
How beautiful you are, my darling, how beautiful! Your eyes are like doves. Like a lily among thistles is my darling among young women. My dove is hiding behind the rocks, behind an outcrop on the cliff. Let me see your face; let me hear your voice. For your voice is pleasant, and your face is lovely. You are altogether beautiful, my darling, beautiful in every way.

You have captured my heart, my treasure, my bride. You hold it hostage with one glance of your eyes, with a single jewel of your necklace. Your love delights me, my treasure, my bride. Your love is better than wine, your perfume more fragrant than spices. Your lips are as sweet as nectar, my bride. Honey and milk are under your tongue. Your clothes are scented like the cedars of Lebanon.

You are my private garden, my treasure, my bride, a secluded spring, a hidden fountain. "Who is this, arising like the dawn, as fair as the moon, as bright as the sun, as majestic as an army with billowing banners?" Oh, how beautiful you are! How pleasing, my love, how full of delights! O my darling, lingering in the gardens, your companions are fortunate to hear your voice. Let me hear it, too!

In describing her lover's desire for her, she says:

The king is lying on his couch, enchanted by the fragrance of my perfume. He escorts me to the banquet hall; it's obvious how much he loves me. His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me. My lover said to me, "Rise up, my darling! Come away with me, my fair one! When my lover looks at me, he is delighted with what he sees.

Song of Songs: 1:12, 15, 2:2, 4, 6, 10, 14, 4:7, 9-12, 6:10, 7:6, 8:10, 13

These are the words of a man who is crazy in love and the reflections of a woman who is wrapped securely in his love. These are the words of a man who

absolutely cherishes his bride. These are the words of a man who would do anything to be with his lover. These are words of passion, desire, longing, and even unfettered obsession. These are words of beauty; the language of unbridled romance. And these are just a few of the things this man says about his woman; in fact, a lot of what I left out is over the top erotic.

What images has this aroused in your mind? How have these words stimulated your imagination? Do you picture the man, the woman? It sounds absolutely glorious; after all, who doesn't dream of experiencing such desire, intimacy, and affection with their true love. But what is shocking is that although these are the words of Solomon and his bride, these are first and foremost the words which God speaks to you and to me, and to His bride the church.

I cannot even fathom it, but He is entirely consumed with what He considers to be our beauty and He chooses to use the picture of erotic love between a man and His bride to describe the intensity of His desire for us. I love this part: "You have captured my heart, my treasure, my bride. You hold it hostage with one glance of your eyes, with a single jewel of your necklace. Your love delights me, my treasure, my bride. Let me see your face; let me hear your voice."

No matter how many times I have read this I still can't get over the fact that this is how God feels about you and about me. He longs for us to turn our eye toward Him just like He longs to hear our voice. This is our God, our Lover.

We are going to start a new study tonight in the letter to the Ephesians but our companion text is going to be found in the Song of Songs, so I would encourage you to spend time reading both. They are very short; Ephesians has only 6 chapters and the Song of Songs has just 8. I think it would be awesome if you

would read each of these books in their entirety at least once a week as we go through this study. If you do I believe that when we are done all sorts of amazing truths will be permanently etched into your hearts.

The reason we are going to look at Ephesians through the eyes of the Song of Songs is that I believe they convey the exact same message. In the book of Ephesians we get a perspective of who we are from God's vantage point; it's a top down view of His love for us from eternity past. Then the Song of Songs captures this love and expresses, in our language, the passion and absolute adoration God has, and has always had, for you and me. Yes, God absolutely adores you—you might even say He is obsessed with you. He thinks you are so lovely and so amazing that He just wants to see you and gaze on your beauty. In fact, He is even jealous of others who get to share in your delight and He desires that you turn to Him and let Him hear your voice.

To Him, you and I (and collectively all those who belong to Him—which we call the "church") are this woman whom He adores and is passionately in love with. And in the book of Ephesians we will learn 1) the extent of that amazing love (which is likened to the *oneness* that can be experienced between a husband and wife) and 2) the power of knowing this love—literally living here and now as if we are the precious desire of the God of who created all things!

In response, this should inspire us to live as this woman who is enthralled with the beautiful man who loves her unconditionally and whose refuge, security, and promise are found in the never ending adoration by her man. We should be mesmerized by His love for us and beholden only to Him. We should never seek our satisfaction or completeness from any other lover; in fact, our relationships

with others should be the fruit or the overflow of our having been satisfied by God's love. We should be so attentive to His love for us that we yearn to know everything about Him so we can freely say:

You are so handsome, my love, pleasing beyond words! My lover is dark and dazzling, better than ten thousand others! His head is finest gold, his wavy hair is black as a raven. His eyes sparkle like doves beside springs of water; they are set like jewels washed in milk. His cheeks are like gardens of spices giving off fragrance. His lips are like lilies, perfumed with myrrh. His arms are like rounded bars of gold, set with beryl. His body is like bright ivory, glowing with lapis lazuli. His legs are like marble pillars set in sockets of finest gold. His posture is stately, like the noble cedars of Lebanon. His mouth is sweetness itself; he is desirable in every way. Such, O women of Jerusalem, is my lover, my friend.

Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, its jealousy as enduring as the grave. Love flashes like fire, the brightest kind of flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can rivers drown it. If a man tried to buy love with all his wealth, his offer would be utterly scorned.

Song of Songs: 1:16, 5:10-16, 8:6-7

I know you guys, in particular, might be thinking this is weird and you might have a hard time connecting to the emotional and even conceptual aspects of God dealing with us in the way that a man deals with a woman. But it is critical for

us to understand this picture; it is a very important Biblical type and a powerful image rich in meaning. Understanding this idiom helps us develop a proper understanding of 1) our relationship to God, 2) our relationship to one another in the body of Christ, and 3) the relationship of a man and woman in marriage and the reasons why this relationship, this union, is given such honor throughout the Bible (which we will be addressing in chapter 5 of Ephesians).

To help us get our minds around this, I want us to understand **1 Corinthians 11:7-8** which I believe illuminates quite beautifully this whole word-picture. In talking about the order of creation and issues of “spiritual authority” amongst men, women and angels, Paul says that man was created in the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. Normally this is understood to mean that woman was created for man thus her beauty is what gives glory to man. You’ve seen it; a guy walks down the street with a hot woman and he feels like he is the cat’s meow.

But I actually think it means something quite a bit different and far more powerful. Woman is the glory of man in that in all of creation she is the one being which captures or embodies the glory of man from the perspective of God. You see the way that man is infatuated and even obsessed by the beauty of a woman, captivated by every curve and move of her body, mesmerized by the intricate and glorious way she has been designed and functions, is all just a perfect picture, or type, of how God views those He has chosen to belong to Him. Those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ are creations of beauty in the eyes of God. And that is why He likens His church to a bride. Truly the woman is the embodiment of the glory of all mankind.

This truth should shape your perspective of who you are *in Christ* and how much worth He has bestowed upon you. In fact, every time you see a woman who captivates your attention in any way, shape, or form, you should instantly worship Jesus knowing that is how He is looking at you right at that exact moment. Remember, you hold His heart hostage with one glance of your eyes.

But with that as a high level overview, let's start off with a little background on Paul's letter to the Ephesians. First of all, there is a little bit of controversy about to whom this letter was actually written. Some people find it very strange that if Paul was writing the church at Ephesus, a church which he founded and spent at least 2-3 years ministering at, that he included no personal references. Yet, in most every other letter it has many references to friends, acquaintances, and the good times spent together. But this letter is strangely void of all of that.

Secondly, some of the oldest manuscripts do not include the reference in verse 1, "to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus" but merely say: "to the saints who are faithful in Christ Jesus." This has led many to believe that this letter was not directed specifically to the Ephesians although they would most certainly have been recipients of the letter. You see it was not unusual for Paul to send a letter like this and have it (or even multiple copies) passed around all the various churches in Asia Minor, of which there were 14 key churches.

Quite a few scholars people believe that this might be the letter Paul references in *Colossians 4:16* when he said: "When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea." Now no one really knows for sure how or

why some of the later manuscripts included the reference to Ephesus (maybe because it was the spiritual hub of Asia Minor and perhaps it was the first stop for this letter), but regardless, for our purposes, we will just choose to refer to this letter by its customary nomenclature, the letter to the Ephesians.

Although Paul founded the church at Ephesus we know that Timothy, whom Paul disciplined, was the overseer of that church. In addition, the Apostle John also served in that role in that later part of his life. We know that John ministered at Ephesus both before and after his internment on the island of Patmos.

Ephesus was located on Turkey's southwestern coast, a little east of Smyrna (which is now known as Izmir), and was the crown jewel of Asia Minor; in fact, it was the most important city in the entire Roman province. Coins excavated from the site are struck with the titles "First and Greatest Metropolis in Asia" and "First of All the Great Ones." At its height Ephesus is believed to have had a population of around 250,000 permanent residents. So its mere size and location made Ephesus a very strategic location in terms of the spreading of the gospel, which is likely why Paul centered so much of his work in and around Ephesus.

The city's chief industry was the supply of idols to pilgrim worshippers who travelled to Ephesus from all parts of the world to pay homage at the city's great temples dedicated to gods such as Artemis also known as Diana, Cybele, and Bacchus or Dionysos. There have been hundreds of fertility god artifacts located in the ruins of Ephesus. These miniature replicas of the gods were said to charm away evil spirits and provide protection to its owners. You have to understand, this was big industry and it brought great profit to the local artisans.

It's funny how when it comes to man and little "g" gods it is always ultimately about money. In **Acts 19** we have a story where the local artisans ignited a crazy riot against Paul and those belonging to the "Way" (which is what Christianity was called back in those days) because so many people were becoming Christians and abandoning their idolatry. You have to understand this was no little affair; God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out. This was real power and when compared to the impotent idols of wood and stone there was no comparison so people were converting in droves.

As you can expect these conversions to the Way resulted in a serious decline in revenue for the local artisans and they were not going to have it. It started with the artisans who were responsible for the images of Artemis (Diana) but they soon gathered together the other craftsmen who were involved in the idol industry and before you knew they had gathered together a mob. The entire city was in an uproar and they all rushed to the amphitheater (which was the largest theater in the Roman Empire and could hold 50,000 people) and before you know it there was a single outcry from the masses and they shouted for 2-hours straight: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." It was crazy; but, after all, this was big business!

Among the other artifacts that have been excavated from the ruins of Ephesus are scrolls about magic, mysticism, and incantations. These writings are known as the "Ephesian Letters" and contain magical remedies for illness, infertility, and prosperity. Check out **Acts 19:11-20** and you will find the converts voluntarily

burning all their books of magic. I tell you all this because Paul makes various critical allusions to Ephesian social and spiritual culture throughout this letter.

Overtime, however, Ephesus declined in glory and even though at one time it was the hub of Pauline ministry, today, in fulfillment of the Prophecy in **Revelation 2:7**, neither the city nor the church exists and in its place is just a small Turkish village amongst scattered ruins.

As far as the timing of this letter, it was written toward the end of Paul's ministry. According to **Acts 28:16** and **Ephesians 6:20** Paul wrote this letter while he was in Rome under house arrest chained to a Roman guard. I guess the only other point of historical background that I want to make before we jump into the text is that this letter is almost identical to the letter sent to the Colossians in both theme and tone; in fact, 75 of the 155 verses (just under 50%) are almost identical. Obviously Paul desired for the larger body of Christ to understand, believe, and bet their lives on the truth he communicated in those 2 letters. So with that said, let's jump into a verse by verse study of these amazing truths.

Ephesians 1:1-2

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The will of God and His sovereign selection is one of the major themes of this letter. Paul makes the point with this little phrase, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus

by the will of God,” that God is intimately involved in the affairs of men. God is not just some disconnected deity that is watching the world spin; in fact, quite the opposite. He has His hands (so to speak) all over our lives and He is personal, purposeful and always intentional.

For example, if you know anything about Paul’s story you would know that he did not set out to be an Apostle, and he was most definitely not chosen by the church leadership for that position. Paul was actually busy arresting, beating, and killing Christians when God decided to pay Paul a personal visit and set him on the path of fulfilling God’s will—which is exactly what he did with the rest of his life.

Think about it. This notion that God has a will for your life is a very powerful concept which is intended to give you great security, comfort and authoritative confidence in how you live. Look at Paul; he just unabashedly threw it out there. I am an Apostle because God chose me to be an Apostle. Just think about it: Taylor, an engineer according to the will of God; Ian, a worship leader and waiter according to the will of God; Julie, a book keeper, IT coordinator, and base player according to the will of God; Ryan, a student and drummer according to the will of God; Lesley, a mother and Psychologist according to the will of God.

This means that in God’s economy there is no calling that is higher than another—the only issue is whether or not you are living in the will of God. Sure there may be different roles with different levels of authority, power, and responsibility and so on, but those differences create no qualitative distinction. Each assignment is vital and necessary for God’s good purposes and intentions as He is executing His will in heaven here on earth.

I know that often it is hard for us to accept this truth and rest in it. We think our lives should have more of this or more of that and it seems our lust for more tempts us, at times, to move from what we know God has asked of us. We need to learn to stand confident in the place or the role where He has us assigned until He chooses to give us a new assignment, a new role, or a new level of responsibility.

I want you to write this down: “whatever it is that God has personally appointed for you, it is perfect.” And believe me you do not want to be in any other place at all (even if, like Paul, you spend your last days chained to a Roman guard). Besides, if you choose to live outside of the will of God for your life you will have some serious problems on your hand; it is not the path you want to take. So I encourage you to take comfort and strength in knowing that your Father knows you and has personally appointed your affairs to fulfill His good works. We will talk more about the will of God as we get further on in this letter.

Now Paul wrote to the saints, faithful *in Christ*, and this is notable to me for two reasons. First, he calls the believers saints. This does not mean that he was writing to a bunch of dead people who had been enshrined in statutes; rather, it is merely a Biblical word which is used 68 times and encompasses all those who belong to God—all those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. But what is interesting is that the word “saints” comes from the Greek word “hagos” which literally means: holy, pure, consecrated. In other words, Paul is addressing these believers according to their *New Creation* which has been made in the likeness of Christ, righteous, holy, and true. And that is what we are—“saints”—those who

have been made holy (through our *New Creation*) and have been set apart or consecrated exclusively for God.

Second, he calls them “faithful *in Christ*;” yet, based on the way Paul exhorted them in Chapter 4 to not live as the ungodly whose lives are filled with all kinds of impurity and greed, it is clear they were probably not so faithful in their behavior. But again, we have to understand that Paul is making an appeal to their *New Creation* which is always faithful to Christ since it is the home of the Holy Spirit who is righteous, holy and true, and forever faithful.

Like the first statement about the will of God, knowing that we are faithful *in Christ* is also intended to bring us comfort. Sure we struggle in the flesh, but we are saints of God who not only belong to God but are forever faithful because we are “*in Christ*.” Thank goodness that our faithfulness totally depends on what He has done for us and who He has made us and not on our ability to do it right; because, simply said, on our own we can’t—it’s all Him.

Paul then says: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This statement foreshadows one of the key truths, one of the mysteries, which Paul is going to reveal to us in this letter and that is that the bride of Christ is made up of both Jews and Gentiles. You see, the Greeks would always greet each other with the word “charis” which means grace and the Hebrews would always greet each other with the word “Shalom” (in the Greek “eireenee”) which means peace—and this was Paul’s way of giving us a preview of the mystery he was going to disclose in this letter. And since grace and peace are from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, we are to know that He made us into one body—one church. This is not something we could accomplish on our

own; the emotional, psychological, and cultural barriers and prejudices were too great, but God makes us one so that we can live as one.

In addition, this little greeting also speaks to the fact that you must receive grace before you can ever know peace. Grace deals with the sin problem which plagues all of humanity; and since grace moves sin out of the way and tosses it as far as the East is from the West, we are able to have peace, know peace, and experience peace. This is even more real when we remember that in our study of *John 20* we found out that Jesus is our peace. If we know Him, we will know peace; and to the extent we trust ourselves to Him, we will experience peace. Peace is inseparably tied to our relationship with Jesus and it is a fruit of giving ourselves to Him as a bride gives herself to her husband.

I also don't want you to miss the way Paul juxtaposed both God and Father and Jesus Christ and Lord. First of all, grace and peace is a gift from the one who is above all—you simply cannot hold a higher title or position than God. That is as big as it gets. Yet, our grace and peace also comes from the one who loves us more than we could ever fathom; and there is no more intimate or personal reference than Father. This is beautiful. The one who is above all is your Father, and He is the one who grants to you grace and His Peace. Yes, He grants you His own Son.

Second, Paul draws us into the relationship between the name Jesus and the title Christ whose position is Lord. Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the promised Savior of the world; but you have to ask yourself if you have honored Him in your life with the position as Lord. And just so you know, this is a position that you will come to know and experience one way or another because He is Lord whether

you like it or not. But you have a choice. You can choose to let Jesus be your Lord by trusting yourself to Him and move with Him as He works out His will here on earth or you can choose to experience His Lordship as a matter of fact, as His will prevails over your will. Remember, He purchased you with His blood (which is why He is the Christ) and one way or another He is going to exercise His rule over your lives. It is just so much more wonderful to choose to be in relationship with Him as your Lord than it is to have to get to know Him as Lord. Let's move on.

Ephesians 1:3-4

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

This is so precious and demonstrates to us that Paul was so totally ok with identifying Himself with the woman from the Song of Songs. The word we have translated as "Blessed" comes from the root word "eulogeo" which literally means "adorable." Now we know that the lesser can never bless the greater, so Paul is not literally blessing God. Paul is saying that our Father is adorable; these are the words of one who is secure in his Father's love. Adorable is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us (or demonstrated His adoration of us) by giving us every spiritual blessing (or adoration) in the heavenly places in Christ. The verb tense is in the *aorist* and *active* tense meaning that it's

been done in eternity past and its all ours now with nothing held back. Can you imagine? It's all ours!

I am not even sure what this really means. I know Peter said that God has given us everything we need for life and godliness, as well as all of His rich and wonderful promises (**2 Peter 1:3-4**). But still I think what Paul communicates is so big, huge, vast, and ginormous that we barely scratch the surface in terms of understanding what it means to live as a child of God and as the bride of Christ. But what I do understand is that it is all given to us *in Christ* (there's that little phrase again—"in Christ"—a phrase that is used 13 times in this letter). Everything that we could ever want, need, or desire is found *in Christ*—He is our completion. There is no life or power apart from Him. He holds all things in His hands, "for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things" (**Romans 11:36**).

And everything we have been given by the Father is because of what the Son has done; it's because of His finished work. There is nothing for us to do other than believe (that is our only work—**John 6:29**). In fact, it is entirely sacrilegious to try and add anything to what He has done. He has blessed us, we have not blessed Him. I know the temptations are overwhelming and express themselves in all sorts of subtle and not so subtle forms of legalism and religious acts of "doing" or "not-doing" for God. But do not be mistaken. We are *saints* because of His finished work. We are holy because of His finished work. We are adored because of His finished work. None of it has anything to do with our being good or our doing it right. Like a bride, we only had to open ourselves up to be loved and even that occurred because He is the One who choose us, pursued us, and set us apart to be His own.

Consider that it says He has given us all spiritual adorations. Maybe this is what those verses in the Song of Songs were trying to communicate to us all along. Perhaps “all spiritual adorations” means that He is obsessed with us, so enthralled with our beauty, and He so adores us that like a loving Father He has given us our beautiful adorable husband who adores us. He has given us all of Himself by giving us His Son. This is so radical!

For a moment I wished I had this really long list of spiritual blessings that I could rattle off for you, but then I realized such an attempt would have marginalized the power of this statement. Sure there are a lot of promises He has made to us and those are wonderful and precious, but I believe this passage is all about our relationship with Jesus and the truth that He is our beginning and our end, our source of all things. It’s never been about what He can do for us or what we can do for Him, but who He is to us. I cannot imagine that there is any greater spiritual blessing than being *one* with Christ and *one* with the Father. Again this is something we cannot even fathom in our puny little minds, but it is nothing short of glorious and for me it breathes new life into my understanding of Jesus’ prayer in John 17.

John 17:20-23

"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may

be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

And just to refresh your memory, this *oneness* is not some mystic concept where we melt away into the god essence that makes up the universe. No, our *oneness* with God is identical to Jesus' *oneness* with the Father. As we studied in *John*, the entire Godhead is made up of 3 separate persons with separate functions but who are united in all ways: nature, essence, purpose, and intent. In the same way, through our *New Creation*, He has made us *one* with Him and *one* with each other. But we must never forget that it is all found "*in Christ*." He is the source of our *oneness* and He is the only way for anyone to receive these spiritual blessings. There is no other pathway—just Jesus!

What is mind numbing to me, however, is that He blessed us with these "spiritual blessings" from before He even created anything that is seen—just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be (in the *present* and *active* tense) holy and blameless before Him in love.

In other words, because God chose you in eternity past, right at this moment, God views you through your *New Creation* as thoroughly unblemished, entirely without sin, fault, or accusation. And, by the way, this is not just our "position" in Christ as some teach, inferring that it is somehow only our future reality or some form of progressive spiritual reality. No, this is our *present* reality in our *New Creation*, as everything that derives from our *New Creation* is from Him and is therefore de-facto, by definition, holy and pure. And what is so amazing is that He determined this for you and me from before He even created the world. He knew

us even then; yes, we were in His amazing mind way back then. He has always loved us and always planned to make us holy, *in Christ*, for the sole purpose of our enjoying deep, intimate, and passionate fellowship with our Maker.

In the same way, right now right at this moment, and from all eternity past, He views you as perfectly altogether beautiful in every way, worthy of His love, a lily in the midst of thistles, as fair as the moon, as bright as the sun, as majestic as an army with billowing banners, as His darling among young women. Yes He has *forever actively* blessed you with all His adorations.

Now as beautiful as this is, some of you might be getting a little uneasy because the implication of this truth is that God chose us (those of us who are believers) and did not choose others (***Romans 8:29-30, 2 Thessalonians 2:13*** and ***1 Peter 1:2***). It is what we call the doctrine of election and the Bible is replete with this truth on all levels as we see examples of this truth being applied to individuals, families, people groups, cities, nations, empires and so on. It is not something we can really argue with since God choosing one over another is all over the Word; it is just something that can make us very uneasy especially when someone asks us how can God be just if He chooses who will follow Him and who will not. But we are going to have to wait until next week to address this issue. But for now, please just rest in the fact that you are God's lovely lily, His chosen one who is loved beyond measure.

Let's Pray