

The Bride of Christ

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The Holy Spirit presents an analogous relationship of Christ and the church with the husband - wife relationship in Ephesians 5. The comparison is strong and beautiful. The church stands in the analogy as a bride and Christ as the husband. Christ died to purchase the church and purify it for his own possession. I want to embellish the figure of a beautiful bride, presented to the loving bridegroom. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27).

What Is the Church?

The word "church" refers to PEOPLE, "a called out" people, "an holy nation." The scriptures describe the church thus: "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2: 14). "Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (1 Pet. 2:9-10). It also refers to a functional unit of the "called out" people in a local sense (1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1). These individuals are called out of darkness into light. "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light . . ." (1 Pet. 2:9). Paul's mission with the gospel was: "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26: 18); "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins . . ." (Col. 1:13-14).

This "called-out" people, the "holy nation" is called by the gospel: "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2:13-14). It is an holy calling: "For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (1 Thess. 4:7); "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9); "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15-16). It is the heavenly calling: "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Heb. 3:1); called to be saints (1 Cor. 1:2; Rom. 1:7).

The church is the "house" of God: "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15); "But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Heb. 3:6).

It is the "body" of Christ: "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23); "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence . . ." "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18,24).

There is only ONE body: "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. 12:4-5). "But now are they many members, yet but one body" (1 Cor. 12:20).

It is called the "temple" of God: "But now are they many members, yet but one body. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:9-11). "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (1 Cor. 3:16-17); "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord. In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." (Eph. 2:19-22); "'Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded" . . . "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light; which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (1 Pet. 2:5-6, 9-10).

It is also the "kingdom" of God: "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13-14); "But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12); "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:18-19).

The church is pictured as the "bride" of Christ (Eph. 5:23-33; Rev. 21:2,9). These figures signify God's PEOPLE as they are related to Him through Christ.

In order for Christ to present a glorious church to himself as an unblemished bride, he sanctified and cleansed it. The merit cause in sanctification is the cross of Christ: he "gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). Christ died to reconcile both Jew and Gentile unto God in one body "And that he might

reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: (Eph. 2:16). We have redemption through his blood: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7); "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:14). The death of Christ is the power to obtain forgiveness of sins.

But the conditional cause is "with the washing of water by the word." Simply stated, this is baptism for remission of sins by faith in Christ and his word. Almost all commentaries concede that this expression refers to baptism in water. Jesus said: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). Ananias told Paul to "... arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). All these passages refer to the same conditions for the remission of sins. In harmony with all these is Ephesians 5:26: "... that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word."

The ultimate purpose for which Christ sanctified and cleansed the church is to make her a suitable bride for himself. In the figure, this illustrious "wife hath made herself ready" for her husband. She is arrayed in "fine linen, clean and white" which is the righteousness of saints (Rev. 19:7-8). This indicates an effort on the part of each saved person to maintain the purity and righteousness which he obtained when he obeyed the gospel of Christ.

The baptized believer is described in the figure of marriage to Christ (Rom. 7:4). Paul said, "I have espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2). "Espoused" means, "To join, to fit together . . . or betrothed, to give one in marriage to anyone" (Thayer). That describes the union of a baptized believer to Christ. When one is baptized into Christ, he becomes married to Christ.

The Glorious Church

"That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27).

The church is glorious because Christ built it (Matt. 16:18-20), purchased it (Acts 20:28), died for it (Eph. 5:25), is the head of it (Eph. 1:22-23), and God is glorified in it (Eph.3:21). Christ paid the ultimate price for it: he "gave himself for it" (Eph.5:25). "Who gave himself for our sins . . ." (Gal. 1:4). "... who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14).

The Unblemished Bride Prepared

By the cross Christ sanctified and cleansed the church that it might be a glorious church. Keep in mind that we are talking about PEOPLE who have been redeemed from their sins and added to this body of saved (Acts 2:47).

A glorious church must be sanctified. "Sanctify" means to set apart for sacred use, to anoint. The church is composed of saved people (Acts 2:47), who are sanctified. They are called saints (Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:2). The saints at Philippi constituted a local church with the bishops and deacons (Phil. 1:1). Jesus said people are sanctified through the truth (John 17:17; John 17:19). Jesus sanctified the people with his own blood (Heb. 13:12). He accomplished this "with the washing of water by the word" (Eph. 5:26; Titus 3:5). Concerning sinners, Paul said to the Corinthians: "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11).

Sanctification produces holiness, which describes a devout, saintly, righteous person. The opposite of holiness is profane, sinful. Holiness is essential to see the Lord: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

The glorious church must be holy (Eph.5:27). "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. 1:4). "In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight" (Col. 1:22). "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling . . ." (2 Tim. 1:9). "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;" "Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:15-16). The church is "an holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5), and "an holy nation" (1 Pet. 2:9).

A glorious church must be cleansed. "Cleanse" is to bathe, wash, absolve, purify. "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:11). "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Christ cleansed the church so that it must be without SPOT. Each Christian must "keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27). "That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ:" (1 Tim. 6:14). "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2 Peter 3:14).

"Wrinkle" means to fold, corrugate, pleat, crease, crumple, crinkle. It is the opposite of what is ironed: smooth and straight. It signifies a flaw, that which is marred. The attire of the bride of the Lamb is to be brilliant: smooth, beautiful and clean. Every spot and flaw is to be removed. Cloth that has been washed and cleaned is often wrinkled before it is ironed or pressed. The church has been cleansed by Christ to be presented to himself: and it must be without spot or wrinkle. "...or any such thing, i.e. anything akin to being spotted or wrinkled. To be without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, is to be free from any and all defects of beauty and morality.

Christ died to sanctify the church, thus to make it holy; and he cleansed it to make it free of every blemish. "Blemish" means a defect, flaw, imperfection, to disfigure. The church must be like Christ: "But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:19).

The glorious church that Christ sanctified and cleansed must maintain its holiness and purity. It must be zealous of good works (Titus 2:14); be of one accord, have the same love, unity (Acts 2:46; 4:32; Phil. 2:2-3; 1 Cor. 1:10); follow peace with holiness (Heb. 12:14). It must be the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:14-15); submissive to Christ (Eph. 5:24); and glorify God by Christ (Eph. 3:21). Each member must be "a new creature" with all that it implies (2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 3:1-25). I admonish each of you to "give diligence to make your calling and election sure" to inherit "the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:10-11).

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Preacher of the Word (Vol. 1, July 7, 1996, #28)
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