

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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The Bride of Christ

Dan Huff

The Scriptures often employ various words to paint a picture to assist us in seeing God's beautiful plan. The church is described in various terms: the body of Christ, the ground and pillar of the truth, a spiritual house, the flock of God, God's field, and a bride. *"For your Maker is your husband, The Lord of hosts is His name; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth"* (Isaiah 54:5). The prophet appears to be looking forward to the time of the church. God chose to use the word *"husband,"* revealing the closeness and relationship that He desires for Him and His people. He is the greatest husband of all, the Creator!

In the New Testament, we begin to see this fulfillment of God's design take form in His Son. John the Baptizer, when describing his role and place in God's blueprint, calls himself a friend, or the best man, of the bridegroom Jesus. Since Christ is the bridegroom, what would His disciples be?

Jesus spoke of the kingdom of heaven in terms of marriage. He spoke the parable about a significant king who arranged and prepared a sumptuous wedding feast for His Son. Those who were invited to the wedding feast made light of it, therefore the king had his servants invite whosoever would come to share in this joyous occasion (see **Matthew 22:1-14**). On another occasion, Jesus spoke of the ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five were prepared, and five were not. But what were they waiting for? For the bridegroom to come and the wedding to take place (**Matthew 25:1-13**).

While Jesus was on the earth, He did not physically marry. However, the Scriptures teach us that everything He did while He was here was to purchase His bride's freedom from sin and to prepare her for the great and wonderful marriage in heaven! Paul, speaking about husbands and wives, gives the Savior as the ultimate example for husbands to follow:

"...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" (**Ephesians 5:25-27**).

After this, in **verse 32** Paul says he was talking about Christ and His church. Again, the husband and wife relationship is used to describe the Lord and His people, the church.

Paul speaking to the church in Corinth: *"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 Corinthians 11:2**). Paul was concerned for the church. Betrothal would be similar to our engagement, but stronger – breaking it would require divorce. It was as if the marriage had already taken place: the bridegroom and bride had made their life-long commitment to one another, but the consummation with intimacy had not taken place yet. Paul says this is how the Lord looks upon those who have entered into the New Covenant relationship through the gospel of Christ. The Lord looks upon Christians as spoken for, as His, and He will complete the marriage when He returns.

The scene of **Revelation chapter 19** is at the throne of God in heaven (**19:4**). As Jesus said in **Matthew 22**, the marriage of the Lamb, the Son of God, has come.

"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." 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. Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God" (**Revelation 19:7-9**).

The Lamb is Jesus Christ (**John 1:29; Revelation 5:6-9**). His bride is the glorious church, whom He washed, cleansed, and sanctified for Himself. Notice what the Lamb's bride is dressed in? This dress begins with our wedding garment of Christ Himself—putting Him on in obedient faith (**Matthew 22:11; Acts 2:38**). *"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ"* (**Galatians 3:27**). Christians are making our own wedding dresses. The righteous acts of the Saints compose the bride's wedding dress. What will our wedding garments look like? What do they look like? The Church (you and I) must prepare for this great and wonderful event. The Lord will not accept a bride who is not purified and fit.

Back in **Matthew 22** the Great King invited all peoples to come to His wedding feast for His Son. The king, walking among His guests, found a man who was not wearing a wedding garment. It was custom for the host to present his guests with robes of honor. The fact that this man did not have a wedding garment was proof that he had no right to be there (**verse 11**). The man was speechless, no excuses, he knew he was supposed to have a wedding garment. Praise God, the Great King, who has graciously offered us a wedding garment of righteousness through the blood of Christ, so that we can take part in the wedding of the lamb (**Isaiah 61:10**). *"For as*

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many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

Have you submitted to the will of God and put on Christ, by faith, in baptism? May we be found like the five faithful virgins, who kept their lights burning bright while they waited for the bridegroom to come; be ready, that we may enter in with Him to that great wedding!

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One Another

Blake Stanley

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, on baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:4-6).

One of the overarching themes in this passage is Christian unity. We are all a part of one body. The same Spirit dwells in each of us. We were all called to the same hope. There is one Lord whom we all follow by the same faith through the same baptism. Unified through these commonalities, we can create strong bonds with one another.

There are challenges to obtaining and maintaining this unity. Underneath the umbrella of the things which bind us together we all stand as imperfect people. We all have sin. We are all tempted to be self-seeking and proud, to feel bitterness, offense, and envy. We are also all different. We differ in our personalities, communication styles, in the way we process information and in many other ways. These imperfections and differences have the potential to undermine the unity found in these commonalities. This may be why Paul starts off this passage by addressing the kind of attitude and approach we should have towards one another. In verses 1-3, we are encouraged

"to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

The church is a "one another" organization. We participate in a congregation not only for ourselves, but also so that we may serve one another. **Ephesians 4:7-16** explains this clearly. In those verses, Paul compares the church to a body whose members function and work together to inspire growth in one another. But in order for this to happen, we must first see to walking worthy of the calling with which we have been called. According to Paul in **Ephesians 4**, that requires us to relate to our brethren in a certain way -- with gentleness, lowliness, longsuffering, bearing with one another.

This same theme is found throughout the Bible. Paul wrote similar admonitions in many of his letters: **Colossians 3, Romans 12, Romans 13, Romans 14, Romans 15, Galatians 5, Titus 3, and Philippians 2** to name a few. Christ's lessons and actions speak to this same subject. From the sermon on the mount to the washing of the apostles' feet the night before the crucifixion, Christ's life is saturated with teachings and examples of how we are to treat and view one another. Even God Himself has laid for us a pattern of works to follow insofar that many of the same characteristics prescribed to us by God, Christ and the apostles are the same characteristics used to describe the nature of God. Longsuffering. Merciful. Kindness. Goodness. Forgiving. Love. In fact, one could argue that our relationships with one another is one of the greatest areas where we can aspire to emulate our Heavenly Father.

God has set forth through commandment, His example, the example of His son and the inspirational writings of the New Testament what our attitudes and actions should be towards one another. The volume of work provides us with evidence of its importance and speaks to the difficulty of the task. If it was easy, why would Paul feel compelled to write about this so many times? Why did Christ have to teach on the subject so often? Why is it that the night before the crucifixion the Messiah took the time to wash the stinky, dirty, calloused feet of His apostles?

Regardless of the difficulty of the task, God wants our hearts and minds to be in a place where we are ready to serve our brethren. In **2Timothy 2:20, 21**, Paul wrote,

"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel of honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work."

We all have the responsibility to God to be prepared to do His will, and God has given us the responsibility to encourage and strengthen one another. My heart has to be clean concerning my brethren, or I'm not going to be prepared for that work. If my brother has a need that I am either blind to or indifferent towards because of the condition of my heart, that's a problem.

Being longsuffering, forbearing, showing tender mercies, forgiving one another, letting the peace of God rule our hearts. These are all things God expects of us and there are no conditionals. It does not matter what others do. It does not matter how others behave. This is our responsibility. Longsuffering, forgiveness and mercy are often required of us when none is asked for and none is deserved. But where would each of us be without undeserved longsuffering, forgiveness and mercy from our Lord? And how pretentious of us would it be to withhold a similar grace from one another?

As we work together in our congregations let us allow the peace of God to rule in our hearts, forgiving one another,

giving preference to one another and, above all, loving one another.

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Christ's Five Love Languages

Nick Hermon

In what ways does Jesus love?

In 1995, Dr. Gary Chapman wrote a book entitled *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate*. Chapman's book sold over 10 million copies and frequently ranks on the *New York Times* bestseller list. It has been used in marriage counseling and is even used in corporate training to better understand colleagues. In the book, it outlines five ways to express love that Chapman calls the "love languages." These "love languages" include physical touch, words of affirmation, quality time, gifts, and acts of service. This got me wondering, "Can the five love languages be applied to what Christ did while he was in human form here on Earth?"

Here are just a few of the MANY examples:

- Jesus showed love through *physical touch* in **Luke 17** by reaching out to lepers, who were deemed untouchable and made them clean.
- He showed *words of affirmation* in **John 15:9**, "*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.*"
- He gave *quality time* in **Mark 6:34**, "*When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.*"
- And he gave YOU the *gift* of life. He gave you the gift of your body and all the intricacies that go with it. He gives you the gift of resources to provide for that body. He gives you the gift of free will -- to think, do, and express your thoughts and feelings. He gives you the gift of living in a place, time, and means of meeting with others of like-common faith to worship Him. He gives you the gift of being able to see the stories of old, learn from them, and apply these lessons to your life. And although you fail Him, He gave YOU the gift of HIS life. He gives the gift of grace so that when you fail, you can have forgiveness of sin. And He gives you the gift of salvation if you choose to diligently serve Him.
- And lastly, he showed *acts of service* when all power had come upon Him and He humbly chose to wash the feet of his disciples.

Matthew 20:28 put it so elegantly: that He came "*NOT TO BE SERVED but TO SERVE and to give his life a ransom for many.*"

Jesus loves in every way we can possibly imagine. His love is unconditional and should be a comfort to us. When you feel that life is insignificant, remember that He left His throne (**John 1:1-14**) and came to earth and gave his life for you because of His love. While we can never love Him as much as He loves us, I hope this serves as a reminder just how much He loves you and you can sing with full confidence, "Jesus loves me! This. I. Know."

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Glory to God!

The church in **Excelsior Springs, MO** was overjoyed when **Martin and Deb Lira** placed their membership with the church in March.

Blessed Are the Dead

Wayne E. Worthington, 93, of **Pueblo, CO**, went to be with Jesus on January 10. Brother Worthington was a member of the churches in **Stull, KS, Colorado Springs, CO, and Pueblo CO**.

Joseph Dunn, Jr., 77, of the **Carlenville, IL** congregation passed away on February 16. He served the church as an elder at Carlenville for many years. Brother Joe was a serious student of the Bible and was well loved. Living his life as a servant, he spent much of his time helping others and using his talents as an electrician and handyman. Those that knew him will miss his strong, sincere bear hugs and his generous spirit.

Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' " "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

~ **Revelation 14:13**

Special Meetings

The church in **Kirkville, MO** will be hosting a **Ladies' Day, May 5, 9:30 AM till 2 PM** with lunch provided. This year's theme is "Daughters of the King." Teachers will be **Maddie Hermon, Heather Lockhart, Cindy Stephens, Lois Williams**.



Please check your expiration date!

Continued from page 3: "Special Meetings"

Please RSVP for either Friday or Saturday night housing to **Gaylene Green** 816-304-5201 or **Cathy Poyner** 660-216-0766.

The church in **Martensdale, IA** plans a **Ladies' Day** for **June 2**. **Trinity Davis, LuAnn Woody, and Callie Barringer** will be relating Esther, Ruth, and Hannah/Abigail to the Proverbs 31 woman. **Sarah Morris, Bethany Morris, and Megan Stevens** will offer small devotions before each speaker on "What does a Godly Woman look like to you?"

The brethren in **Bolivar, PA** invite you to a special meeting during the week of **June 10-15** with **Evangelist Steve Wright**. The theme of the meeting is "Creation vs. Evolution and the End Times." Brother Steve will speak on Sunday at 10 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. A one hour Bible study will be held in the mornings at 10 a.m., Monday-Friday with a thirty minute question period to follow. Brother Steve will also speak Tuesday - Friday evenings on various topics related to the covenants recorded in the Bible.

The brethren who meet at **Old Lamine** (rural Blackwater, MO) invite you to their annual **Family VBS** to be held on **July 21**. This year's theme is "Stand Strong or Stand Wrong." Classes and activities will be offered for both kids and adults.

2018 Meetings

May 5.....Ladies' Day, Kirksville, MO
May 5-6.....Lawrence, KS
June 2.....Ladies' Day, Martensdale, IA
June 9-10.....Vandalia, IA
June 10-15.....Bolivar, PA
June 16-17... Young People's Meeting, Excelsior Springs, MO
June 18-23.....Shaver Lake, CA
July 2-6.....Midwest Bible Campout, Eminence, MO
July 21-27.....Murray Road, Lee's Summit, MO
September 1-2.....Pleasant Hill, IA

"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Here and There

A special congratulations to **Don and Wanda Burkman** of the **Pleasant Hill, IA** congregation who will soon be celebrating their sixtieth wedding anniversary. The Burkman's were married by **Evangelist Tom Dennis** in a garden ceremony on June 2, 1958. Their children are holding a reception in their honor on Sunday, June 3 at the **Marriott Courtyard, 2405 SE Creekview Dr., Ankeny, IA 50021 from 2-5 p.m.** If you are not able to attend the reception, you may send your well wishes to the Burkman's:

**6176 NE 12th Ave.
Pleasant Hill, IA 50327**

Congratulations to this wonderful couple!

The Gospel Message

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