

GOD'S PRIMARY EMPHASIS FOR THE CHURCH

by John Beaumont

Primary Emphasis is first in a series of booklets
by John Beaumont encouraging on-going intimacy
with Jesus.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE... CHRIST AND THE CHURCH.....	5
Jesus is not coming back, for a servant	
Jesus is not coming back, for a structure	
On-going revelation	
Plurality in leadership	
Decentralization	
Jesus is not conning back, for an army	
Implications of a military emphasis	
CHAPTER TWO... JESUS IS COMING FOR HIS BRIDE.....	9
CHAPTER THREE... THE DESIRE FOR LOVE.....	10
Self-giving fulfilment	
God's love need	
A privileged role	
A song of love Snapshots of Jesus	
Living in love's freshness	
Supreme love Priority call	
CHAPTER FOUR... THE PLACE OF HEADSHIP IN LOVE.....	15
The female factor of bride-hood	
A manipulative wife?	
How does the church seek, to manipulate?	
A flawed vessel	
CHAPTER FIVE... THE PREPARATION OF THE BRIDE.....	19
The washing word that makes the bride radiant	
CHAPTER SIX... MAKING HERSELF READY.....	21
Adorned with jewels	
A place of rest	
Beauty treatment	
Spiritual stimulation	
Just for Him—veiled	
Wearing fine linen	

FOREWORD

This is a Love story with a capital "L," not "sloppy Agape" that is so easily forgotten. In this simple, yet profound, message for the body of Christ, John Beaumont has captured in a unique way his revelation of God's word and work for men and women in the church today.

It is not really imperative that you agree with his exposition in every detail. If you read this thoughtfully, however, it may help you shape a new understanding of God's emphasis for His people today. Too often we see a "bless me" message offered to the church. John Beaumont has presented a powerful "bless Him" alternative which will be well received by all believers who wish to become "Lovers".

It has been my privilege to Know John for several years and I have heard him and watched him and lived with him. He has captured in a remarkably sensitive way a major thrust of his own ministry and life style. I am sure this message will make the Kingdom of God more real to all who prayerfully read, digest, meditate and reflect upon it.

**Warren E. Weaver
Richmond, Virginia
November, 1985**

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Ephesians 5:22-33

Chapter 1

Christ and the Church

Paul states, "The two will become one flesh. This is a profound truth—but I am talking about Christ and the church." ¹

This reveals the primary emphasis of this passage, so let us share about Christ and the church from it.

Christ gave Himself—gave Himself on the cross and then rose triumphantly—so that He might present to Himself a radiant church without blemish of any kind.

JESUS IS NOT COMING BACK FOR A SERVANT!

How necessary it is for us all to have an understanding of servant-hood, and more than that, to have the true spirit of a servant.

This is a challenge to humility, to a willingness to be washing our brother's feet, and to be considering others better than ourselves. How much we need to understand self-crucified living if we are to enter into God's highest purpose for His people.

A servant spirit is required of us so that we will respond without question to ongoing revelation from the Holy Spirit, and be willingly led into new truths, new emphases, new freedoms, new challenges and new dimensions of the amazing grace of God.

Jesus is coming back for a bride, not a servant. "In that day," declares the Lord, "You will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.'" ²

JESUS IS NOT COMING BACK FOR A STRUCTURE!

One grows weary of hearing teaching on church structure. It is possible to have perfect structure and yet be totally lifeless. Structure should be like the skeleton of the natural body—functional, effective, growing with the body, and yet not visible and not being the focus of attention unless there is malfunction in some way that needs remedy.

There are three things required to keep us, the Body of Christ, from an undue emphasis on structure, the pain of structural fault of malfunction and the snare of religiosity.

ONGOING REVELATION is so vital to keep us fully alive and healthily developmental. When will we learn that yesterday's revelation becomes today's bondage? So much of the church is tied to the thought that it must be right today because it was right yesterday, without a thought that what was revealed yesterday may well have been for a "season" that is now over. "There is a time for everything, and there is a season for every activity under heaven." ³

Remember the Bible picture of pruning? When we prune a fruit tree it is to remove that which bore fruit last season. It is new growth that bears the fruit. This needs to be clearly understood so that we don't repeat an activity just because it was effective last time!

Perhaps every "move" of God in history has been weakened or brought to an end because reason has been elevated above revelation. This has been termed "consolidation", and is a major threat today to the ongoing movement of God in establishing His kingdom. If you have an ear, be hearing what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

PLURALITY of leadership at every level. This call for quality relationships, godly integrity and recognition of God-given functions rather than clonish sameness. It calls for submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. It will allow the Body to function more fully and effectively, and save local gatherings of saints from the danger of one man following his own "hobby horse" or being too headstrong in feeling that he has the right to hear God for the Body. It will also provide continuity when the times comes for that man to no longer lead that people.

DECENTRALIZATION was an emphasis the Holy Spirit sought to bring in the charismatic renewal. But it hasn't been learnt well yet. The day must come when we will recognize that house meetings are not intended to be an adjunct to the weekly combined "church" gathering. Father's purpose is that the house gathering be the church. The combined gathering could well be held, say, every five or six weeks as a time for combined celebration in worship, and for the bringing forth of significant ministry from apostles and prophets.

JESUS IS NOT COMING BACK FOR AN ARMY!

Singing Scriptures in recent years has caused us to focus on David's experiences as expressed in the Psalms. This has its dangers. For example, it has kept large segments of us using King James language even though quiet thought must bring us to the conclusion that God doesn't speak King James language today. Nor, for that matter does He speak Greek—except to Greeks!

Then too, many of us have continued with David's understanding of coming into God's presence by gathering together. We dare not lose a New Testament experience of living in His Presence, walking in joyful company with Him day by day.

David was a man of war. We have picked up that emphasis in singing Psalms. But because of that he was forbidden to build the house he wanted to build for God. If our focus is on war then perhaps we too will be forbidden to participate in the building of God's house.

IMPLICATIONS OF A MILITARY EMPHASIS

What is in our minds when we think of God having an army of which we are a part as it marches through the land?

Do we think, 'authority'? The influence of the militarism of the Roman Empire may have brought that to the church, but it is authority of a family nature that is needed today. Family authority involves love and compassion, honest relationships and self giving. Army authority is only concerned with the well being of the system.

Do we think centralised human control? True spiritual authority should never be seen as

a right to control. We are to be Spirit-controlled rather than controlled by human leadership. We must be able to hear God clearly for ourselves. This will always be in harmony with the hearing of leaders who are truly walking in humility and sensitivity to the Lord.

Do we think, 'force and aggression'? People have a right to fear pressure, and to fear embarrassment as well. We should reject pressure!

Hear Jesus: "Come here to me, all who are growing weary to the point of exhaustion, and who have been loaded with burdens and are bending beneath their weight, and I alone will cause you to cease from your labour and take away your burdens and thus refresh you with rest. Take at once my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find cessation from labour and refreshment for your souls, for my yoke is mild and pleasant, and my load is light in weight."⁴

Do we think, 'activity'? We need to learn to live in rest, rather than with the "drive and strive brigade" of substandard churchdom. The Christian life is primarily "being" not "doing". Excessive doing is frequently a cover for the guilt of inadequate being.

"Who is he trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast?

"For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there.

"Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people, to whom he said, This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and, This is the place of repose—but they would not listen.

"So then, the word of the Lord to them will become: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there—so that they will go and fall backward, be injured and snared and captured."⁵

Do we think, 'sameness'? Who wants colourless sameness when there is infinite variety in God? Sameness has the stamp "Man Made" upon it! How precious it is in gatherings, for example, to be free to kneel while others stand, or to raise one's hands in adoration even though others may not be doing so.

Do we think, large numbers'? As if our confidence was there, and we can take the land if only we march twelve abreast shouting the same catch cries?

Do we question Jesus' triumph? Do we need to further His triumph, or rather to stand rejoicing in His victory, and having done all, to stand?

Are there thoughts of insecurity, inferiority and unbelief? Surely the outcome is assured. Jesus wins! And we share His triumph! Hallelujah, it is as good as done. The nations of the earth become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ! Glory!

Are there thoughts based on a natural, carnal, humanistic concept of the kingdom of God? That kind of thinking in some measure has even infiltrated that which God is restoring today. Away with it!

If we have thoughts of an army then surely we must centre on the glorious triumph of Jesus. He disarmed principalities and powers, triumphing over them in the cross.⁶

Let us be an army of love, an army of praisers and worshippers, and a people with a

united vision for the glory of Jesus being manifest throughout the whole earth.

Jesus is returning! He is coming for a bride, not a servant, nor a structure, nor yet an army. Bless His lovely name for ever!

Chapter 2

Jesus Is Coming For His Bride

He is coming back for a lover people, and that is the church, it is us!

He describes her, this lover people, as beautiful, chaste, radiant and unblemished.

She will be a bride with no imperfection. Just think of that! A church with no imperfection, no blemish, no stain, no wrinkle, no scars; pure, perfect and lovely.

Doesn't your heart leap for that? What a day when the church comes to where there is no imperfection. Lord, hasten the day!

Nor will there be malfunction. Not some parts ineffective—one eye dimmed perhaps by bias and prejudice, nor an elbow that doesn't bend easily through lack of love between certain leaders, nor even a slight limp as she walks because of traces of stubbornness and self-will. No, no, no! Perfect in every way.

There will be no sign of aging in this radiant bride! No wrinkle that she tries to cover up. She will be in her prime. We have at times thought of the church as having seen better days. "The poor old girl, she's 'over the hill,' " we've thought. The structured church which involves so much of man's creation may be, but not the Bride!

Christ gave Himself, so that He could prepare for Himself and present to Himself this beautiful church, this lovely bride. And He will!. She will be radiantly beautiful. In a day to come there will be a great, great moment when all the universe focuses on a glorious celebration, a great wedding day when the marriage of the Lamb takes place.

Then will be heard what sounds like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, and a great multitude shouting,

"Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns. 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."

Chapter 3

The Desire For Love

At the heart of the picture of the church as a bride is Christ's desire for an intimate love relationship with His people. This involves deep enjoyment in sharing closeness and the delight of mutual desire for and precious fulfilment in each other.

He wants sweet affection, a continuing attraction and gracious honouring and appreciating from those He loves so very dearly. He longs for a people that only feel comfortable in His nearness, in His smile and in His favour. He seeks a people whose supreme joy is to respond to His love, marvel at His beauty and bless Him a thousand times that He ever chose them to be His.

SELF-GIVING FULFILMENT

We need to discover that our only path to total fulfilment is in our lovely Lord Jesus.

Have we given or gained an impression that fulfilment depends on how much we receive from God? Is the kind of teaching that shows us how to get more from God adequate? Or is it simply appealing to basic selfishness, and leading to futility and frustration?

Where does a child find fulfilment? Is it in being given everything they ask for? Of course it is not!

A child comes to his father with a childish treasure, a candy bar, in his hand. He reaches up and offers his precious, slightly licked candy bar to his father. "I love you Daddy," He beams, "It's for you Daddy."

He is showing a love for father that surpasses desire for candy. How appreciative the father is for this expression of self-denying love. Can't you see moist eyes as daddy picks up his son, hugs him, and seeks to let him know how deeply the gesture is appreciated? And what a sense of fulfilment floods the lad's heart in the delight of his father's appreciative response to his love!

Where does a wife find fulfilment? Is it in twisting, nagging and scheming to get her own way all the time—to get whatever she wants out of her husband? You know it is not.

Her fulfilment comes in giving herself to her husband, sensitively endeavouring to minister to his desires and needs, bringing him loving encouragement and being alert to find ways to honour and bless him.

Too many followers of Christ feel that they will know fulfilment and be able to live triumphantly if their present circumstances are altered. However, through a love relationship with Jesus we can know peace and deep contentment now, regardless of our circumstances.

GOD'S LOVE NEED!

We expressed a prophetic word to leaders of a local church, "You are both my greatest problem and my greatest need in this place, says the Lord."

As a leader I find no difficulty in accepting that we often are a major problem to God, and a hindrance to the out-working of His purposes for His people. We attempt to move forward head first rather than heart first, and then wonder why people fall headlong.

But how can God say, "I have great need of you?"

The fact is, that God is love, and love has need. It needs an outlet, an object, and it needs response. Since God loves us so deeply, far beyond any earthly love, so that we can never grasp how wide and long and high and deep His love is, then how great His love need must be!

"I need your love! I need your love!" Can you hear Him say it? "It isn't even sufficient in this hour for Me to have a people that love Me. I need a people who reach out for new and fuller ways to express their love to me day by day."

Here is fulfilment indeed—to be ministering to the love needs of the Lord Jesus, loving Him because He first loved us, and seeking to express our love as fully as He expresses His.

The world scorns a woman who marries a man for his money. We are no better if we simply come to Christ for what we can get out of Him!

Yes, He is rich, and He does shower blessing upon us, but surely our recognition of His Lordship should be because of the intrinsic qualities of His nature. How caring and understanding He is; how supportive and encouraging, how tender and wise. He is so gracious, and merciful too. Holy love is His constant expression. He has provided for us so completely and has the highest purpose for our lives. He splashes colour and beauty all across the universe, builds intricate perfection into the minutest creatures of earth, and yet declares, "My eye is not towards that, nor is My delight in them, but My delight is in My chosen, My joy is in you."

A PRIVILEGED ROLE

We men are enjoined to love our wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. What a challenge! What a privilege too, to be invited to so love my wife that folk, who observe us and know us will be able to say, "Now I have caught a glimpse of the way Christ loves the church."

There are times when I have seen the adoring and sweetly loving attitude of a wife towards her husband shown with such purity and tenderness that I have felt, "Now I

know a little more of the way the church should be towards the Lord Jesus."

Doesn't that lift our roles in marriage to a high place of privilege and honour? We are called to act out in the flesh an expression of God's glorious purpose for His Bride, and the intimate oneness of the relationship He seeks with her.

A SONG OF LOVE.

In the Song of Songs we have a beautiful picture of the love relationship Jesus seeks.

"You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain."

"Awake north wind, and come south wind! Blow on my garden that its fragrance may spread abroad. Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits."⁸

The chill north wind of difficulty and adversity may sweep across my life. Let it carry with it the fragrance of a sweet love relationship with Jesus.

Or the balmy breezes from the south of friendship and favour may be my experience. Still I want the fragrance of the freshness of the love we share to be carried far and wide.

But only my lover comes into His garden. Jesus calls for exclusivity in His love relationship with me. He is no Solomon. He will not share with another. He requires exclusive love and seeks refreshing love that flows on and on as flowing water streams down from Lebanon, a love that grows and deepens as years go by.

It is out of hidden intimacy that new life springs forth. Our emphasis should be on health through the love-flow and life-flow of our shared life with Jesus. It is the nature of healthy things to grow.

Our loving Lord Jesus also calls for expressed love. "Show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely,"⁹ He says.

SNAPSHOTS OF JESUS!

When meeting with leaders of a local church in Maryland we were asked, "How can we bring our people to a more complete dimension in worship?"

The answer received by revelation of the Holy Spirit and passed on was simple and clear. It was this: "Show them fresh snapshots of Jesus!"

We all enjoy viewing the latest family photographs, seeing new and sometimes unexpected angles of ones who are dear to us. It makes them more real and causes us to feel more a part of their lives.

So it is with Jesus. Faded photos may arouse nostalgia but they won't stir up love. The more clear and up-to-date our inner pictures of Jesus the Lord, the closer He will seem to us and the freer and more heart-felt will be our worshipping, adoring love-flow!

LIVING IN LOVE'S FRESHNESS

In marriage there is a danger that we can come to take each other for granted so that our relationship becomes routine, mediocre and unsatisfying. But it never need be so. Love should mature, deepen and increase in tenderness and sensitivity as years go by. So let it be with us and Jesus.

How precious David's expression, "One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek.: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple."10

To gaze upon His beauty every day—what heart longing is expressed in that!

You could have a very lovely view from your lounge window, and grow so accustomed to it that you don't see it any more. You could once have seen great beauty in your wife, or husband, and be oblivious now to the caring and encouraging and self giving which expresses inner beauty.

I must have continuing freshness in my intimate walk with Jesus, even though I purpose to gaze upon His beauty every day. Little wonder I ask myself at times, "John, what fresh loveliness have you seen in Jesus lately?"

It is only as one sees fresh beauty in His tender care and over-ruling grace that one is kept from becoming blind to beauty one has previously observed.

"Your love vanishes like morning clouds and disappears like dew,"11 God told the Israelites. "You love me for a while, all caught up with wonder at my love, but oh, so quickly you become too involved in lesser things and your love towards me becomes so weak and spasmodic."

SUPREME LOVE

If we love someone dearly our thoughts often turn in their direction. Let's not just say or sing that we love our Christ, but let us experience the friendship of His love as He becomes a dear and very special person to us.

Perhaps we need to be careful that we recognize the way He is expressing His love towards us every day, and to be appreciative of that. Although the love of God reached its supreme expression of love at Gal-vary, yet He loves us as much today as He did then!

Jesus told His Father, "I have given them the glory that you gave me . . . May they be brought to complete unity to let the world Know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."¹²

Amazing! Amazing! Amazing! We are loved by the Father just as Jesus is loved. No one has ever been more loved than we are! We are deeply, wonderfully, gloriously loved by a God who is love! How favoured we are! How privileged we are to be the focus of His love— certainly not because we have earned it or deserved it, but simply by His very gracious choice.

Surely songs of joy and praise should be continually rising from an overwhelmingly grateful people. With what stirrings of wonder and delight there should rise up from within us with exaltation, "He loves me! He loves me! He loves me!"

How can people keep singing, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace"?

Surely it ought to be "KEEP your eyes upon Jesus . . . and the things of earth will STAY strangely dim

PRIORITY CALL

The call of God today is that we give absolute priority to an ongoing, intimate love relationship with Jesus. So let us set ourselves to foster and stir up love for Jesus in every way, so that it is not only a commitment to love Him with all of our heart, mind and strength, but also a joyous, exhilarating experience. Not so that we can be satisfied and uplifted in spirit, but so that He can be satisfied as He finds pleasure in His lover people.

Chapter 4

The Place of Headship in Love

In all the earth the church pays lip service to the Headship of Christ. Where His headship is truly recognized and honoured the following will be obvious.

The head is where all the understanding is. It is possible to have such a strong emphasis on Knowledge, truth and biblical understanding that an impression is given that the Kingdom will come when we know enough, and agree on what we know.

There is a law of reserve in both Knowledge and revelation. "We know in part and we prophesy in part."¹³

Frequently there is teaching, teaching, teaching without any thought that Jesus' teaching was teaching to do. He said, "He who does these sayings of mine . . ." Our teaching should be of such a nature that it releases saints into a higher level of walking in the Spirit rather than weighing them down with theory and rule.

Almost every function of the body is initiated from the head. Why were the leaders of the seven representative churches of Asia called "angels" in Revelation chapters two and three? Would it not be because they initiated nothing? Angels are messengers passing on what they have received from God, and performing His bidding without question. Lucifer was the one who questioned and initiated!

The time has passed when it was adequate for a leadership to come to a people announcing, "We have made a decision that this church will follow the following course of action . . ."

Rather, let us express to our people, "When we were meeting together on Tuesday evening a brother began to prophesy. As he did so another brother became quite excited. Eagerly he shared that the prophetic word linked with a scripture that had been on his heart for days. Another shared that a sister had phoned him earlier, mentioning a concern that he now saw identical with the prophetic word. Within us all is a God given assurance of peace that He is speaking to us." Then an eldership can declare, "We are committed to gladly respond to the Head of the Church in this matter, and call on everyone to follow with us."

This would provide a low-profile human leadership, exalt the Head, and emphasise the importance of receiving revelation and responding to it.

Over several years we have sought to allow the Lord Jesus to take the initiative in every aspect of our lives. We have never been so contented and blessed in our lives, nor sought so earnestly to see that He is glorified in everything.

Control of body function is from the head. There is always a danger of the pure and perfect will of God for His people being contaminated by man's involvement. We want to control what God is doing. This leads to the introduction of our own interests, methods, ideas, organization, activity, effort, emphases, structure and leadership control.

This brings the structured church to function very much like a business corporation or a service club, and this is a wide-spread expression of humanism in the church.

When man controls, revelation is stifled and the Lordship of Jesus compromised. The building becomes ours. But let us note well that what man builds will pass away. Only what God builds is eternal. Humanistic effort is completely futile.

All co-ordination comes from the head. Let's take care lest we endeavour to make God fit into our timetable. Abraham and Sarah tried that. It brought them so much distress and pain.

Impatience breeds Ishmaels!

The son of the bond-woman contends against the son of the free woman. The Ishmaelish blending of spirit and flesh is not a step towards an Isaac, but a hindrance to bringing forth the pure expression of life that God desires for us.

Leave God to initiate, control and co-ordinate and He will bring into being the glorious church without spot or wrinkle that will be a worthy bride for the Son of God.

THE FEMALE FACTOR OF BRIDE-HOOD

How strange it is that in a day when women seek with futility to find expression in roles and functions God never intended for them, and in a day when in many ways men are not the husband, father, priest and head that God intended them to be in the family, that the picture of the bride calls men to understand something of the female factor involved.

This is especially so in the requirement that the church submit to Christ as a wife does to her husband in everything. We men need to learn to be fully men, and yet we also need to enter into a wifely submission to Christ in everything. We should be sensitive to His moods and responsive to His desires. We need to learn to "fit in with His plans."¹⁴

At times when we have been visiting to minister in a church someone in leadership has expressed something like, "I feel like a great time of praise before you minister the word." My unspoken reaction always is, "Who cares what you feel like! What does our Husband desire?"

I am not convinced that we need rousing songs so much as we need arousing songs of love.

A MANIPULATIVE WIFE?

We dare never be as a strong willed woman wanting her own way.

I awoke one morning with a distressing thought. "O God, don't tell me," I cried, "That you have a manipulative woman for your Bride-to-be."

Nobody enjoys manipulators. In a wife it is obnoxious and in a church leader it is very shameful. Twisting, wheedling, pouting, bribing and demanding have no place in the Body of Christ!

Nor does repetitive whining in asking, the way a spoilt child does. Nobody enjoys a child's whining. Father does not enjoy ours.

Manipulation is a part of the fall. We understand Genesis 3:16 to be a part of God's judgement because of Adam and Eve's disobedience, and should read, ". . . you will want to manipulate your husband, and he will want to dominate you."

Manipulation and domination are twin destroyers of healthy and loving relationships. The problem some have in wholehearted acceptance of the Fatherhood of God is that they sub-consciously and falsely link, those traits as a part of God's love. No! No! No! Father's love is completely pure. There is never a hidden motive in His love.

HOW DOES THE CHURCH SEEK TO MANIPULATE?

If we were to teach four steps to obtain by faith anything you want from God, surely that would be manipulation, and heretical pandering to selfishness and materialism. Faith is learning to receive gladly from God whatever HE chooses for our lives.

We have heard people say, God just has to move in special blessing in these meetings because we had three days of prayer and fasting before you came to us."

Has to? God has to? Really? Isn't God God? Perhaps such people don't know the difference between a fast and a hunger strike. You can't pressure God to bless your efforts by doing certain things that you are confident will please Him. He sees the motives of the heart.

We have heard people express themselves similarly concerning special evangelistic efforts. "God must give us fifty souls because we have prayed; brought in a special speaker and singers, and we have distributed flyers."

Personally I am deeply persuaded that there is both a higher and simpler way of evangelism than is understood today. We ought not to seek to manipulate either God or man.

Repeatedly I hear the voice of the Spirit within me speak concerning the church the Bride, "It is going to be my way or it's going to be no way." We cannot have the church the way that seems most comfortable to us. We may want it to fit into our cultural climate, traditional experience or biblical understanding, but it is going to be God's way.

If we persistently endeavour to make the church fit into our pattern of understanding and desire then Father will simply withdraw His anointing and the blessing of His presence.

A FLAWED VESSEL

Jeremiah went down to the potter's house where the potter was working at the wheel. The pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter made it into another pot as it seemed best to him. Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the Lord.¹⁵

The key to this story is, "As seemed best to him." That means, "My way, or no way."

You can watch a potter, perhaps on television, making a vessel, and it seems to take no time at all. What is not shown is the effort it takes to make the clay soft and pliable and wholly integrated into one piece. In bible days the potter worked at this with his feet. This is the most difficult part God has in moulding His church into His liking: to get us soft, sensitive and pliable enough to respond promptly and completely to His desire.

To be clay in the Potter's hand, fully yielded, will preserve us from being manipulative in any way, since manipulation is an expression of self-will.

Chapter 5

The Preparation of the Bride

Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

WHAT WASHING WORD MAKES THE BRIDE RADIANT, HOLY AND BLAMELESS?

Let us take the principle, "First the natural, then the spiritual"¹⁶ to gain insight into this. Think of a young woman engaged to be married. What word from him will cause her to radiate joy and love?

It will be a word of love, first of all. Isn't that so? When he says, "I love you" it will light a spark within her.

Many times I find myself almost frustrated in a meeting when I become aware that the Holy Spirit is wanting me to express a prophetic word from the Lord in which He wants to tell His people, "I love you."

It is hardly adequate just to say, "I love you." My heart cries, "If only you were literally here in physical person, what a difference that would make."

I know what He would do. He would look each one in the eye with amazing tenderness in personal focus. He would gently lift a chin if the head was bowed. He would speak their name, though I don't know with what expression. How did He say, "Mary"?

He would name each one, not simply saying, "I love you," but "I am loving you." There is such a difference in that. It is His active love that governs what circumstances He allows into our lives. It is His active love that chooses to deny as well as to give. It is His active love that is involved in His total purpose for our lives. O how He loves!

The best I am able to do is to respond to the Holy Spirit moving to one individual, and then another, sharing how much He likes them, enjoys their company and seeks to lovingly bring specific change into their lives.

How touching to hear Him say, "I never loved any one more than I love you!" I don't understand it, but I receive it with wonder and amazement. How I love Him for being so loving. We need love, and praise Him for ever, He never skimps in showing love towards us.

Yes, indeed it is so! The word of love makes the Bride-to-be shine radiantly. Prophesiers should note that. More than anything else the Lord Jesus is wanting to assure His people of His love.

It will be a word of encouragement. She needs that to make her radiant. Many a time when a woman is betrothed she needs encouragement because she begins to worry or doubt. "I wonder if I can really be an adequate wife for him?" Will she fully satisfy him so that he will never tire of her? Can she be all that she needs to be and that he desires her to be?

Our beloved One wants to say, "I love you so much that I want to encourage you with the realization that I pended per square inch on that egg than any other in all the wide world! And with what delight Mary saw me partake of that for which I had asked. It wasn't that I wanted to make a servant of her. I learned to serve her, and release her to serve by speaking out my desire.

One thing I bless God for is that He doesn't leave me groping around trying to find some way to please Him. He speaks so particularly, and asks for that which is within my capacity to give. He doesn't ask that I be ceaselessly rushing hither and thither, but shows the simple way in which I may minister to Him, to my own great delight. How I love Him!

After a fragrant time of love-flow in a gathering in Australia last year, in a meeting in which there had been an emphasis on the love relationship God brings us into, a supposed word of prophecy came forth including the statement, "I'll use you," says the Lord. Somehow it jarred in my spirit.

Too often the thought of being "used" is emphasized in the church.

All I know is that in that meeting I thought, "I have never told Mary that I'd use her," and I know it wouldn't thrill her if I did!"

How much more appreciated is that word of specific desire for what is within my ability to give. If He asks that I praise Him repeatedly throughout the day then that is within both the realm of my ability and desire. I love Him for that! All I want to do is to respond to the specific desire He reveals through the Holy Spirit for my life at this moment.

Can one adequately tell the wonder of living within the wonder-full experiential knowledge of the washing word of the living Christ? Surely it means to be experiencing heaven while we are on the way there! There is nothing about heaven that we cannot begin to enjoy now. It is all centred in an ongoing intimate love relationship with Jesus in which we live to satisfy Him and bring Him glory.

Chapter 6

Making Herself Ready

In addition to the washing word of Christ there are ways in which the Bride herself should seek, to make herself ready.

"A BRIDE ADORNS HERSELF WITH HER JEWELS/" ISAIAH INFORMS US.¹⁷

In the New Testament we learn, "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment . . . Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands."¹⁸

How good to know that a gentle and quiet spirit is highly valued by the heavenly Bridegroom. He is not impressed by blustering, shouting and ranting. We know of a preacher who used to say, "My Father doesn't shout at me." The implication being that we ought not to shout at Father!

A gentle and quiet spirit must be evident in our family and work situations. It can only be manifest in us when inner transformation has taken place so that these traits are an expression of both quality character and continuing confidence in God.

A PLACE OF REST

How sad if saints haven't entered into the rest that remains for the people of God.¹⁹ It is available for us today. Surely Father is so totally trustworthy that we can be relaxed in the knowledge that He is in control of every factor affecting our lives. His purpose is that we be experiencing peace like a river.²⁰

A river in Scripture indicates at least two things. One is a large quantity of water and the other is a constant flow. Imagine peace like that. It is yours if you will have it so!

When Jesus came to the disciples who were caught in a fierce storm on Lake Galilee, Peter said, "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water,"

"Come," Jesus said.

Peter got down out of the boat and walked on the water to Jesus.

Note that the storm on the lake wasn't stilled until Jesus climbed into the boat. But Jesus had stilled one storm the moment He first spoke to them. He had stilled the inner storm of panic and distress. "Stop being afraid, I AM," He said.²¹

We need to learn that Jesus doesn't always immediately still the storms of life around us, but He does purpose to still the inner storms so that we can know inward calm. This inner tranquility will release us to walk with a gentle and quiet spirit.

WORRY FREE LIVING

When Abraham went forth not knowing where he was going, Kenneth Wuest in his expanded translation says he was "Not troubling his mind as to where he was going."²²

If we link that with Jesus repeated statement, "Do not let your hearts be troubled."²³ We can see that neither mind nor heart should be disturbed or distressed by anything. Troubles should never be internalized. In the world we will have trouble, Jesus tells His followers, but it doesn't have to enter mind or heart. We cannot live trouble free lives, but we can live worry free lives.

Doubtless, fixing our minds on the Lord will Keep us in perfect peace. It was when Peter saw the wind, taking his eyes off Jesus, that he became afraid. It was when he became afraid that he began to sink.

Let there be no strident voice, harsh or loud coming from us for this will be an indication of inner fear and weakness rather than of confidence in the Lord. Reverence for God gives one deep inner strength²⁴ that is marked by a gentle and quiet spirit and comes forth in a sweet expression of Christ-likeness.

Bride, go for that!

BEAUTY TREATMENT FOR THE BRIDE-TO-BE

When Queen Esther was being prepared for the day she would become queen a year of beauty treatment was prescribed. This entailed six months with oil of myrrh and six months with cosmetics and perfumes.²⁵

I was once given some anointing oil that contained myrrh. When just a touch of it was on my finger I found that it left a delightful lingering fragrance. It was difficult to remove even by washing my hands, so think what six months of bathing with it would do!

I see that there is a way for the bride-to-be to bathe herself so that a lingering fragrance of Christ remains upon her. One meets some saints and is aware of the aroma of heaven

upon them in the sweet graciousness and the purity of love that marks their attitudes and expressions. Somehow they have learned to maintain a closeness to Jesus in which something of His attractiveness has "rubbed off" onto them.

How delightful that God is no respecter of persons! If some believers can walk, like that we all can. Let's settle for nothing less. Don't see things the way they are and ask, "Why?" See things the way they should be and ask, "Why not?"

Why not, if God is God? Why not you? Why not now? Why not from now on?

One evening I asked the Lord, "Am I a deprived child in your Kingdom?" I was filled with such deep longing to show Him my love more fully than I ever had. My thoughts were of the woman who brought ajar of very expensive perfume probably costing almost a year's wages.

"Lord, I would love to bring you something like that, wash your feet with tears of love and pour that fragrant perfume over your head and over your feet. What a joy as the whole house would be full of the fragrance. But how can I? You aren't here in physical person now."

Then I became aware of a heavenly scene. Golden bowls were full of sweet perfume which is the worship of the saints.²⁶ And that house was full of the fragrant aroma that comes from out-poured love. Glory!

My desire is to be so worshipping my precious Lord Jesus in everything I do day by day, that not only will this add to that fragrance around the Throne, but that an aroma of Christ will pervade my own life—my attitudes, thoughts, reactions, my sense of values, my choices and my areas of fulfilment so that He is wonderfully glorified in the showing forth of His life through me. Holy Spirit, you alone can accomplish this within. I yield to your moulding of my life to that end!

SPIRITUAL STIMULATION

The Holy Spirit gives us intuitive understanding of the things that stimulate spiritual desire and eagerness, and that stir up love within us.

In the natural we can stir up desire by the focus of attention, by the inward picturing of specific fulfilment, and by the verbalizing of desire. Just to speak about steak, and onions, or of pavlova and ice cream, can really activate our taste buds and saliva glands, and we can thus begin to feel that we are hungry enough to eat right now.

In like manner, centring thoughts on sweet fellowship with Jesus and the grace He imparts can stir us up to spiritual awareness and desire in which an intimate mutual sharing of love with Jesus can cause heavenly things to be as real as they should be, not just in special moments but in continuing joyful experience.

Note that we are also aware of things that weaken spiritual appetite, dull our

awareness of the Lord's presence and increase emphasis on natural rather than spiritual values. In the words of John Wesley's mother, "To you that is sin." Regardless of the attitudes and habits of other Christians, keep clear of such things as though your life depended on it. It does!

Christians need to develop a habit of spurring one another on to love and to good works.²⁷ We can encourage one another to higher levels of godliness than are presently being experienced.

For some years now we have asked the Lord to enable us not simply to seek folk, as they really are, but also in the light of the potential He has placed within them. As He gives that ability we can provoke brothers and sisters towards Father's highest purpose for their lives.

JUST FOR HIM—VEILED!

In the delightful and very meaningful story of Abraham's servant fetching a bride for Isaac we can observe an important step in the bride's preparation.

Isaac went out into the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching. Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel and asked the servant, "Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?"

"He is my master," the servant answered. So she took, her veil and covered herself.²⁸

Once she had known it was the man who would be her husband Rebekah took her veil and covered herself. We catch the same thought in the Song of Songs.

"How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves."²⁹

"Your temples behind your veil are like halves of a pomegranate."³⁰

The veil indicates not only a sense of shutting out all else but the beloved, but also has the sense of being his exclusive possession. The bride must have an eye for Him alone, with a purposeful attitude that wants only to see and be seen by Him as far as the giving and receiving of love is concerned.

This should apply also to the veiling of the temples which is indicative of a mind-set that follows the setting of the heart on Christ.

It is my persuasion that the Song of Songs is a tender story of love between a chaste and beautiful maiden on one hand, and a good upright and handsome young man on the other. Into that idyllic setting comes Solomon wanting her, and bringing her to his palace.

Consequently the book commences with the maiden addressing her lover concerning Solomon. "Let him Kiss me with the Kisses of his mouth—for your love is more delightful than wine."³¹ And also, " take me away with you—let us hurry! The King has brought me into his chambers."³²

On a number of occasions the maiden cries, "Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires."³³

My brother and sister, beware of Solomons! Keep your affection exclusively for Jesus!

Don't allow the Solomon of wealth to draw you away, no matter how appealing greater possessions may seem. Look for a city that has foundations whose designer and builder is God.

Do not allow the Solomon of position and prestige and earthly honour to detract from your magnificent obsession with the Lord Jesus Christ. Earthly recognition is so temporary and the praise of men very fickle. The good pleasure of the Lord lasts for ever.

Take care that the Solomon of worldly wisdom does not draw you away from the simplicity that there is in Jesus. The vain philosophies of men too easily find a way into the church of the living God. Away with it!

Be warned lest the Solomon that craves gratification through the fulfilment of natural lusts arouse you and ensnare you so that deep shame, sorrow and loss ensue. Keep yourself pure, for Christ will have a virgin bride!

Oh how great the need for a veiling unto Christ!

Good news! For those who have already been drawn after a worldly Solomon there is hope. We are persuaded that the Holy Spirit can restore you to a virgin love for Jesus until it is as though you have been His and only His all the days of your life. Reach out for that! Trust Him for that! In the glad awareness that it is granted your heart will overflow the more with gratitude and unceasing love! How very wonderful our dear Lord Jesus is!

WEARING FINE LINEN

Look forward with me to the greatest day of celebration creation will ever know, the wedding day of the Lamb of God.

Surely there will be elements of a holy hush over all of heaven and earth as the culmination of God's purposes throughout the ages is about to take place.

And then there will be the most triumphant and joyous shout that ear has ever heard. Listen to it again:

*"Hallelujah!
For our Lord God Almighty reigns.
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.)³¹*

The Bride has made herself ready! Glory to God! It has actually come to pass. She now is pure, radiant, with no flaw of any kind. Every blemish and imperfection has vanished and she has become, by God's favor alone, a worthy Bride for the Lamb who alone is worthy!

She wears fine linen, bright and clean. She hasn't made her garment. Nothing of her own limitations, failures and short-sightedness mar the robe she wears. It has not been made by her own efforts, striving, understanding or tears. It is given her to wear.

This fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints. Righteous acts cannot be equated with good works.

Righteous acts indicate the practical living out of that which God, by the merits of Jesus' blood and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, has worked within us.

He has cleansed us and made us holy. Preparation for Him involves setting ourselves to behave in a holy manner in every realm of our lives—in our relationships in the home and in our godly behaviour in the work place, as well as in the hidden thoughts and desires of mind and heart.

The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit and still floods them.³⁵ Preparation for Him involves a showing forth of that love to everyone without exception, including people that it is difficult in the natural to love at all. No attitude of ill-will, envy or dislike dare be countenanced in us.

The Holy Spirit has been given that we may experience divine enablement to live victoriously, yes, even as super-conquerors, being obedient to every desire and requirement of God. Preparation of the Bride involves obedience to Him at every level in every area. We are not called to do what is easy, but to do what is right!

While a finger can be pointed at us, "Your actions speak so loudly that I cannot hear what you say," the Bride will not be ready. As long as there is dissention and carnal division involving back-biting and rejection of others in the family, the Bride will be unprepared for Wedding Day.

We must live out what has been wrought within! Let us cry out to God not only for the supernatural ability to do all that is right and pleasing to Him, but also for the wisdom to do it all the right way—in a manner that "adorns the doctrine"³⁶ with such Christ-like love and sweet empathetic gentleness that we will hasten the day of His return.

Amen—Let it be so!

EVEN SO, GOME QUICKLY LORD JESUS!

ALL REFERENCES ARE FROM THE NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED

FOOTNOTES

Number Reference

1. Ephesians 5:32
2. Hosea 2:16
4. Matthew 11:28-30 Wuest
- J. Isaiah 28:9-13
6. Colossians 2:15
7. Revelation 19:6-7
8. Song of Songs 4:12,16
9. Song of Songs 2:14
10. Psalms 27:4
11. Hosea 6:4
12. John 17:22-23
13. 1 Corinthians 13:9
14. 1 Peter 3:1 Living Bible
15. Jeremiah 18:1-6
16. 1 Corinthians 15:46
17. Isaiah 61:10
18. 1 Peter 3:3-5
19. Hebrews 4:9
20. Isaiah 66:12
21. Matthew 14:25-32
22. Hebrews 11:8
23. John 14:1,27
24. Proverbs 14:26 Living Bible
25. Esther 2:12
26. Revelation 5:8
27. Hebrews 10:24
28. Genesis 24:63-65
29. Song of Songs 4:1
30. Song of Songs 4:3
31. Song of Songs 1:2
32. Song of Songs 1:4
33. Song of Songs 2:7
34. Revelation 19:6-8
35. Romans 5:5 Wuest
36. Titus 2:10 KJV.
