

Church = a Bride

21.05.2006

Today in our final sermon in the current series on church, we look at church being the bride of Christ. Revelation 21:2 says the church is Christ's bride, prepared and ready to meet her husband. and Ephesians 5:25-27 speaks the very same thing as it describes the role of the husband.

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."

The most outstanding feature of the church being Christ's bride, is his unique love for us, which husbands are to imitate.

There are five verbs used to show the unfolding stages of his commitment to us.

- 1 He loved her
- 2 He gave himself up for her
- 3 to make her holy
- 4 cleansing her
- 5 so he can present her to himself.

1st. Christ loved the church. The love on view is not just an emotional whim. It is not hot romance, nor is it simply friendship. We know that because of the Greek word for love used in Ephesians 5:25. Rather, his love is a deep commitment, a self-giving type love that continues to love in spite of what may happen.

And we are told that Christ loved the church. Technically, the church did not begin until after the raised and ascended Christ sent His Spirit at Pentecost. So some have suggested that by saying "*Christ loved the church*" it means the whole group of faithful Old Testament Jews and Christians since that time, being called in a short hand way "the church".

In other words, this passage says that Christ loved us with as much love as he loved his

disciples, and as much as he loved any other believer. He loves us as much as husbands are supposed to love their brides on the wedding day. Christ loved the church.

2ndly. He gave himself up for her. His love for us is so great that He laid down His life for us. He cares so much that He did not want any of us to go to hell. So instead, he took the punishment we deserve. That can slip off the tongue so quickly that we may fail to grab how difficult that is for us.

Imagine you have been really wanting a cruise... You have saved up some money by working overtime or a second job. You have cleared the time so you can go on the holiday. You have bought appropriate clothes and your bags are packed ready to go. On your way to the wharf, you see someone who for years has been feuding with you. They have lied about you, created havoc for you, and even set the police onto you a few times. And as you pass by, you stop, and pick them up. At the wharf, you give them the ticket and they go on the cruise, while you stay to pay for the trip, as well as do their work, for which they will be paid. That is a pale glimpse of some of the cost that Jesus made for us. And he did it without whinging and moaning. He did it quietly and for us. WHY?

3rdly. To make us holy, and

4thly. to cleanse us by the washing with water through the word. This most probably is drawn from the bridal bath which brides from Jewish and Greek customs had before their weddings. Clean and fresh, they would then dress for their wedding.

The subtleties of the verbs in Gk suggest that the cleansing comes before the becoming holy, and this idea is seen better in English if we translated it "*to make her holy, having cleansed her by the washing with water through the word.*"

How is the church washed? This may be a reference to baptism at the initiation of people into his church.

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But, as usual in the Bible, when baptism is mentioned, the washing with water is intricately connected to the word, the teaching, the making disciples, the on-going effects of learning how to grow in Christ. A simple washing ceremony is the initiation into a way of life. The church is washed by water through the word, to make her a holy bride for Christ. We need his word.

& **5thly**. So He can present her to himself. This presenting of the bride to her groom will take place as Revelation 21:2 says, when Christ returns. We looked at that last week. She will be presented "*as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*"

Often the church is seen by people now as weak, squabbling, greedy and in tatters. Just as her step-sisters scorned Cinderella, so many scorn Christ's bride. We all make mistakes. We all find that being like Christ is difficult. Sometimes these problems and mistakes are enormous and have far reaching effects, and condemnation pours in.

But this Ephesians 5 passage says it will not last.

For Christ in His love will change us even more radically than Cinderella was changed. and when the clock strikes twelve, we will not revert.

It will be as if:

-a Beauty therapist has massaged all the wrinkles away.

-a dry cleaner has brightened every part.

-a Salon has placed the hair in exactly the right spot.

-and Jenny Craig has reshaped her in the most pleasing way.

Christ in His love will do this for us who believe. He sacrificed himself to serve us, so that we might become all that he longs for us to be, which is the church in all the fullness of her glory.

Such is our heavenly lover. Such is the beauty he inspires in us. Such is the radiance of the glory he shines in us. Such is the God who calls on us to respect him, to respond in love, and to live for him.

Such is the true church God calls us into. It is great to be loved so much.