

# THE PERFECT CHURCH

A study about being the bride of Christ

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; That He might sanctify it with the washing of water by the Word, That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” (Eph. 5:25-27)

What an awesome thought...to be the bride of Christ! His chosen and perfect one!

But what makes a perfect church? Is it the name on the side of the building? No. Personally, I have always been and always will be a member of the Church of Christ wherever it is found and whatever name it carries. We have found groups just using the Bible and teaching the exact things the church in this country teaches all over the world. The very thing that attracted my father to the church keeps me there: No creed but the Bible; no “articles of faith”; no “joining” the church; attempting to always “Speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent and not trying to explain baptism away, but simply presenting what the Scriptures teach about it. Do we get things wrong sometimes? Of course we do. And while the name Church of Christ is certainly a Biblical name, the name is used (as far as I can find) only twice in the pages of the New Testament: once in Rom 16:16 “Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.” and indirectly in Gal 1:22 where it says “ And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ.” A more Biblical name (used again and again) is “the church of God.” Second, as the expression goes “A rose by any other name would still smell as sweet.” It is not what we call ourselves, but rather what we are that determines whether or not we’re God’s church. As Christ tells the church in Sardis in Rev. 3:1 “I know they works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.”

So, who or what is this perfect church? This is a question that I began pondering when our daughter, Rita, came back to live with us. She had been used to a church whose services exhibited a great deal of energy. And the impression she had of the Southern Hills Church of Christ was that it was unfeeling and distant. Fortunately, she found out later that it is actually a very loving, very giving church. It was just not what she was used to.

So, what is this perfect church? Well, certainly not the one you belong to because as soon as you became a part of it, it was no longer perfect.

I asked my daughter what she thought made the perfect church and I liked what she had to say: “The perfect church can’t be built and it’s something you can never have. You can have a perfect church building” (and having worked in construction, I know that’s not possible) “but God says no one is perfect; no not one. So there’s no way to have the perfect church.” “You can have the presence of the perfect one...but we the people of God *who make up* the church...are not perfect. But we *can* strive to be Christ-like.”

In the end, what makes a church perfect in God’s eyes and qualified to be the bride of Christ, holy and without blemish is when we are striving to be like Christ. What does such a church look like?

## #1 Compassion

A. “And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him. And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy. And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? And they held their peace. And he took *him*, and healed him, and let him go; And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day? And they could not answer him again to these things.” (Luke 14:2-6 )

B. Discussion:

Jesus, in this passage and others, seems to be breaking parts of The Law. He compares what He is doing on one occasion, to David taking the show-bread and states quite plainly that what David did was contrary to The Law. (Matt. 12:1-8; I Sam 21:1-6)

What does this tell you about the importance of compassion? In what ways does the Church show compassion?

C. Compassion – important enough to trump law.

Emergency workers routinely break various laws. But we commend them for their service rather than punish them for the laws they’ve broken.

How does this work out as we live the Christian life? Let’s look at one possible situation we as Christians might encounter: Paul, in Heb 10:25 gives the church some instruction: he tells us “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” And yet, if, on the way to church, we see a mother with six children broken down on the side of the road, do we neglect her to do as Paul said and not forsake the assembly? No. The law of compassion is a greater law. Love IS the great commandment. And if we are to be the “perfect” church, we will continuously be striving to show compassion to those around us.

## #2 Humility

A. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” (Phil 2:5-8)

B. Discussion:

Jesus exposes our tendency toward pride and self-honor by His own humility. In vs. 9 of Phil. 2, Paul tells us that because of His humbling Himself, He was exalted. Jesus, in the parable of the chief seats (Luke 14:8-11) tells us “For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

How does a church practice humility? Can you think of examples of the church being humble?

C. Humility – the thing that lifts us up

The church that has “arrived” is the church that will never get there. Because when we think we have it all figured out and know it all we deny that God has anything more He can teach us. That was part of the scribes and Pharisees problem. What Christ said didn’t fit in with what they had learned, so they rejected the messenger and His message. Because someone is different from us does not necessarily mean they’re totally wrong. And though they may be, we need to first be humble enough to examine every issue and second, to accept valid criticism and be willing to change. We need to be quick to correct our own faults and attitudes and slow to judge others for theirs. As Jesus said in Matt. 7:1-5 “<sup>1</sup>Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam *is* in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

### #3 Accepting

A. My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?" (James 2:1-4)

B. Discussion:

One of the remarkable things about Jesus was that He treated all with which He came in contact with respect and honor. Perhaps my two favorite examples are the incident of the woman who is identified simply as "a sinner" who washed Jesus feet with tears and anointed them with costly ointment and the story of Zacchaeus. (Luke 7:36-48; Luke 19:1-10)

Why do some who enter our doors not see our compassion? Are we accepting and compassionate to all? How could we change to better express and extend our love to the hurting in the world around us and who enter our doors.?

C. Accepting – we are all equal in Christ

Accepting the unwashed, the unlovely and the ill is much easier when we remember two things: first, that Christ, who (unlike ourselves) is perfect, accepted all and second, that we, too, were (unless we claim perfection) and still are unlovely sinners in need of God's grace. As Paul says in I Cor. 6:9-11 "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

It is important to “speak where the Bible speaks” and to be “silent where the Bible is silent.” This is something I feel very strongly about. But I am reminded that the scribes and Pharisees kept The Law better than anyone of their generation. The Bible, conversely, when it speaks about Jesus does not focus on His keeping The Law, but rather says of Him that “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him.” (Acts 10:38) “These ought ye to have done and not to leave the other undone.” (Matt 23:23)

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (Jn 3:16) The perfect church is the reflection of that love to the world.

## IF WE ARE THE BODY

It's crowded in worship today  
As she slips in trying to fade into the faces  
The girls' teasing laughter is carrying farther than they know  
Farther than they know

*But if we are the body  
Why aren't His arms reaching?  
Why aren't His hands healing?  
Why aren't His words teaching?  
And if we are the body  
Why aren't His feet going?  
Why is His love not showing them there is a way?  
There is a way*

A traveler is far away from home  
He sheds his coat and quietly sinks into the back row  
The weight of their judgmental glances  
Tells him his chances are better out on the road

Jesus paid much too high a price  
For us to pick and choose who should come  
And we are the body of Christ

*But if we are the body  
Why aren't His arms reaching?  
Why aren't His hands healing?  
Why aren't His words teaching?  
And if we are the body  
Why aren't His feet going?  
Why is His love not showing them there is a way?  
Jesus is the way*