

## Sermon #74 — *Ephesians Sermons*

Title: **“CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH”**

Text: Ephesians 5:25-33

Subject: *Christ’s Love for His Church*

Date: Tuesday Evening — July 11, 2017

Readings: *Larry Brown and David Burge*

Introduction:

Let’s read Ephesians 5:25-33 together.

(Ephesians 5:25-33) “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; (26) That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, (27) That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. (28) So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. (29) For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: (30) For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. (31) For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his

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wife, and they two shall be one flesh. <sup>(32)</sup> This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. <sup>(33)</sup> Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife *see* that she reverence *her* husband.

**MARRIAGE UNION**

What subject could be more precious to our souls than the marriage union of Christ and his church? We cannot be sufficiently thankful to God the Holy Ghost for this portion of Holy Scripture, which so fully explains this sweet, assuring, soul-comforting subject.

Were it not for that which God the Holy Ghost here tells us, no man would ever have imagined that the institution of the marriage in the Garden of Eden was a shadow and picture of the everlasting union of Christ and his church. Yet, that is precisely the doctrine of our text. Ephesians 5: 25-33 gives us God’s own explanation of that first marriage

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recorded in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of the Book of Genesis. Truly, *“this is a great mystery!”*

When *“the LORD God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make an help meet for him”* (Genesis 2:18) and, then, caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and formed Eve from one of Adam’s ribs, he gave us a picture of our Savior and his church, a picture of our union with our Redeemer, a picture of our Savior’s love for us and his utter devotion to us, and a picture of our union with him. What a delightful, instructive picture it is!

- **When Adam saw his wife**, in all the perfection of beauty in which the Lord God created her and brought her to him, he called her bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. And here God the Holy Ghost tells us that the reason he did so was because God’s elect are one with the Lord Jesus Christ.
- **When Adam called his divinely created bride, “Woman, because she was taken out of Man,”** he had his eye upon the last Adam, Christ Jesus,

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and his church which was taken out of his side.

- **And when Adam said, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh,”** he spoke prophetically of the incarnation of our blessed Savior, by which he made himself bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, that he might suffer and die for his beloved bride and make his beloved bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, that we might “ *dwell in him and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit*” (1 John 4:13).
- **How wonderfully and vividly this portrays the fact that “Christ loved the church!”** —

That is the title of my message. — **“CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH.”** We know that Adam spoke prophetically of our Lord Jesus Christ because Adam had no father to leave!

**EVERLASTING UNION**

**Obviously, the marriage of Christ and his church,**

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**took before the worlds were framed by the word of God.** When Christ was brought forth and set up, as the Head, and Husband of his church, the church was brought forth and set up with him. There could not have been a head, without a body. There could not have been a husband without a wife. Christ and his church, as Husband and wife, as Bridegroom and bride are from everlasting married, and are from everlasting one. His delights were with us from everlasting (Proverbs 8:31).

(Isaiah 54:5) “For thy Maker *is* thine husband; the LORD of hosts *is* his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.”

(Hosea 2:19) “And I will betroth thee unto me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies.”

**When the Lord God chose his elect,** the church, in Christ before the foundation of the world, he chose

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her to be holy and without blame before him in love, as the Spirit of God tells us in Ephesians 1:4. When we were presented to Christ as his bride, the church, we were presented to him as Eve was presented to Adam, in the perfection of his beauty, holy and without blame before him in love! From everlasting, she was as the King's daughter all glorious within, dressed in clothing of wrought gold (Psalm 45:13). Though we fell into poverty and wretchedness by sin, when Christ married her, his church was *“holy and without blame before him in love.”* And, now, being washed in his blood again when washed from her sins, in his blood and born of his Spirit, every saved sinner, every believer, every member of his church, is *“holy and without blame before him in love.”* And such, the Spirit of God tells us in our text, we shall be when the Lord Jesus Christ comes to present his church to himself, at the last day, *“a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but to be holy, and without blemish!”*

Oh! Who can imagine the glories of that day, when the Lord Jesus brings his church home and presents

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us to himself, being fully prepared, in body, soul and spirit for the everlasting enjoyment of our Lord in glory “*holy and without blame before him in love*”? In the perfection of his beauty, we shall then enter with him into the marriage supper of the Lamb and be forever with the Lord! — All because “*Christ loved the church and gave himself for it!*”

In our text, Paul is showing us the various duties of husbands and wives. A wife must see that she reverences her husband. And Paul says, “*Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it.*” **Having mentioned the love of Christ, the apostle could not resist the impulse to speak of the details of Christ’s love, and the glorious church, which he has redeemed.** I will follow his example. I would say with Paul, “*Husbands, love your wives.*” And the best argument that I can produce to enforce that exhortation is the love of Christ for his church.

**The love of Christ, what a theme this is!** The apostle said that it is a love that passes knowledge.

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And if it passes knowledge, how much more does it excel any description that I can give of it. The heart can feel this love; but the tongue can never describe it. If there is one subject that I prefer above all others, this is it. — *“Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it!”*

“The love of Jesus,  
What it is,  
None but His loved ones know!”

But, this is theme that altogether baffles me, and makes me feel ashamed of my feeble attempts to speak of it. The love of Christ is the most amazing thing in heaven or earth.

“I stand amazed in the presence,  
Of Jesus the Nazarene,  
And wonder how He could love me,  
A sinner, condemned, unclean.  
O how marvelous, and how wonderful  
Is my Savior’s love for me!”



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If I had heard that Christ pitied us, I could understand that. When I read that he had mercy upon us, I could comprehend that. But it is written that he actually loves us! O my soul! That is a subject beyond me. The love of one mortal for another mortal is easily understood. The love of the infinite Persons of the Godhead for one another, we can imagine. But what kind of love is this? **The infinite, eternal, incomprehensible God loves poor, sinful, finite creatures! Who can grasp that? Miracle of miracles — He loved me and gave himself or me!**

**A COMPARISON**

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul makes a comparison that we could not dare to make had not the Holy Spirit himself drawn it. **Paul compares the love of Christ for the church to the love of a husband for his wife.** — *“This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”* This is a mystery too deep for human intellect to dive into. Its depths will overcome all human reason. This is a subject too sacred for us to think or speak of without

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the utmost solemnity of heart. How can I order my speech before such a grand subject? How can my speech be free and yet guarded? May God the Holy Spirit both guard my mouth and direct my speech, so that Jesus Christ may be exalted in our worship this evening.

*“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it.”* — A parallel is drawn between poor mortals like us who occupy the position of husbands, and our glorious Lord, who is God over all and blessed forever. In marvelous condescension, the Son of God takes the church to be his holy bride. **The Lord Jesus Christ is our heavenly Bridegroom, our Husband, utterly devoted to us in love.** Let us now rejoice in the love he shows to us.

**Proposition:** This is the lesson which the Holy Spirit here gives by the pen of the Apostle Paul. — The Lord Jesus Christ freely and willingly gave himself for his people, so that he might present us to himself a glorious church.

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**Divisions:** Our text tells us three things:

1. The Lord Jesus Christ loved the church.
2. Christ gave himself for the church as the result of his great love.
3. Christ died in order to accomplish a definite purpose.

**THE SAVIOR’S LOVE**

The *first* thing that our text tells us is — **The Lord Jesus Christ loved the church.** — “*Christ loved the church.*” Love must have an object. And the love of Christ has an object. Paul tells us that “*Christ also loved the church.*”

**What is the church which Christ loved?** There is much confusion concerning the meaning of the word church as it is used in the Scriptures. Almost every religious denomination claims to be the true church. I will not enter into any arguments concerning those things; but I think that it is important for us to understand what Paul means in this verse by “*the*

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*church.*” — **The word “church” is used in four distinct ways in the New Testament.**

1. **It is applied to the whole body of God’s elect.** Paul says, “Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and unto an innumerable company of angels. To the general assembly and church of the first born, which are written in heaven...” (Hebrews 12:22-23).
2. **All baptized believers of one place or district are called the church.** We read of “Saul consenting unto Stephen’s death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles” (Acts 8:1).
3. **Sometimes it is used to describe a small number of professing believers in a particular family.** Paul spoke of Priscilla and Aquilla, and “the church that is in their house” (Romans 16:5).

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4. **The term church is even applied to the whole body of baptized people throughout the world, both good and bad.** *“God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers”* (1 Corinthians 12:28).

**Before I go any further, let me briefly tell you what he does not mean when he uses the word “church.”**

- When Paul speaks of the church, he is not talking about a material building.
- He is not talking about a religious denomination.
- In this verse Paul is not even talking about all professed Christians.
- And, though usually when Paul talks about the church he is addressing one local congregation of believers, he is not here talking about any local assembly.

**In this verse of Scripture, the Apostle is talking about the whole body of God’s elect.** He is talking about Christ’s entire mystical body, *“the general*

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*assembly and church of the first born.*” This is the entire number of the redeemed, both in the Old Testament and the New, both on earth and in heaven. This is the church which is the body and bride of Christ.

- All who are chosen, redeemed, justified, called, sanctified, and glorified are in this church.
- All who repent and believe the gospel, all who love Christ, all who are clothed in his righteousness, are members of this church.
- This is that hundred and forty-four thousand redeemed ones, who are saved out of great tribulation.
- This is the heavenly Jerusalem.
- This is the Bride, the Lamb’s wife.

**Take a moment to recall what this church was by nature.** The church which Christ loved was and is by nature as sinful as the rest of the human race.

- She fell with the rest of mankind in that great rebellion against God in the Garden.
- The sin of our father Adam was imputed to us, as it was to all other men.

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- The consequences of sin were upon us, the same as upon the rest of mankind.
- We were radically depraved, inclined to every form of evil.
- We were under the sentence of death and the curse of the law.
- There was nothing in us, but sin, deception, blasphemy, and filth.

Remember that between the brightest saint in heaven and the blackest sinner in hell, there is not difference except that which Christ has made. — *“We were by nature children of wrath even as others.”*

**What is more, we were all defiled by our own transgressions.** Perhaps we did not all fall into the same vices; but we all possessed the same lusts. When we read the black catalogue of human sin, we are made to weep, for *“such were some of you.”*

“We wandered each a different way,  
But all the downward road.”

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**Perhaps you say, “But why did God make us a part of Christ’s church? He could have made a church of the holy angels. He could have found better men.”** That is certain. But we answer, *“Even so Father, for it seemed good in thy sight.”*

- We had no dowry to bring to our Savior.
- We were impure.
- We had no beauty to attract his favor.
- Everything about us should have repelled his love. We were polluted in blood. Yet eternal love says, *“Deliver him from going down into the pit, for I have found a ransom!”*

**Look at the church of Christ, even as you see her visibly in the world.** Even in her regenerate state, she speaks the truth when she says, *“I am black as the tents of Kedar.”*

- She is so often unbelieving and ready to murmur at God.
- She is torn with strife, schisms, and divisions.
- She is marred with envying, backbitings, suspicion, and bitterness.



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- How she is marred with pride, heresy, and self-confidence.

**Yet, for all of this, it is written, “Christ also loved the church.”** Who can imagine such love as this! I will not attempt to describe its fulness. Let me just give you some marks of Christ’s love for his church.

**Children of God, do not attempt to understand; just bathe your souls in it.**

“Could we with ink the oceans fill,  
And were the sky of parchment made,  
Were every stalk on earth a quill,  
And every man a scribe by trade;  
To write the love of God above,  
Would drain the oceans dry,  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,  
Though stretched from sky to sky!”

**Christ loved the church particularly.** We thank God that we have learned to love the doctrines of distinguishing love and grace. Predestination, election, and discrimination are not hard words for us

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to pronounce. We love to read this text and put the emphasis where God puts it. — “*Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.*” — Only for it! — Specifically, for it! — He did not love the world. — “*Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.*” He did not give himself for the world, but for the church. — “*Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.*”

“He loved the world of His elect,  
With love surpassing thought;  
Nor will His mercy e’er neglect  
The souls so dearly bought.”

**In our text Paul compares the love of Christ to the love of a husband for his wife.** Surely, no one would suggest that a man is to love all women as he loves his wife! And our loving Redeemer does not love all the world as he loves his church. He says, “*I have loved thee with an everlasting love.*” That means, “I have loved thee with a special, peculiar, distinguishing love.’

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**Christ loved his church eternally.** The love of Christ did not begin when we believed, nor when he died, nor even when he came into the world. No! The love of Christ has no beginning. It is eternal. And it shall have no end. It is everlasting.

**Christ loved his church unselfishly.** The Lord loves us, not for what good he can get from us, or with us. He loves us for what he is able to bestow upon us. His is the strongest love that ever was, for he has loved ugliness until he changed it into beauty. He loved this sinner, until he changed him into a saint.

**I cannot explain it, but I know it to be a truth of God’s Word — Christ even loves his church with a love of complete complacency, satisfaction, and delight — all the time!** Child of God, let this truth ravish your heart. Our Redeemer delights in us as the object of his love! It is written, “*Thou shalt be called Hephzibah,*” that is, “*My delight is in her.*”

Look abroad upon God’s creation. Would any of you choose a bird, or a beast of the field as the object of

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your inmost love? Yet, the Son of God has set his heart upon such worms as we are!

**Christ loved his church with an intense love of sympathy.** He is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh; and he is touched with the feeling of our infirmity.

**The love of Christ for his church is a love of sweet communion.** O blessed thought, the Son of God delights to dwell with his people. He reveals himself to us as he does not to the world.

**The love of Christ for his church is a constant and enduring love.** — *“Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.”* — “No changes can attend Jehovah’s love!” His love is perfect and knows no change!

One more thing I must say before leaving this part of my subject. — **There is a blessed, everlasting union of love between the Lord Jesus Christ and his church.** — *“For this cause shall a man leave his*

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*father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:31-32).*

- Union is the essence of the marriage bond; and we are one with Christ.
- Since we are one with Christ, we must be eternally with him.
- If his members perish, he will be bereaved.
- If his members perish, he will not be perfect.
- If his members perish, he will never see the fulness of his body and be satisfied.

Are we one with him? Then we may boldly say, *“Who shall separate us?” — “The Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away.”*

“Forget thee, I will not, I cannot; thy name Engraved on My heart, doth forever remain; The psalms of My hands while I look on, I see The wounds I received when suffering for thee!”

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Behold, what wondrous love! I have only touched the hem of the garment. I have but touched the surface of this great sea. Go home and plunge into its depths. There is much more that I would like to say. But I must leave this part of my subject.

**THE SAVIOR’S SACRIFICE**

Now, *second*, I want you to look at our dear Savior’s sacrifice of love. — **“Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it.”** Since the church was not fit for Christ by nature, he resolved to make her so by grace. He could not be in communion with sin. Therefore, the sin must be purged away. Perfect holiness must be accomplished for that one who is the bride of God’s dear Son. How shall this be accomplished? — *“He gave himself for it.”*

Had the Savior given us his crown, his royalty, and his glory to come down to the earth for a while, that would have been a great mercy. Had he given up the happiness of his Father’s house for a season, that would have been great grace. But that is not enough.

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He not only left his Father’s house, and parted with his crown, but he gave himself.

**The Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for us in the covenant of grace before the world began.** We

were espoused and betrothed unto Christ before the foundation of the world, as his chosen bride. And he gave himself to us in covenant agreement. — *“I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say unto them which were not my people, thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God”* (Hosea 2:23).

- He gave himself as our kinsman Redeemer before we ever fell.
- He gave himself as our loving Provider and Protector in the years of our wandering (Hosea 2:8).
- Though we were in the arms of another, we belonged to Christ; and he had given himself as our Head and Husband. He resolved to win our hearts to himself.

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**In the fulness of time he came and gave himself in the incarnation.**

- The angels have never ceased to wonder at this great mystery of godliness, — *“God was manifest in the flesh.”*
- He took our total nature upon himself; in everything except sin, he was one with us.
- He gave himself, through his earthly life, for us.
- He gave us a perfect righteousness in his life.
- He gave us a perfect example to follow.
- He gave us a perfect teaching to learn.
- He loved us freely that God might be glorified in our salvation.

**In due time, having accomplished perfect righteousness for us, Christ gave himself into the hands of death to satisfy the justice of God, to pay the penalty due to our sins, when, at last, he who knew no sin was made sin for us.** — *“In due time, Christ died for the ungodly.”*

- Behold your Bridegroom, forsaken of God for you!
- He was made sin for you!



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- He was made a curse for you!
- Behold, he died for you and for me!

He says, “I have bought you with the silver of my sweat and the gold of my blood, and you are mine.”

**But that is not all. — In the time of love the blessed Savior spread his skirt of love over you and gave himself in the new birth to you.**

- He sought you out, and found you naked, polluted in your own blood, and he spread his skirt over you, and said, “*Live,*” and live you do!
- He came to the auction block of polluted humanity, and gave himself for you.
- And he is still giving himself for us.
- Christ is our Intercessor; and he will not hold his peace until all his ransomed ones are with him.
- He will not be satisfied until we are all crowned with his own glory.
- He will not rest until all his church is seated with him upon his throne.
- All that Jesus Christ is, he gives to his church.

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What more can we want? It is Christ himself that we love. I would rather have Christ than have heaven. I would rather have Christ than have his crown. I would rather have Christ than all the golden streets. It is Christ whom we desire. We want not merely the sight of his eyes, but the eyes themselves, not merely the love of his heart, but the heart itself. And this we have. His Godhead, his manhood, all is ours. — *“He gave himself for us.”*

**THE SAVIOR’S PURPOSE**

Briefly, in the *third* place, I want you to see that — **Christ died for his church in order to accomplish a definite purpose.** He had a definite goal in his death. And it shall be accomplished.

**Our blessed Savior resolved in time to purify his church.** — *“That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word”* (v. 26). — *“I will betroth thee unto me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I*

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*will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord” (Hosea 2:19-20).*

**Our Lord died in order to cleanse his people from their sins, and to purify us unto himself.**

- He put away our sins by the shedding of his blood, and perfectly justified us from all things.
- In the time of his pleasure, he cleansed us from all guilt, sanctified us, making us holy, by making us partakers of his nature. — Christ is in you! And you are in Christ! — That is the union Paul calls “*a great mystery!*”

**The means by which this is accomplished is “the washing of water by the Word.”**

- He caused the Word of the Gospel to come unto us in power, and that is the word of salvation.
- He washed our souls in that fountain of living water which flowed from his pierced side; and he makes us clean.
- And he continues to wash us every day.
- All of those for whom Christ died shall be made clean.

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**Moreover, our Savior died so that he might present us to himself in eternity a glorious church.**

— *“That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”* (v. 27; Ephesians 1:3-4). We are not a glorious church yet. But the Bridegroom is coming; and when he does, he will present us to himself at the marriage feast — a glorious church!

**Though his church is double-dyed with sin, we shall be as white as snow. In that day, we shall be without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. — Imagine that!**

- There shall be no spot of sin, or wrinkle of infirmity.
- Every outward spot shall be removed, and every inward deformity healed.
- In that day, there shall be nothing in us or about us that even resembles sin. All the saints of God shall be perfect.
- There will be no divisions in heaven’s church.

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- There will be no hot tempers.
- There will be no cold hearts.
- There will be no evil thoughts.
- There will be no more declension of spirit.
- There will be no more fear.
- There will be no more sin!

**Christ will present us to himself a glorious church, holy and without blemish.**

- The cleansing is his work.
- The presenting is his work.
- The feasting shall be ours.

**Illustration:** *Hosea and Gomer* — I would sure like to have been in the prophet’s parsonage the night he brought her home!

(Song of Songs 2:4-6) “He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me *was* love. <sup>(5)</sup> Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I *am* sick of love. <sup>(6)</sup> His left hand *is* under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.”

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(Song of Songs 4:1-9) “Behold, thou *art* fair, my love; behold, thou *art* fair! — (3) Thy lips *are* like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech *is* comely. — (7) Thou *art* all fair, my love; *there is* no spot in thee. — (9) Thou hast ravished my heart, my

**APPLICATION**

What shall we do in response to such a loving husband?

1. We should be filled with the deepest gratitude.
2. We should render unto him entire obedience.
3. Let us see that we reverence our Husband.
4. Seek to be like your glorious Head.
5. Let us return unto him with hearts full of love.

(Jude 1:24-25) “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, (25) To the only wise God our

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Saviour, *be* glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”

Amen.