

The Church Of The New Testament (Part 7 of 8)

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Christ and the Church

The apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:23-32, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies -He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

In this passage, we ought to be able to see and appreciate the close relationship that exists between Christ and the church. The close affinity between Christ and the church is suggested by the figure of the relationship between husband and wife.

It was predicted by Isaiah that God would give in his house "a place and a name" better than that of "sons and of daughters" (Isaiah 56:5). We are told in 1 Tim. 3:15 that God's house is the "church of the living God." The term "wife" is suggestive of a closer tie and a more divine union than "sons and daughters." As the husband is the head of the wife, Paul said that even so Christ is the head of the church.

Therefore, the apostle Paul suggests in Ephesians 5: 23 that the husband is Christ, and the wife is the church. Just as a husband and a wife become one, and forsake all and any others, and blend their lives into a oneness and unity, in the same way a Christian is to forsake everything else, divorce himself from everything that would hinder, and blend his life into the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. The husband is Christ, and we, as members of the church, make up the wife, or the bride of Christ. The marriage relationship that results is the church of Christ, under the headship of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

I also believe there is an analogy between the first woman who ever lived on the earth. Mother Eve. and her husband. Adam. and the church of

Christ in its relationship to Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The Bible relates, in the second chapter of Genesis, that after all the things of the earth had been created, the beasts of the field, the fish of the sea, and the fowls of the air, all these various things were brought to Adam to see by what name he would call them. When Adam had named all the beasts of the field, and all the fowls of the air, the Creator was conscious of the fact that every animal and every fowl had its respective mate, and then God looked at man, and said, "It is not good." Up until that moment, God's pronouncement had been not only that things were good, but that they were very good. But now God came to a point in the development of creation in which he said, "It is not good." What was it that was "not good"? He said: "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Probably there are a number of women, young and old, who would agree with that statement, and they are right.

God said that it was not good for man to be alone, and he said: "I will make an help meet for him." I might point out that the term "help meet" means "suitable companion." In accord with God's determination to make an help meet for Adam, the last, greatest and highest of all creation was brought into existence when God created Mother Eve.

I want to show that the means God used in bringing about the creation of Adam's wife form a fitting analogy to the establishment, creation, and formation of the church of Christ, which was to be the bride of the second Adam, Jesus Christ. What did God do? The Bible says: "And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept" (Genesis 2:21).

After God had caused Adam to sleep, he opened his side, and what a wonderful thing that suggests. The woman was not taken from Adam's head, that she might rule over him, nor from his feet, that he might trample upon her, but from out of his side, that she might be a partner and companion along the pathway of life. Then what happened? The Bible says, "And he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof" (Genesis 2:21). That which was to form the woman was taken from Adam's side - a rib. Therefore, Adam paid the price, the price of his flesh and bone for the one who was to be his companion and help meet.

The woman was then created out of the material taken from his side. The Bible states: "And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman" (Genesis 2:22).

The woman was then given to Adam to be his wife, to take upon herself his name, to be married to him. The Bible says that God "brought her unto

the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Genesis 2:22, 23).

As a natural result of that union, children began to be born of that first pair, and the earth was to be replenished as a result. Rehearsing that account just briefly, we can say that Adam was at first alone, but God said that was not good. God determined to make a help meet, a suitable companion, for him. Therefore, Adam was put to sleep, his side was opened and the rib was taken from his side, the woman was created, and became Adam's wife, and as a result children would be born and replenish the earth.

I believe that from that very simple story concerning the creation of woman, the first woman, we can draw a very beautiful analogy to the creation of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. God planned in his great wisdom that at the proper time, when man was ready to receive the truth, the church was to be formed. And just as Adam was the head of the woman, or the wife, so Christ was to be the head of the church. Therefore, we may expect to find a fitting parallel in the establishment of the church.

Do you remember what God did first in creating the woman? He caused a deep sleep to come upon Adam. Now look at the first thing he did in forming the spiritual wife, the Lamb's bride.

After Jesus had lived for thirty-three years upon the earth, and had fulfilled the prophecies concerning him, he was taken at last and nailed to the cross. While suspended upon the cross from the third hour of the day until the ninth hour, during the last three hours a great darkness fell upon the face of the earth. It seems to me that God himself veiled his face and refused to look upon the greatest tragedy of all ages, which was being carried out. The record says that finally the sinless Son of God bowed his head upon his guileless bosom and yielded up the ghost, declaring: "It is finished." While Jesus slept the deep sleep of death, a Roman soldier pierced his side with a spear, opening up the literal flesh of the body of Jesus, and in harmony with the creation of woman, there came forth from the side of Jesus that which was to purchase the church of Christ. The Bible says: "And forthwith came there out blood and water" (John 19:34). Therefore, Christ shed his blood, and with that made the sacrifice and gave his blood that he might purchase and buy the institution that was to be his spiritual bride, or the wife of the Son of God.

The apostle Paul said: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

Look at what happened in the formation of the church. God caused the sleep of death to fall upon Jesus. The material to build the church was taken from his side. Jesus paid his blood. The church, the Lamb's bride was to be brought into existence and made a living reality. It was proper to characterize the church as the wife, since she was married to Christ, and it was natural that spiritual children should be born of that union and into the family. Just as it was impossible for woman to have been created before the opening of Adam's side when that which formed her was taken out, even so it is equally impossible for the church to have been brought into existence previous to the shedding of the blood of the Son of God.

But someone might say: "The Bible says that Christ loved the church and gave himself for it, therefore it must have been in existence, or else he could not have given himself for it.

Well, it is true that Jesus had some followers, but they were not known or called his wife, and they did not become such until Christ died, made the sacrifice, and gave himself for them. Then they became his bride, or his wife. When a young man falls in love with a young lady, he is willing to forsake his father and mother and all things and give himself to her and for her, because he loves her. But was she his wife previous to the time that he gave himself for her? She was in existence as a young lady, but not as his wife, and she did not become a wife until he forsook all others, pledged his life, and gave himself for her.

So it was with the church of Christ. Human beings were in existence before they were known as a church, but they were not in existence as a bride, or as the wife of Jesus, until he purchased them and the marriage was consummated. Then they are joined unto him as a bride, over which he becomes the head, and in which his Spirit dwells, and they blend into one.

Paul said, in Romans 7:1-4, "Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God."

What is Paul talking about? So long as the law of Moses was in existence,

the Israelites were married to that law as their husband. If during its effectiveness, they had been married to another law, they would have been guilty of spiritual adultery, but if the 'first law was blotted out, then they are loosed from it, and are not adulterers, though they be married to another law, or another man. Paul said: "You brethren are become dead to the law by the body of Christ that you should be married to another."

What other? Unto him. What him? Unto him who is raised from the dead. Not the one who walked over the hills of Judea, and the plains of Samaria in his personal ministry - not married unto him until he tasted death, but married unto him that is raised from the dead. The man does not live who can find the marriage consummated between Christ and the church previous to the resurrection of the Son of God from the dead. But what is the object of this marriage, Paul? "That ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God."

Now when he says fruit here, we do not understand it to mean the good works, which are to result from our union with Christ, but men and women born as the result of the marriage of Christ and the church. Let me point out that children born outside of that wedlock and relationship would be illegal in their state.

We said all of that in order to say this: The church, having become married to Christ, has the right to take upon itself the name of the husband, and the children that will result from that union, have the right to take the name of the husband or the head of the household, and become members of the family of God. They will also become heirs of all that Jesus has because they are born into the family of God, and are therefore heirs of God, and joint-heirs, with Jesus Christ.

Since the church is described as the bride of Christ, doesn't it seem to you that the church should wear his name? Does it seem reasonable that Jesus would come to earth, sorrow, suffer, bleed and die to establish the church, and then the church would dishonor Christ by refusing to wear his name, but would instead wear the name of some man? Also, we can see that since Jesus shed his blood to purchase the church, (Acts 20:28), that if we are saved by his blood, we must be in the church.

Is the church essential to salvation? In reply to that question, I ask: Is Jesus' blood essential to salvation? Remember, he purchased the church with his blood. If he gave his blood for the church, and it is only by the blood that we can be saved, then it would seem that the church should be worth what Jesus paid for it.

If I paid 100 dollars for a suit of clothes, the only way I would get any benefit out of the 100 dollars that I paid would be to wear the suit of clothes. In the same way, Jesus gave himself for the church, (Ephesians 5:25), and purchased it with his blood, (Acts 20:28), therefore I must be in the church to receive any benefit from his purchase price.

We may see how Jesus looks at the church from another thought in the New Testament. In Acts 8:3, it is said that Saul made havoc of the church. But in Acts 9:4, Jesus asked Saul: "Why persecutest thou me?" Therefore, to persecute the church is to persecute Christ. I do not believe people can honor Christ and glorify him, and at the same time downgrade and belittle the bride of Christ, which is the church.

The Bible says that Christ is the head of the church, (Ephesians 5:23), and in Colossians 1:18, and Colossians 1:24 that the body of Christ is the church. To separate the head from the body would be to destroy both. That proves that the church is essential.

Sometimes people say: "Oh, I don't believe the church is essential to salvation." Let me ask: Do you believe that Jesus would be the head of something that is non-essential? And the Bible also states that Christ is the savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23). If you think that the church is non-essential, you will have to get another Savior, for Christ is said to be the savior of the body over which he rules as head, that is, the church.

Are you a member of the church that Jesus built?

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