

SERMON XLI

THE LOVELINESS OF CHRIST'S BELOVED

Tobias Crisp

"Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." {Song.4:7}

The gospel of Christ being the great and invaluable treasure of the church, the prize for which it should contend, yea, its sanctuary and refuge; it hath pleased the Holy Ghost, to present and hold forth this in change of raiment, as I may so speak; sometimes presenting it, as it were, in a cloud, more darkly by visions and dreams, when deep sleep was fallen upon God's people. Thus the Lord, in former ages, frequently held out the gospel, especially in that notable example of Jacob, who while he slept, had it preached unto him in the vision of a ladder, that reached from earth to heaven, by which the angels ascended and descended; which ladder was nothing else but Christ, by whom alone the sons of men rise from the lowest condition of sin and misery, to the highest of grace and glory. Sometimes the gospel was brought forth to the church with a mask upon its face, in hard riddles, and dark sentences, to exercise the wits of God's people; and thus, among other times, the gospel was presented unto Samson. You know the riddle that was put forth, occasioned by a lion slain by him, which being dead, there was a stock of honey in it, which represented unto his thoughts, the admirable benefit and privilege of the preaching of the gospel; "out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." {Judges 14:14} It was nothing but Jesus Christ, the lion of the tribe of Judah, by death had a stock of honey, not only nourishing, but sweet to the eater. Sometimes again, the gospel was presented, though not with so dark masks, yet with a veil over the face of it, that though some of the beauty of it might be seen, yet in respect of the glory of it, in an obscure way; and thus it was exhibited unto the Jews in types and shadows, and held forth in their sacrifices, temples, tabernacles, altars, mercy-seat, incense, and the like; in all of which there was a general darkness; namely, a putting over the face of Moses a veil, who in that represented Christ, the Mediator, as he was to be exhibited unto the people in those times; and yet, although for royalty and honors sake, the gospel was veiled; sometimes the Holy Ghost was pleased to lift up the veil for a moment, as it were, that there might some glance of the beauty of it appear; even in those times, for now and then a prophet would out with some admirable expression of the gospel; but this was but as the breaking forth of light in a dark night. Sometimes, again, the gospel was presented in a prophetic habit, and so it was held out, as it were, at a remote distance, that even an elevated and supernatural eye had as much as it could do to see it in proportion; and this was the dispensation of the gospel in the prophets. Sometimes also, it was presented under a parabolic habit; and thus it pleased our Saviour to exhibit it in his time, delighting much to see it in this dress; insomuch, that all the gospel he spake, almost, was clothed in it; and so the kingdom of heaven was likened unto leaven, hid in three measures of meal, and to mustard seed, and a treasure hid in a field; and so he goeth on, setting of it forth under all sorts of comparisons to illustrate it. Finally, the gospel is presented sometimes without either veil or mask over it, in its own proper beauty, shining forth from the face of it, nothing at all hindering the prospect, in its own proportion; and thus was the gospel presented unto the disciples, when they said unto Christ, "now thou speakest unto us plainly, and not in parables." Unto us that live now, the gospel of Christ is represented in all these varieties of dresses together, to administer the more delight. It is accounted one of the greatest pieces of honour in a state, for a prince to have changes of raiment every day; now, the Lord puts so much state upon his gospel, that it shall not always go in one dress, or habit.

The text that I have read unto you holds out the gospel in Christ's own way, which was so much affected by him, I mean, in a parabolic habit. The most glorious excellencies of the gospel, as it pertains to the church of God, are comprised in this text, "thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee." This, as the whole song throughout, is nothing but an elevated strain of discourse between Christ and his church, or a song tuned to the highest note that ever was sung; which discourse is an interchangeable speech between them; the church acting her part first, in chapter 1:2, "let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth;" being amiable, sweet discourse indeed; then she falls upon the high commendation of his love, exalting the praise of her husband Christ above the sky; which kindled such a strong affection in her, that she seemed to be far from him, not near enough unto him; she called unto him therefore, that he would draw her nearer unto him, "draw me, and we will run after thee;" and that she may come nearer, she begs of him, to tell her where she may find him in a nearer communion with him, than yet she had. Hereupon, her part being ended, Christ begins to tune his note to a higher strain, in answering the church, "if thou knowest not, O thou fairest amongst women," saith he. Here, after his commendation of her, he directs her where she may meet with him, by the footsteps of the flocks; by the tents of the shepherds. And then he falls again upon exalting and commending her excellent perfections, by many and several comparisons. The church, by and by, in verse 16, retorts the commendation he gives unto her, upon him again, "my beloved is fair; behold, my beloved, thou art fair, yea, pleasant." Thus you see that here is a making forth of the praises of each other's excellency, and of the high esteem each hath of other in their mutual discourse. Christ saith of the church, "thou art the fairest among women;" she replies again, "behold thou art fair;" and thus they go on in admirable expressions of the praises of each other. It would be too large to run over all the particulars of the sweet intercourse between them. In the text Christ retorts the commendation back again unto the church, before she had given him; she having begun to fall into the high commendation of her love, he follows; she retorts it upon him, Christ will not have it rest there; he will have the last word, as I may say; he retorts it back again to her, saying, "thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee." So that here is an out-vying, as it were, between Christ and his church, which should mount highest in the praise of each other, extolling the excellency of each other unto the skies; the burden of the song being this still, "thou art fair; thou art all fair, my love." In it, observe in general, the high commendation that Christ gives of and to his church; in which note.

1. The most gracious amiable title that Christ gives unto her, he calls her love, the sweetest title a husband can give a wife; but there is an addition of one article, that mightily advances the endeared-ness of Christ, in respect of the specialty thereof; namely, "my love; thou art all fair, my love." 2. The matter of the praise, and commendation that Christ gives to his church, it is expressed in that which is accounted most desirable, fairness; "thou art fair;" but in this there is a double addition that exceeds the praise the church gives unto Christ before; the church is not only fair, but all fair. 3. For the further illustration of this beauty, there is a second addition, "thou hast no spot in thee." 4. The time of which Christ speaks; every man receives this principle, that in heaven, there shall be perfection of beauty, in which the church shall stand. But if Christ had spoken of the state of glory, he would have declared himself in the future tense, "thou shalt be all fair my love." But it is to be observed that he speaks here in the present tense, of the present time of the church, as he hath communion with her here in this world, "thou art all fair." There is a great deal of difference; it is one thing to say of a man, thou shalt be rich, and another thing to say thou art rich. It is true, the church shall be all fair in glory, and it is as true, the church is all fair now. "Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee." That these words are the language of Christ unto his church, appears, if you consider, what is spoken before; there is the commendation of the breasts; now, this hath reference to the spouse; but most plainly it appears in the words that follow, "come with me from Lebanon, my spouse," saith Christ; either they must be the words of Christ to the church, or of the church to Christ; but they cannot be the words of the church to Christ, for she doth not call him spouse, for the word spouse is spoken in reference to the woman, and not the man. You have it further cleared in the contents of the chapter, which show the drift of the whole; the author of them holds forth according to the Hebrew, where the genders are more distinct than in English, that these very words are the

expressions of Christ unto his church. Whereby you see, that this is no new doctrine, neither is it set forth by any obscure person, being delivered by Solomon, or rather by Christ, personified by Solomon, that the church should be all fair, and without spot.

The proposition is briefly this, that the love of Christ is all fair, and without spot. You may remember, beloved, that I have hitherto at large endeavored to set forth the gospel of our blessed Saviour, in the first great part thereof; the gospel consisting principally in two things, the negative and the affirmative privileges of the members of Christ, their great privilege and invaluable benefit, being, exemption from evil, and a participating of all good. All the discourse I have had with you hitherto, hath had reference principally to the former branch of the gospel, setting forth to you the gracious discharge of the members of Christ from all iniquity; and so consequently from all the fruits of iniquity, in these words; "and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all;" and I have further showed you, how the people of God, and members of Christ, partake of such discharge, which is the way of God, by which the sons of men, believers, can have their portion, and their possession of this immunity, and that out of I John 2:1, "if any man sin, &c." It was in my thoughts, beloved, to have made present progress into the text that I have read unto you; but yet in some respect a necessity lies upon me to give you a brief touch of some things I have formerly delivered, by way of acquitting myself from injurious slanders. It is, and hath been my portion, and not unknown to many of you, that while I have labored freely, and by the assistance of the Spirit of the Lord, to make known his mind to the comfort and rest of the weary and heavy laden, I myself have not wanted my burden; yet were it not for the gospel's sake, lest that should receive prejudice, I should never open my mouth to vindicate a truth, as it concerns myself, in so public a way. But as there hath been most false imputations laid upon me, in respect of the gospel, so for the sake of that only, I shall acquit myself publicly before you of such things as are most injuriously charged upon me.

1. It hath been affirmed, and that by persons who have gone for men of credit, and consequently the wound must strike the deeper, and the report take the greater impression; it hath been given forth, I say, that in my discourse among you, I should deliver to you, that the active and passive obedience of Christ, as God and man, in reference to both his natures, hath not a sufficiency in it to make up a complete righteousness for us; and further, that the ground of it should be this, namely, that Christ did not perform the several duties of the several revelations wherein many persons stand; as the office of a magistrate, and the relation of a husband, &c. For the vindicating of myself herein; I shall repeat the matter I delivered before, and you shall also know the truth of what my judgment is in this thing, and then leave it to the church of God, whether it be a slander or no. This I then said, that the active and passive obedience of Christ properly, are the actions and passions of the human nature; for the divine nature is not subject to obedience, because there is not any superior whom it should obey, neither is it subject to passion; God cannot suffer; and therefore doing the commands and suffering the punishments are more proper to the human nature; and this is but a mere creature, and therefore the actions of it, as a creature, cannot extend to a proportion answerable to the injury done by sin to God. For this cause, I say, as I said before, there must be an addition of virtue from the Divine Nature of Christ to make the active and passive obedience of the human nature a complete righteousness. So that all I said is this, that the actions and passions of the human nature are not sufficient to make up our righteousness complete, but there must be something of the Divine Nature superadded, to raise up one proportional to the transgressions we commit. And that expression concerning the not performing of duties of these several relations, was only to this purpose, to show wherein the human nature of Christ in obedience, did not fulfill everything in particular, which is the duty of a man; and that therefore the divine nature of Christ, by the eminent dignity thereof, is, as I said before, to make up the righteousness a complete one. Concerning this, whether it be truth or no, let the church judge according to the word; as for Christ, as God and man, it is well known, I used not the word, neither had I the thing in my mind, nor in my tongue, to the purpose they allege it against me. In a word, this, I say, that Christ, as God and man, hath in himself an absolute completeness of righteousness for all the elect; there need not be a going forth from Christ to anything besides for a perfect righteousness.

2. There is another charge, deep indeed, and I appeal to you, that frequently heard me, whether ever you heard any such thing from me, namely, that by way of inference I should deny Christ; how true this is, let the whole course of my ministry witness, which altogether aimed and endeavored the exalting of him above all the creatures in the world; and, except my being so busy with this truth, become an occasion of so manifest slanders and false aspersions that are raised, I know not what should be the cause of them. But beloved, how is it that I should deny Christ? In that, say they, I deny repentance unto life. Now, whether ever I did so, I appeal to you that heard me; this, I say, concerning faith and repentance unto life, that neither have any efficacy of their own to produce life; but those that attain to life, in time the Lord giveth them to believe and to repent indeed.

3. Another charge is stranger than all the rest; this I must touch also. I will name no persons, nor hint them; my scope is to deliver plainly unto you the truth of my own thoughts, and so lie under censure, or be acquitted. The charge is, that I should affirm, that should an elect person live and die a whoremonger and an adulterer, and in all kind of profaneness; and, though thus living and dying, shall be saved; which, how contrary it is unto the whole course of my ministry, ye are witness; I dare be bold to say, you all know it to be a gross, notorious, and groundless slander. You know, a person being elect, it is impossible he should miscarry, and not be saved. Either God's election must be frustrated, which is impossible, or he that is elected to salvation must attain unto it. I think none of those that have cast this imputation upon me will deny it; but withal, this; I said before, and so I say still, there is no elect person, suppose him to be capable, and to come to years, shall die before he be called, that is, before the Lord gives faith to him to believe, and in some measure frame him to walk by the Spirit according to his rule; in a word, this person is changed in conversation; the principle is this; "he that believeth shall be saved, and, he that believeth not shall be damned;" and that "no unclean thing shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." Every soul, therefore, being elected, as it shall be saved at last, so is it, or shall in time be called and enabled to believe and walk as a child of light. If this be not true doctrine, then I desire my mouth may be stopped.

Having thus endeavored to take off those aspersions, though not in respect of myself, yet in respect of some of you, who peradventure, may receive such things for truth, especially coming out of the mouths of such persons as those from whom the charge comes; I come to the text that I have taken to handle, namely, "thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee." I shall say but little concerning the latter branch of it, it having been all my work heretofore to set forth this immunity we have by the blood of Christ, the cleansing from all sin; I shall keep myself to the former branch, "thou art all fair, my love." Let us therefore take into consideration these particulars that will give some hint of the grace revealed here. Who this love is, of whom Christ speaks? Why this person that is so fair, is here called my love? What this fairness is that is appropriated to her? What it is for her to be all fair? When this time is that she is all fair, "thou art all fair, my love?"

Who this is that is here called the love of Christ, the next words will unriddle the question, "come with me from Lebanon, my spouse." The love of Christ then here is the spouse of Christ, and beloved; if you knew all, you would soon see what glorious, unspeakable, and unsearchable excellencies are contained in this grace, that the church should be admitted into the bosom of Christ, to be his very spouse. There are two things very considerable by which you may perceive, at the least, some of the glory and excellency of this privilege. If you consider the inequality of the persons that are matched; and the great privilege that issues from such a match. The word spouse is nothing but a title of relation, in reference to a husband; now, I say, first consider the inequality of the persons matched, and therein you shall see admirable condescending grace. I remember, in I Sam.18:23, when the servants of Saul came to David to make mention of Saul's mind concerning his marrying his daughter, David was in a kind of astonishment; and when they spake to him of the matter, he replied, "seemeth it to you a light thing to be a king's son in law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed?" This was strange news to poor David; what, presently to marry the king's daughter, and be the son-in-law to a king, being a poor man as I am; is this a small matter in your eyes? Much more may we be astonished, that we, poor miserable wretches, should marry the Son and Heir of the world, nay, the Son and Heir of Glory. Shall this seem a light matter to you to be the spouse of a King, to be

the sons and daughters of a King of kings? It was an admirable witty expression of Abigail in I Sam.25:41, when David sent messengers unto her, to commune with her, to take her to be his wife, she in humility replied to the messengers thus, "let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord;" a high strained compliment, if it had been a mere one; but as it was real, so it expresses the great distance she conceived there was between herself and David; and therefore doth not spare to show her thoughts of her great unworthiness to be matched with him; this is an office good enough for me, to wash the servants feet, and not to lie in the bosom of David. Why, what a great matter was this; she was as rich as David, and she was very beautiful, and her stock and parentage was as good as David's; but there was but this difference, a kingdom was promised to David, and he was anointed king, but yet for the present, a persecuted anointed one; but notwithstanding she admires the great condescending of David, that he should take her to be his wife. Oh then, beloved, what must be the condescending of the Son of God, the heir of the world, and the express image of the Father, and the brightness of his glory, as you have it in Hebrews 1:3, to stoop to match himself to a creature; surely, I say, it were a great condescending. But since he was so pleased to condescend so low as to match himself to a creature, he might well have chosen the highest lineage and most noble stock of creatures, he might have matched himself with angels, but this makes his condescension more admirable; he descended lower, "he took not upon him, {saith the apostle} the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham." {Heb.2:16} And beloved, were it to creatures and the lowest simply, the condescension had not been so great. There may be some beauty in a country maid, though homely attired, as well as there may be in a great personage in richest apparel, of great stock and portion. Had there been beauty, though there had been no lineage, nor noble blood, this were something; but as the blood became ignoble and traitorous, in respect of the first father's rebellions and treasons, so this traitorous blood could not contain itself within its bounds; but as the prophet Isaiah speaks, "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores; they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." {Is.1:6} Even such as "none eye pitied" but "wast cast out in the open field," to the loathing of their persons; {Eze.16:5;} that Christ should take such a nasty beggar, such a beggar, as stinks above ground, as we may say, in regard of its filthiness; that hath no sound part, being full of blotches, and sores, and putrefactions, running over all parts, from head to foot; I say, that Christ should take such a creature, and no place should serve it, but his bosom, his bed; and no communication, but the nearest that possibly may, or can be imagined; even a communion that extends itself to a kind of oneness, and highest degree of unity.

Oh, the astonishing greatness of the love of Christ! They are said to be one flesh, as Christ and his church are set forth by the Holy Ghost, in the union between man and wife; so that, beloved, the church, as she is the spouse of Christ, is made one flesh with him. You have some monstrous births in the world sometimes, that have had some deformed parts growing unto them; as you may see at this time, in some place about this town; a young man with another youth, as I may say, united to him at his belly, whereby he is exceedingly deformed, and very much troubled with the burden of it, and almost poisoned by the noisomeness of it; whereby, the life of him that bears it, becomes worse than death to him. Beloved, such were some of us; nay, such were all of us, by nature; when Christ first took us, we were such monsters, filthy, loathsome, and ugly. And, though we were thus by nature, yet Christ has admitted us, not only into his house, and now and then into his presence, but to sit continually before him; yea, to be his spouse; he makes us "flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone;" what a condescending is this! It is true, beloved, Christ covenants and accordingly he hath done this; namely, cleansed this person, after he coupled himself to it; but, I say, to take persons before this change, in such a loathsome, filthy condition, and make them one with himself, is so strange a condescending, that all the world is not able to parallel it? No, not come near this act of Christ! A king may, peradventure, fancy some worthiness, beauty, something or other, that may be pleasing to him in a beggar, and marry her, for that he fancies to be of worth and delight in her; but, beloved, how could Christ cast his love on such persons, whom he knew were such filthy ones; who, even when he came in the sweetest and fairest ways to woo, spit poison in his face, being full of

enmity, stubbornness and rebellion, even bitter enmity against him; flinging from him, as the greatest enemy in the world? Beloved, by nature, every person, till Christ himself tame him, hath a spite against him, and fights against him, and is so full of malignity against him, as to cast dirt even in his face; and yet for all this inequality and disproportion between Christ and him, he makes this loathsome, wretched person, this rebel and traitor, his spouse.

Now, beloved, if the Lord but open your spirits, to look into this inequality, and see not only the distance, but even the extreme contrariety between Christ, considered as he is in himself and you in yourselves, how can you but break forth into admiration, even to astonishment? It is a notable expression, "behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." {I Jn.3:1-2} John begins with this note of admiration, "Behold," and follows it with an interrogation, as not being able to answer it himself, "what manner of love is this?" Why, wherein expressed; "that we should be called the sons of God." This is a great love, and yet ye know, that sonship is a relation below a spouse; how then should we break forth, if it were possible, into a higher admiration than ever he did, and say, "Behold, what manner of love is this, that we, poor miserable creatures, should be called the spouse of Christ! Now, we are the spouse of Christ; but it doth not yet appear what we shall be."

It remains to consider, the privileges of this relation, and therein see the great loving-kindness and unsearchable goodness of our God, that is pleased to match his own Son unto us, and by such a match, to make us partakers of such excellent and glorious privileges and immunities. I will but name a few of them.

As we are the spouse of Christ, so we are the children of God; he that marrieth the king's daughter, becometh the king's son by that match; but, that is not all; for by this match, we become heirs; if sons, then heir's, heirs of glory, joint-heirs with Christ; a great privilege, if you consider all the wealth and riches you have in and by Christ. This relation entitles the spouse of Christ, to all that ever he hath; to all his honors, and to all his communicable titles. This relation secures the church, the spouse of Christ, from all arrest, from actions, and all suits; let the debts be never so great, the creditors cannot come near her for one farthing; the consideration of this will add also to the exalting and magnifying of the exceeding riches of the grace of God in Christ to men, to show what a blessed condition this spouse-ship is, to those that are strangers unto both; hearing the love of the church, to be the chiefest of ten thousands, may, by the power of the Spirit of the Lord, be one to seek after him. It was the very same case in the Canticles; the daughters of the world say unto the spouse of Christ, hearing her so extol her love, "what is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? What is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?" {Song 5:9} Oh, saith the church, "my beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest of ten thousands;" when they had heard of the excellencies of Christ, they began at last to have their affections taken too, and to say, "whither is thy beloved gone, that we may seek him with thee?" Even so it may please God, when by my endeavour, the excellencies of the privileges of the spouse of Christ are set forth, and the gloriousness of the privileges of the gospel manifested; I say, when these appear, and when Christ, as the chief of ten thousands, is declared; some may seek after him, yea, and embrace him with joy. But, I cannot stand now to speak of them; but hereafter, God willing, if I shall have further opportunity.