

THE BRIDE

In the New Testament, The Church is called the Bride of Christ. It is my intention here to follow that theme and see what that means to us today as The Church. There are several clues that can shed light on this subject. There are the Old Testament types and symbols, Jewish laws and traditions, and the New Testament.

Let us start by setting the stage. In Jeremiah 3:14 God is speaking through the prophet to the children of Israel and says, ***"Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: ..."*** You see here that GOD considers Himself married to Israel. The entire book of Hosea is about how GOD considers Israel to be an adulterous wife and He has Hosea marry a whore to illustrate this to Israel. The next "prop" that I would like to set is a practice that we see in the book of Genesis, the 14th chapter, where Abraham decides that it is time for his son Isaac to get married. Abraham sends his servant to his wife's house to select a bride for Isaac from Abraham's wife's family. You can read the story if you are unfamiliar with it.

When God decided that it was time for His Son to take a bride, he sent His servant John the baptist to the family of His wife, Israel, so that His son Jesus could take a bride from among the Children of Israel. But unlike the case with the family of Bethule, the children of Israel rejected Jesus as a bridegroom, so he was not bound by the request to take a Bride from among the Children of Israel and so he went to the gentiles and they accepted Him. Not all of the Jews rejected Him and not all of the gentiles accepted Him but the rulers of the Jews did reject Him. As with any analogy, we can't take it too far, but this is, in essence, what happened.

Now let's talk about the customs of the Old Testament Jewish wedding. Many weddings were arranged as we saw in the story of Isaac and Rebekah. Some times a young man would see a young lady that he was interested in and would talk it over with his father to get his approval and then the father and the son would go to the father of the prospective bride and discuss the possibility of the two young people getting married. There were many things to talk about and if the bride had a brother, he would be in on the decision and of course

the girl had something to say about it too. The reason that the father and brother had such an important roll in the decision making was because, if the husband turned out to be no good and a dead beat or left his wife, the responsibility for taking care of the problem would rest on the father. In the event that the father was dead or otherwise unable to fulfill this task, the responsibility would fall to the oldest son. There were many things to agree on. There was the price to be paid for the bride, The ability of the young man to provide for the young lady, the stability and integrity of the bridegrooms family, etc. The bride price was no small matter. The price indicated how much the bride was worth to the prospective groom. In the agricultural setting of the old testament, sons meant a free work force for a number of years. A daughter was considered more of a liability and the bride price was a way of compensating the father and mother for raising a girl that would make a good wife. The groom would bring a written contract or (covenant) spelling out the terms of the marriage agreement including the bride price. If the agreement was satisfactory, the bride and groom would share a cup of wine and that would seal the agreement. The two would be considered married but they would not live together and no ceremony would take place. Now a time of preparation ensued. The bride started to make arrangements for the people who would be bridesmaids. She would start to gather things around her that she wanted in her new home. The bridegroom had other preparations to make. He had to prepare a wedding chamber, either in his father's house or free standing near the house. All of this would take time, usually about a year. After all of the arrangements were made with the two families and the agreements were made the bridegroom would say to the bride something like this. ***"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."*** The son does not decide when the bridal chamber is done, the father does. This is to insure that the son doesn't just throw up some shack in order to speed up the time when he can be with his bride. Thus, if the bride asks when the bridegroom is going to come for her the bridegroom would say something like, ***"..of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone."*** When the bridal chamber was finished, and the father gave his approval, the bridegroom would gather his entourage and go to get his bride. The ritual went something like this. The idea was to steal

the bride from her home without her family catching them. This took the cooperation of the brides family and was actually a charade. The responsibility of the bride was to be ready at all times because she didn't know when the Bridegroom would come. One of the things that she needed to have was a lamp, in case the bridegroom came in the night. This lamp had to be kept trimmed and the oil had to be kept fresh so that the lamp would burn bright enough so she didn't fall as they fled to their new home. As the bridegroom and his party drew near to the brides house, the "best man" would give a signal so that the bride would be ready. He may shout to let her know that the bridegroom was coming. Upon arriving, the bridegroom and his party would escape with the bride and her party with the family of the bride in hot pursuit being careful not to actually catch them. When they reach the place that the bridegroom has prepared, the bride and groom enter and the door is shut and locked behind them. When the marriage has been consummated the groom signals the best man and the party begins in the house of the grooms parents. The bride and groom remain in the bridal chamber for seven days. At the end of the seven days, the bride and groom emerge from the bridal chamber and the marriage supper is held. After that everyone goes home and the bride and groom begin their life together.

So God sent John the Baptist to earth ahead of Jesus to prepare the way for Him. But we read in John 1:11-13,

"He came to His own and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." For those who agree to be His bride He paid the bride price. His was the greatest price ever paid, It cost Him his own blood on the cross to redeem us as His bride. You see we could never live in His presence with our sins, so He had to cleanse us from our sins with his own blood. After He made the agreement to be our Bridegroom and to pay the great price for us He shared the cup with His disciples to seal the covenant. We continue to be reminded of our covenant with Him each time we take communion in remembrance of Him. Then he said, ***"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 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 unto myself;***

that where I am, there ye may be also." John 14:1-3 Before He left He also warned His bride to be ready at all times and spoke a parable concerning it. In Matthew 25:1-13 we read,

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be compared to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the prudent took oil in a flask along with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those virgins rose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.' But the prudent answered, saying, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. And later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' But he answered and said, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour." In the Bible, oil usually refers to either joy, or The Holy Spirit. We are now in that time of waiting for our Bridegroom. We need, therefore, to be looking for His coming lest we be like the foolish virgins. We need not be ignorant about how this will happen. We read in I Thessalonians 4:15-18: ***"For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words."***

"So", you might ask, "when will this all take place?"

While no one can tell the time, we can make an educated guess as to where it falls in the scheme of things. I am one that believes that it takes place at, or just before the start of the tribulation period. I have

several reasons for believing this. In the book of The Revelation, after the 4th chapter, we do not see either the Church or Christ on earth until the 19th chapter. The people that represent God during the tribulation are all Jews. I believe that the seven years when the church is taken to heaven and there is tribulation here on earth corresponds to the seven days that the bride and groom spend in the bridal chamber because we read in Revelation 19:7-9 ***"let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." and it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. And he said to me, "write, `Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" and he said to me, "these are true words of God."*** Notice that the white robes are the "RIGHTEOUS ACTS OF THE SAINTS". While we are in the bridal chamber we will come before the judgement seat of Christ.

II Cor.5:10 ***"For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, weather good or bad."*** Again, in Romans 14:10-13 we read ***"But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgement seat of God. for it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.' So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this - not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way."***

So you see that we will come before Christ and be judged for the deeds that we do in this body so that we may be clothed with only righteous acts. The acts that we do with wrong motives will be burned up and thus we are left with only pure and righteous acts. Our sin is delt with at the cross but our unrighteous acts are dealt with at the judgement seat. This is further illistrated in I Cor. 3:11-15 ***"For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood hay or straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and fire itself***

will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

You can not read much of the Bible before you get the idea that God is more interested in your motives than your actions. Often your motive can turn an otherwise good deed into sin. You may give a big sum of money, and that is good. But if you give it to be seen of men, it becomes pride and that is sin. Consider the fate of Ananias and Sapphira in the fifth chapter of Acts. This couple did a very generous thing. They sold some property and gave a lot of the proceeds to the church. Their only problem was their attitude. Peter said, ***"Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."***
Acts 5:3-4

It wasn't the fact that they didn't give all of the money to the church. It was that they said they gave all of it to the church. Their motive was not pure. They were concerned about other people's perception of them so they lied about what they did. If God judged us in the same way today, how many of us would still be alive? I can tell you with certainty that you would not be reading this book because I wouldn't be here to write it.

The wrong motive can also hinder God's power. In I Corinthians 1:17 we read, ***"For Christ, the Messiah, sent me out not to baptize but (to evangelize by) preaching the glad tidings (the Gospel); and that not with verbal eloquence, lest the cross of Christ should be deprived of force and emptied of its power and rendered vain - fruitless, void of value and of no effect."*** (AMPLIFIED BIBLE) Please note that Paul says that if he had preached using clever speech, it would have made the cross of Christ void. He then goes on to say that the word of the cross is the power of God. When we consider what we hear from the pulpits today it is no wonder that there is no power in our churches. If a pastor preaches with the motive of showing how knowledgeable he is, or if he wants to bring guilt or shame by way of the message, there will be no power to accomplish his goals. Meaningful change in the hearts and lives of people can only be accomplished by the power of God. So why do we

hear so much psychology from the pulpit? It has no power to change a life. It only has the power to make us feel miserable because it points out our failures. It is like the Law. It can not justify, it can only condemn. But if we preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified, it sets people free. In the Amplified Bible we read in I Corinthians 2:1-5 "***As for myself, brethren, when I came to you [I] did not come proclaiming to you the testimony and evidence or mystery or secret of God [concerning what He has done through Christ for the salvation of men] in lofty words of eloquence or human philosophy and wisdom; For I resolved to know nothing- to be acquainted with [nothing], and to be conscious of [nothing] - among you except Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and Him crucified. And I (passed into a state of) weakness and was in fear (dread) and great trembling [after I had come] among you. And my language and my message were not set forth in persuasive (enticing and plausible) words of wisdom, but they were in demonstration of the (Holy) Spirit and power [that is, a proof by the Spirit and power of God, operating on me and stirring in the minds of my hearers the most holy emotions and thus persuading them], So that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men (human philosophy), but in the power of God.***"

The Church is dying! Not because we have too little planning, or too few heart wrenching stories, or non professional singing, or non-padded pews, or because we are not seeker friendly, or because we have too few programs, or too few staff, or the wrong song books, or not enough money. Our churches are dying because Jesus Christ is not at the center of every decision we make, every song we sing, every sermon that is preached, every prayer that is prayed, and every program that is started. If the exaltation of Jesus Christ is not at the center of every plan we make, we plan in vane because there will be no power to bring the results that we had planned. There has been a whole industry built upon "church growth". There are seminars, books, videos, and programs. Has anyone stopped to think about the suppositions we must make if we think that church growth can be programmed and packaged? In the second chapter of Acts we are told in verse 41 that there were about three thousand souls added to the church after Peter preached. Now that is church growth! But how do we fit that into a program? If you will read the sermon that Peter preached, you will see that he took the people where they were and pointed them toward Christ. You or I could memorize that

sermine and preach it in a thousand churches and still not see three thousand people come to Christ. Why? Because the Holy Spirit gave that sermine to Peter for that time and he was under the anointing of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit convicted those people of their sins and drew them to Him. In the fifth chapter of Acts, after the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, we are told that fear fell upon the church and in verse 14 we see that multitudes were added to the church. Is this part of any church growth program that you have seen? Jesus said, in John 6:44, "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him;..." How do we program that into a church growth strategy? Besides, why do we want to grow as a church, and what does church growth mean? If a church stays the same size and the people grow deeper in the love and knowledge of Christ, is that church growth? If we go door to door and lead 100 people to Christ and they all start attending another church, is that church growth? And why do we want church growth? Is it not so that we can brag about it? If you are a pastor, is it not because it would make you look good and maybe you could get a better church? The answer to the question, "Why do we want church growth?" is crucial because it exposes our motives about so many things. I believe that church growth is a by-product and not a product. Maybe I can illustrate what I mean. I used to own a saw mill. A saw mill produces three things; lumber, slabs, and sawdust. Lumber is the product and sawdust and slabs are by-products. If I would start concentrating on the sawdust instead of the lumber, I would be in big trouble. Suppose a man brought a nice walnut log for me to saw. If I started to look at the beautiful sawdust and cut the whole log into sawdust, the owner would be disappointed. My job was to concentrate on the lumber and the sawdust would take care of itself. I believe that we need to concentrate on Jesus Christ and make Him the center of all that we do, and growth and all of these other things will take care of themselves. Christianity is not a do it yourself religion. It is a dependency on The Son of God for everything. Four times in the book of revelation, Jesus says **"I am alpha and omega"**, He said **"I am the way the truth and the life"**, He said, **"I will never leave you nor forsake you"** He Said, **"I am the Lord that healeth thee"**, He said, **"If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it."**, He said, **"I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you."**, He said, **"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the Vine, so neither can you, unless you**

abide in Me." I could go on and on but I hope that you get the idea. The power of God is released when Jesus Christ is preached and there is no power in the preaching of psychology, Christian principles, helpful hints, politics, human relations, or railing against the world. In preaching the centrality of Christ it is important that we are talking about the same Christ that the Bible talks about. There are many Christs in the world today and we must be careful that we know what we are talking about. The Christ that the Bible talks about is loving but He is also Holy and just. He is a God of forgiveness but He is also a God of wrath who will judge sin within the church as well as outside of it. The way is narrow; if we go too far to the right we can get into legalism. If we go too far to the left we can get into the notion that He will wink at our sins and that He is not serious about purity. After all, this is the nineties. Sin is still sin and must be judged! A Christians attitude toward sin is very important. Sin has no business being a part of a Christians life.

Wrong motives also deprive us of rewards in heaven. In Matthew 6:1-2 we read, ***"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, They have their reward in full."*** You see, we can either have our rewards here or in heaven, but not both. Even if we don't get the rewards here that we seek, the fact that they were our motive precludes us from receiving any rewards in heaven. Jesus continues to carry this theme in chapter six through verse 18.

We need to continually ask the Holy Spirit to reveal our true motives to us and to purify our motives. The heart is evil and desperately wicked and we are capable of deceiving ourselves. Even in the writing of this book, I need to keep a guard on my motives so that the power of God needed to be an agent of change in the lives of those who read it is not diminished. Even Christ denied Himself.

As I mentioned before, the marriage supper comes at the end, after the bride and groom have been in the bridal chamber for seven days.

After the church is gone, things will return to the way they were in Old Testament times. In Old testament days, believers looked forward in faith to their Messiah. But Jesus had not yet shed His blood

and therefore they were cleansed from their sins by looking, (in faith) to the Savior that would come, and the Holy Spirit could dwell in them based on that faith and the cleansing of their sins based on that faith, and the FACT of the promise of the atonement yet to come. During the tribulation, the church is gone and those who believe will look back at the Messiah that they had rejected and they will have to give their own lives for Christ and then they will reign with Him during the thousand years of peace. We see this recorded in Revelation 20:4.

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."

As you read the next chapter, "WHO RULES THE WORLD?", You will see better where this all fits into the whole scheme of things.

By

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