

The Bride, the Lamb's Wife

by Lewis Sperry Chafer

The church is being perfected into the image of Christ, that God may show the riches of His grace and glory, and will be presented to Him as a glorious church, holy and without blemish.

Scripture: John 14:1, Ephesians 1:3, Ephesians 2:6, Ephesians 5:25, 2 Timothy 2:12, Jude 1:24, Revelation 5:10, Revelation 21:9

Topics: "Christ And Church", "Ecclesiology"

Description

Lewis Sperry Chafer delves into the profound relationship between Christ and His church, using various figures from the New Testament to illustrate the vital connections. The church is depicted as sheep dependent on the Shepherd, branches drawing life from the vine, stones resting on the Corner Stone, a kingdom of priests interceded for by the High Priest, members of His body representing the Head, and the bride of the Lamb awaiting union with the Bridegroom-King. The church's ultimate destiny is to manifest the glory of the Bridegroom through His immeasurable love, wisdom, and power, as described in Ephesians 5:25-32.

Transcript

Each of the seven figures used in the New Testament regarding the church suggest some distinct vital relationship between Christ and His heavenly body of people. As sheep they are utterly dependent upon the Shepherd; as branches they draw the vital life from the vine; as stones in a building they rest on the Corner Stone and are mutually dependent on one another; as newly created beings they stand in the Last Adam, the Head of the new race; as a kingdom of priests they are the objects of intercession of the High Priest and through Him receive their own priestly ministry; as members of His body they are the visible representatives of the Head and the instruments of His manifestation and service; and as the bride of the Lamb they are yet to share in and manifest the ineffable glory and majesty of the Bridegroom-King.

The consummation of the relationships between the Bridegroom and the bride is still to her an anticipation yet to be realized. He has espoused her to Himself: the wedding day awaits His imminent return. It would be normal for her to be looking and longing for His return. Such an attitude is rightly to be expected where any real love for Him exists. His return, however, and the celestial union with His bride will not await the results of the meager power of her poor love for Him. All the divine purpose in calling her out, the present tender grace expended in her behalf, like His certain return, are dependent only on His love for her. This is a "love that passeth knowledge." Here is sufficient motive to insure the accomplishment of all that the

divine wisdom and power can perfect. By no less a perfection will His bride appear in glory. She, because He is able, will be presented faultless before the presence of His glory to His own exceeding joy (Jude 24). That the church is to be His bride and then, as now, the objects of His measureless love, wisdom and power is stated in Eph. v. 25-32:

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

In this passage there is a reference to the church as His body: "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." There is also abundant reference to the church as His bride: "I speak," Paul writes, with reference to husbands and wives, "concerning Christ and the church." He loved the church and gave Himself for it that He might present it unto Himself a glorious church. So shall she be "manifested together with him in glory."

The eternal purpose of God in the marvels of His present saving grace is said to be for the realization of these heavenly glories. "He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. i. 3). "To the praise of the glory of his grace" (Eph. i. 6). So again the purpose of God as it sweeps from one eternity to the other is revealed in another Scripture: "And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Eph. ii. 6-8).

He hath saved us unto good works, or service (Eph. ii. 10), and that we might not perish but have everlasting life (John iii. 16): but the passage quoted above seems to indicate that the primary motive of God in redemption is not to provide that which accrues to man; rather, He is redeeming His people in order that by them in "the ages to come" He may display the "riches of his grace" as manifested in "his kindness toward us through Jesus Christ." When this heavenly people are perfected into the "measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," "conformed into his image," and "like him," it will be a demonstration, before all created beings, of the marvels of His grace, and upon such a scale and in such ranges of glory as will wholly satisfy Him. It is His "exceeding joy" that is in view. Salvation in Christ will manifest His grace; for it is by grace ye are saved. The very purpose of God limits the method by which it must be done. His purpose! is to declare His grace and so salvation is by grace alone. Where in this marvelous declaration is there any place for human device or merit? Who would compare this revealed destiny with any that has ever been imagined by the human mind? Has not God so stripped man of every self-glorifying moral quality in His sight that He might, beginning with such utter nothingness, perform and incomparable display of His unmerited favor and grace?

It is significant that Jesus likened the bride, for whom He gave Himself that He might purchase her unto Himself, to a pearl of "great cost," for which the merchant man sold all that he might possess it. And the

very formation of the pearl is suggestive: It is said that the pearl is built up, layer upon layer, by the secretions which flow out of the wound in the side of the shellfish inflicted by the sharp points of the minute grain of sand lodged under the shell. The pearl, though formed in the triple darkness of the shell, the mud and the sea, and never having been affected by the light of the sun, has power when brought up to the light to catch its rainbow splendor and reflect it back in all its glory. So the church, the "pearl of great cost," is being formed, through the blood that flowed from His riven side, down here in the sea of the nations in this "dark age"; but "it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him." The church will then "be to the praise of the glory of his grace." "In the ages to come" showing forth the riches of His grace and glory. "The Lamb is the light thereof."

Referring again to the conclusions of the council at Jerusalem (Acts xv. 13-18), it is there stated that a Gentile company is being called out for His name. The "name" when used to designate Deity seems to carry with it the thought of the Person--"Where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them." So this body of people thus called out may be said to be a people for His Person. As the bride is for the person of the bridegroom, so the church is for the Person of Her Lord. This is especially disclosed in John xiv. 1-3. "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."

From this passage it will be seen that the bride of the Lamb does not occupy any mansion in the Father's house: He is preparing a place for her and as certainly will come again and receive her, not into the mansions, but unto Himself. He loved the church and gave Himself for it that He might purchase it unto Himself. "That where I am there ye may be also." "Father, I will that they also may be with me where I am." "And so shall we ever be with the Lord." "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

To Israel He is Messiah, Immanuel and King: to the church He is Lord, Head and Bridegroom. The covenants and destinies of Israel are all earthly: the covenants and destinies of the church are all heavenly.

As bride and consort the church will rightfully share with Him His reign (2 Tim. ii. 12; Rev. v. 10; xx. 6). The purpose of this age, evidently, is not to form a kingdom by securing subjects of the King; it is the calling out and perfecting into His very image those who will be co-reigners with Him in His yet future kingdom. The queen is never a subject of the king: her place is to share with him his authority and glory and to rest in the bosom of the bridegroom in the palace of the king.

All the mansions in the Father's house will be occupied. In Heb. xii. 22-24 the inhabitants of heaven are recorded. In this passage it will be noted that there are both "angels" and the "spirits of just men made perfect" in addition to "the church of the first born": "But ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."

Here are seen the redeemed of all ages in heaven; but not all are of the church. The "innumerable company of angels," and the "spirits of just men made perfect" are mentioned as separate from, but

accompanying "the church of the first born." Here is room for the saints of all the ages who may occupy the "many mansions" without necessarily including the "bride of the Lamb" as undistinguished part of that whole company; for it is said of her, "I go to prepare a place for you." Even John the Baptist, who was certainly of the Old Testament order, must designate himself as "the friend of the bridegroom": "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled" (John iii. 29). Abraham, too, was called "the friend of God" (Luke xiii. 28-30).

A real wedding feast, the feast of the ages, would hardly be attended by the Bridegroom and bride alone. Every element of a feast of such a character we are thus assured will be represented; but it is also clear that one seat will be reserved on His right for His spotless bride. Certainly it is not necessary to conclude that saints of other ages are excluded from heaven, or from the kingdom of God, because they are nowhere represented as organically related to the body and bride of Christ. To merge all the redeemed into one company, or to neglect the distinctions of Scripture, is to do violence to very much of divine revelation.

The church is seen typically, though not directly, in the Old Testament. She, as a royal priesthood, is foreshadowed in the priesthood of the Old Testament; as a new generation, or race, she is the antitype of that first race which began and fell in Adam; she is the present tabernacle of God, His present abode in the Spirit; she constitutes the true branches of the True Vine; and the sheep that know His voice and will not follow the voice of a stranger. The church is that body formed out of the wound of the side of her living Head, as Eve was formed from Adam.

The bride of Isaac typified the church as did the brides of other marriage unions recorded in the Old Testament. When Isaac was forty years of age Abraham, fearing lest he might marry some woman of the land, sent his trusted servant, whose name is not given, far away into the old home country to secure a bride for Isaac. When he had made the long journey he was divinely led to select Rebecca to whom that strange offer was to be made. She was asked to go with him, a servant she had never known, to a country she had never seen, to a land from which she would never return, and become the bride of a man she had never met. Truly this was a most unusual request; but she was able to say, "I will go." Then was placed before her some real tokens of Isaac's wealth as foretastes of that inheritance. She decided her future course and lot wholly on the urgent appeal and description given by the unnamed servant of Abraham. They began the long journey back, and she did not know whether to go north, or south, east or west; she must be wholly led by this servant in whom so much confidence had been imposed. As they journeyed during the many days it can be easily believed that he never lost an opportune moment to picture to her new attractions and beauties in the prince Isaac to whom she journeyed. At last she lifted up her eyes and exclaimed with a cry of delight:

"What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us?"

And the last ministry of that faithful servant was to witness:

"It is my master."

She sprang down from the beast and ran to meet him and no more blessed marriage union is recorded in all the records of the Old Testament.

God the Father, typified in Abraham in various ways (See Gen. xxii. 1-14), sent the unnamed Servant, the Holy Spirit (the Spirit's name has never been revealed. He is now known only by descriptive titles) to call out a bride for His well beloved Son. The Servant does not speak of Himself (John xvi. 13), but glorifies the Son before our eyes, and if we can say: "whom having not seen I love," there is given unto us an earnest of our coming inheritance and glory with Him (2 Cor. i. 22; Eph. i. 14). How little we then know of our pilgrim journey! But "as many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the sons of God." And while we thus journey that faithful Guide does not cease to unfold the riches of grace and glory that meet in Jesus our Lord (John xvi. 12-15), and the day is not far away, we believe, when we shall lift our eyes and exclaim, "Who comes yonder?" And the final ministry of our unnamed Guide will be to present us to Him without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, "And so shall we ever be with the Lord."

No human thought needs to be added to God's own description of the blessed estate of those He is now calling out and redeeming by His blood as they will appear glorified together with Him:

"And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; and had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: on the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the west three gates; on the south three gates.

And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the 'names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.

And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.

And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it.

And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life. And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which

bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. xxi. 9 - xxii. 5).

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