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The Bride (Feelin' Sexy)

Revelation 21:9-22:5

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Pastor Walter Wangerine writes:

The woman sitting before me has a . . . problem so difficult to state that she twists her fingers in silence. She has come alone and looks . . . lonely.

"I'm sorry," she says. "I just don't know how to say it."

"Take your time," I say.

She smiles a small apologetic smile. "He," she says—she's referring to her absent husband. The problem is in their marriage. "Whenever we, ah, make love," she says, dropping her eyes . . .

As though she has just made up her mind, she says the sentence smoothly: "Whenever we make love, he laughs." She looks up. Her eyes question me.

"At you?" I ask. "He laughs at you?"

"No. Oh, no." Now she is concerned that I don't misunderstand. "No, he laughs for joy."

This is what she thinks the problems is . . . her husband's pleasure at entering her . . . He laughs like a boy at a new joke; the tears run down his cheeks and he kisses her.

"Does the noise distract you?" I ask.

"I don't think so," says the woman. We're talking about her feelings now, so she drops her eyes again and twists her fingers. "I," she whispers, blushing: "I sort of giggle with him. He's having so much—" Her poor face blazes with embarrassment; her voice falls to a distant whisper, "—so much *fun*, you know. But that isn't right, is it? Isn't he being, I don't know, disrespectful, like laughing in church? And then, when I laugh too, I feel so—guilty."

She feels shame.

In Genesis 2 God makes man, and then He makes his bride from the man's bleeding, wounded side. Verse 24: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh."

In Ephesians 5 Paul writes, "This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying it refers to Christ and his church."

Genesis 2:25: "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made."

The serpent (the Ancient Dragon) tempts Eve. Eve takes the fruit and gives some to Adam.

“Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.”

Psalm 16: “In the presence of the Lord there is fullness of joy. At his right hand are pleasures for evermore.”

They heard the sound of the Lord walking in the garden . . . “and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ And Adam said, ‘I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’”

A pastor went to visit one of his parishioners. He rang the doorbell, waited, and no one came. Finally, he took out his card and wrote Revelation 3:20 on the back and slipped it under the door: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in.”

Two days later the pastor received his calling card back in an envelope with a brief note attached — Genesis 3:10: “I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.”

We’ve been studying The Revelation. We read Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock”

Why *don’t* we open the door?

Why *don’t* we invite Him in? —
not just with our heads but our hearts?

Why *don’t* we thoroughly surrender
in absolute and joyful obedience?

Why *don’t* we invite Him into every dark corner of our souls so every breath we take is the ecstasy of unadulterated, passionate surrender?

Why? — Because of shame. And we’ve had reason for shame.

We’re all like our mother Eve, who trusted the snake and became a harlot. So we hide from God, but we’re desperate for communion and fulfillment. So we join ourselves to idols: cars, houses, jobs, pornography, adultery; but that makes us only *more* ashamed. Then the presence of the Lord is shame and drives us deeper into the trees, deeper into the dark, deeper into the closet. His glory becomes our criticism; it’s the story of Israel.

Through the law God reveals: “Israel, you’re being a whore.” Through the prophets God cries: “Israel, you’ve become a harlot!” But it only drives Israel deeper into the dark, into the closet, and she *will not* open the door and let Him in. She has too much pride to surrender her shame.

A child wrote in a school paper, “The Jews were proud people, and throughout history they had trouble with the unsympathetic genitals.” I think he meant “Gentiles,” but I hope he got an “A” . . . because he was right.

In Acts 2 the problem with the Jews was . . .

An uncircumcised heart,
The unsympathetic genital of the soul;
A heart unfeeling, sealed off to God,
Hiding in the dark, hiding in the bushes.

The law was criticism driving them deeper into shame.

Husband, you know that if you really want to make love to your wife, the last thing you want to say when she puts on the lingerie is, “Hey, you put on a few pounds this week.” That may be true, and it may be best if she hadn’t, and you may love her thoroughly and absolutely, but *that* (criticism) will slam the door, my friend. And she may have sex with you out of obedience but not joyful surrender. Her heart will be far from you.

Jesus said, “This people [Israel] honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.” He was quoting Isaiah, who goes on to say, “Therefore, I will again do marvelous things with this people.”

Ezekiel prophesies to God’s whoring Bride: “Yet I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. I will confound you when I forgive all you have done.”

Hosea 2:14: “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, romance her, entice her, and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her, and there I will give her her vineyards; there I will make the Valley of Achor [Valley of Trouble] a door of hope.” That is, “I’ll take my whoring Bride through trouble, and there in that wilderness I’ll provide a door. I will show my grace and romance her heart out of the darkness.”

Israel of God, Lookout Mountain Community Church, we were *born* into the wilderness. And Christ is the door.

In Revelation 17 one of the seven bowl angels takes John to the wilderness. There he sees the Great Whore, and he hears God call, “Come out of her, my people!”

In Revelation 19 the Word of God—Christ Jesus—conquers.

In Revelation 21 one of the seven bowl angels takes John to the mountain and shows him the Bride of Christ coming down from God.

Jesus takes His whoring Bride and washes her with His blood—His Word. Jesus has entered the shadows—entered the closet—and He whispers, “Eve, Eve . . . I went to the tree. I was crucified on the tree. You handed me the evil fruit (for I am always with you), and I was not deceived, but I took the curse for the love of you.

“I am the last Adam, and I am your Lord. I died for you. So see my face . . . your scars on my brow; your bruises on my back. Now see the glory of God shining in my face. Yes, my Eve, you’ve sinned immeasurably. But I have already loved you immeasurably more.”

Ephesians 5: “Even so husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”

He whispers, “Eve, Eve . . . come out of the darkness. I bear your curse, and now look in *my* mirror . . . not the old law but my perfect law—the law of liberty—my grace . . . and see yourself clothed in my righteousness. And now, Eve, it’s our wedding day. Say ‘I do’ with all your heart, so you would laugh with joy as I enter you and give you life for evermore. Look in *my* mirror and believe.”

Revelation 21:9: This is the last vision in The Revelation, the last vision in Scripture. This tells us what God is doing . . . *why* the wilderness, *why* the Valley of Achor, *why* the curse, *why* the pain, the seals, the trumpets, the bowls of wrath. You’ll never understand the Gospel until you understand what it is God wants.

“Eve, look in the mirror and see who you are.”

Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."

And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates.

And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. [That means John looked and saw his *name*! This was a mirror.]

And he who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls.

The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its breadth; and he measured the city with his rod, twelve thousand stadia; its length and breadth and height are equal. He also measured its wall, a hundred and forty-four cubits by a man's measure, that is, an angel's.

The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.

And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass.

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day--and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads.

And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.

“Eve, look in my mirror and see who you are.”

This is so hard to preach, because it's *all here* . . . “the hopes and fears of all the years.” Little children, there is no night here, and there is no curse here. We're back to the Garden.

But Eve is not just in the Garden, the Garden is in Eve. The Garden and the city are the Bride of Christ. And she is radiant (every, precious stone; supernatural gold; pearls for

gates). She fulfills the prophecies of Ezekiel, Hosea, and Isaiah; the words of Jesus—Living Water—Light of the World. She is twelve tribes and twelve apostles (Israel and the Church). She is a cube, just like the sanctuary in the temple, but 1500 miles wide, 1500 miles deep, and 1500 miles high. A *big gal* . . . she contains the throne of God; she is His temple and He is hers. She sees His face, and she has His glory.

“Eve, look in the mirror and believe who you are.”

Now, this is the future, for the first earth had passed away. Yet John writes, “By its light shall the nations walk.” *What* nations?

In verse 14 he writes, “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates [those pearls]. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and every one who loves and practices falsehood.” That sounds like *now*.

We already *are* the temple of God, according to Paul. We *are* the Bride of Christ. Jesus said, “He who believes in me, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” He said if we believe, we have eternal life *now*. And Jesus said, “We *are* the light of the world.” Jesus taught He was a pearl merchant who paid everything for the greatest pearl—His Church.

A pearl is God’s miracle,
which gets wrapped around a wound
in an oyster buried in the mud.

The Church is God’s people
wrapped around the *wound* of Jesus,
buried in this fallen world.

The gates are pearls. The gates are the Church *now*. And according to Paul, we’ve seen the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God in our hearts already . . . the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

Hebrews 12:22 says, “You’ve come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” In the first century John wrote, “The New Jerusalem *is* coming down.” Somehow it’s already here. Eternity is *now* by faith.

Jesus is not the Ghost of Christmas Future. He is the Alpha and Omega. So this is not what *could* be; this is what *is* . . . *now* . . . what is in eternity.

“Eve, look in the mirror and see who you truly are.”

The problem is that we don’t have eyes to see. In Ephesians 1 Paul prays for the seven churches in Asia Minor: “May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened, that you may know . . . what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints”

You are Christ's glorious inheritance . . . *now*.

(I used to read that verse and feel sorry for Jesus. "God, what a depressing gift!")

Maybe we don't know what glory or beauty really is . . .

Remember in the fairy tale Shrek the princess Fiona is under a curse and she turns into an ogre at night. But she falls in love with the ogre, Shrek, who saved her from the dragon. She begins to think Shrek is beautiful, although the world thinks he's ugly. When Shrek kisses her, the curse is broken, and she is forever gorgeous: that is, she is an ogre during the day as well as during the night. And what we thought was ugly is the greatest beauty to Shrek.

If beauty is in the eye of the beholder,
there is one beholder: the Lord God.

The world thought Jesus on His cross was an ogre, but He is the romance of God. Nothing is more glorious, and we reflect His glory. But unlike the movie, with Christ the curse on all creation is broken. So all will see we've been blinded by the god of this age . . . and nothing is more beautiful than Christ and His Bride.

Nothing is more beautiful in all creation
Than redeemed people;
Because redeemed people reflect
The glory of God through grace.

The great city is a harlot redeemed, a bride in love. But remember, it almost didn't happen in the fairy tale, for Fiona thought the *beautiful* was *ugly*. She thought *she* was ugly. So she hid herself every night in shame.

Maybe we don't know what real beauty is . . . so we listen to the criticisms of the world . . . displaying our pride, vanity, and dead works, but hiding our faith, hope, and love for Jesus, who saves us—our testimony of His grace.

Well, Jesus says, "Eve, please look in *my* face. Look in *my* mirror—*my* Word—and see what I have made you: my Bride. Believe and come out of the shadows and into the light."

People of God, do you have any idea how gorgeous you are to Him? How beautiful you are in eternity? How valuable you are right now? He cannot love you more than He already has and does. He desires you like the most passionate groom longs for his bride on his wedding night.

But he will not storm the closet and rape you.

He will not rip you from the bushes and tear off your garments. He wants you to *want* Him. He wants you to give yourself to Him as a gift. He wants you to stop hiding in shame.

What is it He wants?
He wants a loving Bride.

A groom's worst nightmare on his wedding night is that the bride will come out all wrapped in flannel, hiding herself in shame. He wants the bride to dance into the room saying, "Oh, Baby! I'm hot! I'm sexy! And I'm all for you! Take me now . . . I'm God's gift to you!"

What is a bride's worst nightmare? That she'll dance into the room and the groom will say, "Yuk."

Jesus will not say that to His naked Bride.
To confess your sins is to be naked before Him.

If you've confessed yourself to Him, He has washed you with His blood. Believe the Gospel: You are the gift of God *for God*.

You are the gift of the Father
given to the Son: the Bride.
You are the gift of the Son
given to the Father: His children.

Believing your value is not arrogant. Calling yourself a "piece of crap" is arrogant. How dare you curse yourself, condemn yourself, hate yourself, abuse yourself, demean yourself, when God calls you "Bride"! He did not suffer hell for a piece of *crap*.

Believing your value is not arrogant, for the value doesn't come from you. The New Jerusalem is the creation of *God*. Your righteousness is the righteousness of Christ. Believing your value is believing the cross of Christ and the sanctifying work of His Spirit. "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion." It's already complete in eternity; complete in the *now* of faith.

Did you notice it was one of the seven bowl angels who showed John the Harlot and the Bride? The seven angels reminded us of the seven-fold Spirit: the Holy Spirit—the Spirit in each church, working sanctification.

Whatever the case, the Church conquers by the blood of the Lamb.

He gives us His blood;
He makes us His body.
When we curse ourselves,
We curse Christ.

Look at His side. Where did He get His scars? — They're *your* curses. Why would He do it? — To romance you out of hiding, so you'd look and believe He has made you gorgeous, spotless, and without blemish. He finds you thoroughly sexy in the best possible sense of the word. So He whispers, "Come out. Let me see your face. Let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is gorgeous." It's the end of the story . . . and what did God want? Obedient robots? Knowledgeable scholars? Soldiers to accomplish His mission? No. *A Bride*.

My bride has no mission statement. She has no purpose. I mean, I did not marry her for some *other goal*. She herself is the treasure; my mission, purpose, and goal.

You are God's treasure *now*, as you are. Believe who you are already, eternally, and then you will give yourself joyfully in the freedom of love.

When you do that, every mission will be accomplished, and every purpose will be fulfilled in time. For the Lord enters His temple, and a river of life will flow, and the Bride will begin to produce fruit.

When you do that, the King takes up residence, and you shine. The "light of the world"; "a city set on a hill." The world sees the pearl of great price and longs to enter.

Satan's only hope is to make you hide the glory under a bushel. [Singing:] "Hide it under a bushel? No! I'm gonna let it shine."

"This little light of mine"
is the King of Glory on His throne.

When you do that, when you surrender your heart, you conquer. John writes, "This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith."

Stop hating yourself! Believe the Gospel. Look in the mirror every day and say, "God is *nuts* about you. Jesus died for the love of you. He gives nations for you. You are created for His glory. You are priceless." When you pray, confess everything to Him and then bask in His love.

It is the greatest gift . . . yet I have such a hard time doing it, and now I know why: It is the heart of my warfare against the Ancient Dragon. There is a snake trying desperately to scare me back into hiding, saying, "Stop preaching, stop smiling, stop living. Get self-conscious." He has no weapons except lies and my own shame, but he is subtle, and I have believed his lies.

As I've preached through The Revelation, my wife Susan and I have spent a lot of time praying for a friend. I mean this in all sincerity: She is one of the most (if not *the* most)

beautiful believers I've ever met. She has a hard time seeing it, but I don't, and you wouldn't either.

Her father was a Satanist. (He worshipped the Dragon.) She was raised in a coven. Her story is so painful I don't think I would believe it except that in praying for her I've encountered the demonic in ways that have blown my mind. More than that, I've seen the reason, the glory, and the power of Christ in her like nowhere else in my experience. Even more than that, my wife has walked through the same visions with her, as they both described them to me.

I suspect that at times my friend has battled Satan himself. He tempts her to hide in shame, to curl up in a ball. He tempts her to curse herself and say, "I hate myself. I despise myself."

As a child she was terribly abused and left in a closet. As a young woman it happened again. Satan tells her that's where she belongs (hiding with Eve in the dark). But, you see, the snake is in the dark; the Dragon is in the closet.

Jesus has shown her He has gone there too, to suffer with her. She is terrified to let Jesus in, because of shame, but He has shown her in visions her scars are His scars. Her blood is on His body; He's romanced her out of the closet. In visions He has taken her out of those closets and hundreds of other metaphorical closets, and He has covered her in righteousness.

Into the vision I've prayed, "Jesus, would you show her how *you* see her?" He holds up a mirror. She looks, and she's wearing a dress—a wedding dress entirely white. She gasps in awe and wonder. It's a dress she owns. She bought it as an act of devotion some time ago.

I think my friend is free now of the old rituals and curses and demonic assignments. I think she's almost entirely free of the old fears. But this last year was the hardest. I would preach on The Revelation, and then I'd see the battle fought in her.

During that time, in the heat of the battle, I commanded my friend to hang the wedding dress on her bedroom door and remember what Jesus told her . . . remember how priceless she is, and invite Him into her room and into her bed, her forever Bridegroom, to hold her and to love her. When the dress was on the door and she believed the Gospel, the Dragon was bound.

Now I've seen it happen. She is not her past. She's redeemed. It's the most beautiful and stunning faith I've ever seen. She's walked through the door in the Valley of Trouble, and nothing is more beautiful in all creation than the Bride of Christ.

My friend's story and her life and what I've seen has blown my mind. It seems so strange yet totally familiar; for I've heard the snake's whispers all my life: "Hey, Peter,

you're a pussy. You suck. You're a piece of crap. Your sermon is stupid; we all think you're an idiot. Go sit in the closet, curl up in a ball, and die."

Bride of Christ, you've heard that voice too. But . . .

Believe the Gospel;
Step on the snake's head;
And never, ever hide in shame again.

The epilogue is next week. But we're at the end of the book, the end of the sixth day, and man has been created in the image of God. He has God's glory. What *is* man? — A Bride that reflects the glory of her Groom. She is created at the bleeding side of Jesus, and *nothing* is more glorious in all creation.

So the last Adam whispers, "Eve, Eve . . . look what I've done! Come out of the shadows. Two shall become one body, and we will dance in the Father's light."

In Jesus' name, this is the commandment of God: Believe!

Amen.

"Lord, Jesus, we believe. And it's not to our credit, it's because we've seen the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus the Christ. It's to *your* credit. So, Lord God, we thank you that you have purchased us with your blood and you have sent your Spirit into our hearts crying, 'Abba, Father.' You will not leave us or forsake us; you *will* accomplish the work that you have begun. So we can *shout* at the Devil, 'I *will* dance on the streets that are gold!' and step on his head.

"So, Lord Jesus, we praise you and thank you and ask that you would forgive us for listening to lies. And, Jesus, you already *have*. Amen."

Further Reading

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed. . . . So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

—Genesis 2:24-25, 3:6-8

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the LORD will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My delight is in her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. . . . And they shall be called The holy people, The redeemed of the LORD; and you shall be called Sought out, a city not forsaken.

—Isaiah 62:1-5, 12

"And when I passed by you, and saw you weltering in your blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live, and grow up like a plant of the field.' And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full maidenhood; your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare. "When I passed by you again and looked upon you, behold, you were at the age for love; and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness: yea, I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine. . . . But you trusted in your beauty, and played the harlot because of your renown, and lavished your harlotries on any passer-by. . . . yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. Then you will remember your ways, and be ashamed when I take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord GOD."

-Ezekiel 16:6-8, 15, 60-63

Say to your brother, "My people," and to your sister, "She has obtained pity." "Plead with your mother, plead--for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband--that she put away her harlotry from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts; lest I strip her naked and make her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and set her like a parched land, and slay her with thirst. . . . Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. "And in that day, says the LORD, you will call me, 'My husband,' and no longer will you call me, 'My Ba'al.' For I will remove the names of the Ba'als from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more. And I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness

and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD."

—*Hosea 2:1-3, 14-20*

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

—*Ephesians 5:25-27*

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who is seated upon many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the dwellers on earth have become drunk." And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. . . . Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

—*Revelation 17:1-3, 21:9-11*

Sexual imagery is universal in human religious experience. But when the living God in whose presence Moses had to remove his shoes, is presented as a cuckold husband who relentlessly pursues His wayward wife, some Christians have protested that this is not only an outrageous symbol but a blasphemous one. Why? Because the prophet Hosea implies that God is sexually aroused in the presence of His people. . . . Have you ever been sexually aroused to an intense degree? Really stimulated in a sensuous way? Passionately turned on? Both the Scripture and the liturgy of the Christian community say that human sexual arousal is but a pale imitation of God's passion for His people. That is why human love, though it's the best image we have, is still an inadequate image of God's love. Not because it overdoes it, but because human desire with all its emotion cannot compare with the passionate yearning of Jesus Christ. That is why saints can only stutter and stammer about the reality, why Blaise Pascal on his famous night of fire, November 21, 1654, could not speak a word, why Bede Griffiths wrote, "The love of Jesus Christ is not a mild benevolence; it is a consuming fire."

—*Brennan Manning, Lion & Lamb*

Over the years, I have come to realize that the greatest trap in our life is not success, popularity, or power, but self-rejection. Success, popularity and power can indeed present a great temptation, but their seductive quality often comes from the way they are part of the much larger temptation to self-rejection. When we have come to believe in the voices that call us worthless and unlovable, then success, popularity, and power are easily perceived as attractive solutions. The real trap, however, is self-rejection. As soon as someone accuses me or criticizes me, as soon as I am rejected, left alone, or abandoned, I find myself thinking, "Well, that proves once again that I am a nobody." . . . [My dark

side says,] I am no good . . . I deserve to be pushed aside, forgotten, rejected, and abandoned. *Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life* because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the "Beloved." Being the Beloved constitutes the core truth of our existence.

–Henri Nouwen, *The Life of the Beloved*

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid."

–Matthew 5:14

Shyness is an obnoxious form of vanity.

–Fulton Oursler

My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is comely. . . ." My beloved is mine and I am his, he pastures his flock among the lilies.

–Song of Solomon 2:10-14, 16

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