

The Distracted Bride

by David Orton

<http://lifemessenger.org/the-distracted-bride/>

... I betrothed you to one husband...to Christ...But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:2-3 NASB

The warfare of worship

The Holy Spirit is calling out a bride for the Son in this generation.

But once we respond to this `wooing' of the Spirit we immediately enter what I would call the `warfare of worship'.

If there is one thing in which the enemy excels it is in distracting us from pure worship: from the primacy of abandonment to Jesus' presence; from making him the exclusive focus of all our heart's deepest desires; and from the inner man being constantly cast prostrate before him, conquered and subdued by love.

Satan will especially use the work of God to do this. He so crowds us with cares and responsibilities – with service and success – that our heart-devotion to Christ is all-but smothered. And so, the good becomes the enemy of the best.

Sure, we may lift our hands in worship – we may sing and shout – and even maintain a quiet time, but there is something missing. There is a hollow ring to it all—it no longer seems to sustain or satisfy. In fact, to the discerning it is more – there is a certain dissonance to all that we do and say – we have become what Paul describes as a `clanging cymbal'. We may, like the Corinthians, excel in the gifts and operations of the Spirit, but be without love.

As with the Corinthians the battleground is in our thinking. We are led astray by thoughts that rationalise and justify our priorities and purposes until, in time, these become strongholds that resist the knowledge of God (see 2 Cor 10:3-5). Our minds are gradually `fogged' by natural thinking and become veiled to the truth—particularly the truth about ourselves. It becomes increasingly difficult to exercise discernment. And so, we inadvertently pursue other gods—we follow other lovers even while betrothed to the Bridegroom.

Give to him who asks

There is a principle in God of *giving to him who asks* (Mtt 5:42; Jn 16:24). The Lord will never force us beyond the level we want. He will exhort and challenge. He will rebuke and correct. He will even draw us with *`cords of love'* (Hos 11:4). But in the end we are left free to resist or respond to the pleading and wooing of the Spirit. In effect, he gives us the freedom to ask for whatever we want.

Israel in the wilderness had this freedom. They asked according to their own desires only to receive the answer with *leanness of soul* (Ps 106:13-15 KJV). If we earnestly keep asking for something less than God's best – and remember that 'the good can become enemy of the best' – he may give it to us. If we ask persistently enough for a ministry we may get one. But it may be outside of his perfect will or timing for us. Or we may ask for greater influence, or secretly desire a reputation. But what good are any of these things without the imprimatur of the Spirit—without the pleasure of God upon them? We can gain the whole world, but in the end lose our soul—that is, be spiritually diminished.

Solomon too was given this freedom. Fortunately, remaining true to the Lord he asked only for wisdom. In response God could not resist giving him what he didn't ask for—riches and honour (1 Kgs 3:4-15). God gives those things that we need, and more, when we seek the kingdom – his reign in our hearts – first (see Mtt 6:33; Rom 8:32).

And so, Christ comes to the *Distracted Bride*, to draw her back to himself. He comes with weapons that are not `natural'—that

are not of the flesh and are contrary to the ways of men. These weapons will not force us into God, although if we respond they pull down strongholds—those thoughts that have excused our distractions; for example, “I’m serving the Lord – I’ve got to fulfil my responsibilities — this is the price of ministry”; “These opportunities are God-given!”; “If I don’t do it no-one else will—the need has to be met!”; or “But this is what people expect!”

The weapon that is mighty in God to win the bride is not one of force, but of love. There is no coercion or fear. In fact, fear is banished by perfect love (see 1 Jn 4:18). Three times in the Song of Songs the refrain is sounded, “*Do not arouse love or awaken love until it so desires*” (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). True love is like a fragile bird, and with force it can be fractured or frightened away. So, with great tenderness and with perfect love the Bridegroom woos and then withdraws—“... *Listen! My lover is knocking: ‘Open to me, my sister, my darling...’ I opened for my lover, but my lover had left; he was gone*” (S of S 5:2, 6).

Spiritual *hide-and-seek*

When we are distracted from him the Bridegroom plays a little game with us—a game of spiritual ‘*hide-and-seek*’. It works something like this: *When he hides we seek!* It’s usually not until the felt-presence of God is withdrawn that we start to get desperate.

But why does he have to do this? Because we have excused and justified our lack of response—“*I have taken off my robe – must I put it on again? I have washed my feet – must I soil them again?*” (S of S 5:3). We have been preoccupied with many other things – with the purposes and plans of the heart – even if they are ostensibly to serve him. Martha was ‘*cumbered about*’ with the activity of the flesh in her desire to serve God. But there is a cost to respond to his wooing. This is the way of the cross—and it usually cuts into our flesh – our striving and self-effort – as we attempt to serve Jesus.

Now please understand that the Bridegroom, at this stage, is not dealing with immature love—this is not a new believer here, but someone who has already responded to his love and enjoyed something of his intimacy. The marriage has been consummated (S of S 4:12-5:1) and their love had been previously deepened by a similar experience. Back in chapter 3 she had “*looked for him but did not find him*” (3:1). And only after some desperate searching could she finally say, “*I have found the one my heart loves. I held him and would not let him go...*” (3:4).

But now she is being called to go deeper—deeper in love and higher in worship. She looked for him and could not find him, she called and there was no answer. Sound familiar? You do what you know to seek him, but nothing—you draw a blank. No response to your fasting and praying—your desperate crying. Nothing but silence, there isn’t anyone at home. Why? Because the Bridegroom is playing *hide- and-seek* with his bride.

Suffering outside the camp

While roaming the city searching for him she was found by the ‘*watchmen*’. But they could not help. They only attacked and bruised her. The very ones who should have shown her the way railed on her and rebuked her for losing her lover. They took away her veil, her covering, and exposed her to the eyes of all; to the ridicule of men (see 5:6-7). She had encountered the ‘*watchmen*’ on her previous pursuit of him through the city (see 3:1-4) and no doubt this time they had no patience for her. The religious system cannot understand the bride, nor give her guidance. It has no understanding of the ways of God and of intimacy with the Bridegroom. The system that provides so many of the distractions for the bride is the same one that turns on her when she resolves to pursue him. Until the bride discovers she must suffer with her beloved ‘*outside the camp*’ (Heb 13:11-13) she will not enter the next phase. Her entry, on this earth, to the heavenly realms of his ascension life can only come through the veil of his sufferings. While we do not look for trouble we must ask ourselves, “*Have I so pursued my beloved that I too have identified with him outside the camp and borne the reproach of men?*” But because of her heart for him the bruising of abusive people only extracts from her a deeper love. The daughters of Jerusalem, impressed by her pursuit, ask, “*How is your beloved better than others...?*” (5:9). And she responds with an expression of adoring praise surpassing all her previous descriptions of him:

10 *My beloved is radiant and ruddy,*

distinguished among ten thousand.

11 *His head is the finest gold;*

his locks are wavy,

black as a raven.

12 His eyes are like doves

beside streams of water,

bathed in milk,

sitting beside a full pool.

13 His cheeks are like beds of spices,

mounds of sweet-smelling herbs.

His lips are lilies,

dripping liquid myrrh.

14 His arms are rods of gold,

set with jewels.

His body is polished ivory,

bedecked with sapphires.

15 His legs are alabaster columns,

set on bases of gold.

His appearance is like Lebanon,

choice as the cedars.

16 His mouth is most sweet,

and he is altogether desirable.

This is my beloved and this is my friend,

O daughters of Jerusalem.

Song 5:10–16 ESV

The law of reciprocity

There is a law of reciprocity in relationships—and therefore, in praise and worship. What ascends to the throne as the worship of adoring hearts returns one hundredfold as the outpouring of his own love. The Bridegroom responds to her with several unparalleled songs in praise of her beauty (6:4-9; 7:1-9). They are reunited. And she again experiences the intimacy of his presence (7:8, 9); but this time they are far more demonstrative in their love. She is overwhelmed by his love for her and cries out in utter abandonment, “*I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me*” (7:10). No longer is she fettered by any sense of ‘self’ as expressed in her previous declarations of love (see 2:16; 6:3). She is fully immersed in him. In losing her life in him

she has now finally found it (see Mtt 10:39).

This is where the church is right now. The Bridegroom is calling—“*Arise my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me*” (2:10). He is saying in this hour, “*Open to me, my sister, my darling,...my flawless one*” (5:2). But are we listening—are we distracted by other things? He is calling the bride to new depths of love and heights of worship—to realms of intimacy with him that have only been dreamed of.

Now is the time to respond — are you willing?

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