

DIRTY BRIDE? PURE BRIDE?

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Message Study Guide

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We are the Church. In order for revival to happen, we have to prepare for the harvest. How do we do that? We must prepare.

We are also the bride of Christ. How does the bride, the church, prepare for the Day of the Lord?

Ephesians 5:25-27 NKJV

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.

Sanctification and cleansing are the keys to the beginning of revival. Do we sanctify and cleanse ourselves – absolutely not. It is only through Christ's washing of the water of the word that this happens.

God is not coming for a dirty bride. Leviticus 11:44 says "I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy." Peter also said it in 1 Peter 1:16. We have to prepare our mission field for the kingdom that is at hand.

The church has two great tasks to do in its preparation.

TWO GREAT TASKS

1. To prepare as a bride for the bride groom.

In the Bible, God has likened the church to many things— among them a 'body,' a 'flock,' a 'family,' an 'army,' a 'building' and a 'planting.'

- *Now you are the body of Christ. (1 Cor. 12:2)*
- *Be shepherds of God's flock. (1 Pet. 5:2)*
- *It is time for judgment to begin with the family of God. (1 Pet. 4:17)*
- *Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. (an army) (2 Tim. 2:3)*
- *You are... God's building. (1 Cor. 3:9)*
- *They will be called... a planting of the Lord. (Isa. 61:3)*

Another magnificent light in which the Bible portrays the church is as the bride of Christ:

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. (Rev. 19:7)

We must make ourselves ready by becoming the voice of the Lord in our community. We must make ourselves ready by getting every sin and stronghold out of our lives. We must begin to take on the mind of Christ.

The very concept of marriage between God and his people is not a uniquely New Testament idea. It also occurs in the Old Testament.

- *Your Maker is your husband— the Lord Almighty is his name. (Isa. 54:5)*
- *You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah [which means married], for the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married. 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. (Isa. 62:3-5)*
- *I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord. (Hosea 2:19-20, God speaking to his people)*

Jesus speaks of himself as the bridegroom.

- *Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?" Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast." (Mark 2:18-20)*

John the Baptist spoke of Jesus as the bridegroom.

- *"You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' 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 is now complete. He [Jesus] must become greater; I must become less." (John 3:28-30)*

The church is betrothed, espoused and promised as the intended bride of her husband, Jesus Christ. The marriage is not consummated. That is yet to come.

- *I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. (2 Cor. 11:2)*

At the end, we see the bride married to Jesus.

- *"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." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) (Rev. 19:6-8)*
- *I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.... One of the seven angels... said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God. (Rev. 21:2,9-11)*

There will be a bride, who will be presented perfect to Jesus Christ.

- *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. (Eph. 5:25-27)*
- *This is a profound mystery— but I am talking about Christ and the church. (Eph. 5:32)*

The bride-church is called to measure up to the stature of Jesus Christ!

- *Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Rom. 8:29)*
- *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-13)*
- *Unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:13 KJV)*

2. To prepare our mission field for the Day of the Lord.

We must have a voice that prepares the way of the Lord's return. This will usher in revival and the harvest of souls.

Isaiah 40:3-5 NLT

Listen! It's the voice of someone shouting,
"Clear the way through the wilderness
for the Lord!

Make a straight highway through the wasteland
for our God!

⁴ Fill in the valleys,
and level the mountains and hills.

Straighten the curves,
and smooth out the rough places.

⁵ Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.
The Lord has spoken!"

We must SHOUT the things of the Lord. Not just mumble them. Not just a whisper. We must be bold in our stand for the Lord in these last days.

There is a great wedding that will happen on the Day of the Lord. In Matthew 22:9-10 Jesus gave a parable and said, "Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding. So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests."

God wants his house to be full. God wants heaven to be filled with souls. We must go after souls on this earth – going to great lengths to be the voice of God wherever we go and inviting people to the great wedding. We are inviting people to become the Bride of Christ.

Read Malachi 3:1 NKJV.

¹ "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

God will come to us to remove the sin in our lives before His Day of Return. We must allow him to do that work in us before we can truly be his messengers.
Hosea 6:1 NKJV

1 Peter 4:17-18 NKJV

Ezekiel 37:4-5 NKJV

Ezekiel 37:10 NKJV

2 Timothy 2:20-21 NKJV

I believe that Jesus is coming for a Bride that is without spot or blemish, a church that has been changed from glory to glory, a people who are truly walking as the "Sons of God", not bound by sin or sickness, death or decay... A people who are fulfilling the prayer that Jesus prayed – that we are one with God and one with each other... filled with all the fullness of God, clothed with the Glory of God...

For all this to happen there needs to be some major changes taking place. This I believe is where we are now in the plans and purposes of God. God is beginning to move in a new way, to prepare us as a Bride fit for the return of Jesus. Don't expect all these changes to take place during the "rapture". If you do you could be like the foolish virgins who weren't prepared for their master's return... This is the time to press in to all that God has for us, don't wait until tomorrow...

God is preparing new wineskins to hold the new wine He is pouring out upon His church. Old traditions, old moves of God, as good as they were at the time are not going to bring us into what God has for us in this day and generation. Don't expect what God is doing today to look the same as He did in previous generations, He has reserved something special for this day and hour...

2 Corinthians 6:16 - 7:1 NKJV

¹⁶What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

¹⁷"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord.

Touch no unclean thing,
and I will receive you."

¹⁸"I will be a Father to you,
and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

^{7:1}Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

We must put away everything that contaminates the body and spirit. Every sin must be confessed. Every hidden thing revealed. We must go over our lives with a magnifying glass to inspect. How do we do this: The Word of God! It is a mirror that we either see Christ's reflection when we read the Word or we see the opposite of His Word. God wants to wash you with His word.

I'm not talking about a legalistic standard, but God's standard. Not manmade standards – God standards. We want to search the scriptures and let the scriptures search us.

2 Timothy 2:20-21

²⁰In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. ²¹If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

Paul uses the illustration of a large house that has different kinds of vessels. The gold and silver vessels are kept clean so that they may be used for honorable purposes, such as dinner parties. The wood and earthenware vessels are used for dishonorable purposes, perhaps in the kitchen or to carry out garbage or human waste. They often get broken and are cheaply replaced. It would be easy to misapply Paul's point here. If you took his illustration to its logical conclusion, you could say that the dishonorable vessels serve a legitimate function and thus are just as necessary as the gold vessels. But that's not his point. Rather, the large house represents the professing or visible church. Some who associate with the church are truly born again. Others, such as the false teachers Hymenaeus and Philetus, are probably not born again. They are the vessels for dishonor. Paul is saying that no one should be a vessel for dishonor. To put it another way, he is saying that God isn't going to use a garbage pail life to serve the pure gospel to a hungry world.

Can you imagine being a guest at a wealthy home, where you're seated around a magnificent table? The kitchen door swings open and the cook comes out with a garbage pail and starts dishing the food out of the pail. Even so, God isn't going to use dirty lives to serve the good news of Christ to the world. Rather, God uses cleansed people (2:20-21). Note three things: You must choose the type of vessel you will be. Clearly, Paul is presenting us with a choice: Do you want to be a gold or silver vessel, used for honor, or will you be a cheap clay pot, used for dishonor? Again, you may think, "Well, both are used of God, aren't they?" The answer is, "Yes, but you don't want to be used as a vessel for dishonor!" It's interesting that Paul uses this illustration in Romans 9:21-23, although with a different emphasis: "Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory...." In that text, Paul is emphasizing God's sovereign right to do as He pleases with His creation. As the potter, He can do whatever He wants with the clay, and the clay has no right to challenge the potter. But in 2 Timothy 2:20-21, Paul's emphasis is on our responsibility to cleanse ourselves from the defilement of sin, especially the sin of false teaching, so that we will be vessels for honor.

Cleansed people are sanctified, useful to the Master, and prepared for every good work (2:21). Cleansed people are sanctified. The word means, "set apart" unto God. It is used three ways in the Bible. There is positional sanctification. Through the death of Christ, believers have been sanctified once for all (1 Cor. 1:30; 6:11; Heb. 10:10). There is also progressive sanctification. As we grow in Christ, we are progressively conformed to His image (2 Cor. 3:18; 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:3-7). When we see Jesus, we will be like Him, which is ultimate sanctification (1 John 3:1-3). In our text, Paul is talking about the process of progressive sanctification. We must be growing in the process of being separate from all doctrinal and moral evil, set apart as clean vessels for the Lord's use.

Cleansed people are useful to the Master. "Master" is the Greek word from which we get our word des-pot. It emphasizes Christ's absolute lordship. Paul's point here is that dirty vessels are not useful to the Master, except for purposes that you don't want to think about. Have you ever been in a restaurant and

discovered a previous customer's dirty egg crusted on your fork or plate? You would rightly demand a clean fork or plate. The dirty one is not useful. In the same way, if our minds embrace false teaching and our lives are tainted by sin, we are not useful to our Master.

Cleansed people are prepared for every good work. Prepared has the idea of being willing and ready. The cleansed vessel is waiting for the Master to pull it off the shelf and put it to honorable use. Dirty vessels are not ready to be used.

Cleansed people flee from sin and pursue godliness. There are two commands, flee and pursue. We are to flee from youthful lusts and pursue what we may sum up as godliness, broken down under four qualities: righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart, that is, peace with other believers. Cleansed people flee from sin. "Now flee from youthful lusts...." We usually associate the term with sexual temptations, but as one older pastor once said, "Men, they aren't just youthful!" You don't outgrow sexual temptations. Where do you think we got the term, "dirty old man"? The word translated "lusts" may refer to any desires, although it usually refers to sinful desires. So while sexual temptation may be included in "youthful lusts," it's probably not the primary focus. Rather, Paul was probably referring to wrong desires that younger men are more prone to than older men are.

So Paul was telling Timothy that while it is right to defend the faith against serious errors and to stand firm on the central doctrines of Scripture, there is a right and a wrong way to go about it. He will go on (2:23-26) to explain the right way. Here, he is warning against the wrong way, which is to be arrogant about how much you know, impatiently to blast those in error, and to be quarrelsome and self-assertive. The fruits of the Spirit include patience, kindness, and gentleness, along with self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). Youthful impetuosity is not on the list! Paul says to flee from these youthful temptations. The Bible commands us to flee from some other sins. 1 Corinthians 6:18 says, "Flee immorality." Don't flirt with it. Don't stand there and pray about what to do. Don't get near it. If it comes knocking, run for your life! 1 Corinthians 10:14 says, "flee from idolatry."

You may be thinking, "Well, at least that one isn't a problem for me! I'm never tempted to set up an idol." Really? You're never tempted to set up anything in the place that rightfully belongs to God alone? You never allow watching TV or playing computer games to usurp the time that you should spend alone with God or serving Him? Run from anything that pulls you away from full devotion to God! 1 Timothy 6:11 tells us to flee from the love of money. Are you tempted to gamble? Run! It's the love of money that feeds gambling. Do you look at the rich and think, "I want to live that way"? Run! Are you tempted to steal or cheat on your taxes or be greedy rather than generous? Run! Cleansed people flee from sin.

Cleansed people pursue godliness (righteousness, faith, love, and peace). Fleeing and pursuing are opposites. It is not enough just to flee from sin. Also, you must pursue godly character qualities. The word "pursue" is the same word that is elsewhere translated "persecute." It means to go after it with a vengeance. Run hard after these four aspects of godliness: Cleansed people pursue righteousness. This is a general term that refers to right behavior or conformity to the standards of God's Word. God's Word is not vague about how you should live. It doesn't offer helpful hints for happy living, if you feel like giving it a try. It gives us the commandments of God, which are for our good (Deut. 10:13; 1 John 5:3). Obedience to God's Word is not legalism! Paul commands us, "Pursue righteousness!" Go after it with everything you've got! David exclaimed (Ps. 40:8), "I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart." Hebrews 10:7 puts those words in Jesus' mouth. If you're growing to be like Jesus, you're growing in the delight of pursuing righteousness from the heart.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 NKJV

1 John 2:28-29 NKJV