

Christ the Bridegroom to the Church

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Christ the bridegroom to the church metaphorically parallels the human experience. The analogy is to the bridegroom and the bride and to the husband and the wife. The metaphor equates the Lord and his church to the love, compassion, and mercy of marriage, humankind's most revered and inspiring institution. Paul describes this relationship of Christ to the church in Eph 5:23-30:

23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Christ, the Bridegroom to the Church in John the Baptist's Teaching

From the beginning of Christ's ministry, John the Baptist understood that he was subordinate to Christ. John used the analogy of bridegroom and bride to show the preeminence of the Lord:

28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' 29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom . The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. 30 He must become greater; I must become less. John 3:28-30:

John established that he was the friend of the bridegroom, Christ was the bridegroom, and the bride, the church, belongs to the bridegroom, Christ. The church is the bride of Christ in name and in purpose. The true church cannot wear another's name, nor can she submit to another's will. There logically can be no place for a church named Baptist, Lutheran, Calvinist, or any other name than that of the bridegroom, Christ. Nor can the bride submit to the teaching of any but the true husband, Christ. The principles that establish the marital relationship between Christ and the church are eternal and irrevocable. The New Testament begins and ends with this fundamental principle. Those who believe that John, the Baptist, could have founded the church, even though he, himself, denied it need to consider that John's death by beheading occurred in Mat 14. In Mat 16:18, Jesus Christ said, "Upon this rock I will build [future tense] my church."

Christ, the Bridegroom to the Church in God's Final Revelation

Just as the New Testament begins with the concept of Christ and the Church as bridegroom and bride, it ends with the very same principle in teaching and imagery. In what "sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting, "Rev 19:6-8 records:

"Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

7 Let us rejoice and be glad

and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,

and his bride has made herself ready.

8 Fine linen, bright and clean,

was given her to wear."

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

In Rev 21:1-2, the holy city, the New Jerusalem, is described as the bride: "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." In Rev 21:9-11, one of the seven angels shows John the bride after carrying him away to a

mountain: "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." These passages are clear in teaching that the bride is the wife of the Lamb, the Holy City, and the New Jerusalem.

This mountain to which John was carried away is the same mountain to which all Christians come. Heb 12:22-23 describes the church with the very same terms used by the Revelation: "22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven." From these passages, the bride, the wife of the Lamb, the Holy City, the New Jerusalem are clearly the church of the firstborn.

Christ, the Bridegroom to the Church in Paul's Writing

The apostle Paul also taught that the church was the bride of Christ, espoused to him and wife to him. In 2 Cor 11:2-3, Paul wrote:

2 I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. 3 But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

This passage, combined with Eph 5:23-27, teaches that the church, the body of Christ is his bride and wife. In Paul's teaching, the husband, Christ, loved the church and gave himself up for her. In turn, we, the church, love Christ and espouse ourselves to be a pure virgin to him. The church and its members must be faithful to her husband.

Conclusion

Because Christ is the bridegroom and husband to the church, some facts are evident:

- The church must wear the name of her husband and not the name of any other – the church of Christ. There is only one bride and wife of the bridegroom – the church of Christ.
- The bride and wife of the bridegroom exists now in the church and eternally with Christ the bridegroom and husband.
- The bridegroom, the husband, saves his bride, the wife. The bride, the church, must be faithful and true to her husband.

The entire Bible, God's complete mystery revealed in Christ and the word, concludes with the most beautiful proposal of any marriage:

16 "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. Rev 22:16:17.

Study Questions

1. Why cannot the church be named after John the Baptist? _____
2. List all the synonyms in this lesson for the bride of Christ. _____

3. Why must the church keep the commands of Christ? _____
4. Explain why the church is the first, last, and only bride of Christ? _____
5. Describe how the bride is adorned? _____