

Adultery and Apostasy: The Bride and Bridegroom

~Other Speakers S-Z: Francis Schaeffer:

In Ephesians 5:21-32, Christ makes a very strong statement concerning the church as His bride. In this passage, God very carefully intertwines His relationship and the church with the marriage relationship between husband and wife. In fact, the two ideas are so fused together that it is almost impossible to divide them in an exegetical study:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it. . . . and the wife, see that she reverence her husband (vv. 21-25, 33).

When you examine the New Testament, you find that the brideship of believers is presented in two ways. In some places the emphasis is upon the fact that each Christian is individually the bride of Christ, and in other places it is the church as a unity that is the bride of Christ. There is no contradiction in this. The church is collectively the bride of Christ, and it is made up of individual Christians, each one of whom is the bride of Christ. This is indeed a tremendous mystery--that Christ, the eternal second person of the Trinity, has become the divine Bridegroom!

The Biblical Norm

In other places in the New Testament, this same sort of illustration is used. In John 3:28-29, John the Baptist introducing Christ as a groom: "Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before Him. He [Christ] that hath the bride is the bridegroom." Likewise, Paul uses a striking, almost overwhelming use of this teaching in Romans 7:4: "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God."

The picture here is overwhelming. As the bride puts herself in the bridegroom's arms on the wedding day and then daily, and as therefore children are born, so the individual Christian is to put himself or herself in the Bridegroom's arms, not only once for all in justification, but existentially, moment by moment. Then the Christian will bear Christ's fruit out into the fallen, revolted, external world. This is the biblical picture, one that we would not dare use if God Himself did not use it.

The Old Testament, like the New, emphasizes the bride and the Bridegroom symbolism. In the Old Testament, God is the husband of His people, "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you" (Jeremiah 3:14). Thus we find that the husband-wife relationship is stressed throughout the Scriptures as an illustration of the wonder of the relationship of Christ and the church.

An understanding of this parallel guides our thinking in two directions. First, it makes us appreciate the greatness, wonder, and the beauty of marriage. And, second, it helps us to grasp something of the profound relationship between God and His people and between Christ and His church.

The Bible and Sexual Adultery

The spiritual imagery of marriage is one of the primary reasons the Bible condemns sexual immorality. Promiscuous relationships destroy the picture that God means the marriage relationship of husband and wife to be. The relationship of God with His people rests upon His character and promises, but sexual relationship outside of marriage breaks this picture.

God wants us to understand that this is a serious sin. Both the Old and New Testaments speak out strongly against all sexual involvement outside of marriage. The Bible never allows us to tone down the seriousness of adultery because it shatters the illustration of the relationship God intended to be between Himself and His people, between Christ and the church (See Ex. 20:14; Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22; Jer. 23:10-11; Matt. 5:32; Gal. 5:19).

The Bride of Christ and Spiritual Adultery

In 2 Corinthians 11:1-3, we learn two valuable lessons about how the physical betrayal of adultery in marriage is

applicable to the Christian's relationship with Christ:

Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and, indeed bear with me. For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

Here Paul states that every person who has become a Christian has become the bride of Christ. In addition, however, he warns that the bride of Christ can be led away and corrupted by unfaithfulness. As there can be physical adultery, so too there can be spiritual adultery to Christ.

No one is perfect. None of us is totally faithful to our divine Bridegroom. We are all weak. Many times we are unfaithful in our thoughts or our actions. But there is a clear distinction between the imperfection of all Christians and the spiritual adultery which results when those who claim to be God's people stop listening to what God has said and turn to other gods. As far as the Bible is concerned, the latter is apostasy.

There is a stigma in the use of the term adultery that even the world today wishes to avoid. Often the word is avoided, and called something else such as a "no fault" divorce so that adultery never has to be named. The same is true with the term apostasy in the Christian realm. Men like to tone down on these terms. They prefer to speak of these things in polite language. But God does not. Adultery is the term which God takes and applies like a knife His people when they are unfaithful to Him. In fact, we find He uses the term adultery, and parallel terms, over and over again in the Scripture in regard to His people (See Exod. 34:12-15; Lev. 20:5-6 Judg. 2:17; Isa. 1:21; Jer. 3:1-9; Ezek. 16:30-32; Hos. 4:13; Rev. 17:1-5).

Spiritual Adultery Today

When those who claim to be God's people turn aside from the Word of God and from the Christ of history, it is far more heinous in the sight of God than the worst case of infidelity in marriage. I have taken care to emphasize that God does not minimize promiscuity in sexual relationships, but apostasy--spiritual adultery--is worse. Given this fact, we must be careful to look at it no less clearly than God does.

Consider the claims of liberal theology. It denies the personal God who is there. It denies the divine, historic Christ. It denies the Bible as God's verbalized Word. It denies God's way of salvation. The liberals elevate their own humanistic theories to a position above the Word of God, the revealed communication of God to men. They make gods which are no gods, but are merely the projection of their own minds.

As they describe their theories, they tend to dress them up in polite terms, in fine clothes, carefully weaving these clothes so as not to offend. They dress up their attitudes and statements in fine words. Of course, we must treat men as human beings while having discourse with them, and that very much includes the liberal theologians. We must treat them as made in the image of God, even if they are actively in rebellion against God, and we must let them know that we love them as individuals. But this does not mean that we should forget that apostasy must be named as apostasy. Apostasy must be called what it is--spiritual adultery. The Bible's perspective should be our own, and this is the way God speaks of it and looks upon it, and so this is the way God's people are called to look upon it.

God spoke out strongly against the Jews following their idols, using striking figures of speech in order to bring them to their senses. But modern liberal theology is worse than this, for it turns against greater light, against greater blessing. Yes, modern liberal theology is more heinous than following the Molech of old.

Do you know the facts concerning Molech? Molech, whose idol was in the valley of Hinnon, was a heathen god whom the Jews were constantly warned against following. What kind of a god was Molech? He was the god of the sacrifice of newborn babies. This was the central act of his worship: the firstborn of every woman's body had to be sacrificed to Molech. According to one tradition, there was an opening at the back of the brazen idol, and after a fire was made within it, each parent had to come and with his own hands place his firstborn child in the white-hot, out-stretched hands of Molech. According to this tradition, the parent was not allowed to show emotion, and drums were beaten so that the baby's cries could not be heard as the baby died in the hands of Molech. And there, I would say, stand many in our day.

Many of those who come to me, those with whom I work, are the children destroyed by a worse than Molech. Men--men who were supposedly the men of God--have stood by while their children were eaten up by modern theology. And then we are told that there is supposed to be no emotion shown.

Some of you who read this bear the marks of these things from the background from which you come. All of us are marked by this in some way, to some extent, because our Western, post-Christian world has been undercut by liberal theology. Every scar this present generation has, every tear cried, every baby aborted, every drug trip taken, cannot be separated from the fact that the church has turned away and become unfaithful. This generation are the babies in the hands of Molech. And are we supposed to stand by and hear their cries and cover them up by beating loudly the drums of a profitless discussion? No, we are to weep and to act.

God's Word for Our Generation

What does God say to our generation? Exactly the same thing that He said to Israel 2,500 years ago when He said through Ezekiel: "I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go awhoring after their idols" (6:9). I believe that this is how God looks at much of the modern church and on our Western culture. I believe that this is how He looks on much of our cinema, much of our drama, much within our art museums. And above everything else, this is the way He looks into the churches in which a gospel that is no gospel is being preached. God is saddened. Should we not be moved?

He is the same God. He is the living God. He is the unchanging God. He is the God who is there. And will He not do in the midst of this situation what He did in the midst of the Jewish situation in the time of Isaiah in the Northern Kingdom, and in the time of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel in the Southern Kingdom? Will He not judge our culture? Will He not call it adulterous? I tell you in the name of God that He will judge our culture unless there is a return to a Christian base for culture--and that begins with true repentance and renewal in the church.

Now what should be our response? Listen to Jeremiah speak in 13:27, "Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem!" Indeed, as redeemed people we should know the joy of Christ, but as we look around us in much of the church and in our culture, can we fail to cry tears? Must we not also have this message? Like Jerusalem, much of the church has turned apostate. We must say these words while we cry for the individual and while we never fail to treat him as a human being. However, we must not speak more lightly than Jeremiah. We must not be any less moved. Our response must not be merely a theoretical discussion of an intellectual nature. It must be the cry, "Woe, O liberal church! Woe, O apostate Christendom!"

It is not just a question of abstract theology that is involved, not just an academic difference. It is the difference between loyalty to the living God and spiritual adultery--spiritual adultery against the Creator and the Judge of the universe; spiritual adultery, mind you, against the only adequate Bridegroom for man--the only adequate Bridegroom for all people in all the world; spiritual adultery against the only One who can fulfill the longing of the human heart. To turn away from the divine Bridegroom is to turn to unfulfillment. This is not only sin, but it is destruction.

God's Word for Us

We who by God's grace belong to the people of God, we who have been redeemed on the basis of the blood of the Lamb--let us understand that we are now called to take one more most crucial step. We are to act as that which we are. Who are we? We are not just those going to heaven, but we are even now the wife of God. We are at this moment the bride of Christ. And what does our divine Bridegroom want from us? He wants not only doctrinal faithfulness, but our love day by day.

I must ask myself, "But what about you, Schaeffer?" And what about you, each one of you who knows the grace of God? What should be our attitude? Our attention must swing back now to ourselves. We have a crucial question to ask about ourselves.

We must ask, "Do I fight merely for doctrinal faithfulness?" This is like the wife who never sleeps with anybody else, but never shows love to her own husband. Is that a sufficient relationship in marriage? No, 10,000 times no! Yet if I am a Christian who speaks and acts for doctrinal faithfulness, but does not show love to my divine Bridegroom, I am in the same place as such a wife. What God wants from us is not only doctrinal faithfulness, but our love day by day--not in theory, mind you, but in practice.

For those of us who are the children of God, there can only be one end to this matter concerning adultery and apostasy. We must realize the seriousness of modern apostasy and urge each other not to have any part in it, but at the same time we must realize that we must love our Savior and Lord. We must be the loving, true bride of the divine Bridegroom in reality and in practice, day by day, in the midst of the unfaithfulness of our

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generation. Our call is first to be the bride faithful, but that is not the total call. The call is not only to be the bride faithful, but to be the bride in love.