

Titles of the Church (#7)
The Wife of Christ
Ephesians 5:23
Sermon by Pastor Sylvia Chan

Today we are going to study another title of the Church.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 5:23** For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. (Eph 5:23 ESV)

Here Apostle Paul says that Christ is the head of the church just as the husband is the head of the wife; he compares Christ to the husband and the church to the wife.

Christians often use this verse to illustrate the human relationship between husband and wife, but few study it as the relationship between Christ and the church.

The Most Important Element in a Marriage

What is the most important element in a marriage? Is character harmony the most important element in a marriage? No, it is not! Even though character harmony is important, it is not the most important element in a marriage. Indeed there are many cases of the husband and the wife in a marriage having very different characters, yet they manage to live a happy marriage together for their whole lives.

Is financial sufficiency the most important element in a marriage? No, it is not! There are many poor families in the world, but many of them are content! Indeed in the third world countries, most people are poor, yet many poor couples are quite happy!

The Wife of Christ

What then is the most important element in a marriage? It is faithfulness. Faithfulness is far more important than character harmony, financial sufficiency, etc. Most couples can handle financial difficulty or character differences in a marriage, but no one can tolerate unfaithfulness in a marriage! Let's look at a passage:

^{NASB} **2 Corinthians 11:2 – 3** For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you *as* a pure virgin. ³ But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity *of devotion* to Christ. (2Co 11:2 – 3 NASB)

Here Apostle Paul said to the Corinthian church that he betrothed them to one husband, namely Christ. Please take notice, betrothal (which is engagement in modern-day language) in New Testament times was very significant. After the betrothal, a man and a woman could be called husband and wife even though they had not had a wedding.

Paul said that he wanted to present the Corinthian church as a pure virgin to Christ, but he was afraid that the church might be led astray from her devotion to Christ. In other words, Paul was concerned that the church might become unfaithful to Christ.

Unfaithfulness in marriage is adultery; unfaithfulness to Christ is spiritual adultery.

Spiritual Adultery against Christ

Let's look at a passage, Ezekiel 23:37, to understand spiritual adultery more deeply:

The Wife of Christ

^{NASB} **Ezekiel 23:37** “For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. Thus they have committed adultery with their idols and even caused their sons, whom they bore to Me, to pass through *the fire* to them as food. (Eze 23:37 NASB)

Here Yahweh God spoke to Israel through the prophet Ezekiel; the word “me” in this passage refers to Yahweh God Himself. He rebuked the Israelites for the serious sins they had committed, not only in worshipping idols, but even letting their children pass through fire, which means to offer up their children as a burnt offering to idols. Don’t be too shocked; offering up a human being as a burnt offering was a common practice in idol worship.

Spiritual adultery is more than just worshipping idols. The Israelites worshipped idols, and even offered their sons as burnt offerings to idols. Similarly when the people of God live in sin, their sinful life could stumble other people to fall into sin; that is spiritual adultery.

Spiritual faithfulness to Christ

The opposite of spiritual adultery is spiritual faithfulness. According to Ephesians 5:23, the church is the wife of Christ. Christ is always faithful to the church, there is no doubt about it; the question is whether Christians are faithful to him.

The most serious sin against Christ is unfaithfulness to him, that is spiritual adultery. Conversely, the most important quality of the church is faithfulness to Christ. Also take notice that it is the qualities of the Christians that determine the quality of the church. If Christians are faithful to Christ, the church is faithful to Christ; on the other hand, if Christians are unfaithful to Christ, the church is also unfaithful to Christ.

The Wife of Christ

^{NASB} **Ephesians 5:26 – 27** so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,²⁷ that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. (Eph 5:26 – 27 NASB)

The word “He” in this passage refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is Christ who will make the church holy and blameless; we Christians cannot make ourselves holy and blameless, but we have to be faithful to Christ. If the church is faithful to Christ, He will make the church holy and blameless.

The Marriage Supper Is In The Future

From the passage 2 Corinthians 11:2 – 3, we see that at the present time the church is betrothed to Christ, but when will the actual wedding be?

^{NASB} **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.”⁸ 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.⁹ Then 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.” (Rev 19:7 – 9 NASB)

This passage talks about the marriage supper of the Lamb in the future, after the Lord Jesus Christ has returned to earth. The Lord Jesus is called the Lamb of God. This passage here is talking about the wedding of the Lamb after his return. The church is compared to the bride of the Lamb; she is clothed in fine linen, bright and clean.

What does the “fine linen” stand for? Verse 8 says that the fine linen is the

The Wife of Christ

righteous acts of the saints. “Saints” is the predominant title for Christians in Paul’s writing. (For the meaning of “saints” please refer to my sermon “Title of Christians #9: Saints”) Therefore it is the righteous acts of Christians that make the church glorious; gold, silver, and magnificent buildings cannot adorn the church.

Conclusion

Now let’s sum up everything we have studied today:

- At the present time the church is betrothed to Christ, with Christ as the husband and the church as his wife.
- The most important element in a marriage is faithfulness. If Christians worship idols, they commit spiritual adultery against Christ.
- If the church is faithful to Christ, He will make her holy and blameless.
- The marriage supper takes place in the future after Christ returns to earth. At the marriage supper, the church will be clothed in fine linen, bright and clean, which stands for the righteous acts of Christians.