

Rediscovering God's Church

Message no:8, Picture #6 dated 01/10/17

Reading: Ephesians 5:25-32

We have now reached to the sixth picture—the bride. Although the word bride is not actually used in our text in Ephesians, the concept is specifically stated in other passages of the Bible and is implied in this passage.

Apostle Paul began by speaking to believing husbands about their relationship to their wives. He said the relationship must be one of love, devotion and care—a very sound and practical advice and much needed today. Yet this is not the full meaning of the passage, because Paul went on to say that the husband & wife relationship is patterned on the relationship of Christ to His Church. He then added “*This is a great (profound) mystery.*” It is indeed. I am sure no human mind can ever fully fathom that mystery. But he said very clearly, “*I speak concerning Christ and the Church.*” Thus, we see with absolute clarity the two persons in this union: Christ is the bridegroom and the Church is His bride.

This relationship was very beautifully foreshadowed in the original creation of Adam and Eve as recorded in the opening chapters of Genesis. One of the remarkable features of the creation of Adam was that God had every thing ready for him before he appeared on scene. His entire environment was there: the animals, the vegetation, the weather and the heavenly bodies—every thing he would need. This is also a wonderful picture of God's provision for us in the new creation. Every thing is already there when we arrive on the scene (X ref Matt 6:31-33)

There was just one thing missing for Adam: a mate. This was not a mistake on God's part. God had a purpose in not immediately providing a mate for Adam. He wanted Adam to understand something of the longing that He(God) has for personal fellowship with human beings. So, He allowed Adam to experience the lack of that fellowship, the lack of a mate. He then provided a mate, as recorded in Genesis chapter 2:18 and 21-23.

The Bible puts tremendous emphasis on marriage, We need to fully appreciate how central a place marriage plays in Scripture. Human history began with a marriage—and the first matchmaker was God. And guess what, God is still in the matchmaking business! One day, just a God presented Eve to Adam, He is going to present the true Church to Jesus at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 21:2-3 & 9-11).

Let's look more closely at the circumstances of this spiritual marriage.

Making Ourselves Ready.

Human history will come to a glorious climax with the marriage of the church-the bride, to Jesus Christ-the Bridegroom:

Revelation 19:6-8 {to be read}.

The marriage of the true Church to Jesus Christ will be a cause for rejoicing throughout the universe. It is interesting to note that bride was expected to provide or prepare her own clothing. In the Bible, “fine linen” is always a type of purity. In the book of Ezekiel, at one place in we read that Priests who were girded with wool, were not permitted access to the presence of the Lord (Ezekiel 44:15-18). There had to be absolute purity in the priesthood. In Deuteronomy 22:11, the Israelites were instructed not to wear garments of mixed material such as wool and linen.

So, here “fine linen” speaks of absolute purity and it says that fine linen is the “righteous acts of the saints”

There are two Greek words for righteousness: one is *dikaioisune* and the is *dikaioma*. **Dikaioisune** is righteous ness in the abstract; **dikaioma** is righteousness in action.

When you and I believe in Jesus Christ, His righteousness (dikaioisune) is imputed to us—we are made righteous with His righteousness. When we live out our faith, we express that imputed righteousness in dikaioma, which is outworked righteousness or our acts of righteousness.

Fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. The verse “His bride has made herself ready” is a very searching statement. How? By her righteous acts. In every culture, there is one rule about marriage—the bridegroom never prepares the bride: the bride always prepares herself. The responsibility is placed on her. The scripture says that His bride has made herself ready (by her outworked righteous acts).

The point to be noted is this: The imputed righteousness of Christ will not avail for the bridal feast. It has to be the outworked righteousness.

There is a parallel passage about outworked righteousness in Philippians: *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.* (Phil 2:12-13)

There is a balance here. God works in you first “to will” and then “to do” God’s pleasure. The Christian life is not about struggling to do something against our wills that we do not want to do. Rather, God works in us the will to do what He wants. Then He works in us the ability to do it.

Remember! God works **in us** only insofar as we **work out** what He works in. The measure of what God can **work in** is determined by the measure of what we **work out**. So, there is a two way process. God is working into us; but, by the way we live (our righteous acts), we are working out what God has worked in. **THIS IS THE PREPARATION OF BRIDE..** The fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. So, we must make sure we have the proper attire.

The Relationship between Bridegroom and Bride

We can see three main elements in this picture of Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as the bride.

1. First of all, there is *mutual, unreserved commitment* on both sides. Jesus gave Himself up for the Church, holding nothing back. He poured out His entire lifeblood. Even on human level, God intends it to be a total self-giving of two people—the one to the other. Neither is entitled to hold any thing back. It is required of the Church that she gives herself to Jesus—the Bridegroom, just as fully and totally as He gave Himself up to redeem her on the cross.
2. The second step is *careful preparation*. We saw that the bride—the Church, had made herself ready. She had prepared her attire, consisting of righteous acts. One single provision was not sufficient for every thing, but her attire was continuously being prepared. I would like to think of life in the same way. As you and I walk in faith & obedience, fulfilling the will of God and keeping His commandments—we are preparing our attire—the fine linen that is bright and clean.
3. The third feature in this picture is *union that produces fruit*. The purpose and consummation of marriage is the union of two people. It says “The two shall become one flesh”(Matt19:5). Out of the union comes forth fruit—new life. I believe that is the purpose of God in the relationship of Christ-- the

bridegroom to the Church—the bride. I believe that out of that glorious union, not yet consummated, will come eternal fruit. The eternal purposes of God for all subsequent ages will be unfolded out of the union of CHRIST with His CHURCH.

The Essential Feature of the Bride.

Two verses in 1 Corinthians tell us the essential feature of the bride is to reveal Christ's glory. 1 Co 11:3 reads "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man and the head of Christ is God". In descending order, God the Father is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of the man/husband and the husband is the head of woman/wife. There is a divine order of headship that starts in heaven and moves down into every home. This involves responsibilities on both sides. In the Scriptures we read "*For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man*".(1Co11:7)

It was the male who was first created in the image and likeness of God to show forth God's likeness & glory to the rest of the creation. The wife was also made in the image of God BUT her responsibility is to reflect her husband's glory. Likewise, as the bride of Christ, it is the responsibility of the Church to reflect Jesus' glory. This is a very deep and practical teaching and at some other time, I will take it in its entirety. But for now, let me only say—the wife reflects what her husband is, and children reflect what their parents are. We are always revealing ourselves in those to whom we are related.

In closing, let me say this: God is present everywhere, but His glory is where His presence is manifested—where it can be seen and experienced. Many of us know what it is to feel the glory of God in our bodies OR in the atmosphere OR on the faces of other Christians. The purpose of God in the Church is to manifest the glory of Christ—the Bridegroom, in the Church—the bride. Jesus is not coming for a **spiritually bent**(dishonest and corrupt), **haggard**(looking exhausted and unwell) and **worn out** type of a bride.

Our loyalty to Christ will be tested during our "engagement" period on earth in various ways and almost on daily basis.{Joseph & Mary case}. The marriage has not yet taken place, that is still in the future after the rapture. In the mean time, we must closely guard our relationship with Christ. We must have the element of bride in us. Hebrews 9:28 reads "*So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation*". The qualification for seeing Jesus appear for salvation is "those who eagerly wait". He will come for those who are expecting Him as savior. For the rest He will come as judge.

Let us hold fast to our confession of hope & faith without wavering in Christ Jesus. **Let us** remember our position as the bride of Jesus and discharge our responsibilities as His engaged bride.

Let us reflect His glory for He is our bridegroom and He is coming soon to take us home. With these thoughts, let us ponder upon His love & sacrifice and prepare ourselves to partake in the Holy sacrament which He himself established and constituted.

Let us pray!