

Preparing the Bride

John 15:5,2

"I am the vine, you are the branches, He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for without Me you can do nothing. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."

Colossians 1:24-29

"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the Word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints."

Nothing compares to the pain of broken relationships – especially in the church.

The prince of darkness continues to use the same play, from the same book, since the beginning of time. He knows the only way to impede the expansion of the Kingdom of Light is to transform the intimacy and blessing of human relationships into resentment and despair – especially in the family of God.

Paul understood the strategy of the enemy. He knew Satan's only true power to impede the church is through the destruction of intimate personal relationships. The evil one wants to drive arrows of pain into the bulls-eye of his target – human emotions.

However, Paul saw the sovereignty of God in his emotional afflictions. Paul believed that the Lord uses the evil one and his attack on the brethren as a method to develop a deeper level of intimacy in relationships with people.

Rather than fear it, Paul was prepared for relationship trouble in the church. He understood that the intimacy and depth in long-lasting relationships must prevail, and that the weaknesses of the flesh and emotional sensitivity must be put to the death. He understood the relationship Christ offers His Bride. Jesus, the Great Physician so loves the Church that He gave his life for Her. Jesus said, "For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (Matt 9:13) By nature sinners are not kind and lovable people.

Paul knew the practice of setting aside his emotional state of mind and trusting in God's sovereign control of all details would accomplish two things. By denying emotional fear, the kingdom of darkness would be held at bay. By trusting God, the power of the Spirit is released and into darkness comes a great light. Paul's faith in God was so deep, that if God directed Paul's flesh and emotions into the hands of the evil one for a season of suffering, he knew that the affliction would bring spiritual growth, character development, and a revelation from Christ. Paul wrote "I want to know the power of His (Christ's) resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." (Phil 3:10) Paul's goal was to crucify his flesh, to empower the Spirit, and to experience a new revelation of God's Grace in relationships with God's people. Who wants to pray to be conformed into the image of humility, pain, and death on a cross? Our hope lies in what comes after the cross!

It is the release of the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit into personal relationships that serves as the catalyst for true Kingdom building. Only Christ can teach us to love the unlovable sinners: "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?" (Matt 5:46)

Paul knew the source of power for his ministry. He knew real Kingdom building does not come from the limitation of the human capacity to love. Kingdom success can only happen supernaturally, through complete dependence on the Holy Spirit. Christians must completely render themselves available to God, if they want to take part in preparing the Bride for Her Groom. Christ seeks depth in relationship with His Bride. He wants to go below the surface of casual acquaintances.

Moses learned this lesson in a tragic way, when he chose not to depend on the supernatural power of God as a witness for God's people. "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." (Num 20:12)

The enemy seeks to limit and/or destroy the intimacy in human relationships, in order to render the church powerless. The kingdom of darkness seeks to keep the source of power a secret to minimize the effectiveness of God's people.

The church is vulnerable if it chooses to serve Christ within the limitations of human capacity. The enemy knows he can't stop the wedding feast, but he sure wants to delay it. He must war against the church by deceiving the Bride and to get Her to dwell on the flesh. If the Bride operates in the flesh, She is not operating in the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead. If She is not abiding in Christ, if Her good works are of the flesh, She will not produce fruit.

The enemy preys on Christ's Sheep in the same way the lion hunts for a kill. Satan seeks for the weakest member of the pack. He patiently studies the vulnerability of each creature. After selecting his future victim, he plans for a quick kill by lunging for the creature's jugular vein. Our spiritual jugular vein is that emotional 'hot button' where we're most vulnerable in our relationships with people. Whether its sensitivity to criticism or the need for affirmation – he knows the instincts of his prey. His attack is swift and his bite is deep into the victim.

Consider the church as God's building. The evil one knows that unless a crack in the foundation of the structure is repaired quickly, the crack will cause severe damage, and could result in collapse. "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (1 Cor 13:4-7)

The Kingdom of Light must maintain its source of power and strengthen its defenses. The power source is the release of the Spirit of God in relationships with people and the weakness is the work of the flesh. The kingdom of darkness seeks to overwhelm our human emotions with despair, in an attempt to steal our joy, and keep our flesh in a state of fear or 'high alert'.

Christ implores those who are called, "But I've called YOU to love My Bride. YOU take Her afflictions in YOUR flesh, and YOU prepare Her for the wedding feast."

It is understood that a bride-to-be requires considerable attention prior to the wedding. She is very emotional, uncertain, and overwhelmed with plans and details. On several occasions the Bride will experience fear and ask these questions:

"Do I really know this person with whom I've entrusted my life?"

"What if he stops loving me?"

"What if he is unable to provide for me?"

Who will be patient with the bride? Who will understand her, when she is unreasonable? Who will comfort her? Who will reassure her? Who will build her confidence? Who will draw her to a place of rest? Who will serve the bride when her demands are unrealistic and her expectations set to high? Who will love her when she is selfish and critical?

"I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil 3:14). YOUR prize is the supernatural experience of Christ revealed in YOU, through YOUR cooperation to love His Bride! Amen.