

A SHOTGUN WEDDING FOR THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

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Introduction

A shotgun wedding is an unfortunate situation in which the father of the bride, with shotgun in hand, “encourages” the prospective bridegroom to marry his daughter. The purpose for the bride father’s firearm is because he has the mindset the bride has been defiled by the bridegroom in some fashion, and this is his method of setting things right for the honor of his daughter, the bride.

Two issues are examined in this essay. The first is who comprises the Bride of Christ? For many years, teachers, preachers, elders, deacons, and others, have avowed that the Bride to be is the Body of Christ, the Church. Are they attempting to marry someone who does not belong, or force someone where they do not belong? It is striking that there is ONLY ONE verse in Scripture that explicitly states who the Bride of Christ is. Theologians and scholars are standing by, with a shotgun in hand, emphatically maintaining this union of the Church and Christ will happen, while all the time excluding the implications of this verse.

The second issue is, what authority does Scripture have over those who teach what it says? Are we to question those who explain what a passage states, even though we know it does not say it? Are we more willing to hold to study notes, commentaries or an explanation that is contrary to the explicit meaning of Scripture, even though it goes contrary to what Scripture says? Are we willing to believe in anything other than the holy, inspired, inerrant Word of God? It is the hope of this author that the reader will be like the Bereans, who “received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

Does Anyone Here Have Good Reason Why These Two Should Not Be Wed?

The following verses clearly indicate who will be the Bride of Christ, those participating, and the main characters: the bridegroom, his attendants, a friend of the groom (a sort of best man), the groom’s father and the ten women invited to the marriage feast (sort of like brides maids).

The wedding party/The groom

Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast (Matt 9:14, 15).

And they said to Him, "The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers; the disciples of the Pharisees also do the same; but Yours eat and drink." And Jesus said to them, "You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? "But the days will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days" (Luke 5:33-35).

In all three Gospel accounts, the same situation is described: Jesus is questioned why His disciples do not fast, while John the Baptist's disciples do fast. The way in which Jesus answers is by giving an illustration of a bridegroom and the attendants of the bridegroom. He implicitly states that He is the bridegroom and the disciples are the attendants of the Bridegroom.

The Best Man

"He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. And so this joy of mine has been made full" (John 3:29).

Near the end of John the Baptist's ministry, he turns his attention to the bride and groom. It is like the toast given at wedding receptions where the best man stands up, congratulates the couple, and gives them his best wishes. At the start of the toast all eyes are focused upon best man as he speaks, and when he is done, all attention is then given to the couple. As John states in the next verse: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

The Bridesmaids

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those virgins rose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the prudent answered, saying, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. And later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' But he answered and said, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour" (Matthew 25:1-13).

Those present in this context are ten virgins and the bridegroom. Although one knows the bridegroom is coming, it is no guarantee of entrance into the party; rather they have to be prepared. What does it mean to be prepared? It means to have a double portion of oil ready to be used when needed. There is also no specific identity who the ten virgins are. It should be noted that virgins are always spoken of as being pure. To make the claim the ten virgins are a picture of only Israel is reading into the text again. Is not also the Church awaiting the return of the bridegroom? Is Israel alone waiting for the return? Since this parable is addressed as "The Kingdom of Heaven . . .", it is meant for instruction for all those who are in relationship to the Bridegroom. To say it is only meant for Israel or some other group would mean that all the other parables beginning in the same way are meant for that group alone.

The focus in the above paragraph is finding the round holes for the round pegs in which they go. Since there is no reference to the Bride, there is other information to be drawn out. To approach the Scriptures thinking that the Bride is the Church excluding everything else, is akin to forcing a "marriage" of two separate ideas that should not be bound together, hence a shotgun wedding.

The Wedding reception

And Jesus answered and spoke to them again in parables, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king, who gave a wedding feast for his son. And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. Again he sent out other slaves saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.' But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. But the king was enraged and sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and set their city on fire. Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 'Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.' And those slaves went out into the streets, and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests. But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw there a man not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:1-14).

Strikingly, there is no mention concerning the bride. In Matthew Chapter 22, the characters in the parable are the king (God, the Father), His Son (Jesus) the slaves (the prophets), the invited (the Church), armies (angels) and a man called

“friend” by the king. Again, a bride or any reference to a woman is not referenced. The principle idea presented is that to be in attendance at the feast, one has to be properly dressed. Just to be invited is not enough; one must be clothed in the proper wedding feast garments. Nowhere is it said that the Lord provides wedding feast garments for the Church. What we are told to do is to clothe ourselves in Revelation 19:7-9.

The “wedding garment” is best interpreted as being a picture of good works. This is most clearly seen in the description of the marriage of the Lamb in Revelation 19:7-9:

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready’. And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. And he said to me, ‘Write, Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ And he said to me, ‘These are true words of God’.”

The marriage supper of the Lamb of Revelation 19:7-9 is also the only other eschatological wedding celebration in the New Testament where the clothing worn by the participants is mentioned. The wedding clothes in Matthew 22:11 correspond to the clothes worn by the bride at the wedding of the Lamb in Revelation 19:8. She is said to be clothed in “fine linen, bright and clean”. Furthermore, this fine linen is described as “the righteous acts of the saints”. Moreover, in the previous verse, it states that she “has made herself ready [middle voice in Greek]”. This is in definite contrast to the man without the garment in Matthew 22:13, who did not make himself ready for the royal wedding feast.

♪ Here comes The Bride ♪

“And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me, saying, ‘Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (Rev 21:9,10).

An angel states to the apostle John that he is about to see the bride, the wife, the one who is to be married to the Lamb of God. As John records in the above passage, his eyes did not see a group of people, nor a body of people nor was it recorded as being a Church. The only thing the apostle recorded in the inspired text is “the holy city, (the new) Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God”. In other words the bride is the holy city. The wife of the lamb is the city of new Jerusalem. This is the ONLY place in ALL of inspired Scripture that gives any identity to the bride. Some have said that this cannot be because how can

Christ marry a city? Regardless of how anything sounds, if it is recorded in the Word of God as truth, it has to be true.

So where does the Church fit into this all? Many people in the Church still claim that the Body of Christ is the bride and use the following verses to try to support their claim:

"For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the Church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the Church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the Church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the Church, because we are members of His body. FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the Church" (Ephesians 5:23-32).

Concerning the passage in Ephesians 5 there are a couple of important notes to make mention. Please notice what words are NOT being used here (bride, bridegroom, groom, wedding and marriage). Ephesians 5 is an illustration for the Ephesian Church to realize what the role of the husband is to be in regards to his wife. Present are the illustrations of how much Christ loved the Church as a whole and what sacrifice he was willing to make for them. Many would disagree on the grounds that theologians, preachers, teachers have always said that this reference in Ephesians is support for the bride being the Church. Just because some teacher makes a claim, does that make it true? If this were the case, then the Berean Church would have taken Paul at his word and not bothered to verify what he says was true or not. However, to make the claim of the bride and the Church using this passage is another example of forcing an idea into a passage. This is reading into the text something the text is not trying to explain: round peg, square hole.

Taking this train of thought a bit further, does anyone take a wedding parable as instructions for husband and wives? Should we assume that because of Matthew 25 that our wives should be ready to go somewhere on a moments notice? Do we take Matthew 22 and say that husbands or wives can only be dressed in a certain fashion and if not that they get locked outside of the house?

The Anniversary Party

“But Jesus answered and said to them, ‘You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures, or the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven’” (Matthew 22:29,30).

"Jesus said to them, 'Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures, or the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven'" (Mark 12:24,25).

"And Jesus said to them, 'The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage; for neither can they die anymore, for they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection'" (Luke 20:34-36).

Concerning the “anniversary” are points that are extremely important to consider. The Lord Himself addresses an issue and makes an unshakeable theological certainty. In each of the passages above Jesus is posed a question concerning one woman who marries seven brothers in turn trying to bear a child. However, PLEASE NOTICE what the Lord says here, that those who are involved with the events in the age to come will “neither marry, nor are given in marriage.” The people involved in the age to come will NOT marry, nor be given in marriage. If the Church is the bride then how can people marry, yet decreed that they won’t marry nor be given in marriage?

So what can I get for a rib?

The first marriage that occurs in the Bible is that between Adam, the first man, and Eve, the first woman. When God was looking for a suitable helpmate for Adam in the garden, He first brought all the animals before Adam. However, when none was found suitable, the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam. When Adam was asleep, the Lord removed a specific part of Adam to fashion his helpmate. What the Lord did not do is take a little here, and a little here, etc. It is not like the Lord was impulse shopping, “Oh, I want a little bit of this, and a little bit of that, hold the onions, etc.” Also God did not use Adam’s hair to create Eve’s hair, nor his hands for Eve’s hands, etc. The Lord removed a small portion of Adam’s body to create Eve. He did not use all the body of Adam, just a rib from his side.

Is there any similarity to what happened to the side of the Lord on the cross? At the point the Roman spear pierced the side of the Lord, the Lord had already given up his spirit into the hand of the father. The sacrifice was already made. The immeasurable debt had been paid. So what is the significance of the blood

and water that flowed from the side of the Lord? Could it be symbolic as to what is needed to fashion those who will participate in the wedding feast as an invitee? In Genesis, we are given a type that reveals the fulfillment, the anti-type, with the Roman spear and seeing the blood and water flow. From the first Adam's side a rib was taken and the Lord fashioned Eve from this small bone. With the second Adam we are shown that the blood and water is flowing from the same spot where a rib was removed.

You may say: "But this goes against YEARS of traditions." "It disagrees with what I heard on Christian radio." "It disagrees with what my pastor said last week." "I don't know of a seminary that makes this claim." "These statements are contrary to every commentary I have read." "That is not what I heard from the missionaries who spoke at my Church." "I've never read this before." What is more important: the comments listed above or what is written in the Word of God? There have been times when a passage is read giving a warning or is contrary to what is taught that people have gone straight to the study notes at the bottom and more readily believe what is written there than the inspired text.

There are many traditions that are alive in the Christian Church today. Many of these traditions have become equal or superior to the inspired word of God. People are more likely to believe classical hymns, modern songs, or a Church's constitution rather than the inerrant text. Some would be surprised to learn some of the ceremonial practices we use in Churches today are not what is prescribed for in the Scriptures. What are people supposed to do when they encounter these verses? Do they get encouraged to put the word of God first, or are they told that is not how we ever done that here. Many in Church today are taking these little round pegs and hold them far more close to their hearts than what is supposed to go in the square holes. If the Word of God only has square holes to fill, please throw away the entire round pegs.

It is of little surprise that the Lord Himself says that it takes the faith of a child to inherit the Kingdom rather than the faith of a Church board, TV evangelists, seminary theologians, or radio talk show hosts.