

The Church as the Bride of Christ

INTRODUCTION

- A. At Cambridge, Pennsylvania, Marcus met Alexandra, and found her company delightful because Alexandra, too, was Greek and spoke the Hellenic tongue, as well as English.
 - 1. One day she took him to the office of an American gentleman.
 - a. Marcus didn't know it was the justice of the peace. Alexandra spoke in English, and Marcus didn't know what she was saying.
 - b. The justice of the peace spoke, also in English and Marcus did understand a word or two, like "Yes" and "I do." And Marcus mumbled obediently, not knowing what it meant. He was being married but he didn't know it.
 - 2. After a while he didn't go around with Alexandra anymore, quite forgot her, until he was arrested for desertion and non-support.
 - a. That's when he found out he was married.
 - b. In court Alexandra admitted that the story Marcus told had certain points of accuracy.
 - 1) She conceded that it might be that Marcus didn't completely understand that he was getting married, didn't quite fathom the meaning of the words when he mumbled "Yes" and "I do."
 - 2) He had acquired a wife, and it was English to him.
- B. This morning, we want to take a look at the biblical images of Christ as married to the church, and explore the implications of that image.
 - 1. In the Gospels, Jesus is often referred to as the bridegroom.
 - a. When questioned whether or not he was the Christ, John the Baptist replied in Jn. 3:28-30.
 - b. Jesus often told parables concerning a bridegroom with himself obviously as the bridegroom. Undoubtedly, the most famous is in Mt. 25:1-13.
 - 2. In the rest of the New Testament, Jesus is pictured as the groom (and, at times, the husband) and the church is pictured as his bride.
 - a. Rom. 7:1-4.
 - b. "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" (2 Cor. 11:2).
 - c. Eph. 5:22-33 — Notice that Paul said that he was writing about Christ and the church, not about husbands and wives!
 - d. "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7).
 - e. "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (Rev. 21 :2).
- C. Let's explore the implications of the church as the bride of Christ:

THIS IMAGE SHOWS A HIGH VIEW OF CHRIST

- A. In the Old Testament, the Israelite nation is often pictured as God's wife.
 - 1. "Your Maker is your husband — the LORD Almighty is his name — the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth" (Is. 54:5).
 - 2. "'Return, faithless people,' declared the LORD, 'for I am your husband. I will choose you — one from a town and two from a clan - and bring you to Zion'" (Jer. 3:14).
 - 3. "I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion" (Hos. 2: 19).
 - 4. Because God was married to Israel, paganism among the Israelites was regarded as adultery.

- a. "They would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them" (Jud. 2:17).
 - b. "In the nations where they have been carried captive, those who escape will remember me: how I have been grieved by their adulterous hearts, which have turned away from me, and by their eyes, which have lusted after their idols" (Ezek. 6:9).
- B. Here's the real point: the writers of the New Testament went back into the OT and brought a lot of images relating to God and applied them to Christ.
1. For example, throughout the New Testament Jesus is referred to as "Lord," a title which belonged to God in the Old Testament.
 2. The only way the New Testament writers could apply such images to Christ is if he is divine.
 - a. Throughout his ministry, Jesus was accused of blasphemy because he claimed to be equal with God.
 - 1) When Jesus forgave a paralytic, the scribes said to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mk. 2:7).
 - 2) On another occasion, when Jesus claimed to be divine, the Jews "picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself slipping away from the temple grounds" (Jn. 8:59).
 - b. On one level, the Jews had things exactly right: Jesus was claiming to be divine. But on another level, the Jews had it all wrong, for Jesus wasn't just claiming to be divine — he was divine.
 3. The writers of the New Testament continue, through the Spirit, what Jesus began: claiming divinity for Jesus. This is one of those titles claiming divinity for Jesus, for who can be the bridegroom of the people of God except God?

THIS IMAGE SHOWS THE SON'S LOVE

- A. This image shows the Son's love to such an extent that Paul could hold up the Son as an example for husbands: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25).
- B. Jesus has intense love for his people.
 1. Rom. 8:35-39.
 2. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).
 3. "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us" (1 Jn. 3:16).
- C. Throughout his ministry, Jesus showed his love in practical ways.
 1. When two men called out to be healed, "Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him" (Mt. 20:34).
 2. Lk. 7:12-15.
 3. Notice Jesus' motivation for washing the disciples' feet: "It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love" (Jn. 13: 1).
 4. For Jesus, love was not bound up in emotion. Rather, Jesus demonstrated love through action. He showed his love for his church by giving himself up for her.
- D. A lady attended a church service and waited after the service for some spiritual help.
 1. When she was asked if she could quote any of the Bible, she said that she had once learned John 3:16 in Sunday School. She then quoted it: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only forgotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. "
 2. Noticing that she had said "forgotten" for "begotten," the preacher said, "Do you know why God forgot his Son?"
 - a. She said, "No, I don't."
 - b. The preacher said, "It was because he wanted to remember you."

3. Isn't that the great truth of Christianity — that Jesus willingly went to the cross and allowed himself to be abandoned by the Father so that he could save us, his people?
- E. Because Jesus has loved his people as a husband loves a wife, we, as his people, need to exhibit love.
1. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (Jn. 13:35).
 2. "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (Jn. 15:12).
 3. "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart" (1 Pet. 1:22).
 4. Do we, like Jesus, express our love in practical ways?
 - a. When a brother or sister is ill or struggling, do we pray for him/her, do we visit him/her, or do we call to see what we can do?
 - b. When a brother or sister is too ill to cook for himself, do you sisters volunteer to help provide food? Do you guys volunteer to cut the grass or anything else you can do?
 - c. Are we expressing love in practical ways, or does our love just stay in ourselves?

THIS IMAGE SHOWS THE SON'S HEADSHIP

- A. The image of headship is so bound up in the idea of Jesus as the husband of the church that Paul could admonish wives to be submissive to their husbands the way the church submits to Christ (Eph. 5:22-24).
- B. The church has every reason to submit to Christ:
1. Jesus said that he would build the church (Mt. 16:18) — since he built it, the church ought to submit to Christ.
 2. Jesus is the One who redeemed the church with his own blood (Acts 20:28).
 3. God the Father gave Jesus an exalted position.
 - a. He gave him that exalted position over all creation (Phil. 2:9-11).
 - b. He also gave him that exalted position over the church — "God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church" (Eph. 5:22).
- C. There are some important consequences in the Son's headship.
1. This means that the church is not a democracy — it is a theocracy.
 - a. It is governed by Christ, not by men.
 - b. Even the leaders in the local church don't have control over the church — their role is to call the church to submit to Christ.
 2. This means that we need to submit ourselves to Christ.
 - a. There is an epidemic in this nation of people joining churches for what they can get out of it.
 - 1) Thus, they join the church with the nicest facilities, the nicest daycare, the most entertaining preacher, or the most uplifting worship.
 - 2) That is a terribly wrong way to look at church; it's not what we can get, it's what we can give.
 - b. We cannot choose what we teach and practice as a church.
 - 1) Jesus is the head of the church, we are the church of Christ, and we must do what he bids.
 - 2) I've seen some bumper stickers lately for the Unitarian Universalist Church, a group which believes that everyone will be in heaven and that God is just some impersonal force.
 - a) The bumper sticker reads: "We have room for all beliefs — yours."
 - 2) No, we have room for all beliefs, those of Christ, not my own.

THIS IMAGE SPEAKS OF THE COMMITMENT OF CHRISTIANS

- A. Marriage is a permanent relationship.
1. Jesus taught that adultery was the only reason one could acceptably divorce and remarry (Mt. 19:9).
 2. If a woman "marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress, but if

her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man” (Rom. 1:3).

- B. Likewise, the relationship we enter into with Christ as our bridegroom is a permanent one.
 1. “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God” (Lk. 9:6) .
 2. “My righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him” (Heb. 10:38).
 3. Let us commit ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ! Do you need to come and reaffirm your commitment tonight?