



A GLORIOUS CHURCH

Kevin Presley

Welcome to Let the Bible Speak. It's good to have this time with you to study the Word of God. Today, I want us to study the church; the church that Jesus Christ built and the church that is His bride. How do you view the church? Do you love the church? Or do you look upon the church with skepticism or even disdain? That's the case with many in our day, even many of those who claim to love and follow Christ.

The bible uses many metaphors and adjectives to describe it, but perhaps the word that conveys, as well as any, what Christ sees when He looks at His church is found in Paul's letter to the Ephesian church. This epistle deals with the doctrine of the church as much as any in the New Testament. Paul emphasizes and illustrates many powerful truths about the church in Ephesians and in the fifth chapter, he beautifully describes the churches relationship to Christ, likening it to the marriage union of a man and a woman. Beginning in verse 25, he writes: ***"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."***

Here, Paul uses a superlative to describe the church of Christ that many would never ascribe to the church. He says it is a "glorious" church. The word glory means having great splendor or beauty. What makes it so? By what right does Paul call the church a glorious or beautiful thing when so many today so the church as anything but that? Perhaps we need to look into the scriptures and try to see the church through the eyes of Christ.

When you speak of the church today, it provokes different emotions. Our culture increasingly looks upon the church with suspicion and often holds it in contempt and derision. Many view the church as a corrupted form of organized religion that should fade into the past where it belongs. They tell us that what is important is a relationship with God or with Christ but that has nothing to do with the church. Consequently, churches are quickly dwindling in size and the younger generations want little to do with it even if they claim to believe in God and have a relationship with Christ. Some make fun of the church

and treat of it lightly and blaspheme it at every opportunity. Some are simply disillusioned and don't know what to think about it and so, they simply avoid it.

While some who profess Christianity and are considered members of the church have brought shame upon the church by their hypocrisy and evil conduct, the church is extremely important to God. It is important enough that the bible says Christ died on the cross to obtain the church. Paul tearfully said to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28, *"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."* And Paul also said that it is through the church that God has revealed His eternal purpose for mankind, according to Ephesians 3:8-10. Yes, when God looks at the church, He sees something valuable and something beautiful and glorious and He wants us to see the church in the same way.

What makes the church glorious in God's eyes? It's not the things that make something splendid in the eyes of people. It's not the building it meets in because the church is not a building. A church might meet in a breathtakingly beautiful cathedral, but it can also meet in a simple home or in a plain meeting room and be just as glorious in the eyes of God. It's not its societal status. Though it seems many religious leaders are intent upon making the church palatable and attractive to the world, such will never be the case if that church is true to the word of God. Acts 28:22 says that many considered the early church led by the apostles as "the sect that is spoken against everywhere." The church derives its power not from government, society, or any other earthly hierarchy of power or influence. It derives its power from Christ and the gospel. The church is not glorious because of the social status of its members either for its membership largely consists of common, simple, and often poor people. That was the level of society where Jesus had His greatest appeal while He was on earth and has been the case ever since. "...not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise..." said Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:26-27. It is not even the size of her membership. Though the church of Christ continues to girdle the globe and though the kingdom of Christ continues to increase, the membership of Christ's church is small compared to the population of earth and any local church constitutes a fraction of the people that live in that community. As Jesus said, many travel the broad way that leads to destruction, and few enter the narrow gate unto life. (Matthew 7:13-14) So, if the church is a relatively small group of people with little wealth, little earthly power, and no societal position to speak of, then why does it appear before Christ as a glorious church and why should we see it so today?

First, Paul tells us that the church is a glorious thing because of her relationship to Christ. The church's glory is not of herself. She does not present herself to Christ as glorious but rather, look at the text in Ephesians 5:25-27 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish." First, Christ gave Himself for her, the church. This, of course, speaks of Christ's atoning death upon the cross whereby members of the church have been saved and MADE members of His body. We couldn't save ourselves but, rather, Christ died FOR us, the church. Why did He die? "That He might sanctify (set us apart) and cleanse (wash us clean of our sins) that HE might present HER to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish." Outside of Christ, we would be in our sins and in our sins, we are dirty and defiled. Christ could not marry a defiled bride. He would only marry a chaste and untouched woman who could rightly wear the pure bridal attire of white. But those who make up His bride weren't pure and undefiled. We were sinners and tarnished and sullied by the dirt of sin. In order that He might receive us as His bride, He washed us. He made us clean and dressed us in the pure white

garments of righteousness. And because of the death He died, the blood He shed, and the atonement that He made for us, we can appear before Him pure and holy declared righteous despite our past sins. Titus 3:5, "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." Hebrews 10:22, "let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

That's why Saul was told by Ananias when he came to believe on Christ: "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16) Friend, that's not only what it means to be saved, but it's what it means to be a member of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The church is made up of people who have been washed in the blood of Jesus, thus cleansed from all their sins, and are presented to Him as His pure and holy bride. The bible says of those who were baptized in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins in Acts 2:38 that the Lord thus added them to the church (Acts 2:47). The church is glorious to God because it is made up of His chosen ones who have been brought out of the world, restored to a right relationship with Him by having their sins forgiven and are now living in union with His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. The church is GLORIOUS because of its relationship to Christ. It is His bride. And, consequently, Christ doesn't take any less offense to those who ridicule, reject, and otherwise abuse His bride any more than you would if others treated your bride in that way. He loves His church, and we should give her the reverence and respect that is due the Lord's bride.

The church is also glorious not only because it's Christ's BRIDE, but it's also His CREATION. Man did not design and build the church; God did that. God planned the church from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 3:14-15). It is His creation. It is built according to His wisdom. God drew the plans in eternity and in the fullness of the time, it was not only designed by the greatest Architect, but it was also built by the greatest Carpenter the world has ever seen, Jesus of Nazareth. It was built at the greatest cost of any building ever constructed: the very life's blood of the Son of God. (Acts 20:28) It is the temple and dwelling place of God among men. (Ephesians 2:21) Yes, the church is a glorious institution because God designed it to be so. And woe to the person who thinks they can improve upon it.

Now, if God is the architect and Jesus is the builder of the church, shouldn't we be satisfied with it just as He built it? Shouldn't we be happy to simply be the church we read about in the bible and not try to be anything more or anything less than that church? It seems some are ashamed of the church as we read about it in scripture. You know, if you look at the church as its presented in the New Testament, it's really a very simple and humble thing, as the world looks at it. Some are embarrassed by that. They see the need to garnish and embellish the church and make it more appealing to the carnally minded world. Its simple worship is outdated and irrelevant, they think. To simply work and worship as the church in the way they did then is passe' and out of touch and boring. If it's ever going to be a glorious church, it must get in step with the times and with the culture and show that it can compete with all the excitement and innovation of the world. But such thinking is not only misguided; it's wrong.

The glory of the church has nothing to do with how the world sees it or whether the world likes it and accepts it. The glory of the church is in how God sees it. It's glory and its beauty are in the careful design He had for her when He revealed it through the apostles in the New Testament. And if you search the bible, you'll find that God uses simple and ordinary things in powerful ways for His glory starting with the gospel itself. "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to

bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence." (1 Corinthians 1:27-29) The work of the church is straight-forward, to preach the gospel and edify itself in the truth. (Ephesians 3:10) The worship of the church is simple, primitive, reverent, and holy. John 4:24, "God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." The organization of the church is basic. Local congregations of believers who come together to worship, edify, and serve under the oversight of their own shepherds (older, qualified men appointed as elders) and deacons. You read of no other types of organization, hierarchies of power, or arrangements than that. And to Christ, the churches one and only Head, that is a beautiful and glorious thing.

His church also preaches A GLORIOUS MESSAGE. It carries the glad tidings of salvation from sin through the crucified Christ to a lost and dying world. Listen carefully now, that is the only message the church of Christ is commissioned by Christ to preach. "Go into all the world and preach the GOSPEL to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved. He who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16). Paul described the posture of the church toward the world in Philippians 2:16 as "holding forth the word of life."

When Paul wrote to the worldly Corinthian church, he reminded them that when he first came and brought them to Christ and established them as a church, he didn't come preaching the politics of the Roman government or the Greek world. He didn't come and share the latest and most novel and philosophies coming out of Athens. He didn't come telling them how to live their best life now and become wealthy in worldly goods. No! Rather, he said in 1 Corinthians 2:1-2 "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." That's what the church is to preach today as well. We have no business preaching anything or anybody other than that. Any church that is pointing people to any ideal, any movement, any standard, any authority, any aspiration, other than Jesus Christ is not the true church.

You see many so-called churches today steeped in politics. The church has no business in politics. Let the world be the world and the church be the church. And if the church wants to change and impact the culture then let's get as passionate, and zealous, and consumed with preaching the gospel to lost sinners as many of us are in elections and politics. Politics cheapen the church and obscure her rightful message. In fact, it is my conviction that one of the reasons so many people are turning away from the idea of the church is because so many claiming to represent the church have prostituted the church to politics and worldly concerns. You're not going to change the morality or the spirituality of the nation in the voting booth, or in the halls of congress, or even on the Supreme Court. You change the values and the conscience of a nation by preaching the gospel to the lost world and by raising up godly children in godly homes. The church is glorious in Christ's eyes because of the message He provided for her to preach and the mission that He gave her to fulfill. Her mission is to save the lost by the preaching of the crucified and risen Christ and there is no more glorious mission or message.

She is also a glorious church because she wears a GLORIOUS name. Back to Ephesians the third chapter, verses 14 and 15, "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named," The bride of Christ has been given His name to wear. Oh, I know what people claim; that there's nothing in a name or a name doesn't save but friend, that's just not biblical. It may sound good, and a lot of people may believe and parrot it but it's not scriptural. The church belongs to Christ. It is His bride. It is His body. He owns it and rules it. He is the head of it. Why would it want to wear any other name or be described as belonging to any other person or any other thing? Think about that. Men have denominated the church by calling the church by this name or that

name or identifying it with this particular doctrine or practice or the other... Why should the church be described in any other way than simply the church that belongs to Christ? The church that belongs to Jesus. Why would we want to be known as anything else? You'll never hear a more glorious, more powerful, more holy, or more wonderful name than the name of Christ. That's why the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. They were identified as simply being the followers of the Christ. The church that is Jesus' bride wears a GLORIOUS name, the name of its glorious husband, the Christ Jesus.

And finally, it's a glorious church because it has a glorious destiny. Paul said, "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body." (Ephesians 5:23) He has called the church out of this world spiritually and one day, He'll call her out of this world physically. Christ is one day returning for His bride to take her to be with God in His eternal kingdom. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:24, that when Christ comes again, He will deliver His present kingdom, the church, up to God the Father forevermore. The church has been the target of persecutions, the object of scorn, the rejected of the world since its beginning 2,000 years ago. As one of the greatest most brutal persecutions in her history was coming against her at the end of the first century, John wrote down His great vision, known as the Revelation and assured the anxious and suffering church that a great future was in store for the faithful. That's still true today. The church, no matter how the world looks upon it today, is destined by God for eternal glory. It is a glorious church, and may we come to see it as He does.

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