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EVE AND THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

After God created Adam (Genesis 2:7) and placed him in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15), God said,

“It is not good for the man to be alone.
I will make a helper suitable for him.”

Genesis 2:18 NIV

God caused a deep sleep to come over Adam. While Adam slept, God took one of his ribs and made a woman from it (Genesis 2:20b-22). Then God brought the woman to Adam. Adam said (with delight I think),

“This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called ‘woman,’
for she was taken out of man.”

Genesis 2:23 NIV

Adam gave a name to his wife. He called her “Eve” (Genesis 3:20), which probably means “life-giver.”

At this point Moses, who wrote the book of Genesis, interposed in his narrative,

“For this reason
a man will leave his father and mother
and be united to his wife,
and they will become one flesh.”

Genesis 2:24 NIV

God intended for the relationship that a man has with his wife to be closer than the relationship that he has with his father

and mother. Couples become “one flesh” when they are married to each other. Since they become “one flesh,” their union should last as long as they both live in the body.

DIVORCE

Moses allowed a man to divorce his wife provided he gives her a “certificate of divorce,” (Deuteronomy 24:1). This was a concession on Moses’ part. It represented a step backward from what God originally intended for marriage to be. This concession made it relatively easy for a man to divorce his wife, which worked to the disadvantage of women, because divorced women in the ancient world were often left destitute.

The relationship between a husband and his wife is patterned after the relationship that God Himself desires to have with His people.

GOD IS A FAITHFUL HUSBAND

The prophet Isaiah called God the “husband” of the children of Israel. Isaiah assured the children of Israel that God would take care of them just as a husband takes care of his wife. He said,

“For your Maker is your husband—
the LORD Almighty is his name—
the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer;
he is called the God of all the earth.”

Isaiah 54:5 NIV

Isaiah also spoke reassuringly regarding the city of Jerusalem and the land of Judah. He said,

“No longer will they call you Deserted,
or name your land Desolate.
But you will be called Hephzibah,

and your land Beulah;
for the LORD will take delight in you,
and your land will be married.”

Isaiah 62:4 NIV

Isaiah also said,

“As a young man marries a maiden,
so will your sons marry you;
as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,
so will your God rejoice over you.”

Isaiah 62:5 NIV

The idea that the children of Israel were married to God was a tremendous thought. It gave the children of Israel assurance of God’s protection and help. Such an idea was also full of implications for the future, which are more clearly revealed in the New Testament.

JESUS IS THE BRIDEGROOM

The disciples of John the Baptist came and reported to him that Jesus was baptizing many people (John 3:26). John was not distressed that Jesus was baptizing more people than he was baptizing. John said to his disciples, “A man can receive only what is given him from heaven” (John 3:27). John also said to his disciples, “You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him’” (John 3:28). John said further to them,

“The bride belongs to the bridegroom.
The friend who attends the bridegroom waits
and listens for him,
and is full of joy when he hears
the bridegroom’s voice.
That joy is mine, and it is now complete.

He must become greater;
I must become less.”

John 3:29-30 NIV

When John the Baptist called Jesus the “bridegroom,” he was using a very elevated designation. He must have surely known that God is described in the Old Testament as being the husband of the people of God.

Jesus, for His part, did not shy away from being known as the “bridegroom.” When John’s disciples came to Jesus and asked why Jesus’ disciples did not fast as John’s disciples were doing, Jesus replied,

“How can the guests of the bridegroom
mourn while he is with them?
The time will come when the bridegroom
will be taken from them;
then they will fast.”

Matthew 9:15 NIV

This utterance of Jesus, in which He accepted the lofty designation of “bridegroom,” is in line with the way Jesus presented Himself in general. He said such things as, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30), and, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

THE CHURCH IS THE BRIDE

In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah called for the tent of the house of Israel to be expanded (Isaiah 54:2). Isaiah said,

“Enlarge the place of your tent,
stretch your tent curtains wide,
do not hold back;
lengthen your cords,

strengthen your stakes.”

Isaiah 54:2 NIV

In the New Testament one finds that the tent of the house of Israel has been expanded. God began taking in Gentiles into His family. This does not mean, however, that God had divorced His people. On the contrary, He is still married to them, but their number has been increased.

What was once mono-racial has become multi-racial. What was once national has become international. What was once open only to a few has become open to all. What was once both religious and secular has become only religious. What was once largely ritual has become mostly non-ritual. What was once the house of Israel has become the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

In the course of discussing Christ's relationship to His church, the apostle Paul encouraged wives to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ. Paul said,

“Wives, submit to your husbands
as to the Lord.

For the husband is the head of the wife
as Christ is the head of the church,
his body, of which he is the Savior.

Now as the church submits to Christ,
so also wives should submit
to their husbands in everything.”

Ephesians 5:22-24 NIV

These words may seem strange to anyone who is estranged from God, but it is not distressing to a holy wife to be told she should submit to a godly husband.

To husbands, the apostle Paul said,

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

Ephesians 5:25-27 NIV

Christ is the pattern for husbands to follow. The apostle Paul said,

“In this same way,
husbands ought to love their wives
as their own bodies.
He who loves his wife loves himself.
After all, no one ever hated his own body,
but he feeds and cares for it,
just as Christ does the church-
for we are members of his body.”

Ephesians 5:28-30 NIV

Much about marriage’s deeper significance was still a “mystery” (secret) (Ephesians 5:32) in the days of Moses. Now that Christ has come, however, Christ’s relationship with the church sheds much light on how marriages should be.

WHAT JESUS THOUGHT ABOUT DIVORCE

Jesus was not pleased with the concession that Moses had made regarding divorce. He said,

“It has been said,

‘Anyone who divorces his wife
must give her a certificate of divorce.’”

Matthew 5:31 NIV

(Jesus was referring to what Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 24:1.) Concerning this Jesus said,

“But I tell you
that anyone who divorces his wife,
except for marital unfaithfulness,
causes her to become an adulteress,
and anyone who marries the divorced woman
commits adultery.”

Matthew 5:32 NIV

Jesus allowed for a man to divorce his wife in case she engaged in sex with another man. In such a case, a divorce would be justified. The man who divorces his wife, however, without such justification puts her in a precarious position. It could force her to marry again and thereby commit adultery.

Many of the Pharisees were aghast at Jesus’ teaching about divorce. Some of them came to Jesus and tried to trick Him into saying something wrong. They asked Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason” (Matthew 19:3 NIV)?

By way of reply, Jesus by asked the Pharisees if they had not read that the Creator had “made them male and female” at the beginning (Matthew 19:4). Then Jesus reminded them that Moses had said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh” (Matthew 19:5 NIV).

Jesus gave His opinion about divorce by saying,

“So they are no longer two, but one.
Therefore what God has joined together,

let man not separate.”

Matthew 19:6 NIV

With these words Jesus emphasized a truth that many people seem to have forgotten, namely, that marriage is not just an association of convenience; it is an actual union of two people. Jesus did not think that humans had the right to separate what God joins together.

The Pharisees had expected Jesus to answer in this vein, so they were ready with another question. They asked, “Why then, did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away” (Matthew 19:7)? The Pharisees thought they had trapped Jesus into contradicting Moses; but Jesus replied,

“Moses permitted you
to divorce your wives
because your hearts were hard.
But it was not this way from the beginning.”

Matthew 19:8 NIV

Jesus wished to restore the original cohesiveness of marriage. He said,

“I tell you that
anyone who divorces his wife,
except for marital unfaithfulness,
and marries another woman commits adultery.”

Matthew 19:9 NIV

This is substantially the same as what Jesus had said earlier, as recorded in Matthew 5:32. There, in Matthew 5:32, the emphasis is on an innocent partner who is unjustifiably divorced and who might be tempted to marry again and thereby commit adultery.

In Matthew 19:9, however, the emphasis is on the person who divorces his partner unjustifiably and who then marries someone else. If anyone does this, he or she commits adultery.

THE FUTURE RELATIONSHIP OF CHRIST WITH HIS CHURCH

There is a description in the book of Revelation of the time when Christ will take his bride, the church, to be with Him forever. The scene is introduced by a voice from the throne of God, which said,

“Praise our God, all you his servants,
you who fear him, both small and great!”

Revelation 19:5 NIV

The apostle John, who described the scene, heard a voice that sounded like the roar of rushing waters and peals of thunder. The voice announced the wedding feast of the Lamb. It said,

“Hallelujah!
For our Lord God Almighty reigns.
Let us rejoice and be glad
and give him glory!
For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.
Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear.”

Revelation 19:6-8 NIV

The apostle John penned a footnote to this, in which he explained, “Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints” (Revelation 19:8 NIV).

This description of the wedding feast portrays the holiness and the beauty of the relationship between Christ and His church.

It indicates that human marriage, which is patterned after the divine marriage, should also be seen as holy and beautiful.

Christ has only one bride. His bride is the church, for which Christ died. He nurtures the church and looks her, and it is the church that He will take with Him to heaven.

Although marriages are intended to last for life, they do not extend beyond the grave. In the afterlife, people will neither marry nor be given in marriage. See Matthew 22:30.

Human marriages, which are a shadow of the heavenly marriage, will be dissolved into the blessed oneness that each individual will have with Christ. Marriages on earth point toward heaven.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Where did Adam and Eve get their marriage license? Was their marriage legal? What kind of a marriage ceremony do you think was held for them?
2. What do you think about men and women starting to live together without being legally married to each other? Is there a danger in this? Would it have any effect on the children that may be born to them?
3. What do you think are the main causes for divorce? What advice would you give to couples in order to help them avoid divorce?
4. Should young Christians seek to marry someone inside the body of Christ if possible? How can such partners be found?
5. What can married couples do to keep their affection and admiration for each other alive?

6. What instruction can be derived from the fact that Christ is married to His church?
7. Is it permissible for a human being to be considered as the head of Christ's church? If not, why not?