

# The Bride...

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**W**hat would you think if you heard people making fun of a bride? Imagine they were detailing her failures...and this was happening years after she got married! Her husband dearly loves his bride. He can see her shortcomings too, better than anyone else, but he loves her so profoundly that he is willing to do anything for her—even give his life—like many husbands would (we would hope).

You probably figured out that I'm talking about the bride of Christ—His body, the Church. We know many amazing truths about this from the N.T. A few that are important for my point today, including:

- The Church has local, regional and global implications.
- The Church is not specifically clearly “defined” in the N.T. Rather, it is expressed in several ways with several Greek words.<sup>1</sup> I urge you to study Romans 16 and look into the Greek words to see the range of meaning from fellowships in homes to the church in the region.
- It can be confusing to grapple with the difference between the

local expressions and the regional or global body of Christ.

- We do know that a key part of the Church is to be light and salt—both to the rest of the body and to the world.
- There is much more that could be said. Indeed, the concept of the *body of Christ* is a foundational biblical study, both the N.T., historically and globally today.

I want to focus on how we talk about the Church. I have written before about a pattern in the history of the Church—that some believe they are more committed than others—which often results in the “serious” smaller groups spinning off to start a new group that they feel is more in line with what God is calling them to.

The problem comes when we turn our understanding about what we believe God is calling His Church to and start judging others—especially for those of us with a global focus. I understand first-hand the passion that mobilizers have, which can sometimes move us to being judgmental. Do you go into church each week wishing people were more committed to reaching the unreached peoples of the world? I do, and that is OK. Pastors also want their people to be more committed.

The question is what do I do with that? Do I critique and teach and lead people toward a globally aware vision? Or do I judge? I confess, I have to watch my heart when I “switch” from full-time ministry at Frontier Ventures to my involvement as an elder at my church or with any local church.

Sometimes this kind of passion causes us to call for a new model of how to do fellowship as the body of Christ locally. Some have left their local churches out of frustration.

Actually, I don't have a problem with calling for and starting a new approach. The “way” we do church needs to be evaluated, as I have said many times. New approaches should be tried to reach new cultures and generations. But we do not have to put down what others are doing in order to argue for our new model. When we do, we are acting like the world does today when it argues political opinions.

We need to remember all valid N.T. expressions *are* the bride of Christ—right now—imperfect as we are. He is the head of the body, not us. He is sovereign, not us. He is leading His Church and is also in charge of the timing! I have begun to wonder about some of our mobilization approaches. For example, there are those who say, “It's been over 2,000 years and there are still people who haven't heard.” I get the point. It breaks my heart that so many have not heard a clear message about Christ, that is why I've been on Frontier Ventures staff for 38 years! Successive generations go into a Christ-less eternity among the unreached. But we must learn to balance resting in Jesus' timing, even as we challenge everyone we can to press forward in the task He has given us.

If you are casting vision for a new kind of church or ministry, focus on your vision for it and what you are doing about it. Call people to *that*, not what you are “against.” 

<sup>1</sup> The word *church* is from the German, *kirche*, not N.T. Greek. A very interesting church history story to see how that idea influenced what the church is, in Europe, making it much more formal and “institutional.” This influences “how” we do church today. There is an entire issue of the *IJFM* on *oikos*, which you can download for free at: [www.ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/34\\_1-4\\_PDFs/IJFM\\_34\\_1-4-EntireIssue.pdf](http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/34_1-4_PDFs/IJFM_34_1-4-EntireIssue.pdf)