

Is the Bride Ready?

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By Dave Butts

As a minister of the Gospel, I have officiated at many weddings. There are so many details to be attended to for a wedding to take place: guests must be seated, candles lit, songs played, aisle runner in place. But the most important detail is the essential one...is the bride ready? Until she is ready and in place, the wedding cannot begin, no matter how many other details have been taken care of.

The Lord has taught me so much about the preparation of the Bride of Christ for her wedding day. Scripture is clear in its presentation of the Church as the Bride of Christ. Revelation 19:7-8 is a beautiful picture of this couple and their wedding day: "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.)

Actually, the idea of the Lord being married to His people is not unique to the New Testament. The Old Testament writers often referred to Israel as a bride, pledged to be married to the Lord, the Bridegroom. Isaiah writes, "as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:5). Jeremiah continues this imagery:

"I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown...Does a maiden forget her jewelry, a bride her wedding ornaments? Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number" (Jeremiah 2:2, 32).

How could God express in any better way His desire for intimacy with His people than to use the illustration of a man and woman who court and then are betrothed to one another, finally resulting in a wedding and the consummation of their union? Throughout Scripture, this is God's expressed desire and ultimate purpose for His people.

As I have been studying the Scriptures that relate to this powerful picture of the Lord and His people, I've become increasingly aware of the need to prepare the Bride for her wedding day. As we move closer to the day of the Lord's return, this becomes an increasingly urgent task. Referring again to Revelation 19:7, two things are indicated about the preparation of the Bride. First, she will be ready for the wedding. Secondly, she herself is the one who will make the preparations for the wedding: "For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready."

Without being critical, does it seem to you today that the Church, the Bride of Christ is ready for the wedding? If not, then it is time to bear down and concentrate on this preparatory work. It is time to prepare the Bride for her wedding day!

What does it mean for the Bride to be prepared to meet the Bridegroom? It would probably take a book to answer that completely, but I believe we can make some movement toward understanding this by looking at just a couple of Scripture passages that teach us eternal truths about the Bride and the Bridegroom.

The first truth that is a key to preparation is the issue of ownership or belonging. In John 3:29 we read, "The bride belongs to the bridegroom." Most cultures today are not comfortable with the idea of the marriage relationship being one of ownership of one person by another. But we do understand what it means to belong to someone. There is not just a legal connection, but a passionate, emotional

attachment.

The Church, as the Bride of Christ, belongs to Jesus. It is not only a legal issue accomplished at Calvary, but it is also a matter of the heart. It is a love relationship in which no other love or desire may enter in to mar or damage the relationship. I remember singing the hymn ***Now I belong to Jesus*** many times as I was growing up. It is time for the Church to realize that we belong to Him and begin to nurture that love relationship.

Another truth about preparation of the Bride of Christ is found in Peter's Second Epistle as he teaches about the Second Coming of Christ. He writes, "So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him" (2 Pet. 3:14). Peter gives us these very practical areas of preparation for the Wedding of Christ and His people. This passage is one of the reasons I believe a great revival is coming for the Church. A revived Church is one that is consciously turning from sin in repentance and longing to be found spotless and blameless. A revived Church has submitted to the Lordship and Authority of Christ and will be at peace with her Bridegroom.

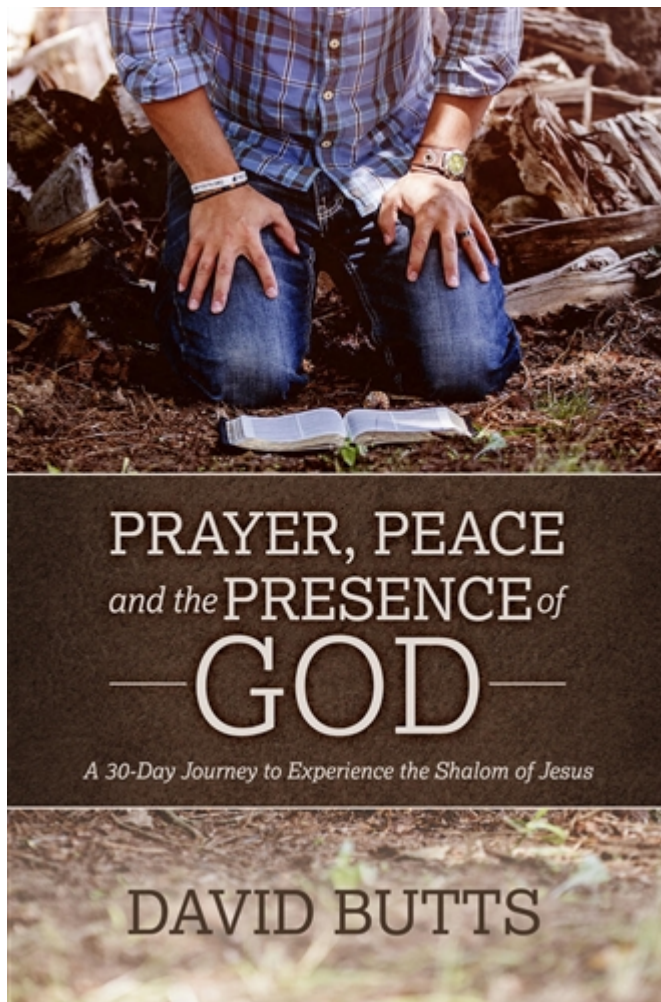
The Apostle John saw a vision of a prepared Bride: "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (Rev.21:2). Is that a passion of your life yet? Are you committed to seeing the Church prepared for the Coming of her Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus?

As I prayed and studied over this topic, one particular day I was taught something hard by the Lord. In the midst of a prayer time, I pictured in my mind's eye a bride standing by the altar, waiting for the bridegroom. But as I continued in prayer, there came one of those sacred moments in which the Lord placed a thought in my mind and made the simple statement: "The Bride is not at the altar yet."

A simple statement of fact, yet also a rebuke and an encouragement. The Church...the Bride is not at the altar waiting for the Bridegroom. The bride is off doing a multitude of things, but very little of it concerns waiting at the altar for her Beloved. The rebuke was clear....but so was the encouragement.

It is time to bring the Bride to the altar. It is time for the Church to become a House of Prayer. The kneeling Church becomes the Bride at the altar, prepared for the Bridegroom.

“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come’” (Revelation 22:17)!



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