

# **Who is She? The bride of Christ!**

## **So, who is she?**

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**Rev. 19:7-9** 7 “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. 8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. 9 And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.”

*The bride of Christ is a Biblical subject with which many Baptists are either vaguely familiar or avoid altogether. In some circles, it is a subject that is best left alone lest you cross someone's dogma or bring suspicion of heresy upon yourself. If, indeed, cultic groups have wrested this subject (as with every other Biblical teaching), that is nothing to the Bible believer. In fact, we do ourselves a great disservice by not sharpening our understanding in any Biblical subject the Lord has given us. Furthermore, as we begin to fully understand this subject, it may come as a surprise to discover how important it is.*

### **So relax.**

Be assured that we will not put forth anything here that is heretical. There is very little of this subject that could be controversial among those who regard the Bible as their final authority. In fact, if you were to ask all Christendom to define it in a word, there is probably no Biblical subject with such universal agreement. No matter whether you are liberal, conservative, neo-evangelical, fundamentalist, post-millennial, pre-millennial, hyper-dispensationalist, anti-dispensationalist, Catholic, Protestant or Baptist. The definition of the bride transcends in agreement so generally, we would be hard pressed to find a Biblical truth that is so clear and universally accepted. So if we have captured your interest, please

read on as we give a simple definition of what is the bride of Christ. Are you ready? Here it is:

## **The bride of Christ is the church.**

That was pretty easy. Now, although most everyone already believes this statement, we want to lay out a brief Biblical foundation to show how it is indeed Scriptural. The term “bride” only appears five times in the New Testament. One of those times it is in reference to the fall of Babylon in which the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride would be heard no more (Rev. 18:23). It is used another time when the Apostle John saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:2). The remaining three times we understand it (by context and comparison) to be used metaphorically in reference to the church (John 3:29; Rev. 21:9; 22:17). There are other places where the actual term “bride” is not used, but which cement the concept together that she is indeed the church. There are also Old Testament illustrations that picture this for us, which goes beyond the scope of this writing. So for the sake of continuity, let’s put it all together and look at some interesting things about the bride from the beginning.

## **The bride is introduced by a friend or agent.**

In the culture of a Jewish wedding, the honoured friend of the groom had the ceremonial duty of acting as an intermediary agent on his behalf, presenting the bride and attending them to the bridal chamber. This is why John the Baptist said **“Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. 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 3:28-29) The Apostle Paul likewise saw himself in this role when he wrote to the church of Corinth **“For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”** (2Cor. 11:2) The espousal of a bride was a contract in which the honour

of chastity was the utmost necessity. It is the supreme requirement on which the contract was dependent. Chastity does not mean perfection from human faults. (The church of Corinth was far from that). It is simply that she has kept herself reserved completely for her husband and no other. It is a matter of great joy for the groom's friend to present to Him a pure, chaste, virgin bride.

## **The church is married to Christ in the present.**

It is vitally important that we understand the present tense relationship of Christ and a New Testament church. Due to the influence of popular Protestant teaching, the common misconception is that the bride of Christ is a futuristic entity. This pretext throws a veil over what God has revealed to us on this subject. If we cannot identify to whom the bride metaphor applies at present, we cannot understand who she is in the future. The marriage metaphor was given in the epistle to the church of Ephesus. The eleven verses of [Ephesians 5:22-33](#) expound the relationship between a husband and wife. They are weaved together with revelation of that church's relationship with Christ. The first three verses of that passage say: **22 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. 24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.** From this passage we see how the church is to submit to its present Head (at this present time) in the same way a wife is to submit to her husband. The verses that follow in that passage show us also how Christ nourishes His church (at this present time) the way a husband is to nourish his wife.

# Christ and the New Testament church: Past, Present and Future.

Continuing in Ephesians 5, we read: **25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27 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.** The marriage of a church and Christ has a three-fold aspect to its relationship. In verse 25 we see how Christ gave Himself for the church. This is in past tense. Verse 26 it shows that he sanctifies cleanses and washes it by the word. This is present tense. No church is perfect, but a church whose head is the Lord is being cleansed, washed and sanctified in this present time. In verse 27 we see **“That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle . . .”** That presentation is the crowning event of a marriage. In the scope of time for us, this will be in the future. We get a glimpse of this presentation in **Revelation chapter 19: 7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. 8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. 9 And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.** Notice how she is arrayed in fine linen. The end of verse 8 says **“fine linen is the righteousness of the saints”**. This fine linen obviously has nothing to do with imputed righteousness (salvation) which is the Lord’s righteousness. This righteousness is of the saints. It is therefore something that goes beyond; as works that are built upon the foundation of salvation. This virgin bride in white linen is unique and precious. In a Jewish wedding, the marriage became legal with the betrothal contract. From that time on, they were husband and wife though the groom did not take her unto himself until he had prepared a place for her. When that task was complete, the wedding took place and the marriage was consummated. As far as the bride is concerned, the espousal contract is contingent on only one thing – that she reserves herself solely for her head. Nothing else will break that contract. The

book of Revelation contrasts this bride to the harlot and her daughters in previous chapters. The distinguishing factor between the bride and a harlot is her faithfulness to one man. A church body that is not faithful to acknowledge Christ as her literal head is not a faithful bride.

## **She is unique among the saints.**

Continuing in [Revelation 19](#), verse 9 says **“And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. . .”** Beside the bride, there will also be those blessed ones in heaven who are called to the marriage supper. This further illustrates for us that the bride does not symbolize the entire realm of salvation within the kingdom of God. The bride is selected by the groom from among it. All who are at the wedding supper are there solely on the merit of Jesus Christ. The bride is not an elite class of “super-saints.” Her distinction among the daughters of Jerusalem is not her perfection or beauty. It is solely that she wears the ring of her beloved. There are many Christian congregations throughout Christendom. Most regard Christ worshipfully as head of an invisible, universal realm, but not as the actual, literal head of their congregation. Most, in fact, are estranged from birth. They are instituted not by Christ, but by another. The lord and founder of most congregations is a denomination, a board of directors, a college or even an individual. The New Testament church, however, was founded by Christ in His earthly ministry. He gave it ordinances; He commissioned it and promised its perpetuity until He returns. Man-made organizations doing works in Jesus name cannot supplant Christ’s New Testament church. Nor can any presume its authority by their sincerity or fundamental orthodoxy. A plethora of congregations, for example, are formed by church splits where disgruntled factions charter a new church on their own authority. As such, the people themselves are the lord of that congregation (as they will be in every successive split thereafter). Likewise others are created by the consensus of Christians in an area desiring a church to suit their needs. Certainly all Christian churches cite Christ as their authority and hold Him in preeminence to one degree or another. What distinguishes a New Testament church from all others, however, is not its object of worship; neither solely by a select list of doctrines. A true New Testament church will hold Jesus

Christ as the literal, actual head of that body ([Eph.5:23](#); [Col. 1:18](#); [Col 2:19](#)). When Christ is the head of the church, sound doctrine will follow.

## **She has remained faithful.**

There are many, while in the way of serving the Lord, find the comforting embrace of a theological system, a movement, a personality or even a pastor who now dwells in the place of her Lord. They may faithfully preach the gospel, stand on the right Bible, defend the truth and bear fruit for the Saviour. But if that church no longer regards its betrothed as the actual head of that body, there will surely be another to occupy that space. As we read again in **[Ephesians 5:22-25](#)**: **“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.”** A church is to submit to Christ – and Christ alone – as a wife is to submit to her own husband and no other. A wife that regards her husband as a figure-head but submits to other men cannot be a wife. How much less can a church call itself the bride of Christ when it does not regard Him as her literal husband and head? [Revelation 2:1-7](#) gives a sobering lesson on this. The Lord addresses this issue with the church of Ephesus (to whom the relationship of Christ and the church was revealed in the book of Ephesians). The Ephesian church had, perhaps, the most things right among all the seven churches of Asia. Yet she would lose her candlestick for this one thing—she left her first love.

## **Disagree?**

We said at the beginning that the definition of the “bride of Christ,” enjoys almost universal agreement. Yet, the Biblical outcome here somehow differs in one major point from that of Catholicism, Protestant evangelicalism, Protestant neo-Baptist fundamentalism, etc. So what is the difference? The difference is not in the definition of the bride at all. Nearly everyone agrees that the bride of Christ is the church. The difference between the popular Protestant concept and that of the Bible is in how they define the church. However we define the bride will reveal

our true concept of the church. Baptist sentiment toward the local, visible church, notwithstanding, if our concept of the bride is universal, invisible and futuristic, it is ultimately because our true doctrinal understanding of the church is also. Most Christians within the Baptist variety today are indoctrinated at birth in the Protestant, dual-church concept. The word “church” in Protestant-fundamental Baptist circles is a double-entendre homonym. All claims to Biblical literacy aside, their use of the word is adulterated to include that which is not Biblical at all. This is not strange because the dual-church doctrine itself is certainly an adulterous affair. God is gracious and longsuffering in our shortcomings, but from Genesis to Revelation, the Lord always withdraws in the event of spiritual adultery.

## **But isn't “church” synonymous with “salvation”?**

Christ tasted death for every man (Heb. 2:9) and Christ gave Himself for the church (Eph. 5:25). Neither of these truths, however, teach that salvation is the church, or that the church is salvation. Salvation is by the grace of God, not by church (Eph. 2:8-9). The thief on the cross is just one example of the grace of God upon a man that was never baptized and never part of any church. This does not negate from that fact that the Lord's NT church is the great treasure and object of His affection for which He gave His blood (Acts 20:28). In Matthew 13:44, the parable of the treasure hid in the field gives us an important illustration. **“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.”** The man in the text bought the entire field for the purpose of obtaining the treasure. The treasure, however, is not the field – and the field is not the treasure. Christ paid the price that He might forgive all that come to Him in repentance without violating His holy demand of justice upon our sin. Salvation is solely by the grace of God, whether you are a church member or a thief on a cross. Salvation is the blood-bought field under which we come under new ownership by the grace of God. The treasure is the church for which purpose

the Lord gave all to buy. That church is not a man-made religious organization. It is not the great whore, the mother of harlots of [Revelation 17](#). Nor is it any of her daughters or those that espouse their doctrines. The New Testament church was founded by Christ Himself and promised the gates of hell would not prevail against it. Every New Testament church is a microcosm of its own, with Christ as its Head. This is the church for which Christ gave Himself. The metaphor of the bride illustrates the relationship it has with its Head in the present tense. Its hope of the future is contingent to its fidelity and submission to cleansing by the word.

## **Some parting thoughts.**

There are two common misconceptions which may cause us to either miss or malign this wonderful truth. Those are, that the concept of the “bride” is something other than a metaphor and that it only applies to the future. The Lord gives us metaphors to teach us important truths. When men twist those metaphors into a self-serving entity, it destroys those truths. Worse still is when we react with an equally errant alternative. The truths we learn from Ephesians chapter 5 concerning the headship and husbandry of a NT church are substantive truths that should be taken seriously. As we begin to comprehend it Biblically, it becomes obvious that the Lord’s bride is not the whole family of God, which is the realm of salvation. The groom doesn’t marry an entire family. He chooses a special one from it. The New Testament church is that special treasure hid in a field for which the entire field was redeemed to obtain. The bulk of Christianity whose ecclesiology operates on the platform of universalism has always taken exception to this truth. Those who presume the “true church” to be a mystical, invisible, universal body of Christians will naturally miss the present-tense reality of Christ being the actual, literal Head of a literal, local, NT church. Consequently, they will also presume the bride to be a futuristic entity comprising all who claim to be Christian. It is, therefore, not an important matter to them. It is completely reasonable from their viewpoint, therefore, to assume this truth to be a presumption of cultic elitism. It is laughable to them that any could presume what they consider to be a “denominational” supremacy. Moreover, they will also conclude that those who believe the bride metaphor applies only to the NT church must think they are the only ones that are saved. The key element here is



that the bride metaphor illustrates a relationship that is realized only in the sphere of a true New Testament church. His churches have been called many different names in history. Their true identity, however, is clear only in the continuity of Christ's doctrine. Whatever the name we have identified with here, the bride will ultimately take the name of the groom. When the Groom returns, He will have a name written, that no man knew, but He Himself (Rev. 19:12). Some have coined the term "Baptist bride" in the pejorative sense, which is generally maligned. Some of whom it is appended will accept it as a badge of separation from their Protestant/Baptistic brethren. It is not, however, an elitist term depicting ones status in the bride by simply wearing the "Baptist" moniker. It is obviously not based on a name, since so many calling themselves "Baptist" today have long ago ceased to regard Christ as their literal and only Head. They left their first love when they began to regard and embrace another through Protestant doctrine. There are many churches of Baptist polity and name that are Protestant by reason of their doctrine. Protestantism is built on the root of its mother system, presuming the root of Catholic universalism to be legitimate. The grace of God is offered to all who will repent and call on the name of the Lord. But the Lord's NT church is distinct within the realm of salvation. Its distinction from all other religious organizations within Christendom is maintained by more than its name. They were first called Christian (Acts 11:26) and Nazarene (Acts 24:5). Through history, they may have been called Waldensian, Donatist, Paulican, Anabaptist . . . or Baptist. Their status as a NT church was never determined by their name, but their Head.

**Ephesians 5:32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.**