

The Glorious Church



Facing the Future (Part 16)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again at the beginning of a new week, sharing with you Keys to Successful Living which God has placed in my hand through many years of personal experience and Christian ministry.

This week I'm going to continue and complete the theme that we've been studying together for the past three weeks, "Facing the Future."

But first, let me say "Thank you" to those of you who have been writing to me. Before I finish this talk we'll be giving you a mailing address to which you may write. It means a great deal to me to hear how this radio ministry of mine has been helping you and blessing you. So please take time to write, even if it's only a brief note.

Now, back to our theme, "Facing the Future."

Over the past weeks we've been looking together at the picture which the Bible paints of this world of ours as we draw near to the close of the present age. In the midst of all the mounting pressures, I've shared with you the key to survival. Yes, and more than survival, the key to victory. It is to find out what God's purposes are and to align ourselves with them.

We've seen that God's purposes center in His two covenant peoples in the earth: Israel and the Church of Jesus Christ. In each case, God's purpose can be summed up in one word: restoration. In my talks at the end of last week, I spoke about the restoration of Israel and I showed how the destiny of all the other nations will be determined by the attitude they take toward Israel.

This week I'm going to speak about God's purpose to restore the church and how we can align ourselves with that. First of all, we need a vision of what God has destined the church to be. In the book of Proverbs we are warned that where there is no vision the people perish or cast off restraint. In other words, God's people need an ongoing vision to fulfill their calling. And this is particularly true in connection with the church. The church is so high above man's natural concepts and ideas and plans that we absolutely must depend upon the vision given in Scripture by the Holy Spirit of what God

has destined the church to be.

One place where this vision is made gloriously plain is in the epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 5, verses 25-27. This begins by an admonition to human husbands to love human wives and that's very much in place and very necessary, but Paul uses it as a kind of stepping stone to a higher level of love, the love between Christ and His church. And he compares the relationship of Christ to the church to that of a man to his bride who is to become his wife. This is what he says:

> "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless."

First we need to see Christ's double provision for His church, the provision that He made through His blood and the provision that He makes through His Word. I could express it simply this way: Christ redeemed the church by His blood that He might thereafter sanctify or make the church holy by His Word. Each provision is absolutely essential for God's purpose to find its fulfillment.

First of all, as Paul says, Christ gave Himself up for the church. He became the atoning sin offering. On the cross He shed His blood and by His blood He redeemed His people to make them a new creation, a new kind of people in the earth, something that the earth had never seen or even conceived of before. But once Christ had purchased His people to Himself by His blood, His plan and purpose was not complete. His final provision for the church is thereafter to cleanse her, to sanctify her, to wash her with the pure water of the Word of God. This is just as essential to make the church what Christ desires her to be as the shedding of the blood with which He redeemed her. And if the church is ever to become what God intends, then the church has to be continually cleansed and sanctified by the precious water of the Word of God. There's got to be a cleansing in every area of our lives (our thoughts, our motives, our imaginations, our attitudes and relationships), all have got to be washed continually by the sanctifying, purifying water of the Word if we're ever to become the kind of church that Jesus has destined us to be.

And then on this basis, we see God's vision for the church, what He has ordained that she shall be. In verse 27 there that I read, it speaks about Jesus presenting to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle but that she should be holy and blameless. The church is to be permeated with the glory, the visible manifest presence of God. Every kind of defiling thing, every kind of disfiguring thing, every kind of thing that would take away from her beauty and her glory has to be purged away, washed away, cleansed away. She has to become holy, set apart to God, mirroring God's holiness in an unclean and adulterous world. She has to be blameless, walking in the fulfillment of all her God-given duties, meeting every requirement of God. Only through the washing of the Word is this possible, only as the Word permeates and penetrates our thoughts and our inner emotions and our inner being can we become that kind of church.

Some people might say, "Well, this is too much. This is extreme." But friends, this is God's purpose. This is God's vision. God will never lower His standards to come down to man's standards. But God has made provision to raise us up to the standard that He's set for us. And the provision here revealed is first, the redeeming blood of Jesus and second, the cleansing, sanctifying water of the Word of God.

I've spoken about God's double provision for the church, the redeeming blood and the cleansing water of the Word and God's vision for the church, that she should be glorious, without spot or wrinkle, holy and blameless. Clearly, this demands a response from all of us.

I would like to speak now about the response that's demanded from us. First of all, the individual response from each believer. This is very clearly unfolded in 1 John 3:2-3:

> "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he [Christ] appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. [Again you see, there has to be a vision. We're going to be like Jesus. And then John points out the practical application of this glorious vision:] Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he [Jesus] is pure."

So the response that's required from each of us individually, when confronted with the vision of what God intends the church to be, that response is that each one of us will purify ourselves: purify ourselves through the washing of water by the Word of God and the standard of purity is God's standard, not man's. "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he [Jesus] is pure."

And then we look for a moment at the corporate response required from the church as a whole. This is beautifully unfolded in Revelation 19:6-8, which prophetically portrays

the climax of this age, the marriage supper of the Lamb. This is how it was revealed to John:

> "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, 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."

There's a picture of the church's corporate preparation. It says, "His bride [the church] has made herself ready." That indicates a process of preparation.

I've lived in many lands amongst many different cultures. I've attended many different types of weddings and all over the world there's one feature that I found in common. Everywhere it's the bride's responsibility to make herself ready for the marriage. And so it is in this heavenly marriage. That's the bride's responsibility, to make herself ready.

And her preparation is described in the final phrase there, "for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." The beautiful garment that the church must put on is a garment woven, not out of threads of linen, but out of righteous acts done in obedience to God and to His Word. So each righteous act is one thread in the total garment that will clothe the church and make her glorious.

You see, we must have a vision of this consummation that sets all our priorities in order. The most important thing for each one of us individually and the church corporately is to find and fulfill the will of God, to see the vision that God has for His completed church and to bend all our efforts, our prayers, our labors, all that we give ourselves to, to the achievement of this glorious purpose of the church. That when Jesus comes, He'll find the church what He has determined it shall be.

Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow and for the rest of this week I'll be speaking about God's objectives for the church.

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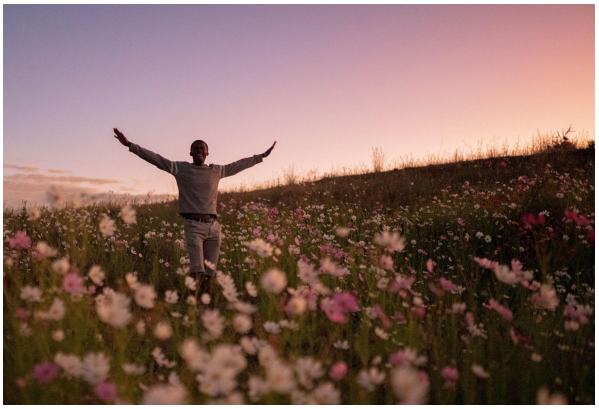

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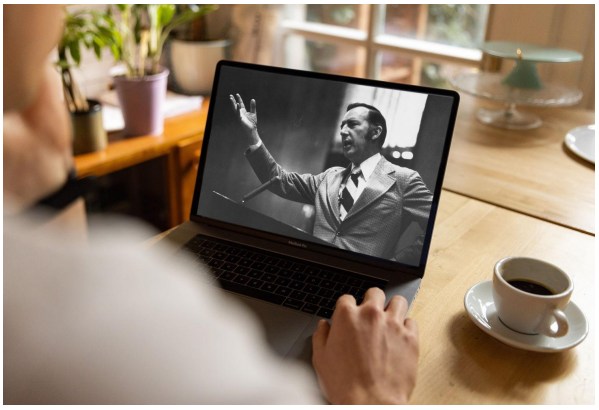

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