



The Bride of Christ

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"Explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words."

1 Corinthians 2:13

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Introduction

“ ... Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to Himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.... This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.”

Ephesians 5:25b – 27, 32

We will look at this passage verse by verse, but let's start with the Apostle Paul's closing statement in verse 32 – he wrote:

“This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the Church.”

Paul explained that what he had written to the Ephesians about husbands and wives spiritually applied to Christ and the Church. Paul was comparing the marriage relationship to the relationship between Christ and the Church – the husband being Christ, and the Church being the wife.



The Church¹ ~ The Bride of Christ

When Christ looks upon you, the Church, He sees His Bride. So, we need to understand and see ourselves as the Bride of Christ.

Now, let's go back to the beginning of the passage - it starts out by saying: "... Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, in order to make her holy...." Ephesians 5:25b-26

¹ Contrary to what is in vogue today for some, I make no distinction between the Greek word, ekklesia, and its English translation, “church”. I use the two words interchangeably. When I say “church”, I mean the full and accurate biblical meaning of “ekklesia”. Simply using the Greek word, ekklesia, in and of itself, helps no one understand the biblical meaning. The biblical meaning will always require explanation for the unlearned. Therefore, I think the English words, “church”, or “assembly”, or “community” are adequate translations. Not everyone identifying with the word “church” is part of the Ekklesia of God. There is only one true Church made up of those who have received the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9-10) - those who “possess the Son”. (1 John 5:11-12)

The Church is a people who have been made “holy” – and that is not of themselves – they have been made holy by Christ. But, let me ask you: What is “holy”? Not smoking or drinking or socializing with those who do? Well, not smoking and drinking may be good for your health; but it takes more than that to be “holy”.

Both in the Old Testament language of Hebrew and in the New Testament language of Greek, the words translated “holy”² mean: “separated”, “set apart”, or “belonging to”. The Church is a people “separated” for Jesus – a people “set apart” to Jesus – a people who “belong to” Jesus. I’ll give you an example of what I understand this to mean: Many households have a coffee mug which is inscribed: “Dad”. This coffee mug belongs to “Dad”. This coffee mug has been “separated” and “set apart” for “Dad”. No one should be using this coffee mug except “Dad”. It belongs to him. You, as the Church, have been “separated” unto Jesus. You have been “set apart” unto Jesus. No one but Jesus can touch you or use you, because you “belong” to Him. You don’t even belong to yourself – and you definitely don’t belong to the Devil! The Church is the *holy* Bride of Christ!

² Hebrew: *kodesh*. Greek: *hagios*

So, Paul tells us that Christ makes us “holy”. But how does He do this? “By cleansing her with the washing of water by the word.” The word makes us “holy”. But what does this mean? It means that people who believe and receive “the word of Christ”³ are people who have been “separated out”, “set apart” unto Jesus. The Greek word translated “church”⁴ literally means “the called-out ones”; and the word “saints” literally means the “holy ones”.⁵ Not because we’re better than everyone else. Not because we don’t smoke and drink like everyone else. But only because we’re willing to belong to Jesus – and not to ourselves, and definitely not to the Devil!

Paul said that Jesus’ plan for the Church is “to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word.” So yes, “holy” also means “washed” and “cleansed” – washed and cleansed by the water of the word. But how does that work? In many households a bottle of stain remover is kept next to the washing machine. When you are washing your clothes, and you see a stain, you apply the stain remover. That’s how the Holy Spirit uses His word. When He sees a “stain” in our life, and He

³ Colossians 3:16

⁴ *ekklesia*

⁵ Greek: *hagios*

applies the stain remover to it! When He speaks to our hearts through the Scriptures, it is like He is saying: *“Thus sayeth the Lord, but thus doeth you – clean up your act!”* No one else can hear Him, but His voice is very clear deep down in our heart. The Holy Spirit is always a Gentleman, but when He speaks His word into us, we are “pierced in our hearts”.⁶

Of course, you have to be “in the word” – you have to be “in the water” to get washed clean. My wife does laundry every day, so it doesn’t pile up. We need to be “in the word” – “in the water” – every day so the sins don’t pile up. We need to read the word every day – study the word every day - “hide the word in our heart” every day. As the psalmist said: “Your word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against You.”⁷ We need to give the Holy Spirit something to work with. Give Him that bottle of stain remover, so to speak; and make sure He has a full bottle to work with! The Church is the blood-bought word-washed Bride of Christ!

So, why do we need to go into this Holy Spirit washing cycle every day? Paul said that Christ wants “to present the Church to

⁶ Acts 2:37

⁷ Psalm 119:11

Himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind – yes so that she may be holy....”⁸

Jesus plans “to present the Church to Himself” – He plans to present His Bride to Himself – “in splendor”, “without spot or wrinkle”, “without blemish” – “holy”. The Church is a betrothed Bride who needs to make herself ready, because there’s going to be a wedding in heaven in the not-so-distant future. It’s written in Revelation 19:7-8: “Let us rejoice and exalt and give Him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready; to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.”

⁸ Ephesians 5:27



Ancient Jewish Wedding Customs

To help us prepare and make ourselves ready, we can learn from the wedding customs found in the Scriptures – specifically the ancient Jewish customs. It was different than how we do things today. It's good to know and understand how the ancient Jewish wedding worked, because the Scriptures reveal that this is the pattern which Jesus is following with His Bride, the Church. Each custom is a symbol representing Christ and His Bride. The ancient Jewish wedding customs went something like this⁹:

⁹ This analogy will cover only the betrothal/engagement viz. the church age. But the analogy could continue through to the consummation of the marriage and celebration of the wedding feast viz. the age to come.

In order to arrange the marriage, the man goes to the household of the girl – who, as you remember, represents the Church. He would bring with him something to pay the price for the bride. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus bought and redeemed us, His Bride, by His own blood, which He shed for us on the cross.¹⁰

The man would also bring a marriage covenant – in it were written promises he was making to the bride. This is a symbol of the New Covenant Jesus made in His blood for us who are His Bride.¹¹

The man also brings with him some wine; and if the father of the girl approves of the marriage covenant, the man and the bride's whole family, including the girl, drink the wine together. This is a symbol of the "Cup of the Covenant in Christ's blood".¹² In the drinking of the cup, the bride commits herself to the man. It is actually at this point that the two are considered husband and wife because the covenant has been made before God. We would say that they are "engaged" to be married, but the promise of the covenant must be kept. Later, their marriage will be

¹⁰ Acts 20:28; Ephesians 1:7 & 14; I Corinthians 6:20, 7:23

¹¹ Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; I Corinthians 11:25

¹² Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; I Corinthians 11:25

consummated; and then there will be a marriage feast. We are engaged to Jesus now. The marriage will be consummated when Christ returns; and then there will be a spectacular wedding celebration in heaven.¹³ After the drinking of the cup, the man promises the bride a dwelling place which he would then go to prepare by adding on a place to his father's house. He speaks words to the bride much like the words Jesus spoke to us in John 14:2-3: "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, so that where I am, there you may be also."

So, the man returns to his father's house. The bride remains at her father's house, and does not know exactly when the man will come back for her. The man could be gone for two years or more. But while she waits, she spends her days preparing – learning how to be a good wife and how to please her husband. But part of her preparation is what the Jews call "mikvah". This is a ceremonial washing for cleansing, purification, and consecration. Do you see the connection between the "mikvah" and Baptism? But this baptism – this washing – is not just a one-

¹³ Revelation 19:7-8

time event – it is a lifestyle – it’s a “living” baptism – it’s that daily cleansing with “the washing of water by the word”¹⁴, until we are wholly consecrated to Jesus – a bride prepared to be presented to Jesus “in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle ... holy....”¹⁵

The Church is that Bride who has been selected to be prepared, consecrated and presented to Jesus.¹⁶

I would like to relate to you a Biblical story about the selection of the Bride. It is recorded in Genesis 24. The characters of the story are Abraham who represents God the Father; Isaac, Abraham’s son, who represents Jesus; Eliezer, Abraham’s servant, who represents, the Holy Spirit; and Rebekah, the bride, who represents the Church. Very briefly, the story goes like this: Abraham sent out His servant, Eliezer, to journey from Canaan to the city of Nahor in Mesopotamia with a camel train loaded with gifts in order to find a bride for his son, Isaac. Eliezer selected Rebekah, and he asked her family for her hand in marriage for Isaac – much in the same way as the ancient Jewish customs we discussed. Then Eliezer returned to Abraham’s house with Rebekah; and Isaac took her as his wife.

¹⁴ Ephesians 5:26

¹⁵ Ephesians 5:27

¹⁶ The idea of the “preparation of the bride” can also be seen in the story of Esther in Esther, Chapter 2.

The point of the story I want to make has to do with how Eliezer, who represents the Holy Spirit, selected the bride, who represents the Church. In the story, Eliezer took his camel train to the city of Nahor and stopped outside the city at a well of water. There, he prayed that he would be able to select the chosen bride for Isaac from all the other women of the city who came out to draw water from the well. He prayed that he would be able to recognize and select her in this way: When asked, she would be willing to give Eliezer and the camels water to drink. Rebekah was the one who did so.

It all had to do with the water! When Jesus comes for His Bride, he will find her at the water well, because she will be in the “holy habit” of going to the well daily to wash in the water of the word. She will be at the well daily, washing in the water of the word, because she wants to be wholly consecrated to Jesus – a Bride prepared to be presented to Jesus “in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle ... holy” - “washed” and “cleansed”; “separated”, “set apart”, and “belonging to” Jesus Christ. The Church is that Bride who has been selected to be prepared, consecrated and presented to Jesus.



Some Thoughts on Intimacy

I find it difficult to try to draw parallels between what we normally think of as “intimacy” between a man and a woman, and that which would exist between Christ and the Church. The ideas of sex and physical affection don’t seem to translate well spiritually speaking. While sex and physical affection between a husband and wife is a gift from God¹⁷, considering these alone would be a

¹⁷ Cf., *Song of Solomon*

very limited view of intimacy. I would like to share some thoughts on intimacy in terms of depth of relationship:

In the end, what I value most in my life is 50 years of relationship with the Lord and 45 years with my wife, Frances. I have a treasure chest of personal experiences and memories which are shared only between the Lord and me, and only between Frances and me. I will try to communicate some of what I mean:

My Bride ~ My Partner

Frances and I have been married 45 years. Marriage can be described in many ways, but possibly one term which may not be first and foremost on our minds when we think of being married, especially newly married, is the idea of “partnership”. After all, “partnership” seems to speak more about work than love. But in the midst of an intimate love relationship, we have also found marriage to be, in the end, all about “a working partnership”. I’m sure this is the case because that is how God deigned it – a working partnership in the midst of an intimate love relationship. In Genesis 2:18, the Lord God said: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a help meet for him.” Now that’s the *King James Version*, and to be honest, I never quite understood what “help meet” meant. Was God saying, “Adam, please, help yourself to some sandwich meat.”? I did some study and found that the two words, “help meet”, are an attempt to translate the one Hebrew word, *ezer*.¹⁸ The *New Revised Standard Version* translates it this way: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner”. I think that is a great translation of this verse. I’ll give some other translations, just to

¹⁸ Strong’s # 5828

get the nuances of the Hebrew word: The *English Standard Version* says, “a helper fit for him”. The *God’s Word Translation* says, “a helper that is right for him”. The *New American Standard Bible* and the *New International Version* both say: “a helper suitable for him”. The *New King James Version* says, “a helper comparable to him”. But I think the *Revised Standard Version* captures it here: “a helper as his partner”. Now if you are doing life alone, that’s one thing. But if you are doing a family and a household – you find that is an actual enterprise, in which you need a working partner. If you are doing a ministry, you need a partner. I think these are just some of the reasons why God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone....”

My Bride ~ My Confidante¹⁹

You may get to know someone in bed; but you really get to know much more about a person by working together – by doing life together. You get to know the other person's soul – their heart and mind, their perspectives and attitudes. You even get to know their thoughts and feelings without a word being spoken. With a life-long partner, you not only have the same values, but you also look at life situations with a singleness of eye. You not only perceive things the same way, but you look out at life together and see in a unique way - in a way in which no one else sees exactly. This is because “the two become one”, and in so doing, they create *a third entity which they share only with one another*. They have perceptions, thoughts and feelings, values and priorities which they have arrived at together and which cannot really be accessed by anyone else. We all know what “inside jokes” are, but along with developing a sense of humor that is particular to themselves, they share a whole “inside world” in which only the two live. It's not that they have excluded everyone else and are living in a fantasy world; they interact and interrelate with others, but they have come to do it as one unit.

¹⁹ Dictionary.com: “A woman to whom secrets are confided or with whom private matters and problems are discussed.”

The Bride of Christ as Partner

Just as we do not often think of marriage as a working partnership, we also do not often think of the fact that the Scriptures tell us that, as the Bride of Christ, we are betrothed and destined to reign with Him for all eternity. This is mentioned a number of times in the New Testament by the apostle Paul²⁰ and also by the apostle John.²¹ Now, we may find it very difficult to imagine exactly what it will be like to reign with Christ, but it is none-the-less true. That the Bride of Christ would be His partner in reigning in His Kingdom is not only part of God's plan and purpose, it is rooted in His heart. I believe it may be very much at the root of His principle that "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner". Apparently, God feels the same way about His Son. He obviously didn't need to, but has chosen to, "make Him a helper as His partner" so that the Church, the Bride of Christ, will reign with Him in His Kingdom. While leaving the details for God to fill in after Christ's return, now, we can project for ourselves a picture of the Church playing the role of a queen who is seated beside the King in His Kingdom.

²⁰ 2 Timothy 2:12

²¹ Revelation 5:9-10; 20:4 & 6, as well as 22:21.

The Bride of Christ as Confidante²²

There is a statement in Psalm 25:14 that is simply amazing: “The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.”²³ Or “The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him, and He will make them know His covenant.”²⁴

The same kind of intimacy I share with Frances after 45 years, I also share with Jesus after 50 years. Much of the life I share with Jesus also includes Frances. But – and I’m sure it is the same for Frances - there are many intimate moments I’ve had with Jesus alone. I find a couple of Scripture verses helpful in trying to communicate the intimacy we can experience with Jesus:

I Corinthians 2:11: “For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.”²⁵

And Proverbs 20:27: “The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all the innermost parts of his being.”

²² Dictionary.com: “A woman to whom secrets are confided or with whom private matters and problems are discussed.”

²³ *English Standard Version*

²⁴ *New American Standard Bible*

²⁵ *New American Standard Bible*

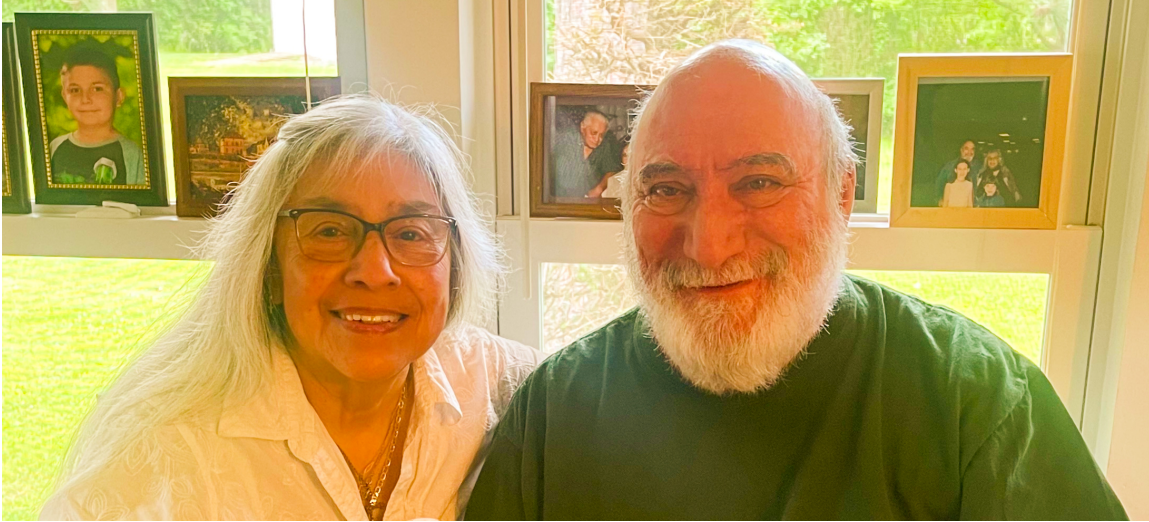
The Spirit of God dwells within the believer. It is on the spirit level that we relate to the Lord, and He to us. This is a level of our being that can be quite mysterious, but simply put: He absolutely knows our every thought, feeling, perspective and attitude – much more completely than we do ourselves. Often, when I am praying – talking – with the Lord, I may find it difficult to put into words what I’m thinking or feeling and I can just say to the Lord, *“Well, you know what I’m trying to say.”*, because He does! And often, while I’m praying – talking – to the Lord, His Spirit will make clear to me what I was oblivious to regarding my own heart - that maybe my perspective and/or attitude on something was wrong and needed to be adjusted.

I believe the Lord also has a sense of humor. I think He enjoys it when in prayer I make fun of my shortcomings, for I’m just acknowledging to Him what He is already well aware of. He knows me! Over the 50 years, I’ve spent much alone time with the Lord, carrying on those “inside conversations” with each other when, because of His love and grace, He shares with me His point of view and His thoughts regarding myself, and how He would have my life fit into His plans and purposes. We all have this relationship with the Lord, but it is so personal and intimate

that what we each have with Him cannot really be accessed by anyone else – this personal intimacy He shares One on one with each of His creatures.

Again, in the end, what I value most in my life is the years of relationship with Frances and the Lord. I have a treasure chest of personal experiences and memories which are shared only between Frances and me, and only between the Lord and me. This is how I understand “intimacy”.

Bill & Frances Furioso
~ At Christ's Table ~



Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, discipled many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

Being an avid student by nature, Bill has done both formal and informal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology. As a writer, he has authored many publications which are distributed worldwide. Because of Bill's disabilities resulting from a spinal cord injury, he can no longer travel, so their ministries of writing, recording, distributing, mentoring, and correspondence are now shared primarily via the Internet... www.AtChristsTable.org

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with a view to

REVELATION of Christ

RELATIONSHIP with Christ

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