

## AF A9 BIBLE STUDY: II Corinthians 11

Scripture of Lesson: II Corinthians 11: 1-33

In this chapter Apostle Paul expresses his concern for the church's purity as the bride for Christ, and warning against false doctrines and preachers.

### 1. Church as bride for Christ

In verse 11:2 Paul confesses that he was jealous towards the Corinthian Christians with "godly jealousy" because he "espoused" them to one husband, who is Christ the Lord so that the bride, which is the church, might be presented as a "chaste virgin" to Christ on the wedding day.

First of all, Paul presents the work of "espousing" a church as a bride for Christ as an important part of the Christian ministry. The first definition, according to Merriam Webster Dictionary is to marry two persons. This is equivalent to an engagement ceremony in modern day culture. In the Jewish culture, when a man and a woman are espoused, they are pledged to marry each other. From the time of espousal to the day of wedding, the virgin bride was supposed to keep herself pure. Paul believed he was the person who ministered the ceremony of espousal between the church and Christ. And he had the godly jealousy (concern) over purity of the Church, because unless the bride has kept herself pure, the wedding will not occur.

In the Book of Revelation, we read of the wedding ceremony between Christ, the bridegroom and the church, the bride as follows:

*Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints [Revelation 19: 7-8].*

So, we can see that the primary reason that Christians keep themselves pure, morally, ethically, and physically, is that we could be presented as the "ready" bride to Christ on the great day of the Lamb's wedding after the rapture of the church. Those who are ready will be pulled out of this world through the Rapture event and be present at the wedding as the next verse foretells:

*Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" [Rev. 19: 9]*

### 2. False gospel and false ministers of God

But, Satan's desire is to cause disruption to this wedding plan by causing corruption in the church. One of his designs for this wedding disruption scheme is to "cause the minds of Christians to depart from godly simplicity to corruption" [v 11:3]. In the previous chapter we studied about the spiritual warfare that has been going on between God's forces and the Satanic forces since the creation till now. Satan uses diverse means through diverse channels, such as the entertainment media, the Internet, books, TV and radio, through dedicated and casual works of false preachers, liberal theologians, satanic thinkers, entertainers, unbelieving teachers, politicians and misguided bloggers, to cause such corruption in the church of God toward the goal of making the church so corrupt that the wedding plan has to be cancelled in heaven.

Paul warns that false preachers have already come to Corinth as apostles of Christ and they preached "another Jesus" to them, coaxed them to receive "another spirit and another gospel." So soon after the ascension of Christ, just within a few decades, there arose numerous false preachers who were preaching false doctrines, such as Simon Magus and those who preached Judaism, to the Christians. In his letter to the Galatian church, Paul warned them about this false gospel that Magus was spreading:

*I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ [Galatians 1: 6-7].*

We need to be circumspect that the gospel and doctrine we are following is what Jesus proclaimed and what the early apostles affirmed and gave their lives to spread in the first century. Our methods of worship and living may be different from those of the early church. But the doctrine we follow and our knowledge of Jesus must be the same as those of the apostolic church.

Often false preachers are popular because they declare as having spoken to God and receiving a power from Him directly. And they speak enticing words that satisfy our human nature and stir public popularity based on populist themes. One such example is 'prosperity gospel,' through which they declare that God will prosper you in you believe in Jesus. Considering the millions of Christians who are being persecuted and even put to death in many nations, this false gospel message is hardly justified. So, is the prosperity gospel effective in America only? God forbid. Our Lord God wants Christians to be faithful and loyal to Him in whatever circumstances He places us so that His power and glory be manifest through us, just as little lilies do in a field wherever the seeds fall and sprout.

### **3. Afflictions during his ministry work**

In the rest of the chapter, Paul reiterates all of the hardships and afflictions he has had to go through during his evangelic ministry. They include floggings; risks of high waters, robbers, threats from fellow Jews and Gentiles; risks on land and on the sea; physical fatigue, lack of sleep, hunger, thirst, cold and poverty. Yet his daily concern was over all the churches he founded in various locations so that they are kept pure and safe [v. 11:28]. Yet, his hardships were no impediment to his dedication to Christ and His great calling as an evangelist for Christ among the Gentiles. In fact, Paul is writing to the Christians that it has been his "privilege" to suffer as Christ suffered. In his letter to Timothy, one of his young companions, he encourages Timothy to share in his sufferings for the gospel:

*Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began [1 Timothy 1:8-9]*

What marvelous example of true ministry Paul exhibited! I am thankful that the Lord raised such true servants in the first century as examples for us to follow today. Those of us who profess to be servants of Jesus cannot compare the difficulties we face with those of Apostle Paul in our modern society. However, we can espouse their true spirit of dedication to the Great Commission of the Lord and their true love and care for God's flock of believers. May God help us to be as devoted to this great calling as Paul was!

*Discussion topics:*

- 1. Share your views on today's Christian world of "diversity" with many doctrines and beliefs.*
- 2. Share examples of true pastors whose ministries you have observed.*