

Picture 6: The Bride



Seven Pictures of God's People (Part 8)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we continue to look together into the mirror of God's Word to find out what kind of people we really are as God's redeemed people. The title of this series of talks is, "Seven Pictures of God's People." All our seven pictures are taken from Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. So far, we've looked at five of these pictures: the assembly, the body, the workmanship, the family, and the temple.

Today we're going to look at the sixth picture, the bride. This picture is found in Ephesians 5. Although the word "bride" is not actually used, the implication in this passage is absolutely clear. I'm going to read Ephesians 5:25–32:

> "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the Church, for we are members of his body. For this reason [and this is a quotation from the Old Testament, from the story of creation], a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church." (NIV)

In that passage, Paul begins by talking to human husbands, believing husbands, about their relationship to their wives. He says it must be one of love, devotion, care—all very sound and practical advice, very needed today. And although it's all true and valid, it's not the full meaning of the passage, because Paul then goes on to say, "Remember, the husband/wife relationship is patterned on the relationship of Christ to His church." And he says, "This is a profound mystery." It is indeed. I am sure no human mind can ever fully fathom that mystery. But he says very clearly again, "I am talking about Christ and the church." So, out of that passage we see with absolute clarity the two persons in this union: Christ is the Bridegroom and the Church is His bride.

This was very beautifully foreshadowed in the original creation of Adam and Eve as recorded in the opening chapters of Genesis. One of the remarkable features about the creation of Adam was that God had everything ready for him before he appeared on the scene. His entire environment was there: the vegetation, the animals, the weather, the heavenly bodies—everything was there that he would need.

That's a beautiful picture, I think, of God's provision for us in the new creation. Everything we need is already there when we arrive on the scene. There was just one thing missing, there was no mate for Adam. Now that wasn't a mistake on God's part. God had a purpose in not immediately providing a mate for Adam—at least, I believe so. I believe he wanted Adam to understand something of the longing that God has for personal fellowship with man. So He allowed Adam to experience the lack of that fellowship, the lack of a mate. And then He provided the mate. Now let me read just a few verses there. Genesis 2:18 and 21–23:

> "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.' [From that we get the familiar phrase 'the helpmeet.' Verses 21–23 of Genesis 2:] So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man.'" (NIV)

Now that was a completely different method of creation than God used for any of the other creatures. But there was a purpose in it. While Adam lay in a deep sleep, part of his own being was taken out of him, and out of that part God formed a bride for him and then presented it to him. And this is a picture of the Lord Jesus. He gave himself up for the church on the cross. He died, His body was laid in the tomb; but while He lay in that deep sleep in the tomb, God took something out of Jesus. And out of that something, part of His own nature, He formed the Bride, the church. And one day, just as He presented Eve to Adam, He's going to present the church to Jesus.

You see, the Bible lays tremendous emphasis on marriage. I don't think we appreciate how central a place marriage plays in the Bible. As I've already indicated, human history begins with a marriage. And the first matchmaker, I'd like to mention, was God. I'd also like to tell you, by the way, that God is still in the matchmaking business. But the Bible also comes to its glorious climax, and human history comes to its climax, with another marriage. Let me read to you what it says in Revelation 19:6–8. This is not a human marriage; this is the marriage of the Bride, the church, to the bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

> "And I heard as it were, the voice of a great multitude, and as the sound of many waters, and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, 'Hallelujah, for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad, and give the glory to Him [Now there is one primary cause for rejoicing:] for the marriage of the Lamb [that's Jesus] 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." (NASB)

So there's the picture of the culmination of human history, and it culminates in the marriage of the Church, the Bride, to Jesus the Bridegroom. And it's a cause for rejoicing throughout the universe. But note that the Bride was expected to provide or prepare her own clothing. This is very interesting. I've lived and worked in various different continents, various different countries, and I've attended various marriages in different cultures. And I have never been in a place where it wasn't one of the major tasks of the bride to prepare her attire for the wedding. I've never known a bridegroom come along and prepare the bride's attire. I think this is almost universal to the human race. And so it is with the church. The church is responsible to provide her attire and get it ready for the wedding. Jesus makes it possible, but the church has to do it. And the clothing of the church is fine linen, bright and clean, which is the righteous acts of the saints. Each righteous act that we make in faith is helping to prepare our attire for that wedding day.

Now let's look at the main elements in this picture of Christ the bridegroom and the church the bride. I see in it three main features. First of all, mutual, unreserved commitment on both sides. Jesus gave Himself up for the church. He didn't hold anything back. He poured out His entire lifeblood. And I believe that's what marriage is. Even on the human level, God intends it to be a total self giving of two persons, the one to the other. Neither is entitled to hold anything back. And it's required of the church that she gives herself to Jesus, the bridegroom, just as fully and totally as He gave himself up to redeem her on the cross. So that's mutual, unreserved commitment.

The second thing I see there is careful preparation. In that closing picture of the marriage supper of the Lamb, the

emphasis is on the fact that the Bride, the Church, had made herself ready. She'd prepared her attire, and her attire consisted of righteous acts. It wasn't one single provision that was sufficient for everything, but it was a continual preparing of that attire. And I like to think of it this way, as you and I walk in faith and in obedience, fulfilling the will of God and keeping His commandments, we are preparing our attire—that fine linen which is bright and clean.

The third feature I see in this picture is union that produces fruit. The purpose, the consummation of marriage, is the union of two persons. The two, it says, shall become one flesh. And out of that union it's the purpose of God in creation that there shall come forth fruit, new life. And I believe that's the purpose of God in the relationship of Christ, the Bridegroom, to the Church, the Bride. I believe that out of that glorious union which has not yet been consummated, there's going to come eternal fruit. I believe the eternal purposes of God for all subsequent ages will be unfolded out of the union of Christ with His church.

All right, the two-fold application again: the essential feature, and what's required of us. First of all, the essential feature—I think I've stated it clearly—it's mutual commitment. Total, unreserved self-giving, first by Jesus the bridegroom; then in return by the church, the bride.

What's required of us? I believe the emphasis is on our careful preparation. We've got to be aware that there's a marriage ahead, a glorious wedding ceremony, and we've got to be preparing our attire by the righteous acts that we're continually performing as we walk through this world.

Well, our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be speaking about the seventh picture.

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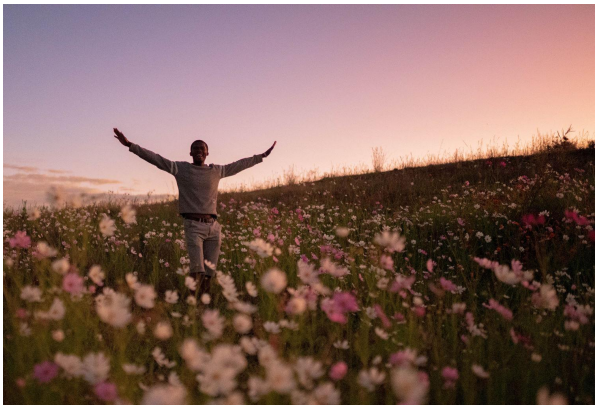

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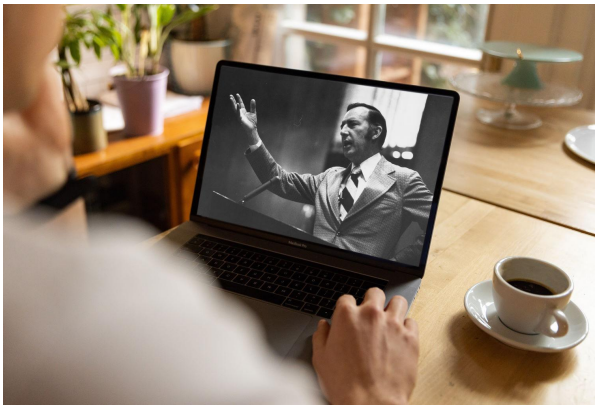

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