

WIC
WOMEN IN THE CHURCH



BIBLICAL
FOUNDATIONS
FOR WOMANHOOD
Bible Study
Series

*Studies
in*

Ephesians,
Philippians,
Colossians
and 1 & 2
Thessalonians

PAUL'S
LETTERS TO
MATURING
CHURCHES

Student Book

*Adapted by
Lynn Brookside*

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BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR WOMANHOOD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

This is a Bible Study series for women that will:

- Teach women to study Scripture from a covenantal perspective.
- Use the objectives and concepts of Biblical Foundations for Womanhood to help women apply Scripture to their lives.

In addition to the Scriptures, your Bible study leader is using the Adult Biblical Education Series books, by Dr. Jack Scott, as commentaries for her lesson plans. From time to time, pertinent material from these commentaries is reprinted in your student book. You will not need to purchase the Scott commentaries in order to participate in class.

The Biblical Foundations for Womanhood books provide the resources for applying Scripture to life.

The objectives, or foundational principles, of the Biblical Foundations for Womanhood books are:

1. To teach women a biblical perspective of their relationship with Christ, family, and church.
2. To challenge women to fulfill their helper design.
3. To help women examine the implications of the covenant in their relationships.
4. To train women to cultivate community by obeying the Titus mandate to nurture one another for God's glory.
5. To train women to be channels of compassion by obeying the Micah mandate.
6. To equip women for leadership roles in the women's ministry of the church.

Biblical Foundations for Womanhood includes these books:

- Leadership for Women in the Church
- Spiritual Mothering
- By Design
- Treasures of Encouragement
- The True Woman



This Bible Study series recognizes that a women's Bible study does not stand alone. It is to be a part of the entire discipleship ministry of a local church. Therefore, this study does not attempt to duplicate or replace other aspects of the educational ministry of the church, but rather to focus on the specific calling to women to teach other women a biblical perspective of womanhood. Women encouraging and equipping women is the covenant way. It is a part of healthy church life. The Apostle Paul wrote to the young preacher Titus:

You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

TITUS 2:1-5

Why?

An Explanation from the CE/P-WIC Staff and the Women's Advisory Sub-Committee

Why has CE/P embarked on this venture to provide a Bible study series for women? This is a legitimate question and we feel you should know some of the considerations that entered into this decision.

First, for several years many have asked for inductive studies from a Reformed perspective. We have heard that request, but wanted to be sure that we were not simply reacting. We wanted to be sure that if we produced something, it would be in step with our whole approach to women's ministry in the local church. There are already good Bible study materials available, and we saw no reason to publish another one unless it served to sharpen our focus even more and to give cohesion to what we are already doing.

Second, we wanted to be sure that anything we produce is written from a biblical reformed perspective, emphasizing our covenantal theology. Often the "inductive method" tends to lift a passage out and dissect it, but it does not look at the passage in light of the over-arching covenant scheme of Scripture. This makes it easy for women to come away with a distorted understanding and application.

Third, we believed that if we produced a study, it should be one that would help to facilitate a context of covenant relationships. We wanted a covenantal approach rather than an individualistic study that focuses only on a woman's relationship with the Lord. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* states:

All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by His Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His grace, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: *and, being united to one another in love*, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man. (XXVL.1, italics added)

We concluded that we needed to provide Bible studies that will equip women to establish and nurture Titus 2 relationships, encourage women to build community within the church family and help women to be involved in ministries of compassion. We desired to provide studies that will cause families and churches to be blessed because women are gathering to study God's Word.

Fourth, we believed that if we provided a Bible study series, it should help to develop Bible study teachers within the church. It would have been easy to provide a video of a dynamic Bible teacher, but then there would be a danger that the ministry would become personality-driven. Of course there is a place for the video format, but for long-term teaching we desire to see a covenantal approach where relationships are built between the teacher and students and among the students.

Fifth, we believed that any study we produced should be specifically for women. We did not want to encourage women to duplicate other educational programs of the church. We believed this study should be driven by Titus 2 and have specific application for women.

Sixth, above all, we knew that if we produced a study, there must be a commitment to theological integrity and academic excellence. We believe that by using the *Adult Biblical Education Series* books as commentaries, we have achieved this.

Adult Biblical Education Series

In 1977, CE/P Coordinator Charles Dunahoo hired Dr. Jack Scott to develop a Bible study survey for use in the Christian education ministry of local churches. The result was the *Adult Biblical Education Series*, a twenty-four-volume study of Genesis to Revelation.

Dr. Scott went to Korea as a missionary in 1952. He met and married Eleanor, a missionary nurse. They have four children. In 1957 they returned to the U.S. and Dr. Scott enrolled at Hebrew Union College to

study Hebrew. He then pastored churches in Kentucky and Mississippi and became one of the founding professors of Reformed Theological Seminary. For more than thirty years he wrote Sunday school lessons for the *Clarion-Ledger* in Jackson, Mississippi. When he retired from that at age seventy-two, an article in the newspaper quoted him as saying, “It may seem funny, but right now I find myself with a strong need to feed on God’s Word. When I’m doing the lessons, all of the focus is on a particular lesson. I wanted more time to be able to study for myself, to hear God speaking to me.”

When Dr. Scott joined the church as a young child in Greensboro, North Carolina, the pastor assigned him a Scripture. “It’s something the minister did for all children,” explains Dr. Scott. “I’ll never forget the day. My Scripture was 2 Timothy 2:5: ‘Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.’” Dr. Scott says that he took his verse seriously and began reading and studying the Bible daily, compiling pages of notes and commentaries.

We asked Dr. Scott for his thoughts about the ABES being used as the commentary for the *Biblical Foundations for Womanhood Bible Study Series*.

“I am delighted to learn that [it] will be used as a reference for your new Bible study project . . . Preparing my studies over a period of eight years was one of the highlights of my own ministry. I learned so much, myself, about God’s Word in the process. My prayer in preparing them was that they would be a challenge to others, not just to go through what I said but to go into the Bible themselves, and learn more of the riches of God’s Word. Your project is certainly a fulfillment of my own desires for what I wrote.”



Paul's Letters to Maturing Churches

*Studies in Ephesians, Philippians,
Colossians, and 1 & 2 Thessalonians*

OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY

That the members of this study group will:

1. Know God better.
2. Develop a deeper understanding of and love for the covenant of grace.
3. Develop a habit of looking for covenant promises and responsibilities as they study Scripture.
4. Develop a better understanding of our privileges and responsibilities as children of God and members of His covenant family.
5. Develop a deeper love for Christ's representative on earth, the Church.
6. Develop a greater desire for unity with God's people.
7. Begin to see a picture of the covenant community, the Church, as an outpost of God's love in a dark world.

A Covenantal Perspective

1. Study Series Design

The Biblical Foundations for Womanhood Bible Study series is designed to:

- Teach women God's Word from a covenantal perspective.
- Use the objectives of Biblical Foundations for Womanhood to help women apply Scripture to life.

Those objectives are:

1. To challenge women to fulfill their helper design.
2. To help to teach women a biblical perspective of their relationship with Christ, family, and church.
3. To help women examine the implications of the covenant in their relationships.
4. To train women to cultivate community by obeying the Titus mandate to nurture one another for God's glory.
5. To train women to be channels of compassion by obeying the Micah mandate.
6. To equip women for leadership roles in the women's ministry of the church.

2. Four Questions

These questions will help to explain a covenantal perspective of faith and life:

Question One: What is the covenant?

Question Two: What is a covenantal approach to faith and life?

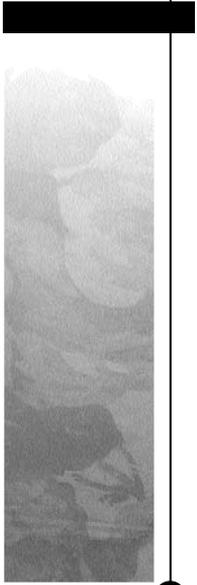


Question Three: How do we study Scripture from a covenantal perspective?

Question Four: What are some characteristics of the covenant that can guide us to think and live covenantally?

Question One: What is the covenant?

(From *Heirs of the Covenant*)



When God created Adam, He made a covenant with him. A covenant is a binding agreement with specific terms. The promise was God's presence. This is amazing because the Creator entered into an arrangement in which the creature had a claim. The Creator obligated Himself to the creature. The condition was perfect obedience. God would keep the covenant promise. Adam must obey the covenant obligation. He could not eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This was the test. This would demonstrate Adam's conscious acceptance of the covenant promise. This is called the covenant of works, but it does not mean that Adam worked to earn his relationship with God. God sovereignly initiated that relationship. It means that Adam had to make a choice to remain in God's presence by subjecting himself to God's authority.

While Adam and Eve lived in God's presence, they reflected His glory to one another and to creation. So they lived in harmony with one another and with creation.

But Adam ate the forbidden fruit. He broke covenant. His covenant-breaking severed his perfect relationship with God. Because God is holy, there can be nothing unholy in His presence. His holiness will consume anything unholy. Now when Adam and Eve faced each other, and when they faced creation, they reflected their own selfishness. Adam was our repre-

sentative in the covenant agreement. The consequences of His covenant-breaking thundered through creation, through history, and into every human heart.

One night after hearing the story of Adam and Eve, our three-year-old grandson Mac prayed, “Dear God, please let Adam and Eve go back to the Garden.”

The good news is that God did just that. It was not a return to the literal Garden, but He made a way for them to return to His presence.

God was not obligated to do anything. He could have turned away from the creature and the creation. Instead He intervened. He came to the Garden. He called to the man. And He clothed Adam and Eve in garments of skin (Genesis 3:8, 9, 21). Here is the essence of the covenant of grace—God came, He called, He clothed. God comes to us while we are dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1-9). He calls us into a relationship with Himself (Acts 2:38-39). And He covers our guilt with the perfect righteousness of Christ so that we can once again live in His presence (Isaiah 61:10)—glorious, sovereign grace from beginning to end.

It has to be that way. The penalty of sin is death. And dead people can do nothing—absolutely nothing—to regain life.

As *The Westminster Confession of Faith* says: The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.



LESSON



When God came to the Garden, He made a promise to the man, and He pronounced a curse upon Satan. “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15)

This was not the establishment of the covenant of grace; it was the revelation of that covenant. This covenant was not established with Adam, but with Christ. This covenant was not an afterthought. It was not made in response to man’s sin. The divine agreement to redeem man was in place before man was created. Jesus, the Mediator and Head of this covenant, is the “Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). Because redemption was in the divine will of God, it was the same as done. “He will crush your head” was not a hoped-for future event; it was an accomplished fact. Neither were the beneficiaries of the covenant an afterthought. “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves” (Ephesians 1:4-6)

In spite of man’s performance, God returned to the Garden and said, “I will still be your God; you will be My people; I will provide the way for you to live in My presence; I will dwell among you.” This is grace. It is undeserved. Adam demonstrated his belief in the promise by naming his wife Eve, which means life. He believed that she would bear children, including the Child who would leave the glory of God’s presence in order to secure a place for us in God’s presence.

Throughout the rest of Scripture, God unwraps His covenant-promise that He is our God, that we are His people, and that we live in His presence. (*Heirs of the Covenant*, pp. 24-27)

LESSON

Question Two: What is a covenantal approach to faith and life?

A covenantal approach is a relational model that flows out of the realities of covenant theology. A covenantal approach to teaching Scripture seeks to balance an educational and a relational component. Biblical discipleship combines teaching the content of the covenant in the context of covenantal relationships that validate the gospel of grace. Biblical discipleship imparts a way of life as we live in community with God's covenant people.

The covenant motif runs throughout Scripture. The word is mentioned almost three hundred times. The biblical covenants give the framework of Scripture. Without understanding this framework, our approach to understanding and applying God's Word will be cursory and convoluted.



Psaalm 78:5-7 “He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.”

CONTENT — *Covenant of Grace*

Psalms 119:130 “The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.”



People hide in caves of isolation and ignorance. The process of encouraging them to come out is both *educational* and *relational*. We are to shine the light of God's truth (education) *and* love (relational) so that it becomes safer to be outside the cave than it is inside the cave.

CONTEXT — *Covenant Community*

John 17:20-24 “My prayer is... that all of them may be one...”



Colossians 3:12-14 “Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

A part of the teaching process in Christian education is to help our students develop covenant relationships with one another and with others in the church family. Covenant life is intergenerational.

CULMINATION — *Covenant Compassion*

Micah 6:8 "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."



Colossians 2:2, 3 "My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

The learning process is not complete until our students become covenant keepers who "put their trust in God . . . [and] keep his commands" (Psalm 78:7), who "act justly. . . love mercy, and walk humbly with our God" (Micah 6:8).

Question Three: How do we study Scripture from a covenantal perspective?

(From *Heirs of the Covenant*)

The Bible is not simply a disconnected collection of stories. It is God's revelation of Himself. It is His story of the redemption of His people

The Bible is a covenant document. It reveals the Initiator, the promise, and the terms of the covenant. Christianity is not simply a moral code. It is a covenant relationship with the living God

In Scripture, God makes Himself known to His people. In the written Word, the living Word reveals Himself

In Scripture, God teaches me about myself. I learn that my sinful tendencies are a manifestation of my sinful nature. I learn that my sin separates me from God's presence. I learn of my desperate need for a mediator to go before God on my behalf.

In Scripture, I learn that Jesus, the Mediator of the covenant, is the fulfillment of the [promise] in Genesis 3:15. He is the Seed of the woman who crushed the head of the serpent so that we can live in God's presence. Jesus is the message of Scripture. We must see Him on every page of Scripture in order to understand God's message to us

We must see the overarching message [of Scripture] before we dip down to teach any individual part. If we "dip" without the rope, we may well drown in our own speculations about what it means. Simply telling the story of a person or an event is a superficial, fragmented view of Scripture and generally results in superficial, fragmented lives. This fragmentation usually carries us in one of three directions—legalism, liberalism, or moralism.

When we trivialize Scripture, we reduce the

Christian life to formulas (legalism), or we rationalize away the demands (liberalism), or we concoct a list of things we are going to do for God (moralism). This eliminates the need for and the message of grace. A covenantal understanding points us to God's sovereign grace. This enables us to have a biblical world and life view so that we see ourselves and our lives from God's perspective

We must be focused and intentional as we read Scripture. We must look for Jesus on every page. The following questions can help to magnify our spiritual eyesight:

What does this teach me about God's character and His promise?

What does this teach me about Jesus, the Mediator of the covenant?

What covenant privileges and responsibilities are mine because of who God is and what He has done and is doing for me through Jesus?

(Heirs of the Covenant, pp. 70-76)

Question Four: What are some characteristics of the covenant that can guide us to think and live covenantally?

- **The covenant is sovereignly initiated and sustained, and thus eternally secure.** The more we understand this Divine initiative, the more we understand that we deserve nothing but have been given everything. It is a covenant of grace. Our confidence is not in self but in God.

Implications for life and ministry:

This knowledge produces a humility that frees us to "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the

interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4). We have the security to cast our cares on the LORD knowing that He will sustain us (Psalm 55:22).

A covenantal perspective begins with God—who He is and what He has done for us. Then we consider our covenant privileges and responsibilities because of who He is and what He has done.

Knowing that God is the Sovereign Initiator and Sustainer means that we teach about His grace, we rely upon His grace, we cultivate environments of grace in our homes and churches, and we develop ministries that are brought about in the power of grace. In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul says that he wants us to know about the grace that God gave the Macedonian churches. Then he says that they gave out of the most severe trial and extreme poverty. He says they gave beyond their ability. If we live and minister out of the strength of our own resources, it is just self-effort. It is not until we get beyond our ability that we begin to live in the power of grace.

- **The covenant is relational:** The God of heaven and earth is a personal God who enters into an intimate relationship with us. He binds Himself to us in covenant faithfulness.

Implications for life and ministry:

Our relationships with each other are to mirror His relationship with us. This is not a relational model built on sentimentalism and felt-needs theology. It is a relational model built on the covenant of grace. There is a huge difference.

The reference point for a needs-based model is experience and feelings.

The reference point for a covenant model is the character of God as He shows Himself to us in His Word.

This is a relational model built on doctrines such as justification and adoption. God declares us to be just in His sight

on the basis of the merits of Christ. He adopts us as His children and accepts us into His family not because of our performance but because of His grace. This is the basis for the covenant community. These are the reasons we accept and love one another.

Our relationships in the covenant community are not about living up to each other's expectations. They are about accepting one another and reflecting God's grace to each other as we are being transformed by the power of the gospel.

People today are unusually primed for covenantal ministry because they want meaningful relationships. They have seen the relationships around them crumble and they want substantive, lasting relationships. Meaningful, lasting relationships are characteristic of the covenant of grace. It is only grace that can move us beyond self-serving relationships.

- **The covenant is familial:** From the beginning, God worked through families. The covenant promise was given to Abraham and his seed.

Implications for life and ministry:

The Christian family is to exist within the context of the covenant family, the family of families, the church.

It is imperative that we understand this context because our notions about family are usually shaped more by culture than by Scripture, and we live in a culture of individualism, selfism, and materialism. We must think covenantally about the family. Scripture teaches an interdependence of individual families and the household of faith. We acknowledge our commitment to God's design for families by helping those who are married to build strong families^{3/4}whether or not we are married^{3/4}and by loving and caring for the children and teens in the church—whether we have children or not. Families acknowledge their commitment to live covenantally by realizing that the covenant community is part of their her-

itage and is a resource to help them show and tell their children about the wonders of our God.

- **The covenant is corporate:** Salvation is personal, but God does not just deal with us as individuals. God deals with us as His children.

Implications for life and ministry:

We are a family and there should be a deep oneness that reflects the unity of the Trinity. God's Word is to be taught in the context of a loving community. Every ministry in the church, including the women's ministry, should be diligent in seeking to cultivate a sense of community throughout the entire church family.

A covenantal perspective has a high view of and love for the church. A covenantal approach to women's ministry teaches women about the beauty and protection of the church. Even when people in the church fail us, our Savior calls us to love His bride and to pursue her peace and purity.

A covenantal perspective means that we are our sister's keeper. We have covenant privileges and responsibilities to one another. Titus 2 says that older women have responsibilities to nurture, encourage, and instruct younger women.

- **The covenant is generational:** Throughout Scripture there is the emphasis that one generation is to tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord and the wonders He has done. This is the covenant way. This was not just the responsibility of the parents. It was the responsibility of Israel. In Titus 2 this is gender specific, but it is the same covenant principle. This is why this instruction was given to the pastor of the church—it is a church issue.

You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach

what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. (Titus 2:1, 3-5)

Implications for life and ministry:

Titus relationships are covenant relationships. Without this framework, they will become self-focused and self-serving. The Titus mandate calls women to teach the next generation of women about biblical womanhood. A women's ministry should challenge and equip women for a lifestyle of Titus 2 ministry to one another.

- **The covenant is compassionate:** God is a God of compassion, and we are to be a people of compassion.

Implications for life and ministry:

A women's ministry should care for women and teach them to love and care for others. Opportunities should be provided for involvement in ministries of compassion. It's the covenant way of life.

“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8)

- **The covenant is integrative:** The covenant is the thread that holds Scripture together. The covenantal framework of Scripture shows the purpose, harmony, and connections of Scripture. It is all about Jesus. The ultimate question of life is how we relate to Him, for it is “in Him [that] we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen” (Romans 11:36).

Implications for life and ministry:

This integrated framework of Scripture gives us an all-encompassing worldview so that we can think about God's truth and apply that truth into all of life.

A covenantal approach to ministry means an integrated approach to ministry. All ministries of the church are to be united in purpose, vision, philosophy, and strategy.

Classes or ministries are often clustered by ages or interest, and there is nothing wrong with that. However, we must be intentional in merging the vision for the various ministries into a whole.

- **The covenant is exclusive:** “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God. . . .” (Exodus 20:3-5)

Implications for life and ministry:

We must pray for wisdom and grace to demolish all idols in our lives.

- **The covenant is inclusive:** We are commissioned to “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15).

Implications for life and ministry:

We must always be outward focused and zealous to extend the boundaries of the covenant community to include others.

3. Characteristics and Themes of Ephesians



LESSON

The focus of Ephesians is the mystery of the church.

The church is God's new humanity, a colony where the Lord of history has established a foretaste of the renewed unity and dignity of the human race (1:10-14; 2:11-22; 3:6, 9-11; 4:1-6:9).

That in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will . . . (1:10-11, NKJV)

The church is a community where God's power to reconcile people to Himself is experienced and shared in transformed relationships (2:1-10; 4:1-16; 4:32-5:2; 5:22-6:9).

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (2:4-7, NKJV)

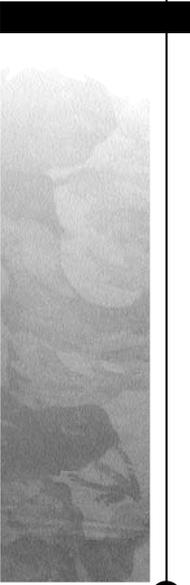
It is a new temple, a building of people, grounded in the sure revelation of what God has done in history (2:19-22; 3:17-19).

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (2:19-22, NKJV)

The church is an organism where power and authority are exercised after the pattern of Christ (1:22; 5:25-27),

And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church . . . (1:22, NKJV)

and its stewardship is a means of serving Him (4:11-16; 5:22-6:9).



And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ . . . from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (4:11-13, 16, NKJV)

The church is an outpost in a dark world (5:3-17), looking for the day of final redemption.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light . . . (5:8, NKJV)

Above all, the church is the bride preparing for the approach of her lover and husband (5:22-32).
(*NGSB*, p. 1859-1860)

Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. . . . Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. . . . For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. . . . This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. (5:23b, 25b-27, 30, 32, NKJV)

4. The Bride of Christ

Why is it important to understand God's covenant with us? Because we are the Bride of Christ.

Ancient Jewish wedding traditions were quite wonderful. On these most-celebrated social occasions virtually the whole village joined in the festivities.

Prior to the big event, the fathers of the bride and groom arranged the engagement. Then there was a betrothal ceremony where the couple exchanged vows in the presence of family and friends. Three kinds of gifts were given. The groom gave a gift to the bride's family. This gift sealed the betrothal covenant and bound the two families together. Second, there was a gift to the bride or groom from her father. Then there was the bridegroom's gift to the bride, usually clothes or jewelry.





LESSON



After the betrothal ceremony, the groom returned home to prepare a place for his bride. Often this was an apartment in his father's house. She got ready for his return. She did not know exactly when he would come for her, but she knew that he would come because the betrothal covenant pledged him to do so.

When the bridegroom was ready, he left his father's house to claim his bride. His friends accompanied him on this journey, and as they wound through the village streets, others joined the joyful processional. The crowd grew larger, and the singing grew louder until it could be heard in the bride's home: "The bridegroom comes!"

The radiant bride met her bridegroom, and they went to his home for the wedding supper. Parents and friends blessed the couple, the couple made a covenant of faithfulness, and then they were escorted to the bridal chamber where the marriage was consummated.



Scripture is replete with references to Jesus as the heavenly Bridegroom and the church as His bride. He will come for His bride because He is bound by the betrothal covenant. He is a covenant keeper. He is preparing a place. (*Your Home—A Place of Grace*, p. 17, 18)

As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you.

Isaiah 62:5

Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and His wife has made herself ready.

Revelation 19:7 NKJV