

Session 15 Bridehood: The Foundation of Spiritual Warfare

INTRODUCTION

We're talking about the identity of the bride, and we'll talk about the same in Session 16.

New creations in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). That's the key phrase: "All things have become new." Verse 21: "That we might become the righteousness of God in [Christ]" (v. 21).

The most difficult thing in our Christian walk is this issue of everything becoming new and our identity flowing out of this reality. We'll find in a few moments that this is the main issue of spiritual warfare in 2 Corinthians 10: this issue of "all things being new," and the believers walking in the revelation of that reality in terms of the image that they have of themselves or their spiritual identity in Christ. We have a new position in terms of everything becoming new, and the new position is that we possess the righteousness of God.

THE VAST OCEAN OF GOD'S LOVE

This is basic Christianity, so I'm just covering this really fast. I assume most of you are very familiar with this. The first issue involved in all things becoming new is that we have been accepted by the Father. We have also been accepted by the Son. There are many dimensions to the acceptance or the love of God, many facets to God's love. Ephesians 3:18 talks about the height and the depth, the length and the width of the love of God. I call it, "the vast ocean of God's love." There are so many dimensions.

Jesus spoke of two dimensions at the Last Supper. In John 15:9, He said, "As the Father loves you, that's how Jesus loves you" (Jn. 15:9, paraphrased). Then, in John 17:23: "As the Father loves Jesus, that's how the Father loves you" (Jn. 17:23, paraphrased).

He talked about the way the Father loves us and He talked about the way the Son loves us in two different verses. I like to separate and distinguish between the love of the Father as part of our identity and then the love of the Bridegroom, the embrace and the cherishing of the Bridegroom.

RELEASING THE WORKS OF GOD AND STOPPING THE WORKS OF DARKNESS

The second aspect of this new position in the righteousness of God is that we have authority to use the name of Jesus. We can release the works of God and we can stop the works of darkness. That's just a summary statement. We can release the works of God—healing, power, and miracles—and we can stop the works of darkness through the name of Jesus.

The third aspect of this new position is that we have Someone living on the inside of us, the third person of the Trinity. God dwells in the human spirit. Those are the three basic aspects of our new position of everything becoming new. The most important aspect of this in terms of our life on the earth and in terms of spiritual warfare is that this new position results in us having a new identity, a new spiritual identity. This is the thing that's most difficult in our struggle: to see ourselves differently; to define our life differently in the light of spiritual truth. We can have the new position with those three issues, but when we begin to define, interpret, and view our life in light of these things, we talk about our new identity, a new image of ourselves through the gospel, through the righteousness of God.

SERVANTS, CHILDREN, AND CO-HEIRS WITH JESUS

In the next session we'll look at this in far more detail. This is just a little hint. There are three aspects of our spiritual identity in terms of "everything becoming new." We're working off of 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Behold, all things have become new."

The first thing to which God introduces us is the idea that we're servants of God. The angels are servants of God. We're accepted into the presence of God like the angels are, as servants. There are many aspects of that. We'll look at it next session.

Even more glorious than being servants accepted in the presence of God is that we're sons and daughters embraced by the Father. That's more glorious than being servants. We're sons and daughters embraced by the Father. We're an extension of the divine family. We're not divine, but we're an extension of God's family. The angels are not. They're servants, but they aren't a part of the family. They're never sons and daughters.

The third part of our identity is even more glorious than being children; it's more than being in the family. We're sitting in position of royalty next to the Son of God as co-heirs, as the bride. Again, in the next session we'll look at these three different dimensions of our spiritual identity, but I'll refer to it a little in this session. That's why I wanted to outline it ahead of time.

THE CONTEXT OF PULLING DOWN STRONGHOLDS IN 2 CORINTHIANS 10-14

Pulling down strongholds. This is an important point. It's not in the notes, so you can write this maybe at the top. The context of 2 Corinthians 10-14—I'm talking about four chapters, the last four chapters of 2 Corinthians. I wish that when people taught on spiritual warfare from this passage they would consider the context of the last four chapters as one theme in Paul's mind. Anyone who studies 2 Corinthians knows that chapters 10, 11, 12, and 13 are really one subject he's dealing with. Therefore the issue of spiritual warfare is in the context of this subject. We must understand the context so as to understand the point that Paul is making when he addresses spiritual warfare.

I'll give you the context very simply, although I wish I had outlined it on the notes here. Paul is challenging the false teachers at Corinth. That's the number one thing he's doing. He's exposing and challenging false teachers at Corinth. The reason he's challenging them is because they're giving the people wrong information. They're giving the people wrong doctrines, wrong information about how the gospel works and who they are. This information is leading the saints into bondage. That's really what Paul is after. The saints are being led into bondage. That's the issue of strongholds he's talking about. Bottom line: it's hindering their ability to walk in love towards the Lord Jesus. It's hindering their hearts being empowered to love.

The issue of 2 Corinthians 10-13 is that these false teachers with wrong ideas are bringing the saints into bondage. Bottom line: it hinders their ability to walk in love, to have passion for Jesus. He's talking about passion for Jesus; that's what's going on in these four chapters. You'll see that in a moment. This context is essential if you're to understand these verses as Paul meant them in his day. I'm not saying there can't be more insights in these verses than Paul intended, but Paul was addressing a very specific problem in 2 Corinthians 10, 11, 12 and 13: the problem of false teachers with wrong information who brought the saints into bondage and kept them from being lovers of God, when it's the destiny of the Church to be lovers of God. I wish I had that all on the notes, because that was a lot of information to follow.

“FOR THOUGH WE WALK IN THE FLESH, WE DO NOT WAR ACCORDING TO THE FLESH”

Let’s read verses 3-5. “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.” That’s a key phrase. “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:3-4). Paul is interested in pulling down strongholds. Now he’s going to talk in verse 5 about how it happens: by “casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (v. 5).

There are a lot of concepts here. My purpose today isn’t to give a really in-depth teaching on this, but just a very, very brief overview of pulling down strongholds as Paul intended it to be understood in these four chapters.

Number one: he talks about weapons of warfare. He uses the word *war* in verse 3 and the word *warfare* in verse 4. In other words, he’s introducing the concept of spiritual warfare. Number one: there’s a war going on. In Ephesians 6:12, he says, “We don’t wrestle against flesh and blood, but there are demons involved in this warfare” (Eph. 6:12, paraphrased). There really is collision in the realm of the spirit; there really is warfare.

THE WEAPONS THAT WE USE ARE MIGHTY IN GOD

He says, “The weapons that we use are mighty in God.” God has given us weapons. These weapons he describes as mighty. They aren’t carnal weapons; they’re divine weapons. The weapons are basically twofold. The weapons are the Word of God. The weapons are the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The mighty weapon, number one, is the Word of God, and we’ll see that in a few moments. We’ll prove that unmistakably. He’s talking about the Word of God. That’s the weapon that Jesus uses as the sword out of His mouth in Revelation 19. In Ephesians 6:18, the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. It’s the word that comes from His mouth. That’s the mighty weapon. It’s not human; it’s divine.

Secondly, though it’s really just two sides of one coin, it’s the ministry of the Holy Spirit. What does the Holy Spirit do but bring us the Word of God? That’s really what He does. If you’re getting a word of knowledge or you’re getting a discernment of spirits, some manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit, it’s really what God is thinking being made known to you. That’s really all that’s happening. It’s His heart being revealed to you, whether it’s the written Word or the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It’s the heart of God being made known. Those are the mighty weapons, in the most summary version.

A STRONGHOLD: A COLLECTION OF THOUGHTS THAT ARE IN AGREEMENT WITH SATAN

He talks about the idea of pulling down strongholds, spiritual strongholds. That’s the point: to take these strongholds. What is a stronghold? A spiritual stronghold in this context is a collection of thoughts that are in agreement with Satan. That’s what a stronghold is: it’s a collection of thoughts that are in agreement with Satan. There are spiritual strongholds in the atmosphere over cities and nations, but that’s not what Paul is talking about right here. That’s not the context. I’m not saying that he couldn’t have that in mind, but he’s addressing a very specific problem at Corinth. We’ll see exactly how this passage unfolds and what problem he’s addressing.

Paul is aiming at the thoughts and teachings of these false teachers. Those are the thoughts that have lodged in the hearts of the Corinthians that have created a resistance to the Holy Spirit and the inability to be set free. These collections of thoughts are in agreement with Satan. Therefore, they aren’t in agreement with God. In one sentence, these thoughts accuse God. They accuse God’s Word. They accuse God in His Word all the time.

That's Satan's main tool against the believers: he accuses night and day before God (Rev. 12:11). He accuses us night and day. He tells us God is a liar. He tells us we're not loved by God, that God isn't true to His Word, and He's not like He says He is. The number one thing that creates strongholds in our minds is the accusation of Satan against God and God's Word concerning us.

You have to understand this very clearly. A stronghold in the ancient world was like those giant walls; some were ten feet, some were thirty feet thick. They were the walls around the city. When a stronghold was raised around a city, the walls were built and it kept the bad men out and the good men in, right? Those ten-foot thick stone walls kept the enemy from hammering his way in. They protected the city.

Paul is using this in exactly the opposite application. He's saying, "These ten-foot thick stone walls keep bondage in, and they keep God's blessing out." They're negative strongholds. These are strongholds we don't like. He's using the imagery of the Roman world, of a stronghold that kept one group out and one group in. He says, "These are bad strongholds, not good ones. They keep bondage in and they keep blessing out."

He's talking to people who are new creations in Christ; that's the point. He's talking to people to whom earlier in 2 Corinthians he said, "Everything has already been made new for you. However, you still have bondages in your life." It's a very common thing in the lives of believers. These spiritual bondages can be discerned and torn down. He makes it very clear that the key issue of these strongholds is the subject of the knowledge of God.

THE IDEAS THAT LODGE IN THE HEART RULE THE WHOLE HUMAN RACE

He says in verse 5, ". . . casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God." The central issue that empowers these strongholds is coming against the knowledge of God. They accuse the true knowledge of God in our hearts. The truth about God is attacked in our minds. It's about ideas. Believe it or not, strongholds are about ideas.

You think, "Well, that's pretty simple." No. The ideas that lodge in the human heart rule the entire human race. That sounds so simplistic, but let me tell you, your life is ruled by the ideas that are lodged in your heart. Your emotions are enflamed by them, whether good or bad ideas. Most of these ideas we haven't even thought through, because it's a complex system of ideas that all of us believe about ourselves, about God, about life, and about death. We can't even analyze them all. We have very specific ideas that we haven't even fully discerned that are lodged in our minds. Many of these ideas are against the truth of the knowledge of God and we don't even know it. We're not even thinking that way.

THE MOST POWERFUL AND UNDER-USED OF ALL OUR WEAPONS

Paul says we have to break these wrong ideas, and in breaking these wrong ideas that accuse God, you'll be set free. The whole point he's getting at is that then you'll be lovers of God. That's the object of these four chapters. So God is accused. How are these strongholds broken? It says, by "casting down arguments." Isn't that an amazing thing? Number one: we expose the arguments against God. We expose wrong ideas against God. Isn't that simplistic? It's very powerful. We expose them and then we renounce them. That's how we cast down arguments. How do we expose wrong ideas or arguments, and how do we renounce them? By the Word of God; the mighty weapon is God's Word. The mighty weapon is the Word of God. Then the second weapon, of course, is the Holy Spirit, and the gifts of the Spirit revealing it and using us. Those are the mighty weapons that everyone has.

Someone says, “Well, that doesn’t seem like that big of a deal.”

Let me tell you, the Word of God is the most powerful and most under-used weapon lying on the shelves of the people of the earth. If we dusted that thing off and got that thing into our hearts; if we exposed and renounced the arguments in our minds that were against God; we would be surprised at how our hearts would be emboldened and empowered in a new way in the things of God. This thing is like a weapon—like a mighty weapon sitting on the shelf.

Obviously there are unreached nations, but all over the world it’s like the Lord is saying, “It’s a mighty weapon, but you really have to take this thing seriously and let it get into your heart.”

WRONG IDEAS ARE HEIGHTENED BY DEMONIC ENERGY

He says, “Every high thing that exalts itself.” This is how these demonic strongholds work. Number one, these collections of ideas, the strongholds; and then, secondly, every high thing; the enemy comes and puts demonic energy on these collection of ideas. So we get wrong ideas, and then it’s like these wrong ideas build a nest. Then the enemy comes and rests on it, and he energizes it and heightens the power of these ideas to hold us in bondage.

I’ll say that again. There are two things that are going on. The wrong ideas in our minds, number one; then, number two, a demonic energizing of these ideas. Those are the high things, the principalities and powers. Those are the ones that have exalted themselves against God. There are all kinds of dimensions of spiritual hierarchies. There are five categories of spiritual powers, negative spiritual powers in Ephesians 6:12—powers and principalities, etc. There are five different categories. He says, “These are the high things that have exalted themselves against God Himself.” These powers will actually energize the wrong ideas. Paul calls them in 1 Timothy 4:1 the “doctrines of demons.” In other words, they’re wrong ideas that are heightened by demonic energy, and they lock our hearts up in powerful bondage.

It doesn’t matter what anyone says; until we expose these things, renounce them, and then, thirdly, resist Satan, our hearts can’t get unlocked. There are strongholds, because they lock our hearts up.

A GLORIOUS BONDAGE TO JESUS’ IDEAS AND HIS ENERGIZING POWER

Paul goes back to the issue of concepts. He says, “The bottom line is, it’s bringing your thinking into captivity”—not to Satan. He’s contrasting this in terms of captivity to Satan, because they were held in captivity to Satan’s ideas. He says, “Let’s bring our mind and our thinking into captivity to the Holy Spirit and let Him energize our thinking.” He’s talking about a glorious bondage to Jesus’ ideas and His energizing power. He’s contrasting it with the energy of demons.

We buy into all kinds of wrong ideas. The devil says, “This is wonderful. They have the Word of God and they’ve been misled. Somehow or the other they’ve been misled, and let’s take advantage of it. They’ve built a nest. Let’s rest on it and put power on it.”

The Lord comes along and says, “Here’s what you need to do.” Paragraph D. “Cast down the arguments. Expose and renounce: expose the ideas and renounce them. The third thing you need to do is to resist Satan’s bondage of them. Resist Satan in the name of Jesus.”

That's basically Paul's strategy, because he's thinking of the false teachers, as I'll show you in just a moment. He's talking directly about the false teachers bringing wrong ideas. He's talking about the Corinthians being held in bondage in relationship to not walking in love. That's what's on his mind.

I'm convinced that there are spiritual powers in the atmosphere in the city, over cities and nations, but that's not the subject of 2 Corinthians 10. He's talking about ideas in the minds of the Corinthian believers that they bought into from the false teachers who held them in bondage and carnality. They have to be renounced. They're concepts; they're arguments; they're ways of thinking that he's talking about. Demons energize them. Those are the high things.

SINGLENESS OF MIND, WHOLEHEARTED DEVOTION

Wholehearted lovers of God. 2 Corinthians 11:3. 2 Corinthians 11 is the next chapter, and he's still on the same subject. He's not changing subjects at all; he's talking about these false teachers in verses 2, 3, and 4 of 2 Corinthians 11. I'm just taking phrases out of verses 2-4. When he's addressing the false teachers and talking about how much corruption they're bringing to the church in Corinth, he says, "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2). That's how the NKJV says it. That means, "Without duplicity, without double-mindedness, without duplicity." *Simplicity* doesn't mean just something simple; it means "singleness of mind." He means singleness of mind. The other versions of the Bible translate it as *devoted* because it means "singleness of mind, without duplicity." Instead of two ways of thinking, there's one way of thinking; that's what he means.

The NIV translates it, "sincere and pure devotion" (2 Cor. 11:2, NIV). It translates that word as *sincere*. That's simplicity, but pure devotion—that's the "singleness of mind" concept. It's sincere and yet pure; it's devotion he's talking about. It's a single-mindedness without any duplicity is devotion. The NASB calls it "simplicity and purity of devotion" (ibid, NASB).

THE NUMBER ONE OBJECT OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE

The reason I wanted to get that is that I want you to get the idea of devotion from the word *simplicity*, because that's what's in Paul's mind. He says, "Here's my problem, my number one concern. You've been led astray from a life of being lovers of God. You've lost your ability to be devoted." That's what the strongholds have done in their lives. Because the number one object of God's plan for the human race is that we would be lovers of God, right? The number one object of Paul's ministry was to bring forth lovers of God out of the city of Corinth. That's why he went there: to preach the Word, the mighty weapon, and it would result in people resisting wrong ideas that were in agreement with Satan, saying yes to the gospel, and becoming lovers of God. That's the whole point. He says, "The thing I fear is that your minds are led astray from the simple devotion to the person of Christ Jesus"—simplicity of devotion. The number one object of spiritual warfare is to release hearts into the love of God. Chapters 11 and 12 are one continual subject. This is what God the Father has promised the Son: lovers of God; a bride.

Giving the first commandment the first place in our lives. Paul wanted the first commandment to be first place in Corinth. That's what he's talking about here: the first commandment having first place; being empowered to be lovers of God, as opposed to being in bondage from spiritual strongholds. The strongholds were preventing this simplicity; they were preventing their hearts from being empowered with simplicity of love.

TWO SLEDGEHAMMERS THAT PULVERIZE SPIRITUAL STRONGHOLDS

The bridal identity: betrothed as a virgin. 2 Corinthians 11:2. That's the verse right before the verse we just read. Paul says, "I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2).

Paul is introducing the bridal identity to the Corinthians here. Well, maybe not introducing it, but certainly declaring it right here. He undoubtedly made it clear to them on his other visits, but he's declaring the bridal identity. He's making two declarations. Number one: they're betrothed. Number two: they're chaste virgins. Paul is making two separate declarations. He's making these declarations in the context of hammering against the walls that are holding the people in bondage. There are these big, ten-foot high stone walls, hypothetically, that Satan has erected in the lives of these Corinthians. He says, "Let me tell you. The two mighty weapons I will use like a sledgehammer to pulverize these walls are, number one: you're betrothed to Christ Jesus."

They're thinking, "Wow, that's not how we view ourselves. We view ourselves entirely differently."

He says, "And number two: you're chaste virgins."

Those are two points he's using like a sledgehammer to pulverize these stone walls that have been erected in the minds of the Corinthians that keep them in bondage and keep the blessings out. These are two very, very powerful doctrines that Paul is declaring. He's declaring it in the context of spiritual warfare.

SLEDGEHAMMER NUMBER ONE: YOU ARE BETROTHED TO CHRIST JESUS

OK, let's look at these. You're betrothed. On the handout, it says, "Legally engaged." It should say, "Legally married." It speaks of engagement, but when someone was betrothed or engaged or espoused, as another translation says it, they were legally married, but the marriage wasn't yet consummated. They would have a legal ceremony to be engaged or betrothed or espoused. Choose whichever word you want.

The NIV says, "I promised you to one husband" (2 Cor. 11:2, NIV). It's stronger than that, because it was a legal agreement. Being espoused, or betrothed, was a legal ceremony where they came together before witnesses. They went through a certain process. They didn't live in the same house for one more year; they had to get their hearts prepared and they had to go build their house. Again, they didn't drive out into Johnson County and pick out a nice house; they had to go build it from the ground up. They had to build the house. Typically, there was a one-year period of engagement, but they were legally married. That's why being *promised*, as the NIV phrases it, isn't strong enough; they were engaged, so they were legally married. If they broke the engagement, it required divorce. The old man couldn't call up on the phone and say, "Well, the Lord told me we're just supposed to be friends." They couldn't do that. They had to go before the elders and actually have a divorce proceeding, even during the engagement.

"THEN WILL I KNOW, EVEN AS I AM FULLY KNOWN"

In this age we're legally married at conversion. We're legally married at conversion and the marriage is consummated at the second coming, at the marriage supper of the Lamb. That's when the marriage is consummated: at the second coming. That's when Jesus unveils the full splendor of His heart.

It's like He unveils His heart to us, and in that unveiling He empowers us to be totally His. That's when the marriage is consummated: when He gives Himself totally to us in manifestation, and then that gives us the power to give ourselves totally to Him without any hindrance.

1 John 3:2 says, “In that day we will see Him as He is, and then we will be like Him because we have seen Him face to face” (1 Jn. 3:2, paraphrased). It’s the day when He shows Himself totally to us in His fullness. He’s giving Himself fully right now. We only see Him dimly, but in that day we will see Him in fullness, and that will empower us to give ourselves fully to Him. That’s the consummation of the marriage. We’re legally married to the Lord now, but in the custom of Israel, we’re espoused. We’re betrothed at this point in time.

WE ARE THE ONES WHO WILL DELIGHT THE HEART OF CHRIST

Here’s the point of being betrothed; here’s what Paul is saying. He’s not just saying, “You’re in a legal contract.” He’s saying, “You’ve been desired by God, and it’s already established in the eternal councils. You’re the chosen one.” That’s what He’s saying, because they understood what *betrothed* meant in that day. He says, “You’re lovely. You’re beautiful. You’re desired by God Himself. You’re the one He chose for His Son to be His eternal inheritance. You’re the betrothed one.” He’s using this like a sledgehammer to pulverize these big stone walls that have been erected in the thinking of the Corinthians by the false teachers.

In other words, he’s saying that God enjoys your beauty. “The King greatly desires your beauty” (Ps. 45:11, paraphrased). Psalm 45 is maybe the one psalm that’s like the Song of Solomon. It’s the bridal psalm. I like the translation that says, “The king is enthralled by your beauty” (ibid, NIV). I love it!

This happens the day you’re born again. This is a very powerful, emotional truth that he’s speaking to them right now. It’s like the Father is saying, “I know My Son’s desire, and because I know His desire I chose you, because I knew you would fill His desire. You’re what He wants.”

We have been betrothed. We have been promised to Jesus by the Father. Because the Father knows what enralls the heart of Christ Jesus, and He knows it’s us. This is the concept. It’s a very powerful, emotional concept, being chosen to be in line as the royal bride to the Son of God forever. We’re promised. We’re promised, signed, sealed, delivered, and guaranteed. It’s already been established in the courts of heaven. We’re betrothed. Praise God! This is awesome.

Here’s the point Paul is making: he’s trying to give them a new image of who they are. Most of them don’t feel this way. He’s saying, “That’s why you’re ensnared in carnality, because you don’t know the truth of who you are.” This is the point that we’ll make later. Paul says, “This new information will stand against the arguments in your mind that you’re worthless, you’re nothing, you’re forgotten, you’re neglected, you’re unimportant.”

All of these are lies, these arguments that really accuse God, because we’re calling God a liar; God says the opposite of every one of those things about us. Paul says, “These arguments accuse the truth of God. I’m giving you truth that will tear down these walls in your life.”

SLEDGEHAMMER NUMBER TWO: YOU ARE A CHASTE VIRGIN

He goes on to the next point. He says, “You’re not just the promised one that He desires. You’re not just the guarantee because your beauty enralls His heart. It’s more than that. You’re a chaste virgin. You’ve been made clean and you’ve been made pure by a gift.”

We looked at that earlier: the gift of righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). When were you made a virgin? Instantly, at the new birth. It says we’re accepted; we’re the righteousness of God. This is so awesome! Let me ask you this

question. How righteous is God the Father? How righteous is He? His righteousness can't be improved upon; its amount is infinite, and its duration is eternal. God's righteousness is infinite—it can't be improved upon—and it's eternal—it never wears out. You have the righteousness of God clothing you as a garment. There's nothing in the way of the full embrace of God to us. Why? Because everything in the path has been removed in terms of God's heart pulsating towards us. There's no hindrance in terms of His affection legally being released to us.

When were you made a virgin? The day you were born again. How? By an instant gift of salvation. It was a gift. It was given to you instantaneously.

The point is this: there's no guilt or shame in the court of God. In God's court there's nothing that keeps Him from giving His embrace to you. He's given it to us in the cross. We'll fully receive it in our experience, but there's nothing in the path.

For the unbeliever, the wrath of God is in the way of God's embrace because of sin. But to us God is saying, "No, you're a virgin." Every obstacle has been removed for God to release His embrace, because the unbeliever can't receive it until he or she repents and receives the gift of righteousness. It's talking about the ability to receive the divine embrace. All hindrance has been removed from God's point of view.

Secondly, everything that would hinder you from being in the position of the bride on the last day, every hindrance that would keep you from being the bride, has been removed legally at the cross. You're chaste, or you could use the word *pure*. It's the same word. You're a pure virgin in the sight of God, in the court of God. He's talking about from God's point of view. This is absolutely fantastic! The penalty, the hindrance in God's court is gone. Now, B is our legal standing. From God's point of view, it's all been removed. A is the emotional reality of this touching us. It's not just that we're clean in the court of God; we're desired by God. There's an emotional dimension, not just a legal one. He chose us because we enthralled His heart. Once the issue of God's wrath was removed, we were given the status of a pure virgin in the sight of God. Once that happened, then we could be betrothed. We could be in line and receive the fullness; nothing would hinder His heart from reaching out and embracing us.

"I HAVE BETROTHED YOU TO ONE HUSBAND . . . CHRIST"

Paul said, "I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you. . . ." Paul's goal was to present the Corinthians as a chaste virgin to Christ. When is he going to do this? He wants to present them in two ways. First, he wants to present them as a virgin, and, secondly, he wants to present them as betrothed. It's a twofold presentation, but when does he want to do it?

He presents them now in the present-tense sense of his own day. In the present tense he presents them in intercession. When he would bring them before God, he didn't say, "Lord, I bring the Corinthians. I know some of them are still stumbling in immorality, anger, and bitterness." He didn't present them that way. He said, "Lord, these are the ones from which the wrath of God has been removed. I present these broken lives to you that have the gift of righteousness. I present them as pure virgins; nothing is in the way from Your point of view. And I present them as betrothed. They are the one Your Son desires. That's how I present them to You in prayer." It changes the way that we pray.

Secondly, this was the imagery the apostles used. They thought of their labors as laboring in the earth for their generation; then, on the last day, being able to stand before God and say, "Now I present all the labors and the

sufferings and the stonings and the whippings. Here's the fruit of it. I present to You the one You desire from my labors." That was part of the idea of the apostolic ministry. They were focused on presenting people who were desired by God, who were pure in the court of God, and presenting them on the last day as lovers of God.

THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF THE MINISTRY OF PAUL THE APOSTLE

When it's all said and done, Paul says, "When I've finished my ministry, they loved You. I offer them to You."

The Lord says, "Good job."

The Lord doesn't care how big Paul's ministry is. The Lord doesn't care about the size of his mailing list, or his conferences. He wants people who are lovers of God offered to Himself on the last day. That's what's in the heart of God, and that's what's in the heart of Paul.

That was Paul's focus of ministry. We'll read the verse again: "I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2).

Here's Paul's idea: he's jealous to present them. He wants to establish believers in a new spiritual identity. He wants these believers to grasp that they are desired—that's the idea behind *betrothed*—and they are clean—that's the idea behind *virgin*. They are desired and they are clean. Paul says, "My goal is to call them into this reality of being betrothed and being virgins." It's not something they work at being; it's something that's automatically true of them the day they're born again. Paul's struggle was getting them to buy into it.

NOTHING IS HINDERING GOD FROM FULFILLING HIS FULL PLAN IN YOUR LIFE

Here's what Paul does. He goes into Corinth. He looks at all the unbelievers in the city as potential people who can be called into the marriage relationship. He sees the bum on the street in skid row and he says, "You don't have a clue of the potential dignity and destiny of who you are." He looks at them as those who are potentially the betrothed of Christ Jesus. That's number one. Then, once they say yes, he wants to get these believers to see themselves in two ways. He wants them to see themselves as desired and clean—as betrothed and as virgins.

Paul says, "My greatest challenge is keeping the wrong information out and the right information in. Because you need to see yourself as desired by Him and as beautiful to Him, and you need to see yourself as clean in His sight." That doesn't mean he can't see wrong things, but he's speaking in legal language. Nothing is hindering God from fulfilling His full plan in your life. Nothing is hindering God from bringing you into eternal glory—nothing. In the sight of God, everything has been removed that's hindering His full embrace in bringing you into eternal glory.

Paul saw people not as potential targets for his ministry. Today that's so common: someone views someone else as another potential catch. Paul saw them as people who needed to be enlightened to the fact that they were clean and desired in the court of God. Of course, the ultimate goal was that they would have simplicity of devotion; they would be extravagant lovers of God. That's what he was after. That's how he viewed human beings. He viewed the lost as those who could be potentially betrothed. Once they were believers, he tried to get them to see themselves as desired and as clean. The end result was that they became extravagant lovers.

THE MAIN PARADIGM OF PAUL’S MINISTRY: EMPOWERING LOVERS OF GOD

Paul’s jealousy. On the handout I call it his “fiery emotion.” His heart was fully alive with this point. This wasn’t a secondary point; this was his main view. His main paradigm of ministry was this driving jealousy to get people to see who they could be; then, once they said yes to Jesus, getting them to believe they were desired and clean, and to make them lovers of God—to empower them to be lovers of God.

That was his point. That was the main motive of his ministry, because the false teachers said, “He’s just jealous because you guys are going to our conference instead of his. So he’s giving us a bad rap.”

Paul said, “No! I’m not jealous because I want more numbers. I’m jealous because I know the destiny of who you are and I know how much God wants you to be lovers of God. This is my reason for life on the earth: to help others cooperate with the Holy Spirit to become lovers of God. What a great way to live!”

Of course, he got thrown into prison, whipped, and stoned a few times, because the devil doesn’t like this stuff.

REPENTANCE BRINGS US INTO OUR DESTINY AS LOVERS OF GOD

Our former identity. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. He’s still speaking to the Corinthians. I’m drawing the whole lesson from the Corinthian church, because they were the ones who understood what he said in the last letter. He says, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9)?

He’s talking about those who have made a decision to resist the commands of God. That’s who he’s talking about. He’s talking about those people who are not born again; he’s not talking about immature believers. The enemy is always there whispering in our ears, “See, this is you.”

No, he’s talking about those who have taken a stand in the presence of God and said, “I won’t say yes to You. No! I’m going my way.” That’s what he’s talking about here.

Paul says, “Do not be deceived about this” (1 Cor. 6:9b, paraphrased). In other words, there were all kinds of false gospels and false methods of salvation. He said, “There’s only one method. Don’t be tricked by this.” Those other methods that say sin without repentance is OK are false methods. He says, “Repentance is necessary, because it brings us into our destiny as lovers of God.”

THE IMPENITENT WILL NEVER INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD

He goes on to say, “Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9-10). He’s referring to those who aggressively seek these kinds of lifestyles without repentance. They will not inherit the kingdom of God. They’ve turned down the salvation of Jesus Christ. Again, he’s not talking about immature believers; he’s talking about people who have aggressively chosen this lifestyle, and no one is going to change their minds. They’ve said no to the salvation of God; they want to go in a different direction.

“BUT YOU WERE WASHED, BUT YOU WERE SANCTIFIED, BUT YOU WERE JUSTIFIED”

Here’s the key point, in verse 11; it’s a glorious verse. “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). This is our new spiritual identity. “And such were some of you.” He looks at them and says, “It’s a new identity.”

Here's the problem at Corinth: many of them still saw themselves as immoral. They got saved, and not all of them were instantly freed from all the passions of their heart, like all of us. They still identified themselves as immoral. That was the way they saw and defined their lives.

Paul says, "No, you *were* like this, but God views you in an entirely different way.

"But you were washed. . ." In one day, in one moment. Now these sodomites, adulterers, fornicators, homosexuals, and extortioners didn't get saved on Thursday and never have another negative feeling or negative life pattern and everything was gone and they were just happy and full of joy. That's not what happened. In the court of God the shame had been lifted. God wasn't holding anything against them. Paul says, "You *were* this way, but you're no longer this way anymore in the court of God, in the sight of God. You're justified. There's no guilt." God isn't holding anything over you anymore, because the Son of God took your wrath upon Himself, and God can't pay the same penalty, or have someone pay the price for the same penalty, twice. If God put our penalty on Jesus and then He put it on us, it would be injustice in the court of God. You're justified. There's nothing in the court of God keeping you from the eternal purpose of God—nothing.

UNIQUELY DESIGNED AS THE COMPANION OF THE LIVING GOD

Number 4 is even more emotionally powerful. You're sanctified. As we said earlier, the words *sanctified* and *holy* are the same word. It's the same exact word: *sanctified* and *holy*. It means "set apart."

People have said that for years: "Well, we're set apart by God." You're unique in the plan of God. God looked at all of His creation, pulled you, and said, "I want him or I want her to get out of that line and come over into this line." They've been pursued by God and uniquely designed for another purpose called the eternal companion of Christ Jesus. You have designs on your life from the living God. That's what He's saying. You have a unique design and purpose for your life. You're the eternal companion of the living God. When you look at the word *sanctified*, write, *special*. Write, "totally in a unique purpose." Write, "God has really special designs on me." That's what *sanctified* means.

He's hammering at their identity here. He says, "You *were* those other things. You're washed. There's no guilt. You've been pursued. You have a unique purpose. You've been set apart." Now God views you according to this new plan. He sees you as His Son's bride—the one who is promised to His Son. Paul says, "Every time I pray for you, I always present you as betrothed, and I present you as virgins."

The Corinthians said, "Yes, but I still feel like an idolater. I still feel so bad. I've had bad dreams about it. I remember it."

He says, "Well, when I pray for you I present you not as an idolater. I present you as betrothed, and I present you as a virgin."

They said, "Huh; is that how God receives us?"

He says, "Yes, that's why I'm presenting you that way, because the only way God will receive my prayers about you is in this light."

IF YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE A VIRGIN, YOU WON'T LIVE LIKE ONE

The key part is feeling like this. We don't live by feelings, but feelings are a part of our redemption. Feelings come and go, but feelings still come. They do go, but they do come, too. I don't believe that God has called us to live by feelings, but feelings are a part of our life with God. They show up occasionally—sanctified feelings do. As I said the other day, if we don't feel like a virgin, we won't live like one. We're trying to get people to live clean, but they feel dirty before God. Do you know how difficult it is to get a person to live clean while they're feeling dirty in the presence of God? It's impossible. They can grit their teeth and gut it out for a month or a year or two or three depending on the strength of their will. In the end, under pressure, over time, if they feel dirty they'll live dirty.

THE ENEMY WANTS US TO LIVE IN THE DARK MEMORY OF OUR SIN AND FAILURE

The thing that makes me want to run into the commands of God is the fact I feel His smile and His desire a little over my life. I say, "Man, I love it! If You feel this way, I'll come to You, but if You're angry at me and about to wipe me out, when I stumble I'll run from You instead of to You."

If you feel dirty, if you feel shameful, typically under pressure, over time, you'll live in shame. You'll do shameful things. The enemy raises up these images, these lying images of who we are. He wants us to live in the dark memory of our sin and failure. He wants us see ourselves as immoral. He wants us to see ourselves as idolaters. He wants us to see ourselves as the extortioner, as the person who stole that money, and is nothing but a thief. God says, "No, no! Quit living in those dark memories of what you did in the past. Stand in My presence as one desired; as one betrothed; as a clean virgin."

Because the Lord could say, "Paul, I won't accept your prayers for them now on any other basis, but you plug into My courtroom according to how I've defined their life."

You can't pray for someone else that's a believer in a different way and be in agreement with the throne of God. God doesn't want us living in the dark memories of our bondage. Our bondage is so real to us. The memory of it in our thoughts is so present and so powerful.

God says, "I want you living by divine revelation; by the truth of what I said about you." These are the strongholds. These are the arguments. These are the "minds brought into captivity" that Paul was talking about in chapter 10. He's talking about it and addressing it here in chapter 11.

IF YOU LIVE A LIFE OF SHAME, YOU'LL RUN AWAY FROM GOD

How does God view you? What's your core identity? "What defines your life?" is what I'm asking. What defines your life? Are you slaves of sin who struggle to love God? Or are you lovers of God who struggle with sin? Obviously, the answer is number two. Are you an immoral person who is trying to be a lover of God, or are you a lover of God who might have struggles with immoral thoughts or occasionally do something wrong? I'm not saying those things are OK; I'm saying we have to come to Him in repentance, but my real point is this: if you get a certain amount of shame on your life, you won't come to Him in repentance, because fleeing from Him will seem less devastating than coming to Him. However, if you understand the truth of the gospel, it will drive you to repentance when you discover the weakness of your flesh.

DON'T REHEARSE YOUR SINS; RECEIVE HIS ENJOYMENT

Are we sinners who love? Or are we lovers who sin? The answer is number 2: we're lovers who sin. Let's stay with this for a second. Your answer determines whether you quit in the struggle. Here's how you know if you've got the first identity. You come to God in a worship service and you rehearse your past sins to Him again. You've already repented of them. In fact, you repented of them two weeks ago, or thirty-two months ago, or four and a half years ago, or eighteen years ago. It doesn't matter. When I come before the Lord, He doesn't want me coming with my negative list of who I am after I've already repented. Rather, He wants me to come before Him in this regard: "I am my Beloved's, and He is mine. I love Him, and He loves me" (Song 6:3, paraphrased). It's the other way around, "He loves me. Therefore, I love Him."

AGREEMENT WITH OUR SHAME IN FAILURE KEEPS US TRAPPED IN BONDAGE

I like to come into the presence of God having blown it. I come and I've repented. I don't want to short-change repentance, but when repentance has happened, you're washed, you're cleansed, and you're sanctified. You have a divine design on your life.

We come into worship and we say, "God, You love me." That's my entry point. That's the way I present myself. "You love me. I'm betrothed. You seek me. You want me. You love me. You enjoy me. You love my beauty. Here I am!"

Here's how lots of people come in. "Oh God, please, I beg You. If You'll forgive me one more time I'll never ask another thing again. I promise."

God says, "What's wrong with them? Maybe they don't get it yet."

That agreement with the enemy holds us in bondage. It keeps blessing out and it keeps bondage in. A sincere believer who's been entrapped in his sin many times defines his life by his struggle rather than defining his life by who God has made him. If we define our life by our sins instead of defining our life by the One who pursues us, we're in trouble. I'm loved; He desires me. I don't feel that nearly often as I would like, but I'm telling you, that's my confession. That's the way I present myself in the presence of God. I am my Beloved's. He really likes me. I am His and He is mine. He loves me; I love Him. My love is pretty weak, but there's genuine love there. Compared to the six billion people in the human race, I'm one of the few; I'm one of the 5 percent of the earth who have love for Jesus in their heart by the Holy Spirit. Maybe it's a few hundred million, but it's a very small percent. I'm one of those, and so are you. That's how you present yourself before God.

HOW DO YOU CHALLENGE THE MOST CARNAL OF CHURCHES?

New information about our new position. 1 Corinthians 6:2-3; 3:21-23. Paul says in 6:2, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world" (1 Cor. 6:2)? He goes on to say, "Do you not know that we shall judge angels" (v. 3)?

"Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are your: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come; everything is yours. Because you are the inheritance of Jesus. You belong to Him" (1 Cor. 3:21-23, paraphrased).

Paul is challenging the saints at Corinth in 1 Corinthians to a greater consecration, a greater dedication. Throughout the book, how does Paul exhort the most carnal church in the first century? How does he exhort the most carnal church to obedience?

“Do you not know that you are eternally exalted in position before God? Don’t you know that? You will judge the whole world. Don’t you know the position you have in the court of God?”

They say, “No, we don’t.”

He says, “Don’t you know that you will judge even the most majestic angels? That you will evaluate and arbitrate the entire angelic host? Don’t you get it? Don’t you know?” This is bride talk. He’s saying, “Don’t you know who you are? There’s only one who’s higher than the angels, and that’s Me. You’ll judge them. Guess what? Don’t you know who you are?”

THE SUN SHINES FOR THE REMNANT OF HUMANS WHO FREELY LOVE

He goes on and says, “Everything is yours” (1 Cor. 3:22, paraphrased). He says, “The reason God created the sun and the stars and moon was so that earth would work.” The only reason God wanted earth to work is so that the human race would exist. The only reason He wanted the human race to exist was to extract a remnant of the human race who would love voluntarily. He says, “The sun exists for the remnant that voluntarily chooses love.” Everything has been created for the remnant of the human race, the redeemed—those who will say yes to love. Everything exists with them in mind. The whole order of the universe is governed with us in mind.

Paul says, “Whether it’s Paul, Apollos or Cephas”—which is Peter, the apostle Peter. The greatest ministries with power on them don’t exist for those men; they exist for the redeemed to come forth in blessing. He says, “The only reason I gave apostles was so that you could be blessed, not so that they could be famous and people could write books about them. That’s not why I gave them. I gave them so that you would be blessed. Everything is yours.”

He says, “The whole world was made for you.” Isn’t that amazing? God created this glorious, giant rock called “planet earth” with the majestic mountains and oceans and all the magnificence with only you in mind.

He says, “The very presence of life, my strategies, and the way that death works; things present and things to come; everything is yours for one reason: because you’re His inheritance. You belong to Him.” That’s bride talk. He says, “You’re His inheritance.”

CLEAVING TO THE LORD AS TO A FAITHFUL SPOUSE

Resisting sin with a new identity; oneness with God, 1 Corinthians 6:17-20. I didn’t mean to have verses 15 and 16 here, so I’m starting with verse 17. He’s talking about resisting sin with this new identity. “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17).

He uses this reality of being joined to God. Again, this is bride talk. This is the language of leaving and cleaving and being joined unto the Lord. This is the bridal language of Ephesians 5:31, “You will leave your father and mother and be joined, or cleave unto your wife” (Eph. 5:31, paraphrased). He says, “You’re joined”—which is the same word he used earlier—“cleaving to the Lord; the two of you are cleaving to one another.”

That's the language of the bride from Genesis 2. He says, "Don't you know that's who you are? That's how God sees you. You're one of the cleaving ones; one of the married ones; one of the betrothed ones."

NOTHING WILL FREE A PERSON FROM SIN LIKE BEING LOVED AND LONGED FOR

Paul goes on to say, "Don't you know that your body has the Holy Spirit living in you? You are not your own" (1 Cor. 6:19, paraphrased). In other words, "You belong to God. You're His inheritance." Then he adds, at the very end of the sentence, "You are God's" (v. 20, paraphrased).

Therefore, quit sinning. The point is this, in bridal language: you've been joined to the second person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus, forever. Therefore, since you're joined, quit sinning. He didn't say, "Quit sinning so you can be joined." He said, "You've repented. You've changed in attitude. You're joined; now quit sinning."

There's nothing that will free a person from immorality like the vision of who they are as the Bride of Christ, feeling cherished, loved, desired, and longed for. So much sexual bondage, perversion, and addiction are rooted in the emptiness of the vacuum of the human heart. We were created to be enjoyed and desired by God, and to feel that we are. When we're not, then we're in a major vacuum.

Paul's strategy is the same one Jesus used with the Laodiceans in Revelation 3. He told the Laodiceans, "God has called you to a supper, and He's called you to a throne. He's called you to the marriage supper and He's called you to a throne" (Rev. 3:20-21, paraphrased).

He gives us new information. Then He tells us to obey. God chose new information as the vehicle that empowers us to obey in deeper ways.

REBUKE THE REBELLIOUS, BUT INFORM THE IMMATURE

Paul's approach to the carnal Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. Do you know what we do? We rebuke people to get them to obey. The Lord says, "No, give them new information. You rebuke the rebellious; you inform the immature."

That's why I emphasize night and day the love of God, because 95 percent of the people sitting out there on Sunday morning are immature and they struggle. They don't need to be rebuked; they need to be informed. That was Paul's strategy, and that was Jesus' strategy. He informed them. He rebuked the rebellious that were resistant, and He warned them, but that was a very small percentage of the redeemed.

"HE WHO COMES PREACHES ANOTHER JESUS WHOM WE HAVE NOT PREACHED"

OK, I'll skip page 10. Go to page 11. False teachers with wrong information. 2 Corinthians 11:4. He deals with the false teachers that give false information. It says in the handout, on page 11: "He's dealing with the false teachers that have given false information." Paul is being sarcastic: "For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it" (2 Cor. 11:4)! In other words, "You put up with it so well!"

Paul says, "Why are you doing this?" These false teachers were being paraded around Corinth as the great inside truth. Paul says, "Why are you doing this?" Again, the whole subject of these four chapters is the false teachers. He says, "They bring another Jesus."

THE SPIRIT OF BONDAGE AND FEAR WILL NEVER EMPOWER YOUR HEART TO LOVE

Here's the tricky part. They acknowledge Jesus the Nazarene as being God and being the Messiah. Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? Who is Jesus? He's the eternal God. He's the Messiah. Wow! The problem is, they refused Jesus' method of salvation by grace. They wanted the eternal God, the Messiah, to save by law. They were really right that He was the Messiah and the eternal God, but they were wrong in that He didn't extend salvation by law. Paul says, "He extended salvation by grace."

Here's the point. God enjoys you before you perform. That's what empowers you to perform. That's the message of grace. God enjoys you before you've ever done anything, because you're betrothed and a virgin. That's what empowers you to obey.

These false teachers were called *Judaizers*. They taught the opposite. They said, "If you obey, then God enjoys you."

The Corinthians said, "What's the difference?"

Paul says, "What's the difference?! It's as different as night and day. If you have to obey first and then God enjoys you, you'll have so much shame and failure that when you stumble you'll run from Him instead of to Him. You'll never be a lover of God." He said, "The difference is as far as the east is from the west. There's a vast difference. This is the message I gave you. You said yes to the gift of righteousness. You felt God's love. That is what empowered you to obey. However, their message is that you obey, you jump through all the hoops, and then God might enjoy you. It's a false gospel. It will wreck your ability to be a lover of God."

That, of course, is Paul's whole point. He says, "They have a different spirit. They use the spirit of fear, the spirit of bondage, and the spirit of condemnation." You can put the word *shame* there. They used bondage and condemnation and shame after the people repented. They repented, but they still hadn't measured up with full attainment, so they put the spirit of fear on them. They told them, "God's about to forget you forever."

That's the spirit of fear. A person ought to be under conviction until they repent. I've repented of sins; I've confessed them; I've acknowledged them. I've asked the Lord to wash me, but guess what? I still haven't got victory in the area yet. I've repented, but I haven't attained. I haven't got a ten on the list of ten yet. Where am I at?

They said, "Well, you're on shaky ground, buddy. You're just about wiped out."

They said, "Oh my goodness."

Let me tell you this. The spirit of bondage and fear will never empower the heart to love, never. It never has. It never will. It can get people jumping through hoops for a while, but it will never empower the heart to walk in love, ever.

Paul brought the spirit of liberty. God enjoys you because He has seen your willing spirit. You haven't attained yet, but you've got a willing spirit and He's put the cloak of righteousness around you. You're betrothed and

you're clean. It's the spirit of liberty: a different gospel, or a different good news, for the human race. That's what the word *gospel* means: "good news" for the sinful people of the human race.

In other words, this false gospel never, ever brought people into an image and identity as the betrothed, chaste virgin. It never brought people to see themselves as betrothed, as a chaste virgin. It brought them into a status of—what's the word I'm looking for? It starts with *p*; *purgatory*? No, that's not it. "The penalty box"? No, that's not it. Anyway, I'll think of it in a second. Oh, it's killing me. No, not really. I'll get it in a second. *Probation!* That's it. I knew it started with *p*. They tell us that we have to obey and be on probation for a season. See, lots of people, some of you in this room, are on probation in the way you view yourself. You're on probation in the courts of God. You can't worship; you can't fellowship; you can't imagine walking forth in your destiny because in your own mind you're still on probation.

THE CRAFTINESS OF SATAN KEEPS US ON PROBATION FOREVER

Satan's strategy. 2 Corinthians 11:3. This is the fear Paul is talking about in relation to spiritual warfare. "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). That's the verse we started with.

"As the serpent deceived Eve." of course, we know the serpent is Satan from Genesis 3. Do you think it's an accident that he's using Eve, who was the first lady of creation? We're talking about Eve who was the bride of the first Adam, the picture of Christ. It says the first lady of creation was tripped up by Satan's lies.

What is his craftiness? He comes in half-truths. That's the craftiness of Satan: these half-truths.

The Judaizers said, "Well, He's the Messiah and He's the eternal God."

They said, "Hey, have them come teach the Bible study."

The Judaizers said, "Yeah, but you're on probation if you don't measure up."

The people said, "Wow, that man's a real end-time holiness teacher."

No, that's a deception. That will keep you from being a lover of God. That will drive you out of the courts of God. That will never empower you to be a lover of God, never. You're a betrothed virgin who is pure in the sight of God. That's the image. You're not on probation until you measure up. No, you're fully accepted while you're still stumbling with a sincere, willing spirit.

LEARNING THE TRUTH ABOUT OURSELVES AND GOD WILL LEAD US OUT OF BONDAGE

Paul said, "Here's Satan's goal: to do the same thing to you that he did to Eve—to corrupt your thinking."

Here's why. Wrong ideas create a wrong image of who you are in your own heart. Wrong ideas about God and wrong ideas about yourself create a wrong image in your heart of who you are. This wrong image leads you into the wrong practices and the wrong kind of lifestyle. There are so many people in so much addiction and bondage to so many things. That's the practice. A significant amount of it goes back to the way they view themselves, and specifically how they view themselves in the presence of God. It goes back to wrong ideas that were sown in their mind. Satan knows this. The NASB says, "Your minds will be led astray" from the truth (2

Cor. 11:3). It's the imagery of spiritual warfare: if he can corrupt your mind, if he can get you to buy into one of his arguments against God, he will cause your heart to be frozen. He will freeze your heart in bondage. It's called a stronghold of darkness, accusing the knowledge of God. Paul says, "We have to expose it. We have to cast it down. We have to bring the mind into the obedience of Christ Jesus and out of obedience and agreement with Satan."

Why does Satan want your mind? Because the wrong ideas will lead to a wrong image, which means that emotionally you'll be ensnared. When you're ensnared emotionally, it's just a matter of time until you keep stumbling and stumbling and stumbling with your will. You'll never be able to make choices consistently with your will under the pressure of temptation and pain. Over the long term you'll never make choices with your will that go contrary to where your emotions are at the end of the day. You'll do it for a while, and I think it's right to do it. It's right to obey God when we don't feel like it. I'm saying you won't do it for a very long time. We have to feel right in the presence of God if we want to live in the optimum way. Amen.