

The UNION

Get Ready to Meet the King!

God Calls His Church to
Truth, Faith and Holiness

Joan H. Richardson

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CHAPTER 24

The Union

¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another in the fear of God.

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. ²⁴ Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church. ³⁰ For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. ³¹ “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³² This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. ³³ Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife *see* that she respects *her* husband. (Ephesians 5:19-33 NKJV)

The passage above *is a great mystery*, for marriage doesn't merely pertain to flesh and blood as we might think; instead, the words allude to the spiritual reality in the union of a man and a woman, so closely relating to each other that each receives the other. Then he is in her, and she is in him. They communicate almost like speaking to oneself. It's as though each were thinking aloud; she shares his thoughts and his emotions, as he does hers. They relate face to face, word to word, heart to heart; their

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affection for each other unites the two as one in the flesh, and their sexual relationship expresses the bond of that love. Thus, love unifies them as one in the marriage bed where they are one flesh as well. Marriage was made for a man and woman in love.

Though few have known such love, when a man submits to Jesus Christ and cares for his wife as Jesus loves the church, her heart should easily yield to his authority, and their relationship together patterns Christ and His church.

When we respond to the love of the Lord in full surrender to His will, we live in Him as He lives through us. Then we are one with Him, and He speaks through us. That's how He shares His life with believers who yield to His will in response to His love. Abiding in Him is not a contractual agreement: it's an attitude of the heart that's always open and available for Him; nothing is held back or hidden, but we silently release our hearts to Jesus. In Spirit and truth, we let Him know us all the time, every moment.

On a Role

Though the Scriptures adjure men to love their wives as the Lord loves the church, not many men have even attempted the feat. It's a commission of high calling. Love is a wife's greatest need and its challenge is to the husband. By esteeming his wife as himself, the husband's strong nature grows temperate.

When men love, they experience God who reveals Himself to the hearts of those who love. *He who does not love does not know not God, for God is love. (1 Jn. 4:8 NKJV)*

Since Messiah mercifully sacrificed His life and drew us into the loving union with God, He gave the man a sacrificial role in the marriage relationship. A man who neglects his wife neglects a relationship. If he does the same in his relationship with Christ, He will say, "I never knew you!"

A foolish man is proud, unkind, angry, short-tempered, and unyielding, but a wise man is disciplined by self-control, leading to godliness and love. Tenderness, understanding, and patience will win his wife's heart forever. As he shares his thoughts and feelings with her, she reciprocates. When they look at each other, their eyes dance. This is love: knowing each other with affection and respect. Each responds to the other with heartfelt admiration and acceptance.

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When His Son's flesh was torn, the curtain of the temple's holy place was also torn as the Father opened up His heart to us; thus, as we open our hearts to Him, with nothing veiled—we can know Him as He knows us. By emotional and spiritual intimacy, the two become one.

Similarly, Christ and the church are connected by the marital relationship. Taking the wife's role, we must all bare our souls to God if we want intimacy with Him. We may not hide from Him; we're here for God all the time. If we refuse to reveal our hearts to Him, then we can't know God. If we are hiding anything from Him, even in the recesses of our minds, won't be fulfilled by the One who calls us to be holy as He is holy.

We must all expose ourselves to His light because we are to God as a wife is to her husband. If there are any dark places in our hearts that we don't confess to Him, how can He forgive us?

In the fear of God, we turn to Him, trusting His forgiveness and His power to cleanse us because of His promises. We honor Him by godly fear and love Him by obedience. Thus, we grow into His likeness; that's when we truly love Him.

Marriage teaches us how to know Christ. We don't love our mates by a list of rules that we memorize by rote. Behind closed doors, personal intimacy is a lifelong experience. The religious leaders at the time of Christ were unable to keep the laws they espoused because their foundation was love, which they lacked.

Hypocrites will cry out, but Christ will say, "Go away from Me, all of you who practice iniquity!" They'd professed faith, had known the right words, but had hidden from God—retaining shameful thoughts, they'd resisted the Spirit. They'd agreed to the covenant but walked away from it, preferring darkness to the light that exposes hidden things. This is why it says, *But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness!* (Mat. 6:23) Therefore, if we let Him cleanse us by confessing our sins, we're His forever.

Marriage Rules

Yeshua described the divine plan for marriage, commanding husbands to love their wives fervently and unconditionally as He loves us. If the Lord is the Judge at the door of the heart; how do we speak to our mates? How do we look at them? How

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well do they know us? The law of Moses and the words of Jesus are in harmony, but we haven't investigated the Scriptures carefully on this matter:

³ *Some* Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful *for a man* to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" ⁴ And He answered ⁵ and said, "Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'?" ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." ⁷ They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY?" ⁸ He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. ⁹ And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."
(Matthew 19:3-9 NASB)

No man has the right to despise his wife who is faithful and respectful to him; he should be praising her. God has called us to peace in the marriage relationship. The law was written for those who harden their hearts against their wives, in which case, the certificate of divorce freed her to marry another. She wasn't commanded to remain under bondage to an unloving husband. Yeshua was commanding His listeners to turn from their hardness of heart and love their wives.

Marriage is a refuge, a place where a woman and man share life together; where each loves, understands, and comes to know the other better than anyone else. They're best friends. It was not meant as a place of pain, loneliness, neglect, or abuse:

24 When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give *it* in her hand, and send her out of his house. ² And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. (Deuteronomy 24:1-2) [Christ allows this between the believer and unbeliever.]

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The rabbis and lawyers challenged Christ, citing Moses on divorce; they thought Moses had justified the practice of finding fault in their wives. Yeshua clarified Moses' law, explaining that divorce had been allowed because men were calloused, as indeed his audience was.

The law presented an instance in which the husband had emotionally separated himself from his wife, constantly finding fault in her, even judging her, believing she was unclean; therefore, Moses said if the wife saw no favor in his eyes for her, the husband should *allow* a divorce. The law allowed divorce in mercy toward the *woman!* Yet the leaders had not understood it.

Neither Moses nor Paul denies the teaching of Christ. When Yeshua came, His words convicted their hardened hearts, even in public places, but the seeds of truth never easily enter hard soil. He would have changed their hearts, calling them to repent, but they were unmerciful toward others and couldn't receive it themselves. Their pride resisted the Spirit; that's the nature of man.

Biblical counsel strengthens, unifies, and preserves lives, marriages, families, and nations. A marriage that succeeds influences others in positive ways. None of us belongs to himself alone but we were created to help one another. Our marriages affect others for better or worse.

If a husband requires his wife to do things against her conscience, should she obey him? No, but many marriage beds are defiled by acts of sodomy and perversions. The wife must obey her husband but not by sinful behavior.

Here's an illustration: Government is good because God ordained it, but not all governors are good. Godless men create ungodly laws. Shall we disobey God and obey the government if the law requires it? No, we should obey God rather than men.

In the same way, He ordained the governance of marriage, but immorality is improper, even in a marriage bed. Does lust or perversion fill our mind in the marriage relationship? Is God pleased by that? Is it acceptable in holy matrimony?

The greatest commandment is to love. In a loving marriage, hearts are healed. By love we forgive and find grace with God. Obeying the royal command, we are at peace with God and with each other. But if we use or abuse our mate, we sin against God and, even in marriage, we sin against our own bodies.

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If a partner neglects the relationship, he risks it all. The two are one flesh, but without respect, love has no foundation. Love is patient and kind; not envious, boastful, or arrogant; not self-willed, irritable, or resentful. ... *let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.* (Eph. 5:33) Jesus is the epitome of humility and love—the perfect Mate for His submissive bride.

Members of His Body

Christ imparts forgiveness and love to us each day. If we are holy, our words and behavior reveal it; if we are carnal, the same is true. Today is the day of salvation, and *now* is the best time to repent of any known sin.

What does it mean to *walk in the Spirit*? If His Spirit were the hand, we'd be His glove. In other words, we give ourselves to Him, and God works in us and through us to do what pleases Him; in return, we cooperate by activating our faith in relationship together with Him. We live by His Word, and He speaks to us in various ways. He accomplishes His purposes in us because we believe in Him. And that's what it means to believe.

When the Spirit abounds, we rejoice in Him. We are one in Christ by His Spirit, finding peace as we rest in His strength, casting all our cares on Him. Apart from Him, we can't be holy, but by His Spirit, we're able to obey His will by believing His words. It's been His desire since Eden: "*Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you.*" (Gen. 3:16c NIV)

Just as the husband has been given godly authority over His wife, so Christ has authority over each of us. As members of His body, our desire is for Him who is as a husband to us. His Spirit has authority over us, and most often our submission is a pleasure. There are times when He requires us to do what we don't want to do; then we should obey in the fear of the Lord.

As we walk daily in His presence and keep His words, we're His body—His flesh and bones. What He does, we do; where He goes, we go; what He says, we say—by abiding in Him. As we care for our flesh, we care for the other members of His body and esteem them more highly than ourselves. The Union: it's all about our marriage to Christ and our personal intimacy with God, which prepares us for His Kingdom.

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³¹ For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. ³² This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.
(Ephesians 5:31-32; cf. Gen 2:24)

He sent His Word into our hearts to quicken mortality as we who are two become one. He calls this unique and holy creation His mystery by our union with His Word because we have received Him. His love woos our hearts to be knitted with His Spirit by prayer through our passion to know Him more. Our union consummates our covenant: we, in Him and He, in us: *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.* (Eph. 5:26-27 NKJV)

His goal is a new creation unlike Adam, who was made like Him but was not one with Him. The mystery of the new man is seen in the union of God and His Son. Solely and collectively, we are one *in* Him and *in* the Father as He is *in* us by our faith in His Son, *that God may be all in all.* (See 1 Cor. 15:28)

¹⁸ “For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. ¹⁹ For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain.”
(Galatians 2:18-20 NKJV) – Paul, reproving Peter for his hypocrisy in returning to dietary laws like one under the law returning to the works of the law for his salvation.

Unless we believe the inspired words, we stunt our growth at the point of our unbelief. Old wineskins have limited ability to live by His Spirit; He would empower us to be like Yeshua. If we refuse to believe His words, we will shrink back to who we used to be, retaining only a semblance of the faith we first had.

As members of His body, therefore, we interact with one another, sharing His life—Jews and gentiles—all ethnicities, races, colors, and nations. For this purpose, Jews were scattered

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into all nations: to gather all nations to Him. His truth makes us all one. The closer we are, the more brightly we shine.

Are we far from Him who is so near to us? We are only as close as our Union. Together we proclaim His love in compassion to a deceived and dying world. In the fear of God, we speak the truth without fear of man.

We embrace them who are not like us, for Christ cared for us and rescued us from the wrath of God though we were not at all like Him. A man and his wife are often opposites, but they become one by their love and submission to each other.

Now we are His sign of hope for them who are unlike us; God sends His Word from us to them just because He loved us, and we reciprocate by telling others the great things He's done. He keeps changing our hearts as we find the gain of giving. *She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. (Prov. 31:12)*

The law sets limits, restricting us who strive to keep it, but the Spirit removes our limitations, expanding and increasing in us—spirit, soul, and body—with greater ability than ever before. The key to it all is our faith in the indwelling Christ as we communicate with Him in this marriage of two as one since the day He breathed His Spirit into our hearts:

³⁷ “And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. ³⁸ But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. ³⁹ And no one, having drunk old *wine*, immediately desires new; for he says, ‘The old is better.’” (Luke 5:37-39 NKJV)

The Intimacy

⁹ But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. ¹⁰ But God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. (1 Corinthians 2: 9-10)

Our Savior led the way for the resurrection of the members of His body; He paid the price for our redemption; sent His Spirit for our life, and ascended into heaven to prepare a place for us.

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Believing His words with childlike faith, we learn His ways to become a suitable match for our King. He makes us worthy as we move closer to Him in an attitude of fear and trembling as we *work out our salvation*, foreseeing things that are to come.

When He raises us to life again, He will meet us personally. Each of us is His closest and dearest friend who loves and obeys Him because we know His words are true. Our confidence in Him won't disappoint us. We're an undefeated army with Him as our King. We thank the Lord Jesus Christ in all things, knowing the victory is ours through Him:

¹⁴ But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.

¹⁵ For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task? (2 Corinthians 2:14-16 NIV)

Prepared for His return, His bride seeks His arrival, quiet and still before Him. Learning His voice, she is sensitive to the sound of a pebble on a pane, or a whisper as she sleeps. The truth draws her into the Union of her wholeness where He heals her with His words.

The Sacred Union

3 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

(1 John 3:1-3 NKJV)

Now is the time to know and believe the truth, and by the truth, to unite as one. Each believer is responsible to seek the purity of holiness by casting off the teachings of men that fail the tests of the Scriptures. As one new creature, we embody His holy wife without spot, wrinkle, or blemish—faultless in Christ. Our

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Union is one in the Father, in His Holy Spirit, and in His Son, one with His Word. These three agree in one Name, Yehovah, for God is One, and we are chosen as one in Him. He gives us His Name—*Yehovah is Salvation, Yeshua, Elohim ADONAI!*

We won't look to the right or to the left, to ourselves or to others, to experiences or to traditions but to know the truth. His Word is truth. By His Word He delivers us from darkness and deception because we dare to believe God only.

It's time to discard the leaven and its strongholds, purifying our minds and hearts with His Word, focusing on our Savior and living by the faith that obtains the goal of God in Christ—the high calling of perfect holiness! The aspiration is higher than knowledge, above revelation, greater than prophecy: our goal is to love others in complete devotion to the Word of God: *love covers a multitude of sins.* (See 1 Pet. 4:8) Although we stumble with our words, sometimes offensively; at times, defensively, stepping out of place, we can be sure that He who works in us *will establish us in every good work.* (1 Thess. 2:17)

Love and humility are the products of faith in His words. If we rationalize His words by referring to our experiences, then we're living by what we see rather than by faith in what God says. He finishes His righteousness in us by His grace, responding to our faith when we *live by faith, not by sight.* (See Hab. 2:4)

If we consider ourselves apart from Christ in us, we're at our wits' ends. Saints have fallen into sin, short of truth and goodness. Apart from grace, the truth would condemn us all, and yet, mercy wouldn't exist apart from it. God loved us in Eden where we first fell; compassion urged Him to reveal His love to men and to angels by the plan for our redemption:

Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed *each other.* (Psalm 85:10)

Mercy meets the truth in Yeshua-Jesus. Perfect in holiness, He offers peace for all who are far off the path. However, if we hide in our shame, refusing to enter the light, even as sinners do; then we resist the grace of the Savior's heart. He would receive us all with forgiveness and love, but who is willing to turn to Him from sin? yet just as we are, He gives us His life.

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²⁰ “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (John 17:20-21 NIV)

Envisioning their union, Yeshua prayed for all of us to unite by our love for one another, living proof that God sent Him. In His faithful love, He gathered His scattered ones back to the land and will soon gather His saints to where His glory rests:

²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—²³ I in them and you in me— so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:22-23 NIV)

I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.” (John 17:26 NIV) – Yeshua, praying for personal intimacy with each of us who believe.

He heals those He wounded, and out of death, raises us into His own immortality. He will not leave us in the grave. *As for me, I will behold their face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness. (Ps. 17:15)*

The Consummation

He knows us though we see Him through a veil. He carried a cross to die for us, spilling His blood to the earth; He breathes His Spirit into us, and now His life remains in us. He prepares a place for us; knowing this, we await His return. And we know the times are in His hands. He does all things well.

¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ Himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. (1 Corinthians 6:15-17 NIV)

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She was once unloved and unlovely; then He loved her and called her His beloved. Made complete in His love, she searches His words to know Him; takes up her cross to follow; loses her life to find Him; and gives Him her soul without regret. She gives up her name for His and yields her will to His until He completes her as His own. As one, they bond and rest, assured by the embrace. Her heart, her soul, her mind, her strength—all she has, she releases to Him, casting her cares to His love.

On earth the two become one flesh. In the kingdom, we are one by His Spirit; the marriage is consummated by the Union of two, God with man, conceived by His Word as the new creation:

⁷ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.

⁸ The foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹ But the prudent answered, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you *too*; go instead to the dealers and buy *some* for yourselves.' ¹⁰ And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. ¹¹ Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' ¹² But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' ¹³ Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.

(Matthew 25:7-13 NASB)

Our Husband is our King who seals us with the Signet of His life, and our love secures our hearts forever. The true witnesses, both His body and His bride. With nothing lacking, we're made whole; though once apart, we're one forever.

Like Esther before King Xerxes, we approach His throne in trepidation but with courage, knowing He loves us. We bow in awe before the King whose most intimate embraces we have known—such a mystery!

... I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.

(2 Corinthians 11:2b NIV)

At last we fill our lamps with the oil of His Spirit; our love burns like a flame. Fearless of the future, we trust in Him whose heart we share. We understand the choice, the truth, and the cost as our faith finds its home in His arms.