The Calling of the Bride of Christ

Few Christians stop to consider that Scripture describes our relationship with Christ through one of the deepest and most intimate images known to man: betrothal and marriage. In the New Testament, Christ presents Himself as a Bridegroom preparing His Bride, and believers are called to live in a relationship of love, faithfulness and expectation toward Him.

This image is no accident. A genuine engagement does not rest on a promise alone, but on attraction, admiration and the desire to be together. No one enters such a relationship without being won over by the beauty of the beloved's character. In the same way, God reveals to us the beauty of His Son in order to draw our hearts to Him. We are not called merely to believe certain truths about Christ, but to know Him, to admire Him and to love Him.

As we look upon the humility, purity, goodness, love and holiness of the Lord Jesus, a desire is born in our hearts to belong to Him completely. This is the essence of the Christian life: a living relationship with Christ, in which the Bridegroom reveals His beauty, and the bride is drawn and transformed by love into His image.

We are called to share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Scripture, the glory of God refers not only to His power, His majesty or His authority, but also to the beauty of His perfect character. When Moses asked, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory," God answered him, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee" (Exodus 33:18-19). So the glory of God is revealed through His moral beauty: goodness, justice, mercy, love and holiness.

God does not reveal this beauty to us merely so that we might contemplate it from a distance, but so that we might be drawn to Him.

Our love for Christ is the heart's response to the revelation of His love and beauty. As we come to know Him, we are drawn by His character and captivated by who He is in His very essence. We see His gentleness, His humility, His patience and His self-giving love, and we come to desire Him not only as Saviour, but also as the pattern for our lives.

Scripture uses the image of betrothal and marriage precisely to describe this relationship. It is not a relationship founded on fear or obligation, but on love, admiration and wonder. God reveals His beauty so that our hearts may be won by Christ, and so that we may respond with a love that is free and whole.

Yet God's purpose is not only that we admire the beauty of Christ, but that we be transformed into His image. True love produces likeness. Whoever truly loves longs to resemble the one they love. That is why Paul declares:

"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:13)

God's plan for us is not merely that we be forgiven or that we get to heaven, but that we be formed after the character of Christ. As we behold His beauty, we come to love what He loves, to hate what He hates, and to reflect that same moral beauty in our own lives.

In this sense, the whole Christian life can be understood as a season of spiritual betrothal. The Bridegroom reveals His beauty, draws the heart of the Bride and prepares her for eternal union with Himself. First love is born out of this contemplation of Christ, and it grows the more we come to know Him. In this way God's plan is fulfilled: that we be drawn to His Son, transformed into His image and made ready for eternal glory.

In Revelation 19:7-9 we read:

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb."

Here we see the goal toward which this spiritual betrothal leads. We are called to become the Bride of Christ, made ready to meet the Bridegroom. This is one of the highest callings set before us in Scripture.

Revelation 21 carries this image further, describing the final fulfilment of God's plan:

"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

Then a voice is heard, saying:

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

This is the Bride's final destination: full and everlasting fellowship with God.

And yet Scripture makes it clear that this calling demands perseverance. In Revelation 21:7 we read:

"He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son."

The Bride is made up of overcomers, of people who remain faithful in their love for Christ to the very end.

What is more, in Revelation 22:17 we find one of the most beautiful pictures of spiritual maturity:

"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come."

The Bride has become so united with the desires of the Bridegroom that she speaks together with the Holy Spirit. She has been transformed into the image of Christ and is able to take part in the marriage of the Lamb.

So the Word of God shows us plainly what we are called to. We are presented as a Bride made ready for her Bridegroom, as sons of God and brothers of the Lord Jesus. Our whole walk is a preparation for that meeting. We are called to cultivate a relationship of love with Christ, to be drawn by the beauty of His character, to grow up to the measure of the stature of His fulness, and to remain faithful until the day when the betrothal gives way to the eternal marriage of the Lamb.

Let me remind you of the church in Ephesus. It was born through the ministry of the apostle Paul and is mentioned in Revelation, chapter 2. The message addressed to that church calls us to examine our relationship with God and to remember the calling we have received.

The Lord Jesus brought this church to life through the Gospel, yet it lost something so important that He warns it He will take away its candlestick. The candlestick represents the witness and the light God gives to a church. Losing that essential thing carried consequences so serious that the Lord Himself says He will come and remove the candlestick out of its place.

We read in Revelation 2:1-5:

"Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

I remember how, years ago, I would read this passage and not understand what the Lord Jesus meant when He said, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." He was not speaking about some later love, but about the first love. I searched for answers, I asked myself the question and I studied the Scriptures, but I could not grasp what it meant to leave your first love.

I seemed to have all the qualities mentioned in this passage: labour, patience, discernment toward those who are evil, the ability to test those who claimed to be apostles and to expose them as liars, suffering for the Lord's name, and perseverance without growing weary. And yet something was missing. I did not yet understand the Lord's true calling.

He has called us to be His Bride. Scripture says, "His wife hath made herself ready." That preparation is essential. Married life does not begin on the wedding day; it is prepared long before. The season we are living in now can be likened to a spiritual betrothal between Christ and those He has redeemed.

In a relationship like that, there has to be love. No one can become a wife without love. That is why first love is not a secondary detail of the Christian life, but the very foundation of the relationship between Christ and His Bride. Even where there is service, perseverance and sacrifice, without this love the most important thing is missing from the relationship we are meant to have with the Lord.

Many people come to God for all sorts of reasons: out of fear of hell, out of longing for heaven, or out of a need for help. But the Christian life cannot be sustained over the long haul by motives like these. Only love can sustain a living relationship with Christ. That is why so many grow weary along the way. You cannot lose something you never had. Before you can lose your first love, you must first come to know it.

The apostle Paul speaks of exactly this relationship in 2 Corinthians 11:1-4:

"For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."

Here Paul expresses the divine jealousy of God. Jealousy of that kind exists only within a relationship of love. God does not want a divided heart. He wants to be loved with our whole being.

That is why Paul fears that believers might be deceived, as Eve was deceived by the serpent, and drift away from purity and faithfulness toward Christ. He warns against the preaching of another Jesus, another spirit and another gospel. The danger is not only that of denying Christ, but also of accepting a false picture of Him, one that no longer demands exclusive devotion or wholehearted love.

First love is that pure, deep and passionate love that marks a genuine relationship with Christ. It is not the enthusiasm of the early days, as many think, but the very source and driving force of the spiritual life. It sustains us in our walk with God, motivates our obedience, strengthens us in trials and turns service from a burden into a joy.

The strength of this love is so great that Scripture compares it with one of the most powerful realities known to man:

"Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." (Song of Solomon 8:6-7)

Death cannot be conquered by human strength. No one can escape it by his own resources. In the same way, true love has a power that goes beyond the limits of human nature. It holds on, it perseveres and it overcomes every obstacle. If death rules over the mortal body, the love of Christ rules over the heart that has surrendered fully to Him.

This love does not wear out our relationship with Christ; it sets it ablaze. The more we know Him, the more we love Him. It is not used up by giving, but grows. It is not weakened by time,

but matured by faithfulness. It is the fire that keeps the spiritual life burning and the only power able to carry us to the finish line of the Christian race.

The church in Ephesus was rich in good works, but it had lost the love that had first bound it to Christ. That is exactly why the Lord tells it, "Thou hast left thy first love."

This is a warning for us too. God calls us to search our hearts and see whether love for Christ is still the centre of our lives. If we love the world, comfort, success, or even God's blessings more than we love God Himself, we are on the wrong road.

First love is the fire that kindled our relationship with Christ, and it must keep burning to the end. It is a love as strong as death, a love that many waters cannot quench and the floods cannot drown. It is the power that prepares us to meet the Bridegroom, and one day it will reach its fulfilment in the marriage of the Lamb. If we abide in this love, we will reach the destination for which we were called, because love for Christ is the beginning, the strength and the fulfilment of our walk with God.

May the Lord help all of us to understand this fire, this living flame that must be born in us and carefully kept. Let us not grow bored or weary of keeping it alive. God tells us in Hebrews, "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." (Hebrews 10:38). Hebrews stresses that God takes no pleasure in those who, in reality, turn away from their love for Christ, our Bridegroom. Amen.

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