

A Washed Bride Presented

Ephesians

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Bible Text: Ephesians 5:26-27
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Let us open God's word tonight, brothers and sisters, to the book of Ephesians, Ephesians 5, and tonight we will consider just two verses from this section, Ephesians 5:26-27. I'm going to begin reading a little strangely in the center of verse 25 so as to give us the effect of what is coming in verses 26 and 27 which will be our concentration. So let us give our ears to God's word as I begin with verse 25b.

25 ... Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 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.

Thus ends the reading of God's word this evening. Let us pray for his illumination and his grace to us tonight.

Our Father in heaven, we come to You not tonight as those who humble ourselves before You as our God, not only as our Creator God but especially as our Redeemer God. Lord, as we have just sung a moment ago, Lord, why was I a guest? Lord, we have only one answer and that is Your grace. We praise and we glorify You that we are Your guests, that we are Your children. We acknowledge that we are just mere recipients of Your mercy and we are so grateful this night for it. Lord, as we come to Your word now, we come, Lord, looking for sustenance for our souls, we are looking, Lord, for Your Spirit to again set our eyes upon our Savior and strengthen our trust in Him. Lord, we pray tonight You would illumine our hearts and minds to this particular text of Scripture and may You, Father, indeed apply it to Your people for their good and for Your glory. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

You may be seated.

Well, our focus for some time now has been upon the subject of marriage. In fact, the series that we have been going through on marriage was a total of nine sermons over the past several weeks delving into these paragraphs concerning this divinely ordered relationship between a husband and a wife. Technically, we have concluded that series on

marriage, even though tonight we're returning to a couple of verses that are found within the paragraph where Paul is addressing the husband in this marriage relationship which we'll actually find these two verses particularly to have quite an overlap with the subject we considered this morning out of chapter 30 of Exodus. It's not uncommon for us to find in Paul's teaching where he may be actually teaching on a particular practical note or a practical matter and includes within that subject matter some very potent theological gems concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, and that happens to be the case here with verses 26 and 27.

The purpose of this passage is to elaborate on the larger point that he's making in this paragraph as we've already seen, touching upon how a husband is to love his wife, and the character of that love, of course, is to be sacrificial. That's why he begins, "Husbands, love your wives even as Christ has loved the church and gave Himself for her." Not in any way to undermine the concept of passionate romantic love, Jesus' love took the form of active sacrifice for the welfare of his bride, which is the point that Paul is making and he's applying that to the husband.

Now we considered this important before when we were considering the aim and the character of Christ's love for his bride, but tonight we see that Paul has actually provided for us very helpful content that gives us insight like an open window into a greater depth of understanding of what Jesus has actually done for us as our Savior, our husband, which is the position we're to see him in, in this passage. Now there are a number of layers I'll mention to you ahead of time, to this text. It's like peeling an onion so this will require a little patience as we peel through one layer after another to see and hopefully get to the heart of what it is that Paul is teaching us about our Lord in this passage.

We should first note just the need for a perfect bride without spots. He's talking here about the bride being none other than the church of Jesus Christ, and in order for her to be his bride, she must be perfect. We find in the book of Revelation that the final consummation of the age is likened to a wedding, indeed we find language such as this out of Revelation, the last couple of chapters, "Come, I'll show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb," and it's talking there, of course, about the church of the Lord Jesus Christ that is his bride and of whom he is the husband. But this Lamb's bride is one that's perfectly holy. She's without any spots and she's without any wrinkles, she's without any blemishes, to use the language that Paul does here in Ephesians. In fact, she can appear with him in the presence of the Father no other way but a perfect spotless bride without blemish, and thus she must be nothing short of the word in our text, glorious, full of glory, perfectly glorious, presented with her husband, the Lord Jesus. That is nothing less than what's known as the eschatological radiance and brightness of this bride; that that brightness and that radiance that we associate with the eschaton to come, on that great day this bride is presented with this radiant glory, indeed, that is the wedding day upon the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Much like a bride whenever we have modern-day weddings, it's very customary, at least in the United States, for the bride to be wearing a white dress, this emblem of purity or flawlessness that is not characteristic of anything other than really that consummation day when the bride of Christ is presented

not in her ugliness, not in her spots and her blemishes, but is presented perfectly pure and perfectly holy, but perfect in righteousness not in just a white robe.

Oh, how we long for that day to come when Christ will come again and we will all be at the marriage supper of the Lamb, but what is that that he has done for us to secure us that hope of that great day? Some of those details we are given in our text tonight. In verse 26, we read, "that He might sanctify her." That he might sanctify her. Now often when we use the word "sanctify" or you hear the word used, "sanctification," or "sanctified," that language we often associate with the theological doctrine of sanctification that predominantly deals with the progression of being made holy, our hearts being renovated and all the need of continual processing of renovation of our souls, and we all, of course, are in process.

The word "sanctify" which is "to make holy," indeed it can legitimately theologically be associated with such a concept of progression over time, of a continual renewal or renovation of the heart, yet you actually might find it surprising that most every time in sacred Scripture that that word "sanctify" is used, it's actually used in a definitive manner and not in a progressive manner and a definitive manner not over a space of time or duration of renovating. That's why we use often the categories and I think these are very important categories to have situated in our minds, of definitive sanctification and progressive sanctification. We often when we use the word "sanctify," we exclusively use it in that ongoing, progressive, sanctifying way, however, our text tonight as in most of the Pauline epistles, sanctify is used in this definitive way, this definitive sanctification.

To sanctify definitively is to consecrate something. To consecrate it. To set it apart, to consecrate it into the Lord's service for the Lord's purposes. Now there is many examples in Scripture that we could go to to maybe help us in grasping this concept of definitively sanctifying something, like for instance, an object of the tabernacle, an object within the tabernacle would be considered sanctified. It's consecrated. You could take something like the ark of the covenant that you couldn't even touch without dying because it was consecrated to the use of the Lord himself. Land, take for instance. God had consecrated the land of Canaan. That's the reason why there was the chereb warfare that was engaged in there in that land as the people of God were called to go in and wipe out the enemies of God. Is it because the enemies of God were of some race or some ethnicity? No, it happened to do with the plot of land that their feet were standing on. Only those within the context of Canaan, within the lines of Canaan, were subject to chereb warfare. Those outside were not. Why? Because the land had been sanctified by God himself. He had consecrated that particular plot of real estate. The same is true with persons like the priesthood. The priests were set apart, sanctified, consecrated for a particular task in the Lord's service. We also find in holy Scripture that the Lord sanctifies time. It's kind of a shift in our reasoning when we move from an object being sanctified to time being sanctified, but that is essentially what the Sabbath is. It is a consecrating not of an object or a person, but it's actually taking that same concept and applying it to time where he actually has consecrated time and set it apart for a specific purpose.

Again, all of these things that are consecrated or set apart are done so for the Lord's service. It moves from being something in the common arena to being in the uncommon arena because it is indeed consecrated and what Paul is telling us in this passage is that Christ has so chosen to sanctify his bride, to consecrate his bride. She is set apart by him, for him, for his special purposes. She is not just some common gal. No, she is most uncommon as his wife, wholly set apart for him. She is his glorious bride.

But how, how is it that she is so glorious? How is it that she is sanctified? Well, she's not. She is full of spots. She herself is full of wrinkles, of blemishes. She is, to use the word Paul does here, unholy, and this is what Paul next takes up, is how does the Lord consecrate her who does have spots and blemishes and is unholy. Well, the Scripture tells us by cleansing her with the washing of water. We're going to that next layer. He is to sanctify her. How is that? By cleansing her with the washing of water. Paul uses a participle of means, as it's called, which is often rendered using the word "by." So "by cleansing her" or "by the means of cleansing her" might help in grasping what's going on here. He's touching on the means by which she will be sanctified and be consecrated.

The idea here is that she needs to be cleansed, she needs to be purified. Cleanse her with the washing of water. Again, we're not talking about an ongoing gradual progression of purification but we're talking about a purification event. A purification event, bathing or washing with water was a common form of Old Testament purification so as to remove or cleanse someone from some defect. You find that in the Aaronic priesthood. You also find that with an Israelite that may have a disease of some sort; there would be a purification washing that would be needed to cleans from that particular defilement.

Now while there is some discussion related to what the washing with water is in reference to in this passage, the large majority find it most naturally a reference to baptism and I think there is legitimacy to seeing this cleansing her with the washing of water as in reference to baptism. It would surely be most natural for the early church to associate language such as washing with water most naturally with the whole subject of baptism, indeed the linkage between washing with water and anything related to the work of Christ's redemption or when you're talking about Christian consecration, especially in the early church were you have a multitude of people who are coming to faith in Christ for the very first time, the whole subject matter of Christian consecration would most naturally in the early church be associated with what they look around seeing everybody happening to them. They're being washed with water in the waters of baptism.

Well, what is baptism in relation to washing? Well, we need to remember that with any sacrament there are two parts: there is the sign and there's the thing that signified. That is true with the Lord's Supper, for instance, that is also true with baptism. There is the sign and the thing that is signified.

Now what does this external sign of baptism signify? Well, in part the cleansing from the blemish of sin. Cleansing is very much at the heart of identifying what baptism is. It's the remission of sins. It is expiation, the removal of sin. Water washing sign, think about it, if

you water wash something there is a visual effect there of cleansing. That sign is signifying something spiritual, a spiritual cleansing, a spiritual remission of sins.

Now remember that there is a sacramental union between a sign and a thing signified. That certainly means that the names and the effects of one can be attributed to the other. We even find this in holy Scripture where you have the name being used for both the sign and the thing signified because of that sacramental union. Take an example of the Lord's Supper, Jesus says, "This is My body." It's because there's a sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified that you can actually use the thing signified for the sign and use the same language for sign as the thing signified because there's a sacramental union between the two.

So Paul is indicating that all of the spiritual cleansing which is signified in the sign of baptism, is what Christ has come to do to sanctify his bride. Now how does all that is signified in the sign of baptism come to affect so as to truly render the bride sanctified? Well, it's for this reason that Paul uses the next three words, again, we're peeling to the next layer, by the word. Do you see that? That he might sanctify her by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. It's only through the Holy Spirit's operation by the word that he actually regenerates the heart. It's only the Holy Spirit's activity through the word that he actually brings life to his elect.

This is an appropriate time, I think, for us to address the necessity of faith in relation to baptism. If one does not have genuine faith in Christ Jesus, then there is no new heart to even speak of. If one does not have their hope and their trust in Christ, there is no spiritual life to speak of. Why? Because only if one is savingly united to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith is one even part of his bride. One does not even have claim to being his bride and to spend eternity with her husband if she does not believe upon that husband, which is the Lord Jesus Christ.

The waters of baptism are but a sign. One may have the waters of baptism and be externally consecrated in the visible church and yet not be a member of the invisible church. As the older theologians used to put it, to be a member of the administration of the covenant of grace one may be, and yet not partake of the substance of the covenant of grace which is Christ Jesus. Even some of that language you see coming out even in our confession tonight about the administration of the covenant versus the substance of the covenant. One who is externally baptized, externally consecrated into the visible church does not equate them with being truly a part of the invisible church, truly a part of the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ. One may have the sign of the administration of the covenant of grace but not really believe on the substance of the covenant of grace which is what the whole thing is about anyway. That's what this sign is pointing to.

One may be visibly united to the people of God but not have faith like Abraham. That's Paul's whole point in Romans where Paul says, "Not all of the children of Abraham are children of Abraham." You see how he makes the distinction. One may be externally a part of and a member of the visible church and not be a member of the invisible and not have saving faith.

He also goes on to say, I believe this also is in Romans, not all who receive circumcision, the sign, were truly circumcised in the heart, the thing that is signified. Sign, thing signified. Just because one has the sign does not mean that one truly has embraced by faith what that sign is all about. One may be rendered externally consecrated by membership in the covenant of grace but not truly be holy. Maybe externally holy and consecrated as a member of the covenant but not truly be clean by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit which only comes through the word of the Gospel.

That's the reason why Paul includes here the word. The word. By cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. Now is there any advantage to being part of the people of God? Is there any value to receiving the sign? That's almost a direct quote from Scripture, isn't it? Paul asks that very question, is there any significance and any value to circumcision? And he says, what's his answer? Much in every way, great in every way. Don't think for a moment that it's just meaningless and inconsequential. No, there's huge benefits. There's huge consequences but they're not saving in themselves if one is not cleansed with the washing of the water by the word by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. This is a wonderful place we're bringing out the significance of baptism and the difference between being a part of its administration of the covenant and actually embracing the Christ of the covenant.

Well, we should all ask the question that we should be asking our neighbors as well, have we received the word of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and been brought to life? Have I truly been regenerated? Do I have new life in me? Have I gone through simply ritual and simply through religious practice but not truly been regenerated and have a new heart? Has our heart been struck down by the law of God, exposing our great need for a Savior? Has the word so brought us to look to the Savior, Christ, as the only way of salvation, the only grounds of our hope of being cleansed and being made holy, knowing that Christ Jesus is the only way by which we are found without blemish because of his love? Has the word of the Gospel of Christ worked in you and me such that we know that he is ours and we are his? That he is my husband and I am a part of his bride? Oh, what comfort to know that in him we are perfectly righteous through faith, and oh, what longing sets in our hearts as we look forward to the future of that wedding day, following these brief moments that we have on this fallen earth when upon his Second Coming, his bride he will present to himself glorious, without spot, without wrinkle, without blemish or any such thing, as Paul says there in chapter 5. You will be at the wedding feast. You'll be there completely holy and without blemish. Christ, our perfect husband, so loved his church and gave himself for her to sanctify her for that day. May its prospect, even its prospect make our eyes to shine and our heads to lift and our confidence to cease from waning.

Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, we thank You for this definitive sanctification that our Lord Jesus Christ ensured that we would have through His work of redemption. We thank You, Father, that You have even given us a sign that points to that very reality, the need for a

new heart, a new life. Lord, we pray that we would not be those who have only merely received the external sign but have truly believed upon that One who is the essence of the covenant, the thing that's signified. And Father, we pray that You would give us hearts to believe and to continue to believe and rest upon Him. Lord, we pray that our Husband would become all the more satisfying to us. We pray that our Husband would be all the more front and center in our walk, seeking to please Him and serve Him and submit to Him as our good and loving and perfect Husband. Father, though we know we are with many blemishes and many spots in ourselves, Lord, we look forward to that day when those spots and blemishes will in all actuality in Your very presence be gone. We long and look forward to that day. We thank You that through the work of our Lord Jesus we have this washing, this definitive sanctifying through His work for us. We have no other boast but in Him and we have no other One to whom we look even as we await that great day but our great Husband. Lord, set our eyes upon Him and may you cause them to be lightened and glad. We pray this in His name. Amen.