

THE CHRISTIAN & THE CHURCH (06)

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Introduction

In our last study we began looking as the first metaphor or imagery of the church as the bride of Christ. The secondary title I gave to this study is : **The call to a life-time commitment of loyalty to and unrivalled love for Christ.** We began our study in the O.T. by looking at Jehovah's covenant relationship with Israel. The nation of Israel is pictured as the bride of Jehovah. This imagery is seen in various passages. We focused upon *Ezekiel 16*. I will briefly survey for you the material we covered.

Ezekiel 16 describes for us how the Lord found Israel as a abhorred and cast out female child. This casting out took place at birth. The Lord rescued and tenderly cared for her until she grew into a beautiful young woman. The chapter describes Jehovah's betrothal and covenant marriage to Israel, His great love for Israel, His many blessings upon Israel. Then the chapter describes the horrible ugliness of Israel's unfaithfulness to Jehovah, her ingratitude and her frenzied harlotries. Israel's conduct was so shocking that even her pagan Philistine neighbors became ashamed. We have seen many illustrations of this in modern times : the world's shock and great shame over the conduct of professed Christians and particularly Christian leaders.

The Lord's love for and loyalty to Israel was unquestionable. He called Israel into a relationship of exclusivity with Him. It was to be a monogamous covenant relationship of a life-time commitment, loyalty to and unrivalled loved for Jehovah. The opposite of unrivalled love is spiritual adultery and religious harlotry.

We saw that Israel's harlotry was religious. Harlotry is the word used to describe the sin of God's people being joined to idols, directly worshipping idols or becoming indirectly

involved in the activities of worshipping idols. The Lord's exclusivity demand means that whatever you love more than the Lord is an idol. Such love is idolatrous.

We then turned to the N.T. and saw that the metaphorical imagery of the church as the bride of Christ is hinted at in *Matt.9:14-15*; *22:1-14*; *25:1-13*; and *Jn.3:29*. We then turned to *2Cor.11:1-3* which we studied in some detail. Please turn again to *2Cor.11:1-3*. (**read**). We began by answering the question : **What is a betrothal?** Then we looked at Paul's role as drawn from the imagery. Paul is a part of the bride of Christ. Yet at the same time his role is two-fold. Firstly, his role is evangelistic. Through his evangelistic role he became the father of the bride and betrothed her to her bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul said to the Corinthians in *1Cor.4:15*, "in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel." Secondly, Paul's role is pastoral. Like the father of the bride, he must work to preserve the purity and fidelity of the bride until she is fully given over to her husband on her wedding day.

Conversion to Christ brings you into the bride of Christ. In the language of Paul's imagery, you are betrothed to the heavenly Bridegroom as a "**pure virgin**". Christ's choice of you, love for you, loyalty to you and commitment to you are unquestionable. He didn't have to choose you nor love you. Paul made it clear that you were betrothed to "**one husband**". Your loyalty to Him must be undivided. Your purity for Him must remain inviolable. Your commitment to Him must be steadfast. Your love for Him must be unrivalled. The expression, "**one husband**", demands an exclusive monogamous covenant relationship.

In closing our study we looked at what it means to have an unrivalled love for Christ. We applied this concept of unrivalled love to what Jesus said in *Matt.10:37-38* and *1Jn.2:15*. According to *Jas.4:4* the absence of unrivalled love is the active enmity of adultery. In the language of *Ezek.16*, it is religious harlotry.

New Testament Imagery (continued).

We come now to continue our study of the N.T. metaphor of the church as the bride of Christ. I want to begin by looking firstly at the sin of idolatry. Please turn to ***Isa.44:9-20***. (read). The sin of idolatry is one that the Bible speaks very strongly against. It is an abomination that is greatly abhorred. It is described as sheer stupidity and a lie. (cf. ***Jer.10:14***). Worshipping an idol is comparable to you coming here and worshipping this pulpit. Idolatry is an incomprehensible insult to God. It is worse than a man loving his dog more than his wife. Idolatry is forbidden in the very first commandment. The basis of the Ten Commandments is the Lord's redemption of His people and the covenant relationship He established with them. It was a covenant relationship they agreed to. (***Exod.19:8; 24:3, 7***). It was a covenant relationship that gave to the Lord an exclusive claim upon them.

The first commandment says, "You shall have no other gods before Me." (***Exod.20:3***). In other words, "I am to be your one and only God." There is an emphatic exclusivity here. Israel was forbidden to have any other gods besides the Lord. Israel was forbidden to have any other gods in addition to the Lord. The church father, **Origen**, wisely noted that the first commandment has to do with love. He wrote, "*What each one honors before all else, what before all things he admires and loves, this for him is God.*" **Luther** wrote, "*Whatever your heart clings to and relies upon, that is properly your God.*" And **Matthew Henry** wrote, "*whatever is esteemed or loved, feared or served, delighted in or depended on, more than God, that we do in effect make our god.*"

Deut.6:4-5 says, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." In our last study we saw the exclusivity demands in these verses. But here is the point : if Israel had loved the Lord as required here, with total exclusivity, commitment and loyalty, she would have faithfully obeyed the first commandment and be kept from

any form of idolatry. Israel became an idolatrous harlot because she failed to love the Lord as required in these verses.

The Israelites were warned that when they took possession of the land of Canaan they were to utterly overthrow and destroy and all the gods and sacred places of the Canaanites. The Lord warned, “you shall not worship their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their deeds.” (*Exod.23:24*). In *Deut.12:30* the Lord warned the Israelites against making inquiry into how the Canaanite nations worshipped their gods in order to see what can be learned from them. There is nothing to be learned from a pagan idolatrous culture about the worship of the true and living God. The Lord declared in *vs.32*, “Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it.” Our worship of God must be rooted in God’s revelation.

The Lord God is the incomparable One. In *Isa.40:18* the Lord asked, “To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him?” In *Isa.46:5* the Lord asked, “To whom would you liken Me and make Me equal and compare Me, that we would be alike?” Pharaoh asked, “Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?” (*Exod.5:2*). Well, Pharaoh learned that there is no god like the Lord our God. (*Exod.8:10*). And he learned that all his gods and goddesses were utterly useless before the Lord.

Psa.97:7 says, “Let all those be ashamed who serve graven images.” To worship and serve an idol is to worship and serve something that is lifeless, useless and powerless. A person’s idols may be made of gold and silver (*Isa.40:19*), but that does not change the fact that they are lifeless, useless and powerless. One of the most amazing questions in the Bible that sums up the sheer stupidity of idolatry is the question Laban asked Jacob, “why did you steal my gods?” (*Gen.31:30*). All graven images, however grotesque they may be, are made from ideas that are drawn from creation. Even when demonic powers are worshipped, the demons are still created beings.

Idolaters replace the true and living God with created things they have deified. These things may be spirit beings, living or dead human beings or animals or images they have made from clay, wood, stone or metal. Paul said idolaters have “exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” (*Rom.1:25*). In the final analysis there is no difference between worshipping a man or worshipping a block of wood.

The second commandment (*Exod.20:4-6*) forbids the worship of the true and living God with the use of idols. Those who worship the true and living God through the use of and with the help of animate and inanimate objects are also idolaters. Moses warned Israel, “watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, so that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure.” (*Deut.4:15-16*).

In our last study we looked at *Exod.34:14* where the Lord said to Israel, “you shall not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.”. The worship of idols provokes the Lord to jealousy. It is worship that robs God of His glory. (*Isa.42:8*) It is worship that demeans God who is the incomparable and highly exalted One.

Philip Ryken noted that a more accurate and positive description of God’s jealousy is God’s zeal. The word used describes the burning passion of God’s love. God’s jealousy is an intensely caring devotion to the objects of His love. **Ryken** added, “*A holy jealousy is one that guards someone’s rightful possession. The most obvious example is the love between a husband and wife. No husband who truly loves his wife could possibly endure seeing her in the arms of another man. It would make him intensely jealous, and rightly so! God feels the same way about His people. His commitment to us is total. His love is exclusive, passionate, intense – in a word, jealous.*”

Christopher Wright wrote, *“The jealousy of Yahweh is a function of His covenant commitment to His people. Having committed Himself exclusively to them, He requires exclusive loyalty in return. In a context of committed love, the exclusion of rivals is a perfectly proper concern, as that celebration of human love declares : ‘Love is as strong as death, its jealousy as unyielding as the grave.’ (Song of Sol. 8:6 NIV).... The covenant relationship between God and God’s people really means something only if God is totally committed to it. A God who was not jealous for the reciprocal commitment of God’s people would be as contemptible as a husband who didn’t care whether or not his wife was faithful to him. Part of our problem with this profound covenantal reality is that we have come to regard religion, like everything else, as a matter of “consumer choice”, which we have virtually deified for its own sake. We resent monopolies. But the unique and incomparable, only living God makes necessarily exclusive claims and has the right to a monopoly on our love.... Jealousy is God’s love protecting itself.”*

God’s stand against idolatry did not change in the N.T. In **Rom.1:21-23** idolatry is condemned. Idolatry is described as exchanging the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible things. In **1Cor.6:9-10** idolaters is second on Paul’s list of the unrighteous who will not inherit the kingdom of God. In **Gal.5:19-21** idolatry is fourth in the list that is described as the deeds of the flesh. In **Rev.21:8** idolaters are among those who will be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death. In **Rev.22:25** idolaters are among those who are outside the city.

1Thess.1:9 describes conversion to Christ as “turning to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” Turning away from idols and turning to the true and living God points to Biblical exclusivity. Conversion to Christ is not adding Christ to your religious beliefs and gods. Your religious beliefs must be cast out and forsaken and Christ alone who is the truth must be embraced. (**Jn.14:6**). Your gods and goddesses must be destroyed and thrown away and the only true and living God must be embraced. (**Jn.17:3**).

As Christians we are warned, “Do not be idolaters” (*1Cor.10:7*). This is a command in the present tense and conveys the idea, “*never take part in any idol worship.*” It does not matter who has invited you to this idolatrous worship or who is conducting this idolatrous worship. You cannot accept such an invitation. Let me strike a note of warning here. We seem to think that idolatrous worship is found only among pagan religions. That notion is false. Idolatrous worship is also prevalent in Christendom. There are many so-called Christian churches that are guilty of practicing idolatrous worship. And there are so-called evangelical churches that are guilty of idolatrous worship. I am very careful about accepting invitations to worship in other churches. In two instances I have had to get up and walk out of worship services that I had attended. Let us be very careful, wise and discerning lest we become a partaker of activities that are idolatrous.

1Cor.10:14 commands us, “flee (**be continually fleeing or running away**) from idolatry”. *1Jn.5:21* says, “guard yourselves from idols”. The verb emphasizes urgency and personal effort. It calls upon you repulse every lure or attack of idolatry. *1Cor.5:11* calls upon you to not associate with any so-called brother in the church who is an idolater.

In *Rev.2* we find the warning given to the church in Pergamum (*vs.14*) and Thyatira (*vs.20*) against eating things sacrificed to idols. Both verses set side by side the sins of eating things sacrificed to idols and committing immorality. In *vs.14* the reference is to Balaam’s actions in causing the Israelites to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit immorality. In that incident the Israelites committed physical immorality with the foreign women and spiritual immorality by worshipping their gods. In *vs.20* reference is to the actions of Jezebel who led King Ahab into such abominable idolatry that his idolatry became proverbial.

Now let us turn to *1Cor.10:14-22*. (**read**). The real danger here is that in eating things sacrificed to idols you become a partaker in demon worship. The Christian who does this

provokes the Lord to jealousy. And now note the warning in the form of a question :
 “We are not stronger than He, are we?”

The question in **2Cor.6:16** is very important for us : “what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God.” As an individual Christian you are the temple of the living God. As a church we are together the temple of the living God. What agreement has the temple of God with idols? The answer is : absolutely none! The Lord is a jealous God who has exclusive claim over you. He tolerates no rivals. As the bride of Christ, let us beware of the adultery of idolatry. Let us beware of provoking the Lord to jealousy.

Let us return now to **2Cor.11** for one more point. Paul said in **vs.2**, “I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.” Paul had his eyes on the future when the betrothal period would culminate in marriage. The marriage is briefly described in **Rev.19:7-9**. Please turn to **Rev.19:7-9**. (**read**). Now turn to **Rev.21:1-2, 9-11**. (**read**). The glorified bride or church is pictured as “the holy city, new Jerusalem.” Her glory is the glory of God. Where is the church today? Paul’s marriage metaphor places the church between the betrothal and the wedding. The second coming of Christ would usher in the wedding festivities.

This brings us to **Eph.5:22-33**. (**read**). As we approach the study of this passage, let us keep in mind the meaning of betrothal. A betrothal was a legal contract in which the betrothed couple were legally husband and wife even though the actual marriage took place at a future date. Secondly, a betrothal removed the young woman from the authority of her father and placed her under the authority of her husband. The church’s betrothal to Christ has placed the church under Christ’s husbandly authority, under Christ’s husbandly Lordship.

The key verse in this Ephesians passage is **vs.32**, “This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.” In an earlier study we saw that the word “**mystery**” refers to something that was hidden in God, something which

human beings could not unravel by their own ingenuity or study, something which God has revealed to those who believe in Him, something that God has helped them to understand. In *Eph.3* we met the first mystery which God has revealed to us. This was dealt with in our second study.

In *chap.5* we are introduced to a second mystery. Paul said “this mystery is great”. The word “**great**” stresses the magnitude, the importance and the profoundness of this mystery. What is this mystery? It is that the union of the husband and wife into one flesh is a model or metaphor for the union of Christ and the church. It is not my intent to expound this passage verse by verse. I want to point out to you the relevant points for our study.

The **first** fact that we must note is **the fact of exclusivity**. This exclusivity brings to the fore the fact that marriage is a monogamous covenant relationship. Wives are commanded to submit to their “**own**” husbands (*vs.22*). Husbands are commanded to love their “**own**” wives (*vs.28*). A husband and a wife are called to a life-time commitment of exclusive and unrivalled love for each other and loyalty to each other. Anything less is not only unacceptable but sinful and quite likely adulterous. The exclusivity of your relationship to your spouse models the exclusivity of your relationship to Christ.

The **second** fact we must note is **the wife’s submission** to her husband (*vs.22, 24*), her respect and reverence for her husband (*vs.33*). The extent of the wife’s submission is “in everything”. (*vs.24*). But “everything” is conditioned by the fact that Christ will not ask His bride to submit to sinful actions. For this reason a husband cannot misuse the word “**everything**” and force his wife to violate her conscience. A wife’s respect and reverence for her husband are unconditional matters. In *1Pet.3:2* the Christian wife is commanded to respect and reverence her unsaved husband. From day one the Christian wife must cultivate a heart of respect and reverence for her husband. A wife must **never** demean, put down or talk down to her husband. She, as his helper, must wisely and carefully correct him when he is wrong. But she must never disrespect him or treat him

with irreverence. Speech that demeans is a very serious sin. It is akin to violating the sixth commandment against murder because demeaning speech is an attack on the image of God in a person. A Christian wife's submission to her husband models the church's submission to Christ. A Christian wife's cultivation of respect and reverence for her husband models the church's cultivation of respect and reverence for Christ.

The **third** fact we must note is **the husband's headship** or lordship over his wife (**vs.23**), his selfless and sacrificial love for his wife (**vs.25**), his care for and cherishing of his wife (**vs.29**) and his ongoing efforts to keep her looking glorious (**vs.27**; cf. **Ezek.16:10-14**). Peter says husbands must deal with their wives in an understanding manner because she is a fellow-heir of the grace of life. (**1Pet.3:7**). She is also made in the image of God. But she is more than that. More importantly, she is a fellow-heir of the grace of life. A Christian husband's loving headship and lordship over his wife must model Christ's loving headship and lordship over the church. A Christian husband's selfless and sacrificial love for his wife must model Christ's selfless and sacrificial love for the church. A Christian husband's caring for and cherishing of his wife must model Christ's caring for and cherishing of the church.

Let me address now the Christian husband's responsibility for his wife's glory. Brides are usually most glorious on their wedding day. And then, it seems, the glory gradually fades away. It has nothing to do with age. It has to do with neglect, the husband's neglect of his wife. I stated in our last study that in **Ezek.16** Jehovah is pictured as the most loving, doting and generous husband. Turn to **Ezek.16:10-14**. (**read**). The spiritual application of this physical picture is what Paul said in **Eph.5:27**. Christ's goal is to present to Himself a bride "in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless." In **Rev.19:8** the Lamb's bride is dressed in the righteousness of fine linen, bright and clean. In **Rev.21:11** the bride's brilliant splendor and glory is the glory of God.

Now Brethren, I know that after marriage any number of negative physical factors can come into being and take effect. But despite all of this, husbands have the responsibility,

within reason and ability, to make sure their wives retain and even enhance their glory. Give her the freedom to get herself pampered with all those funny pronouncing “**cures**” they do in beauty salons. The Greek verb ***kosmeo***, from which we get the English word “**cosmetics**”, means “**to adorn**”. Despite the misinterpretation and misuse of ***1Tim.2:9*** & ***1Pet.3:3***, the Bible is not against women adorning themselves to retain their glory. Let people say, “*since she got married she is looking so much better.*” Let people say, “*she is growing old, but she still looks nice.*” “*She has put on a few pounds, but she still looks nice.*” You maintaining and enhancing the glory of your wife must model what Christ is doing for His bride, the church.

You may say, “*But Pastor, I am single. How do these things apply to me?*” Let me answer briefly. If you are praying for and looking for a husband, look for a man who is modeling the Christ you have found in Ephesians. If you are praying for and looking for a wife, look for a woman who is modeling the bride of Christ you have found in Ephesians. The questions are these : if you are looking for a husband who is modeling Christ, are you modeling the bride of Christ? If you are looking for a wife who is modeling the bride of Christ, are you modeling the Christ found in Ephesians? The problem arises when you want to be a feminist but you want a Christ-like husband. The problem arises when you want to be a sweet man but you want a Christ-like wife. You will find out very quickly that it does not work that way.

Now, Brethren, I trust that you are beginning to understand why Paul said “**this mystery is great**”? The magnitude, importance and profoundness of the responsibility you have as a husband and wife to be the metaphor of Christ’s relationship to His church and to exemplify the gloriousness of Christ’s relationship to His church in this world is awesome. Your great and unrivalled love for your wife does not make you a hen-pecked “**manicou**” man. The only true man there ever was is Christ. And He is the only one who ever exemplified what true manliness is all about. To model Christ’s example is to model true manliness. Manicou men are those, both young and old, both single and married, who fail to model Christ’s example. Your great and unrivalled love for your

wife exemplifies what real manliness is all about and glorifies Christ great love for the church.

Your submission to your husband and your respect and reverence for him does not make you an enslaved woman. True womanhood is summed up for you in **Prov.31**. No feminist has ever been able to say that the woman described in **Prov.31** was enslaved and treated as a chattel. Your submission to your husband and your respect and reverence for him exemplifies true Biblical womanhood and glorifies the church's submission to Christ and the church's respect and reverence for Christ. It is in Christ that true womanhood is glorified.

If you live according to **Eph.5**, the world will hate how you conduct your life and despise how you conduct your life and fiercely criticize how you conduct your life. If you allow the world to influence your thinking and conduct in these matters, then the world is your lord and god and idol. And according to **Jas.4:4** you are an adulteress.

In closing, I have one final point to make. You are betrothed to Christ. Everyday you call your Beloved via your personal devotions. You speak to Him via your worship and prayers and He speaks to you via His word. But once a week, on a day that He has set out for you, you have a special date with Him. That day is the Lord's Day. That place is in this building. That time is 9.30 a.m. You say He is your Beloved. You do not merely love Him. You are supposed to be deeply in love with Him, loving Him with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. (**Mk.12:30**). He is your Betrothed. Do you look forward with great anticipation to this special date with Him? Are you anxious for the days to pass by quickly?

How do you come to meet Him? Do you come to meet Him with heart and soul prepared? Do you come anxious to hear all that He has to say to you? Remember Cornelius. When you sing, you are singing to Him. How do you sing? Or is meeting with Him so boring that you go to sleep?

Now let me ask you : if you treated the person you are engaged to and hope to marry the way you treat Christ, would that person have just cause to question your love, your loyalty, and your commitment? Would that person have just cause to say to you : *“I think we need to rethink this engagement”*? The problem today is that relationships are a dime a dozen. They start today and end a week later. *“You are the person I have been looking for all my life”*, that is, until you meet that other person you have been looking for all of your life. Today I see very little commitment to work hard to build lifetime relationships and friendships. If this is so with you, how then can you expect to build a relationship of unquestioned commitment, loyalty and unrivalled love with one you may want to marry? What’s worse is that this poor attitude of our culture is being reflected in our dealings with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The point the word of God is setting before you is this : your relationship to Christ is infinitely more important than any relationship you can have on this earth. Your unrivalled love for Christ must be greater and deeper than the love you can have for any person on this earth. This, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, must be the love story that no love story on this earth can compare to. This is the greatest love story that will ever be told for an eternity to come. This is the love story that must be the primary foundation in your life. Many believe the Songs of Solomon is an inspired illustration of the greatness and intensity of this love story.

This is what Israel failed to understand in her relationship with Jehovah. So instead of having an unrivalled covenant love relationship with Jehovah, she became an adulteress and harlot. This is what many are failing to understand today about their relationship with Christ. James is right when he says that the greatest lure for committing spiritual adultery against Christ comes from the world. The attractions of this world that can move us with great subtlety to unfaithfulness to Christ are many. How we need to carefully examine our dealings with the world, our relationships with the world, our friendships with the world, the things the world offers us and see whether they are leading us, with unnoticed subtlety into unfaithfulness to Christ.

Paul said in *1Cor.10:11* that the things written in the O.T. were written for our instruction. They were written to teach us and warn us, we “upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” Let us not make the same mistake Israel made in her dealings with Jehovah. To make the same mistake is to be without excuse. Those who make the same mistakes will discover that grace also intensifies judgment.