

## Without Spot or Wrinkle

In **Ephesians 5:22-33**, Paul uses the marriage relationship to illustrate the church's relationship to Christ. The love of Christ moved Him to sacrifice Himself for the church. He did this so that He would cleanse the church and make the church holy. His love for the church involves doing all He can to make the church beautifully perfect (without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish). His love for the church demands that we not be a spot or blemish.

What if we are a spot or blemish? The sacrifice of Jesus provides the cleansing. He shed His blood to wash away our sins (our spiritual blemishes). We avail ourselves of this cleansing by the "washing of water by the word." This is the same combination we find in **1 Peter 1:22-25; 1 Corinthians 12:13; John 3:5; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 10:22**. We obey from the heart the gospel revealed by the Spirit when we are baptized into the death of Christ. It is Jesus who has given His word that causes us to be cleansed when we are baptized in water in His name (**Acts 2:38**) for the remission of sins (**Acts 10:47-48**).

The previous paragraph actually does not have to do with those who are already members of the body of Christ. It speaks of what to do so that the Lord will remove blemishes from your life in order to enter the body of Christ. However, what Christ has done and why He has done it (and what we have done) are all for the purpose of a final goal—a perfectly pure church that glorifies the Lord.

Therefore, as members of the body of Christ, this must be our goal as well. What are we to do to help accomplish this goal?

First of all, we need to be diligent to grow spiritually. We must be diligent to add virtue to our faith, then knowledge, then daily applications of that knowledge in the character traits of self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (**2 Peter 1:5-11**). These traits will lead us to live a pure life out of a pure heart devoted to loving God (**1 Peter 1:14-16; Matthew 5:8**). Jesus calls us to perfection, *even as* our Father in heaven who is perfect (**Matt. 5:48**).

Obviously, we all fall short of that call for perfection (**Romans 3:23**). What then? We must remember that perfection will not come solely by our effort (though it does require our whole-hearted diligence); perfection will be through forgiveness, the removal of our imperfections. We need not be baptized into Christ again; we are already in the body of Christ where the blood of Christ and the Spirit of Christ is found. We are told to repent and pray (**Acts 8:22**) and confess our sins (**1 John 1:8-10**) in order to be forgiven.

If we die in our sins, we will be removed so that the church may be perfect in heaven. If we are forgiven, our sin is removed so that we can be a part of the church in its perfection.

Keep in mind that this perfection will not be seen in any congregation on earth. We must keep growing and learning from our mistakes (**Hebrews 5:11-14; 2 Peter 3:18**); we must encourage weaker brethren to overcome their weaknesses, too (**Galatians 6:2**). Our imperfections do not give us the excuse not to try to live a holy life.

Jesus *died* so that we could be pure and holy. Therefore, we *must* strive for this goal.