

Jeff's Org

WHAT IS THE CHURCH? • THE CHURCH IS A BRIDE •
EPHESIANS 5:26-32; REVELATION 19:7-8 • NO DATE

MAIN POINT

God has chosen and will purify the church to be His holy bride.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What are some of the differences between how men and women view weddings?

If you are married, what was the most memorable part of your wedding?

Why is a wedding an important event? Why do you think we invest so much time, money, and effort in weddings?

The wedding day is a special day in a person's life, and we prioritize it accordingly. God, knowing our value of weddings, chose to give us the picture of the church as a bride. According to the Bible, the church is the bride of Christ, and as His bride, we must approach the groom with that same kind of intentionality.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 5:26-32.

According to Paul, how should a husband treat his wife in a marriage? How should a wife treat her husband?

What is this kind of marriage meant to represent, according to verse 32?

When God designed marriage, He created something beautiful. The most basic beauty of a marriage is that it is a symbol for the relationship between Christ and the church. Marriage, while temporary on earth, demonstrates the everlasting love that Christ has for the church. These instructions about earthly marriage give us further insight into the relationship between Jesus, the groom, and His bride, the church.

Husbands are told to love their wives as Christ loves the church. How does Jesus love the church?

Wives are told to submit to their husbands as the church submits to and follows Jesus. In what way are we as the church meant to follow Jesus?

What must we, as Christ-followers, believe to be true about Jesus in order to follow Him like this?

Jesus loves the church fully and unconditionally. He holds nothing back from us and has our absolute best in mind. Because we believe in His great love and care, we are to follow Him fully, trusting that He knows the right direction for us to go.

Have you ever thought about the church being a bride before? Why or why not?

What do you like about that picture of the church? What do you struggle with?

Why do you think God chose this particular picture for the church?

In God's design of earthly relationships, there is none more intimate than marriage. Similarly, God wants a relationship built on love, trust, and intimacy with His people. It's a relationship where He knows us fully and completely and is committed to our ultimate good. He will never leave us or forsake us—there is no divorce in this marriage! Given Jesus' commitment to us, we should aspire to commit fully to Him so that we might be a beautiful bride waiting for Him.

What are some of the differences between the way Jesus loves the church as His bride and the way we love Him as our husband?

Look back at verse 25-27. How did Jesus set apart His bride, making her holy? What was His goal in doing so?

Jesus died that we might be made the holy people of God. Not only did He die, but He continues to work in the people of God so that they might grow in their commitment to Him. Just as men and women leave their first families to form a new one, we must leave our old ways of life to be fully committed to Jesus. When we do, He is faithful to continue to help the church grow in holiness.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 19:7-8.

What similarities do you see between this picture of the church and the picture from Ephesians 5?

Why is there rejoicing in this passage? How do you think the bride has prepared herself for this day?

What role do individual Christ-followers play in helping the church as the bride be prepared for the wedding day?

What does the fine linen represent? How active are you in helping the church put on this kind of fine linen?

Someday, the church as the bride will come face to face with her groom, Jesus. Until that day, it is our responsibility to make sure the church looks more and more like the beautiful bride God intends her to be. This happens when each of us embrace the good work that God has to do in us and through us. As we pursue purity and good both in ourselves and out in the community, the church continues to be shaped into the beautiful bride of Christ.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What specifically might need to happen in your personal life for you to become a more radiant part of the bride of Christ?

Are you investing an appropriate amount of time, energy, and money in this spiritual wedding? What needs to change about your lifestyle to be more committed to the bride?

What can you do for the community this week as “good works” (represented by the fine and pure linen of the bride)?

PRAYER

Pray today for the bride of Christ. Ask God to continue to use our church for the good of His kingdom. Pray that more and more people would be committed to the bride of Christ and that the church might continue to grow in love and purity.

COMMENTARY

| EPHESIANS 5:26-32

6:10. Paul’s concluding teaching challenged believers to recognize their spiritual weaknesses and to draw on the Lord. We can’t strengthen ourselves. We need power from outside. The Lord

Jesus is the One who supplies spiritual strength. Paul had already used the phrase “His vast strength” in Ephesians 1:19 to refer to God’s active power in the lives of believers.

5:25-28. Husbands in the first century were accustomed to the culturally acceptable pattern of demeaning their wives. Therefore, Paul had to take a firm hand in instructing the men of Ephesus. Most of them probably had never seen the example of a home in which the husband truly loved his wife sacrificially. This fact may explain why Paul went to Christ’s love for the church as the example of love that husbands are to follow. The best love pattern to follow is Christ, who gave Himself in sacrificial death for His beloved. These verses apply not only to husbands, but also to their friends and families. They are to support and honor a husband’s love for his wife and do nothing to challenge, diminish, or otherwise interfere in his relationship with her.

5:29-31. As Paul finalized his instructions to husbands and wives, he emphasized that the expression of unity in a marriage goes far beyond sex. It includes every area of a couple’s life and relationship. A couple’s unity is based on recognizing that previous family ties are to be reprioritized after marriage. Husbands and wives are intentionally to leave their parents. Their primary human loyalty is to each other.

5:32-33. It was no mystery that husband and wife join together as one flesh. That teaching went back to Genesis. The mystery was that the redeemed and the Lord Jesus are joined together in one body, which a godly marriage reflects. Thus on the one hand, Christian husbands (and wives) look to Jesus’ sacrificial self-giving as the supreme example of love. On the other hand, a godly, one-flesh marriage visibly models the one-flesh relationship between Christ (the Bridegroom-Head) and His people (the bride-body).

| REVELATION 19:7-8

19:1-4. The vast multitude pictured as a choir singing the heavenly “Hallelujah Chorus” (vv. 1,3,4,6) was taken to heaven in 7:9 and is identified as the “heaven dwellers” by comparing 7:15 and 13:6. They now praise God for (1) their salvation and (2) His righteous judgments upon Babylon, the “notorious prostitute” (17:1), thus avenging the blood of His servant—the martyrs.

19:6-8. The praise of the vast multitude as a heavenly choir now turns to (1) the coming reign of the Lord and (2) the joyful marriage of the Lamb. The wife of the Lamb (Christ) is the church (Eph. 5:31-32), those redeemed from all nations (5:9-10; 7:9) by His blood (1:5-6; 5:9-10). Since these descriptions are equally true of the vast multitude (7:9; 19:1,6) and the “heaven dwellers”

(12:12; 13:6), it appears that there is a shift in imagery from the group of people being portrayed as a choir to being portrayed as the wife of the Lamb.