

Message Four

The Beauty of the Bride

Scripture Reading: Rom. 6:19, 22; Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:7-9; 1 Thes. 5:23; S. S. 8:13-14

I. The process of dispositional sanctification is the process of our organic salvation as our beautification to become the beautiful, holy, and glorious bride for Christ—1 Thes. 4:3a; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; Eph. 1:4-5; 5:25-27; 1 Thes. 5:23-24; Rom. 6:19, 22:

- A. Ephesians 5:25-27 reveals the entirety of God's complete salvation in presenting Christ to us in three stages:
1. In the past, Christ as the Redeemer gave Himself up for the church for our judicial redemption—"Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her"—v. 25.
 2. In the present, Christ as the life-giving Spirit is dispositionally sanctifying the church by saturating her with His element so that she may be His counterpart; this is organic salvation as bride beautification and bride preparation—"That He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word"—v. 26.
 3. In the future, Christ as the Bridegroom will present the church to Himself as His counterpart for His satisfaction—"That He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she would be holy and without blemish"—this is our glorification for bride presentation—v. 27.
 4. In the past, Christ gave Himself up for the church; in the present, He is sanctifying the church; and in the future, He will present the church to Himself as His counterpart for His satisfaction; therefore, His loving the church is to sanctify her, and His sanctifying the church is for His presenting the church to Himself glorious.
- B. The beauty of the bride comes from the very Christ who is wrought into the church and shining out from the church to be expressed through the church—Isa. 43:7; Eph. 3:21.
- C. Christ is a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty to the remnant of His people—Isa. 28:5:
1. A crown is like a hat or turban, whereas the diadem is the headband as the most beautiful, glorious part of the crown—Exo. 28:36-39; 29:6; Isa. 62:3.
 2. We need to continually behold the beauty of the Lord in the church as the house of His beauty so that we may be transformed from glory to glory, beautified by the Lord, to become His beautiful bride with Him as our diadem of beauty—2 Cor. 3:18; Rev. 19:7-9; Isa. 28:5; Psa. 27:4; Isa. 60:1, 7, 9, 13, 19; 62:3; Rev. 21:11.

II. The Lord's primary work in the recovery is His genuine work to prepare us to be His glorious bride; apart from the continual, dispositional sanctification spoken of in Ephesians 5:26, there is no way for the bride to be prepared and, hence, no way for Revelation 19:7-9 to be fulfilled:

- A. The church is being beautified through the process of sanctification by Christ as the life-giving Spirit cleansing us by the washing of the water in His word—Eph. 5:26-27:
1. This indicates that in the word of Christ is the Spirit as the water of life; the words that He speaks to us are spirit and life—John 6:63.
 2. As the life-giving Spirit, Christ is the speaking Spirit; whatever He speaks is the word that washes us; this does not refer to *logos*, the constant word, but to *rhema*, which denotes an instant word, the word that the Lord presently speaks to us—Matt. 4:4; John 6:63; Rev. 2:7; 22:17a; cf. Isa. 6:9-10; Matt. 13:14-15; Acts 28:25-31.
 3. Christ's speaking is the Spirit; His speaking is the very presence of the life-giving Spirit—John 6:63; Eph. 6:17.

4. The indwelling Christ as the life-giving Spirit is always speaking an instant, present, living word to metabolically cleanse away the old and replace it with the new, causing an inward transformation.
- B. Through such a washing process we are saturated with Christ and beautified by Christ to be His holy, beautiful, God-expressing bride, a bride without blemish or imperfection—Rev. 19:7; cf. S. S. 6:13; 8:13-14.
- C. Christ as the life-giving Spirit sanctifies the church by cleansing her according to the washing of the water in the word; according to the divine concept, *water* here refers to the flowing life of God typified by flowing water (Exo. 17:6; 1 Cor. 10:4; John 7:37-39; Rev. 7:17; 21:6; 22:1, 17); we are now in such a washing process in order that the church may be holy and without blemish.
- D. The Greek word for *washing* in Ephesians 5:26 is literally *laver*; in the Old Testament the priests used the laver to wash away their earthly defilement (Exo. 30:18-21); day by day, morning and evening, we need to come to the Bible and be cleansed by the laver of the water in the word.
- E. Paul uses the Greek word *rhema* when he speaks of the word with its washing process (Eph. 5:26); *logos* is God's Word objectively recorded in the Bible; *rhema* is the word of God spoken to us on a specific occasion (Mark 14:72; Luke 1:35-38; 5:5; 24:1-8).
- F. The *rhema* reveals something to us personally and directly; it shows us what we need to deal with and what we need to be cleansed from (the laver of bronze was a mirror that could reflect and expose—Exo. 38:8); the important thing for each one of us is this—is God speaking His word to me today?
- G. One thing that we always treasure is that the Lord still speaks to us personally and directly today; true growth in life depends upon our receiving the word directly from God; only His speaking in us has true spiritual value—Heb. 3:7-11, 15; 4:7; Psalms 95:7-8.
- H. The central point of our prayers should be our longing for the Lord's speaking, which enables us to fulfill the goal of His eternal economy according to His heart's desire to have a bride as His counterpart—Rev. 2:7; cf. 1 Sam. 3:1, 21; Amos 3:7.
- I. In a very practical sense, the Lord's presence is one with His speaking; whenever He speaks, we realize His presence within us; Christ's speaking is the very presence of the life-giving Spirit.
- J. The speaking of the indwelling Christ as the life-giving Spirit within us is the cleansing water that deposits a new element into us to replace the old element in our nature and disposition; this metabolic cleansing causes a genuine and inward change in life, which is the reality of dispositional sanctification and transformation.
- K. We must be beautified by Christ as the life-giving, speaking Spirit in our spirit; through the Lord's speaking within us as the life-giving Spirit, we are becoming His glorious church—Eph. 5:26-27; Rev. 2:7.

III. Ephesians 5:27 reveals that the church as the bride of Christ will eventually become a glorious church, a God-expressing church, “not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she would be holy and without blemish”:

- A. Our only beauty is the shining out of Christ from within us; what Christ appreciates within us is the expression of Himself—Psalms 50:2; 2 Cor. 3:15-18; cf. Exo. 28:2:
 1. “Your eyes will see the King in His beauty” (Isa. 33:17a); “the King will desire your beauty” (Psalms 45:11a).
 2. “You are as beautiful, my love, as Tirzah, / As lovely as Jerusalem, / As terrible as an army with banners”—S. S. 6:4.

- B. For the bride to be prepared means that she is clothed in “fine linen, bright and clean,” which is “the righteousnesses of the saints” (Rev. 19:8); this fine linen is the beauty of the bride.
- C. On the day of his wedding, a bridegroom cares much more for the beauty of his bride than for her ability; the Lord Jesus, our God, cares primarily for the beauty of Himself expressed through our humanity; we need to be beautified by Christ day by day so that we can be prepared to be presented to Him as His lovely bride.
- D. Whenever we take time to behold the beauty of the Lord in His word by pray-reading and musing upon His word (Eph. 6:17-18; Psa. 119:15), He becomes our beauty, and we are beautified by Him to become the house of His beauty so that He also may be beautified (27:4; 2 Cor. 3:18; Isa. 60:7b, 9b, 13b, 19b, 21b).
- E. The washing of the water in the word in Ephesians 5:26 deals mainly with spots and wrinkles; spots refer to something of the natural life, and wrinkles are related to oldness; only the water of life can metabolically wash away such defects by the transformation of life.
- F. To be holy is to be saturated with Christ and transformed by Christ, and to be without blemish is to be spotless and without wrinkle, having nothing of the natural life of our old man—cf. S. S. 4:7.
- G. Also, the church will not have “any such things,” which means that she will not have “this or that kind of defect”; God will bring the church to the place where nothing can be said against her in any respect—Eph. 5:27.

IV. Ephesians 5:26-27 matches Song of Songs 8:13-14; both reveal that it is by the Lord’s speaking to us that we are prepared to be His glorious bride with the desire for His second coming—“O you who dwell in the gardens, / My companions listen for your voice; / Let me hear it. / Make haste, my beloved, / And be like a gazelle or a young hart / Upon the mountains of spices”:

- A. In Song of Songs the loving seeker of Christ asks Him who dwells in the believers as His gardens to let her hear His voice while her companions listen for His voice—8:13; cf. 4:13-16; 5:1; 6:2:
 - 1. This indicates that in the work that we as the lovers of Christ do for Him as our Beloved, we need to maintain our fellowship with Him, always listening to Him—Luke 10:38-42.
 - 2. Our lives depend on the Lord’s words, and our work depends on His commands (Rev. 2:7; 1 Sam. 3:9-10; cf. Isa. 50:4-5; Exo. 21:6); without the Lord’s words we will not have any revelation, light, or personal knowledge of Christ as our King (Isa. 6:1, 5), our Lord (2 Cor. 5:14-15), our Head (Col. 2:19), and our Husband (2 Cor. 11:2); the life of the believers hinges totally upon the Lord’s speaking (Eph. 5:26-27).
- B. As the concluding prayer of this poetic book, the Song of Songs, the lover of Christ prays that her Beloved would make haste to come back in the power of His resurrection (gazelle and young hart) to set up His sweet and beautiful kingdom (mountains of spices), which will fill the whole earth—8:14; Rev. 11:15; Dan. 2:35:
 - 1. Such a prayer portrays the union and communion between Christ as the Bridegroom and His lovers as the bride in their bridal love, in the way that the prayer of John, a lover of Christ, as the concluding word of the Holy Scriptures, reveals God’s eternal economy concerning Christ and the church in His divine love—Rev. 22:20.
 - 2. “Come, Lord Jesus!” is the last prayer in the Bible (v. 20); the entire Bible concludes with the desire for the Lord’s coming expressed as a prayer.