

Is The Church The Bride of Christ?

By Pastor Roger Feenstra

The **marriage of the Lamb** and the **marriage supper of the Lamb** (Revelation 19:7,9) are nearly always taken to mean the Church as the Bride and the Lamb (Jesus Christ) as the Groom. The latter is correct. Jesus is the groom, but the Church is not the Bride. Christians have usurped the marriage of the Lamb!

This idea that the Church is the bride of Christ has come to us via theology, not the Bible. As the adage goes, repeat something long enough, and people will believe it. To say the Church is not the Bride of Jesus Christ is so antithetical to what Christians believe that when the claim is made, it comes across as heresy. *Of course, the Church is the Bride of Christ!* They scream. People will turn against you if you challenge them on the issue.

Some of you believe the Church is the bride, and you might be tempted to stop reading these notes (or hitting the unsubscribe button if watching online). Yet, if you try to prove from *Scripture that the Church is the Bride*, you will come up short—because the claim is never made. It will only be found in commentaries.

It would be hard to find a commentary that says otherwise. Nearly every evangelical commentary will claim that the Church is the Bride. Because of that, we have ignorantly gone along with it. We have not been like the good “Bereans” who *searched the Scriptures to see if it is true*. It does not matter if 1,000 commentaries say the Church is the Bride and zero commentaries say otherwise. On this topic, the 1,000 commentaries are incorrect. Commentaries are not the word of God, and the Church is not the Bride of Jesus Christ. I will let that sink in and come back to it in a moment.

Revelation 19:7 begins with the phrase, **Let us be glad and rejoice**. The rejoicing flows from the fact that Israel has believed in the Messiah Jesus. Israel has finally cried out, *“Hosanna, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord”* (Mark 11:10). This is His second coming, which will take place at the end of the Seven-Year Tribulation, and now **the marriage of the Lamb is come**. It has taken seven years, but **the wife has finally made herself ready**. It has taken all the judgments (the trumpets, thunders, woes, and vials) of the seven years to convince Israel, break her stubborn will, and welcome her Messiah.

If we make this **marriage of the Lamb** about the Body of Christ or the Church, we will have missed the significance of Jesus’s statement in the passage already cited above. Jesus, speaking to Israel in Matthew 23:38,39 states,

“Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

Because the **marriage of the Lamb is come**, we can assume Israel has done what Jesus said they must do. They have repented and believed in Jesus as the Messiah. Repentance was a requirement for Israel, not for those of us in the dispensation of grace.

We should remember the purpose of the Tribulation: From the start, the purpose is to break the stubborn will of the Jews (the holy people). This purpose was prophesied in Daniel 12:5-7. *“When he shall have accomplished to scatter (break) the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished.”*

Therefore, the **marriage of the Lamb** is about the relationship between God and Israel, not the Church. This has been our premise throughout the entire book of Revelation. It is all about Israel—This has been the Time of Jacob’s Trouble (Jeremiah 30:7), not the time of trouble for the Church.

The identity of the Church was given by the Apostle Paul. His letters overflow with the Church’s description. WE ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST, and Christ is the Head of the Body. Does it make logical sense that the Body of Christ is married to Christ? Can Christ marry Himself?

Marriage relationship allusions to God with Israel are prevalent in Scripture. Isaiah 5:5, *For thy Maker, is thine husband...; Isaiah 62:4,5, But thou shalt be called Hephzibah (my delight in her), and the land Beulah (Married); Hosea 2:16,19, And in that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi (my husband); Jeremiah 3:14, Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you...*

Ah, but pastor, those verses are from the Old Testament, and they are about Israel and God. Israel is the wife of God the Father, but the Church is the wife of God the Son.

Nowhere do we find that in Scripture.

REVELATION 21:2, 9-21

Let me show you several passages from the New Testament in which people twist to make the bride the Church. The first is in Revelation. As we have seen throughout the book of Revelation, it explains itself. Thankfully, the Bride is identified in Revelation, and guess what? It is not the Church (Revelation 21:2, 9-21).

“I will show thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” Now we are getting somewhere! Here in this passage is the exact definition:

*“And he carried me away in the spirit to a **great city, the holy Jerusalem...**”*

The Revelation passage describes the city. It is the beautiful bride. The bride is the **holy Jerusalem** (Israel). However, there are individuals who strongly believe that the bride mentioned in this passage symbolizes the Church. They go to great lengths to defend this interpretation by asserting that the holy city implies a connection to us. They say, *after the Rapture, that’s where we will have been living.*

That is a gigantic speculation, that even if it were true, it is never implied, nor does John refer to the Church. To make a doctrine of the Bride being the church according to this passage would be flawed.

Like flat-earthers, the naysayers keep pressing with more *gotcha* passages: *What about Ephesians 5:23-32? There it claims that the Church is the bride!*

EPHESIANS 5:23-32

The Ephesians 5 passage is the primary proof text for many who say the Church is the Bride of Christ. But there is a problem: The passage never says that the Church is the Bride. Paul could have simply cleared up the whole controversy for us by writing in BOLD letters,

THE CHURCH IS THE BRIDE

But he doesn't, nor does he allude to it.

Instead, he focuses on Jesus, and who Jesus is. Paul states clearly in Ephesian 5:23 that Jesus is the head of the church and that he is the Savior of the body.

To claim the Church is the bride and Christ is the husband in Ephesians 5, then we must also acknowledge the husband as the Savior of the wife. I've not heard anyone teach that. It is conveniently skipped.

A misreading of the passage is why people get mixed up. The Ephesians 5 passage is not comparing the church to marriage, rather it compares marriage to the church insofar that it is not two bodies, but one body. Paul is looking back to Ephesians 3, where he reveals the mystery of Jew and Gentile as one body, with Christ as the head. The point of Ephesians 5:

The Church is to be one in Christ.

In fact, in Ephesians 5:32, Paul states, "This is a great mystery: but I speak of Christ and the church." He is not speaking of Christ and the bride.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:2

There is another New Testament passage often misunderstood as referring to the church as the Bride. It comes from an analogy given by Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:2, where he says, "I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a pure virgin to Christ." Paul is talking about purity within the church. Lack of purity has been the problem among the Corinthians. The illustration is that Paul desires the Corinthians to be pure and fully devoted to Christ, just as an engaged woman would be to her fiancé.

If we interpret this illustration as a doctrine, i.e., as the Bride being the Church, then we would have to say that Paul is the Church's father. Paul calls the Corinthians his "sons" and says, "In Christ Jesus, I have begotten you through the gospel." But he doesn't claim to be the father of

the Church. It seems like a big jump to make Paul the father of the body of Christ based on his illustration in 1 Corinthians 4:14,15.

To make this a doctrine of the Church being the Bride is to ignore all the other clear teachings that we have already seen. In fact, in verse one, Paul warns the Corinthians that what he is about to say is “folly.” He is giving an illustration, not a doctrine.

A general rule of interpretation:

Do not make a doctrine out of a historical event or an illustration.

In the Revelation passage, 19:7, **And his wife hath made herself ready. Hath made** this is in the *active tense—the wife is the one who had readied herself*. How can this be the Church? We have not made ourselves ready. We were made ready by receiving a gift; by grace through faith, not of **ourselves**. We are complete in Christ (Colossians 2:10), and we are perfect in Christ Jesus (Colossians 1:28). Today, in the body of Christ, we have a perfect standing before God, and our standing is in grace.

The entire belief system of the Church being the Bride was fabricated first by the Catholic Church, and even after the Reformation, it remained as a doctrine in evangelicalism. The concept is read into the Scripture and is incorrect and should be handily rejected.¹

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