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Christ and His Bride

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"Christ... loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27).

The Father appointed all things for His Son. Those 'all things' were to be the joint inheritance of His Son and His Son's bride, the Church. That comes out very clearly in the New Testament. That bride was in the race of mankind, created as we are told in the book of Genesis. That bride would have to be of a certain order, a certain character, a certain kind, to be suitable to that Son. She would have to be a very special bride, she would have to be made for Him most suitable.

Then we have the story of Adam and Eve, and we know what happened through their surrender to Satan. Something spiritual happened in them, a change took place in their very nature. God had made them, firstly, for union with Himself; then for communion with Himself; and then for likeness to Himself; and in dependence upon Himself; leading to the last thing, absolute and implicit faith in Him. Those are the five things which characterise the Church according to God's mind - (1) union with God, vital union, the union of one life; (2) communion with God, intercourse, fellowship, oneness of mind; (3) likeness to God, in His own image and after His likeness, taking character from Him, He giving His character and His nature to the Church; then (4) dependence upon Him so complete that there is no life apart from Him. (It is one of the great tests of marriage union - and I

should say, taking it from a man's standpoint, a most difficult one - for a wife to be absolutely dependent upon a man for every penny. There is a revolt against that in our times: but God meant it to be like that with His Church - just absolute dependence, having nothing apart from Him, drawing everything from Him.) And that means (5) perfect faith in Him. Those five things must characterise the bride of Christ.

Now the thing that happened when Satan carried the day with those two changed all that. It broke the union; it brought an end to the communion; it marred the likeness and made impossible its full expression; independence came in - for theirs was an independent act: Satan had tempted them to act on their own, without any relationship to God at all - and that all meant that faith in God was destroyed. It was something that happened in the nature. It was not just an act, but something that entered into their very nature; and so that is how we find the race.

Now the Lord lays His hand upon one and another of those who are to form that bride. He brings them to the place where they have to make this decision and take this position - 'I die to all that which happened long, long ago; I die to broken union, to interrupted communion, to spoiled likeness, to all independence and unbelief. I repudiate it, I put it all away; I say that belongs to a creation which I hate, and I want that to be done with, dead and buried. In Christ union is restored, communion begins again, the likeness, conformity to the Son, is taken up by the Holy Spirit; I am from this time utterly and wholly dependent upon the Lord, not to live unto myself but henceforth "unto him who for their sakes died and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:15), and henceforth my faith is in Him.'

"Christ loved the church," and He gave Himself, for one thing, to purchase her; for the other thing, to effect that death of herself, on her behalf. We cannot kill ourselves, but the Lord Jesus has done it for us. He has died to all that other condition for us, and has risen to all this thought of God for us. So that in His death we died to all that happened in Eden, and in His resurrection we rise to all that God ever intended that bride to be. "Christ... loved the church, and gave himself up for it... that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing."

That brings us to this further stage, that we are together as the Church, as the bride, on resurrection ground, and ours is no longer an independent life, even as Christians. We are dependent upon one another in Christ, because Christ has committed Himself to the Church, and we come into a greater fulness of Christ in a related way with one another than we should if we were just isolated individuals; we get a greater fulness of Christ in our fellowship together. So we need the Church, because Christ comes to us in the Church, and this dependence upon the Lord is shown by our spiritual dependence upon one another, upon fellowship, upon the communion of the people of God. In Christ we are one, providing Him with what the Father ever intended Him to have - a glorious Church.