

The Parson's Tale

[THE REMEDY AGAINST LECHERY]

Now cometh the remedye agains lecherye, and that is generally chastitee and continence that restraineth alle the desordeinee mevinges¹ that comen of fleshly talentes. And evere the grettere merite shal he han that most restraineth the wikkede eschaufinges of the ardor² of this sinne. And this is in two maneres, that is to sayn, chastitee in mariage and chastitee of widewehood. Now shaltou understonde that matrimoine is lefevel³ assembling of man and of woman that receiven by vertu of the sacrement the bond thurgh which they may nat be departed⁴ in al hir lif—that is to sayn, whil that they liven bothe. This, as saith the book, is a ful greet sacrement. God maketh it, as I have said, in Paradis, and wolde himself be born in mariage. And for to halwen⁵ mariage he was at a wedding wheras he turned water into win, which was the firste miracle that he wroughte in erthe biforn his disciples. Trewe effect of mariage clenseth fornicacion and replenissheth holy chirche of⁶ good linage, for that is the ende of mariage. And it chaungeth deedly⁷ sinne into venial sinne bitwixe hem that been ywedded, and maketh the hertes al oon⁸ of hem that been ywedded, as well as the bodies. This is verrey⁹ mariage that was established by God er that sinne bigan, whan naturel lawe was in his righte point¹ in Paradis. And it was ordained that oo² man sholde have but oo womman, and oo womman but oo man, as saith Saint Augustin, by manye reasons.

First, for mariage is figured³ bitwixe Crist and holy chirche. And that other⁴ is for a man is heed of a womman—algate, by ordinance⁵ it sholde be so. For if a womman hadde mo⁶ men than oon, thanne sholde she have mo hedes than oon, and that were an horrible thing bifore God. And eek a womman ne mighte nat plese too many folk atones. And also ther ne sholde nevere be pees ne reste amonges hem, for everich⁷ wolde asken his owene thing. And fether-over,⁸ no man ne sholde knowe his owne engendrure,⁹ ne who sholde have his heritage. And the womman sholde been the lesse biloved fro the time that she were cõjoint¹ to manye men.

Now cometh how that a man sholde bere him² with his wif, and namely in two things, that is to sayn, in suffrance³ and in reverence, as shewed Crist whan he made first womman. For he ne made hire nat of the heed of Adam for⁴ she sholde nat claime too greet lordshipe. For theras the womman hath the maistrye⁵ she maketh too muche desray. Ther needen none ensamples of this: the experience of day by day oughte suffise. Also certes God ne made nat womman of the foot of Adam for she ne sholde nat been holden too lowe: for she can nat patiently suffre. But God made womman of the rib of Adam for womman sholde be felawe unto man. Man sholde bere him to his wif in faith,

1. Inordinate urges. "Talentes": desires.

2. The wicked blazings up of the fire.

3. Permissible.

4. Separated.

5. Sanctify.

6. With.

7. Deadly.

8. I.e., in union.

9. True.

1. I.e., in its natural working order.

2. One.

3. I.e., symbolizes the relationship.

4. Second; "heed": head.

5. At any rate, by proper management.

6. More.

7. Each.

8. Moreover.

9. Children.

1. Joined.

2. Behave. "Namely": especially.

3. Patience.

4. In order that.

5. Domination; "desray": disturbance.

in trouthe, and in love, as saith Saint Paul⁶ that a man sholde loven his wif as Crist loved holy chirche, that loved it so wel that he deide for it: so sholde a man for his wif, if it were neede.

Now how that a womman sholde be subyet to hir housbonde, that telleth Saint Peter.⁷ First, in obedience; and eek, as saith the decree, a woman that is wif, as longe as she is a wif, she hath noon auctoritee to swere ne to bere witness withoute leve⁸ of hir housbonde that is hir lord—algate, he sholde be so by reson. She sholde eek serven him in alle honestee, and been attempree⁹ of hir array. I woot wel that they sholde setten hir entente¹ to plesen hir housbondes, but nat by hir quaintise² of array. Saint Jerome saith that wives that been appareiled in silk and in precious purpre³ ne mowe nat clothen hem in Jesu Crist. Loke what saith Saint John eek in this matere. Saint Gregorye eek saith that no wight seeketh precious array but only for vaine glorie, to been honoured the more before the peple. It is a greet folye a womman to have a fair array outward and in hireself be foul inward. A wif sholde eek be mesurable⁴ in looking and in bering and in laughing, and discreet in alle hir wordes and hir deedes. And aboven alle wordly thing she sholde loven hir housbonde with al hir herte and to him be trewe of hir body. So sholde an housbonde eek be to his wif. For sith⁵ that al the body is the housbondes, so sholde hir herte been, or elles ther is bitwixe hem two as in that no parfit⁶ mariage. Thanne shal men understonde that for three thinges a man and his wif fleshly mowen⁷ assemble. The firste is in entente of engendrure of⁸ children to the service of God: for certes that is the cause final of matrimoine. Another cause is to yeelden everich⁹ of hem to other the dette of hir bodies, for neither of hem hath power of his owene body. The thridde¹ is for to eschewe leccherye and vilainye. The ferthe² is forsoothe deedly sinne. As to the firste, it is meritorie;³ the seconde also for, as saith the decree, that she hath merite of chastitee that yeeldeth to hir housbonde the dette of hir body, ye, though it be again hir liking and the lust⁴ of hir herte. The thridde manere is venial sinne: and trewely, scarsly may ther any of thise be withoute venial sinne, for the corrupcion and the delit.⁵ The ferthe manere is for to understonde, as if they assemble only for amorous love and for noon of the foresaide causes, but for to accomplishe thilke brenning⁶ delit, they rekke nevere how ofte. Soothly it is deedly sinne. And yit, with sorwe, some folk wol painen hem⁷ more to doon than to hir appetit suffiseth. * * *

Another remedye agayns leccherye is specially to withdrawn swiche⁸ thinges as yive occasion to thilke vilainye, as ese, eting, and drinking. For certes when the pot boileth strongly, the beste remedye is to withdrawe the fir. Sleeping longe in greet quiete is eek a greet norice⁹ to leccherye.

Another remedye agayns leccherye is that a man or a womman eschewe the compaignye of hem by whiche he douteth¹ to be tempted. For albeit so that

6. In Ephesians v. 25.

7. See I Peter iii.1.

8. Permission.

9. Modest.

1. Do their best.

2. Extravagance.

3. Royal scarlet; "mowe": may.

4. Modest; "bering": behavior.

5. Since.

6. Perfect.

7. May.

8. With desire to beget.

9. Pay each.

1. Third.

2. Fourth.

3. Meritorious.

4. Desire.

5. On account of the impurity and bodily delight.

6. That burning.

7. Exert themselves.

8. Such.

9. Nurse.

1. Fears.

the deede be withstonden, yit is ther greet temptacion. Soothly, a whit wal, although it brenne² nought fully by stiking of a candele, vit is the wal blak of the leit.³ Ful ofte time I rede that no man truste in his owene perfeccion but⁴ he be stronger than Sampson and holier than David and wiser than Salomon. * * *

2. Burn; "stiking": application.
3. Flame.

4. Unless.