

Spiritual Adultery, Part 1

Franklin Church of Christ
Edwin Crozier
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Introduction:

I am not sure I have ever been shocked by Bible reading like I was when I first read chapters such as **Ezekiel 16** and **23**. The word pictures are sexually graphic and abhorrent. But there is a reason for that. God wants us to know exactly how abominable He sees it when His children do not follow His rule. Consider this, God chose to describe disloyalty to Him as a spiritual version of the one sin for which He lawfully allows a husband or wife to divorce their spouse (**Matthew 19:3-9**). To Him it is adultery and not just the “I was tempted and made a mistake one night stand” kind of adultery. It is harlotry. But it is not the “I am trying to make some money so I am selling myself” kind of harlotry. It is even worse than that. It is one so given to immorality that the harlots are paying others to commit immorality with them (cf. **Ezekiel 16:33-34**). It is disgusting. It is abominable. And yet, the Israelites didn’t seem to know they were committing such lewdness and debauchery. They appeared to think they were not all that bad. In **Hosea 8:2**, a book which most deeply looks into the harlotry of Israel, despite their harlotry, they still cried out “My God, we of Israel know You!” But **Hosea 5:4** said they did not know the Lord.

This is where I get concerned today. How easy it might be for us to cry out, “My God, we of Your church know You!” while we do not really know Him. I don’t want to be that person. Then I look around at all the churches and all the differences. Even among those who claim to be nothing more than a local body of Christ’s people, I see amazing differences. I have heard of churches so restrictive as to use only one cup during the Lord’s Supper and not allow Bible classes. But I have also heard of churches so permissive as to claim the Lord’s Supper can be taken on Saturday and baptism for the remission of sins is not so necessary to salvation as our own feelings about whether or not we are saved. I have heard about every size, shape and variation in between. When I see this, I fear that many of the Lord’s people today are in the same situation as Israel during the time of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea and we don’t even realize it. Let’s examine some scriptures and see what spiritual adultery is and what leads to it. Then, let us examine ourselves and our congregations and see if we need to affair-proof our relationship with God.

Discussion:

- I. What is spiritual adultery?
 - A. **Hosea 1:2** says, “The land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the Lord.” Spiritual adultery is forsaking the Lord.
 - B. As **Hosea 2:13** says, it is forgetting God to follow other lovers.
 - C. **Hosea 6:4** describes the problem showing that Israel and Judah had no loyalty. That is, though they took marriage vows one day, the next day they had forgotten them. They could not be trusted. How would you like to be married to someone like that?
- II. **Proverbs 7:6-23** provides a great word picture for us regarding this. Here is a young man who is walking through the harlot’s street. The harlot comes out and begins to entice him. She drags him off to be her lover for the night. While this is the story of literal adultery, let’s think of this along the lines of spiritual adultery. Who are today’s harlots that strive to tempt us away from Jesus, our groom (cf **Ephesians 5:25-32**)?
 - A. *Materialism*—**Colossians 3:5** says greed amounts to idolatry. Both individuals and churches can follow after the harlot greed, when they stray from the Bible pattern for the sake of money. How many Christians have forsaken the kingdom way because they first wanted to pursue money and material goods, setting their financial life in order and then one day getting to the spiritual (cf **Matthew 6:33**; **I Timothy 6:10**). How many churches have compromised the biblical pattern to appeal to the wealthy who might give (cf. **James 2:2-3**)?
 - B. *Pleasure*—**Philippians 3:18-19** speaks of enemies of the cross whose god is their appetite. That is, the driving force behind all they do is their own desires and pleasures. The events of **John 6** are a good example. The people were more than willing to follow Jesus when they thought He was a king who would provide bread and circuses. However, when He pointed out that the miraculous feeding was not about feeding the crowd but about showing a sign, they didn’t like that. He pointed out His kingdom was not about eating (see also **Romans 14:17**). When He began to teach them about who He was—the bread of life—and that they should be

more concerned about eating His body and drinking His blood, they were no longer interested. 5000 men left, not counting women and children. How many Christians have forsaken the Lord to follow after momentary pleasures (cf. **Hebrews 11:24-25**)? How many pursue alcohol, drugs, immorality and lasciviousness because it makes them feel good? How many churches have abandoned the pattern of God seeking to draw people in with food and fun instead of drawing them with the teaching of the Lord (**John 6:44-45**)?

- C. *Popularity*—**John 12:42** tells of synagogue rulers who believed in Jesus. Yet, they refused to confess Him because they feared being put out of the synagogue. What was the issue? They were courted by the harlot of popularity. They wanted to fit in. How many individual Christians turn their back on the Lord for the sake of fitting in? Even Peter succumbed to this temptation when he denied the Lord (**Matthew 26:69-75**) and then again when he got caught up in his hypocrisy regarding the Jews and Gentiles (**Galatians 2:11-14**). How many individuals will laugh at the dirty jokes, spout a few curse words, go along to the bar or drinking party just to fit in and be popular? How many churches have abandoned the biblical pattern of the Lord to fit in and be popular? The mainstream churches of the world have turned worship into entertainment, fellowship into eating, ministry into recreation. For them, the church's work is not about drawing people closer to God through His word. It is about social, secular entertainment and well-being. They have diverted the money which should accomplish the Lord's work to accomplishing social welfare? Is benevolence to the poor and needy good? Certainly. However, it is not the church's mission to lift up the poor from their material needs. The church's mission is to lift up the poor in spirit with the message of Christ's gospel. But when we are involved in these social programs, the denominations like us. We look more like them. We can fit in. When we are spending our time teaching **Acts 2:38**, we look different and they will "put us out of the synagogue." How many individuals and churches have compromised God's pattern so they can fit in and be popular among the mainstream religions of our day?
- D. *Self*—In **James 4:3**, James rebuked the Christians because their prayer worship wasn't about God, but about seeking selfish pleasure. Sadly, most of the time all the other harlots which allure us are bound up in this one. We are allured by the harlot of self. Instead of serving God, we want to do what we want to do. Have you ever wondered why idolatry was so alluring to Israel and Judah? Think about it. If I make up the god, who gets to make up the rules? I do. Idolatry is alluring because in the end, all idolatry is the service of self. All spiritual harlotry is doing what I want, because I want. But Christianity is about self-sacrifice (**Romans 12:1-2**). It is about taking up the cross and following Jesus (**Luke 9:23**). It is about being crucified with Christ (**Galatians 2:20**). But how many Christians have forsaken the Lord to pursue their own wants? How many churches have abandoned the biblical pattern to pursue a fun course of more popular religion? How many have decided that if in their own mind they think something is good it is alright? How many have abandoned the demand for book, chapter and verse Bible authority for all they do? **II Timothy 3:16-17** says the Scripture provides us with equipping for every good work. Too few today demand scriptural authority for their work. Instead they simply demand that it feels good. Who are they following? God or the harlot of self?

Conclusion:

Why do we do what we do? Is it because of God's rule or something else? We must take care that we, the bride of Christ, are maintaining our faithfulness to Him. We must be involved in dalliances on the side or in on-going affairs with worldliness and the flesh. We must not be enticed by the harlots of materialism, pleasure, popularity or self. We must be enamored with Jesus, devoted to Him with pure love. In our next lesson, we will examine how Christians and churches fall into spiritual adultery and how to overcome if we do. For now, the warning against spiritual harlotry will suffice. Let us take care to be true and faithful to the Lord.