

# Purity and Unity of the Church

## Introduction

Is it possible for different assemblies to be more pleasing or less pleasing to God? What criteria can be used to determine a church's purity and unity?

**EPHESIANS 5:25-27 - Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.**

We see an analogy used here, what is true for husband and wife is even more true for Bridegroom (Christ) and bride (church). What Jesus does for the church includes:

- making her holy - 'to be set apart', devoted to God or consecrated
- cleansing her with water - reminiscent of baptism
- using the word of God to achieve this
- making her blameless - forgiving her of all sins
- making her beautiful

**1 PETER 1:13-16 - Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."**

Whilst Christ makes the church holy, we too have a role to play. Consider the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). We must be prepared.

## Purity of the Church

Consider the following definition of "purity" – *the purity of the church is its degree of freedom from wrong doctrine and conduct, and its degree of conformity to God's revealed will for the church.*

An assembly will always be in the process of "being made holy", as such we may find churches in differing stages of purity. Factors that make a church purer might include:

- Biblical doctrine
- Proper baptism and communion
- Correct church discipline
- Genuine worship
- Effective prayer
- Effective evangelism
- Fellowship
- Biblical church governance
- Spirit-led ministry
- Personal holiness of the assembling members

Factors that may move a church towards less purity:

- Bad practices
- Unrepentant sin
- Worldliness
- False teaching
- False worship

Consider the churches in the book Revelation. We see different assemblies in varying stages of purity.

### Questions for us to reflect on

- Do you agree there are differing stages of purity among churches?
- If a church is “less pure”, what options do you have as a member?
- Can a church achieve a state of complete purity? If so, how?

### Unity of the Church

**JOHN 17:20-23 - “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 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. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 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.**

Consider the following definition of “unity” – *the unity of the church is its degree of freedom from divisions among true Christians.*

Think of parents seeing their children fight. Is this possibly how God sees us when we do the same?

- If there have been unresolved issues and misunderstandings, bitterness can quickly grow in our hearts and begin to destroy the unity of an entire assembly.
- We are warned to be aware of divisive brothers or sisters, and to be mindful of constantly grumbling and complaining.
- But there is hope - there is repentance, reconciliation, and mediation.
- Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God, Jesus promises (Matt 5:9).

### Final questions

- Do you see unity as an issue for you?
- In what areas do you think unity is essential? Is “unity” the same as “sameness”?
- Would you describe yourself as a peacemaker? Does your presence and actions bring people together or divide?