

Marriage And The Bride Of Christ (Part 8)

The Bride: Nourished, Cherished, and Glorified

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Given 09-Oct-10; Sermon #1014

Too many marriages end in the divorce court, and nobody knows how many husbands and wives are emotionally divorced even though they share the same address. Ranked #1 in the world for highest divorce rate is the United States! The divorce rate in the United States is double that of Canada. According to Enrichment Journal on the divorce rates in America, the divorce rate for first marriage is 41%, for second marriage is 60%, and for third marriage is 73%.

Of course, there are various reasons for divorce, but one general reason I would like to mention is that such people are neglectful—taking his or her spouse for granted because of his or her self-serving attitude.

I am sure you that have observed over the years, that many marriage relationships are strained and damaged because the husband often neglects providing affection to his wife, or if he does, it is often a self-centered pseudo-affection that expects something in return or it is just short of a brush-off. But it is not husbands alone who are guilty of this, although we may be more inclined that way.

It seems that the apostle Paul recognized this tendency in husbands and wives, and addressed it in I Corinthians 7 where he instructs husbands and wives to render the affection that is owed, by the marriage contract, to one another.

I Corinthians 7:3-4 Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

'Affection' in the New King James Version of verse 3 is translated "benevolence" in the King James Version from the Greek word *eunoian*. This word also suggests: kindness and good-will. And, although it does generally carry that meaning its specific intent is 'affection.'

When Paul added the Greek word from which is translated 'due,' he reminds them of the requirements of their marriage vow, and of the fact that in person, property, and in every respect, they belong to each other.

Now we move to Ephesians 5:25-31, where the apostle Paul's primary object is to teach husbands their duties towards their wives; and he does this in terms of the relationship of Jesus Christ to the church.

But marriage responsibilities are far more than just duties, because "duties" are something you are required, even demanded to do; but the responsibility of husbands to wives and vice versa goes beyond that; it also includes the love of God imparted through His Spirit—the same Spirit Christ has in loving the church.

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.

Then in verse 28-33, Paul reiterates a husband's calling to self-sacrificial love for his wife by comparing this love to the regard the husband has for his own body, and then, to Christ's love for his body.

Ephesians 5:28-33 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 each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

As you know, the "body" mentioned here, for which Christ sacrificed Himself, was not his own person, but the "body" which is the church.

Paul passes from one to the other, but in order to easily understand this teaching, we will take them separately. We have considered first of all, what he says about the relationship of Christ to the church, in order that we may then be in a position to apply it to the husbands in their relationship to the wives. We have considered how Christ died for the church, gave Himself for her, and how, having done that, He proceeds to separate her to Himself (to sanctify, set apart, put on one side, set His personal

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affection on the church), so that He can cleanse her and continue with this process of spiritual purification.

Paul appeals to a self-evident fact in verse 29. It can hardly be denied that no one ever hates his own body. He devotes himself to looking after it in every way. He supplies it with food to promote its development and maintain its health. He cares for it and cherishes it. This is how Christ loves His body, the church. Paul appeals to the same principle when addressing husbands as he did when addressing wives. Wives are to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church.

There are still two expressions to consider in connection with this continuing treatment that Christ gives to the church. They are found in verse 29, where we read that 'no man ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord does the church.'

The first word translated 'nourish' here means "to bring to maturity." Maturity develops in a variety of ways. When we humble ourselves, and we husbands put our wife first we show the kind of maturity necessary for a successful marriage. 'Nourish' also has the general meaning 'to bring up,' as a parent would in caring for his children. The sense is that the parent provides for their needs, and guards them from exposure to dangers and neglect.

A good husband puts his wife first after God in his priorities and provides abundantly for his wife's needs. His children, although important and needing special care, have a secondary place to his wife. If a father naturally will give his life for his children, he should be just as willing, if not more so to give his life for his wife.

Now, the second word translated 'cherish' means "to soften with heat." 'Cherishing' is something that every woman needs and desires. A wife needs specific personal attention, not vague distracted awareness. She welcomes proper appreciation, not just casual acknowledgment. She must know that she is special and important to her husband.

In addition to common principles of cherishing, the details of how a husband should cherish his wife may be somewhat different for various personality types.

It is important to set aside quality time for discussing common interests, concerns, and family issues, and it is essential to allow plenty of time for intimate conversing and delicate intimacy. The problem with most men is that we are driven and motivated by a

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mental list of things that we believe have to get done. Is that list of repair and maintenance projects really more important than the love of your life—your wife? Is your Internet surfing and Facebook time essential to your marriage?

Taking time for nourishing and cherishing probably is not normally on our list of priorities. We take for granted that our wives know that we love and cherish them.

Proverbs 31:10 Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies.

Would you take the time to gather up rubies, you men? Your wife is priceless! She is far above the value of precious gems. That is how Jesus Christ views His future Bride, the church—far above rubies!

The idea of warmth that is associated with this word "cherishes" indicates that a husband should defend her from cold by properly clothing her—and the two expressions 'nourishes and cherishes' together indicate that he provides food and clothing for her body.

The husband is to do this on a physical level for his wife, like Jesus Christ does on a spiritual level for God's church. One of the ways Christ nourishes and provides for the church's spiritual necessities is through His ministers; and the physical necessities are provided through others who serve in the church.

But this analogy should not be spiritualized too far. The general principle is: that Christ has a tender concern for the needs of the church, as a man has for his own body, and that the husband should show a similar consideration for his wife. Paul does not say that 'in the past He has nourished and cherished the church;' the whole purpose is to show that He *goes on doing* that work. This is entirely in line with what we have been told about cleansing, which is clearly a continuing process of sanctification.

This nourishing and cherishing is also something that continues, and is not merely an action once and for ever accomplished in the past. That is why those who would confine what we have been dealing in verse 26 to a past action only, seem to be missing the entire point and teaching of this whole section of Ephesians 5. The death of Jesus Christ and His resurrection is once and for all, but all the rest of God's work is continuing, with this ultimate objective in view.

Now let us look further at these two very interesting words. He 'nourishes.' This explains

Marriage and the Bride of Christ (Part 8) by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

itself. Its essential meaning is that of feeding, providing food, and providing nourishment. Christ is concerned about the health, the growth, the development, and the well-being of His church, so He nourishes her.

Paul has, in a way, been dealing with this theme in chapter 4 where he expresses it in these terms: 'He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some pastors and teachers.' What for? 'For the perfecting of the saints,' for this process that continues.

It is something that keeps going on 'for the work of the ministry, for the edifying [the building up] of the body of Christ. Till we all come ...'—there is the ultimate objective again! So here in Ephesians 5, we have another way of saying the same thing, and it is fantastic for us to realize, as members of God's church, that Christ is therefore nourishing the life of the church.

It is an expression of His love for us; and of His care for us; that He provides us with the spiritual food we need. The Bible is given by God, and by Jesus Christ as Spokesman and High Priest, through the Spirit, as food for the heart and mind. It is a part of His nourishing of us. And all the ministry of the church, as chapter four reminds us, is designed for the same end.

In other words, there is no excuse for the church when she is ignorant or underdeveloped or weak. There is likewise no excuse for any individual Christian—Christ Himself is nourishing us.

The apostle Peter, in his second epistle, tells us that 'All things that are needful or necessary for life and godliness have been provided.' That makes the position of the complaining Christian such a serious one.

II Peter 1:2-4 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

We will never be able to plead the excuse that there was not sufficient food because we were in a wilderness. The food is available, the 'heavenly manna' is provided; everything one can ever need is here in the Bible.

Here is nourishment—concentrated and unadulterated, as Peter again puts it in his first epistle, in the chapter 2: 'The sincere (unadulterated) milk of the Word; that we may grow thereby.'

I Peter 2:1-3 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

God and Christ continually provide it. This is a wonderful thing for us to contemplate—that Christ is nourishing the church under God's direction.

The husband in his care for his wife works to provide food and **all** that she needs. Parents take care that their children have healthy nutrition and plenty of it, in the right food and at the right time. To show great concern in that respect! Christ is doing that for us in an infinitely greater way.

How are we responding to it? Do we realize that He is constantly nourishing us? A part of this care is to provide opportunities of public worship. Public worship is not a human institution; and people do not come to Sabbath services—at least they should not—just as a matter of duty.

Yes, it is a matter of obedience and duty, but people should come because they realize that they cannot grow if they do not come. They come to be fed, to find spiritual food for the heart and mind—'nourishment.' God has provided it. He provides it through His ministry and through Bible study, prayer, fasting, and meditation.

God calls people, He separates them, He gives them the message, and His Spirit is present to give illumination—inspiration in the preparation and the delivery and the teaching. He inspires the speaking and the hearing, but we are required to prove all things, and to ask Him for discernment to avoid being deceived. All this is part of Jesus Christ's way of nourishing the church.

Ephesians 5:28-29 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.

Again, take the word 'cherishes.' Here is a word that is used only twice in the New

Marriage and the Bride of Christ (Part 8) by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Testament. It is a word that conveys a very definite idea, generally that of clothing. What the child needs physically above everything is food and clothing. What the Bride, the wife, needs is similar.

Those are the first two things you think of, the food and the clothing—cherishing. But it conveys a further idea, namely that of caring for, looking after, guarding. It is an expression of solicitude.

When you nourish and cherish a person you show, by a constant watchfulness, a care and a concern that he or she will thrive and develop and grow. Such are the ideas that are conveyed here by this term 'cherishes' which Paul adds to the term 'nourishes.' Part of cherishing our wives, husbands, is to encourage them to learn and to grow spiritually. Also, encourage them to study and to further their education, it does not have to be formal. Encourage them to have hobbies, and to get the most out of life that they can in learning, and not to thwart their efforts or to keep them under your thumb, or to discourage them.

Our primary trouble is that we do not always have a true conception of our Lord and Master's interest in us and His concern about us. That is our basic lack; we do not know His love. People are often concerned, and rightly so, about their love to Him; but you and I will never love Him as He loves us until we begin to know something of His love to us. This is what we see in this comparison by Paul, between the husband and the wife, and Christ's care for the church. A marriage is a training ground as well as many other things for our roles in the Kingdom of God.

We cannot 'work up' love. In the case of the church, love is always a response, a reaction to His love. We are to reflect His love.

I John 4:19 We love Him because He first loved us.

When we are called, we come to realize that we are quite helpless in the area of love, until God's love shines down on us. And we come to realize it in this very practical way of understanding something of what He has done for us, and what He provides for us in the nourishing and the cherishing.

The more we see that, and realize it, the more we are amazed by it, and the more we will love Him in return. But that cannot happen until there is a change of heart in us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Marriage and the Bride of Christ (Part 8) by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

We must not stop at Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. We begin there, but we see that, having finished that work, He goes on to make all this vast and ample provision for us, and to care for us by divine intervention, in things that happen to us, and in leading and guiding us. In a thousand and one ways He is nourishing and cherishing the life of the church for which He died; and, in addition, we must realize this further work of His for us.

Why does Christ do all this? Why did He die for the church? Why this process of sanctification and of cleansing? Why the nourishing and cherishing? What is it all designed for?

The answer is found in the significant statement here in Ephesians 5:

Ephesians 5:27 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.

Everything is designed to that end. All we have been looking at is the immediate object, but having in sight that ultimate object. That is the purpose of what Christ has done, and is continuing to do.

But to get the full force of this expression we have to vary the translation a little. The truer translation is this: 'That He [Himself] might present her to Himself.' The sentence begs for an additional 'Himself' there. And it is necessary to add it for clarity for this reason—so we are reminded that every analogy, even the analogies of Scripture, is inadequate. An analogy only attempts to give us some glimmer of an understanding of what the truth really is. But no illustration is completely sufficient.

The apostle Paul, here, is illustrating this relationship between Christ and the church in terms of husband and wife; and yet, right away, we meet with something that shows that the analogy is inadequate, and does not go far enough.

We all know that the normal procedure is that someone else presents the bride to the bridegroom, the father, or a relative, or a friend. He brings the bride to the bridegroom in the marriage ceremony. Having been helped in all her preparation by others—in her upbringing and education, and even in her clothing and so on—the bride is presented to the bridegroom by someone else. But that is not so here. Here, He will present His Bride to Himself, 'He Himself might present her to Himself.'

Marriage and the Bride of Christ (Part 8) by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

This is just another way of emphasizing the great theme of the Bible—that the whole of our salvation is of Christ, for the purpose of increasing God's family. It is *His* doing. He even presents His to Himself. Of course, God the Father is there in the capacity of the Supreme God.

He has done everything for us from beginning to end, as He follows the direction of God in every detail, He even speaks what God the Father has told Him to speak.

John 12:49-50 For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak."

We see there the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ.

Christ will present us to Himself in all this glory. The picture before us, therefore, is that our Lord and Savior looking forward to the moment, to the day when He will present the church to Himself. And what will she be like? She will be 'a glorious church' which means a church characterized by glory.

Here is a term with which we are familiar, in the individual sense, in the Scriptures. The ultimate destiny of each of us, the ultimate issue of all our individual salvation is glorification—justification, sanctification, and glorification.

Romans 8:30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

This shows that there is a connection between justification and glorification. 'Justification' is being declared right in God's sight; 'glorification' is receiving resurrection bodies, that is, receiving eternal life. The one does not exist without the other in its own proper time; as the calling does not subsist without the act of justification. This shows that the saints are to persevere during the process of sanctification as Christ works to prepare us to be ready for God to glorify us.

Paul speaks of glorification as if it were already complete, since God will certainly finish the good work that He started.

Marriage and the Bride of Christ (Part 8) by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Philippians 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

And Paul wrote at the close of Philippians 3:

Philippians 3:21 Who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He [Christ] is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

This is to happen to us individually; but the church also, as a whole, is to be glorified. It is really quite exciting.

That is what is meant by the phrase 'glorious church.' She will be in a state of glory. Paul helps us to understand it first by describing what she is like externally. He describes this in terms of two negatives. The church, in her glory, will have neither spot nor wrinkle upon her. There will be no stain, there will be no blemish. It is very difficult for us to realize this. While the church is walking in this world of sin and shame she gets splashed by mud and mire. There are therefore stains and spots on her. And it is very difficult to get rid of them.

All the substances and techniques used in therapy, all the means of cleansing are inadequate to remove these spots and these stains. The church is not clean yet; though she is being cleansed, there are still many spots on her. But when she arrives in that state of glory and of glorification she will be without a single spot; there will not be a stain on her. When Christ presents her to Himself, with all the spirit beings of heaven looking on at this awe-inspiring thing, there will not be a single spot or blemish on her. The most careful examination will not be able to detect the slightest speck of unworthiness or of sin. Paul introduces us to this idea in Ephesians 3:

Ephesians 3:10 To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,

These principalities and powers will be looking on; and He will not only present her to Himself, but before them. The Bride and Bridegroom will stand before the hosts of eternity and they will not be able to find a single stain or a single spot or blemish on her. That is what it means to be 'without spot.'

And, thanks to God, without "wrinkle." Wrinkles, as we know, are a sign of age, and/or a sign of disease, or a sign of some sort of constitutional trouble. As we all get older we develop wrinkles. Wrinkles are a sign of imperfection and/or the process of dying. The fat disappears from the skin. Disease too can deprive us of this layer of fat, and so it can make us look prematurely old. It does not matter what the cause is—any kind of trouble or anxiety leads to wrinkles. The church has many today that are being erased so to speak by Jesus Christ, under the instruction and guidance of God the Father.

It is all a sign of strain and of decay, of advancing age and failure. The church in this world has many wrinkles upon her; sin not only separates us from God, it also causes us to look old and aged both physically and spiritually. But Paul says, when the anticipated day comes on which Christ will present the church to Himself in all her glory, not only will there not be a single spot, there will not be a wrinkle left. Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit will cleanse us.

Psalm 51:6-7 Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Hyssop is the plant or herb that was commonly used by the ancient Israelites in their sacred purifications and sprinklings. Under this name the Israelites seem to have comprised not only the common "hyssop" of the shops, but also other aromatic plants, as mint, wild marjoram, and so on. The idea of the psalmist here is not that the mere sprinkling with hyssop would make him clean; but he prays for that cleansing of which the sprinkling with hyssop was a symbol, or which was designed to be represented by that.

Psalm 51:8-12 Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. [which cause spots and wrinkles] Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

The whole structure of the psalm implies that he was seeking an "internal" change, and that he did not depend on any mere outward ordinance or rite. He recognized that the cleansing he needed had to be from the inside—a change of heart because of an internal righteous spirit.

For members of God's church, and the church as a whole, everything will be smoothed out; her skin will be perfect and whole. It is impossible to describe this perfection. The spiritual massaging of the church will have been so perfectly done that there will not be a single wrinkle left. And she will remain like that eternally.

We are going to be glorified individually as well. No infirmities will remain; no vestige of disease, or failure, or sign of age. And we will go on living in that eternity of perpetual good spiritual health, with neither decay nor disease, nor any diminishing of the glory that belongs to us. That is the righteous state that we will be living in. What about the demons who have lived millennia and longer sinning? Are they covered in wrinkles and spots and blemishes?

Please do not forget that the idea the apostle Paul is anxious to convey is this: the righteous pride of the Bridegroom in His Bride. He is preparing her for 'the Big Day.' There is going to be His great celebration when He shows her to the whole universe.

But, not only will that be true of her externally; she will be the same internally. Psalm 45 is a perfect prophetic description of all this:

Psalm 45:1-14 (The Glories of the Messiah and His Bride To the Chief Musician. Set to "The Lilies." A Contemplation of the sons of Korah. A Song of Love.) My heart is overflowing with a good theme; I recite my composition concerning the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. You are fairer than the sons of men; grace is poured upon Your lips; therefore God has blessed You forever. Gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O Mighty One, with Your glory and Your majesty. And in Your majesty ride prosperously because of truth, humility, and righteousness; and Your right hand shall teach You awesome things. Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies; the peoples fall under You. Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions. All Your garments are scented with myrrh and aloes and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, by which they have made You glad. Kings' daughters are among Your honorable women; at Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir. Listen, O daughter, Consider and incline your ear; forget your own people also, and your father's house; so the King will greatly desire your beauty; because He is your Lord, worship Him. And the daughter of Tyre will come with a gift; the rich among the people will seek your favor. The royal

Marriage and the Bride of Christ (Part 8) by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

daughter is all glorious within the palace; her clothing is woven with gold. She shall be brought to the King in robes of many colors; the virgins, her companions who follow her, shall be brought to You.

In verse 13, the psalmist emphasizes that she shall be 'all glorious within the palace.' The term 'the palace' is in italics showing that it was added, but it was incorrectly added and should not be there. *Young's Literal Translation* of Psalm 45:13 reads, 'All glory [is] the daughter of the king within, of gold-embroidered work [is] her clothing.'

This description shows her spiritually glorious and radiating refinement and beauty. The gold embroidered work for clothing is a mark of royalty and quality. Notice what the apostle Paul brings out in his epistle to the Ephesians 5:27, 'but that she should be holy, and without blemish.' Paul is essentially positive that she will be positively holy.

The holiness, the righteousness of the church, is not the mere absence of sin; but it is the sharing of Christ's own righteousness. In contrast, this is where the merely moral person is left—without any understanding at all. He has no conception of anything but a negative morality; morality to the world means that you do not do certain things. That is not God's emphasis; that is not what the Bible means by righteousness. The biblical term means 'to be like God'!

God is holy, and the church becomes holy with this positive shining righteousness, this perfection. It is much more than a mere absence of evil. It is essentially positive uprightness, truth, beauty, and everything that is good and glorious in all its essence as it is in God.

The church is immersed in that. She is clothed with the righteousness of Christ now. We should thank God constantly that He sees that, and not us! But, then, there will be more than that. The church and her members will indeed be like Him, positively, entirely holy and righteous.

And then, to make sure that we understand this, Paul says, 'without blemish' which means 'without blame.' He has already said all this in Ephesians 1:

Ephesians 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, [What for?] that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

Here in chapter one Paul establishes the theme 'that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love;' and he carries this theme through this epistle to the Ephesians; then in chapter 5 he works it out more fully. The church, then, is going to be in this glorious state.

Let me sum it up in the following way: the terms used by Paul are designed to convey perfection of physical beauty, health, and symmetry, the absolute perfection of spiritual character. Think of the most beautiful bride you have ever seen. [For you husbands, of course, that was your own bride, Right?]

Multiply that by infinity; and still you do not begin to understand it. But that is what the church is going to be like!

There is never any perfect beauty in this world. A beautiful face, perhaps, but ugly hands. No one is perfect, but there is always something, some sort of blemish. But there will be none with the church. And that is, I suppose, the supreme quality of this beauty that is being described—it is symmetry; it is absolute perfection in every respect.

This is the thing that we should long for most of all. We are all so lopsided. Some people are full of head knowledge, the theoretical knowledge of doctrine, and they never move any further. Others have no doctrine, but they only talk about their activities and about their lives—they are equally defective spiritually. A person who has only a theoretical or philosophical understanding of these things, and who does not produce good fruit is a very unworthy representative of His Lord and Savior.

And so is the other! The so-called practical person has no time for doctrine, the other has nothing but doctrine; they are both equally at fault. It is very important that we learn to be balanced in the way that we live our spiritual lives. It is even that way in our physical lives with food. There are certain foods that are good for you, but if you eat too much they are bad for you, and can actually cause harm or disease, or any number of things. So there must be a balance in the things that we do, and we look to Christ for that and His example, and those faithful people who are listed in Hebrews 11.

We look forward to the day when we will be complete and whole with nothing lacking, and proportionate and balanced. Had you realized what a privilege it is to be a member of God's church?

Jesus Christ has loved us with an everlasting love, He has died for us, in preparation for that great day when He will present us to Himself a glorious church not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that we should be working with Christ's help to be holy

Marriage and the Bride of Christ (Part 8) by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

and without blemish.

This is a process that is going on continually. And please remember that it will go on until it is finished. Nothing can stop it, because she is His Bride. His righteous pride in God's Kingdom and in her is such that He cannot allow anything to hinder or stop the work that God has given Him to do!

The apostle Paul expressed the guarantee in Ephesians 3:

Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

That is the power that works in us, and will continue to work. He did not stop at His death; He does not stop at justification; He is continuing to work within us. He does all that Paul has been describing, 'to Him is glory in [and through] the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.'

This body of Christ, God's church, is going to be made perfect. We must be careful not to resist Him. Be careful not to resist the ointments, the emollients, the gentle teaching that He gives in His instruction in the Word in various other ways. Because if we become deeply stained with sin, He has some very powerful detergents and acids that He can use, and that He does use, in order to rid us of sin!

Hebrews 12:5-6 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."

Paul expresses this principle in II Corinthians 13:

II Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.

The exhortation is this, that if we do examine ourselves and judge ourselves, we will not

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be judged; but if we fail to do so He will do it to us; He will do it for us. There is no question about this; this is quite definite.

I Corinthians 11:28-32 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

We are not to live our lives in a careless manner, not thinking about what we are doing and why. We must think things through, consider the end. When in doubt, do not. These are some of the phrases that we try to teach our children By not discerning the significance, the importance of the Lord's body, a Christian does not understand what he is doing.

And the reason is: because he does not realize that the church is the Bride of Christ and that Christ *is going to* make her perfect and glorified. 'For this reason [because they do not examine themselves] many are [physically, mentally, and spiritually] weak and sick among you, and many sleep [spiritually].

'Many are weak' means, never feeling quite well, they do not understand why. 'And many are sickly,' that is to say, they are positively ill, diseased. 'For this reason' because they do not examine themselves, Christ has that other 'not-so-pleasant' way of doing it if we will not. If we cannot rule our families well why would He give us even one city? Read the biographies of the saints and you will find that many of them thank God, as they look back, for an illness that came to them.

So Paul's words are plain and clear—if we would judge ourselves, if we would examine ourselves and deal with ourselves and punish ourselves—we will not be negatively judged.

But we are judged now (as we know the members of God's church are being judged now).

Revelation 11:1-2 Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple,

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and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.

This is right before the Tribulation.

We are being judged, chastened, and disciplined accordingly by Christ who is doing God's work to perfect us.

I Corinthians 11:31-32 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

Because Christ's ambition for His Bride—the church—makes Him look forward to that great wedding day when she will be 'a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing,' and she will *be* 'holy and without blame before Him in love' He carries on His work to that end.

And if we do not respond to Him, and yield to His endearments and to the manifestations of His tender love and encouragements, he will use any method of cleansing it takes to get us there if we respond to Him. He may have to apply the acid of 'weakness,' or the alkali of 'sickness,' and although painful and agonizing, it will be for our good.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that every time we are ill or injured it is of necessity a chastisement. However, illnesses are the result most of the time of sin. It may be the sins of the world, or it may be our own sins, but sin is involved somewhere.

Paul realized that the thorn in the flesh was given to him to keep him humble so he would not regress to being proud and self-righteous again. The scriptures teach that 'the Lord chastens who He loves' and this is one of His ways 'many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.'

Because you belong to the body of which He is the Head, be careful, be wary because He will cleanse you, He will perfect you. He will do everything in His power to complete you.

Jesus Christ is preparing a place for His Bride in His Father's palace, so when He

Marriage and the Bride of Christ (Part 8) by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

comes to gather God's church together He will have an organized place to which to take us immediately.

John 14:2-3 In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

That is what you and I, as Christians, are going to see. Christ's will is that the church may see 'the glory which He had with the Father before the foundation of the world.' 'We shall see Him as He is.' He now has the glory that He shared from eternity with the Father.

This is one of the reasons that it is wrong to attempt to paint pictures or have any pictures of man's idea of what our Savior Jesus Christ looks like. There is a reason why there are no facts concerning His physical appearance. The so-called pictures of Christ are erroneous human fabrications which do nothing more than encourage idolatry. People worship the savior they have created on canvas from their own perverse imaginations. These are not true depictions of Christ who in reality is so glorious.

I John 3:1-2 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

When Christ ascended to heaven the glory returned, and He is now in His glorified state. You and I are going to 'see Him as He is.' We will need to be glorified before we can withstand that sight. As the Bride of Christ we will be there face to face and by His side sharing this glory.

How does Jesus Christ accomplish this? The answer is: by the Holy Spirit of God! It is only through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit that we can walk in harmony as husbands and wives. The unity of people living God's way of life must be done on a daily basis if we are to enjoy the family harmony that reflects life as citizens of heaven.

Husbands, according to the apostle Paul, we are being tested and judged according to how well we nourish and cherish our wives, 'just as the Lord does the church.' It is

humanly impossible to do this with the excellence of the Lord, unless we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 3:14-19 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height, to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

'Be filled with all the fullness of God,' means the same thing as Ephesians 5:18, where God commands us through Paul to "be filled with the Spirit." This means that we have a responsibility to obey him and to produce the fruit of the Spirit. The command is plural, so it applies to all Christians and not just to a select few.

The verb "be" in 'be filled with all the fullness of God,' is in the present tense, and it means "keep on being filled"—so it is something we should want to do constantly and not just on special occasions. And the verb is passive. We do not fill ourselves; it is the love of Christ that does it for the faithful.

The verb "fill" in Ephesians 5:18 has nothing to do with contents or quantity, as though we are empty vessels that need a required amount of spiritual fuel to keep going. In scripture, 'filled' means "controlled by." In Luke 4:28, "They. . . . were filled with wrath" means 'they were controlled by wrath' and for that reason tried to kill Jesus. Acts 13:45 records, "The Jews were filled with envy" means that 'the Jews were controlled by envy' and opposed the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. To 'be filled with all the fullness of God' means to 'be constantly controlled by the Spirit'—in our mind, emotions, and will.

We do not fill ourselves, but by working to have peace in our marriage and family the Spirit produces fruit. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Romans 8:23 Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

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What is this adoption; what is this redemption? The fulfillment or completion of it is the glorification 'of our body.' That means getting rid of the spiritual spots, the stains, and the wrinkles, and every such thing, and being perfect and glorious in God's and Christ's presences.

Have you noticed this in Revelation 19?

Revelation 19:7-9 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."

What a privilege of being invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb, when He presents the Bride to Himself! She will be clothed with this clothing of righteousness without, and within she will be perfect. What a great blessing to be at that spectacular wedding feast!

It is not surprising that Jude ends his short epistle by saying:

Jude 24-25 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.

How should we be feeling knowing this? We should feel exactly as any woman who becomes engaged to be married feels! We should be looking forward to the great wedding feast, and longing for it, and living for it. This should be at the center of our lives to the exclusion of everything else.

We should be animated by this, stimulated and moved by it, and always looking forward to it—the wedding day, the ceremony, the angels who guard us looking on, the feasting, the wonder and the glory and the splendor of it all!

Ephesians 5:27-29 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

Marriage and the Bride of Christ (Part 8) by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)
flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.

That was our Lord and Savior's objective for us. He died for us so that we might come to that!

He has separated us so that we might come to that! He nourishes and cherishes us so that we might come to that!

May God help us to realize the privilege of being a member of His church. May we also be given the knowledge and understanding so we may realize something of that glory that awaits us and that we will set our affections on that, and not on things of the earth!