

Marriage And The Bride Of Christ (Part 6)

The Bride of Christ

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There is a *Newsweek* article by Pat Wingert, dated February 26, 2008, titled: "The Incredible Shrinking Bride." The subtitle is: "How the pressure to look perfect on the big day is leading some women to extremes."

Since 24-year-old Noelle Nicolai got engaged in early January, she has been surprised that no one has asked about her plans for "happily ever after," or the details of the engagement. Instead, all the questions have revolved around one topic: "What she is going to look like on her wedding day."

"I've fielded a barrage of 'What are you going to do with your short hair?' 'Do you have a dress?' 'What will your makeup be like?'," says the Utah native. Although Nicolai has long prided herself on her ability to resist what she calls society's "aesthetic obsession," she says that less than a day after becoming engaged she found herself writing a to-do list of "shallow" goals that included teeth whitening, monthly facials, waxings, hair shine treatments and tanning. She went to a dermatologist for a regime of antibiotics, creams and cleaners to guarantee a blemish-free face by her wedding day at the end of June. She even pulled out her retainers from her high-school years to get her teeth back in "post-braces alignment." At the top of her list: knocking 12 pounds off her already thin frame. (She's got a Body Mass Index of 20—the lower end of the normal weight range.)

All this fuss seems a little crazy to her fiancé, who's constantly reminding Nicolai that he's happy with her as she is. But Nicolai is hardly alone in her desire to look perfect on her wedding day. Consider the stacks of wedding books on store shelves [1,350 at last count, according to Books in Print], the growing number of wedding workout videos and the ever-expanding list of bridal reality shows on TV: "Bridezillas," "Platinum Weddings," "Rich Bride, Poor Bride," "Buff Brides," "Bulging Brides" and "My Big Fat Fabulous Wedding," to name just a few. The cost of the average American wedding is now approaching \$30,000, with women spending an average of \$1,500 for their dress, hair and makeup, according to the American Wedding Study 2006, conducted by the Condé Nast Bridal Group. The standard for brides today, says Nicolai, "is red-carpet-worthy good looks." Not only can that lead to unrealistic expectations and unnecessary stress for brides-to-be but, sometimes, to unhealthy behavior as well.

There's a much-YouTubed "Bridezilla" video of a shrieking bride literally chopping off her hair, and while the clip is clearly staged, Nicolai says a lot of brides-to-be can relate.

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"Bridezilla exists within every bride-to-be, and it takes effort to rein in that inner demon," she says. She's trying to maintain some perspective and balance. She's made an effort to seek out research on how to make a marriage successful. She's setting aside time for religion and service projects, and she's making sure that every conversation with her fiancé doesn't revolve around the wedding. But that doesn't mean she doesn't still feel the pressure to look her best when she walks down the aisle. "At the end of my wedding day, it won't matter if my hair was perfect, my teeth were blindingly white or my body was as hard as the rock on my finger," she says. "But that doesn't mean I won't try!"

Is the bride's responsibility merely to look good on her wedding day? Is there not a lot of training to go through, and preparing to do before the wedding that takes place early in life?

The woman in this article actually showed some depth and right focus in her thinking when she said she has 'made an effort to seek out research on how to make a marriage successful.' Usually, the world looks at marriage mostly from a superficial viewpoint as described in the article.

Especially today, in most weddings, the bride is the primary focus—the centerpiece of the pictures and the most interesting element on the wedding day. Rarely, if ever, is this focus because of her sterling character or wholesomeness which she may be bringing to the marriage. More often than not, the focus is because of the shallow sensation of excitement that the glamour, the romance, and the appearance that a wedding provides.

In direct contrast, God's design of and focus on marriage begins even before the wedding day, and on through life, and emphasizes harmony and sacrificial love. Marriage is a symbol for God's covenant with His people. The betrothed is to act in a pure, moral, and faithful way.

The unity, sacrificial love, and interdependence usually associated with marriage enable us to comprehend, in part, the unity, love, and interdependent features of God's relationship with His people under the symbols of God's covenant with Israel and the church as bride and body of Christ.

The focus is on the individual's understanding of the relationship between God and His people. Spiritual realities are made clearer by comparison with earthly experiences.

The New Testament "bride image," for example, emphasizes certain basic truths:

(1) The Church-bride is elected to God's purpose, but is free to make a choice

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(Ephesians 4:1).

(2) Christ, in love, gives Himself to establish a covenant relationship with His one bride.

(3) Christ's atonement is a "betrothal gift."

(4) Christ's love cleanses, and makes the bride worthy of Him.

(5) The bride looks to and prepares for the future wedding day.

In this sermon series on Marriage and the Bride of Christ, we have been going through Ephesians 5:25-33, where the apostle Paul's fundamental intention, as we have seen, is that we cannot understand the duties of husbands and wives unless we understand the truth about Christ and the church; so we have started with that truth, as Paul does.

In my last sermon, we considered how the husband is to love his wife, 'even as Christ loved the church.' We reminded ourselves of the content of the word 'love;' and that it is the greatest word that the Bible knows. It is the same sort of love with which Christ has loved the church; and with which God has loved the world.

As a result, we are concentrating on this love of Jesus Christ for the church. In my last sermon, we only looked at love in general. We saw Christ's whole attitude towards the church; His concern about her, His pride in her, the way He shields her, guards her, and protects her. That is brought out here in Ephesians 5.

But we are going to progress beyond that aspect, because Paul wants to remind us that this attitude of Christ toward the church is something that manifests itself in practice, something that has to be done.

Ephesians 5:25-33 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. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "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

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each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

It is not enough to consider Christ's attitude towards the church here, the way He looks at her and regards her. It is also something that displays itself in practice.

The principle, therefore, is that love is not something theoretical. Love is not something merely about which you write poetry. Love is not merely the theme of some romance book or movie, or some great song. Love is not something that you look at theoretically or externally. Love is the most practical thing in the world. That is the great principle that the apostle Paul teaches us here. There is no word, perhaps, that is being more debased at this present time than the word 'love.' Many people obviously have no idea what it means.

It seems that the world has never used terms of endearment so freely; and so poorly understood them—there may never have been so little love in the world as today. Everybody addresses everyone else in terms of endearment; and often they are merely words of exaggeration, to express ordinary courtesies.

People who scarcely know one another throw around these tender terms; but there is no content to them. That is why many people, if you listen to their talk, sound like the greatest lovers in the world; but they really know nothing about love, and may well be divorced the next day.

For some reason the idea is widespread that love is something to be talked about, and to be sung about. This is where the poets and composers can be so dangerous. Have you ever noticed the extraordinary contrast between the things the poets write about in their poems, and their actual lives?

It is because they think of it in a theoretical manner, as something very beautiful, but the truth about love is that it is the most practical thing in the world. Christ teaches this very thing Himself!

John 14:21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."

How commonplace theoretical love sounds to us with our so-called romantic view of

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love! It is, of course, not romantic at all, it is ridiculous, it is sentimental, it is carnal, and it is worldly. Christ says, 'This is love, that a man keep My commandments.' Because it is not what you or I say that finally proves whether we are truly manifesting love; it is what we *do*. This is not to say that husbands and wives should not tell each other 'I love you.' They should!

This is certainly the essential matter in the relationship between husband and wife. The question is not whether the man can write wonderful poems and letters, and use great expressions of his love; the test of a man's love is his conduct in the home day by day, and how he treats others in his day to day life.

It is not as much an issue of what he was like before they were married; it is not a matter of what he is like on the honeymoon; and, it is not a question of what he is like during the first few months of married life. The vital question is: What is he like? How does he behave when there are problems, difficulties, trials, and illness, and when middle age and old age come along?

Many marriages break down because people do not realize what love means, at the beginning.

Remember the apostle Paul's description of love, in I Corinthians 13, where he emphasizes its essential practical character. He tells us that it does do this, that it does do that; and sums it all up by saying, 'Love never fails.' That is the test of love! It is not conditional, it is not something that is temporary, and it is not something that is a one time thing.

If you want to test whether a man's love to his wife is what it should be, do not only listen to what he says; but always observe what he does, and what he is. That is the test!

Paul brings all that out here in Ephesians, and he does so in an amazing manner.

Ephesians 5:25 says, 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church.' How do we know that He loved the church? Here is the answer at the end of verse 25, 'and gave Himself for her.'

That is love—'He gave himself for her.' But he does not stop at that.

Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, [in order] that He might sanctify and

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cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, [in order] 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.

Let us look at this carefully and analyze it. This love of Christ, this attitude of Christ towards the church displays itself in practice in three main respects.

First, there is what He has already done for the church. Christ loved the church and gave—He has done it—‘gave Himself for her.’ Here, of course, we are at the very heart and center of God’s truth. There would be no church apart from this.

This was the first thing that was absolutely essential; this is the foundation. And so, look what Paul says, in writing to the Corinthians:

I Corinthians 3:10-12 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

It is Jesus Christ and what He has done. That is why Paul emphasizes Jesus Christ and Him crucified. There would have been no church at Corinth or anywhere else if it was not for that.

Call to mind the story of the apostle Paul saying farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus. You find the account of it in Acts 20:

Acts 20:28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

That is part of the great relationship between Christ and the church—between the Bridegroom and the Bride. He had to buy her before He could have her as His Bride. Paul puts it in terms of the church as a whole, but remember, and be quite sure of this in your minds, that this is true of every single one of us, every Christian, every member of God’s church.

Paul does not hesitate to say so in his own case.

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Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her—yes, but also ‘for me,’ and for each and every one of us as individuals.

Paul has already introduced this great theme earlier in his epistle to the Ephesians. He did so in the first chapter:

Ephesians 1:7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

It is also the great theme in the second chapter:

Ephesians 2:13-14 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near [How?] by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, He has abolished the middle wall of partition.

How did He do that?

Ephesians 2:15 Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace.

Paul keeps on repeating it; and we must keep on repeating it. It is not a matter of Christ's sacrifice only applying to our initial conversion, we then go on and it keeps applying to the whole process of salvation.

This is something we should never forget; it is something that continues. It is not only the foundation and basis; it is the source of the life and the power that continues: ‘Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for her.’

What Paul is saying then is this—and it is essential doctrine. All that Jesus Christ did, He did for the church. ‘Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for her.’ Christ reminds

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His Father of this in His great High Priestly prayer recorded in:

John 17:1-2 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.

They are His people, they are His church. He says:

John 17:9 "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours.

And here we are reminded that He died for the church. We must never lose sight of this. He died for the church. His death, because He is the Son of God, is sufficient for the whole world; but it is efficient only for the church. His purpose in dying was to redeem the church. He gave Himself for the church, for all who belong to her when she will be complete and perfect. All was known to God from eternity, and the Son came, and gave Himself for the church.

And so, what we have to remember is that we could never be His at all, and we could never be enjoying any of the benefits of this Christian life, unless He had done this. A person has to be rescued and to be redeemed before he can belong to the church.

That is what makes us Christian. You may be the best moral man in the world, but that will never make you a Christian; it will never make you a member of Christ; it will never make you a member of God's church. Of course, it is our responsibility to try and be as submissive and obedient as possible.

There is only one thing that puts a man into the church, and that is that Christ has purchased him with His own blood, and that He has died for him, and redeemed him. This is the only way of entry into the true church—not a visible church, but the true church, the invisible, the spiritual Body of Christ. We are saved by His precious blood.

I Peter 1:17-22 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without

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blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart.

Notice that the apostle Peter's focus here, is on 'the precious blood of Christ,' and that it is in the context of the importance of God the Father, and it is ultimately to glorify God.

What is Christ's ultimate purpose? Verse 21 says, 'so that your faith and hope are in God.'

In connection with this, the apostle Paul's great concern in Ephesians 5 is to emphasize the truth from the standpoint of showing the greatness of Christ's love to the church.

Ephesians 5:25-27 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.

Why did God the Father and His Son do these things, and how did He do these things for us? We have the answer in many places in the Scriptures. Relating this to marriage, how should a husband love his wife? 'Just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her.'

What did that involve? Perhaps the best statement concerning the matter is in Philippians 2:

Philippians 2:5-8 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

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It is crucial and essential that we husbands be humble in our marriages, and always treat our wives and our family members humbly. Obedience to God is required and vital in a good marriage. That seems like an obvious point to us, but it is not so obvious to billions of people around the world.

What does that mean? It means that that is how Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for her. He did not consider Himself—He humbled Himself and He was obedient to His God.

That is the first point. 'He thought it not robbery to be equal with God;' which means that though He was of a divine nature or condition, He did not eagerly seek to retain His equality with God, but took on himself a humble condition—even that of a servant. And there is another key word in a marriage on what a husband should be, he should be the best servant in the family.

Christ was the eternal Son of God, and He had been sharing that glory with His Father from all eternity, but He did not hold on to that and say, 'Why should I go to earth, why should I lay aside the signs of My glory, why should I go down and be ridiculed and degraded upon?' No, He did not do that, did He?

He did not consider it robbery to be equal with God; He did not regard it as something that He must hold on to at all costs because it was His by right. Instead, He 'made Himself of no reputation.' There was no compulsion at all apart from the compulsion of love and obedience that Christ had in doing this. Both go hand in hand.

If Jesus Christ had considered Himself, if He had considered His own eternal glory and dignity, there would never have been a church at all. He was the One through whom all things had been created; and all the angels worshipped Him, and all the great powers and principalities bowed to Him. They worshipped Him as the Son and glorified Him.

What if He had said, 'I can't put any of that aside; I must have this respect that is due me'? Well then we would not have a church and we would not be able to be forgiven for our sins, and we would have no future. But He did the exact opposite, and He humbled Himself by making Himself of no reputation. He was born as a babe in the likeness, the form of a human being.

He knew that He would be rejected by the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the lawyers; that people would mock Him, and throw stones at Him. He knew that all that would happen even though He had done nothing to deserve it.

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So, why then did He do it? He did it for the church; because of His love for the church. 'He humbled Himself' and 'made Himself of no reputation.' He did it for the good of the church, the body that was to become His Bride. He was buying her, purchasing her, and thinking of nobody but her. Not Himself, but her! Of course it is understood that God the Father is always top in our thoughts, and was in Christ's.

'Let this mind be in you also,' you husbands! 'Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for her.'

But there is another aspect of this that I want to emphasize in order to bring out the depth of the teaching. Christ did that for us, for the church, while we were still sinners, while we were ungodly, and while we were still enemies.

Paul's argument in Romans 5 uses these same terms: 'In due time Christ died for the ungodly'; 'while we were still sinners'; 'If, while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved in His life.'

Notice the terms. We were 'ungodly,' we were 'enemies,' we were 'sinners,' we were corrupt. There was nothing to recommend us at all. Look at the potential firstfruits in our sin, in our enmity, in our ugliness.

The Son of God, the Prince of Glory, loved her while she was like that, and in spite of it; loved her even to the extent of giving Himself for her, dying for her. She was not a beautiful model; she was not a woman of sterling character.

Again, 'Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church.'

We are not called to do what He did to that extent in giving our lives, although it may come to that some day. But He, in spite of everything, loved to that point of giving Himself; His blood was shed literally, for us.

So the apostle Paul tells us, 'Those of you who are in this married relationship find things in each other that you don't like or don't approve of—deficiencies, faults, failures, and sins. You are critical, and stand on your pride, and you condemn, and you quarrel, and you separate. Why? Simply because you fail to remember the way in which you yourselves have been called and are in the process of salvation, and have become Christians and members of God's church.'

Paul reminds the church that if Jesus Christ had reacted to Christians as they react to

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one another there would never have been a church.

‘Love never fails’—love goes on loving in spite of everything. That is the love with which Christ has loved the church.

It is a terrible mistake to separate doctrine from practice. Nevertheless, we are guilty of separating them when it comes to marriage and family. Many of us have failed to realize that we are always to think of the married state in terms of atonement.

The English word atonement is derived from the two words "at onement" and indicates a state of togetherness and agreement between two people. Atonement presupposes two parties that are at odds with one another, with the act of atonement being the reconciliation of them into a state of harmony.

Is that our usual way of thinking of marriage and family—husbands, wives, all of us?

The general biblical meaning is the reconciliation between God and sinful human beings. So, atonement is a solution to the main problem of the human race—its separation from God beginning with the initial sin of Adam and Eve.

Is that how we instinctively think of marriage and family, in terms of atonement?

Do you know what section of the library or bookstore we find what the secular books have to say about marriage? It is under ‘Ethics.’ But it does not belong there. We must consider marriage in terms of atonement.

The most foolish of all people are those who dislike and criticize God’s truth; and that explains why they fail in practice. You cannot separate these things from biblical teachings. Biblical doctrine must govern your whole life, and must influence your whole outlook and every activity.

Paul describes Christ's atoning work in terms of the offering of a sacrifice.

Ephesians 5:1-2 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

This atonement and redemption included great suffering. The author of Hebrews frequently mentions the suffering surrounding the atoning work of Christ to impress

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upon the minds of Christians the great cost of salvation.

Hebrews 13:12-13 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

Remember, a primary reason that Christ gave His life for us, the church, is to sanctify.

Christians are commanded to bear criticism and accusation as Christ did, on behalf of Him, and in defense of what He taught and in agreement with how He lived. That is what 'bearing His reproach' means. Husbands, we are to sacrifice ourselves in marriage by serving and sacrificing for our wives.

We have been looking at Ephesians 5 as our pivotal chapter, which is often called the practical section of the epistle to the Ephesians.

In the second half, Paul addresses ordinary questions; but within this context of marriage he suddenly brings us face to face with the doctrine of the church, and the doctrine of the atonement.

Ephesians 5:25-27 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.

Love demands our whole life.

Matthew 22:36-39 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

So we are to love God first with all of our heart, body, and mind, and we are to love our wives with the same effort. We start there, but we continue *from* there! That is the first point Paul makes, and that is the love of Christ.

But then in Ephesians 5:26, Paul goes on to a second point. What is Christ (because of this great love of His) doing, or continuing to do for the church? Verse 25 says that 'He gave Himself for her'; Why? 'That He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.'

Here is another of these essential statements. Notice that verse 26 has two main functions. The first function is the one that I have already mentioned; it reminds us of what Jesus Christ is continuing to do for the church. But it also has a second function. It tells us why He did the first thing. 'He gave Himself for her; that [in order that]'—this is His object. Why did Christ die? He died 'in order that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word.'

That is the teaching we have here concerning sanctification. It is all here, atonement, justification, and now, sanctification.

The first thing to remember is this: forgiveness and deliverance from condemnation and death is never an end in and of themselves, and should never be considered to be that. They are but a means to a further end. We cannot stop at forgiveness and sanctification.

Let us take a closer look at what Paul teaches here about sanctification. The first principle is that there is nothing that is so utterly unscriptural as to separate justification and sanctification, as they go hand in hand with one another.

The death of Christ is not merely to bring us forgiveness, and to justify us, and to make us legally righteous in the sight of God. 'He gave Himself for her' [in order that]. It is only the first move in a series; it is not a last move in any sense, and we can never stop there.

Titus 2:14 Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

That is why He gave Himself for us; not merely so we might be forgiven, not merely to save us from the grave, but to purify and to separate for Himself this peculiar people who are zealous for good works. Christ said it all in His priestly prayer in John 17:

John 17:19 And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.

To stop at justification is not only wrong in thought; but it is impossible for this reason—it is something that Christ does; it is He who does this in us. He gave Himself for the church. Why? That He might sanctify and cleanse the church. He is the One doing it. Of course, God the Father is always right there involved in it, and without Him it cannot be done either.

The trouble arises from the fact that some persist in regarding sanctification as something that we decided to do for ourselves. That is not taught anywhere in the Scriptures. The teaching of the Scripture is this: Christ has set His heart and His affection on the church.

There she is, under condemnation, in her sin, and in her rags! He came, the incarnation had to happen, He took on Him ‘the likeness of sinful flesh.’ He took her sins upon Him, and He bore them in His own body on the tree.

He has taken the punishment, He has died, He has made atonement, and He has reconciled us to God. So the church is delivered from condemnation. But that does not satisfy Him. He wants her to be a glorious church; He wants to ‘present her to Himself a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.’

So He immediately proceeds to prepare her for that destiny. He cannot stop at the first step; He goes on to sanctify her. In other words, His death upon the cross for us and our sins was simply the first step in this great process of conversion. And He does not stop at the first step. He has a complete purpose for the church, and He will go through it all step by step.

In the final analysis you and I have no choice in this matter of sanctification. It is something that Christ does.

He died for you, cleansed you—and He *will* do it. If He has died for you, He will go on with the process of sanctification in you; He will eventually make you complete.

There is something alarming about this; but it is an essential biblical teaching. If you and I do not submit voluntarily to this teaching, He has another way of cleansing us; and He will use it.

Hebrews 12:6 “For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.”

He will not allow you to remain where you were in your filth and corruption, saying, 'I'm all right, Christ has died for me, I'm forgiven, I'm a Christian,' as mainstream Christians say. He will not have that! He has loved you, you belong to Him; and He will make you clean. But that takes time.

If you will not come voluntarily, and in the right way, He will put you into that gymnasium of which we read in Hebrews. He will get rid of the corners, He will get rid of the filth and corruption, and He will wash you. It may come about through an illness that He will send upon you or allow you to contract.

As one of God's methods, He chastises. Your circumstances may go wrong; you can lose your job, or someone dear to you may die. Because you belong to Him if you are a true Christian, because Christ died for you, He will knock you down, He will cleanse you, and He will perfect you. But that is only if you are not voluntarily submitting to Him, and obeying Him. And sometimes it is just to fine tune us. But it is still because we have flaws in our character.

That is something He must do to do God's will and for our own good. Sanctification is not something that you and I determine—'He gave Himself for her, that [in order that] He might sanctify her and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.'

The first principle therefore that we must grasp is that sanctification is primarily and essentially something that Jesus Christ does to us, and He has His ways of doing it. It includes, of course, obedience and submission on our part.

But we should not put our primary emphasis there. The decision of sanctification is not ours; it is His. The decision was made in eternity before the foundation of the world. It is His activity, it is His operation; and having died for you, He will do it. Resist Him at your peril!

He will bring every son who has been called into that final and everlasting glory. As Hebrews 12 puts it, if He does not deal with you in this way, you are 'illegitimate' and not a true son.

Hebrews 12:5-11 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a

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father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons [and we might add, not members of God's church]. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Illegitimate children are usually abandoned by their father. The care of them is left to the mother, and the father tries to avoid all responsibility, and usually he tries to hide like the negligent coward that he is. He does not even want to recognize his own child; he does not provide for him; or instruct him; or direct him; or discipline him. A father who is worthy of the name, will do all these things. 'For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.'

Paul says this is the way it should be with Christians. God has not cast us off. We are not illegitimate. In every way God the Father and His Son act toward us as righteous Fathers, but in different capacities.

This is one of the main things that distinguish us as legitimate children of the family of God. Because we do go through life with corrective occurrences, it certainly indicates that God and Christ's paternal care and attention designed to correct our faults is active in our lives.

If we are not chastened, we are not God's legitimate children; and it would be as if we had been cast off and completely disregarded. This is a definite indication that God is working with His children.

So, we should receive every affliction as full proof that we are not forgotten by God and Christ, who work with us to develop righteous character, and to support us in living their way of life. We live our lives under the watchful care of a perfect Father and of a loving Bridegroom.

We have to remember that trials do come in a marriage. You know the song, "(I Never Promised You) a Rose Garden," that is certainly the case in most marriages. But we have to realize that God is working in us, in our families, and in our marriages. Sometimes there are hard knocks to go through, and there are times when we are

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beaten down, but we cannot let that interfere with our marriages.

How does Christ carry this great principle into effect? The answer is found in the word 'sanctify.' 'Even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for Her; that He might sanctify.'

This word 'sanctify' is used in many different ways in the Bible, but its primary meaning is to set apart for God, for His unique possession and for His use. You will find, for instance, in Exodus 19, that the mount on which God met with Moses, and gave him the Ten Commandments, was 'sanctified' in that way. It is called the 'holy mount' because it was set apart. There was no change in the mountain, but it was set apart for God's purpose, for God's use, and for God's special possession.

The vessels that were used in the Temple ceremonies were likewise sanctified, or set apart for holy use. There was no material change in the cups and the platters, but since they were to be used in the Temple, and for God's service only, they could not be utilized for common use.

To be sanctified means to be set apart for God and for His special use and purpose, as His exclusive possession. So we are not our own; we are not free to verbally or physically abuse one another in the Body of Christ, in our marriages and in our families.

Then a secondary meaning emerges. Because we are thereby set apart, we are also 'made holy.'

Now back in our pivotal passage of Ephesians 5:25-26, there can be no question as to the meaning of this word 'sanctification.' It carries the first connotation, 'Set apart for Christ.'

Ephesians 5:25-26 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 sanctify and cleanse her.' It has the meaning of 'set apart for Himself, separate from everything else, for His own possession, for His own use, and for His own pleasure'. Then, the apostle Paul adds the word 'cleanse,' supplying the second meaning of sanctify.

He divides it up into two steps. Here is the church in her rags, in her filth, and her

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corruption. Christ has died for her; and He has saved her from condemnation. He takes hold of her where she was and sets her apart for Himself. She is delivered from the domain of darkness, and transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son.

Colossians 1:13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

That is to say, she is moved out of the world into the special position that, as the church, she is to occupy. That is what Jesus Christ has done with the church. A similar thing happens when a man finds his affections and his love set upon one girl out of a billion. He chooses her for himself, and he selects her from all others. She is unique to him, she is essential to him, and she is dedicated for him.

Isaiah 62:5 And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

We know, and we have seen the excitement that is in the eyes of a bridegroom on his wedding day. He is excited, his father is excited, his mother is excited, and everyone is excited, but he most of all.

Marriage is not a fifty-fifty proposition. Each partner must be one hundred percent determined and committed to do his or her God-ordained part. Marriage is a testing ground of sorts to show God whether we will be faithful. If we will not even exercise the character to remain faithful in our marriage during this short physical life, what assurance does God have that we will submit to Him and remain faithful to Him throughout eternity? It is definitely a testing ground, and it can be the hardest test of all, especially if proper principles are not applied.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.” This sacrificial love of Christ is to be emulated and internalized by the Christian husband, who will give “until it hurts” and beyond, in constant appreciation of His wife's role as a dedicated helper and companion, who has the same spiritual potential that He does.

A man must consistently think of his wife as part of himself, equal with him, and so ‘love his wife even as himself’.

So the husband separates her from all others and sanctifies her. She is so precious and

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unique in his eyes that he wants to make her one with him. That is the simple truth about every one of us who is a Christian and a member of God's church in a real sense. The Lord of glory, the Eternal Son of God, has set us apart, has isolated us for Himself.

Let me remind you of what is true of you at this very moment.

I Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood [a kingdom of priests], a holy nation [set apart], His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

We are not perfect and sinless, but we are 'a holy nation' in the sense that we are a group, a nation of people set apart. And Peter goes further, God's 'special people'—a people for His own personal and unique possession. He says, 'that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.'

That is what Christ has done for the church. He has called us out. That is one meaning of the word 'ecclesia,' the 'called-out ones.' We are called out of the world, put together here to form this body, this bride for Christ. And then Christ proceeds to deal with us.

That means that the bride is now no longer free to do some of the things she did before, but lives for her husband, and he lives for her.

The husband does not look at other women, because his bride is the one he has selected, separated, and sanctified for himself. This is how Christ looks at the church. That is how a husband must regard his wife.

And we, as the bride of Christ, should think of ourselves as no longer free, no longer belonging to ourselves, no longer belonging to the world, but belonging to Christ.

Let me leave all of this in the form of a question. I am addressing Christian members of God's church. Here is the practical question that I address to everyone who is a Christian.

Are you aware of the fact that Christ has separated you, that He is sanctifying you? Husbands, when you chose your wife, you in a sense sanctified her and set her apart.

When Christ dies for an individual who accepts Him as his personal Savior, He takes

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that individual, and moves him (or her), and puts him into this special position. It was the first step in the move; but He never stops at that. That is the preliminary that leads to sanctification.

So it is useless to claim that Christ has died for us unless we know that He has separated us. We no longer belong to the world; there has been a change in us, we have been moved, we have been translated from the kingdom of darkness into the God's Kingdom of light. So we have to be very careful what we do in the world. And we should ask ourselves, 'Would Jesus do this?' It may be a saying that mainstream Christianity uses, but it is one that we *should* use. We should ask ourselves, 'Would Jesus do this?', as we go out and do something in the world, as we live our lives at home, and so on. Because He is the bridegroom that we will marry.

What a privilege it is to be a Christian, to belong to Christ as a member of the church—His Bride, for whom Christ died, and whom He is preparing for Himself—set apart from the world for the glory that we are to enjoy with Him!

'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her. . . .'