and wrath, a child of the devil? Did he court thee so as thou wast surrounded with fear and trouble?

2. Did he court thee as by the austerity of the law; so by the sweetness of the gospel, when he saw thee cast down, when he saw thee a poor heavy laden sinner, like to be crushed under thy weights? Did he then court you with such a word as that, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," Matth. 11:28; or with such a word as that, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come to the waters; he that hath no money, come; buy wine and milk, without money and without price," Isa. 55:1. "Flee to your strongholds, ye prisoners of hope." Did he thus court you with the gospel-offer?

3. Did he court you by his love-letters? This is another antecedent of the contract. Got you ever a love-letter sent from Christ out of heaven? But you will say, What is the love-letter? Even the Bible: "Search the Scriptures, these are they that testify of men" John 5:39. Here there are the declarations of the love of Christ to thy soul: here there are love-promises in these letters, that shall be yours. There is a love-covenant in these letters. Have you read and pondered them? And can you say that Christ spake them into your heart? If it be a text that was preached upon, or if it be a single word, O Christ drop that into my heart! And I think it will go with me to my death-bed, it came with such life and power. In a word, Got you any gifts before the marriage-contract, such as the, gift of true conviction, such as the gift of heart-contrition, the gift of real humiliation, the gift of self-denial, the gift of faith? These are given, some before, some at the contract?

2dly. Try by the constituents of the marriage.

1. If this marriage be made up betwixt Christ and thee, then thou hast put away all lovers besides Christ; the right hand will be cut off, the right eye put out; you will be divorced from all other husbands, particularly from the law; ye must be dead to the law, that ye may be married to another husband, even to Christ. But you will say, What is it to be dead to the law? I answer, It is not to lay it aside as the rule of obedience; for the law shall still be the rule and standard of the believer's obedience, life, and conversation but to be dead to the law, is to be sensible that the law cannot save us as a covenant of works. It is to disclaim all hopes of being justified by the law, or by our works or obedience to it. I see Christ, the glorious husband, hath brought in an everlasting righteousness, answering the law fully: this is the garment I must put on, and cast off my filthy rags.

2. Hast thou given a cordial consent upon the contract-day? Can you say you was enabled to take him, as the Psalmist, "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, thou art my Lord;" and thou art my God, my head, my husband? Have you given a rational consent to it? Yea, a super-rational and supernatural consent? A deliberate, chaste, stayed, solemn, unconditional consent? Did you say it with faith, and with an heir of heaven, that he was yours, and shall be so forever? It is true, persons may be matched to Christ who cannot condescend on the precise time: the Spirit may work many times some way that we cannot know; yet it is his ordinary way with his bride, after many tossings, to break in with ravishing, conquering sweetness, to draw forth her soul to a solemn remarkable closing with him, and consenting to him. Have you then been engaged to make over yourself to the bridegroom, by an unreserved resignation of yourself to him, that you will not only take him wholly, and for ever, for holiness and happiness, for light and life, for grace and glory, but also make over yourself to him, soul and body, whatever you are, whatever you have been? Have you been thus made to yield yourselves unto the Lord? Are you one with him? Have you one spirit with him? Are you of one faith with him, of one way with him, endeavouring to walk as he walked? "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit," 1 Cor. 4:17.

3. Can you say, that upon the marriage-day, you got a marriage-gift from the bridegroom? Among the Jews, the bridegroom was to give a marriage-gift to his bride: Now, what gift did you receive on this marriage-day? Can you say, indeed I got the wedding garment; he clothed me with his righteousness, which he span out of his own bowels, weaved with his own hands, and, dyed with his own blood; and thus all my guilt is covered, the curse is done away? This is indeed what few get; yet some have been, and are able to say, I am delivered from the wrath to come; and there is no condemnation to me; and on such a time I got also an ornament of the graces with the spirit, which I wear as jewels, that is to say, faith, love, obedience, patience, humility;, and I got the promise of an hundred-fold here, and I am expecting more gifts yet, before the marriage be consummated I am expecting mare assurance, I live in the hope of glory; I expect a sealed pardon of all my sins, and I look to get the earnest of the spirit, and more every day.

4. Another constituent of this marriage-contract is, the bride, on that day, puts off one veil, and puts on another. This was the Jewish custom, the brides put off the veil of bashfulness, and puts on the veil of subjection. Christ's bride, before the marriage, cannot look the bridegroom in the face, is ashamed to look upon him; but she is made to put off this veil in the presence of her former lovers, and to take Christ by the hand, and then she puts on the veil of subjection, whereby she promises in his strength, to subject herself to her husband's will. Have we thus promised to be obedient to his commands, in his own strength, whatever he enjoins us to do or suffer?

3dly, Try by the consequents of this marriage. Would you know if there has been a contract between Christ and you? Try then by the immediate consequents.

1. Did you see the king in his beauty, and such a glory and excellency in him as could not be paralleled by all the glory of ten thousand worlds?

2. What was your converse with him on the contract-day? Can you say, he embraced me in his arms, and I embraced him in my heart, and there was sweet communion and fellowship betwixt him and me?

3. Wast thou crowned in the marriage-day, so as thou wast known by others, as it were, to be the bride of Christ? The Jews, they not only crowned the bridegroom, but the bride also. You see what the crown is that Christ's bride should have, Rev. 12:1. "There appeared a great wonder in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." The bride of Christ is crowned with the doctrine of the twelve apostles.

4. The bride of Christ keeps at home, and delights in the bride-chamber. This is her delight all the days of her life, to dwell in the house of the Lord, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple, Ordinances will be sweet, being the galleries wherein the King is held.

II. Try by the qualities and duties of the bride, which are also the consequents to this marriage.

1. If you be Christ's bride, then you will love the bridegroom. Love is what every wife owes to her husband; much more doth the believer owe it to Christ who hath expressed far more love to this bride than ever a husband did to a wife; he loved her, and gave himself for her. He shed, the hottest blood of his heart to save and redeem her. You will love him with a love of desire; "With my soul have I desired thee in the night;" with a love of delight; "My meditation of him shall be sweet;" with a love of benevolence, wishing well to his interest; "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning; let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not thee to my chiefest joy," Psal. 127:5,6. They that habitually love husband, wife, children, riches, or any thing more than Christ, have no reason to think that they are matched with him.

2. If we be married to Christ, we will trust in and depend on our husband? In whom can a wife trust, if not in her husband? The believer rests on Christ for grace and glory; and commits all to him, ventures all on him, and expects all from him. The soul that is espoused to Christ, looks on the infinite virtue of his blood, the infinite efficacy of his spirit, the infinite fulness of his, grace, the infinite dimensions of his love, the infinite faithfulness Of his promise: in all this he sees an infinite ground of hope, and thereupon he ventures, and rolls all on him. Here, he says, I will stay and rest, here I will build, here I am resolved to stay, here I am resolved to live and die.

3. If we be married to Christ, we will have a zeal for his glory. Some sacrifice Christ's interest to their own honour: but the believer says, Let my master increase. Though my name should never be heard of in the word, let Christ be exalted. O, says Christ's bride, I would have all the world coming and adoring him! I would have all the world to love him! I would have all the world to praise him! Especially when she is under any lively influence, O then, says she, if the greatest enemies knew what were in our Lord, they would come and join with him, as I have done!

4. The bride of Christ cannot live without him. An honest wife will be hard put to it, to live many years without her husband. O it is sometimes like a hell to her to miss Christ in ordinances! O, the sore moans

and heavy groans of the deserted soul, that has had the experience of the sweetness of Christ! "O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!" Job 23:3. "O that it were with me as in months past!"

5. If you be Christ's bride you will be longing sometimes for his second coming; less or more you will desire the day of judgment, and long for his appearance. The epilogue of all the spouse's sweet discourses is, "Make haste, my beloved, be thou like a roe, or a young hart, on the mountains of Bether, till the day break and the shadows fly away." And the conclusion of the whole Bible is, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly," Rev. 22:20. Can you say you have longed for his coming? I see the devil reigns here, corruption reigns here, and never will things be right till he come again in the clouds and set heaven and earth in a flame, when these nuptial solemnities shall begin to be celebrated, and the marriage solemnized while eternity lasts.

6. If there has been a marriage betwixt Christ and your souls, then readily you have some of the love-tokens to present; I mean, some expressions of his covenant love: you can tell, that, some time or other, he brought you to the banqueting-house, and displayed a banner of love over you. Sometime he hath enlarged your soul with ardent and longing desires after him, and satisfied you with the fatness of his house. The soul that is really espoused to Christ, will readily have some experiences of his love to tell of.

7. The spouse of Christ is a chaste spouse. Idols never get her heart as before; though now and then she may give a squint look, yet idols never have that force and room in her affections once they had; she is afraid of doing any thing that may be displeasing and dishonouring to him: hence we will find the spouse of Christ breathing out earnest desires and requests to God, to be kept and led in the way of righteousness; "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes," Psalm 119:5. Hence she groans up her case, "O wretched one that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death!" Rom. 7:24.

8. If we be Christ's bride, we will be a fruitful bride. Let us try; have we never a child of good works, or of grace? "Thy belly," says Christ to the spouse, "is as an heap of wheat," Song 7:2. You know wheat is very fruitful: the barren soul that never loved, never mortified, never repented, never gave alms, never appeared for God; that barren soul is not the spouse of Christ; for the spouse of Christ is fruitful. This much by way of trial.

4thly, For exhortation. Is there a spiritual marriage betwixt Christ and believers? O then! Shall we not be persuaded to come and close with Christ for our husband, and take our Maker for our husband, our God for our husband? If we be ambitious, here is the top of our ambition, Jesus Christ; if we be covetous, here is the true riches; whatever we are, whatever we have been, if we come to him, he will in no ways cast us out: it is true, we cannot come of ourselves, but let us cry, Lord, if I die, I shall be buried under the mercy-seat, praying, weeping, looking, as I can, and go to hell with Christ in my heart as much as I can. Come to him, and he will overcome your whole impotency; lay your case before him, saying, Lord, I am a wretched one in the highest degree: Lord, here is a great offer made, I have no heart to it; O, and give a discovery of a lost state, and of thy excellent glory. O, draw out my heart, and let me die upon the spot, rather than reject Christ for ever.

Many motives might be adduced; consider only,

1. The loveliness and beauty of Christ. His beauty is universal; he is lovely in his person, lovely in his nature, lovely in his offices, lovely in his estates of humiliation and exaltation, lovely in all his relations; his beauty is transforming, it will make the bride comely also; it is communicative, the bride is made comely

through his comeliness. When we speak of the comeliness of Christ, we should let angels and saints above, that have the more immediate intuition of the radiant splendour of this blessed object, go forth to declare his glory. Everything in him is lovely, and nothing is lovely without him, nothing is lovely but what proceeds from him and goes to him; he is so lovely, that he cannot possibly be otherwise: he is the primary, original, and necessary loveliness.

2. Consider, as he is lovely so he is loving; his love is infinite, eternal, free, distinguishing, effectual; never man loved like him. O how many foldings are in this love, as can never be unfolded?

3. Consider, if we close with Christ we will give him a glad heart; his heart is glad in that day, when he takes a poor sinner by the hand; the day of his espousals is the day of the gladness of his heart. How many times have we, grieved him by our hypocrisy, and formality, and backwardness? And would we now give him a glad heart, for all the grieved hearts, we have given him? Then let us embrace him as offered in the gospel, and then he will be glad. Why? Then he will see the fruit of election, the fruit of redemption, the fruit of his death, the fruit of his resurrection, the fruit of his ascension, the fruit of his intercession: then he gets back the temple of the Holy Ghost; the lost sheep is found again: then he gets back the member of his own body.

I might give something by way of direction. You may say, What shall I do then, that I may be married unto Christ?

In one word, if you would have Christ for your husband, O then, entertain his suit, and hearken to his wooing, and courting motions! Is he darting light into your hearts, and letting you see the evil of some sin that formerly ye delighted in? O do not resist his suit, by continuing in sin after this! Is he strengthening that light so as to set conscience on fire with the sense of sin, and apprehension of wrath? O quench not this fire till you get water out of the wells of salvation! Otherwise ye reject his suit. --Is he carrying his suit farther, and stirring up your affections to desire after Christ! O quench not this motion! But cry to him to fasten the nail sure, and carry on the work, till the marriage be completed.

Now, I might give a word of exhortation also to them that are married and espoused to Christ.

All I shall say is this; O let Christ's bride live on him, and take all from him! As a poor woman married to a rich man, she lives upon his riches. Many are ready to say, that if Christ would call us his bride, we would live on ourselves; we would pray, repent, believe, &c.; but the bride of Christ must get all these things in him, and take all from him, and live wholly on him, and freely on him. When Joseph's brethren did not know him, they were buying and selling with him, they would have nothing from him without money; but when they knew that he was a brother, for all the offences that they had done him, they were content to come down every man of them, and take all from him for nothing; this is the way you must do with Christ, when matched to him; we must not, with the legalist, have repentance and duties of our own, we must take all from him, who is the repository of all divine fulness, whereof the believer's part is, out of that fulness to receive grace for grace.

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