

BETROTHED TO CHRIST

David Baker, prepared for the Presbytery fellowship word, 07 November 2021

Transcription of recording, slightly edited

Betrothed to one husband, who is Christ

In this session, we will continue with our consideration of the marriage of Christ and the church, and we will particularly look at the admonition of the apostle Paul to the congregation in Corinth.

There was a large congregation in the city of Corinth, and they were to be part of the lampstand church in the region of Macedonia and Achaia. The region of Macedonia included the Thessalonians and the Philippians.

Paul spoke to the Corinthian congregation as a congregation that should have been part of a lampstand church in the entire region.

He addressed, or called, them to be a local expression of the bride of Christ in their particular locality or their particular city.

He said to them, 'For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you [which means 'joined'] to one husband [That one husband is Christ. He is the One who has risen from the dead.], that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

'But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent [Satan] deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.' 2Co 11:2-3.

We will define the 'simplicity that is in Christ' as being the fellowship of the *agape* meal.

Adam was a type of Christ; Eve was a type of the church

In the same way that Adam was a type of Christ - and Christ is called 'the last Adam' - Eve was a type of the church.

When Paul wrote to Corinth, he likened them as a congregation, or likened their situation, to the situation that the woman found herself in in the garden of Eden, when Satan brought an alternative word to her.

He brought that word during the period between her marriage and when she became a mother.

This is the way in which Paul addressed the Corinthian congregation.

We recall that the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam and, while he was asleep, the Lord took a rib from his side. From the rib, He formed and fashioned the woman to be Adam's wife and a comparable helper for him.

Once He had formed the woman, He brought her to Adam, and Adam then confessed, or proclaimed, 'This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man.' Gen 2:23.

The Lord God formed and fashioned the woman

When we consider this account in the beginning, we do note a number of important distinctions.

The first one is that the rib came from Adam. The rib came from his side, but he was not the one who formed and fashioned the woman. It was *the Lord God who formed and fashioned the woman from the rib*.

Adam named the woman Eve

The second important distinction is that once the Lord had formed the woman from the rib taken from Adam's side, He brought the woman to Adam, but it was *Adam who named her*.

Adam called her 'woman', but the naming of his wife was not complete until he called her Eve, which means 'the mother of all living'.

The distinction between marriage and motherhood

As we considered last week, there was an intervening period there of between 3000 to 4000 years between when Adam called her 'woman' and when she received the name of Eve, which was the mandate of her motherhood, and the capacity for her to be the mother of all living.

In this regard, we note the distinction between marriage and motherhood.

Applying this to the marriage of Christ and the church, we note that the church was formed from the physical body of Christ when Jesus laid down His life for her through His offering on the cross.

Paul stated, 'Jesus Christ loved the church, and He gave Himself for her.' Eph 5:25.

God the Father formed and fashioned the woman

This was by offering on the cross, but in the same way that Adam did not form his own wife, Christ did not form the church to be His wife, as though the end of His offering was in His own hands.

It was *God the Father*, by the Holy Spirit, who *formed and fashioned the church*, from the physical body of Christ, to be His wife and a comparable helper for Him.

The Father presented the church to Christ, who named it

Picking up these important points of distinction, we see that *the Father presented the church to Christ* to be His wife. And when we see the bride city, it is coming down out of heaven from God; that is, out of heaven *from God the Father*, as a bride adorned for her husband.

However, it is the work of Jesus Christ, as the Husband of the church, to *name* the church as the New Jerusalem, which is the bride city.

Again, we note that it was Jesus Christ Himself who promised to give the name of the bride city, which is 'the New Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven from God', as an *inheritance*. It is an eternal inheritance to the *presbytery* and to the *lampstand church* in Philadelphia.

This is the promise to every lampstand church.

And, in relation to Corinth, it is the promise for every *congregation* that is part of a lampstand church. Every congregation is called to be a local manifestation of the bride of Christ in bringing forth sons of God.

When we consider these two points together, we observe the remarkable *fellowship of offering* between the Father and the Son; and this fellowship of offering is *by* the Holy Spirit.

The Father presents the church to Christ, so that the church will reveal Christ as a comparable helper to Him.

Likewise, it is the Son who names the church so that she is equipped to bring forth sons of God.

Christ is washing and sanctifying the church by the washing of the water of the word, and His goal in doing so is that the church will bring forth sons of God.

But those sons of God *reveal the Father*.

So the Father's focus is to reveal Christ, and Christ's focus is to reveal the Father.

The distinction between human and godly jealousy

With this in view, we observe that the apostle Paul, as he addressed the congregation in Corinth, particularly in the verses that we are considering today, primarily identified himself with the fatherhood of God toward the Corinthian congregation when he said that he had joined them to 'one husband'; and that one husband is Christ.

Paul identified himself with the fatherhood of God in saying to them, 'For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy.' 2Co 11:2.

There is a big distinction between human jealousy and godly jealousy. *Human jealousy* is envy that is the expression of self-centredness.

Godly jealousy is part of the nature of who Yahweh is; and it is *revealed by His name*.

When the Lord revealed His name to Moses, He said to him, 'You shall worship no other god, for the Lord [that is, Yahweh], whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.' Exo 34:14.

There is a big distinction between human jealousy, which is the expression of self-centredness, and the jealousy that belongs in the fellowship of Yahweh, which is completely other-centred and is an expression of *agape* love.

In the same way, there is a distinction between our sorrow, or the sorrow of man, and godly sorrow.

However, Paul was doing much more than making a distinction between human jealousy and godly jealousy.

He was particularly drawing our attention to the jealousy of God's fatherhood, or the jealousy of God the Father. The jealousy of God the Father is the expression of His *agape* love.

It is His jealous love over *the sanctification of His sons*.

And it is also His jealous love over *the church as the bride of Christ*, because it is the Father who betroths the church to Christ.

The Father places us in the body according to His sovereign will

We will consider this a little further in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

The apostle Paul explained that it is God the Father who places each son into the fellowship of the body of Christ, according to His own sovereign will.

'But now God has *set* the members, each one of them [every one of them; every member], in the body, just as He pleased.' 1Co 12:18. The word 'set', or 'placed', means that *He has laid us down*.

We often use the term 'planted' because, in Paul's letter to the Romans, he said that 'we have been *planted together* in the likeness of Christ's death.' Rom 6:5 KJV.

We are planted, or laid down, in the likeness of Christ's death. And as we are joined in the fellowship of Christ's death, we are also joined in fellowship with one another.

The Father has united us with other members of the body of Christ as the context for us to lay down our lives for one another.

It is important to remember that Jesus said, 'Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.' Mat 15:13.

It is the heavenly Father who plants us, or places us, or 'lays us down', in the fellowship of the body of Christ. And He places us exactly where He wants us to be. This is according to His own sovereign will.

This point, of course, has major relational implications for us, because we cannot just choose to 'pick up our tent and pitch it wherever we choose'. As members of the body of Christ, we are members of one another, and the Father is joining us to specific members in the body of Christ.

In the same way, it is the *Father* who places us in the community of the church in a particular locality, to be part of a local expression of the bride of Christ.

The Father places us under the headship of Christ as members of Christ's body and bride

The community of the church is a house to house fellowship that functions under the headship of

Christ, which is expressed through the presbytery that is in His right hand.

It is important that we recognise this relationship between the Father and the Son.

It is the Father who places us under the headship of Christ as an individual *member of the body of Christ*.

The Father also places us under the headship of Christ as *part of the community of the church*, which is the bride of Christ.

Jesus clearly explained this principle in the context of His teaching on the fellowship of the *agape* meal, which is recorded in John Chapter 6.

This sermon by Jesus is an extensive consideration of the fellowship of the *agape* meal; of our participation in the fellowship of the body of Christ; and of our participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering.

In the context of this teaching, or this discussion, Jesus said, 'All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me, I will by no means cast out.' Joh 6:37.

He was referring to those who come to Christ to become living and active members of His body.

However, remembering that the bride is also taken from the physical body of Christ, Jesus' words are equally applicable to those who are presented by the Father to Christ, to become part of the community of the church as His bride.

The twelve disciples were the first group given by the Father to Christ

It is helpful to remember that the first group who were given by the Father to Christ were the twelve disciples. And Jesus prayed particularly for them, and also for all of us, as described in John Chapter 17.

The first group who were given by the Father to Christ were the twelve disciples. And, apart from Judas, who was lost because of his unbelief and betrayal and was then replaced, those twelve became *the foundation stones of the bride city* which comes down out of heaven from God.

Placed in the body and bride according to the Father's will

Speaking about the members of His body and also His bride, Jesus continued, 'This is the will of the

Father who sent Me, that of all He has given me I should lose nothing.' Joh 6:39.

He was saying that it is the Father's will that He 'lose none'.

But further, He was also saying that it is the expression of the Father's will to give us to Christ. And the Father places us in the body, and in the community of the church, *according to His own will*.

'This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.' Joh 6:39.

The bride city

Significantly, as Jesus continued to explain that it is the Father who brings us to Him to become members of His body and His bride, He quoted directly from the words of the prophet Isaiah concerning the bride city and her children.

'It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.' Joh 6:45. Jesus was quoting directly from Isaiah Chapter 54.

Isaiah was speaking to the remnant of the house of Israel, but he was looking toward, talking about, and asking them to lift up their eyes to see the same city that was revealed to Abraham. That is 'the city which has foundations and whose Builder and Maker is God'.

Isaiah began to describe this same bride city: 'O you afflicted one, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay your stones with colourful gems, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of crystal, and all your walls of precious stones.' Isa 54:11-12.

This is a very brief description, and we find a far more extensive description of the bride city when it was revealed to the apostle John, and he recorded what he saw. Rev 21-22.

But they were looking at *the same bride city* with foundations, with walls, with gates - this is the bride of Christ.

Our children shall be taught by the Lord

Significantly, the prophet Isaiah declared that the bride city will bring forth a multitude of children

who will possess the covenant of peace as sons of God.

He spoke about the children of the city. 'All your children shall be *taught by the Lord* [quoted by Jesus in His teaching recorded in John Chapter 6], and great shall be the peace of your children.' Isa 54:13.

When Isaiah spoke about the children of the bride city, saying, 'Great will be the peace of your children', it particularly applies to children who are born into believing families under the New Covenant.

Those children possess the covenant of peace. They are born of God while they are still in the womb of their mother. And they receive this covenant, and the blessing of Abraham, because of the faith of their parents.

This refers to children in the families who belong to the community of the church as the bride of Christ.

Significantly, those children who possess the covenant of peace will be taught by the heavenly Father because they are His sons; they are His children.

He has entrusted His children to us to train in His ways

When, as Christian parents, we dedicate our children to the Lord, we are recognising that our children belong to Him.

We are also recognising that *He has entrusted them to us*, and that it is our responsibility and our accountability to raise them 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord'.

This is the first expression of 'your children shall be taught by the Lord'. They are learning in the home, and their Christian parents are training them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Then, as they grow, they will become increasingly aware that the Father is speaking directly to them. And they will come to know the voice of the Lord as it is proclaimed to them by the messengers of Christ.

Like little Samuel, they will begin to hear the voice of the Lord for themselves. And then they will 'learn' as they hear *the voice of the Father*. As He speaks to them as His children, they will learn to respond by joining the fellowship of the *agape* meal in an age-appropriate manner.

This is what Jesus was referring to when He stated that they will hear and learn from the Father. They will hear His voice and learn to participate in the fellowship of the *agape* meal.

The fruit of learning from the Father is the faith to be baptised

The 'fruit' that is produced as a child begins to hear and learn from the Father for themselves will be their faith to be baptised. And we know that this often happens when a child is around seven years of age.

Baptism is an important expression and foundation of their own faith to come to Christ, themselves, to participate in the fellowship of His body, which is the one house of the Father; and to also participate in the community of the church, which is house to house fellowship. They will do this in an age-appropriate manner.

Baptism into Christ is significant for a child who has already been born of God in the womb, because of the faith of their parents.

It is also equally significant for a person who has grown up outside of Christ in the world, and has responded to the gospel of sonship as it is proclaimed to them to be born of God.

Baptism is the expression of their faith to come to Christ, because they are being given to Christ by the Father.

When they are born as a son of God, the Father gives them to Christ. And they come to Christ because the Father gives them to Christ to become a participant in the body of Christ and in the community of the church.

This is *according to the Father's will*.

White robes are both our priestly and wedding garments

The Father gives us to Christ to become an active participant in the fellowship of His body and bride.

And our authority to participate in the body and the bride is symbolised in the Scriptures as 'a white robe'.

The white robe is our *priestly garment* which enables us to serve the Father as priests in His house, which is His temple, the body of Christ.

The white robe is also our *wedding garment*.

In the book of Revelation, the apostle John recorded that he saw a great multitude clothed in white priestly garments.

'After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no-one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes.' Rev 7:9.

These are the white robes that they have received and are then made white in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. They are made white in the blood of the Lamb.

This multitude stands before the throne and before the Lamb, so this is describing their priestly service, clothed with white robes, 'with palm branches in their hands'.

John also recorded that he heard 'the voice of a great multitude'. This includes the great multitude whom he saw in white robes with palm branches in their hands, signifying that they are ready to celebrate the marriage supper with Christ.

That great multitude is part of the voice of the great multitude that John then heard. 'Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come [that happened on the day of Christ's crucifixion], and His wife has made herself ready.

'And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.' Rev 19:7-8.

So the Father gives us to Christ. We come to Christ to become *participants in the fellowship of His body*; and also *in the community of the church*, which is the bride of Christ.

Our authority to participate as part of the body and the bride is the white robe that we are receiving, and are making white in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

Submitted to Christ's headship to express the motherhood of the church

Returning to our key verses, when the apostle Paul said to the Corinthians that he was 'jealous over them with a godly jealousy', he was identifying with *the fatherhood of God* that places every family in the community of the church in a particular locality, to be part of the local expression of the bride of Christ.

I will read that again, because this is really the application of what I am saying.

Paul was identifying with the fatherhood of God that places every family in the community of the church in a particular locality, to be part of the local expression of the bride of Christ.

Paul recognised his real relational connection to them when he said to the Corinthians, 'You are in our hearts to die and live together.' 2Co 7:3.

Speaking as a father to the Corinthians, he had betrothed, or married, the congregation to Christ.

He wanted to ensure that they were submitted to Christ's headship, and committed to being washed and sanctified by Him, so that they could begin to *express the motherhood of the church*.

That is really the summary of what we are saying in this session concerning Paul's admonition to the Corinthian church.

Betrothal – waiting to be married

It is important to recognise that when Paul told the Corinthian congregation that he had *betrothed them to one husband*, he did not mean that they were engaged but, rather, were *waiting to be joined by marriage*.

When we first read this verse, that is probably the way we initially tend to interpret it, so it is helpful to make a brief comment on the language used here.

The word that Paul used here for 'betrothed' is a completely different word from the word that is used in the Gospels to describe the relationship of Joseph and Mary prior to the birth of Jesus.

'Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.' Luk 1:26-27.

The word that is translated as 'betrothed' in this verse means 'engaged to be married but not yet joined in marriage'.

That is, they were not yet one flesh; and neither had they received the remnant of the Spirit as an anointing in order to bring forth godly seed. This is an important point.

The following verse in Matthew also makes it clear that Joseph and Mary were engaged to be

married, but they had not yet been joined in marriage.

'Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together [engaged, but not yet joined], she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.' Mat 1:18.

Betrothed to Christ is being joined and fitted together

In contrast to this, when the apostle Paul said that he had betrothed the Corinthian congregation to Christ, he used a word which means 'to join and to fit together'.

It has an application, of course, in relation to being *joined* to the fellowship of Christ's physical body, but also in being *married* to Christ as part of His bride.

On the day of Christ's crucifixion, the church was presented by the Father to Christ to be His bride.

Ongoing fatherhood toward the church

However, there is an *ongoing work of fatherhood* that is expressed toward the church, and toward each family. This work is to *present every household* to Christ to become part of His bride. This is the way in which the apostle Paul addressed all of the families and households in the congregation in Corinth.

In the same way that the Lord God brought the woman to Adam in the beginning, Paul had brought the Corinthian congregation to Christ, and was asking them to be submitted to the expression of Christ's headship toward them, through a presbytery in the right hand of Christ.

The expression of motherhood in the church

He knew that as each family was washed and sanctified by the washing of the water of the word, as the expression of Christ's headship toward them, they would be equipped to express *the motherhood that belongs to the church in bringing forth godly seed*.

This was the goal, or the focus, of Paul's admonition to the Corinthian congregation.

Every family is called to fellowship at the tree of life

However, Paul was also concerned that they would receive a word from another kind of fatherhood that would cause them to turn aside

to embrace another 'husband', if you like; but it would be a husband of their own imagination.

He called this 'another Jesus'.

'But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.' 2Co 11:3.

In the beginning, the woman was deceived by the serpent when she turned aside from the fellowship of the *agape* meal that she enjoyed with her husband every day at the tree of life.

When she turned aside from that fellowship, she was deceived as she began to listen to *another word*. The word of Satan was the expression of *another fatherhood*, and it was drawing her to another tree.

Likewise, Adam was *disobedient* when he listened to the voice of his wife.

In contrast, the word of God the Father draws every family to fellowship with Christ at the tree of life. This is the whole focus of the gospel of sonship, as the apostle John declared.

He said, 'That which we have seen and heard, we are declaring this to you, so that you may have fellowship with us, and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.' 1Jn 1:1,3.

The desire of God the Father is to *join every family* to the fellowship of the *agape* meal as active participants in a house to house fellowship, under the headship of Christ.

When Paul referred to the 'simplicity' that is in Christ, or the 'simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ', as some translations read, he was referring to the fellowship of the *agape* meal.

The word that is translated 'simplicity' is equally translated as 'singleness' and 'sincerity' and 'generosity'. It refers to the fellowship that was immediately evident in the church in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost when they were continually devoted, from that time, to the apostles' doctrine, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayers.

The Scripture says that they 'continued with one accord in the temple', with that 'singleness', receiving the word as it was publicly proclaimed to them by the apostles. And then they also continued breaking bread from house to house as

they 'ate their food together with gladness and simplicity of heart'. Act 2:46.

There was a fellowship of hospitality, and there was a fellowship of offering which was an expression of generosity that was seen among them so that there was no lack; there was no need.

Embracing a mixture forfeits our heavenly inheritance

However, despite this single-mindedness that we have seen in the beginning, many of the believers in Jerusalem wanted to be part of the community of the church, but they also wanted to continue to participate in the economy of the earthly temple as the centrepiece of the Jewish nation, because of their traditions.

They did not want to let go of all of their family obligations, loyalties and familiar cultures.

Even though the early church in Jerusalem was the first manifestation of the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, every family that embraced this mixture forfeited their citizenship of the heavenly Jerusalem, which is from above, and returned to bondage as those who belong to the Jerusalem from beneath.

Reverting to the ways of the flesh and to the Law

The fruit of this bondage was then seen in their families, and they brought forth children who were born after the flesh.

This is what Paul identified when he wrote to the church in Galatia as well, when he compared two motherhoods and two kinds of children.

In a similar way, we know that many within the Gentile lampstand churches, who had begun to walk in the Spirit in response to the word of the apostle Paul and in response to his ministry toward them, also reverted to walking after the flesh.

This was in contrast to many of the believers in Jerusalem, who reverted to embracing the ordinances of the Law Covenant.

Accommodating another gospel

Many of the Gentiles turned aside from the sonship gospel of John to embrace Greek philosophy and, as they did so, they replaced the fellowship of the *agape* meal with the sacramental practise of the Eucharist.

This was the outcome of receiving another word and embracing another gospel. Motivated by godly jealousy, this was Paul's major concern for the Corinthian congregation.

He explained his major concern: 'For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted - you may well put up with it!' 2Co 11:4.

Paul was not, in the first case, worried that they would reject the gospel that he proclaimed to them, and would replace it with another.

His first point of concern was that they would continue to believe that they were receiving what he had given them, while at the same time also embracing and accommodating another gospel.

It was the mixture, in the first case, that was the major problem. That was his major concern.

The mixture of alternative doctrines today

As the Head of His church, Jesus Christ has addressed the mixture that *presently* exists within His lampstand churches.

We find His personal admonition to each presbytery and lampstand church in Revelation Chapters 2 and 3.

Jesus identified specific alternative doctrines that are the fruit of an alternative word - and that alternative word is the word of Satan himself. The doctrine of the Nicolaitans, the doctrine of Balaam, the doctrine of Jezebel, the doctrine of the Laodiceans are all the doctrine of Satan.

Returning to the simplicity of the *agape* meal

The washing of the water of the word that is the expression of Christ's headship toward His church enables each family to turn from these alternative doctrines and to return to this simplicity that is in Christ, which is the fellowship of the *agape* meal.

When Jesus addressed the first lampstand church in Ephesus, His promise to the overcomers was that they would have *access to the tree of life*. That is, the Lord would restore for them the fellowship of the *agape* meal. Rev 2:7.

We are certainly rejoicing as the Lord has restored, and is continuing to restore, the fellowship of the *agape* meal in our community.

This is the simplicity, or the singleness, which belongs to Christ.