
The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON CXXII : THE WISE AND SPIRIT FILLED LIFE OF SUBMISSION / THE HAUSTAFEL (5:15-6:9)

Ephesians 5:25-33 — Paul to the CHURCHES —

THE BIBLE'S USE OF METAPHORS — In the last lesson we saw the Lord often uses metaphors to teach great eternal truths, and each of these metaphors are to be kept in their context. Using a metaphor does not necessarily 'lock in' an application; a metaphor may be used in different ways at different times to teach different truths. The example we gave in the last lesson was that of the marriage metaphor used throughout the OT. While the basic sense remained the same (the Lord as the faithful husband and His people as the unfaithful wife), the specific identity of the Bride might change from one passage to another (sometimes the 'wife' was all Israel; sometimes only the northern or southern kingdom; and in Ezekiel the 'wife' was the city of Jerusalem). It should be noted as well that the 'Bride' of Jehovah in the OT was Israel as a *national* entity, what we would say in NT language both the saved and unsaved. This is evident by the 'wife' often becoming totally apostate, something a truly saved person could never do. In the NT the Bride of Christ has more of a *spiritual* application, referring to the saved in one manner or another. So in this lesson we want to continue looking at the marriage metaphor to see how it is developed in the NT.

THE MARRIAGE METAPHOR IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE 'BRIDE OF CHRIST'

'THE CHURCH IS THE BRIDE OF CHRIST' ... MEANING WHAT? — When asked, 'What or who is the Bride of Christ?' most believers will very quickly and automatically respond, 'The church is the Bride of Christ,' almost as one of Pavlov's dogs. But what exactly do they mean when they make such a statement? What is the church to them?

- Some (e.g., dispensational Protestants) would say the church is all the saved from Pentecost to the rapture (which most of them would say is pre-tribulation). Many of them would equate that with the coming (at Pentecost) and departure (at the rapture) of the Holy Spirit; some of the more extreme would even go so far as to say there is no new birth prior to Pentecost and after the rapture. But as we have seen throughout these studies, that definition of the church is not what the NT teaches about the ecclesia.
- Some (e.g., Amillennialists) would say the saved Jews prior to Christ is the church in the OT, which then became the church (all those saved) of the NT; therefore the church are all those saved in both the OT and the NT. While I would strongly disagree with quite a few of the basic tenets of Amillennialism (e.g., that the Lord is no longer working with Israel as a nation since "all the NT saved are 'spiritual Jews'" according to Rom 2:28,29 in their eyes; that a large portion of the OT is spiritual rather than literal; that the NT churches is an outgrowth of Judaism, thus destroying the uniqueness of the NT ecclesia as explained in Eph 2,3; etc.) we will see at the close of this lesson that I (dare I say we?) would be in close agreement with what we might identify as the Bride (see comments below on Rev 21). But I believe the Amillennialists are confusing things limited to this age of time with eternal truths.

- Some (commonly called Baptist Briders) would correctly identify the ‘church’ as individual local congregations as has been defined in these lessons. But taking it a step further, they would then argue that since the first church started by our Lord in Jerusalem was a Baptist church, the only churches today are (some of) the Baptist churches throughout history. The Bride would therefore be those who belong to faithful Baptist churches while all others would be ‘friends of the bridegroom’ (other non-Baptist churches as well as OT saints). But as mentioned above, while I would agree with much of what they say concerning the definition of ecclesia, I believe they are confusing things limited to this age of time with eternal truths.

My thoughts:

- Throw out the term ‘church’ – the term itself does nothing but add confusion to the argument. Before any discussion of ‘is the church the Bride of Christ?’ takes place, it must be clarified what is meant when we say ‘church’ (see above).
- We must remember all passages which relates to the identity of the Bride are only metaphors which are passage specific (as we saw in our last lesson on the OT). Each passage on its own is teaching an eternal truth which may be illustrated in terms of a marriage relationship, but we must be careful not to carry the meaning of that metaphor into another passage where it may not fit. We do great harm by determining the definition of ‘the Bride’ by one passage only and then forcing or ignoring other relative passages. We should also be careful not to place too much literalism into what is only an illustrative teaching tool. The Bible is a whole and does not contradict itself; therefore we must adapt our thinking to each specific passage to which we are studying.

‘READ THE BIBLE FORWARD, NOT BACKWARD’ — I know this was mentioned in the last lesson but it deserves repeating. As one person described John Gill, *“He read the Bible forward, not backward,”* meaning he first looked to Moses and the Prophets before interpreting the Apostle’s writings. John Gill: *“If we spent more time with the OT Hebrew prophets than our favorite eschatological writer, then our eschatological views might change.”* Chip Thornton [John Gill and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb; G3 Ministries, written Sep 21, 2022; <https://g3min.org/john-gill-the-marriage-supper-of-the-lamb/>] says this concerning John Gill: *“I appreciate how Gill reads the Bible forward, not backward. Again, he commented on every verse in the OT before he came to the NT. Few, if any, eschatological writers have done that. They jump into the book of Revelation with an uninformed understanding of the prophets. Often, we see later revelation imposed on and even altering earlier revelation without any NT writer’s authentication. I prefer John Gill’s style: Read the Bible forward, not backward. Revelation’s author, John, was Jewish. John’s heritage, too, was steeped in the OT prophets. What’s more, God revealed Scripture to mankind progressively. Before we spend years studying the book of Revelation, we should spend double that time studying the OT Hebrew prophets.”* We must remember that *when the Apostles wrote, there was no New Testament. The only Bible Jesus and the Apostles used is what we call today the Old Testament. It would be a great error to consider the Bride of Christ without first looking at what the OT says concerning this topic* (thus the reason for the previous lesson).

METAPHORS RELATING TO THE IDENTITY OF THE BRIDE OF CHRIST — What follows is my best attempt to list the verses in the New Testament of metaphors or parables relating to the ancient Jewish marriage customs. All the following verses are from the NKJV. Note there are many places where the terms ‘marry, marriage, bride, bridegroom, wedding feast,’ etc.

are used which have no direct bearing on identifying the Bride of Christ:

- The Sadducees asked Jesus about brothers marrying the same woman, whose wife will she be in heaven? (Matt 22:23-33 || Mark 12:18-27 || Luke 20:27-38)
- Speaking of His return, Jesus said the days will like before the days of Noah: men eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. (Matt 24:36-44 || Luke 17:26-30)
- The wedding in Cana where Jesus did His first miracle (John 2:1-12)
- Paul's counsel to the unmarried (1 Cor 7:25-40)
- Stay pure prior to marriage for God will judge fornicators and adulterers (Heb 13:4)
- When the Lord destroys Babylon, the voice of bridegroom and bride will not be heard in her anymore. (Rev 18:21-24)
- Jesus also gave a parable of a man invited to wedding feast and takes a seat of honor but is asked to take a lower place. But other than it being a wedding feast, there is nothing here directly applicable to our present lesson (Luke 14:7-11).
- Jesus gave a parable of servants who were unprepared when their master returned from the wedding. But other than the master returning from a marriage, this again has no real application to our present lesson (Luke 12:35-40).

What follows are several parables which speak of the Father inviting people to a wedding feast, people rejecting or accepting the call, etc. At first glance I thought these parables had nothing positive to add to our lesson, but upon further reflection I do believe there are things we might glean from these parables.

● ¹ *And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said:* ² *“The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son,* ³ *and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come.* ⁴ *Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, ‘“See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.’”’* ⁵ *But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business.* ⁶ *And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them.* ⁷ *But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.* ⁸ *Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy.* ⁹ *Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’* ¹⁰ *So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.* ¹¹ *“But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment.* ¹² *So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless.* ¹³ *Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’* ¹⁴ *“For many are called, but few are chosen.”* (Matt 22:1-14)

Jesus gave this parable of a king sending out servants for his son's wedding, inviting people to come but many reject the invitation. The messengers were even beaten and killed, so the Lord turned to others. Included within this parable is one coming to the wedding feast without a

wedding garment who was cast out, illustrating the necessity of being clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ for heaven. The emphasis of this parable is the Jewish rejection of the gospel message, after which the Lord turns to the Gentiles.

But what does that have to do with our present lesson? I believe we could file this under '*similar metaphors with different applications*.' At we consider the identity of the '*Bride of Christ*,' we might ask what is the typical automatic response of the identity of the Bride? Most would respond, '*the Bride of Christ is the church*,' and by that most would mean people saved in this age (see the notes above). But while the identity of the Bride in the parable above is not given, who are the guests? The guests are those who respond to the invitation given by the King; or in this parable, God the Father, the One preparing the wedding for His Son. So while the emphasis of this parable is the Jewish rejection of the gospel message, we would be on firm Scriptural ground to say those who respond to the invitation to come to the wedding are the saved. That being so, how would this relate to other metaphors which appear to teach the Bride is the ecclesia, or to what others would say anyone who is saved? This is yet another example that we must not push a metaphor (or parable in this case) to the extreme. Or if pressed, this parable illustrates that similar metaphors may be used with different applications in different passages.

One final observation prior to moving on: in our last lesson we saw in the OT where Jehovah is given metaphorically by several prophets to be the 'Husband' and the 'Bride' being national Israel in some form or another. Maybe a Messianic Jew might make the observation that in this parable, the 'Bride' could be Israel and the NT saved are the guests at the wedding? Interesting thought.

● ¹⁵ Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, *"Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!"* ¹⁶ Then He said to him, *"A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, ¹⁷ and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' ¹⁸ But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' ¹⁹ And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' ²⁰ Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' ²¹ So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.' ²² And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' ²³ Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. ²⁴ For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.'"* (Luke 14:15-24)

Another parable very similar to the one in Matt 25 that we just looked at. Again, while I originally mentioned this parable did not have anything to do with our present lesson, I can repeat the comments made on the previous parable above. While the servants were not extending an invitation to a wedding feast, if one were to press the similarities between the parables we come to the same conclusion: the ones accepting the invitations would be those who are NT saved people. No mention of a bride in this parable so this may not have a direct correlation to the parable in Matt 25, but the saved people are still the guests invited to the feast.

● ¹ *"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. ³*

Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. ⁵ But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. ⁶ “And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ ⁷ Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. ¹¹ “Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ ¹² But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ ¹³ “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming. (Matt 25:1-13)

The parable of ten virgins, five who kept prepared and five who were negligent in the keeping of their lamps; the bridegroom came unexpectedly and the unprepared were cast out. And while I originally commented that this speaks of the Jewish wedding customs of the day and the coming of the bridegroom, it too has no real application to our present lesson; but upon further reflection there is something similar to the previous parables from which we may learn a lesson. Jesus was giving the parable to emphasize the important of being ready for the Lord’s return. Who are those to which the parable is to be applied? – the virgins, wise and foolish, or those who we might say have at least made a profession of faith. To press further, the wise virgins would be those truly saved and watch for the Lord while the foolish virgins we might say have made empty professions and are not truly saved, therefore are lax and fall away prior to the coming of the Lord. But as it applied to our lesson, those who are saved are not the Bride in this parable but what we might call the bridesmaids, those assisting the Bride in her preparation for marriage. Once again, if we were to press the details of this parable, this would be an example of a parable giving similar metaphors with a different application than what we see in other passages.

‘THE BRIDEGROOM, THE BRIDE, AND THE FRIEND OF THE BRIDEGROOM’ — As discussed in the last lesson, the metaphors in these passages consistently portray our Lord Jesus as the bridegroom but the identity of the friend of the bridegroom varies according to the passage. In the gospel of John, the friend of the bridegroom metaphor is identified with John the Baptist:

²² After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. ²³ Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized. ²⁴ For John had not yet been thrown into prison. ²⁵ Then there arose a dispute between some of John’s disciples and the Jews [or possibly, ‘a Jew’] about purification. ²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, “‘Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified — behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!’” ²⁷ John answered and said, “‘A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him.’ ²⁹ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3:22-30)

But in the other gospels (Matt 9:14,15 || Mk 2:18-20 || Lk 5:33-35) a similar metaphor is given wherein the friends of the bridegroom are identified as Jesus’ disciples:

¹⁴ Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, “‘Why do we and the Pharisees fast often,

but Your disciples do not fast?’”¹⁵ And Jesus said to them, “‘Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.’” (Matt 9:14,15)

¹⁸ The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then they came and said to Him, “‘Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?’”¹⁹ And Jesus said to them, “‘Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast.²⁰ But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days. (Mark 2:18-20)

³³ Then they [the Pharisees and Scribes, see v. 30] said to Him, “‘Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?’”³⁴ And He said to them, “‘Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them?³⁵ But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days.’” (Luke 5:33-35)

In these metaphors there is a single purpose for which the metaphor is being directed. In the first (John 3:22-30), the ‘friend of the bridegroom’ is a metaphor for John the Baptist, the purpose being his preparatory role is secondary to that of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. The whole passage speaks of John the Baptist’s humility and recognition of his position before his Lord and Master. In the second (Matt 9:14,15; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35), the question of Christ’s disciples not fasting like the disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees is answered. Jesus said His disciples were not fasting because He was still among them, but when He would be taken from them then they would fast. As with other metaphors or parables, if we are to derive any other lesson from these passages, we must make sure we are able to back that up with other direct statements from elsewhere in the Scriptures.

‘THE BRIDE OF CHRIST’ METAPHOR? (2 COR 11) — There are two passages which are interrelated, both having to do with the presenting of the bride:

*¹ Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly – and indeed you do bear with me. ² For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. **For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.** (2 Cor 11:1, 2)*

In this passage Paul is illustrated as the one presenting the bride to Christ in the betrothal ceremony (some would say Paul is acting here as ‘the friend of the bridegroom,’ responsible to assist in the bride remaining pure prior to marriage). While I would not agree with those who use this passage to teach only Baptist churches will be the Bride of Christ, the metaphor presented by Paul is a beautiful picture of an ecclesia with Christ and I would not want to diminish any lesson we might derive from that picture. But as we consider Paul’s comments here we must also bear in mind another passage in Eph 5:

*²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,
²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ **that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.** (Eph 5:25-27)*

So we see in 2 Cor 11 the one presenting the ecclesia at Corinth to Christ is Paul, but in Eph 5:27 it is Christ presenting the ecclesia(s) to Himself. **Both of these passages are using Jewish**

marriage traditions as a metaphor to illustrate the relationship to Christ to His ecclesia(s). These passages do not contradict each other but rather complement each other. Each is teaching its own truth, using a metaphor in a similar fashion. Let us relish the truth(s) the Lord is showing us through the metaphors in both of these passages.

Does Paul here teach the identity of the Bride in 2 Cor 11? He definitely uses the marriage metaphor to relate to the ecclesia as being betrothed and in preparation to meet her bridegroom. I would not disagree with those who identify the ecclesia as the (at least future) Bride of Christ using this passage.

‘THE BRIDE OF CHRIST’ METAPHOR? (ROM 7) — There are some who use Paul’s comments in Rom 7 to identify the Bride of Christ, specifically v. 4:

‘Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another – to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.’ (Rom 7:4)

But if we are to use this to help identify the Bride of Christ, we must take the entire passage in its context:

*¹ ‘Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? ² For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. ³ So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. ⁴ **Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another — to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.** ⁵ For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. ⁶ But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.’ (Rom 7:1-6)*

The context is one of submission and slavery, either to righteousness or to the law and sin. Paul says the law has dominion over a person as long as we are alive (7:1) but at the moment of our salvation we became dead to sin and the law through the work of Jesus Christ (7:4,6). Paul is in essence following up his remarks on the believer being dead to sin from Rom 6:

⁶ ‘knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.’ (Rom 6:6-9).

Paul uses marriage as an illustration of the believer no longer being under the law: under OT law, a Jewish wife is bound to her husband while he is alive, but of course at the death of the husband the wife is free to marry another. In like manner, since the believer is dead to the law and sin through the death of Christ, the believer is now free to be ‘married’ to Christ who was raised from the dead.

The metaphor of the marriage relationship is used in this passage of individual believers. The emphasis here is the believer's sanctification and their relationship to grace and the work of the Spirit. This is not to deny other passages where marriage is used as a metaphor but is in addition to those other passages. Every passage we consider must stand in its own context, whether it is similar to another passage using the same metaphor or is independent and complementary with another passage using the same metaphor.

THE BRIDE IN EPHESIANS 5 — We come now to what is typically thought of as the 'undeniable defining' of the ecclesia as the Bride of Christ. This is a natural assumption since Paul uses Christ's relationship to His ecclesia to illustrate several truths concerning marriage, but I do not think it defines the ecclesia as the Bride of Christ in the way most people consider this passage. Most see a parallel throughout this passage but I believe that to be an error. *As we consider the passage before us, it must be remembered that Paul is using the relationship between Christ and the ecclesia to teach us truths about marriage, not the other way around* (but note my comments when we get to vv. 31-33).

Let us first see what Paul says in Ephesians 5:22-30 about Christ in relation to the ecclesia (we will not concern ourselves at this time as to what this means for our marriages).

- **CHRIST IS HEAD OF OUR ECCLESIA** — *'Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church;'* (vv. 22, 23) Our Lord Jesus Christ is the head of our ecclesia. This conveys leadership, authority, provision, guidance, and direction. Paul has already used this metaphor twice in this epistle (1:22; 4:15), both of which included the 'body' as it does here.

- **CHRIST IS SAVIOR OF THE BODY** — *'and He is the Savior of the body.'* (v. 23b) Paul here reinforces the concept of Christ as the head, perhaps even a reminder of His ultimate authority since He was the one who rescued His people from eternal separation from God. It could also provide an explanation for His headship: He is Head because He is the Savior.

- **OUR ECCLESIA IS TO BE SUBJECT TO CHRIST** — *'Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.'* (v. 24) Paul essentially repeats what he just said but in reverse. Since Christ is the head of our ecclesia, the ecclesia is to be in subjection to Him. But in this relationship our Lord is never tyrannical nor is the ecclesia merely servile since it is a relationship of love. Our ecclesia looks to our Lord for His beneficial rule, experiencing His presence and love, receiving from Him gifts that will enable growth and maturity, and responding to Him in gratitude and awe.

- **CHRIST LOVED THE ECCLESIA AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR HER, THE ULTIMATE GOAL BEING TO MAKE HER HOLY** — *'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.'* (vv. 25-28) Our Master showed His love for us by giving His life as a sacrifice for our sins (v. 25) with the ultimate goal of making us like unto Himself and taking us home to glory, redeemed through His blood.

- **CHRIST NOURISHES AND CHERISHES THE ECCLESIA** — *‘For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.’* (v. 29) The ecclesia exists and will continue to exist because it is sustained by our Lord and Master in love.
- **THE ECCLESIAS ARE MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST** — *‘For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.’* (v. 30) Another metaphor, previously mentioned in v. 23. Note *‘THE body of Christ’* is His glorified, resurrected body in heaven. Everything else is a metaphor, a picture used to teach various truths. Paul uses the same metaphor elsewhere; e.g. 1 Cor 12:12-31 where the ecclesia in Corinth is a ‘body’ used to illustrate how the Lord places those with differing gifts within His ecclesia, each for their own purpose. No one is unimportant; each has his / her place in the body. Note especially 1 Cor 12:27, *‘Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually,’* showing Paul was speaking of that ecclesia in Corinth and not all Christianity (as these verses are usually understood). Of course as we have often said in these lessons, what is true of that single ecclesia is true of all and each ecclesia.

If that was the end of this passage I would argue Paul is not here equating the Bride of Christ with the ecclesia, and I previously made such a statement (*Mea culpa!*). But upon further study I must agree with those who believe Paul to be making an extraordinary conclusion to his argument.

- **THE MYSTERY** — *‘“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.’* (vv. 31-33)

While I originally believed this passage had little to offer about the identity of the Bride of Christ, I have come across things in my studies which is making me back off on that claim. I do believe the first portion of this passage is misunderstood because people do not take into consideration Paul is using Christ as an example for our marriages and not the other way around. But I have read comments about vv. 31-33 which is making me rethink my previous conviction. Please follow the argument as we look at what Paul says (specifically in v. 32). [quoting loosely from Clinton Arnold, *Ephesians*, 392-397; see also Best, *Ephesians*, 552ff; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 380ff; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 826ff; F. F. Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, 393ff; Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:643; Ellicott, *Ephesians*, 139; Alford, *Alford’s Greek Testament*, 3:138f; Eadie, *Ephesians*, 426-435; Abbott, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 173ff]

Paul quotes Gen 2:24, the basis for marriage established by the Lord from the very beginning. Nothing new in that aspect but Paul says this is a ‘great mystery.’ How could a text as old as Genesis now be a ‘mystery?’

This has been debated for centuries. The first question is what does Paul mean by the word ‘mystery?’ (it could have its typical meaning of *‘something hidden until revealed,’* or it could have the sense of *‘something secret, something difficult to understand or explain’* as we usually understand the word outside of Scripture, or the Catholics use the Latin Vulgate translation to give it the sense of *‘sacrament,’* something even Catholic theologians argue against.) Without going into too much detail, it is best to take this in its usual Scriptural sense of *‘something hidden until revealed by the Lord’* as it is used throughout Ephesians (1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 6:19). So the Lord revealed something to Paul that has been previously hidden. But to what is Paul referring?

The choices are (a) the preceding clause, *‘the two will become one flesh,’* (b) the following clause, *‘I am speaking of Christ and the ecclesia,’* or (c) both. But if Paul was referring to *‘the two will*

become one flesh, ' this would be unnecessary and superfluous since nothing new is being revealed by Paul quoting Genesis. Most I have studied therefore say Paul is using the divine institution of marriage and that *'the two will become one flesh'* (v. 31) to support his understanding of the closeness of Christ and the ecclesia. ***By revelation Paul is engaging here in a form of 'typological exegesis' that rests on a correspondence between creation (Gen 2:24) and redemption (Christ and the ecclesia) – an interpretation of the Genesis text that is unique to Paul. "But making the marriage of Christ and the Church the archetype for Christian marriage has no antecedent and is Ephesians' unique addition to the early Christian household code tradition."*** [Lincoln, 363]

The very term 'mystery' (see Dan 2:18, 19, 30) implies something about the plan of God that cannot be known apart from God's own gracious revelation. The commentators I am using suggests Paul "believed that God had revealed to him ***an allegorical application of the statement in Genesis*** in a manner similar to the way God revealed to Daniel the allegorical interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.... ***Paul calls this interpretation of Gen. 2:24 a great mystery because no one could have understood that the text should be read this way apart from God's gracious revelation of this truth to Paul.***" [Thielman, 828]

That Paul was making a new observation revealed to him by the Lord is further indicated by his use of *'but I am saying.'* The only other use of this emphatic phrase in the NT is by our Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:22, 28, 32, 24, 29, 44). Paul is not here contrasting his statement with other doctrines (as did our Lord, *'you have heard it was said ... but I say unto you...'*). Rather Paul recognizes that his interpretation is surprising but he knew it by revelation. In essence he was saying, 'When I refer to the well-known establishment of marriage in the book of Genesis, I am talking about the intimate union of Christ and the ecclesia.' We further know Paul was taking a short digression in v. 32 to show the first marriage in Genesis was a type of the present relationship between Christ and His ecclesias by him saying 'nevertheless' at the beginning of v. 33. This pulls the reader back to the train of thought Paul had been developing before his comments on Christ and the ecclesias.

But it would be an error to interpret every element of the Genesis passage typologically; for example, there are those who make comments such as, *'As a man is to leave mother and father and cling to his bride, so Christ left God the Father and His mother (either the heavenly Jerusalem or Mary) in order to cling to His ecclesia.'* The main point of commonality Paul is stressing here is the bond of union between husband and wife that prefigures the closeness and intimacy that characterizes the church's relationship to Christ under the new covenant. 'This mystery' thus refers to the union of husband and wife in marriage as a divinely instituted metaphor of the close and intimate union between Christ and the ecclesia. It is a 'great' (μέγα, mega) mystery because it is so profound and significant. "[T]he marriage of Adam and Eve was a type of Christ and his church; for in this the first Adam was a figure of him that was to come, as well as in being a federal head to his posterity: Adam was before Eve, so Christ was before his church; God thought it not proper that man should be alone, so neither Christ, but that he should have some fellows and companions with him." [Gill, 9:106] ***"The final line of the citation is a key affirmation that applies both to the Christ-church relationship and to the husband-wife relationship. Whereas in the last line before the citation (5:30) Paul said that 'we are members of [Christ's] body,' here he declares through the testimony of Torah that 'the two will become one flesh.' In the original Genesis context, this applied specifically to husband-wife relationships, but here Paul points to the fact that it transcends the institution of marriage and points to the closeness and unity between Christ and his church."*** [Arnold, 393]

THE BOOK OF REVELATION AND THE BRIDE OF CHRIST DIRECTLY DECLARED

— While still not making clear statements as to the identity of the Bride, the first clear verbiage of the Bride and wedding supper of the Lamb in Revelation is given in chapter 19:

¹ After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, ‘’Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! ² For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.’’ ³ Again they said, ‘’Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!’’ ⁴ And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, ‘’Amen! Alleluia!’’ ⁵ Then a voice came from the throne, saying, ‘’Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!’’ ⁶ And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘’Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! ⁷ Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.’’ ⁸ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. ⁹ Then he said to me, ‘’Write: ‘Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’’ ¹⁰ And he said to me, ‘’These are the true sayings of God.’’ ¹⁰ And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘’See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’’ (Rev 19:1-10)

So while yet unidentified, the Bride of Christ is directly discussed. But it is in Revelation 21 where the Bride is clearly identified. This is not to say the Bride could not be a metaphor for something else in other verses; as has been discussed, we must take each passage on its own. We have seen that Paul speaks of the ecclesia at Corinth being ‘betrothed’ to Christ (2 Cor 11:2) and then more clearly in Eph 5:32 Paul declares the Lord had revealed to him the first words on marriage written by Moses in Gen 2:24 was also a metaphor for Christ and the ecclesia of those who received his letter. And as stated before, what was true of that single ecclesia is true of each and every ecclesia. So on earth and in time the Bride of Christ is the ecclesia (or one could say ‘the ecclesias,’ or one could even extrapolate that out to refer to believers since most of the NT was written to believers within an ecclesia). But John is showing us truths outside of time when he clearly states, ‘*I will show you the Bride...*’. Since the passage is so long (the entirety of chapter 21), I will first give a birds-eye view followed by the passage itself:

- v. 1 new heaven and new earth
- v. 2 John saw New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Note this does not say here the New Jerusalem is the bride but adorned as a bride (but see vv. 9,10).
- v. 3 tabernacle of God is with men, He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, God will be their God
- v. 4 all tears wiped away, no more death, sorrow, crying, pain
- v. 5 “I make all things new”
- v. 6-8 Christ gives water of life freely to any who thirst. He who overcomes shall inherit

all things, Christ will be his God and he shall be his son; but unsaved cast out to eternal damnation.

- v. 9-14 angel says to John, ***I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.*** John sees the New Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. New Jerusalem described with gates with names of 12 tribes of children of Israel written on them (v. 12) and foundations with names of 12 apostles (v. 14).
- v. 15-21 size and beauty of city described
- v. 22 but no temple inside New Jerusalem for Lord and Lamb are its temple
- v. 23 no need of sun, glory of God illuminates it
- v. 24 ***nations of those who are saved shall walk therein***
- v. 25 gates shall not be shut; there is no night there
- v. 27 ***no unsaved will be there but all those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life [ALL THE ELECT]***

Here is Revelation 21 in its entirety:

¹ Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. ² Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, ***prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*** ³ And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

⁵ Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

⁶ And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. ⁷ He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. ⁸ But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

⁹ Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, ***"Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife."*** ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. ¹² Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: ¹³ three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.

¹⁴ Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the

twelve apostles of the Lamb. ¹⁵ And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. ¹⁶ The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. ¹⁷ Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. ¹⁸ The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. ¹⁹ The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, ²⁰ the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. ²¹ The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

²² But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. ²⁴ And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. ²⁵ Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). ²⁶ And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. ²⁷ But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. (Rev 21:1-27)

Following this amazing picture of the eternal state, there is one other mention of the Bride in the book of Revelation:

'And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.' (Rev 22:17)

The New Jerusalem references the OT saints (21:12, each gate having the names of the twelve tribes of Israel) along with the NT saints (21:14, each foundation having the names of the twelve apostles). I believe the city either represents all the elect or the city is inhabited by all the elect, both OT and NT saints. Is this what the Lord was referencing when He said the following? –

¹⁰ When Jesus heard it [the centurion saying he was not worthy of Christ coming to his house, but just speak a word and my servant will be healed], He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" ¹¹ **And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.** ¹² But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹³ Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour. (Matt 8:10-13)

While I cannot argue definitively this is a reference to the future marriage feast of the Lamb, I also have no problem in thinking it does refer to it. But whether this is the wedding feast of the Lamb or not, this passage does teach the NT saints will sit together with the OT saints.

So the Bride is directly identified in chapter 21, at least for this metaphor. But as I have said throughout these last lessons, these are metaphors and word pictures which God Almighty gives to help us frail, poor, limited beings understand great eternal truths. So the Bride metaphor might

picture other truths in other passages, *but in vv. 24-27 I believe we are forced to identify the Bride of Christ with all the elect of all the ages, everyone who has ever been saved, everyone 'whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life' (v. 27).* No exception seems to be present in these verses; all the elect from all ages are gathered (as the New Jerusalem?), without are all the lost, everyone who ever lived without bowing their knee to the Lord while they were alive.

If there are other metaphors in the Scriptures, those are not to be disregarded nor ignored. Each are to be taken in their context and used to glean the truths the Lord is giving to us, passage-by-passage. But the context of these verses in Revelation 21 is the eternal state so we might infer this to be the final metaphor given in the Scriptures of the Bride, here pictured as all the elect, chosen from all earth's ages.

One further observation as we conclude: while I believe the Scripture teaches the final and eternal Bride of Christ will be all the elect, I also believe that belongs to eternity and does not negate any picture given within the pages of our NT that relates to time. The local congregations might be considered as being betrothed to our Master; that metaphor still remains for us during this age. The Father is (was?) still considered the Husband of national Israel in its varying metaphors, as we saw in our last lesson. That is not negated by what still remains future for us trapped in time. If there was ever a time to *'rightly divide the Word of Truth'* I believe it is as we consider the topic of these last few lessons. May the Lord give us His Spirit to guide our thoughts.