

Love the Bride

By [Mike Glodo](#)

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The passage in which the preaching is based is Ephesians 5, verses, 25 through 27. Paul says this. He says:

Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Let's pray:

Father. I thank you for preserving your word for us, I thank You, Lord for sending your son Jesus, that He loved us, that he gave himself up for the church, that He died for her. And I pray that you would not only allow the husbands in this room to love their wives that way, but I pray that you would allow each of us to love your bride that way. Help us to want to lay our lives down to love the church because she's your bride and she's so valuable to you that you are willing to give up your only son, Father, for us, for her, and help us to love her the same way that you love her, regardless of whether it cost us our time and our energy and our effort where we get noticed, help us to love your people like you love your people, and I pray this in the name of Your Son. Jesus, amen.

I have been with you before, but it's been a few years. Last time as Scott and I talked you were at the other school, which has been at least five years ago, but I think it was more like nine years ago, the last time I was with you all. And so I don't expect you to remember anything I said then, or even that it was me. But I'm pleased to be here and encouraged by the witness of Christ Kingdom church and by your own pastor's love for Christ and for his cause, and to see men, women, boys and girls come to know Him in a saving way.

I was in a church very similar to this and my first pastorate, and we were meeting in the school and trying to communicate to the neighborhood in which we were meeting God's love for people through Christ.

I'd only been on the job maybe three or four months, and a young couple asked to meet with me. Now, they weren't married, and I had a hint of what they

wanted, but it was complicated by the fact that when they signed the little guest registry in our church every Sunday that we passed around, they signed with their own names, but they signed with the same address. And so while, on the one hand, I was really interested in helping them in their interest and their hunger and their thirst for God. I was a little bit nervous, because I knew they were living together and they weren't married, and I was pretty sure they were going to ask me about getting married.

So, you can see the dilemma, do I tell them what they're doing is wrong, or do I try to kind of smooth the path toward further interest in God?

Well, of course, as a pastor, I told them that there's something better for them than the situation they were in. I didn't want to deny them the blessing of marital love, because there's a difference between living together without being married and living together being married. Living together without being married, you don't have the kind of depth of commitment. Even though people may feel like in their hearts, they have the same kind of love for other, for one another, until you swear before God and the church of your lifelong commitment to one another, you don't have the same kind of commitment from the other person.

I did not want them to be denied the blessings of covenant love or marital love, even though marriages don't always reflect that kind of deep covenant bond that's God's ideal. Well, for the same reason, I want us to look at these couple of verses in Ephesians today, but not to talk about marriage, or at least not talk about human marriages, but to look at what God's word calls the marriage between Christ and the church, because, for the same reason, many Christians don't experience the depth of God's covenant love in the church, because they haven't made the covenant commitment to the church.

In other words, a lot of times, and it's especially true with American Christians, we live in a relationship to the church. It's a lot more like people living together without being married.

And so the question before us today is, have I committed myself, or have I committed myself to loving the church the way Christ loves the church?

And if I haven't, do I realize that I'm missing out on the blessings of the covenant relationship with the people of God? That's really the challenge for us this morning. Do I love the church the way Jesus loves the church? Because as these verses which Kurt read will tell us, it's because Christ loved the church with a sacrificial love.

Must we love the Bride of Christ or the church with the same kind of love? It's very easy to see in these verses that we read, if we simply look at the bridegroom and the bride, and then we as part of the wedding party, if you want to put it that way.

So first, let's look at the bridegroom, how the bridegroom is described in these verses. These verses are going to tell us something about the bride, the bridegroom, (that's Jesus), and they're going to tell us that he's loved the church with a sacrificial love.

And therefore, to look at his example as the greatest example ever of sacrificial love, Christ loved the church with sacrificial love, and so he is our example of what consummate love is. It says Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, simply put, straightforwardly put, he loved her. That was his motivation, and then that motivation resulted in an action. He gave Himself up for her.

And what's the result of Christ's action of what Paul describes as marital type love? It says that He might sanctify her, that is to set her apart. That's the word sanctify. It has something to do with the word holy, but it first means to set apart, to belong exclusively to himself.

So he claimed the church for himself in exclusive love, to make her his own, but also to cleanse her, to wash her, as the words will continue to tell us. Very simply, he loved her. That was his motivation. He gave Himself up for her. That was his action. And that the result was he cleansed her.

Now these verses by Paul are applied to marriage, and love, but Paul, very typically, in the midst of giving very practical advice, will break out in these grand theological themes. He does the same thing in Philippians 2. "Have the same attitude in yourself that was in Christ."

In other words, have the same humility toward one another's in Christ, who, by the way, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God. This is one of the greatest statements of who Jesus was and what the Incarnation meant in the whole Bible.

Philippians, chapter two, Paul does the same thing here. "Husbands, love your wives." And he could have left it at that, just love your wives, but he gives us the metaphor of Christ and the bride. And so this metaphor is the consummate expression of love, a motivation of love which results in an action. It's not the same kind of love unless it results in sacrificial action.

You know, somebody can say, "I love you, I love you dearly." What's that old country western song? "You don't even call me darling, darling, or you don't have to call me darling, darling, but you don't even call me by my name."

That's not sacrificial love.

Real, consummate, divine love results in sacrificial action, with the result that the person is set apart. And this is what Christ did for his church.

Now, no one here was alive at the time, I'm pretty sure. On January 20, 1936 the Duke of Windsor became Edward the eighth King of England. Now, even though no one was here alive that during that time, many of you know the story. You know what I'm about to say.

It was in January 1936 that the Duke of Windsor became Edward the eighth King of England. But less than 11 months later, what did he do? He abdicated his throne. Why would the King of England, which was really the only legitimate monarchy in the West anymore.

why would he give up his throne? Well, he had fallen in love with an American divorcee named Wallace Simpson, and this was scandalous at the time, probably more so that she was American than that she was divorced.

But he gave up his crown for the love of a scandalous woman. And you know, this is precisely what Paul is telling us here.

And what he said, also in Philippians 2 that I referred to, "though he existed in the form of God, he did not regard equality" - Equality with God a thing to be held on to. But instead, He humbled Himself, and He took upon the form of a servant, and even to the point of death, and death on a cross, the most scandalous death a person could die in that time.

Why for a bride that had been perpetually and continually unfaithful to him? If you look at the sweep of the Old Testament, we'll talk about that more in a minute. You see constantly God's people are described as a wanton wife who goes off after other husbands. Ezekiel 16 is a graphic depiction of that. I just finished writing the chapter on the book of Judges this summer, and constantly, Israel is worshipping of other gods. It's described as marital infidelity, but that's what Christ has done for His church, and this changes how we look at love.

Love is not simply a marriage. In human terms, we may think of it as a marriage of equals.

But in divine love, it's not a marriage of equals. It's a marriage of one infinitely greater than all of us, especially apart from God, alienated from God in our sin, even dirty and filthy in a moral conscience sense, and yet he bore the cost of the wedding.

We have a mutual Singaporean friend who works also for the same organization.

He has two daughters and two sons. Now – as it regards his daughter, he likes the Singaporean tradition where the groom's father pays for the wedding.

And for his sons, he likes the American tradition.

He's hoping his sons marry American girls and his daughter marries a Singaporean boy.

But when I was first trying to learn how to do ministry, I had a mentor, and I would follow him around. He was a master at wedding rehearsals, because wedding rehearsals are often, let's just say sometimes they're complicated scenarios. Can't count on everybody being sober, depending on who the parties are and who the extended are. You can't pick your relatives, right?

And sometimes things were tense. Weddings are enormously stressful anyway, and so on the rehearsal night, my mentor would go through the ceremony 345 times till it was just almost like autopilot, because he would say, "the last thing you want people to do is think on their wedding day." You want the thinking to be over.

And so the last time he would go through it, when it got to the point of asking, "who gives this woman to be married to this man," instead of saying that, he would say, "Who is paying for this elaborate affair?"

And because everybody was on autopilot, the father of the bride would almost always say, "I am." But then he would stop and realize what he was saying.

But it's true in the case of divine love for us, that the father of the groom sent the Son to pay the price of the wedding with his own life.

This is how the book of Ephesians begins a great triune chapter in chapter 1. It was the will of the Father, the action of the Son, and the applying work of the Holy Spirit. That's Chapter 1 of Ephesians. And what does it say the purpose of all that was? Twice in Ephesians 1, it says, "so that God would establish a church on earth."

The Book of Ephesians sums up - probably better than any book of the Bible - what God's grand plan is, which is for God to build himself a church on earth. Every chapter of Ephesians centers upon the church once and even twice - and uses the metaphors of body and temple as well as the noun "church."

Pastor Puckett told me that in the next couple of weeks, you'll be talking together about vision for the coming year and vision for Christ, kingdom, and church. So I thought it would be a great time and a great opportunity for us to reflect once again on who the church is in God's eyes.

We have this grand and glorious bridegroom, who has made us a scandalous people, his bride. He has given us his name, even as He took upon our shame and our sin. And the wedding between Christ and the church begins with a focus on him - but then who is the bride?

We've already looked at that briefly.

The bride is that people whom Christ loved with that sacrificial love - and the things that Jesus did for the church, tell us a little bit about the church, don't they?

When we're told that he did this, he loved her to sanctify her. It tells us we needed sanctifying, that we were not a holy people apart from Christ's redeeming love, that he might cleanse her by the washing of the word. It tells us we were people who were unclean apart from Christ's sacrificial love, so that He might present the church to himself in splendor.

So this tells us that, apart from Christ's sacrificial love, we're not, splendidous, we're shabby. But Christ's love makes us splendid. It makes us glorious, so that she might be holy and without blemish. This tells us that, apart from Christ's sacrificial love, we have blemishes. And this word is especially a word that is applied to animals that aren't suitable for sacrifice because they have some kind of congenital defect that don't make them acceptable for presenting as an offering to God. That's who we are. We are a people who are unacceptable. We have a blemish that prevents us from belonging to God, and yet Christ makes us without blemish.

So these things tell us about the church - and think about this. My son starts at Stetson this week. We just took him up yesterday, he got into cooking in the last year. He loves getting the cookbook out and following the recipe and seeing tasty food come out the other end. Well, think about the recipe for the church.

You start with a blemished people who are unfaithful to their Creator, who belong to another and who need to be washed. And when we when we look at the church that way, there are a couple of things that are very practical for us. One is we realize the church is not a perfect people. I mean, with the recipe that says imperfect sinners. This is to Christ's credit. The criticism against Jesus wasn't that he dined with tax collectors and sinners, but that Jesus had said a physician comes for those who are sick.

And so the church always needs to remember that it's an imperfect people. It doesn't reflect divine love to the world by pretending that it merited divine love, and so this conditions how we look at the church. We don't expect perfection. We expect difficulties. We expect hardship. We expect insult.

I have my son going off to college, my second child going to college. My daughter is older, and she's finished her school, and we're not yet empty nesters, because she's back, but you do a lot of inventory taking at these grand moments of life.

And really, the fact is, for a woman, the majority of her hurts in life have been administered by her husband, and for her husband, the majority of his hurts in life have been administered by his wife.

Why? By virtue of being in a covenanted, committed relationship, it's just a matter of statistics, the wounds which my children have suffered, the majority of them have come from me and for my wife, because we are imperfect people trying to reflect divine love, and this really should condition how we come to the church.

We don't come to the church to be untouched. We come to the church to be in love, committed love, a relationship with imperfect people. But there's a flip side to this as well. Not only do we not expect a perfect church, but we also look at the church through the eyes of Christ.

We're thinking about weddings here a little bit today, and I've had this happen, and this is more of a confession than anything: If you've gone to a wedding. And maybe you're a friend of the bride, and you think the groom's just not a good person for her.

You're just sitting there the whole time. You're trying to be happy, but...

Or perhaps you're a friend of the groom, but you don't think the bride is a good match for him, and you're just sitting there, and if I were being chauvinistic about it, that's not a good idea, is it?

Metaphorically speaking, when the groom lifts the veil, you think, "ah, put it down."

But it's unfair, because the man comes out without anything on his face. But here's the thing, why does that groom look upon that bride and see her as flawless?

Because he loves her.

And why does that bride look upon that man and not see any of the things that you think are obvious faults?

Because she is full of love for him.

What's the expression as to what beauty is? "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." And love can be blind, but divine love isn't blind, and when it is divine love, the beauty that is in the eye of the beholder is a transforming love.

It's a love that changes the object of affection.

It is a love that sanctifies. So the church is, on the one hand, a simultaneously blemished, unfaithful wife, and on the other hand, a pure and chaste, glorious bride. Why? Because everything that is necessary to make her glorious has already been done. There is not one thing remaining for Christ to do to make the bride glorious. We simply await the Spirit's application of the work of Christ to our life, so that one day we'll look on the outside what Christ has already made us in the heavenly places.

I know there are people here who have been hurt in a church. I know there are people here who have felt judged, who have felt cynical about the church, if not this church, some other church, you read it in the paper every day about some scandal or some abuse or some kind of failure in the church.

Is there anything in the church's record that was outside of the divine mind when Christ took to himself a human nature, and died on the cross for her sins. Is there anything about the church that Christ did not know when he gave himself up for her?

You see, that is divine love.

And that's the love that Paul is calling us to imitate. All you have to do is go back to verse 1: "Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children."

So we're supposed to imitate God, and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. You see, Paul is saying Christ's love for the church is not only a pattern for marital love, it is the pattern for Christian love.

We're not called to love a perfect church, and we're not even called to love a church to make it perfect, but we're called to love an imperfect church, because that is what divine love does, and that's what we do when we imitate divine love ourselves.

There's really nothing that we know about the Church that Jesus didn't know about it when he gave his life for her. And for that matter, whenever we are tempted to start muttering and complaining and groaning about how lousy church is, we need to remember to hear the divine voice saying, "you're talking about my wife."

There was a very fine church a number of years ago, a very fine church in the greater Philadelphia area that was trying to reach out to people who weren't much interested in church. And it was well - motivated in trying to do so, but unfortunately, the message it put on a billboard along the Schuylkill Expressway was: "Jesus hated church too. Try us out."

There are a lot of churches that are making their mark by being anti church.

Frankly, I usually don't use these kind of words. It's pretty common to say this kind of thing. Usually I don't say it. But there's a whole approach to church planting and being church that basically says: "Church sucks, but not us!"

But they're talking about the Bride of Christ.

God knows all this about his church, but he doesn't say that about her. He says, "Christ loved her and gave Himself up for her."

Now, how does that help us or hurt us? Well, that's the last thing. We're the wedding party. We are the wedding guests. And if we're going to imitate divine love, it means loving the church the way Jesus loved the church. That's the simple lesson. But now we need to take inventory, and, frankly, the inventory is much more varied than we are too proud to admit. There are different kinds of relationships to churches that people have, just like there are different kinds of marriages.

There are some marriages that are power marriages. Somebody marries somebody else because they have power, influence, and status.

Sometimes people marry another person because that person is so attractive that it makes them feel more attractive. It elevates their self-esteem by being with such an attractive person.

People go to churches for connections. It's a status church. "It gives me a status in the eyes of other people." Or they go to a church because it's just a blaze of glory. It's glorious on the outside, and so it makes them feel better because their church is glorious and that doesn't mean the churches are bad.

It just means we must check our motives.

One of the most frequent and one of the most prevailing metaphors for marriage that I find among churches is what I call the mall church.

The big shopping malls are giving way to more local strip malls and the like. But you know, usually you start going to a certain mall because you got that one store you like. That's why I used to always go to Altamonte Mall. We lived near it, and they had Papyrus. It's a paper store. I love paper and pens, and so I'd go to Papyrus at the Altamonte Springs mall store. But then Papyrus closed, so I quit going there.

We even use the language of "church shopping." Because we're looking for the store in that church that services our desires, our consumption needs.

I don't go to the mall to say, "Hey, I'm here to serve you. How can I bless this mall?"

And if you have a shopping mentality toward the church, you're not walking into the church saying, "How can I give my gifts? How can I imitate divine love in this body? How can I serve as a priest in this temple made of living stones?"

Now, when we go to get what we want, and that mall store closes in that church, we go shopping again. Almost sounds like George Carlin when I say it that way, but we go shopping, shopping.

There's an old song, some of you may have heard it:

Put another log on the fire.
Put another log on the fire.
Cook me up some bacon and some beans.
Go out to the car, Jack it up, change the tire,
darn my socks and sew my old blue jeans,
fill my pipe, then go fetch my slippers.
Boil me up another pot of tea.
Put another log on the fire, baby.

Then what's the last line?

Then come and tell me why you're leaving me.

You see that's the kind of marriage, a country western marriage, where a clueless husband expects a wife to do everything for him and then wonders that she's dissatisfied.

And I think much of our dissatisfaction at times with the church is because we come to get and not to give. And if you read the whole scope of Ephesians, the future of the world, the cosmic plan for all time is for God to build a church on earth, and don't pull that "invisible church" thing on me.

Jesus didn't die for an "invisible church." Paul didn't write one letter to an "invisible church."

He wrote these letters to flesh and blood, sinning, grieving, crying, forgiving, repenting, believers in bodies and in chairs and pews or standing or whatever they were. Christ didn't die for some abstract, indefinite church. He died for the visible church.

The challenge of these verses is not simply for us to comprehend that Christ gave himself up for me, but that Christ gave himself up for us, and that he did it fully mindful of our sin and our imperfections and our tarnish, and everything that we see that is true, but yet which his death is destined to transform.

Therefore, the challenge for us is to love the church the way Christ loves the church, and as we do so, to examine our connection, as well as our commitment to the church, be it this church or another church.

If I were your pastor, I'd say, "If you've been coming for a while and you haven't joined, join. You don't have to join here. Just join somewhere else. Make a covenant commitment, the same kind of commitment that God has made to you in Christ, because when you do, you make a covenant commitment to one another, and you start to experience the real blessings of covenant love."

But I can't say that, because I'm not your pastor.

My daughter is 25 and she's not engaged yet. I'm not going to put any pressure on her. She's not going to listen to this sermon, but she is in a very meaningful and good relationship. But no pressure, Rachel, if you're listening.

But you know, and this is kind of unfair to you men who have daughters, I don't mean to be too much of a low bow here. But I started thinking a long time ago about one day having to give her away in a wedding, particularly when she was four years old.

At that time, we were part of Orangewood Presbyterian Church in Maitland, and we had what I call "Christian Halloween," a Fall Festival.

So all the families and people from the community were invited to come, and there were all kinds of booths set up for beanbag toss and throwing. I don't know if they had darts, but in all kinds of different games, they might even have had a dunk pool for one of the pastors. And the kids could go around and play all these little games and get little tickets, and then they could cash their tickets in for candy. And there was no way to lose. And so every kid got their fill of Kool Aid and candy.

We spent a few days ahead of time, asking my daughter, "What do you want to wear? How do you want to dress up?" Because all the kids wore costumes. Well, she had a little white lacy dress that really did look like a wedding gown. And so she said, "I want to go as a bride." And so my wife took one of her headbands and attached some lace on it so it could be like a veil, and she could wear it front or back, either way,

My contribution was to make some shoes. So we took some old shoes that were worn out, and I decided "I'll paint them gold." I couldn't find regular spray paint, so I got Tacky Glue gold, tacky glue paint, and I painted them that morning.

But it's very humid here in Florida, and I had to use a hair dryer to try to dry the paint. And it was pretty dry when we left for the Fall Festival.

Because everybody was coming, they had just mowed the church lawn. That morning, just so the grass was nice and short, so you can see what's coming.

My wife was working one of the booths, so it was a daddy daughter night, and we went around to all the games, and within probably 10 minutes, the veil was in my back pocket. Red Kool Aid ended up on the front of her gown, and her shoes had turned into fuzzy slippers with all the grass clippings, so I'm walking her back to my little truck, and thinking, "Man, you know, someday we're going to play this game for real."

She was at the age where every little boy wants to marry his mom, and every little girl wants to marry your dad, and it's heartbreaking when they find out they can't. But I said someday, someday she'll walk down the aisle, God willing, for real, and she's going to be beautiful. Right now, she's a bit of a cartoon, a caricature, but she's going to be a beautiful, glorious bride that any young man would love to have as his wife.

It started really getting to me. You know, Chuck Swindoll once said that "giving your daughter away in marriage is like handing a Stradivarius to a gorilla."

And it feels that way, doesn't it? Dads, if you've been through it or thinking about going through it, well, sometimes... sometimes the church is a caricature of the bride that we see in Ephesians 5.

But at the end of the story, at the end of the book of Revelation, we see a bride coming out of her chamber prepared for her husband.

And our challenge, our call, is to love that bride through the eyes of Christ, mindful of her present failings, but hopeful and believing of her glorious future.

May God give us the grace. It takes a lot of grace. It takes a lot of faith to believe in the church as the Creed tells us to.

We believe that grace is abundant for those who come to Christ in faith, so let's pray:

"Till with the vision glorious
her longing eyes are blessed.
I till then, the church victorious
will be the church at rest."

Lord, help us to join in the grand picture of us, your people as the bride of Christ, help us to be loved and to love not only you but one another the way you first loved us. We ask it in the name of the great bridegroom himself. Amen.

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