

The Church is a Body of Brides

Recently there was a Church that had to look for a new Pastor, so guess what they did? Hey, that's right! They called in the **Pastoral Search Committee** to do their job, right? Of course! And folks, not that there's anything wrong with a search committee, but wait till you see this Church's criteria for picking a Pastor. Here are some of the guys they looked at but decided for various reasons to pass on.

1. **Noah:** He has 120 years of preaching experience, but no converts.
2. **Moses:** But he stutters and his former congregation says he loses his temper over trivial things.
3. **Abraham:** But he took off to Egypt during hard times. We heard that he got into trouble with the authorities and then tried to lie his way out.
4. **David:** But he is an unacceptable moral character. He might have been considered for minister of music had he not 'fallen.'
5. **Solomon:** But he has a reputation for wisdom but fails to practice what he preaches.
6. **Elijah:** But he proved to be inconsistent, and is known to fold under pressure.
7. **Hosea:** But his family life is in a shambles. He's divorced and then got remarried to a prostitute.
8. **Jeremiah:** But He is too emotional, loud and an alarmist. Some say a real 'pain in the neck.'

9. **Amos:** He does come from a farming background but he'd be better off picking figs.
10. **John:** He says he is a Baptist but he lacks tact and dresses like a hippie. He wouldn't feel comfortable at a potluck supper.
11. **Peter:** But has a bad temper, and was heard to have even denied Christ publicly.
12. **Paul:** We found him to lack tact. In fact, he's too harsh and his appearance is contemptible. Besides, he preaches too long.
13. **Timothy:** He has potential, but he's much too young for the position.
14. **Jesus:** But He tends to offend Church members with his preaching, and He's too controversial. In fact, He even offended the search committee with his pointed questions.
15. But we did find one guy. He seemed to be very practical, cooperative, good with money, cares for the poor, and dresses well. So we all agreed that he's just the man we're looking for to be our Senior Pastor. His name? **Judas Iscariot!**

Now how many of you guys can appreciate the saying, "For God so loved the world that He **did not** send a committee"? Wow! And what was the problem there? That Church had no idea what they were doing, right? But folks, believe it or not, did you know many Churches today **not only** have no idea what they're doing, **but get this**, they don't even know who they are? **Why?** Because they're acting like they've got **practical amnesia!**

Oh, we say we know who the Church is, but half the time, with our lips and with our lives, we act like we've forgotten who we are. And it's not only detrimental in our walk with Christ. It keeps others from believing in

Christ. Therefore, to avoid this **atrocious** of Christian's acting like they've got practical amnesia by not knowing who they are, we're going to continue our study from the Word of God on the people of God entitled, "**Will the REAL Church Please Stand Up?**"

And last time we saw the **first thing** we saw we needed to know about the Church if we're going to stop acting like we've got practical amnesia is that **The Church is the Body of Christ**. And there we saw the American Church no longer calls itself the **Body of Christ**. No! They call the Church a **Building** or the **Body of Man**.

But people, believe it or not, that's not the only thing we need to know if we're going to stop acting like we got practical amnesia. The **second thing** we need to know about the Church is that **The Church is a Body of Brides**. But hey, don't take my word for it. Let's listen to God's.

Ephesians 5:25-32 "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."

Now folks, according to the text, the Bible is clear. We the Church are not only members of the Body of Christ, but we're what? We're the wife or **Bride of Christ**, right? **And so here's my point.** Surely, we all know that, right? I mean, surely every Christian who's ever lived knows that we're the **Bride of Christ**, right? Well, you'd think so, but we've got some problems. **Why?** Because if you look at the **behavior** of most Christians it appears that we **don't have** a beautiful **bride-like** relationship with Christ. No! We've got a dry stale boring religion with Christ!

So why in the world would Christians think we've got a religion with Christ instead of a relationship? Hey, great question. I'm glad you asked. It's pretty simple. The **first reason** we think we've got a religion with Christ instead of a relationship is because **We've Forgotten the Words of Christ.** People, I don't know if you've noticed this or not, but throughout the Gospels, **Jesus went to great lengths** to make sure we knew the purpose of His Coming. And it wasn't to start a new religion. **How do I know?** Because **with His own words**, Jesus declared He'd come for a beautiful intimate relationship with people, **just like with a bride.** **How?** By comparing our relationship with Him to the **Seven Phases** of a Jewish Marriage Ceremony.

So what are these Seven Phases of a Jewish Marriage Ceremony speaking of God's desire for a relationship and not a religion? Hey, great

question. I'm glad you asked. The **first phase** is the “**Shiddukhin**” or the “**Match**.” You see, unlike today, Jewish marriages were arranged by the fathers. And what the father would do is get a person do be the “matchmaker” and go find a bride for the son. And gee folks, guess what? That's exactly what the Bible says Jesus did for you and I.

John 15:16 “You did not choose Me, but I chose you...”

John 6:37;44 “All that the Father gives me will come to me...No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”

Now folks, I don't know about you, but I'd say that's pretty interesting, how about you? In fact, if you keep thinking about it, you'll see that's exactly what we're doing when we get saved. We're accepting Jesus' love proposal to be “matched” or married to Him forever.

Oh but that's not all. The **second phase** in a Jewish marriage ceremony was called the “**Mohar**” or the “**Bride Price**.” Now right after the “match” was made, a mohar or bride price was hashed out between both parties over the value of the Bride. And gee folks, guess what? That's exactly what the Bible says Jesus did for you and I. In fact, **the price He paid was extremely high!**

1 Corinthians 6:20 “You are not your own. For you have been bought with a price...”

1 Peter 1:18 “Knowing that your were not redeemed with perishable things...but with precious blood...the blood of Christ.”

Now folks, I don't know about you, but I'd say that's a pretty high bride price, don't you think? And if Jesus paid **that big of a price** for us, then I'd say He must love us an awful lot, how about you?

Oh, but that's not all. The **third phase** in a Jewish marriage ceremony was called the "**Mattan**" or the "**love gifts**." Now in this phase, the groom would offer the bride gifts **even though he didn't have to**. He simply did it as an expression of his love for her. And gee, guess what folks? That's exactly what the Bible said Jesus did for you and I. He gave us some awesome love gifts! Check it out for yourself.

ETERNAL LIFE: **John 10:27-28** "My sheep hear My voice and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand."

PEACE: **John 14:27** "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you..."

FORGIVENESS: **1 John 1:9** "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

JOY: **John 15:11** "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

Now folks, I don't know about you, but I'd say those are some pretty awesome "love gifts," how about you? And what you have to keep in mind is that these "love gifts" are voluntary. Jesus didn't have to give them. Therefore, I'd say He sure must love us an awful lot, how about you?

Oh, but that's not all. The **fourth phase** in a Jewish marriage

ceremony was called the “**Shiluhim**” or the “**dowry**.” Now in this phase, the Father of the bride would give her gifts. And the purpose of these gifts was to help equip her for her new life with the groom. And gee, guess what folks? That’s exactly what the Bible says **God the Father** has done for you and I. Listen to how He equipped us.

THE SPIRIT TO LIVE FOR HIM: **John 14:16-17** “And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Helper...that is the Spirit of truth.”

SPIRITUAL GIFTS TO SERVE HIM: **Romans 12:6** “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.”

AN ENGAGEMENT RING TO REMEMBER HIM: **2 Corinthians 1:21-22** “Now He who established us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.”

Now folks, the word “pledge” there is actually the Greek word for “**engagement ring**.” And people the Bible says that God gives us the Holy Spirit as a reminder that one day we’ll be with Him forever, **just like the reminder of an engagement ring**. What a gift, huh?

Oh, but that’s not all. The **fifth phase** in a Jewish marriage ceremony was called the “**Ketubah**” or the “**marriage contract**.” Now in this phase, the marriage was legally formalized by a written marriage contract called the ketubah. And it recorded the bride price, the promises of the groom, and the rights of the bride. And gee, guess what folks? That’s exactly what the Bible says God has done for you and I. **How?** By giving us the **New Contract** or

covenant stated by Jesus Himself.

1 Corinthians 11:25 “In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’”

People, whether you realize it or not, every time we take communion, it’s a reminder of our marriage contract with Jesus. And I don’t know about you, but if Jesus signed our marriage contract with **His own blood** then gee I’d say it’s pretty secure, how about you?

Oh, but that’s not all. The **sixth phase** in a Jewish marriage ceremony was called the “**kiddushin**” or the “**betrothal**.” Now it was here that **after the marriage contract was signed** that the couple became what was called betrothed. And even though this meant they were legally married, they still didn’t live together. **Why?** Because they still had to go and make preparations for their new life together. **For instance**, the groom had to go back to his father’s house and start building an addition to the house called the bridal chamber. And it was here that they would consummate their marriage and settle down and live together as a family. And gee, guess what folks? That’s exactly what the Bible says Jesus is doing **right now** for you and I.

John 14:2-3 “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

Now folks, I don't know about you, but if God took 6 days to create the heavens and the earth in all its majesty, then can you imagine how incredible our bridal chamber is if Jesus' been working on it for two thousand years?

Oh, but that's not all. The **seventh and final stage** in the Jewish wedding ceremony was the "**nissuin**" or "**the taking**." Now once the chamber was completed, the Father would inspect it and tell the son, "Okay, go get your bride." And what was the neat romantic thing about this was the Jewish bride had no idea when he was coming. **It could be at anytime.** Therefore, she always had to be ready for his sudden arrival. And when he did, he would **take** or **abduct** her and whisk her away to the Father's house. And gee, guess what folks? That's exactly what the Bible says we need to be ready for! **Why?** Because Jesus could come at any moment and abduct us, His bride, the Church.

1 Thessalonians 4:16,17 "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout...Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord."

Now folks, I don't know if you know this or not, but the words "caught up" is where we get our word "rapture" from. And what it literally means is a "catching or snatching away" just like an **abduction**. Hmmm.

Now, I don't know about you but I'd think after two thousand years, Jesus' got to be getting close to finishing that Bridal Chamber, right? Therefore, wouldn't it make sense to make sure we're ready to go?

But people the bigger point is this. It's obvious by the **Words of Christ** that He intended for us to have a beautiful bride-like relationship with Him, right? Therefore, where does the American Church get off treating in our relationship with Christ as a religion? I mean do we really think He likes us **twisting of His words**? I don't think so folks. **Why?** Because you should listen to what He said to the religious people of His day. Maybe you've heard of them. They were called the Pharisees. And here's what He called them to their face in **Matthew 23**. He called them a bunch of blind men, blind fools, blind guides, brood of vipers, band of murderers, bag of dead people's bones and a bunch hypocrites! And gee whiz folks, I don't know about you, but it doesn't seem that Jesus was too pleased with the Pharisees. **Why?** Because they twisted and perverted what He said, what He had worked so hard for! They tried to take the beautiful bride-like relationship with God and turn it into a dry stale stupid boring religion.

And people, the point is this. If Jesus didn't like it then, then how do you think He likes it today? Therefore, I'd say the American Churches treatment of our relationship with God as a religion, **really is** a big deal, how

about you?

Oh, but that's not all. And the **second reason** why we think we've got a religion with Christ instead of a relationship is because **We've Forgotten the Works of Christ.**

Romans 5:6,8 "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Now folks, according to our text, the Bible's clear. When Jesus died on the cross, He didn't do it for his best buddies, did He? No! He did it for who? The ungodly, the sinners, you and I, right? **So here's my question.** How many of you think Jesus went through all that pain and torture on the cross, just so he could start a brand new religion and build giant buildings across the world? No, of course not, right? It was obvious that He did that **work on the cross** for a relationship, right?

And here's my point. Surely every Christian who's ever lived knows that Jesus died on the cross for a relationship, right? Well, you'd think so, **but that doesn't seem to be the case. Why?** Because, if you listen to most Christians talk, you'd think Jesus died so we could have some sort of **religious country club** where we tell each other how wonderful we are because we do wonderful religious things.

So why in the world would we do this? Why do Christians think Jesus' **work on the cross** was for a religion instead of a relationship? Hey, great question. I'm glad you asked. It's pretty simple. The **main reason** we do it is because we not only **treat His work on the cross like a Religion** but **We Celebrate it like a Religion**. Oh people, whether you realize it or not, one of the biggest atrocities of the American Church is to not only in treating our relationship with God as a religion, **but get this**, we even make it an annual event! **How?** By the way we celebrate Easter! And people, hello! Celebrating Easter is not bad! Praise God we can celebrate the day that Jesus raised from the dead for our sins, right? That **should be a time of celebration**. But people, the problem is **the way** we celebrate Easter. Let's be honest. We've been tricked by our culture into twisting and perverting the work of Christ on the cross. **How do I know?** Because Easter's no longer about the provision for sin that Jesus has made. No! It's about an egg-laying chocolate covered fuzzy bunny parade!

And to show you how horrible this behavior is to the **work of Christ**, let's compare what society says Easter is all about versus what the Savior says it's all about. You see, if you asked the average person what Easter is all about would they not say it's all about getting a new **bonnet** for our head? Of course! But doesn't the Bible say it's all about Jesus being given a

crown of thorns on his head? Or if you asked the average person today what Easter is all about would they not say it's all about getting a big ol' **bag of candy**? Of course! But doesn't the Bible say it's about Jesus **bearing the cross** for the sins of humanity? Or if you asked the average person today what's Easter all about would they not say that it's about getting a big giant **bunny drenched with chocolate**? Of course! But doesn't the Bible say it's about **Jesus on the cross dripping with blood** for all our sins? Therefore, in light of this behavior, I'd say God's probably not too pleased with what we've done with Easter, how about you?

But you might be thinking, "Gee whiz, Pastor Billy. Aren't you making a mountain out of a molehill? Okay, so we treat our relationship with God like a religion and we even celebrate it like one. So what? What's the big deal?" Big deal? I'll tell you what the big deal is. Treating our relationship with God as a religion not only affects our walk with Christ, **it spreads to others** and kills their chances of believing in Christ, like with this story.

"In the 1500's, there was a cabin boy named Juan. He was an employee of the Panfile Narvaez Fleet. And like all boys of his age, Juan decided to break the rules and jump ship and explore the new territory the ship discovered on the Coast of Mexico.

And this may have sounded innocent enough, but the only problem was, Juan was infected with the smallpox virus. And because of his one act of

disobedience, Juan's deadly influential presence was responsible for the deaths of three million Indians."

Now folks, I don't know about you, but I'd that one act of disobedience was just a little bit costly, how about you? And **here's my point!** How many millions of people have been turned off to Christ because we the Church have infected them with a **religious disease!** And how many of those people have died and gone to hell because were too busy **playing Church** instead of being the Church?

People of God, this is why being a Christian is not a game. What we say and do affects the eternal destiny of people around us. Therefore, it's high time we get rid of our **practical amnesia**. We've got to remember who we are! People we don't have a religion with God. We've got a relationship with God. **Why?** Because the Church is a Body. It's **A Body of Brides!**

To find the way to God, to understand the *truth* of God's Word, and to received the gift of eternal *life*, begin by repentance and faith through a prayer like this:

"Dear God, I understand that I have broken Your Law and sinned against You. Please forgive my sins. Thank You that Jesus suffered on the cross in my place. I now place my trust in Him as My Savior and Lord. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen."
