



## GREG ALBRECHT

# PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

**QUESTION:** Can you tell me how exactly “the church” is the “Bride of Christ”? What does this description teach us?

**RESPONSE:** Yes, the church is the bride of Christ—but the bride of Christ is not the only descriptive metaphor that the Bible uses to describe Christ-followers who compose, by the grace of God, the church.

We must also define the word “church” as we consider your question. The “church” (Greek *ecclesia*) is, according to the New Testament, an “assembly” – it is a plurality of entities, many individuals, a gathering, a group, a meeting or a crowd. When Jesus spoke of “the church” he said, “Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:20). So, the assembly or gathering of the *ecclesia* can be small or large.

The word *ecclesia* is not reserved, as used in the Greek language, only for a specifically spiritual definition—an *ecclesia* can take place for any reason, as we see when *ecclesia* describes a riot in the city of Ephesus (see Acts 18). In ancient Greece cities actually had a place called an *agora* where an *ecclesia* (meeting or assembly) could take place.

The “church” as the **bride of Christ** is an assembly of people who are spiritually “in Christ” and in whom Christ himself lives. They are Christ-followers.

Now, the church is also spoken of in the Bible as the **body of Christ**—he is the head of the spiritual body, and those who trust, believe and follow are all a part of that body, as he calls and places his followers within his body. If we insist on only thinking of the church as the **bride of Christ**, then we must struggle with the fact that the church is also the **body of Christ**. Obviously, he would not literally marry his own body—so there are different descriptive metaphors being used to describe the church.

Another oft used metaphor of the church in the New Testament is of a building—Paul says that Christ-followers are “**the temple of the living God**” (1 Corinthians 6:16). Once again, if we are only thinking that the church is the **bride of Christ** then we must also realize that he will also marry not only **his own body** but he will construct a **building**.

Paul Minear in his book, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, catalogued 96 images of the church used in the New Testament, including a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9), the circumcision (Romans 2:25-29, Philippians 3:5-11 and Colossians 2:11-12), ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:18-21), citizens (Galatians 6:10 and Ephesians 2:10), exiles (Hebrews 11:13), an olive tree (Romans 11:13-23), a fig tree (Mark 11:12-14), a vineyard (Matthew 21:28-41) and the table of the Lord (1 Corinthians 10:21). There many other metaphors of the church used in the New Testament—light, salt, the new creation, a flock, a priesthood, the sanctified, the children of God and the friends of Jesus. □

What about Scripture passages where shame appears to be used as motivation? Could it be these are not cues to utilize shame; rather, they reflect a culture where shame was prevalent?

### Jesus, the Shame Disruptor

Christians have adopted the use of shame yet this focus is contrary to the example of Christ. In the story of the woman caught in adultery, Jesus did not condemn the woman, but told her to change her

behavior. (John 8:1-11) He addressed her guilt, but he also disrupted her legacy of humiliation. The far-reaching potency of shame can be difficult to imagine—until, as in Tuam, actual graves are uncovered. Imagine the transformation if the young women and children had encountered a disruption to their humiliation. Imagine if Christians were known for love, not for encouraging shame. □

*Rachel Ramer is the author of Religious Angst. This article is an excerpt adapted from her book.*