

Wooing a Loveless Bride

Christianity at its core is not a moral code to keep, a creed to champion, or a cause to engage. It is a person to love. The Bible speaks of our relationship with our Lord in a very intimate way — a bridegroom and His bride. The book of Revelation teaches us that our Lord is preparing His bride to love, marry, and cherish forever. That bride is His church. That bride is all those who place their faith in Jesus.

Over the next several weeks, we will study the seven churches of the Apocalypse in order to grasp more fully exactly what Jesus longs for for His bride (Revelation 2-3).

Although we are the bride of Christ and the objects of His eternal, steadfast love, we all tend to struggle with wayward hearts that grow cold in their affection for our Savior. If you feel yourself prone to wander spiritually, you are not alone.

Last week, we learned that the Apostle Paul prayed for the church at Ephesus to possess a sincere, undying love for the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 6:24). Now, 30 years later, a “creeping separateness” (words from Sheldon Van Auken’s “A Severe Mercy”) has come between them and their Lord.

If the Scripture is true that we love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19), then the only lasting cure for a cold spiritual heart is to take a fresh look at the loving heart of Jesus. Revelation 2:1-7 serves as an exposé of His heart for His bride.

Revelation 2:1-7

1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. **2** “‘I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. **3** I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. **4** But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. **5** Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. **6** Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. **7** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’

In this passage, we learn five things about our Lord that serve to woo us back to full devotion.

I. His unceasing presence with us (v.1)

- A. He holds the angel or messenger in His hands. He cares that much about those who lead His church. This description of Christ comes from chapter one. Some think it refers to the pastor/elder of the particular congregations. Many scholars believe it refers to an angel of God who came with special purpose of grace and blessing... much like a guardian angel. However, the important thing is not identifying the messenger but hearing the author.
- B. He walks among the lampstands. The function of the church is to serve as Christ’s lampstand (Rev. 1:12, 16, 20). Jesus ceaselessly walks among His people. He is engaged in constant vigilance for His bride. Christ’s unceasing presence must have

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been extremely encouraging for a church endeavoring to serve in the midst of a culture very hostile to their faith.

II. His unsurpassed omniscience of us (v.2)

- A. Twice he says, "I know your works." "I know you are enduring patiently." The bridegroom is not only always with us, He intimately knows us. He knows what drives and motivates us.
- B. This should encourage us tremendously. It truly is a marvelous thing for the child of God that the Lord knows our hard work, our perseverance, and our faithfulness. He knows the fickleness and waywardness of our hearts as well and still loves us.

III. His unmatched graciousness to us (vv. 2-3).

We see the Lord's graciousness in our passage in that He commends before He critiques. He praises His bride and puts in the forefront all that He can find to approve. He commends them as a church that is diligent, persevering, and discerning. Jesus praises their hard work, their patient endurance, and their passion for doctrinal and moral purity.

IV. His unparalleled care for us (vv. 4-6)

- A. Our bridegroom cares enough for us to confront us with our sin (v.4). Oftentimes Jesus has to wound us to heal us. He says, "I have this against you. You have abandoned the love you had at first." What love is he speaking about? "The love that transforms and energizes all other loves" (Sinclair Ferguson). He speaks of a simple, pure, and undivided devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the love that often characterizes a new believer. A love that is fervent, uninhibited, excited, and openly displayed. How easy it is for a church to become frigid in love while being devoted to doctrine!
- B. Our bridegroom cares enough for us to prescribe a thorough remedy (v.5). Jesus' Remedy is threefold:
 1. Remember. It is in remembering that the Spirit awakens us to the love of Christ. Remembering is one of the supreme acts of Christian worship when we celebrate the Lord's Supper.
 2. Repent. Repentance is not something you do to merit forgiveness and restoration. It is your sustained change of direction because you have been forgiven. Repentance is not a one-time deal for the Christian, but it is ongoing throughout our entire lives.
 3. Resume. Do the things you did at first.
 - "For me the surest way to do that is to gaze upon the Five Wounds and thank God daily for sending His Son, His only Son, the Son Whom He loves (the Abrahamic formula in Gen. 22) to die on the cross for me" (Ronnie Stevens).
 - Invest time and energy in reading God's Word and asking the Lord to speak to you.
 - If there is any area of sin for which the Lord convicts, confess it to a band of brothers or sisters and ask them to pray for you (see Acts 19:17-20).

- Resolve to talk about your Lord naturally in conversations throughout the day, sharing what He means to you and what He does for you (See Philemon 6).

V. His ultimate gift to us (v.7)

- A. To the one who overcomes, "I will grant to eat of the tree of life in God's paradise."
- B. Eating from the tree of life means you live forever with God in His garden of delights.
- C. How is it that we are granted this gift? Because our beloved bridegroom ascended another tree that resulted in his death.
- D. Hear the poetic words of George Herbert in "The Sacrifice": "All ye who pass by, behold and see, man stole the fruit but I must claim the tree. The tree of life for all but only me, was ever grief like mine?"

Discussion Questions

1. What do you learn about the Lord Jesus Christ from this passage that alarms you? What do you learn about the Lord Jesus Christ from this passage that encourages you?
2. If Jesus were writing a letter to you and your church, what do you think He would commend? What corrective criticism would He offer?
3. What do you think it means to abandon the love you had at first? Put positively, how would you define first love from a biblical perspective? Please see Revelation 2:4, 2 Corinthians 11:2-3 and 1 Corinthians 7:35 to describe first love.
4. How might we more effectively practice the presence of Christ among us when we come together for corporate worship? Please see Ephesians 2:17 and Hebrews 2:12 for starters.
5. What transformation do you think the Lord wants to make in your life if you practiced His presence and acknowledged Him as the unseen guest at every meal and the silent listener in every conversation?
6. Ask the Lord to show you if any other love or loves have supplanted the love of Christ in your heart (See the following Scriptures for other loves – Mark 4:19, 1 Timothy 6:10, 2 Timothy 3:1-4)

- Oswald Chambers cautions in his devotional book, *My Utmost for His Highest*, “Beware of anything that competes with your loyalty to Jesus Christ. The greatest competitor of loyalty to Jesus is serving Him.”
 - Read and reflect on Jeremiah 2:13. What are the broken cisterns from which you are drinking that only make you more thirsty? Could it be your career, your appearance, acceptance by friends, getting into an inner ring, wealth, status?
7. Why do you think “abandoning your first love” merits the warning of Jesus removing the lampstand (v.5)? What does it mean for Christ to remove one of His lampstands?

Going Deeper

1. What would it look like for you to restore your first love with your heavenly bridegroom? What are the disciplines, people, or events in your past that have stirred your affections and devotion to Jesus? What are those things that tend to arrest and hinder your affections and devotion to Jesus?
2. Another way of putting this is two questions from Jack Miller in his book “Outgrowing the Ingrown Church”: What have you done recently simply because you love Jesus? What have you stopped doing recently simply because you love Jesus?
3. Jesus’ intolerance of evil is also an important thing for us to imitate (v.6). This doesn’t mean that we become ill-tempered and mean-spirited. For we must exercise extreme caution because the evil in the world is also within our sinful hearts. D.A. Carson offers this caution: “When hate for the practices of those who err (v.6) becomes hatred of those who err, Christians depart from the redeeming love of God in Christ and pervert the faith.” How might believers be tempted to do this in our present culture? What can we do to guard against this tendency?