

Sermon for Sunday, November 8, 1970 by Andrew A. Jumper, Pastor
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THE TROUBLE WITH GOD'S WIFE
II Corinthians 11:1-6

Text: "... for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband." II Corinthians 11:2

(This printed sermon does not include the full text of Mr. Jumper's remarks, many of which were spontaneously added.)

The relationship of God and of Jesus Christ to the Church is described in many ways in the Bible. St. Paul called the Church the "new humanity" when he described Jesus as a sort of new Adam. The Church is sometimes called the body of Christ of which He is the head; at other times it is likened to the vineyard of God or to the flock of God.

One of the most vivid ways of describing the Church in both the Old and New Testaments is the analogy of a wife. In the Book of Hosea, the prophet was told to go into the market place and purchase a prostitute who was on the block for sale. He was to love her and cherish her as his wife. He did this, but his wife, Gomer, was not content with the new life and went off to prostitute herself again. Still, God told Hosea to keep on loving her, to go find her and bring her home and restore her again.

In this parable Gomer represents the Church. God's people, the Church, are like this wife who was redeemed from a dreadful existence but whose heart still lives in the gutter, who keeps going back to old ways and old sins. Yet God, like Hosea, loves his wayward wife, keeps on forgiving her, and keeps going back to reclaim her from her evil ways.

God's wife is coming in for a lot of criticism today. Her reputation is not exactly the best. Let's look at some of the charges leveled against God's wife in order that we might understand her better and let us try to evaluate some of the criticisms against her.

One criticism of God's wife is that her theological wardrobe is no longer stylish; it is out of date. If she is to appeal to modern man who is very scientifically oriented, who is skeptical of miracles and has almost completely repudiated any belief in the supernatural, who explains religious experience in psychological language, then she must have a new theological wardrobe.

What they are really talking about, however, is a theological miniskirt, for they would reduce the faith and the theology of the Church to a miniskirt that hardly covers the subject.

I wonder if modern man is really that modern, after all. Billy Graham says that the majority of the people who attend his crusades and the vast majority of those who come forward to commit their lives to Jesus are under thirty. Perhaps

modern man yearns most of all for knowledge of the supernatural, for a real and dynamic relationship with God.

Can we understand the current rebellion of today's youth apart from their rejection of a materialistic society and a search for something that will give life meaning, purpose and direction? Can we understand the use of hallucinogenic drugs apart from a burning desire to find more in life than they have found? People who use such drugs speak of the experience in glowing terms as though they were involved in some religious experience. They have not found reality in the Church, so they are seeking it elsewhere.

No, I do not believe modern man wants God's wife stripped of her wardrobe and left with only a theological miniskirt. I think modern man wants the Church to proclaim her faith unequivocally, to stand by her convictions and beliefs with integrity, to believe what she says and to say what she believes.

The world today, I think, wants the Church to quit beating around the bush and trying to appeal to men by claiming to believe whatever they believe. They want to hear the Church state her faith and stand foursquare upon it so that they can trust her and find meaning and direction for their own lives.

Another criticism of God's wife is that she wants to raise her 20th century children on a 19th century morality. It is charged that the old morality standards of the Church are no longer relevant for a "sock it to me" generation which has the Pill and which has been freed from the binding moral restrictions that are to them meaningless.

To the extent that the Church does have a 19th century morality, I agree wholeheartedly with her critics. She needs to get rid of that kind of approach to life because we don't live in a 19th century world.

As a matter of fact, the world we live in is much more like the first century world which Jesus and St. Paul knew. Immorality has become rampant and sex magazines and sex-oriented movies are daring to make more and more exposure of wickedness in order to put it in a good and acceptable light.

More and more of our TV screens are filled with violence and three of the most so-called significant movies produced last year had as their theme lesbianism/homosexuality. Jesus said, "out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man..." (Matt. 15:19).

I suppose Corinth was the seat of wickedness in the ancient world. St. Paul wrote to them and said, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 6:9-10).

To the Galatians Paul wrote, "Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19-21).

No, God's wife ought not to try to raise 20th century children on a 19th century morality. She needs to raise them on a first century morality. Without compromise, without equivocation, God's wife ought to speak out for the sort of righteousness that God demands of us, just as she did in the first century, because those are the problems that still face our world today. The Christian Church was born into a dreadful moral environment. Like a canker, that environment was to erode away until the great Roman Empire had been eaten away from within and collapsed.

The only thing to survive out of the chaos and moral confusion of those days was the Christian Church which had stood foursquare for human morality. Western Europe and western civilization survived because the Church stood for morality. Today our society is being eroded by the immorality that is rampant in our midst and unless we, the Church, begin to stand for human morality, our society, too, will be eroded from within until it also collapses about us.

Another criticism of God's wife is that she ought to get out of the house more. It is charged that she spends all of her time, all of her energy, all of her resources on her own children. What she should do, it is said, is to go where the action is.

She ought to get out of the house, they say. She should be involved in social issues, in poverty problems, in political arenas, in issues of war, and all of the whole spate of problems that confound mankind. I was recently told by a fellow that he did not plan to participate in the building program of his church. He thought that the money should be spent on problems and needs which face human society today instead of on a new house for God's wife.

Now certainly we would all agree that the Church has a responsibility and a concern for the needs of the world. But what happens to the children if God's wife devotes all of her time, all of her energies, all of her resources to others? Now I know many sad cases where a mother has done that and her own children have suffered the dreadful consequences.

I am convinced that the main task of God's wife is to raise her children in such a way that they will go out and change the world, and in the name of God, seek to meet the needs of their world for the sake of Jesus Christ. The job of God's wife is to raise her children in such a way that they will change the world.

The job of God's wife is to keep on bearing children to keep on leading men and women to a saving relationship to Jesus Christ--so that these born-again people, these babes in Jesus, these children of God will keep on being born in order that the world might keep on being changed and made better.

And I'll tell you this: all of the great moral advancements, all of the scientific achievements, all the advancements and ideas about the worth and dignity of individuals have come about because the children of God, going out into His world, have witnessed for Him and have changed the world.

And while God's wife, like any good wife, must serve her world, her first task, her primary duty, is to raise the kind of men and women who will make her world a better place in which to live.

God's wife is certainly not perfect. For example, she suffers from the womanly temptation to settle down. She craves a place to shelter and entrench herself and her children. Secretly, I suspect, like most wives she wants to reform her husband. She wants to domesticate Him, to tie Him down to where she is and to where she wants to stay.

But God cannot be tied down. God is free. God is a missionary. God is a pioneer, an explorer, a creator of that which has not been before. God tears the old times off the world's calendar so that every age is a new age. He keeps on moving and He keeps on calling His wife to follow Him and often she is reluctant to do so. No, God's wife, the Church, isn't perfect.

But I wonder if the trouble is really with God's wife today?

If Jesus is who He says He is, if God acts in the world in the way the Bible says He does, if life is to be lived the way Scripture says it is to be lived, if a holy relationship to God is made possible through the inner working of the Holy Spirit as the first disciples say it is, then this has tremendous significance for my life. If I don't want to live my life that way, if I don't want to live my life the way the Bible says, then I have to try to change the Bible.

So the problem is not with God's wife, it is with God's children. Today as never before we are experiencing the spectacle of children in revolt against parents and against society. They want to live as they please.

Not long ago I was talking with two young college students, about right and wrong, about ethics. They both said a person ought to do what he wants to do as long as it doesn't hurt anybody. One had a girl friend who worked in another town. He had wanted her to come for the weekend, but she had to work. They thought this wasn't fair. They thought she ought to call in and say she was sick and come on anyway. Life, they said, was meant to be enjoyed and it didn't hurt to break the rules because society wasn't fair. And that it was all right for her to call in sick, draw sick pay, and come on for the weekend. Never mind the plans of the person who might be called in to take her place. Life is to be enjoyed and people ought to be able and free to do what they want.

I fear something of this sort is going on among a lot of people today, not only among students but among the adults of our society. We live in the permissive generation. And since God's wife stands unequivocally for what is right, since

God's wife has a first century moral code, people want to change her. The problem is not with God's wife, the problem is with God's children.

And is the problem with God's wife that she isn't doing anything to involve herself in the world? I suspect not. It is a great deal easier to involve ourselves in humanistic endeavors, in service projects, to meet the physical needs of man than it is to lead him to Jesus Christ.

One of the greatest things that the Church can do for a man is not to remodel his earthly pigpen. We don't need any more remodeled pigpens. What we need are remade men. Men who have been led to salvation and to Jesus Christ. No, the problem is not God's wife, it is with God's children who find it difficult to have a burning faith to share with lost men and women, so they substitute something else.

God's wife has come in for a lot of criticism today, but I think the problem is not with God's wife but with you and me, God's children. Let us resolve that we will stand foursquare for the faith of the Church without equivocation. We will say what we believe and we will believe what we say. Let us stand for the moral standards of the first century in order that our world might not be eroded from within and collapse about our ears. Let us stand foursquare for leading other men into a dynamic, real relationship with Jesus Christ.

The problem of our day is not God's wife but God's children.