

The Church As the Bride of Christ

15102023 Ps David

Imagine this scene where the atmosphere is full of joyful anticipation. Families and friends are dressed in their best or in their festive clothing. The room is decorated with meaningful beauty. People smile even as tears fill their eyes. Why do weddings fill our hearts with such emotions? Perhaps experiencing the union of the bride and the bridegroom reminds our hearts of something for which we were made, of something toward which we are headed?

Every time I attend the wedding, and see the bride walk down the aisle it moves me, sometime even to tears, because it reminds me of the day when I, as part of the church, will be received by Christ Jesus.

Today let's have a look at what the Bible says about the relationship between God and His people. Let us consider how we are described as the bride and God as the bridegroom and how it all relates to us.

The Bible is full of hints about God's people being His bride. In the Old Testament, the prophets often portray God's people as a beloved bride who, unfortunately, is also often an adulterous wife. God is seen as the faithful husband who pursues and wins back His bride time and time again, and whose steadfast love is strong and lasting.

For example, the book of Hosea portrays the prophet Hosea as being directed by God to remain faithful to a wife who was repeatedly unfaithful to him.

Hosea 3:1

3 The Lord said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes."

This gives us a picture of what God is like in the face of our own idolatry.

Jeremiah also contains imagery of God's people as a formerly loving bride who has now become a prostitute, chasing after other men who use and abuse her (see **Jeremiah 2**).

Ezekiel portrays the tender and generous love of God for His people, which is then thrown in His face as He watches her not even accept payment for her prostitution, but instead bribe other men, paying them to let her be with them (**Ezekiel 16**).

After clearly depicting the unfaithfulness of the people in dozens of chapters, **Isaiah** ends with a beautiful reaffirmation of God's faithful and enduring love for His people:

Isaiah 62:4-5 NIV

⁴No longer will they call you 'Deserted', or name your land 'Desolate'. But you will be called Hephzibah (delight), and your land Beulah (married); for the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married.

⁵As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.

Hephzibah means 'my delight is in her', **Beulah** means 'bride' or 'married'.

We see that God's people are loved and received as His bride.

What Does It Mean That Jesus Is the Bridegroom?

Instead of giving up on His adulterous people, God Himself came near to her as Immanuel, who dwelt among us.

John 3:29

²⁹The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The **friend** who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.

We can see in the New Testament that John the Baptist calls himself the friend of Jesus, whom John refers to as the bridegroom.

Jesus also calls Himself the bridegroom when He was criticized for not enforcing the level of fasting that the Pharisees practiced among His own disciples, saying:

Matthew 9:15

¹⁵Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.

The second part of this verse states how He would be put to death and later of His ascension to heaven; we know that all this happened to Jesus so these verses are referring to Jesus.

Jesus came to us and He clearly proclaim His identity as the bridegroom of the church.

What Does It Mean That the Church Is the Bride of Christ?

Metaphorical language can be mysterious. Consider this: It is a beautiful idea that the church is the bride of Christ, but what does it actually mean to be the bride of Christ? As it is written in...

2 Corinthians 11:2

I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.

Through Christ's sacrifice, intimacy with the Father can be restored and sins are forgiven. Through Christ's atonement, we are presented to God with the purity of a virgin on her wedding day.

While God's covenant relationship with the Israelites remained, through His son, He formed a new covenant with all who believed in Jesus Christ and who are surrendered to His lordship. Those who believe are called the church.

And as Christ promised to be faithful to the church, He described His expectations for the church's relationship as His bride.

Paul explains the mystery after giving instructions to Christians husbands and wives in **Ephesians 5:25-32**:

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."

This passage naturally applies to the relationship between a husband and wife but it also extends to the relationship between the church (the bride) and Christ (the bridegroom). The church must submit to the authority of Jesus Christ and surrender to His lordship.

What Are Characteristics of the Bride of Christ?

Based on this passage, we see two main characteristics of the Church as the Bride of Christ: she is beloved and she is beautiful.

1. The Church Is Beloved by God

Just like a bridegroom loves his bride, God adores his Church. He has not merely professed His love in words, but also demonstrate that love through sacrificial actions.

Romans 5:8

God showed His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

He made the first step. His love for us is unconditional love.

Sally Lloyd-Jones explains that the Bible is “a love story about a brave Prince who leaves his palace, his throne—everything—to rescue the one he loves.”

All the great love stories of the world echo this greatest of love stories. And just like a good husband in an act, God’s actions towards the Church are always full of love. He nourishes and cherishes her in everything.

She is not left alone.

Matthew 28:20

20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

He has her back.

Isaiah 58:8

8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

He provides for her.

Philippians 4:19

19 And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

He protects her in and through all things.

2 Thessalonians 3:3

3 But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.

2. The Church Is Radiantly Beautiful

Just like a glowing bride dressed in a white gown on her wedding day, the Church is portrayed in the Bible as washed and splendidly pure because of the work of Christ. Though the Church is made up of sinful people, redemption is a powerful restorative force that also looks forward to glory when everything wrong will be

made right – when God sees His Church, He sees her made whole and holy, gloriously and graciously freed from the stains of sin and shining in the light of His love.

Although in the Old Testament the prophets portrayed God’s people as a straying wife with an ever-faithful husband, but in...

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We can rejoice that God delights to cleanse His bride in an ongoing way even when she stumbles.

Still Awaiting “Happily Ever After”

As with so many aspects of the Christian life, there is an “already, but not yet” element to the Church’s identity as the Bride of Christ. This is the heavenly reality, but the wedding supper celebrating the eternal union of God with His people is still to come. As believers, we are told to await this feast with great joy and anticipation and to prepare ourselves.

The scripture in Revelation 19:7 lets us see into the glorious future that is to come:

Revelation 19:7

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.”

Revelation 21:2 is reminiscent of the glorious moment in a wedding ceremony when the bride appears:

Revelation 21:2

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

The church as the bride is then declared to be the New Jerusalem, the city of God coming down from heaven. What is unique about this huge, glorious city is that there is no temple, for “the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” are its temple (Revelation 21:9-23).

God Himself dwells with and among His people, the glorious church. The church is the bride of the Lamb, the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world, who judges in righteousness as a Lion, and lives with His people forever.

All of these references to the church as the bride of Christ indicate the relationship between Christ and His church. Christ's intimacy with His bride is characterized by righteousness, purity, and faithfulness, and the marriage is worthy of the most wonderful wedding celebration ever, one that will begin the new era.

Paul P. Enns sums up what we are preparing for: “The church is the bride of Christ. The kingdom will be the eternal celebration of the wedding of Christ and the church. We will enjoy rapturous celebration as the bride of Christ in the eternal kingdom.”

We can join with all believers throughout the ages, longing for our bridegroom’s second coming, saying: “Come, Lord Jesus!” We are part of the greatest love story of all time, and just like in all great love stories, we truly will live “happily ever after.”