

The Bride of Christ

"Who is the bride of Christ?" Yes, what does the Bible as a whole say?

Jesus used the entire Hebrew Scriptures and viewed it as the Word of God. "He said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.'" (Luke 24:44) Early Christians viewed the writings of Paul and other apostles as inspired scripture. "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction." (2 Peter 3:15-16) "But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold." (Jude 17)

"Jesus does not refer to his followers as his bride. In fact, he NEVER did." Unfortunately, this statement is false.

"**The revelation from Jesus Christ**, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John," "I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned **I saw** seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was **someone like a son of man**, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest." "**Write**, therefore, **what you have seen**, what is now and what will take place later." (Revelation 1:1, 12, 13, 19) The Revelation plainly states that it is from Jesus Christ Himself, which he gives to John the Apostle, whom Jesus instructs to write down the series of visions which Jesus shows him. Obviously, the Revelation is in highly symbolic or figurative language - not literal. Nevertheless, there is plenty of evidence using Revelation along with the rest of the Bible to identify the bride. It is only possible to understand Revelation, as it is fittingly placed last in the order of Bible books, by referencing the entire Bible.

"Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: '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 God's holy people.) Then the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!' And he added, 'These are the true words of God.'" (Revelation 19:6-9)

The praise of the vast multitude (vv. 1-4) as a heavenly choir now turns to: (1) The coming reign of the Lord. (2) The joyful marriage of the Lamb. The **wife of the Lamb (Christ) is the church. (Ephesians 5:32)**, those redeemed from all nations (Rv 5:9-10; 7:9) by his blood (1:5-6; 5:9-10). Since these descriptions are equally true of the vast multitude (7:9; 19:1,6) and the "heaven dwellers" (12:12; 13:6), it appears that there is a shift in imagery from the same group of people being portrayed as a choir to being the wife of the Lamb.

The imagery of a wedding to express the intimate relationship between God and His people has its roots in the prophetic literature of the OT (e.g., Isa 54:5-7; Hos 2:19). This is the culmination of human history—the judgment of the wicked and the wedding of the Lamb and his bride, the church. The church consists of all faithful believers from all time. The bride's clothing stands in sharp contrast to the gaudy clothing of the great prostitute of 17:4 and 18:16. The bride's clothing represents the good deeds of the believers.

"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**. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ." (2 Corinthians 11:2-3)

"Here also, Paul is using the husband and wife relationship as a metaphor to show the loyalty, fidelity and chastity that the congregation should have toward Jesus." -- TRUE!

"He is not saying that the congregation would actually marry Jesus. Such a thing would be out of step with Paul's view of sexual morality."

Here, you use a "straw man" argument, which is a misrepresentation of opposing arguments in place of the real point at issue, which is: Who is the bride of Christ? The issue is not whether or not Jesus gets married. The Bible absolutely says he does get married - not in a physical sense, as your "straw man" argument seems to imply, but in a spiritual or symbolic sense.

Paul cannot bear the thought that there might be any rival to Christ and his gospel. As their spiritual father (cf. 6:13), Paul has promised the Corinthian believers to Christ, who is frequently depicted in the NT as the bridegroom with the church portrayed as his bride (Mt 9:15; Jn 3:29; Ro 7:4; 1 Co 6:15; Eph 5:23-32; Rev 19:7-9; 21:2). Pure virgin pictures Christians undefiled by the doctrines of false teachers (v. 4). So the church is called to be a pure bride to one husband—Christ. This metaphor goes back to the OT, where Israel is the bride of God (Isa 54:5; 62:5). Paul saw himself as the best man who acted for the bridegroom (compare John 3:29).

You quote Ephesians 5:21-27. Notice a little different emphasis which highlights the answer to the question: who is the bride of Christ?

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now **as the church submits to Christ**, so also **wives should submit to their husbands** in everything. 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." (Ephesians 5:21-27)

With this emphasis, the answer becomes obvious that the bride of Christ is the church. You omit quoting from two of the most important verses in this context, since the point is even more obvious that the bride of Christ is the church.

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery—but **I am talking about Christ and the church.**" (Ephesians 5:31-32) The profound truth of the union of Christ and his "bride" the church is beyond unaided human understanding. It is not that the relationship of husband and wife provides an illustration of the union of Christ and the church, but that the basic reality is the latter, with marriage a human echo of that relationship.

"So it does not look like John is saying Jesus is marrying a city either." John absolutely says the Lamb Jesus marries his bride, the Holy City, New Jerusalem.

"I saw the Holy City, the **new Jerusalem**, coming down out of heaven from God, **prepared as a bride** beautifully dressed for her husband." (Revelation 21:2) The bride of the Lamb, introduced in 19:7-9, is now pictured as the Holy City, New Jerusalem. This picture of Jerusalem as a beautiful bride (see Isa 61:10) contrasts starkly with the vision of Babylon as the prostitute (17:4-5; 18:2-3).

The symbolic vision of Revelation 21:9-22:9 depicting the New Jerusalem uses vivid word pictures to describe the bride, the wife of the Lamb—all those who respond to Christ's message of salvation (see 21:2; 22:17; Eph 5:22-32).

"I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." (Revelation 21:9) Well, what does the angel show John? "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." (21:10) The angel's offer to show John **the bride, the wife of the Lamb**, parallels the angel's offer to show him the judgment of Babylon in 17:1.

"The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let the one who hears say, 'Come!' Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life." (Revelation 22:17) The Lamb's wife (see 21:9) is the church, the people of God. Both the Holy Spirit and the bride, the church, extend the invitation to all the world to come to Jesus and experience the joys of salvation in Christ.

The obvious Biblical answer to the question "who is the bride of Christ" is the church itself. Certainly, Christians are described by numerous other metaphors in the Bible, none of which negate the metaphor of the "bride". For example, Christians are called "salt", "light", "slaves", "guests", 'faithful stewards', "wise virgins", "workers in the vineyard", 'doing business with talents or minas', and "sheep", etc. The Bible is full of word-pictures. We can use the Bible itself to interpret them. Where the Bible is specific, we can be specific as to a word picture such as "the bride". Where the Bible is not specific, it is dangerous to make unfounded assertions, as this type of thing has caused many problems through the centuries, which is another subject itself.

Agape,