

Ephesians 5:25-27 Re-write from Feb. 8, 2004

Second Baptist Church, Lincoln, NE  
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## The Perfect Church

Ephes. 5:25-27

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her [26] to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, [27] and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*

Remember that perfect person you married? There she comes walking down the aisle in that gorgeous wedding dress. You are standing at the altar waiting for her. Or ladies, maybe you are the one standing at the back of the sanctuary looking up to the front at that man waiting for you and thinking one of two things, “Wow, isn’t he handsome!” Or maybe at that moment, you were having a major panic thinking, “What am I doing here!” and she almost threw up on her dress after she said “I do!” (That’s what Grace was thinking).

When you began dating that person and considering if this might be the person you would marry, you probably had some criteria. “I want them to be tall.” “I want them to be motivated toward a career that pays well.” Maybe you were like Grace who took a good at my teeth to see if there is a chance children in the future would have crooked teeth! Perhaps you wanted someone who was intelligent. Or Mature. Or someone with good spiritual and moral values. For you, that person was the perfect mate. You had made up your mind. God had brought you together to be each other’s mate and this was the perfect person.

About a week or two after the ceremony, you began to realize that it wasn’t as “fairy tale” as you had thought it would be. That person whose head and bad breath is on the pillow next to you doesn’t look quite like they did in that white dress walking down the aisle. That man who is so bright and intelligent doesn’t have the brains to pick up his dirty socks and that sweet, gentle bride certainly has a temper when asked about the recent charges on the credit card. It is amazing how that perfect person doesn’t seem so perfect anymore when faced with the realities of life. The Bible talks about “the two shall become one” when marriage takes place. Sometimes the “two becoming one” is a little too close, a little too much reality. What happened to that person? They’re not the same as they were! Why couldn’t the fairy tale last forever?

In the Gospel of John, Jesus took several chapters to describe the life of the church. We call this the upper room discourse and it is an extremely important and powerful section of scripture as Jesus lays out expectations and promises for his disciples. In chapter 13, he taught them to be servants to each other. So that when the church was actually formed a couple months later, they

would have an understanding of Servant Leadership. In chapter 14 of John, he told them the way to eternal life, which would be the message of the church to the world. *“I am the way, the truth and the life – No one comes to the father except by me.”* Jesus then promises them a helper. The church will not grow like other institutions like businesses, schools or organizations. It will grow by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

In chapter 15, Jesus tells them that they are the vine and the branches. That Christians are connected to their source of nourishment, Jesus Christ. It is not us over here and Christ over there. We are all connected because we belong to Christ. Jesus prepares them by telling them that the church will be hated by the world. They hated Jesus, they will also hate his followers. That is also true today as there is open animosity and hatred toward the church today. Hollywood laughs at the church, mocks the church. It should not come as a surprise to us that there are people out to destroy the church. In chapter 17 of John, Jesus prays for the church, present and future. He wants us to be one, unified by his blood and his spirit. By being one, others will know of the love of Christ. So after Jesus is done telling the disciples about his hopes and dreams for the church – He leaves them and ascends into heaven, and just as he said – when they went into Jerusalem and waited and prayed, the Holy Spirit filled the church with power. Great and wonderful things happened.

The bride of Christ – the church – was born! It was a great institution. 3000 people came to Christ at Pentecost. From that point on, people were daily being added to the number. Miracles of healing and demonic exorcisms took place. People were raised from the dead. The church grew in number as they shared all their material wealth in common. Wealthy landowners and leaders sat and broke bread and fellowshiped with slaves and household servants – because they both shared the common gift of God’s grace.

Every week they worshiped together in designated places marked by the symbol of the fish. Here is what Acts 2:42-47 says about that church: *They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. [43] Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. [44] All the believers were together and had everything in common. [45] Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. [46] Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, [47] praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

The church seemed to be perfect. Persecution was rampant around them and many of their members were put to death in cruel ways. They were fed to the lions, used as adversaries in the Roman games of the Gladiators, boiled in oil, crucified, beheaded. However, the church became bolder. Christians worshiped and sang praises to God under cover in catacombs and darkly lit homes in the countryside in order to thwart the efforts of the Roman authorities.

The church spread across Asia Minor by the common trade routes. People of all walks of life were compelled to confess their faith in the risen Christ. Every Sunday was a celebration of the

resurrection, a time of joy and hope. For the next three hundred years, the church grew under the yoke of persecution.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, Constantine became the new emperor. Christianity became the official state religion. However, the persecution continued for anyone considered a heretic. In the next several centuries, nations were **conquered in the name of Christianity**. When kings were defeated by a Christian nation, they were not killed, they were baptized. As civilization expanded through the wars of conquering nations, monasteries and churches followed. Soon the church dictated the actions of kings. Whole nations were living under the threat of political retaliation by the **Vatican in Rome**. While it seemed the church ruled the world, Christ did not rule the hearts of people. For several centuries, the church was the greatest perpetrator of evil on earth. The Crusades became a political quest for European kings to expand their grasp on the Middle East.

The Bride of Christ, the church, had begun as a pure and holy wife, but had fallen prey to the greed and lust of politics and world domination. The **dark ages** were exactly that. From about 900 to 1500 a.d., corruption and violence inundated every level of the church. Evangelism was replaced with conquest. The love of Christ was limited to a small group of humble priests and citizens who had not forgotten the commands of Christ. It wasn't until the church had become so corrupt that she was collapsing from within, that **Reform took place** under the banner of Martin Luther, John Calvin, Zwingli and others.

The bride was being reclaimed. The Bible was being translated into the language of the masses. **Revival began to sweep** across Europe and the New World. Through the Industrial revolution and westward expansion of America, the Gospel went where people went. Missionary movement like hadn't been seen since the first century suddenly took shape as William Carey, Adoniram Judson, Hudson Taylor and others brought the gospel to nations around the world. Revivalists like Jonathan Edwards and Charles Finney preached revival across the new frontier. Colleges like Yale and Harvard were started, not to produce intellectuals, but to produce disciples of Jesus Christ. The bride of Christ was being reclaimed. She hasn't been perfect, but now by the power of the Spirit, she was being consecrated.

In the past couple hundred years, the church has followed the trends of our culture. We've become materialistic, apathetic and sleepy. We need to be the bride of Christ, preparing ourselves for the final consummation when Christ comes again. Let me read that scripture again: *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her [26] to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, [27] and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*

We are in a constant effort and work of purifying the bride of Christ – because we ARE the bride of Christ. In the first century, the time Paul was writing this, it was customary for the attendants of the bride to wash her and prepare her for her marriage and marriage bed. Now

days, all the bridesmaids do is stand up and smile pretty in their matching dresses while their friend gets married. In ancient times, their function was to prepare the bride by cleansing her.

Today, the bride of Christ is being prepared. This is a time of cleansing. She has been cleansed before during times of reformation and revival – but the cleansing goes on.

If you could choose the kind of church you wanted, what would it be? Some might say, “Bigger”, or “more programs”. But I hope instead of those standard answers, your answer might be, “I want us to be a church that listens to God and does his will. I want the church to be the purified body of Christ. I want the church to be a place of worship and service to the one we love – Jesus Christ.”

The perfect church may not exist, even though Paul described the church in Ephesians 5 as being perfect and unblemished and undefiled. But Christ is bringing us along step by step, courting us, wooing us as his bride. May God help us be the bride for which Christ is looking.  
AMEN