

A GLORIOUS CHURCH NO. 628

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”
Ephesians 5:25-27.

WHAT a golden example Christ gives to His disciples! There are few masters who could venture to say, “If you would practice my teaching, imitate my life.” But the life of Jesus is the exact transcript of perfect virtue, and therefore He can point to Himself as the paragon of holiness, as well as the teacher of it. The Christian should take nothing short of Christ for his model. Under no circumstances ought we to be content unless we reflect the Grace which was in Christ Jesus. Even as a husband, which is a relationship that the Christian sustains in common with the rest of men, he is to look upon Christ Jesus as being set before him as the picture, and he is to paint according to that copy. Christ Himself being the Bridegroom of the Church, the true Christian is to seek to be such a husband as Christ was to His spouse. I fear, Brothers, that we often stop short of the Master’s example—that we compare ourselves among ourselves, and are therefore far from being wise. We think if we avoid the egregious faults of some, and can attain to the moderate virtues of others, we have done well. Let it be so no longer. He would never excel in statuary who should take the works of some mere amateur to be his copy. No; the sculptor knows that he cannot rival Praxiteles or Phidias, and yet he takes some Greek torso or bust from the antique to be his model—he must have perfection there, even if there is none in his own workmanship. The painter would never attain to eminence if he went to an exhibition and devoted himself to the study of some work of moderate worth, and said, “I will attempt to reach this, and there I will stop contented.” No, he goes to the galleries of the great masters, and though his timid pencil may not dare to hope that he shall strike out thoughts so clearly and make life stand out upon the canvas as they have done, yet he seeks to drink in their inspiration, hoping that he may rise to some proud eminence in art by imitating them. Let the Christian, then, aspire to be like his Lord who is the Author and Finisher of his faith; and let him, as he runs the heavenly race, look to Jesus, and make “the Apostle and High Priest of his profession” his continual study, and aim to be changed into His Image from glory unto glory.

You must be struck in reading the passage before us, on what high ground the Apostle takes the Christian. It is possible that some husbands might say, “How can I love such a wife as I have?” It might be a supposable case that some Christian was unequally yoked together with an unbeliever, and found himself forever bound with a fetter to one possessed of a morose disposition, or a obstinate temper, or a bitter spirit. He might therefore say, “Surely I am excused from loving in such a case as this! It cannot be expected that I should love that which is in itself so unlovely.” But mark, Beloved, the wisdom of the Apostle. He silences that excuse, which may possibly have occurred to his mind while writing the passage, by taking the example of the Savior, who loved, not because there was loveliness in His Church, but in order to *make* her lovely. You perceive “He loved His Church and gave Himself for it, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” He did not admire her because there was no spot in her; He did not choose her because she had no wrinkles; but He fixed His affections where there were many spots and wrinkles—where everything was deformity. He still set His heart, and would not withdraw till He had loved the spots away, and loved every wrinkle out of her who was the object of His choice. And now He seems to say to every Christian man, however unhappily he may have fared—“If perhaps, in the lot of Providence, you have been yoked to one who deserves but little of your affection, yet if you cannot love because of esteem, love because of pity; if you cannot love because of present merit, then love because of future hope, for possibly, even there, in that bad soil, some sweet flower may grow.

Be not weary of holy tillage, and of heavenly plowing and sowing, because at the last there may spring up some fair harvest that shall make your soul glad." He loved His Church, and gave Himself for her that He might present her to Himself a glorious Church. I do not intend, however, this morning, to enter into the duty of husbands; that is not the reason for which I selected the text, but to set forth the love of Jesus towards His people.

And first, let us consider *the object of the Savior's love*. "He loved the Church." Then let us *observe the work which love has carried on in pursuance of its gracious design*. "He gave himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it through the washing of water by the Word." Then, thirdly, let us look at *the beloved object when the design is accomplished*—"without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing." And then, let us pause awhile to *behold this beloved object, presented by our Lord to Himself in the day of His triumphant espousals*.

I. First, then, may the Spirit of God help us while we look at THE CHOSEN CHURCH, THE OBJECT OF THE SAVIOR'S LOVE.

Some of our brethren are very fond of what is called the general or universal view of God's benevolence. I trust we are not afraid to deal with that whenever we come across it in Holy Scripture. We believe that, "God is good to all, and that His tender mercies are over all His works." We believe Him to have the love of benevolence towards all His creatures, and we can preach without bated breath upon such a text as this—"He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." But some of these brethren are very much afraid of the peculiar and special sign of the Savior's love, and they seem to shrink from a text which has anything particular and discriminating in it; and they shake it off from their hand into the fire as Paul did the viper of old. Now we thank God we have learned to love the distinguishing Doctrines of Grace, and that predestination and discrimination are not hard words for us to pronounce now, and neither do they grate upon our ears; but we love to read this text, and put the emphasis upon the accusative case. Christ loved the *Church* and gave Himself for *it*. We perceive that Christ did not love the *world* in the sense in which the term "loved" is here meant. We see here that Christ gave Himself not for the *world*, but for *it*, that is the Church. In the sense in which He is said here to give Himself, He did so for none except His chosen people, the Church—His one, special and particular object of affection. It is not thus that Christ has loved universal creatureship—and all mankind alike without exception or difference—but He loved the Church, and gave Himself for *it*.

Now what is this Church which Jesus Christ loved, if it is not the entire company of the elect? As many as the Father gave Him from before the foundation of the world, whose names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life before the stars began to shine—as many as were taken by Him to be the sheep of His pasture, the jewels of His crown, the children of His Love, the subjects of His Kingdom, the members of His body, each one of them being particularly known to Him, and chosen in Him before the mountains lifted their heads into the clouds—so many compose the Church of Christ which was the object of His redeeming Love.

We have to search for these chosen ones in what is called the Church visible. We know that they are not all Israel who are of Israel, and that the visible Church is not identical with that Church which Christ loved, and for which He gave Himself. There is a Church *invisible*, and this is the center, and life of the Church visible! What the wheat is to the chaff and heap upon the threshing floor, such are these living Christians among the mass of professors in the world. There is a distinction which we cannot see, which it is not for us to try and make manifest, lest, in endeavoring to root up the tares, we root up the wheat also. There is an unseen Church which becomes visible in Heaven, which will be apparent and manifest at the coming of the Son of Man. This it is which Christ loved, and for which He gave Himself.

Now observe what this Church was *by nature*, for that is the subject of our discourse just now upon this first head. The Church which Christ loved was in her origin as sinful as the rest of the human race. Have the damned in Hell fallen through Adam's transgression? So had the saved in Glory once. The sin which was imputed to lost spirits was equally and with as fatal consequences imputed to them, and had it not been for the incoming of the Covenant Head, the Second Adam, they had forever suffered with the rest. They, too, were alike depraved in nature. Is the heart deceitful above all things in the unregenerate? So it is in the elect before regeneration. Was the will perverse? Was the understanding darkened? Was the whole head sick, and the whole heart faint in the case of those who continued in sin? It was just the same, at first, with those who have been, by Sovereign Grace, taken into the heart of Christ. "We were," says the Apostle, "by nature the children of wrath even as others." Remember that between the brightest saint in Heaven, and the blackest sinner in Hell, there is no difference except that which *Christ* has made. Had those glorified ones been left to continue in

their natural state, they would have sinned as foully, and as constantly as the worst of sinners have done. To begin with, there is no difference between the Election and the non-election. They are all alike fallen; “they are all gone out of the way—they are altogether become unprofitable; there is none that does good, no, not one.”

No, more, this Church of Christ is made up of persons who are *actually defiled* by their own transgressions. Are you and I members of that Church? Ah, then we are compelled to confess that in us by nature dwelt all manner of concupiscence, vileness, and an evil heart of unbelief, always prone to depart from the living God, and to rebel against the Most High. And what have we done since? Or rather, what have we *not* done?—

*“We wandered each a different way,
But all the downward road.”*

We did not all fall into the same vices, but still when the black catalog of sin is read, we have to weep over it, and to say, “Such were some of us.” And why we should be made a part of Christ’s Church is a question that never can be answered except with this one reply, “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.” Do the wicked sink to Hell with their sins like millstones about their necks? We would have sunk there, too, and as rapidly, and as fatally, unless Eternal Love had said, “Deliver him from going down into the pit, for I have found a ransom.” Look at Christ’s Church as you see her visibly in the world, and I ask you, Brothers and Sisters, though she has much about her that is admirable, whether there is not much that might cause her Lord to cast her away? Even in her regenerate state, she speaks truly when she says, “she is black as the tents of Kedar.” Mark the hypocrites who come into the Christian Church and mar her purity. Observe the formalists that crowd her courts—that sit as God’s people sit, and sing as God’s people sing—but have hearts full of rottenness and villainy! Observe even the true saints—how unbelieving, how often carnally-minded, how childish—how ready to murmur against God! How few of them are fathers in Israel. When they ought to be teachers, they have need to be instructed in the first elements of the faith. What heresies come into the Church, and how many unstable minds are carried away with them. What divisions there are! How one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” and a third, “I am of Christ.” What envy there is, what backbiting of those who are eminent for usefulness. What suspicions against those who are a little more zealous than their fellows! My Brothers and Sisters, what a lack of affection we can see in the Church of Christ; how little brotherly kindness, how little sympathy!

On the other hand, how much of pride is discovered—how much *caste* creeps in and prevails even among those who profess to be Brethren! How we find some claiming to be lords in God’s heritage, and taking to themselves names and titles to which they have no right, seeing that, “One is our Master,” and we are not to be called, “Rabbi,” among men. When I look at the Church even with a blinded eye, having no power to see her as God’s Omniscient eyes must see, yet is she covered with spots! Well may she wear her veil, and say, “Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun has looked upon me.” O Church of God, how is it that Jesus Christ could love you, for even in your Church capacity, and Church estate, there is so much that could make Him say, “You are reprobate silver; you shall be cast into the fire.” Lo, how much there is that must make Him say of you, “Salt is good, but this salt has lost its savor, and how shall it be seasoned? It is therefore good for nothing but to be trod under foot of men.”

And yet you see, dear Friends, it is written that Christ loved His Church, and gave Himself for her. I think I see it—a piece of untilled ground—neither hedged, nor walled, nor covered with vines, nor redolent with the perfume of sweet flowers, but it is a spot in the wilderness, filled with thorns and thistles; her hedges are broken down; the stones of her walls are scattered; the wild boar out of the woods waste her; all kinds of unclean creatures lurk among her weeds and brambles. Oh, how is it, Lord of Glory, that You could buy, at the price of Your heart’s blood, such a waste piece of ground as that? What could You see in that garden, that You should determine to make it the fairest spot of all the earth, and that it should yield You the richest of all fruit?

I think, again, I see the Church of God, not as a fair maid decorated for her marriage day with jewels, and carrying herself right gloriously both in her person and her apparel; but I see her as a helpless child, neglected by her parents, cast out, unwashed, unclothed, left uncared for, and covered with her filth and blood. No eyes pity her; no arms come to bring her salvation. But the eyes of the Lord Jesus look upon that infant, and straightway love beams forth from those eyes, and speaks from those lips, and acts through those hands. He says, “Live!” And the helpless infant is cared for—she is nurtured—she is decked with dainty apparel; she is fed and clothed, and sustained, and made lovely through the love-

liness of Him who chose Her. Thus it is that strong love moved the Grace of God, and the Church found that Christ gave Himself for her.

I must not, however, leave this point without reminding you of what kind of love it is which Jesus Christ gives to His Church—you perceive it is the love of a husband. Now the love of a husband is *special*. Those gentlemen who think that Christ did not love the Church more than He loved the rest of the world, must have a very strange idea of how a husband ought to love his wife, for it says, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church.” And surely a husband ought to love his wife more than he loves other people! Therefore Christ cherishes for the Church a special, particular affection which is set upon *her* rather than upon the rest of mankind. The Lord has set His Church as much above the rest of the world as He has fixed His own Throne above the kings and princes of this lower earth, and the day shall come when she, “fair as the moon, and clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners,” shall be recognized as being the favorite of Heaven, the peculiar treasure of Christ—His regalia, the crown of His head, the bracelet of His arm, the breastplate of His heart, the very center and core of His own love. Let us not quibble at this Truth of God, for it is exceedingly precious. Let us seek the honey out of it, and believe that Christ loves the Church with a special love.

Again, a husband loves his wife with a *constant* love, and so does Christ His Church. He will not cast her away tomorrow having loved her today. He does not vary in His affection; He may change in His *display* of affection, but the affection itself is still the same. A husband loves his wife with an *enduring* love; it will never die out—he says, “Till death us do part will I cherish you,” but Christ will not even let death part His love to His people. “Nothing shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” A husband loves his wife with a *heartly* love, with a love that is true and intense. It is not mere lip service; he does not merely speak, but he acts; he is ready to provide for her needs; he will defend her character; he will vindicate her honor because his heart is set upon her. It is not merely with the eyes that he delights, now and then, to glance upon her, but his soul has her continually in his remembrance; she has a mansion in his heart from where she can never be cast away; she has become a portion of himself—she is a member of his body—she is part of his flesh and of his bones. And so is the Church to Christ forever, an eternal spouse. He says—

*“Forget you, I will not, I cannot; your name
Engraved on My heart does forever remain;
The palms of My hands while I look on, I see
The wounds I received when suffering for thee.”*

Now let us leave this point, only reminding you, again, that this Church is only the Church of Christ because He has made her so. She had no right or title to His affection; He loved her because He *chose* to do so, and having once loved her, He never will divorce her—she shall be His, world without end.

II. And now I shall want your patience a few minutes on the second point, and that is THE WORK WHICH LOVE SEEKS TO ACCOMPLISH IN ITS GRACIOUS DESIGNS.

Since the Church is not fit for Christ by nature, He resolved to make her so by Divine Grace. He could not be in communion with sin. Therefore it must be purged away. Perfect holiness was absolutely necessary in one who was to be the bride of Christ. He purposes to work that in her, and to make her qualified to be His spouse eternally. The great means by which He attempts to do this, is, “He gave Himself for her.”

Beloved, I wish I had the power of speech this morning as one sometimes has it, or rather, I wish that another had to handle such a weighty theme as this—for how can I set forth to you the preciousness of this gift? He gave Himself for His Church. Had He given His crown and royalty, and come down to earth for a while, that were mercy. Had He given up, for a time, the happiness and pleasure of His Father’s house, this were something—and this He did. But it was not enough. He would not merely leave His Glory, and part with His crown—He must give Himself. Here He is on earth, born of the Virgin; a helpless Infant, He slumbers at her breast. Throughout His life, foxes had holes, and birds of the air nests, but “He had not where to lay His head.” He has given you much in this. “He is despised and rejected of men, a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” The crown of thorns is on His brow, the lash of the scourge is on His back, the spear is at His chest, the nails are in His hands and feet. He has given you much, but now He is about to give you all He has. He is stripped naked to His shame; He gives His last garment that He may cover the nakedness of man, but when He cries, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me!” when having drank the last drop of the bitter cup of woe, He bows His head and says, “It is finished!” and He gives up the ghost—He has given you all that He can give—for He has

given you Himself. He gives you His Godhead; that comes on earth, but is veiled in clay; He gives you His entire Manhood, for His body is given to the scourge and tomb, and His soul to agony and death—He gives Himself.

Perhaps you will say, “But how does His giving Himself tend to cleanse His Church?” You know, Beloved, how the precious blood of His heart takes away sin; how the Righteousness of His life covers His Church, and makes her beautiful in the sight of God; you know how the water which flowed with the blood purifies and sanctifies His people, but, perhaps you will never realize better how Christ gives Himself to you than you do at the sacramental table. There in type and symbol you see in that bread, His broken body; you see set forth in shadow in that wine, His blood. And what do you do with that bread? Do you look at it? Yes, with tears in your eyes. What do you do with the cup? Do you regard it? Yes, with loving eyes. But this is not all. “Take, eat!” says the Savior. “Drink, drink all of it,” He says. And as you eat and drink, you are thereby reminded of the great Truth of God that He has given you His flesh to eat, and His blood to drink—and that these, like some healing medicine, will purge you of all diseases, cleanse you of every lingering cancer, go through and through the secret parts of your soul, and expel with their sanctifying influence the very roots and seeds of corruption, and make you perfect in every good work to do His will. I admit that you may not feel this at present, but you have that within you in having received Christ which will be the death of all sin. He has given Himself to dwell in you, to kill every lust, to slay every corruption, to expel the Canaanites out of the Canaan of your heart till King David shall reign in Jerusalem, and the Jebusite shall be put away forever. Beloved, this is the way in which He sanctifies and cleanses His Church—by giving Himself for her—first upon the tree, and afterwards in the Church, by the work of the Holy Spirit as a quickening and cleansing power, dwelling there forevermore.

When the text says, “He gave Himself for it that He might sanctify and cleanse it,” is there not allusion here to the double cure of sin? Here is Christ sanctifying by the Spirit, that is to say, taking away the propensity to sin—killing the power of sin in us—helping us to reign over our corruptions that we may in heart and life be pure, even as our Father which is in Heaven is pure. And as to the cleansing, may not that allude to Justification and pardon? Of that we spoke particularly last Sunday to our own joy if not to yours [Sermon #627, Volume 11—JUSTIFICATION AND GLORY—read/download, by God’s Grace, all 63 volumes of CH Spurgeon sermons, and over 475 Spanish translations free of charge at www.spurgeongems.org]. We are complete in Him; We are perfect in Christ Jesus, and the design of Christ is that sanctification shall be as perfect as Justification—that the power of sin shall be as thoroughly slain as the guilt of it—that altogether sin shall cease to be in the Christian.

But what is the outward instrumentality which Christ uses? The text says, “With the washing of water by the Word.” We Baptists are generally thought to lay great stress upon Baptism. There can be no greater mistake made than to suppose that we exaggerate its importance! I sometimes think we do not value it enough. Those who practice infant baptism might be much more fairly charged with exaggerating the importance of Baptism than those of us who scrupulously require a profession of faith from all persons before we think of baptizing them into the name of the Lord. I do not believe that Baptism is intended here, nor even referred to. I know that the most of commentators say it is. I do not think it. It strikes me that one word explains the whole. Christ sanctifies and cleanses us by the washing of water, but what sort of water? By the Word. The water which washes away sin, which cleanses and purifies the soul is the Word. The Word of God has a cleansing influence. It comes and convicts the man of sin. It makes him see his impurity so as to hate it. When applied with power by the Holy Spirit, it works repentance; it leads the man to weep and bewail himself before God. That same Word leads to faith in Christ Jesus, and faith works by love, and purifies the soul. The Word is preached, the Word is believed; and as soon as ever that Word is believed, it begins to act like water in the heart of man. You cannot receive the Gospel, and yet be as filthy as you were before. My Brothers and Sisters, if you really welcome the Truth of God, those grosser sins will be washed away at once. Next, as you discover them, your besetting sins will be cleansed away, and constantly—as you understand the Word better, believe it more firmly, and feel its effect more powerfully—you will by it, as by water, be washed and cleansed from all indwelling sin till you are sanctified and cleansed and made fit to enter into Heaven. This one thing let me say solemnly—I go not into this world to preach the efficacy of baptismal water in cleansing souls from sin. Let those who care to do it, and think it their office, magnify their office exceedingly. Let those who think that sacraments have necessarily efficacy in them, stand out and boldly declare it; but, as for us, we believe that the water which cleanses is none other than the Word of God, which is preached by man, and applied by the Holy Spirit. We rest upon the uplifted Cross of Christ, upon the Doctrine of His Atonement, on the great Truth of His abiding Presence in the Church of God, and ever pray, “Sanctify us by Your Truth, Your Word is Truth.”

And, mark you, the world has had a fair trial of both plans. Throughout the dark ages, the world tried the efficacy of Baptisms and sacraments—century after century Popery and priest-craft gutted the world with the idea that Baptism and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper were a prescription for cleansing away sin. What was the result? Were not the cities filled with harlots? Were not the dungeons crowded with prisoners? Had not the earth become an Aceldama, and was not the whole land, like Sodom, reeking with filth? Then came Luther and Calvin, and though these men held not all the Truth of God in its fullness, yet, at least they held "the washing of water by the Word," and Luther, and Zwingli, and Calvin declared, "The world's great purgative is faith in Jesus Christ, not sacraments. The priesthood lies with Christ, and not with men. Priest-craft is to be put away. Justification is by faith in Jesus Christ, and that faith comes by hearing, and that hearing by the preaching of the Word." And what happened? Why, the world woke as from a long slumber! She found herself in chains—she snapped the chains as Samson snapped the green withes. Progress came—knowledge, light, truth—and if the world is not holy, yet what strides has she made since the day when Tetzels "Indulgence for Sin" defiled the world through and through to its very center with blasphemy! We have but to keep on using this washing of water by the continual preaching of the Word, and the day shall come when our poor planet shall be cleansed from blood and filth, and shall come out from the mists in which she is now enveloped, and shine like her sister stars, bright in the light of her God! And the only sounds that shall be heard from her shall be songs of joy and peace, because the Lord God Omnipotent reigns. This, then, is Christ's way of cleansing and sanctifying His Church—by the washing of water, that is to say, by the Word of God.

III. And now let us pass on, again troubling your patience, to the third point—THE LOVED ONE AS SHE IS PERFECTED.

One is inclined to draw a veil over the face of beauty which never can be painted. She is to be a *glorious* Church. We love our own highly-favored Church. I am sure there is not a member of it—at least I do not know one—who does not feel his heart leap every time he thinks of this Church which God has so prospered, and blessed, and honored. For all that, we are nothing but a militant Church, and a very imperfect one—a Church that has cause to mourn and humble herself before God for many sins. And I, as pastor, looking upon you all, cannot help while I bless God for all I see that is excellent, bowing my own head in the dust because of the sins of a people favored with the Gospel who, nevertheless, have much to confess before God. We are not a *glorious* Church. You can cast your eyes upon such churches as the Moravians who gave themselves up, men and women, to Christ's cause, and scattered themselves all over the world, preaching the Gospel. Greenland was not too cold, the Sahara was not too hot—they sacrificed everything for Christ—but yet the Moravian Church with all its excellence has much of which it may well repent. It is not a glorious Church. You may look where you like, and you shall see that the dust of travel is still upon the wilderness Church. She has the Presence of God—she has her Shekinah—but alas, she is troubled within by a mixed multitude. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, sometimes vex her. Her Master sometimes has to send her fiery serpents, and she still needs to keep the bronze serpent lifted up every day; for even in her ranks, there are some that still need to look and live.

We have no glorious Church on earth, nor do I think we can get much idea of what a glorious Church is. I tried yesterday, last Sunday, rather, (and all the days since then seem to have gone so rapidly that I thought of it yesterday). I tried last Sunday to show what a glorious *person* was. But what must a glorious *Church* be? There is one lamp. Well, that is very bright, very pleasing; you like to have it in your room—but think of all London illuminated to the very top of the cross of St. Paul's—and what an idea you then have of brightness. Now, one glorified Christian is a lamp. Think, then, of all Heaven with its domes of Glory lit up with ten thousands times ten thousands companies of blood-bought spirits whom Jesus Christ has taken up—a *glorious Church*! One flower is very sweet. I smell its perfume. But I walk into some vast conservatories, into some gentleman's garden, acres in size, and there are beds of flowers—blue, and scarlet, and yellow. I see the verbena, the calceolaria, and the geranium and many others, all in order and in ranks. Oh, how glorious is this! Those undulating lawns, those well-trimmed hedges, those trees so daintily kept—all growing in such luxuriance. One flower is sweet, but a garden! A garden! Who can tell how sweet this is? So, one glorified saint is one of God's flowers, but a glorious Church is Christ's garden. A drop of water may be very precious to a thirsty tongue, but a river full of it! Children are pleased, when for the first time in their lives they sail across some little lake, but how surprised they are when they come to the deep and rolling sea which seems without shore or bottom! Well, so pleased am I at the very thought of the glorious Church. As yet I have never seen anything but one little lake—this Church—the Church of

God in England, the Church of God in the world—what is it, after all, but “a drop in a bucket”? But the *glorious* Church—the whole of the people of God gathered together in one, all perfectly free from sin, all made like unto Christ, and all bright with the Glory which excels even that which Moses and Elijah had when they were with Christ in the holy mountain, or such as Moses had when he came down from the top of Horeb, when he had been 40 days with God—a *glorious* Church, a mighty company of *glorified beings*!

But do observe what is said of her. She is to be, “Without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” “Without spot”—that is much; but, you see, spots can be taken off. The face is washed, and the spot comes out; the garment is thoroughly cleansed, and there are some chemicals and acids applied, and the spots can be removed. Though, truly, some of us have scarlet spots of a crimson-like dye, yet the blood of Jesus is a wonderful detergent, and it can get out spots of any color. Though we may have been lying in the lye-tub of sin even for 70 years, yet Christ will get all the spots out of us if we are a part of His Church. Though His Church is double dyed, yet Christ will make her white as snow.

But that is not the wonder of the text; the marvel is, “without spot or *wrinkle*.” You may get a spot out of your face, but you cannot smooth out a wrinkle! You may make what efforts you please, but you cannot get rid of your wrinkles. You who are getting old, if time has come and driven his plow across your brow, why the furrows will remain there—they will not come out. Yes, but the Church of Christ is to be without wrinkle as well as without spot! How will He get the wrinkles out? There is no chemical that I know of that can get rid of them. But Jesus Christ has a sacred art, having in Himself, by the washing of water, even the Word, the power to get wrinkles out! Lightfoot says there is an allusion here to the carefulness of the Jew in his ablutions. The Jew not only washes very carefully when he is purifying himself for worship, but lest any dust or impurity should remain in any crack of the skin, or in any wrinkle, he seeks by washing again and again with the severest care, to get out the least filth that would be in the wrinkle. Very good, Dr. Lightfoot, but the Jew cannot wash wrinkles out; he can wash away the dirt, but he cannot get rid of the wrinkle. But Christ can banish away both. Another good writer says, that perhaps there is an allusion here to the fuller’s trade. The fuller gets out the spots first, and then as the cloth may have been so folded up that there are creases and wrinkles in it, he uses different stretching and millings, till at last he manages to get out the creases and wrinkles from the cloth as well as the spot. I do not know whether there is an allusion to that, but this I know—there shall not be a spot of sin on any of God’s people, nor yet a wrinkle of infirmity. They shall lose the effect of old age and weakness in their bodies, and they shall lose the defects and infirmities in their souls. The outward spot shall be removed, and the inward deformity, which was like a wrinkle ingrained into their very nature, shall also be taken away.

But do observe the next word. The Holy Spirit seems to exhaust language to describe this purity. He says, “Without spot, or wrinkle, or *any such thing!*” She shall have nothing *like* a spot, nothing that can be *construed* as a wrinkle—she shall be fair, and the world shall be compelled to acknowledge that she is. The eyes of God shall look upon her; and though He sees in darkness, and discovers the hidden things of night, even He shall discern neither spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing in any one single part of the body or the soul of any one of the members of the mystical body of Christ. Oh what perfection, Beloved, is this! I cannot speak of it, but I can delight in thinking of it. I was trying to think last night what I should be like when I was freed from my spots and wrinkles. Ah, you can all see them now—I wonder you put up with them sometimes! But what shall I be when I have parted with them forever? And I *shall* get rid of them. Death is stamped on every infirmity—the Lord has put the poison into the heart of my inbred sins, and bless His name for it. But what will you and I be like when we are perfect? No hasty temper, no sloth, no wrong thoughts, no cold hearts, no problems in prayer, no sluggishness in praise. Oh, Brothers and Sisters, there will be some of you so different, we shall scarcely know you! When some Brethren die, I believe they will go to Heaven, but they will be strangely altered by the time they get there. They are good people, but they have such crotchety ways, such strange sense of humor, such hot tempers, that surely we shall have to be very wise people to know them in Heaven! We shall need to be informed who they are, they will be so greatly changed; but this will be the happy state of all—whether altered much or little—we shall be, “without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.”

I must not dwell longer, though the theme invites it. Hypocrisies, heresies, declensions, divisions—all these will be put away from the Church. Infirmity, doubt, sin, fear of every kind will be put away from every Believer, and we shall be presented blameless, holy, and unprovable in the sight of God.

IV. And lastly, THE LOVED ONE IS TO BE PRESENTED.

It is said, He is “to present her to Himself.” Every day Christ presents His people to His Father in His intercession. The Holy Spirit presents poor sinners every day in conversion to Christ, but there is to be a day when Christ will present His glorious Church “to Himself.” When He shall come, then shall be the wedding day. There shall be heard the cry, “Behold, the Bridegroom comes!” Then the virgins with their lamps trimmed shall go forth to meet Him, and His Church shall enter into the supper, to sit down and sup with Him and He with her. Today the Church is like Esther bathing herself in spices, making herself ready for Ahasuerus, her lord and master; today we are engaged, at the coming we shall be married. We are now waiting impatiently for Him, then we shall be in His embrace. Today we wear not the crown, today we wave not the palm, but tomorrow when He comes, we shall be crowned with Him and triumph with Him. Let us long for His appearing. Let this bright hope sustain you in the dreary months of waiting, and the weary hours of fighting, “He comes! He comes!” And when He comes, He will be glorified in all His saints, and admired in those who have believed on Him.

I would to God we were all members of His Church. There is only one token of membership which is Infallible, and that is, saving faith in Christ. If you believe in Jesus, you shall be without spot or wrinkle; but if you believe not, you are not of His Church, and neither shall you be a partaker of His cleansing power nor of His glorious Advent.

God give you a new heart and a right spirit, and wash you with water this day by the Word, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

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