

though not married, at the time of the annunciation of the Saviour's birth. The betrothal was a time of rejoicing among the friends. We have a reference to the espousal in Longfellow's *Evangeline*. Usually, on this occasion, the bridegroom-elect gave some gift, or pledge, to the bride or her parents. From the time of the betrothal onward the betrothed considered herself sacred to her spouse. He was busy preparing a home for her. She was busy in preparing for the day of his coming to take her to that home.

Third. The marriage feast. When the probation was over, the bridegroom came with his attendants and took the bride from her home to the home prepared for her, when the nuptials were performed and the company sat down to the marriage supper. It is to this event Christ refers in the parable of the ten virgins, Matt. xxv. 1-13.

It was a time of great festivity, continuing for a number of days. It was such an occasion that Christ graced with his presence, in Cana of Galilee.

The analogy between this and spiritual things under Christ is very striking.

1. *Christ desires a union with men.* There is no thought more prominent in the gospel than this. And none more thrilling. For this Christ came to earth, died, rose, ascended, and lives on high.

2. *Christ sent his friends to win men.* John the Baptist came to prepare a people for Christ. He likens himself to the friend of the bridegroom, Jno. iii. 29. Christ sent the apostles out to tell the world of his charms, and of his desires, and to win the affections of men, and to gain the consent of men to live for him and with them. These men are called his *friends*, Jno. xv. 14. Christ comes not in person, but through these friends, to whom the task is committed of preaching the gospel to the whole creation, and making disciples of all nations.

3. *Men are publicly espoused to Christ.* When their love has been aroused, and their consent to be Christ's gained, their willingness to live for him and with him is publicly announced and celebrated. In the confession of faith of the gospel Christ is acknowledged, and in the solemn ordinance of baptism the old life of selfishness is buried, and men rise to live for Christ. So we read that when Paul preached Christ in Corinth, "many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized," Acts xviii. 8. Referring to which event Paul afterwards says: "For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ." II Cor. xi. 2. So Paul says again, that Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be wholly and without blemish; which statement he precedes, and follows, by references to the marriage relation, indicating that the betrothal, and the marriage, is the idea involved. Eph. v. 25-27.

Consequent upon this public acknowledgment of Christ there is given men a pledge, a portion of his heavenly estate. Salvation from their sins and the gift of God's good

spirit are the dowry royal with this Son of heaven's king plights his faith to the church in her espousals. This is at once the earnest of her inheritance in him and the token of his possession in her. Henceforth she is not her own, but bought with a price. She must consider herself as sacred to her spouse. He has gone to prepare a place for her in his Father's house. Jno. xiv. 1-3. The church must live for him in his absence. She must not allow her mind, or thoughts, to be corrupted from the simplicity and purity that is toward Christ. She must prepare for the final union with her Lord, to which the espousal was but preliminary.

She must, since she has been raised with Christ, "seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated on the right hand of God." She is exhorted to set her mind on things that are above, not on things that are upon the earth. For she is dead to the world; her life is hid with Christ in God. She is "wrapped up" in her beloved. Col. iii. 1-3.

4. *Christ will come for his people and unite them to Himself in an eternal union.* He shall be attended with the "holy angels." He shall gather his elect from the four winds of heaven. The dead shall be raised incorruptible, the living shall be changed, together shall they be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and so shall they ever be with the Lord. II. Thess. iv. 16, 17. That glad event was seen in vision by John the Revelator, and is described Rev. xix. 6-9, as the "Marriage Supper of the Lamb." The probation of the Church is now over. With joy has the Bridegroom brought his espoused from the earthly abode to the heavenly home. And in the midst of heaven's shining hosts, while golden harps, swept by seraphs' fingers, breathe out transporting music, the King of all worlds takes into an eternal union with himself those who have lived and waited for him on the earth. The Bride enters into the mansions of the Father's house to go no more out.

Hence the Church is taught to watch and wait for her Lord's returning; to keep her heart pure and her garments unspotted by the world. How many Christians fail to grasp the significance of this holy relationship! How prone are we to dally with the world, and forget that our affections should be sacred to Christ. How absorbed we become in our "homes" here, forgetting that we have been engaged for the home over yonder. What danger there is that we will forget our holy vows and prove unfaithful to our absent Lord.

It seems that in these matters men are more foolish than in any others. No young lady would expect to be taken in marriage by a man to whom she had repeatedly refused her heart and hand; or to whom she had proven false, after plighting her faith. Yet how many are "expecting" in some vague way to be made happy hereafter, who repeatedly reject Christ's offers of love and fellowship and salvation here. And how many, alas! who having once consented to be his, but having proven unfaithful to him, are deceiving themselves with false hopes of being accepted hereafter. Let us remember that if we desire Christ to accept us we must first accept him. And if we desire him to acknowledge us as his before the heavenly hosts, we must acknowledge him as ours—and ourselves as his, before our earthly fellows. Christ will reign supreme in our hearts, or he will abdicate the throne. He must be all, or he will be nothing to us. Let us accept him, love him supremely, live for him entirely, that we may live with him eternally.

THE DIVINE FATHERHOOD.

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The revelation of the Divine Fatherhood, as the basis of communion with God, shows the real meaning and power of prayer. Why does God regard what we say to him, and how does he answer? are questions that perplex many minds, and sometimes prove stumbling blocks in the way to the mercy-seat. The answer to these inquiries is not supplied by human reason. Jesus lets the light in on the whole subject when he says, "When ye pray, say 'Our Father.'" If man is but a factor in nature, a part of the great whole of the universe, and of no greater importance than any of the others—if he is but the result of natural law, and of no greater dignity than any other organized or unorganized body, then, indeed, there is to him no real fatherhood in God. If man is not closer to God than a sheep, then there is no reason that he should recognize God and the sheep not. From any plane lower than that on which man is placed, in the teaching of Christ, it may be that recognition of the fatherhood of God is impossible. But if man is God's child, then a recognition of the divine fatherhood is not only possible, but necessary. Shall not the child commune with the parent? The working out of parental love and care, and the response of filial love and trust, demand that intercourse between the human and the divine should exist. If in our thoughts we debase humanity, and obscure deity, we create difficulties that we cannot overcome. In the Bible God and man is brought close together. Man is wandering, but the Father has not withdrawn himself and left man to perish, but is seeking him; man is rebellious, but the Father's love will win him; man is degraded and lost, but the Father's attributes unite to save and ennoble him. What wonder is it that the cries of the child move the parent's heart? Would we not wonder if they were unheeded? The appeal to parental love is the strongest that can be made. Evidence of this is abundant all around us. Birds and beasts forget their fears and brave all dangers to answer the cries of their offspring. It is the cry of the helpless dependence and stirs the depths of parental nature. From this we learn what is the divine idea of fatherhood. And when we take this idea, and divest it of the limitations and weaknesses, with which it is associated in the creature, and link it with the perfection of the divine nature, the power of the relationship is somewhat comprehended. The Fatherhood of God is not an afterthought that is out of harmony with the constitution of things. The world is built in harmony with this relation of man to God, and it is governed in the same way. As the children of God, Christians are enriched by enjoying the privileges and blessings of the children of a King. What a real meaning the words "Our Father" has to them. They need the Father's sympathy and help. What great possibilities, what dignity, what greatness opens before them. The noblest there is in us is developed, and all littleness of feeling rebuked by the thought that God is our Father. Those who are in Christ are lifted from a position of alienation and estrangement from God to