

THE  
EVERLASTING ESPOUSALS;

Being a Sermon preached at the administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, August, 1714.

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Hos. ii. 19,  
*And I will betroth thee unto me for ever.*

THIS solemn ordinance we are called to partake of, is the feast of the espousals betwixt Jesus Christ and believers, as also the seal thereof; wherefore it is necessary the guests be such as are espoused to Christ, being brought "into the bond of the marriage covenant," otherwise the seal is but profaned. The text shows us, that all is ready for these espousals on Christ's part; there is nothing to hinder the happy match, if sinners be willing. Our eyes do see this day, that even the seal of the covenant, the holy sacrament is ready for us; and thus we have a fair occasion to advance our eternal interest. There is such affinity betwixt marriage and death, that every marriage-contract amongst men has a clause of death in it. Our marriage-vows run in these terms, "Till God shall separate us by death:" so that the dying day must needs stare the parties in the face on their marriage-day; and the marriage-bed is but a preamble to the death-bed. But, behold, here is a marriage-contract without that shocking clause, nay, plainly excluding it; "I will betroth thee unto me for ever."

I have already explained these words; but I shall put you in remembrance of the nature of betrothing or espousing, as it was used amongst the Jews, seeing it gives light into the text. Betrothing or espousing was the bridegroom's taking the bride into a marriage-covenant. It was done publicly before witnesses, under a canopy or tent set up for that purpose: and hereunto it is thought the Psalmist alludes, Psalm xix. 4, 5, "In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun: which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber." Some competent time intervened betwixt the espousals and the solemnizing and consummating of the marriage. Nevertheless, by the espousals, they were truly husband and wife, as appears from

Matth. i. 18, 19, 20, where, while Mary was yet but espoused to Joseph, he is called her husband, and she his wife: and therefore, if a betrothed virgin was defiled in the city, both the man and woman were to be stoned to death: "the damsel because she cried not, being in the city," (and therefore held consenting), "and the man because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife," Deut. xxii. 23, 24. So they were reputed and punished as adulterers.

Thus you see the covenant our God proposeth is a marriage-covenant, that our Maker may be our Husband. However men, in the height of their corrupt wisdom, may think it unbecoming the gravity and weight of the matter, to speak of the great transaction betwixt a Saviour and lost sinners, under the notion of a marriage; it is sufficient to us, that the infinitely wise God has not thought it unbecoming, but sees it to be a condescension necessary for our weakness. And it must needs be dangerous to mock at that manner of speaking the Lord's word warrants the use of; "I will betroth thee unto me," saith the Lord in our text.

The parties in this marriage-covenant, are Jesus Christ the Son of God, and the captive daughter of Zion, lost sinners. The Father hath made this marriage for his Son, Matth. xxii. 2. And the apostle tells us, it is Christ whom sinners are espoused to; "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ," 2 Cor. xi. 2. It is the glorious Bridegroom himself that proposeth, advanceth, and effectuateth the marriage-treaty; "I will betroth thee." It is the peculiar quality of this marriage-covenant, that it is for ever. The Lord brought Israel into a visible church state by the Sinai covenant; but that covenant did not last, Israel was put away: here he promiseth to bring them back by the new covenant, the gospel-covenant from Mount Zion; and that this covenant shall be perpetual, to continue while the world stands. But, as these words look to the spiritual Israel, the elect ones both of Jews and Gentiles, the covenant is declared to be everlasting, scorning to be confined within the narrow boundaries of time, but reaching forward through all the ages of eternity.

DOCT. I. The way laid down in the wisdom of God, and pursued in the gospel, for reinstating lost sinners in the favour of God, is the espousing of them to Jesus Christ.

I have already spoken to this doctrine at large, and therein explained the nature of a sinner's espousals to Jesus Christ in several particulars. There are two points yet remaining, which I shall propose together in a second doctrine.

DOCTRINE II. As sinners may be espoused to Christ, so whomsoever he espouseth to himself, he espouseth for ever, never to part with them.

In handling this doctrine,

I. I shall shew, that sinners may be espoused to Christ.

II. I shall consider the perpetuity and everlastingness of this marriage-covenant; and then apply it.

But, before I enter on these things, it will be necessary to resume some particulars touching the nature of the espousals betwixt Christ and sinners: to give you a view thereof in few words.

Our Lord Jesus Christ comes, by his messengers, into the bride's mother's house, (the public ordinances), and courts her consent: but words alone will never prevail in that case; he comes forward, by his Spirit, into the inner chamber of her heart, and there proposeth the marriage-treaty, and brings it to a happy issue. We may take up this in three things; (1.) Christ, by his Spirit, enters the inner room of the heart, with the fiery law going before him as his harbinger; and so terrible is the sight, that the sinner begins exceedingly to fear and quake; but yet has no kindness for the bridegroom, no heart to the match. So a tribunal is erected within his own breast; he is accused, convicted, and condemned as a breaker of the law, and then beholds his absolute need of a Saviour, Acts xvi. 29, 30. (2.) God reveals his Son in the broken, bruised, sensible sinner, by the light of the gospel shining into his heart, Gal. i. 16. The royal bridegroom is manifested unto the soul in his glorious excellencies, and absolute suitableness to its case; and withal, in his willingness to betroth the wretched creature to himself. (3.) The Spirit of Christ powerfully touches the heart of the sinner, who is thereby made willing to embrace Christ and join hands with him in the marriage-covenant, Psalm cx. 3. Thus the treaty of espousals comes to be concluded, which we may sum up in these three particulars.

*First*, The parties are pleased with one another; Christ is pleased with the sinner, and the sinner is pleased with him. And then the language of the bride's heart is, 1<sup>st</sup>, I am pleased with his person. I have been long seeking a match for this soul of mine, a rest to this restless heart; but, whatever I cast mine eyes upon, I still perceived something about it that was shocking; something it had, I could never love; something it lacked, which I could not want: but here is a covering of mine eyes; "he is altogether lovely," Cant. v. 16. 2<sup>dly</sup>, I am pleased with all his offices. There is a glorious suitableness in each of them to my case, 1 Cor. i. 24, 30. I am weak, foolish, and ignorant; it is good he is a Prophet. I am la-

den with guilt, I cannot remove it; it is good he is a Priest: the sight of his precious blood revives my fainting soul. My lusts are strong, too strong for me; it is good he is "a King mighty in battle," Psalm xxiv. 8. *3dly*, I am pleased with the marriage covenant; it is well drawn; there is nothing to be added to it, nothing to be altered in it, 2 Sam. xxii. 5. *4thly*, I am pleased with the marriage duties; the laws of the royal bridegroom, Psalm cxix. 128. *Lastly*, I am pleased with the cross, content to take part with him in all conditions, to cleave to him for better and worse, Luke xiv. 26.

*Secondly*, As Christ left his Father's house for her, she gives up with her own people and her father's house for him. Her heart parts with all other lovers, that she may be his only. She renounceth the first husband, namely, the law, as a covenant of works, never to look for her living by it, nor her comfort from it any more, Rom. vii. 4. She renouncest all her lusts and idols, gives up with them for ever; and sets a particular mark of disgrace on the beloved lust she had a particular fondness for, Job xxxiv. 32.

*Lastly*, The glorious bridegroom's consent to be her head and husband she finds in the word, which the Spirit applies to her, and she by faith applies to herself. Her soul consents to take him as he offers himself: so Christ gives himself to her, she receives him, and gives herself to him, John i. 12: 2 Cor. viii. 5, and from that blessed moment she may say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his," Cant. ii. 16.

Thus she is united to Christ, joined unto the Lord, and made one spirit with him, 1 Cor. vi. 17. And from this union results a communion betwixt the parties, agreeable to the nature of the spiritual marriage.

Now having given this short account of the nature of the espousals,

I. I shall evince, that sinners may be espoused to the Son of God. "Behold, we bring you glad tidings of great joy;" if ye be willing to be espoused to Christ, he is willing; all is ready to the bride's consent. To clear this, consider these following particulars, which may be as so many motives to stir you up to accept of Christ in the marriage-covenant.

*First*, This match was from eternity projected and concluded, in the cabinet council of the Trinity, Jer. xxxi. 3, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." God, from eternity, foreseeing that all mankind would be ruined by the fall of Adam, and not willing that the whole kind should be lost, set on foot this project, a proper project for recovering lost sinners, and securing them when recovered.

Man being joined to God at first in a simple covenant of friendship, that covenant was found too slender a bond for such an unstable creature: wherefore a marriage covenant is devised; for that will separate betwixt friends, under the strictest bonds of friendship, which cannot separate betwixt husband and wife. Now, the King's friend turning to be his enemy by the breach of the first covenant; to bring the criminal out of prison to court again, and restore her to favour, it is concluded, that she be espoused to the King's Son, and so united to him in such sort, as there should never be such a fatal breach betwixt God and the sinner again.

*Secondly,* The bridegroom and all his relations are well pleased with the match. We have his own mind in the text, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever." But will he indeed betroth me? may the sinner say. "Yea, I will betroth thee," saith our Lord in the following words, twice in one verse, and a third time again in the verse immediately following. Why, truly, it is hard for sensible sinners to believe it; yea, this speaks him to be peremptory in it, he will not be diverted from it. If ye would know how it agrees with his Father's mind, Isaiah will tell you, "The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness' sake," Isa. xlvi. 21. Yea, he becomes a suitor to you in favour of his Son, he solicits for him, Matth. xvii. 5, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." It is very agreeable to the mind of his Spirit; for the words he puts in the mouths of all his servants, in reference to it, are full of good-will to the match; "All things are ready: come unto the marriage," Matth. xxii. 4. The angels, these glorious inhabitants of the upper house, when first the bridegroom came in person into the bride's country, in pursuance of the blessed project, sung to his arrival, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men," Luke ii. 13, 14. Yea, there is a full satisfaction with it through all the bridegroom's country: joy appears there in every face, upon the success of it. "Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth," Luke xv. 7.

I might here tell you, that the mighty stir made about this match in the bride's country, to hinder it, is a plain evidence of the reality of it. All her relations are against it. When the royal Bridegroom was going forth to pursue his design of love to lost sinners, their father, the devil, addressed him, and offered him "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them," if he would give over the suit, Matth. iv. 8, 9. When that did not take, he assaulted him and murdered him, by his hellish agents, that so the designed match might be marred: but the blessed Jesus having overcome death and the grave, and sat down at the right hand of the Father,

so that he can reach him no more; he turns his rage against the bride, and employs his power to the utmost against her to stop it. No sooner does she begin to lay to heart the offered espousals, than she finds her own people and her father's house violently set against it, and must lay her account with vehement tossing she was not acquainted with before. Her father, the devil, misrepresents Christ, as a husband she can never have a comfortable life with: if that prevail not to make her lay aside the thoughts of it, he rages and threatens: if she will proceed in it, he shall cause her repent that ever she entertained the motion, and bring her back again from her new husband, to her great confusion; and that therefore it is better for her to draw back in time, and take second thoughts of the offers made her by other hands. Her friends, even the world that lieth in wickedness, use all methods to discourage her: they cry out, she will stain the reputation of their family, and disgrace them all: and, be sure, they will make her the fool of the company at least, if their hands be bound that they cannot imbrue them in her blood. And, to crown the difficulty, the hungry children she was wont to feed, (namely), her lusts, and in a special manner, the fondling, the beloved lust, hang about her weeping, because they must be starved if the match go on. All this evidenceth, that sinners may be espoused to Christ.

*Thirdly,* The lawful impediments of this match are all removed, at the Bridegroom's expenses and pains. When the purpose of this match was declared, there stood up to object against it, parties concerned, whose mouths could not be stopt with fair words. Justice says, The bride is my debtor, and I will not forgive her; and, forasmuch as she hath not to pay, she must be sold into the hand of vengeance, to satisfy the debt, Matth. xviii. 25. She is my criminal, saith the law, and I will not pardon her; sentence of death is passed on her, Gal. iii. 10.; and whithersoever one may go to pick out a spouse for himself, he must not go into a prison, and bring forth at his pleasure a condemned woman to be espoused to him; for though marriage break term of service, it must not break law: therefore there must be an execution-day before there can be a marriage-day. She is my lawful prisoner, says the devil, and I will not give her up: "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?" Is. xl ix. 24. These were lawful impediments indeed, which, unremoved, would have put an effectual stop for ever to the marriage betwixt Christ and sinners; but his heart was intent upon the match, and therefore he set himself to remove them out of the way. Accordingly, he became surety to justice for her debt, and paid it to the last farthing; laid down his own life for the criminal:

and now that the ransom is paid, the jailor must needs let his prisoner go.

*Fourthly,* The marriage-contract is drawn up already, and signed by the Bridegroom, bearing his consent to match with the captive daughter of Zion : ye have it in this Bible, ye have it in our text, and the words following, “ I will betroth thee unto me for ever, yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord.” This is his word, this is his writ, which he hath sealed with his precious blood. He cannot, he will not deny it; and he hath sent it to you, that ye for your part may consent to it, and so the blessed match is made betwixt Christ and you.

QUESTION, “ But why is this marriage-contract drawn up before the bride’s consent be obtained, yea, and without consulting her at all ? ” ANSWER, This is highly reasonable, we have no ground to complain of it; for we have nothing to contract on our part. We have nothing to bring with us, no, not so much as to cover our nakedness ; for all our father’s house go in rags, Rev. iii. 17. Nay, we are worse than nothing ; our father Adam left us with a burden of debt, poverty, and wants, yea, and a burden of the curse besides, Gal. iii. 10. And well may we increase the debts, we can never pay one farthing of the old or new accounts. But our Lord seeks no portion with us, whatever our case be, he is willing to betroth us to himself, Isa. lv. 1, “ Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money.” Nay, he will have nothing with us, nor have we any thing worth his taking off our hands. And if we do not come to Christ content to receive all freely, without presuming to give for what we are to get, we may fear we meet with Simon’s entertainment, “ Thy money perish with thee,” Acts viii. 20. Were a prince to marry a beggar’s daughter, and she should present herself to the marriage in her beggarly attire, patched up after the best fashion of her father’s house ; would he not say, Take her away, and strip her of these garments, she shall bring none of them to me : they are suitable to the quality of her father’s house, but not of my spouse ; they would be a stain to my honour : clothe her with change of raiment on my own expense ? The application is easy : we are nothing, we can do nothing, we have nothing to commend us to Christ ; and if we pretend to any thing of that kind, we dishonour the Royal Bridegroom. There is no reason then we should have any thing ado in the marriage-contract, but to bless God that it is brought to our hand, and sign it with our whole hearts.

Besides, had our advice been taken to the framing of it, we see so

little into our own true interest, we would certainly have marred it, inserting some clause that would at length have ruined us. Finally, It is one of the articles of the covenant, that Christ shall gain the sinner's consent, John vi. 37, "All that the Father giveth me, shall come to me." And so saith our text, "I will betroth thee unto me."

It may be, some are saying in their hearts, "O that I knew my name were in that marriage-contract, how joyfully would I then sign it! but I fear it is not to be found there." In answer to this, consider there are (if I may speak so) two copies of it, the one close sealed, and the other opened. 1. There is a sealed copy thereof laid up in heaven, under the custody of the Bridegroom and his Father: in this are to be found the names and surnames of all that already are, or ever shall be, espoused to Christ; and behold the seal thereof, 2 Tim. ii. 19, "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." 2. There is an open copy thereof, let down to earth, and lodged in the bride's hand: this ye have in the Bible, which is the book of the covenant. It bears not the names of those that are to be espoused to Christ, but runs (as it were) in that form, "We, under subscribers," &c. Now, the Royal Bridegroom has signed this, and it is incumbent on you to sign it likewise, consenting to take Christ as he is offered to you in the gospel; and so the espousals are made, Isa. xliv. 5, "One shall say, I am the Lord's: and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob: and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord." Now, upon this, I offer these two things.

1<sup>st</sup>, A view of the sealed copy is the peculiar privilege of those that are espoused to Christ, by subscribing to the open copy; "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him: and he will shew them his covenant," Psalm xxv. 14. And to require a sight of that which is laid up in heaven, before ye have by faith complied with the design of that which is lodged in your own hands, is to endeavour to overturn the settled order and method of grace. But, "Shall the earth be forsaken for thee? and shall the rock be removed out of his place?" Job xviii. 4. Even these that are espoused to Christ, though they shall get a full view of it in heaven, where it is laid up; yet it is but a slender view they get of it now: at best, sometimes, the Lord opens it a little to the believer, so as he can see to read his own name in it, but cannot see the name of his wife or child therein, though their names be really in it, as well as his own. And it may be, some of the saints never see so much as their own names in it, till they come to glory, being, "through fear of death, all their lifetime subject to bondage," Heb. ii. 15.

2<sup>dly</sup>, Though your name be not in the open copy, yet we can say,

it is indorsed and directed to you, and every one of you : therefore ye have a sufficient warrant to sign it for yourselves. What is your name ? Wilt thou answer to the name of thirsty sinners ? Then read your name, and see how it is directed to you, Isa. lv. 1. " Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money ; come ye, buy and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price." Wilt thou answer to the name of willing sinner ? Then it is directed to you, Rev. xxii. 17, " Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Art thou called heavy-laden sinner ? Arise then, the Master calleth thee, Matth. xi. 28, " Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Is thy name whorish backslider ? " Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again unto me, saith the Lord," Jer. iii. 1. Art thou a lost sinner ? " The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost," Luke xix. 10. Nay, art thou the chief of sinners ? Even to thee is the word of this salvation sent ; " Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief," 1 Tim. i. 15. But, whatsoever artifice ye may use to disown these, or any of these to be your name ; surely ye are men, sons of men ; ye cannot deny that to be your name : therefore it is directed to you, and every one of you ; " Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men," Prov. viii. 4. But to proceed,

*Fifthly*, The proxies for the bridegroom are sent forth to make suit for sinners their consent to be espoused to him ; " Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us," 2 Cor. v. 20. And surely this must be glad tidings to those who are willing to be espoused to our Lord, Isa. lii. 7, 8. We are impowered to treat with you, in his name, for this blessed match ; to declare unto you that he is willing to be yours ; and we call unto you, according to the tenor of our commission, Matth. xxii. 4, " All things are ready ; come unto the marriage." Despise not our call : for he is great who hath said, " He that heareth you, heareth me : and he that despiseth you, despiseth me," Luke x. 16. And, by the refusal of his word in our mouths, ye run the dreadful risk of eternal ruin, Mark xvi. 15, 16, " Go preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved : but he that believeth not, shall be damned."

*Sixthly*, The bridegroom has already put on his marriage-robcs : the Son of God hath clothed himself with the robes of humanity, that he might be a suitable match for the children of men : " Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same," Heb. ii. 14. Such was

the distance betwixt God and his guilty creature, that the sinner could never have joined hands with a God, but with an incarnate God. The bride could never have been able to look on the glorious bridegroom, in his unveiled divine glory and majesty, without being confounded at the sight: therefore was his wedding-garment taken off on earth, namely, the veil of his flesh, wherewith he hath covered himself, in view of the marriage. Look on it with joy, O captive daughter of Zion. Behold! it is a dyed garment, and of the right colour for a marriage robe; which, in this case is only red, blood-red, Isa. lxiii. 1, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine fat?" Let thy soul then say unto him, as Ruth said to Boaz, Ruth iii. 9, "Spread thy skirt over thine handmaid," (that is, make me thy spouse) "for thou art a near kinsman." It was an ancient ceremony in marriage for the man to throw the skirt of his garment over the woman's head, in token of his appropriating her unto himself, her subjection to him, and the protection he owed her: it is applied to the spiritual marriage, Ezek. xvi. 8, "I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine;" or, "thou wast to me," i. e. married to me; for so marriage is expressed in the Old Testament language, Lev. xxi. 3; Deut. xxiv. 2; and xxv. 5. And thence that phrase is brought into the New Testament, Rom. vii. 4.

Now, no skirt but a bloody skirt could serve this gracious purpose. The bride is a criminal, and without shedding of blood is no remission," Heb. ix. 22. Therefore there can be no marriage with the Son of God but under a covert of blood. The rays of divine wrath would pierce through any other covert, and separate the parties. And therefore the chariot, (of the marriage covenant) wherein Christ's spouse is carried to his Father's house, hath a covering of purple, Cant. iii. 10. Now, this purple covering is no other than the blood of our slain Redeemer, which covers the soul from the storm of God's wrath, as the covering of a chariot defends from storms that come from above. Behold then a crucified Saviour, meet to espouse guilty sinners to himself.

*Seventhly,* The wedding-garment for the bride is ready, being purchased at the expense of the bridegroom. It is the white raiment of Christ's righteousness, which, with the espousals, is offered unto all that hear the gospel, Rev. iii. 18. It is Christ's active and passive obedience to the law, imputed to every believing soul, upon its espousals to Christ. This is that glorious raiment which beautifies

the soul in the sight of God, wherewith Christ's spouse is arrayed, as the lilies, with that which they toil not, neither do they spin for, though there were sore toil and bloody sweat at the making of it. Thus her wedding-garment is taken off in heaven, even as his was taken off on earth: a blessed evidence of a design of perfect peace betwixt heaven and earth in the way of a marriage covenant.

*Eighthly,* The tent for the espousals is set up, even the church. The tabernacle of the Most High God has mercifully visited our ends of the earth, and therein erected a church, which is the tabernacle he has set for the Son of righteousness, as a bridegroom, there to espouse sinners to himself. This tabernacle, which has stood long amongst us, God hath been threatening to pull down, because of our misimproving the preached gospel; which calls us to tremble, and to comply in time with the espousals offered: and indeed several of the cords thereof are broken already; but had not the Lord been on our side it had been lying all along on the ground by this time. Thanks to our gracious God, it is yet standing: but woe to those who shall not be espoused to Christ before the tabernacle be removed.

*Ninthly,* The feast and seal of the espousals, namely the holy sacrament we are now to partake of at his table, is ready, that the espoused bride may feast and rejoice in her Lord and husband. Though the table be not in heaven, yet the provision given to the believing communicant at the table is from heaven, even the flesh of Christ, which is meat indeed, and his blood, which is drink indeed; Jesus Christ, with all his benefits, being represented, sealed, and applied to believers by this ordinance. This holy feast is the seal of the marriage covenant, whereby Christ seals the covenant to us, 1 Cor. xi. 25, "This cup is the New Testament in my blood." The bridegroom's seal is a red, bloody seal, like his marriage-robe.

QUESTION. But what need is there of a seal to the Lord's covenant? ANSWER. God's naked word is as good security as his writ, and his writ as good as his seal: but the difficulty sinners find in believing requires them all: and therefore the Lord has graciously condescended to give us all we could require of the most faithless man on earth, that we may believe him; his word, his writ, his seal, yea, and his oath too, Heb. vi. 17, 18. Some of you find no difficulty in believing the covenant, and your welcome to Christ. I dare not commend unbelief, or the least doubt of God's word: it is very dishonouring to God, though Christ's spouse is often found slow of heart to believe. But I fear the unacquaintedness of many with the difficulty of believing the covenant, and their welcome to Christ, proceeds rather from a spirit of pride and blindness, than

from the spirit of faith. The marriage covenant betwixt the son of God, and a vile unworthy sinful creature, is such a great thing, so very unlike to our condition, that it is a great matter to believe it. And truly nothing but the testimony of God himself, and "the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead," will make a sensible sinner really believe it, Eph. i. 16, 20. If a prince should send a writ to a beggar woman, wherein, having heard of her miserable condition, he appoints her a free house, and a few pence weekly, to maintain her while she lives, there would be no great difficulty in believing this, it is so like her condition, being but a small thing: but, suppose him to send an ambassador to espouse her unto him; in this case, if she were so frantic and mad, as to believe her lodge to be a palace, her nasty covering a cloth of gold, and her rags precious jewels, it is likely she would have little or no difficulty to believe the reality of the great proposal made to her; but if she were truly sober, she would hang down her head, and say, Do not mock a poor woman. And if, upon the producing the marriage contract, confirmed with the prince's oath and seal, she began to believe it, and rose up to subscribe it; it would be no great marvel, if, looking to her rags and nastiness, she suddenly halted, and said, I am a fool to believe this; till considering the words of grace in the marriage contract, the nature of the prince's oath and seal, her heart were overcome into a belief of it. The application is easy; there is great need of the seal of the marriage covenant betwixt Christ and sinners, and it is ready for yon.

*Tenthly,* Here are witnesses enow. Here are the friends of the bridegroom, to bear witness to the espousals. Ye may be witnesses each one for another; yea, as Joshua saith, Josh. xxiv. 27, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us." And they will surely witness something in this case, either for us, or against us. They will at least bear witness to the offer of the espousals made here this day.

*Lastly,* Here is the bridegroom, and here is the bride; the eternal Son of God, and a company of wretched lost sinners gathered together in this place. He has given his consent already in the words of the text read in your hearing, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever." What would you have more? would ye have him to declare it by a voice from heaven? Nay, but this is a more sure word of prophecy, 2 Pet. i. 19. Bear witness then, ye friends of the bridegroom; witness all, and every one of you here present; witness ye stones of the place, that the eternal purpose of this match is declared, the bridegroom and all his relations are pleased with it, the lawful

impediments of it are removed, the contract is drawn up, the proxies for the bridegroom are sent forth; he hath put on his marriage-robcs, and the wedding-garment for the bride is ready, the tent for the espousals is set up, the feast and the seal are ready, the bridegroom and the bride are both present: and, as for the bridegroom he hath given his consent already; and therefore there is nothing wanting to make up the espousals betwixt the Son of God and sinners here present, but their consent.

And shall it be wanting? O! are not ye saying, ye friends of the bridegrom, ye neighbours, ye stones of the place, bear witness for me, that my heart is overcome, and I consent to take him as he offers himself in the marriage covenant, for my head and husband; renouncing the first husband, the law, as a covenant of works; renouncing all my lusts; giving up myself, soul and body, to be his, and for him; to be his wholly, his only, and his for ever?

II. We proceed now to speak of the perpetuity and everlastingness of this marriage-covenant. And here I shall only enquire, in what respects the espousals betwixt Christ and the soul are for ever.

*First,* They are for ever in design.

*Secondly,* They are for ever in fact.

FIRST, They are for ever in the design of parties. In espousals amongst men it is not so: the design is only for term of life; for the parties know one another to be mortal, and that death will separate them if nothing else do it. But in the spiritual espousals the parties join hands never to part; they both look upon it as a contract for eternity.

*First,* Christ takes the sinner with a design to be that sinner's husband from the moment of the espousals for ever; and his designs are immoveable as mountains of brass; they cannot be broken; he knows perfectly before the espousals, whatsoever will fall out betwixt him and his spouse in the course of the marriage; and with a full view of all future events, he takes her for ever with a fixed purpose, 1st, Never to put her away while she desires to abide with him. Nay, 2dly, Never to part with her, though she should desire to go away; never to put her away, never to let her go, Jer. xxxii. 40, "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me."

*Secondly,* The soul consenting to the espousals, takes Christ, with a design to be his spouse for ever, never to separate. Howsoever hypocrites deal with him, whatsoever secret reserves they have in

their pretended embracing of the marriage covenant, the believer takes Christ with a sincere purpose never to leave him, never to part with him.

1. The believer takes Christ with a sincere purpose never to leave him, nor go away from him, whatsoever hardships he may meet with in the world for cleaving to him, and following of him : his resolution is, " So will not we go back from thee," Psalm lxxx. 18. He may indeed fear that he will leave Christ ; nevertheless he can appeal to God's omniscience, he has no such design, but his soul loathes it. He has counted the cost, he has weighed in the balance father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also ; and finds that the royal Bridegroom downweighs them all ; they are all light in comparison with Christ ; and therefore he is peremptorily resolved, whatever becomes of them, he will never leave him, Luke xiv. 26.

2. The believer takes Christ with a sincere purpose, never to part with him, nor to be put away, howsoever unkindly his Lord may seem to carry himself towards him ; " Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him," Job xiii. 15. This is his design, although he may be very hardly bestead in keeping his ground in a time of trial : but in the day of espousals, the soul sees there is no help in any other, therefore says, " Lord, to whom shall I go," but unto thee ? and resolves, that if it die, it shall die at his door.

And thus, in the spiritual espousals, the voice of the bride, like an echo, sweetly answers the voice of the bridegroom ; " I will be troth thee," saith he, " unto me for ever." " Amen," says the bride, " for ever, ever, ever."

Allow me here to distinguish this eternity, this " for ever" of the bride, in three parts, each of which she has in view, in her closing with the marriage covenant. In the espousals,

1. She has in view the beginning of that eternity, which is from the very moment wherein she is espoused. So she is to be altogether his, from that moment, thenceforth not to go back. Christ says, " To-day if ye will hear my voice ;" she dare not, she will not say, to-morrow ; no, not the next hour ; for that would be a day or an hour kept back of that eternity, covenanted away to him, and now no more her own.

2. She has in view the remaining time-piece (if I may call it so) of that eternity, which lies on this side death, Psalm cxix. 112, " I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes always, even unto the end." She foresees there will be many difficult steps in her way through that piece of it : but now, that we have once met, saith her soul, on this side death, we shall never part. What Ruth said

to Naomi, is the soul's language here to the Lord Christ, " Whither thou goest, I will go," (as long as I am going on the earth); " and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God, Ruth i. 16. The consideration of these difficulties stirs up the soul to take hold of Christ for that part of the ever, Psalm xlviij. 14, " This God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death."

3. In the espousals the soul has a view to death, the entrance of proper eternity, and so forward for ever and ever. The work we have in hand is weighty work indeed: it is work for eternity. I think I may say, there will not be a soul espoused to Christ, nor a worthy communicant at the table of the Lord, in this place this day, who will not do their death-bed work here, as really as if they were fully persuaded they should never go from the place they sit upon, but in their coffins. If they take Christ, surely they take him for ever.

There are two things, which, how long soever men may shift and put off, yet they will find necessary to do them on their death-beds, when they perceive they must quickly leave the world; one is, to dispose of their souls for eternity; the other is, to dispose of their effects, whatsoever they have in world: both these will be done by the worthy communicant at the Lord's table, or wheresoever any shall be espoused to Christ this day.

(1.) Whosoever shall here be espoused to Christ, will dispose of his soul for eternity here, as if he were on his death-bed. Observe how the Psalmist, resigning himself to the Lord, speaks, as if he had been about to draw his last breath, Psalm xxxi. 5, " Into thine hand I commit my spirit." So consenting to the covenant now, is but doing our death-bed work betimes. And there is good reason to do it now; for we know not at what hour our Lord will come; and whether we shall ever rise up from our seats, or not. They who manage this work aright, will surely act for eternity, which they have in their view.

(2.) Whosoever shall here be espoused to Christ, will here dispose of all that he has, as if he were lying on his death-bed. And indeed, the soul's joining with Christ, in the marriage covenant, is a dying after a sort: therefore it is very natural the man make his will, seeing he is a-dying. It is a dying unto sin; and so he will solemnly give up with sin, leaving all his guilt to be cast into the depths of the sea of the Redeemer's blood; leaving all his lusts to be broken and destroyed by the Redeemer's sanctifying Spirit. It is a dying to the world; and so he will give up all his earthly comforts and enjoyments to Jesus Christ, to be disposed of at his

pleasure, pleading no more right to dispose of them himself hereafter, than a dead man can claim to. Whoso give themselves to the Lord, will make a tender of their relations to him also, that they likewise may be his ; and will lay down at his feet their houses and lands, liberty and life, and whatsoever is dear to them in the world.

Thus, in the espousals, the believer disposeth of his all, as on a death-bed, leaving all to the Lord, or upon him; taking him for all, and instead of all, as he offers himself, for ever. For the espousals are for ever in design, in the design of both parties.

SECONDLY, The espousals betwixt Christ and the soul are for ever in fact. As this match is designed to be everlasting, so it is everlasting indeed. It shall never end, but last it shall, from the moment it is made, through all the ages of eternity.

1. It is everlasting, without interruption.
2. It is everlasting, without expiring.

*First,* It is everlasting, without interruption: it shall never be broken. The marriage covenant betwixt Christ and his spouse, is not like Adam's covenant, where man might be in this day, and out to-morrow ; to-day the friend of God, to-morrow his enemy : nay, it is a bond of peace with God, which the believer shall never be shaken out of, though devils do their worst. The spouse of Christ receives a kingdom which cannot be moved, Heb. xii. 28. Marriage covenants amongst men may be broken, yea, and made null on just grounds, before the time come wherein they would expire of course: but the marriage-covenant betwixt Christ and believers is not liable to such uncertainties. If it could be broken, or the relation become extinct in any case, it would certainly come to pass in one or all of these four ; 1. In the case of the adversity of either party. 2. In the case of the advancement of either party. 3. In the case of desertion. Or, 4. In the case of the spouse's unchastity. But in none of these cases is the covenant broken, or the relation extinguished ; in all of them the fatal breach is still avoided.

*1st,* The espousals betwixt Christ and the believer stands firm, the covenant remains sure, in the case of the adversity of either party. This case is fatal to many covenants among men, of whom there are many who, as Nineveh's captains, Nah. iii. 17, are like the "great grashoppers which camp in the hedges in the cold day: but when the sun ariseth, they fly away." They stick close in a time of prosperity, but adversity drives them off; and they remember not, but renounce the brotherly covenant. But, in this covenant, the parties will never break with one another, how low soever either of them be brought.

- (1.) Christ will not break with his spouse, though she be brought

very low; he will cleave to her in her greatest adversity, having taken her for ever, and for all conditions. If thou be espoused to Christ, though thy worldly comforts fail, thy reputation sink, thy substance decay, poverty and want overtake thee; yea, though thou be brought so low by sickness and distress, as to be unable to do any thing for thyself, or any thing for thy Lord and Husband: yet know, that even in that case the covenant stands firm, and all is yours in right and title. Our Lord will not disown his spouse though she be going in rags. Job was very low every way, before that God turned his captivity; but as low as he was, the Lord owns his relation to him, and seems to take a pleasure in owning it, Job xlvi. 7, 8, "Ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath. Go to my servant Job,—and my servant Job shall pray for you, for him will I accept: ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job." Four times in these two verses, the Lord calls him his servant Job. And thus the covenant sweetens what is bitter in the believer's lot, and makes his thorny crown of afflictions better than a crown of gold.

(2.) Christ's spouse will not break with him when he is in adversity. The apostle speaks of the afflictions of Christ, to wit, in his members, the members of his mystical body, Col. i. 24. These offend hypocritical professors; and in such a time many of them fall off; but they that are indeed espoused to Christ, follow the lamb whithersoever he goeth, Rev. xiv. 4. Christ with the cross will be as dear to them as with the crown. Though enemies should prevail to lay Jerusalem on heaps, they will favour the very dust thereof for his sake. If he go to the wilderness, they will follow him thither. They will take part with him, whosoever do oppose him, and side with him, though all the world should side against him; they will never break with their Lord and Husband, upon the account of the most bitter cup his enemies can fill up to them.

*2dly*, The espousals stand firm, and the covenant remains sure, in the case of the advancement of either party. This case has been fatal to some matches amongst men: but here lordship does not change manners. The bride now makes choice of Christ for her head and husband, while the world generally despises and rejects him. The day approacheth wherein she shall see him come in the clouds of heaven, in the glory of his Father, with all his holy angels, sit down on his throne, judge the world, and put all his enemies under his feet: but will he then forget the marriage covenant? will he then overlook the soul that is now espoused to him? nay, he will not. When "our God shall come, and shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people;" behold

how the marriage covenant is remembered, and the espoused graciously noticed! “Gather my saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice,” Psalm 1. 3, 4, 5. On the other hand, howbeit the prosperity of fools shall destroy them, yet the spouse of Christ will never change her Lord and Husband, whatever prosperous turn her outward condition in the world may take. As the world’s frowns will not frighten a believer from cleaving to Christ, so the world’s smiles will not entice him from it. He will contemn its bribes as well as its boasts, Cant. viii. 7, “If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned.”

*3dly,* The espousals stand firm, and the covenant remains sure, even in the case of desertion on either side. And this is a case which often falls out in the present state and course of the spiritual marriage.

(1.) Sometimes the Lord, in his sovereign wisdom, for his own holy ends, deserts his spouse in great measure: then the soul, that was dandled on the knee, is cast down; she, that had ready access to her Lord, is held at the back of the door; she, that was crowned with loving-kindness, has the crown kicked off her head: but though the marriage covenant is laid up out of her sight, yet it is not torn in pieces: though he in his anger shuts up himself (as it were) in his chamber, yet he never leaves the house: still the relation stands, and there is no total desertion in the case, Jer. xxxii. 40, “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good.”

(2.) Sometimes the foolish creature deserts her espoused Husband, ceaseth to entertain actual communion and fellowship with Christ: then is she found pursuing this and that other vanity, gadding about among created things, as if she were not espoused, but had her choice yet to make: and she begins to nestle in some forbidden place. But her Lord will not so part with her; he will set fire to her nest wherever it is, and graciously bring her back again, as the Psalmist prays, Psalm cxix. last verse, “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant.” Christ’s spouse never totally forsakes him; for so runs the everlasting covenant with respect to her part, “I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me,” Jer. xxxii. 40.

*Lastly,* But what shall we say in the case of the unchastity of the spouse of Christ? We must not speak wickedly even for God, nor talk deceitfully for him, Job xiii. 7. It is evident from the Lord’s word, that even in that case, the espousals stand firm, and the covenant remains sure, Jer. iii. 13, 14, “Thou—hast scattered thy ways to the strangers, under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my

voice, saith the Lord. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you." Wo unto us, our case is desperate, if the infirmities of Christ's spouse make void the marriage covenant. But they do not make it void: surely our Lord will put a difference betwixt weakness and wickedness; and we know no sin a believer falls into but sins of infirmity, (I say, not daily infirmity), "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace," Rom. vi. 14. There is a clause in the covenant touching the miscarriages of believers: but it is not an irritant clause: "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments: then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break," Psalm lxxxix. 30—34.

Look not on this doctrine as a pillow for carnal security: for, although those who are espoused to Christ need not fear putting away, there remains enough to frighten them from sin, while their sins may be pursued with all manner of strokes upon their bodies, even to death itself; and with terrible strokes on their souls, even to the arrows of the Almighty being within them, "the poison whereof drinketh up the spirit," Job vi. 4. Yea, one sin in them may be punished with suffering them to fall into another, as David's sloth was punished with suffering him to fall into other sins of a far more gross nature, 2 Sam. xi. And so a believer has that to fear which is more to be feared than hell, if of all evils sin be the greatest. And he spoke right who said, "That if on the one side were presented unto him the evil of sin, and on the other side the torments of hell, he would rather choose to fall into hell, than to fall into sin."

The sum of the matter is this: Our Lord has brought his spouse, by the marriage covenant, into a paradise on earth, while the rebellions dwell in a dry land; and of the tree of life she may freely eat; but under the pain of her Lord's displeasure, she must not taste of the forbidden fruit. Nevertheless, the day she eats thereof, is not the term-day of the covenant, that she must remove; nay, but he will chastise her, and bruise her, till she vomit up the sweet morsel. And he may so bruise her in his hot displeasure, as her faith and hope may be brought to the very point of expiring; yea, her natural life may go for it, she may lose her life in the cause; only the covenant stands sure, the espousals are not disannulled. The believing Corinthians provoked the Lord by unworthy communicating; and for this cause (says the apostle, 1 Cor. xi. 30.)

many sleep, viz. the sleep of death, which they shall not awake out of till the resurrection. They profaned the sacrament of his body and blood, which many do, and yet prolong their lives: but he made their bodies to fall, and their blood to go for it; he would not so wink at it in them. But when God sent their bodies to the grave for this cause, did he send their souls to hell for it likewise? No; they were within the bond of the covenant, and that cause could not break it; but God pursued them so hard for it in this world, because they were not to be pursued for it in another world; ver. 31, "But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." So that the marriage covenant betwixt Christ and believers is everlasting, without interruption.

*Secondly,* It is everlasting, without expiring. When a man has a lease or tack of houses or lands, though the tack be not broken, yet at length the years thereof run out, and it expires of course: when a man marries a woman, though there be neither adultery nor wilful desertion in the case, yet the marriage bond is dissolved at length; on the death of either party the marriage expires: but the years of this covenant will run on through the ages of eternity, but never run out; the marriage betwixt Christ and believers will never expire.

*1st,* It does not expire at death. Our exalted Redeemer dieth no more: the espoused bride must die indeed; but the marriage covenant shall not die with her. The time comes at length, that the believer's last pulse beats, his eyes are set, his breath goes, and the silver cord, that tied his soul and body together, is loosed; but even then the golden cord of the marriage-covenant, which knits him to Christ, remains as fast as ever. The children begotten of his body are no more his; the wife of his bosom, who was one flesh with him, is then free: but the espousals betwixt Christ and his soul continueth firm; he is still joined to the Lord, and one spirit with him. He is carried to the land of forgetfulness; but if his dust could speak in the house of silence, it might say, on as good ground as ever, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his;" for the believer's death is but a sleep, which cannot dissolve the relation, John xi. 11, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth;" though dead, yet still our friend. Nay, when his dust is scattered here and there, and the steams of his dead body are flying through the air, they are well wrapt up in the bond of the covenant, which insures the believer's resurrection: as our Lord himself teacheth, while he proves it from Moses' calling the Lord, "the God of Abraham," Luke xx. 37.

*2dly,* It does not expire with the world's ending. This world will have an end: but the marriage covenant betwixt Christ and

believers will outlive the world, and never end. This world's ending shall be by fire; the day will come that this earth, and the works that are therein, shall go up in flames, 2 Pet. iii. 10, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up." What will then become of the lands and estates, the farms and merchandise, the worldly substance great or small, which now keep back many from the marriage of the King's Son they are bidden to, and leave them no appetite for the gospel feast? But these who now come into the marriage covenant, shall lay up something for themselves this day, which the fire of that dreadful day shall not reach; for though that fire shall burn up mountains, castles, and palaces, break through charter-chests, and destroy the rights and evidences of lands and honours, handed down from father to son, for many generations; yet it shall not be able to burn the marriage contract betwixt Christ and believers: "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee," Isa. liv. 10.

But why do I speak of the expiring of that marriage, when the world ends? For, when the last day is come, the marriage of the Lamb is come; the marriage betwixt Christ and his spouse shall then be solemnized and consummated.

Let us take a view of the solemnizing and consummation of the marriage betwixt Christ and believers; it is within the compass of that clause in the text, *for ever*. I shall give it in these seven particulars.

1. At the last day the royal Bridegroom shall come out of his Father's house, his ivory palaces, the highest heavens, in the robes of his glory, attended with all his holy angels, Matth. xxv. 31.

2. The bride shall come out of her mother's house, the house of mother-earth, Job i. 21, the grave, that darksome, narrow, lonely house. (These are accepted, who shall be found alive at his coming). But it shall be a joyful outgoing; never bride had the like. Hear the mirth that will be at that outgoing, Isa. xxvi. 19, "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise: awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust." This is a prophecy, which will not till then have its full accomplishment. Behold the glorious train sent to attend her, and bring her along to the bridegroom, a train of angels, whom "he shall send to gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other," Matth. xxiv. 31. And all shall rejoice together, for, "with gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought," Psalm xlv. 15.

3. The bride shall be presented to the bridegroom: she shall "meet the Lord in the air," 1 Thess. iv. 17. She sees how his lovely picture, as it is drawn by the pencil of the Holy Spirit, in the word of the everlasting gospel; and she contracts with him: but then she shall see him in person, and be solemnly married unto him. She is presented "as a chaste virgin to Christ," 2 Cor. xi. 2. Look on her as presented that day; where are all her former deformities? she is presented, "not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing," Eph. v. 27. Where is all her former blackness? she "shines forth as the sun," Matth. xiii. 43. Where are all her rags, which so often clothed her with shame? "She is brought unto the King, in raiment of needle-work," Psalm xlvi. 14.

4. The witnesses are present; the whole congregation of heaven and earth, to be witnesses to the marriage. There is the glorious company of holy angels: there is the black company of the wicked, of whom many were wont to satisfy themselves to be only spectators of the espousals; and now, to their eternal confusion and anguish, they shall be spectators of the marriage, and but spectators.

5. Then the royal Bridegroom, being on his throne, shall solemnly take his espoused bride in marriage, before the world, angels and men, saying, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," Matth. xxv. 34. And in token thereof, he shall put a crown on her head, 2 Tim. iv. 8, and set her down with himself on his throne: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne," Rev. iii. 21.

6. There shall be a glorious triumph, to grace the solemnity of the day; a triumph over the enemies of Christ and his spouse. All the wicked world shall stand trembling before them, and be adjudged to everlasting fire, and driven from before the throne, in consequence of that fearful sentence, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels," Matth. xxv. 41.

*Lastly*, Christ and his spouse shall be the last on the field; and when they have seen the backs of all their enemies, (while they depart into everlasting punishment), they shall go away attended with angels, and enter into the King's palace, where they shall sit down to the marriage supper of the Lamb, at a table that shall never be drawn.

So the marriage expires not with the world's ending, but is then solemnized and consummated.

Shall we proceed any further in quest of that, which we are sure we shall never find? We have looked into death, and we find

the marriage expires not there; we have looked to the world's ending, and we find it is so far from expiring then, that then it is solemnized and consummated: if we attempt to go further, we lose ourselves in a boundless ocean of eternity, where we can see nothing more to take our mark by. Let us stop then, and conclude, that the blessed espousals are for ever; that the spiritual marriage betwixt Christ and believers never expires; never, never, never.

I proceed to the APPLICATION. And the only use I shall make of this doctrine is to exhort you, that, seeing sinners may be espoused to Christ for ever, ye would therefore consent to the offer, and be espoused to him for ever. Christ makes offer of himself unto every soul here this day; and we are come in his name to propose unto you a marriage with the Son of God, that we may gain your consent thereto. O come into this blessed match: accept of Jesus Christ, your Maker, to be your Husband for ever. Shall we not prevail with you, in a treaty so very suitable to your case, so very much for your advantage? Howsoever it be entertained, we must make the offer in his name, proclaim the royal Bridegroom's will and pleasure, and make suit for your hearts. Therefore "hearken unto me, that God may hearken unto you."

*First,* Are there any in all this company who have an unstable, false, and fickle heart, that they can never get fixed, but still it breaks all bonds? No doubt there are. To such I say, Here is a suitable match for you. Come into the marriage covenant, put that heart in Christ's hand: these whom he espousest, he espousest for ever. If ye cannot keep the covenant, the covenant will keep you. The covenant of works could never keep an unstable heart, the condition of it being perfect and complete obedience, without the least failure or wavering; a condition ye cannot pretend to fulfil, and therefore ye can have no hope from the way of that covenant. I know the sorry shifts that some make to delude themselves, by patching up a bastard covenant of works, wherein they engage not with Jesus Christ as a Head and Husband, to live by him, being united to him, (which they could certainly do, if they took the way of the covenant of grace), but they covenant with him only as a master, to give him their work for wages. Surely this covenant of your own making will never keep you: your hearts, howsoever ye watch them, will leap out and break it; but the marriage covenant will secure the most unstable heart that is to be found amongst us; so that it shall be as the tree whose root remains fixed in the earth, howbeit the branches thereof are shaken by the wind. Though the spouse of Christ may be tossed to and fro by the blasts of temptation, yet the root of the righteous shall not be moved, Prov. xii. 3.

*Secondly,* Are there any in this company that are mourning for the loss of their deceased relations? or any that are afraid of such a mournful occasion abiding them? Here is a suitable match for such persons, the King immortal offers to betroth you unto him for ever. Ye cannot think of the death of your friends, of parting with your dear relations, but with greatest sorrow of heart. Truly ye that are of that disposition will never find a relative suitable to your mind, but by coming into this marriage covenant. The Lord Jesus Christ will take you into the nearest relation with himself; he is willing to espouse you, and being once espoused, ye shall never part. Death, that inexorable messenger, who snatcheth the husband from the wife, and the wife from the husband, the child from the parent, and the parent from the child, cannot prevail here, and shall never be able to separate betwixt Christ and these that are espoused to him, Rom. viii. 38, 39, "Neither death nor life—shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

*Thirdly,* Are there any who know not how to get safe through the world in the evil day? Here is a suitable match for you: be espoused to Christ; he will go betwixt you and all hazards. How bad soever the times be, they will still be within the compass of that sweet clause in the text, "for ever." And therefore I infer, that our Lord offers himself to be a head and husband to us for the evil day, the day of trial. Take him for your husband for ever. If it be a dark day, he will be for a light to you, and guide you; if it be a day of war, he will cover your head; if it be a day of searching of corners, he will hide you either under heaven, or in heaven. Embrace the covenant, and then, although ye sing the triumph before the victory, ye shall not be ashamed, Psalm xlix. 5, "Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil?"

*Fourthly,* Are there any who have none to provide for them? or any under fears, that, ere long, they will be in a destitute and helpless condition? Come ye into this match, and ye shall never want a provisor, who will surely furnish you all that you shall need, and that is enough; "Verily thou shalt be fed:" yea, "in the days of famine they shall be satisfied," Psalm xxxvii. 3, 19. What time ye are espoused to Christ, even your daily bread is secured to you by the covenant, Isa. xxxiii. 16, "Bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure." The carnal world will laugh at this, and bid us sit down and dine upon it; but they cannot laugh the people of God out of their experience, whose consciences do bear them witness, that they have dined sometimes more sweetly upon a promise of the covenant, than it is possible for carnal men to do at their most plentiful tables.

*Fifthly,* Are there any here that have been ranging through the creation, seeking a match for their souls, something commensurable to the desires of their immortal spirits, but could never yet find it? Ye have not failed to meet with disappointments, even where your hopes have been most raised: ye have found some one thorn of uneasiness or another, wheresoever you have essayed to take up your rest; and whithersoever ye have turned yourselves, ye have still come away dissatisfied; ye have tried many methods to attain to satisfaction, and none of them has answered your design. Be persuaded at length to make trial of this; embrace Christ in the marriage covenant, and be assured he will be to you what no created person or thing can be, a complete covering of the eyes, and a rest to your heart for ever, Psalm lxxiii. 25, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee."

*Sixthly,* Are there any whom nobody cares for, who are rejected by all, and cast at every door? Our Lord will receive you, even you; for "he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel," Psalm cxlvii. 2. His family, so far as it is made up of the children of men, is made up of foundlings: Israel was a poor foundling; Egypt would lodge them no longer; Canaan would not take them in: but when they were cast at all hands, the Lord took them up, Deut. xxxii. 10, "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness: he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye." So, however forlorn your case be, he will take you up, and bring you into the bond of the covenant, even the marriage covenant.

Ye have a Scripture full to this purpose, representing the case of the Jews, whom the Lord took into covenant with himself, but applicable to every soul whom Christ espouseth, Ezek. xvi. 5, "Thou wast cast out into the open field, to the loathing of thy person." Ver. 8, "I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine." It is evident there is an allusion here to the inhuman custom of exposing of infants, very usual among several heathen nations. The Lord shews Israel and all these whom he has espoused, what a miserable case he found them in, and how graciously he dealt with them when they were in that case.

Thou wast cast out into the open field; thy case was as ill as that of exposed outcast infants. Now, that barbarous custom we find was, to take out the infants, and leave them in some place where they might perish, if some body did not find them, and take them up, as Pharaoh's daughter did Moses when he was exposed,

Exod. ii. Such was thy case, hopeless and helpless, being abandoned of all, and unable to help thyself. This barbarity was exercised on these infants that were lame or deformed, and who they judged were not like to be useful to the commonwealth. So Christ's bride is altogether unsightly, and has nothing promising about her in the day he begins to manifest herself unto her ; no beauty for which she is to be desired. Sometimes they exposed infants to perish by the waters, the sea, rivers, or lakes ; sometimes they laid them down in woods or desert places, where they might be a prey to ravenous birds and beasts : accordingly thou wast cast out in the open field, even the waste howling wilderness, Deut. xxxi. 10. Thus the sinner lay a ready prey for the devourer, and so thy case was as ill as that of exposed infants.

But that is not all ; it was worse than theirs usually was : they were laid out, but thou wast cast out ; not laid down warily, but violently thrown away, to, or in, the loathing of thy person, as some abominable thing men cannot endure to look at. When they were exposed, they were put either in a kind of close basket, or in an earthen pot ; but so much kindness was not shown to thee, thou wast cast out in the open field, or (as the word is) "to the face of the field ;" thrown to, and left upon the bare ground without the least shelter.

But it was yet worse : when infants were exposed, they were swathed and adorned, yea, and precious things, as gold, jewels, rings, were laid down with them for the charges either of their education or burial, if any that found them should be at the pains to do either of these unto them. "But I covered thy nakedness," saith our Lord. As for those whom he takes up, there is nothing to be got by them ; it is of mere grace, absolutely free grace, that he takes notice of them to help them. They have not so much as to cover their nakedness.

Now, behold how grace abounds to the foundling ; "I entered into a covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine," i. e. my spouse, as I showed before. If one free-born had been exposed, he lost his freedom, and passed into a servile state ; but those whom our Lord takes up, he does not enslave, but espouse unto himself.

*Finally,* Observe, that the first covering the Lord casts upon the naked foundling, is the marriage-robe, the robe of his own righteousness. He does not delay the espousals till the bride be brought into a better and more honourable condition than he found her in, but takes her as she is in her miserable condition, and, espousing her, covers her nakedness ; "I spread my skirt over thee, (betrothed thee unto me), and so covered thy nakedness."

O the riches and freedom of grace ! Let those that are espoused

to Christ already be humble; and the worst of sinners, who are willing now to take him, be encouraged to come forward unto the marriage.

*Seventhly,* Are there any amongst us, who are difficulted in these weighty points of greatest concernment, to wit, How they shall safely die, and go into another world; how they shall stand before the great tribunal? Hearken ye to this offer, Jesus Christ, the Lord of the other world, who sits upon the tribunal, is willing to betroth you unto himself for ever. O blessed device for eternity! Can there be such a proper expedient for the business of another world, as to be espoused unto the Lord of that world? Can there be such a proper expedient for a comfortable standing before the tribunal, as to be joined now, in a marriage covenant, to the Judge that sits upon that tribunal?

*Lastly,* Are there here any of the children of apostate Adam, who have fallen off from God, fallen out of his favour, and are under his wrath? the gate of heaven is shut upon you; the pit has enlarged her mouth for you; the earth groaneth under you; and ye are in danger of perishing for ever: Come ye into this covenant, accept of Jesus Christ for your Head and Husband; so shall ye be re-instated into the favour of God, and made happy for ever and ever. “For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

This offer is made unto you all without exception. Christ is willing to be yours, Rev. xxii. 17, “ Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” The Bridegroom is stretching out his hand, in order to join hands with you in the marriage covenant; and will not ye stretch out your hand unto God? Psalm lxviii. 31. What will ye do? will ye not give your consent to the Son of God, to be espoused unto him for ever? Before ye adventure to refuse, there are three things I would beg of you as rational creatures.

1. Before ye refuse to be espoused to Christ, consider how ye will dispose of yourselves to greater advantage. Will a full swing in your lusts be to your greater advantage? Will your betaking yourselves into the devil’s fields to feed his swine, (to feed insatiable lusts), be to your greater advantage, than to partake of Christ and the benefits of his covenant? If ye reckon so, ye will at length find, to your eternal loss, ye have reckoned amiss.

2. Before ye refuse it, consider how ye will do without it. Possibly you may make some silly shift to live at ease in the world, without being espoused to Christ: but I pray you consider, how will ye die without it? how will ye stand before the tribunal of God without it?

*Lastily,* Before ye refuse this offer of the espousals, make it sure,

(in case of repenting of the refusal afterwards), that ye shall have another offer thereof; and that upon this refusal, the sentence shall not pass against you, which is written, Luke xiv. 24, "For I say unto you, that none of those men, which were bidden, shall taste of my supper." If it do pass against you, ye are for ever ruined; but ye can have no such assurance: therefore do not adventure to "refuse him that speaketh from heaven;" but give yourselves away to him in the everlasting marriage covenant.

Let none raise objections against themselves, to hold them off from embracing the covenant. There is as much in the very proposal of it, as may take off all your objections, on whatsoever ground ye state them; "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."

But necessity has no law. In vain do we stand to dispute whether or not we shall take that way, which we must needs take, or inevitably perish. Ye must be espoused to Christ, or God will be your enemy through the ages of eternity: there is no other way for sinners to be re-instated in the favour of God. Ye must either be espoused to Christ for ever, or ye must be damned for ever. The case is already judged, Mark xvi. 16, "He that believeth not, shall be damned." If ye reject the marriage covenant, ye must die in your sins; for so doing, ye reject the remedy of sin. But why will ye judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, and reject the counsel of God against yourselves? Will ye fly in the face of the grand device of the wisdom of God for the salvation of sinners, and wilfully die of your disease, when the Physician is come to your bed-side? There is no salvation out of this covenant, strangers to it have no hope, Eph. ii. 12. Wherefore, ye must either join yourselves to the Lord in the covenant of peace, or he will have war with you for ever.

This covenant is drawn with blood, the precious blood of the royal Bridegroom: it is the new testament in his blood. Behold how he loved his bride, in whom there was nothing lovely! O trample not upon "the blood of the everlasting covenant!"

Now, let your hearts give an answer, before the Lord, unto these few questions.

*First,* Are ye pleased with the Bridegroom? His Father is pleased with him, all the holy angels and saints are pleased with him; and are not ye pleased with him? I assure you, he is so far pleased with you, even the worst of you, as to take you for his spouse; "I will betroth thee unto me for ever." Are you pleased to take him for your Husband?

*Secondly,* Are ye willing to renounce all your former lovers, and to part with all your lusts for ever? Assure yourselves, if ye take him ye must let these go away. God's covenant is a holy covenant; and ye will bring a curse upon yourself, instead of a blessing, if ye come to seek a shelter to any one lust under it.

*Thirdly,* Are ye content to take Christ for all, and instead of all? will ye receive him in all his offices? will ye receive him as your Prophet, to teach you, renouncing your own wisdom? as your Priest, to save you by his death and sufferings, renouncing your own righteousness? as your King, to reign and rule over you, renouncing all your idols? Art thou content to give up thine own will to him, and that "thy desire shall be to thy husband," to grant it, or withhold it, as he seeth meet; so that thou shalt be no more master of thyself, or at thine own disposal, but wholly at his disposal?

*Lastly,* Will ye take him for ever, from this moment, for prosperity and adversity, for life and death, for time and eternity?

If it be so with you indeed, then ye are espoused to the Lord Jesus Christ for ever; and welcome to the feast of the espousals at his table: but, if not, ye will get a long eternity to repent this refusal, unless you change your mind, and repent of it in time.