



I really appreciate Robert's clear and accurate description of God's heart in the discipline of His children. There is a deep love and compassion in how God pursues the hearts of men and women He has redeemed. Robert speaks to the role of biblical community in God's redeeming of His bride through loving and redemptive discipline. It would be incredibly unloving for God to not correct His children and this work highlights the deep love of God through church discipline.

Lee Lewis

Forth Worth Campus Pastor, The Village Church, Fort Worth, TX

One of the most painful things to do as a pastor is to teach and lead out in the discipline of the church. We need need courage. This books helps encourage us as we obey the call for the purity of the gospel through the local church.

Darrin Patrick

Lead Pastor of The Journey, St. Louis, MI

Author of *Church Planter: The Man, The Message, The Mission, and For the City*



Books about church discipline tend to treat well one or two areas on the topic. Robert Cheong's contribution is unique, then, for its breadth: it is scripturally rich, theologically robust, narratively engaging, practically saturated, and ecclesially helpful. It is also unique because its author, a scholar pastor, has been engaged in hundreds of church discipline cases either personally or by means of counseling and training others, so his book reflects a wisdom forged through experience.

Here are three highlights that await you: the narrative opening and closing of each chapter will grip your attention so that you won't be able to put the book down, the gospel centered writing will give you a fresh perspective on the nature and purposes of church discipline, and the appendixes will treat your questions about how to engage in the actual process of redeeming the church through discipline.

Gregg R. Allison

Professor of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY

The subject of church discipline is no walk in the park. People's lives hang in the balance. My friend Robert clearly shows that church discipline is an integral part of gospel centered ministry both theologically and practically. He provides a step by step guide so that the reader understands not only what discipline is but how to go about it. In the process, he gives us a model for the body of Christ ministering to one another in the grace, compassion, and humility characteristic of the gospel. This is a must read for every pastor.

Rob Green

Pastor of Counseling and Seminary Ministries, Faith Church, Lafayette, IN



I appreciate this book for three reasons. First, it's theologically rich, anchoring church discipline in the glorious drama of God's redeeming work. Second, it's pastorally wise, written by a seasoned shepherd who knows the joy and pain of leading and protecting the flock. And third, it's practically helpful – the appendices alone are worth the price of the book. Robert's work on this important subject is a gift to every gospel-loving church leader and church member.

Bob Thune

Co-author of *The Gospel-Centered Life*
Lead Pastor, Coram Deo Church Community, Omaha, NE

Many churches are realizing that their weakness stems in part from a failure to follow what the scriptures teach about church discipline. Robert Cheong's book is a wonderfully practical and refreshingly gracious treatment of the topic. Even those who don't subscribe to everything Cheong says will find this book to be a significant help. Indeed, the appendices are a must read, for they are full of practical advice on how to carry out the process of church discipline and restoration. I suspect many pastors and church leaders will be turning regularly to Cheong's work for instruction.

Thomas R. Schreiner

James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY

I followed a pastor and mentor who faithfully led our church to practice biblical church discipline. Of all the comments and expressions of appreciation I could make about my predecessor Bill Goode, that is by far one of the most important. His courage to be a biblical pastor made my job much easier and I am forever indebted to him. The church of Jesus Christ needs to carefully heed what my friend Robert Cheong has written. This book is wise, winsome, gospel-centered and full of grace. Some of what it teaches will require taking hard and sometimes unpopular steps. Do it for many reasons, including the respect and appreciation you will receive from the pastor who follows you.

Stephen Viars

Senior Pastor, Faith Church, Lafayette, IN

It has taken courage for Robert Cheong to write this book. He is knowingly wading into an area of much confusion and regret in churches. Church discipline is a ministry which, even if it is done well, it can be a painful experience for all involved. So it also takes the heart of a shepherd to speak to those leading through church discipline or



living somewhere in it. Robert has the courage and shepherd's heart – and the Gospel clarity – to help us all in difficult times where church discipline is the redemptive way ahead.

Andy Farmer

Pastor of Community and Care, Covenant Fellowship Church, Glen Mills, PA

How we engage sin in the church reflects our view of God and His redemptive character. Robert Cheong carefully guides readers through how his local church, Sojourn Community Church, shepherds hearts back toward Jesus through restorative and instructive church discipline. *God Redeeming His Bride* is a timely addition to any pastor's – or church member for that matter – field manual for real-life ministry. I commend it to pastors who desire faithful application of God's Word in every aspect of their ministry, especially the difficult ones. This book is meant to be taken with you into the trenches of spiritual warfare.

Ed Stetzer

President, LifeWay Research, Nashville, TN



This book is a treasure-trove of grace, wisdom, and gospel truths regarding the difficult topic of church discipline, drawn from a pastor's hard-earned experience with the reality of sin and the power of the gospel. Robert Cheong shows how biblical church discipline is rooted in God's mission to bring redemption to sinners and sufferers through the work of Jesus proclaimed by the church. We see how God calls his church to participate in his relentless, loving pursuit of his people. Filled with Christ-centered theology, gracious wisdom, and practical advice, this handbook is highly recommended for pastors and ministry leaders.

Justin Holcomb

Executive Director, *The Resurgence*

Lead Pastor, Mars Hill Church U-District

Adjunct Professor of Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Seattle, WA

The title itself—*God Redeeming His Bride*—should alert us that this is not your typical book on “church discipline.” Dr. Cheong does not disappoint as he places church discipline in its proper place as the corporate relational process of speaking God's truth in love for God's glory and the maturity and purity of God's people. Eminently practical while deeply theological, this gospel-centered approach to church discipline is a ground-breaking book that every pastor and every church leadership team should read and apply.

Robert W. Kellemen

Executive Director, Biblical Counseling Coalition, Lafayette, IN



God Redeeming His Bride is one of the best tools available to the church today that can help us recover the critical and pastoral practice of church discipline. Robert Cheong proves himself to be a modern day Richard Baxter as he has given us a thoroughly biblical, deeply theological, eminently practical, and easily accessible book I believe God will use to bring greater health to our local churches.

Joe Thorn

Author, *Note to Self: The Discipline of Preaching to Yourself*; Lead Pastor, Redeemer Fellowship
St. Charles, IL

Robert Cheong is committed to fostering gospel-centered communities that express the full range of God's love toward one another, even when it comes to correction and discipline. He expands our view of church discipline considerably by mining the riches of God's Word and grand redemptive story—beyond the handful of classic “church discipline” passages—and casting a vision for the whole church living as a patient, loving, wise, intentional, and personally engaged community. He's packed the appendices with invaluable practical guidelines to help us diligently work out the details.

Mike Wilkerson

Author of *Redemption: Freed by Jesus from the Idols We Worship and the Wounds We Carry*
Pastor and Director of Biblical Counseling, Mars Hill Church Seattle, WA

It is one thing to believe, in theory, in what God says in the Bible about the necessity of church discipline. It is another thing altogether to know how to navigate the process in the case of an unrepentant, falling church member. In this book, Robert Cheong, with biblical brilliance and pastoral compassion, provides a model for churches and leaders. Even those who hold to a different model of church government can benefit from seeing Robert Cheong trace out a path. This book is obviously the result of many years of prayer and practice. Read it not only for its helpful information, but also for its heart.

Russell D. Moore

Author, *Adopted for Life and Tempted and Tried*
Dean, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY

It was impossible for me to read this book without being personally convicted by my lack of faithfulness to live out the radical love of Jesus in the context of a community on mission. My failure to pursue people who have sinned and hurt the church was shown to be significant. Additionally, the book is full of sage advice on exactly HOW to walk through the rigors of church discipline. The day after I read it, I found myself quoting it





several times. It's hard for me to imagine someone writing a more helpful, practical, gospel-centered book on church discipline.

Abe Meysenburg
Pastor and Elder, Soma Communities, Tacoma, WA

Robert Cheong's book has become my new favorite on the painfully glorious topic of church discipline. Our brother has given us biblical moorings, gospel implications and practical wisdom for doing the hard and heart work of discipline in the life of the local church. This book will help many Christians understand why John Calvin insisted that church discipline is one of the three essential marks of the church. But it will also make the gospel, itself, more beautiful to many, as Jesus' passionate love for his bride is explained and applied in such a profound and practical way.

Scotty Smith
Founding Pastor
Christ Community Church, Franklin, TN
Adjunct Professor of Practical Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary,
Redeemer Theological Seminary, Westminster Theological Seminary



As difficult and painful as it can be, church discipline is a crucial obligation that Jesus has given to us as his people. But how do you do it? As a pastor, how do you both care for those who are in sin and at the same time lead the church as a whole to exercise its duty to exercise discipline? And why is church discipline necessary in the first place? These are some of the questions that Robert Cheong addresses in his book *God Redeeming His Bride*. Setting the concept of church discipline in the context of the Gospel and God's work of redemption, Cheong gives highly practical advice about every step in the process – encouraging and teaching along the way. This will be a helpful book for any pastor facing the prospect of leading his church through the difficult – but ultimately redemptive – process of church discipline.

Greg Gilbert
Author, *What is the Gospel?*
Senior Pastor, Third Avenue Baptist Church, Louisville, KY



ROBERT K. CHEONG

GOD REDEEMING HIS BRIDE



A HANDBOOK FOR
CHURCH DISCIPLINE

CHRISTIAN
FOCUS



Robert K. Cheong serves as Pastor of Care at Sojourn Community Church in Louisville, Kentucky. Before receiving a M.Div. and Ph.D. at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, he served in the nuclear-powered Navy followed by almost a decade in the corporate world. Robert is married to Karen and they have three grown children. He has a passion to equip the church to engage in God's mission through gospel care in community.

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FOREWORD

I love the church. I say that without embarrassment or qualification. The bulk of my life and ministry has reflected, albeit inadequately, that passionate conviction. I am not starry-eyed in my love for the church. I know that the church we all experience is far from the church of my dreams, or more accurately the church of my theology. But that notwithstanding, 'love the church' should be every Christian's motto. Why? Because Christ does. The Bible tells us that explicitly in Ephesians 5:25. It is also implicit throughout the whole narrative of Scripture where we discover that God's purpose has always been to have a people for Himself; a people He reveals His glory to and a people He displays His glory through. If God loves the church with such passion and ruthless determination as the Bible story shows, then we as that church, should love her too.

Which is why the subject matter of this book is of such vital importance, and why my friend Robert Cheong has done us all such a huge favour in writing it. But he has not chosen an easy subject for his first book. I suspect that if church discipline were billed as a conference theme, it is unlikely the conference would attract a large, paying audience. The subject of church discipline will probably never 'go viral'. It is far too old school for that. It is not on the list of those things which satisfy our seemingly insatiable thirst for hype and the *avant-garde*. But church discipline is critical. It is not a topic of indulgence for the theology geeks among us. It is a topic



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for all of us who are concerned about the reputation of Christ, the health of His church and the credibility of the gospel. It really is that important.

Hebrews 12:5-11 tells us that the Lord disciplines those He loves. To *not* be disciplined is a mark of disinterest and lack of affection. It is a sign of illegitimacy (v. 8). So, given the significance and importance of discipline in the Lord's dealings with us, why is it such a neglected practice in the church?

I suspect there are a number of reasons; one is certainly image. Even the word *discipline* needs a make-over. In our world, discipline conjures images of authoritarianism, heavy-handedness, excessive control and hypocrites. I would suggest that if the average church member was asked about what came into their minds at the mention of church discipline, most would come up with words or images like ex-communication, shunning the offender, and very uncomfortable church meetings when someone was 'put out of fellowship'.

This book rectifies such prejudice. In these pages, church discipline is not given a face lift, for the simple reason that it doesn't need it. What Robert does is remove the misconceptions so it can be seen for the beautiful thing it really is. Here is his working definition of church discipline: *Church discipline is God's ongoing, redeeming work through His living Word and people as they fight the fight of faith together to exalt Christ and protect the purity of His Bride.* That surely has to go a long way in recapturing the dynamic and glory of God's instrument of maturity! What I really love about the book is the way that Robert's love for Christ, his love for the body of Christ and his understanding of the gospel of Christ shine through on every page. This is not primarily a book about strategies and procedure. It is about God's love for His people, His unfailing passion for our holiness and His unswerving commitment to His own glory. That's not to say that this is all about principles, to the extent that it neglects the practical details. There is plenty of help and direction in taking us through the necessary mechanics of implementing discipline at all levels. But the weight of the book is where it should be – on God's character and purpose as revealed in the the gospel. The book is helpful, insightful and well written. Most of all, it is deeply and consistently biblical.

Although I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, I venture to suggest that this is a book whose time has come. As



Foreword

I travel around, speaking with church leaders, listening to church people, I get an impression that people are becoming increasingly aware that things need to change, and increasingly dissatisfied with the status quo. A profession-based, lowest common-denominator Christianity is far from what the Lord had in mind and is never going to commend Christ to a lost world. The call of the gospel remains what it has always been: 'Be holy as I am holy'. An indispensable means to that end is the church being the church in the way we speak the gospel to each other, live the gospel out with each other and apply the gospel to each other's lives as we do life-on-life together on-mission.

I have been in Robert's home and spent time with his family. I have heard him talk about his love for Christ and His Church. I have watched him interact with colleagues and engage with those for whom he has responsibility. All this to say that there is a real connection between the author and the content of this book. This is not a theoretician writing. This is a man of integrity, who not only believes what he writes but lives it.

One of the key passages relating to church discipline is Matthew 18:15-20. It is surely significant that immediately prior to that, Matthew records Jesus speaking about the temptation to sin (vv. 7-9) and then telling the story of the lost sheep (vv. 10-14). Church discipline is God's appointed means of rescuing those of us who fall into temptation and walk away from the Lord and His people. The three teaching units together remind us of our vulnerability, our preciousness and our mutual responsibility.

This book, like no other I know on this subject, captures those truths. May the Lord use it to help us, as His church, become the beautiful bride she was purchased to be.

Enjoy grace,

Steve Timmis

Co-founder of *The Crowded House*, Co-founder of *Porterbrook Network*,
Director of *Acts 29 Europe*
Sheffield, England



INTRODUCTION

THE BACK STORY

Writing a book on church discipline was never on my radar. But God had other plans. In 2009 Sojourn Community Church removed eight members from our fellowship for various scriptural violations that were embedded in months of rebellion and refusal to submit to Jesus and His church. This was the first time in the church's nine-year history in which we exercised God's redemptive steps of removal. The learning curve and heartache were immense. God was abundantly gracious as He guided us through the escalating and expanding movement of church discipline with not only the eight people we eventually removed from membership, but with the countless other situations where His people were intentionally pursued with the gospel, repented and came back to Christ.

During 2009, out of sheer desperation and necessity, I developed Sojourn's Church Discipline Guidelines which we posted on our website. As churches across the country downloaded and reviewed the guidelines, a number of church planters and pastors expressed the desire to develop such guidelines for their churches, knowing the significance of and necessity for church discipline. The overwhelming feedback was that they wanted practical help in navigating through the various aspects of church discipline.

As I took a step of faith to write about church discipline, I knew that my limited experience and perspective needed broadening. In



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the fall of 2010, I was blessed to interview thirty pastors across the United States and United Kingdom about their experiences with shepherding God's people through discipline. Pastors from Acts29, Sovereign Grace, Southern Baptist, Presbyterian, Anglican and various non-denominational churches participated in this rich discussion. In interviewing two to three pastors during a given conference call a dynamic and synergistic dialogue ensued that resulted in us learning from one another in encouraging and humbling ways. Another exciting aspect of this endeavor was that I was able to listen to the pastoral hearts of men who shepherded God's people with great care and conviction. I walked away from every interview encouraged by the beautiful ways in which God was growing His churches as they proclaimed and lived out His Word through church discipline.

WHY ANOTHER BOOK?

Every author battles with this daunting question. As I considered the experiences from Sojourn and other churches, along with much prayer, I began to envision how another book on church discipline could add to what has already been written. The bottom line is that another book on church discipline had to serve the church by offering both a gospel-centered perspective and practice so that it would be helpful to ministry leaders—from pastors, deacons, and small group leaders. There are four global reasons why you should read “yet another book” on church discipline:

First, you will learn how to deal with those rebelling against God primarily by understanding how God deals with you in your ongoing rebellion against Him. You cannot lead others in carrying out God's discipline if you and your people do not have a clear understanding of who God is and how He lovingly disciplines us as His bride.

Second, you will understand church discipline within God's larger story of redemption. You can easily misunderstand and distort God's design for church discipline if you carry out this important function of the church separate from His redemptive story as Jesus prepares His bride for an eternal union.

Third, you will see how God redeems His children impacted by the discipline process, from those being directly disciplined to their



Introduction

family members, small group members, church leaders and the entire church. God grows His people when they are forced to wrestle with the profound truths of the gospel as sin is exposed and as the church fights the fight of faith together as a community of God's people.

Fourth, you will walk away with a better understanding of the realities of the gospel life, from the continual need for faith and repentance in the midst of the struggles of life to God's ongoing work of redemption in and through His people.

God Redeeming His Bride

As the title implies, we will be spending a lot of time looking at God's redeeming work in and through His Bride, the people of God, whom He calls to engage in His gospel mission. So let's take a moment to lay some groundwork so that we can journey together with a common understanding of three major themes found throughout this book: (1) redemption, (2) the bride of Christ and (3) gospel mission.



WHAT IS REDEMPTION?



Throughout salvation history, God's redemption can be understood primarily as the deliverance of His people from the oppression of suffering and sin, whether it is from the slavery to enemy nations or from the slavery to indwelling sin.¹ But ultimate redemption in the gospel story is seen as God delivers His people from the tyranny of the devil and the condemning power of sin through the forgiving and redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). If the forgiveness of sins is not amazing enough, God goes above and beyond what we could ever ask or think as He puts a paradoxical spin on the notion of redemption. On the one hand He frees us from the bondage of sin but, on the other hand, He lovingly makes us slaves to righteousness, or slaves to Himself (Rom. 6:18, 22). In other words, we not only have been set free to live with God but set free to live for God, which is true and ultimate freedom.

This divine rescue is beautifully displayed from cover to cover in the Scriptures as God's story of redemption unfolds. The Old

¹ See I. H. Marshall's work, "The Development of the Concept of Redemption in the New Testament;" Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, pp. 367-369; House, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 23, 292, 295.





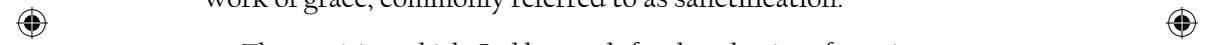
GOD REDEEMING HIS BRIDE

Testament highlights God's redemptive work as He repeatedly delivers His undeserving people out of their plight of sin and suffering. But as the New Testament opens, we see God's redemption revealed in a way never seen before. At this moment in history, God sent the perfect Redeemer to set His people free by bearing our wickedness and enduring our affliction so that we might have life in Him. As the New Testament moves beyond the Gospel narratives, we see God advancing His gospel mission and bringing glory to Himself by raising dead people to life in Christ (Eph. 2:1-3) and redeeming His bride through the trials of life so that they conform more and more to His image.²

Knowing that our redemption is accomplished by Jesus' finished work on the cross, how should we think about God's ongoing redemptive work?

Redemption Accomplished and Applied

Theologian John Murray offers a helpful way to look at God's redemption not just as an historical event, but also as a continuing work of grace, commonly referred to as sanctification:



The provision which God has made for the salvation of men is even more strikingly manifold. For this provision has in view the manifoldness of man's need and exhibits the overflowing abundance of God's goodness, wisdom, grace, and love. This superabundance appears in the eternal counsel of God respecting salvation; it appears in the historic *accomplishment of redemption* by the work of Christ once and for all; and it appears in the *application of redemption* continuously and progressively till it reaches its consummation in the liberty of the glory of the children of God. When we think of the application of redemption we must not think of it as one simple and indivisible act. It comprises a series of acts and processes. To mention some, we have calling, regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, glorification.... Each has its own distinct meaning, function, and purpose in the action and grace of God [emphasis mine].³

God not only accomplished our redemption through the death and resurrection of Jesus, but He continues His redemptive work in our

² Phil. 1:6; 1 Pet. 1:6-9; James 1:2-4; Gal. 5:16-25; 1 John 1:8-10; Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:14-16.

³ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 79-80.



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lives through our never-ending relationship with Jesus. Pastor and theologian John Stott offers additional insights on God's ongoing redemption in the lives of His people:

But it is a moral bondage from which Christ has ransomed us ... redemption is a synonym for the "forgiveness of sins," now as "the curse of the law" ... Yet even our release from these captives does not complete our redemption. There is more to come. For Christ "gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness," to liberate us from *all* the ravages of the Fall. This we have not experienced.... The New Testament people of God, though already redeemed from guilt and judgment, are yet waiting for the "day of redemption" when we shall be made perfect. This will include "the redemption of our bodies."⁴

Why is it important for us to understand God's relentless redemptive work in us as His people? Even though God has called us to holiness (Lev. 19:2; 1 Pet. 1:15-16) we still struggle with the evilness of sin as we live in a fallen world, awaiting "the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30; cf. Rom. 8:23).

Crying Out for Redemption

Like the psalmists, we cry out for God to redeem us as we find ourselves entangled by the affliction of sin and oppressed by evil.⁵ In the same way Paul saw his sinfulness with intense clarity and felt the weight of his wretchedness.⁶ He cried out and groaned for deliverance, as he eagerly awaited the day of redemption, the day when all of the redeemed will no longer have any trace of sin and death. This is the sobering reality of living in the "already but not yet."

But we do not struggle and cry out like those who are without hope. Our prayers and pleas are not dispersed into the darkness of the cosmos but are directed to and gathered by our Deliverer who

4 John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 178.

5 Pss. 44:23-26; 55:17-19; 69:17-18; 119:133-135.

6 Rom. 7:24-25; Gal. 5:16-18. Scholars have been split whether Paul is describing his pre-Christian or post-Christian experience in the Rom. 7 passage. Schreiner states that this passage can be interpreted either way since "Paul does not intend to distinguish believers from unbelievers in this text" since the main point of this section is that the law does not have power over sin and cannot transform human beings (Schreiner, *Romans*, 390).



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hears and answers our requests made according to His will (Ps. 116; 1 John 5:14-15). Like Paul, we can cry out in desperation knowing that Jesus Christ is our Redeemer.

Jesus Our Redeemer and Redemption

We can easily view our redemption either in terms of a theological concept or as a process of change. Redemption is both a real concept and about change. But redemption is much more than a concept or process. Redemption is a person. Jesus is not only our Redeemer but He also is our redemption (1 Cor. 1:30; Luke 21:27-28).

Why is this distinction important for us to understand and cling to? By understanding this truth, the gospel becomes more beautiful and intimate, the love of Christ becomes higher, deeper and wider, and His love, which is better than knowing about any concept or process, compels us to no longer live for ourselves but for Jesus (2 Cor. 5:14-15; Eph. 3:16-19). Our relationship with our Redeemer is our redemption. And it is in and through our relationship with Him that we, as the bride of Christ, experience God's gracious and ongoing redemption.



THE BRIDE OF CHRIST



In His sovereign wisdom, God showcases marriage throughout His redemptive history. In Genesis, we see the first marriage between the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden. In Revelation, we see the final and ultimate marriage that will take place at the end of time—the marriage between Jesus and His bride, the church. We can respond in a variety of ways as we seek to understand our God-given identity as the bride of Christ.

Most, if not all, women dream about marriage. They spend hours envisioning whom they will marry, their wedding dress and their wedding ceremony. Consequently, women can easily relate to being the bride of Christ. What woman wouldn't want to be in an everlasting relationship with one who offers perfect love, protection and provision?

There are some men who dream about marriage in a similar way. But no man dreams of being a bride! Men conceptually understand that the church is the bride of Christ but they can stumble when they try to make sense of this notion for themselves. Before men dismiss this biblical concept, let's consider a couple of questions.





Introduction

Is it right for us as men and women to understand our God-given identity as the bride of Christ at the personal level? Absolutely! But how can men get around the difficulty regarding this gospel reality? Let's consider a line of reasoning that will explain why God's intentional metaphor does not and should not clash with any aspect of biblical manhood. We need to understand why our all-wise God chose this particular metaphor, though knowing that such imagery could serve as an obstacle for men.

To begin with, God knows that we, as finite and fallible beings, need concrete ways to understand the infinite and perfect truths of the gospel. Not only did God create marriage, but He also designed marriage to give us both a conceptual and concrete understanding of our supernatural relationship with Him in Christ. There is not a man or woman alive who does not grasp the privileged blessing of the covenant commitment associated with marriage.

Next, God knows that the "bride" metaphor has its limitations. That is why, within this overarching bride metaphor, God gives men a specific role as He compares the marriage between a husband and wife to the marriage between Christ and the church (cf. Eph. 5:22-33). In this passage, the man reflects Christ in his sacrificial love for his wife while the woman reflects the church in her submission to and respect for her husband. Interestingly, men don't struggle in seeing themselves as Christ in this metaphor, but instead struggle to love their wives in selfless and sacrificial ways. Additionally, in other passages God refers to His people as His "sheep," "the body of Christ," "the temple of the Holy Spirit" and "branches" as He speaks with vivid imagery about our spiritually intimate relationship with Jesus.⁷ But we don't take offense at these metaphors because we know that we are not animals, body parts, buildings or vegetation. We don't focus on the literal meaning associated with the metaphors but on the powerful truths that the literary device is meant to convey.

God has brought us into an incomparable relationship with Christ where we experience everlasting life, peace, satisfaction, joy and pleasure.⁸ Therefore, instead of focusing on being a literal bride, men should focus instead on the deep and profound truths

⁷ John 10:1-18; 1 Cor. 6:15-20; John 15:1-13

⁸ John 14:6, 27; Matt. 5:6; Ps. 16:11



GOD REDEEMING HIS BRIDE

associated with how Christ loves them, since every man, like every woman, longs to be deeply loved in an everlasting relationship.

The souls of both men and women hunger and thirst to be loved in ways described in Ephesians 5. Christ loves His bride sacrificially, dying for her so that she did not have to suffer the wrath of God for her sinfulness (v. 25). Christ cleanses His bride “by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (vv. 26-27). Christ loves His bride in the same way He loves Himself, as He nourishes and cherishes her (v. 28). Christ holds fast to His bride since He is one with her (v. 29). If we take a moment to meditate on these truths found in just this one passage, we will all find ourselves drawing near to Christ in the same way a bride draws near to her ever-faithful and loving husband.

The gospel clearly reveals that Christ loves His bride perfectly. But His infinite and redeeming love has a purpose. Jesus pours out His love into our hearts so that we will be compelled by His love to live for Him and not for ourselves (Rom. 5:5; 2 Cor. 5:14-15). Jesus calls each and every one of His children to join Him as He carries out His gospel mission in an imperfect world. Let’s take a look at what this gospel mission is all about.

GOSPEL MISSION

God’s mission is about making His glory known as He redeems a people for His own possession, people zealous to be a part of His mission as they reflect their Redeemer in word and deed.⁹ In other words, when God saves us by His grace, we not only become His people but His mission becomes our mission. But what exactly is our mission as the bride of Christ?

While carrying out His mission on earth, Jesus summed up all of the law, prophets and writings by two great commandments (Matt. 22:37-40), calling us to love God and others. God makes it clear that we love Him when we obey His commandments and love others.¹⁰ From God’s double-love command, our mission is to live by faith in obedience to our Creator and Redeemer as we love one another,

⁹ Ps. 106:8; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9; Eph. 2:10

¹⁰ John 14:15, 21, 23-24; 13:34-35; 1 John 4:20-21



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knowing that believing and doing His will gives life to us and gives glory to Him. But when we fail to trust and obey, God calls us to repent from our wicked unbelief and sinful disobedience. Such an intentional life of faith and repentance with Jesus and others describes what it means to pursue holiness. God sanctifies, or changes us by His grace, as we strive to live out the gospel with such intentionality so that we reflect our Redeemer in increasing ways (1 John 4:12, 17).

After Jesus was resurrected from the dead and before He ascended to heaven He commissioned His disciples to bear witness to His gospel message and mission.¹¹ Specifically, in what most would consider the preeminent passage that summarizes the church's commission, Jesus commands His followers to make disciples through His authority, by going out, baptizing those who repent and believe, and teaching them to observe all He commanded (Matt. 28:18-20). From this passage, our mission is to be disciples as we make disciples.

Combining the great commandment with the great commission results in the church's great mission. God's mission for His church focuses on both the church and the world. Therefore, the mission of the church is to glorify God by worshiping Him with our whole life, as we love one another in the church and world so that we would trust and obey God by His grace. Such a mission reflects our Redeemer, redeems us as His people and draws others to His beauty and glory through faith and repentance.

Given the topic of this book, we will look extensively at how church discipline plays an integral role in God's mission through His church.

DEFINING CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Even though there is much to discuss before we can more fully understand how God disciplines us through His church, let's take a look at the definition of church discipline that will inform and guide the rest of the book:

God's ongoing, redeeming work through His living Word and people as they fight the fight of faith together to exalt Christ and protect the purity of His Bride.

¹¹ Matt. 28:16-20; Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:8. See DeYoung and Gilbert's book, *What is the Mission of the Church?* for a robust discussion of the nature of the church's mission.



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Church discipline is about God and how He disciplines us, as His children, in our ongoing struggle with sin. But it is important for us to see that God's discipline is part of His mission of redemption, not something that is separate or different. In summary, God redeems us in our rebellion through His discipline.

In what we commonly call church discipline, God uses His living Word and people to confront our evil and unbelieving thoughts and desires that lead us to fall away from Him as our living God (Heb. 4:12; 3:12-14). God calls us to pursue, encourage and warn one another¹² in the midst of our sinful struggles in ways that reflect how He mercifully deals with us.¹³ The goal of such pursuit is for the wayward ones to repent of their sin and turn back to Jesus, experiencing His restoring love (Isa. 55:6-7) and seeing His incomparable glory even as they are progressively being transformed into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). Such ongoing efforts exalt Christ and protect the purity of His church. As the bride of Christ participates in God's mission by faith and obedience while serving as agents of His disciplining work, the church individually and collectively experiences and is changed by God's redeeming love.

It is important for us to understand that God's redemptive work is not only focused on the individuals who are outwardly rebellious, but also on everyone who is involved—from family members, those in the same small group, those in the same social circles to those in the entire church. We will see how God simultaneously works at both the individual and corporate levels as the book follows John and Kathy's struggles to live out the gospel in the midst of marital unfaithfulness. In John's waywardness we will also see how God accomplishes His redeeming work in Kathy, Tom and Sharon, who are their small group leaders, Pastor Greg and the entire church as they pursue and pray for John.

Not only does God wish individual believers to be holy as He is holy, He also wishes His Church to reflect His purity. We recognize

¹² Rom. 14:19; Heb. 10:24-25; Col. 1:28

¹³ Ps. 23:6; Rom. 15:5; Jer. 11:7-8



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that there may be some who are members of our local churches who are not truly Christ's disciples. Only God knows who are His children and who are not. We are to discern a person's confession by the fruit of their lives. This is one of the reasons why the Lord gave specific instructions to the Church to remove those who chronically refuse to submit to Christ and His church since the church is not able to affirm their profession of faith (cf. Matt. 18:17). We will see that in such cases God still does His redemptive work as God's people remove "the leaven" as they trust and obey (1 Cor. 5) and as those removed experience a foretaste of God's eternal judgment.

Now that we established a common framework for understanding redemption, the "bride" metaphor and gospel mission, along with a definition of church discipline, it's now time to see what lies ahead.

NAVIGATING THROUGH THE BOOK

It is helpful to know where you are going before you start any journey. An overview helps you to navigate through the details found throughout the chapters without getting lost. A global perspective also allows you to see how the individual chapters build upon each other to provide a comprehensive understanding.

God Redeeming His Bride is divided into three parts, with every chapter ending with questions to help you to reflect and respond to the truths presented in the chapter.

Part 1 focuses on "Our Redeeming God and His Bride." Chapter 1 highlights our triune God who entered space and time to create and redeem a people for His own possession. Chapter 2 reveals the unlikely bride of Christ who has been given a radical life and mission in the kingdom of God. Chapter 3 takes a look at God's counter-intuitive ways displayed in His story of redemption as He shames the wise and the strong through the cross, as well as through church discipline.

Given the nature and mission of our redeeming God and His bride, Part 2 focuses on "The Bride's Rebellion and God's Discipline." Chapter 4 reveals our struggle to live out the gospel. As a result, we not only fail to carry out God's mission but also fail to see the need for church discipline. Chapter 5 addresses how the popular understanding of church discipline may limit and even skew how



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we understand God's discipline through the church, which should be consistent with His story of redemption.

Knowing that all of us will continue to struggle to live out the gospel on this side of heaven, Part 3 addresses "God's Call to Carry Out His Redemptive Discipline" for His glory and for His bride's growth. Towards the end of each chapter in Part 3, leadership points are offered to help us to consider essential elements in the everyday mission of the church, along with the escalating and expanding redemptive efforts that can come with church discipline. Chapter 6 highlights the "one another" commands as the basis for everyday gospel mission, which includes God's ongoing discipline through His living Word and people. Chapter 7 looks at the mess and mission of gospel relationships. Despite the fact that sin disrupts and divides God's people, we are still called to God's radical mission. Chapter 8 examines the essential role of community in pursuing and calling those who are in chronic rebellion back to Jesus. Community guidelines are offered to help us to see how we can get others involved in fighting the fight of faith as the family of God. Chapter 9 covers the escalating and expanding efforts of the church to call those who refuse to submit to Jesus and refuse to listen to those around them. We will see the importance of warning and waiting, withholding communion and telling the church should those warned refuse to repent. Chapter 10 guides us through what it means for the church to treat those who "refuse to listen even to the church". We will see the significance of removing those who are unrepentant from the covenant fellowship of the church and how we need to instruct the church during and after the removal. Chapter 11 discusses God's ongoing discipline after removal, the battle for repentance and God's mercy for those who repent and seek restoration. We will learn what issues need to be considered when developing a restoration plan and how we can inform the church and celebrate upon restoration, should the Lord grant repentance. Chapter 12 completes the journey by addressing the cost of gospel mission and the reality of liability as we engage in God's discipline as the church.

The story of John and Kathy, which unfolds in each chapter, serves as a concrete example of how the issues discussed in each chapter is relevant and crucial. Knowing and applying the truths



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and principles found throughout this book will help you shepherd the “Johns and Kathys” in your church along with those around them. Don’t miss the intentional teaching points found in their story as you follow their journey. Also, be sure to learn something from each character in this realistic but fictional account.

But don’t just read the chapters. You will miss an equally valuable part of the book if you do not take the time to read and utilize the practical appendix that is provided to give you a better sense of the “nuts and bolts” associated with church discipline.

PUTTING THE APPENDIX TO WORK

Appendix items tend to be overlooked. Why take the extra effort in flipping to the back of the book when you are reading through a chapter? Recognizing the tendencies of most, you need to know that you will miss an essential part of the book if you do not peruse the practical discussions, guidelines, example manuscripts and plans found in the appendix.

This handbook is designed to be a ready reference. Each appendix can be read independently but cannot be understood apart from its respective chapter. Therefore, you will do yourself a disservice if you only read the appendix to get to the “practical stuff.” Remember, the truths of the gospel need to drive gospel ministry, not the other way around.

Please note that each example manuscript and plan offered in the appendix is presented for illustrative purposes. You should not use them “as is” but you should use them only as reference as you prayerfully decide how to draft your own documents. You want to make sure the wording, tone and emphasis of your documents are consistent with your own church and specific to the details of the situation being addressed.

ENJOY THE JOURNEY

May the Lord bless you as you begin your journey of understanding your redeeming God and the radical life and mission He has for you. Keep yourself open to what God has in store for you as He reveals His truths and your heart as you read and reflect on His story of redemption. Be sure to respond with faith and repentance, praising God for His abundant compassion and pardon (cf. Isa. 55:6-7).



GOD REDEEMING HIS BRIDE

As He draws you near, experience His redeeming love, behold His glory and enjoy His grace.





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