

CHRIST'S FAITHFUL BRIDE

Not being seduced by perverted versions of the gospel

I have a wedding coming up, which got me thinking about the Church being a bride, too. "I promised you to one husband, to Christ," Paul wrote, "so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him (2 Corinthians 11:2)."

"A pure virgin?!" The idea of being a virgin on one's wedding day is probably laughable to people nowadays. But it wasn't to Paul, not when it came to the Church, because the Church was Christ's future wife. It was hugely important to Paul, then, to keep Christ's girl out of trouble until the wedding!

It wasn't an easy job, though. Paul watched in alarm as the wolves homed in and the Church's eyes were drawn irresistibly to them. "I'm afraid," he continues in verse 3, "that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ."

The Church was attached to Christ but it certainly wasn't immune to the charms of others, though, "for if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached...you put up with it easily enough (verse 4)." Anyone could turn up in Corinth preaching their own version of Christ, and the Church let them do it.

It's the same today, too. All kinds of Christs are turning up in the Church. We've got the Pagan Christ, the Cosmic Christ, the Christ presence, Christ consciousness, Christ is nature, Christ is you, Christ is me, we're all little christs and so is every flower, rock and beetle! And for some odd reason, professing Christians are soaking this stuff up. By attaching Christ's name to all this stuff, though, it gives the impression it's all very spiritual and even Christian. It isn't Christian and it has nothing to do with Christ, but the Church "puts up with it easily enough" today, too.

Things don't change much, do they? The Church is being seduced as cleverly as it ever was by people "masquerading as angels of light (2 Corinthians 11:14)," and it's amazing how easily a Christian's head can be turned by a perverted version of the gospel (Galatians 1:6).

Paul's defence, however, was simple. "I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom," he wrote, "for I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:1-2)."

Paul didn't try to sound spiritual to impress people with how clever he was. He simply stuck to the point of who Jesus was and why he died.

To Paul, Jesus wasn't some vague "Christ consciousness," he was the Son of God in whom God in "all his fullness dwells (Colossians 1:19)." And Jesus was no "essence permeating all creation," either, he was the mighty Lord of the universe who rose from the dead to reverse the mess we humans have made and restore everything back to God (verse 20). And to Paul, it wasn't because we're all little christs that we're rescued from the ravages of our human nature and we stand before God without fault. It's because of the one and only Christ and his death on the cross (verse 22).

This was the Christ that Paul locked the Church's attention on, the Christ "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," not some poky little creation of puffed up human imagination.

For all his hard work, though, Paul couldn't prevent some Christians being tempted away from Christ by those preaching a do-it-yourself spirituality without the need for

Christ or his death. Their arguments were highly persuasive, too, despite the fact that no human-devised spirituality has ever been able to deal with human nature (Colossians 2:22-23).

Imagine how Paul must have felt, then, watching Christians dumbly falling for the Oprah Winfreys and the Eckhart Tolles of his day, when he knew what Jesus would do for them by comparison. Jesus would create completely new creatures out of them, personally transforming their nature into his nature (3:10) so that one day they would be revealed with him (3:4) in all the beauty and perfection of his bride.

Jesus had the power to do it, too, but would the Church trust him? That was the question. Would the Church glue her eyes on Christ, totally trusting him with the outcome of her life, knowing how he felt about her, or would her head be turned by others?

It depended very much on the Church realizing who she was. She was Christ's wife-to-be, his pure and virgin bride. And what more beautiful sight is there than a virgin bride? As she walks up the aisle with her eyes glued on that one person she saved herself for, she can walk with her head held high. She kept the wolves at bay. It wasn't easy, but she did it.

And is her husband-to-be grateful?

Well, imagine how Christ feels with a bride like that.