

INTRODUCTION

In **Revelation 21:9**, one of the angels said to John, **"Come! I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife."**

In **Ephesians 5:25** Paul wrote: **"Husbands, love your wives, just 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."**

Here Paul accentuates the beauty of the relationship between Christ and His church by comparing it to the traditional Jewish marital background. By looking at Jewish marriage we can see many things about this special relationship between Christ and His bride, the church.

1. JEWISH CUSTOM

A In that culture, being espoused was much stronger than being engaged. It was actually being married. This is why Joseph the stepfather of Jesus entertained thoughts about divorcing Mary. He was thinking of dissolving the bond that had been sealed.

B After the angel assured Joseph of Mary's fidelity, he advised him in the following words. **"Do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit"** (Matthew 1:20).

Noticed that she is referred to as his wife because they were already married. But a waiting period was required before the bride and groom actually started living together. It was during that time that Mary became pregnant.

C After the espousal, the bridegroom would often depart to prepare a house where he and his bride would call their home. This could take quite a bit of time to accomplish.

The bride therefore, was to have the patience to wait for her beloved, and the loyalty to refuse any temptation to be with another man. She lived for the return of her husband and was always in a state of eagerness to hear the charming voice of the bridegroom.

D Often times after two people are married adultery takes place. This is unfaithfulness to the marriage vows to keep oneself for the other.

It is also possible for the bride of Christ to be guilty of spiritual adultery. It so happens that this was beginning to take place in the church at Ephesus.

The angel of the church at Ephesus was told, "I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from what you have fallen; repent and do the first works" (Revelation 2:4).

How is your love Christ and His church?

Have you let it slip to the extent you are an unfaithful bride?

E Once the house was finished, it was customary for the father of the groom to examine it; and if it met his approval, he would say, "Go and get your bride."

The festivity that followed was not the marriage, since this had occurred previously.

It was the marriage feast or supper. This is what the five foolish virgins missed in Jesus' parable of the ten virgins.

F Before the death of Christ, John the Baptist introduced Jesus as the bridegroom in **John 3:29**. He did this emphasizing the fact that he was not the Christ.

John explained that he was merely a friend of the bridegroom and that his joy was fulfilled in introducing the presenting Jesus, the true bridegroom.

G As the groom would depart after the bride to prepare a place for them to live so Christ has returned to heaven to prepare a place for His bride the church.

Jesus said, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3).

It is this momentous occasion we patiently wait as Christ's bride.

H No other event holds more meaning to us or produces as much eager anticipation as the return of Christ from heaven. As we wait for Jesus we must be characterized by loyalty and fidelity to Christ and His teaching.

Remember that Christ wants to present his bride to himself as "a glorious church not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish"

2. CHRIST LOVES HIS BRIDE

A This is such a simple statement to make. Yet, how profound it is. Paul said that husbands are to love their wives. In like manner Christ loves his bride the church. However, His love greater than any love we have ever experienced here on earth.

B To love is to do what is best for the other person. Christ was the personification of this kind of love in that he did what was best for us but which brought him great sorrow, pain and agony. He died on the cross for our sins.

Paul said to the elders of the church Ephesus, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

C The love that Christ had for his bride is so profound that we cannot fathom the depth of His love. Surely anything that was loved so profoundly must have been of utmost importance.

How can men say the church is not important?

How disappointing it must be to Him when we do not put the kingdom first. He put us first.

Do we put Him first?

D Christ's love for the church causes Him to protect His bride. Every bride looks to her husband for security and protection for she is the weaker vessel. Not weaker in mind or spirit but physically.

Peter instructed husbands to "dwell with them with Understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel."

E As we walk in the light of God's word we are assured "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." This is a continual process. His blood keeps on cleansing us of our sin as we walk in the light.

Paul says, "He is the Savior of the body" (Ephesians 5:23).

F 1 John 3:9 "Whoever has been born of God does not practice sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God." As long as we retain the word (the seed) in us we cannot be harmed by Satan.

3. CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF HIS BRIDE

A In Ephesians 5:22 - 24 "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything."

B Here the whole question of authority is answered. There is no doubt as to who is the head. This is true in marriage and just as true in Christ's church.

In Colossians 3:17 "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." To do something in the name of is to do something by the authority of."

C A wife has no problem submitting herself to her husband because she knows he loves her and would do nothing to harm her.

She willingly submits for there is no danger. So it is with the bride of Christ. We willingly submit to Christ. There is no problem for His commands are "not grievous."

CONCLUSION

The great idea behind the church as the bride of Christ has to be the great and profound love that Christ has for us.

With this knowledge of his profound love how could we ever forsake Him?

How could we ever do anything but love Him?

John says, "We love him because he first loved us." The bride seeks to please the bridegroom.

Any moment now, the announcement may come from heaven "the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him!"

May our expectation of His return produce within us purity, steadfastness and joy.