
DISCERNMENT NEWSLETTER

“...how is it that ye do not discern this time?” Luke 12:56

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The Earthly Bride and her Heavenly Bridegroom

*By the late Johan Malan
Mossel Bay, South Africa (May 2014)*

The true church of Christ is not only described as His disciples and witnesses but also as His bride. All these capacities oblige Christians to live holy and fulfill their upward call in a dedicated way. The command towards sanctification is closely related to our position as the bride of Christ. Paul writes to the church in Corinth:

“For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ”

(2 Corinthians 11:2-3).

We should take care that sin does not enter into our lives in the form of growing cold in our love, fleshliness, or spiritual deception. These things can only be averted if we faithfully observe our calling as members of the bridal church of Jesus Christ. Make sure that you have a testimony of both justification and sanctification.

The preparations which the bride has to make to be ready for the Bridegroom's return demand a separated life under the full control of the Holy Spirit. The oil in the lamp (Matt. 25:1-13), as well as its light, symbolize the presence of the Lord in our lives. It enables us to follow in the footsteps of Christ and to become conformed to Him:

*“He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked”
(1 John 2:6).*

Spiritual vigilance and readiness to serve are characteristics of the bride – but also a wedding garment which is untainted by sin (Eph. 5:25-27). We must put on the Lord Jesus and diffuse the fragrance of His knowledge everywhere, so other people may be drawn to Him with cords of love. Our main interest should be Bible study under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit searches all things, also the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10). David often entered into the presence of the Lord by investigating the treasures of His Word, in which he discovered riches of grace by which he was spiritually motivated and strengthened:

“One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple”

(Psalm 27:4).

True happiness can only be found in Him:

“In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures for evermore”

(Psalm 16:11).

All those who long after the fullness of the Lord with undivided hearts will certainly find it: *“They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see the light”* (Ps. 36:8-9). The Son of God invites everybody to drink from this river of divine blessings:

“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as

the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive”
(John 7:37-39).

After receiving the Holy Spirit when we are born again we still need the filling of the Holy Spirit so He can fully control and empower us to serve the Lord. Paul realized that the power and fullness of Christ’s presence through His Spirit was still lacking in the lives of many Christians, and for that reason he earnestly interceded for them:

“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height [of] the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God”
(Eph. 3:14-19).

When we behold the greatness of the creation around us, the thought should occur to us that the love of the Lord Jesus is also without bounds and immeasurable – it is wider than the world, higher than the highest heaven, and deeper than the deepest sea. The main purpose of our lives should be to be rooted and grounded in divine love, to the extent that it will determine the basic character of our thoughts and actions. That is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, which is extended to all believers.

Only those Christians who fully understand their calling and devote themselves to it with undivided hearts are busy building with gold, silver and precious stones on the foundation of Christ in their lives. They will be commended by the heavenly Bridegroom

when He comes for His bride. Those believers in whose lives this fullness is lacking are building with perishing material on the foundation of their repentance. Spiritually speaking, they are leading fruitless and unfulfilled lives, and as such they are in danger of appearing before the judgement seat of Christ with empty hands (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

Members of the bridal congregation of Christ should ensure that they never find themselves in this situation. In Psalm 45, we are reminded that we will appear before the King of kings in an ivory palace as His bride:

“You are fairer than the sons of men; grace is poured out upon Your lips; therefore God has blessed You for ever.... You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.... [In] ivory palaces they have made you glad.... At Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir.... The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace; her clothing is woven with gold. She shall be brought to the King in robes of many colours.”

The exalted nature of this occasion is emphasized by the fact that God’s Son Himself is also addressed as “God: *“Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions”* (Ps. 45:7). The word “Elohim” is used in this scripture for both the Father and the Messiah-King. This is the first name which is mentioned for God in the Bible, and it refers to the Triune God. This personal noun is used in both singular and plural contexts:

“Then God [Elohim] said, Let Us [Father and Son] make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.... So God [the Triune God] created man in his own image;... male and female He created them”
(Genesis 1:26-27).

It is the desire of God the Father that all believers become conformed to the image of God the Son. How else can the bride be rendered glorious for the illustrious wedding of the Messiah where she will stand at His side? We must be sanctified during this life as preparation to appear before the heavenly Bridegroom. That will only happen if we have an active expectation of Christ's second coming, and daily search ourselves with a view to be cleansed from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit (2 Cor. 7:1). Everyone who cherishes the hope on the appearing of Jesus Christ "*purifies himself, just as He is pure*" (1 John 3:3).

Purity is the key to a life of service to the Lord, while at the same time it also adorns our future wedding garment: "*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. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints*" (Rev. 19:7-8). Righteous acts can only be produced under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and to that end we need to fully surrender ourselves to His control.

We should persevere in holiness and resist any feelings of despondency which may be caused by pressures from the world and attacks against us:

"Hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations"
(Revelation 2:25-26).

Do you persevere on the narrow way as you should? Consider the faithfulness of all the heroes of faith in biblical times (Heb. 11), and also during the 20 centuries of church history, and derive inspiration from their example:

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of

witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith"
(Hebrews 12:1-2).

When we stand in the heavenly ivory palace of the Bridegroom, faith will be consummated by the full revelation of divine reality. We will subsequently not live by faith in the sense that we only experience the unseen world spiritually, but our eyes will behold the fully revealed glory of the Lord and His kingdom. Only then will we fully know just as we are now fully known by the Lord. Like Christ, we will also have glorified bodies (Phil. 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2).

The world around us is daily becoming more and more entangled by spiritual and moral darkness, and continuously drift away further from the Lord and His righteousness. By their own actions, unrepentant sinners are heading for the judgments of God which will be poured out upon a rebellious world during the coming tribulation period (Matt. 24:21; Isa. 13:9). These judgments are definitely not meant for the bridal church of Christ, and for that reason we must ensure that we escape this coming time of disaster:

"Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man"
(Luke 21:36).

Are you busy watching, praying and separating yourself from the perverse lifestyles of the world? While unrighteousness is proliferating and filthiness and injustice increase, consecrated members of the bridal church should become more holy (Rev. 22:11). Although we are in the world we are not from the world. We have a completely different calling in life, and because of that we follow lifestyles and pursue objectives which radically differ from those which are

entertained by people to whom worldly happiness and material wealth are the ultimate purpose of their lives.

As children of the light we have been promised an imperishable kingdom of which the glory can not even be expressed in human language (1 Cor. 2:9). To be co-heirs of this kingdom we must be worthy to be united with Christ forever as His bride at the marriage of the Lamb. Only then will we reign with Him as kings when He reveals His kingdom at His second coming. He has paid the full price to make this blessing possible, and that is why the glorified church will sing to Him in heaven after the rapture:

“You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth”
(Revelation 5:9-10).

What is a True Church?

By Pastor Anton Bosch

The earth is filled with churches of all descriptions and I recently came to wonder how many of those millions of congregations are churches where the Lord is pleased to dwell and what the requirements are for a congregation of people to be a valid church. Here are some (not all) of the conclusions I came to.

It is evident from the letters to the seven churches in Asia (Rev 2:1 – Rev 3:11) that not every group of people that call themselves a church are indeed a church. Take the church of Sardis as an example. Jesus says of them: *“you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead”* (Rev 3:1). The most prosperous and most upbeat of the churches, Laodicea, was at the point of being spit out of God’s mouth and the church that was doctrinally most orthodox, Ephesus, was about to (and indeed did) lose its

status as a church when the Lord removed their lampstand.

From these and other examples we can conclude that the things that people use as measures of a church may be the wrong criteria. None of the things like having a church building, a long history, leaders, a large congregation, a good income, correct doctrine or lively worship qualify a group of people to call themselves a “church.” Neither does the absence of these things disqualify a group from being a valid expression of the Church. There are many very small, poor, illiterate groups of believers who meet in obscure places, without leaders or even Bibles that are more of a church than the largest and most ostentatious of congregations.

So what makes a group of people a church and what gives it the right to continue to exist as a valid church? The first ingredient that is needed is that Jesus Christ is the focus of the church. God clearly intended for Him to be the foundation and the cap stone – in fact, the all in all. So if the church revolves around doctrines, buildings, leaders, preaching, worship, history, etc., and Jesus is not truly the focal point of its very life, it is not a true church. We can easily measure this aspect by removing any one of the many secondary things. Say for example, if the leaders were all to be removed would the church be able to continue, or if the building was destroyed, or the Bibles confiscated or the amplifiers burn out? Would your church be able to continue without these things? I know many churches that would not because what keeps it going is the preacher or the building or something other than Jesus Christ!

Just this week I saw a statement by the largest Pentecostal denomination in the US stating that the most important thing is saving the lost. Preaching the Gospel is very important, but the moment it becomes the reason for a group’s existence, it has forfeited its right to be called a

true church since evangelism has taken the place of Jesus!

After Jesus, the next important ingredient in a valid church is obedience to the Lord. A church which does not walk in humble obedience to every word of the Master will be walking a different path to that of the Lord. When a person's body is cut off from the head, that person dies, since it is the head that keeps it all going as the body responds to the impulses and messages sent from the brain. So a church that does not submit to and fully obey the instructions that come from the Head, Christ, is dead even though it may seem to have life. Colossians 2:19 speaks of those who are "...*not holding fast to the Head.*" Many churches follow their traditions while others follow some cleverly devised vision or master plan while others just muddle through from week to week. No matter how great the vision or tradition, if the assembly does not look to the Lord and obey His directives every moment, every step, it is no longer a church but an organization.

The third important ingredient of a true church is that the members are knit together and is one body, not just a collection of people. A pile of bricks, sand and cement does not make a house. Only once the bricks are each placed in their right place and cemented together with those around it, can it begin to be a house. Many Christians meet together from time to time and call themselves a church while each one lives their own self-centered lives. They are not a church but a club. In a true church the individuals are so absorbed in the life of the church that it is impossible to see the members as separate from one another, but as spiritually and literally one just as the Trinity is one.

When Paul speaks of the members "*knit together*" (Eph 4:16, Col 2:19) it is in the sense that a broken bone knits and becomes one or a woman takes balls of wool and knits them together into a sweater. The individual balls and

threads lose their separate identities and they together become something altogether different and more useful. When we begin to pull the separate strands apart, the whole thing becomes a heap of useless threads.

The fourth ingredient is that the church is Bible-based. Groups that get together around the teachings of their favorite guru or doctrine are sects and cults. A true church meets on the basis of the Bible as God's inspired and infallible Word which is still applicable to every area of man's existence today. Many claim to be Bible-based but they are not. They do not preach the Bible but they preach man-made ideas. They do not live the Bible but have modified the Bible to fit into their own preconceptions and they no longer believe that the Bible is relevant to every area of life in the 21st century.

The fifth ingredient of a valid expression of the church is that it reaches out to the unsaved. A group of people may have the first four of the ingredients but if they lack an evangelical heart for the lost, they have lost their purpose for being on earth. The first four can be done in heaven, but the reason why the church is still on earth, is so it will reach out to the lost, the sick and the dying.

How does your church rate? If it is does not have these five ingredients, maybe it is because you have not contributed that which is missing? So let me rephrase the question. Are you contributing towards these five things and are they real in your life? You see, the church is made up of individuals, not leaders, and when the individuals are deficient in their walk with the Lord, the church will be the same.

*"...you have a name that you are alive,
but you are dead."
(Revelation 3:1)*

From First to Last. . .
A Spiritual Life-Lesson from the
Back of the Line

By Pastor Larry DeBruyn

“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”
 (Micah 7:18-19, NASB)

Perhaps most of us, at one time or another, when leaving a store, have experienced being first in waiting at an unattended checkout lane and counter only to see another lane open up and the attendant then serve people who should have been served after after you. Well, it happened to me the other evening. Allow me to share with you a lesson I learned from it.

After meeting my wife to eat at our favorite place the other evening (*Steak ‘n Shake* for any who might be curious), I told her that I needed to shop for a few groceries and run a couple of errands after our meal. So I drove to the grocery store, procured a few items, and then decided as I drove by it, to stop in at one of the local “city garage-sale stores”—you know what I’m talking about, could be *Goodwill*, *Salvation Army*, *DAV* or a local mission store. These stores take in people’s discards and sell them. One person’s trash becomes another’s treasure. Frankly, I like going into those stores to look around, even to buy something now and then. I’ve found coffee cups and sturdy drinking glasses that our family both likes and uses. But usually when I go to a store like that, my first stop is at the bookshelves labeled “religious and inspirational.”

And so it was that evening. I looked and found a book titled *The Presence Driven Church* (Not the real title, but close. As you may or not be aware of, I previously wrote an article on “God’s Present of His Presence” that appears on my website and Herescope.).[1] So having written about the subject of His presence, my curiosity was piqued; I grabbed the book and proceeded to the front of the store to check out. But there was nobody at the check out counter. So I waited. . . and waited. . . the only one standing in front of four unattended checkout counters. “Isn’t there anyone working here tonight?” I thought. Impatience began to arise within. I just wanted to purchase the book and get on with my evening.

Then I noticed a lady move to the farthest checkout counter from where I was waiting to open it up. “Oh, she’ll call me over,” I thought. After all, I had waited. I was first in line. She saw me standing. But guess what? She didn’t signal me to come over and get in line first. No, she motioned for two other women to take their place at her counter. “Very inconsiderate,” I thought.

So I moved to get in line after the two ladies who were receiving “preferential treatment.” They had many items in their carts. . . mostly clothing. The first lady had article after article. Her checking out was tediously slow. I was getting irritated. “Is this book worth my waiting?” I asked myself. Maybe I should just put it down and walk out of the store. No. Don’t be impatient, I told myself.

So I waited. . . my annoyance growing despite my pep talk to myself. “You know what?” I thought, I’m just going to wait and when I check out, I’m going to tell the checker how rude she had been to me and how she ought to put first customers first. That’s what I’m going to do. But while you’re waiting, I told myself, why don’t you start to read the book on God’s presence? Hypocritical, I know. Reading about God’s presence amidst

growing impatience. Somehow, the two do not seem to “line-up” together.

But I started to read the book anyway. . . make the time go faster. Finally, the first lady finished checking out. I thought, now the checker will invite me to the counter because I only have one thing to check out, and the next young customer had, you guessed it, a whole cart load of stuff! But the checker seemed indifferent to my waiting there. . . and inside my annoyance increased. She started checking the girl out. Then she noticed me standing there and somehow the error of ignoring me dawned upon her. She realized she’d made a mistake. She said to me—now are you ready for this—“I am sorry sir. I should have checked you out first.” She didn’t say it once. With a humble voice, she said it once and mumbled it a couple of more times. She was distraught and contrite.

My heart melted. The checkout lady’s apology rebuked me. I thought to myself about myself. . . Here you were impatiently thinking of railing and going off on her for her tactless inconsiderateness, and now spontaneously she apologizes to you. Within the confines of my heart, I felt embarrassed. “Oh,” I said trying to make light of the uncomfortable situation, “it’s just given me time to start reading the book.” Further, I told the checker and the ladies in front of me, who had heard the checker’s apology, “Well, we’ll just call it, ‘Ladies first!’ You do still believe in that, don’t you?” The young African-American high school girl in front of me said she believed in *chivalry*. Imagine. . . a young girl still believing in chivalry!

My having been snubbed from getting my place in line suddenly became a non-issue. My heart was relieved. Though it took me much longer than I had anticipated, with a healed attitude I finally checked out, and by the way, having perused most and read some of the book!

In the aftermath of reflecting upon this incident, I thought to myself, “How I felt after the checker’s apology to me must somewhat mirror how God feels about us when we apologize to Him for not giving Him first place in the line of our lives.

Now I know, my experience that evening was not exactly analogous to the Lord’s feelings about us. For example, He doesn’t offend or get impatient with us. He’s longsuffering. But how often do we serve ourselves and others before Him in the business of life? Then there comes that clarifying moment when suddenly we realize the error that we’ve ignored serving Him first. So we tell Him we’re sorry. Does His heart melt toward us as mine did toward the checkout person that evening? I believe so, for that is God’s character. All He’s looking for from us is an acknowledgement on our part that we have offended Him, and when the repentance comes, that’s it! It’s over. His heart delights in our response of admitting we erred by ignoring Him, but now desire to serve Him *first* and others *second* (Matthew 22:37-40).

Toward such repentant hearts, Micah tells us that the Lord does not retain “*his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy*” (Micah 7:18b, KJV).

ENDNOTES:

[1] Larry DeBruyn, “God’s Present of His Presence,” *Guarding His Flock Ministries*, January 1, 2014, <http://guardinghisflock.com/2014/01/01/the-present-of-his-presence/> is also published as a booklet. This article was originally published on the Herescope blog on December 31, 2013, <http://herescope.blogspot.com/2013/12/the-present-of-his-presence.html> and has now been posted as a downloadable PDF file at the Discernment Ministries website: <http://www.discernment-ministries.org/God's%20Present%20of%20His%20Presence.pdf>