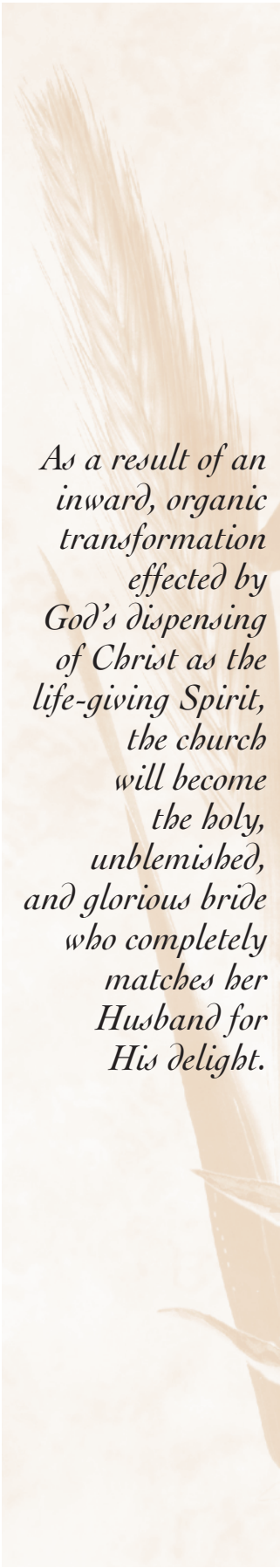


The Church as the Bride in Ephesians: the Great Mystery

by David Yoon

In Ephesians 5 a familiar subject conceals a great mystery. Marriage in this chapter forms a shell that must be broken open in order to see the kernel of the divine revelation concerning the most profound mystery in the universe. In this passage Paul speaks of wives submitting to their husbands and of husbands loving their wives, but at the conclusion he utters an astonishing declaration, one that crystallizes his entire apostolic ministry: “This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church” (v. 32). Clearly, this chapter was not written merely to expound on the ethical conduct of Christian spouses but, far more significantly, to unveil the mysterious union of Christ and the church, the center and reality of God’s New Testament economy. This revelation is missed by many expositors, although some correctly identify the great mystery in Ephesians 5 to be the union of Christ and the church. Few, however, adequately discern the organic and spiritual nature of this union and how it is produced, developed, and consummated for the fulfillment of the divine economy. Rather, they narrowly focus on Christ’s self-sacrificing love demonstrated in His redeeming death (v. 25), a once-and-for-all event, and neglect or even deny the aspect of Christ’s love demonstrated in His life-imparting sanctification in resurrection, an ongoing process culminating in the presentation of a glorious bride to Christ at His coming (vv. 26-27). Some Reformed expositors even contend that Christ’s union with the church is primarily covenantal and merely symbolic in nature, thereby negating the reality of a deeply intimate and spiritual union between Christ and the church in the divine life. What is crucially absent from nearly all interpretations of Ephesians 5 is Paul’s central vision: the mystery of God’s economy, which is His plan and endeavor to dispense Himself in Christ as the Spirit into the believers in order to produce them as the church, His organic counterpart.

The book of Ephesians centers on this mystery. The first three chapters are devoted mainly to the revelation of the mystery concerning the church, and the last three chapters concern the believers’ walk according to this revelation in their practical living. Nevertheless, Paul’s teaching in the latter chapters is still governed by his commission to enlighten all to see the economy of the mystery (3:9). Hence, God’s economy remains central in Paul’s speaking concerning marriage. In 5:32 he unequivocally states that underlying his instructions to husbands and wives is a subject of far weightier significance: Christ and the church. Moreover, among the nine verses in Ephesians 5:25-33, only a few of them exhort husbands to love their wives (vv. 25, 28, 33), whereas most of them disclose the love of Christ for His church (vv. 25-32). To apprehend the depth and breadth of this love requires the backdrop of the entire divine economy. Only by seeing this economy will we begin to know Christ’s knowledge-surpassing love—love that motivated Him not only to give Himself up in order to deliver us from our sins through judicial redemption (Rev. 1:5) but also to bring us fully into glory through organic salvation in sanctification by dispensing Himself as life into us (Eph. 3:19, 21; 5:26-27; 2 Thes. 2:13; cf. John 17:22-24).



As a result of an inward, organic transformation effected by God's dispensing of Christ as the life-giving Spirit, the church will become the holy, unblemished, and glorious bride who completely matches her Husband for His delight.

Through Christ's redeeming and life-releasing death on the cross, believers receive not only the forgiveness of sins but also the life of God to be the church as the Body of Christ. By the continual dispensing of Christ as the nourishing life supply into the members of His Body in a cherishing atmosphere of divine love, they grow up into the Head, Christ (Eph. 4:15), and function to build up His Body (v. 16). Through this divine dispensing by the operation of the life-giving Spirit in the word, all the "spots" of the natural life and "wrinkles" of the corruptible and decaying old man are gradually washed away, and the holy and glorious life and nature of the Triune God are progressively constituted into the saints until the church is wholly renewed, expressing the righteousness and holiness of the divine reality, God Himself (5:26-27; 4:22-24). As a result of this inward, organic transformation effected by God's dispensing of Christ as the life-giving Spirit, the church will become the holy, unblemished, and glorious bride who completely matches her Husband for His delight. It is for such a bride that Christ will return to enjoy with her the deepest union and highest satisfaction. The heart of the great mystery concerning Christ and the church is nothing less than Christ as the life-giving Spirit imparting Himself into the church to build her up as His organic Body and adorn her as His beloved bride for the fulfillment of the mysterious economy of God.

The Mystery in Ephesians— the Church as the Issue of the Union of Christ with the Believers

The referent of the word *mystery* in Ephesians 5:32 is a subject of significant debate. But much of the fog surrounding the interpretation of this word dissipates when we place the great mystery in Ephesians 5:32 in the broader context of Ephesians, the subject of which is the church as the mystery of Christ, the Body of Christ, in the economy of God. An accurate understanding of the word *mystery* is very helpful; for this W. E. Vine's definition is enlightening:

In the NT [μυστήριον] denotes, not the mysterious (as with the [English] word), but that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be made known only by divine revelation, and is made known in a manner and at a time appointed by God, and to those only who are illumined by His Spirit. In the ordinary sense a "mystery" implies knowledge withheld; its Scriptural significance is truth revealed. (424)

The notion of mystery is especially prominent in Ephesians, not only because it occurs several times (1:9; 3:3-4, 9; 5:32; 6:19) but even more because it is invoked at the heart of profound and critical passages concerning the organic union of Christ and the believers for the producing of the church. Verse 9 of chapter 1 is of particular importance since it contains the first use of the word and thus establishes the precedent for the rest of the book. Here Paul identifies the mystery as the will of God for His eternal economy, when he speaks of God "making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself, unto the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him" (vv. 9-10). Just before speaking of the mystery of God's will, Paul declares that it was according to the good pleasure of His will that God the Father chose the believers in Christ to be holy and without blemish before the foundation of the world, predestinating them unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself and gracing them in the Beloved (vv. 3-6). By God's salvation in Christ through His triune dispensing—the Father's dispensing in His selection and predestination, the Son's dispensing in His redemption, and the Spirit's dispensing in His sealing and pledging—His chosen saints are made the many sons of God for the constitution of the church as the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (vv. 3-14, 22-23). Such a lofty will, which God purposed in Himself in eternity past for His economy in eternity future, was a mystery kept hidden until the time in which He was pleased to make it known by causing the riches of His grace to abound to us in wisdom and prudence (vv. 8-9). *Mystery* in Ephesians, therefore, denotes the once hidden but now revealed will of the Triune God to produce a Body for Christ by His divine dispensing for His eternal economy.

Mystery is again closely linked with God's economy and the church in 3:8-11, where Paul declares that his commission was

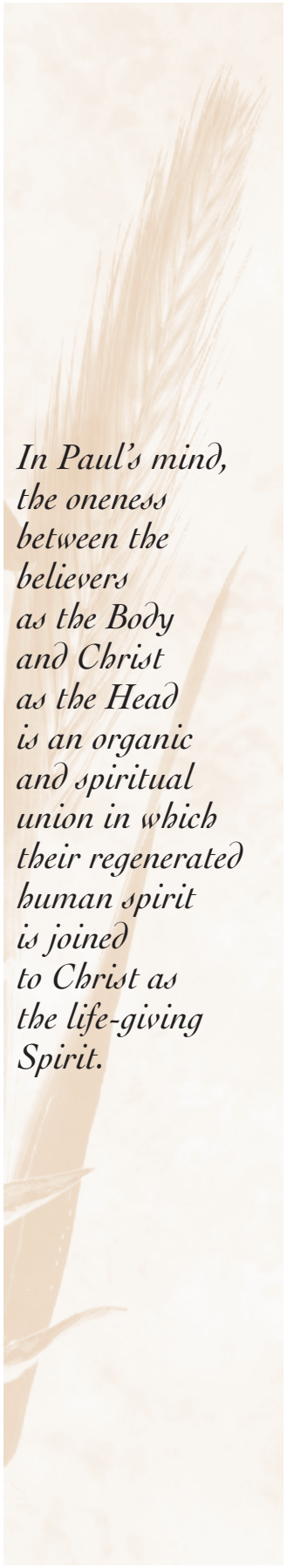
to announce...the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel and to enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things, in order that now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies the multifarious wisdom of God might be made known through the church, according to the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord.

According to these verses, the mysterious economy of God—His eternal purpose for which all things in the universe were created—is to dispense the unsearchably rich Christ into the believers in order to produce the church as a universal display of the all-inclusive Christ as the multifaceted wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24, 30). This understanding of the mystery as God's hidden purpose concerning Christ and the church is confirmed by Paul's statement earlier in Ephesians 3 that the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations, has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in spirit (vv. 3-5), that "in Christ Jesus the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the Body and fellow partakers of the promise through the gospel" (v. 6). The mystery of the divine economy is to produce the Body of Christ by bringing the believers, both Jews and Gentiles, into union with Christ and thereby into the enjoyment of God in Christ as their inheritance (1:14) and the participation in the riches of Christ as the gospel (3:8). Hence, the revelation of the mystery in the first three chapters of Ephesians shows God's intention in His economy to dispense Himself in Christ into the believers in order to unite them in Christ for the producing of the church as the Body of Christ unto the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.

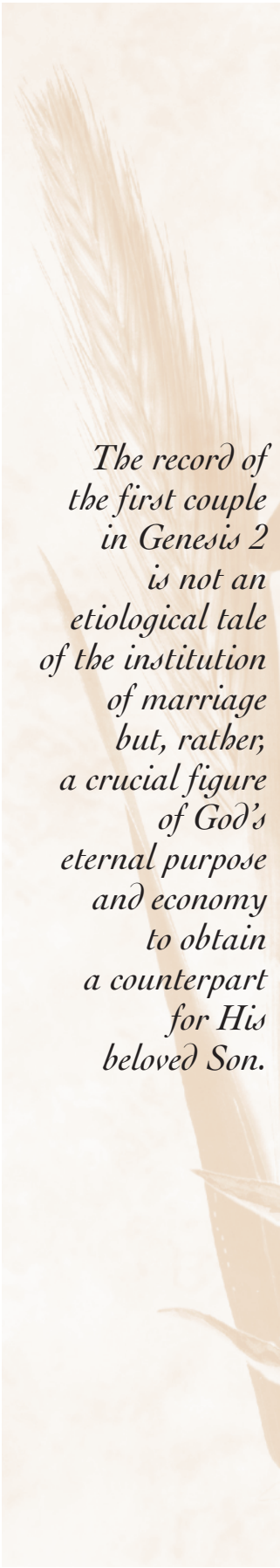
In light of the consistent usage of *mystery* in Ephesians to denote God's economy to gain the Body of Christ, the great mystery in 5:32 is the mystical union of Christ and the church, by virtue of which the church becomes both the Body and the wife of Christ. In *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, Harold W. Hoehner insightfully notes that there is a parallel between Ephesians 5:30-32 and 1 Corinthians 6:15-17 in that both passages cite Genesis 2:24 to portray the believers' union with Christ (777-778). In Ephesians 5:30 Paul says, "We are members of His Body," underscoring the believers' organic union with Christ by identifying them as members of Christ's Body. Then in verse 31 he quotes Genesis 2:24 to present the physical union of a man and his wife as a type of the union of Christ and the believers as His Body: "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh." Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 6:15-17 Paul presents an argument based on both the literal and spiritual meanings of Genesis 2:24. Here Paul first states that since a believer's body is a member of Christ, he must not commit fornication with a prostitute lest he make a member of Christ a member of the prostitute (vv. 15-16), citing "the two shall be one flesh" as his proof-text (v. 16). He then immediately makes a spiritual application of that verse by saying that a believer who is joined to the Lord is one spirit (v. 17). This indicates that in Paul's mind, the oneness between the believers as the Body and Christ as the Head is an organic and spiritual union in which their regenerated human spirit is joined to Christ as the life-giving Spirit, constituting their whole tripartite being a member of His mystical Body (v. 19; John 3:6; Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor. 15:45b). Therefore, as Witness Lee points out, a husband and a wife becoming one flesh signifies that "Christ and the church not only are one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17) but also have become one Body (Eph. 1:22-23)" (*Four Crucial Elements* 160).

The Great Mystery concerning the Union of Christ and the Church Typified by Adam and Eve

According to the context of Ephesians 5, which repeatedly refers to Christ as the Husband and the church as the wife, the church's union with Christ is not only spiritual but also



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marital. To unveil that Christ is both the Head of the church as the Body and the Husband of the church as the bride, Paul employs the union of Adam and Eve as a profound type of Christ and the church. However, many expositors oppose a typological interpretation of the Genesis 2 account, even among those who correctly see the mystery in Ephesians 5:32 as referring to the union of Christ and the church. Such writers argue that Genesis 2:24 is the only substructure for Paul's application in Ephesians 5 and that the details of the preceding narrative in Genesis 2 do not prefigure Christ and the church. One such expositor, Andreas J. Köstenberger, contends in "The Mystery of Christ and the Church: Head and Body, 'One Flesh'" that the only sort of typology allowable in this passage is a "retrospective form of typology" in which Paul would "look for a way to illustrate the union of Christ and the Church and use the principle enunciated in Gen 2:24 regarding the 'one flesh' marital union" (88-89). Köstenberger deems typological interpretations "fanciful developments," since Paul "does not elaborate on any typological connection" (91). This attitude is not unique to Köstenberger; rather, it expresses a position dogmatically held by critics of typological interpretations in general: if there is not explicit typological use of an Old Testament account in the New Testament, typology is not to be read into it. For Köstenberger and like-minded scholars, the Old Testament record is not usually meant as a type of what was to happen in the New Testament, and to see greater meaning in those stories than what the apostles explicitly endorsed would be "presumptuous" (89).¹

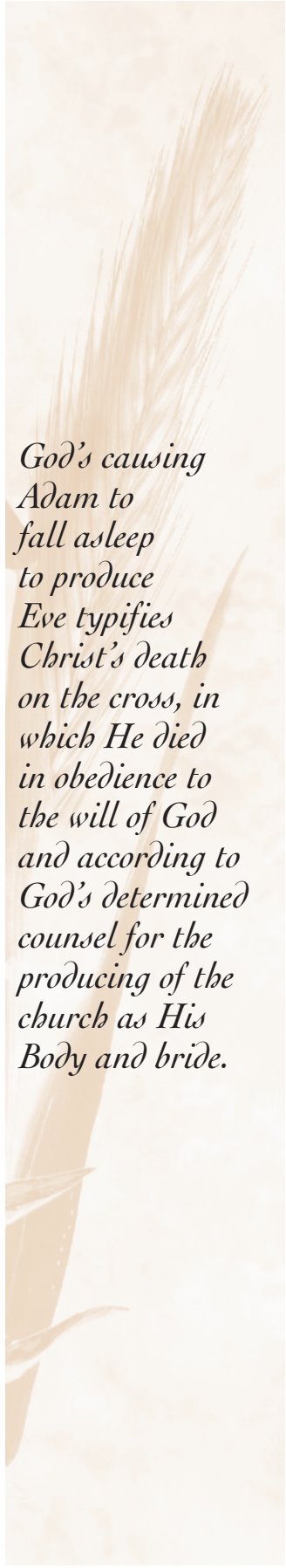
Given their prominent position in the Bible, it is improbable that Adam and Eve are merely two historical individuals and not also types with spiritual significance. The record of the first couple in Genesis 2 is not an etiological tale of the institution of marriage but, rather, a crucial figure of God's eternal purpose and economy to obtain a counterpart for His beloved Son. Many portions of the Old Testament explicitly speak of a marital relationship between God and His elect (Isa. 54:5-8; Jer. 2:1-3; 31:31-32; Ezek. 23; Hosea 2:19), which prefigures the marriage between Christ and the church revealed throughout the New Testament (Matt. 9:15; Mark 2:18-20; John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2-3; Rev. 19:7). Therefore, when Paul speaks of the true, spiritual significance of marriage and invokes Genesis 2, his words are more than sufficient grounds to understand Adam as a type of Christ and Eve as a type of the church. Furthermore, Eve was taken out from Adam, whom Paul identifies as a type of Christ (Rom. 5:14), in order to be joined as one flesh to him. The typological process by which Eve was produced and prepared provides understanding as to how the church becomes the glorious counterpart to Christ.

Paul expressly asserts that Adam is "a type of Him who was to come" (v. 14), that is, a type of Christ, who is identified as the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45). Adam was made in God's image and according to His likeness and was given dominion over all things (Gen. 1:26); Adam thus typifies Christ, who, as the image of the invisible God and the impress of God's substance, is God's glorious expression (Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4; Heb. 1:3) and who, as the Lord of all and the Ruler of the kings of the earth, is the God-appointed King and Representative to rule over all things created by God (Acts 10:36; Psa. 2:6; 8:4-8; Heb. 2:6-9; Matt. 28:18; Rev. 1:5). In Genesis 2:18 Jehovah God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper as his counterpart." Adam thus typifies and portrays Christ as the real, universal Husband, who is seeking a wife for Himself (cf. Isa. 54:5; John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:31-32; Rev. 19:7; 21:9), and Adam's need for a wife typifies Christ's need in the divine economy to have a complement (Gen. 2:18). But even as Adam named all the animals and the birds, "for Adam there was not found a helper as his counterpart" (v. 20). Just as all the animals and birds were disqualified from being Adam's counterpart because none of them had the same life, nature, and expression as Adam, so also nothing in the old creation is able to match Christ as His counterpart because the old creation does not share the divine life, nature, or expression of Christ.

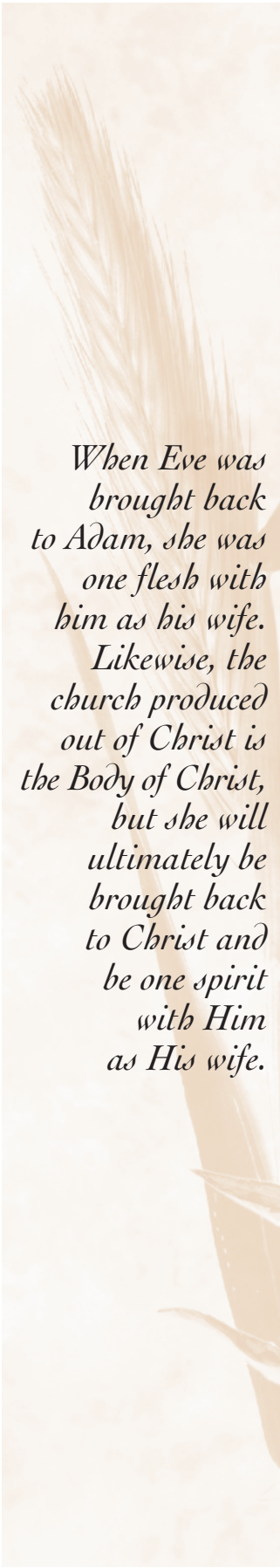
Genesis 2:21-24 unveils how God in Christ produced a counterpart that matches Him in life, nature, and expression but not in the Godhead. A statute of God in Leviticus 19:19 prohibiting the breeding of two different kinds (species) reveals that in order for Christ to be joined to the believers as His bride, He and they must be of the same kind, the same species. Therefore, the marriage of Christ with the believers required that He partake of the human life and nature through incarnation to become a God-man—signified by the forming of Adam—so that in resurrection He might dispense the divine life and nature into the believers to make them God-men (John 1:14; Heb. 2:14; 1 Tim. 3:16; John 10:10; Col. 3:4; 2 Pet. 1:4)—signified by God causing a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, opening his side, taking out one of his ribs, and building the rib into a woman (Gen. 2:21-22). God’s causing Adam to fall asleep to produce Eve typifies Christ’s death on the cross, in which He died in obedience to the will of God and according to God’s determined counsel for the producing of the church as His Body and bride (Matt. 26:42; Acts 2:23; Isa. 53:6, 10; Eph. 5:25-27; cf. John 11:11-14; 1 Thes. 4:13-16). The parallel between the formation of Eve and the formation of the church—the former as the issue of Adam’s sleep and the latter as the issue of Christ’s death—has been noted by Augustine: “Adam sleeps, that Eve may be formed; Christ dies, that the Church may be formed. When Adam sleeps, Eve is formed from his side; when Christ is dead, the spear pierces His side, that the mysteries may flow forth whereby the Church is formed” (134).

The rib taken from Adam’s opened side, which rib corresponds to the water that flowed out of the crucified Christ’s pierced side, typifies the unbreakable, eternal life of Christ, which was released through His death and dispensed into His believers in resurrection for the producing and building up of the church as His Body and counterpart (John 19:34; 12:24; 10:10; Heb. 7:16). This rib corresponds to Christ’s unbroken bone in John 19:36 (Exo. 12:46; Psa. 34:20). On the one hand, the Lord’s physical body, which signifies His human life, was broken (Matt. 26:26), for He was indeed put to death in the flesh (1 Pet. 3:18). On the other hand, His bone, which signifies the divine life within Him, remained unbroken and undamaged, for this life is the immortal and indestructible resurrection life, which cannot be conquered by death (John 11:25; Acts 2:24; Rev. 1:18; 2:8). It is very significant that Genesis 2:22 does not say that from this rib Eve was made (עָשָׂה, as in 1:26), created (בָּרָא, as in v. 27), or formed (יָצַר, as in 2:7) but that she was built (בָּנָה, rendered in the Septuagint as οἰκοδομῶ)—the word used by Paul when speaking of the building of the church (Eph. 2:10-12; 4:12, 16; 1 Cor. 3:9-10, 12, 14). As noted by expositors such as G. H. Pember in *Earth’s Earliest Ages* (114) and Robert Govett in *Govett on Ephesians* (262), there is thus a distinct parallel between the building of Eve and the building of the church, revealing in type that it is because the church is built with the endless, indissoluble, unconquerable resurrection life of Christ that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against her (Matt. 16:18).

When Eve was brought to him, Adam proclaimed with wonder and delight, “This time this is bone of my bones / And flesh of my flesh; / This one shall be called Woman / Because out of Man this one was taken” (Gen. 2:23). The root of the Hebrew word for *woman*, לְאִשָּׁה (*Ishshah*), is אִשׁ (*Ish*), indicating that Eve was the duplication of Adam and came out of Adam, portraying in type the truth that the church is the duplication of Christ. Just as Eve derived her life, nature, and essence from Adam and was, therefore, fully Adamic, so also the church is completely “Christly.” Furthermore, Adam and Eve are treated as a singular collective in a number of verses (1:27; 3:24; 5:1-2) and are even called by one name—“Adam” (v. 2), showing that in the eyes of God, Adam and Eve were one person. The same principle applies in 1 Corinthians 12:12, where Paul refers to Christ and the church collectively as “the Christ”: “Even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ.” The truth that the church is constituted exclusively with Christ as her unique element is clearly revealed in Colossians 3:10-11, where Paul declares that in the church as the new man there cannot be any natural persons, but “Christ is all and in all.” Just as Eve was not formed of the lifeless, natural elements of the earth but was built with



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When Eve was brought back to Adam, she was one flesh with him as his wife. Likewise, the church produced out of Christ is the Body of Christ, but she will ultimately be brought back to Christ and be one spirit with Him as His wife.

Adam's rib, an organic element, so also the church is not the old creation formed from the natural human life but is the new creation built with the resurrection life of Christ as the organic increase of Christ in resurrection (John 3:29-30). Hence, all things that come from man's natural life, including man's natural ability, intelligence, virtues, and strength, are outside the church and have nothing to do with the church; not only are they profitless in building up the church, but they even mar the church as God's holy temple (1 Cor. 3:12, 17). Strictly speaking, the church is not a composition of persons who believe in Christ yet live according to their old human nature; instead, it is the totality of Christ as the life-giving Spirit constituted into all the believers and lived out of them (Gal. 2:20; 4:19; Phil. 1:21). In other words, the church as the Body is not simply the aggregate of all believers but the aggregate of the Christ within the believers. Hence, in order to be the reality of the church as the organic Body of Christ, we need both to put off the old man, the natural man with his fallen nature, by allowing the death of Christ to terminate every aspect of our natural life, and to put on the new man, the redeemed and regenerated man with the divine nature, by putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the unique constituent of the new man (Eph. 4:22-24; Rom. 13:14; Gal. 3:27-28).

In Genesis 2 Eve typifies the church not only as the Body of Christ, that which comes out of Christ and is then mystically united to Christ as the Head to be a divine-human organism, but also His counterpart, a corporate woman in an intimate relationship of love with Christ as the Husband. When Eve was taken out of Adam, she was the body of Adam. But when Eve was eventually brought back to Adam, she was one flesh with him as his wife. Likewise, the church produced out of Christ is the Body of Christ, but she will ultimately be brought back to Christ and be one spirit with Him as His wife. Therefore, Jehovah bringing Eve, the reproduction of Adam, to Adam in Genesis 2:22 prefigures Christ presenting the glorious church, His reproduction, to Himself at His second coming (Eph. 5:27). And Adam cleaving to Eve as his wife in order to live together with her in Genesis 2:24-25 typifies Christ and the church being joined as a couple and living in a blissful union of life as the New Jerusalem for eternity (Rev. 21:2; 22:17).

What Genesis 2 shows is that Adam and Eve had to be *of* one flesh before they could *become* one flesh, signifying that before the church can be joined to Christ as His bride she must be brought to the point of fully matching Christ by growing in His life unto maturity as His Body. In other words, Genesis 2 reveals in type that the building up of the church as the Body of Christ in the present age equals the preparation of the church to be the bride of Christ at His second coming. This is the great mystery of God's economy concerning Christ and the church. The seed of the divine revelation concerning this mystery sown in Genesis 2 blossoms in Ephesians 5:25-27, which is a marvelous revelation of Christ dispensing Himself as life into His believers by sanctifying and nourishing them in order to produce and build up the church as His Body and prepare the church to be presented to Him as His counterpart. Ultimately, the church as the spiritual Eve in Ephesians 5:25-27 consummates in the New Jerusalem as the eternal Eve, the wife of the Lamb in Revelation 21 and 22.

Christ Loving the Church and Giving Himself Up for Her

The account of God preparing Eve for Adam, as a typological portrait of the great mystery concerning the union of Christ and the church, is fulfilled in Ephesians 5:25-30, which presents a wonderful revelation of the love of Christ for the church demonstrated in three stages—Christ as the Redeemer in the past, the Sanctifier and the Nourisher in the present, and the Bridegroom in the future—for the producing of the church as the organic Body and beautiful bride of Christ, who is made the same as Christ in life, nature, and expression.

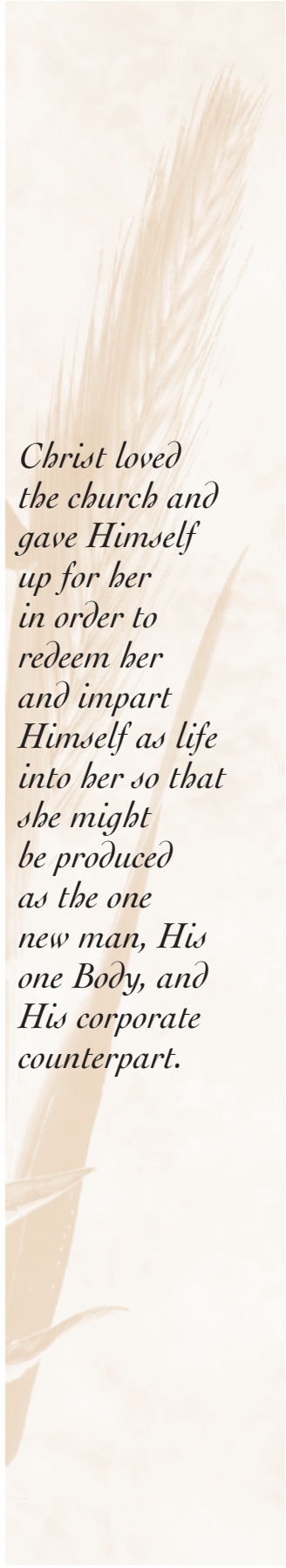
At once the Fulfiller of the deep desire of God's heart as well as the highest model of husbandly virtue, Christ "loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (v. 25). Love, being the nature of God's essence (1 John 4:8), is embodied in Christ (Col. 2:9), who has loved us as His cherished counterpart with a love that surpasses all time and every limitation, spanning eternity to eternity (Eph. 1:4; 2:4; Jer. 31:3) and being unchangeable by any eventuality (Rom. 8:35). Even the fall of man provided Christ a supreme opportunity to display His immeasurable love for us. Through His incarnation He partook of blood and flesh in order to shed His priceless blood and bear our sins in His sinless body on the tree for our redemption (Heb. 2:14; 1 John 1:7, 9; 1 Pet. 2:24). As the Merchant who sought and found the church whom He treasured as a pearl of great value, Christ went to the cross and sold all that He had and bought the pearl, giving His life as a ransom for the church (Matt. 13:45-46; 20:28). Christ, as God blessed forever, so deeply loved the church that He spared nothing but rather paid the highest price to acquire her: His own precious blood (Rom. 9:5; Acts 20:28). Only eternity will fully tell of the love that filled His heart and caused Him to suffer the cross's death for our redemption in order to purchase the church, His bride (Heb. 12:2; cf. S. S. 4:9).

The knowledge-surpassing and eternal love of Christ resulted in more than a sacrificial, redeeming death. In Paul's view, Christ gave Himself up for the church not only to redeem her but also to release His divine life in order to produce her as a divine-human organism. This thought corresponds to the truth in Ephesians 2:15-16 that through His death, which imparted His eternal life as the divine essence into the believers, the Lord Jesus created the church in Himself as the "one new man," reconciling both the Jewish and Gentile believers "in one Body to God through the cross." Through the fall we became not only sinful but also dead, alienated from the life of God (v. 1; 4:18), but God in Christ, because of His great love for us, made us alive together with Christ (2:5), regenerating us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead by dispensing into us His divine, eternal life released through His death (1 Pet. 1:3), so that we may be produced as the church, an entity in which divinity is joined with humanity (Eph. 1:22-23). The goal of the love of Christ manifested in His death on the cross was not to gain a vast multitude of individual redeemed saints but to gain the church as a corporate entity composed of all His believers. In brief, Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her in order to redeem her and impart Himself as life into her so that she might be produced as the one new man, His one Body, and His corporate counterpart.

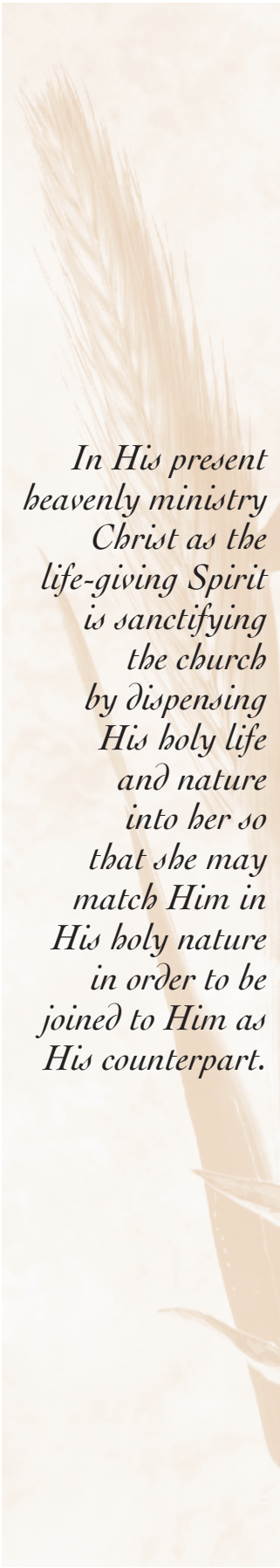
Christ Sanctifying the Church

After stating in Ephesians 5:25 that Christ loved the church, giving Himself up for her, Paul speaks concerning the purpose of His love exhibited in His death: "That He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word" (v. 26). This verse indicates that Christ's love for the church is not only displayed in His giving Himself up as a man in the flesh for her through His redeeming and life-releasing death in His ministry on earth; it is also manifested in His continual action of giving Himself to the church as the life-giving Spirit in His present ministry in heaven. Through the progressive impartation of His divine life and His holy nature into her to sanctify her, He makes the church holy not only positionally but also intrinsically. In the universe the Triune God alone is holy; that is, He alone is unique and distinct from everything that is common (John 17:11; Acts 2:27; 3:14; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). But in the economy of His salvation He communicates His holiness to His elect. Holiness refers primarily to God's inward nature, not His outward acts; hence, to be sanctified we need not only to be separated outwardly with regard to our position before God but also to be permeated inwardly with the element of God's nature so that we may be holy in our whole being, even as He is holy (Lev. 19:2; 1 Pet. 1:16; 1 Thes. 5:23).

Holiness is intrinsically related to God's eternal economy to dispense Himself into His



*Christ loved
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in order to
redeem her
and impart
Himself as life
into her so that
she might
be produced
as the one
new man, His
one Body, and
His corporate
counterpart.*



In His present heavenly ministry Christ as the life-giving Spirit is sanctifying the church by dispensing His holy life and nature into her so that she may match Him in His holy nature in order to be joined to Him as His counterpart.

chosen people in order to produce and build up the church as the counterpart of Christ. The believers were chosen by God in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love in order to be His counterpart according to the good pleasure of His will (Eph. 1:4-5), and they are destined to become “the holy city,” the wife of the Lamb in the new heaven and the new earth for eternity (Rev. 21:2). The believers’ sanctification is the very purpose that God in Christ planned according to the desire of His heart in eternity past, which purpose is guaranteed to be accomplished in eternity future for the fulfillment of His heart’s desire. The principal operation of God in His economy on the bridge of time between these two ends of eternity is to sanctify His chosen people in order to prepare them as a bride for His Son. In His present heavenly ministry Christ as the life-giving Spirit is sanctifying the church by dispensing His holy life and nature into her so that she may match Him in His holy nature in order to be joined to Him as His counterpart. Just as Eve could be joined to Adam because she shared Adam’s human nature, so also the church can be joined to Christ in a marriage union only when her redeemed human nature is fully cleansed of the spots and blemishes of the fall and fully permeated with the holy and divine nature of Christ. By sanctifying the church to such an extent, Christ will gain a spouse who completely matches Him as a person of two natures—divinity and humanity—thereby attaining God’s goal in His selection and fulfillment of the eternal destiny of the church.

Many expositors suppose that sanctification, as mentioned in Ephesians 5:26, refers to the process by which the believers are set apart from profane or sinful things unto God through the redemptive work of Christ. For instance, in Hoehner’s mind, sanctification here is the procedure by which “persons who are not inherently holy...are set aside or consecrated to God or to God’s service,” and “people who are redeemed are considered sanctified or set apart to God” (751). Similarly, Peter T. O’Brien in *The Letter to the Ephesians* regards sanctification in this verse as a strictly positional matter:

Through his sacrificial death Christ claimed the church as his own to be his holy people... There are two elements: a separation from all that is unclean and evil, and a consecration to God and his will...

[In verse 26] sanctification focuses on being set apart to God. To use systematic theological categories, it is positional or definitive sanctification that is in view here, not progressive sanctification. (421-422)

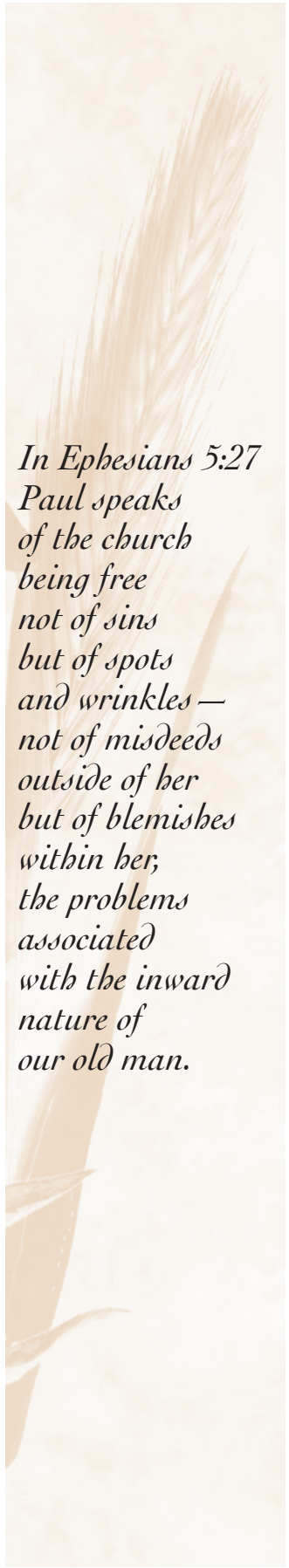
In the view of most expositors, Christ’s work of sanctifying the church was finished on the cross and is to be appropriated mainly through the believers’ baptism. Indeed, it is baptism that many of these expositors believe “the washing of the water” refers to. However, although superficially appealing and historically popular, this interpretation is discordant both logically and scripturally. If the water in verse 26 with which Christ washes His bride is taken as the literal water of the baptismal, we are constrained to understand the spots and wrinkles in the next verse also in physical terms, and the whole passage becomes absurdly unspiritual. Furthermore, neither in Paul’s writings nor in the rest of the Scriptures—in type or in fulfillment—is the water of baptism considered to be a bath in which Christ washes us of our inward defects or to be a means of sanctification; much rather, it mostly bears the connotation of death and judgment (Gen. 1:2; 7:17-24; cf. 1 Pet. 3:20-21; Exo. 14:22, 29; cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-2), being directly referred to by Paul as a tomb in which we are to be buried with Christ into His death (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12). Other writers, such as O’Brien (422-423) and Hoehner, also see baptism as incompatible with the context, the latter going so far as to say, “This is reading patristic and modern liturgy into the first century, and, moreover, there is nothing in the present context or in Titus 3:5 to indicate that this has reference to a baptismal rite” (753). Instead, they see water as a metaphor for the spiritual cleansing of redemption that draws upon the ancient custom of a prenuptial bath, “the word” as the word of the gospel, and Christ’s action of washing as the fulfillment of Ezekiel 16:9 (753-754).

Although such commentators correctly perceive the inadequacy of the baptism interpretation, they nevertheless share the inaccurate view that the washing of water is a positional, judicial, objective, and initial aspect of sanctification, thereby neglecting its deeper significance related to a dispositional, organic, subjective, and ongoing aspect of sanctification.

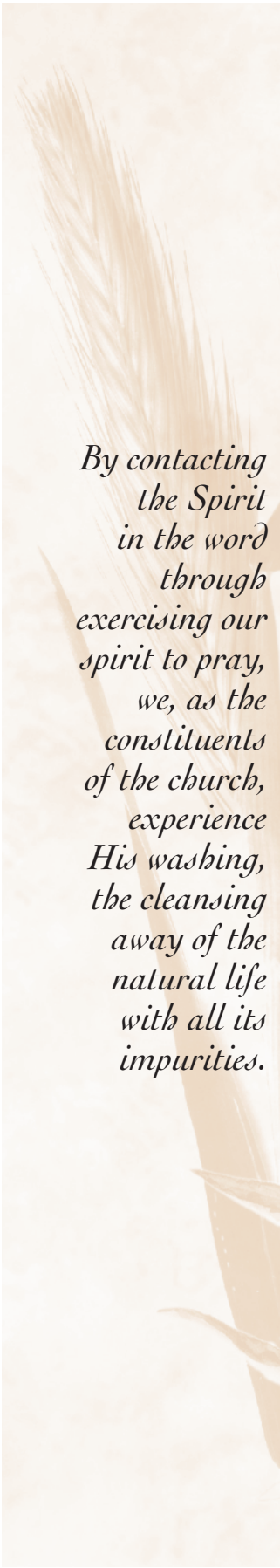
The word *washing* (τό λουτρόν) used in Ephesians 5:26 is very rare in the New Testament and has here the definite article, indicating that Paul is referring to something particular and recognizable. This word could be translated literally as “the laver,”² which was a prominent piece of furniture in the tabernacle and, as with all the articles of God’s house, is laden with typological meaning. By the divine arrangement of the furniture in the tabernacle, the laver stood between the altar of burnt offering and the Tent of Meeting. The location of the laver for washing being directly after the altar for sacrifice signifies that “the washing power of the laver comes out of God’s judgment at the altar. After passing through God’s full judgment at the altar (the cross), the crucified Christ entered into resurrection and became the life-giving Spirit who washes us (1 Cor. 15:45; 6:11; Titus 3:5)” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Exo. 30:18, note 1). The laver, therefore, signifies a cleansing subsequent to the removal of sins—not the outward washing away of sins by the blood of Christ but the inward cleansing of the forgiven sinner by the Spirit. Christ gave Himself up for the church on the altar of the cross, and now in resurrection He is sanctifying her, cleansing her in “the laver of the water.” The water refers to the Spirit of life who issued out of Christ’s death and resurrection (John 7:37-39) and is symbolized by the water that flowed from His opened side (19:34). For this reason the only other time λουτρόν appears in the New Testament is in Titus 3:5, which speaks of “the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit,” by which all the corrupt elements of the old man (v. 3) are purged away and the divine essence of newness is imparted into the believers to bring them progressively into the experience of their status as a new creation. This is why in Ephesians 5:27 Paul speaks of the church being free not of sins but of spots and wrinkles—not of misdeeds outside of her but of blemishes within her, i.e., the problems associated with the inward nature of our old man. Such defects can be solved only by the operation of Christ as the indwelling, life-giving Spirit subjectively sanctifying and washing us (1 Cor. 6:11), renewing our being by imparting the new elements, the elements of the divine life, into us (Titus 3:5; Rom. 6:4; 7:6). Therefore, it is through the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who gives life, that Christ is sanctifying the church, dispensing the holy nature of God into the believers, so that they may be the same as He is in His holy nature but not in His Godhead. In *Critical and Exegetical Hand-book to the Epistle to the Galatians*, Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, expounding on Ephesians 5:26, underscores that sanctification involves the transmission of Christ to the believers in and through the work of the Holy Spirit:

The sanctifying influence of the [gospel] is the efficacy of the Holy Spirit, who works by means of the gospel ([Eph. 6:17]); but the Holy Spirit is subject to Christ ([2 Cor. 3:18]), and Christ also communicates Himself in the Spirit to men’s hearts ([Rom. 8:9f]); hence it is said with justice that *Christ* sanctifies the church through the word (comp. also [Eph. 2:21]), in which case it is self-evident to the Christian consciousness that the operative principle therein is the Spirit operating by means of the word. (512)

It is by the continual washing of the resurrection life of Christ as the Spirit who gives life that we can gradually put off every vestige of the old man, every trace of the old creation, and put on Christ as the unique content and constituent of the new man (Col. 3:9-11). Having fully passed through such an inward washing and renewing of her nature by the flowing resurrection life of Christ as the life-giving Spirit, such that no natural blemish is left, the church will be fit for the glory in which she will be presented to her Bridegroom (Eph. 5:27).



*In Ephesians 5:27
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and wrinkles—
not of misdeeds
outside of her
but of blemishes
within her;
the problems
associated
with the inward
nature of
our old man.*



*By contacting
the Spirit
in the word
through
exercising our
spirit to pray,
we, as the
constituents
of the church,
experience
His washing,
the cleansing
away of the
natural life
with all its
impurities.*

It is crucial to understand why the washing of the water is “in the word” (ἐν ῥήματι), which Charles Hodge in *Ephesians*, part of *The Crossway Classic Commentaries*, deems “the principal exegetical difficulty” in verse 26 (191). Many Reformed theologians interpret that word to be the so-called baptismal formula, the words of Matthew 28:19 or perhaps the name of Christ (cf. Acts 2:38; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16) as a sacramental pronouncement at the time of baptism. However, to restrict the word as the means of washing in Ephesians 5:26 to a formula pronounced but once at baptism robs this spiritual expression of its full meaning, the reality of which believers may and must avail themselves throughout the entirety of their Christian life.

The secret to interpreting the significance of the expression *in the word* in Ephesians 5:26 lies in the foregoing conclusion: the washing water is “in the word” because the life-giving Spirit is embodied in the word (2 Tim. 3:16; cf. Eph. 1:13). Indeed, the words that Christ speaks to us “are spirit and are life” and thus are nothing less than “the Spirit who gives life” (John 6:63); they are “words of eternal life,” words that embody and transmit the Spirit of life as living water to us in order to sanctify us (v. 68). It also noteworthy that the Greek word translated “word” in Ephesians 5:26 is not λόγος (logos), which denotes the constant and objective word recorded in the Bible, but ῥῆμα (rhema), which denotes the instant and applied word spoken by God in Christ—a living and experiential word that “the indwelling Christ as the life-giving Spirit” speaks in order to “metabolically cleanse away the old and replace it with the new” (John 6:63; Eph. 6:17) (Lee, *Recovery Version*, 5:26, note 4).

“The word” in Ephesians 5:26 is the word spoken directly by Christ to the church, since this verse explicitly identifies Christ as the Sanctifier of the church. But according to Revelation 2 and 3, Christ speaks to the churches as the Spirit (cf. John 16:12-13), as seen by the fact that at the beginning of each epistle it is emphasized that Christ Himself is the Addresser (Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14), whereas at the end the call is to give heed to what the Spirit says to the churches (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Furthermore, elsewhere both the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11) and the word (John 17:17; 15:3) are said to cleanse and sanctify the believers. In Ephesians 6 Paul identifies the Spirit with the word by instructing the believers to “receive... the sword of the Spirit, which Spirit is the word (ῥῆμα) of God, by means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit” (vv. 17-18). The implication of this verse is that the spiritual essence of the word of God is accessed by means of prayer, meaning that as a believer prays with the constant word (logos) of the Bible, Christ as the Spirit speaks instant words (rhema), which are actually the Spirit Himself (cf. 2 Cor. 3:6). By contacting the Spirit in the word through exercising our spirit to pray, we, as the constituents of the church, experience His washing, the cleansing away of the natural life with all its impurities, and His sanctifying, the impartation of His holy element to make us holy and, thereby, practically experience the work of Christ to prepare His bride.

In Paul’s mind, Christ’s sanctifying the church to be His wife includes nourishing the church as His Body (Eph. 5:29). After exhorting husbands to love their wives even as Christ also loved the church in verses 25 through 27, Paul says, “In the same way the husbands also ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his own wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ also the church, because we are members of His Body” (vv. 28-30). Here the expression *in the same way* “points back to the love of Christ described in verses 25-27” (Hoehner 763), thereby indicating that Christ’s loving the church as His counterpart by dying for her and sanctifying her corresponds to Christ’s loving the church as His Body by nourishing and cherishing her. Since the believers are members of the organic Body of Christ by virtue of their union with Christ as the Head in the divine life, the church as the Body of Christ is part of Christ, even Christ Himself in union with the believers. Therefore, for Christ to love, nourish, and cherish the church is for Him to love, nourish, and cherish Himself within the believers. This thought is surely based on the

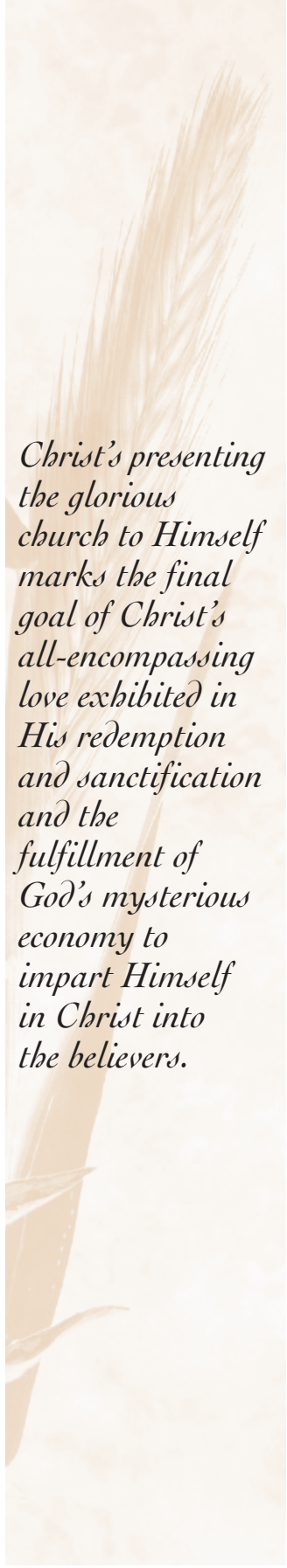
foundational revelation that Paul received from Christ at his conversion, which governed his Christian life and his apostolic ministry: the church as the Body of Christ is in such a vital, intimate, and genuine union with Christ as the Head that for Paul to persecute the church was, in actuality, to persecute Christ Himself (Acts 8:1, 3; 9:1, 4-5). Nowhere does Paul liken the church to a body of Christ; instead, he consistently and unequivocally identifies the church *as* the Body of Christ (Col. 1:24; Eph. 1:22-23). The Body of Christ is not an elegant metaphor for the church, as many posit; it is an organic reality, the church as the Body joined to and incorporated with Christ as the Head in life and nature, of which our human body is but a figure (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-13).

Because Christ as the Head loves the church as His own Body, He nourishes and cherishes her; that is, He feeds us as His members with the riches of Himself as the divine life in His living word, and He nurtures and fosters us with tender love and care. By this attentive operation of Christ we may grow in life to no longer be little children but corporately arrive at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13-14). In Paul's view, the growth of the Body of Christ as the issue of Christ's nourishing the believers is equivalent to the building up of the Body (vv. 15-16; 2:21-22). Therefore, the building up of the Body of Christ through Christ's nourishing the Body is tantamount to the preparation of the bride of Christ through His sanctifying her, just as the organic building up of Eve's body from Adam's rib was God's preparation of his counterpart.

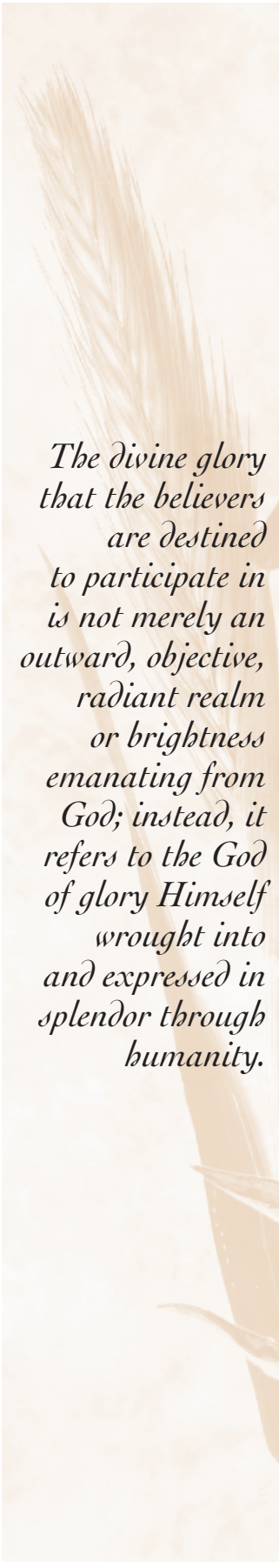
Christ Presenting the Church to Himself Glorious

Immediately after declaring in Ephesians 5:25-26 that Christ was constrained by His love for the church to give Himself up for her in order to sanctify her, Paul indicates in verse 27 the purpose for which He is sanctifying her: "That He might present the church to Himself glorious." As Hoehner observes, this verse "is important not only in the immediate context but it also serves as a climax to the argument and theology of the whole book" (761). This is because Christ's presenting the glorious church to Himself marks not only the final goal of Christ's all-encompassing love exhibited in His redemption and sanctification but also the fulfillment of God's mysterious economy to impart Himself in Christ into the believers for the producing of the God-constituted and God-expressing church as the Body and bride of Christ. It is when Christ as the Bridegroom presents to Himself the glorified church as His bride and enters with her into the wedding feast that Christ will be abundantly satisfied with the fruit of the travail of His soul, the issue of His loving death on the cross (Isa. 53:11).

Although some expositors erroneously contend that Christ presented the glorious church to Himself as His bride at the time of crucifixion or at the moment of baptism, most expositors correctly understand that the presentation of the bride will take place at Christ's second coming. However, few expositors realize that the presentation of the church as the bride depends on her glorification, which hinges on her gradual sanctification. Although 5:26 is the only explicit reference to sanctification in Ephesians, Paul twice uses the imagery of sealing to denote the sanctifying work of saturating the believers with the holy nature of God, saying that we were "sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise...unto the redemption of the acquired possession, to the praise of His glory" (1:13-14) and that in the Holy Spirit we were "sealed unto the day of redemption" (4:30). The fact that we were sealed *in* and *with* the Holy Spirit indicates that the Holy Spirit is not only the agent but also the element, the "ink," of the sealing (2 Cor. 3:3). Just as parchment is impressed and infused with ink to bear a particular image, by being sealed with the Spirit, we receive the Spirit as the essence of holiness into us and are thereby sanctified. On the one hand, the past tense in these verses—"were sealed"—indicates that at regeneration the Holy Spirit sealed us once for all, causing us to bear a permanent mark showing that we belong to God as His inheritance (Eph. 1:11). But the living Spirit with whom we were sealed is not static but operative from the day of our regeneration throughout our



Christ's presenting the glorious church to Himself marks the final goal of Christ's all-encompassing love exhibited in His redemption and sanctification and the fulfillment of God's mysterious economy to impart Himself in Christ into the believers.



The divine glory that the believers are destined to participate in is not merely an outward, objective, radiant realm or brightness emanating from God; instead, it refers to the God of glory Himself wrought into and expressed in splendor through humanity.

lifetime (cf. 1 John 2:27). Hence, in Ephesians 1:14 and 4:30 Paul uses similar expressions: *unto the redemption of the acquired possession* and *unto the day of redemption*. These expressions imply that the Holy Spirit seals us continually by increasingly saturating our whole being with the holy and glorious element of God until the redemption, the transfiguration, of our body (that is, our glorification), to the praise of the glory of the Triune God within our wholly sanctified tripartite being (Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:21). The truth concerning the glorification of the church as the issue of sanctification is confirmed in Hebrews 2:10-11. According to verse 10, God in Christ as the Author of salvation is “leading many sons into glory”; verse 11 then says, “For both He who sanctifies [Christ] and those who are being sanctified [the believers] are all of One [God the Father], for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brothers.” The word *for* at the beginning of verse 11 closely links the glorification of the believers in verse 10 with their sanctification, indicating that God is carrying out His “so great a salvation” to progressively bring us as many sons into glory through Christ’s ongoing work of sanctifying us dispositionally to constitute us His “holy brothers” conformed to His glorious image (v. 3; 3:1; Rom. 8:29). The process of being sanctified by Christ is tantamount to the process of being led into glory by God in Christ. Through resurrection Christ as the Author, the Pioneer, of our salvation took the lead to enter into glory (Luke 24:26; 1 Pet. 1:11), and through sanctification we, His followers, are being brought into the same glory, which was ordained by God for us (1 Cor. 2:7). This recalls 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, which states that we were chosen unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and were called to this salvation “unto the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This reveals that we need to allow the life-giving Spirit to sanctify us by imparting the holy essence of God into us so that we may obtain His glory. In brief, glorification is the result and peak of sanctification.

In His New Testament economy God works Christ into the believers in order to produce a glorious church. On the one hand, a majority of believers may agree that the glorification, the transfiguration, of the believers’ body will take place in the twinkling of an eye at the coming back of Christ (1 Cor. 15:51-54). On the other hand, few realize that such an instant glorification of our body is the issue of the gradual glorification of our entire inner being. According to the New Testament revelation, the divine glory that the believers in Christ are destined to participate in is not merely an outward, objective, radiant realm or brightness emanating from God; instead, it mainly refers to the God of glory Himself wrought into and expressed in splendor through humanity (Acts 7:2; Eph. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; 1 Pet. 4:14; 2 Cor. 4:4, 6). Although at His return Christ will come from the heavens with glory (Rev. 10:1; Matt. 25:31), He will present a glorious church to Himself not merely by coming to the believers in a sudden and outward way, as many expect, but, more intrinsically, by gradually increasing within the believers and then eventually being manifested from within them. Christ will glorify the saints not by descending upon them from the heavens but by coming to “be glorified *in* His saints and to be marveled at *in* all those who have believed” (2 Thes. 1:10, emphasis added). In Paul’s words, “the hope of glory” is not the Christ who is in the heavens but the Christ who is in us—that is, the Christ who as the seed of glory was sown into us through the regeneration of our spirit, is growing in our soul through the transformation of our soul, and will blossom out of us through the transfiguration of our body (Col. 1:27). Hence, when Christ glorifies us, He will shine forth from within our tripartite being that has been constituted with Himself (3:4; cf. 2 Cor. 3:8-9; 4:17). This indicates that glorification involves a subjective experience of the indwelling Christ as the life-giving Spirit.

Today Christ is preparing His glorious counterpart by permeating the believers’ inward parts with Himself as the very glory of God. The more we turn our heart to the Lord and behold and reflect the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, thereby being transformed into His image by the Lord Spirit from glory to glory, the more the Lord will gain the glorious bride, the corporate manifestation of God in the flesh, whom He desires (3:17-18; 1 Tim. 3:15-16). We should also pray that the Father of glory will impart the riches of His glory into us, causing Christ, the effulgence of God’s glory, to make His home in our

hearts so that we will be filled with Him unto the fullness of God, the Body of Christ, until there will be glory to God in the church (Eph. 3:17-21; Heb. 1:3). Apart from participating in this organic, intrinsic, and gradual process of glorification, we will not be dispensationally qualified to be included in the glorious corporate bride whom the Lord will present to Himself and bring into the wedding feast in the millennium at His coming back (Matt. 22:2-14; 25:1-13; Rev. 19:7-9; cf. 20:4-6). Ultimately, the eternal consummation of the holy, blameless, and glorious church as the wife of Christ is the holy city, the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth, which city is the wife of the unblemished, spotless Lamb, a bride adorned for her husband and shining with the radiant glory of God (21:2, 9-11).

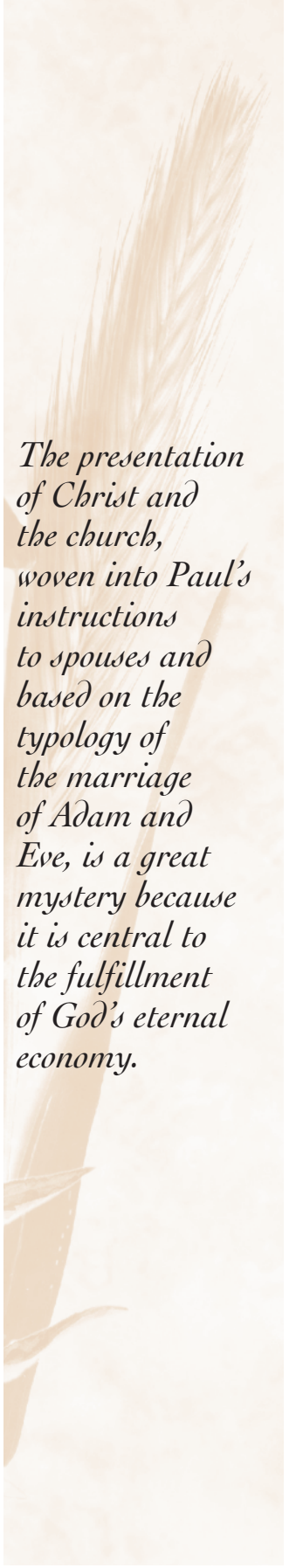
Conclusion

The presentation of Christ and the church in Ephesians 5, woven into Paul's instructions to spouses and based on the typology of the marriage of Adam and Eve, is a great mystery—that is, a revelation of immense significance—because it is central to the fulfillment of God's eternal economy. This passage shows in beautiful detail that between Christ's loving act of giving Himself up for the church in death and His presenting the glorious church to Himself at His coming back, there is an indispensable process in which Christ as the Spirit of life gradually sanctifies and nourishes the church by continually imparting His divine life and nature into her in order to prepare her to be a mature, beautified, and even deified counterpart to Himself. To take the church through this process was the goal of His death, and its completion will bring about His long-awaited return. When He comes, He will marry His holy, blameless, and glorious bride, who is the same as He is in life, nature, and expression but not in the Godhead. As He is in resurrection, so is she, because she is built from the indestructible resurrection life released through His death; as He is intrinsically holy and without spot or blemish, so is she, having been washed, by the life-giving Spirit imparted through Christ's living words, from every blemish of the natural man and every spot of the old creation and having been utterly saturated with the holy nature of God; and as He is the Lord of glory, so is she in glory, having been glorified by beholding and reflecting His glory, being permeated with His glorious element and thus transformed into His image from one stage of glory to another stage of glory. In the present age of the church, God's economy is to dispense Christ, the embodiment of the Triune God, as life into the many members of His Body in order to cause them to grow and be built up as one organic, corporate entity. Then, as prefigured in the building of Eve and her presentation to Adam, once the Body is full-grown, the bride will be ready, and Christ will return. May our coming Bridegroom be pleased with us in that day because we gave ourselves to participate in the process of sanctification for the building up of the church as the organic Body of Christ and thus contributed to the fulfillment of His heart's desire to enjoy a marriage dinner with His bride in ineffable mutual exultation at His return.

Notes

¹Such a claim guts the Old Testament of much of its meaning and spiritual value. In John 5 the Lord Jesus declared that the Scriptures testify concerning Him (v. 39) and that Moses wrote concerning Him (v. 46). Similarly, in Luke 24 the Lord explained to the disciples the things concerning Himself in "all the Scriptures," beginning from Moses and all the prophets (v. 27). He went on to say that all the things written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Him must be fulfilled (vv. 44-46). In light of such statements, critics of typological interpretation are forced into the untenable position of arguing that the mostly brief and, in many cases, redundant references to the Old Testament within the New are an exhaustive interpretation of everything typological in the Scriptures—that everything figurative to be said about Christ and the church in the holy and inspired words of the Old Testament has already been said by the New Testament writers.

²*Laver* in Greek is τό λουτήρ, as in Exodus 30:18, which refers to the basin for washing (Lust), whereas λουτρόν denotes a bath or the washing itself (Strong).



The presentation of Christ and the church, woven into Paul's instructions to spouses and based on the typology of the marriage of Adam and Eve, is a great mystery because it is central to the fulfillment of God's eternal economy.

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Women in the Old Testament as Types of the Church

Of the seven women as types of the church [in the Old Testament], Eve typifies the church being produced as well as the nature of the church, Rebekah typifies the church being chosen from the world, Asenath typifies the church being obtained by God in the world, Zipporah typifies the church in the wilderness, Ruth typifies the church being redeemed, Abigail typifies the warring church in the midst of sufferings, and the Shulammite typifies the church experiencing the resurrected Christ and enjoying rest with Christ in a condition of resurrection and glory. The significances of the types of the seven women, the children of Israel, the tabernacle, and the temple present a clear understanding of the church, showing where the church comes from, how the church is produced, the nature of the church, and the course of the church, including its origin and destination.

In the history of the children of Israel we can see many aspects related to the types of the seven women. For example, Rebekah was from a far country, and the children of Israel also came from a far country; Zipporah was in the wilderness, and the children of Israel were also in the wilderness; Ruth was redeemed, and the children of Israel were also redeemed; Abigail engaged in warfare, and the children of Israel also engaged in warfare. Hence, the children of Israel connect the types of the women and the dwelling places. The children of Israel were a woman on one hand and a city on the other; they were both a counterpart and a dwelling place.

From *Three Aspects of the Church, Book 1: The Meaning of the Church*
by Witness Lee, pp. 237-238