

## The Church as bride, 2Corinthians 11:2-4; Revelation 19:7-9

1. The Bible has a high ideal of human marriage; but we live in a fallen world in which divorce, singleness, widowhood etc. are common, also in our church. This made it tempting to avoid the subject of the Church as bride, but I still decided to tackle it. My aim is not to condemn anyone or to address our (often imperfect) human relationships. We will not talk about human relationships, but about the biblical ideal for the Church.
2. We know that the Church is fallible, not least because it consists of fallible people. On the contrary, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that the official Church is infallible. This is a strange illusion.
3. In the Bible 'Bride of Christ' is a metaphor for the Church, as it is already for Israel in the Old Testament (Isaiah 61:10, 62:5; Jeremiah 2:2). As a metaphor, it has its limits, just like the metaphors of the flock and the body which we considered in previous weeks. This means that we can't say anything about the gender of church members or about having children.
4. Being the bride of Christ is about:
  - Jesu's self-giving for us. He died in our place to set us free, to buy us and to own us.
  - Joyful anticipation, desire, love. Jesus will come soon to bring his bride home. Are we looking forward to that great moment, or are we clinging to our lives here on earth? If so, why would that be?
  - [Technical point] A legal relationship, which is similar to the old British 'law of coverture'. Coverture was a legal doctrine in common law whereby, upon marriage, a woman's legal rights and obligations were subsumed by those of her husband. Coverture arises from the legal fiction that a husband and wife are one person.

Similarly, in a way believers have no independent status before God, because God sees them as he sees his Son Jesus. We lose our independent status, we become members of a new family and we adopt the name of Jesus, 'Christians'. As Jesus is righteous before God, so are we.

This is obviously very different from the role and position of women in modern society!]

- My main point is that the ideal for a bride is purity, cleanness, integrity. How is that with us, individually and as a fellowship? Are we clean, free from sin? Are we ready to meet the bridegroom?
5. [Another complicated point] Our justification, our acceptance by God, is a one-off fact, but our sanctification (becoming pure and clean) is an ongoing process. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Do we allow him to work in us? Our purity is not a condition for acceptance by God, but a fruit of grace and justification. Purity is not a matter of legalism but of living according to God's will, imitating Jesus.

### Justification

### Sanctification

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|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| □ What God does at the beginning | □ What God does subsequently |
| □ God declares us OK             | □ We become increasingly OK  |
| □ Yes or no (0% or 100%)         | □ By degrees (1 to 99%)      |
| □ Legal                          | □ Moral                      |
|                                  | □ Leads to purity            |

6. I could have come up with my own subjective list of elements of purity, but I rather decided to listen to Paul. In Colossians 3 Paul describes our purification thus:  
‘Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other.  
Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.’
7. The bridegroom will come soon; is his bride ready?