

Deified to Be the Bride of Christ

The entire Bible reveals that God is a Husband to His people and that His people are a bride, a wife, to Him. This great story will consummate in a blessed wedding in the coming age and a universal marriage life for eternity. The divine vision of the marriage union of God and man contains the light of the intrinsic kernel of God's economy, that, as articulated by Athanasius of Alexandria in the fourth century, "the very Word of God...was made man that we might be made God" (*Incarnation* 65), that is, the same as God in life and in nature but not in His Godhead. The fulfillment of this great vision naturally entails the need for the bride of Christ to be prepared for this marriage, a need that strongly implies the "word of righteousness" (Heb. 5:13), the truth concerning the believers' responsibility and accountability to God for their life in the church age.

The Goal of the Entire Bible Being the Marriage of God and His People

Four prophets in the Old Testament—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea—speak of God as the Husband of the people of God and of His people as His spouse, His wife. Isaiah 54:5 says very clearly, "For your Maker is your Husband; / Jehovah of hosts is His name." Jeremiah 31:32 says similarly, "Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by their hand to bring them out from the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was their Husband, declares Jehovah." Jeremiah also speaks of the betrothal of Israel to God, saying, "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus says Jehovah: I remember concerning you the kindness of your youth, / The love of your bridal days, / When you followed after Me in the wilderness, / In a land that was not sown" (2:2). Hosea 2:19 and 20 reiterate,

And I will betroth you to Myself forever; / Indeed I will betroth you to Myself / In righteousness and justice / And in lovingkindness and compassions; / Indeed I will betroth you to Myself in faithfulness, / And you will know Jehovah.

Similarly, Ezekiel 16:8 speaks of the covenant of marriage between God and His people:

Then I passed by you and saw you; and then was your time a time of love. And I spread My skirt over you and

covered your nakedness; indeed I swore unto you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord Jehovah, and you became Mine.

This covenant was enacted at the mountain of God, through the giving of the law (Exo. 20:1-21). The giving of the law was a transaction in which God's people became engaged to Him.

In the New Testament, Christ is the Bridegroom and the Husband to His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated elect. In Matthew 9:15 the Lord Jesus revealed Himself as the Bridegroom who had come to take the bride. Earlier, John the Baptist had declared concerning Him, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom" (John 3:29). In 2 Corinthians 11:2 Paul said, "For I am jealous over you with a jealousy of God; for I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a pure virgin to Christ." At the end of this dispensation, there will be a glorious wedding day, at which time Christ will come to marry His redeemed and take her as His bride (Rev. 21:9). Following this, for eternity the Triune God as the Husband will enjoy a sweet married life with His wife. This wife will be the New Jerusalem, the wife of the Lamb (vv. 9-10), the ultimate consummation of the union, mingling, and incorporation of the processed and consummated Triune God with His chosen, redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified elect. In this way the conclusion of the Bible is the universal marriage of God and His people. As we shall see, for God to marry His people requires that we become the same as He is through a lifelong process of transformation. Ultimately, the believers must bear the responsibility to gain the fullest portion of the Spirit and allow Him to fully work within them. Only those who thus overcome will be prepared to meet the coming Christ as His bride.

The Counterpart to a Husband Being the Same as He Is

God's purpose and intention in creating man was to gain a counterpart for Himself (Gen. 1:26). This great purpose can be seen in type in the creation of Adam and the producing of Eve as his wife. Adam is clearly regarded in the Bible as a type of Christ, the last Adam, "Him who was to come" (Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:45). As a man, the leading one in God's creation, Adam typifies God as the real, universal Husband who is seeking a wife for Himself,

and Adam's need for a wife typifies and portrays God's need to have a complement. In Genesis 2, Jehovah first formed man with the dust of the ground and set him in front of the tree of life with a river (vv. 7-10), signifying God Himself as life and the life supply to the man He created. Then verse 18 says, "And Jehovah God said, It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper as his counterpart." What immediately follows is very significant in the divine revelation of the union of God and man. Verses 19 and 20 say,

And Jehovah God formed from the ground every animal of the field and every bird of heaven, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called any living animal, that was its name. And the man gave names to all cattle and to the birds of heaven and to every animal of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper as his counterpart.

Subsequent to uttering the need and desire for a counterpart to Adam, Jehovah created and brought before him the beasts and the birds, all the time knowing that none of these could be his match in marriage, since his match must be not only his helper (*azar*, Heb.) but one suitable for him and corresponding to him as a counterpart (*neged*, Heb.), "a helping being, in which, as soon as he sees it, he may recognise himself" (Keil 86). In the cattle and birds of the air, Adam did not recognize himself, for none of them were the same as he.

The language of the Septuagint is full of insight here, rendering the same Hebrew phrase *as his counterpart* as κατ' αὐτόν (according to him) in verse 18 and as ὁμοιος αὐτῷ (like him or the same as he) in verse 20. The helper yet to be found for Adam needed to be one according to Adam and like Adam, that is, the same as Adam in species, life, nature, and appearance.

Adam is to become acquainted with the creatures, to learn their relation to him, and by giving them names to prove himself their lord.... "The man sees the animals, and thinks of what they are and how they look..." (*Delitzsch*).... The thoughts of Adam with regard to the animals, to which he gave expression in the names that he gave them, we are not to regard as the mere results of reflection, or of abstraction from merely outward peculiarities which affected the senses; but as a deep and direct mental insight into the nature of the animals, which penetrated far deeper than such knowledge as is the simple result of reflecting and abstracting thought. The naming of the animals, therefore, led to this result, that there was not found a help meet for man. (Keil 88)

Thus Adam was keenly aware of the kind, character, and nature of each of the created animals and of his relation to them. According to this deep and penetrating insight, he

realized that none of them were ὁμοιος αὐτῷ, "the same as he," leaving him yet without a true counterpart.

The Bride Produced by the Operation of the Divine Life

Genesis 2:21 and 22 continue our account: "And Jehovah God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place. And Jehovah God built the rib, which He had taken from the man, into a woman and brought her to the man." The producing of Eve from one of the ribs of Adam is an allegory, a type of the church produced by the death and resurrection of Christ. We must compare verse 21 to the account of the Lord's crucifixion, especially in the record of John. John 19:34 says, "But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water." Blood signifies the redemption accomplished by Christ on the cross while water signifies the life of Christ to produce the church:

Two substances came out of the Lord's pierced side: blood and water. Blood is for redemption, to deal with sins (John 1:29; Heb. 9:22) for the purchasing of the church (Acts 20:28). Water is for imparting life, to deal with death (John 12:24; 3:14-15) for the producing of the church (Eph. 5:29-30)... This death that imparts life released the Lord's divine life from within Him for the producing of the church, which is composed of all His believers, into whom His divine life has been imparted. This life-imparting death of the Lord's is typified by Adam's sleep, out from which Eve was produced (Gen. 2:21-23), and is signified by the death of the one grain of wheat that fell into the ground for the bringing forth of many grains (John 12:24) to make the one bread—the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:17). Hence, it is also the life-propagating, life-multiplying death, the generating and reproducing death. (Recovery Version, John 19:34, note 1)

In his joyous astonishment upon waking and finding his counterpart, Adam utters, "This time this is bone of my bones / And flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23). Again the Scriptures are rich with divine metaphor. The bone signifies the resurrection life of Christ. At the end of Christ's crucifixion, the Jews asked Pilate to have the legs broken of those who had been crucified (John 19:31). When the soldiers came to Jesus, however, they found that He had died already and that there was no need for them to break His bones. This fulfilled the Scripture which said, "No bone of His shall be broken" (vv. 32-33, 36; Exo. 12:46; Num. 9:12; Psa. 34:20). Though Christ passed through death in His human life, His resurrection life remained unbroken. We again see the resurrection life of Christ prefigured by bone in the account of the death and burial of Elisha in 2 Kings 13. Verse 21 says, "And it so happened that as the people were burying a man, they saw a band [of invaders]; and they cast the man into the grave of Elisha.

And as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he came to life and stood up on his feet.” Thus, the bone is a symbol, a figure, of the resurrection life of Christ, which nothing can break, hurt, or damage. This is the life with which the church is produced and built up as the multiplication of the God-man to become the real Eve to match Him and complement Him.

The Bride Having the Same Source and Substance as the Husband

Genesis 2:23 continues the account of the producing of Eve: “This one shall be called Woman [*ishah*, Heb.] / Because out of Man [*ish*, Heb.] this one was taken.” *Out of* implies very much in the divine understanding. It refers to the source and thus to the identity of the substance. Eve came from the source of Adam and was of the same substance as Adam. “The woman was created, not of dust of the earth, but from a rib of Adam, because she was formed for an inseparable unity and fellowship of life with the man” (Keil 89). In verse 23, Luther sees in the Hebrew *ish* and *ishah* a particular play of words, rendering *Woman* more as “a female man” in recognition of her organic source in and union with the man.¹ Eve was, in the most literal and spiritual sense, the same as Adam in life and in nature, though possessing an existence, being, and status distinct from his. Because of this, she was organically qualified to be joined to Adam in marriage.

Moses adds to this account: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (v. 24). Paul interprets and applies this maxim to Christ and the church, the universal Husband and wife (Eph. 5:31-32). Christ and the church as one spirit, typified by a husband and wife as one flesh, are the great mystery of God’s economy. First Corinthians 6:17 tells us that “he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.” God is Spirit (John 4:24), and man has a human spirit (v. 24; Prov. 20:27; Zech. 12:1; 1 Thes. 5:23). In this innermost organ, which is very similar to the nature and substance of God, man contacts, worships, and is joined to the processed and consummated Triune God in an organic union with Him. Thus, the preparation of the bride of Christ requires that we the believers learn to contact God in our spirit and live and walk in and according to the spirit (Rom. 8:4). Those who do not thus enjoy the organic union with God in the course of their Christian life will not be prepared to meet the Lord as His bride. Again we see the responsibility of the believers before God in this age.

All the elements and salient features of the Genesis account of the formation of Eve as the counterpart to Adam leave us with a strong and clear impression concerning the nature and producing of the church as the genuine counterpart of Christ. The church comes out of Christ and is constituted with Christ through His death

and resurrection, not only in the once-for-all work of Christ in the Gospels but by a subjective experience of His death and resurrection through His divine life. By producing the church in this way, God in Christ is wrought into man as life. It is through the process of the life-releasing death of Christ and the life-imparting, life-propagating, life-multiplying, and life-reproducing resurrection of Christ, that God in Christ is wrought into man with His life and nature that man in life and nature can be the same as He is in order to match Him as His complement. It is only those believers who are not only regenerated but also transformed to match God that will be qualified to be Christ’s bride at His coming.

Not Breeding with a Different Kind

In saying that the church comes out of Christ and is the same as He is in life and in nature, though not in His Godhead, we are saying in the most holy sense that Christ and His bride are of the same species. In Genesis 1, God created each of the living things according to their kind (vv. 11-12, 21, 24-25), establishing a principle in the physical world and reflecting the same principle in the spiritual realm (Matt. 7:16-18). In John 3:6 the Lord tells us, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,” and in 1 John 3:2 the apostle tells us that, having been born of God as His children, we shall be manifested with Him to be “like Him” (ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ, cf. Gen. 2:20, LXX), that is, like Him in life, nature, glory, and expression.

Here again we find application to God’s economy in His marriage union with man as the universal Husband and wife. Leviticus 19:19 tells us, “You shall keep My statutes. You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor shall a garment made of two kinds of material come upon you.” *Different kind* with respect to breeding signifies a difference of birth, descent, origin, race, stock, or species; thus, kind, sort.² The statutes of God absolutely proscribe the union of two species, “mixing together the things which are separated in God’s creation” (Keil 410), and if such an illicit crossbreeding is contrary to the nature of the beasts of the field, how much more is it contrary to the One who created them, who seeks a counterpart for marriage of His own kind! How short of the truth is the understanding of many Christians today, who accept their intrinsic mismatch of life and nature with God as acceptable to Him as long as they are justified by faith, awaiting a fellowship with Him in eternity in self-likeness, in and by their human life and nature alone! Christ as the Husband will not “breed with a different kind.” The Divine must marry a divine. He must marry one of His own kind, the glorious bride of Christ, who is bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh, having been not only regenerated but also transformed and conformed to the image of

Christ (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2; 8:29) to be ὁμοιος αὐτῷ, the same as He is in life and in nature.

A Glorious Church, Not Having Spot or Wrinkle

Ephesians 5:25 through 27 says, “Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her that He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word, that He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she would be holy and without blemish.” In this passage Paul reveals the church in the aspect of the bride of Christ. The church comes out of Christ, as Eve came out of Adam. Thus, the church has the same life and nature as Christ, and it becomes one with Him as His counterpart, as Eve became one flesh with Adam. We must heed the words of this passage very closely. The church that Christ will present to Himself will be glorious. Glory is God expressed. Hence, to be glorious is to be God-expressing. The church presented to Christ will be a God-expressing church. Except for the fact that we have no part in the Godhead, we must become exactly the same as God in His life, His nature, and His outward expression, His glory, as Eve was the same as Adam. Thus, we may consider glory—as an attribute, condition, and characteristic of the church—to be a prerequisite to her presentation to the coming Christ.

Therefore, the church as the bride of Christ, in preparation for the coming of Christ as her Bridegroom, must have no spot, wrinkle, or any such things, but rather be holy and without blemish. *Spot* signifies something of our fallen, human, natural life. *Wrinkle* relates to the oldness of the old man in Adam (Rom. 6:6). To be holy is to be saturated with Christ and transformed by Christ, and to be without blemish is to be spotless and without wrinkle, having nothing of the natural life of our old man. Only our subjective experience of the Spirit as the water of life can wash away such defects by the transformation of life.

We see a negative example of the problem of the natural man in Matthew 16. Upon hearing of the Lord’s coming crucifixion and resurrection, Peter took the Lord aside to rebuke Him, saying, “God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You!” (v. 22). The Lord immediately turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men” (v. 23). In speaking as he did, Peter exercised his natural mind and pity for the Lord. In him, however, the Lord recognized the source and element of the natural life, rebuking Peter by saying, “Satan!” Peter’s natural life, his fallen life of the old creation, was one with Satan to frustrate the Lord’s accomplishment of His purpose on the cross. Immediately following this, the Lord added, “If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take

up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his soul-life shall lose it; but whoever loses his soul-life for My sake shall find it” (vv. 24-25). Our mind is the expression of our self, and our self is the embodiment of our soul-life. Within Peter was the spot of the fallen, human, natural life and the wrinkle of the oldness of the old man, expressing the self, bearing self-likeness and even Satan-likeness.

To be sure, at that time Peter did not match Christ as a glorious member of His glorious bride. A church composed of natural “Peters” is not of Christ’s kind, qualified to match Christ as His counterpart. In contrast, Colossians 3:10 tells us that the church is the new man, which is being renewed according to the image of Christ as the expression of God. Verse 11 goes on to say that in the church there is neither this person nor that person, but “Christ is all and in all.” That Christ is all means that He is the intrinsic person of all the members who constitute the new man. The church in its true and glorious condition is a part of Christ; it is nothing less than Christ Himself. The church is the element of Christ in the believers, the totality of the organic portion of Christ in the believers. This strongly implies that even though we the believers are a regenerated people, if we live and act according to our natural constitution and disposition, we are not in reality the members of the new man, which will consummate as the bride of Christ for His return. The natural, self-expressing life that still remains in the believers cannot be considered part of the bride of Christ. Only that which comes out of Christ can be recognized by Him as His counterpart, and only that which comes out of Christ can return to Him and match Him. If we have not put off the old man and gained Christ as the intrinsic, organic element in our whole being, then for all practical purposes we are still not His bride. Until we become the same as He is in life, nature, and expression, we are not qualified to marry Him at His return. The old natural life with its spots and wrinkles is not of Christ’s kind, and Christ will not “breed with a different kind.”

Our Need for Transformation and Maturity in the Divine Life and Nature

At this point we have established the governing principle of the fulfillment of God’s economy and His great desire to obtain a counterpart for Himself in a glorious, eternal marriage. Christ’s counterpart must be organically and intrinsically like Him, the same as He is in life and in nature. She must be constituted through the all-inclusive death of Christ and with His unbreakable resurrection life to be in every way “bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh.” She must be of the same kind, origin, stock, race, and species. Moreover, she must be a glorious church, not spoiled or marred by spot, wrinkle, or any such things of the old natural life of the old man. We must consider all these matters in the light of our responsibility to grow unto maturity in the divine life.

Paul presents the key to our gaining of Christ's organic likeness in 2 Corinthians 3:18: "But we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit." It is the responsibility of the loving seekers of Christ to pursue the Lord and gain Him in their entire being for their complete transformation. We must enjoy the dispensing of the Divine Trinity in the divine transformation for the divine conformation to the image of Christ and be matured in this process as a prerequisite for our marriage to Him. It is for this reason that Revelation 19:7 declares, "Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." How significant are the words *has made herself ready!* The bride makes herself ready by her cooperation with the Triune God for her full transformation in the divine life. The readiness of the bride, therefore, depends on the maturity of the overcoming believers, who will be rewarded by the Lord at His coming by being invited to the marriage dinner of the Lamb (v. 9).

Song of Songs 8 presents a poignant poetic picture of the immaturity of the believers. Verse 8 says, "We have a little sister, / And she has no breasts: / What shall we do for our sister / On the day when she is spoken for?" To have "no breasts" signifies immaturity and the underdevelopment of life in the love and faith of the Lord. Even at the time of the Lord's coming, many genuine believers, though justified by faith and regenerated in their innermost being by the Spirit, will be found in a condition of immaturity in the divine life. They may be considered as a "little sister," spiritual preadolescents unfit and unprepared for marriage. In contrast to the little sister, the seeker of Song of Songs, eventually matured through all the stages of the Lord's operation in her, is called Shulammite (6:13). *Shulammite* is the feminine form of *Solomon*, indicating that the overcoming seeking believer becomes the same as Christ. The Shulammite was a country girl, but now as a counterpart to Solomon, she has become the same as Solomon—a portrayal of the bride who becomes the same as Christ in life, in nature, and in expression for the carrying out of God's economy.

In these things—life, nature, and expression—we become the same as God and Christ, but not in the Godhead, through the deifying operation of the incarnated Word, who "has become Man, that He might deify us in Himself" (Athanasius, *Letters* 576). God became man through incarnation; man becomes God through transformation. It is through a lifelong process, beginning with regeneration, proceeding through sanctification, renewing of the mind, and transformation, culminating with our conformation to the image of Christ, and consummating in our glorification that we become God. When we reach

this point, 1 John 3:2 says that "we will be like Him." The ultimate issue of this process is the New Jerusalem, the wife of the Lamb. It is only by God becoming man to make man God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead that the bride of Christ can be prepared and the New Jerusalem can be consummated.

The preparation of the bride as the Shulammite to the real Solomon is a matter of our maturity in the divine life and nature as the full extent of the process of transformation and conformation to His image. Without the maturity of life we are not ready, prepared, or qualified to marry Christ. We cannot presume to be the glorious counterpart of Christ in our natural condition, and we cannot be acceptable to Him as His bride in an immature condition. Those who do not mature in this age will meet the coming Lord in their self-likeness, not in His glorious image. They will be found by the Bridegroom in the expression and appearance of the self, marred with the spots and wrinkles of the old natural life. They will be a "little sister," spiritual preadolescents, unprepared for the marriage of the Lamb. They will be—in a significant part of their inner being—another species, not of Christ's kind, with whom Christ cannot mate. They will not be like Him organically and intrinsically. Thus, they will be excluded from the marriage dinner of the Lamb.

by John Campbell

Notes

¹"*Man wird sie Männin nennen, weil sie vom Manne genommen ist*" (Gen. 1:23). "With 'Männin' and 'Mann,' Luther attempts to render a Hebrew wordplay" (Bibel 6), where elsewhere he renders the expected *Mann* and *Weib*. Compare this irregular and particular word usage to the old Latin *vira* from *vir* (Keil 90).

²"*Kilayim* [different kind, Heb.] from *kele* separation, signifies *duae res diversi generis, heterogeneae* [two things of diverse genus, heterogeneous]" (Keil 421).

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