

Jesus Withdraws from His Beloved Bride

Song of Solomon 5:5-6; Job 23:8-10

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How does God assure you that your faith in Jesus Christ is genuine and that you are not deluding yourself about being a Christian? No doubt there are many ways God assures you, but one way is to observe how you respond to those times when the Lord Jesus seems so distant from you. Is there an attitude of “no big deal”? Does your day-to-day routine continue without any thought of Jesus? Is He only a faint memory? Or does faith in Jesus Christ stir up within you earnest desires for His nearness? Does love for Christ reveal itself in crying out to the Lord with the psalmist: “How long, LORD? wilt thou hide thyself for ever [Psalm 89:46]? How you respond to those times when Jesus withdraws the sense of His presence tells much about your trust in and love for Jesus Christ.

Dear ones, there is a daily battle between the old man and the new man within every Christian, but that is precisely the point—there is a battle and struggle, rather than satisfaction and contentment when the Lord seems so far away. None of us as Christians (no matter how sanctified) will enjoy the nearness of His presence 24-7, but let not His absence become something about which you have little or no concern. The nearness of Jesus throughout all eternity is what will make heaven, heaven. It is what brings heaven to earth to know and enjoy the blessed presence of Him to whom we are bound by an everlasting marital covenant of grace. If the distance between you and your beloved Savior is of little concern to you, then something is seriously wrong.

The main points from our text are: (1) The Repentance of the Bride Is More Than Feelings (Song 5:5); (2) The Withdrawing of Jesus Leads to Renewed Desires for Him (Song 5:6).

I. The Repentance of the Bride Is More Than Feelings (Song 5:5).

A. Review.

1. The elect bride of Christ has spiritually fallen asleep. She has become spiritually lazy upon her bed. This happens when we pursue our pleasures rather than His. We lean upon our own understanding rather than Christ’s. We love our will rather than His will. We prefer the approval of men over the approval of Jesus. We become spiritually drowsy at the wheel, and become unaware of the danger all around us from the world, the flesh, and the devil. We walk away from Jesus as our first love and become apathetic and careless. This has been the experience of us all as Christians (as we see in Song 5:2).

2. But then to make matters worse, we add insult to injury by making excuses for our sleeping and backsliding (just as did the bride, Song 5:3). We justify why we cannot heed the voice of Jesus speaking to us through His Word and Spirit to open the door of our heart to Him. We procrastinate why it is not a good time to commune with Jesus. And yet Jesus comes, not only calling out to us through His Word and knocking on our consciences to open ourselves entirely to Him (not half-way or half-heartedly), but He love us in spite of our spiritual laziness, and sovereignly removes the latch to the lock, and stirs up within us renewed faith, love, repentance, and obedience (Song 5:4).

B. Now let us see what true repentance looks like as we behold the bride of Jesus Christ (Song 5:5). She was greatly affected and moved inwardly, (Song 5:4), but is that all that genuine repentance manifests?

1. What biblical repentance is not?

a. **It is not mere remorse or regret over sin.** “I shouldn’t have done that. That was stupid. I was not thinking clearly.” You may kick yourself over your fit of anger, your cutting words/names, or your betrayal of some kind. But beating yourself and regretting that you were so foolish is not biblical

repentance. That's simply penance—inflicting pain on yourself to pay for your sin. Repentance is not directed to self.

b. **It is not mere sorrow expressed to others for some wrong committed against them.** “I am so sorry for what I have done to you in hurting you.” That should be said, but it's more than that.

c. **It is not mere grief over the consequences that you face for what you have done.** “Look at the painful heartache I will suffer for what I have done. See how others will treat me now. I don't know if I can endure what this will cost me.” It's not about what you will suffer. It's not about you first and foremost. That is pride—not repentance.

d. **It is not limited to mere inward sorrow over your sin against the Lord and being stirred up with new affections of love for the Lord Jesus.** The bride did not remain on her bed with inward sorrow. It begins there, but it does not end there. It begins inwardly, but it is seen outwardly in changes the Lord is working not only in your heart but in your speech, what you watch, what you listen to, who you choose to hang out with, and in behaving differently at home than in public (Philippians 2:12-13). If no one sees any change, it is not true repentance.

2. What biblical repentance is?

a. **It is first and foremost a godly sorrow that you have offended your most holy, loving God and Savior by your sin (Psalm 51:4).** The word “repentance” in Greek means a change of mind. You thought one way about your sin (you excused it; you blamed others for it; you did not consider it to be so bad compared to others, after all, it was a secret sin), but now you know and sorrow that you have broken God's law and have sinned against Him who is absolutely holy and who set His love upon you when you were dead in your trespasses and sins. Biblical repentance is not preoccupied with getting caught or with the consequences, but against whom the sin is committed. When Peter looked upon Jesus, He wept greatly that He denied such a Savior.

b. **It is a godly sorrow that looks to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.** Biblical repentance looks at your sin and confesses it and then looks from your sin to Jesus Christ who bore your sin, and clings to the promises of God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ. The mourning over sin is not the end of repentance—the end is being comforted by Christ's love, mercy, and forgiveness (Matthew 5:4). Repentance remembers past sins, but does not live in the past because of the forgiveness of Jesus.

c. **It is realized in changes that God works in you inwardly and outwardly (Song 5:4-5).** Repentance like sanctification begins within, but cannot remain there—it must be seen. Just as faith without works is dead, so likewise is repentance.

d. **It is expressed toward others against whom you have sinned, hurt, or betrayed.** Humility is necessary in repentance in order to go to the Lord and to others (even if it will be mocked and laughed at by others who consider it a weakness rather than a grace).

II. **The Withdrawing of Jesus Leads to Renewed Desires for Him (Song 5:6).**

A. The bride has now left her bed of spiritual laziness and making excuses for it, and as she goes to the door where Jesus had been knocking and which He has sovereignly unlocked by His grace, she opens the door, but Jesus was not there. He had withdrawn the nearness of His presence. He had pleaded with her to open the door to Him and when she finally is awakened and opens the door to Him, He is gone. What could possibly be the reason for Jesus pulling away after He had called in love for her to open the door, knocked upon it with tenderness, and had sovereignly unlocked the door and moved her heart to desire Him?

1. Jesus was not withdrawn as to His divine presence—for He is omnipresent (John 3:13). In this sense, Jesus cannot withdraw Himself.

2. Jesus is not withdrawn from you as your Redeemer by way of the ministry of His Holy Spirit to you. The Spirit of Jesus is sent to apply all of the benefits of Christ's redemption to His elect. Jesus will

neither you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5), and no one or nothing can separate you from the love of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:35-39).

3. Jesus withdraws the sense or feeling of His presence in the lives of Christians (as we have all experienced—Job 23:8-10). You have known that blessed presence of the Lord Jesus as you have prayed, read the Scriptures, meditated upon His Word, heard God’s Word preached, sung a psalm, or partaken of the Lord’s Supper. O what a blessing to enjoy that closeness of communion with Jesus. But then you have also had that experience where you have opened door to Jesus, and you did not find that same sense of His presence. You are yet united to Christ by faith. He has not deserted you as your Savior or Lord. He is not playing games with you. He is teaching you in the School of Christ. What is He teaching you?

a. He is increasing your hungering and thirsting for Him. Absence makes the heart grow fonder for someone you truly love.

b. He is teaching you not to take for granted those times that He is near. After great times of blessing, you are especially vulnerable to spiritual sleep (Song 5:1-2). Treasure those times and guard them that they do not slip through your fingers like sand.

c. He is teaching you not to rest in your feelings, but trust in His promises. Walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Your faith is exercised to godliness when you don’t see or feel, and yet you trust Him. The exercise of faith in such circumstances will more likely bring back that blessed and precious presence of Jesus. It is easy to enjoy Jesus when you feel so near to Him, but we need to grow in faith when we cannot feel Him (John 20:29).

d. He is chastening you in love when you have become spiritually lazy in order that you might be more watchful over the signs of lukewarmness toward Jesus and backsliding in your love and duty to Him (Hebrews 12:5-6). His chastening in love evidences that you belong to Him. He loves you too much to leave you in your spiritual laziness and sin.

e. He is teaching you to long for that heavenly communion with Jesus that will never be interrupted and will never end.

B. Note the response of the bride when the Lord Jesus withdraws that nearness of presence from her. Is she happy and content with it? No. Is she apathetic and indifferent about it as if it is no big deal? No. What does she do?

1. She remembers how the voice of Jesus through His Word melted her heart in His calls of love to her to open the door. She forgets not His appeals. She rehearses them in her mind, for they are her comfort that He has not forsaken her. So you too are to improve upon the Word you hear preached to you and the promises of God in the sacraments.

2. She sought for Him even though she did not find Him, and she called for Him even though He did not immediately answer (parable of one who came at midnight to borrow food from his friend, Luke 11). Dear ones, when you do not find the Lord Jesus near to you, do you give up? Do you quit seeking? The bride here does not quit seeking the Lord in all of the means of grace, and neither should you. When you prepare for worship, are you asking, knocking, and seeking the Lord Jesus? Or is it no big deal to you whether Jesus is present or not? Your continued asking, knocking, and seeking evidences your love and repentance.

3. Why did the Lord Jesus fall asleep in the boat just to see it nearly capsized by the great storm? He wanted His disciples to seek Him with all of their heart (and lean not upon their own skills and resources as experienced fishermen). He wanted them to realize that without Him they could do nothing. He wanted them to find all that they needed in Him. And so in your life Jesus at times may seem to be asleep when you call upon Him. He is teaching you to continue to call upon Him. Let your voice not grow weary in crying out to Him for His mercy. He that keeps you neither slumbers nor sleeps.

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