

The Bride of Jesus

"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied."

1.PET 1:2

A quiet, old, sunburnt traveller watched with a mixture of surprise and satisfaction at how his host unpacked the camels and fed them. Already, half the reason for his journey, which bore much responsibility, had been fulfilled. Led by a prophecy, which had turned out to be so out of the ordinary that his lips were flowing over with spontaneous praise to the Almighty, he had been guided to the family, where he hoped to find the suitable wife for his master's only son. It was even the young woman herself he had met first and had immediately noticed her beauty. Her brother also showed himself to be unexpectedly friendly. Everything had developed wonderfully.

Eliezer asks for the hand of Rebecca. This servant was so full of enthusiasm for his mission that he did not even take time to sit down for the meal which had been prepared for him. He first had to pass on the very important message which was the reason for his journey! Things got better and better. Everything which was said made such an impression upon Laban and Bethuel that he immediately gained permission for the engagement of Rebecca to Isaac. Rare and precious gifts sealed the agreement, as they celebrated under the stars of the Syrian sky.

Early the next morning, Eliezer wanted to leave to return home. However, the girl's relations asked him to delay his departure. They asked him to stay for ten more days. In the end they left the decision up to Rebecca. Her answer to his question of whether or not she wanted to go with this man was beautiful and certain in its simplicity: *"I will (want to) go."* (GEN 24:58).

The Holy Spirit courts the Church as the bride. This old story from a faraway country, told in the 24th chapter of the book of Genesis provides us with a parable of another One who is also looking for a bride, prepared and given to the firstborn of the Father. In this story, Eliezer did exactly the same job that the Holy Spirit has been doing in a spiritual way for hundreds of years. Since the Church is quite clearly called the "Bride of Christ", the use of this example is correct and justified.

Paul used this risky comparison with the most holy and intimate human relationship when he showed Christians the necessity of turning away from the sin which is in the world. Although the actual wedding of Christ and His bride is not yet fulfilled reality, the believers are already "engaged" to Him.

"For I am jealous over you" he wrote, "with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." (2.COR 11:2).

The vows have already been taken. When done according to God's Law, they were sealed

through baptism and confirmed often thereafter by partaking of the holy cup of the Lord. The Apostle Paul saw backsliding as nothing other than the breaking a holy vow. Their souls burnt with a fire like that of jealousy. Like Rebecca back then, the Christian says to everybody, "I want to go!" This decision should be irrevocable. We are engaged in the same way to Christ. He has chosen us. We are, *"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father..."*

Sanctification of the Spirit. Being fully aware of the many temptations, from within and without, to become lukewarm and lazy in our love of the way to meet the Bridegroom; the Lord gave us a heavenly "servant" who is even more faithful to us than Eliezer was to Rebecca on her long journey home through the desert. In theology, we call this help the "Sanctification of the Spirit". Practically, this contains many different ways through which the Holy Spirit can work in Christians and pull them away from every sin. This can motivate and lead to a complete surrender of the whole heart to Christ and His service.

Through the power of a new life. The Holy Spirit did this firstly through the power of the new life we receive through Jesus Christ, when we were revived by the faith we have in His Name. The Spirit is the mediator of this new life and He always takes care that it is strong and can flow freely without hindrance. The sap of the tree which comes up in Spring causes

the dead leaves of the previous year to fall off. In a similar way, the joyful, fiery satisfaction and new life in Christ, takes much of the temptation and its enticement away and causes old sinful habits to disappear, without us even realising how. However, the danger is if we come to the point when this new life turns into a daily routine and we miss out on the joy of the Spirit? Are the old habits returning with even greater temptation than before? The answer has to be, that we need this fullness of the Spirit in our lives. Nothing other than being filled with the Spirit can give us the power to overcome. Romans 8 teaches us this. It is through the "Spirit" that we destroy the works of the flesh. We have to be taken hold of by the Spirit, for Jesus.

Through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit sanctifies us through personal use of the Word of God. Through praying while reading the Bible, the Word becomes light for us, which reveals to us the real cause of our actions and thoughts. The scripture was inspired by Him and He can bring it to life again when it is read and interpreted. It is idle presumption for us to seek revelation of God's will from outside sources or by listening to our "inner voice" when we deliberately neglect the Book He gave us.

Through Love. The Spirit sanctifies us mostly through love, and here we return to the thought of our "engagement". The special work of the Spirit by taking His treasures and showing them to our souls to enable us to love Christ more. The riches of Christ are

unexplored but they could be revealed through the one who knows them. It is the Spirit who searches all things, even the depths of God. Certainly, the Holy Spirit wants to talk to Christians about Christ more than Eliezer spoke to Rebecca about Isaac on their journey back. *"Whom you have not seen but love..."* (1.PET 1:8). And such love is the most fragile and yet the most powerful way of being sanctified, and delivered to the most binding power to Christ you can imagine. Love of Christ will force you to sanctify your life, when all other little driving forces do not work. Love of Christ will inspire you to a total and complete devotion more than any other look at human need or any other arising opportunity will be able to. This love is more powerful than anything else.

*"But the path of the just
is as the shining light,
that shineth more and more
unto the perfect day."*

(PROV 4:18)

Jesus Christ - the goal. It is in the nature of things that the Holy Ghost wants to stay in the background, because it is His great duty to talk about Christ. Our engagement with Christ demands that Jesus is reserved the whole love in our heart. Therefore, it is inevitable and correct that the centre of the Gospel, the focus of the Word, and the way of fellowship will always be in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Wrong emphasis on the Holy Ghost will cause us to miss the vision of

Christ Himself. While having deep respect, we can call this the "glorification of the mediator". However, He (the Holy Ghost) always points to Somebody else. We are never more certain to see the Holy Spirit work, than when we find groups of believers or single Christians, who have made Jesus Christ their "everything". This is perhaps the reason why the person and the work of the Holy Spirit is so little understood. He stayed in the background in a special way: *"He that hath the bride is the bridegroom..."* (JN 3:29). This causes us to worship the Lord more and more.

New Anointing is Necessary!

When times of stagnation and lukewarmness come over the assembly; when there is a lack of walking in holiness and powerful testimony, then it is high time, to ask earnestly, that the Holy Spirit starts stirring up and working in His people. When we lose sight of the aim, then it is certainly in God's Will to place new emphasis on the mediator. It is necessary to ask for the anointing of the Holy Spirit. In comparison to Isaac, Eliezer was meaningless to Rebecca, concerning the love of her heart and all her forthcoming fate; however, it would have been a sad day for her, if she had lost that faithful guide, or had despised his daily advice during the long journey through the desert. Was not her engagement the direct result of his loving and faithful care. For its fulfilment and realisation his continual guidance and help is needed.

by Donald Gee

Translated from the German: "Die Braut Jesu"

CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLIES INTERNATIONAL, P.O. BOX 888, COFFS HARBOUR N.S.W. 2450, AUSTRALIA