

THE MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE

Genesis 2:21-25; Ephesians 5:25-33

²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, He took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man. ²³ The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'Woman,' because she was taken out of Man." ²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵ Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. (NIV)

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing of water through the Word, ²⁷ and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ in this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church – ³⁰ for we are members of His body. ³¹ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. [Gen. 2:24.] ³² This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. (NIV)

THE MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE (Ephesians 5:25-33)

INTRODUCTION: 3 Truths

One: We must understand the relationship of Christ to the Church if we would have our marriage be all that God intends it to be!

Two: The relationship between a husband and his wife is comparable to that between Christ and the Church. ¹

Three: What is true of Christ and the church is true for each and every one of us. ²

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

I. The Attitude of Christ toward the Church: *“Christ loved the church...”* Jn. 3:16; Eph. 2:4

II. The Actions of Christ resulting from His love: Eph. 5:25-33

A. His Love Revealed in What He Did for Her: *“He gave Himself up...”* ^{3,4}

B. His Love Revealed in What He Is Doing for Her: Eph. 5:27, 29

1. He is *“sanctifying”* her, or *“making her holy”* Eph. 5:27; Titus 2:14 ⁵

2. He is *“cleansing her by the washing of water with the word...”* Eph. 5:27 ⁶

3. He is *“nourishing”* her Eph. 5:29

4. He is *“cherishing”* her Eph. 5:29

C. His Love Revealed in What He Will Do for the Church: Eph. 5:27; 3:10; Phil. 3:20, 21 ⁷

1. What We Will Be Like: *“Glorious”*

1) Externally

“Without stain” - “Without wrinkle or any other blemish” -

2) Internally

“Holy” - “Blameless” - ⁸

2. When We Will Be Like This: Rev. 19:6-9 ⁹

D. His Love Revealed in What He Will Ultimately Do for the Church: Eph. 5:30-32

“We are members of His body...His flesh and bones... two will become one flesh”

INTRODUCTION- pictures of our wedding

“Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church...”

There are 3 truths that we need to grasp at the outset of our study:

One: We must understand the relationship of Christ to the church if we would have our marriages be all that God intends them to be. I believe that love is a man’s chief privilege; and the way we love our wives most clearly demonstrates the glory of the Christian life. And to love our wives biblically, we must love them ***“...as Christ loved the church.”***

Two: The relationship between husbands and wives is comparable to that between Christ and the church! They are the same in nature! Later Paul says, ***“This is a great [Greek “mega”] mystery”***! In chapter 1:18-23 Paul introduced them to the doctrine of the church; in 4:15, 16 he added to the definition. And he now draws on that teaching in order to help them understand the true nature of Christian marriage.¹

Three: What is true of the relationship of Christ to the church is true of every single one of us (Rom. 7:4 ***“So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to Another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.”***). Christ is the husband of the church, the church is the bride of Christ, and each one of us can, in that sense, look upon the Lord Jesus Christ as our husband.² Therefore it is of primary importance that we rightly understand the relationship between Christ and the Church! So let’s examine our text.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

1. Attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ to the church: ***“Christ loved the church”***.

Paul uses a verb form of the word ***agapa***, as he always does when speaking of Divine Love. ***“Agapa”*** is the highest word the Bible knows.

John 3:16; Ephesians 2:4 – *“But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ...”* *Agapa* is selfless love: love that gives; love that loves, not because of, but in spite, of what might be found in its object. Christ loved us *“while we were yet sinners... enemies... ungodly... without hope and without God”*. Christ loved the church, not because she was glorious and beautiful, but that He might make her so. And true love is always active, so we note the resultant...

II. Actions of Christ toward the church. *“...even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it.”*

Christ loved the church so much that He sacrificed Himself for her. Now, love is the most practical thing in the world. It is not what we say that proves our love; it is what we do. And this love of Christ, this attitude resulting in action, displays itself in 3 main respects.

A. HIS LOVE IS REVEALED IN WHAT HE DID FOR HER: *“He gave Himself up for her...”*

1. There would be no church apart from Christ and what He has done. Eph. 1:7 *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins;”* Eph. 5:2 *“...walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us...;”* and Paul’s farewell words to the elders of this church at Ephesus in Acts 20: *“Feed the church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood.”*³

Christ had to purchase and redeem the church before He could have her as His bride. Again, remember this is personal: in **Gal. 2:20**⁴ Paul says: *“I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.”*⁴ Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her – yes, and He also did it for every one of us as individuals. This is foundational!

B. SECOND, HIS LOVE IS REVEALED IN WHAT HE IS DOING FOR HER:

“Christ. . . gave Himself up for her, to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing of water through the Word...”

1. He is sanctifying her – Paul writes in the KJV, *“that He might sanctify her...”*). Forgiveness and deliverance are means to a further end. As Paul wrote to Titus in 2:14: *“He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”*⁵ Now...

a. The primary meaning of *“sanctify”* or *“make holy”* is *“to set apart for God, for His peculiar possession and for His use.”* And this leads to a secondary meaning: Because they are thus set apart, they are also made holy; but this meaning is covered in Paul’s next word, *“cleansing.”* So, here is the Church, you and I, spotted, wrinkled, and stained people for whom Christ died and whom He then sets apart from Himself, *“a holy nation... a people of God’s own possession.”* We are not sinless, but we are set apart for Him as His body and Bride. And note...

b. This sanctification is the work of God. Yes, we must be obedient, we must be submissive; but He does the separating and the purifying. Our job is to be obedient to His Word!

2. He is cleansing her – *“...with the washing of water by the Word...”* Again, it is by way of this word *“cleanse”* that the idea of purifying comes in.

Christ’s ultimate objective is that the Church should be delivered from the guilt, the power, and the pollution of sin. We must be cleansed before we can be presented to the Lord as *“a glorious church.”* And the process is: *“the washing of water through the Word...”* The real work of holiness is done within us by the Holy Spirit using the Word until we are clean and free from spot and wrinkle! **John 15:3**: *“Now are you clean*

through the Word which I have spoken unto you”; John 17:17: *“Sanctify them through Your truth: Your Word is truth.”* So Christ is cleansing the church through the work of the Holy Spirit whom He has sent, and who uses the Word in doing His work. Then note: **5:29**

3. He is nourishing her – *“no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the Church.”* The essential meaning is that of feeding or providing nourishment. Christ is concerned about the growth and development and well-being of His church, so He nourishes her through the Word, teaching, gifts, and the fellowship of believers...

4. He is cherishing her – the essential meaning has to do with clothing; but it also conveys the idea of caring for, looking after, and guarding. It shows His constant watchfulness, care and concern.

C. HIS LOVE IS REVEALED IN WHAT HE WILL DO FOR HER: *“in order that He Himself might present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless...”*

Why this process of deliverance, sanctification, cleansing, nourishing and cherishing? Everything is designed to the time when Our Lord will present His bride to Himself. Beloved, our ultimate destiny is glorification – Phil. 3:20, 21 ⁷

“...our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.” Individually, and as a whole, the church will be in a state of glory. See **what that means for us**:

1. Externally, we will have *“no stain”* – no spot, or blemish. Walking in this world of sin and shame, we get splattered by mud and dirt, but when He presents us to Himself with all the principalities and

powers of heaven looking on (**Eph. 3:10**¹⁰), there will not be a single spot upon us, not the slightest speck of sin. And **“without wrinkle or any other blemish”** – these are signs of age or disease! Beloved, when Christ presents us to Himself in all our glory, He will have renewed our youth. No infirmities will remain, no vestige of disease, failure, or age! Christ is preparing His bride for the day of great celebration when He will show her to the whole universe.

2. Internally, we will be **“holy”** – more than just an absence of evil, we will be sharing Our Lord’s own righteousness. This is positive uprightness, truth, beauty, and everything that is glorious in its essence. And we will be **“blameless”** – **Eph. 1:3, 4**⁸ **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ: For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.”** These terms convey absolute perfection of physical beauty, health and spiritual character. We shall be complete and entire!

This is what it means to be a Christian: our name is written on His heart, as well as upon His hands; He loves us with an everlasting love; He has died for us; and He is preparing us for that great day when He will present us to Himself as His glorious bride!

When will this take place? **Rev. 19:6-9:**⁶ **“Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting, ‘Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.’**⁷ **Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready.**⁸ **Fine linen, bright and clean, was given to her to wear.’ (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.)**⁹ **Then the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’”**⁸ The Church – the bride, you and me and the saints of all

ages – will be clothed with the garment of righteousness without and within, perfect and entire, lacking nothing!!

D. HIS LOVE IS REVEALED IN WHAT HE WILL ULTIMATELY DO FOR THE CHURCH: “...for we are members of His body. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.”

Just when we thought there was nothing higher, we come to the final part of the “*mystery*”! Paul first emphasizes that we are “*members of His body*” – he brings out the intimate character of the relationship. Then he adds (KJV, many MSS, Gen. 2:23), “*We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.*” It appears that, in some mysterious way, as Adam was put to sleep and Eve was taken out of him, and so was of the same substance as Adam; so a deep sleep came upon Jesus and, in that operation, the church was taken out of Christ, from His bleeding, wounded side! What Paul is doing here is emphasizing that we are sharers of Christ’s very nature (2 Pet. 1:4, “*partakers of the divine nature.*”)

WE ARE NOT DIVINE, WE ARE NOT GODS. But somehow the Lord Jesus Christ is the former and beginner of a new humanity in which we share – we partake of the nature that the Mediator now has; we derive our life from Him! Adam and Eve were two, but in another sense they became “*one flesh*”! Adam was incomplete, but Eve made up his “*fullness,*” that which was lacking in him. And in **Eph. 1:23**¹¹ we read, speaking of the Church, His body, that God “*...appointed Him to be the head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way.*” The church is the “*fullness of Christ*” – the church makes up, as it were, this fullness of Christ just as Eve made up the fullness of Adam.

The Lord Jesus Christ, as the eternal Son of God, is perfect, complete and entire, and He has always been so from all eternity – ***“in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”*** He is, and always has been, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. The whole fullness of the Godhead is in each of the Three Persons. There is no lack, there is nothing to make up, no fullness which is lacking. But as the Mediator, Christ is not full without the church!

This is a great mystery, that the eternal Son of God, in order to save us, put a limitation upon Himself. He remains God eternally – there is no limit on that, there is no lessening of His deity. It is a great mystery! There He is, One and Unchangeable. He became man, and as Mediator, He will not be complete until the church is entire. He has a bride to whom he is to be joined, and they will become ***“one flesh.”*** When the Lord Jesus Christ returned to heaven He took His glorified body with Him. That human nature is in Him now, and always will be. He is still the Second Person in the blessed Holy Trinity, but this human nature which we now have is there in Him, and we shall be in Him to all eternity. The Lord Jesus Christ left heaven and came into this world for His bride.

¹²**Ephesians 2:15b**: ***“His purpose was to create in Himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace...”***

Christ died in order that He might purchase and save this bride of His, who now, as the result of that operation, is part of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. This is supreme mystery! There is nothing more glorious than this. We are sharers of His human nature; we are joined to Him, and we shall be throughout eternity. The church is the bride of Christ, because He left His Father’s throne for you and for me!