

# The bride of Christ

Maurice Pogson

**I**N THIS exhortation we will liken ourselves to the cells of a living body. We are designed to be fitly framed together to make up the body of the bride of Christ, just as individual cells make up our physical body.

What are cells? They are very complex microscopic parts which, when doing their individual work properly, help to maintain harmony in the body. A single body cell is an insignificant part of the body and on its own is of no value. For a body cell to be visible it must be greatly magnified. Almighty God is the only One Who can greatly magnify us. This tells us that cells of the body of the bride of Christ must not be puffed up. They are, in the terms of our Lord, "little ones" (Mt. 18:10). Moreover, it takes only one unhealthy cell to let the body down. What sort of cell are we? Are we healthy and vibrant cells?

## The example of the patriarchs

What does it mean to be a part or cell of the body of the bride of Christ? What type of character is the groom looking for in his bride? There is an illustration in Genesis 4: "And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD [Yahweh]. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD [Yahweh] had respect unto Abel and to his offering" (vv. 3,4). One of these was a cell that was healthy and vibrant; the other a leprous cell whose work was destructive. What kind of a cell are we?

In Genesis 22 we have the record of the sacrifice of Isaac. Here Abraham is, as it were, a cell in the body of the bride of Christ. We finite beings tend to want God to respond to our requests in *our* good time, but God, in His infiniteness, foresight and wisdom, responds in *His* good time. Abraham had to wait a very long time for Isaac, in our estimation. Thus Abraham referred to Eliezer as his heir because, from a human point of view, God was not acting quickly enough. If God promises to give you something in this life there is absolutely no way you will die with that promise unfulfilled. But what if, later, after you have received the promise, He threatens to remove what He gave to you, as with Abraham when he was told to offer up Isaac? How would we respond? We wait dec-

ades for a promise to be fulfilled, and then God says, "I want that back". Are we of the same cell group as Abraham, a cell of the bride of Christ?

In Genesis 24 we have the account of Abraham's servant being led to Rebekah as a bride for Isaac. When Rebekah is asked, "Wilt thou go with this man?", she says, "I will go" (v. 58). She loses no time in departing. Yahweh chose this bride for Isaac, and He never makes a mistake. Rebekah had a choice: stay or go. She chose to go and marry a man she had heard only a little about and had never seen. She would never again see her family. She left her country, her kindred and her father's house, and went unto a land and a groom that the Lord would show her. She did in one day what it took her faithful father-in-law years to accomplish. What a bride!

Could we imagine ourselves doing what Rebekah did? We may believe that before much longer we will be taken to meet our groom. We have never met him in person but we know a lot about him, a lot more than Rebekah knew about her groom. Are we ready to go at a moment's notice to our groom? In Matthew 19:29 our groom says: "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life".

## Subjection

The Lord has given us a choice of two very different grooms to choose to serve. One will lead us to blackness forever, while the other will lead us to eternal light and life. How would we feel about being told whom we had to marry? Without doubt we would not be at all impressed and would put up as much argument against it as we could muster. In Genesis 38 we have the story of Tamar's two husbands who were slain by Yahweh for their evil. These two men were brothers, they came from the same mould. After the death of the second husband she was then told by her father-in-law to go home to her father and remain a widow until the next brother, from the same mould, was grown up, and then she would be his wife.

How would we feel about being in her shoes? In our culture Tamar appears to be hard done

by. She did not have the right to marry whom she would; she was told whom she would be marrying next. She even had to wait for him to be old enough to marry (which must have been a while), but it did not bother her at all. In fact she was upset about not having been married to this third son earlier. She did not even know how he had turned out, for he was but a lad when she saw him last. What a bride! There is humility. There is a cell of the body of the bride of Christ. We have absolutely nothing to fear about changes in our groom's character.

Let us now consider Leviticus 18 to see something rather different. Compare verse 8, "The nakedness of thy father's wife shalt thou not uncover: it is thy father's nakedness", with verse 11, "The nakedness of thy father's wife's daughter, begotten of thy father, she is thy sister, thou shalt not uncover her nakedness". The nakedness of an unmarried woman belongs to herself, she owns it, but a married woman is different. Her husband owns her nakedness, not herself, as is also stated in Leviticus 20:11,20,21 and Deuteronomy 22:30 and 27:20.

The bride is in total submission to her groom, to the point of being owned, not because of a tyrant husband but because that is the way Yahweh requires it. Man had no say in the making of this law, and Hebrews 4 declares: "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do" (v. 13). Our nakedness as the bride of Christ does not belong to us, it belongs to our groom. Why? Paul says: "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:19,20). To this he adds: "Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men" (7:23).

Peter likewise wrote: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18,19). We are exhorted to commitment and separation in these words: "But as the One Who called you is holy, you yourselves also be holy in all your conduct and manner of living. For it is written, You shall be holy, for I am holy" (vv. 15,16, Amplified Bible). How subject are we to

our Lord who is our groom? Is our subjection absolute?

### Commitment

It is recorded in Joshua 15: "And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife" (v. 16). We might say, 'Poor Achsah', for would not this situation have caused her alarm? I doubt it. She would have willingly submitted herself to whoever it was who won her. She was to be a prize for the winning man. How would we feel? Suicidal? Not Achsah, she committed herself to her groom. You may say, 'That was the custom of the day'. True, but why has it changed? Yahweh made that law, and He does not change. Is it not the Women's Liberation movement that has caused things to change? Are we in any way seeking a watering down of our commitment to our groom?

We are talking about our commitment to Christ, the lack of which brings disaster to a marriage. Our groom is committed to us. He will not leave us nor forsake us, but what if we do not ensure that nothing stands between us and we do not make him our Lord in our hearts? Consider what Joshua says at the end of his probation. He exhorts the people:

"Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: know for a certainty that the LORD [Yahweh] your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD [Yahweh] your God hath given you. And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD [Yahweh] your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof" (23:12-14).

That word "cleave" in verse 12 is the same word used for a man cleaving to his wife. Is anyone more important to us than our groom, the Lord Jesus Christ? Are we totally committed to him so that whatsoever he asks of us we will do?

Just how accepting are we of our groom's requirements, come what may? Are we allowing

him to rule over us, as God said Adam was to rule over his bride? These are words of Solomon: "A foolish son is the calamity of his father: and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping. House and riches are the inheritance of fathers: and a prudent wife is from the LORD [Yahweh]" (Prov. 19:13,14). How often do we try to change our groom's requirements to suit ourselves? Have we ever stopped to think about that continual dripping of water, and compare it to ourselves in the eyes of our groom?

Consider what the Apostle Peter says:

"Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement" (1 Pet. 3:1-6).

Sarah is a wonderful example to both brethren and sisters equally here. Is the Lord Jesus Christ truly our Lord in our hearts? Or is there someone or something standing in the way?

### Readiness

How ready for the arrival of our groom are we? In the parable of the ten virgins we read: "And while they [the foolish] went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut" (Mt. 25:10). Why were they not ready for the groom? In Luke 14 our groom enlarges upon the reason: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (v. 26). They were not ready because someone or something (tangible or otherwise) was more important to them than the groom. They were not preparing themselves for him, they were too self-centred. A little later Jesus said: "Remember Lot's wife" (17:32). Her goods and chattels were more important to her

than the saving of her soul. She was a leprous cell. What are we?

We know only too well that our groom spoke on one plane while the disciples listened on another plane, just as, perhaps, we still do. The disciples were, however, wise enough to ask Christ what he meant by his words. So should we if we are to understand what he requires of us. Searching the Scriptures daily with an open mind is the way to do this, for this is life unto the cells of the body. Consider what he said to the scribes and the Pharisees: "Woe unto you . . . hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Mt. 23:23). Here we have an educating comment from our groom. How much notice are we taking of him? Are we leaving anything undone? If we think about this in our marriages the "weightier matters" could be what we refer to as the 'little things'.

### Reverence and fear

In Ephesians 5 there is mention of the reverence due to the husband from the wife: "Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband" (v. 33). In Luke 1 there is mention of fear:

"And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His name. And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree" (vv. 46-52).

The word "reverence" in Ephesians 5 and the word "fear" here in Luke 1 are the same Greek word used in the same way. God put some of the most wonderful women of old through some very hard times. This did not dampen their desire to serve Him, and how great is their reward! We need to have that same spirit of reverence and fear.

In Exodus 34 we see a bit more directly the character that we should be striving to develop in our lives:

“And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him [Moses] there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, the LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and That will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation” (vv. 5-7).

If we are to please our groom we need to be merciful and gracious, longsuffering, abounding in goodness and honesty. We need to be “kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath for-

given [us]” (Eph. 4:32); “forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave us” (Col. 3:13).

In Hebrews 13 there is an appropriate conclusion to our exhortation:

“Let your conversation [way of life] be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and forever” (vv. 5-8).

Is this the sort of ‘cell’ we are?



## Exposition

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# “Simon, son of John, lovest thou me . . . ?” (Jno. 21:15)\*

Tom Barling

THE OCCASION itself was most interesting; in the interval between the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and his ascension, the Lord revealed himself to seven of his disciples at the Sea of Galilee. They had spent the night in vain endeavour, failing to catch any fish. Then a strange figure on the seashore bade them cast their net on the right side of the boat. The result was dramatic; they now had 153 large fish in their net, and the net did not break (Jno. 21:1-11).

The Lord had prepared breakfast for the tired fishermen, and after they had partaken of it he proceeded to interrogate Peter three times, as recorded in verses 15-17:

“Simon, son of John, lovest thou me more than these?”;

“He saith to him again a second time, Simon, son of John, lovest thou me?”;

“He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of John, lovest thou me?”.

The purpose of the interrogation was apparent to all, especially Peter. The one who had been so positive about his love for the Lord, transcending that of any other (*cf.* Mt. 26:33), now had the opportunity to atone for his three-fold denial by a reaffirmation of his love. What is so remarkable about the occasion is that, whilst Peter uses in all his three replies the Greek verb *phileō*, the Lord in the first two of his questions employs the verb *agapaō* but in the third question uses the same word as his apostle, *phileō*. A common explanation of this linguistic phenomenon is that Peter, ashamed of his denials, modestly uses a word less elevated than *agapaō*, and that the Lord in his third question comes down to the level of his apostle, and uses the same word.

The purpose of the present study is to put this common explanation to the test. We need, first,

\* Quotations from the RV.