

Paul ended our previous passage in 2 Corinthians by saying <sup>17</sup> *“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”* <sup>18</sup> *For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.* 2 Corinthians 10:17,18 What we or others think of ourselves is not what matters. It is what the Lord thinks of us. Only God can see the heart of man. In chapter eleven Paul continues defending his ministry to the Corinthians and exposing the false teachers. His comparisons will not be boasting in himself, but in what the Lord has done in and through him. Even then, because it sounds as if he is self-congratulatory, he calls it “a little foolishness.” He asks them to bear with this method as he tries to get them to see what has happened to them from a spiritual perspective.

<sup>1</sup> *I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me!* 2 Corinthians 11:1 Several times in the passage he says that this is foolish and even sounds like those who boast in their own supposed greatness. Some of the Corinthians believe the false teachers who see Paul as a fool, so Paul says, “Bear with me acting foolish by defending myself with the things man thinks is so great.” If the false teachers want to use the world’s standards, then Paul says okay, let us compare mine with theirs, even though that is foolish, because that is not what really matters. But before laying down that contrast, Paul shares his chief concerns with the Corinthians, hoping they will see why he must stoop to the comparison. Perhaps Paul may be thinking of Proverbs 26:5, <sup>5</sup> *Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.* Beating them at their own game can cause others to see their accusations are baseless.

<sup>2</sup> *For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.* 2 Corinthians 11:2 Genuine pastors have one great desire for their flock. John the Beloved wrote, <sup>4</sup> *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.* 3 John 1:4 Paul calls it divine jealousy. Most of the members of that congregation came to the Lord under Paul’s ministry. In one sense you could say Paul officiated their betrothal to Christ, for that is what it means to be born-again (John 3:3<sup>i</sup>). Like a proud father giving his daughter’s hand in marriage, he was jealous to present the whole church as a pure virgin to Jesus (Ephesians 5:27<sup>ii</sup>). Hosea predicted this age when he wrote down the Lord’s promise: <sup>19</sup> *And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy.* <sup>20</sup> *I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.* Hosea 2:19,20

Paul frequently uses this analogy of Jesus as the husband and the church as the bride. Like all of Paul’s teachings, this is rooted in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 54:5 it was prophesied that the LORD would be the husband of God’s people. <sup>5</sup> *For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.* Ezekiel 16 speaks of Israel as a faithless bride of the LORD. When Paul writes that marriage is a picture of Christ and the church, he is interpreting these passages from the prophets to apply to the people of faith in a covenant relationship with Jesus the Messiah (Ephesians 5:31,32<sup>iii</sup>). The New Covenant, also referred to as The New Testament, is a marriage covenant (Hosea 2:16<sup>iv</sup>). As I have sometimes shared when we partake of communion, Jesus’ words at the Last Supper were the same words that were used for a Jewish betrothal in that day (John

14:2,3<sup>v</sup>). You could say that from the beginning marriage was an institution created by God to help us relate to our relationship with Jesus and His covenant with the people of faith.

Presented as a pure virgin contrasts with many references in the Old Testament regarding idol worship as idolatry (Ezekiel 23:37<sup>vi</sup>; Jeremiah 3:9<sup>vii</sup>). Anything we put before Christ defiles our relationship with Christ just like unfaithfulness in marriage defiles our relationship with our spouse. Idolatry is like having another spiritual love other than Jesus, and that is why it was referred to as adultery. So, when Paul says he wants to present them as a pure virgin, he is not writing about the physical, but rather spiritual dedication to Christ alone. He must be our chief desire, the love of our life.

The false teachers are suggesting Jesus and the Laws of Moses must be equally important and necessary. Spiritually speaking that would be making the rules found in the Law your additional husband. As we see in the next verse, it means Jesus is not the Jesus we read of in the Gospels but is instead another Jesus. That other Jesus did not take all your sins upon Himself, for that Jesus asks that you keep rules if you want to be good enough for God. It undermines the grace of God that paid our sin debt (Ephesians 2:8,9<sup>viii</sup>). It changes the desire from selflessly wanting to be Christlike out of love for Jesus for paying that debt to an effort to save ourselves. That is idolatry of self and rules.

I would never want to officiate at a wedding where I knew the bride had a secret lover. That is what Paul is saying here. He wants the Corinthians to love Jesus first and without any competing idols in their hearts. He is concerned that the teaching of the false teachers is wooing them away from that pure devotion.

If we would be that pure virgin to Christ, we must put away all things that compete for our love for Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23<sup>ix</sup>). That is the crucifixion of the old self. <sup>24 ...</sup> *Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* Matthew 16:24 That is what baptism represents when we go under the water, our old nature being buried with Christ. It is changing what we see as satisfying and exercising the fruit of the Spirit called self-discipline. Or as we read in the previous chapter, it is taking every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5<sup>x</sup>).

At the end of Paul's passage on marriage representing Christ and the church in Ephesians 5, he concludes by saying, <sup>33</sup> *However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.* Ephesians 5:33 As our groom, Jesus displayed the greatest love by laying down his life for us (John 15:13). Our part is to respect Him. We respect Him by following His lead, obeying His instruction, speaking well of Him, and admiring His attributes.

<sup>3</sup> *But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.* 2 Corinthians 11:3 Paul expresses that the thing he feared was similar to what happened to Eve in the Garden. The serpent used his cunning to tempt Eve. Eve had it made. She had the perfect husband. If anyone could say, "God gave me the perfect spouse," it was Eve. She had all her needs met in the garden God made for them. But the serpent led her thoughts astray from a sincere and pure devotion to the One who walked with them in that garden (Genesis 3:1,2<sup>xi</sup>).

The word sincere is translated as simplicity in the KJV. It can also be translated singleness. In other words, sole satisfaction. It can also be translated bountifulness. Christ had given them everything, but the serpent turned her thoughts from all that was hers to

the one thing that was forbidden. That verse always reminds me of a Bible study I attended over 50 years ago. The teacher noticed one light bulb in a row of lights on the ceiling and pointed to it as an illustration. He said, “Instead of Satan pointing to all the lights that worked, he pointed to that one thing that was not hers.” The minute he said that the light, wired in a row with all the others, suddenly lit up. I took it as God saying, “Bad analogy! Light is good, and I gave Adam and Eve every good thing. What was forbidden was not good for them.”

God does that with us. The bountiful goodness of God in our lives is enough to thank Him for all eternity, but we get focused on the passing things that are not just as we would like them. They are often things that would not be good for us. As soon as we attain that thing, we think all is well, at least for a day or two, and then we find it was not all that we hoped it was. Sometimes we even end up the worse for it. Then we begin to search for something else that we think will give us joy and peace. It reminds me of those books that tell the sad story of lottery winners whose lives are destroyed by all that money (Proverbs 23:4,5<sup>xii</sup>). The day they win they think they have arrived. A year later they wish it never happened.

This pattern of searching for something more is due to the fact that **the hole in our soul is so big that only God can fill it.** But we do the very same thing that Eve did. We look at how beautiful an object is. We imagine how it can change our life for the better. We think of how it would please our physical senses. We become fixated on obtaining the thing to the point that we forget about all the goodness that we have been given (Genesis 3:6<sup>xiii</sup>). We disregard God’s warning and try to fill our emptiness with it.

When counseling married couples, I have them write down all the things that first attracted them to their spouse and all the good qualities they can think of. It reminds them of what they have and to appreciate that instead of what they do not have. I encourage couples to find the satisfaction of their soul in Christ, and not to fall for the lie that some other human can fully satisfy them. The only perfect human was Jesus. **The very thought that someone can satisfy you is selfishness on display.** And when two people come together thinking the other person will satisfy them, they are bound to clash in a big way! No wonder the divorce rate is so high! Some people brazenly lie as they say their vows. If they were honest, they would say, “I promise that I will expect you to satisfy me all the days of my life no matter what I do or how I behave.” Only when we are satisfied in Christ can we be honest in saying the traditional vows. Couples may have good intentions, but if in their heart their priority is selfish, they will either change or they will not stay together.

I am speaking of the desire for the perfect spouse to represent the different ways the serpent tempts us with his cunning to turn our eyes away from the abundance of goodness that is already ours. Someone recently told me that they were in a group that had to text one another every day what they were thankful for without ever repeating the same thing. It was a tool to battle depression. At first it was easy. But as time went on, they had to start seeing the little things they were blessed with that they had overlooked. **Gratitude encourages a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.**

This is our daily battle: sincere and pure devotion to Christ or to something else that we think might fill the void in our soul. The serpent knows our weak areas and will offer all kinds of shiny objects to stir dissatisfaction in our souls. He is cunning. Remember that his goal is our destruction (John 10:10<sup>xiv</sup>). Jesus’ goal is our sanctification

so that He might make us His bride. It is a relationship where both serve one another in sincere and pure devotion. Is there anything more beautiful?

*<sup>4</sup> For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.* 2 Corinthians 11:4 Paul describes the deception for which he fears that they have fallen. It is “another Jesus.” It is a different groom. There are a lot of other Jesuses. Many in the New Age claim that He is just one of many ascended masters. Some say that when your third eye is opened you will realize that you too are a god. They are not the Jesus of the Bible. Jesus even predicted this time would come when many say they are the Christ (Matthew 24:23,24<sup>xv</sup>). The Jesus of the Bible fulfilled dozens, some say hundreds, of prophecies of the details of His life. He alone who was eternally with the Father was the ransom for our sins, a plan that was established before there was time (Matthew 20:28<sup>xvi</sup>).

In the case of the false teachers, their message to the Corinthians taught that it was a Jesus who was a good man and showed the way, but in fact was not the way (John 14:6<sup>xvii</sup>). They taught that laws and rules took the place of His sacrifice. That is not the real Jesus. It is a substitute that enables us to take pride in what we do and to accept the praise of man (James 2:10<sup>xviii</sup>). The Jesus John proclaimed was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29<sup>xix</sup>; Acts 4:12<sup>xx</sup>). He is the only atoning sacrifice God sent to reconcile us, and without Him we have no hope (Titus 3:5<sup>xxi</sup>).

Paul was also afraid that they received another spirit. The Holy Spirit has the fruits he described to the Galatians of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22,23<sup>xxii</sup>). But when they “got in the spirit” they were feeling wonderful and important. Their ecstatic experiences were not resulting in that fruit Paul described. Instead of humbling them and causing them to worship Jesus, it made them prideful and focused on self. That *is* another spirit.

He is afraid they received another gospel, which in fact is not good news (Galatians 1:6<sup>xxiii</sup>). This other gospel was that you can please God with your good works and earn heaven (Galatians 2:16<sup>xxiv</sup>). It was a lie, but Paul said they readily put up with it. Paul saw them as God’s little lambs who he had shepherded by the grace of God, and now false shepherds had come in and were leading them to poisonous weeds and fast running waters that endangered their souls. (Contrast with Psalm 23:2<sup>xxv</sup>.)

Satan knows what our flesh wants to hear. This is a major temptation in our city. The false shepherds say, “You can be spiritual and do the things you want to do.” In other words, the flesh can be part of your spiritual journey and make you someone special. Cunning! But it is cunning because it plays on our baser desires and tells us that sin is really part of the path to spiritual enlightenment, whether it is drugs or promiscuity or another class channeled by someone claiming to have special knowledge. It promises satisfaction, but it is always one more class, one more experience, and just a few thousand dollars to attain. It is the hiss of the cunning serpent who has had millennia of experience.

Jesus’ message is very simple and straight forward and free to all. *<sup>28</sup> Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*” Matthew 11:28-30 The false teachers tell us we must labor to earn our salvation. Jesus gives it freely. We are heavy

laden with guilt, with unforgiveness, fears, self-doubting, and concerns of what people think of us. But Jesus invites us to rest in His accomplishment on our behalf (Hebrews 4:3<sup>xxvi</sup>).

Jesus' invitation is to take his yoke upon us, to team up with Him. What a privilege to work with Him. Of course, He is leading and doing the main pulling and directing. We are just alongside Him learning from Him how to traverse life. After all, His was the only perfect sinless life (2 Corinthians 5:21<sup>xxvii</sup>). He says that is the way to find rest for our anxious souls. He adds that His yoke is easy. That is because He is doing the hard part. And His burden is light. He knows how much we can take and only gives us what He will enable us to carry. He calls it a light burden.

Life is full of burdens whether you are in Christ or not. The difference is that in Christ your burdens are for an eternal cause, and light because He carries them with you. They store up for you treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:19,20<sup>xxviii</sup>). You will be doing what you were created to do, and in that we find a life of meaning. You will be a member of the kingdom of God, a heavenly family that supports and loves one another (John 13:35<sup>xxix</sup>).

Religion without the biblical Jesus says the burden is all ours. No need to yoke up with Jesus. He had his yoke, and we have ours. But the burden to be good enough for God is unbearable and impossible. Without Christ, guilt is never erased no matter how good you are. **The difference between Christianity and all other religions is that we know we cannot please God, but that Jesus did.** We know salvation is a gift and cannot be earned by us (Ephesians 2:8,9<sup>xxx</sup>). We can be what Paul was hoping for the Corinthians, presented to Christ as a pure virgin with a sincere devotion to Him, or we can live for self and reap what we have sown. It seems to me that when we contrast the two paths without the confusion of Satan's cunning, Jesus' way is the obvious choice. Paul was simply reminding the Corinthians that should be their choice. The Scripture passage today reminds us that it should be our choice as well! I pray it is your choice today and every day. A missionary once said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose." That is what made Paul different from the false teachers. He surrendered his life to God. It is what makes us different from the world.

Questions:

- 1 Why was Paul asking them to bear with him?
- 2 What was the divine jealousy he felt?
- 3 Why would he say we are betrothed to Christ?
- 4 What does it mean to be a pure virgin?
- 5 What was Paul's fear?
- 6 Review the alternate translations for "sincere".
- 7 How can we keep a pure devotion to Christ?
- 8 What three things did he accuse them of readily accepting?
- 9 How do we see that in our city? In our lives?
- 10 What is Jesus' invitation?

*"Now may the Lord of Peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. the Lord be with all of you." (2 Thess. 3:16)*

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<sup>i</sup> **John 3:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

<sup>ii</sup> **Ephesians 5:27 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

<sup>iii</sup> **Ephesians 5:31-32 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." <sup>32</sup> This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

<sup>iv</sup> **Hosea 2:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> "And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no longer will you call me 'My Baal.'"

<sup>v</sup> **John 14:2-3 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

<sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

<sup>vi</sup> **Ezekiel 23:37 (ESV)**

<sup>37</sup> For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. With their idols they have committed adultery, and they have even offered up to them for food the children whom they had borne to me.

<sup>vii</sup> **Jeremiah 3:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Because she took her whoredom lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree.

<sup>viii</sup> **Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

<sup>ix</sup> **1 Thessalonians 5:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>x</sup> **2 Corinthians 10:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

<sup>xi</sup> **Genesis 3:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"

<sup>xii</sup> **Proverbs 23:4-5 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. <sup>5</sup> When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.

<sup>xiii</sup> **Genesis 3:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

<sup>xiv</sup> **John 10:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

<sup>xv</sup> **Matthew 24:23-24 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. <sup>24</sup> For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

<sup>xvi</sup> **Matthew 20:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

<sup>xvii</sup> **John 14:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

<sup>xviii</sup> **James 2:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

<sup>xix</sup> **John 1:29 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

<sup>xx</sup> **Acts 4:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

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<sup>xxi</sup> **Titus 3:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

<sup>xxii</sup> **Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

<sup>xxiii</sup> **Galatians 1:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—

<sup>xxiv</sup> **Galatians 2:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

<sup>xxv</sup> **Psalms 23:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

<sup>xxvi</sup> **Hebrews 4:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’” although his works were finished from the foundation of the world.

<sup>xxvii</sup> **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

<sup>xxviii</sup> **Matthew 6:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

<sup>xxix</sup> **John 13:35 (ESV)**

<sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

<sup>xxx</sup> **Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.