

# A Profound Mystery

## Christ and the Church

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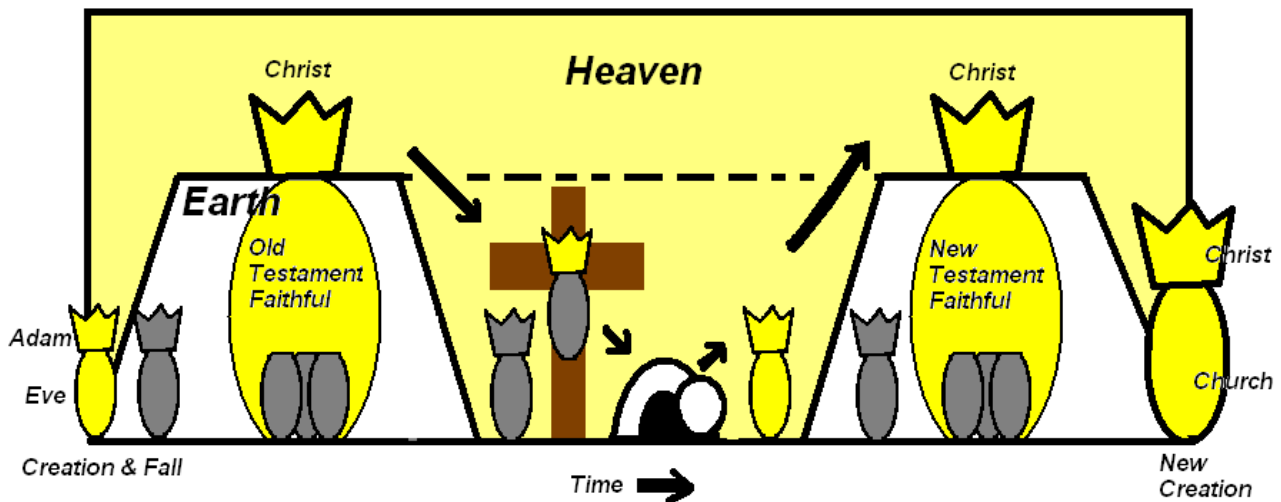
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## Introduction

In this study I examine the linkage between the human institution of marriage and the relationship between Christ and the Church. Particularly I explore how the relationship between Christ and the church is present at the cross of Christ, as well as at the end of time. At the cross, Christ and the church are united under the judgement of God for sin. At the wedding of the Lamb, before the new creation, Christ and the church are united in glory. I believe that it is the joining of the church to Christ that firstly allows for the judicial execution of Christ on the cross, and secondly provides the mechanism by which the sinful church shares in Christ's resurrection.



Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures

(1Co 15:1-4)

## A Profound Mystery

In Ephesians 5 we find an intriguing statement: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” Eph 5:31-32

It is this “profound mystery” that I want to explore in this study. To begin, let us examine the immediate context. We must remember at this point to return to the book of Genesis as quoted here, but first we will examine the context in the letter to the Ephesians. This particular passage in Ephesians begins at verse 21, where the general subject of the following verses is described. From Eph 5:21 to 6:9 we are dealing with various authoritative relationships established by God. The first relationship is described in Eph 5:22-33 as wives submitting to husbands, and by analogy the church to Christ. Secondly children to parents in 6:1-4, and thirdly slaves to masters in Eph 6:5-9. In all of these relationships the scripture provides instruction for both sides of the relationship. For our purposes we will concentrate on the relationship between wife and husband, as described in Eph 5:22-33.

We must keep in mind as we read through the instructions of Paul for husbands and wives, that what we read here in some way reflects the relationship between Christ and the church. We shall discover more of exactly what the boundaries of this analogy are as we proceed.

The first point derives from Eph 5:22-24. Here Paul begins by describing the appropriate role for wives in their relationship with their husbands, as one of submissiveness. It is perfectly reasonable that he begins with the wife, as we will see that she stands in the place of the church, to whom the letter to the Ephesians is ultimately directed. His reasoning here is that the husband is the “head” of the wife. We have met this analogy before before in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians:

But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God

(1 Cor 11:3)

The husband is not “head” of his wife as a chairman is head of a committee. Rather we will see that he is the “head” in the same way that a literal “head” is the head of a body. The relationship between husband and wife is as inseparable and unified as the relationship between the head and body in the physical realm. Paul continues to say that the husband is the head of the wife in the same way that Christ is the head of the church. It is at this juncture that we first see something concrete toward understanding our mystery. Our first point of connection between the husband/wife relationship and the Christ/church relationship is that in these relationships both husband and Christ stand in the place of the head. In the former case the body is the wife, in the latter case the body is the church. The disposition of the body toward the head is one of submission.

Here in the case of Christ, our Lord is specifically the Saviour of his body, the church. In verse 24 Paul makes practical the analogy by saying that as the church submits to Christ, so should the wife submit to her husband. It seems that the human marriage relationship is a mirror in the natural realm of the spiritual relationship between Christ and the church. This can work two ways. Christians can apply the model of the submission of the church to Christ to correctly order their own marriages. And non-Christians can be exposed to something of the spiritual reality of Christ and the church as they see Christian marriages in the world.

From verse 25, Paul changes perspective and addresses husbands. In their case they are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. This is the second point of connection, that the disposition of the head toward the body is to be absolutely characterised by love. This love will be to the degree where the head will give himself up for the body. We see this absolutely perfectly in Christ in his sacrificial death on the cross. Yet Paul says further that this giving up of himself was not without purpose, but was so that He might *make her holy*. This is love, that is focussed on the good of the other. The mechanism of sanctification is puzzling, for the church is cleansed by “a washing of water in the word”. I believe the word signifies the gospel of faith in Christ. And I believe the water represents both the baptism which signifies the start of the Christian life, and the Spirit which he pours out on his church.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

(1Pe 3:18-22)

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who

believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

(Joh 7:37-39)

And the end result of his sacrifice, is that she is presented back to Him in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. Now the mystery begins to come more clearly into view. That which we see on earth, the holy bond between man and wife that has been from the beginning of creation, is in reality but a shadow of the spiritual fulfillment which is Christ and the church. In the same way as the earthly tabernacle foreshadowed and was drawn as a faint copy of the tabernacle in heaven, so Paul draws the earthly bond into an analogy with the most precious and intimate relationship of Christ and his church. And now, just as Christ gave himself for his church, so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. The love with which Christ loves the church, and with which husbands should love their wives, is not a love between two *separate* entities. Rather is it a love which sees the other as a literal “other” part of their own substance. The degree of connection between the two could not be closer. This love should be characterized by intimacy, a closeness that is both physical and spiritual. Here we see that the closeness extends to a unity that is organic. Christ is the head, the church is the body! The husband is the head the wife is the body! These are not two but one! As Paul says “he who loves his wife loves *himself*” (Eph 5:28b).

Now the proper action of him in the place of head is described. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes it and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, *because* we are members of his body. Paul slips again from the individual husband and wife into the realm of Christ and the church. We are members of his body. Each of us does not stand alone in relationship to Christ, but we are gathered together within his flesh, which is the church. And yet the head cares equally for every part of his body. If one part suffers every part suffers with it, and not least of all the head.

And now we will leave Ephesians, to follow the word back to Genesis as Paul directs.

Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

(Gen 2:23-24)

This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

(Eph 5:32)

## **The Creation of Man**

For an overview it seems reasonable to include the description of the creation of Man from Genesis 1 in our study. From there we will proceed to examine Gen 2:18-25, which provides more detail on the process summarised in Genesis 1.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

(Gen 1:26)

Note the purpose of God. “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness”. There is a lot more in this statement than the few words would suggest. His purpose is to create *Man*. Not “men”, *one man*. As we proceed we will see that this is a very important point similar to this one from Galatians:

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.

(Gal 3:16)

I believe that the purpose of God has not changed from the first creation of Adam and Eve. He desires to create one Man in two persons, and this will be the result at the end of time when Christ and the Church are finally united, apart from sin.

God says "let *them* have dominion". This signifies the plurality in unity that we have met before in the relation of Christ and the church, head and body. Although there is *one man, Adam*, "in the image of God he created *him*" yet he, *singular* is male and female, *plural*.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created *him*; male and female he created *them*.

(Gen 1:27)

This unity of one man in two persons is further shown when they together are called "Adam" in Genesis 5.

This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created.

(Gen 5:1-2)

God creates in Adam two persons to whom he relates as one being through the "head", Adam. This theme where the two can be represented by one of the parts is also seen in other aspects of the creation. "day" and "night" are joined as one "day", "earth" and "sea" are joined as one "earth". In the same way with Christ and the church, God relates to both through the head, Christ. Though there is one Christ, the Son of God, yet he is the head of his body, the church. So that which is said to be given to Christ, can be said to be given to his body also, in that the head is joined by love and grace to the body and the body joined by love and submission to the head.

We can look forward again to Paul's vision of Christ and the church in Ephesians and see this view of Christ and the church as one man:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, *to mature manhood*, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

(Eph 4:11-16)

The nourishing and cherishing care of Christ for his church is demonstrated here in the outpouring of the Spirit on the church, in the expression of the manifold gifts of the spirit, in different offices and roles. And the purpose is for the building up of the body, to attain a unity in faith and knowledge of the perfect head. To mature manhood, *literally a single "mature man"*. The "mature man" is Christ, as the head joined by love to his body the church. The image here is not of many christians individually coming to maturity, but rather many christians together growing up as one body into the perfect head.

At this point we shall move on to the detailed description of the creation of the first man in Genesis 2.

Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

(Gen 2:7)

The first point to notice is that the Lord does not create both male and female together, but Adam is created first. For us this is analogous to Christ who is preeminent in all things:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

(Col 1:15-18)

Just as Adam was before Eve, so Christ is before the church. And just as Christ bears the image of God, so Adam.

So God created man in his own image, *in the image of God he created him*; male and female he created them.

(Gen 1:27)

For a man ought not to cover his head, *since he is the image and glory of God*, but woman is the glory of man.

(1 Cor 11:7)

And yet, God notes that while Adam reflects the image of God there is a deficit in relationship. Noone as yet reflects Adam's glory.

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." ... So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Gen 2:18,21-24

Now in this first creation of Eve we may have a type of the later creation of the church, where the "deep sleep" of Adam is a type of the death of Christ for the church, and God himself creates for Him a bride who is literally "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh", as a result of that death. And here we have now returned to Eph 5:32 in the connection of Adam's earthly reality to Christ's heavenly fulfillment.

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

(Eph 5:31-32)

In order that this relationship between Christ and his church is echoed throughout time, the earthly institution is commanded at the beginning of history. Our Lord affirms the importance of this earthly historical reality echoing through to his time:

He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them

male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

(Mat 19:4-6)

The earthly reality is important for Christians because God has chosen to have his Son displayed in imperfect men and women joined in marriage. It is our responsibility to reflect Him in everything as faithfully as we can, where he has placed us. In marriage our place is either as a husband or a wife, where the primary responsibility of the husband is love and provision, and the primary responsibility of the wife is submission and reverence.

So we see that the earthly institution of marriage reflects the heavenly marriage of Christ and the church. In the next chapter we will look for Christ and the church in the history of the fall.

## The Fall

The tragedy of the fall is at the root of the ministry of Christ. Firstly we must understand how it is that the fall came about.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

(Gen 2:15-17)

The Lord gave the man a command, just one thing in which his Son (Luke 3:38) should obey him. He should not eat of the fruit of a certain tree in the garden. And God explains the penalty, that when he eats of it he will surely die. After this command is given, God forms Eve out of Adam, and brings her to him, and after this first marriage we hear the history of the fall.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

(Gen 3:1-6)

Now Satan does not approach Adam, but instead talks with Eve. Eve knows of the command to Adam, although she seems to embellish it, going beyond God's command to make it more restrictive than what God had said. "neither shall you touch it". The command to Adam she applies also to herself, as is fitting, her being "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh". "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said you shall not eat of the tree in the midst of the garden". The serpent's lie to Eve is incredible in its audacity: "You will not surely die...you will be like God knowing good and evil." Paul gives us some commentary on why it was that Eve ate of the fruit, beyond its desirable appearance:

and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

(1Ti 2:14)

But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led

astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

(2Co 11:3)

The root of his attack seems to be deception, Eve believed the lie. And yet Adam we see is “with her” and it is his response that is absolutely critical. Eve has been deceived into eating the fruit that will result in death for Adam. She indeed is “one flesh” with him, so in a way, Adam has already transgressed the commandment. And yet at this point as Eve offers up the fruit to Adam there remains a chance for salvation. God gave the command to Adam, prior to the creation of Eve, and he is responsible to God to keep that command. Adam has a choice to make at this point, follow his wife, and through her the lie of the serpent, or remain obedient to God, and intercede with his Father for his wife. But Adam chose to follow his wife, and through him sin and death entered into the world.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned-- for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

(Rom 5:12-14)

Now we begin to return from the tragedy of the fall, and the depths of the earthly Adam to the glory of the last Adam, Christ. For Christ is the Son of God who chose the other path with his deceived and destitute wife, the path of obedience.

Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.

(Luke 22:42)

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

(Heb 5:7-10)

As we continue in Romans 5 we see that Adam is a “type” of Christ:

Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

(Rom 5:14-19)

As Adam was condemned by the tree, so Christ is exalted by the tree of his cross. As Adam condemned all those after him by his act of disobedience, so Christ by his obedience makes righteous all those who follow Him.



For since by a man death came, also by a Man comes the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all will be made alive.

(1Co 15:21-22)

But where is Eve in this type? Eve is IN Adam. The church is IN Christ. Although Eve was deceived by Satan and guilty of transgression, the responsibility for the transgression falls on Adam, her head. Likewise with Christ, although the individuals making up the church are likewise deceived by Satan and guilty of transgression, the responsibility for transgression falls on Christ, the head of the church. And the beauty of this mystical union is that He who is the head of the church is without sin!

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but having been tempted in all respects in quite the same way as we are, yet without sin.

(Heb 4:15)

## Christ, the Church and the Cross

And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

(Gen 3:17-19)

Here we see the result of Adam's sin. The very ground is cursed. As Adam was the ruler of creation, now it shares in his fall. He will eat of the produce of the ground in pain all the days of his life. Yet even in this Adam is a type of the one to come:

He was despised and rejected by men; *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

(Isa 53:1-3)

Even the "thorns and thistles" which the ground brings forth for Adam have their type for Christ:

Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. And the soldiers *twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head* and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands.

(Joh 19:1-3)

And the death of Adam has its fulfilment in the death of Christ on the cross. "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Christ takes the full force of the curse of death upon himself.

It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!"

(Luk 23:44-47)

But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

(Heb 2:9)

But this death of the last Adam is the necessary entrance into righteousness for the church. It is this death which satisfies the justice of God, because Christ on the cross is united with the sinful church. As the scripture says in Isaiah 53:

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

(Isa 53:4-12)

As Adam established sin for Eve by his transgression, so Christ establishes righteousness for the church by his obedience. Now when Christ died on the cross head and body died physically together. In Adam's case, the head and body were both dead because of unrighteousness, because Adam was the author of disobedience. But in Christ's death on the cross, it is only the body which is unrighteous, the church. The head is "innocent", obedient, righteous. So we have two truths. The one "man" Christ comprises a righteous head and unrighteous body on the cross. He is on the one hand worthy of death due to the sins of the body, the church. But on the other hand the "man" is worthy of life due to the righteousness of the head. So Christ in joining himself in love with the unrighteous is able to save those to whom he is joined. He dies because of her, but is raised because of his righteousness.

God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

(Act 2:24)

She dies because of her sin, but is raised because of her faith in His righteousness, which joins her to him beyond the grave. So at the cross we find the justice and love of God conjoined in the marriage of Christ and the church. The justice of God is satisfied in the destruction of the sinful flesh, and yet by joining himself to a sinful wife, Christ's righteousness overflows to her who is one flesh with Him. So at the cross the physical body of Christ represents his spiritual body, the church.

And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him

(Col 1:18-22)

At this point I must stop and consider those who are not *in Christ*. For them, there has been no

sacrifice for sin. Only those joined to Christ as his body, those in the church, share in his death and resurrection. The sacrifice of Christ is available to all, but effective only for those who through faith become part of his body, justly executed on the cross. Those outside the church must face their penalty on the last day.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

(Joh 3:16-18)

## The Church on the Cross

And so in a very real sense Christ and the church died together as one man on the cross. As Paul says in Romans 6, we who have entered in to the church in baptism become partakers of his death on the cross:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

(Rom 6:1-3)

This baptism into his death has a twofold purpose, firstly to destroy the sinful body and secondly to attain to the benefits of his righteous life.

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. *We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.* We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

(Rom 6:4-11)

This understanding of the oneness of Christ and the church on the cross may help us understand a puzzling passage of scripture, where Jesus, the righteous one, is baptized by John:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

(Mat 3:13-15)

I believe Christ undergoes baptism here for the unrighteousness of his body – the church. This is not to say that baptism is unnecessary for individuals in the church because Christ has already undergone it for the church. I believe that this is simply another scriptural indication of the spiritual reality that is in Christ. That whereas He is personally completely righteous, He has chosen to be bound to one who is not, and who needs the “washing of water in the word”.

## Conclusion

The picture of marriage as head and body, and spiritually as Christ and the church is useful to understand how God's righteousness and love meet at the cross. On the cross we find three truths:

- A perfect saviour, Christ the head of the church.
- A sinful church, the body of Christ.
- These two joined by God into one, so that each shares the just recompense of the other.

Christ through love gains a sinful bride and the just penalty for that sin, but beyond that the hope of resurrection with her “so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish”.

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"-- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

(Rev 19:7-8)

The church, through faith and submission gains a sinless saviour and the glory of his resurrection.

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

(Col 2:6-14)