

Systematic Theology
Defining the Church (Part 3)
Selected Scriptures
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Tom Pennington, Pastor
Countryside Bible Church

You've heard the expression that a picture is worth a thousand words. We've all experienced that; we've all had that sort of "aha" moment when we've seen a picture of what we really couldn't grasp before. And a lot of companies are picking up on this concept of a picture being worth a thousand words. Most international companies are now opting out of words on their products, and are using pictures and symbols instead. If you're like me, you get a little frustrated sitting in your car trying to figure out what that picture on that button is supposed to be as opposed to the word that used to be there. We all tend to remember faces better than names. This also plays into this idea of a picture being worth a thousand words.

In fact, I read an article this week that there's a team of university researchers developing software, that you will see in the coming weeks and months that will work on PCs and eventually on all the different platforms. It's called Visual ID. It's an experimental program that seeks to help individuals more rapidly find their Word files or their spreadsheets by tagging them with a graphical, and largely arbitrary, icon. The article said that a snowflake, for instance, might represent a document listing the members of an organization, while a dachshund with a hat might become the visual mnemonic for the household expense file. The principle, the article says, behind the visual ID is that individuals can remember pictures better than words, and can navigate faster and easier with distinct individual images than with the generic word icon as most of us have in our computers, tagged Microsoft Word documents. J.P. Lewis, a researcher at the University of Southern California and the principal author of the project, said, "Our visual brains suck up the appearance of everything we see. It doesn't require effort or even conscious thought; we just do it all the time." This soon will be on your computer and on mine.

When you think about the value of a picture, it shouldn't surprise us that the Scripture, although written with words, is full of brilliant, vivid word pictures. You can think immediately of some of the most loved or familiar ones. No one can forget the image of God as a shepherd, or the pictures that Christ drew of the broad way and the narrow road that leads to heaven, or the wise

man building his house on the rock and the foolish man on the sand, the prodigal son in the pigpen, or up and returning to his father. All of those powerful images drive home the truth to our minds. And so, it's perfectly normal that when God wants us to grasp the reality of a great mystery called "the church", He chooses to explain it and illustrate it with a number of powerful word pictures, or images.

Let me remind you of where we are. We're in the middle of our attempt to define the nature of the church. We can do that, and will do that, in five very distinct ways. We can look at the key words, which we have done already. We can look at the main metaphors for the church, which we're in the middle of, and we'll complete tonight, Lord willing. And then in coming weeks, we'll look at the primary attributes assigned to the church. We'll look at the key components of a church - what makes up or constitutes a church - as opposed to some other entity or organization where a bunch of Christians get together. And then we'll look at the key marks of a healthy or a pure church. Those are two different things. There can be a church that isn't healthy and pure, so we want to look not only at the key components of a church, but at the key components of a healthy church, or a pure church.

Now, we're in the middle of our study, as I said, of the main metaphors the Scripture uses. Here's just a few, these are not exhaustive. The church is called the body of Christ, it's called the bride, it's called a building, it's called the flock of sheep, a household or a family, a royal priesthood, and the pillar and ground of the truth. Those are just a few; we're not going to look at all of those. We've looked at one, and we're going to look at three more tonight, to complete, to round out our study. Let me remind you as we look at these metaphors, of the simple ground rules that we laid last time.

Remember that God intends all of these images to remind us that the church does not, and cannot exist separate from Christ. Every one of these metaphors ties back to Christ in some way. If the church is pictured as a flock, then He's the shepherd. If the church is pictured as a building, He is the foundation, the cornerstone, and the architect and builder. If the church is pictured as a bride, He's the bridegroom. So understand that all of these show in some way our relation to Christ.

Secondly, don't choose one these images as your primary way of thinking about the church. God gave us this vast variety in order to give us a little taste of the richness that is the church. And if we concentrate on one metaphor we don't get the full picture of all that the church is. Remember that they are metaphors; that is, the church is not, for example, a building. We'll talk about that some tonight. Instead, it is a metaphor, there is a point of similarity between that image and what

the church is, the reality that is the church. And then finally, don't think of these images as temporary. Instead, they are always accurate depictions of the reality of the church.

So, with those ground rules laid, last time we examined the most common New Testament metaphor and Paul's personal favorite, the image of a body. If you weren't here last week, I encourage you to get that message. You can go online and listen to it free of charge, and get a CD. But that is the primary metaphor that the New Testament uses to describe the church. Tonight, I want us to briefly overview three others in the short time we have. First of all, the church is a building, or a temple. When you look at the metaphor itself, it's clear in Scripture that God intends to present the church this way.

First Corinthians 3:9, "... you are ... God's building." Ephesians 2:21, in Christ "... the whole building ... is growing into a holy temple in the Lord..." 1 Peter 2:5, "... you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house...." So, there's no question that Scripture wants us to think of the church in this way. It's used, by the way, of a local church, of the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 3:16. Paul says, "... you [which is plural here, referring to that body of believers that gathered in Corinth, you] are ... [the] temple of God..."

But it's also used of the universal church, that is, all of those who profess Christ and are connected to the visible church. For example, in Ephesians 2 you get this feeling of the entire church. He says,

... you are fellow citizens with the saints, [You are] ... of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets ... [and] the whole building ... fitted together, is growing into a holy temple.... [You get this picture that it's bigger than the church in Ephesus. He's talking about the entire universal church as a building.]

Same thing is true in 1 Peter. In 1 Peter 1, Peter writes to these believers scattered all over, and he says in 1 Peter 2:4 and 5,

... [we come] to Him as a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious [Of course, referring to Christ] ... you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house....

So, he refers to these peoples scattered across a number of regions, not one local church, and he says you are being built into a spiritual house. So it's clear that both a local church can be called the building of God, a temple of God, and the church as a whole can be as well.

So, what does this mean? Well, essentially we're being told in this metaphor that the church is like a temple, built by God Himself to be His dwelling. When you look at what the Scripture says, the foundation of this building we find in 1 Corinthians 3. In fact, turn there; we'll look at this passage several times tonight for different reasons. But in 1 Corinthians 3:10, Paul says,

According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder
I laid a foundation.... [Now watch verse 11] For no [one] ... can lay a foundation
other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

He goes on to use the building metaphor in verses 16 and 17, so we know that he's talking about the church. So, the foundation of the church is Christ. The church is built on the foundation, listen carefully, of the historical person and work of Jesus Christ.

You say, Well, wait a minute. What about Ephesians 2 where we're told that the foundation is the apostles and prophets? Let me explain how these relate to you. Christ is, in one sense, the only foundation and that's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3. But how is it that you and I know about the historical Christ and His life and His teaching? In the early church, before the completion of the canon, the prophets received God's revelation and taught the people. And then, of course, the apostles received, as Jesus had prophesied in John 14 to 16, the apostles received the permanent revelation about Christ and they preserved that revelation in the Scripture. So, when we say that Christ is the foundation, He is the ultimate foundation, His work and His teaching.

But the way we know about Christ, the way we know about His work and teaching, is through, in the early church, the prophets and to us, the apostles, the writing of the apostles, the New Testament. That's the foundation that's laid because that's where we're told about Christ as the foundation. Robert Saucy in his book puts it this way, his book on the church, which is an excellent resource by the way. I think it's *The Church in God's Program*, it's in our bookstore. He says, "The church, therefore, is only built upon the true foundation of Christ as it stands upon the inspired Scriptures." Christ is ultimately the foundation and the Scriptures given to us by the apostles tell of Him. He's also the Cornerstone, according to Ephesians 2:20 and 1 Corinthians 3:11. He is the Cornerstone.

You know today, if you've been involved in any sort of building, you knowing that laying a cornerstone is a formality in many buildings. Any building that's a public building usually has a cornerstone of some kind. And it's basically a perfunctory thing, it's mostly a political thing. But that has not always been the case. In ancient times, it was difficult to get a building square, to get everything built exactly the way it should, and so you would pay someone to create a perfectly square stone, a stone that had been carefully planed and squared and trued until you knew that every angle of that stone was exactly perfect. That stone would then be laid down as the first stone, the foundation would be framed from it, the angles would all be built from that cornerstone, and ultimately the entire structure itself would go back and true to the cornerstone. That's why Paul chooses this image. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone; He is that to which everything in the church is leveled and trued, the cornerstone.

But He's not just the foundation and the cornerstone, He's also the architect and builder. In Ephesians 2:21, Christ is depicted as the One who is building up this house. And of course, in Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, "I will build my church." What's the process of construction? Well, if you look at Ephesians 2, in fact turn there for a moment, Ephesians 2:20. First, you have the cornerstone laid, Jesus Christ Himself being the Cornerstone, that's that from which everything is trued. Then you have the foundation, He Himself is the foundation, but also what's true about Him, as we just discovered is given us in the writings of the apostles, so their writings are trued and leveled to Christ Himself, to His teaching and ministry. And then the walls are put up and the stones are fit together, each stone, then is arranged in connection to the foundation and all the foundation is arranged to the Cornerstone so the whole thing holds together. And then the stones themselves are fit together.

Notice, Ephesians says, verse 21, "... in whom the whole building, being fitted together..." It's a very interesting Greek word. One lexicon puts it this way, "In construction terms, it represents the whole of an elaborate process by which stones were fitted together. It includes the preparation of the surfaces, including the cutting and rubbing and testing to make sure everything is true. Then the preparation of the dowels and the dowel holes, and finally, the filling of the dowels with molten lead to hold everything together as the ancient construction was so often done." In Christ then, the whole building is fitted together in that sense. And "... is growing into a holy temple in the Lord..." And along the way, new stones are added. We'll come back to that in a moment. That's the meaning of this metaphor.

So, what's the message? The image of a temple emphasizes certain realities about the church. The lessons we can learn. First of all, it helps us understand the priority of worship. A temple had one

primary function: its primary function was approaching the deity in worship. So, it's no surprise that the church is described as a building, and not just as any building, but as we saw in 1 Corinthians 3, a Temple. This increases our awareness of God's special presence when we meet. You see when you came to the Temple of Solomon, you knew that you were coming into the presence of God because the glory cloud came down and took up residence there. Well, this metaphor of the church as a temple teaches us that now, when we come together, we are entering the presence of God just as surely as the Old Testament worshiper was entering into the physical presence of God. Listen carefully, that's not because God lives in this place. It's because God lives among His people. And when we come together, His abiding presence is among us, and we come together as the church, we're a temple, we're a place of worship of our God.

In 2 Corinthians 6:16, we read, "... we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.'" That's the picture that's here. It's the priority of worship; we're the temple of God. God dwells among us, and when we come together we come together to worship. I was talking this morning with someone in our church about this reality that so many churches have everything upside down. The church, in the gathering of the church, is all about the individual. Well, the whole concept of the church as a temple says coming to church is not about me, and it's not about you. It's about God! We are the temple of the living God. It emphasizes the priority of worship.

Secondly, it emphasizes the church's character as holy, set apart to God. Just as the temple was holy; and over and over again we're called a holy people, and a holy priesthood, and a holy temple.

Thirdly, it emphasizes the need for evangelism. In 1 Peter 2:5 it speaks of us being living stones, each of us a stone. How can a building be built without new stones added? That's the picture; new stones still need to be added. And so, this picture of a building impresses upon us the importance of reaching out to others, seeing new stones added to the building God is constructing. We need to communicate the gospel to family, and friends, and neighbors.

Fourthly, this metaphor of the church as a building underscores the leaders' responsibility to build by serving and equipping. Turn back now to 1 Corinthians 3, 1 Corinthians 3. This passage is often used for a variety of things. One of the main things is to teach the judgment seat of Christ for individual believers, and that is true. Each of us will give an account to Christ. But the primary focus of 1 Corinthians 3 is leadership. Because, notice in verse 10, well let's back up,

even before that. He's talking about leadership even as early as verse 4. There are those in the church saying,

I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos." ... "What then is Apollos? ... what is Paul? Servants ... even as the Lord gave *opportunity* to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

Paul's saying, "Listen, no man deserves the credit for what God is doing, each of us as leaders, Apollos and myself, have been used by God." Verse 9,

"... we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building." [So, notice the difference. We, that is Apollos and I,] "... are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building." [He's making a dichotomy here between the leadership and those who aren't in leadership. Verse 10,] "According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and ... [somebody else] is building on it." ... [We have to] be careful how we build. [Again, he's talking to leaders. And he goes on to talk about the reality that leadership will give an account to God for how they've built. A very serious thing.]

But I want you to notice, there's one final message in this, a message for all of us about the terrible sin of divisiveness. Look in 1 Corinthians 3, when he finishes talking about the judgment seat of Christ, and the reality that leaders, as well as every individual believer (but here again the focus is on leadership) will stand before Christ. Notice the change he makes in verse 16,

Do you not know that you [speaking plurally] are ... [the] temple of God [You, the church in Corinth are the temple of God] and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man [tries to destroy] ... the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.

This is an absolute shot across the bow against anybody who would seek to create division and trouble in the church. It's the temple of God, it's His dwelling, we, not the building, we the

church. And if anyone is involved in destroying that building, then God will destroy him. Very serious, sober note for us all.

Well, let's move on from this powerful image of the church as a building, and particularly as a temple, to the church as a household, or a family. That, by the way, is a picture of my dad's family that I happen to have on my computer. Just to give you a little background, a household or a family. Now, what is the metaphor? Well, Jesus begins to hint at it in His ministry. In Matthew 12, remember His family came and wanted Him to come and stay with them, and

Jesus ... [stretched] out His hand toward His disciples ... [and] said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! ... whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother." [He began to lay this foundation that our real family is a spiritual one and not a physical one.]

Again, in 2 Corinthians, Paul mentions that part of the promise God had made to His people is that He would be a Father, and we would be sons and daughters to Him, that there would be a family created. Turn to Ephesians 2, and you see this same metaphor developed in different ways. Ephesians 2:19, he says, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens ... you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household," In biblical terms, a household, again, wasn't so much a building as it was the people that lived under your roof. It would include your immediate family, perhaps extended family, your servants; everyone who was a part of your household was included in this statement. And he says, "you are God's household. You live under His roof; you're part of His family."

Notice again, just a page over in Ephesians 3:14, Paul prays,

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name,"

Now, that's hard to understand at first glance. What is Paul saying, "every family"? He's not talking about some obscure reference to family trees. Basically "every family" refers to believers from every place, and every period of history, both those who are in heaven and on the earth. So, he's representing all believers as part of the extended family. We're all connected; we're all part of the family. And then in Ephesians 4:6, he comes back to this theme again. He says, there's "... one God and Father of all..." This isn't the universal fatherhood of God, that God is a Father in

the same sense to all humans. Instead, he's saying to the church there is one God and Father of us all.

Now, what is this meaning to teach us? Essentially, by saying the church is a family, he's saying that we are an assembly of those, as we studied back a few months ago, who have been adopted by God and who have thereby become a part of His family. I don't know about you, but that's an amazingly comforting truth. By God's providence, neither Sheila nor I have any parents or grandparents here in this world; they're all with the Lord. But it's wonderful to know that we have a family, that we have an extended family. We're connected to each other because we have been adopted by God. We are brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers in the family of God. The church is a family, and when we meet on the Lord's Day for worship, we're getting together, if you will, for a family gathering. That's the image behind this metaphor.

Now what are the messages for us in this? Just two brief ones. I think this image of the church as a family should increase our commitment to and our love for one another. Turn to Ephesians 4:1. Notice Paul says,

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, [And here's how I want you to do it] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [And now he's going to give you arguments why. Why should we do that? It's because, there's one body, and there's one Spirit] ... one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [and] one God and Father....

Listen folks, we're all part of the same family. So, we may as well learn to get along. That's what Paul is saying. We have the same Father; we're part of the same family. And so, we should be committed to each other, to unity, to gentleness, to patience, to being tolerant for each other, to loving each other, preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

And of course, 1 John. John, in his epistle, makes the point about how our love should be very practical. First John 3:13,

[Don't] ... be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.... [Listen, John's terminology is the same sort of picture. We have become brothers and sisters in

Christ, so we ought to love each other.] He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; ... you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. We know love by this, that ... [Christ] laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. [And let's talk real practical. We may never be asked to lay down our lives for each other, so what about having this world's goods and seeing somebody in the family in need and closing our heart against ... [that person,] how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. [The fact that we are part of the family should drive us to be committed to each other.]

A second part of the implication of the church as a family is that we are to purposefully choose to respond to one another like family members. In 1 Timothy 5, Paul, talking to Timothy says this, he says,

... [Don't] ... sharply rebuke an older man, but *rather* appeal to *him* as a father ... [and] the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, *and* the younger women as sisters, in all purity.

We're to relate to each other as one big family. Is that how you think of this church? Do you think of the people who gather here each Lord's day as part of your family? Do you take that kind of interest in them? Do you reach out to them? Do you care about what matters to them? Do you love them? Do you ask really how they're doing? Do you care for them practically, in love? That's the message and the implication of the reality that we are a family.

Well, let's hurry on, to one final one. This, by the way, is Rembrandt's wedding, Jewish wedding of Isaac and Rebekah. But we're called, the church is called, the bride of Christ. I love this image and you'll see why in just a few minutes. First of all, the metaphor, very straightforward. Ephesians 5:23, Christ "... is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body." And he goes on to say, in verse 25 that Christ loved the church in the same way that husbands love their wives. We are connected to Christ; the message of Ephesians 5 is that the church is connected to Christ in the same way that a wife is connected to a husband. We are the bride of Christ.

Now, this image of God's people as married to Christ isn't new with the New Testament, it's there in the Old Testament. In fact, Israel is often pictured as the wife of Yahweh. A couple of weeks ago, I mentioned this reference to you, Isaiah 54:5,

“For your husband [Israel] is your Maker, whose name is the LORD of hosts; ... your Redeemer.... For the LORD has called you, like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even like a wife of *one's* youth when she is rejected,”

When you come to the New Testament, you see the apostles using the image of marriage to describe our relationship to Christ in a variety of passages. So, essentially this metaphor means this: the church, all of us, are together, the bride of Christ. I love what this image communicates, the truth it communicates to us.

First and foremost, it communicates Christ's love, the depth of His love for His church. Three times in Ephesians 5 we're told of Christ's love for the church. Turn back to Ephesians. Ephesians 5:2, we're told He loves you and gave Himself up for us. In verse 25, “Husbands, love your wives ... as Christ also loved the church...” Verse 28, “So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies.” Just as Christ also does the church. Christ demonstrated His love in the price that He paid for His bride. You see, in the ancient world it was common for a groom to pay for the bride an agreed upon amount to her father or her brother. The price Jesus paid was this: He loved the church and gave Himself up for her. As one author said, “Christ did not give of the wealth of creation for the church which He could have given without end, but He gave Himself.”

You also see the love of Christ in His constant care for His church. Ephesians 5:29, “... no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church....” Look at those two words, “nourish” and “cherish”. The word “nourish” means “to feed.” The word “cherish” literally means “to keep warm”. The only other time in the New Testament it's used is in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 of a nursing mother tenderly caring for her child. That is how Christ cares for us, for His church. He nourishes and cherishes it, even husbands, as we're commanded to our wives.

A second message that we learn from this metaphor of the church as the bride is the exalted position of the church. We're not His servants and slaves only, we are also His bride. It raises the level of the relationship which we have been given in Christ. There's in this metaphor the demand for the church's loyalty. We are called to absolute devotion to, and loyalty to Christ. In 2

Corinthians 11:2, Paul says, "... I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you *as* a pure virgin." Do you understand the depth of Christ's love for you, and for us together as the church? Do you understand the exalted position He's given us? The loyalty that we owe Him?

There's another message in this image and that is the priority of personal holiness. Look again at Ephesians 5:26,

... [He] loved the church, gave Himself up for her, ... [in order] that "... He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless."

Do you know what it means that the church would be holy and blameless? It means that you would be holy and blameless, and that I would be holy and blameless. This metaphor of the church as a bride: you're part of the bride. Are you making the bride holy and blameless? Or by your presence are you bringing spots and wrinkles and those such things? The priority of personal holiness is underscored.

Also, the need for our love and submission to Christ. Ephesians 5:24, "... as the church is subject to Christ..." Paul says that's understood, he goes on to apply it to wives, to husbands, but the point is, it's understood that the church would submit itself to Christ. And in 1 John 4:19, we understand the need to love Christ. But I want to finish our study tonight with this one, because I think this so wonderful.

The image of us as the bride of Christ drives home the importance of us anticipating Christ's return. You see, this beautiful image of the church as a bride grows out of the marriage customs that were common in the first century. They were much different than our own customs in terms of marriage. First, there was a period called the "betrothal period". It was more serious and binding than our engagement. In the presence of witnesses the man and the woman and their families agreed to the terms of the marriage, God's blessing was pronounced upon the union, and that was the betrothal. That ceremony with the man and the woman and the families agreeing to the terms of the marriage initiated a period of time called the "interval".

From the day the betrothal period began, they were legally man and wife; if they wanted to end their relationship, it required a divorce. But they lived separately and were not allowed to

consummate the marriage. Usually, the interval lasted long enough to complete the arrangements for the wedding, rarely more than 12 months; so, usually less than 12 months. When everything was ready, the date for the wedding feast was set, and that's the third part of the ancient ceremony, the "wedding feast" itself.

The final part of the process was the preparation for, and the procession to, the wedding feast. The bride is preparing herself and adorning herself, the groom cleans up, puts on his best clothes, once all of the arrangements have been finalized in the interval period. Then, accompanied by friends, the groom makes a grand procession through town to the home of his betrothed. It was usually in the early evening; the procession went with torches, singing and dancing through the village. When they arrived at the bride's home, she joined them and the entire procession headed back to the groom's home for the wedding feast. That night, the marriage would be consummated, and all the partying and the festivities lasted up to a week. And you thought your children's weddings were expensive!

That's the background behind this powerful image of the church as the bride of Christ. The church, understand, is betrothed to Christ. His dowry was His own life. As the hymn says, "From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy bride. With His own blood He bought her and for her life He died." We now live in the period of the interval. The wedding feast is coming; it's time for the bride to prepare for the wedding. And how do we do that? How do we prepare?

Well, Revelation 19:7 says that the church makes herself ready. Second Corinthians 11:2 says that the spiritual leaders that God has placed in our lives help us prepare for the wedding. But in Ephesians 5, Paul says that it's Christ Himself that is preparing His bride, so that He "... might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless."

Listen, we're responsible to be pursuing holiness, but in the end, it's Christ Himself Who is making us the bride that we ought to be, that is making you the part of the bride that you ought to be. And we're to live in eager anticipation. Turn finally to Revelation, Revelation 19. Here's where the image all comes to fruition. Revelation 19:7,

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give ... glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." [It's time for the wedding feast] It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright *and* clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then He said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are

those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’” And He said to me,
“These are true words of God.”

Listen folks, by using the image of a bride, the church as a bride, Paul wants us to understand how eagerly we are to be anticipating the return of Christ. Those of you who are married, do you remember back when you were just a short time from your wedding? You were counting it in days, in some cases in hours and minutes and seconds, because the wedding ceremony was coming. The celebration was coming, the marriage was coming. Paul says that’s how we’re to wait for Christ’s return. We’ve been betrothed, and we just can’t wait for the Groom to come back and take us to His house for the wedding celebration and the wedding feast.

Is that how you think about Christ and His coming? Are you like a bride who’s so busy in the details of life that you’re not even looking, you’re not even looking seriously for the wedding to come? The church, you want to know what it’s like? It’s like a body. It’s like a building. It’s like a family. And it’s like a bride. That’s what the church is.

Let’s pray together.

Father, as we look at these images, we’re reminded of how important the church is to Your Own heart. Father, forgive us for pouring our time and resources and energy and prayers into other things besides the church.

I pray that You would help each of us to commit ourselves to this amazing organism: this body, this building, this family, this bride, until our Bridegroom comes. And Father we pray, may He come quickly.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.