

## Message Two

### The Betrothing Ministry of the New Testament

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 11:2-3

- I. **The entire Bible is a divine romance, a record of how God courts His chosen people and eventually marries them—Gen. 2:21-24; S. S. 1:2-4; Isa. 54:5; 62:5; Jer. 2:2; 3:1, 14; 31:32; Ezek. 16:8; 23:5; Hosea 2:7, 19; Matt. 9:15; John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-32; Rev. 19:7; 21:2, 9-10; 22:17:**
  - A. When we as God's people enter into a love relationship with God, we receive His life, just as Eve received the life of Adam—Gen. 2:21-22.
  - B. It is this flowing, transforming, and building life that enables us to become one with God and makes Him one with us—vv. 9-12, 22.
  - C. In order for God and His people to be one, there must be a mutual love between them—Hosea 11:4; John 14:21, 23; Exo. 20:6; Jer. 2:2; 31:3.
  - D. As God's people love God and spend time to fellowship with Him in His word, God infuses them with His divine element, making them one with Him as His spouse, the same as He is in life, nature, and expression—Psa. 119:140, 15-16; Eph. 5:25-27; 2 Cor. 3:18.
- II. **The apostle Paul's burden in his ministry was to betroth the believers to Christ—"I am jealous over you with a jealousy of God; for I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a pure virgin to Christ"—11:2:**
  - A. The goal of the Lord's recovery is to recover Christ as the unique Husband for us to love; we should be attracted to Christ, love Christ, appreciate Christ, and treasure Christ.
  - B. The genuine ministry of the New Testament always stirs us up to love the Lord Jesus with the first love, strengthening us in the simplicity of eating and enjoying Christ as the tree of life for our life supply—2 Cor. 11:2-3; 3:3-6.
  - C. To love the Lord with the first love is to give Him the preeminence, the first place, in all things, being constrained by His love to regard and take Him as everything in our life—Rev. 2:4-5; Col. 1:18b; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Mark 12:30; Psa. 73:25-26.
  - D. Paul's concluding word in the Epistle to the Ephesians is a blessing of grace to "all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptibility" (6:24); in the book of Ephesians the phrase *in love*, which is rich in feeling, is used repeatedly (1:4; 3:17; 4:2, 15-16; 5:2).
  - E. The goal of the book of Ephesians is to bring us into love, God's inner substance, that we may enjoy God as love and enjoy His presence in the sweetness of the divine love and thereby love others as Christ did—1:15; 2:4; 3:19; 5:2, 25; 6:23; cf. 1 John 4:16-19.
  - F. Because the church in Ephesus, as one of the churches in Asia, had turned away from the apostle Paul's betrothing ministry (2 Tim. 1:15; Rev. 1:4a), they eventually left their first love and lost the enjoyment of Christ as the tree of life (2:4-5, 7); their failure in the matter of loving the Lord became the main reason for the failure of the church throughout the ages (Matt. 24:12; Mark 12:30-31; cf. Rev. 3:14-22; Dan. 7:25).
  - G. There are four main points in the Lord's epistle to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7; these four main points are four words that begin with the letter *l*—*love, life, light, and lampstand*:
    1. We must give the Lord Jesus the preeminence in every way and in everything to recover our first love for Him; then we will enjoy Him as the tree of life, and this life will become the light of life—John 8:12; Eph. 5:8-9, 13.
    2. The light of life causes us to shine as the golden lampstand, as the testimony of Jesus; if we lose our first love for the Lord and do not repent to do the first works that come out from our loving the Lord, the lampstand will be removed from us—Rev. 1:9-12, 20; 2:4-5.
    3. The golden lampstand symbolizes the Triune God—the Father as the substance is embodied in the Son, the Son as the embodiment is expressed through the Spirit, the Spirit is fully realized and expressed as the churches, and the churches are the testimony of Jesus—Exo. 25:31-40; Zech. 4:2-10; Rev. 1:10-12.

4. In the divine thought, the golden lampstand is actually a living and growing tree with calyxes and almond blossoms; thus, the lampstand portrays the Triune God embodied in Christ as a living, golden tree of resurrection—growing, branching, budding, and blossoming in us, with us, by us, and out of us as the fruit of the light (the fruit of the Spirit), which is good in nature, righteous in procedure, and real in expression, that God may be expressed as reality in our daily walk—Exo. 25:31, 35; Eph. 5:8-9; Gal. 5:22-23; John 12:36.

**III. The Lord's recovery is a recovery of loving the Lord Jesus with the first love, the best love, and of eating the Lord Jesus as the tree of life for the building up of the organic Body of Christ, which is the building up of the New Jerusalem as the goal of God's eternal economy—Rev. 2:4-5, 7; Eph. 4:15-16; Rev. 22:14:**

- A. Eating the tree of life, that is, enjoying Christ as our life supply, should be the primary matter in the church life; Christ as the tree of life is “good for food” (Gen. 2:9) so that we may eat Him for our enjoyment and be constituted with Him for God's expression (1:26; John 6:57, 63).
- B. The content of the church life depends on the enjoyment of Christ—the more we enjoy Him, the richer the content will be; but to enjoy Christ requires us to love Him with the first love; if we leave our first love toward the Lord, we will miss the enjoyment of Christ and lose the testimony of Jesus; consequently, the lampstand will be removed from us—Rev. 2:4-5, 7.
- C. To enjoy Christ as the tree of life, we must tell Him all the time, “Lord Jesus, I love You”; if we have a burning love toward the Lord Jesus, giving Him the first place in all things, we will enjoy all that He is—1 Cor. 2:9; S. S. 1:1-4; 8:13-14.
- D. To believe in the Lord is to receive Him as life, and to love the Lord is to enjoy Him as life, to enjoy the very person whom we have received; faith is given to us by God so that by it we may receive Christ as our life; love issues out of such a wonderful faith and enables us to live out all the riches of the Triune God in Christ as our life—2 Pet. 1:1; Heb. 12:1-2a; 2 Cor. 4:13; Gal. 5:6; John 1:12-13; 21:15-17; Col. 3:4.
- E. The very life that we received when we believed in the Lord Jesus is a person, and the only way to apply and enjoy this person is by loving Him with the first love; since the Lord Jesus as our life is a person, we need a new contact with Him to enjoy His present presence at this very moment and day by day—John 11:25; 14:5-6; 1 Tim. 1:14; John 14:21, 23; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Rev. 2:4-7; Col. 1:18b.
- F. “Give yourself to love the Lord. No other way is so prevailing, and no other way is so safe, so rich, and so full of enjoyment. Just love Him. Do not care for anything else”—*Life and Building as Portrayed in the Song of Songs*, p. 21.
- G. When we love Him, He will manifest Himself to us, and He and the Father will come to us and make Their abode with us (John 14:21, 23); thus, we need to pray prayers such as: “Lord, show me Your love and constrain me with Your love that I may love You and live to You”; “Lord, keep me loving You all the time”; we must continually tell the Lord, “Lord Jesus, I love You; Lord, keep me in Your love! Attract me with Yourself! Keep me all the time in Your loving and present presence”—S. S. 1:1-4.
- H. Based upon this, we can sing and pray—“I love my Lord, but with no love of mine, / For I have none to give; / I love Thee, Lord, but all the love is Thine, / For by Thy love I live” (*Hymns*, #546, stanza 1); “Something every heart is loving; / If not Jesus, none can rest; / Lord, my heart to Thee is given; / Take it, for it loves Thee best” (*Hymns*, #547, stanza 1).

**IV. In his betrothing the Corinthian believers to Christ, Paul expresses a deep concern for them—“But I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your thoughts would be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity toward Christ”—2 Cor. 11:3:**

- A. Paul likens different teachings other than the unique teaching of the eternal economy of God to the deceitful speaking of the serpent to Eve in Genesis 3:1-7; the serpent distracted Eve from the simplicity of enjoying the tree of life to the complicated and complicating tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which is the tree of death; death is separation from the enjoyment of God—Rom. 8:6.

- B. In Joshua 9 the children of Israel were deceived by the Gibeonites because they were like a wife who forgot her husband; what they did here was exactly the same as what Eve did in Genesis 3; we should take God as our Husband, co-living with Him, always relying on Him and being one with Him to enjoy Him; we should habitually “ask for the counsel of Jehovah” (Josh. 9:14) and “inquire in His temple” (Psa. 27:4b), checking with God about everything in our daily life.
- C. Different teachings other than the unique teaching of the eternal economy of God separate us from the genuine appreciation, love, and enjoyment of the precious person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as our Husband, our life, and our everything—1 Tim. 1:3-5.
- D. The secret of discerning the genuine New Testament ministry is simply this—anything that cuts us off from the enjoyment of the Lord is of the serpent, but anything that causes our enjoyment of the Lord to increase is of the Spirit and of the New Testament ministry.
- E. In order to live in the reality of the Body of Christ, we must enjoy Christ by loving Him to the uttermost, and in order to love Him, our thoughts need to be rescued from being hardened (2 Cor. 3:14), blinded (4:4), rebellious (10:4-5), and corrupted (11:2-3).
- F. We should pray, “Lord, search and rescue my thoughts so that they can focus solely on You” (Psa. 139:23-24); in order for our thoughts to be rescued, we must set our mind on the spirit, which means that we must care for and pay attention to our spirit (Rom. 8:6).
- G. We need to be those who think “the one thing” (Phil. 2:2); our thinking should be focused on the excellency of the knowledge of Christ and the experience and enjoyment of Christ; focusing on anything else causes us to think differently, thus creating dissensions among us; our goal is the fullest enjoyment of Christ and the fullest gaining of Christ (1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 3:8-9, 14; 4:2).
- H. The one thing, the unique thing, in the Lord’s recovery is God’s eternal economy with Christ as the centrality and universality—Col. 3:10-11:
  1. The one thing that should be focused on, stressed, and ministered in the Lord’s recovery is the eternal economy of God—1 Tim. 1:3-4.
  2. The content of God’s eternal economy is Christ; actually, Christ Himself in His full ministry of three stages is the divine economy (John 1:14; 1 Cor. 15:45b; Rev. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6); God’s desire is to have a recovery purely and wholly of the person of Christ (Col. 1:17b, 18b; 2 Cor. 12:2a; 2:10; 3:3).