

# The Bride of Christ (contd): Faithfulness and Love

## What is a Church? Part 6

### Revelation 2-3

Summary: The evaluation of the 7 churches was an evaluation with respect to faithfulness. Most churches are worse and better than you think (complex perception). The virtues Jesus looks for: Separation, humility/richness, hard work, progress, intolerance, perseverance, and love. Wifely duty #3 is delight in God. #4 is inviting others to the feast.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Review

We are a church. And since we are a church it seems to me the most obvious question we could ask is, “What is a church supposed to do?” So we are in the midst of a study of what the Bible says a church is supposed to be. We are studying the five main metaphors God uses to describe a church so we can learn from them what our responsibilities are. The 5 metaphors are these:

1. We are compared to a body
2. We are compared to a bride
3. We are compared to a family or household
4. We are compared to a temple
5. We are compared to a priesthood.

As the body of Christ we found that our responsibilities are to properly represent the Lord Jesus so when people look at us they get an accurate picture of Him. We are to build one another up so the body reaches maturity so we can do His work, and His work is the dispensing of His grace.

The second metaphor is that of a bride. As His bride we found that we have four wifely duties. We are to be beautiful to Him (constantly working to eliminate sin from our midst), and we are to be faithful to Him. We don't want to be an adulterous wife. And we are spending a little extra time on this one because Scripture spends a lot of time on it.

### Faithfulness (contd.)

#### **The 7 Churches are evaluated specifically with respect to faithfulness**

When Jesus sent the letters to the seven churches in Rev.2&3 he evaluated each church. You might wonder, if this is a study of what the Church is supposed to be, why not simply do a verse-by-verse study of Rev.2&3? There are two reasons. First, it is because I have already done that. It is a series called “Dear Church,” and it will be available for free on [TreasuringGod.com](http://TreasuringGod.com) soon. I didn't want to just rehearse something I have already studied because I want to learn more.

That's the first reason. But the more important reason why we aren't doing that is because of the purpose of those letters. They have a very specific purpose. Jesus does not necessarily evaluate the churches in every respect – only with respect to one general category. Have you ever noticed that nothing is said in those letters about areas that are very important aspects of church ministry? For example, Jesus says nothing about church unity, evangelism, elders, deacons, ministry to widows, helping the poor or spiritual gifts. The rest of the NT is clear that every one of those is very important.

The reason Jesus didn't evaluate the churches with respect to those areas is because in the book of Revelation the Lord was concerned specifically with evaluating His Church in light of what is coming in ch.4-22. There is a time of massive tribulation that is described later in the book, and the church's job is to overcome and be victors (or overcomers) in that tribulation and persevere to the end. Jesus says different things to each church, but the one thing that is the same in all 7 letters is that they are to be overcomers. So Jesus tells all the churches that they are to be overcomers to start the book, then He describes this terrible time of tribulation throughout most of the rest of the book, then at the very end of the book He says **He who overcomes will inherit all** (the rewards of heaven), while the rest will be thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev.21:7,8)

In Mt.24 Jesus warned the disciples about that same time of tribulation.

**Mt.24:10-13 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.**

The terrible suffering and increased lawlessness of that time will cause the great cooling of the Church. And people's love for the Lord and for one another will fade away, and they will end up turning away from the faith. That is the main thing Jesus is warning us against in Rev.2&3, and so the evaluations are not complete evaluations of every aspect of the church's responsibility. They are specifically evaluations that have to do with their faithfulness - strengths and weaknesses that relate to their likeliness or unlikeliness to remain faithful all the way to the end.

So I didn't want to limit our study to just that one section of Scripture, because there is more Scripture has to say about a church's responsibility than just that. However, now that we are focusing on faithfulness we would really be remiss if we didn't at least take a brief look at Rev.2,3.

## **Most churches are worse and better than you think**

One of the attributes of God that God Himself emphatically points to in the first 3 chapters of Revelation is His perception. He presents Himself in ch.1 as the one whose eyes are like burning fire (1:14, 2:18). His penetrating, all-seeing gaze is able to see past any façade, any external show – right to the exact truth of the matter. That is also part of the idea of the 7-fold Spirit. That comes from Isa.11, where the Spirit is everywhere and sees and knows absolutely everything.

We serve a God who has perfect perception of reality, and He shares that perception with us in these chapters. If we want to be like Him we will learn to become as perceptive as we can so we can evaluate churches the same way He does.

Five of the seven churches are rebuked. Six of the seven are praised. So if the percentages are an indication for how churches tend to be, then about 71% of churches are bad and about 86% of churches are good. Our natural tendency, when we learn that 71% of the churches are bad, is to conclude that only 29% are good. But that is not how it works. Most churches are both good and bad.

In fact, I think most churches are much worse than you think, and much better than you think. Chances are, Agape Bible Church is much worse in God's eyes than we are in your eyes, and we are also much better in His eyes than we are in your eyes.

For the most part we lack the perception of Christ and so in our mental laziness we become reductionistic and we oversimplify our evaluation of both people and churches. It is so much easier when you've got the good guys and the bad guys. So when we decide a person or a church is good, we just blind ourselves to the bad. And when we decide a person is bad, he's all bad. We become blind to anything good about him. If he does something that seems good we assume it must be from a bad motive or we just ignore it altogether.

And a lot of people do the same thing with churches. They see some terrible weakness or flaw or sin in a church, and they just write it off as a bad church. People like that usually end up just not going to church anywhere.

We need to learn to join the Lord by His side by having the same affections toward the church that He has. And to do that we have to develop our perception to become more and more complex like His is. Don't worry about figuring out if a church is good overall or bad *overall*, just evaluate each individual aspect of their ministry on its own. And be delighted in what is good and be grieved over what is bad.

God's complex perception is such a wonderful attribute. I love it that God is like that. I love it that God doesn't take one sin in my life and smear it across the rest of my life as though that one thing were all that defined me. It is because of this attribute that I can be guilty of terrible sin and be deserving of punishment in hell forever on the one hand, but at the very same time I can be in the right on some minor little issue over here, and if I am treated unfairly I can cry out to God for justice in that area, and He will keep that separate from the evil parts of my life and grant me justice in that one little area where I was in the right. I love it that God can look at the big, horrible sins in my life and be angry over those, but at the very same time be pleased with me and commend me and even reward me for the righteous things I have been doing. What a wonderful thing it is to serve a God who has the attribute of complex perception!

## **The virtues of faithfulness**

Let's just take a brief look at each of the virtues Christ focused on in these 7 churches, so we can understand exactly what kinds of things the Lord is looking for when He assesses the faithfulness of a church.

### ***1) Separation***

After rebuking the dead church in Sardis Jesus commends them with these words:

#### **But you have a few people in Sardis who have not defiled their clothes (3:4)**

One thing the Lord loves in a church is when there are people there who will not go along with the crowd when the crowd goes the wrong way. This is hard. It is hard enough not to go along with the world. But it is really hard not to go along with the church when everyone in the church is going the wrong way. When everyone in the church is doing some wrong thing it makes it seem like it couldn't possibly be wrong. Or even if it is wrong, it certainly couldn't be that bad if all these wonderful people around me are doing it.

One of the most difficult things to do in life is to stand up for what is right when you are the only one. People will say, "*You* are the only one who is right? The whole church is wrong and you are right? What kind of arrogant egomaniac are you?" And your own soul will say that to you: *How could I be the only one who is right?*

And when your own soul says that to you or when someone else says that to you, you should listen because most of the time when someone thinks the whole rest of the church is wrong and he's the only one who is right - that person is deceived. So if you ever find yourself in that position, you had better pray hard and search the Scriptures *very* carefully.

However if you do that, and no matter how hard you try you can't come to any other conclusion because the matter is very clear and plain in Scripture (from your point of view), then you *must* stick with what you believe. Don't ever say, "To me it seems like the Bible is saying this, but I'll just assume I am missing something and everyone else is right." Don't ever, ever go against what you think the Bible says.

So one mark of a faithful church is a church full of people who will not soil their garments no matter how much pressure there is. The Lord Jesus Christ is a good Shepherd, and following Him

is always worth any price, no matter how high that price is. He is a loving Husband, and remaining faithful to Him in order to remain close to Him is worth any sacrifice.

## **2) *Humility and spiritual richness***

A second virtue Jesus looks for is humility and spiritual richness. Laodicea was rebuked for thinking they were rich when in reality they were wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked (3:17) Smyrna, on the other hand, though they were very poor financially, was commended for being rich spiritually. (2:9) The faithful church is the church that recognizes its spiritual poverty and strives for spiritual riches. Their main pursuit is not earthly wealth or comfort or prestige, but spiritual wealth and riches (lots of love, lots of faith, lots of patience, lots of wisdom, lots of insight, pristine purity of heart, fruitfulness in ministry, changed lives, people becoming Christians, restored marriages, discouraged people being strengthened, the weak becoming strong, etc.).

People like that get a lot more excited about some new person who joins the church who deeply loves the Lord and is eager to use his spiritual gifts than they do about a guy who makes \$500,000 a year and tithes, but isn't very exercised about spiritual things.

An attraction to earthly pleasure as a priority is a mark of unfaithfulness to our Husband in heaven.

**Jas.4:3-4 You ask and don't receive because you ask wrongly, so that you may spend it on your desires for pleasure. <sup>4</sup> Adulteresses!<sup>1</sup> Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the world's friend becomes God's enemy.**

Churches can fall into materialism just as easily as individuals. Bit by bit we start making comfort a higher and higher priority until the next thing you know we are deciding not to do certain ministries that would be fruitful just because we prize our own comfort.

Jesus told the wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked Laodiceans to buy gold from Him and become rich; and to get white clothes from Him and eye-salve from Him. We glorify God when we see our own poverty and destitution and then we look to Him for spiritual riches. When we do that we show Him to be the rich, glorious, generous King that He is. We exalt Him as the ultimate Provider and Benefactor that He is. And so we get spiritual riches in the deal, and He gets glory – everybody wins.

## **3) *Hard work***

Another virtue Jesus looks for is hard work.

**Ephesus - I know your works, your labor ... 3 You ... have tolerated many things because of My name, and have not grown weary. (2:2-3)**

**Thyatira - I know your works-- your ... service (2:19)**

**Laodicea - I wish that you were cold or hot. (3:15)**

The Lord expects His Church to work – hard. We are His servants. We don't want Jesus to return and evaluate Agape Bible Church and say to us what He said to the servant in Mt.25:26: "You wicked, lazy servant." If we want to be vigilant we need to always be asking ourselves: "Is this church working hard?" (And remember, the church is not the leadership. The church is you.) When you sit in church on Sunday morning, are you surrounded by people who are really *laboring* hard as a church?

Jesus begins most of these letters by saying, “I know your works.” Sometimes people mistakenly think that since we aren’t saved by works, and we don’t earn merit by our works, therefore works are not important. That is dead wrong. The word “works” appears 12 times in the 7 letters. In fact, in Rev.2:23 there is a striking statement about works, and it is the only statement in the body of one of these letters that mentions all the churches (plural). It appears right at the center of this whole vision, and it really is a central thought for the whole vision:

**Rev.2:23 Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your works.**

Christ wants all the churches to know that. That is why He gave this vision. Eph.2:10 and Tit.2:11,12 make it clear that we were saved for the purpose of good works. And according to Mt.24 and several other passages it is your works that determine whether you go to heaven or hell. You are not saved by works; you are saved through faith alone. But you will be judged by your works on Judgment Day because works are the measure of whether or not you have saving faith. Jesus commended the Ephesian church because they worked hard – lit. they labored to the point of exhaustion. So let’s work hard, Agape. Whatever your role is in this church, make sure you are not being lazy.

But I should also say this – don’t just work hard for the sake of hard work. And don’t ever rely on the efforts of your own hard work as the source of success in ministry. Hard work will result in success only when it is generated by the right source.

**1 Thes.1:3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.**

The only hard work that will have any worthwhile result is hard work that is produced by faith, love and hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Is our Lord Jesus Christ worthy to be zealously, energetically served?

**Ro.12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.**

So let’s work hard Agape. Whatever your ministry is in this church, let’s make sure that when the Master returns He finds us with sweat on our foreheads. Don’t let Him return and find us doing nothing. When you have young children and you tell them to go do something that they really don’t want to do they will move as slowly as they can. That is rebellion and disobedience. Let’s not do that as a church.

#### **4) Progress**

Are we progressing or declining? Thyatira was praised because their recent works were greater than their former works (2:19) and Ephesus was rebuked because the opposite was true of them. They had lost their first love and had fallen from their former works (2:4,5). And that is really interesting because Ephesus is the same church that is praised for their hard work. They were even praised for their perseverance in hard work. But then they were rebuked because even though they were working hard, they were not doing as much as they were before. Their works of love were bountiful and good and worthy of praise, but they were on the decline.

Any time we examine ourselves as a church and find that our works are not as great as they used to be or they have stagnated so we are making no new progress, we are in trouble. Churches

that are not making progress are on the decline. They are on their way to becoming worthless, and when that happens the Lord said He will spit them out of His mouth.

God is a never-ending fountain of life-giving, strengthening, empowering, enabling, joy-giving grace. And so if we drink from that fountain - if we experience His presence and feast at His table, His grace will have its effect. We will make progress. That means if we are not making progress, that can only mean we are not experiencing God's grace - we are not drinking from the fountain. We are calling others to drink, but we aren't drinking. Let's drink! Let's just drink in all the grace we can from all the means of grace God has given us (His Word, His Spirit, His people, the spiritual gifts, the Church, prayer), and the progress will take care of itself.

### ***5) Intolerance of false teachers***

This is a really big issue for the Lord.

**Ephesus - you cannot tolerate evil. You have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and you have found them to be liars. (2:2)**

**- you hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (2:6)**

**Pergamum - You have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to place a stumbling block in front of the sons of Israel: to eat meat sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality.<sup>15</sup> In the same way, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. (2:14,15)**

**Thyatira - you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and teaches and deceives My servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat meat sacrificed to idols. (2:20) - I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who haven't known the deep things<sup>1</sup> of Satan-- as they say-- I do not put any other burden on you. <sup>25</sup> But hold on to what you have until I come. (2:25)**

Not all open-mindedness is innocent. Not all curiosity is innocent. There is such a thing as evil curiosity. When a person is curious to listen to false teachers and people who promote error, that can be a sign of an unfaithful heart. It is a kind of attraction to something the Lord hates. If He hates something, we should hate it. We should not be attracted to it and interested in it.

And not only should we not be enticed by false teaching, we should not even tolerate it in the church. It is very easy to begin to tolerate error in the church. Even churches that are very careful about who is in the pulpit – making sure they have a pastor whose teaching is sound, a lot of times error will abound in that church nonetheless because they are not careful about other teachers. So they get sound teaching from the pastor, but they have people teaching heresy in Sunday School classes and Bible studies. Or sometimes it just comes from people who aren't official teachers at all. How many times have you been in a Bible study and the teacher opens it up for discussion and someone makes a comment that is dead wrong, and nothing is said because they don't want to embarrass the person? We need to guard the truth at all times.

The Lord Jesus has been faithful to us – He has not disowned us (even though He has a lot more reason to be embarrassed over us than we do over Him), so let's be faithful to Him. And let's not be ashamed of Him or of the gospel.

The next virtue is the one that Jesus emphasized the most: perseverance.

### ***6) Endurance/Perseverance***

**Ephesus – 2:2 I know your works, your labor, and your endurance, ... <sup>3</sup> You also possess endurance and have tolerated many things because of My name, and have not grown weary. (2:2-4)**

Thyatira – 2:19 I know your works-- your ... faithfulness, ... and endurance.  
25 I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who haven't known the deep things<sup>1</sup> of Satan-- as they say-- I do not put any other burden on you. <sup>25</sup> But hold on to what you have until I come. (2:19,25)

Philadelphia - I know your works. Because you have limited strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name ... 10 you have kept My command to endure (3:8,10)

Pergamum - you are holding on to My name and did not deny your faith in Me, even in the days of Antipas, My faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan lives. (2:13)

Smyrna – 2:9 I know your tribulation and poverty, yet you are rich. I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the Devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will have tribulation for 10 days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown<sup>1</sup> of life. (2:9,10)

Perseverance to the end is the whole point of why these letters were written. What good is faithfulness if you don't persevere in it? What good is any virtue if you don't persevere in it? Final salvation comes only through perseverance.

**Mt.24:12-13 (in the last days) lawlessness will multiply, the love of many will grow cold. <sup>13</sup> But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved.**

Listen to Jesus' interpretation of the parable of the soils:

**Lk.8:11-15 The seed is the word of God. <sup>12</sup> The seeds along the path are those who have heard. Then the Devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. <sup>13</sup> And the seeds on the rock are those who, when they hear, welcome the word with joy. Having no root, these believe for a while and depart in a time of testing. (in other words, they fail to persevere) <sup>14</sup> As for the seed that fell among thorns, these are the ones who, when they have heard, go on their way and are choked with worries, riches, and pleasures of life, and produce no mature fruit. (they also fail to persevere) <sup>15</sup> But the seed in the good ground-- these are the ones who, having heard the word with an honest and good heart, hold on to it and by persevering, bear fruit.**

And the principle applies to churches as well as to individuals. Probably most bad churches used to be good churches. Very rarely does someone plant a dead, liberal, apostate church. They start out good but then fail to persevere. We need to understand that there is nothing about the way this church is starting that guarantee we won't go bad. We have to persevere. The enemy will come at us with temptations, crises, bad leaders, bad followers, suffering, difficult people, confusion, oppression, persecution, the cares of this world, and if we are like most of the churches Jesus wrote to we will fall in some very serious ways. Our only hope to avoid that is to be like the only two churches that were not rebuked at all – Smyrna and Philadelphia. Both those churches were suffering and both were persevering.

Do you want to know the really great thing about perseverance? As long as you are willing to persevere, you will be able to. There will never, ever, ever be a time when you find that it is impossible for you to persevere as a Christian. God will never let that happen.

**1 Cor.1:8-9 He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.**

**Rev.3:10 I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.**

That does not mean we will be exempt from suffering, but it does mean we will be able to persevere through it to the end and be overcomers. Praise God for His preserving love!

One interesting observation about this virtue is that it is only presented in positive terms. The churches are either praised for having it, or commanded to have it. But no church is rebuked for not having it. Even the worst church of all – Laodicea, who received only rebuke and no praise at all – even they were given a loving call to repentance. There was still time left for them to repent and then persevere. What mercy and patience our Lord has with us!

One more virtue that Christ mentions:

## **7) Love**

If you want a really interesting study, compare Ephesus with Thyatira sometime. Ephesus was rebuked for having lost their first love, and Thyatira was praised for their love. They had opposite strengths and opposite weaknesses. Ephesus was really strong in the area of intolerance. They hated all the false doctrines the Lord hated. He praised them for hating and refusing to tolerate the teaching of the Nicolaitans (who were promoting license – teaching that grace means you can do whatever you want). So they were strong against sin and strong against error, but their love was on the decline.

Thyatira was just the opposite. They were praised for their love – they were a very loving church. But they were rebuked for tolerating a false teacher who was teaching the same error as the Nicolaitans.

Love should correspond perfectly with holiness and hatred of evil, but in our sinful hearts very often it does not. The more we pursue love, the more susceptible we tend to be to the sin of tolerance. The more we pursue holiness, the more susceptible we tend to be to the sin of becoming unloving.

How can we learn, as a church, to walk that razor's edge? How can we fight hard against sin and error and refuse to tolerate it and hate it as we should without becoming callous and prideful and unloving? And how can we be a tender, compassionate, loving church where people are affirmed and embraced and genuinely cared for without softening on our stance against sin and error?

The balance is only found when our love for people is a function of our love for God. The more you love God the more you will love those He loves.

**1 John 4:20-21 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup> And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.**

**1 John 5:2 This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.**

So what was the problem in Ephesus, where they had declined in love? They were declining in their love for people because they were declining in their love for God. Thyatira had the opposite problem - they had a lot of love for one another, but they were compromising when it



came to sin and doctrinal error. Where does that come from? What causes us to be attracted to the world and the things in the world?

**1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**

The problem in Thyatira was lack of love for God. The symptoms of that in Ephesus were very different than the ones in Thyatira, but the core problem was the same. When we try to live the Christian life with power that comes from any source other than our love for God, it doesn't work. Things that should fit together perfectly (like love for people and intolerance for sin), become opposites instead of harmonious companions, so that we fail in one or the other all the time. And the solution is simple: greater love for God.

### **Wifely duty #3: Desire and delight in the Groom**

In the Bible study we did leading up to the launch of this church we spent 15 weeks studying the subject of loving God. That is the most important study I have ever done in my life, and my guess is it will be the most important study I will ever do. If you listen through one series – please listen through that one. That study changed my life in dramatic ways.

Before teaching that study I spent over a year studying as intensively as I know how what it means to love God. I was not teaching anything during that time, so I devoted my full attention to learning all I could about loving God. And after more than a year and a half of studying and trying to live out what I was learning, this is the definition I came up with for love:

Proper love for God is the soul's delight in God that rises out of desire, gives rise to complete commitment to him, and which is most joyfully expressed through loving those God loves with the very love of God.

If you want the full explanation of how I got that from Scripture refer to the “How to Love God” study. That definition boils down to one word: *delight*. That is essentially what love is – delighting in a person. The rest of the definition just talks about what the source of that delight is, what the result of that delight is, and how that delight is most joyfully expressed. “*Love for God is the soul's delight in God...*” – that's what it is at the core. And it is a delight “*...that rises out of desire*” – that's where it comes from – the source. And the result of having this delight is that it “*...gives rise to complete commitment to God*” – that's the effect this delight has on your heart. And this delight is expressed in a whole lot of ways, but the greatest of all – the expression of this delight that will bring the greatest joy is this: it is a delight “*which is most joyfully expressed through loving those God loves with the very love of God.*”

For now all I want to direct your attention to is the core component – delight in God. One of the reasons the Bible uses the metaphor of a wife to describe the church is so we would understand our duty to take delight in the Lord.

**Mt.9:15 Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests be sad while the groom is with them? The days will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.**

That passage is all about sadness and happiness. They asked Jesus why the disciples didn't fast, and Jesus' answer was, “They don't fast because the kind of fasting you are talking about is an expression of sorrow, and they don't do that, because they aren't sad. They are like a woman on her wedding day. And I am like the Groom. Why would they be sad?” Jesus expects us, as His bride, to take great delight in Him and to be full of joy in Him.

**Jn.3:29 He who has the bride is the groom. But the groom's friend, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the groom's voice. So this joy of mine is complete.**

So those are our three wifely duties:

- 1) We are to be faithful to Him,
- 2) We are to be delightful to Him,
- 3) We are to be delighted by Him.

(And by the way – the reason human marriage exists is to illustrate this. The highest and most important reason why there are husbands and wives – why marriage exists on this planet - is so that there would be a visible illustration of the way Jesus Christ and His Church relate to each other.)

If God took a group of people who had never heard the word “church” before, and He threw them together in a room with nothing but a Bible and said, “OK, I want you to function as a church,” one thing you would find them doing is joyfully celebrating the presence of the Bridegroom. Our duty to come together and be happy; our responsibility to come together each week full of joy; our mandate to come together each week filled with the same kind of delight in Christ that a woman has in her new husband on her wedding day - that duty is every bit as serious and important as our duty to preach the Word or win the lost.

And the process of learning to delight in God more is very simple – just experience His delightfulness. God compares Himself, very often, to food and drink. The more you experience Him the more delighted you will be – guaranteed. And you experience Him by experiencing His attributes (an attribute is something wonderful about God).

That is one reason why the daily devotionals are built around attributes of God. If we spend the week feasting our hearts on attributes of God, then when we come together on Sunday mornings we will be full of joy and delight in Him. And if we ever find ourselves meeting together on Sunday mornings without any great joy or delight in God being expressed; if we become like Ephesus and lose our first love so that the love we have for Him now is not as intense as it used to be; then we will need to repent and take some drastic measures to return to Him.

Let’s make sure we never forget that loving God is the greatest commandment. It is more important than anything else. In fact, without love for God, nothing else we do matters at all. If we are about anything it needs to be love for God. If people visit us and notice one thing, let it be love for God. If we decide we need to improve at loving people, let us do it by learning to love God more. If we decide we need to improve at anything, let us do it by learning to love God more. If we desire to grow in numbers, let’s do it by loving God more and attracting those who want to love God more. Let the people who hate us hate us because of our love for Christ. Let the people who love us love us because of our love for Christ. If we lack love then all our activity and prayers and praises and preaching and talking are just a lot of annoying, clanging, banging gongs and cymbals.

Let’s never forget that this is the most basic core of what we are all about. We didn’t develop the church slogan on a whim. The slogan that appears at the top of every page on our website and on all our literature is this: “Spreading and deepening delight in God through our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” That is our task as a church.

“Deepening” means doing all we can to make that love for God stronger and stronger and more and more intense. “Spreading” means bringing more and more people in Denver, in Colorado and around the world to delight in God. We want Jesus Christ to be glorified. And He is most glorified not just when people know about Him - He is most glorified when people see Him and take delight in what they see. And the more people that do that the more glorified He is.

That is the foundation for evangelism and outreach and missions come in. When you are enthralled or amazed or especially delighted by something, to fully enjoy that you try to recruit others to also be enthralled or amazed or delighted. You go to someone close to you and say, "Isn't that amazing?" You ask that question because you want them to affirm that it is amazing. Because somehow if they are amazed, that increases the enjoyment you experience in your amazement. And so if they can't see what's amazing about it, you will try to get them to see it. And if they never see it you're disappointed and your enjoyment of the amazement is diminished.

The more thrilled we become with Jesus Christ, the more we will want the greatest number of people possible to join us in our being thrilled. And that is also part of our wifely duty.

#### **Wifely duty #4: Inviting others to the feast**

At the very end of the vision, after all the marvelous promises of the coming glory, the writer calls upon us to invite people to partake of the living water. He quotes Isa.55, which invites everyone who is thirsty to come and drink the life-giving water from God. Look what John says in v.17 after Jesus says His final words:

**Rev.22:17 Both the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" Anyone who hears should say, "Come!" And the one who is thirsty should come. Whoever desires should take the living water as a gift.**

Everyone is invited into heaven. And the two main figures who are doing all the inviting are whom? The Holy Spirit and the Bride of Christ. One of our roles as His bride is to become so enamored with Him, to love Him so deeply and so passionately, and to take such exquisite delight in Him that our joy drives us to grab hold of as many people as possible and say, "Look! Isn't that amazing?"