

**LESSON FOUR**

**A MYSTERIOUS TYPE OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH  
&  
CHRIST SANCTIFYING THE CHURCH BY CLEANSING HER**

Scripture Reading:

**Eph. 5:25** Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her

**Eph. 5:26** That He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word,

**Eph. 5:27** That He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she would be holy and without blemish.

**Eph. 5:28** In the same way the husbands also ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his own wife loves himself.

**Eph. 5:29** For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ also the church,

**Eph. 5:30** Because we are members of His Body.

**Eph. 5:31** For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh.

**Eph. 5:32** This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church.

## Questions:

### Section 1

1. What is the first couple seen in the bible and what is this a picture of?
2. Why do we need Christ and why does Christ need us?

### Section 2

1. How does Christ nourish the church and who is the source?
2. What does it mean for Christ to “cherish” the church? Give an example of your own experience with this.

### Section 3

1. What is the purpose of Christ loving the Church and giving Himself up for her? What is the purpose of sanctifying the Church?
2. Why is it important for us to attend church meetings? Please share some of your personal experiences.

### Section 4

1. What is the way by which the Lord sanctifies us?
2. What does the Greek word for *word* denote, and how does it relate to the laver in the Old Testament?
3. What is the result of this kind of washing?

#### [Section 1]

#### **A MYSTERIOUS TYPE OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH**

In his exhortation in chapter five, the apostle presents the church as the Bride of Christ. This aspect of the church reveals that the church comes out of Christ as Eve came out of Adam (Gen. 2:21-22), that she has the same life and nature as Christ, and that she, as His counterpart, becomes one with Him as Eve became one flesh with Adam (Gen. 2:24). The church as the new man is a matter of grace and truth, whereas the church as the Bride of Christ is a matter of love and light. The apostle's exhortation in chapter four is focused on the new man with grace and truth as its basic elements, but his exhortation in chapter five is focused on the Bride of Christ with love and light as its basic substances. In grace and truth we should live as the new man, and in love and light we should conduct ourselves as the Bride of Christ.

Many Christians know that husband and wife are a type of Christ and the church. However, most know this type only in a superficial way. Their knowledge of this mysterious type does not touch their being or affect their living. We need to get into the depths of this type in order that our being and our life may be changed by it.

#### **A COMPLETE PICTURE OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH**

The first couple in the Bible, Adam and Eve, present a significant and complete picture of Christ and the church. According to the book of Genesis, God did not create man and woman at the same time and in the same way. Firstly, God formed man's body from the dust of the ground. Then He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul (Gen. 2:7). After God created man, He said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18). The animals and the fowl were brought to Adam, and Adam named them. But for Adam “there was not found a help meet for him” (Gen. 2:20). Within Adam there was the desire to have a counterpart, to have someone to match him. Among the cattle, the beasts, and the fowl, there was no counterpart to Adam. In order to produce such a counterpart, “the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam” (Gen. 2:21). While Adam slept, the Lord took one of Adam's ribs and used it for the building of a woman (Gen. 2:22, Heb.). In life, nature, and form the woman was the same as the man. Therefore, when God brought the woman to Adam, Adam exclaimed, “This time it is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23, Heb.). Adam knew that at last he had found his counterpart.

Genesis 2:24 indicates that a man and his wife are one flesh. We should regard a husband and wife not as two separate persons, but as one complete person, as two halves of a whole unit. A husband and a wife as a complete unit are a marvelous picture of Christ and the church as one entity.

Because there was no counterpart for Christ in the created universe, God caused Christ to die on the cross. As He slept there, His side was opened, and blood and water came forth (John 19:34). Because in Genesis 2 the problem of sin had not come in, that chapter mentions only the rib that was taken out of Adam; it says nothing about blood. But John 19 speaks of blood, which solves the problem of sin. The water signifies the flowing life of Christ, the eternal life, which produces the church. This life is also typified by the rib. According to John 19, not one of the Lord's bones was broken when He was on the cross. This was a fulfillment of the Scripture which said, "Not a bone of him shall be broken" (Psa. 34:20). The unbroken bone of Christ signifies Christ's unbreakable eternal life. Hence, Adam's rib typifies the unbreakable eternal life of Christ. It is with this eternal life that the church is built up as the Bride, the counterpart prepared for Christ. In this building up of the Bride, Christ gains the church as a match for Himself.

We have pointed out that Eve had the same life and nature that Adam had. This signifies that the church has the same life and nature that Christ has. Furthermore, just as Eve had virtually the same image as Adam, so the church bears the same image as Christ. Moreover, in stature Eve was very nearly the same as Adam. This indicates that the church has the same stature as Christ.

### **A COMPLETE UNIT**

Together Adam and Eve made a complete unit. In the same principle, Christ and the church make a complete unit. The church is Christ's other half. Adam and Eve became one flesh, but Christ and the church are one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). We can say to the Lord, "Lord Jesus, without the church, You are just a half. You are not complete. Likewise, without You, we are not complete either." Praise the Lord that when Christ and the church are joined as one, they make a complete unit!

In the church there is no place for our natural life and fallen human nature. The human life and nature are not adequate to match Christ. In order to be His counterpart, we need to be one with Christ in life and in nature. This means that Christ and the church as one unit have the same life and

nature. Furthermore, Christ and the church have the same image and stature. We should not merely know this as a doctrine, but see it as a heavenly vision. We need to see why we must receive Christ as our life and partake of His divine nature and, furthermore, be transformed into His image from glory to glory. We also need to see that we must attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ because we are to be Christ's counterpart. If we see this vision, we shall be able to understand the type of Christ and the church in chapter five of Ephesians.

### **[Section 2]**

### **CHRIST NOURISHING THE CHURCH**

At this point we need to go on to consider how Christ nourishes and cherishes the church. When we are nourished, something enters into our being to meet our need. Nourishment, therefore, must come out of a supply. Without a supply, it is impossible to have nourishment.

Christ nourishes the church with all the riches of the Father. Christ is the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead. Hence, all the riches of God are in Him, and He enjoys these riches. Then He nourishes the church with the very riches of the Godhead that He Himself has enjoyed.

This is proved by John 15. In this chapter the Lord Jesus says that He is the vine and that the Father is the husbandman. The Father is the cultivator, the planter, the farmer. We, the believers in Christ, are the branches. The vine nourishes the branches with what the vine absorbs from the soil. God the Father is the soil, the water, and everything to Christ as the vine. The vine absorbs the riches from the soil and the water, digests them, and then transmits them to the branches. This is the nourishing. Christ nourishes the church with the riches of the Father which He has absorbed and assimilated. By nourishing the church, Christ meets the inward need of the church.

It is correct to say that Christ nourishes the church with His life and with His word. But neither life nor His word is the source. The source is the Father. What Christ receives of the Father becomes the life and the life supply which are embodied in the Word. For this reason, the Word is the word of life, even the bread of life or the supply of life. If we would be nourished by Christ today, we need to abide in Him to absorb His content into our being as life and the life supply. In order to experience this in a practical way, we daily need to contact the living Word, for the Word is the embodiment of life and of the life supply. The more we abide in the Lord and

contact the Word, the more we experience His nourishing. This is the way Christ nourishes the church.

All the members of the church need to practice abiding in the Lord. There should be no insulation, no separation, between us and the Lord and no detachment from Him. As soon as we are detached from Him, the supply of nourishment is cut off. Along with abiding in the Lord constantly, we must daily come to the Word and take it in as our life and life supply. Then we shall receive nourishment. Furthermore, all the meetings of the church should be meetings of nourishment. Morning watch and our fellowship with the saints should also be times of nourishment.

### **CHRIST CHERISHING THE CHURCH**

According to the New Testament, Christ's care of the church has two aspects. The inner aspect is the nourishing, and the outer aspect is the cherishing. To be nourished is to have something imparted into us inwardly, whereas to be cherished is to be warmed and comforted outwardly. Cherishing is related to environment. In our environment or circumstances the Lord Jesus is often real to us as a warm, tender breeze blowing upon us. As this warm breeze comes upon us, we have the sense of being soothed tenderly. Although this takes place in the environment, it is something more than the environment itself. It is even something that surpasses the Lord's presence. When the Lord's presence becomes a gentle breeze, we experience His cherishing. This cherishing includes soothing, comfort, and rest.

In the environment of the church life, we often experience the Lord's cherishing, although we may not even be conscious of it. However, if for any length of time we are in an environment where there is no church, we sense that the climate has changed and that the environment is different. Then we begin to sense that we have lost something, that the tender, warm breeze is no longer blowing upon us. We may have everything necessary for our material existence, but we know that something we formerly enjoyed is missing. When we return to the church life, we immediately and spontaneously enter into the environment and atmosphere of the Lord's cherishing. Once again we are warmed, soothed, and comforted. This is cherishing.

Just as a child is cherished by the very presence of his mother, so we are cherished by the Lord's presence. My little granddaughter often desires simply to be intimately in her mother's presence.

Simply to be in the presence of her mother is a comfort to her. The presence of her mother provides a tender, warm atmosphere. In like manner, the Lord's presence produces an atmosphere of tenderness and warmth to cherish our very being.

We experience such an atmosphere in the church meetings. I am saddened whenever there are saints who do not care for the meetings, but prefer simply to have fellowship in their homes. No matter how enjoyable the fellowship may be in your home, the atmosphere there is not nearly as cherishing as the atmosphere in the meetings. How pleasant is the spiritual climate in the gathering of the saints! As soon as we enter this atmosphere, we are cherished by the Lord's presence. It is by the atmosphere produced by the Lord's brooding presence that the Lord cherishes the church. To be in this climate, this atmosphere, this environment, gives us rest, comfort, healing, cleansing, and encouragement. No atmosphere can compare to the atmosphere of the church meetings. For this reason I do not want to miss even one meeting of the church.

Nourishing and cherishing go together. Through the nourishing we enjoy the supply of life inwardly, and through the cherishing we experience the soothing, comforting atmosphere outwardly. Whenever we are in an atmosphere of cherishing, we can absorb every word of the ministry. This indicates that under the cherishing we receive nourishing. A church that is nourished and cherished in such a way will be strong and healthy.

The nourishing and the cherishing are the church's portion, and they should be found in every meeting. If there is no nourishing and cherishing in the meetings, then there is a problem. The problem, however, may be with you and not with the church. If you are proper, normal, and healthy, you will enjoy the cherishing atmosphere of the Lord's presence in the church and in this atmosphere receive the nourishing supply of life. Praise the Lord for the way He cares for the church! The church people have the privilege of enjoying the Lord in such a fine, tender, intimate, real way.

### **CHRIST'S INCREASE**

As Eve was Adam's wife, so the church is Christ's Bride (John 3:29; Rev. 19:7; 21:2, 9). Furthermore, Eve was Adam's increase, and the church is Christ's increase (John 3:30). When John the Baptist was told of the many who were coming to Christ, John said, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom" (John 3:29). Then he

went on to say, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (v. 30). The increase in verse 30 is the Bride in verse 29. For the Lord to increase means that He must have the Bride. All the following must go to Him. All those who believe in Him should follow Him to be His increase. Although John spoke a clear word regarding this, he was not willing to practice it. This was the reason that God allowed him to be imprisoned and later beheaded. Eventually, John the Baptist received nothing, and all the increase, the Bride, went to the Bridegroom to be His increase. Just as Eve was Adam’s increase, so the church as the Bride of Christ is Christ’s increase.

### **[Section 3]**

## **CHRIST SANCTIFYING THE CHURCH BY CLEANSING HER**

In this message we will consider a third aspect concerning Christ and the church—the aspect of sanctifying by cleansing. Christ sanctifies the church by cleansing her (vv. 25-27). Christ’s purpose in giving Himself up for the church is to sanctify her, not only separating her to Himself from everything common but also saturating her with His element that she may be His counterpart. He accomplishes this by cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word.

### **I. CHRIST LOVING THE CHURCH AND GIVING HIMSELF UP FOR HER**

Verses 25 through 27 are actually one long sentence. In these verses Paul is saying that husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. He did this that He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of water in the word, in order that He might present the church to Himself glorious, without spot, wrinkle, or any such things. Christ’s purpose in loving the church and in giving Himself up for the church was to sanctify her by the washing of the water in the word. Sanctifying is by cleansing, cleansing is by washing, washing is by water, and water is in the word.

Christ is sanctifying the church so that He might present the church to Himself. In the past, Christ as the Redeemer gave Himself up for the church for redemption and the impartation of life (John 19:34); in the present, He as the life-giving Spirit is sanctifying the church through separation, saturation, transformation, growth, and building up; and in the future, He as the Bridegroom will present the church to Himself as His counterpart for His satisfaction. Therefore, Christ’s loving the church is to separate and sanctify her, and His

separating and sanctifying the church are to present her to Himself.

The first point in Ephesians 5:25-27 is that Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. The second point is the sanctifying in verse 26, and the third is the presenting in verse 27. The first point is for the second, and the second is for the third.

Christ’s loving the church and giving Himself up for her was for redemption and for the impartation of life. According to John 19:34, blood and water came out of the Lord’s pierced side. The blood was for redemption, and the water was for the impartation of life so that the church might come into existence. In Ephesians 5:25 we have the church coming into existence through Christ’s loving her and giving Himself up for her.

After the church has come into existence, the church needs the sanctifying. The process of sanctification includes saturation, transformation, growth, and building up. Although sanctification includes separation, the main aspect of sanctification is saturation. The church needs to be saturated with all that Christ is. Saturation is accompanied by transformation, growth, and building. Through such a process of sanctification with all these aspects, the church becomes complete and perfect, the reality of what is typified by Eve in Genesis 2.

After Eve had been prepared for Adam by being built out of Adam’s rib, she was presented to Adam, the source from which she came. In like manner, the church will be presented to Christ, who is her source. This presentation will be done not by God but by Christ Himself. Ephesians 5:27 says that Christ will present the church to Himself glorious. Hence, He will be both the presenter and the receiver.

Without separation, saturation, transformation, growth, and building, the church cannot be perfected and grow into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Only through an all-inclusive process of sanctification can the church become complete and attain to the measure of the stature of Christ’s fullness so that Christ can present a perfect church to Himself.

In these verses we have three stages of the production of the church. First, the church is brought into existence. Second, the church is sanctified and thereby perfected and completed. Finally, the church is presented to Christ as a glorious church without spot, wrinkle, or any such things. It is presented to Him holy and without blemish. We are presently in the second

stage of the production of the church, the stage of sanctification. When this stage is complete, we will be presented to Christ as a glorious church.

## **II. CHRIST SANCTIFYING THE CHURCH**

### **A. Separated and Saturated**

In this message we need to dwell on the matter of the all-inclusive sanctification of the church. In the church meetings we are nourished inwardly and cherished outwardly. We are also sanctified. Not many of us have been separated unto the Lord simply through our private time with the Lord. On the contrary, most of us have been separated from the world unto God through the help we have received in the church meetings. We need to be nourished and cherished in order to be separated from the world. As we are separated, we are also saturated. It is the nourishment that brings in the saturation. Furthermore, the more we are cherished by the atmosphere in the meetings, the more we are willing to give up the things of the world. By the cherishing we simply lose our taste for those things, for we realize that they are the very things that cause us to be cold toward the Lord. The cherishing also helps us to be saturated with Christ. This saturation spontaneously produces transformation. You may not be conscious of how much you have been transformed, but others are aware of it. They can see the change in your life and in your living.

Transformation does not come through teaching or correction or through chastisement. It comes through the nourishing and the cherishing. If you faithfully come to the meetings to be nourished and cherished, spontaneously you will be separated from the world and saturated with the riches of Christ. Then with you there will be growth, transformation, and building. This is the way the bride will be prepared for Christ. Eventually, the bride will be complete, perfect, and grown to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Then the Lord Jesus will come and present this prepared bride to Himself.

#### **[Section 4]**

### **B. The Washing of the Water in the Word**

Now we must see the way the Lord sanctifies us. In verse 26 Paul says that Christ sanctifies the church by cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word. According to the divine concept, water here refers to the flowing life of God, which is typified by flowing water (Exo. 17:6; 1 Cor. 10:4; John 7:38-39; Rev. 21:6; 22:1, 17). The washing of the water here is different

from the washing of the redeeming blood of Christ. The redeeming blood washes away our sins (1 John 1:7; Rev. 7:14), whereas the water of life washes away the blemishes of the natural life of our old man, such as “spot or wrinkle or any such things” (Eph. 5:27). In separating and sanctifying the church, the Lord first washes away our sins with His blood (Heb. 13:12) and then washes away our natural blemishes with His life. We are now in such a washing process, that the church may be holy and without blemish.

With Eve in Genesis 2 there was no need of cleansing because in that chapter she had not fallen. Rather, she was pure and without mixture. But because we are fallen, contaminated, and defiled, we today need to be cleansed. Many things in us must be purged away: the flesh, the self, the old man, the natural life. Furthermore, we have many spots and wrinkles from which we need to be cleansed.

If we had the nourishing and the cherishing without the cleansing, our problems would remain with us. The Lord’s nourishing and cherishing always issue in His cleansing. In the process of spiritual metabolism brought about by the cleansing, the “germs” in our being are killed, and the negative things are discharged. Through the nourishing and the cherishing with the cleansing, we become healthy and strong. In the meetings the cleansing takes place within us unconsciously. The more we are nourished and cherished in the meetings of the church, the more we are cleansed metabolically.

It is the nourishment that we receive that makes the cleansing possible. If the nourishment ceases, the cleansing will cease also. But if we continually take in the spiritual supply, the elements we absorb into our being will cleanse us inwardly and carry away the old, dead, and unclean things. This metabolic process is taking place day by day in the church life.

The cleansing is the sanctifying. The cleansing by the washing of the water of life is in the word. The Greek word for word in Ephesians 5:26 denotes an instant word. The indwelling Christ as the life-giving Spirit is always speaking an instant, present, living word to metabolically cleanse away the old and replace it with the new, causing an inward transformation. This indicates that in the word there is the water of life, which is typified by the laver between the altar and the tabernacle (Exo. 38:8; 40:7). In Greek the word rendered “washing” in Ephesians 5:26 means “laver.” This Greek word is used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word for laver. In the Old Testament, the priests washed

themselves from earthly defilement in the laver (Exo. 30:18-21). Now the laver, the washing of the water, washes us from defilement. Therefore, we are cleansed by the laver of the water in the word.

In a very real sense, the word of God is a laver. According to the Old Testament, the priests who served God in the tabernacle had to have their sins dealt with by the blood on the altar, and they had to have their defilement dealt with by washing in the laver. I believe that Paul's concept here is that the church is cleansed by the laver of the water in the word. Hallelujah, we have the real laver! The priests had only a type, a material laver made of bronze. But we have the real laver, the laver in the word of God.

As the priests in the Old Testament came first to the altar and then to the laver, so we come first to the cross to be saved, redeemed, and justified, and then we come to the word to be cleansed. Day by day, morning and evening, we need to come to the Bible and be cleansed by the laver of the water in the word. By coming to the word in this way, we are cleansed from the defilement we have accumulated in our contact with the world. Whenever you contact the world in the course of your human living, you need to come to the word to be cleansed.

In the laver of the word there is water. This is not the water that quenches our thirst; rather, it is the water that washes us. Here Paul is concerned not about thirst but about the removal of negative things. These things are washed away by the water in the word.

One day *a brother* was speaking about Bible reading. A certain sister told him that she had a poor memory and forgot everything she read in the Word. She asked *a brother* what was the purpose for her to go on reading the Bible. In his answer *a brother* spoke of the way women in China wash rice in a willow basket. They dip the basket in and out of the water a number of times. Every time they take the basket out of the water, all the water flows out of the basket. Nevertheless, although the basket retains no water, both the basket and the rice are washed. He then applied this illustration to the reading of the Word. Although we may not retain anything of what we read, we are washed by it nonetheless, and we are cleansed. Let us be encouraged to come to the Word again and again to be washed. Let us place our basket in the water of the word and draw it out. The water may flow through the basket, but we will be cleansed.

### **C. Dealing with Spots and Wrinkles**

The washing in Ephesians 5:26 does not deal mainly with sins but deals with spots and wrinkles. Spots are something out of the natural life, and wrinkles are signs of oldness. Only the water of life can metabolically wash away such defects by the transformation of life. All the spots and wrinkles in the church will be washed away through the inner cleansing of the water in the word. The more we come to the Word, the more we are nourished. The nourishment we receive brings about an inner cleansing from the defects caused by the natural life and from the wrinkles caused by oldness. We all need such an organic, metabolic washing to take away our defects and the marks of our oldness. As the church is washed organically and metabolically in this way, the church is renewed and without blemish.

Such a washing takes place entirely by life and by the nourishment of life. Let us be encouraged to abide in Christ as the source of nourishment and to contact the Word to receive the nourishing element so that we may be washed organically and metabolically from all defects and oldness. By means of such a washing, the church will be perfected and become glorious.

## **III. CHRIST PRESENTING THE CHURCH TO HIMSELF**

### **A. A Glorious Church**

It is such a glorious church that Christ will present to Himself at His coming back. Glory is God expressed. Hence, to be glorious is to be God's expression. Eventually, the church presented to Christ will be a God-expressing one. Such a church will also be holy and without blemish. To be holy is to be saturated and transformed with Christ, and to be without blemish is to be spotless and without wrinkle, with nothing of the natural life of our old man.

The church that comes out of Christ will go back to Christ just as Eve came out of Adam and went back to Adam. As Eve became one flesh with Adam, so the church which goes back to Christ will be one spirit with Christ.

The church presented to Christ will be glorious; it will be the expression, the manifestation, of God. For the church to become glorious means that the church becomes God's expression. Because the nourishing, the cherishing, and the sanctifying will cause the church to be saturated with the essence of God, the church will eventually become the bride to express God. Every local church today must be God's expression. The only way for us to become His expression is to be continually saturated with the

divine essence. If we would experience this saturation, we need Christ's nourishing, cherishing, and sanctifying.

### **B. Holy and without Blemish**

We have pointed out that the glorious church, the church that expresses God, will be holy and without blemish. To be holy is to be separated to the Lord from common things and then saturated and permeated with the divine nature, with all that God is. The church that has become holy in this way will also be without blemish. Blemish here is like a defect in a precious stone. This defect comes from mixture within the stone. If we would be pure, we must be without mixture; that is, we must not have anything other than God in our being. One day the church will be like this. It will be not only clean and pure but also without blemish, without mixture. The church will be the expression of God Himself mingled with a resurrected, uplifted, and transformed humanity. This is the glorious church, the church that is holy and without blemish. In the future such a glorious church will be presented by Christ to Himself. Today, however, the church is undergoing the process of Christ's nourishing, cherishing, and sanctifying.

References:

Life-Study of Ephesians msg. 53 & 54