

“SPIRITUAL ADULTERY”

What is the Scriptural basis for the use of this expression?

By Jack W. Langford, July 20, 2013

INTRODUCTION—SHOCKING LANGUAGE

I usually do not start a Bible study by admitting my ignorance, but in this case it will factually illustrate the seriousness of this subject. I was saved a few months before my sixteenth birthday. Up until this point in my life I was not considered a very smart kid. I never took school seriously, that is, unless I got into serious trouble. However, now that I was born again, I began to read the Bible. At first, the only explanation of the Scriptures I was receiving was the very basics on salvation from the radio preacher from whom I had heard the gospel.

My grandmother gave me a large older four volume set of the King James Version. Like a hungry baby I began reading many chapters every night. Of course I didn't understand a lot of what I read, especially from the “Old Testament,” but I was getting familiar with the many stories and instructions.

When I came to the various passages, especially in the prophets, which spoke of Israel's “fornication, adultery, whoredoms and harlotries,” in my ignorance I took this all very literally. I thought, those people must have been very, very, wicked and even depraved. They seemed to engage in sexual immorality right out in the open hillsides, in the streets, their own houses, and even sometimes in the very Temple which was the center of their worship. It seemed to become a part of their everyday lives. They used poles and stones and engaged in the market places, in the countryside, and in festivities. When I first read this I thought, “How depraved can people get?”

Later when I read it again I thought, “Can this be real?” Then it finally dawned on me that this language was not to be understood as literal sexual orgies, but rather God's description of their religious diversions into various and sundry idolatries in a religious departure from God's revealed truth. As a result I actually had mixed feelings.

On the one hand, at first I actually felt relieved. These Israelites were not really that bad a people. In fact most of them were very dignified citizens held in high esteem in society. It is true that some of them became involved in homosexuality, but as to the larger picture they were a very cultured society. How was it then that the prophets used such crude and shocking language to describe their religious activity?

Then on the other hand, and in answer to this question, the shocking realization came to me—God wants us to know that religious deviations from His revealed will in the spiritual realm are to be considered as such perversions in the physical realm. Furthermore, these spiritual perversions were just as serious as the physical perversions, if not more so.

Now this was a startling new revelation to me, to say the least! In fact, this condition was so serious that it was the reason God allowed other nations to come in and eventually destroy the whole nation of Israel. The people were carried away into captivity. There was the destruction of their cities and even the burning of the Temple. Jerusalem became a veritable “ghost town” and the whole land, originally “flowing with milk and honey,” became a vast desolation.

So it is, that when one reads the Hebrew Scriptures this terminology is to be found in many, many places. Furthermore, its importance to us today has become a serious question in the minds and thoughts of many sincere Christians—and it definitely should be! Can Christians be guilty of the same thing in our present world? The Scriptures answer this question for us.

1. ISRAEL'S "EXAMPLE"

The apostle Paul was inspired of the Holy Spirit to make it very clear that the things which happened to the children of Israel, as recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures, were designed by God to be "*examples*" for the Church of Jesus Christ in this day and age.

1 Corinthians 10:6 and 7, *Now these things [Israel's experiences] became our **examples**, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become **idolaters** as were some of them. As it is written, 'the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.'*

Again in verses 11 and 14, *Now all these things happened to them as **examples**, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come . . . Therefore my beloved, flee from **idolatry**.*

The prophets characterized Israel's defection into idolatrous practices, and their co-mingling of idolatry with the worship of God even in the Temple of God in the following manner: over 70 times as "*whoredom, whoredoms, whoring, whorish, whore, or whores*"; some 20 times as some form of "*harlotry*"; at least 4 times as "*fornication*"; and approximately 20 times by some form of the word "*adultery*"; at least 12 times as "*filth or filthiness*"; nearly 20 times as "*lewdness*"; etc., etc. (according to the King James Version of the Bible). In none of these cases was the act of "whoredom, harlotry, fornication, adultery, etc." speaking of physical immorality. Rather, such perversion was understood to be in the spiritual realm. Thus we get the expressions concerning Israel that they committed "spiritual adultery, whoredom, harlotry or fornication." The terminology depicts the horror and seriousness of the sin.

Consequently, it is important to note that Paul's two statements above are both connected with "*idolatry*." And in both statements it is clear that Christians are not to follow in any form of modern "*idolatry*." It becomes obvious, therefore, that for the Church of Jesus Christ to practice different forms of religious idolatry, and co-mingle them with their own worship services, fellowship meetings, marriages, and funeral services, festivals, etc., would most certainly be just as much "*whoredom, adultery, fornication and harlotry*" in the spiritual realm as was Israel's. So the expressions made by the inspired prophets will obviously apply in a secondary way to us today just as they did in the past.

In addition, we must remember that the apostle Paul was not merely writing to the Corinthian saints. He makes it very clear that the contents of these instructions are to ". . . **all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord . . .**" It has sometimes been acknowledged by competent Bible teachers that there is as much, if not more, idolatry in the

religious realm in our world today than there has ever been in the past. And sad to say, much of it is found within the so-called “Christian Religion.” It is a well-known historical fact that in the early days of the “Imperial Church of Rome” pagan practices were brought over into Christendom in abundance in various and sundry ways. Many of these perversions in rituals, statutes, priestcraft, sanctuaries and holy days are well documented.

2. APOSTATE CHRISTENDOM

In further confirmation of this is the fact that the very same language that the prophets used in regards to Israel is also used to describe the final form of **professing Christendom**, as recorded in the book of Revelation. In Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:1–18; 18:1–24 and 19:1–5 we have the following words used to describe “Mystery Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth”—4 times “*whore*”; 1 time “*Harlot*”; 8 times “*fornication*”; and 1 time “*filthiness*” (King James Version). So we can realize that the very same language is also used in the Greek Scripture concerning apostate Christendom as was used in the Hebrew Scriptures concerning Israel. In addition, it has the very same understood meaning—religious perversions in modern forms of idolatry—in the midst of professing Christianity. This type of language, in this type of a setting, is only used in the Bible in regards to religious perversions.

In addition, in reading the book of Revelation one needs to remember that this book was written at the very beginning of this Church Age to describe a religious system which will endure throughout this Church age, and will have its final judgment come just after the true Christian Church is raptured up into heaven at the close of this age. In addition, this religious system will have brutally killed many of the saints of this Age of Grace—17:6; 18:6, 13, 20, 24 and 19:2.

Furthermore, the primary command in this context is for the true saints of God to remove themselves from this religious system. Notice the language of Revelation 18:4—

*Come out of her, my people
so that you will not share in her sins,
so that you will not receive any of her plagues;
for her sins are piled up to heaven,
and God has remembered her crimes.*

Obviously, for the saints of God throughout this age to participate in “her sins” is to participate in spiritual “*fornication, whoredom, harlotry and filthiness*” by which this system is described. So “saints” can and often do participate in “*spiritual adultery or fornication*.” Those who become saints in the “Great Tribulation” and are still associated with the “Mother of Harlots,” or any of her daughters, should also depart in order to escape her judgment.

We might not be reading this account in our English Bibles were it not for men such as John Wycliffe (1320-1384) and William Tyndale (1484-1536) who responded to the call to “*come out of her*” in Rev. 18:4. Those men were the first English translators of the Bible who, along with many thousands of others, “*came out*” of Roman Catholicism.

I personally remember when my mother, brother and I decided to “*come out*” of the Methodist (daughter of the Anglican, daughter of Rome) denomination (about the spring of

1952). We immediately, formally, joined the Church of the Open Door, in Los Angeles, under the ministry of J. Vernon McGee. At that time I also met the former pastor of the church, Louis T. Talbot, and purchased his booklet, *The Scarlet Woman*, which was a typical Fundamentalist exposition of Revelation 17 and 18. It was then that we first realized that we had taken a step away from one of the major granddaughters of Roman Catholicism. Talbot states in his book—

. . . the ‘great whore’ which John saw. . . is none other than apostate Christendom in its final form. This spectacular organization will include those, both Catholic and Protestant, who profess the name of Christ, yet deny ‘the faith once for all delivered unto the saints.’

She not only represents the Roman papacy as it is yet to be, but she also represents all the systems of Protestantism that are going to be ‘spewed out’ of the mouth of the Lord when the true church is taken away. (Pages 3 and 6.)

So it is that Roman Catholics and also most Protestants are guilty of “spiritual immorality” according to Revelation 17 and 18. Most Fundamental Bible teachers have long recognized this. Of course, most Fundamental teachers would also say that this only represented the Modernists and Liberals in Protestantism and not the independents. Nevertheless, they recognize that this “Old Whore, Mystery Babylon” exists right now, today, and the vast majority of professing Christians are partakers in this wicked system of religious perversion.

Even the Roman Catholic Church has long recognized that the identity of this woman is, in fact, the religious system with headquarters in Rome. However, in their commentary and Bible footnotes they state that it represented “ancient pagan Rome.” Their identity is accurate as far as recognizing that the prophecy is referring to the Roman religious system. They obviously fail to remember that this Scripture is not *past history*, but rather prophecy of the *future* from John’s perspective. In other words, it must be the *present* “pagan” Romanism. The present Roman religious system is well known as “*the Mother*” in Christendom. Some Catholics even brag about their system being “the Mother” of all churches in Christendom. However, here in Revelation 17 it is called by God, “*the Mother of Harlots and abominations of the earth.*” All religious harlotry in Christendom is sinful. Rome is simply the “Mother” of it all.

I, myself, back in 1957 while stationed in Germany, saw a large beautiful brochure which one soldier brought back from his leave in Rome where he visited the Vatican. He got the brochure at the Vatican’s own tourist souvenir store. The cover was a picture of the Woman sitting upon the Beast with seven heads and ten horns, and the title was *The Eternal City*. So the Vatican has actually never denied the identity of the Woman of Revelation 17.

Interestingly enough, in the first book of the Bible we have an account about the beginning of Babylon’s religious confusion, the famous “Tower of Babel.” Babylon became the fountainhead of perverted religious systems. In finality, the last book of the Bible closes with another account about Babylon; this time it is called “Mystery Babylon” because its identity is not understood by the blind, Christ rejecting world. The original Hebrew meaning of the word *Babel* was taken from the verb *balal* which meant “to mix, confound, pour out or confusion.”

However, in the Chaldean meaning of the same word, bab-el was *the gate of god*. Thus, Babylon became the supposed “Gate of God,” whereas, in reality, it was the beginning of the departure away from God. Alexander Hislop, in his famous book *The Two Babylons* (first published in 1913), indicates right on the cover that this work traces (in great detail) the worship of Nimrod and his wife right up to its final manifestation in **Papal Rome**.

3. “FILTHINESS OF THE SPIRIT”

No one denies that Christians can commit physical acts of fornication or adultery. It is interesting to note what Paul says about this in 1 Corinthians 6:15–20—

*Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?
Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them
members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know
that he who is **joined to a harlot is one body with her?**
For ‘the two’ He [God] says, ‘shall become one flesh.’
But he that is joined to the Lord is **one spirit with Him.**
. . . Or do you not know that your body is the temple of
the Holy Spirit Who is in you, Whom you have from God,
and you are not your own? For you were bought with a
price; therefore glorify God in your body
and in your spirit, which are God’s.*

Now the matter of interest to us in this passage is the realization that what is true of the physical would also be true of the spiritual. In the physical realm, to be joined to a harlot is to be a “**member of a harlot,**” and “**one body with her.**” And, in addition, Paul reveals that the believer who is joined to the Lord “**is one spirit with Him.**” Therefore, it is perfectly consistent to recognize that to be joined to a religious system other than that revealed in the Scriptures is to be **one spirit with a religious harlot**. Indeed, Paul goes on to say that there are two ways to “glorify God.” This should be done “in your body and **in your spirit.**”

It becomes obvious that for a believer to join himself to a religious “harlot,” as described in Revelation 17, would in effect be committing “spiritual immorality.” Indeed, this is precisely what is to be understood in 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1. There the apostle Paul admonishes Christians to stay away from the idols’ temples and any association with such false religious systems. To religiously associate with them would require a *spiritual cleansing*—

*. . . let us **cleanse** ourselves from all **filthiness** of the flesh and
the spirit, perfecting holiness [separation] **in the fear of God.***

It is obvious from this revelation that association religiously with another religious system would constitute “*spiritual filthiness.*” The English word “filthiness” here is the same as that used in Revelation 17:4 concerning the “filthiness” because of the association with that Roman “harlot’s” activity. In the Greek the “filthiness” mentioned in the 2 Corinthians passage

means “to stain or soil as by defilement or immorality.” The latter passage in Revelation 17 means “impurity or uncleanness” in the context of spiritual immorality. So it is perfectly clear that the believer can commit “spiritual impurity” in the sense of “spiritual immorality.” No one should therefore ever deny that “spiritual adultery” is a very apropos description of any compromising association with man-made religious systems.

4. ESPOUSAL TO JEHOVAH and ESPOUSAL TO CHRIST

It should be understood that the primary basis upon which God could consider Israel’s religious and spiritual departure from Him as “adultery” is because of the fact that God initially placed Israel in a spiritual marriage relationship with Himself. Moses first explained that God was “*jealous*” over Israel—Deut. 6:15. God showed special love and favor towards Israel—Deut. 7:6–11. As under contract, Israel had been “*espoused*” to Jehovah (see Jer. 2:2 [K.J.V.], and Ezek. 16:8). In the New King James this is translated “*betrothal*.” This is like Mary being “*espoused*” to Joseph in the New Testament (Matt. 1:18). Then Israel functioned as the very “*wife*” of Jehovah. Many passages state this, as Isa. 54:6; Jer. 3:1, 20; Ezek. 16:32; etc. Therefore, when Israel began participating in idolatry God accused her of being adulterous and acting as a harlot (see Jer. 3:1–14; and Ezek. 16:1–34, and 44–59; etc.). This continued even to the extent that God separated from and eventually “divorced” Israel—Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:6–10, etc. And yes, amazing as it may seem, one day in the future God will take Israel back to Himself—Isa. 54:5–10; Hosea 2:1–23 and 3:1–4. So, in light of all this, it is perfectly clear that God could refer to Israel’s defection into idolatrous practices as “adulterous, whoredom, harlotry and filthiness.” It was a spiritual departure from her unique relationship with God.

Now we all know that a similar truth is made in regards to the Church’s relationship to Jesus Christ. There is a spiritual “*jealousy*” and “*espousal*,” 2 Corinthians 11:2—

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

No doubt, Paul, as Christ’s messenger, is acting on behalf of Jesus Christ and speaking through Him. Then Paul goes right on to speak of *other Christs* and *other gospels* which would be a temptation to the saints to cause them a distraction and departure from their walk in the truth and separation unto Christ (11:3–15). Obviously Paul feared that the Corinthians had already entertained some preachers who made great claims of authentication, but were actually “false apostles.” In this context, for the Corinthians to carelessly follow these men would mean a defection from their unique “espousal” to Christ. This would most certainly equate “*spiritual immorality*” on behalf of the Corinthian saints (and any other saints as well), just like Israel following “*other lovers*” as accused by the Hebrew prophets.

Some have pointed out that “espousal” under the Law was as good as being considered married, and any immorality would legally be grounds for divorce, just as if the wife had committed physical adultery. So, though it is true that the Church is actually yet to receive her

formal marriage to Christ (Eph. 5:25–27), yet even in the Ephesians 5 passage the Church’s relationship to Christ is now considered as a present example to Christian husbands and wives.

*Husbands, love your wives, **even as** Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify it, having **cleansed** it by the laver of the water in the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having any spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*

Does anyone want to argue that this “cleansing” process only involves physical sins? I hope not, because as we already know, there is also “filthiness of the spirit” specified by the Word of God. Indeed, as was true in the case of Israel whose flirtation and interaction with idolatry constituted “spiritual immorality,” so it is that the Church’s flirtation and participation with that “old Mother of Harlots” or one of her daughters constitutes “spiritual immorality” as well.

Thus it is, that the basis God had for the warning and condemnation of Israel is the same as Christ has for the warnings and condemnation to the Church. Thank God, the Church will be “cleansed from her filthiness” prior to the actual marriage. And in addition, the Church is likened to the very “flesh and bone” of Christ which also precludes any divorce.

The apostle Paul was also inspired to write in verse 32—

This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church

If we really love our *Head*, how much more Christians should totally avoid the unbiblical practices of those who minister in some form of “Mystery Babylon.” These two “Mysteries” as revealed in the Scriptures—“Mystery Babylon” and the “great mystery of the Church which is Christ’s body”—stand in stark spiritual contrast to one another.

5. “FELLOWSHIP WITH DEMONS”

“I would not that you have *fellowship with demons*,” the apostle Paul said (1 Cor. 10:20). And again, “You cannot drink the cup of demons” or “eat at the table of demons” (verse 21). To do so, Paul explains would be to “PROVOKE THE LORD TO JEALOUSY” (verse 22).

This is another reminder that Christians are able to have associations with idolatrous religious systems which would in turn amount to “*spiritual immorality*,” thus “*provoking the Lord’s jealousy*.”

Some of the Corinthians thought that since they were “knowledgeable” and knew the truth, that the idols and the idols’ temples were just false and empty of reality, so therefore they could have harmless association with them, and even eat their good meat without any evil effect (1 Corinthians 8:1–6) upon themselves.

Paul corrected this brash assumption two ways: first, by revealing that they are “provoking the Lord to Jealousy.” That fact alone should cause any spiritually intelligent believer to follow God’s directives instead of his own selfish assumptions.

Secondly, Paul points out that the unsaved don’t have the believers’ superior knowledge, and they (the unbelievers) partake of those things in spiritual deception. Consequently when these neighborly people (unbelieving “brethren”) see the Christians participating in some of their idolatrous religious activities they naturally think that the Christians are sanctioning idolatry. Paul explains that as a consequence the Christian’s gospel is nullified and they (the unbelievers) could be lost in hell (“perish”) as a result. (See 1 Cor. 8:7–13.)

Billy Graham is a good example of fornicating with that “old Whore.” In the midst of some of his campaigns he had “wonderful fellowship” with certain Catholic Bishops and Cardinals as he watched them celebrate their Mass. Graham even went so far as to sanction their ungodly Mass ritual saying that it does not contradict anything in the Gospel. Now this may have allowed multitudes of Catholics to come to his crusades, but in reality, what does this do to the gospel he preaches, other than to equate it with Rome’s liquor? How happy Satan must have been when Billy Graham thus “ADULTERATED” THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST by his walk.

Consequently the inspired apostle pleads with all of us in 1 Cor. 10:28–33,

But if anyone says to you, ‘This was offered to idols,’
do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you . . .
Why should my [selfish] liberty be [mis-] judged
by another man’s [idolatrous] conscience? . . .
Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do,
do all to the glory of God.
Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Gentiles
or to the Church of God.

A closing note:

Remember, as I first stated in this study, as a very young Christian I had mixed emotions when I realized that Israel’s immorality was not physical, and that Israel was actually, in the main, a very wholesome society. So it is that many Christians today will attempt to justify their association with any man-made religious system, either Catholic, Protestantism or independent because of the many “good people (even ‘born again, saints of God being used of God’)” who are in them. Nevertheless, this does not change the fact or the nature of what God calls “WHOREDOM.” And God does not want “good Christians” practicing “spiritual adultery”! No one would argue that King Solomon was not a humble saint asking for God’s wisdom, and that Solomon was mightily used of God. However, when Solomon forsook God’s wisdom and followed his own “smarts,” he participated in a vast number of idolatrous systems. As a result a horrible judgment came—the nation of Israel was virtually ripped apart.

The simple principle as announced by Paul should always be followed—

Follow (imitate) me, just as I also follow (imitate) Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).