

# Will the Real Bride Please Step Forward

by Philip Powell

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*Philip Powell explores the characteristics of the true church, urging believers to embody the traits of the bride of Christ through righteous living and faithfulness.*

**Duration:** 59:59

**Scripture:** Ephesians 5:25

**Topics:** "Church Unity", "Effective Prayer"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the nature of the emerging church and identifies four hallmarks of the bride of Christ. The first hallmark is that the bride of Christ is characterized by life, emphasizing the importance of avoiding dead formal religion. The second hallmark is holiness, highlighting the need for believers to live a holy life. The third hallmark is unity, emphasizing the importance of unity within the church. The fourth hallmark is a love for the truth, emphasizing the importance of seeking and embracing the truth of God. The preacher also encourages the congregation to pray for the rain of God's blessings and discusses the prerequisites of effective prayer, including the attitude of approaching God with the desire to glorify Him. The objective of prayer is to share in eternal life and to know God. The sermon references various Bible verses, including John 14:6 and John 17:1-3, to support the points made.

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## Transcript

Okay, we've mentioned our topic then today, which is the characteristics of the emerging church. Will the true bride please step forward? And if I could just mention something about the notes, which will also be available with the tapes as they go around. The notes are hopefully designed to be helpful to you.

And with each set of notes, there will be one of my articles on the Bride of Christ from the Omega Times, reduced in size. And so that has been a great blessing to a number of people. A lot of people have written in and thanked us for our involvement in that topic.

It has stirred up a few people as well. And some of the leaders have objected. Now, well, God bless them.

But so as from next month, July, I'm opting out. I'm not going to write anymore for a while because it has caused quite a stir. I don't know where they've not come to me directly, but they have gone to others and complained.

And so, well, that's their problem. But I believe that God wants me to continue with this and to bring a message. And so we are going to do that.

And today we're looking at the characteristics of the true church. Will the real bride please step forward? Now, when there's a line of girls in a room, unless they are dressed distinctively, you don't know who the bride is, right? But on the wedding day, you know who the bride is, correct? And the bride emerges, although all the bridesmaids are beautifully dressed and so on. You can always distinguish the bride from the bridesmaids, right? Will the true bride please step forward? And there she comes in a regalia, usually in beautiful white.

And we're told that when the bride is joined to Christ there in the book of the Revelation, which we're going to read in a moment, that she will be distinctive by her garments. And it says that the garments that she wears represents the righteous acts of the saints. Okay, so works do matter.

Do you agree? Works don't save us. But if we're saved, we'll work. Okay, this is the big problem that I think Martin Luther had when he brought in his Reformation.

He said justification by faith sola, alone, by faith alone. And he was right, he was right. But then he had a problem with the gospel, with the epistle of James.

And he called it an epistle of straw, because James deals with works. And he could not seem to reconcile this idea that James was dealing with works which follow salvation, not works that produce salvation. And we must see that very, very distinctively.

So will the true church please, the true bride please step forward? There are some verses that I've quoted there. Specifically, I'll try and bring this little reading thing down here and see if that will help me a bit. But specifically, Matthew 16, verse 18.

Now you all know that verse. It's a particular setting in a place called Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus challenges his disciples, who do men say that I am? And they said, well Lord, there's a lot of conjecture about you. As inevitably there will be.

Modern society calls Jesus a superstar. Right? And they put a film on about it. Folks, Jesus is not a superstar.

Some people say he's not only a superstar, he is not a superstar, full stop. He never came to be a superstar. He came to be a super savior.

And we must remember that. And so there's always been and always will be a lot of conjecture about Jesus, who you are. And so the disciples said, well Lord, there's some say you're this, there's some say you're that, there's some say you're the other thing.

Some say you're that prophet, some say you're John the Baptist raised from the dead. Some say you're, you know, Elijah. And he said, but who do you say that I am? And he put his finger right on the spot.

And Peter said, you are the Christ. That means the anointed one. Incidentally, he is the only truly anointed one.

I did a study recently in that full sense. Let me just qualify that. I did a study recently on that often abused and misquoted verse.

Touch not the Lord's anointed. And you know, people use it to suggest that leadership should never be criticized. Nonsense.

It's never used in that connection. Never. Actually, it has to do with two things.

It has to do with the people of God. When it says touch not the Lord's anointed, it was dealing with a nation, not with leadership. Remember that.

It was saying don't touch the anointed people of God. And that is a message for us as leaders. We must not touch the people of God.

Right? It's not the other way around. That's interesting. And then it goes on and says do my prophets no harm.

It's okay. I might bring those notes along sometime. I've just put it out.

But I did it for somebody who wrote to me on this very issue. And I felt I needed to. But that's the, it's used in Chronicles.

It's used in Psalm 105. I think it is. I wasn't intending to say this today.

But it's used in Chronicles and Psalm 105. And it has to do with Israel. And it adds the phrase and nor do my prophets any harm.

And when a person stands up to prophesy in the name of the Lord and has the prophetic mantle upon him, and it is a word from the Lord, if that is ignored, then, of course, it carries with it its own consequences. Always does. The other time that people refer to that is when David used it in connection with Saul.

And it had to do with killing a king, not with criticizing a leader. Okay? In fact, David criticized Saul. And he criticized him to his face.

He wasn't talking about that. He was talking about putting his hand out to kill a king who had been anointed. And, of course, you don't do that sort of thing.

Well, that's interesting, isn't it? Okay. So, Peter said, You are the Christ. He stands supreme above all others as the Messiah, the Anointed One.

That's what that word means. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Hallelujah.

And Jesus turned to him and said, Peter, you're a very, very happy man. You're a very fortunate man. You're a man to be envied.

Because flesh and blood has not revealed it to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I say to you that you are Peter. And upon this rock I will build my church.

And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Upon what rock? Of course, himself. But also, there's an implication when he addresses Peter.

Because the church is not built upon the apostles and prophets. Not modern day apostles, pardon me, but Ephesians 2.20 where it talks about being built upon the apostles and prophets. It's the Old Testament

prophets and the New Testament apostles who have given us the revelation of God.

And it cannot be anything else. That's where we're built. You say, don't you believe in apostles and prophets? Yes, I do.

Well, I don't believe the high-flying guys who claim to be apostles today are usually apostles. I would suggest that they get beaten by rods about 39 times, once or twice, before they start making those sort of claims. In fact, in Western culture it's almost impossible to have an apostle in the center of the New Testament today.

Why? Because one of the requirements was that he build on nobody else's foundation. And you can hardly ever do that in Western civilization today. When they go and suffer as the Chinese have suffered, I don't mind calling them apostles.

I heard a man talk about the church behind the bamboo curtain. And he talked about some of those little men who are pastors in those churches now, who hobble around with marvelously shining faces and glorious personalities. And he said, when you inquire why they hobble, he said, during the communistic regime they were strung up in prison by their feet.

And they took iron bars and broke their ankles. And they counted it a joy to suffer for Christ. Far sooner, think of those as apostles of the Lamb in our modern setting, if you want that type of equivalent.

And Jesus does address that issue when he says you are Peter. What he is saying here fundamentally is this. I'm going to build my church, and the word church is Ecclesia, my called out ones.

I'm going to build a group of people. I'm going to build a society which is going to be different from any other society in the world. It's going to be my society.

It's going to be my Ecclesia. You see, they're all building their Ecclesia. The Pharisees and the Sadducees and everybody, the Greeks, the philosophers, all of them were building their Ecclesia.

It was a well known word. The Ecclesia, the called out group for a particular purpose, to a particular philosopher, to a particular master, to a particular teacher. And Jesus said, they're doing it, but I'm going to do it.

And mine is going to be different. I will build my church. And how will I do it? Peter, you put your finger right on the point.

I'll build it on the basis, not of information, but I'll build it on the basis of revelation coming from God. You are the Christ. That's what you said about me.

And everybody who comes into my kingdom, into my Ecclesia, comes in on the same basis. They come in on the basis of a divine revelation, a transmission from God, which brings them into the true church of Jesus Christ. I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Now let's turn to Revelation chapter 19. Revelation chapter 19. If I can find it here.

Revelation 19 verses. Shout the verses out to me to help me. Well, you're six to nine, isn't it? Okay.

And I heard, as it were, the voice of great multitude, as the sound of many waters, and the sound of mighty thundering, saying, For the Lord God omnipotent reigns. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come. Okay.

Let us be glad and rejoice, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. I heard a man recently say that some of the righteous acts of the saints are so flimsy that the church could hardly get dressed up in a bikini, let alone a wedding dress.

Then he said to me, Write, Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said to me, These are the true sayings of God. And then Ephesians chapter 5. And you're all fairly familiar with this passage of scripture, I'm sure.

Ephesians chapter 5 verses 25 to 27. Husband, love your wife just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with a washing of water by the word, 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. And then 2 Corinthians 11 to very quickly.

Paul says of the church at Corinth. He said, I have espoused you to Christ that I may present you as a chaste virgin to him. When I first wrote my article in Omega Times about the bride of Christ, I had a letter saying is, you said, questioning or challenging my idea that the church is in fact the bride of Christ.

The person I wrote to, and I've written to him again and asked him to respond, if he would, to what he thinks to be the bride of Christ, but he hasn't responded yet. And my position on it is that the scripture points very, very clearly to the idea that the church, the total, true, real church, the real church, not the structured church, not the thing that calls itself the church, but those who are genuinely born again of the spirit of God constitute the church of Jesus Christ. Now we'll run on to that and we'll be dealing with it more and more as we go on.

The word bride, just looking at your notes for a moment, appears 14 times in the authorized version of the Bible. Nine times in the Old Testament, we've linked, we've listed all of those. Three in Isaiah, five in Jeremiah, and one in Joel.

It appears five times in the New Testament, and all of the references are by John in his gospel or in his revelation. All of them, with the possible exception of Revelation 18.23, refer to the bride of Christ. In other words, he doesn't refer to bride in the natural sense.

He always refers, when he uses the term bride, it's always to the bride of Christ. Now, you may not make too much of that, but to me it has significance. That this teaching is so important that the Holy Spirit reserved even the very word for that special group of people, which is going to be his church, that he calls from the peoples of the world.

Now, that is significant when you think that the first use, and I've listed it there, is in John 3.29, where John the Baptist said, He that hath the bride, and that's the first time the word is used, he that hath the bride is the bridegroom. But the friend of the bridegroom which standeth and heareth them rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled.

Now, you remember the setting. Here was John the Baptist baptizing people, and then suddenly, and he's very popular, as we said last week, just before the appearing of Christ, God commissioned him to go out

into the wilderness. He went away from the religious establishment, and he began to preach, and people flocked, and Jacob Prask, when he was through, suggested a thing which stayed in my mind, that before Christ comes, that probably God will raise up voices outside of the religious structures to preach the true message, in a wilderness setting, so to speak.

Now, John was very popular at the time of his message, but gradually his popularity waned, and another arose, and this other one was Christ. And so, you know, most of us would get envious, wouldn't we? But John was a beautiful character. And they came to him and said, the one that you bore witness to, in Jordan, he's preaching, and everybody's going to him and being baptized.

And out of that, John made this statement, he that hath the bride is the bridegroom. Very clearly he's identifying Christ as the bridegroom. Very clearly he's identifying his two people as the bride, because if you go back through the chapter, chapter 3 of John, it's the teaching of the new birth, where Jesus brought it to Nicodemus, that except a man be born again.

So he establishes a basis of coming into the kingdom, and John now says that those people who come into the kingdom on that basis are the bride, and he is the bridegroom. And then he makes this profound statement, he must increase, I must decrease. Oh, that we all would have that as our motivation, hallelujah, that Christ might become supreme and everything, and that we might decrease.

Now it's very, very interesting that John the writer, now I'm talking about, John the divine as he's called, had actually given the account of a wedding in Cana of Galilee before he made the statement. And yet in that account, in John chapter 2, he never makes reference to a bride. Now presumably there was a bride there, you wouldn't have a wedding without a bride would you? Yet he never mentions it, why? I believe the Holy Spirit was controlling him, so much so that he uses this word exclusively of that group of people that make up the bride of Christ.

Ok, the other references are there for you, you might like to run down them and look at them, Revelation 21.2 And I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride, adorned for her husband, that's the second use, or rather the third use. Revelation 18 is the second, we'll look at that in a moment. Revelation 21.9 Now the only one that's in question is Revelation 18.23 And the quotation is this, Revelation 18 deals with the destruction of the harlot church.

Read it when you get home, very clearly, the destruction of the harlot church. And after the destruction of that harlot church, it talks about the sound of the bride being no longer in thee. Now it could be an ordinary bride, it could be an ordinary bridegroom, I'm not going to be dogmatic about this.

But it seems to me that it could also refer to the bride of Christ. That there is coming a time in the structured church, when it will so depart from the ways and things of God, that there will be no longer the sound of the true bride there. And there could be a time when the voice will be heard, as 2 Corinthians 6, verses 16-18 says, Come out from among them, and touch not the unclean things.

Now I'm saying that, just simply, as a warning. It's happened throughout church history. Generally, when the church gets prosperous, and self-reliant, and powerful, it becomes corrupted.

And over and over again, God calls out a people, who will subscribe totally to him and his word. So, with that in mind, I want to look at the, when did I start this? The emerging church, her nature. It's ok, I've tagged myself today, I've brought only a C6C, so I've got to keep to an hour.

Ok, the emerging church, her nature. There are four hallmarks, and I might not get through it all in detail, so I'll run down them very quickly. Four hallmarks of the emerging church.

First of all, the bride of Christ is characterized by life. Secondly, the bride of Christ is characterized by holiness. Thirdly, the bride of Christ is characterized by unity.

And fourthly, the bride of Christ is characterized by love of the truth. Those four things, four signs of the emerging church. Your notes are printed back and front, four pages.

The bride of Christ is characterized by life. Religion is a horrible thing, and dead formal religion is its most awful expression. It has enslaved men and women and kept them in bondage.

It has deceived people and kept them away from Christ. No wonder there is a great hallelujah in Revelation 18 that ascends from heaven's gathered hosts at the destruction of the harlot church. For the harlot church represents false religion.

We said more about that last week in my message about when God calls for a drought in the church. Now God's first act in creation and in regeneration is always to breathe life. Genesis chapter 2 verse 7 informs man of the dust of the earth.

And then he comes and he breathes the breath of life. And the Bible says, and man becomes a living soul. John chapter 20 verse 22, Jesus has formed his church.

There they are in embryo form on the day of the resurrection. He comes and he breathes into them and he says, receive the Holy Spirit. So, the regeneration and the original generation, the creation and the new creation, the first thing is always the infusion of life.

You don't marry a dead bride. Okay, so the church, the true church, the true bride is a living organism, a lively group. Hallelujah.

One of the most wonderful statements in the Bible is, as I live, saith the Lord. You know, Hebrew talks about God swearing by two irrevocable things. The first irrevocable thing is that he's alive.

The second thing is that he can't break his word. Never. God is alive and God will never ever break his word.

Hallelujah, that's wonderful. That to me causes me to be thrilled. Hallelujah.

And so God always, when he swears, he swears by himself. He wouldn't swear by any other because he would be swearing by a lesser thing. He swears by himself.

So he establishes an oath on the basis of his life and that life is indestructible. Only in God rests immortality. Immortality means not subject to death and only in God rests immortality.

He shares it with us as a deposit, not from the past, but from the present on into the future, so that we have eternal life, but we don't have immortality. This body is subject to death, right? The process of death. That's why we get sick.

That's why we get old. It's subject to the process of death. But thank God he has shared with us an aspect of his own immortality, which is his eternal life, so that this body will be changed one day.

Hallelujah. And we will go on into eternity where we will never die. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

So this is the first and foremost characteristic. As I live, says the Lord, is a statement that appears 15 times in Scripture and 14 of those times in Ezekiel. The other time is Romans chapter 14, verse 11, where it is written, for as it is written, as I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me and every tongue shall confess to God.

Ezekiel is being called the Calvin of the Old Testament, and I think we need to rediscover, although I'm not a Calvinist myself in that extreme sense, I think we need to rediscover some of the truth of the sovereignty of God, that God is in control, not man. Thanks very much. Hallelujah.

And it would take all the pressure off of the so-called, you know, sprint to the end where we've got to evangelize the world before Christ comes. Just say, God's not in control of all this business. And so in our sprint to the end, we bring in all sorts of things to try and get them into the kingdom, including rock and roll.

God save us. And we say, we've got the folks. We've got them.

Look, they're making decisions. Of course they're making decisions. They're so hung up on the jolly beat of the music, they couldn't do anything else but make a decision.

Call them and they'll do it. But has there been a vital change? Have they been committed to Christ? Do they come to Christ on the right basis? Or do they come simply on a sense of excitement and hyped-up activity? We come to Christ, brothers and sisters, because we need to come to Christ, because we are sinners, and we need a Savior, and we need repentance. And it's not a business of just putting our name on a dotted line and finding joy, peace, and happiness.

We need to find God. Hallelujah. And so this whole thing comes back to that vital and incredible truth of the fact that God is in control, and He brings life.

David Du Plessis, who is credited with taking the charismatic movement of the Catholic Church, whether that was good or bad, I don't know. Hello. I think it was good, actually.

Because I'll tell you what, it gave them an opportunity to make a decision. But usually what has happened, and mark this, is the Structured Church accommodates whatever comes along and turns it to their advantage. I think it was genuine what happened with David Du Plessis, and I still think there's some genuine things happening.

But the Structured Church is just concerned with getting the whole world under its umbrella. And so they'll accommodate the Papua New Guinean, Spiritist, Anonymistic worship. Oh yes, they will.

You go and see. They'll accommodate what happens in the Philippines, and they'll accommodate the charismatic thing as well. So long as they can ultimately be dominant and in control.

It's all part of the harlot system. And I'm not saying that the Catholics are the harlot church. I don't think so.

I think all structures of religion come into that category. They will head it up. In all probability, almost certainly.

That's where it's heading. And you read now some of the fearful things that are happening with the Anglican Church and the Presbyterian Church in some places, and other churches just grifting. And in fact,

even the Sermons of God are getting observers there.

And all sorts of things like that. It's a part of the deception of the religious system. And God Almighty save us from it.

David Du Plessis, who I believe was motivated by God, said there's a difference between having truth on ice and truth on fire. And we need to have truth on fire. He also made that great statement, God has no grandchildren.

That's true, he has only kids. He has only children. Hallelujah.

John Wesley, similarly, he was a man with a strangely warmed head and a strangely warmed heart and a strangely cool head. We need both, don't we? But we need the life. The bride of Christ is comprised of a group of individuals who have experienced an infusion of divine life.

When those individuals gather together, you have a lively lot. But it's the life of Christ. Hallelujah.

It's the life of Christ which brings us together. What grand anticipation. We've got a wedding coming.

Hallelujah. He's coming soon. Hebrews chapter 9 and verse 27 says, And as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment, so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, and unto those who look for him shall he appear, what? A second time, sin apart, without sin, unto salvation.

So that's the first thing. The church characterized by life. Not formality, but real, genuine life.

Then the second thing, the bride of Christ is characterized by holiness. The word holy appears 611 times in the Bible. Holiness, 46 times.

Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost, 96 times. He who is the Spirit of life, his favorite designation is holy. Exodus 15, 11 says, Who is like unto thee, O Lord among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? Holiness to, or unto the Lord, appears 6 times as a phrase.

Exodus, unto the Lord. And in the final battle of God, it says that the riders have over their harness holiness unto the Lord. Jeremiah 22 verse 3 says, Israel was holiness unto the Lord.

Israel, as the representative of the church, as the forerunner of the church in the purpose of God, holiness unto the Lord. The expression, be ye holy, or be holy, appears a total of 48 times in the Bible. Leviticus 20 verse 7, Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy, for I am the Lord your God.

Peter quotes that. In 1 Peter 1, 15 and 16, But as he which is called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation, because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy. The last words that are sounded out from heaven, that final sort of epitaph upon the history of mankind, as individuals and of the whole of the world, is this, He that is unjust, let him be unjust still.

And he which is filthy, and there are some people around, let him be filthy still. And he that is righteous, let him be righteous still. And he that is holy, let him be holy still.

What a fearful thing. Now we are in the time of grace, when we can thank God to which comes from being filthy and untrue and sinful to becoming righteous and holy, but there is coming a day when it will end. And the statement will go out, That's it gentlemen, what you have decided, you have decided forever, and

nothing can change it now.

What a fearful thing. God Almighty help us, and may we be among those who are holy. A little while ago I heard John Jamieson, the former New Zealand Commissioner of Priests, a few of us were at the meeting, speaking at a meeting in Matamata Baptist Church.

And he referred to the influence of the world philosophy on the church. For example he said in the area of situational ethics, where basically what you say is, you know, situational ethics says, there is no right or wrong, there is no absolutes, what seems right is ok at the time, and so you get down and in school they are introducing it, where you sit around and discuss, what will you do in this situation or that situation, and nobody is right, and nobody is wrong, and all of that sort of business. And he says that that idea has come into the church, so that now it's what feels good.

And he says that the appeal of holiness has been replaced by a drive for happiness. Boy that's true isn't it? You think of what happened with the Wesley's and the Whitfield's, and the preachers that I was brought up under. The preaching was an appeal to righteous living, to holiness.

But now it's, oh come on, have a bit of fun with Christ. I went into a church a little while ago, no names, no pictorial, they started out by handing sweets out. Now you might say there's nothing wrong with that, and there might be times when we'd hand out sweets, but what I'm saying is it's setting a tone.

It's setting a tone. Sit back and be relaxed, and enjoy yourself. Now of course we enjoy ourselves in church, but the motivation, the drive is different.

The drive is God. Everything has to be directed towards that. Now we have our times of fun, and enjoyment.

I don't believe we should be miserable at all, but the whole thing has been replaced, and it's a fun thing. And God Almighty looks down, and He says hey, people are going to hell. I remember the story of Amy Carmichael, who had a vision, and in her vision, she saw the church, playing with daisy chains, sitting down, in cover, making daisy chains, when people were going to hell.

And she said in her vision, she could hear people screaming, as they were going over the precipice, into hell. And there the church was sitting, having a good time, praying. God forgive us.

God forgive us. Now I'm not saying that that will make us miserable, but the whole thing has got to be changed. We've replaced an appeal of holiness, with a drive for happiness.

The appeal of the second coming of Christ, is not that we'll just have a good time up there, but the appeal is always, as in 1 John 3, 3, and every man that has this hope, purifies himself, even as he is pure. And that expression means to make pure, or to purify, to cleanse, or it means to offer, or to become a burnt offering, on a sacrifice. And that is the implication, and that is the appeal, of the second coming of Christ, and of the message, of holiness.

Well, we'll just skip over that. You can pick it up in the notes, and see, and we're on page 3 now. 1 John 2, verse 28, And now my little children abide in him, that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed from before him, at his coming.

And we will not be ashamed, if we have lived our lives, according as much as is in us, to his calling, and his will in our lives. Now I don't believe that's to bring legalism, or bondage. That's to live simply, in the light of scripture, and say, Lord, by your grace, I want to do, what you want me to do.

The third thing about, the Bride of Christ, is it's characterized by unity. I must run down this quickly, but it's very, very important. How does the Lord's Prayer start? Come on, come on somebody.

And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, glorify your Son, that your Son also, may glorify you. For John 17, is the Lord's Prayer. I tricked you.

The other one, is the Pattern Prayer. We've called it, the Lord's Prayer. Sorry, but I wanted to make a point.

John chapter 17, is the great prayer for unity. And friends, it's going to be fulfilled. John chapter 17, verses 11, 21, 22, and 23.

Look at it with me, will you, quickly. John chapter 17, think about this, listen to the praise if you want, and get a perspective of it, because it's so vital. John chapter 17, verse 11, And I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to you, Heavenly Father, or Holy Father, keep through your name, those whom you have given me, that they, what, may be one, as we are one.

John chapter 17, verse 21, And they all, that they all may be one, as you Father are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe, that you have sent me, verse 22, and the glory, which you gave me, I have given them, that they may be one, just as we are one. Verse 23, I in them, and you in me, that they may be made perfect, in one, and that the world may know, that you have sent me, and have loved me, as you have loved me, as you have loved them, as you have loved me. Okay, John chapter 17, one incredible chapter.

Let me run down through it very quickly. First verse, you have the posture of true prayer. Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven.

That's where prayer is answered from. As we said last week, where do we get our water from? Do we get our water from Egypt, or do we get it from heaven? In Egypt you pump it up. In Israel and in the church it comes down.

Jesus lifted up his eyes. He didn't try and pump it up, or hike it up, or philosophize it up, or cite it up. He lifted up his eyes to heaven.

That's the true posture of prayer. You have the prerequisites of effective prayer. Verse one, the second part to five, the whole chapter.

The attitude of approach of true prayer is Father, glorify your name. Glorify your Son, that your Son also may glorify you. The Great Westminster Catechism.

I love it. Can't think of it at the moment. Man's deep end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

Those two things. But don't reverse them. Don't try and enjoy yourself, and out of that enjoyment glorify God.

But rather, determine to glorify God, and out of that you'll get enjoyment. Jesus said, glorify your Son, that your Son also may glorify you. That is the true attitude of approach in prayer.

The objective, verses two to three, is that we may share in eternal life. Look at those verses of John chapter 17, and as you have given him authority over all flesh, that he should give eternal life. Oh, there's nothing like eternal life.

And this is eternal life, verse three, that they may know you. That's the objective. That's the drive.

Eternal life. God's sovereignty. He's the dispenser of eternal life.

The goal is a satisfied life. Hallelujah. In verses four and five, I have glorified you on the earth.

I have finished the work which you have given me to do, and now, oh Father, glorify me together. You can see him as a person who is totally satisfied. He's come to the end of a short life, as far as Christ is concerned.

Thirty-three and a half years, yet he says, I've done it. I've completed it. Paul said, I have set myself a course.

I want to run so that I won't be ashamed. Hallelujah. He says, laying aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset you, run with patience the race that is set before you.

And the psalmist said, I will be satisfied when I awake in his likeness. Hallelujah. There's no satisfaction apart from that.

You can achieve everything in life, even in church service, but unless you glorify God, you will die unsatisfied. Oh God, that I might live to bring glory to you, and at the end of my days, by the grace of God, like Jacob of old, turn up my toes in bed and say, I'm ready to go. Hallelujah.

Glory to God. Brothers and sisters, I believe that is the picture that is presented here. And then we see the purpose of effective prayer.

It's always unity. Unity. Oneness.

There are three expressions here. Verse 11, Jesus says that they may be one as we are. Verse 21, he says that they may be one in us.

And verse 23, he says that they may be made perfect in one. He deals with the style of unity. He deals with the relational unity, and he deals with the ultimate of unity.

He deals with the style of unity. The church is aiming for unity, and what they're doing is setting up a structured unity. What they say is we all compromise, and we will have unity on that basis.

So we have the Hindus, we have the Buddhists, we have the Roman Catholics, we have the Protestants, we have everybody in a great conglomerate, everybody loses their identity, everybody is there. We've got unity. Nonsense.

You've got a mess. You've got a distortion of the truth. You've got a compromise to the point of death.

You haven't got unity. What is unity? Here he says that they may be one as we are. What is it? It's a light unity.

Think of the unity of the Trinity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There are three persons, and yet there's a total blending.

Nobody can fully understand the Trinity. Nobody. That rather controversial character called Johnny Ortiz, Juan Carlos Ortiz, talked about mashed potato love, and he likened it to the Trinity.

He said you get three potatoes, when you boil them together, they're individual. He said that when you get hold of them, and you mash them, you've still got three potatoes, but they're mashed, and you can't differentiate one from the other. Everybody misunderstood what he was on about, and they said there he doesn't believe in the Trinity, he doesn't believe in the oneness.

Well, how can you illustrate something which cannot be really illustrated? But I thought he brought out a lovely truth, that really here is a blending to such an extent that we have lost a sense of individuality in that overall picture of the love of Christ, that it has to be linked to Him. It has to be a life principle. It's not a death principle.

So the style of unity is that of the Father and the Son. They haven't compromised on anything. They are blended together in unity.

It's a life unity. And then it's a relational unity. It's not abstract or formal or structural.

It's one in us. My unity is with you because I have a unity with the Father, right? So my unity with a Roman Catholic, because he has a unity with the Father, is the same thing. My unity with another group is the same thing because my unity is with the Father, provided they have a unity with the Father.

That is the issue. That is the fundamental issue. So it's a relationship thing.

I have a relationship with Him. You have a relationship with Him. So I must have a relationship with you.

It's impossible to be otherwise. And so this is what he's talking about. He talks about one in us.

So the unity for which he prays is not a unity severed from himself, as the Buddhists would be, the Hindu would be, and the friends of any idolater, including Roman Catholics, would be, if they are continuing in idolatry. Right? You with me? It cannot be a oneness with the Father. So it has to be a oneness with the Father.

And then the ultimate unity is that we should be complete, accomplished, finished, brought to an end. The great verse, John 17, 23, I in them, and you in me, that they may be made perfect in one. What an expression.

Made perfect in one, that the world may know that thou hast sent me. Now I'm not a Greek scholar, but let me just give you a little exercise here. There are four Greek words built one upon another.

The first, telos, which is linked to tello, means to set out for a definite point or goal. So when he talks about being made perfect, he uses that word, made perfect in one, he talks about setting out in a definite direction. Right? What's your goal? Where are you heading? Right? The unity he's talking about is a unity that you have to establish a goal about.

Where are we going? So we're moving in a specific direction. And then the next word, which it's built upon, means to be brought to an end or finished. It's wanting nothing necessary to completeness.

So when he talks about being made perfect in one, we set a goal, an objective, but now there's been added to us this dimension where there is nothing that is lacking for completeness. And then there is another word, which is added to that, and it's all blended into this one expression, and it means to add what is yet wanting in order to render a thing full. It means to bring to a close or fulfillment by event.

So what's in view here when Jesus says that they may be made perfect in one? I tell you what's in view. The prophecies of Scripture. The second coming of Christ.

And the thing that he prayed for there will never be totally realized until he, blessed be his name, comes back. Now meanwhile, we have a very important task to perform. We have to preach the gospel, but we do not have to engineer unity.

Only he can do that. And he does it. First of all, by giving us a goal.

What is the goal? Well, I've long since made just one goal in my life. You know what it is? It's what Paul made. Oh, that I may know him.

Not that I may have big numbers. Not that I may be a success. Not that I may have great wealth.

Though if he gives me all of those, I will not say no. But my motivation, my goal, is oh, that I may know him. And having set that goal, he will ensure that there is nothing lacking for completeness or for fulfillment.

And ultimately, when I stand before him, I will stand unashamed. Not because of anything in me, but because of everything in him. For he has been the consuming passion and compassion of my life.

Do you get it? I tell you, friends, it takes all the pressure off. And it gives us a perspective of life. So the oneness for which Christ prays is that which will be fully brought in at the return of Christ.

Now the question is this. Will there be precursors in the bride of Christ? Will there be signs of this? Yes, there will. And so, it's characterized by unity.

Look for these signs. One, a consuming love for the universal body of Christ. God took away from me the spirit of denominationalism almost as soon as I got into the ministry.

I've worked mainly in assemblies of God till they rejected me. And I don't say that with any malice or anything. But I never ever thought that assemblies of God was the kingdom of God.

Right? The kingdom of God is bigger than any denomination. And bigger than me or anything that I can ever do. Hallelujah.

And I have a consuming for the body of Christ that I may do what I can do for the glory of God that is poor sex having exposed. I can't claim that. But that I may make my little contribution to presenting you as a chaste virgin to Christ for the glory of God.

A consuming love for the universal body of Christ. A disregard for doctrinal differences that divide. Now, certain doctrine is important.

Some people say, oh, we don't believe in doctrine. Nonsense. Doctrine simply means teaching.

And if you don't know how to live right, how can you live right? Right? So doctrine is important. Teaching is important. If you don't know how to do it, you can't do it.

So it's crazy saying, you know, I'm just living and I don't care about teaching and all that. We've got to know the scriptures. But there are certain little nitty-pitty things which are unimportant.

Which I'll see one way, you'll see another way. And we must disregard those doctrinal differences that divide. And that emerging church of Christ will have those hallmarks, I believe.

The third thing is a concentration upon the pure truth of the word of God. And so, Revelation 22, 17 says, And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come. Could there be now that be emerging? The Spirit and the Bride say, Come.

And let him that feareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

Okay, the fourth characteristic, the Bride of Christ is characterized by a love of the truth. When Jesus, who is the embodiment of truth, stood before Pilate, he pronounced the death sentence upon him, ultimately. Although he tried to wash his hands.

You can't wash your hands of Christ. You've got to make a decision one way or another. And he went through the formality of washing his hands.

But he actually pronounced the death penalty upon Christ. And Jesus, who bore witness to the truth, standing before him, Pilate said to him this, Are you a king then? Incidentally, when he asked him if he was the king of the Jews, he didn't answer. Because Jesus was never exclusively the king of the Jews.

They called him the king of the Jews. But he wasn't exclusively king of the Jews. And when Pilate put that to him, he never answered.

But when Pilate put to him this question, Are you a king then? This is how he answered. He said, You say that I am a king. For this cause came I into the world.

What? To be king? No. To bear witness to the truth. The truth.

A friend of mine on one occasion, because I questioned certain things that were being taught, said, Ah, Phil, he said, The problem is that you're a teacher, and so you're always thinking about truth. I'm a pastor, so I'm always thinking about people. Wow.

I thought we were all committed to truth. Pastor, teacher, evangelist, prophet, apostle. The fundamental thing, if we're not committed to truth, we're not committed to anything.

And ultimately, we won't be a good pastor. And eventually the thing will crumble around us. Because truth is foundational to everything.

And we all have to be committed to truth. What an incredible statement that was that Jesus made in John 14, verse 6, and we'll leave it there. When he said, I am, what? The way.

And there he presents a picture of a journey. And he presents a picture of a road. Look at the notes and the meaning of the words.

And he's saying, I am a road, walk me. I am the way. Then he says, I am the truth.

And there he presents different images of truth. That which is truthful and that which loves the truth. And what he is saying there is, I am the truth, know me.

And then he says, I am the life, live me. Hallelujah. We used to sing it, didn't we? I am the way, the truth, and the life.

That's what Jesus said. I am the way, the truth, and the life. That's what Jesus said.

Without the way, there is no going. Without the truth, there is no knowing. Without the life, there is no living.

I am the way, the truth, and the life. That's what Jesus said. Hallelujah.

Hallelujah. As the church starts to come to that great climax, where she's going to be presented as a pure bride to a heavenly bridegroom, what will be the characteristics? Life, holiness, what's the third one? Unity, and a love for the truth. God give us all of those for his namesake.

Let's bow in prayer, shall we? And what I want us to do now, I would like you to... Look, please, don't feel embarrassed. Don't feel obliged. But I would love to hear four or five, three or four or five or two or three or whatever, prayers along the line of what we specifically mentioned last week about the rain coming down from above.

Now, I'm not asking that we will pray for natural rain. The Lord knows we get enough of it here in Hamilton. Don't we? But what I think we ought to pray... And I'll turn this thing off, I suppose it's finished.

No, it's still going, just a little bit. Let's get it on then. Okay.

Hey, I must have been less than an hour. That was good luck, wasn't it? Very good, wasn't it? Good. Let me tell you this before we pray.

I'm a man of few words, as you know. We had a... I used to link with an interdenominational ministry in England called... Well, we just gave it a name, Prayer and Bible Ministry. I've taken that to India in various parts.

But the guy that I was linked with was a fellow from South Africa, a marvellous man of God from a brethren background called Dennis Clark. Incredible man. And Dennis stirred me up and a lot of us to pray for the things in the nation.

On one occasion, we came together to pray in the midst of a drought. And Dennis told us that we had to break the drought. And I couldn't see it.

I really couldn't. I was just one of the leaders and I wasn't really in unity. And I was thinking, well, what about those poor people in Australia always in the drought? And those people in India, why should we, you know, be all screwed up about it? But gradually, during the week, as it went on, it got to me.

And I saw it. That in actual fact, it was a spiritual thing that needed to be broken. And I shall never forget it.

I know it happened. Dennis was praying, as was his custom, getting the people together and we would pray. We'd have three sessions a day, two and a half hours each session, half ministry, half prayer.

The basis, though, of coming together was really prayer. And we had about a hundred people from different denominations together and we were praying for many things. But every time, you know, we'd get off on a tangent, he'd bring us back.

He'd say, look, friends, we've got to break this drought this week. And so on. And many, there'd be many things to try and break the drought.

They'd even brought a witch doctor from Africa to try and break the drought. In Britain, think of that. Christian England.

And anyway, this was on the Thursday, I shall never ever forget it. It was a morning session. Dennis was praying and suddenly it came like a revelation to me.

And I saw that he was right and I was wrong and I said, Amen! Like I'd never said Amen before. Now, do you know what Amen means? Almost. Get the bag.

But actually, it's a very strong word and it means this. It is so. Now, it doesn't just mean so be it.

Although, you know, mostly we say that. But it's stronger than that. So be it sort of puts it off to the future.

Well, so be it. So be it. It will be, you know.

But when you say it is so, it brings the future into the present. Now, that's what Amen means really. Jesus used it quite frequently.

The old King James, when you have the expression verily, verily, it's Amen, Amen. Same word. Amen, Amen.

He's saying it is so. It is so. Nothing can break it.

It is so. It is so. Now, that day when Dennis prayed and I said Amen, there was a blending of spirits and it was agreement in a very, very different way.

We didn't pray again that day. Dennis knew, we all knew the answer had been established. At five o'clock that afternoon the rain came.

And it's gone on record that that broke the drought. Now, I know nobody in the world would have known. We don't want them to know.

But I know it happened. I know it happened. But the other thing that we prayed for was that in breaking the drought and sending the rain and it was a very serious drought in England.

They never had anything like it. I don't know. We prayed that God would send the spiritual rain.

And this is the big thing about Auckland, folks. I wouldn't feel like I said last week in the place there. I couldn't pray for rain on Auckland at the moment.

Because you don't know who'd get the glory or the credit. I mean, would it be the wizard from Christchurch or would it be...

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