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### "A Radiant Church, without Stain Or Blemish"

- Eph 5:27

That you are reading this book suggests you have already been drafted by the Lord of the Universe to be part of His Church. Hopefully, this book will help you to understand more fully exactly what it is you've been drafted into (even if you've been in the church for years).

Based on Mt 16:13-20, the church is made up of people who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Believing such comes only as a result of direct revelation from the Father. This revelation is the very rock upon which Jesus builds His church.

Not surprisingly, Scripture declares Christ Jesus to be the head of His church (Eph 5:22-24; Col 1:15-20)! He is the head, we are the body; He is the groom, we are His bride; He is the shepherd and we are the sheep. Though He calls us friends, Christ is still the Lord, and the church His servant. We are citizens of a heavenly kingdom, awaiting the return of our King.

As the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders sang in Re 5:9-10:

". . . you were slain,

and with your blood you

purchased men for God

from every tribe and language

and people and nation.

You have made them to be a

kingdom and priests to serve our God,

and they will reign on the earth."

Yet, of what interest are we to a God who is all sufficient in and of Himself and who has no need of anything? Our whole reason for existence is to please Him (Re 4:11). Nothing more, nothing less. We live to "glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Re 15:6). Our role on earth is to be a credit to His name. Christ loves the church and gave Himself "to make her holy . . . and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph 5:25-27).

A key word to pick up on here is "holy." In first century Greek usage, it simply meant "set apart" or "separate." In this sense, if you had a pan you used especially for changing the oil in your car, it could be considered a "holy" pan (set apart from other pans for a specific purpose). Outside the city of Corinth there was upon a hill overlooking the city a temple built for the sex goddess Aphrodite (hence the term "aphrodisiac"). This temple held in its employ hundreds of religious prostitutes, all

devoted to their goddess. Significantly, the Greeks described these women as "holy." They were set apart, away from the city, to be exactly like their deity. Similarly, we who believe in the Lord Jesus are called to be "holy," set apart from the world to be like our deity: Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God. This is what it means to be a holy, radiant, blameless church!

One important way we are to help each other toward holiness is through the discipline process of Mt 18:15-20. Anyone who acknowledges Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, is to be accepted as part of the church. Accordingly, he is to pay homage to Jesus as king, to be His subject, and to act as a kingdom citizen. It is the church's duty to help people obey Jesus' commands. It is for the good of both the church and the disobedient to remove from fellowship those who don't behave as kingdom citizens. Since even a little yeast leavens a whole batch of dough, we must "get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast . . . the bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Co 5:6-8).

Jesus declared the greatest commandment to be to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (this, in reality is the "great commission"). But, how is love for the Lord expressed? Jesus didn't leave us guessing. He went on to say, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching . . . He who does not love me will not obey my teaching." (Jn 14:23-24). John repeated this idea in 1 Jn 5:2, "This is love for God: to obey His commands."

Our king, Lord, groom, head, and shepherd has communicated His will to us very specifically. He trained and personally sent out twelve men to uniquely represent Him after this resurrection (Mt 10:1, 40; Mt 28:19-20; Ac 2:42; Eph 2:19-20). These apostles had a special promise from Jesus that the Holy Spirit would enable them to remember what Jesus taught and to guide them into new truth as well (Jn 14:25-26; 16:12-13). Though now long dead, they left behind for us their inspired writings, which constitute the essence of the New Testament (1 Ti 3:14-15; 2 Ti 3:16-17). To accept one of the Twelve (or their writings) is to accept Jesus Himself (Mt 10:40; 13:20).

In regard to other people, the "great commission" practically works itself out through the second greatest command: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22:37-39). To the world we are to shine like stars as we blamelessly hold out the word of life to a crooked and depraved generation (Php 2:15-16). To those in the kingdom we are to be encouragers, spurring one another toward love and good deeds (Heb 10:24).

Thus, at the coming wedding supper of the Lamb, the church is described as a "bride" to whom "fine linen, bright and clean" is given to wear (Re 19:7-8a). Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints. Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb (Re 19:8b-9).

- S.A.

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