

Naked Bodies and Intimate Secrets

Revelation 2:18-29

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When I first thought of asking my wife Susan out on a date, it was on the stairs between the second and third floors at Heritage High School, going up, and I was walking behind her. She was wearing very nicely fitting, white, polyester pants. I remember thinking, “Wow! Like a goddess . . . Venus in white, polyester pants.”

On our first date (I was amazed she would go out with a dweeb like me in the first place) I pretty much just thought, “Wow . . . she’s *gorgeous!*” And she pretty much just thought, “Wow . . . he’s *listening* to me! That’s really nice.”

I loved dating Susan, you see, not only because she was pretty but also because she did all the talking. I was too nervous to speak, but she would talk and talk and talk and talk . . . All I had to do was say, “Yeah . . . uhuh . . . sure . . . right . . .” I need to be honest. I don’t really know what she said. I don’t remember. But it didn’t matter because it came out of that *gorgeous body!*

You see, it was a symbiotic relationship . . . my admiration of Susan’s tight, white pants, and her desire to tell me everything. We didn’t realize it at the time, but God was beginning to teach us the greatest lesson we would learn, and are learning.

Whether you are single or married,
Whether you are male or female,
If you are a Christian,
God is teaching you
The very same message.

In longing or in fulfillment,
Teaching you the same message,
Because it’s built into the very nature of reality,
And into you . . .

In the beginning God created man. “God created him in His own image, male and female he created them.” Together . . . His image. And He said, “I like it. It’s good.”

Man is born from woman and woman is created from man, out of his side. God brings them together in the Garden in the covenant of marriage, a communion in which two persons become one flesh, and in that communion bear fruit . . . life. In fact, they are *commanded* to bear fruit.

But very soon they steal fruit, and they fall. Right away they cover body parts. In fact, they cover those very parts where they are incomplete without the other, where they are joined

together in the image of God. They cover those parts that are like internal organs exposed—something internal on the outside.

He covers the part that is to penetrate the female with life. *She* covers the part that is to invite the seed of the male, which she is to receive in ecstasy as a gift of grace, in order that her body would nurture that seed and bear life.

They covered those parts where they are joined in communion . . . those parts they *long* to join but now are *ashamed* to join . . . those parts that not only join body but connect spirit and soul.

And in the place of ecstasy, life, and joy,
They have fear, shame, and pain;
Instead of love that brings life,
There is lust that brings death.

So they cover *those parts* from each other, and they hide *themselves* from God.

In Ephesians Paul tells us that God made us this way—male and female, to be joined together in this communion where two become one flesh—as a lesson, reference, or picture of Christ and the Church. He designed us this way *before* the Fall, as even then He knew He would need some way to tell us, while we were in exile, of His love . . .

And His life
And our sin
And His redemption.

More than love as a concept,
He could say, “I *long* for you like a bridegroom longs for his bride. And you are only complete in *me* and with me *in* you.”

More than the words “salvation by grace through faith”;
“You can only bear fruit, my bride, when you surrender to my love and receive my joy in your place of shame.”

Sin hurts, not just like some law that is broken. It hurts . . .

- Like when you walk in on your bride in the embraces of another man . . .
- Like when you long for the embrace of a lover, and he’s in another room satisfying himself with pornography, or she’s whispering intimate secrets to another . . .
- Like how it feels when you love someone *so much*, yet you are so wounded by them that you fly into a rage and want to kill them! But you can’t kill because it’s *them* that you love! So torn apart inside you choose to die for them . . .
- Like *that*.

Marriage is a covenant created by God to picture the eternal covenant. And sex is a sacrament of that covenant, like communion is a sacrament of the new and eternal covenant. “Sacrament” is a theologian’s word. It is used to describe something that is a sign or a seal of a covenant. It’s used to describe something that is a *physical* act but also a *spiritual* act, where the physical and spiritual are inseparably bound together. Sacrament in a covenant that bears fruit . . . life.

Little did we know on our first date in 1978
that God was beginning to teach us
the greatest lesson that we would ever learn.

Little did we know on our first date in 1978
that God was sucking us in.
He had set a trap, and it was springing shut.
(He does that, you know.)

At the start of John’s gospel (John who received The Revelation, I believe), Jesus’ inaugural miracle was going to a wedding feast—a marriage supper—and turning *water* into *wine* . . . really great, abundant wine. And everybody wanted to follow him. Who wouldn’t? “Free wine! What a great religion!”

Then in John 6 Jesus says to the crowd, “You must drink my blood.” Not *wine*; *blood*. And most of the people leave. By John 19 Jesus hangs naked on a cross on a hill outside Jerusalem. Almost everyone is gone, but John is still there to watch as the Roman soldier plunges his spear into the side of Jesus, the second Adam, and blood flows out like a river, and the second Eve is born—the Church—the Bride.

In a kindergarten class in Sunday School the teacher was explaining how God made people. She got to the part about how God made women. “He took a rib out of the side of Adam and fashioned it into Eve.” Little Tommy was mesmerized by the lesson.

Later in the week he was feeling kind of bad . . . he lay down on the couch holding his side. His mom came in and said, “Tommy, what is wrong?” He said, “My side hurts. I think I’m having a *wife*.”

I know it hurts.
Single or married, it hurts.
But don’t throw in the towel.
There are no shortcuts that bypass Calvary.
You must go there.

Revelation 2:18: “*And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.*”

I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will throw her on a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her doings; and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches shall know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve.

'But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay upon you any other burden; only hold fast what you have, until I come. . . .'

Thyatira was the smallest and most inconsequential of all the seven cities to which The Revelation was written. It lay at the junction of two great valleys along a very important trade route. I think of Thyatira like a truck stop. Remember, guys, truck stops on family vacation? If you are like me, that was probably the first place you encountered porn . . . on those condom dispensers in the men's room. "Dad, what *is* that?"

There is something about being *out there*, on the road, hidden and unseen. Jesus has eyes like a flame of fire. He sees everything hidden. He knows Thyatira. It's the smallest town but gets the longest letter. It lies at the center of the letters to the seven churches, as if it's most important.

Jesus intimately cares about
the secret places and the private parts.

He commends the church but then says, "I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel." Notice that this is not someone outside the church. If you know your Old Testament, you know that Jezebel is the pagan queen of wicked King Ahab. Jezebel seduced, beguiled, and enticed the Israelites into the worship of Baal and Asherah. Baal was the Canaanite fertility god, and Asherah was his consort. The worship of Baal involved feasting and ritual prostitution.

Evidently a woman in leadership in Thyatira was enticing folks into idolatry and "porneuo," translated "sexual immorality" or just "immorality." Thyatira was a Greek city, so it would have had Greek gods.

In Corinth across the Aegean Sea they had a temple, on top of the acropolis, to the Greek goddess Aphrodite, or in Latin "Venus." In that temple there were 1,000 cult prostitutes. At those prostitutes men would worship the goddess.

In Thyatira they would have had similar practices, even a mingling of Greek gods and Canaanite gods—Asherah and Venus. Somehow she was beguiling people in church into immorality. We say, "How could they *do* such a thing?!" For a Greek it wasn't such a big distraction, because in health class at school they taught those little, Greek boys and girls, "It's about a *sperm* and an *egg* and *fertilization*, and that's what it is—biology!"

Like they teach today: "Nothing more natural than sex, except maybe death." So Paul writes to the church at Corinth in I Corinthians and says this:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? It's written, "The two shall become one flesh," but he who is united with the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. Shun porneuo. Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you?

You see the lie of Satan, don't you? "What you do with your body really doesn't matter. It's just your *body*." Then he uses it as a door for all the lies of hell and his demons.

Ironically, in places like Thyatira and Corinth they would have cult prostitutes yet with the underlying belief that your body just doesn't really matter . . . kind of like Vegas or Hollywood. It's no wonder it was also in Corinth where they abused the communion table, acting like it was only bread and wine. So Paul writes, "Anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body of Christ drinks judgment on himself."

- On our communion table is food . . . probably came from King Soopers or Safeway . . . bread, juice, and wine . . . food and *spirit*. It's a sacrament.
- My marriage bed . . . biology and *spirit*. It's a sacrament.

I'm not only one *body* with my wife, but if Paul is right, I commune with my Lord who resides within our one *spirit* with Jesus. I had better discern *His* body or I defile *His* temple. I am concerned that many of you may not even have a category in your mind for the ecstasy that God designed for marriage to your spouse or to Him.

Either willingly or unwillingly your temple has been defiled without ever having been cleansed, so now you look at it and think it's just . . . biology . . . painful biology. This is the tragedy:

You not only cover your private parts
From your marriage partner;
You hide your heart from the lover of your soul.
So religion for you is not a communion of *joy*;
It's fear and shame.

Jezebel is seducing believers in Thyatira to "porneuo." That means sex outside marriage, sacrament outside covenant. Porneuo is where we get our word "pornography." And "porne" in Greek is translated "harlot."

In Revelation 17 an angel comes and gets John and says:

"Come see the great porne [the great harlot]. She's seduced the kings of the earth and the nations of the world. The merchants of the earth have grown rich with the wealth of her wantonness. She is fallen and she is the abode of demons."

John hears a voice issuing from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people. Come out of her lest you take part in her sins."

The woman rides the beast. The beast seems to be the entity or power that is behind the fallen governments and economies of our world. The woman is drunk with the blood of the saints—Christians—and she’s riding the beast.

Did you know that in 1996 alone we Americans spent 8 billion dollars on hard-core pornography? America is the world leader in the production of pornography, our economy intimately tied in with pornography. Today on-line porn revenues are estimated at 2 billion dollars a year. It’s also estimated that 20 million Americans visit cyber-sex sites each month. It’s no wonder it’s tough for you guys, because you’re sinners.

And you’re living in a fallen world,
And the harlot rides the beast,
And she tells the beast all about you.
She knows your deepest hungers,
So our economy is built on seducing you.

It’s not just what we call “porno,” it’s an entire advertising industry. Men, God made you to be the initiator in the image of Jesus. He *made* you to be aroused by the sight of your naked bride, but the Dragon, the Beast, and the Harlot *know* it, so they lure you to other temples, especially when *your* temple is requiring grace . . . sacrifice . . . longsuffering . . .

But Jesus says that to worship at other temples, even in your own mind, is adultery. It opens the door to the Evil One, to his lies, to his demonic spirits, and to shame that deadens your heart and makes you unable to experience the communion which God intended. And this is the really sad thing:

You long for that communion more than ever,
but you are unable to experience it.
The hunger is stronger than ever,
but you can’t feel it.

For your heart is encased and deadened by shame. You go back for more and more and more and receive less and less and less, and the Great Harlot laughs and drinks your blood while you pay her to ride that beast. You are defiling your temple. And you’re probably defiling a young woman’s temple. *And* you’re defiling your wife’s temple. You’re spitting on your heart, and you’re spitting on the heart of Jesus.

How can you expect your wife to receive your love when it’s not her that you’re loving in your mind? I *know* what you say . . . “It’s just another *body*.” No! It’s not just another body. It’s a temple.

And it’s at your wife’s body,
No matter how broken or bloodied,
Old, out of shape, or frigid;
No matter how she emasculates you and rejects you;

It's at her body alone that you're to seek to
Worship the Living God with your sexuality.

Your seed—your "sperma," guys—belongs to her, not to a magazine.

Now you may have noticed that I have been preaching to men. So some of you women may be feeling a little self-righteous. I'll have you know that I'm an equal-offense preacher. And I believe men and women are equally fallen.

Men are fallen pursuers – corrupted masculinity.
Women are fallen receivers – corrupted femininity.

Jesus says to Thyatira, "It's that woman Jezebel who is beguiling and seducing my servants into idolatry and porneuo." We don't know exactly what that means, but apparently she teaches what Jesus calls the "deep things of Satan." Probably that means she teaches what she calls . . .

"deep truths" . . .
truths that others just wouldn't understand . . . mystical, prophetic, intimate
secrets . . .
perhaps the idea that something is found in idolatry or fornication that the others
aren't ready for or couldn't see.

Whatever the case is, it's justification for keeping their communion of intimate secrets entirely in the dark.

At the last church where I was in California, the Senior Pastor had multiple affairs with upstanding, good-looking church women. I was in on the original accountability group, and I didn't *get* it. Because, you see, he was a middle-aged, slouching, pot-bellied, balding guy. I remember thinking to myself, "I see what *he* gets—some pretty good-looking, naked bodies! What do *they* get?"

Now I know. *Intimate secrets* . . . a powerful man sharing intimate secrets. He would say things like this: "Well, the rest of the church doesn't really understand *grace* like we do." The women said they were victims. I don't buy it any more. Those intimate secrets belonged in the sacrament of their covenant at home.

There is only one person in the world from which I seek to not ever keep secrets. People will come to me, tell me things, and say, "Can we keep this in confidence?" I say, "No. Not if it means keeping it from my bride."

I was talking to a friend this week who does a lot of Christian marriage counseling. He said, "You know, it's weird. When a man gives up on a marriage and throws in the towel, he turns to porn. When a *woman* gives up on a marriage and throws in the towel, she turns to *gossip*, like with other women in the church."

Paul wrote, “If you can’t control your burning passions, get married.” I think he’s talking mostly to guys there. We can hear that. In I Timothy he tells Timothy, “Refuse to enroll younger widows.” We don’t know exactly what this means, but then he says, “They will want to marry.” And I’m reading the Bible here . . . “Besides that, they learn to be idlers, gadding about from house to house, and not only idlers but gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.”

It appears that Paul, that sexist pig, actually saw marriage as a cure for gossip in women in the same way he saw marriage as a cure for that burning lust in men. Kind of like God was saying this back in 1978 to two, immature, high school kids:

Hey, Peter and Susan, *listen*. That burning desire in you, young man? I made it, and there’s a place for it. That desire in you, young woman, to tell somebody absolutely everything? I made it and there’s a place for it. *Marriage*.

And I’m sucking you in. And you will learn the deep lessons of love, and it *will hurt*. You’ll be tempted to run. That’s why I’m binding you in a covenant. Young man, don’t you go looking for naked bodies anywhere else. Young woman, don’t you go looking to share all your intimate secrets somewhere else.

You know, the harlot rides the Beast for women as well as for men. It happens in a lot of ways, I suppose, but this week I was thinking, “Isn’t the nation’s number one selling periodical the National Inquirer?” “Inquiring minds want to know.” (Talk about economy riding the Beast!)

So we get upset about pornography at the check-out stand, but what about all those magazines that are devoted to nothing other than exposing the intimate secrets of other people’s covenants?

Remember this: Jezebel was part of the church. I have been amazed and surprised at women emotionally and sometimes physically communing with women, sharing all their intimate secrets with other Christian women, and then being *cold* and *frigid* to their husbands, saying, “He just *doesn’t get it*. There are deep, deep, wonderful truths of Jesus that I experience and know through this other woman.”

I think Jesus calls that “the deep things of Satan.”

One woman said to me, “My husband will just have to learn it from Jesus first.” Wrong! Don’t you *get it*? Jesus is in *you*, longing to teach him—draw it out of him. Women, you make him masculine with your feminine. Men, you make her feminine with your masculine. I’m saying, help each other in marriage. Husbands, share intimate secrets with your wife. Stop shutting down. And listen. Wives, present your bodies to him as a gift.

- I’m not saying that if you’re the perfect wife he’ll be a perfect husband. No, he may be wretched. And he may leave you and divorce you. And then Jesus says, “Now turn that passion toward me. No man could ever fulfill it. Turn it to me.”
- I’m not saying if you’re the perfect husband she’ll be the perfect bride. She may be absolutely wretched! So then you may learn the *deepest* lesson of love: grace. You

may then learn forgiveness as she herself nails you to a cross . . . with Jesus . . . *with Jesus.*

Grace, forgiveness, body broken, blood shed . . . those, my friend, are the deep things of God. And He hung there on a cross for everyone to see, outside Jerusalem on that hill—the Hill of the Skull.

Robertson McQuilkin was the president of Columbia Bible College. Several years ago his wife was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. He resigned his post at Columbia Bible College in order to take care of his failing wife Muriel.

He spends his time now changing Muriel's diapers, spoon-feeding Muriel her meals, and holding Muriel as she sleeps. She hardly has the youthful body of a goddess. Yet he washes her naked body every day. She cannot speak to him intimate secrets, yet they *are* an intimate secret.

A young man asked him one day, "Do you ever miss being president?" He said, "No, I enjoy loving Muriel." But that night he thought about that question. He just couldn't sleep. He lay awake wondering what God was doing. He prayed, "God, I'm not complaining. I *enjoy* this assignment. But I just have one question: If a coach takes a player out of the game and puts him on the bench, he doesn't want him in the game. You don't have to tell me, but why don't you want me in the game?"

He says in the morning they went for their usual walk around the block, and a familiar, old drunk got in the way, looked them up and down, then slurred, "I like it. That's good . . . that's really good . . . I like it." He turned around and waddled away, mumbling to himself, "That's good . . . I really like it."

McQuilkin says they finished their walk, went back to their garden, sat down, and then it hit him with a start. He said, "That was you, God, wasn't it? *You're* the one whispering in my spirit, 'I like it and it's good.'" Then to God he wrote this: "I may be on the bench, but if you like it, God, and say it's good, that's all that counts."

Robertson McQuilkin may be hesitant to say it, out of humility, but *I* will say it:

He's not *on* the bench.
He's at the absolute center of the game,
hanging on a cross with Jesus for his bride.

Women, every powerful man is becoming weak until he dies. Men, every beautiful woman is becoming less beautiful until she dies. Yet there is a deeper beauty, isn't there? And there is a deeper power, and there is a deeper love.

Marriage is to be a picture of that deeper love . . . a lesson for all married *or* unmarried, in fulfillment of what we begin to experience here (although only an incomplete taste), or in the longing of singleness.

It's to be a message either way, a lesson for all to see. The lesson is this: Body broken and blood shed. The Great Bridegroom's blood shed.

He has loved us at our absolute worst. Will you love Him at His worst?

Naked?

Weak?

Ugly?

On a cross?

You are beginning to see it, aren't you? Because what I just said kind of bothered you. You're beginning to see that there's nothing more beautiful than *this!* And nothing more *powerful* than this. At this table He shares His body and invites you into the secret, wonderful, mysteries of God and His love for you.

- It's here you find the communion that you most desperately want.
- It's here you find the strength to be the single person God wants you to be.
- It's here you find the strength to be the *married* person God wants you to be.
- It's here you find complete forgiveness.

In fact, His penetrating love is born even out of those places of your greatest shame. *Grace.*

The sweet wedding wine of Cana did turn into blood. It turned into the blood of the covenant on the hill of Calvary. But it turns back to wine again at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. And He always saves the very best wine for last.

Good Friday turns into Easter,
and it's better than the Garden.

Muriel will soon look like a goddess, more beautiful than you could possibly imagine. And you, my friend, will receive a new body as well.

Jesus says to Thyatira, "*He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations . . .*"

Next is a quotation of Psalm 2 that is about Jesus himself: "*. . . and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power from my Father; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*"

My wife told me that women tell secrets to get power. Well, men want sex to *experience* power. Pornography is evil, destructive power. Gossip is evil, destructive power. They both equally destroy a church. But listen to Jesus: "To him who endures I give power over nations."

What power?

“*My power.*”

It’s a *communion* of power,

His power in *you*, the Bride of Christ, bearing life.

And he says, “I will give you the morning star.”

What’s that?

In Revelation 22 Jesus says, “I am the bright and morning star.” Wow! But it’s even more than that, and I don’t know exactly what to make of this: To those Greeks in Thyatira, the morning star had yet *another* name . . . Venus.

Listen closely. Every desire created in you by God will be fulfilled in glory. So be patient. Endure. Hold fast. *Right now* learn the deepest lesson of love . . . the love of God that hangs on a cross and gives birth to a new world, even in us, His Bride.

And on the night that the Great Bridegroom was betrayed and abandoned by His Bride, he took the bread and he broke it, saying to His Bride, “This is my body given to you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after the supper, he took the cup and said, “This is the cup of the new covenant—the eternal covenant—in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it.”

He also said, “I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it with you in my father’s kingdom.”

Let’s pray.

“Oh, Lord Jesus, through the power of Your Holy Spirit would You draw us into this communion, into this table, where Your body lays before us? Would You help us to see, Lord Jesus, with the eyes of our heart that You are absolutely gorgeous in glory, the bright, shining, morning star? You are also beautiful, body broken and blood shed . . . the morning star hanging on a cross. And the morning star precedes the dawn.”

Even now He gives you the morning star wrapped in naked, battered, beaten flesh, and He says, “Would you love me? For I have loved you all the way to hell.”

So come to this table and trust the One who has earned your love. Give to Him all those places of shame. While I was preaching there were things that sparked in you . . .

great shame over something, or
great fear over something, or
anxiety over something, or
insecurity over something, or

perhaps a name that you think you have
that this world has given you.

Bring all those things to this table and let His love enter into those places . . . our deepest shame,
fear, and anxiety . . . and receive His grace.

“Behold,” He says, “I make all things new. I am good come out of evil. And I will create life
beyond your wildest dreams. Just come to my table and believe my love.” If you have faith in
Jesus or *hope* in Jesus, praying “I believe, but help my unbelief,” come to this table and receive
from Him—the Morning Star who hangs on a cross. Amen.

You each have a different story, the story that God is writing in you through His grace. Satan
has worked a number on every one of us. He wants you to think you’re the *only one*. So,

Some struggle with gender identity issues;
Some struggle with sins in the past;
Some struggle with broken marriages;
Some struggle with pornography;
Some struggle with gossip;
Some struggle with lesbianism;
Some struggle with male homosexuality.

If you came to this table in faith, Jesus has washed you—His naked, wounded bride. He has
washed you with His blood, He gives you a white robe, and He tells you to put it on and stop
listening to the lies of the enemy! “That’s not who you are! You *are* My Bride. Believe it!”
Right now is a brand new beginning. “Behold,” he says, “I make all things new.”

You are walking out into a world that is bent on seducing you, so remember: When you stumble,
you put the white robe back on . . . surrender to Him . . . ask His forgiveness . . . and you walk
again, remembering who you are . . . because all human love in this world is imperfect.

But He says, “I’m coming soon. And we will have a honeymoon beyond your wildest dreams.”
In Jesus’ name, believe that.

A lot of guys struggle with pornography. The enemy says, “You’re the only one, and if anybody
ever found out, it would be just awful.” No, it wouldn’t. You need to shine the light on that.
Ask Aram, our Pastor of Congregational Care, if our struggles are common. (They are.)

So we are offering a group for men struggling with sexual issues. If you want to be a part of it,
call Aram. It’s especially geared toward the problem of pornography, which is really big in our
society.

If you are a woman, let me say that if you are in a marriage and your husband is doing evil things
and he doesn’t want you to tell anybody, I think you probably *do* need to tell somebody. Shine

light on it. But the thing is, don't go forming another covenant of intimate secrets with somebody else.

Whenever our desire to share intimate secrets becomes entertainment, it's called "gossip." If you're a doctor and look at women's bodies, that's one thing. But if it's for entertainment, it's called "pornography."

So keep your eyes open.
Remember the Lover of your soul.
Utilize your church and other people in the same struggles.
No matter what, learn the deep lessons of love.

The Morning Star hung on a cross for you, and He will not let you go. In Jesus' name, amen.

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