

Like Marriage

When trying to explain to someone something they are not familiar with or unable to see it is sometimes helpful to compare it to something everyone is familiar with. You often hear people say, "It tastes just like chicken" to describe some exotic dining experience. Jesus Christ often began a teaching by saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like....". Many times in both the old and new testaments the analogy is made to marriage when trying to explain the nature of Gods relationship to his people. The prophet Isaiah wrote concerning the nation of Israel: ... *as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.*¹ When God's people fell into sin, especially idolatry, the sin was likened to adultery on the part of a wife.

Does a maiden forget her jewelry, a bride her wedding ornaments? Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number.²

"Look up to the barren heights and see. Is there any place where you have not been ravished? By the roadside you sat waiting for lovers, sat like a nomad in the desert. You have defiled the land with your prostitution and wickedness.

Therefore the showers have been withheld, and no spring rains have fallen. Yet you have the brazen look of a prostitute; you refuse to blush with shame.

Have you not just called to me: 'My Father, my friend from my youth, will you always be angry? Will your wrath continue forever?' This is how you talk, but you do all the evil you can."³

The apostle Paul in his letter to the church at Ephesus gave instructions on marriage. In this passage he uses the love of Christ as an example of the love that should be present in a marriage and at the same time uses the example of the marriage relationship to illustrate the love of Christ for the Church.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church--for we are members of his body.

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."

This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church.

However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.⁴

These passages put the whole question on a personal level. You exist, God exists. God desires a close relationship with you. It is your choice whether you have a close relationship to God or a distant relationship. This is why God makes the comparison to marriage. The marriage relationship requires attention and commitment and there are consequences if you neglect the relationship. Would you be married to someone and yet pay no attention to their likes and dislikes? Would you pay no attention to what they need to be happy? This is the choice we have in this life, would God want to be with us for eternity if we have already proven no concern for his feelings? This is a serious situation with serious consequences. When you look at the relationship from this perspective it is easier to understand the passages where God expresses his anger. How would you feel if your spouse paid no attention to you and instead committed adultery? God sent Jesus Christ to assist us in understanding and fulfilling our obligations in this relationship. Because of the seriousness of this

¹ Isaiah 62:5

² Jeremiah 2:32

³ Jeremiah 3:2-5

⁴ Ephesians 5:25-33

relationship he promises us additional help in the form of the Holy Spirit if we actively participate in this relationship. Jesus told his disciples:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you.

I am going there to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

"If you love me, you will obey what I command.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.⁵

The up side of the analogy we have been talking about is that God loves us like a husband loves a wife. The down side is that there are consequences if we ignore that love. Like marriage, both parties in the relationship must agree. In the following passage Jesus underscores this point.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council.

He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."⁶

God has revealed his love for us and likened it to the love of a husband for his wife. What is your response to this? Like marriage this relationship requires active, committed participation.

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder.

You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

⁵ John 14:1-3,15-19

⁶ John 3:1-5, 16-21

And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.

You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.⁷

The Bible employs the figure of marriage to underscore the level of attention the proper relationship with God requires and also to underscore that the choice to be pleasing to God excludes certain other beliefs and philosophies. The book of Revelation includes many symbolic and metaphorical references, the figure of a wedding and marriage is employed throughout the book to express what we have been talking about, the relationship of God to his people. We'll end with an excerpt from that book.

Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.

Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."

"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.

Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.

And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.⁸

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⁷ James 2:19-26

⁸ Revelation 22:12-21