

Christ and the Church:

Husbands and Wives.

Ephesians 5.

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Christian Friend Vol. 6, p. 141.

The exhortation through Ephesians is of a peculiar character. I think generally believers in the present day are not sufficiently aware that it is an exhortation based and built on the fact that we have got the life that expresses itself in the particular way which this epistle traces out. God made man, and there were certain things according to the first creation right and proper for the creature. Dependence on the word of God, and love toward all his fellows, man has lost all the power of that through sin. There is then a new creation, and that creation is described in the first chapter of this epistle. We are God's workmanship (Eph. 2: 10); that is, we are the thing which He has made. Ver. 9: "Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." It is not workmanship as a thing in which God is acting at the present time (that is quite true); but if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature — he is altogether taken out of the old into fellowship with the new. Christ, as a man down here, essentially divine, perfectly pure, had power to do God's will, and did it. I am in Christ, and then came the works He has created us to — works essentially different from those of the first Adam. The works we have traced out in the end of chaps. 4 and 5 are the works of truth, and of love, and of light — of truth, in that God revealed what was truth when His Son came into the world; of love, in that God delighted in Christ, and has so united a people with Him that He can so speak of us as being "in Christ." He says, "Be ye followers of God as dear children, and walk in love as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us."

And then again (v. 8), He brings out light: "Ye were sometimes darkness, now are ye light in the Lord." These works we found redemption works. Adam could not know "the truth." It is not truth abstractedly; it is Christ, the full expression of what God is, and the full discovery of what man's need is; that is, the truth in which I have been created. Bring Christianity into the scene, everything gets its character stamped upon it according to what Christ is. "All His paths drop fatness," tender mercy, and goodness, as He goes through the work. Am I a Christian — God's workmanship in Christ? Truth: what is the truth? Do you talk about the truth? Why, you are a sinner! I say, "You need not tell me that. My sinnership and the measure of my saintship have been proclaimed upon the throne of God; for the Lamb of God, who died for me, is there." Righteousness: I am in Christ. How can God receive one who has no claim on Him at all? Surely if He honours the Christ of God, He will turn His back upon the man who is the very contrast. Ah, yes! but Christ has sat down as the Saviour, and righteousness is secured to me in Him — the righteousness of God. Was it right for God to receive Christ? Ah! surely it was. He sits there at God's right hand as the Saviour. It was for sinners with not a rag, not a title to present. By the very extremity of the evil connected with me, Christ cannot do without me. He wants me for the very proof of what that very righteousness is in which He is before God.

Then the "love." Well, how did all the real delight of God have a sweet smelling savour? Where did it come out? Just where Christ met all the very thoughts of God: "I could sweep man away with the besom of destruction; but then, I have not my own way. I will have mercy, and not sacrifice; I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." The Father turned to the Son as the only Person who could meet the difficulty; therefore He met the Father's mind, and made Himself a sweet savour unto God as

meeting the question of the holiness of God. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." "Now are we the sons of God." Love, beloved, would humble by love.

"Now are ye light in the Lord." It is all perfect light. We can draw near to the holiness of God, right through the veil up to the place where God Himself is, and dwell in the light, and see God, what He is. I am part of God's workmanship in that way; and after tracing out those three elements of the new creation as He does in the fifth chapter, He comes down to a sort of testing of our hearts and circumstances where we are, and He says, "Now let joy abound in your hearts." The mind of man is onesided; it will go into great joy, and forget other things; and He who wrote this knew there was need, so He puts in another word, "Rejoice evermore; and again I say, Rejoice:" Now, that is a test for what you are really down here in the wilderness. Can you give thanks always for all things? It is a test of the grace really in its purity in us. "Giving thanks always for all things." The workmanship of God can bear that test. "Rejoice evermore." God is my joy, and I am for Him. Christ is my exceeding great reward; and though He remove real blessings from us as He often does, we are to give thanks always for all things. Have I not enough to rejoice in, not only when He barks the fig-tree, and lays bare the vines, but in spiritual conflicts, temptation, so as to bring out our weakness? "Giving thanks always for all things;" that is a part of what the privilege of the Christian is according to this new nature He has given to us.

A little word, a happy word, I would put in from Philippians. A bold, confident man would say, "I have learnt the whole lesson." God had him in the school teaching him. What should enable Paul to say to those Philippians, "It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure"? There is God working in, and before there is God working in, there is the having set us in Christ. He is working in us according to the nature He has brought us into. Then He takes up these relationships down here; and it is most blessed to see how not only all these things in connection with domestic life — wives and husbands, parents and children, servants and masters, which, alas! man in this nineteenth century so dishonours on earth - how all these things passed before the mind of the blessed Lord as the Spirit has given them.

Just for a moment or two let me call your attention to what was more particularly upon my mind, what is said of Christ in His love. First of all, He is said to be the Head of the Church, and the Saviour of the body. Now the Church, in the sense it is spoken of here as His body, is made up, so far as the elements of it are concerned, of sons of God. The title is special. Before I can belong to that Church I must be a son of God; but creating a body for Christ was needful to God. Brought to Him in that sense, we find there is a certain measure of glory, moral glory, which will come out in displaying that He is the Head of the body, and we are members in particular. (v. 25.) He speaks of His love. I find often a good deal of practical truth in the way that is presented: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church." "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you." I lay the stress entirely upon "as I have loved you;" that is, Christ took up the believer before the foundation of the world by the hand of God. It makes all the difference, if I do that to my brethren; it is not that I have got to pay out love to them, much less expect it, but I have got to look at the believer and say, there is a man that God gave to Christ before the foundation of the world. He may be walking very rightly towards me; never mind. Christ did not throw up His shoulder towards Peter; He brought Peter down, knew how to do it, knows each one as given to Christ before the foundation of the world, and therefore having power to find fresh water to wash one another's feet, "even as Christ." He did not love us first of all when He was in the world; so He says, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church." We have His love and His conduct brought out to us in Philippians. He was

associated with His Father in the thought that it would be a good thing for God to go off the throne and become a man, stain the pride of man's heart, to show how a man could be down here on earth in dependence upon God, doing nothing but God's will.

He had this love, everything, in association with God. God trusted Him for it, sent Him for it. He came the perfect servant; therefore when He says in that verse, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church," it is not only that the love of the husband is to be a love that spends itself, but he must take up the object on whom the love is spent and connect it with the mind of God; then it is all self-denial on the part of the husband. The first thing when this company was brought before His mind was, not only that He loved them, as sons of God, or as a body that would be brought by Him into the glory, where God and the Lamb would display all their glory, but that He had to give Himself for it.

The merchantman seeking goodly pearls found one pearl of great price, and went and sold all that he had and bought it. The Son of God could not have the Bride at all if He had remained in divine glory. He must take a lower place in which man could become associated with Him; utterly go down to qualify us for that glory. He took a place by which He could; He gave Himself for it, and then again, "that He might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water by the word," set it apart. None but He who was the Son of God could have given that Nazariteship to the Church which is here expressed. When Christ met us first of all, beloved, we had nothing but sin. What would cleanse us? What had we of our own but sin? Nothing could take out the scarlet stain of sin but His own life-blood, and that blood has touched my conscience. I am separated by that blood; that blood is on my conscience; I am to walk as separated to God. There is the putting apart, and the washing of water by the Word, the constant application of the word of God to the soul to keep up cleanliness, the cleansing of all. It could not be unless the Son of God had us in His hands. Then after the separation — primarily to God, if any child of God sin we have an advocate with the Father" — it comes in to keep the conscience clean; there is the constant application of the word of God to us. He applies the word by the Spirit to the heart of the babe in Christ to show that he was not under condemnation, but under acceptance; to the young man, that he cannot identify himself with the things round about him, be cannot carry the dust of earth into heaven. You understand this word? Your answer is, "Following Him into heaven you get rid of it." He applies the word in entirely different ways to each one of us, not only to classes, but to each separate soul. There is love! What a variety of expression His love has! The Son of God, to identify Himself with the Father's mind in the thoughts of God that He should have a Church, quietly waiting, and His love never failing during four thousand years, finding nothing in man to commend man to Him - all in Himself. His love perfectly ready for God, laid out for them to do everything for Him; the first thought in His mind, after waking up out of the grave, thoughts of love about His people — "My Father and your Father, my God and your God." "Go and tell Peter." What blessed words of love! And nearly two thousand years have run their course, and He is just as diligent on the part of those who are brought to Him now as He was then. Did you ever think of the extraordinary position we are in as the manifestation of His love? Because He bore you upon His heart, and me. He saw us in the stream of time, just picked us up, and is making us know the love, just as His people were brought out through the wilderness. Perhaps He will appear before we get to the end of the course. Then there will be the thought, expressed according to His mind and His Father's mind, what this love of God is - "the Church given me as my Bride;" this Church connected with the manifestation of the glory of God. He will present it to Himself — He will, and with triumph. There is what He throws the husband upon as the well of water where he would always find water. The Christian's springs are never dry. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." There is love in Christ's heart for us. The one who is called to hold the place of a husband can draw from that spring fresh water to enable his soul — what? to please himself in his wife? No; to take her up in the association where she is set, to help her — never

a will of his own, always with this thought about God.

Then, on the other hand, when he speaks about the wife it is just the same beautiful help given to the soul in the circumstances. He says, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." You follow me as I follow Christ. A thousand little things that it makes no difference how they are settled unless it be according to God. If I were a husband, and had to settle the burden of the responsibility, then the wife is quit of it clearly, and the will is bowed. The responsibility rests upon the other side. Well now, a servant with a master — a tyrant? Never mind; it is God trying me, not my master. Just leave it in the Lord's hands, perfectly willing in subjection to Him. A most blessed thing it is, beloved, where the wife finds grace in all that passing relationship (for it is a passing one) not to take it up as that which will minister to her own joy, but finds herself as the one he can reckon on most blessedly from the retired position in communion with the Lord, so that when in the hurry and drive of the business and duty of the husband he expresses what should be done, he just finds her heart at home with Christ. I do not know what tells more on real character than just finding this. When the husband, perhaps a strong character, can say this of wife, "Well, the one thought of her soul is, what will please Christ? Why do I not do this thing? Well, I found my wife praying about the thing, and she was not sure it was His mind." "Shall we not be more like the world if we do this thing?" It is not the putting forth her own will; it is really being the keeper of the king's head. "God has given me one whose thought is always what the Lord would have." It would be the very thing to keep the husband and his heart before God, who knew over and over again where his foot would have slid, but there was one in the Lord's presence watching and praying before God to find out what was the Lord's mind, and throwing the mind forward because of the very difficulties, so that the heart can pass on quietly. We have the ear of our God, and His ear is not heavy that it cannot hear; and His arm is stretched forth in the token of His love to the people that know His name and hang upon Him. G.V.W.