

MARRIAGE:

Its Ideal, Its Responsibilities,
and Its Connection with the
Assembly.

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“She is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.”—1 COR. vii. 39.

“Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”—2 COR. vi. 14.

THE DIVINE IDEAL.

IT is little understood that human relationships are based upon the divine; not upon divine ideas merely, but upon divine relationships. The Persons of the God-head, the Father and the Son, for instance, existed before the same relationship in the human family. As in the case of Moses, who saw that of which he made a pattern, the things themselves existed first. Be it, that it was in God's mind, yet He is God, ~~the~~

God who calleth things that be not as though they were. The patterns themselves then became types of that which God would bring about.

Now marriage is of this kind; it is according to that which God intended for Him who was His Son, of which also it became a type. Adam came first, a figure of Him that was to come. Then Eve is builded and brought to him, a type of the assembly as the bride. "This mystery is great, but I speak concerning Christ and the assembly." Eph. v. 32.

This divine ideal is the subject of the Spirit's contemplation in Ps. xlv., where everything is viewed in its perfection and completion, without insisting upon the responsibilities that flow from it. The Messiah: the Bridegroom comes first into view

of the Spirit and then the bride, primarily Israel, and by application, the assembly, which more fully answers to it.

Let us for a moment consider this divine ideal, of which the relationship of man and wife is now a type. Blessed indeed it is to contemplate, in company with the Spirit of God, the glories of

THE HEAVENLY BRIDEGROOM.

The heart is immediately filled with a good matter, and the tongue becomes the pen of a quick scribe. We may note three things about Him. First,—“Thou art fairer than the children of men.” This is a remarkable expression for the Psalmist, with whom only the man of the first order was known. Christ, for it is He of whom the Spirit of Christ in the Psalmist testifies, is

evidently looked upon here as a Man of another, i.e., of His own order. A unique Man! None other such! Fairer than any mere son of Adam. Grace is poured into His lips, as also gracious words pour forth from His blessed lips (Lu. iv. 22). Because of this, He is blessed for ever; but in this respect He is alone in His blessedness. The only result for others being judgment, which is committed to Him because He is the Son of Man. "Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O most mighty" (v. 3).

Next, not only is He Man and of His own order, but He is God also; "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." This is shewn by His characteristics as a Man down here. He loved righteousness and hated wickedness, which exhibits the very nature of God. No mere man, though

knowing good and evil, ever loved the good or hated the evil. He who did so is immediately hailed as God. "Therefore, O God, Thy God hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows." Wonderful to think that now, when thus disclosed and hailed as God, His fellows can be spoken of. How good to be among them, and so enabled to join the singing which He leadeth, in praise to His Father and His God!

But a third thing is involved in this--Incorruptibility. "All Thy garments smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia, out of the ivory palaces whereby they have made Thee glad." Nicodemus brought a hundred pounds weight of myrrh and aloes and wound it about the body of Jesus with the linen, for his burial, to embalm Him. As

though this were not enough, Mary and others brought more. But no amount of spices would have insured absolute incorruptibility in a mere man. Jesus, however, rose from among the dead, as out of ivory palaces; all His garments being redolent of incorruptibility. God's Holy One saw no corruption! In this state He is anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows. Those fellows share with Him in resurrection and incorruptibility, as well as joy and praise. "This corruptible must put on incorruption."

Now the Spirit turns to

THE BRIDE.

She is addressed as daughter, shewing community of relationship, and is called upon to forget her own country and her father's house; new relationships replacing for ever

the old. He is also her lord, whom she worships. Now *her* clothing is referred to, as *His* garments had before been brought into notoriety. "The king's daughter is all glorious within, her clothing is of wrought gold." Gold sets forth divine righteousness as suiting God in glory. But this is wrought gold. How was it wrought? Whether it be His garments or her clothing, both alike speak of His death. He must pass through death in order to prove His own incorruptibility. In order to clothe His bride in divine righteousness, suited to God in glory, He must also pass through death, work out that righteousness in labour and travail and blood. She, invested in this, the outcome of His work, is brought before the King in raiment of needlework which is the fruit of divine righteousness, wrought

by her own hands in the power of the Spirit. Thus does He delight to look upon her! A fair and holy scene then lies before her, eternally with Him. Gladness and rejoicing, children instead of fathers; a name to be remembered in all generations; the people's praise for ever and ever. This is God's ideal Bridegroom and this His bride. This, the relationship upon which that of every married couple is based and this that of which each is a type.

We turn now to consider for a moment

ITS RESPONSIBILITIES.

That the responsibilities of the man and his wife flow from this relationship Eph. v. 22-33 shews. In the Psalm we have had "He is thy lord and worship thou him." Here the wife is to submit herself to her own husband as unto the Lord. For the hus-

band is the head of the wife, as Christ is Head of the assembly, and He is the Saviour of the body. As therefore the assembly is put into the subject place, so the wife would find her joy in being subject to her own husband in everything. True, the assembly, as in man's hand, has not maintained that subjection, and is a sufferer thereby. Many a wife also, may not be subject to her husband and in like manner suffers loss. Still the Word of God remains, and the instructions are after His own ideal. Happy the wife (as blessed the husband) who seeks in all things to bring the Lord in, as the One to whom all allegiance is due.

Further, the husband is to love his wife after the pattern of Christ's love to the assembly, who gave Himself for it. Wonderful gift! Amazing price! Here again we

see what He endured to clothe His bride in wrought gold. Then again He cleanses her by the washing of water by the word and finally presents her to Himself in glory, without any trace of sin, or of the state through which she now passes, where time asserts itself in blanched hair and wrinkled brow.

Again, Christ nourishes and cherishes the assembly; so should a man his wife. Blessed 'to be able to fulfil in any measure that which is a type of this great mystery, Christ and the assembly. For this shall a man leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife, was written first in Gen. ii. 24, not in view of Adam, who had neither father nor mother to leave, but spoken by him as a sanction to this union, and as here applied in view of Christ and the assembly.

This being so, it seems impossible that such a relationship could be entered upon by any intelligent believer, without reference to the assembly as God's witness on earth. We are, therefore, not surprised to find, whatever the law of the land may from time to time have demanded, that marriage has always been for believers connected with the assembly, up to the measure of their intelligence as to it.

We turn, therefore, to consider

ITS CONNECTION WITH THE ASSEMBLY.

It was, as we have seen, God's institution in Eden as a pattern and type of Christ and the assembly. It was continued to the Jews under law as of Him, and was further approved of by the Lord Jesus when here, He Himself being present at a marriage

feast with His disciples. It is important that the believer should have right thoughts about this institution as before God, in order that he may intelligently fulfil all the claims upon Him in it.

It can hardly be maintained that it concerns only the contracting parties. We are not set in this world simply as individuals, to do as we please. No exercised believer could possibly think so with the Bible in his hand. Were it so, the confusion already existing, by reason of the action of sceptics and others who seem to think that these matters concern themselves alone, would soon be worse confounded and the whole scene closed up in judgment. We are set here in relationships ordained of God, to Himself, to the family and to the state in which we live. All these claims must be

honourably met by the believer if he would be happy and useful here. The stability of the whole fabric of society depends upon this. Entering upon a new relationship closer and dearer than the others, does not mean the sacrificing of those others for it, but being taken up in harmony with them the new will be upheld and maintained by the old.

Of primary importance are

GOD'S CLAIMS.

These are paramount, and are to-day made good in the assembly, hence the assembly meeting, where the marriage is really solemnized in His sight and sealed for ever. This is more than a mere commendation of the parties to the Lord, which may be the case in other matters of interest;

the tie is formed here before God and ratified by Him in heaven.

It may be as well to trace this in the Word of God, so as to intelligently answer to His claims. In Matthew's Gospel, which is dispensational, we have several notices of the assembly until it is recognised as an existing thing upon the earth, substituting that which was of God in Israel. That which in Israel's day would have been referred to the Elohim, or Judges, is now to be referred to the assembly, "Tell it to the assembly," ch. xviii. 17, is God's final court of appeal between brethren. Thus the assembly binds or looses, because of Christ's presence there.

The assembly is first noticed, as set forth in the treasure and the pearl, in the parables of the kingdom of heaven in mystery. Ch. xiii.

In the figure of Peter sustained by Christ upon the water, is set forth the opposing circumstances to which by faith in Christ it will have to prove itself superior, and upon which it must walk. Ch. xiv.

Education in the glory and sufficiency of the Person of Christ, upon which for the assembly everything depends, culminating in Peter's notable confession, based upon the revelation of the Father to him, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," and the Lord's reply, "Upon this rock I will build my assembly," is given in chs. xv. and xvi.

Its place in the glory with Christ, the nearest to Himself, who is the centre and Sun of the whole scene and without which the kingdom cannot be set up, we have in figure in ch. xvii.

Then follows for the first time the recognition of its existence as a thing upon earth, to which, and no longer to the Judges, difficulties between brethren, amongst other things, are to be brought. "Tell it to the assembly." The assembly here is God's court of appeal for His people; there God's mind is learned, because Christ is there. So that whatever is done in the assembly under His influence and direction is made valid by God. "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (v. 18). Ch. xviii.

Finally, instruction is given to those who are now looked upon as composing the assembly, as to things that were held to be of God from the beginning, marriage, little children, etc., which instructions are thus

connected with themselves as those who represent the assembly? Here, too, we get the further restriction, "What therefore God hath joined together let no man put asunder" (v. 6). There is to be no loosing of this bond. These principles are true to faith in the light of the assembly even in days of brokenness and confusion. Ch. xix.

Then comes

THE STATE'S CLAIMS.

These must be met, not only as a matter of necessity, but of conscience, and the contract be legally entered into before a properly constituted authority.

Outside the sphere where God is known on earth marriage has always been abused in one way or another. Even in Christendom now there is great effort on the part of un-

believers to throw off the restraint of the bond, abolishing, as far as they are concerned, everything but the legal ceremony by which all are bound. To this priestcraft and ecclesiasticism has lent itself, by the way it has marred the religious ceremony, which made men desire to escape it. On this account the law of the land comes in with a strong hand and insists on a legal contract between the two parties. Then, to meet all cases, authority for the two things has been vested in one person, by including ministers of religion among licensed legal registrars, so that those who wish to combine the two can do so; while those who wish to evade the religious ceremony, from whatever cause, are free so to act.

Now all believers are bound by the law

of the land for conscience sake. But many believers with exercised consciences partook of the objection to a religious ceremony, which was false and obnoxious to them, and availed themselves of the separation between that and the legal bond. This, however, was on their part not to set God or the assembly aside, but rather to have the event ratified according to God, in simplicity, in the assembly, recognising that what is binding before God transpires there.

Again the legal bond can, under certain circumstances, be dissolved, often on very slight occasion, and divorce courts are established in the land for this purpose, where judges in these cases are kept constantly occupied. But of that which is of God and ratified before Him, the Lord Jesus said, as we have before noticed, "What

therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.”—Matt. xix. 6.

In addition to this, there are the family claims, in the midst of which, when all is happily brought about, both the others transpire, and where new joys are experienced, though not unmingled with a certain sorrow, as all here on earth is.

For a believer, then, to act as though marriage was a purely civil contract, is to take one's place with unbelievers and to ignore God's claims.

On the other hand, if exercised before God as to the state of the religious systems around him, to have the marriage conducted by a minister of religion so called, is to build again the things he has destroyed, having refused this office as unscriptural.

Yet the fellowship of the saints, the ratifi-

cation in the assembly of the new bond, is of all importance and greatly to be desired by those who wish to walk with God. What intelligent believer would be without Jesus and His disciples at his marriage? Who would miss the blessing and the joy of it, that knows what it is?

WHAT THEN IS TO BE DONE?

Putting these things together, does it not appear that the simple and happy way would be to commit oneself to God, and to answer to His desires for one's blessing, in a meeting convened for that purpose, where the marriage is celebrated before Him and ratified by the presence of the blessed Lord Jesus in the midst of His disciples, who brings with Him the wine of divine joy, the best wine! An event which may well be

described as binding before God and His people—a great comfort to the heart of those so united.

This being recognised as of primary importance, it is easy to fulfil the claims of the law of the land, not by constraint, but for conscience sake, and to enter into the legal bond before a registrar, either at his office, or at the home of one of the contracting parties. This may be done either before or after the meeting above referred to, as shall be most convenient to the parties concerned.

May the Lord grant unto His gathered people to be more exercised as to this matter and more instructed in His ways as to it. Surely we are not dependent for such things any more than for the ministry we so graciously and abundantly receive, upon those

who fill an office we cannot in conscience recognise, not finding it in the Scriptures although they may be believing men and faithful up to the light they have as to these matters.

“Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths”—Prov. iii. 5-6.

“They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which can not be removed, but abideth for ever.”—Ps. cxxv 1.

G.J.S.

