

MARRIAGE & HEAVEN.

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*"This mystery is great but I am speaking with reference to Christ & the Church."
—Ephesians 5.32*

The greatest earthly and visible picture of the gospel of Jesus Christ and His sacrificial and loving death for His Church is in fact the covenant-bond of marriage. Properly lived out, the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman gloriously makes the gospel visible as a husband loves and leads and sacrifices for his Bride and as the wife submits to, honors, and respects her husband.

1. the church is BETROTHED to Christ.

Right now, every true believer is betrothed to Christ and has the Spirit of God as a pledge, the down-payment. The Spirit guarantees the believer's future inheritance. Christians have not enjoyed the fullness of the marriage supper yet. No Christian on earth has experienced the home of Christ yet. Every saint travels now and journeys now to the eternal home to be with Christ. The Church, at the present, is betrothed to Christ. As in ancient Judaism, in betrothal, the husband and wife were legally married though they had not yet come together intimately yet. When the husband would come gather his bride, then they would have the wedding ceremony and then they would consummate their marriage and physically come together as a married couple. But even during the betrothal period, legally, the husband and wife were married. So it is with every Christian who is married to Christ legally by being justified by faith. The marriage has been made. God has entered His covenant with His Bride and shall never break it. They are married but Christ and true believers who now serve Christ on earth have not enjoyed the marriage supper nor have they enjoyed the physical, perfect, full union that awaits at the consummation. That is yet to happen.

2. the church is PROMISED to Christ.

God promises true Christians that to die results in their gain. For a Christian, to live is Christ; yet, to die is infinitely better. During the present period as believers on earth serve Christ and worship Him, there is a promise that every believer clings to and knows that one day when Christ returns, He will gather His elect unto Himself. But even at the present hour, as Christ is not yet with His people, the church is in fact promised to Christ. The Lord Jesus will receive His Bride and will receive the full reward of His sufferings.

3. the church is KEPT/PRESERVED for Christ.

He who began a good work in believers will perfect that work until the final day. The work of God shall never fall short; it shall never fail. True believers are kept for Christ not by their supreme love for Christ but because of His securing love for His elect. True Christians make it to heaven not because they primarily persevere but because Christ Himself preserves them and guards them in their faith so as to ensure that they persevere till the end. Just as a bride was preserved – even during the betrothal period – for the coming wedding feast when she would then be joined to her husband physically, so it is with the people of God who are preserved now till that day when she is joined with her great Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus, eternally in glory.

4. the church is PREPARING for Christ.

In Judaism, during the Betrothal period before the husband would gather his bride for the moment of physical consummation, the Bride would prepare herself and do all that was necessary in readying herself for the soon-coming union. She prepared herself. In the same way, at the present on earth, every true believer prepares himself to meet Christ! True believers are clothed in fine linen and made righteous because of the spotless righteousness of Jesus Christ credited to them. But the bride of Christ makes herself ready by righteous acts (Rev 19.7-8). Every believer longs to meet his Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus, and yearns for Him! She beautifies herself by becoming more like Christ, by pursuing Him, by earnestly seeking holiness and by abiding in the Vine. Each day that goes by, as the Bride readies herself to meet her promised Bridegroom, she longs with greater love and with fervent passion for His dawning. But till that moment comes, she prepares for this meeting – for then she will forever be with the Lord (1 Thess 4.17).

5. the church is LONGING for Christ.

Like the lovers in Song of Solomon, the woman longs for her lover by saying: 'draw me after you and let us run together' (Song 1.4). The bride says: 'let his left hand be under my head and let his right hand embrace me' (Song 2.6). Again, 'O my dove ... let me see your form, let me hear your voice' (Song 2.14). These verses picture the longing that lovers have between each other. As a husband and a wife passionately long for each other, so the church longs for Christ; and, to be sure, Christ longs for this coming union with His Bride! The true church longs for Christ and has a desire to depart and be with Christ (Phil 1.23). Till the union is fully consummated, the Bride of Christ, the Church, longs for her Husband by thinking of Him, by delighting in Him, by communing with Him in intimate fellowship through prayer and the Word of God.

6. the church is LOVING her Christ.

Christ loves His bride and died for her. Because of the work of God in the heart, every true believer loves Christ and has an ever-growing affection for Christ. Of course, it is not what it should be, nor what a believer wants it to be, but believers

love Christ and long for Him! Though believers have not seen Him, they love Him (1 Pet 1.8). A blessing of divine grace is promised to those who love the Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love (Eph 6.24). As a bride of old thought about and considered her coming groom who would come and fetch her to live with and protect and lavish affection upon her, so the Bride of Christ loves her Savior with ever-increasing affection the more that she considers Him! Let the soon-coming Bridegroom ravish his own with His love and let believers love Him with diligence and with passion.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS:

Marriage, then, is an unbreakable union that reflects the union with Christ and His church. The intimacy of marriage between one man and one woman reflects the intimacy that the Church enjoys with Christ *now* and that will be fully enjoyed when Christ gathers His own unto Himself forever in His home in glory!

The wedding in marriage points to the ultimate wedding between Christ and His Church. Furthermore, the preparations for marriage mirror the lengthy preparations of the eternal union. Consider the two-fold elements of this preparation:

1. Christ's preparations = for us in heaven
2. Church's preparation = spotless and pure in holy deeds

The physical and sexual union between a man and a woman in marriage points to the coming eternal union between Christ and His Bride. As there is no act in the marriage relationship that expresses more intimate affection, exclusive love, and ravishing delights than sexual intimacy, so this God-blessed act points to the most superior intimacy and affection, the ever-flowing and exclusive love, and the unending delights of being ravished by Christ in heaven! The sex-act in marriage points to the glorious intimacy that the church will have with Jesus Christ forever and ever – without end!

The joy of a present, earthly wedding feast dimly points to the overflowing and ever-increasing delights of the heavenly marriage supper of the Lamb! And it comes quickly! As the Bridegroom, He promises His Bride repeatedly that He is near and that He comes quickly (Rev 22.7, 12, 20).

To refuse sexual intimacy to one's spouse in marriage not only sins against the clear commands of the Lord in the Word of God, but it presents a terribly distorted picture of the gospel since it would present a coming marriage between Christ and His Bride without enjoying the ravishing spiritual intimacy together. What a horror! Godly husbands and wives must enjoy frequent sexual relations together not just for the protection of the spouse's purity, for the satisfying of one's spouse, for the enjoyment and obedience of being 'one flesh' in all areas, but also because it serves to remind

Godly couples of the soon-coming full intimacy when Christ and His Church enjoy one another for all of eternity!

Summary: HUSBANDS should ponder the following key points:

1. marriage is UNBREAKABLE
2. marriage is JOYFUL
3. marriage is INTIMATE
4. marriage is EARTHLY
5. marriage is PREPARATORY
6. marriage is FUTURE-POINTING

Bear in mind, the preparation for a wedding serves to emphasize the all the preparations for the heavenly wedding! The love between a married couple serves to illustrate – albeit dimly – the perfect love between Christ & His Bride! The frequent and unashamed intimacy a man enjoys in his wife is but a dim shadow of the perfect, glorious, ravishing, and full intimacy the Church will enjoy with her Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, forevermore in glory! And, the tenderness between a husband & a wife demonstrates in an earthly sense the perfect tenderness that Christ has for His church & that she reciprocates toward Him.

Let husbands and wives delight in love toward one another. Let them intoxicate each other with love (Song 5.1). Let them hold to each other and not let each other go (Song 3.4). Let lovers indulge frequently and joyously in regular, selfless, others-centered sexual intimacy in obedience to the Lord (1 Cor 7.3-5). And let Godly couples remember, talk about, pray about and gladden their hearts that every time they enjoy sexual delights within the covenant-bond of their marriage, it points to unbounded, unending, unfathomable delights that the Bride of Christ will enjoy with Christ, her Bridegroom, for endless eternities to come. Truly your marriage is a picture of the heavenly realities to come. The question is, is your marriage currently picturing a *poor* or an *accurate* heavenly marriage to come? Enjoy your spouse! Live in harmony with one another and ravish each other with selfless pleasures and thank God for the gospel and for your marriage. After all, speaking about marriage, the Apostle Paul writes: 'this mystery is great, but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the Church' (Eph 5.32).