

**THE
INVITATION**

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BECOME ONE WITH CHRIST

BY JOHN STONE

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To my bride Karina—
The crown upon my head
And to the Head we crown—
The Lord Jesus Christ

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LETTER TO THE BELOVED

this is love for God (1 John 5:3)

Years have passed since the vision came.

When I shared it with friends, their faces showed doubt. They shook their heads and hurt my heart. I never thought the vision would be too hard for them to believe. I never thought they would reject my story the way Job's friends rejected his. I hoped they would be excited. Instead, they refused to believe. So I hid the experience away in my heart. I buried my treasure.

Then this past Christmas the Spirit spoke clearly: "Write the vision."

I knew exactly which vision He meant. But I resisted, not wanting to believe my spiritual ears. Maybe there was some mistake. But there was no mistake. The Spirit was calling me to openly tell about being married to the Lord Jesus Christ—truly married to Him—in this world in this life, not in some future time or place.

Still I hesitated. I did not want to share my treasure only to see it trampled underfoot again (Matthew 7:6). For years my plan had been to take this experience to the grave. For two weeks I delayed. I dragged my feet, hoping the call would fade. But the Spirit nudged me again. He whispered: “Write the vision.”

These words were almost the same that He told the prophet Habakkuk: *Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it and carry the message to others (Habakkuk 2:2).*

The first time I heard the Spirit say, “Write the vision,” the words came through a friend about ten years older than me. The second time, they came through that friend’s son—a man ten years younger than I. Neither father nor son knew what the other had said. Neither knew the vision they spoke about. But I knew. I understood what God was saying.

Since I had received the command from what felt like both the Father and the Son, I could wait no longer. Obedience is required. Obedience is love for God, and I love God (1 John 5:3). So here it is—shared in hopes of encouraging you, even if some might reject it.

If on your journey with Christ through this world you have longed for a higher purpose than anything you have yet found, perhaps this is it. Perhaps here you will see greater glories and say to yourself, “Ah-ha—I see. I see.”

I pray you do. I pray you go all the way to the altar, just as Jesus went all the way for you. Go all the way, beloved. There is nothing else like it.

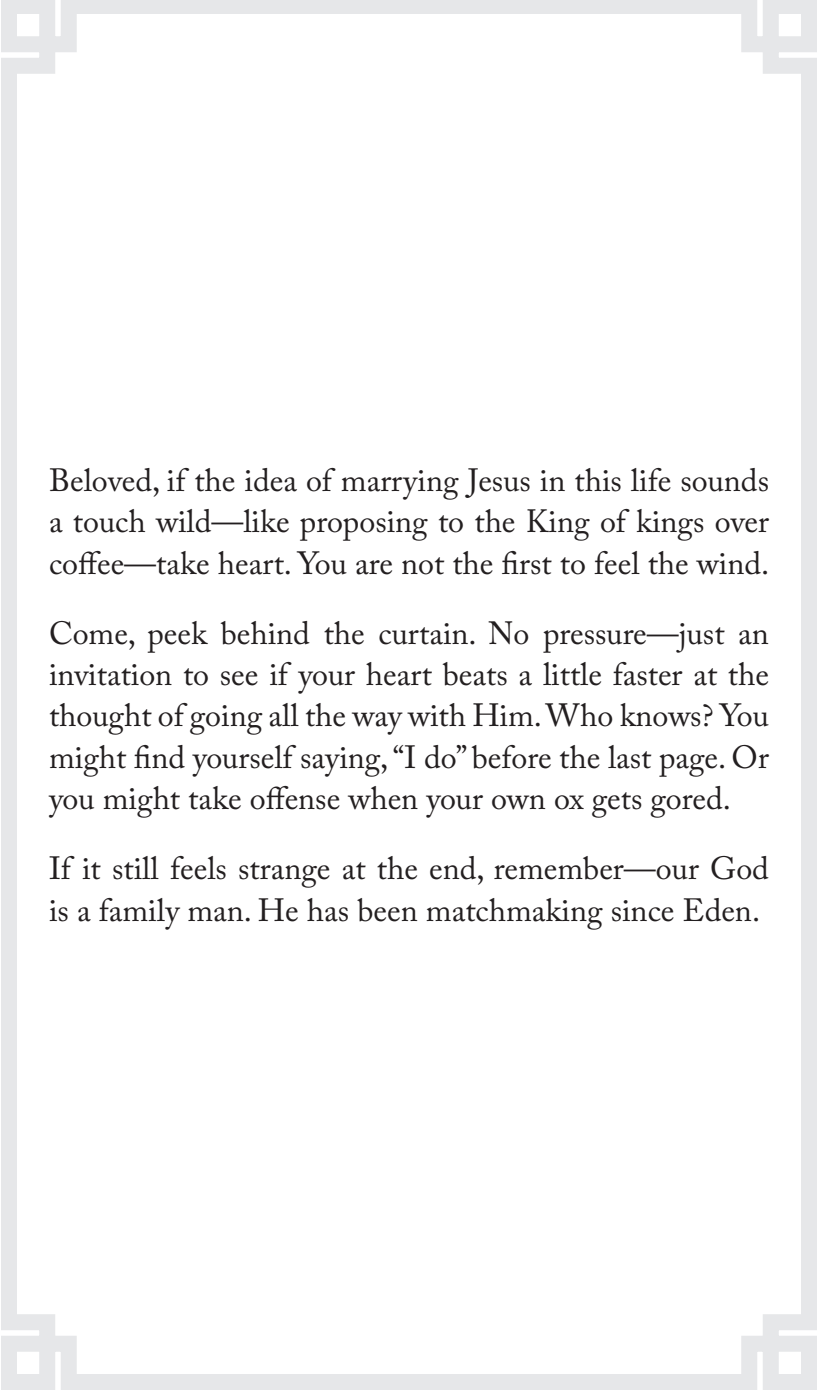
Godspeed,

John Stone



BOOK I
THE VISION

so he may run who reads it (Habakkuk 2:2)



Beloved, if the idea of marrying Jesus in this life sounds a touch wild—like proposing to the King of kings over coffee—take heart. You are not the first to feel the wind.

Come, peek behind the curtain. No pressure—just an invitation to see if your heart beats a little faster at the thought of going all the way with Him. Who knows? You might find yourself saying, “I do” before the last page. Or you might take offense when your own ox gets gored.

If it still feels strange at the end, remember—our God is a family man. He has been matchmaking since Eden.

CHAPTER 1

THE MARRIAGE VISION

to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean (Revelation 19:8)

The Lord Jesus Christ sent me to ‘a Jerusalem.’ He sent me there to call His people to repent. With all my heart I went where I did not want to go and did what I did not want to do. I went with a good attitude. I was prepared for the mission. The years of preparation were hard and costly.

The religious leaders in that ‘Jerusalem’ invited me to come and asked me to speak in open discussion. Jesus sent me to them. I obeyed Jesus because I love Jesus. Jesus sent me in love. With His love I loved those He sent me to. Jesus sent me to a convention of church leaders to tell them to repent for selling the Father’s things to the Father’s children. After all, they were only stewards of the resources the Father gave His children.

“Freely you received, freely give,” I told them (Matthew 10:8). *“Be a wise and faithful servant,* the Scripture says. *Give the children their*

food at the proper time (Matthew 24:45). Stop selling them what is rightly theirs. Train them to share their God-given resources with you in return.”

The leaders listened. They heard the words I spoke. They understood what I said about trusting God completely. They knew what I meant about paying the full price to draw near to God. After they listened, they made their choice. They chose not to come closer to God. Instead they chose to keep going their own way, trusting some in God and some in their own plans: wanting to sacrifice a mixed offering.

But like an angel with a sword standing in the road, the words God gave me to speak blocked their path. They could not get past those words. So to keep going their way, they silenced me. They forced me to stop calling them to repent. They sent an armed security guard to threaten me. The guard came with his badge and his gun. His message was this: “Because you are so polite, you may stay at the convention provided that you speak no more about repentance.”

That was the response the church leaders gave: Do not call us to repent.

No discussion allowed. Nothing else said. Silence! was all they communicated. How ‘civil’ of those so-called men of God.

As a result of my obedience to the Lover of my soul, I was ‘stoned’ with as many ‘stones’ as those men could throw while still looking somewhat Christ-ian. What they did was not Christ-ian. It was religious. Very religious. By forcing me to be as silent as a man in a grave, in a way those men ‘murdered’ me.

In a way I ‘died’ the way all prophets die: in obedience to God, in some Jerusalem calling for repentance, heartbroken for the people throwing the stones.

Jesus sent me in His love. I loved those people. I even glimpsed the glory of what would have been had they repented. My heart grieved at the great loss. It was not just their loss. The whole Church suffered loss when they refused to repent. They could have set a new course and shook the world. *Lord, do not hold this sin against them (Acts 7:60).*

THE VISION

After the religious leaders threw their last ‘rock,’ I saw myself being married to Jesus. In the vision, the Bridegroom stood to my left. To my right stood the best man, an African. The African was also a visitor to this ‘Jerusalem,’ this international conference of two-hundred invitation-only Church leaders. The African led a ministry called The Star of David. The African had encouraged me earlier that day. He told me to tell them to repent.

The man said, “Say it plainly.” He said, “Brother, go all the way.”

I needed that man’s encouragement. He helped me carry my cross. Maybe he was descended of Simon of Cyrene—the African who helped Jesus carry His cross up Calvary hill (Matthew 27:32).

In the marriage vision, the three of us—Jesus, me, and this African—stood facing the Father. The African stood to my right. He was the best man, a friend of the Bridegroom. The Father, facing us, performed the ceremony. The marriage happened just as Isaiah prophesied. Isaiah wrote, *Your sons will marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you (Isaiah 62:5).*

Later that night after the vision ended, back in my hotel room, I asked my Husband a question. “May I go home?”

Why must I stay among these people, I wondered. Those leaders and I shared little in common. We sang the same songs and said the same creeds but they did not want to repent. They did not want to sit in the Refiner's fire and become a pure Bride for Jesus.

"Yes, come home," my Husband replied.

His words—"come home"—surprised me. Should Jesus not have said, "Yes, go home"? Was the Bridegroom not in this 'Jerusalem'?

UNCHANGED

In Solomon's Song of Songs, the Bridegroom rarely appears in Jerusalem. When He does appear, only His Bride sees Him. Since Solomon wrote the Song of Songs, the Bridegroom has not changed. He never changes (Hebrews 13:8).

Spiritual children might see Jesus the King. Spiritual children might walk with the Good Shepherd and play in their Father's lap. But contrary to what many well-meaning teachers have taught us, spiritual children do not meet the Bridegroom in this world or know the Bridegroom in the world to come. Of course, every redeemed soul will behold His glory and dwell in a heavenly mansion, yet only those who have paid the price for deepest union will know the ecstasy of the Bride on her wedding day.

Only the Bride knows the Bridegroom because only the Bride has His heart. Only the Bride made herself ready (Revelation 19:7). She accepted His invitation. She paid the price for His intimacy. She alone went all the way to the altar. Let me explain.

While in this world, a child of God can accept the invitation to become the Bride of Christ. While the Son of God was in this world, He accepted the Father's invitation to become the Bridegroom. Jesus, *the firstborn of many brothers*, paid the price

to enter the marriage relationship with us so that many sons can pay the price to enter the marriage relationship with Him (Romans 8:29, Hebrews 2:10). Christ is our Pattern (Hebrews 8:5). He is the Way (John 14:6).

The Bride and Bridegroom are a pair alike in dignity. Each has proven his love for the other. While in this world, each gave all of his heart, all of his mind, all of his soul and all of his strength hoping the other might live. Each died to himself hoping the other might live.

For a spiritual child to become the Bride of Christ, death to self is required. Death to self—if it will occur—must take place in this world because there is no death in the next. There is no second chance for a child of God to conform his life to the Pattern, to take up his cross and follow Christ to his own end so that Christ might fully live in him. This life in this world is our only chance to go all the way.

Go all the way. There is nothing else like it.

CHIEF OF SINNERS

Beloved, if the thought becoming the Bride of Christ feels more like a cruel joke than a possibility, if you consider your life too wretched for such glory, keep this in mind: There is not one of the Ten Commandments I have not broken. St. Paul confessed something similar. He said he was *the chief of sinners* (1 Timothy 1:16). This is the man who wrote most of the New Testament, performed astounding miracles and started churches across the known world.

St. James, the half-brother of Jesus, says, *For whoever keeps the whole Law yet stumbles in one point, has become guilty of all* (James

2:10). That means if any man sins once then he has become guilty of breaking every single law God ever made.

Beloved, there is no hole too deep to climb out of because the truth is this: Each of us starts his life with Christ at the cruddy bottom of the blackest pit. I am not trying to offend you but the truth is this: we are all chief sinners.

CHAPTER 2

A NEW IDEA

you will call Me, 'Husband' (Hosea 2:16)

The thought of marrying the Lord Jesus Christ in this life in this world may sound strange to Christ-ians in the 21st century. But this is not a new idea within Christendom. It is as old as time. From the earliest days men and women lovesick for Jesus have found their deepest desire in spiritual marriage to Christ—which is God's best plan from the beginning.

JOHN WINTHROP

In the 1600s an Englishman named John Winthrop (1588–1649) entered this spiritual marriage. Winthrop studied law at Cambridge and later became the first governor of Massachusetts. Yet his greatest love was Jesus. He gave everything to follow the pathway of love to its end. In dying to himself, Winthrop married Christ. In his private journal, Winthrop wrote of a dream. Here are his own words:

“In my sleep I dreamed that I was with Christ upon earth, ... I was so ravished with his love towards me, far exceeding the affection of the kindest husband, that being awaked it had made so deep impression in my heart, as I was forced to unmeasurable weeping for a great while, and had a more lively feeling of the love of Christ than ever before.”

Winthrop called himself “the Lord’s handmaid.” He asked—word for word: “Will not my Lord and husband Christ Jesus (whose love surpasses knowledge, and is larger than the ocean) accept in good part the poorest testimonies of my love and duty towards him?”

Naturally speaking, Winthrop was married four times and widowed thrice. Yet he wrote that his earthly marriages helped him taste the far sweeter love of his heavenly husband. Here is what he said:

“[Christ] married me to himself, so as I am become truly one with him.”

From Winthrop we learn two truths: A man can know intimate union with Christ Jesus in this life. And natural marriage points us to the greater spiritual marriage that beckons every believer.

FAUSTINA KOWALSKA

Faustina Kowalska (1905–1938) was a young Polish woman burning with love for Jesus. She paid the full price until she spoke face-to-face with her Bridegroom.

Of the Bridegroom’s face she wrote this: “It is from the face of God that this joy flows out upon all, because we see Him face to face. His face is so sweet that the soul falls anew into ecstasy.”

CATHERINE OF SIENA

Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), a young Italian woman, never married on earth. Yet in a vision, Jesus placed a ring on her finger as a sign of spiritual marriage.

Catherine lived in prayer, service and bold obedience. She wrote letters calling the Church to repent and love Jesus more. In her book *Dialogue*, she recorded words Christ spoke to her:

“I have espoused you to Myself in faith, and I have made you My bride.”

This godly woman often spoke of living in “sweet union with my Spouse.”

BRENNAN MANNING

Brennan Manning (1934–2013), author of *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, said plainly: “The deepest desire in our hearts is for union with God. God created us for union with Himself. This is the original purpose of our lives.”

ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA

Manning echoes an early church father, Athanasius (c. 297–373), who declared these famous words:

“For the Son of God became man so that man might become god.”

The Greek Orthodox Church still teaches its millions of members that the goal of the Christ-ian life is *Theosis*—becoming one with Christ through spiritual marriage.

GOD CHASERS

Men and women lovesick for God risk everything to gain Jesus. They cry, “I may die chasing Christ but I will never stop until I have Him.” Jesus above is the goal of their life below. Living like this is supposed to be normal Christ-ianity—not some rare exception.

A song called “Soul Cry” by Misty Edwards puts it raw and simple. Here are some of her exact lines:

*As the deer pants for the water
So my soul thirsts for You.
As the body dies without water,
My soul dies without You.
My soul cries. My soul cries.
My soul cries for You.*

Beloved, union with God is spiritual marriage. Union with God does not happen in the Child-Father relationship that most American believers live in today. It happens only in the mature marriage relationship—the only relationship where two become one (Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:8, 1 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 5:31).

If you have known God only as Father, this truth may hit like cold water. Good. Wake up. It is time to grow up.

Every believer—you included—can know *Theosis*. You can marry Christ in this world in this life. It is your high purpose, and the way to the altar is made.

A NEW CHURCH AGE

In the past a few pioneers blazed this trail—Winthrop, Faustina, Catherine, Manning, Athanasius. But pioneering days are over. The path is clear. A new age is breaking. A whole generation of lovesick Shulamites is now running hard after the Bridegroom. Nothing can stop them. They will not be bought off. They will not compromise or be a mixed offering. They are going all the way.

Only self-preservation can rob you of God's marriage plan. But you? You are not the compromising kind. You are lovesick. You will stop at nothing to have Jesus. Modern Shulamites sing it like this (exact lyrics from one of their songs):

*You're in my blood, my veins,
in every word I pray.
You gave it all for me.
I'll give it all for You.
Oh, I'm in love with You.
Overwhelmed by You.
And if the world is listening,
this is my confession:
You are my obsession.*

Beloved, the age of the spiritual child is fading. The age of the Bride is at hand. The American Church is about to outgrow milk and diapers. She is about to stand up, put on her beautiful gown and become the Bride of Christ.

And that, beloved, sounds like a brand-new idea—until you realize it was God's plan from the very beginning.

Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are true words of God' (Revelation 19:9).



BOOK II

INFANTS

in Christ I gave you milk (1 Corinthians 3:2)

A gentle word before we begin, beloved.

If some of the truths ahead look like risky ground to stand on, please pause and hear my heart. Or better, listen to the Spirit.

When storms of life came and the ground beneath me shifted, I found myself floundering, desperately reaching for Solid Rock. Some of what I trusted to be faithful turned-out sand. Some things I learned in church simply were untrue.

These words are not written to wound, beloved, but to heal and awaken—to open sleepy eyes to see that our ‘Jerusalem’ has been overrun. The enemy is inside the walls and seated in high places. What helped us reach this place cannot move us forward.

So then, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His shame. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come—the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband—the wife of the Lamb (Hebrews 13:12-14, Revelation 21:2, 9).

CHAPTER 1

GROW UP

*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men
(1 Corinthians 3:1)*

In a vision I saw a medieval castle. The castle represented a small congregation I knew well. The design of the Crusader-like castle was correct but everything else was wrong.

The castle was built from dried mud instead of stone. A group of people stood in the courtyard, arguing. They belonged to the little church I was familiar with. Looking deeper into the vision, I saw the pastor huddled in an upper alcove. He knelt by his bed, alone with the Lord, praying with tears for the unruly people quarreling below.

As I watched, I understood that workers should have been coating the castle walls to make them black and stone-hard, but none were working. The towers should have had brightly colored flags flying but the walls were bare. Watchmen should have stood on the towers but none were there. Soldiers should have guarded the ramparts and cavalry should have patrolled the fields. Not

one warrior was in sight. None of the people in the courtyard had weapons or armor. In fact, none had proper clothes or even totally clean clothes. Some wore filthy rags.

Messengers should have been riding in and out on horseback. Farmers should have been planting, tending and harvesting the fields around the castle. A feast should have been going on, with games and minstrels singing. The castle and its surroundings should have been full of kingdom activity. Aside from the pastor praying fervently and the sun shining, only one thing was happening—and it was not good.

The group of untidy people in the castle courtyard was divided. Those not throwing insults watched the ruckus like spectators at a fight. Two women in the middle yelled at each other. No one tried to stop them, not even the men nearby. The two women were the leaders. Their faces were twisted. When one finished her insult, she threw a brown clump at the other. The second woman threw one back. Back and forth the two women went: insult, clump; insult, clump. The clumps they threw were dried feces.

OUR PEOPLE

The people in this vision were our people—our brothers and sisters in Christ, *those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours (1 Corinthians 1:2).*

In the natural world, I sat among this congregation. I preached from its pulpit. People there were meeting Christ Jesus. Some were being delivered and a few experienced supernatural healings. I saw salvations, signs and wonders inside the little church. Once, white feathers fell from the ceiling as if proving

that God's wing covered the people (Psalm 91:4). But the castle vision was also true of these Christ-ians. Our brothers and sisters in this assembly were worldly-minded and immature. They were babes in Christ.

THEY COULD HAVE GROWN UP

Not long after I saw the castle vision, that assembly split apart. After the church split, their pastor—heartbroken—went home to his great reward. Alvin Taylor's reward is great because he was faithful in the Lord's house. He walked in union with God through this world.

While this humble man of God led the proverbial horse to water, he could not be blamed for its refusal to drink. Those Christians would not drink deeply from the River of Life because they wanted Jesus on their own terms. They wanted Christ in their own image. They wanted Christ and they wanted what their flesh wanted. Their souls were conflicted. Their souls were part godly and part ungodly, and they liked the mixture. The parishioners not actively arguing were complacent, comfortable compromisers unwilling to stand up for Truth. They were spiritual babies who refused to grow up.

Spiritual babies have the Seed of righteousness but walk in this world by their ungodly minds. Spiritual babies think and act like the world while at the same time the spark of Christ lives in them. They are carnal Christ-ians.

What kind of church would that assembly be today if the saints there had exercised their right to mature beyond spiritual babies? God gave them the leadership needed to mature. They could have submitted their wills to God and grown up. God gave them the choice to remain spiritual infants or mature, and they chose.

ANIMAL NATURE

To the amazement of many and the delight of heaven, that little church could have turned the world upside down. Those people did not turn the world upside down because they refused to grow up. Those church people were probably saved from the lake of fire and likely had a place in heaven but they remained spiritual infants because they refused to grow up. They chose to live like animal-men just like the world around them.

I have been like that—a worldly-minded Christian enslaved to his animal nature. Even as a ministry leader, I was a spiritual infant, a babe in Christ, a carnal Christian. I was a grossly immature believer who thought and acted exactly like the world thinks and acts, and at the same time I was a church leader, a minister. How did that happen? Let me tell you the story.

BY MY POWER

At the age of twenty-nine I organized a men's service ministry at the church I attended. I created this ministry by my natural wits. God allowed me to run ahead by the power of my self-will. One year after the ministry launched, fifty men were organized into six teams of eight. Each team met weekly to encourage one another in Jesus, to welcome people to church and to park cars. We parked thousands of cars every weekend. Every Saturday and Sunday we greeted thousands of people. It was a big church.

By natural standards I was a successful ministry leader. But at heart I was no different than the self-willed saints in the castle vision. I was an infant in Christ doing what I wanted to do, ministering by my natural wits and not by God's Spirit. I was no more useful in God's spiritual house than a natural newborn is to

his natural family. I was loved by God but useless to God because *the flesh profits nothing (John 6:63)*.

Just as the men's service ministry was rolling (by natural measurements), the Lord Jesus Christ whispered to me, "You have done this by your power. Now I am going to teach you to do things by My power."

Being a spiritual infant, I did not understand what the Lord meant by "my power" and "His power." But I knew it was time to resign from the ministry God allowed me to build through my natural wits. So I resigned. I stepped down. I quit ministry leadership.

While I did not understand it at the time, the season of doing things by my self-will had closed behind me. Because I accepted the invitation to follow Christ further—to grow up a bit—the season to live by the Spirit and put the self-will to death had finally arrived. For the first time in my life I would be living as a spiritual son, doing things by my Father's Spirit and not by my flesh. As it is written, *the sons of God walk by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:14)*.

No matter how good one's self-will seems, self-will is the flesh and the flesh opposes God who is Spirit (Romans 8:6). Christ-ians who live by their self-will are infants in Christ and useless in God's house. As I write, the American Church is full of spiritual infants as deceived as I was into thinking they are God-ordained, God-pleasing leaders of His people. You probably know several yourself.

While America's infantile Church leaders cannot please God, they can change the way they live. They can choose to grow up. They have the choice. While alive on Earth, every believer chooses how mature he will be for eternity. Do you want to grow up?

THE RIGHT TO MATURE

Two distinct subgroups exist among believers who primarily relate to God as their heavenly Father. The Bible describes two categories of spiritual children. The first group is called “Infants in Christ.” The second group is termed “Children of God.” Contrary to current Church thinking, Infants in Christ and Children of God do not share the same level of spiritual maturity. Spiritual Infants and spiritual Children are different—very different. Let me explain.

When someone is born again, he is a spiritual infant. A spiritual infant must choose to mature into a spiritual child. To mature from an infant into a child is what I did when I chose to obey God and resign from the men’s service ministry. I chose to grow up. I exercised my right to quit being a “nursing baby” and I became a child of God. I laid hold of the six foundational principles of Christ-ianity listed in Hebrews 6:1-2 and then started walking by the Spirit, forsaking my natural wits.

Just as a spiritual infant has the right to mature into a child of God, a spiritual child has the right to mature into the Bride of Christ. This right to mature must be exercised. God’s invitation to continue to mature must be constantly accepted. Becoming a child instead of remaining an infant, and becoming the Bride instead of remaining a child, are day-by-day choices believers make whether they admit it or not.

Later in this book we will see what the Bible says about this God-given right to mature. For now it is important to realize that you have been given the right to spiritually grow up but you must exercise that right to do so. Beloved, we cannot remain like the saints in the castle vision and hope to make it to the wedding feast. We must start traveling the narrow path, the pathway of maturity. And we need to start now.

TO WAKE US UP

If that castle vision hits too close—if it looks like your church or your own heart—please, do not look away. God showed it to me not to crush us but to wake us up. We have all played in the mud, thrown the filth or stood watching, me included. But the same God who loves babies enough to feed them milk is calling us to grow up. If we earnestly want to get out of the crud, He will not leave us stuck in the muck. Take the next step you sense Him asking you to take. Take another drink from the River of Life. God has plans for you that you never dreamed of.

The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without cost (Revelation 22:17).

CHAPTER 2

SPIRITUAL AGE

Come now, let us reason together (Isaiah 1:18)

Once the Spirit showed me that a sixty-year-old mega-church pastor was spiritually eight years old. If I tell a story, you will understand what I mean.

One Sunday morning following impressive 3-D graphics of angels flying around the stage, the pastor-man said, “We’re not Disney but we’re trying to be!”

Ostensibly he said it for a laugh but his underlying meaning rang clear in my spiritual ears. The man hoped that by adding the fleshly abilities of his production team to the Spirit’s work, he could advance God’s supernatural Kingdom.

Another time the same fellow confided to me that if he had not intentionally lied to his congregants, not one person in the assembly would have joined small groups. I pressed him but the rascal was non-repentant in his ends-justify-the-means approach.

This Spirit-plus-the-flesh ‘mixed offering’ way of living is the watermark of childish Christ-ianity. Jesus says, *It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing (John 6:63)*. Anything less than or beyond obedience to the Spirit is a mixed offering (Malachi 1:8). Mixed offerings are impure. Or you might say, immature. They are sacrifices unready for the cross.

Like the megachurch pastor, every believer has a chronological age and a spiritual age. Between these two ages there is no connection. The prophet Job speaks to this dichotomy.

JOB

Job writes, *I thought age should speak, and increased years should teach wisdom. But it is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding. The abundant in years may not be wise, nor may elders understand justice (Job 32:7-9)*.

Job originally thought the natural world had it right. He thought gray-haired people had godly wisdom and youth did not. Job learned otherwise. Job discovered that a man’s years on earth bear no relation to his possession or lack of godly wisdom. The number of a man’s natural years as a Christ-ian has no connection to his spiritual maturity.

JEREMIAH

When the prophet Jeremiah thought he was too young to minister to the graybeards of Israel, the Lord God replied, *Do not say, ‘I am a youth,’ Because everywhere I send you, you shall go, And all that I command you, you shall speak (Jeremiah 1:6-7)*.

Living by the Spirit empowered the youthful Jeremiah to minister to the chronological elders of Israel—elders who lived by their self-will.

At the point the Bible introduces us to Jeremiah, the young man was neither a spiritual infant nor a spiritual child. Jeremiah had grown up. What he endured to grow up, we are not told. We are only told that he is physically youthful and at the same time, spiritually mature.

Willing to go wherever God sent him and say whatever God asked him, Jeremiah was a spiritual adult at a young age. Because Jeremiah had submitted his life to God's will, he matured. Jeremiah was spiritually qualified to minister to the so-called elders of Israel in part because they were spiritually younger than he was.

To be God's minister, Jeremiah needed neither the commission nor applause of the old men of Israel. Jeremiah did not require a mentor, a spiritual father or a spiritual covering. He did not need to be submitted to any man because Jeremiah was submitted to the Holy Spirit. He was covered by the wings of God. Jeremiah was physically young and spiritually mature. The physically old and spiritually immature needed to open their hearts to the words God spoke through this young man.

Believers like Jeremiah go where God sends them and say what the Spirit gives them to speak—nothing more, nothing less. Believers like Jeremiah can be nineteen years old or ninety. However old their birth certificates indicate, godly people live in union with God and as such, they please God. They walk by the Spirit.

Jesus was twelve when He lectured the Temple elders. Jesus the boy was more spiritually mature than adult priests.

The same potential for spiritual maturity seen in young Jeremiah and in twelve-year-old Jesus resides within each believer in the uniqueness of their personality (Luke 2:42-47). If we are to

spiritually mature, we need only exercise our God-given right to grow up.

If this truth about spiritual age leaves you feeling exposed or confused—maybe even a little angry—stay with it. God is not mocking your years in church or your gray hair. He is inviting you deeper into Him. Chronological age means nothing to Him. Spiritual age means everything. You can start growing today, no matter how old you are in years. If you find the courage to obey, He will meet you where you are with power to obey, with the power to walk to the wedding, to accept the invitation.

CHAPTER 3

THREE SORTS OF MEN

*But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people
(1 Corinthians 3:1 ESV)*

First Corinthians 3:1 helps us see how to grow up. This verse sheds light on the pathway of spiritual maturity by listing three sorts of men. Two sorts of men are believers and one is not. The verse says, *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:1)*.

Spiritual men and infants in Christ are two types of believers. Men of the flesh are unbelievers.

(1) SPIRITUAL MEN

“Spiritual men” comes from the Greek word *pneumatikos*. *Pneumatikos* describes men like Jeremiah—men governed by the Spirit of God.

Watchman Nee’s (1902-1973) classic book, *The Spiritual Man*, describes spiritual living. In his book Nee explains that a spiritual

man has the capacity to go where the Spirit sends him and to do what the Spirit tells him. Such a man lives in harmony with the Spirit. He hears God speak and complies with God's desires no matter the personal cost. And it costs. After starting over seven hundred churches across China, Nee spent the final twenty years of his life as a prisoner inside a Communist labor camp for refusing to compromise his Christ-ian beliefs.

The man who lives by the Spirit is no longer a spiritual infant. He has matured into one of two categories of spiritual maturity. The spiritual man lives either as the child of the Father or as the Bride of Christ. Just as a great divide separates the spiritual infant from the spiritual child, a gulf also separates the spiritual child from the Bride.

(2) INFANTS IN CHRIST

“Infants” comes from the Greek word *nēpios*. Importantly, believers who are *nēpios* are in Christ even while living like the world around them. St. Paul addresses infants in Christ as his spiritual brothers although they live by their wits (1 Corinthians 1:31).

Infants in Christ possess the Seed of righteousness that marks them as belonging to the household of God. While born from above, infants in Christ remain worldly-minded. I was a ministry leader and I was an infant in Christ. I was “saved” while I lived by my wits like the world.

In 1 Peter 2:2 spiritual infants are referred to with a different Greek term, *artigennētos brephos*, meaning newborn babies.

For our purposes, “infants” (*nēpios*) and “newborn babies” (*artigennētos brephos*) have a similar level of spiritual maturity. Neither is spiritually minded. Both types of these Christ-ians live by their natural wits. Both are baby believers.

In the natural realm a child too young to speak thoughtfully is an infant, equal in age with one not yet weaned. The spiritual equivalence between being unable to speak intelligibly and unweaned is established in 1 Corinthians 3:2; there the Author says, *I gave you milk to drink, not solid food.* 1 Peter 2:2 parallels this verse, telling spiritual infants not to concern themselves with eating spiritual solid food; instead they should *long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow up to salvation.*

In this verse “word” and “salvation” are both synonyms for Jesus; unfortunately, we do not have time to explore what that means right now. The point here is that without enough spiritual milk, babies cannot mature to eat spiritual meat. Babies should not worry about spiritual meat. Babies need milk.

1 Corinthians 3:3 continues describing spiritual infants by comparing them to men of the flesh, to natural men, to men of the world. In other words, the Scripture here clearly tells us that spiritual infants are worldly-minded. Both infants in Christ and natural (unsaved) men live their day-to-day lives in the same exact manner. Both live in reliance upon their self-will and not by the Spirit.

Infants in Christ and unbelievers live the same way I did when I led the men’s ministry at the megachurch. No matter what I did then as a ministry leader, I could not please God who is Spirit because I ministered by my flesh and the flesh profits nothing.

(3) ANIMAL MEN

The phrase ‘men of flesh’ comes from the Greek word *sarkikos*. *Sarkikos* indicates “fleshly.” When we think of the word “fleshly,” it is appropriate to think of how animals live. Infants in Christ are unspiritual “animal-men.” As it is written:

I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly (sarkikos). For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly (sarkikos), and are you not walking like mere men (anthrōpos)? (1 Corinthians 3:3).

Sarkikos describes people governed by their animal appetites. Sarkikos indicates depravity, that which is earthly, perishable, and rooted in nature—like an animal. In addition to describing spiritual infants as sarkikos or animal-men, 1 Corinthians 3:3 equates spiritual infants with anthrōpos, a word meaning ‘mere men.’

Nothing but the Seed of righteousness separates infants in Christ from unsaved heathens, from men of this world. As if cousins to apes or Neanderthals, infants in Christ can neither speak rightly of the things of the Spirit nor can they accept that which comes from the Spirit. In form and appearance, in motivation and action, and in substance—except for the Seed of righteousness—infants in Christ mirror men who are hell-bound—except they abide in God’s house.

The difference in make-up between a spiritual infant and a man heading to hell is the Seed of righteousness, the Seed of destiny implanted in the spiritual infant’s soul. Other than one big distinction, both types of these men live at war with the Spirit. Both infants in Christ and the unsaved live as animal-men. Sarkikos Christ-ians live ungodly lives because they live by their worldly mind-set even when doing things that American Christ-ians historically admire, like me leading a ministry at a megachurch.

MAKE YOURSELF READY

Beloved, these may be harsh words but they are honest words, true words we must come to grips with if we are to grow up. If we are going to make ourselves ready for the Bridegroom, we must quit deluding ourselves; only His *Bride has made herself ready* (*Revelation 19:7*). The Father's babies and children have not made themselves ready. They still have some growing up to do.

Maturity Level	Mind Type	In God's House?
Apart from Christ	Animal	No
Infant in Christ	Animal	Yes
Child of God	Spiritual/Animal	Yes
Bride of Christ	Spiritual	Yes

CHAPTER 4

NURSING BABIES

out of the mouth of infants (Matthew 21:16)

While I have said some hard things about infants in Christ, Jesus says something wonderful. In Matthew 21:16 Jesus says, *Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise for Yourself.*

Spiritual infants can sing the true praises of God, as Sunday morning worship can attest. Christ's righteousness is imputed to infants in Christ and that righteousness makes them acceptable to God. God the Father loves His babies even while they live in the world like animal-men.

Spiritual babies are unfamiliar with spiritual life in the same way that natural babies are ignorant of life. In fact, the book of Hebrews goes so far as to say that spiritual infants lack personal experience with absolute integrity, godly virtue, and purity as white as snow (Hebrews 5:13). Read how the Author of Hebrews explains this: *For everyone who partakes only of milk*

is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant (Hebrews 5:13).

“Not accustomed to the word of righteousness” does not mean that babes in Christ are necessarily immoral or moral. An infant in Christ can be considered virtuous by the world and judged mature by an immature Church. I was considered by hundreds (maybe thousands) of born-again believers to be a spiritual leader while being completely carnal in nature. My ‘good Christian life’ fooled every spiritual baby, me included. No matter what an immature church or its immature leadership believes is true, spiritual infants remain unacquainted with righteousness. I was unacquainted with righteousness and the baby Christians who applauded me were too.

While the Lord is our righteousness, only those who live like He is Lord can be cognizant of that righteousness (Jeremiah 33:16, Jeremiah 23:6). Only those who live by the Spirit live like Christ is Lord. That said, spiritual infants may be gifted moralists or honored pulpiteers or dependable bishops, but they do not live like Christ is Lord. To live like Christ is Lord, believers must mature enough to live by the Spirit.

NO MAN IS GOOD

In St. Paul’s letters to the Christians at Corinth, the Author’s description of the Corinthians’ spiritual condition borders on insult. If there is an extenuating circumstance for their spiritual immaturity, maybe it is that their leaders had only been born again for three to five years when the Apostle Paul penned his heavy-handed admonition. A more likely reason for the Author’s harsh words is that the Corinthian Christians quit believing what the apostle taught them. Discounting the foundational principles of the faith (the pure milk of the word), they lost their

underpinnings. They quit living by the Spirit. They reverted to natural strengths to live their self-defined Christ-ian lives.

Like many American Christ-ians today, the Corinthian Christ-ians quit believing God's apostles. Surely St. Paul thought the Corinthians understood the basics of Christ-ian living when he left them. St. Paul would not have intentionally left them in a state where they could be devoured by spiritual "wolves" (2 Peter 3:16, Ephesians 4:14).

When we realize that the Corinthian believers are compared to animal-men because jealousy and strife exist among them through early forms of denominationalism, their shame hits a little closer to home: *For when one says 'I am of Paul' and another 'I am of Apollos,' are you not mere [animal] men? (1 Corinthians 3:4; anthrōpos).*

Of animal-men God says, *A natural (psychikos) man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised (1 Corinthians 2:14).* To such people *the word of the cross is foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18).*

Because spiritual things are spiritually discerned, the wisdom of God is foolishness to unbelievers as well as to Christ-ians who live like mere men. Mere men live by man's wisdom, and man's highest wisdom is foolishness before God. The number of times I have said spiritual things to unspiritual Christ-ians and then been responded to as if I had horns sticking out of my head cannot be half-counted on my fingers plus yours. When I was as spiritually mature as an animal-man, I did the same ill to many who walked by the Spirit.

LENS OF FOOLISHNESS

Infant Christ-ians and hell-bound people view spiritual things through the same lens—the lens of foolishness. Both see the things of God as foolishness no matter how ‘correct’ their theology, no matter how many years they have occupied pulpit or pew, or how well they think they know the Bible. To spiritually minded believers, these infants in their foolishness look like natural babies in soiled diapers not wanting to be changed. Both types of believers —the spiritual and the unspiritual— see the other as acting foolishly. Yet only one sees correctly.

One difference between the two types of Christ-ians is that the spiritual man understands why the babe in Christ acts the way he does. The spiritual man can exercise patience and compassion. Meanwhile the spiritual man remains a mystery to the baby Christ-ian in the same way that a natural adult is unknowable to a baby. No matter how hard the spiritual baby tries (if he tries), he cannot comprehend a spiritual twelve-year-old, much less a spiritual adult.

REFUSING TO GROW UP

Like the Corinthian believers of old, infants in Christ can persist in living in their depraved state. Christ-ians can refuse to grow up. Remaining spiritually immature grieves the One who died that we might live life abundantly. Refusing to grow up is like trading one’s heavenly birthright for a bowl of bean soup (Genesis 25:29-34). That trade has been made before, beloved, and it did not end well for the man who bought the soup.

While infant believers are true brothers *sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus the Christ, their Lord and ours*, their nature by their

choice remains unredeemed, foolish and worldly (1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:1). Only the Seed of righteousness separates spiritual infants from unbelievers greasing the skids to hell (Mark 4:30-32). As such, infant believers can be quick to find fault in members of the Lord Jesus Christ's own body.

SHOWING PARTIALITY

At the macro level we could call this fault-finding "denominationalism" or "bitter church splits." At the micro level we know it as "unrighteous judgment." Whatever we call it, it means showing partiality. The Spirit says, *if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors (James 2:9).*

Long ago I chuckled when some wag said, "Christ-ians shoot their wounded." Grinning seemed better than weeping. Fault-finding between the saints is partly to blame for the civil war presently engulfing the American church (Civil War in the American Church; www.shilohvalley.org).

Civil war in the house of the Prince of Peace is an unparalleled humiliation for the Head of the house and for every household member. This civil war will end when the body of Christ quits living by its animal nature. It is time to grow up.

FRATRICIDE

Since all believers belong to One body, unrighteous judgment among Christ-ians is self-hatred. Self-hatred is fratricide (James 2:10). Wielding God's words of life as weapons of death, we club one another with truths and half-truths. We close our eyes and ears to truths that other parts of the body have, truths that would help us grow up.

When issues arise between us that are worth fighting for, we fail to conquer with love, patience and godly wisdom. Like animal-men, we carry the heart of Cain towards our brother, Abel. The fratricide we practice results from our refusal to grow up.

Infants in Christ are not doomed to live like animal-men. They can choose to exercise their God-given right to grow up and *become children (teknon) of God (John 1:12)*. Children of God can choose to mature into the Bride of Christ. Day by day, each of us chooses. Whatever we choose, there is a price to pay. Our choices have eternal consequences.

That said, for the moment it is important to understand that being *sealed for the day of redemption* is no guarantee that a believer will mature from spiritual infancy into spiritual childhood, or from spiritual childhood into the adult Bride (Ephesians 4:30). God will not force anyone to mature. While He has given us the power and the right to mature, each of us chooses what we do.

Has the time come to grow up?

CHAPTER 5

THE RIGHT TO MATURE

to them He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12)

American citizens who reach the age of eighteen have the right to vote. But having the right to vote does not automatically make one a voter. For an American adult to become a voter, he must exercise his voting right. He must first register to vote and then properly cast his ballot. Only after completing both acts has the citizen become a voter. Similarly, spiritual infants (nēpios) must exercise their right to mature before they can become children (teknon) of God.

This right to mature is explained in John 1:12-13: *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right (exousia) to become children (teknon) of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born ... of God.*

The word 'right' comes from the Greek word 'exousia.' Exousia indicates the power of choice, the authority and liberty to do

something. In the context of John 1:12-13 (above), right (exousia) means that infants in Christ have been given an open door to mature into children of God. It is a door they must choose to walk through. Those who are born of God must exercise their right to mature, otherwise they will never outgrow spiritual infancy.

American Church teaching has long held that all believers are children of God despite the Bible clearly communicating something different. As we now see, the Bible says that being born again grants one the right to mature from spiritual infancy (nēpios) into spiritual childhood (teknon), not the promise. A born-again believer may choose to mature into a child or he may choose to remain a diaper-wearing infant. Maturing is a choice.

ADDICTED TO JESUS

Within the framework of John 1:12-13 (above), the phrase ‘children of God’ describes believers who have become dependent upon, desirous of, and “addicted to” Jesus. In other words, children of God have fallen head-over-heels in love with Jesus. In the Pauline letters the phrase ‘children of God’ designates people governed by the Spirit, believers who have become closely related to God. Christ-ians who exercise their right to mature and become spiritually minded are no longer babes in Christ (nēpios); they have matured into children (teknon).

Because maturing is a supernatural process, exercising one’s right to mature from a spiritual infant into a spiritual child never lends itself to human calculation. There is no Bible school measurement technique that determines spiritual maturity levels. The maturation process does not correlate with improved behavior patterns like church attendance or tithing. Seminary diplomas and religious titles cannot differentiate spiritual babies

from spiritual children or for that matter, spiritual children from spiritual adults.

Today some of our born-again ‘PhD Reverends’ and bishops remain spiritual infants; while being saved, they are worldly-minded men, living by their wits. Across three continents I have met more than a few such Christ-ian ‘leaders.’ For two years straight, one of those so-called leaders appeared in my mirror.

SPIRITUAL REALITIES ARE SPIRITUALLY DISCERNED

St. John writes that “love for God” and “obedience to God” possess the same essence: *For this is love for God, to obey His commands (1 John 5:3)*. The more obedient a man is to God, the more he loves God. The more a man loves God, the more spiritually mature he is. The man so in love with Jesus that he always dies to his own desires so that Christ’s desires live through him, is a spiritual adult.

St. John’s understanding of spiritual maturation harmonizes with St. Paul’s description of the Corinthian believers—believers who while faithfully ‘doing church’ for three to five years had not matured beyond spiritual babies. At the time St. Paul wrote his first letter to the church at Corinth, the believers there were self-willed; they were governed by their animal instincts, not by the Spirit. They chose not to exercise their right to grow up.

Because spiritual realities are spiritually discerned, spiritual infants and spiritual children can mistakenly view other infants and children as more mature than they actually are. Immature Christ-ians can also mischaracterize true believers as wolves in sheep’s clothing, as enemies of the Church.

A believer’s maturity cannot be determined by his outward behaviors, no matter how saintly or contrary those behaviors

appear to be. Mature Christians constantly wear a spiritual robe of humility that none but the Spirit can see through. Unless God points out the spiritual adults among us, our natural eyes will never see those men and women for the selfless saints they are. In fact, when we mature into spiritual adults, humility makes it difficult for us to see ourselves for who we have become.

Beloved, we should not be fooled. Trying to measure spiritual maturity with natural senses is like trying to measure volume by weight. It (almost) never works and we should stop trying. When the Church grasps this fact then it will be a sign that we have done a bit of growing up.

A simple prayer you can pray to exercise your right to grow up is this: “Jesus, please help me fall head-over-heels in love with you. Discipline me any way you see fit. Make my heart like yours. I want to love you the same way you love me—totally.” Pray this prayer day after day, year after year, until God completely fills your heart with love for Him and nothing else. Then you will be a grownup. You will be the Bride of Christ.

CHAPTER 6

RAISING SPIRITUAL INFANTS

I will make myself like the Most High (Isaiah 14:14)

During a visit to Lusaka, Zambia, I read a newspaper article about a local pastor who was tricked by a con artist into handing over a pile of church money for new church furniture that never arrived. When the congregation discovered the swindle, they blamed their pastor. The congregants reasoned that God had given their pastor responsibility for their welfare and he had broken trust.

Realizing that their pastor had given away the church's money because he was walking in the flesh and not by the Spirit, a mob of angry Christians descended upon their pastor's house. They caught the man and beat him with sticks and fists until he wiggled free and leapt from a window. At the time the article went to press, the pastor was last seen running down the dusty road as fast as his two legs could carry him. That immature man and the immature church people made a spiritual mess. Spiritual infants make messes.

Making messes is part and parcel of their infantile nature. While the Church does not care for its spiritual infants at least as well as the world nurtures its natural babies then we are condemned by the world. Are we not condemned by the world?

Today it could be said that the world cares more for its babies than the Church cares for her babies. People in the United States go to jail for child abuse yet the American Church has not matured enough to realize that spiritual child abuse exists within its walls. This will soon change. Hidden among us are believers who are growing up.

One day soon the Bridal generation will emerge from the byways where God has hidden her. She will appear from the “caves” where she was kept to God alone. Spiritual babes who matured into spiritual children will discern these spiritual adults. When God’s children finally figure out who the true spiritual adults are then God’s house will experience order. God’s house will have adult leadership for the first time since Pentecost.

Even if a spiritual infant has been saved for thirty years and should know better (or as the Author of Hebrews quipped, “by this time you ought to be teachers”), we should continue to be patient and persistent with the infants among us. Maturing believers are governed by godliness in their relations with spiritual infants (Hebrews 5:12).

Denigrating long-time infants by harboring unrighteous judgment and ‘shooting the wounded’ never helps anyone grow up. However, interacting with spiritual infants under the direction of the Spirit as St. Paul did with the Corinthians, might usher these babies into the spiritual life so that they too *may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2)*.

INFANTILE LEADERSHIP

While spiritual infants can be misjudged as unsaved, the opposite can also be true. Spiritual infants can be seen as mature and relied upon to behave accordingly. Like Israel leaning on the uncertain staff of Egypt, relying on a spiritual infant for spiritual strength inevitably fails (Isaiah 36:6).

How many times has an infantile believer led others astray with moralism or worldly wisdom? Not long ago I led Christians down the wrong path and was applauded by the church for doing it.

Overestimating the maturity of a baby believer because he is well mannered, educated or eloquent or possesses natural leadership skills, wreaks havoc in the Church. It causes division and harms the people of God. This maxim is true because infants exist in a state of war with the Spirit even if they graduated seminary magna cum laude and run a church of ten-thousand souls. Examples of relying on infants to lead God's people are easy to recall and painful to recount.

IMMATURE SPIES

When the twelve spies returned from the land of Canaan, something like a vote among Israel was taken on whether to obey God and enter the promised land or to rebel and remain in the desert. The two spies who saw with spiritual eyes, Joshua and Caleb, desired to obey God. Conversely the ten spiritual 'leaders' who saw the promised land through natural eyes thought it wisdom to rebel against God's plans. Invading Canaan looked like a suicidal mission to the ten infantile leaders.

While the ten immature spies looked and spoke like spiritual leaders, they were carnally minded. Being men of the flesh, it was impossible for them to comprehend God's will, much less submit

to it. Those unspiritual leaders caused forty years of corporate suffering. Does this story sound familiar?

Suffice it to say that misunderstandings about fellow believers' spiritual maturity—whether esteemed too high or measured too low—give rise to pain, confusion and divisions within the household of God. This ought not be. When we grow up, it will not be.

SALVATION CULTURE CHURCHES

Salvation culture churches are assemblies where the over-arching spiritual concern is salvation. Salvation culture churches are populated in pulpit and pew with long-time infants who never exercise their God-given right to mature. Their main concern is birthing spiritual babies and then unwittingly keeping them that way. These churches' idea of the Christ-ian's life-purpose is threefold: get saved, be good and go to heaven. Among salvation-culture churches the moralistic life is judged as pleasing to God.

Moralism, beloved, is spiritually reprehensible. Moralism is the practice of following one's own sense of right and wrong. Following one's own senses—however refined those senses might be—is self-saving. Self-saving means elevating oneself to the place of Savior. Self-saving is behaving as Satan, the son of the dawn, when he proclaimed, *I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High (Isaiah 14:14)*.

Following the path of moralism is not the same as following Christ. Christ commands, *Follow Me (Matthew 4:19)*. The pathway of maturity is obedience to Christ. To accept the wedding invitation, we live in union with the Holy Spirit. No man can follow Christ unless he can hear the Holy Spirit speak and he possesses the courage to obey.

Because ‘living by the Spirit’ is often misunderstood by baby Christ-ians to equate with moralism or living by ‘Biblical values,’ assemblies that baby Christ-ians dominate are readily reduced by the unseen enemy into religious clubs and social welfare societies.

In assemblies where this abnormality occurs, infant believers are unaware of the vast spiritual wealth being stolen from them. If those believers were aware of the great robbery, they would become indignant and demand compensation. Like the riled-up church folks in Zambia, when America’s salvation-culture Christ-ians wise up, they might catch their pastor and beat him with sticks and fists and chase the rascal out of town for keeping them spiritually impoverished.

GET THE BLESSING

Beloved, at some point in time salvation-culture Christ-ians (as well as their leaders) become as responsible as Esau for losing their spiritual blessings. At some point baby believers cannot blame foolish pulpiteers for their own immaturity. Let’s not forget the hard lesson of Esau: *For you know that even afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears (Hebrews 12:17).*

This —Esau’s eulogy— may be the saddest passage in the Bible. Do not let these same words be said of you. Like Jacob, do whatever it takes to get the blessing. Christ Himself is the blessing. Pay any price to have Him. This life in this world is the only time we will ever have to pay the price to inherit the Blessing. If you think I am talking about salvation, I am not. I am talking about becoming the Bride of Christ.

The American Church will not remain in its infantile state forever. A remnant will grow up. A remnant will pay the price to become the Bride of Christ in this world in this life.

Will you?

CHAPTER 7

SPIRITUAL MILK

not solid food (1 Corinthians 3:2)

A friend once explained to me that his church had started hosting so-called Christ-ian yoga classes. When he confronted his lead pastor about allowing demonic worship into the church through the practice of yoga, the preacher-man told my friend that he was “willing to do anything” to lead souls to Christ. Moments before my friend left that assembly forever, he told the church “leader” that people who follow the Spirit do not do evil to accomplish good. They do not allow the people that God entrusts into their care to worship demons. He explained that God’s will is not accomplished through ungodly behavior. The pastor did not understand; he may have been zealous for Christ but he was an infant in Christ.

Beloved, the times have changed. The new spiritual season is not what it used to be. American church leaders who do not quickly grow up will see their pews emptying because their people went in search of true leadership, leadership that will provide them with the spiritual milk they need to grow up.

SIX LOGICAL TEACHINGS

When a man is born again, he is a spiritual infant needful of spiritual milk. St. Paul writes, *as to infants in Christ, I gave you milk to drink, not solid food (brōma) for you were not yet ready to receive it (1 Corinthians 3:2)*. Likewise St. Peter says, *like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word (logikos) so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation (1 Peter 2:2)*.

Spiritual milk is synonymous with the elementary teachings (or ‘logical teachings’) about the Christ. The phrase ‘elementary teachings’ could be expressed as ‘the first word’ (the first logos) (Hebrews 6:1-2).

‘The first word’ implies the origin, the commencement, the foundational beginnings of the logos word of the Christ. The first word of the Christ is the only thing a man born anew can gain spiritual sustenance from. The first word of the Christ is the spiritual milk that God offers to baby believers. For spiritual babies, nothing else is digestible (Hebrews 6:1-2).

LOGIKOS

First Peter 2:2 explains that spiritual milk is the pure milk of the word (logikos). This is significant. From the Greek word ‘logikos’ we derive the words logic and reason. Hence First Peter 2:2 reveals that the elementary teaching about the Christ can be grasped by the logical, carnal mind—the only mind-type infants in Christ possess.

For a new believer to mature beyond spiritual infancy and become spiritually minded, no food except the first word of Christ suffices. In fact, infants cannot ingest (meaning, understand) anything else. Without spiritual milk, infants starve. Even if spiritual babies desired solid food, they could not swallow it. If

spiritual babies swallow anything other than ‘milk,’ it chokes or sickens them.

Hebrews 6:1-2 lists the six ingredients of spiritual milk—the first logical word of the Christ. Those six ingredients are:

1. Repentance from Dead Works
2. Faith toward God
3. Instruction about Baptisms
4. Laying On of Hands
5. Resurrection of the Dead
6. Eternal Judgment

INGESTING SPIRITUAL MILK

Simply hearing these teachings in meetings or reading about them in books does not automatically mature an infant believer into a spiritual child. The first logical word must be ‘ingested.’ As natural babies must consume natural milk to grow, so spiritual babies must welcome ‘the first logical word’ of Christ into their hearts.

The first logical word is ‘fed’ through teaching and ‘ingested’ by learning. Teaching and learning necessarily include experiential exercises. Experiential exercises are like the laboratories and field trips that accompany classroom lectures. The assembly that leaves infant feeding to preaching alone or worse, the church that does not provide ‘whole milk’ to its infants, could be guilty of a spiritual Breach of Trust. In other words, they could be guilty before God of spiritual child neglect.

As an example of what is meant by infant feeding, consider the milk ingredient the Bible calls repentance from dead works.

DEAD WORKS

Spiritually minded believers know that good deeds done in disobedience to the Spirit are dead works. Dead works are seemingly good religious actions rooted in the flesh and not in obedience to the Spirit. A work of the flesh is an abomination to the Spirit, no matter how good or godly it appears to be. It is sin that distances the doer from God and allows Satan deeper access into the soul of the sinner.

Cain was the first man to do a dead work. Cain sacrificed the produce of his fields to God instead of offering an animal sacrifice (Genesis 4:2-7). God never asked Cain for his corn. God called Cain to obey. Cain was supposed to trade his corn for an animal and then sacrifice the animal. Cain knew that *without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22)*. Had Cain not known this axiom then he would not have been guilty of a dead work.

After Satan led Cain to do the dead work—to worship God the way Cain's flesh wanted to worship—Satan was then able to entice Cain to murder Abel, his righteous brother.

Satan followed this same pattern when tempting the Pharisees of old. After tricking them into doing dead works for God, he then led them to kill their brother, Jesus, the King of righteousness.

Spiritual infants must be taught about dead works. They easily think that anything they do for God pleases God. Infants have worldly minds, and worldly-minded Christians are led by their flesh, meaning Satan (1 Corinthians 5:5).

Listen to the prophet Samuel as he explains the paradigm of dead works to King Saul: *What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen!*

Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams. Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft and stubbornness as bad as worshiping idols. So because you have rejected the command of the Lord, he has rejected you as king (1 Samuel 15:22-23).

Before St. Paul's eyes were opened and he began living by the Spirit, he killed and imprisoned Christians while thinking he was pleasing God (Acts 7:58, 8:3, 22:4-20). Likewise, the High Priest and Sanhedrin (Israel's judges who commissioned St. Paul to do his devilish work) believed they were pleasing God. The lesson of spiritual infants opposing Spirit-led believers appears on many pages of the Bible. Job's friends and Jerusalem's watchmen in the Song of Songs abuse God's holy people, confident that their satanic acts are godly (Job 38:2; Song of Songs 5:7). Nothing has changed since those pages were written. Spiritual infants naturally oppose God's Spirit-led people.

A spiritual infant might appraise an in-your-face street preacher or sandwich-board wearing abortion protester as crazy or egotistical when that zealot is being led by the Spirit to behave as he is. I am guilty of this very sin. I once heard a man of God recount how the Lord once instructed him to get out of his car at an interstate rest stop, kneel on the sidewalk, raise his arms to heaven and praise Jesus.

The man said, "As I was being obedient, I 'overheard' a man thinking 'Nut job!' as he walked by."

Hours after hearing the man of God recount his story about obediently praising the Lord at the interstate rest stop, the Spirit reminded me that I was the very man who sauntered by that day. I was the spiritual infant who wrongly judged this Spirit-led man to be a 'nut job.' I was the one who cast criticisms upon this saint's selfless act of obedience. I was the religious 'Saul' throwing rocks at this 'Stephen' (Acts 7:54-8:3).

Heartbroken, I wrote and apologized. Good naturedly, the man of God forgave me and blessed me. This is not the worst of the spiritual errors I have made by using my natural wits to judge God's holy people. Beloved, if you knew me as God does then you would know that I am the worst of sinners (James 2:10).

Like me cursing the saint kneeling at the rest stop, babies in Christ lack spiritual discernment because they walk by the flesh. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. Hence the caution, *Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh* (Galatians 5:16).

FIRST WORD

The remaining milk ingredients that Church leaders are responsible for teaching, modeling and coaching spiritual babies in are listed in Hebrews 6:1-2. An easy-to-read book on this subject is *First Aid for Converts* (www.shilohvalley.org).

Without all six parts of the first logical word of the Christ, an infant cannot mature (Hebrews 6:1-2). If an infant does not mature into a spiritual child, and if the child does not mature to spiritual adulthood, then that believer will not join the Bridal generation. If you or a friend experience problems hearing or obeying the Holy Spirit, look again at the six elementary teachings of the Christ. Chances are you or your friend is missing one or more of these six elementary principles. That lack prevents you from maturing into a spiritual child.

THE BRIDAL REFORMATION

The generation of the Bride will reform the Church. The Bride will care for spiritual infants and spiritual children as if they were her own because they will be. In the future, it will not take years

for a new believer to become spiritually minded and begin living in union with the Holy Spirit. It will take one day. I know it will take one day because the Lord Jesus Christ showed it to me. One twelve-hour session is all that is needed for a spiritual baby, under the care of spiritual adults, to mature into a child of God.

SPIRITUAL MEAT

Weaning is the process of accustoming an infant to solid food. In a spiritual sense, weaning is the process of a believer transitioning from a diet of milk (the six foundational principles) to a diet that includes solid food (obedience to the Spirit).

In the New Testament, 'brōma' is the Greek word sometimes translated as "solid food" or "spiritual meat" (1 Corinthians 10:3). The King James Version translates First Corinthians 10:3 this way: *And did all eat the same spiritual meat (brōma)*. Other Bibles translate brōma as "food" or "solid food." Spiritual meat (brōma) is different from spiritual milk.

Spiritual meat was for the Christ as it is for the Christ-ian. John 4:34 tells us exactly what Jesus' solid food was and by implication, what solid food is for believers today: *Jesus said to them, 'My food (brōma) is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.'*

Spiritual food (spiritual meat or brōma) is obedience to the Holy Spirit.

To eat spiritual food, the man of God complies with the commands the Spirit writes on his heart and whispers into his ears (Jeremiah 31:33; Isaiah 30:21). The laws written on a man's heart by the Spirit are the only laws the Spirit empowers a man to obey. "Eating solid food" distinguishes the spiritual man from the animal-man. Having the Holy Spirit is the sine qua non that

a person is born from above. Obeying the Holy Spirit is the one and only proof that a believer has matured from a spiritual infant into a spiritual child.

Obedience to the Spirit is the essence of spiritual life. Obedience to the Spirit is love for God (1 John 5:3). There is no substitute for obedience to the law written on one's heart. Obedience is the pathway of maturity. When we obey the Spirit, we walk with God.

It is a mistake to think that spiritual food can be fed to the man in the pew by the man in the pulpit. The only nutrition the man in the pulpit can provide is spiritual milk. Milk alone cannot provide enough nutrition for the man in the pew to grow up. The time has come to wean ourselves off a milk-only diet. It is time to grow up.

BUYING LAND

Years ago during a Sunday morning sermon, I repeatedly 'heard' the preacher telling me to purchase a piece of property. My spiritual ears clearly heard this instruction despite the preacher not physically saying one word about buying land. Walking across the parking lot after the service, I mentioned what I 'heard' to my wife. She said she heard the same thing. Because we realized God was talking to us, we bought the land we previously considered too costly. We obeyed the Spirit instead of our flesh. We chose to grow a bit.

LISTENING

To remain spiritually healthy, to grow from strength to strength, "meat-eating" believers are always asking the question, "What is the Spirit telling me to do?"

They pray prayers like, “Jesus, what is on your mind today? ... What do you want to talk about, Jesus? ... Do not let me stray from your will. ... Discipline me any way You see fit. ... Help me grow up.” Then they listen. The prayer time of maturing believers is more listening to the Spirit than asking for God’s blessings.

Once I saw a bedraggled woman walking down the street. I knew she was walking home from church because I had seen her there. Her clothes were ragged and her hair was a mess. I prayed, “Lord, bless that woman.”

God’s response was immediate. He said, “John, you bless that woman.”

Out of my parked truck I jumped and caught up with the woman. She needed a vacuum cleaner, she said. Soon she had one. I was growing up.

THREE YEARS OLD

The norm in the West today for transitioning a natural baby from a milk-only diet to solid food is twelve to twenty-four months. However there is an ancient Jewish writing that references weaning being completed on the child’s third birthday. 2 Maccabees 7:27 says, “So bending herself towards him, mocking the cruel tyrant, she said in her own language: My son, have pity upon me, that bore thee nine months in my womb, and gave thee suck three years, and nourished thee, and brought thee up unto this age.”

According to WebMD.com, the third birthday is an average child’s age when twenty teeth have come in. Twenty teeth is a complete set of teeth. Having all twenty teeth means the child can chew solid food. This is the natural realm.

Because the natural realm portends spiritual realities, three spiritual years is the spiritual age when a believer is weaned. A believer matures from a baby to a child when he reaches three spiritual years of age.

Why the American church pumps spiritual milk into believers like they are tasked with raising veal cows is beyond me. Making it acceptable for the saints to remain infants (*nēpios*) “tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine,” terrified by shadows and lacking adult supervision is like running a daycare without adults (Ephesians 4:14). In America, what is illegal in the natural realm is normal Church operations.

American Christendom will soon change. You will help change it. You and your friends will become adept at maturing spiritual infants into spiritual children. If we pause to consider it, dedicated nursing rooms inside churches’ physical walls is a natural reality portending a spiritual sea change (1 Corinthians 15:46). Hallelujah!

Soon we will see spiritual babies properly nurtured within the Church. Our babies will receive the spiritual milk they need to mature into Spirit-led people, and we will all grow up together.

God hasten the day.

CHAPTER 8

DIRTY JOBS

The earth is the Lord's and all it contains (Psalm 24:1)

After resigning from the parking ministry, everything I tried to accomplish by my own strength turned out muck. Learning to do things by God's power meant I went from being qualified for a job by an energetic "I can do that!" to being qualified because God told me to do it. In this new paradigm, God told me to do things I did not want to do, things like cleaning roadside ditches and tidying up public restrooms. How glamorous!

As a freelance Spirit-led garbage collection man, I learned to keep work gloves and garbage bags inside my vehicle. I also learned that if I did not immediately clean up 'whatever-whenever' as soon as I heard the Spirit say do it, then invariably I had to return to the same spot and clean up much more filth than would have been required had I obeyed immediately. As I learned to obey immediately, I matured.

No matter how pressed I thought I was for time when the Spirit said stop and clean the roadside ditch or public restroom, I always

arrived where I was headed on time, or if I was late, I would arrive to discover the event had been postponed or canceled. Unplanned ditch cleaning never made me late. Cleaning public toilets in obedience to the Holy Spirit never slowed me down. God shepherded my life as I obeyed Him, and I grew up.

Beloved, you can gain fresh insights into how messed up American humanity is by handling some of the waste that actual human beings toss into roadside ditches from car windows. Soiled diapers, I understand, but why and how some of the refuse I found in ditches got into human hands to begin with, remains a mystery to me.

Washing children's feet in third world barrios—a task which I have done—is a sunny walk in New York's Central Park compared to some of the American ditches I have toiled in. On the upside of this line of spiritual training, seeing people's faces as they realize a businessman in coat and tie is cheerily cleaning a truck-stop restroom sans tools of the trade is a reward of its own kind.

During those years of providing unplanned janitorial services and garbage collection, one of my favorite verses became, *The earth is the Lord's and all it contains (Psalm 24:1, 1 Corinthians 10:26)*. On my better days, I smiled to myself, realizing that since everything everywhere belongs to God, I was cleaning God's stuff. Like show host Mike Rowe in the cable television series *Dirty Jobs*, mostly I had a good attitude about it but sometimes ... well sometimes I felt a little stretched.

A prophet friend once said to me, "John, the ministry that does not begin by cleaning toilets will end up in one." While I do not know if my buddy's pithy proverb ranks alongside Solomon's proverbs or not, I can honestly say, Been there. Done that.

How about you?

CHAPTER 9

TREES BEARING FRUIT

Each tree is known by its own fruit (Luke 6:44)

The gate was crowded with businessmen waiting to board an overbooked aircraft. Every seat in the boarding area was occupied, one of them by me. Businessmen stood all about. A businessman seated straight across from me was busy making calls and typing on his laptop. In the business world, he was making things happen.

Sitting there, I heard Jesus whisper, “Tell him about Me.”

“Lord,” I answered, “I would be embarrassed.”

Men standing shoulder-to-shoulder around me. Men were piled up in the seats beside me. Twenty or more men would hear every word I said.

“Tell him about Me,” Jesus softly said again.

Again, my thoughts replied, “I would be embarrassed.”

A third time Jesus said, “Tell him about Me.”

I repeated what I had twice said.

Then Jesus whispered, “Do you love Me?”

Jesus’ question cut my heart in half. I was heartbroken. I love Jesus deeply, from the heart.

“I’m telling him right now!” I exclaimed.

And I did (John 15:13). As I told the businessman about Jesus, he grew quiet and contemplative. He asked questions. I felt the men around us listening in on our conversation. I had the impression that my boldness encouraged another Christian businessman nearby, although I never knew who he was. Some kind of boldness, huh?

As I was learning to be obedient, I was producing spiritual fruit.

FRUIT TREES

Scripture makes analogies between men and fruit trees. Passages comparing men to fruit-bearing trees include Psalm 1, Psalm 52, Psalm 92 and the Song of Songs. The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel draw this same parallel. So does the Bridegroom.

The Bridegroom says, *For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush (Luke 6:44).*

The Law of Moses communicates something important regarding fruit trees. At first glance Leviticus 19:23 might appear odd but the underlying truth this verse conveys aids our discussion.

Leviticus 19:23 dictates that for three years after planting, any fruit a tree yields is ‘uncircumcised’ and unfit for consumption. It says, *When you enter the land and plant all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. Three years it shall be uncircumcised to you; it shall not be eaten. But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to the Lord God (Leviticus 19:23-24).*

How can a fruit tree be ‘uncircumcised’ or ‘holy’ unless it is comparable with a man?

This Biblical parallel between men and fruit trees infers that any Kingdom fruit a believer bears for his first three spiritual years is produced through his natural strength, through his self-will. Producing Kingdom fruit through natural strength does not make that fruit acceptable to God, no matter how good it appears to be. *The sons of God walk by the Spirit of God, and the flesh profits men nothing (John 4:24, 6:63).*

This statement is not meant to insinuate that Kingdom fruit generated through natural strength cannot increase God’s Kingdom. In my work with the parking ministry, God got something out of my natural effort but I will not be rewarded for it. That service will go unrewarded because its fruit was produced through natural strength. It is a fairy tale to believe that Christians receive heavenly rewards for works accomplished through the flesh, beloved, because the flesh profits nothing.

The fruit of a man’s spiritual life becomes holy and acceptable to God in that man’s fourth spiritual year, the same year he begins living by the Spirit (Luke 4:14; Romans 15:19). As already written, it need only take one day for a born-again person to mature into their fourth spiritual year. Or it can take a lifetime. How long it takes to grow into a spiritual three-year-old and become a spiritual Christ-ian, is up to you. It is your choice.

FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

Once a Christ-ian reaches the spiritual age of three, he can continue eating solid food by continually obeying the Spirit. As a result, he will grow stronger. Growing spiritually stronger, he produces more kingdom fruit so that he can grow stronger and produce more fruit. Hence it is written, *They go from strength to strength (Psalm 84:7)*.

In this continued cycle of

eating → growing → producing
eating → growing → producing
eating → growing → producing

believers mature from strength to strength.

IF YOU DO WHAT I COMMAND YOU

The Bride is not like me at the airport gate. The Bride loves Jesus more than her own life. She never argues with God about obeying. She leaps at every opportunity to love her Lover. She expresses her love for her Lover through heartfelt obedience regardless of consequences, regardless of cost (1 John 5:3). It costs to love Jesus.

A generation of Christ-ians with the Bride's nature, the world has never seen. Not even in the Book of Acts. But she is coming and all the world will see her. As sure as day follows night, the generation of the Bride is coming upon the earth, shining in the darkness like a galaxy of stars. The darkness will flee before her.

CHAPTER 10

THE BOY PRIEST

a boy girded with a linen ephod (1 Samuel 2:18)

When my second daughter reached the age of four, her Sunday school class acted out the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. My daughter was selected to play one of the many who bowed down to King Nebuchadnezzar's golden idol.

When the trumpets sounded and the drummers drummed, instead of bowing down to the golden idol, my daughter burst into tears, brought the play to a halt and was removed from the classroom. She was inconsolable. On the ride home my little princess calmed enough to explain what happened.

She said, "Dada, I wouldn't bow down to the golden idol even for pretend."

Hallelujah!

Neither would three brave Hebrew men, saying: *O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if He does not, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the golden statue you have set up (Daniel 3:16-18).* They might have added, “Not even for pretend.”

Having tried my hand at stage acting, I can attest that pretending to sin bears spiritual consequences, even in the context of a church play. ‘Make-believe’ sin opens doors to a spiritual netherworld that the uninitiated cannot conceive. Most infant believers in the American Church have no idea how wicked evil truly is.

Although ‘only’ a Sunday school play, my daughter recognized the difference between good and evil, and then she did all within her power to resist evil. In the economy of a four-year-old, she paid a steep price to follow in the footsteps of three Hebrew men who today are as proud of my daughter as we are of them.

In this instance the four-year-old was more spiritually mature than her teachers—chronological adults who not having their spiritual senses trained to know the difference between good and evil, unwittingly led a flock of lambs into enemy territory. My daughter was spiritually old enough to save herself but not yet strong enough to save any with her. Consequently, beloved, chronological age is relatively unimportant in the kingdom. Spiritual age however, is serious business.

SAMUEL

Samuel was a chronological boy ‘eating solid food’ and producing acceptable kingdom fruit. Samuel was ministering before the Lord, *a boy girded with a linen ephod (1 Samuel 2:18).*

Samuel had probably reached his fourth chronological year (aged three) when his mother shuttled him to Shiloh where the Tabernacle was located. Some Hebrew scholars think Samuel may have been as young as two when she handed him to Eli, Israel’s High Priest. I think he was three.

Because the boy Samuel obeyed God, he ate spiritual meat. Because he ate spiritual meat, he grew spiritually strong. As a result of his spiritual strength, he produced kingdom fruit. Then Samuel repeated the process of eating spiritual meat, growing spiritually stronger and producing Kingdom fruit. Any believer can choose to be like Samuel whether they are physically four-years-old or ninety-four or somewhere in between.

SAMUEL’S SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT METHOD

Step 1		
Obey God	→ Grow spiritually Strong	→ Produce Kingdom fruit
Step 2		
Obey God Again	→ Grow spiritually Stronger	→ Produce more Kingdom fruit
Step 3		
Continually obey	→ Be a Mighty Man of God	→ Produce great Kingdom fruit
Step 4		
Repeat Step 3		

Eat well, live well, the West says—the natural world portending spiritual realities.

BABYSITTING

Under normal family circumstances, older siblings bear some level of responsibility for the younger. Busy moms know that a three-year-old can fetch a diaper, carry a bottle and report tears or danger.

I grew up in the swamps of South Carolina. In the county where I lived, a three-year-old boy ran to the house and told his daddy that an alligator was about to eat his little brother. The daddy grabbed his deer rifle, braced his gun on the frame of the back door, aimed over the head of the baby and shot the twelve-foot long alligator just before it ate the baby. The baby was Kelly Jackson and his big brother, Jay Jackson. My high school football team was captained by the baby the alligator did not eat.

In a spiritual sense, the same paradigm holds true in the household of God. Spiritual three-year-olds can save infant believers from approaching evil. If this were not true then Samuel would not have been spiritually ministering to the Lord in his fourth year—aged three.

For believers abiding in the Child–Father relationship, their care of spiritual infants is called babysitting. When the Bride of Christ babysits, we call it something different. We call it parenting. St. Paul uses another word for parenting; he calls it fathering (1 Corinthians 4:15).

Regards parenting, it is written, *But women will be preserved through the bearing of children (1 Timothy 2:15)*. Since this statement is true in the natural realm, we might also say, “Spiritual adults will be preserved through the bearing of spiritual children.”

Bible stories reveal the relational behavior of spiritual children spiritually babysitting. One example is Abraham rescuing Lot in

the war of the kings (Genesis 14:14). We know Abraham was a spiritual child when he accomplished this daring exploit in part because his name had not fully matured—he was still known as ‘Abram.’ At the time Abram rescued Lot, Abram behaved like a big brother to Lot; Abram was maturing to become ‘Abraham’—a spiritual father to Isaac.

Other examples of spiritual babysitting include Miriam looking after Moses in the bullrushes, David attacking the giant who threatened his heavenly Father’s ‘sheep,’ and possibly, Timothy’s early work with church plants in Corinth, Thessalonica, Philippi and Ephesus.

Because a sizable portion of current Church leadership relates to God as His children, babysitting—not fathering—occurs throughout the American Church. Having so many spiritual babysitters is not wrong but it does explain the large numbers of recurrent issues confronting American Christendom, issues like divisions and jealousies combined with limited spiritual and natural resources.

When the Bridal generation emerges from the purifying fires, when the Lord brings her out of the caves in which He has hidden her away to Himself, this pattern will change. The Church’s best for its babies will no longer be babysitters. Instead, spiritual adults will run the household of God. The generation of the Bride is coming, beloved, and with her we will experience adult leadership.

To recognize the spiritually mature among us, we must first honor the chronologically mature (Hebrews 13:17). When God says, *You shall rise up before the gray-headed and honor the aged*, compliance therewith is not elective (Leviticus 19:32). Those who refuse to obey this command in the natural realm will never mature enough in the spiritual realm to recognize the Bride of

Christ. They will not meet the Bridegroom. If we do not honor the naturally aged, we cannot recognize the spiritually aged. The natural must come first (1 Corinthians 15:46).

CHAPTER 11

THE PARADOX OF PAIN

Though he slay me, I will hope in him (Job 13:15)

C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) once described the Lord Jesus Christ as a surgeon operating on the Bride-to-be, shaping her into the Bridegroom's image.

Lewis writes: "A cruel man might be bribed—might grow tired of his vile sport—might have a temporary fit of mercy, as alcoholics have temporary fits of sobriety. But suppose that what you are up against is a surgeon whose intentions are wholly good. The kinder and more conscientious he is, the more he will go on cutting."

Our Lover goes on cutting out the imperfections of those determined to draw near to Him so that they can draw even nearer to Him, and the cutting hurts. The cutting kills those parts of us unfit for union with the Bridegroom.

Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938) envisioned the temporal trials befalling those determined to conform to the Pattern, those

people single-minded enough to press on until they meet Jesus face-to-face. She saw their earthly struggles and their glorious arrival in heaven. In her diary Faustina writes:

“And I saw the other road or rather a path, for it was narrow and strewn with thorns and rocks. And the people who walked it had tears in their eyes and all kinds of suffering befell them. Some fell down upon the rocks but immediately stood up and went on. At the end of the road was a magnificent garden filled with all sorts of happiness, and all these souls entered there. At the very first instant they forgot all their sufferings.”

Believers who die to themselves hoping Christ might live shall soon forget their *trouble as waters that have passed by* (Job 11:16). Trials that proved excruciating and unexplainable in this world shall be counted as nothing to those who meet the Bridegroom face-to-face (John 16:20-22).

DIFFERENT CROSSES

When the Christ says, *If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me*, Jesus did not speak of the cross He bore (Matthew 16:24). He spoke of the Bride's cross. The cross of pain and death that the Bride bears is different than the cross of Christ.

On the Bridegroom's cross, Life died.

On the Bride's cross, death dies.

On the Bridegroom's cross, purity died.

On the Bride's cross, impurity dies.

On His cross, selflessness died.

On the Bride's cross, selfishness dies.

On His cross, perfection died.
On the Bride's cross, imperfection dies.

On His cross, the Lamb was slain.
On the Bride's cross, the sin-goat perishes.

On His cross, the God-man died.
On the Bride's cross, the sin-man dies.

Rufus Moseley (1870–1954) describes differences between the Bridegroom's cross and the Bride's cross from another perspective. Moseley writes: "There is a glory side to the cross ... I was put upon a cross of life—while He went to a cross of shame. I had been put upon a cross of bliss—while He had been put upon a cross of agony. I had been put upon a cross of heavenly manifestation—He was put upon a cross of desertion, where it appeared that even God Himself did not care, or had forsaken Him. The Cross is a way of life. The way of love meeting all hate with Love, all evil with good, all negatives with positives."

In the 15th Century, Thomas à Kempis (1379–1471) said this about the cross: "In the Cross is salvation; in the Cross is life; in the Cross is protection against our enemies; in the Cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness; in the Cross is strength of mind; in the Cross is joy of spirit; in the Cross is excellence of virtue; in the Cross is perfection of holiness. There is no salvation of soul, nor hope of eternal life, save in the Cross."

Amish Bishop Ben Girod carried his cross through this world and wrote a book about some of his journey: *Baptized by Fire, The Gethsemane Way*. I recommend Girod and his books. He followed the Pattern. He carried his cross. Like all who die to themselves hoping Christ might live, he has a story to tell.

HEROES OF THE FAITH

Three years before I traveled to the church conference where the marriage vision occurred, the Holy Spirit told me to read biographies of great men of God. Of the dozen men I studied, only one theme proved common among them: each man spent his life carrying his cross. In this world in this life, each one of those great men of God died to himself hoping Christ might live. As Faustina saw, through this world they walked a narrow path strewn with thorns and rocks.

Today's heroes of the faith are no different than Amish Bishop Ben Girod or Thomas à Kempis or the twelve men of God I read about. You can choose to be like these faithful men. You can choose to ascend the heights of Christendom and there meet Christ Jesus face-to-face. If you accept the invitation, you can become the Bride of Christ.

I hope you do, beloved. I hope you go all the way.

CHAPTER 12

LEFT BEHIND

those who were invited were not worthy (Matthew 22:8)

In war-weary Uganda, John Mulinde's church planting team daily witnessed miracles, salvations and deliverances. While doing his missionary work, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to Mulinde in a vision. Alone in a banana plantation, kneeling with his face in the dirt, Jesus appeared in what Mulinde describes as a light beyond brightness. Mulinde tells his story:

“Then I heard a voice, deep and calm. He called my name three times. I couldn't answer. There was no strength in me to answer. But inside me I was saying 'I am here.' He called me 'John' three times.

“ 'John, John, John, I knew you before the creation of the world. And I chose you and set you apart to serve Me as a witness in these last days. But I want to say to you, if I had come today to take my Bride, you wouldn't be part of it. I wouldn't take you.'

Mulinde said, “I can't describe the shock that came upon me. I think it was shock. I didn't even respond. It hit me.

“And He said again, ‘I wouldn’t take you for it is written, “He will appear to those who wait upon Him.” You are not living your life as a person waiting upon Me. You are allowing all kinds of filth to come into your life. You are living like one who cares not.’

“I thought, ‘This cannot be happening to me. I gave up my job to serve the Lord. I gave up my house that my father had given me because I wanted to go to the mission field. I gave up this. I gave up that. This can’t be God saying to me, He wouldn’t take me.’ And all my theologies and all my teachings could not accept that.

“Then He spoke to me these words written in the book of First Corinthians chapter six. He just quoted them. ... ‘Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders, nor greedy, nor thieves, nor drunkards, nor slanderers nor swindlers, will inherit the Kingdom of God.’

“And He went on to say to me, ‘Your life is so full of filth. You walk with an outward appearance [of godliness] and you cover a lot of things in your heart. You forget that I am the Lord who examines the heart. And you are not ready. You are not ready to meet Me. ... There is no crooked word that comes out of My mouth. Do you call Me a liar? ... You have not sinned. You live in sin. You live from morning to evening in such imaginations. ...’

“I had not fallen into sin. It was my way of life. ... All along I must have been deceived. I thought I was serving God. And yet I was so filthy inside. The devil must have taken my life captive a long time ago. At that moment I thought of the miracles we were witnessing. I thought of the healings. I thought of all these things.”

Chastised like Jonah in the belly of the fish, Mulinde and his evangelism team ceased their church planting work and spent

several days in heartfelt repentance. They begged the Lord to totally cleanse them of the sin of ministering by their self-will. They asked the Lord Jesus Christ to fill them with the Holy Spirit. Then Jesus appeared to Mulinde a second time. In the second vision Mulinde describes Jesus as speaking like a broken-hearted man. Jesus' voice, Mulinde says, was full of weeping and sobbing.

“ I will tell you about My People, my children, my Church,’ said Jesus. And then He explained how the Church is to live completely liberated and free, separated, redeemed and fulfilled.

“ ‘But My people have turned away from that,’ Jesus said.

“ ‘They have chosen to go back to living their human lives, human effort, human desires, human wisdom and human will. ...’

“ ‘My servants—the preachers of the Word, have traded their souls for worldly things so they speak from the worldly spirit. And they tell my people it is okay to live the way they live.’

“ ‘Many of My people do not know the joy of forgiveness,’ said Jesus, ‘because they have never been led into deep repentance and total surrender to Me. They have been told it is okay to live in self-will and do whatever they want. And My heart grieves because I see what the enemy is doing to them. ...’

“ ‘My people are living in utter wounded-ness. There is a lot of pain and bitterness. ... And I hurt because My healing is complete. ... My stripes are complete. And my people have settled down to live in their wounded-ness, their bitterness, their selfishness, and they have been told that is all salvation is about.’

“ ‘I paid for everything,’ Jesus continued, ‘It is a finished work. But they have chosen to live below it. My heart is grieving because the Day of the Lord is near. The Day is coming. ... It is a day of agony, a day of wailing, a day that no man can stand. ...’

“My people are not ready. My people are not anywhere near readiness and My heart grieves for them. I have done everything to set them free. They don’t need any other thing but that which was done.”

Beloved, if Mulinde’s testimony is not the trumpet’s call for a sea change in our hearts, what is?

CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE

What Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809–1892) writes of duty-bound soldiers in his poem *Charge of the Light Brigade* could also be written of those who put the self-will to death to live in union with the Spirit. Tennyson writes:

Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do & die,
Into the valley of Death Rode the six hundred.
Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley’d & thunder’d;
Storm’d at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred.

The generation of the Bride will do as the Light Brigade did. They will obey their Lover even when He leads them into the jaws of death and the mouth of Hell.

Courageously these intimates of Christ *suffer hardship ... as ... good soldier[s] of Christ Jesus ... and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it* (2 Timothy 2:3, Matthew 16:18).

CHAPTER 13

ANOTHER MOSES

when you search for me with all your heart (Jeremiah 29:13)

During a period of civil unrest in South Africa, my friend Ron Campbell heard a knock on his front door. On the porch stood an African he had never met. The visitor's name was Moses. Moses said rioters burned his home to the ground. All Moses had left was a Bible and an old bicycle. The Lord, Moses explained, led him to this door.

Campbell settled Moses into a room and then went about his business. Four days later the housekeeper reported that since arriving, the refugee had not eaten. Campbell hurried to find his guest prostrate on the floor. Moses was unmoved from the position in which my friend had left him four days before. Campbell was afraid Moses had died. Moses had not died. Moses was lying before the Lord. Moses was waiting on God to tell him what to do.

Moses arose and announced that he was commanded to go. Campbell asked Moses where he was going. Moses' destination

was hundreds of kilometers distant. Without food, drink or money, Moses was determined to pedal his bicycle for several days in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. Moses had waited on the Lord and now Moses was going with the Lord. The two, the Lord Jesus Christ and Moses, lived in union. The two were One.

Campbell on the other hand, was a baby Christ-ian. Because he was a baby Christ-ian, he could not comprehend Moses. He could not understand how or why Moses lived the way he lived.

Campbell thought it would be nice to carry the destitute wanderer to wherever it was he was going instead of seeing the old man pedal off without a penny. He loaded Moses' rusty bicycle into the back of his pickup truck and asked the homeless man to sit up front.

He drove Moses several hours to where the road ended. There a goat path led up into the Drakensburg Mountains. At the head of the goat path, Zulu women were washing clothes in a natural pool. Moses stepped out of the truck and told the women why he came. Some women left their washing and headed up the mountain path to bring down the men of the village. More than a hundred Zulus eventually appeared.

Once the South African villagers were assembled near the pool, Moses did what John Mulinde learned to do two-thousand miles to the north. Moses planted a church in union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

For three days Moses cast out demons, healed the sick and led most of the villagers to Christ. Then Moses baptized the new believers in the mountain pool, including the witch doctor who slithered up on his belly like a snake before being delivered of a demon.

A few hours after the water baptisms, Moses installed church leaders and promised the new Christ-ians that he would come back. Then Moses told my friend that God released them to return home. Campbell says he was dumbstruck.

Moses' church plant in the Drakensberg Mountains took four days of fasting and prayer plus three days of Gospel work. Campbell said that he had read about Christ-ians like this Moses in the Book of Acts but added, "I never thought someone could live like that today" (www.soundthetrumpet.org).

Beloved, this South African Moses is a Christ-ian living like Christ-ians are supposed to live—by the Spirit (Luke 24:49). The ways of this Moses are the ways of every Bride; they are the ways of all who live in union with the Bridegroom.

My friend's way of living until he met Moses was normal western Christ-ianity—"normal" meaning he had lots of theology, a country club-like church and next to no supernatural power or authority. After meeting Moses, Campbell changed. Now he lives like Moses—in the righteousness of Christ, with the mind of Christ, by the power of Christ. After all, the New Covenant is man's God-given opportunity to live in Christ as Christ for Christ.

THE OTHER MOSES

In Exodus 17:6 God commands the original Moses to provide water for the people by striking the rock. Moses obeys, water flows and Moses' ministry is successful. Later in Numbers 20:8, the people again need water. This time God commands Moses to provide for the needs of the people by speaking to the rock, not striking it as before. Instead of submitting to this new ministry plan and speaking to the rock, Moses does as he did earlier. Moses strikes the rock. Although Moses disobeyed, water flows

and the people drink. In both instances the needs of the people were met by God through Moses but here is the lesson:

For ministering ‘successfully’ in a noncompliant manner, Moses was barred from entering the Promised Land. Because Moses ministered to the people through his flesh and not through Christ as Christ, he paid a steep price.

Beloved, the Lord’s words, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness,” should stir up knee-knocking fear in the hearts of ministers who cannot hear the Spirit speak or lack the courage to obey His voice (Matthew 7:23). The Lord Jesus’ strong words should bring sobriety into the minds of all God’s people, you and me included. The will of God is not something to be ignored or modified, beloved. As Moses discovered, ‘successful’ ministry apart from God’s plan can cost you greatly.

As many ‘ministers’ will discover on the Day of Judgment, it can cost you your eternal life. Ministering outside of God’s will can prevent you from entering the Promised Land. It can bar you from the wedding feast. It can land you forever in the flames of hell.

Beloved, millions of men like the African Moses are about to walk, pedal and hitchhike their way across the earth in Christ, as Christ, for Christ. Kicking down the gates of Hell, they will march as the army of the Lord. They are the generation of the Bride. The Bride is coming. Will you be counted among her ranks?

THE LAST REFORMATION

Torben Søndergaard, a native of Denmark, calls the generational maturing of spiritual children into the Bride, “The Last Reformation.” Søndergaard says:

“We believe that the church is facing a last reformation. A reformation that will go deeper than any reformation before—away from church traditions, suffocating structures and countless meetings in church buildings. We believe that it is a reformation where we get back to what we read in the Acts: A simple disciple-life led by the Holy Spirit where the kingdom of God comes near in homes, on the streets, in shops—yes, all places where people are.”

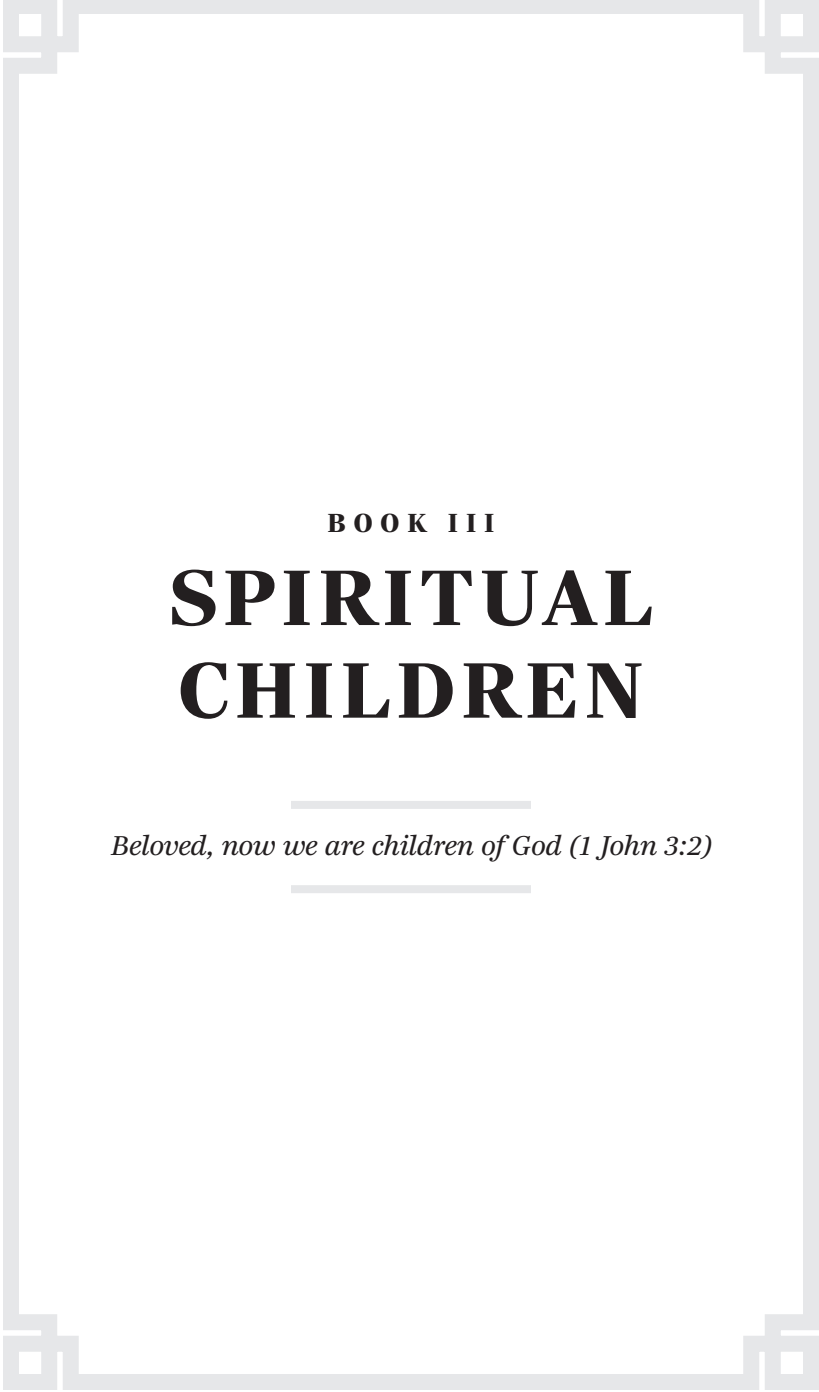
Some of Søndergaard’s early adventures are recorded in a YouTube movie entitled, *The Last Reformation: The Beginning* (www.thelastreformation.com).

Beloved, while on earth the Lord Jesus Christ held no diploma. He pastored no synagogue or church. He was awarded no earthly honorifics and was remiss to advertise His heavenly ones. If Christ was like that when He walked the Earth, why are today’s Christ-ian leaders so different than Him? If a man today lives in union with Christ, will his life not resemble Christ’s?

The Bridal generation’s focus is on the inward workings of Christ in them. The Bridal generation knows that the Kingdom is an inward working that grows outwards, not an outward show that works itself inwards. More of Christ and less of themselves, is their life’s purpose, not Christ in others. John the Baptist explains this paradigm this way: *He must increase but I must decrease* (*John 3:30*). What say you?

Beloved, there is no easy road to become the Bride. It is hard going. If you stumble, get back up. God is faithful. He will walk with you to the end.

and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (*Matthew 28:20*).



BOOK III

**SPIRITUAL
CHILDREN**

Beloved, now we are children of God (1 John 3:2)

Beloved, years ago a few believers from Pennsylvania and I discussed some of these same revolutionary ideas. An Amish couple who had been excommunicated in part for believing that salvation is by God's grace and our faith, and not by works, had brought us together (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The ideas we spoke about proved so strange to one woman's understandings that she began to wonder if I was an angel of light sent to deceive her and her church (2 Corinthians 11:13-14). As she prayed about the possibility that I was an enemy agent, the following verse jumped into her mind: *There was a man sent from God and his name was John (John 1:6)*. Once the Holy Spirit gave the sweet woman this verse, she breathed a sigh of relief.

If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority (John 7:17).

CHAPTER 1

A LIVING AND HOLY SACRIFICE

you share the sufferings of Christ (1 Peter 4:13)

One sunny Sunday morning I sat among eight hundred people in an American church service. Near the end about a dozen believers who had been practicing prophesying paraded to the front. It is written, *you can all prophesy (1 Corinthians 14:31)*.

These prophesiers-in-training began calling out individual pew-sitters and by the Spirit, encouraging them. The prophesiers' final salvo of encouragement was aimed at an uncomfortable-looking man. The boot-wearing bearded man did not fit in with that country club crowd. A female prophesier-in-training called out to the man. She said, "You have placed yourself on the altar of the Lord and you refuse to remove yourself from the flames."

The prophetic woman did not know the man but the Spirit knew him. The Spirit sustaining that man on the altar of self-sacrifice was the same Spirit that sustained Shadrach, Meshach

and Abednego in the fiery furnace twenty-six hundred years ago (Daniel 3). Had the Spirit not helped that man endure his suffering, he would have jumped from the flames to save his carnal life. He would have escaped the agonies of self-sacrifice and compromised his soul. He would not have become the Bride of Christ in this world or in any world to come.

In the same way the Spirit helped the man remain in the flames of self-sacrifice, the Spirit helped Isaac lay himself down upon the altar of stone and yield his life to God (Genesis 22:1-10). Likewise, the Spirit helped St. Stephen pray for the religious mob while they stoned him to death (Acts 7:60). The Spirit always helps the determined man yield his earthly nature so that Christ's heavenly nature might reign in him.

One difference between a believer becoming a living and holy sacrifice and a Levitical animal sacrifice is this: The believer's self-sacrifice is voluntary while the animal has no choice (Romans 12:1). What the American Church chooses to believe about being "a living and holy sacrifice" may change but God never changes. To become acceptable marriage material for the Bridegroom, we must place ourselves on the altar of self-sacrifice and endure to the end of ourselves. At the end of ourselves stands the Bridegroom awaiting His Bride.

HALF-HEARTED CHRIST-ANS

Some Christ-ian joker once said that the problem with living sacrifices is that they keep crawling off the altar. This allusion to immature Christ-ians trying to save themselves is spot-on. One Sunday you will hear these brothers shouting for God's fire to fall and the following Sunday you can watch those same saints flail away at the devil in hopes of escaping the fire God sent. Self-saving Christ-ians yearn for Jesus the Fireman. They do not want the Baptism of fire Jesus sends.

Instead of helping these immature believers crawl off the fiery altar of self-sacrifice by advising them to change their circumstances or teaching them some humanistic coping mechanisms or rebuking the devil, why not explain to them what the Baptism of Fire is? Why not encourage these immature believers to dig deeper into Jesus and press straight ahead when difficulties arise (James 1)? Why not challenge them to go to the end of themselves to meet Christ in the same way Christ went to the end of Himself to meet them? Why not lead them in a prayer where they thank their Heavenly Father for the judgments He sent into their lives?

Jesus promises spiritual gold to those who go all the way, saying, *But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved (Matthew 24:13)*. Those who share in Christ's glory, also share His suffering (Romans 8:17). There is no other way to get the gold.

ACCEPTABLE MARRIAGE MATERIAL

Hardships that result from living in union with Jesus are tools that fashion believers into acceptable marriage material (Romans 8:29). Believers who avoid unjust suffering, avoid the marriage supper of the Lamb. To live the abundant life, believers pass through the fire Jesus sends not fearing the flames (John 10:10). Jesus, the One who looks like the Son of God, always accompanies those passing through the fire He sends (Daniel 3:25). In the fire, they meet Him face to face.

The child of God nearing the age of majority (twenty spiritual years) recognizes unjust suffering as the only process that makes him acceptable to the Bridegroom (Esther 2:12). The man lovesick for Jesus learns that God uses the Destroyer to destroy the ugly self-will. The lovesick disciple discovers that his nature is eternally transformed as he seeks refuge ever deeper in the nature of his Lord Jesus Christ (Isaiah 54:16). The man on the

cusps of the marriage relationship refuses to leave the flames of unjust suffering until summoned by the king (Daniel 3:26-28). Thus it is written, *And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:4).*

PATRICK BRADY

During the Vietnam War (1955–1975) helicopter ambulance dust-off pilot Patrick Brady won the United States' highest award for valor, the Medal of Honor. In an interview Brady describes the courage required for total self-sacrifice. Brady says: "But there is one way in which we are all equal. Only one way. That's in matters of courage. All of us can have all the courage we want. And that's the key to success in life. That's important that our children look at that and say courage is a good thing. Sacrifice is a good thing. The sacrifice of a soldier is a particularly good thing because there is no bottom line to it. People will sacrifice in society but usually there's a bottom line. They're gonna make something out of it. Not a soldier. All ... [sacrifice] does for a soldier is increase his capacity for more sacrifice. And also for more responsibility. So that kind of sacrifice is very, very important. And people who have the Medal [of Honor] should be able to stand for that kind of a sacrifice."

With words akin to Brady's, St. Paul encourages maturing believers to *suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2:3)*. To grow up, we must find courage for self-sacrifice.

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go (Joshua 1:9).

CHAPTER 2

KALLAH

but in your thinking be mature (1 Corinthians 14:20)

In an orthodox marriage ceremony the officiant asks, “Who gives this woman to be married?” The officiant never asks, “Who gives this child?” To the former question the bride’s father responds, “I do.” This pattern also occurs in the spiritual marriage ceremony.

Our heavenly Father never gives children to be married. He only gives away children who have matured into adults. Beloved, contrary to Church groupthink, few who primarily relate to God as their Father are mature enough to be given in marriage to the Bridegroom. Spiritual children do not magically become spiritual adults.

Spiritual children must mature into spiritual adults. The process we undergo to become spiritual adults includes the Baptism of Fire and discipline. Both help us grow up. While the Baptism of Fire and discipline are both unpleasant, they are normal parts of the Christ-ian life, but they are not the same parts of the Christ-ian life. Discipline is different than the Baptism of fire.

The Baptism of fire is suffering as a result obedience. Discipline is suffering because of disobedience.

THE FATHER'S DISCIPLINE

After being a Christ-ian for a few years, I noticed this verse about the Father's love: *Those whom the Lord loves, He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives (Hebrews 12:6)*. The verse hit me like a hammer. Wanting to be fully loved, I saw that I needed to be fully disciplined.

I prayed, "Jesus, please discipline me any way you see fit. I want to be completely loved." While praying that prayer, I involuntarily choked on each syllable. My flesh revolted to keep those words from exiting my mouth. With a struggle, out the prayer came. Praying that prayer was a fight the Spirit helped me win.

AGE-APPROPRIATE DISCIPLINE

The Father's discipline is appropriate for each child's spiritual age. In the same way parents do not hold their kindergartner to the same behavioral standard that they hold their teenager, in the same way courts do not judge juvenile offenders as adults, so the Father's disciplinary standard is not the same among His children. While Fatherly patience is lavished upon the very young, the closer to the wedding one draws, the stricter the Father's discipline becomes. Believe me. I am experienced in what I write.

Believers who do not notice God's discipline becoming stricter in their own lives have either stopped maturing as a child (teknon) or they have not progressed from infant (nēpios) to child (teknon).

Without the Father's discipline, there is no spiritual maturity. Without maturity, there is no spiritual adult. Without an adult, there is no spiritual Bride. Without a Bride, there is no wedding feast.

NOBILITY

The Baptism of Fire is unjust suffering. It is suffering for the sake of righteousness. Unlike discipline, unjust suffering is undeserved. To bear up under unjust suffering one must be courageous, selfless, patient, determined and brave. In a word, noble. The harsher the unjust suffering is, the more noble one must be to endure to the end. Think of Christ in His great sufferings. To endure to the end, you must become as noble as Christ. That is the standard.

To be equally yoked to the Bridegroom, the Bride-to-be proves her worthiness. She demonstrates her heavenly nature and divine nobility, not just to the Father and the Bridegroom but also *to a great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1)*. Even a civil wedding requires a witness.

Suffering for the sake of righteousness finds favor with God. As it is written, *For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it [and] you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God (1 Peter 2:20)*.

Suffering unjustly is normal Christ-ianity. Enduring unjust suffering to the end is Christ.

NAMES OF UNJUST SUFFERING

Unjust suffering has at least thirteen New Testament monikers including:

1. Being persecuted for the sake of righteousness (Matthew 5:10-12)
2. Sharing the cup of Christ (Mark 10:38-39)
3. The baptism of fire (Luke 3:16)
4. Being a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1)
5. Being crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20)
6. The fellowship of His sufferings (Philippians 3:10)
7. Dying with Christ (Colossians 2:20)
8. The steadfastness of Christ (2 Thessalonians 3:5)
9. Suffering for the sake of the gospel (2 Timothy 1:8)
10. Enduring a great conflict of suffering (Hebrews 10:32)
11. The endurance of Job (James 5:11)
12. The fiery ordeal (1 Peter 4:12-19)
13. The tribulation and perseverance of Jesus (Revelation 1:9)

WORTHY

Nobly enduring unjust suffering endears us to the Lover. It transforms us into Christ-ians. At its apex, unjust suffering justifies the union of the Bride and Bridegroom, both to God and to the cloud of witnesses.

The Bridegroom explains, *And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me (Matthew 10:38)*. The Bride is worthy (axios) of the Bridegroom.

Worthy comes from the Greek transliteration 'axios.' Axios means being equal in value, weighing the same, befitting, congruous, perfectly corresponding, well matched. Axios describes Romeo

and Juliet, the star-cross'd lovers who, as Shakespeare aptly describes, are both alike in dignity.

When a believer becomes axios of the Bridegroom then he (or she) is a perfect match for the Bridegroom. The axios believer has grown worthy of becoming one with God. The goal of the Christian life is Theosis, meaning to become one with Christ. The purpose of the Christian life is to live in Christ as Christ. The New Covenant makes this possible. The New Covenant makes the Righteousness of Christ, the Mind of Christ and the Power of Christ available to those who will take it. But you must take it.

PERFECTED ONE

The person worthy of spiritual marriage is 'kallah.' Kallah translates to English as bride, daughter-in-law and wife. The root word for kallah is kalal, meaning made perfect or perfected one. If a believer is axios of the Bridegroom then that believer is kalal—made perfect.

The Lawgiver commands believers *to be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48)*. Hence the axios Bride is called, *My sister, my darling, my dove, my perfect one! in Song of Songs 5:2*.

While God's command for believers to be as perfect as God might seem unrealistic or unfair to the spiritual child, God made a way for His people to become kalal and thus kallah. The wedding invitation comes to all believers. But only believers who say yes and keep saying yes to His will for their lives no matter the cost attend the wedding feast. And it costs. It costs all. But when all is spent, All is gained.

God's original plan is that fallen man be perfected in Him, through Him and for Him so that 'the Man' will not be alone. The perfected

man is axis of the Bridegroom. To measure up to the Bridegroom, to become alike in dignity and worthy of His intimacy, believers do for Christ Jesus what Christ Jesus did for them.

As Jesus totally loved her, so she totally loves Jesus. Having loved Jesus with the love of Jesus, she becomes one with Jesus. As it is written, *For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:5).*

I am not intoning that *equality with God is a thing to be grasped (Philippians 2:6)*. Although there are many Christ-ians, there is only one Christ. Rather I am saying that Christ-ians empty themselves of themselves for His sake. The by-product of their selflessness is the taking on of His nature (Philippians 2:6-7).

COMMON-UNION

The sacrament of Communion ('common-union') celebrates the Lover's death until He comes, not His life. To the spiritual adult, Communion honors the intimate relationship the two lovers enjoy. Each died to self in hopes that their lover might live; and their hope is fulfilled in their union.

Imagine the spiritual newlyweds' first conversation:

Bride: "You died that I might live. How could You love me more?"

Bridegroom: "Beloved, you died that I might live. You could not love Me more."

This conversation or something like it is worth remembering when taking Communion, for *all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death (Romans 6:3)*. Christ's death is His expression of love for us, and our death-to-

self expresses our absolute love for Him. Our common-union with Christ exists in His death.

St. Paul echoes this sentiment when he writes, *Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, ... that I may know ... the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death (Philippians 3:8, 10).*

Hmm.... baptized into His death ... suffering the loss of everything ... fellowshipping in His sufferings ... conforming my life to His death. Who pays such a price to gain Jesus?

If you think you have missed your chance to pay the marriage price, think again. It is never too late to turn your heart wholly over to Jesus to do with as He pleases and become the Bride of Christ. Today is the day of salvation—not yesterday, not tomorrow—today.

CHAPTER 3

LINE OF DEMARCATIION

And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me (Matthew 10:38)

Don Finto in his book, *Prepare!*, writes, “Here in the West in our attempt to bring more of the unsaved to Jesus, we often do them a disservice by giving them the impression that life will be much easier when they commit their lives to following the Lord. Scripture paints a different picture. Though we have a secure and magnificent future, the path into that future is not always one of ease. Every biblical hero from Genesis to Revelation demonstrates this.”

Finto could have easily added that those who become intimates of the Lion, first die like the Lamb. Biographies of saints who became intimates with Jesus invariably reflect the difficult life of Christ. Those who become the Bride travel with Jesus into His death. It is the only way to the wedding.

There are believers who choose not to go all the way into His death. Anyone can stop wherever he wants along the narrow path. Jesus never forces any born-again believer to love Him the same way He loves them. For example, Jesus says the foolish virgins are in the kingdom of God but choose not to become the Bride because they did not spend everything they had on holy oil (Matthew 25:1-13). Abraham's nephew Lot is another good example of someone in the kingdom who chose not to become the Bride.

RIGHTEOUS LOT

Two Peter 2:7 says, *God rescued righteous Lot*. From this statement we know two things about Lot; he was both saved and righteous. We also know that Lot was remiss to lose things of this world—including himself—to gain Christ.

In Genesis 19 God commands Lot to abandon the city of Sodom and escape to the hills. Lot refuses to go. While being physically dragged from Sodom by angels, Lot finally agrees to enter a nearby town but still will not fully obey God and run to the hills. Lot refuses to forsake the world and follow his uncle Abraham up the mountain to God. Lot loves God but he loves his life too much to let it go.

Do we love our life more than God, or do we love God more than our life? Christ-ians like Lot want Jesus the Savior; but never turning their backs completely on the world by following the pathway of obedience all the way up to God, they never meet Jesus the Bridegroom.

The line of demarcation between the Father's dependents—His spiritual infants and children, and the Bridegroom's Bride, is this: The Bride carries her cross to the end of herself in hopes

that Christ might live. She follows the narrow pathway all the way to the end of herself; there she meets God face-to-face in marriage. Infants and children have not gone that far.

Jesus says, *And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me (Matthew 10:38)*. This is Jesus' invitation to travel the pathway that leads to the marriage altar.

DAY OF REGRET

For Christ-ians who do not accept the invitation, for those who refuse to grow up, the Day of the Lord will be a day of weeping:

*Alas, you who are longing for the day of the Lord,
For what purpose will the day of the Lord be to you?
It will be darkness and not light (Amos 5:18).*

The Bride never longs for the Day of the Lord because she hopes others will follow in her footsteps.

Beloved, if you need to change now so the Day of the Lord will go well with you later, do it. Change. Today is the day of salvation. Confess your sins to another believer and ask that friend to pray for you so that you might be healed (James 5:16). Jesus forgives repentant sinners. He will heal you and empower you to accept the invitation.

CHAPTER 4

THE BRIDE AND THE CHILD

you may become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4)

We have all been to weddings. The groom waits at the altar and the bride comes down the aisle on the right arm of her father. The father gives her away to the groom. The “I do-s” are all said and the aisle the woman walked down as ‘Miss Father,’ she now walks back up as ‘Mrs. Husband.’

After a woman marries, she remains a child *of* her father but she is no longer a child *to* her father. Her father gave her away. Married, the woman belongs to a new man. Belonging to a new man, the woman takes on a new identity—the identity of her husband. Receiving a new identity, the woman receives a new name—‘Mrs. Husband,’ because she has taken on a greater nature.

The natural bride who subjects herself to her natural husband also receives a new nature, a little at first and more as the marriage matures. The nature she receives is that of her natural husband.

She becomes one with him; he does not become one with her. The natural must proceed the spiritual (1 Corinthians 15:46).

While the child, 'Miss Father,' will never manage the household checkbook, 'Mrs. Husband' might because *the heart of her husband trusts in her and he will have no lack of gain (Proverbs 31:11)*. The spiritual implications of this verse are awesome to consider.

Just as the Lord Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of the Father and the two are One essence, so the spiritual Bride is One essence with her Bridegroom. The Bride sits at the Lord Jesus Christ's right hand and the two live in union as One (Ephesians 1:20, John 10:30). The spiritual Bride is a partaker of His *divine nature (2 Peter 1:4)*. This is true in the spiritual realm because it first became true in the natural realm.

In the natural, Jacob called Rachel his 'right hand.' We know Jacob thought of Rachel this way because in Genesis 35:18 Jacob names their son, Benjamin. 'Benjamin' means 'son of my right hand.' The wife at her husband's right hand is one reality of a godly marriage.

Thus two important differences between the believer who is a spiritual child and the believer who has matured into the spiritual Bride are 'name' and 'nature.'

We could say 'name' and 'nature' are the same and the difference is singular, meaning the Father and His child are two as two while the Bridegroom and Bride are two as One. This is also correct.

SUBMIT VERSUS OBEY

Another difference between the spiritual child and the spiritual Bride are their responsibilities to God. Let's start with their natural responsibilities in their earthly relationships.

The Bible uses one verb to describe a natural child’s responsibility to his earthly father and another verb to describe the natural bride’s responsibility to her earthly husband. While these two verbs are different, each causes the same result: Compliance with the man’s will, whether the man be the child’s father or the bride’s husband.

Household Position	Responsibility	Inference	Result
Child of God	Obey the Father (Ephesians 6:1)	No choice	Compliance
Bride of Christ	Submit to the Bridegroom (Ephesians 5:24)	Choice	Compliance
	Fear/Respect the Bridegroom (Ephesians 5:33)	Choice	Compliance

God instructs the natural child to obey (*hypakouō*) his father (Ephesians 6:1). Conversely, the natural wife must submit to (*hypotassō*) and fear (*phobeō*) her husband (Ephesians 5:24, 5:33).

These three verbs—to obey, to submit and to fear—yield the same result: Compliance with the man’s will. However the wife’s responsibility ‘to submit’ and ‘to fear’ her husband carries a weightier connotation than the child’s duty ‘to obey’ his father.

‘To submit’ indicates that the wife bears total responsibility for the results of her choice. The wife can comply with or rebel against the desires of her husband. Likewise, ‘to fear’ implies that the wife may choose how she regards her husband. She can honor or dishonor him.

The wife may choose to view her husband with contempt or she may decide to treat him with respect. Because the wife is an adult, how she treats her husband is her choice. Importantly, the

wife's treatment of her husband is not an involuntary reaction to his behavior, to her circumstances or emotions. To honor or dishonor him is her hour-to-hour choice.

Regardless of her husband's character, the family's financial condition or her emotional state, the wife is an adult, responsible to God for her behavior. How she conducts herself towards the man she consented to marry is her daily decision. To say that her behavior depends upon her husband's behavior might sound wise to worldly ears but such counsel scorns Christ and despises the Christ-ian life. God has the power to change any circumstance he wishes to change, including a bad-tempered husband.

CROWN OF THORNS

Men who observe a woman treating her husband with contempt intuitively understand that the woman acts disgracefully. Men are hardwired to sense disrespect.

The only godly choice the disgraced husband has is to endure the shame and love the woman in her foolishness. The husband is an adult. He chose to marry the woman. Because a godly husband has the Holy Spirit, he chooses his response to his wife's ungodly behavior.

The disgraceful wife belongs to her husband in the same fashion as the crown of thorns belongs to Christ. Christ could have refused the crown of thorns but He chose to endure it (Matthew 26:53). Christ suffered the contempt of the one He chose to marry, dying to Himself in hopes that she might live. *Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).*

If a man will mature into the marriage relationship with Christ then he must learn to do as Jesus did—endure the cross and

despise the shame. There is no other way to the wedding. There is no alternate route to the right hand of the Bridegroom.

A MAN I KNOW

A man I know once gave his wife flowers. The woman immediately shoved the flowers petals-first into the kitchen sink's garbage disposal. As she sent the man's gift of love down the sewer, the woman cursed the man and spit on him. The man stood firm. He endured the shame. As he endured, a supernatural light encompassed the man. Supernal peace encapsulated him. The man saw the heavenly light around him. He felt God's saturating peace.

Nothing his raging wife said or did over the next few minutes penetrated the light or disturbed his tranquility. Looking out through the protective light, the man said the woman's face appeared demonically disfigured. The man said it seemed his wife was not in control of herself. The man felt empathy towards his wife. His heart hurt for her.

Only once out of hundreds of times that his wife raged at him did that man experience the supernatural light and peace. Even without the comfort of the Light, he went all the way for her.

KINSMAN REDEEMER

Carrying our own crosses as we do, we encourage husbands with shameful wives to stand fast, reminding them that they are a type and shadow of their wife's Kinsman Redeemer—the Lord Jesus Christ. As a godly man endures the shame his wife heaps upon him, he shares in the sufferings of Christ. He stands in the purifying fire (1 Corinthians 16:13). And stand he must, for *how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?* (1 Corinthians 7:16).

The godly husband endures in hopes that his wife might share in his Redeemer's glory (Romans 8:17). He stands in the gap for her even as the first Adam sacrificed himself for Eve, even as the Son of Adam sacrificed Himself for us. *And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman was thoroughly deceived and became a wrongdoer (1 Timothy 2:14).*

Beloved, there is no difference between the crown of thorns Christ wore and the godly man patiently enduring the disrespect and contempt of his wife. Both Sons of Adam (the earthy and the heavenly) bear the shame in hopes that their beloved might live. *For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23).*

THE WIFE'S CHOICE

A female child receives discipline from her father but the disrespectful wife—even a wife like Hosea's Gomer or the flower-grinder, cannot be disciplined. This is another difference between the spiritual child and the spiritual Bride.

The wife cannot be disciplined because she no longer belongs to her father; he gave her away. The wife belongs to her husband. Married people intuitively know husbands cannot discipline their wives. A wife is an adult responsible to God for her behavior. She is not responsible to her husband. She is responsible to God (Psalm 51:4).

A wife may help build her husband's house or she may choose to tear it down (Proverbs 14:1). How she chooses to behave is unrelated to her circumstances, her emotions or her husband's behavior. She is an adult. Her behavior is her choice.

Inside the kingdom, the only disagreement this last sentence will face is from babies in Christ and spiritual children who have not matured enough to carefully considered married life.

A CONTENTIOUS WIFE

It is written, *A continual dripping on a rainy day and a quarrelsome wife are alike; to restrain her is to restrain the wind or to grasp oil in one's right hand (Proverbs 27:15-16 ESV).*

The husband of a wife who argues is not responsible for his wife's actions even if those actions destroy his own house, be that house his body (as Christ was crucified) or his family (as Jerusalem was burned and its inhabitants slaughtered and enslaved).

The woman who through argument and rebellion spreads evil in her husband's house is accountable to God for the destruction she allows. The godly husband tries to save what she is destroying but he cannot restrain her. *To restrain her is to restrain the wind or to grasp oil in one's right hand.* The wife is an adult, responsible to God. The husband is called to love his wife with his life and then let God deal with her. If she does not repent then she will succeed in destroying her husband's house because a *house divided cannot stand (Matthew 12:25).*

Beloved, I know of the things I write. I am familiar with the grief and acquainted with such loss. My hope is in God alone. The pathway of obedience is not an easy road to walk but it is the only way to the wedding feast.

CHAPTER 5

SELF-DISCIPLINE

a virtuous wife is the crown of her husband (Proverbs 12:4)

Harvey Dick was an Army colonel who loved me when I was unlovable. Being a troublemaker, I made it onto the Colonel's prayer list. Every morning that man prayed for me and other unlovable young men he loved with God's love. Twenty-five years after first crossing paths with Colonel Dick, that man of God passed away. I was still on his list.

At his funeral, it seemed he spoke to me from his place among the *great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1)*. He said, "John, I didn't know. I didn't know. I didn't know."

Hearing him speak into my spiritual ears, my heart shook. I burst out crying and had to walk away. During his life on earth, everyone always knew exactly what that man meant when he spoke. This time was no different. Although he said the same thing three times to me from heaven, there was no question in my heart as to what he meant.

With the first “I didn’t know” Colonel Dick meant he did not know about my relationship with Jesus. With the second “I didn’t know,” he meant he never had a clue on earth how wonderful heaven was going to be, and the third “I didn’t know” meant that he never imagined how powerful his prayers had been. Now that he was in heaven he knew that his prayers saved my troubled life and the lives of other young men, too. But here is the point, beloved.

From his new perspective in the heavenly host, Colonel Dick saw greatness from God’s perspective. In godly order, his own place on the ‘great list’ was last. He saw truth in layers.

Like the Colonel’s new layered vision, the Bride’s heart is also layered. Her heart is layered with love. The depths of her heart’s layered love has the power to work self-repentance. Let me explain.

GET-OUT-OF-JAIL-FREE CARD

Two weeks following my vision of marriage to Jesus, He said, “I will no longer discipline you.”

Foolishly I thought I had a pocket full of the Monopoly board game’s “Get-Out-of-Jail-Free” cards. I proceeded to disobey. I had not been disobedient for years. As I was disobeying, I saw a vision.

In the vision I was playing in a pig sty while wearing once-beautiful wedding clothes. While I defiled myself with pigs, my Beloved stood beyond the pig sty fence, under a grove of green trees about thirty meters away. When I looked up from the mud hole, I saw Him standing there. Jesus wept.

Immediately I thought: A wife *who shames him is like rottenness in his bones (Proverbs 12:4)*. My heart grieved because I had hurt my Lover’s heart. I had wounded the Lover of my soul so deeply as to make Him cry.

Besides grieving Jesus, I next realized that I had harmed my Lover's house. A wise man once wrote in part, "every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main," going on to explain that when anyone suffers, we all suffer (John Donne, 1571-1631). What that knowing churchman understood is that each of us is connected through God to all humanity. Because I was now intimately related to God, I was intimately related to God's house. My sin harmed people that my Lover loved.

Besides hurting Jesus and others, of least importance, my playtime in the muck harmed me.

From the pigsty that was the order I saw it in: Foremost I hurt Jesus; second I hurt His people, and last I hurt me. My heart ached all the way through. Broken-hearted does not describe what I felt. I was devastated. Crushed.

LAYERED LOVE, LAYERED PAIN

When the Bride sins, the layered pain she feels causes her repentance. Her heart is layered with the love of God. Her heart hurts so much at hurting her Lover that she self-disciplines. It is not a perfect life that exempts the Bride from the Father's discipline. Rather, the Bride no longer needs the Father's discipline. When her sin is pointed out to her, she is so broken hearted that she disciplines herself. Spiritual children receive the Father's discipline because their hearts are not yet saturated with the love of God. Children lack the heart-motivation to always repent.

TESHUVA, DAVID'S KEY

A bone-crushingly honest book on the power of heartfelt repentance is *Teshuva, David's Key* by David Davenport. This

autobiography chronicles the author's trail of brokenness and subsequent restoration through the power of Biblical repentance.

If you took a detour off the narrow path and need encouragement to stand up and get going again, this story will help you. Write me a letter; I will pray for you too.

CHAPTER 6

THE YOUTHFUL ADULT

may it be done to me according to your word (Luke 1:38)

The Bible compares a spiritual child to a Bride in the opening chapter of Luke. The old priest Zacharias is the spiritual child. Mary the teenaged mother of Jesus, is the spiritual Bride.

Luke begins by recounting how the angel Gabriel first delivers one miracle message from God to the priest Zacharias and then a second logic-defying dispatch to Mary. Zacharias and Mary respond to the angel's messages by speaking virtually the same words of unbelief. Unbelief is sin. Both the seasoned priest and the teenager sin through their responses to God's words.

Zacharias responds to God's messenger by saying, *How will I know, for I am an old man?* (Luke 1:18).

Mary, using an idiom, asks Gabriel, *How can this be, since I do not know a man?* (Luke 1:34).

While Zacharias' and Mary's sins of unbelief are the same, their motivation for repentance differs. These motivational differences reveal their spiritual relationship with God. Zacharias, the chronological adult, reveals himself to be a spiritual child while the chronological child, Mary, proves herself to be a spiritual adult.

The elderly priest is disciplined with muteness so he can learn to govern his mouth. The Father's discipline is Zacharias' motivation for repentance. Although Zacharias is righteous and chronologically advanced, and although he is a priest of God Most High, Zacharias remains a spiritual child. Children are disciplined by the Father. Zacharias is disciplined for unbelief.

Mary, however, repents of her own volition. Mary repents because her heart hurts over what she has done. She senses that her response has dishonored her Lord and she disciplines herself. Mary self-disciplines, saying, *Behold, [I am] the slave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word (Luke 1:38).*

Repenting for unbelief and accepting the Lord's will for her life (however singular God's message proved itself to be), Mary's heart professes if not her mouth, *The wife must revere her husband ... just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord (Ephesians 5:33, 1 Peter 3:6).*

BIG-L LORD

The preceding Biblical text about wives revering their husbands is found in both Ephesians 5:33 and 1 Peter 3:6. This command reveals that a woman's natural husband is to her a type of big-L Lord. The manner in which the believing wife chooses to behave towards her little-l lord (her natural husband) is the same fashion in which she acts towards her big-L Lord. There is no difference. The natural reality reveals the spiritual truth.

A believing wife cannot love her big-L Lord in heaven more than she respects, honors and obeys her little-l lord on earth. In other words, a woman's love for God is measured by the degree to which she submits to her natural husband.

The wife who, like Sarah, fully submits to her natural husband loves God with all of her heart, mind, soul and strength. Such a woman lives in obedience to the First Great Command (Matthew 22:37); she trusts God to save her even if her natural husband pimps her out as Abraham did Sarah.

The Christ-ian wife who partially submits to her natural husband, partially trusts in herself to save herself. Such a woman is spiritually immature. She needs God's discipline. The wife who disrespects her husband dishonors God the Father. She is a spiritual child, an infant or an unbeliever. Whatever the partially submissive Christ-ian wife is, she is not the Bride of Christ.

Christ-ians who refuse to obey God in their natural marriage never meet God in spiritual marriage. The natural must precede the spiritual. There is no way around it. Difficult circumstances never create valid excuses for rebellion to God's marital precepts. Look again at how Sarah behaved when her husband, Abraham, prostituted her (Genesis 12:10-20, 20:1-18). Sarah is the mother of our faith.

MARY THE ADULT

Early in her marriage to Joseph, Mary exemplifies the faith of Sarah, the faith of a spiritual adult. If this teenage girl, the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, had not been so spiritually mature, what would have happened to her son, Jesus? Think of it.

Mary awoke the Child in the middle of the night, helped load the donkey with the family's household possessions and before

daybreak without saying goodbyes, began trekking out of the Promised Land towards a pagan land.

Mary did all this sans complaint because her husband woke her up, saying, “Mary, I had a dream. We must move to Egypt now.”

And Mary obeyed her natural husband—in everything.

Mary esteemed her natural husband as her little-l lord because she loved her big-L Lord more than her own life. No wonder Mary is venerated. If you are a woman, could you do what Mary did and not be afraid?

Could you be that ‘crazy’ submissive to your natural husband this very night because he awoke you saying, “I had a dream, my wife. Pack quickly. The family must move to Mexico now, right now, this very hour.”

Or if you are a man, would you act that ‘nutty’ because you had an inspired dream? Would you wake your wife, pack the children into the car and head straight for the international border without telling anyone goodbye?

Or would you “put out a fleece,” submit the “bold idea” to your American pastor, the prayer team or small group, and await a word of confirmation, reassuring your worrisome self that wisdom is found in *a multitude of counsellors* (*Proverbs 11:14, 15:22 and 24:6*)?

A MULTITUDE OF COUNSEL

Beloved, a multitude of counsel is any word spoken by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Everything the Holy Spirit reveals to a man is the testimony of three witnesses; as the Bible explains, *Every word (rhēma) shall be confirmed by the mouth of*

two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1).

As the spiritual Bride travels the narrow path to her wedding, counting her life as nothing in order to gain the Bridegroom, the day will come when she (or he) discovers that she (or he) is just as ‘crazy’ obedient to the Spirit as Joseph and Mary were because she (or he) loves God just as Joseph and Mary did—with all of their heart, with all of their mind, with all of their soul and with all of their strength (Matthew 22:37). ‘Common sense’ was not allowed to prevent God’s will being done in their lives.

When the childish church folk advise the Bride to ‘put out a fleece’ and get ‘a word of confirmation’ before taking such ‘radical’ action, she smiles at them with the smile of Mona Lisa, thinking to herself, *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me (John 10:27)*. Then she obeys her Lover, giving no second thought to the children’s chattering voices or the self-saving cries of her flesh.

Because the Bridal heart is in tune with the Lover’s voice, the Bride does not need man to confirm in public what her Beloved whispered to her in secret. Indeed, *The secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him, and He will make them know His covenant (Psalm 25:14)*.

The Bride might gently reply to the ‘concerned’ American church folk by saying, “The Father affirms it, the Son affirms it, the Holy Spirit affirms it and I affirm it—yes, a multitude of witnesses affirms God’s message to me.”

Fixing her eyes on Jesus, despising the shame for the joy set before her, the Bride-to-be carries her cross to her Calvary singing: I Have Decided to Follow Jesus.

Suffering the death of her self-will (and sometimes the loss of relationships) for the sake of love, she becomes a reflection of the Lover who will have a lover in His image (Genesis 1:27). Following the Way all the way, she becomes worthy of marriage to the King of the universe. Truly, *His bride has made herself ready (Revelation 19:7)*.

If the Lover has told you to do something that is not yet fully done, before reading further teshuva, repent. Put your feet back on the pathway of obedience that leads to the marriage supper of the Lamb. As Jesus said through one of our prophets, “Humility and obedience always lead to Me.”

Or have we somewhere better to go? *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God (John 6:68-69)*. Amen.

CHAPTER 7

IN EVERYTHING

subject to their husbands in everything (Ephesians 5:24)

American humorist Samuel Clemens (1835-1910) wrote under the pen name Mark Twain. Twain dryly observed, “It ain’t the parts of the Bible that I can’t understand that bother me, it’s the parts I do understand.”

Ephesians 5:23-24 might have been one of those plainly worded Bible parts that bothered the man. Like a fly in the kitchen, this Bible verse can bother Christ-ians who, like the spiritually immature Lot, still have the love of the world inside them.

The passage says, *But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be subject to their husbands in everything.*

“In everything” is rendered from the Greek transliteration *en pas*.

En pas means ‘in each and every thing, always.’

Not a lot of wiggle room there, beloved, but plenty of meaning to cause worldly minded folks to worm as the flesh rebels.

A PECULIAR PEOPLE

The woman who subjects herself to this royal command reveals herself to be a daughter of Sarah (1 Peter 3:1-6). Abiding in subjection to her husband—even as the true Church does—godly beauty becomes her essence; and with glory—not thorns, she crowns her husband’s head.

People who always try to fit their Christ-ian lives into societal norms instead of struggling to become godly, war with God. They refuse to grow up. Beloved, know for certain that a square peg has a better chance of sliding into a round hole than a maturing believer does of fitting in with the world. Because Christ is socially unacceptable, maturing Christ-ians are unacceptable to the world. They even clash with the worldly heart-parts in other Christ-ians.

Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9 KJV).

IN EVERYTHING ALWAYS

When Church leaders and husbands daily struggle to obey Christ in everything, it is easier for wives to understand their deep need to subject themselves to their husbands. When so-called leaders and husbands do not earnestly desire to obey Christ, they can become stumbling blocks to wives who would.

No matter the quality of her leadership, the wife who refuses to struggle to align herself with God’s commands for her natural marriage forfeits the glories God desires to grant her in spiritual marriage. In the end, there is no way around it. To become the Bride, a wife must crucify her flesh by submitting to her husband in everything.

EVAN ROBERTS

Evan Roberts, the young evangelist often credited for igniting the 1904 Welsh Revival, preached four main points, one of which was: “Be ready to obey the Holy Spirit instantly.” The Bridal generation agrees with Roberts. She obeys instantly.

The Bridal generation is populated with daughters of Sarah—those Christians who have become a crown of gold upon their Husband’s head. These people are not searching for escape clauses to difficulties or high-sounding reasons to disobey their husbands. They are looking for ways for Christ to change their hearts so they can overcome their worldly nature and party at the marriage feast.

What about you?

IF—THEN IMAGINATIONS

Only childish and ungodly marriage ‘authorities’ rattle off un-Biblical reasons for wives to rebel against their husbands. Such counselors vainly imagine an “if/then” phrase precedes God’s command for wives to submit to their husbands. These so-called counselors mislead the immature by saying things like, “If your husband loves you as Christ loves the church, then submit to him.”

Beloved, no such qualifying sentiment appears in the Biblical text. No “if/then” phrasing exists. This ungodly teaching is the elixir of Peter Pan’s ‘Never Never Land,’ that fantastical place where children never grow up. It is a lie from the unseen enemy.

God says wives submit to your husband *en pas*—in each and every thing always because He knows what is best for wives. He loves them. When the Church chooses to do God’s will in its

natural marriages then the glorious realities of spiritual marriage will come into focus for us all.

SARAH

When Abraham instructed his wife, Sarah, to prostitute herself not once but twice, Sarah's self-will had reason to protest. An ungodly counselor might have said, "Sarah, you're totally justified in disobeying your weaselly husband. God does not want you to sleep with Pharaoh. Tell Pharaoh the truth about your husband's lies. Your husband needs to grow up. Let God discipline Abraham through Pharaoh. You are a princess, Sarah, not a playboy's prostitute."

Thankfully Sarah was not the kind of Christ-ian who loves to live in 'Never Never Land' with her 'Daddy-God' and never grow up. No, Sarah refused to save herself. Either God would save her or she would not be saved. Sarah humbled herself before God and walked straight through that fiery trial, not once but twice.

Sarah trusted God to save her and then she obeyed her earthly husband to the end of herself. Devotion to God constrained Sarah to submit to Abraham *en pas*—in everything. Beloved, since Sarah's time on earth, nothing has changed. As it was for the mother of our faith, so it remains for her spiritual daughters. So it remains for us all.

If a daughter of Sarah fails to subject herself to her husband in everything, her heart breaks. Heartbroken, she repents. She self-disciplines. She climbs out of the pig sty and presses on, yielding her life to God, hoping Christ might live in her.

Wives who willingly struggle to subject themselves to their husbands in everything crown both their little-h husband and their big-H Husband with the radiance of a faith more precious

than gold (1 Peter 1:7). As it is written, *A virtuous wife is the crown of her husband*” (Proverbs 12:4). *And on his head were many crowns*” (Revelation 19:12).

Do you want to be one of Christ’s crowns?

CHAPTER 8

WEDDING PREPARATIONS

today is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2)

I lay face down on my bathroom floor, spending time with Jesus—nothing unusual there. But this day I was taking inventory, making sure I had surrendered every corner of my life to Him.

One holdout stood out: beer. Alcohol is a strong drug, and I liked it. I had never handed it over. Through tears I prayed, “Jesus, if You want beer drinking, I’ll quit. I don’t know how, but if You want it, I’ll find a way.”

I meant every word. I love Jesus.

Two days later He changed my taste buds. Beer became impossible to swallow. For two months I still carried a bottle in my hand—old habit—stopping at the store to buy more I would never drink. Finally I saw how ridiculous that pattern was and put it down for good.

Years later, multiple surgeries left me addicted to prescription painkillers. One day my unbelieving doctor said he was taking me off opioids. Inside me something dark and ugly rose up screaming “No!”

Outwardly calm, I realized God had placed my body under this doctor’s authority. To submit to God meant submitting my body to the doctor’s care.

What could I say to my Lover but “Okay”?

The instant I said “okay” aloud to the doctor, the addiction broke. It sounded like a wooden yardstick snapping in two. The darkness left.

The Lover may not break your bonds the same way He broke mine. But when He says it is time to let go of some earthly chain, listen. If you love Him more than your life, He will give you power to obey.

Obedience prepares you for the wedding. It is the only way to mature.

NO NEED TO RUSH

We do not rush ahead of the Lover, guessing at commands He has not yet spoken. Moses stretched his hand over the sea, then the waters divided, then the people crossed on *dry land* (*Exodus 14:21-22*). Moses did not rush God’s timing. He waited and obeyed.

Forty years later God told the priests to step into the flooded Jordan—and they did (*Joshua 3:13-15*). The priests were not looking for a bath. They wanted to obey. Into the water they went.

Jesus told Peter, “Come,” then Peter climbed out of the boat (Matthew 14:28). Peter did not dive in blindly. He waited for the command, then obeyed.

The Bride-to-be never acts on what she thinks should happen no matter how ‘good’ or ‘right’ it seems. She waits for God to speak and then moves in union with His will. Jesus prepares her for the wedding as she faithfully follows Him.

Beloved, accepting the invitation means doing only what you know to do today. Today *is the day of salvation* (2 Corinthians 6:2). Today is the day of Christ.

In the New Covenant, only the commands written on our hearts and whispered in our ears must be obeyed (Jeremiah 31:33; Isaiah 30:21). We never load ourselves or others with burdens not meant for today.

We do not do what God commands others unless He tells us to join them. We do not rush ahead. While we never yield ground to the enemy, we never start battles God has not ordered.

GIVE ME MY PEACE!

One day I had no peace. I blamed the Lord. All day at work I muttered, “God, I’ve done everything You asked. Where’s my peace? You’re going to give it to me!”

I did not see it then but the Lord was leading me into a battle that needed to be fought.

That night, family duties done, I grabbed my Bible and locked myself in a closet. I shouted at heaven, “I’m not leaving until You give me Your peace! I’ve put You first, my wife second, my child third, my job fourth. My life is ordered right. No sin I can see.

You're not holding up Your end! Unless this house burns or it's time for work, I stay right here!"

I shook my fist at heaven, meaning every word.

ON THIN ICE

As I waited, a quiet thought came: "Look in the back of Jonah." I opened my Bible to Jonah 4. Two verses jumped out—the Lord asking Jonah: Do you have good reason to be angry? (Jonah 4:4, 4:9).

I thought, "Boy, Jonah was on thin ice."

Then I froze. The Lord was speaking to me. I was the one on thin ice before the King. I repented instantly. Anger vanished. But peace still had not come. I stayed on the closet floor.

BEATEN BY A BOXER

I slipped into a supernatural state—vision, trance, dream—I do not know. White letters and numbers streaked left to right across a black background, too fast to read. Then a few stopped: Is. 44:6.

I snapped back out of the trance and opened my Bible to Isaiah 44:6.

As I looked at my answer, each letter, number, and mark leaped off the page like a boxer's glove, smashing my face. I reeled as every jot and tittle pounded my soul. It took everything to keep reading.

When I got to the end, the words struck me like thunder: *Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last; besides Me there is no god' (Isaiah 44:6).*

LITTLE ‘G’ GODS

When I reached the end of the verse, the message was crystal clear. The Lord showed me I had made little-g gods of everything on my list after Him. My wife, my child, my job, my church, my friends, my mind, my possessions—each an idol.

My life was saturated with spiritual adultery.

The Lord drove it home, making clear the meaning. He is not just to be first on my list of lovers. He is supposed to be first, second, third—everything. Anything else in His place is a false lover from hell, stealing my peace, keeping me from the wedding feast.

That night in the closet I repented of worshiping idols, of loving other lovers—for spiritual adultery, far worse than the natural kind.

I chose the Bride’s path: love God alone, no matter the cost. When I did, His peace immediately flooded into me like a deep river. *These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace (John 16:33).*

I confess I have not always kept that peace. My self-will lurks in the shadows, trying to turn my heart to other lovers. I hate my self-will. May it die daily so Christ can live.

After that night in the closet, everything on my old list was wiped off and in its place was God. Loving God alone prepared me to love others rightly. Jesus will do the same for anyone who loves Him with all of his heart, all of his mind, all of his soul, and all of his strength.

PREPARED

One dark night a gunman pointed a pistol at my face. Ex-Special Forces, twice abandoned by wives, PTSD raging through his mind, alcohol soaking his blood stream, my friend was aiming to kill me.

When he saw I loved him and was not afraid to die, he turned the gun on himself. With love, I was saved from him and he was saved from himself.

(By the way, Jesus can make you calm and focused when a gun is at your head or pressed to the temple of someone you love.)

Beloved, I am no hero. Jesus saved us both. Before that night with the gunman, God had trained me in the ‘minor leagues’ of love—attacked with fists, knives, curses, and learning to forgive every time. I had jumped out of the path of cars trying to run me over. Once I talked a man with a loaded shotgun out of suicide.

Because I had made Jesus my Alpha and Omega, when the gunman’s barrel stared me down, I was ready to lay down my life so that man might live. Perfectly calm. Perfectly peaceful.

Jesus stood before Pilate the same way—peaceful, clear, prepared (Matthew 27:13-14).

With the Lord’s help you can be just as ready to sacrifice your life for love. Christ Jesus is no respecter of persons. What He did for one, He will do for any who go all the way.

This mark of maturity—humbling oneself unto death—is shared by the whole generation of the Bride, men and women alike, doubly so in the women. Here is what I mean.

DOUBLY SO

Chromosomes are tiny recipes inside our cells. The twenty-third pair decides what sex we will be. Males have X and Y shaped chromosomes. Females have XX.

If the X foreshadows the cross, and the Y hints at the triune God, then the male XY points to the sacrificial cross (the X) of the triune God (the Y).

The female XX pictures the Bride: first claiming His cross for salvation (first X), then taking up her own cross (second X) to become His worthy one. At least it seems so to me.

CHAPTER 9

AGE OF MAJORITY

when I became a man (1 Corinthians 13:11)

My favorite parts of Sunday morning meetings in today's American Church are worship before the preaching and then talking with the saints after the service. A man of God I know reads his Bible during the preaching no matter what is being preached. Another prophet friend heads to the lobby for a cup of coffee as soon as the service takes a wacky turn. Some Sundays, he says, he drinks a lot of coffee.

While the American Church is currently founded on pastor-teachers, there is no New Testament record of a pastor or teacher founding or leading a church. (How in the world did we come to this?) When the generation of the Bride appears, the foundation of the Church will revert to apostles and prophets, as the Master Builder originally intended. The Master Builder says, *God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-20).*

Apostles and prophets understand that they support the Church, not the other way around. Being the foundation, apostles and prophets are under the Church, not over it. Their heart is to build Christ in others because Christ has revealed Himself in them. Apostles and prophets are the first to wash the feet of the saints, be that foot-washing literal or figurative. The humility of true apostles and the tender-heartedness of true prophets proves how well they understand that Christ alone is over the Church.

TRUE APOSTLES

According to the Scriptures, real apostles appear as men condemned to death, last of all, a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. They are fools for Christ's sake, often appearing weak, without honor, hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, roughly treated and—like the South African Moses—sometimes homeless. Apostles work with their hands because God's power is in their hands. They are reviled and persecuted by the false Church and false apostles, yet they endure. When slandered, they forgive. Apostles are the scum of the world, the dregs of all creation and the foundation of Christ's true Church (1 Corinthians 4:9-13). As one of them explains, God speaks to all of His sheep, but He only speaks about His Church to His apostles and His prophets (*The Apostolic Ministry Returns*, Terry Bennett, 2025).

In my travels I have met four apostles, one in Africa and three in America. Not one of them would tell you he was an apostle if you paid him to let you in on the secret.

When the Church grows up, we will do away with childish things like calling men 'apostles' who fit no part of the Biblical description (1 Corinthians 13:11). As we mature, we will quit acting like pastors and teachers are the foundation of the Church and we will stop pretending that the Spirit speaks to such men about His Church. When the Bride appears, she will correct our ways.

CHAPTER 10

THE MYTHOLOGICAL CHILD-BRIDE

*When I was a child, I used to ... reason like a child
(1 Corinthians 13:11)*

What would happen if a spiritual child somehow finagled his way into union with God? What if a child married the Bridegroom? The answer, beloved, is grim. That is why God will never allow it.

The spiritual child is unfit for marriage. He still withholds something of himself for himself. He has not died fully to self so Christ can live. He has yet to grasp the price of absolute selflessness. He has never bled out to his end.

A child may talk about total sacrifice—may even teach it—but his heart knows as much about absolute selflessness as a playground kid pretending to be married, knows about marriage. A spiritual child cannot fathom what Christ endured for him because he has never endured to his own end for Christ. He has not paid the marriage price.

CHILDREN REQUIRE DISCIPLINE

If a child somehow became the Bride, he would be a 'child-bride.' As a child, he would still need discipline. But as the Bride, he lies beyond the Father's discipline. That's Catch-22.

Cut off from discipline, the mythological child-bride lacks motive to repent. Unrepentant, he cannot dwell in intimacy with the king of righteousness. So the child-bride gets dismissed—divorced—from the Lord's house with no way back. Tossed out like Adam and Eve from the Garden, the gate bolted shut forever.

Return demands repentance. Children choose to repent through experiencing the Father's rod. The Bride cannot be disciplined. She repents because of her love for her Lover. This is why God bars anyone clinging to even a smidgeon of childishness from the marriage bed. To become the Bride, we must grow up into Christ. We must possess His selfless heart.

The Father must first see Christ crucified in us before He gives us away. If some part of our flesh still exists, He knows we will willingly crucify it when the time comes. Crucified with Christ, we no longer live—Christ lives in us. Christ is the Gospel.

TWENTY YEARS

The spiritual age at which one becomes the Bride is twenty spiritual years. Twenty spiritual years is the age of majority, the age when one matures from a spiritual child into a spiritual Bride. How do I know this? Let me explain.

In the book of Numbers, Israelites aged twenty years and upwards are classified by God as adults. Adults are held accountable for grumbling (Numbers 14:27-31). The children who grumbled were to some degree unaccountable and hence undeserving of

the law's full measure of punishment—death outside of Eretz Israel (the land of Israel). God ensured that every adult grumbler died before the nation of Israel entered the Promised Land. Adults are accountable for their choices. Children, however, need discipline and time to grow up.

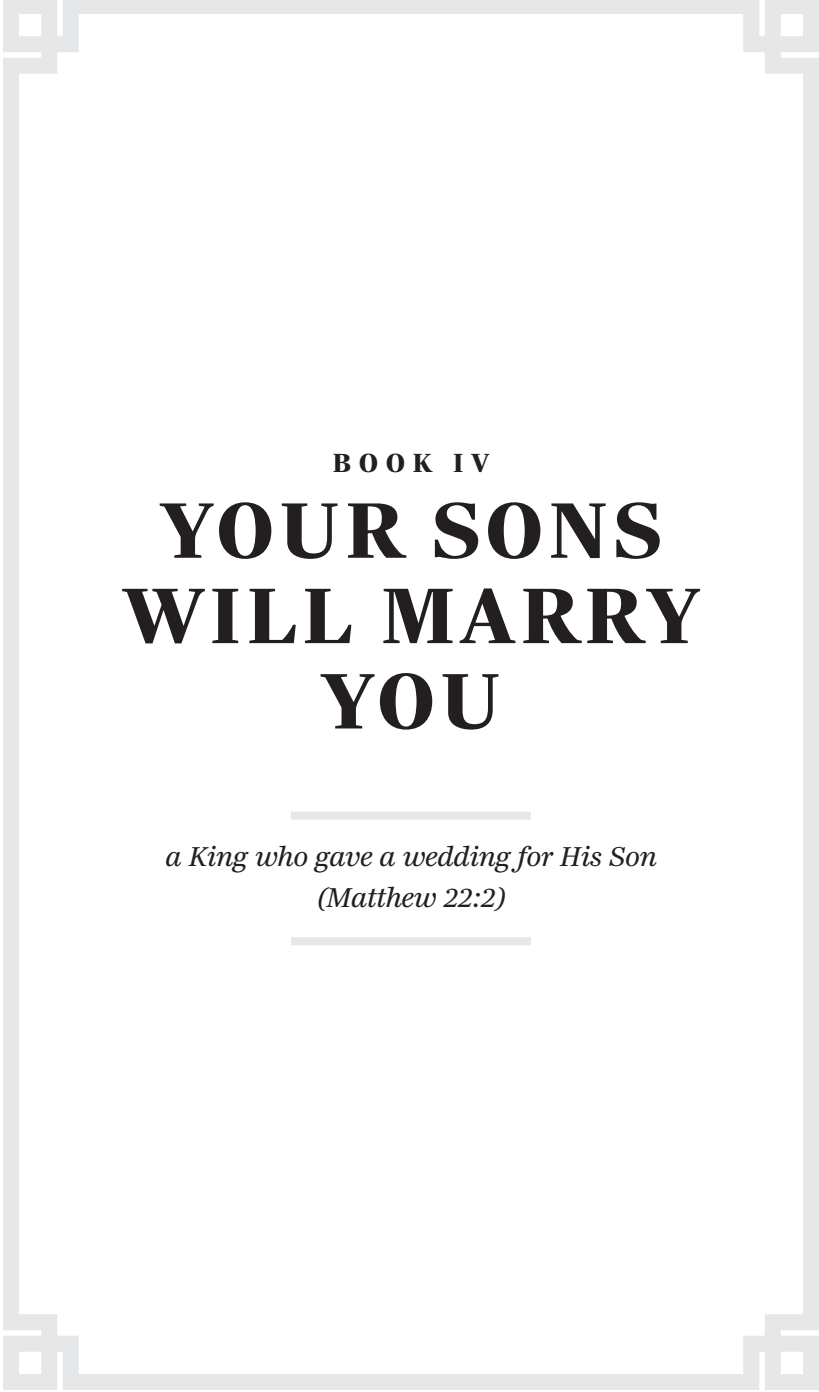
In a similar manner, the Mosaic law requires Atonement beginning at age twenty. Having reached the age of majority, men become responsible for their sins and need atonement (Exodus 30:11-16).

Twenty is also the Levitical age for soldiering (Numbers 1:3). This is the natural.

The natural age of adulthood portends the spiritual age of adulthood. The New Testament reveals the direct link between natural truths and spiritual realities (1 Corinthians 15:46).

St. Paul and the writer of Hebrews admonish grown men for not acting like spiritual adults (1 Corinthians 3:1; 1 Corinthians 14:20; Hebrews 5:12).

Beloved, should we keep wandering through this wasteland, never crossing into our Promised Land? Or has the time come to grow up and possess the promise of Christ Himself?



BOOK IV

**YOUR SONS
WILL MARRY
YOU**

*a King who gave a wedding for His Son
(Matthew 22:2)*

Beloved, the Bridegroom is not looking for toddlers in tuxes or half-grown girls in veils. His eye searches for someone ready to match Him step for step—the one who traded diapers for dancing shoes, their life for His.

Is it hard to mature to the place where you match Christ Jesus in love? Yes. It is difficult and costly. *Pick up your cross and follow Me* is not an invitation to a Sunday ice cream social. But if you are willing to pay the price, the Holy Spirit will help you all the way (John 16:7). His Spirit *will never leave you or forsake you* (Hebrews 13:5).

In other words, beloved, the fix is in. The game is rigged in your favor. If you want Christ badly enough, God will make a way for you where there seems to be no way (Isaiah 42:16). Has the time come to trade the nursery for a walk down the aisle to the altar? Is being wed to Christ worth the price to be paid?

Yes, the aisle is long and the cross is heavy—but the wedding ring is eternal, the feast is endless, and the Groom? He is worth every thorn, every heartache, every trial.

CHAPTER 1

THE EPHESIANS FIVE MARRIAGE

this mystery is great (Ephesians 5:32)

A man cried out, “Lord, just reveal Your love to my wife, then her heart will melt!”

Jesus answered gently, without condemnation: “I am revealing My love to her—through you.”

The man froze. He saw the truth: his love for his wife fell far short of God’s love for her.

He repented. He grabbed Strong’s Concordance and hunted down every verse about marriage in the Bible. He had to learn how to love the wife of his youth. He worked hard and the Spirit led him. He discovered that one passage sums everything God has to say about how to love his wife: Ephesians 5:22-33.

If that man's conclusion is true—and I believe it is—we need not chase down every marriage Scripture. But maybe together we can take a fresh look at these twelve verses.

TWELVE VERSES

Marriage is no human invention. It is God's design, with heavenly purpose and eternal weight. In it the New Covenant is revealed for the world to see. Jesus said it plain: *The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a King who gave a wedding feast for His Son (Matthew 22:2).*

Earthly marriage was invented by God. It is a natural reality revealing spiritual truths.

When we use regular font to denote natural marriage commands and italics to show spiritual marriage truths, then the Ephesians 5:22-33 passage glows like entwined lovers. The two marriages—natural and *spiritual*—are inseparable.

- (22) Wives, be subject to your own husbands, *as to the Lord.*
- (23) For the husband is the head of the wife, *as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.*
- (24) *But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.*
- (25) Husbands, love your wives, *just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her*
- (26) *so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,*

- (27) *that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.*
- (28) So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself;
- (29) for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, *just as Christ also does the church,*
- (30) *because we are members of His body.*
- (31) *For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.*
- (32) *This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.*
- (33) Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.

Verse 32 admits it: This passage is all about spiritual marriage—Christ and His Church. Yet natural and spiritual marriage remain tightly woven. Obey this passage in your earthly marriage—no matter how your spouse responds—and you are on your way to the wedding feast.

NOT OF THIS WORLD

A humorist quipped: “Half a psychiatrist’s patients come because they’re married—the other half because they’re not” (A. H. Glasgow, 1905–1998).

Natural man cannot grasp marriage’s heavenly design. The glories of marriage are for spiritual people—for Christ’s people.

This fact comes with a negative proof: Society's confusion about marriage. Society is confused about marriage because marriage originates from the God they reject.

Through my own marital battles, I learned the hard way: the command, *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her*, demands supernatural power (Ephesians 5:25). No man can do this through his own strength. He must die to himself so Christ can live.

Husbands, love her where she is—not where you wish she were. Meet her exactly as Christ meets us—spiritually, emotionally, physically. Good luck doing that through human strength. That kind of love does not occur naturally in any man. My flesh is strong willed, highly self-disciplined. I tried and I failed. Beloved, only men who *partake of the divine nature* can love their wives like Christ loved the Church (2 Peter 1:4). There is no alternate means.

To gain that other-worldly nature, to love her as Christ loves, the husband shoulders his cross and follows Christ's bloody footprints. He refuses to throw off the bonds of love, even for a breath. The bonds of love demand his breath. His self-will must die. In a sense, marriage is designed by God to 'kill' believers. It 'killed' me.

The godly husband climbs his own Calvary, laying down his life so his beloved might live abundantly (John 10:10). Dead to self, he rises in Christ, clothed in God's nature (Luke 24:49). Empowered by God. One with Christ.

Beloved, only fairy tales promise 'happily ever after' without a cross to bear. A godly marriage demands everything—and in return, it gives you Christ Himself.

START SOMEWHERE

At first, dying to self looked small to me—and felt huge. My wife felt I loved church, outdoors and books more than her. She was somewhat right. The truth was this: I loved myself more than her.

To meet my wife where she was, I quit fasting. I quit reading my Bible at home. I cut church to one service a week. I halved my hunting trips. I read fewer books. I started watching TV with her. (I despise TV.) These sacrifices pale beside the Bridegroom's losses for me. But every man who completes a journey starts somewhere.

What I did not see when I started this journey: I was dying more for Jesus than for her. My cross-carrying was my love for God. Years passed before I grasped the fact that sacrificing self in obedience to Christ grew Christ in me. Although she was remiss to accept God's love in me for her, I grew up. I grew in love—Christ's love—because Christ grew in me.

There comes a time to do *away with childish things* (1 Corinthians 13:11). Beloved, if that time has come for you, I bless you on your journey. I bless you as you start.

CHAPTER 2

TERMS

I no longer live (Galatians 2:20)

Jesus the King died so Jesus the Savior could meet both worldly prince and earthly pauper on equal ground; He died to offer men His life (Hebrews 4:15). King Jesus left heaven's throne so Jesus the Savior—born in a barn—could tell the poorest, “I know your poverty” (Luke 2:7).

Jesus the King reigns at God's right hand, but Jesus the Savior fled His homeland for safety in a foreign country. He can say to the desperate, “I know your flight” (Matthew 2:13).

While the heavenly host sings endless praise to Jesus the King, Jesus the Savior was murdered by those He came to rescue. He knows rejection. Jesus the Savior was arrested and punished although He committed no crime. He understands injustice.

Jesus the Savior governed His own will under crushing pressure. He knows the weight of leadership. He knows what it takes to keep it together for others. Because Jesus the Savior went

homeless and hungry, He knows what it means to trust God for bread and shelter (Matthew 8:20, Matthew 4:2).

No man exists that Jesus the Savior cannot meet face-to-face on equal terms. He gets us.

But Jesus the Bridegroom is different from Jesus the Savior or Jesus the King. Every believer meets the Savior. But only those who accept His terms of endearment meet the Bridegroom. It is childish to think otherwise. Beloved, it is time we grow up.

HIS TERMS FOR HER

Today's woman—like her mother Eve—resists respecting, honoring and submitting to her husband *in everything* (Ephesians 5:24). Her flesh rebels. It wants to rule. To submit in everything, she needs a cross to kill her self-will.

If she loves God enough to crave that crucifixion, God empowers her. Each act of submission to her own husband nails more self-will to her cross. God's nature grows in its place. She matures.

Through submission she empties herself so Christ can live. Submitted to God's will in everything, she enters union with the Bridegroom—the One who first submitted to God's will in everything (Ephesians 5:24).

Only fairy tales work some other way. Marriage is a divine institution.

This is the way. Walk in it (Isaiah 30:21).

HIS TERMS FOR HIM

No man naturally loves his wife as Christ loved the church. To love her with God's love, he must empty himself of self so Christ's nature can fill him and work through him. Only then is he worthy to meet the Bridegroom.

THE WAR

Israel means 'wrestles with God.' That wrestling is the war inside every believer—Spirit against flesh. The enemy is not across the dinner table. The enemy stares back from the mirror. Only the foolish think otherwise.

Marital stress drives the wise spouse to pray, "Lord, change me. Help me love my wife. Help me honor my husband. Not my will but Yours be done."

In the fight to obey God's marriage laws, the godly husband and wife find their earthly union entwined with God. They trade their lives for Jesus' life. Selfishness dies and selflessness rises. Natural becomes supernatural. Animal-men suddenly become sons of the living God.

Natural marriage offers every spouse a battlefield to war against the flesh and find intimate peace with God. How do you see it?

He must increase but I must decrease (John 3:30).

CHAPTER 3

THE MARK OF THE BRIDE

Love is as strong as death (Song of Songs 8:6)

Through obedience to God, the man grows not just as husband to his wife but as father to his children—natural and spiritual. If unmarried, he ‘marries’ himself to the Church, trading his life so she might live in Christ (Matthew 19:12). This mystery is great, but that is how it works.

As the man spends himself loving his wife where she is (woman or Church) he begins to grasp how the Bridegroom totally loves him. Submitting to God’s will in the most intimate earthly relationship reveals the most intimate spiritual one. The faithful man’s eyes open to see the glories of submitting *en pas*—*in everything* (Ephesians 5:24).

By obeying the law written on his heart by the Spirit, he trades his life for true Life. He receives treasures the Father’s children cannot hold.

DIVORCE

Remembering that we are dust, for the cause of unfaithfulness God permits a man to divorce his wife—or, you could say, evict her from his house (Deuteronomy 24:1). The mature man—the Bride—emulates the Bridegroom when his spouse strays.

Through intercession he pays her redemption price, like Hosea with Gomer. Whether she values or scorns his self-sacrifice, he does it because as his Lover is faithful to him, so he remains faithful to his unfaithful wife (Ephesians 5:25-27). He has learned to love. He has the Lover's heart. Beloved, I know of what I write.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:15

If the unbeliever leaves and the Spirit does not say “pursue,” then the Bible says the believer is free from the bonds of marriage. The Spirit's voice is the Law we listen to. The New Covenant means the Law for our lives is written on the heart, not on tablets of stone or a book's pages.

God's gift of free will means a man can leave the God he once knew. Likewise, free will means a spouse can break the marriage vows. If a believer could not renounce and leave, then he could never be held in that relationship by the bonds of love—he would be an unwilling slave forever. In spiritual marriage God is not looking for slaves. He is searching for lovers corresponding to His nature.

If the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or sister is not bound in such cases. God has called us to peace (1 Corinthians 7:15).

I deeply honor the way my Anabaptist friends cherish Jesus' words on marriage—*What God has joined together, let no one*

separate (Mark 10:9). Their commitment is beautiful and rare across the American Church, and we have much to learn from their example.

Some Christ-ians honestly think that 1 Corinthians 7:15 contradicts Christ's red-letter words on marriage. I have wrestled with that tension myself. *Come now and let us reason together (Isaiah 1:18).*

Every word in the Bible is God-breathed by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16). The Spirit who speaks through Jesus in the Gospels is the same Spirit who speaks through St. Paul in the epistles. The Spirit cannot contradict Himself—He is truth; God is One—He does not oppose Himself (Numbers 23:19; 2 Timothy 2:13). His nature never changes (Malachi 3:6).

When the Holy Spirit speaks of the lifelong marriage covenant in Matthew 19:6, and the same Spirit gives pastoral guidance for an abandoned believer in 1 Corinthians 7:15, then we search for the harmony in the passages rather than assume a contradiction.

The Spirit warns us about misunderstanding St. Paul's words. He says: *...in all [his] letters ... there are some things that are hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:15-16).*

None of us wants to fall into that trap, beloved. So let's seek the Spirit's wisdom together. For me, it looks like this:

Since Christ Jesus placed His authority on the apostles—saying, *The one who hears you hears Me (Luke 10:16)*—then all the books of the Bible are fully inspired. All carry equal weight.

God's plan that earthly marriage is "until death do we part" is for two believers, for two souls equally yoked to Christ through the New Covenant. It cannot apply to a marriage that includes

an unbeliever who leaves or commits adultery. Because to break the marriage union would be to leave the New Covenant. In other words, these two marriage Scriptures are godly guidance for believing spouses when their partners rebel against God.

Beloved, when the Scriptures seem contradictory, it is a sign that my understanding lacks sufficient maturity. It is an indicator that I have room to grow in Christ.

BAPTIZED WITH FIRE

These revelations on marriage are no intellectual game, wishful thinking or over-simplified Bible stories. Through no choice of my own, I have been soaked in these precepts. I am not bragging but I have been baptized with fire by them all. I know these things from the inside. From Hosea to Matthew to Corinthians, beloved, I understand what I write. I paid the price.

Nevertheless, do not believe me or Church tradition on this or anything. Believe the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth. What is His counsel to you about this? When you ask, what do your spiritual ears hear Him say?

A CHRIST-TYPE

In natural marriage, the man is a Christ-type—a *savior* of the body, giving his life so the one he loves might live (Ephesians 5:23). The godly husband's self-sacrifice reflects the first husband, Adam. This is what I mean:

In Eden, Eve chose death for the sake of lust. But Adam chose death for the sake of love—God's self-sacrificial love.

Meditate on Genesis 3. There you will see it: Eve's selfishness; Adam's selflessness—the son of God, dying to himself and all he

knows to remain united with Eve because of love—*love as strong as death* (*Song of Songs* 8:6).

Incredibly, Adam sacrificed himself without any visible means of redemption. Adam died not knowing there was a way back from death to Life with God. Thus men who die so another might live earn the title “son of Adam, son of man” (Strong’s H120 אָדָם).

A man meets the Bridegroom when he loves his wife as Christ loved the Church. A wife meets the spiritual Husband when she respects, honors, and submits to her natural husband in everything always.

The mature wife sees her earthly husband as savior of the body while awaiting her true Savior (Ephesians 5:23-24).

Submission in everything includes unloving commands, even as Sarah submitted to Abraham, calling him *lord*. Anything less reveals the flesh clashing with the Bridegroom—the One who subjected Himself to unjust commands, yielding Himself wholly so man might be whole.

Since believers hide with Christ in God, their circumstances—including unloving commands and ungodly spouses—hide there too (Colossians 3:3). Complaining about circumstances is complaining against God.

SELF-SACRIFICIAL NATURE

Believers conform themselves to the Bridegroom’s self-sacrificial nature so *on earth as it is in heaven* becomes “Christ on earth as He is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Without self-sacrifice, there is no resurrection for Christ or the Christ-ian.

To be a Christ-ian means to be a little Christ. Becoming Christ is man's purpose. Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 297–373) turned the phrase this way: "The Son of God became man so man might become god." Athanasius got it right.

The destiny of becoming one with God belongs to the Bridal generation. Submit to the Lover in everything, and you live the life that begins and never ends in Christ. Ready to start?

CHAPTER 4

SARAH OR VASHTI

*An excellent wife is the crown of her husband,
But she who shames him is like rotteness in his bones
(Proverbs 12:4)*

During a time of tight finances, my sister got a penny-pinched grocery budget from her husband—an engineer who probably calculated ‘calories per cent.’

One day she loaded the kids, hit the store and bought the bare minimums. Never having baked bread before, she grabbed ingredients to make loaves from scratch. The pennies were tight and the calories needed. The only treat for the kids: the smallest jar of honey. At the checkout, that tiny jar pushed my sister over budget.

Fuming in front of the cashier, she pictured her husband as Scrooge. She almost bought the honey anyway. He made good money. But she crucified her self-will and left the honey behind. She died to self so Christ might live.

My sister chose to obey her little-l lord and trust her big-L Lord to save her from her husband's unjust strictures. She was conforming herself to God's marital law: *wives ought to be subject to their husbands in everything*—including grocery budgets (Ephesians 5:24).

Back home, the bread-baking turned into a mini-disaster. Flour spilled, kitchen chaos, the loaves came out brick-hard, inedible. My sister collapsed on the linoleum floor, crying. Three little ones asked why Mommy cried. She just hugged them. No bad word about Dad—that was her last test.

Then the phone rang. A church woman, knowing nothing of the mess, chirped, "Margaret Lynn, I'm coming over to bake bread!"

Half an hour later she arrived with ingredients, cleaned the kitchen, taught my sister how to bake bread from scratch, and filled the house with warm, delicious smells.

As the church lady left, she said, "Oh! Margaret Lynn, I almost forgot one thing."

She returned from her car with a gallon of honey.

"You know, John," my sister told me, "Jesus even cares about the honey."

The Bible tells similar stories—wives facing harsh commands from their husbands, and who the wives trust to save them. Men and women who become the Bride grasp these lessons. Let's take a look for ourselves.

VASHTI THE BEAUTIFUL

Queen Vashti, Esther's predecessor, matched Sarah in everything except one. That one difference sets Sarah and Vashti worlds apart.

Vashti means 'beautiful woman.' She was truly beautiful—physically, emotionally, intellectually. The daughter of Babylon's king, she became queen of Persia, the world's greatest empire. Yet all her glamour hid a spot of rottenness in her heart. That rottenness flashed aloud when she refused to submit to her husband en pas—in each and everything, always.

King Ahasuerus commanded Vashti to appear before him and his drunk friends wearing only her crown—to show off her beauty (Esther 1:11). Vashti refused (Esther 1:12).

Maybe she thought, "I am Queen Beautiful, not queen harlot. This is beneath the king, the kingdom, and me. It sets a dangerous precedent. When he sobers up, he'll thank me."

Healthy marriages follow God's laws—whether the man and woman are believers or not. God created marriage. He set its bounds. Vashti's reasoning was dead wrong.

By presuming she knew better than the man she vowed to honor, she threatened the fabric of the king's household—and his kingdom. Every king's counselor saw it. Her disrespect—no matter how 'reasonable'—shamed her husband and endangered his God-given authority (Daniel 2:21; Romans 13:1).

If Vashti's rebellion stood, it would destroy the kingdom. As Jesus explains, *Every kingdom divided against itself is destroyed, and a house divided falls (Luke 11:17)*. That includes King Jesus' kingdom, King Ahasuerus' kingdom and your house and mine.

NO PLACE FOR REPENTANCE

Vashti's judgment came swiftly. No place for repentance was found (Hebrews 12:17, Deuteronomy 7:10). Public divorce—unanimous approval from the king's wise men.

Vashti never saw her king's face again. She could not return to her father—he had given her away. She could not return to her husband—she was no longer his wife.

Shut out until death. Every tie she had to the king's kingdom was severed the moment her self-saving rebellion was judged by the head of her house.

Vashti 'the beautiful' lost what she thought was hers forever. Thrown out, locked out, forgotten by the God-ordained head of her house.

Her lesson stands eternal.

FORFEITED IDENTITY

By presuming she knew better, Vashti forfeited her identity—derived from the head of her house: master, father, husband.

Dismissed for disgrace, she became disgraced. Her name—'Beautiful'—mocks her forever.

God made Vashti an eternal warning to wives natural and spiritual. He also made Sarah an eternal example—for the opposite reason.

May all who enter God's household embrace Sarah's faith and heed Vashti's irrevocable fall.

SARAH'S FAITH

Sarah means 'princess,' 'noblewoman'—wife of a king. Her name comes from her husband's rank.

Unlike Vashti's near-perfect beauty, Sarah is totally beautiful—inside and out. Unlike Vashti, Sarah never tried to save herself or her dignity. Sarah trusted God to save her from her unloving husband while submitting to his ungodly commands—in everything. When Abraham told Sarah to prostitute herself—not once but twice—to pagan kings, Sarah's self-will had every reason to scream.

An ungodly counselor might say, "Sarah, disobey that weasel. God doesn't want you sleeping with Pharaoh. Tell the truth. Say you're married. Let God discipline Abraham."

Sarah refused the open door to 'Never Never Land', that mythical place where children never grow up. She refused to save herself. Either God would save her or she would not be saved. Because she was a spiritual adult, Sarah humbled herself. She obeyed her husband and walked into the fire—twice.

She trusted her big-L Lord to rescue her from her little-l lord's self-saving faithlessness. And God did. God saved Sarah just like he saved my sister. Just like He will save you—if you obey your husband even in his unjust commands, even in his faithlessness.

Think of it: By faith Sarah entered pagan harems, offering her body's virtue to prove her soul's purity. Willing to unite in flesh with the king of death, she proved worthy of the eternal King's unending Life. Trusting her heavenly Husband unto death, she earned the title Mother of the Faith. She was not given it.

Later she submitted a second time—again for Abraham’s sake. He tried again to save himself. Sarah died to self once more to ‘save’ him.

Abraham told her, *Obey me so it may go well with me... and I may live because of you (Genesis 12:13).*

Sarah submitted *en pas*—in each and everything, always. Her big-L Lord was smitten with her selfless beauty. He rescued her from her pimp husband and from Pharoah—king of death—then He robed her in eternal dignity. No wonder Sarah is venerated. She went all the way. Twice.

By subjecting herself to God’s marital laws, Sarah won both husbands *without a word (1 Peter 3:1).*

Women who follow Sarah’s way—submitting to husbands in just and unjust commands—always win their Husband’s heart (Ephesians 5:24). Hence it is written: *Let your true beauty be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in God’s sight. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves—submissive to their husbands, just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. You are her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear (1 Peter 3:4–6).*

ANOTHER DAUGHTER OF SARAH

Years ago a woman told me her husband called her into the bathroom to smoke dope—so the kids would not see.

The woman had just started living godly. She did not want to break man’s law by smoking dope or God’s law by disobeying her husband. She prayed silently. The Spirit answered: “Obey your husband. I will fix it.”

She obeyed—in everything. Days later her husband died of drug overdose, leaving her widowed with two small children. Her natural husband paid the price for her sin by dying. Or her sin was laid on her spiritual Husband who died for her. Either way, the Judge charged her sin to her husband. She crucified her flesh and conformed to God's will—in everything.

MADAM JEANNE GUYON

Madame Jeanne Guyon (1648–1717) is another daughter of Sarah—enduring years of marital abuse, then Church persecutions, until God forged her into a champion of faith. Her books disrupted norms and blessed millions—including me.

Millions more daughters of Sarah are coming, beloved. They are as awesome as an army with banners, and the *banner over them is Love* (*Song of Songs* 2:4; 6:10). They are the generation of the Bride. Will you pay the price to join them? Will you never save yourself—even from an 'unkind' command God whispers?

Who is this growing like the dawn, beautiful as the full moon, pure as the sun, awesome as an army with banners? (Song of Songs 3:6; 6:10)

CHAPTER 5

EQUALLY YOKED

like a lamb led to slaughter (Isaiah 53:7)

God's marital precepts cut both ways. The command for wives to endure to their end so their husbands might live, demands the same from husbands: endure to your end so your wife might live.

Like the faithful women in this book who trusted God to save them from unloving husbands, I know a man who went to the end of himself for his wife.

This man refused to quit loving his wife although she poured out years of emotional abuse and drove him to suicidal depression. She threatened his life and tried to take it more than once. She turned his child against him. She had affairs and gave him an incurable STD.

She told everyone she was unloved—while rejecting the love he offered. His love was God's love for her. Rejecting God's love through him, she remained truly unloved.

After years she abandoned and divorced the man—doing everything imaginable to make him reject her first, searching for something real to ‘justify’ her rejection of his love. He persevered. God sustained him like Hosea. He went all the way with God, and God went all the way with him.

Like Christ, this man loved his wife *to the end* (*John 13:1*). He covered her sins even through the divorce she started. He forfeited his rights, hoping to the end she would accept his love—Christ’s love—and live.

Conforming his life to his cross, his life became nothing: first to redeem his unfaithful wife, later to be saved from the suffering he endured. For such a man as this, Christ died.

Yet if the unbeliever leaves, let him leave. The brother or sister is not bound in such cases. God has called us to peace (1 Corinthians 7:15).

FILLING UP CHRIST’S SUFFERINGS

Obedying God’s laws means filling up Christ’s sufferings—a brutal ordeal (*Colossians 1:24*). Look again at the Crucifix. Or is there an easier path to become worthy of the One who died a vicious death hoping we might live?

To live unoffended means the self-will is dead. Love suffers no offense. Offense reveals surviving self-will—self-will that needs to die. The self-righteous dress it up as “righteous indignation.” But offense is the fruit of self-righteousness—and anathema to Christ.

The Lamb slain says, *Blessed is he who takes no offense at Me (Luke 7:23).*

You are about to read about the Lamb slain from the beginning of time. If what follows offends you, it is your self-will taking the

hit—not Christ inside you, not the Crucifix. I have walked this road to its end and speak with authority.

SLAIN AS THE LAMB

Going all the way—as the cross demands—the believing wife beaten by her husband endures even unto death, hoping her chaste conduct wins him *without a word*, dying to self as Christ died for us (1 Peter 3:1).

The wife is bound to her disobedient husband as long as he lives, hoping her death as ‘a Christ’ wins him without a word (1 Corinthians 7:39; 1 Peter 3:1-2; 1 Corinthians 7:14). Submitting to be slain like a lamb is how Sarah saved Abraham—earning her the title Mother of the Faith. Daughters of Sarah live—and die—like Sarah. And God saves them.

The wife suffering at her husband’s hands is his hope of glory. She follows Christ. She is a Christ-ian who suffers at the hands of those He loved and died for.

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by your behavior, as they observe your chaste and respectful conduct (1 Peter 3:1).

The daughter of Sarah who suffers such an end gives her body for her natural husband in obedience to her spiritual Husband. She dies to self because she loves her spiritual Lover with all her heart, all her mind, all her soul and all her strength (Matthew 22:37).

Her undeserved death is normal Christ-ianity. It qualifies her to be yoked to the Bridegroom forever. We encourage such a woman in her trial—and if needed, celebrate her death. Communion

celebrates the Lover's death until He comes, not His life. What else can we who live as Christ, do?

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? (Romans 6:3).

His death is always undeserved. It is always the greatest evil. The same death by the same evil is endured by all who pick up their cross and follow the Lamb to their end. Or do you know some other way to the wedding? So you know some other 'Christ-ianity'?

Thank God the Bridegroom lives forever while evil is a passing shadow. Thank God He meets His resurrected Bride at the doorway to the Garden tomb.

THE UNBELIEVING HUSBAND

If the believing wife abandons her disobedient husband, some might wonder if she takes his sanctification with her: *The unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife (1 Corinthians 7:14).*

Better question: If she rebels against her spiritual Husband's command not to leave, has she left her Sanctification? I think so.

If a professing husband leaves his unfaithful wife, does he justify the Lover leaving him for unfaithfulness? *With the judgment you render, you will be judged (Matthew 7:2).* Does he want the risk? Do you?

The merciful receive mercy (Matthew 5:7). Who among us lives without God's mercy? I need total mercy—and aim to give it.

For a Christ-ian to leave a spouse—however awful the marriage—is risky. Best to endure to the end, whatever end might come,

hoping the spouse lives. Christ died for us while we were His enemies. We are called—and empowered—to live likewise.

1 Corinthians 7:15 is different than its preceding verse, 7:14: if the unbeliever leaves, let him go. The remaining believer is free from the marriage vows.

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace (1 Corinthians 7:14-15).

Amen.

CHAPTER 6

SELF-STYLED CHRIST-ANS

Save yourself and us! (Luke 23:39)

The two criminals crucified beside Jesus picture two types of Christ-ians. Both men pick up their cross, follow Him and suffer unjustly—at first. But only one goes all the way. Only one submits to death and enters Paradise with the Lover of his soul. Jesus said it plainly: *The one who endures to the end will be saved (Matthew 24:13; Mark 13:13).*

The thief who sneered, *Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!* Is like the Christ-ian who stops short of marriage (Luke 23:39). He follows the Spirit—in general, but demands Christ save him. His ‘sacrifice’ never includes total death to self. He wants Christ on his terms, not God’s. When the self is at risk of dying, he compromises. He slips off the altar, excusing himself from the final pains.

He prays: “Jesus, I followed You. I carried my cross to Calvary. I even let them nail me up beside You. But this is far enough. You

forgave my sins. You're my Savior. Save me from this sickness, this marriage, this job, this debt, this fire! Save me!" The self-styled Christ-ian never truly ends his prayers with, *Nevertheless, Your will be done (Matthew 26:42)*. Like the foolish virgins, when the Bridegroom comes, he misses the wedding feast.

SHARING CHRIST'S DEATH

Beloved, sharing in Christ's death is not just water baptism. It is carrying one's own cross until the self-will dies completely. What does *Follow Me* mean if not that? (Matthew 16:24). The lovesick Bride joins Christ in Friday's dark death so she can walk hand-in-hand with Him in Sunday's light.

If we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:5).

What is *the likeness of His resurrection* but marriage union with Him? Those who refuse to join Him in His death will never be like Him in His life. I am not saying self-styled Christ-ians miss heaven. I do not know about that. I am saying compromising Christ-ians never enter the marriage relationship. They never become worthy of the Bridegroom. They never gain His heart.

Christ-ians whose lives do not include unjust suffering should realize the life they are living is their own, not Christ's. *Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12)*. Persecution is a promise, beloved, not a possibility, even for those of us who live in suburban America.

Truly, *the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance (2 Corinthians 1:5)*

CHAPTER 7

SIMON OF CYRENE

*How beautiful in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints
(Psalm 116:15)*

For about a year I attended a large, wealthy church. Civil war raged inside it. One side wanted a ‘nice’ church for ‘nice’ people doing ‘nice’ things. The other side heard the distant call to follow Jesus and their hearts leaned toward it. The two sides could not peacefully coexist. Spirit and flesh are at war; they never make peace.

Leadership in this assembly came from elected committees—mixed bags. The church lurched like a drunken giant, now relying on natural reason (self-will), now stumbling toward the Spirit. The congregation matched its leaders: some hot, some cold. Together—lukewarm (Revelation 3:15-18). I pray better for them. Jesus dreams bigger, too.

My ‘Simon of Cyrene’ moment came after my only visit with the head pastor.

Some committee had announced his retirement—code for ‘fired.’ He was serving out his last weeks when I showed up with my ‘revelation’ about the church’s cancer and the cure. I was too immature to see that he already knew.

His secretary seemed distant. The elegant office felt worn, air as stale as a funeral parlor. The pastor greeted me with genuine warmth—God’s love. He did not know me, yet he loved me. I felt it. He knelt and prayed earnestly for the Lord to direct our talk. Then he asked why I came.

I spilled my ‘vital’ insight. He replied quietly, “John, they won’t listen. I’ve told them again and again. They won’t listen.”

I was so busy delivering my message that I missed the leaden air and the sadness etched in his face. I was juvenile. Selfish. Proudful.

Walking out past the marble arches and cross-crowned spires, I first thought he mourned losing his job.

Wrong.

Then I figured he grieved for his stubborn flock—he loved them, and they refused to hear.

Wrong again.

The funeral-home smell that clung to him clued me in. It was not job loss or grief. It was death. Not animal death or natural passing. It was the smell of Jesus on the cross—head slumped, eyes vacant, flies crawling, blood pooled black beneath the stake, soldiers stinking, religious men striding home satisfied, moans of “Why?” fading as loved ones turned away from the Christ.

Spiritually, that pastor smelled like Golgotha's death. I know. I have smelled it.

But the jolt hit me too late. I was half an hour from the church, almost home. I had missed my chance to affirm a man dying to self so Christ might live. I had navel-gazed past a crucified brother like a schoolgirl primping for the prom. Please pray for me. Sometimes I am so shallow, so self-absorbed and childish.

Pray I never squander such moments again—but that I comfort the mourning and encourage the dying. I want to be a Simon of Cyrene.

Beloved, Simon did not initially sign up for the cross—he was drafted. But he carried it anyway. Will you?

OFFENDING THE TRANSLATOR

In Quito, Ecuador, a local woman translated as I preached to street kids. I described the brutality Christ suffered—the face so disfigured He scarcely looked human (Isaiah 52:14).

She softened it. Turned truths into half-truths, even lies. Like a Holocaust denier, she glossed over man's inhumanity to the Son of Man. Even as she spoke, the Spirit showed me why: her flesh was offended by the Lamb led silently to slaughter. She was avoiding the crucified life, choosing compromise over death to self. She wanted Christ on her terms. She was a self-styled Christ-ian.

Beloved, *Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?* (Luke 24:26).

That day's miracle was not just street kids finding Jesus. It was the lid staying on my anger until we reached the van. There I

exploded. I told the woman what she did and why. I was not nice. Everyone in the van heard me. I yelled.

She never mistranslated my words again. Over the next week we won hundreds of children to the kingdom. Maybe she forgave my anger. Maybe she repented. Maybe she took up her cross.

Christ-ians who protest the Crucifix—"Jesus got off that cross!"—are no different than the mistranslating translator. They take offense at the inhumane abuse Christ-followers suffer.

Without the Crucifix, Jesus is no Savior, and man has no salvation. Without our own cross, there is no wedding.

To those determined to follow Christ all the way to the feast, the Crucifix is wondrous to behold (Matthew 10:38; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). The spiritually mature look in the mirror and see themselves crucified—yet there they stand, taking their last steps to the altar.

CHRIST'S WORK

Jesus promises that whoever believes in Him will do the works He did—and even greater (John 14:12). Those works include suffering for the sake of righteousness. St. Peter put it plainly: *Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example to follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:21).*

Unjust suffering is normal Christ-ianity. Persecution is proof of one's love for God.

St. Paul rejoiced that his own sufferings filled *up what was lacking in Christ's afflictions (Colossians 1:24-26)*. When Christ is fully formed in us, His work is finished in us. *It is finished,*

Jesus cried from the cross about His own inward mission (John 19:30). Today the Spirit continues that same work in us.

When you meet someone suffering under the burden of their cross, be kind. Be patient. Be gentle. If they are screaming in agony and untouchable, remember, they have been scourged and are dragging a cross. Like Simon of Cyrene helping Christ to Calvary, lend them your strength for a while. Be a friend. Love them as Christ loved you.

Blessed is he who takes no offense at Me (Matthew 11:6).

CHAPTER 8

GAINING CHRIST

As He is, so also are we in this world (1 John 4:17)

A man went to his pastor for marital help. The pastor brushed him off: “No marriage could be that bad.” The man asked, “What about Hosea’s?” The pastor shot back, “You’re no Hosea!” That pastor was childish, spiritually blind, and his ears were full of wax.

Years later, the wife abandoned the man and she sued for divorce. Even the man’s Christ-ian lawyer doubted his story: “A difficult marriage—if you’re telling the truth.”

This abused husband needed godly counsel. He needed kindness. He needed love. Instead, he met counselors who recoiled from his cross. These so-called men of God missed Jesus’ clear promise: *If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you (John 15:20).*

DEEPER CHRIST-IANITY

Beloved, real Christ-ianity includes Bible studies, miracles, spiritual gifts, weekend services and the promise of heaven.

But those things are found at the shallow end—the kiddie pool where toes get wet.

True faith drives a man into deep waters. How Christ lived on earth two thousand years ago is how we are called to live today. Nothing has changed. We are invited into union with God as sons made perfect in Him. The New Covenant makes available to us Christ's righteousness, His mind and His power so we can live in this world, in this life, as He lived—even while being crucified. Beloved, Christ is the Gospel.

ALL THINGS LOSS

St. Paul counted everything loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ—logic, comfort, relationships, social approval, retirement accounts, physical health—all rubbish (Philippians 3:7-9). Are you willing to treat them the same? To trade your crummy life for His glory?

To gain Christ, some among us will lose wealth, relationships, their reputation and their sanity. I have watched men surrender these things and more to gain Christ. I have lost them all myself. Of the few men I know who made the trade, none ever mentioned regret for swapping their rubbish for Christ. A pretty good deal if you want it. The bargain of the age, you could say.

MATURING IN LOVE

Over decades, St. Peter grew from loving Jesus with brotherly affection (*phileō*) to commanding the Church to love God with fierce, all-consuming love (*agapaō*) (John 21:15-17; 1 Peter 1:22, 4:8). St. Peter moved from opposing the cross to embracing it, like a lamb led to slaughter.

We can mature the same way. We can give ourselves completely to our Lover, because as He is, so also are we in this world. (1 John 4:17)

Today is the day of salvation. If you want to start, begin now: for better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health—until death unites you with Him forever.

MEGACHURCH MARRIAGE PASTORS

One Sunday I sat in a megachurch auditorium (my final trip to a megachurch) and listened to husband-and-wife ‘marriage pastors’ dispense their homemade ideas about marriage to ten-thousand people. They never once mentioned Ephesians 5:22-33—the Bible’s defining passage on the subject—not even in passing.

I left wondering whether I had just heard postmodern sociology professors lecturing or watched toddlers playing house. Beloved, everything Jesus taught about marriage is distilled in those eleven verses. Ignore them, and no godly marriage is possible.

While the church sidesteps God’s clear design for natural marriage, she cannot mature into spiritual marriage. Until we hold His plumb line over our own hearts, the world remains unaccountable for marriage deviancy. As deviant as the world has become, it does not take a prophet to know how far from truth the Church has wandered.

Beloved, the world did not invent marriage confusion—the Church did, by forgetting the cross-shaped love that binds it together with Christ.

CHAPTER 9

THE BRIDAL GENERATION

The church glorious (Ephesians 5:27)

Neville Johnson (1940-2019)—founder of The Academy of Light in Australia—shared a prophetic vision of the coming Bridal generation. In what he called a “prophetic experience,” Johnson saw people emerging from purifying fires, radiant and transformed.

They glowed with light in hues of blue, white and red. Their skin was smooth, almost like glass, not a single wrinkle. These saints moved across the world, healing the sick, raising the dead and supernaturally providing food and water. The power of God flowed through them without hindrance—casting out demons, restoring the broken, even emptying psychiatric wards through miracles.

Johnson beheld the Church glorious: without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, holy and blameless, walking this earth hand-in-hand with her Lover (Ephesians 5:27).

I too, glimpsed the Church glorious, though in a different light—a celestial soccer match: Team Bride versus Satan’s Superstars.

CELESTIAL SOCCER MATCH

Picture a cosmic stadium packed beyond capacity, louder than any World Cup final. All creation watches, breathless. On the pitch, the teams are evenly matched—except for one stunning difference: every player on Team Bride keeps their eyes closed.

They could open them. Their natural sight worked fine. But none did. Instead, Team Bride’s players rely entirely on the inner voice of the Bridegroom to guide their every move (Deuteronomy 26:17; Jeremiah 7:23). Mature in marriage, they flow in harmony with God’s will.

With pure joy, Team Bride dominates the field. Every sprint, they bound like a deer; every cut and strike is a masterpiece of grace. In attack or defense, they prove unstoppable. When an opponent lunged for a foul—grabbing a jersey, tripping, or sliding hard—the Bride’s player either evades effortlessly or absorbs it, turning the foul into advantage.

Even the goalkeeper stands calm, eyes shut, attuned only to the Bridegroom’s whisper. Rarely tested, he waits. Then, in the match’s climactic moment, he uncoils like a panther—arms extended, soaring through the air—to snatch a screaming shot bound for the far post. A blast he never ‘saw’ coming, yet he clears it cleanly.

Rising swiftly, ball secure, the goalie takes two strides and booms a punt downfield. It lands on the foot of an unmarked winger streaking up the sideline. One touch back to a trailing forward—bang!—another goal for Team Bride. The universe erupts.

Imagine it.

Imagine being that goalkeeper in the ultimate showdown between Heaven and Hell. You stay locked on the Lord's voice for the entire match, only to explode into action for three glorious seconds—a hall-of-fame dive that steals the breath of all creation. As you rise and launch the counterattack, the crowd roars not for you, but for *Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27)*.

Beloved, the Bridal generation is not playing for the crowd. They play to the Voice—and they win every time.

What voice directs your life?



BOOK V

**HOUSEHOLD
RELATIONSHIPS**

How blessed are those who dwell in Your house!
(Psalm 84:4)

Jesus said, *In My Father's house are many dwelling places*—but not all rooms come with the same view (John 14:2).

Some live in the servant's quarters, busy with tasks. Some rest in the nursery, safe in the Father's arms. Some play in the children's wing, learning His ways day by day. But the Bride abides in the bridal chamber—sharing intimate Life with her Lover.

Beloved, while on earth we choose our heavenly room. We select our eternal view. How close to the Lover we live in this world, sets the stage for our place in the next.

Choose wisely.

CHAPTER 1

THREE RELATIONSHIPS

We will be like Him (1 John 3:2)

Warner Brothers once released a film that portrayed the Bride's coming appearance on earth: *The Book of Eli*. The story follows Eli, a wanderer in a post-apocalyptic wasteland, carrying the last remaining Bible to a place where it can be preserved and reprinted for a broken world.

Only at the end do we discover Eli is blind. Every deadly obstacle he overcame, every enemy he defeated, every step of the treacherous journey—he accomplished not by natural sight or strength, but by moving in perfect harmony with the Voice he alone heard clearly.

Eli explains it: “One day I heard this voice. Hard to explain, but it was like it was coming from inside me, yet I could hear it as plain as I’m hearing you now. It told me a path would be laid out before me, that I’d be led to a safe place for the Book, that I’d be

protected from anything or anyone standing in my way. I've been walking ever since... I know what I heard. I know I'm not crazy. And I know I never would've made it without Help."

Soon after delivering the Bible, Eli dies peacefully in his sleep. As the film closes, another blind traveler—a woman inspired by Eli—steps into the same ruined world, guided solely by that same inner Voice.

The movie never shows the years of refining Eli endured to reach such intimate union with the Spirit. Yet one thing is clear: he was no child. He had grown up.

THREE RELATIONSHIPS

Believers mature through as many as three distinct household relationships with God:

1. Bride to Bridegroom
2. Child to Father
3. Slave to Master

Every Bride of Christ, every Child of God, every Servant of the Master dwells in the Household of God. None of these positions is despised, yet the more intimate is to be desired. Anyone indwelt by the Holy Spirit relates to God through one of these three and is—in the language of the American church, “saved.”

THE LIST

Two New Testament passages lay out these household relationships in order of descending intimacy.

First, Ephesians 5:22–6:9 spells out the responsibility each member owes to the Head of the house:

- *Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord (Ephesians 5:22).*
- *Children, obey your parents in the Lord (Ephesians 6:1).*
- *Slaves, be obedient to your earthly masters... as to Christ (Ephesians 6:5).*

Colossians 3:18-22 mirrors the same order:

- *Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord (Colossians 3:18).*
- *Children, be obedient to your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord (Colossians 3:20).*
- *Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters... fearing the Lord (Colossians 3:22).*

OBEDIENCE EQUALS LOVE

Jesus says it plainly: *If you love Me, you will keep My commandments (John 14:15, John 14:21).*

John echoes: *This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3).*

God tells us this eternal truth for our own benefit: Obedience to the law written on our heart is the pathway of maturity. Obedience to the Spirit is the way to the wedding.

Because obedience is love, and because God's commands are not heavy, anyone may grow as close to the Lord as they choose. Intimacy with God is a choice—and it carries a cost. Ultimate obedience costs your life and results in marriage.

We cannot love God with all our heart, soul, and mind—the First Great Commandment—without obeying His commands (Matthew 22:37). Love and obedience are inseparable. As we

grow in obedience, we grow in love. Grow great in love and become acceptable marriage material.

WHICH COMMANDMENTS?

Under the New Covenant, sealed by Jesus' blood, God promises to write His laws on our hearts and place them in our minds (Jeremiah 31:33, Hebrews 8:8-13). The commands we are to obey are the ones the Holy Spirit whispers directly to us (John 5:25, Acts 22:14, Isaiah 30:21).

These are the only commands He empowers us to fulfill. When we do God's will by God's power, we live as Christ. We become true Christ-ians. We love God from the heart. Obedience to the Spirit is the pathway to maturity—and it leads straight to the wedding feast.

We honor the Bible deeply, yet God never promised to guide us into all truth through an inspired book. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would do that (John 16:13). Those who cannot hear the Spirit's voice or who lack courage to obey Him may remain "intellectual Christ-ians," but Christ-ianity is not an intellectual exercise. It is not merely getting saved, being good, and going to heaven. It is not conforming yourself to Biblical precepts from the outside in. To be a Christ-ian means to live as Christ lived, from the heart outwards.

Just as the first Adam needed a helper suitable to him, the Last Adam—Jesus—seeks a helper corresponding to Him (Genesis 2:18). The Bridegroom longs for a Bride who is bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh. It is not good for the Man to be alone. This is why our heart must change. As we travel to the wedding altar, we change from the inside out—a process that makes us acceptable marriage material.

A SUITABLE HELPER

John wrote: *Beloved, we are God's children now... [but] we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2).*

Who is like Him? Only the one who abides in union with Him, walking hand-in-hand, sharing His desires—His glorious Bride. The one who dies like the Lamb has the heart of God.

The believer who obeys to the end of self-will overcomes the flesh (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7). The one who crucifies the animal nature becomes the Bride. Jesus is not marrying lions; He is marrying slain lambs—those who die hoping Christ might live.

As Neville Johnson saw, that generation now stands at the threshold of the King's furnace, ready to emerge from the purifying flames. The first wave is about to be called forth. Neither the world nor the Church has ever seen such a company, not even the Book of Acts.

May you rest in the Refiner's fire until you become irresistible to the Bridegroom and unstoppable on earth (Psalm 45:10-17, Matthew 5:48, James 1:4). May you live in union with the law written on your heart until you have the heart of the Lamb. That is the way to the wedding. There is no other.

CHAPTER 2

ENTERING THE HOUSE OF GOD

Like his Teacher (Matthew 10:25)

To function as a living member of Christ's Body, we submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit—not to the church, not to doctrine, not to the Bible as an end in itself, not to a pastor, but to the Voice within whispering, *This is the way; walk in it (Isaiah 30:21)*. This is our role in the New Covenant: obey the Spirit's commands.

If a believer cannot hear the Spirit speak or hears yet lacks courage to obey, then he remains an infant in God's house—present but unfit to help.

The one who twists *you are not under law but under grace* into license for self-will, perverts grace and enslaves himself again to sin (Romans 6:14-15). Having received grace, we are called to present ourselves to Christ *as slaves of obedience (Romans 6:16)*.

Entering Christ's New Covenant means putting self-will to death by conforming to God's will (Luke 24:49). Conforming to God's will means obeying the law He writes on the heart. To those who conform to His will by His power, grace is never wasted (1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 6:1). Righteousness is simply union with God's will. To abide in Him is to be as acceptable to the Father as Christ Himself (Romans 12:1). In Him we bear God's image on earth. Conformed to His will, we live as Christ.

In this unity of conformity, each of us sacrifices self so Christ may live—just as Christ sacrificed Himself so we might live. Our sacrifice of obedience is evidence of God's love alive in us. When we love God as selflessly as He loves us, we become marriage material.

OBEDIENCE TO GOD = LOVE FOR GOD

- *He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me (John 14:21).*
- *If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word (John 14:23).*
- *This is love for God: to obey His commands (1 John 5:3).*

IN CONFORMITY

It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master (Matthew 10:25). We are created in His image and called to be conformed to His likeness. The New Covenant makes normal Christ-ianity a journey of becoming a little 'c' Christ on earth.

If this is not every believer's desire, it is certainly the longing of His Bride. She has the mind of Christ.

True Church unity flows from individual conformity to Christ. Unity works from the inside out, person by person, never the outside in. Unity is never a matter of clothing; it is a matter of the heart. Apart from sharing Christ's heart, no one experiences unity with Christ—or with His true Church.

THE GREAT LOVE STORY

Act 1: The Lover gives Himself to death to open the door of His house to His beloved.

Act 2: The lovesick bride-to-be enters His house and begins giving herself to her Lover—casting off every trace of unloveliness, taking on His very nature.

Act 3: Having given themselves completely to one another, Lover and beloved are perfected as One in love. God is love. Wedding bells ring.

Beloved, the door stands open. The Lover waits inside. Will you cross the threshold and never look back?

Today if you hear His Voice, do not harden your hearts (Hebrews 4:7).

CHAPTER 3

INCREASING INTIMACY

Come to Me (Matthew 11:28)

Some Christ-ians are taught that receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit means they receive the Bridegroom. The trouble with this view is simple: just as the Son is not the Father, the Holy Spirit is not the Bridegroom.

Though both are fully God, the Holy Spirit is given as a pledge—the earnest money, the down payment—guaranteeing that we will one day become God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory. A down payment promises full ownership; it is not ownership itself. Full possession comes when we cross over and leave this world behind.

Beloved, if the Holy Spirit were the Bridegroom, we would be pursuing the One we already hold, like searching a house for the guest who has already arrived.

A STEPWISE PROCESS

Scriptures say we are to grow up. They trace the path from infancy to maturity:

- *We are no longer to be children (nēpios), tossed about by every wind. Instead, we are to grow up in every way into Christ (Ephesians 4:14–15).*
- *As long as the heir is a minor (nēpios), he differs in no way from a slave (Galatians 4:1).*
- *Brothers and sisters, do not be children (paidion) in your thinking; be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature (teleios) (1 Corinthians 14:20).*
- *When I was a child (nēpios), I spoke, thought, and reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put away childish things (1 Corinthians 13:11).*
- *Let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and press on to maturity (teleiotēs) (Hebrews 6:1).*

TELEIOTĒS

Teleiotēs—derived from the Greek word ‘teleios’—means full adulthood; it means no longer a child, brought to completion through obedience, perfected in love. Only teleiotēs believers have their senses trained to discern good from evil (Hebrews 5:14).

We must be honest: spiritual infants (nēpios) cannot tell good from evil. Even spiritual children (teknon or paidion) who do not yet hear the Spirit clearly remain vulnerable to deception; they can call evil good, and good evil. When I was a spiritual child, I was guilty of this.

C.S. Lewis captured this danger when he wrote, “What seems to us good may not be good in His eyes, and what seems to us evil may not be evil.”

Beloved, children can mistake salt for sugar or apple cider vinegar for apple juice. But the mature taste and see. They know the difference. Their spiritual senses are trained. They choose the sweetness every time.

The believer who reaches teleiotēs discerns clearly. A generation of such believers is rising—the Bridal generation, perfect and fully mature. Ripe with the Lover’s love.

Think carefully: if the Bridegroom married Himself to one who cannot always distinguish good from evil—if He became one with a spiritual child (nēpios or teknon)—He would eventually find Himself joined to a spouse capable of unrepentant sin. He would be unequally yoked with evil. Because the Holy One cannot be married to sin, He cannot wed a spiritual child, no matter how loved or devoted that child is.

Today the American Church relates to God primarily as Father, and her persistent inability to discern good from evil remains a deep source of heartache—for the Lover, for the Bride, and for the Church herself. The friends and brothers in the Song of Songs bear witness to the pain that immaturity inflicts.

Beloved, the Bridegroom is not looking for a playmate, but for a companion united with Him in heart, ripened in His selfless love. Has the time not come to do “away with childish things”?

When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things (1 Corinthians 13:11).

CHAPTER 4

SUPPORTING ACTORS

A lily among thorns (Song of Songs 2:2)

In a vision, I saw the Lord’s soldiers on a darkened battlefield. Almost all were asleep—armored more or less but asleep, or worse, intoxicated. Demonic imps swarmed over them, hacking the hapless warriors to pieces with gleeful malice.

I grabbed a soldier who had not yet been torn apart. He wore full armor and did not look wounded at all. I hauled him up by his breastplate, shaking him hard. “Wake up! Look around you!”

His eyes opened groggily, unfocused. I shouted, “The enemy is slaughtering us while we sleep!”

He mumbled, “Okay... okay...”

When I released him, he slumped back into the fog of his slumber—refusing to rise.

The vision broke my heart. The Lord’s army was overrun because we chose not to wake up, preferring stupor to sobriety.

After touring the battlefield, I reported to the Commanding General—Jesus. “Sir, we are taking heavy casualties. We are being overrun. Very few are fighting back—and the ones resisting are heavily attacked.”

He replied, “Yes, John, I know. But we will grow up quickly. When we do, the tide will turn.”

God, may the tide turn soon.

GROW UP

The Lord of Heaven’s Armies commands those who relate to Him as children *to grow up* into Christ in every way (Ephesians 4:15).

Beloved, this command was originally given as loving instruction but the time has come to take it as rebuke. If the words sting, it is the flesh recoiling, not the Spirit. It is time to grow up.

In the Song of Songs, the daughters of Jerusalem and the city’s watchmen represent people who dwell in God’s household—some even in positions of influence. Yet neither group is teleiotēs, fully mature. Neither consistently discerns good from evil. Neither is the Bride. Neither has truly grown up.

THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM

The daughters of Jerusalem would not recognize the Bridegroom if He invited them to dance (Song of Songs 3:3-4). Their eyes cannot fully see. They prove this when asking the Bride, “What makes your Beloved so special?”

She must describe Him in glowing detail because they have never truly seen Him (Song of Songs 5:8-9). At least the daughters admire the Bride and desire to know the Bridegroom. They are

traveling to the wedding, spending what they have on holy oil (Matthew 25:1-13).

THE WATCHMEN

The watchmen are far worse. They intentionally wound the Bride, believing they do good by it—proof they cannot tell the difference between good and evil (Song of Songs 5:7-9). Entrusted with kingdom authority and charged to keep watch over Zion, they let the Bridegroom come and go right under their noses without ever sensing His presence.

The watchmen may perceive angels and demons yet they remain blind to both the Bridegroom and His Bride. A modern prophetic voice—Misty Edwards—sings directly to this blindness:

Oh watchmen on the walls, open up your eyes.

Seer, what do you see? Open up your eyes.

Oh watchmen on the walls, why do you sleep?

Shake off your lethargy and complacency.

For I testify about [today's watchmen] that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge (Romans 10:2).

These household members—the daughters and the watchmen of Jerusalem—are genuine children of God. They have a place in God's house. Yet children—no matter how sincere or zealous, no matter how well they teach or prophesy or work miracles—need to grow up.

MY LOVER

Scripture says, *He who pampers his servant from youth will in the end find a son (Proverbs 29:21).* That son matures until he stands

in the same intimate place as Abraham, whom God Himself calls “My lover” (Isaiah 41:8).

When we reach spiritual adulthood, we become the Lover’s lover, as mature in faith and friendship with God as Abraham and Sarah in their latter days. This depth of intimacy is the Lover’s deepest longing for all those whom He chose before *the foundation of the world*—you included (Ephesians 1:4; Revelation 13:8).

After all, *it is not good for the Man to be alone (Genesis 2:18)*. He desires a counterpart who fully corresponds to Him—a lover bearing His image, one loving with His love.

Beloved, the battlefield vision I saw is no dream. It is as real as reality gets. We need to wake up.

CHAPTER 5

AHAB

You shall ahab the Lord your God (Deuteronomy 6:5)

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) once preached on the First Great Commandment. In that sermon he imagined this exchange:

“You say, ‘I never do anything against God.’”

“No, my friend—that is not the question. The question is: Do you love Him?”

“Well, sir, I never violate the proprieties of religion.”

“That is not it. The command is, ‘You shall love Him.’”

“Well, sir, I do a great deal for God—I teach Sunday school and more.”

“Ah, but do you love Him? It is the heart He wants, and He will not be content without it.”

The happiest creatures, Spurgeon concluded, are those who love God without reserve.

Nothing has changed since that nineteenth century sermon. The happiest of all is the Bride. She has her Lover to herself and He will never let her go. *God is in her midst; she will not be moved (Psalm 46:5).*

YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD

When a Bible scholar asked Jesus which commandment is greatest, He quoted Deuteronomy: *You shall love (ahab) the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength (Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37).*

Because Jesus draws directly from the Hebrew text, He is commanding that men *ahab* God—not merely the Greek word *agape* that appears in the New Testament. Both words become “love” in English, but *ahab* carries far deeper fire. For those longing to become the Bride, grasping *ahab* is essential. *Ahab* means infinitely more than love.

As a noun, *ahab* embraces everything we mean by lover, yet goes beyond to include best friend, confidant, soul mate, devotee, admirer, the one forever desired and continually longed for, the sole focus of the heart’s affection (short of sexual union).

As a verb, *ahab* means to be utterly consumed by, swept away by, enamored with, captivated by another.

At its core, “You shall *ahab* the Lord your God” means: Make God the all-consuming focus of your existence, leaving no room for any rival thought, affection or pursuit.

THE LORD'S AHAB

This blazing intensity matches how the Lover loves us. He calls Abraham not merely “friend,” but “My ahab”—My lover (Isaiah 41:8).

When modern voices casually claim to be “God’s friend,” they are actually claiming to be the intimate, submitted, fully mature lover of the Bridegroom. Yet many today who speak this way still describe their walk with God in childlike terms. At best, these people do not understand the depths they invoke. At worst, they mislead.

Those who truly obey the First Great Commandment follow Abraham’s path: their life becomes consumed with ahab for God until God becomes their Ahab—their Lover, their all-consuming desire, far surpassing love for father, mother, son, daughter, ministry, reputation or anything else under the sun (Matthew 10:37-39).

Agape, the Greek word chosen by New Testament writers, is noble—but agape is to ahab what the Appalachians are to the Rockies. Both are mountain ranges, both translate as “love,” yet one towers twice as high. English “love” shrinks even further: I can love vanilla ice cream without it costing me my life. But cease to ahab God, and life itself is lost.

Only ahab love—relentless, overwhelming, totally self-sacrificial—possesses the power to carry a soul all the way to the wedding feast. Agape alone cannot. Love barely starts one up the mountain path.

THE COMMAND REPEATS ITSELF

Notice how the First Great Commandment doubles back on itself: “You shall ahab the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

To ahab God is, by definition, to give Him all. The “with all” phrases that follow simply define ahab. When we truly ahab the Lord Jesus Christ, nothing of us remains for anyone or anything else. We are consumed with God, consumed by God and exist for God alone.

The one who enters spiritual marriage becomes one with Christ’s very nature—a true “God-man.” And the Man—the Second Adam—is no longer alone. He has gained the counterpart He desired in the beginning: bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh, breathing the same Spirit.

On the cross, God proved His ahab for us. Now He invites us to take up our cross and prove our ahab for Him (Matthew 22:37).

Beloved, ahab is no Sunday feeling—it is the burning passion that fashions fallen men into God’s perfectly matched lovers—men before whom angels stand in awe, men who are one with Christ.

CHAPTER 6

ALIKE IN DIGNITY

When I became a man (1 Corinthians 13:11)

William Shakespeare described Romeo and Juliet as “alike in dignity.” Just as well he could have called them equally yoked (2 Corinthians 6:14).

To become equally yoked with the Bridegroom, alike in dignity, our inner man must become like Christ. The ancient church called this Theosis—becoming one with God. The Orthodox Church still teaches this today.

MINISTRY OFFICES

Spiritual gifts, church offices or seminary degrees never prove the inner man or reveal his level of Theosis. As we have seen, the watchmen of the Song of Songs hold positions of authority in Zion—perhaps prophetic or seer giftings—yet none are the Bride (Song of Songs 3:3; 5:7). Instead of recognizing her, they wound her and tear her garments. They cannot discern good from evil.

Beloved, I write from experience: like the Beloved in the Song of Songs, childish leaders have torn my ‘wedding garments’ and rebuked me for seeking my Lover. They have hurt my heart deeply—and like Christ, my heart longs for their maturity.

Scripture warns: *Many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14)*. Heart quality, not outward polish or spiritual power, determines whether one can be yoked to the Bridegroom.

Try as they might, no churchman or committee can appoint anyone to a place in Christ’s Body. Christ alone assigns each member’s function. For the Body to work properly, we must occupy the place He gives—not the one we desire but the one He calls us to. The place He has for us always matches our current heart quality. The right place has what we need and needs what we give—even when what we give is rejected.

The only way to stay in our proper place—be that place sunny or stormy—is obedience to the Spirit. Left to our own devices, we will step out of our appointed place. We will become dislocated—non-functioning in His Body and in danger of hearing, *I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness (Matthew 7:23)*.

The flesh accepts what God rejects and rejects what God appoints. Only the Spirit agrees with God. Only the Spirit knows one’s heart quality. When we listen to our flesh, we are our own worst enemy. We must learn to listen to the Voice, no matter life’s circumstances. God designed those circumstances—good and bad—to fashion our heart into His, to make us like Him in dignity.

MARY

Mary was a teenager—by modern standards, a child—when she entered the marriage relationship with the Head of the house. We can rightly call it marriage: their union produced the legitimate Son. To outward seeing eyes, Mary never looked the part—the mother of God. But to the Lord who *weighs the hearts*, she was perfectly beautiful (Proverbs 21:2).

Like Mary, the Bridal generation will include young believers who are spiritual adults. It may seem strange that chronological children can relate to God as His Bride, yet it is far stranger—and sadder—to see gray-haired believers still relating to Him as little children. If your spiritual eyes open wide enough, you too will see it and grieve.

OBEYING PARENTS

Because young believers can surpass their natural parents in spiritual maturity, Scripture gives careful instruction: *Children, obey your parents in the Lord* and simply, *Children, obey your parents* (Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20).

The Lord wants chronological children to honor their earthly parents regardless of their parents' spiritual maturity, and He wants spiritual children to obey their heavenly Father. Obedience, in both realms, is the pathway of maturity. There is no other way to the wedding.

Just as natural children cannot grasp the depth of intimacy between their parents, spiritual children cannot comprehend the union of Bride and Bridegroom. We only fully appreciate that relationship after we enter it. God can use this book to call you to it and technically explain it, but only those who become the Bride experience the passion of the Bridegroom.

LOVE AND RESPECT

One encouraging sign that the Bridal generation draws near is the widespread impact of Dr. Emerson Eggerichs' book *Love & Respect* (Thomas Nelson, 2004). Although it focuses on natural marriage, the book clearly explains God's relational principles in accessible language—providing a strong foundation for understanding spiritual marriage and making an excellent wedding gift.

EQUALLY YOKED

Beloved, it is okay if some of these truths feel beyond full grasp right now. But it is not okay to withhold your whole heart, mind, soul and strength from God. It is not okay to ignore or compromise the gentle promptings you sense from Him, even when those leadings seem scary or unreasonable.

Jesus says it clearly: *If you love Me, you will keep My commandments (John 14:15).*

Do you love Me? (John 21:16).

Beloved, the Groom will have a Bride alike in dignity—one grown enough to love Him with God's love, one whose heart beats in rhythm with His own. Will you invite Him to finish the work in you? Will you ask Him to release His judgments into your life?

CHAPTER 7

ISAAC AND REBEKAH

Forget your people and your father's house (Psalm 45:10)

The Second Coming of Christ will not sprinkle magical dust in the clouds that instantly transforms unprepared believers into marriage-ready Brides as they rise to meet Him. There are no fairy godmothers in the kingdom—only Cinderellas who prepare themselves and a Prince who chooses wisely.

Jesus warned that half the virgins in the kingdom who cry *Lord, Lord will* be shut out when the Bridegroom arrives because they were not ready (Matthew 25:8-13). I would not gamble my eternity on whether the ones left behind get a second chance. The five wise virgins teach us the truth: only thorough self-preparation gains entrance to the wedding feast.

Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time (1 Peter 5:6).

PREPARING TO MEET THE BRIDEGROOM

In Genesis 24, Isaac foreshadows the Bridegroom, and Rebekah—the virgin who captures his heart—prefigures the Bride. If the story is unfamiliar, pause and read it now—the parallels will shine brighter. It will take six or seven minutes of your time.

Types in the Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah		
Isaac	→	The Spiritual Bridegroom
Rebekah	→	The Spiritual Bride
Abraham	→	The Heavenly Father
Abraham's Servant	→	The Holy Spirit
Laban	→	Jesus as the Elder Brother
Bethuel	→	The Heavenly Father
Abraham's relatives	→	Children of God
Promised Land	→	Beulah Land (the Land of Marriage)
Gifts given to Rebekah	→	Spiritual Gifts
Sarah's Tent	→	The Tent of Meeting
The Servant's ten camels	→	The Law
The Servant's men	→	Angels

Rebekah grows up in her father Bethuel's house with her brother Laban beside her. Bethuel and Laban are types of the Father and the Son. In the same way, we mature in the Father's care alongside our elder Brother, Jesus: *Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son (2 John 1:9).*

Abraham's trusted servant—likely Eliezer of Damascus—pictures the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father to find and prepare a

bride for the son, adorning her with gifts along the way (Psalm 145:14).

*Arise, my darling, my beautiful one,
And come along.
For behold, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone (Song of Songs 2:10-11).*

This rising from voluntary submission is a kind of resurrection—the summons to leave the refiner’s fire to walk with the King in the land of promises fulfilled.

Rebekah matures outside Beulah Land (the place of marriage). So do we: spiritual children grow up under the Father’s watchful care with the Brother until we are ready to cross the River into marriage.

The one who becomes the Bride has experienced the Father’s discipline—first enduring it, then accepting it, finally seeking it. Every crooked place within her heart, He makes straight (Luke 3:5). She hungers and thirsts for righteousness, and her righteousness is Christ Himself (Matthew 5:6; 1 Corinthians 1:30). When she was a child, she desired to mature into the Bride—so she invited God’s judgments into her life.

Have you?

BEULAH LAND

Some equate Beulah Land with heaven. Beulah means married. If that thought was true, no one could enter spiritual marriage in this life. Yet the veil between heaven and earth is torn wide open (Matthew 27:51). Mature believers already sit with Christ in heavenly places while walking the earth below—living in both realms at once whether they can see it or not (Ephesians 2:6).

EYES TO SEE

When Abraham's servant meets Rebekah at the well, she draws water tirelessly for him, his men and ten thirsty camels—hundreds of gallons poured out in cheerful service. She proved herself generous, diligent, beautiful inside and out. So too, those on the cusp of bridal maturity are spiritually lavish, hardworking, and radiant to eyes that truly see. They carry their Father's heart.

The pitcher on her shoulder symbolizes the soul—drawing and pouring out living water to the weary (Isaiah 12:3). Christ is that Salvation, the Living Water.

Rebekah offers food from her father's house freely, without charge or approval needed. She declares there is room for all and invites the travelers in—like Jesus Himself (John 14:2). This is the mark of one prepared to be the Bride: she has her Father's heart. She knows what to do and does it in natural unity with His will.

Raised perhaps as royalty in the area of Aram Naharaim, Rebekah already carries the dignity of Sarah—a princess by nature. At the well, her heart and actions reveal a Proverbs 31 woman, ready for the Son of promise—no matter her exact age.

An entire generation of Rebekahs is arising—shining like the dawn, as beautiful as the moon, as pure as the sun, *as awesome as an army with banners* (Song of Songs 6:10). The banner over them is love (Song of Songs 2:4).

QUALIFIED TO ADMINISTER THE KINGDOM

Rebekah consents to the marriage because she has reached the age of accountability. She is mature. She speaks for herself yet honors her father. She does not belong to herself; she must have

her father's blessing. Children cannot consent; they are not yet accountable. Their father's heart is not perfected in them.

Once betrothed, guided by the servant, she journeys toward Isaac, knowing she marries into Abraham's vast inheritance: *The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand (John 3:35; Genesis 24:36).*

Along the way, she ponders the weight of her coming role—*noblesse oblige*: high calling demands high responsibility. So the spiritual Bride, led by the Holy Spirit toward Beulah Land, prepares to receive her husband's nature to administer his kingdom by His will alone.

She follows her Lover's pattern: He emptied Himself, humbled Himself, became *obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*. Therefore *God exalted Him (Philippians 2:7-9)*.

When Rebekah crosses the Euphrates River, she passes her point of no return—her Rubicon. She has died to herself so her Husband might live. So does the Bride: at some moment, she gives her heart fully to the Son of Promise, leaving father's house and relatives behind. Water baptism foreshadows this crossing—from childhood into the land of marriage.

Like Rebekah, the Bride will never return to the old land she matured in. She has grown up. Her Father gave her away. She no longer belongs to His house. She belongs to her Husband.

Listen, O daughter, give attention and incline your ear: Forget your people and your father's house; Then the King will desire your beauty. Because He is your Lord, bow down to Him (Psalm 45:10-11).

ENTERING SARAH'S TENT

Rebekah arrives to find Isaac meditating in his field—a garden scene echoing Eve brought to Adam. Veiling herself, she surrenders her own ‘head,’ receiving her Husband as Head (Ephesians 5:23). Isaac’s fields are ready; now he builds his house (Proverbs 24:27).

Jesus walks His fields today, longing for those who count all things loss—dung!—to gain Him (Philippians 3:8).

Rebekah enters Sarah’s tent, becoming a daughter of Sarah, inheriting matronly authority. In the tent of meeting, she removes her veil before her lord—just as Moses did before God (Exodus 34:34).

She lays down her life on the marriage bed, shedding blood as the veil to her most holy place is torn. Asleep in her husband, her husband in her, she dies to self. Awakening in joy—laughter, for Isaac means laughter—she rises in His name.

So the Bride lays down her life *that the King of Glory may come in* (Psalm 24:7). *Weeping endures for the night, but joy comes in the morning* (Psalm 30:5).

Like Eve taken from Adam’s side in deep sleep, the Bride was in the first Adam during His life; she emerges through His death-sleep, and becomes the helper corresponding to Him—bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh, one in Spirit (Genesis 2:23; 1 Corinthians 11:8-9).

It is not good for the Man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). Isaac found comfort in Rebekah after Sarah’s passing (Genesis 24:67). So the Son finds comfort in His Bride.

Truly, *Your Husband is your Maker* (Isaiah 54:5).

THE AMBASSADOR

Abraham promised his ambassador, his servant: *He [the Lord] will send His angel before you (Genesis 24:7)*. Later the servant testifies: *The Lord has guided me (Genesis 24:27)*.

The Father's Ambassador is Christ Jesus, and like Abraham's servant, the Spirit guided Him too. *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to bring good news to the poor*, confesses Jesus (Luke 4:18).

Like Isaac, the Bridegroom will not return to the old land; the Bride meets Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Spiritual children mature under the Father's care with the Son, then follow the Holy Spirit across the river into Beulah Land—the Land of Marriage, the Promised Land where Bride and Bridegroom meet.

Beloved, the Bridegroom waits in the field. The Ambassador has come with gifts and the invitation. Will you accept His offer?



BOOK VI

**INVERTING
HOUSEHOLD
RELATIONSHIPS**

*Now why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do
what I say? (Luke 6:46)*

God's house has a beautiful order—servants serve the Master, children obey the Father and the Bride submits to her Lover.

But what happens when we flip the script? When servants boss the Master, children ignore the Father or the Bride—God forbid!—tells the Groom how the wedding should go?

Spoiler: it is called presumption—and it is the fastest way to turn a love story into a tragedy.

In the following pages we will expose the strange fire of inverting household relationships: the heartbreak it brings, the destruction it causes. We will explain the way back to the narrow path that leads to the wedding.

Beloved, please take caution: like a hot stove, some of what you are about to read will scorch the flesh. What you are about to dive into crosses swords with Church traditions—but not with the Bible. Not with God's best plans for us all, the plans we are determined to follow.

CHAPTER 1

THE GREAT TRANSGRESSION

Against You, You only, I have sinned (Psalm 51:4)

A friend once confessed to the Father that he had reached the end of his rope. The unjust suffering felt unbearable, so he told God he was taking a break from the narrow path.

In essence my friend was going AWOL—deserting his wife, children, church and radio ministry. This man who had spoken at my wedding, was abandoning the Midwestern city the Lord had sent him to redeem. God warned him sternly: “You’re not going to like it!”

He knew he had been bought with a price; his life was no longer his own (1 Corinthians 7:23). Despite the warning, despite possessing sound theology, despite experiencing God’s grace, he stopped dying to self that Christ might live. Trying to escape the purifying fire God sent, he presumed on God’s will. He inverted the Child-Father relationship—making himself lord of

his life. Choosing his own way forward, he shrank back from the pathway to the wedding.

On Christmas Day 2020, the Lord ended his presumption, calling him home. Whatever reward awaited my friend, it fell short of what could have been. Presumption robbed him of God's best.

Beloved, this story grieves my heart not because God judged my friend but because my friend ignored God's daily offer of restoration.

PRESUMPTION

David called inverting household relationships “presumptuous sins”—and warned they lead to “great transgression” (Psalm 19:13). To presume means to decide for oneself what is best; it means usurping God's place.

Unrepentant presumption spreads like wildfire, consuming the igniter. It destroyed my friend's church, ended the Christian radio station I helped him launch, cost me his friendship and diminished his eternal inheritance.

Even presumption that is repented from can leave believers in lesser destinies. To reach our highest calling—to become Christ's Bride in this life—we must conquer it. We submit to God in everything, always, even when our desires must die. As St. Paul confessed: *I die daily* (1 Corinthians 15:31).

If we slip, we repent. *A righteous man falls seven times* but he gets back up an eighth (Proverbs 24:16).

PATSAR

The Hebrew word *patsar*—often rendered “presumption”—carries tones of pushiness, stubbornness and arrogance. It suggests ‘pecking at’ authority. Think of a henpecked husband.

In today’s Church, presumption shows clearly in Slave-Master (employee-employer) or Child-Father dynamics. We grasp the natural parallels so we see it better in the spiritual. The Bride-Bridegroom relationship is harder for us to see. This is partly true because few in the Protestant Church understand that what we see ‘preaches’ just as much as what we hear. God created men to represent the Father or Bridegroom in the assembly, and women, the Church or Bride.

When a woman assumes a bit of authority over a man in home, church or workplace—and when men permit it—presumption raises its ugly head and Satan sneers at God.

The flesh—not the Spirit—rebels against verses like *I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man (1 Timothy 2:12)* or *Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord (Ephesians 5:22)*. Make no mistake about it, our rebellion against God’s order stems from wanting to rule Him. The root of presumption is satanic.

To enter the Bride-Bridegroom union, we first align our personal male-female relationships with God’s design. Natural precedes spiritual. Disobey in the natural, and spiritual glory remains out of reach. In natural marriages, only spouses who want to marry Jesus need comply. Beloved, I know what I write.

If this rubs you the wrong way, I understand. Who am I, anyway?—a nobody. Do not take my word for this or anything else. Call out to God for wisdom and listen. His sheep know His voice.

ACTING LIKE LORD

Inversion happens when the lesser acts as lord over the greater—knowing the Head’s will yet choosing against it. This is presumption. It is not presumption when we step forward in faith: “Lord, I believe You’re leading here—if not, correct me; I’m listening.” Nor is ignorance presumption; ignorance signals immaturity, not rebellion. Presumption is deliberate defiance—like my friend fleeing the fire God sent to purify him.

Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu exemplify it: they worshiped as seemed right to them, not as God commanded (Leviticus 10:1). For offering “strange fire,” they died. Their sincerity provided no safety.

They inverted the Servant-Master relationship, presuming their way pleased God. Their judgment was swift because of their proximity to God. They sinned in His face.

“Strange fire” means worshiping or ministering in self-chosen ways. To do so proclaims to the spirit world that our God is just one option among many. See Saul, Ananias and Sapphira.

THE LAW OF COMING NEAR

God promises: *I will put My law within them and write it on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33)*. To draw near—especially into marriage intimacy—we obey the Spirit’s whispers, no matter the cost (Isaiah 30:21). We call this the Law of Coming Near: Worship God in Spirit and truth (John 4:24). *By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy (Leviticus 10:3)*.

Those who “know Him” yet disobey His commandments are liars (1 John 2:4). These are strong words from a holy God. The Bridal generation heeds them.

Examples of Strange Fire—Presumption		
Eve	Served forbidden fruit because it appealed to her	Genesis 3:6
Cain	Demanded “equal rights” with a bloodless offering	Genesis 4:5
Hophni & Phinehas	Priests who treated God’s offerings with contempt	1 Samuel 2:12
Miriam	Claimed equal authority reserved for “the Man”	Numbers 12:2
King Saul	Usurped the priest’s role	1 Samuel 13:9; 15:22
Peter	Ministered from self-will, earning “Get behind Me, Satan!”	Matthew 16:23
Religious leaders	Rejected the Plumb Line—Jesus—to protect their crooked hearts	Mark 15:11
Ananias & Sapphira	Garnished their gift with lies	Acts 5:4
St. Paul (pre-conversion Saul)	Persecuted Christ in believers believing he was serving God	Acts 9:1-4
Diotrephes	Refused to welcome itinerant ministers	3 John 9-11

PUNISHMENT ACCORDING TO PROXIMITY

The chastisement one receives for presumption correlates to one’s nearness to the Head. Kindling strange fire far from His presence may seem tolerated (Romans 11:29). But do not be deceived—God will bless what He will not inhabit, but He still destroys strange fire from His face.

Diotrephes, distant in heart, never knew God (3 John 1:9-10). Ananias and Sapphira, close enough to lie to the Spirit, died instantly (Acts 5:1-10).

Kindling strange fire by baby believers and childish Christians differs vastly from striking it in the marriage bed. The Bride's tender heart would never dare.

GOD NEVER CHANGES

The Law of Coming Near stands unchanging. So does human tendency to worship God in ways that feel good to the flesh—until fear or love compels obedience.

Early on the narrow path, fear of God drives obedience: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). His salvation draws near those who fear Him (Psalm 85:9).*

Deeper in, tasting His love, we obey out of love: *If you love Me, keep My commandments (John 14:15).*

Both motives propel one towards the wedding feast but love is more powerful. At some point, love for God must consume one's heart or else when the journey becomes too hard, the walk to the altar will end. Only love can carry one all the way.

Those who reject God's male-female order never draw near to the altar. Bridal glories remain inaccessible to them. But the Bridal generation bows to every heart-whisper. Her all-consuming love for God means she is going all the way.

Beloved, presumption is no small slip—it is decidedly trading down from the marriage suite to the servant's quarters. It is swapping one's eternal inheritance for a bowl of bean soup. If you will lay your self-will down, He will lift you up, all the way to His arms forever.

CHAPTER 2

THE PATH

Unless you repent you will all likewise perish (Luke 13:3, 5)

With spiritual eyes, I saw a golden sword fall on the lead pastor's head. The man was preaching from the dais of a suburban church. I sat on the back row. The Spirit said not to name the assembly.

In the vision, the man tumbled from the stage—judgment was coming to him. I knew it.

Days later, over lunch, I tearfully warned the man: Repent before the sword strikes. Perhaps mercy would turn it. God loves mercy.

He tilted his head: “How can you know, John? You do not know.” I did not know what the man meant. Later I learned the pastor presumed in his ministry—doing as he pleased, letting chaos reign to keep peace (and paycheck).

Six months later the assembly learned of his “early retirement.” He did not repent for presumption so God fired him from his ministerial job. I wish he had repented.

BACK TO THE PATH

Beloved, some today wander off the narrow path—blinded by hyper-grace or misapplied social justice or they are offended at unjust suffering. Reasons matter little now.

What matters: scramble back—or die trying. There is only one way to worship: in Spirit and truth. There is only one pathway to the wedding: the narrow path. The easy path leads nowhere good.

Some—perhaps you—will “die” returning to the narrow path. That too is the way and will suffice. Death to self for obedience to the Spirit is normal Christ-ianity. You can make it. Be bold like David and turn now.

In coming chapters, we will see inversion of Slave-Master, Child-Father, Bride-Bridegroom as strange fire—echoing Nadab and Abihu, Ananias and Sapphira, and recent stories.

What I want you to hear before we go further is this: if you find you are committing the sin of presumption, repent. Do not put it off like the church pastor who was fired or worse, like my friend who lost his life. Please repent.

Beloved, the narrow path is not a detour—it is the only way to the wedding. If you have inverted a household relationship, turn back now. The Bridegroom awaits His Bride.

CHAPTER 3

INVERTING THE SLAVE-MASTER RELATIONSHIP

A slave is not greater than his master (John 13:16)

The Slave–Master relationship lies behind us in the Church’s journey, making presumption—offering strange fire—easiest to spot here. Over-the-top natural examples clarify it before we turn to the spiritual.

1. A housekeeper who orders the mansion owner to scrub floors, then lounges poolside, soon finds herself unemployed. Presumptuous.
2. A truck driver who delivers goods whenever and wherever he pleases loses the keys—and possibly his freedom. The cargo is not his.

3. In war, a soldier who refuses the order to advance faces execution. Obedience is non-negotiable.
4. A janitor who dons priestly robes, seizes the shepherd's staff, and presides as bishop is gently escorted to care. We must stay in our assigned place.

These servants are clearly unfit. Why? The Slave–Master dynamic is familiar. We know a servant does not lord over the master. Only the immature, deceived or rebellious pretend otherwise.

Scripture's command—*Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect*—feels sensible (1 Peter 2:18–20).

Beloved, we are looking at these truths not to condemn but to make us ready for marriage. When we step out of presumption and into simple obedience, we are running the trail to the wedding feast.

In the spiritual realm, the one who claims to serve the Lord yet persistently disobeys His directions is no true servant. Despite applause and good works, he risks hearing, *I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness (Matthew 7:23)*. Good deeds done in disobedience are *filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6)*.

Yet listen to the sweeter invitation that rings even louder: “I know you; come near to Me, you who obey.”

BEST CITIZENS

Paul teaches that all authority comes from God (Romans 13:1–7). Rebellion against earthly authority—unless it commands sin against God—is presumption, strange fire.

The Bride and Bride-to-be submit to authority because it represents the Bridegroom. They pay taxes cheerfully, give as the

Spirit leads, honor contracts, obey speed limits, return library books on time.

When loving the Lover with everything, even “small” things matter. Willful obedience expresses love. Godly believers make the best citizens—discovering unearthly joy in unreserved surrender. In that joy they begin to shine with God’s Presence, carrying His peace as they go.

PAYING TAXES

The Lord once spoke to me: “If you pay your taxes with the same joy you pay your tithe, I will credit to your account the good your nation does, not the evil.”

I pondered it deeply. My attitude needed adjustment. Now I draw smiley faces on IRS checks and imagine my dollars feeding widows and orphans.

Samuel warned King Saul: *Rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry (1 Samuel 15:23)*. Insubordination—intentional disobedience—cost King Saul the kingdom.

Yet David, after his own presumption, repented quickly—and became *a man after My heart, who will do all My will (Acts 13:22)*. One repentant heart changed everything.

TENDER HEARTED

Hiding in the cave, David cut a corner from King Saul’s robe—taking the kingly mantle by force. Though King Saul hunted him, David’s small act of presumption pierced his own heart (1 Samuel 24:5-6).

David did not excuse himself with “Saul deserves it” or “He’s a bad boss.” He confessed: *Far be it from me... to stretch out my hand against [the Lord’s anointed] (1 Samuel 24:6).*

David sinned not only against King Saul but against the Anointed—the Messiah. In that moment, he spiritually seized authority not yet given.

But watch what a heart of love for God did: the moment David’s heart broke in repentance, the Lord rushed in. David became the forerunner of the Lamb who would surrender everything. That tender, repentant heart made him “a man after God’s own heart”—the very pattern of the Bride.

The Bride decides: Either God brings salvation, or none comes. Total dependence on God is prerequisite for bridal intimacy.

Is that the cry rising in your heart today? That if God does not save you then you will not be saved? If it is, beloved, you are already stepping into eternal beauty.

DAVID’S BROKENNESS

Gene Edwards’ *A Tale of Three Kings* beautifully explores David’s brokenness under King Saul and later King Absalom. David resolved: My Lover will rescue me—or take me home. Either way, I am safe. My life is hidden in Him.

Beloved, God’s ways have not changed since David’s days—and neither has His heart. He is not asking you to save your self-will; He is inviting you to let Him crucify it so that Christ may live fully in you. There is no other path to oneness with Him... and there is no greater joy.

LIFE AS THE LAMB

Those hungering for intimacy choose the Lamb's way. Raising a hand to escape a difficult boss, spouse, or circumstance is raising a hand against the Lord's anointed—usurping the Savior's role, walking in Satan's footsteps: *I will make myself like the Most High (Isaiah 14:14)*.

How else are the Scriptures fulfilled unless those who are called Christ-ian live as the Christ?

Take up your cross and follow Me is not an invitation to a life of ease (Matthew 10:38). It is the wedding invitation—the way we die with the Lamb that we may reign with the King, radiant and unstoppable, hand-in-hand with our Bridegroom (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 20:6).

OBEDIENT SLAVE

As a young man, I felt 1 Timothy 2:1-2 was a personal command: *pray for all people, kings, and those in authority*.

Obediently, I began praying daily for nations and leaders—including difficult ones. Over time, godly compassion grew in me for them. My heart aligned more with God's longing that all be saved.

It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master (Matthew 10:25).

For seventeen years, a boss insulted my faith, appearance and work. I learned to forgive—praying for him and his family daily. In obedience, God gave me love for him.

In that love, I tasted something of the Bridegroom's heart, His pain. *The Lord raises up those who are bowed down (Psalm 146:8)*. In the bowing, He slowly fills us with Himself. My heart began to hurt for this lost man.

Beloved, the Slave–Master path is simple: bow low, obey fully, and watch the Lord turn your service to Him into love for Him. That is how obedience works. This is how we grow in godly love.

CHAPTER 4

BREACH OF TRUST

My Father has entrusted everything to me (Matthew 11:27 NLT)

The Lord Jesus Christ is the ultimate expert in trusts: “My Father has entrusted everything to me.”

In the natural realm, a trust places precious assets in a trustee’s care for a beneficiary.

God entrusts His greatest treasure—the Bride-to-be—to church leaders (trustees) for the joy of His Son, the Bridegroom. In this light Ephesians 4:11-14 takes on fresh urgency:

He gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers—to equip the saints for ministry, build up Christ’s Body, until we reach unity in faith and knowledge of the Son, maturing into the full measure of Christ’s stature, no longer children tossed by waves or carried by cunning doctrines.

Beloved, when God-appointed church leaders walk in the Spirit, they are vessels of His glory, helping believers grow into the

mature, lovesick counterpart the Bridegroom longs for. But so-called leaders who rely on their own wisdom instead of the Spirit fall into presumption—and can lead others there too. In legal terms this is called a Breach of Trust.

Church-appointed and self-appointed ‘leaders’ are continually guilty of Breach of Trust. They are not even in the place God assigned them.

BREACH OF TRUST

A Breach of Trust occurs when a trustee violates duties or terms—intentionally or through negligence, broken promises or misplaced priorities. Trustees bear responsibility for any loss the owner experiences.

Ministry carries great honor—and great responsibility (James 3:1). If leaders hinder the Owner from receiving His fully prepared Bride, the loss grieves the Lord’s heart more than we can imagine. Yet He is not quick to condemn; He yearns to restore and empower every one of His leaders who turns back to Him.

The terms are simple: walk by the Spirit, not the flesh (Galatians 5:16). Minister in union with God, fulfilling His perfect will. Faithful trustees do exactly that. By the Spirit they are wise, able and fruitful.

WICKED, LAZY TRUSTEES

Jesus’ parable of the talents cuts deep when we read “trustee” for “servant”:

You wicked, lazy trustee... Throw out the worthless trustee into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 25:26, 30).

These words of the Lord are sobering because the stakes are eternal. Christ warns not to drive us away but to awaken us to the glory waiting on the other side of surrender.

Leaders who serve people instead of God breach trust. *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men (Colossians 3:23).* The Spirit empowers those who desire God's will above man's.

Assemblies rarely outgrow their leaders; they often reflect them. The more leadership obeys the Lord Jesus Christ, the more the people mature—until the Bride begins to arise in their midst: radiant, unified, ready to walk hand in hand with her Bridegroom. That is God's purpose for His Church leaders—to make believers into Brides.

A SHEPHERD OF WOOLY SHEEP

One Old Testament shepherd never breached trust, although no one would have blamed him if he had. His faithfulness amid continued injustice sets the standard for spiritual shepherds today—those willing to pay the price that Christ may abound in His people. Giving account to his harsh master, the shepherd said:

These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and female goats have not miscarried... I bore the loss of whatever was torn by beasts... Heat consumed me by day and frost by night, and sleep fled from my eyes... You changed my wages ten times (Genesis 31:38-41).

This shepherd is Jacob; his conniving master, Uncle Laban.

Beloved, Jacob's steadfast obedience in the fire refined him for something far greater. It prepared him to meet the Bridegroom face-to-face.

HUSBAND—GREAT MAN—CHAMPION

After his accounting, Jacob wrestled all night with a “man” (‘iysh)—husband, great man, champion (Genesis 32:24). That night became Jacob’s bridal encounter. Wrestling turned to embrace; his name changed to Israel—marking his new nature as one united with God.

WALK IN THE WAY

Beloved, breach of trust is not just a leadership mistake that effects those committing it. It poisons the spiritual babies so they never mature into the Bride. Faithful trustees prepare her for the wedding, giving her the proper food in season. What type of trustee are you?

CHAPTER 5

INVERTING THE CHILD-FATHER RELATIONSHIP

*A stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father
(Deuteronomy 21:18)*

Despite a father's deep love, unrepentant presumption led Prince Absalom—King David's beloved son—to an untimely death. When David cried, *O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!*—these may be the most heartbroken words ever spoken by a father (2 Samuel 18:33). They echo the Father's own grief when His children choose rebellion over intimacy.

Absalom's inversion of the Child-Father relationship cost him his life. This natural tragedy mirrors a spiritual truth: unrepentant presumption in the Child-Father relationship sets the spiritual son—despite the heavenly Father's love—on a path toward untimely spiritual death.

Beloved, the Father warns us not to scare us stiff but because He has seen too many Absaloms ride off a cliff. He prefers to throw a wedding than to mourn a funeral.

RECALCITRANCE

In the natural realm, we easily see the folly of a child lording it over his parents. Even with best intentions, the child lacks maturity to make wise decisions for himself or his family. The Lord Jesus Christ cares deeply about proper order in the Child–Father relationship. In the Old Covenant, He prescribed severe consequences for persistent rebellion in children (Deuteronomy 21:18, 21).

In the New Covenant, the command remains: *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right (Ephesians 6:1)*. Stubbornness and an unrepentant heart store up the wrath of God (Romans 2:5).

ACCORDING TO HIS NATURE

Let us not deceive ourselves with a shallow view of grace. A preacher once dismissed my correction with, “Jesus loves me, this I know... God is love, John. He’ll work things out.” Yes—God is love. And because He is unchanging, He works things out according to His nature, not our wishful thinking.

The Failure of Foolish Thinking		
Esau	found no place for repentance though he sought it with tears	Hebrews 12:16-17
Eli	honored his sons above God	1 Samuel 2:29
Hophni & Phinehas	despised God's offerings	1 Samuel 2:12-17
King Saul	feared people more than God	1 Chronicles 10:13-14
Ananias and Sapphira	tested the Spirit	Acts 5:1-10
Churches that	leave their first love, tolerate compromise or grow lukewarm	Revelation 2-3
Men who	honor Christ with their lips while their hearts remain far from Him	Matthew 15:8

The stories referenced in the above chart grieve the Father's heart—they are not happy tales of endless grace, but heartbreak that made Him cry.

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father (Matthew 7:21).

To draw nearer to the Lover, the bold invite His unyielding judgments—they refine us for the wedding. There is no alternate route. Obedience is the pathway of maturity. The Father walks it with us, cheering every step we take toward the marriage altar.

PERSISTENT PRESUMPTION

Isaiah warns that persistent presumption removes the supply of bread and water—the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Isaiah 3:1). When Christ is pushed away by rebellion, spiritual famine

follows—not because the Father withholds but because we close the door to His presence.

The prophet describes the result: the removal of mighty men, warriors, judges, prophets, elders, counselors and skillful artisans from among us (Isaiah 3:2-3).

In their place we receive spiritual children as princes, babies ruling, oppression and insolence toward elders (Isaiah 3:4-5).

Beloved, this famine we now endure is reversible. The moment we repent and realign with the Father's order, He rushes in with fresh bread, living water and selfless leadership—raising up a generation that shines with His glory. How else can we make it to matrimony?

HOW DO WE MEASURE UP?

Is the American church turning the world upside down like the Church in the book of Acts—or merely talking about it? Are we living Christ—or studying Him endlessly?

Isaiah's prophecy speaks to every assembly where inversion of the Child-Father relationship reigns: where there is immaturity in leadership, lack of spiritual authority, and oppression instead of freedom. Yet the cure is simple and near: humble repentance. The Father waits to heal and raise up mature sons and daughters who carry His heart.

In natural history, Isaiah's famine came when Jerusalem fell. Today, many sense the siege surrounding God's house—but the greater danger lies within our hearts, the place where persistent inversion pushes out the Spirit and leaves us famished for God's presence.

THE BIBLE-CHURCH PRISON

In an assembly I attended, orthodoxy was professed but not lived. Sound familiar? They inverted the Child–Father relationship in worship, and the Lover opened my eyes to the spiritual reality.

One Sunday a young girl read Scripture from the platform while the pastor stood behind her, lending ‘authority’ to the moment. As she read, a subtle web fell over the people. It was one more layer upon layers of deception, layers that had fallen week after week, year after year.

The web had grown as heavy as chains, crushing movement and breath. A dark reddish cloud muted worship and silenced witness. The saints were spiritually imprisoned, suffocating—yet they smiled as if all was well. They were not well. They were imprisoned and dying. I fled, heartbroken—not in judgment but in grief. To stay silent would affirm their strange fire. So I ran out of the service, as one fleeing Sodom.

Later, I gently shared with that church’s leadership—quoting their own statement of faith, explaining the spiritual realities, pleading for alignment with God’s household order. They stonewalled, unmoved. They refused to pay the price to return to the narrow road, if they had ever been on it.

WHAT THE EYE SEES

Beloved, what the eye sees preaches powerfully (Psalm 94:9; Job 29:11). Placing a child in ‘the Man’s’ place visually inverted the Child–Father relationship—declaring to the assembly (and the other created beings) that a child can teach the Father.

The assembly sighed, “Isn’t this cute.”

It was not cute. Having the bright-eyed girl read Scripture from the pulpit was strange fire. It was inverting God's household order. Yet even strange fire can be repented of—when hearts are willing to pay the price.

Week after week, the people remained restrained, muted, ashamed of the Gospel—spiritually oppressed and nearing death because they inverted the Child-Father relationship. They confessed they were children of God and then worshipped the Father in ways they wanted, not in the ways He prescribed. And they refused to return to the narrow path, at least when God sent me.

ORTHODOX RESPONSES

In reflection, humble leaders might have responded differently than they did. God fearing leaders might offer to:

1. Examine the Scripture with me or
2. Repent of their ignorance or
3. Wrestle openly with obedience to God's plans for corporate worship (1 Corinthians 14:23-40).

While presumption hardens hearts and strange fire brings deadly consequences, no heart is beyond God's reach. If God can turn Sauls into Pauls, he can restore *the hearts of the children to their fathers* (*Malachi 4:6*). I pray He does. Imagine those children breaking free of those chains and living in God's marvelous light. They could shake the world.

CHAPTER 6

INVERTING THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP

*The wife does not have authority over her own body,
but the husband does (1 Corinthians 7:4)*

The Church does not have authority over herself, but the Husband does. Beloved, this is not tyranny—it is the punchline to the oldest joke in the universe: the creature trying to out-captain the Creator. Spoiler: He wins, and the prize for surrender is better than any DIY crown.

Presumption in the Bride–Bridegroom relationship is harder to spot than in the Servant–Master or Child–Father dynamics. We more easily see where we have been than where we are going.

Our actions in natural marriage shout what we truly believe about the spiritual one. Play fast and loose with the natural, and we find the spiritual door locked—with us on the wrong side wondering why our homemade key refuses to turn His patented lock.

As we keep saying, submitting wholeheartedly to the Lawgiver's laws for natural marriage prepares us for spiritual marriage.

The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple... More desirable than gold... sweeter than honey... In keeping them there is great reward (Psalm 19:7-11).

For those who pay the price to mature, the Bridegroom Himself is the great reward—the face-to-face meeting that turns “I do” into “I finally get it.”

When we struggle to bring about God's plans for natural order, we basically take a crash course in the spiritual parallels—taught by the best Professor money cannot buy. Obedience to God in natural marriage is the gym where we build muscle for loving Jesus with everything. Get strong enough there, and He will step out from behind the curtain to meet you face-to-face. Miss the workout and you miss the meeting.

Whoever has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me... and I will love him and disclose Myself to him (John 14:21).

A CRAFTY APPEAL

Warning: Fleshly thoughts arise when the snake is talking: *You are mature enough to decide what is right; this is too hard to do. God will grace your decision. Save yourself. You surely will not die... You will be like God (Genesis 3:4-5).*

The serpent's pitch is still selling out stadiums after six millennia—same snake, same plan, new packaging—all designed to keep you from intimacy with God.

THE TRIANGLE-MARRIAGE TRAP

One of those newly packaged deceptions pictures Christ-ian marriage as a triangle: husband and wife equal horizontally, then both submitting upward to God.

Sounds democratic, feels fair—until you realize it is a clever detour around the actual road signs. Follow this dead-end trail long enough and you will wonder why the wedding feast never shows up on the GPS.

Some point to Ephesians 5:21—*submit to one another*—as proof of equality in marriage. But Ephesians 5:21 is about the Spirit's voice flowing through believers, not rewriting the organizational chart.

Scripture is clear: Christ is the head of every man, man is the head of woman, God is the head of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3). Wives submit to their own husbands as to the Lord; husbands are the head of wives as Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:22-23). These are the true road signs. Everything else is false.

When Satan twisted a verse into a deceptive road sign, Jesus replied: *Man shall live on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4)*. We never take one Scripture at the cost of another. The Voice of God always agrees with itself.

We listen for the Spirit wherever He speaks—even through others. Abraham learned this with Sarah: sometimes she counseled him through her flesh, sometimes with the Spirit. The trick? Discernment—and the humility to bow when the words we hear are the real deal. My sheep know my voice, says Jesus.

GOD → CHRIST → MAN → WOMAN

Galatians 3:28—*neither male nor female... all one in Christ*—speaks of equal value and inheritance, not erased roles. Our bodies remain male or female. Pretending otherwise is arguing with the bathroom mirror. Humble the body under God's design, and watch the living room reflection start looking more like the Bride.

Unmarried women remain under fatherly covering until given in marriage. Widows and orphans are never abandoned—the Father is faithful. He will make a way for them.

GENDER CONFUSION

When the Church rejects God's gender-specific order, confusion spreads. The Church is God's plumb line on earth. Crooked plumb line? The whole building wobbles—and the world calls it progress.

But here is the divine punchline: the moment we straighten up and realign, clarity returns like sobriety to a Sunday morning sailor. No more confusion—just the sharp, beautiful outline of a destiny more beautiful than any island paradise.

GOD HUMBLLED HIMSELF

Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross. Therefore God highly exalted Him (Philippians 2:8-9).

If the Son climbed the heights through obedience, imagine the view from the top for those who follow His footsteps. Or would we rather hear: *Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I say? (Luke 6:46).*

Beloved, God's marriage blueprint is not about putting anyone down—it is about lifting the willing up into the wild, glorious dance of Bride and Bridegroom. Live God's marriage plans out in the natural, and the spiritual mystery cracks wide open: union, intimacy, joy—forever with God. Believe me. I know what I write.

Ready to trade the triangle for the real thing? The Bridegroom is waiting—and He has the very best plan. If you are willing to pay any price to be a godly husband or wife, He will change your heart towards marriage. He will chase out the darkness with the light of His glorious love.

Beloved, this is not about your spouse. It is about you. What do you say to the invitation?

CHAPTER 7

GIBEONITE DECEPTION

Not the smallest letter or stroke (Matthew 5:18)

I remember when tithing felt like climbing a tall tree, walking out on a limb, then chain-sawing the branch I stood on. Each bank check I wrote felt like a free-fall prayer: *Lord, if You do not catch me, I am toast.* Decades later, tithing no longer requires faith. Financially, it is the safest place I know.

That is the punchline of obedience: what once felt like suicide becomes the only sane way to live. The flesh screams “You will fall!” The Spirit whispers, “I have got you.” Guess who is right every time? God turned my old fear into the security of knowing I am loved. He provides for me in the riches of Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

New commands often require ‘crazy’ faith to obey. After obedience, understanding the ‘why?’ follows—or it does not. Either way, the righteous live by faith, not by IQ points. As long as the intellect

rules some corner of us, the flesh still holds a foothold. The flesh is endlessly inventive at finding new excuses to stay in charge—like a bad tenant who keeps changing the locks.

TIME AND DISTANCE

The elders of Israel let the Gibeonites trick them into thinking time and distance made God's commands optional (Joshua 9). Three thousand three hundred years later, the same sales pitch still works: "That was back then, this is now."

Spoiler: the Lawgiver has not updated His policies. He does not change.

Believers today who argue a command of God has grown 'outdated' or 'irrelevant' because of time or distance, fall for the Gibeonite Deception. In marriage especially, American Christianity has swallowed it whole. (I hear my Anabaptist friends yelling: "Not us, Brother John, not us!"—and God bless them for holding the line.)

TODAY'S GIBEONITES

In Joshua's day the Gibeonites showed up with moldy bread, tattered clothes and a lawyer's tongue—desperate to stay among God's people and escape the death decreed for their wickedness.

Modern versions of this skullduggery remain just as creative: "We are all about grace now," "Culture has changed," "Love is love," "Hate has no home here." Same moldy bread, new packaging.

The Bride-to-be is wise to these tricks. She knows the Lawgiver's promise:

Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:18-19).

The Bride will be called “great” because she keeps and teaches His ways. She never lets anyone shave a corner off His Word. She remembers His ultimate warning:

If anyone adds to the words of this book, God will add to him the plagues written in it; and if anyone takes away from the words of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city (Revelation 22:18-19).

In plain English: The Bridegroom is not negotiating for a Bride, and the Bride is not writing the vows. Beloved, it is God’s way or the highway. Make sense?

THE MENORAH

The Temple menorah is a type of the Church—seven lamps on one golden base, fed by one oil (Zechariah 4:2; Revelation 2:5). It pictures one Christ to all seven churches. What the Spirit says to one, He says to all. There are not different laws for different churches—there is one Lawgiver and one Church (plus the false church and her anti-Christ.)

When the One who holds the seven stars and walks among the seven golden lampstands says, *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*, He is not sending seven different memos to seven different churches (Revelation 2:7). He speaks to every believer in every age across every culture. He speaks to us.

WAR WITH SELF-WILL

Commands that rub us the wrong way are usually the ones our Lover is calling us to wrestle with today. The ones that feel ‘unfair’ or ‘outdated’ are the ones appointed for the altar of self-sacrifice.

When we humble ourselves and offer the sacrifice, conforming ourselves to His will, a pleasing aroma rises. Self-will burns. The incense of surrender fills the holy place.

CONFORMED TO HIS IMAGE

Unlike the worldly-wise, the Christ-ian’s heart teaches his mind, not the other way around. Solomon discovered a brilliant mind can have a broken heart (Ecclesiastes 1:18).

When we train our minds to submit to God’s laws written on our hearts, we grow in godliness—we conform to His image (Romans 8:29). *The conclusion, when all has been heard: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person (Ecclesiastes 12:13).*

Beloved, the Bridegroom is not looking for flawless followers or updated versions of Christ-ianity. He is not interested in academic loopholes. He is looking for the one who says, “Your word, Your way—every letter, every stroke. Your will be done, not mine. On earth as it is in heaven.”

When the Lord finds that one, His heart turns to him. He stops all of heaven and says, *Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil (Job 1:8).*

Why not you?

CHAPTER 8

PURSUING GOD

Keep seeking the things above (Colossians 3:1)

At the darkest hour of the American Revolutionary War, patriot Thomas Paine wrote: “What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives everything its value” (The American Crisis No. 1, December 19, 1776). Paine urged his countrymen to sacrifice for earthly freedom.

But beloved, no earthly prize, not liberty or even life itself, rivals the value of becoming one with Christ.

St. Paul urges us onward: *If you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1).*

Beloved, Christ is seated. He is not coming down to fetch us. We climb to Him—raising our nature to His, staking self-will to our cross. In the clouds He departed; in the clouds we rise to meet Him.

Like Eve escorted to Adam, Rebekah traveling to Isaac, the five wise virgins going out to meet the Bridegroom—so the spiritual Bride pursues her Lover. We follow obedience's narrow road, maturity's steep path, our own Via Dolorosa. While the Father comes to His children, those who will be the Bride follow the Spirit to the Bridegroom. There is no alternate way.

The Scripture *Taken away to meet the Lord... we shall be with Him forever* takes on fresh fire when you realize that we are the ones doing the traveling, the pursuing, the climbing (1 Thessalonians 4:17). We are chasing God.

SEAT WITH YOUR NAME

Ephesians 2:6 tells us God has already given us a seat with Christ in the heavenlies. Think of it as a reserved throne—nameplate engraved, waiting for you to arrive and occupy it beside Him.

We climb the ladder to heaven one act of obedience at a time—through the coals of fire between the cherubim, the very flames that guard His throne. To pass through those coals is to become a living sacrifice consumed on His altar. No one sees God and lives—to himself (Exodus 33:20). Self must burn away before we can sit face-to-face with our Lover.

Those same cherubim once guarded Eden's gate with a flaming sword (Genesis 3:24). The fire of that sword has not moved or grown cool with time. It still guards the way to the Tree of Life. The difference? Jesus tore the veil and made the path open for those willing to walk through the flames. Christ is not offering asbestos suits. He is handing out invitations to die like He died.

CHRIST AS THE ARK—THE COVENANT AS MARRIAGE

Imagine a man climbing into the Ark of the Covenant in Solomon's Temple.

First, up the outer court steps—conversion. Then higher, into the inner court—circumcision of heart. Higher still, through the torn veil into the Holy of Holies (Matthew 27:51). Finally, into the Ark itself.

Touch the Ark and die—to self. No selfishness survives in Christ.

The Hebrew word for “ark” means both coffin and treasure chest. Inside is death to ego—and the priceless treasure of Christ's own Life. Climb inside the ark—the coffin, the treasure chest—and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

The promise of the New Covenant is not cheap grace but an open door to costly union. The Bridegroom paid everything to unlock that door. Now He waits for the one who will pay whatever it takes to enter in beside Him.

Beloved, the seat is reserved. The fire is lit. The veil is torn. The question is simple: will you climb through coals for Him? The Bridegroom is not negotiating the price—the price is your life. The trade—your life for His. No dickering. This is it.

CHAPTER 9

THE BLESSING OF THE GOOD PART

Mary has chosen the good portion (Luke 10:42)

Mary of Bethany reveals the Bridal heart when she seats herself at His feet in the assembly, listening to His words, disregarding all else (Luke 10:38-42). Mary desires her Lover. She hangs on His every word. Her heart aligns with the Lawgiver's will—including the command that women remain silent in the churches, subject themselves and not teach or exercise authority over a man (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-13).

This heavenly command was in force in Mary's day—*just as the Law also says (1 Corinthians 14:34)*. She obeyed it before the Corinthians had to be reminded of it.

That is the Bride's instinct: in His presence, she has nothing to say.

Because Mary willingly submits to God's will, the King of the universe declares she has chosen the good part—which shall never be taken from her (Luke 10:42).

Beloved, what is the good part except the Lover Himself? *None is good except God alone (Mark 10:18)*. Apart from Him, we have no good thing.

It is childish to claim we love the Lawgiver with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength—yet pick and choose which parts of His will we like. The Bride does not edit the Lover's letter. She devours every word.

MISVALUED MINISTRY

Unlike Mary, spiritual children can misfocus, thinking what they do *for* Jesus matters more than being *with* Jesus. Martha fell into this trap, thinking that 'work for God' and 'love for God' are the same.

Martha was distracted with her 'diakonia'—her service, her ministry (Luke 10:40). She interrupted the Lord to complain about Mary sitting in His presence. Watching her service disrupt her peace, an onlooker might think she appointed herself to the work, not the Lord. What was on Martha's menu that day is long forgotten. Mary's restful choice still calls us deeper into Christ.

Mary's ministry of sitting, listening and ignoring everything else—including church busyness—flows from her lovesick devotion. Mary chose His Presence over performance, and Jesus gave Himself to her. (Sometimes I have difficulty following this wisdom myself. Please pray for me.)

Like Mary, the Bride bears lasting fruit by abiding in His love, seated at His feet, doing ‘nothing.’ Psalm 45:10-11 captures this paradigm:

*Listen, O daughter... Forget your people and your father's house;
Then the King will desire your beauty. Because He is your Lord,
bow down to Him.*

Bow down. Be quiet. Forget your Father's house. This is not punishment—this is the fast track to the good part. Besides, how hard is doing ‘nothing’? Doing nothing means jumping into the River of Life (2 Kings 5:10-14). If Jesus asked us to do something hard, some would run to do it and then afterwards form two lines: one to complain and the other to brag, and neither would be godly.

RELATIONAL COMMANDS

Paul repeats Mary's principle: *A woman must quietly receive instruction in entire submissiveness. I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet—for Adam was formed first, then Eve (1 Timothy 2:11-13).*

Founded in creation order, this natural command mirrors the spiritual reality: the Bride quietly receives from the Bridegroom. She does not teach Him or exercise authority over Him. He existed first; she follows His lead.

A woman's self-control in the assembly is one of many keys to the Kingdom (Matthew 16:19). Females alone hold this key. Their silence flows from reverence for the Bridegroom. It costs voice—and forever gains His heart.

Her presence—not her voice—guides the blind and strengthens the feeble (Romans 2:19). Without a word, she proves herself worth far more than rubies (Proverbs 31:10).

We esteem such women on earth because heaven does—and hell hates them. These women travel the path to the wedding, quietly kicking down the gates of hell along the way. If they do not shrink back, they will take their seat at the wedding feast.

NEITHER MALE NOR FEMALE

Why command women to submit if *there is neither male nor female... you are all one in Christ Jesus?* (Galatians 3:28).

Equal value, different roles. St. Paul's letter to the Galatians speaks of inheritance, not erased design. Our bodies remain male or female in this world—so we humble them under His hand. In the process we reveal God's hidden nature and coming judgment to principalities and powers.

By bowing to the Lover's 'socially unacceptable' commands, the Bride manifests the Bridegroom on earth—for those with eyes to see (Colossians 1:27; 1 Peter 3:1).

Some sectors today push "equality" not for justice but because—like their father Satan—they want to overthrow the Man and seize the throne (Isaiah 14:13-15). Gender confusion is the fruit of this rebellion: if male and female mean nothing, why be either? While the Church is crooked, the world remains unjudged.

Beloved, every word God spoke about male and female drips with eternal truth. Ignore it and you lose your equilibrium, and the world loses its plumb line of truth. Embrace it, and you make yourself into marriage material—clear, radiant, ready.

THE SANDS OF TRUTH

A friend named Terry Bennett was taken by Jesus to a beach with endless sand. Jesus asked him, “What is this?”

My friend feared answering.

Jesus said, “These are the sands of Truth.”

He scooped up one handful: “What is this?”

My friend played dumb: “Lord, I do not know.”

“This is all the Truth mankind has ever known.”

Jesus held one tiny grain: “What is this?”

He was nervous now: “Lord, you know.”

“This is all the truth you will ever know in this life.”

Jesus warned him: “Preach your Revelation series now and you will live long enough to be embarrassed at it.”

The church was packed and waiting. My friend walked out of his office, down the hall to the sanctuary and sent the crowd home. He would not preach in presumption. He was not nearly as fearful of man as he was of God.

READY TO TRADE?

Beloved, it is folly to disobey even the least command of God, thinking we know better than the One who knows every grain of Truth. The good part is waiting—as endless as the sands of a beach and will never be taken away.

CHAPTER 10

FEMALE MINISTERS

Train the young women (Titus 2:4)

The Bible shows us that the Lord Jesus Christ ordains some women as teachers, prophetesses and evangelists (Titus 2:3-5). Their ministries often include spoken words. If the Lawgiver forbids women to speak aloud in the assembly, where do these anointed women release their words? Let us find the answer in Scripture. Jesus is not crowdsourcing the marriage contract; He's not changing its terms for our moods (Matthew 24:35).

FEMALE EVANGELISTS

What is the point of evangelists—male or female—preaching salvation to a room full of believers? I grew up under an evangelist preacher. His sermons were predictable even to me as a child: no matter the text, the man raced to 'turn or burn,' grace, repentance, the blood, heaven or hell—always ending with an altar call and the hymn *Just As I Am*.

As a boy, I thought avoiding hell and winning souls was the whole game. Turns out, evangelists chained to pulpits miss their calling—and many in their hearing miss maturity. Like fishing in a bathtub—evangelists in churches make lots of splash but no catch. They belong in the streets.

The Samaritan woman may be the New Testament's first evangelist. She told her town about Jesus and many believed because of her testimony (John 4:39).

Aimee Semple McPherson (1890-1945) was a gifted evangelist. Her greatest challenges might have been avoided had she not stood night after night in the place of the Man, inverting the Bride–Bridegroom relationship. In theatre terms, she was miscast.

First Corinthians 14:23-40 outlines New Covenant assembly order—and evangelists get no speaking slot. Turn them loose where the lost are. Pulpits are for building saints, not saving them. Keep the fishers of men on the sea, not at the local aquarium.

PROPHETESSES

Scripture gives three key examples of female prophetesses and tells us where they spoke.

1. **Deborah** Prophetess, judge, warrior, songwriter, worship leader (Judges 4:4). She sat under a palm tree in the hill country; Israel came to her for judgment (Judges 4:5). Deborah did not stand behind a pulpit or chase thrones. Instead, leaders chased her wisdom. She stayed in her lane and God turned that lane into a highway of victory. She once stood in the place of the Man because Barak refused his calling (Judges 4:8-9). When men play hide-and-seek with their assignment, God can use women—

but a shaky man in the right spot beats a strong woman in the wrong one every time.

2. **Huldah** Prophetess in Jerusalem (2 Kings 22:14). High priest and elders went to her home for the word of the Lord. The king sent messengers. Huldah did not chase platforms—platforms chased her. Prophetesses like her will counsel kings in business, politicians in government and leaders in the true Church. Humble men will knock on her door. Proud men will miss the download.
3. **Miriam** Prophetess, worship leader, songwriter (Exodus 15:20). She watched over baby Moses with devotion. God rewarded her faithfulness by making her a leader of women. But when Miriam teamed up with Aaron to go audition for Moses' role —presuming she had equal billing with the Man— God gave her a seven-day timeout outside the camp—with leprosy as her ticket (Numbers 12). Her contemplation of presumption brought her shame. Miriam's story is recorded for our instruction: gifts of God like accurate prophecy, music and leadership never entitle one to step out of order (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Among the Bridal generation, women with Miriam's timbrel and gift of female leadership will arise. Encourage these women. Hell hates them; heaven throws parties over them. The Church needs them.

CHAPTER 11

ELEVEN EXCUSES FOR REBELLION

He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me (John 14:21)

The Bible speaks with unmistakable clarity: women are to remain silent in the full assembly and submit to their own husbands as to the Lord (1 Corinthians 14:34–35; Ephesians 5:22–24; 1 Timothy 2:11–12; Titus 2:3–5; 1 Peter 3:1–6).

Yet many Western voices have crafted ingenious excuses to evade these commands. The following presents the eleven most common objections, each answered by Scripture.

1. When no man stands up

Deborah led because Barak refused his calling (Judges 4:6–9). God raises women when men cower, yet that remains the exception, not the pattern. The rule is plain: men lead, women flourish in their appointed place. The Almighty does not operate a permanent contingency plan.

2. Galatians 3:28 erases roles

The verse proclaims that neither male nor female exist in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28). Our physical bodies, however, remain male and female, and while we are in this world we subject them to divine design (Romans 12:1). If our bodies were *in Christ Jesus* then they would not get sick or die. Rebellion disguised as equality or pragmatism is still rebellion against the King.

3. These commands were only for Corinth

If the ‘flesh bothering’ instructions in 1st and 2nd Corinthians applied solely to the troubled church in Corinth two thousand years ago, then so did every other precept in the same letters: slaves seeking their freedom (1 Corinthians 7:21), widows free to remarry (1 Corinthians 7:39), the complete framework for spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12–14), etc.

To discard one section of Scripture while retaining the rest is arbitrary, capricious and perilous. Such reasoning opens the door to editing the entire New Testament to suit pop culture. (And the first thing coming out is the Cross. Without the Cross, there is no Christ.) The Spirit who addressed Corinthian Christ-ians addresses us all. The ‘only for Corinth’ excuse is not scholarship; it is a convenient escape hatch that—when you open it to get out—lets the enemy come rushing in.

4. Only the Jezebel spirit must be stopped

The true Biblical condemnation falls upon those who tolerate Jezebel, not upon invented rules to restrain her (Revelation 2:20). These commands do not exist to suppress Christ-ian women. They exist to guard the saints from evil spirits that emasculate men and sow confusion among women. The Jezebel spirit must be

turned away on the Church steps, not conciliated in the pews or worse, allowed to sneak into leadership. There is no restraining Jezebel. She is a law unto herself.

5. Priscilla taught Apollos

Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos aside privately and explained the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:26). They did so at their home, not in the synagogue or assembly. The pattern holds: in the proper place, under the unction of the Holy Spirit, women can minister with power.

6. Anna the prophetess spoke in the Temple

Anna served night and day in the temple with fasting and prayer (Luke 2:37). She spoke within the temple complex, most likely in the Court of the Women, where such ministry was permitted—not in the mixed assembly, not in the place of the priests, certainly not in the holy of holies. No contradiction exists.

7. Head coverings prove women spoke publicly

First Corinthians 11:5 states that women pray and prophesy with heads covered. That describes how they do so, not where. The command to remain silent in the full assembly stands firm (1 Corinthians 14:34). No loophole here.

8. Hannah's second prayer was public

Hannah's first prayer was silent (1 Samuel 1:13). Her second prayer is recorded (1 Samuel 2:1–10), but Scripture never states that she spoke it aloud in the assembly or where she prayed it. God hears the silent heart. No evidence shows she violated God's law.

9. Women answered questions in the assembly

Hannah and Sapphira answered questions from leaders to uncover sin (1 Samuel 1:15–16; Acts 5:8). Neither

stood in the place of the man nor taught the whole assembly. Private answers align with the pattern.

10. Church history and modern examples prove acceptability

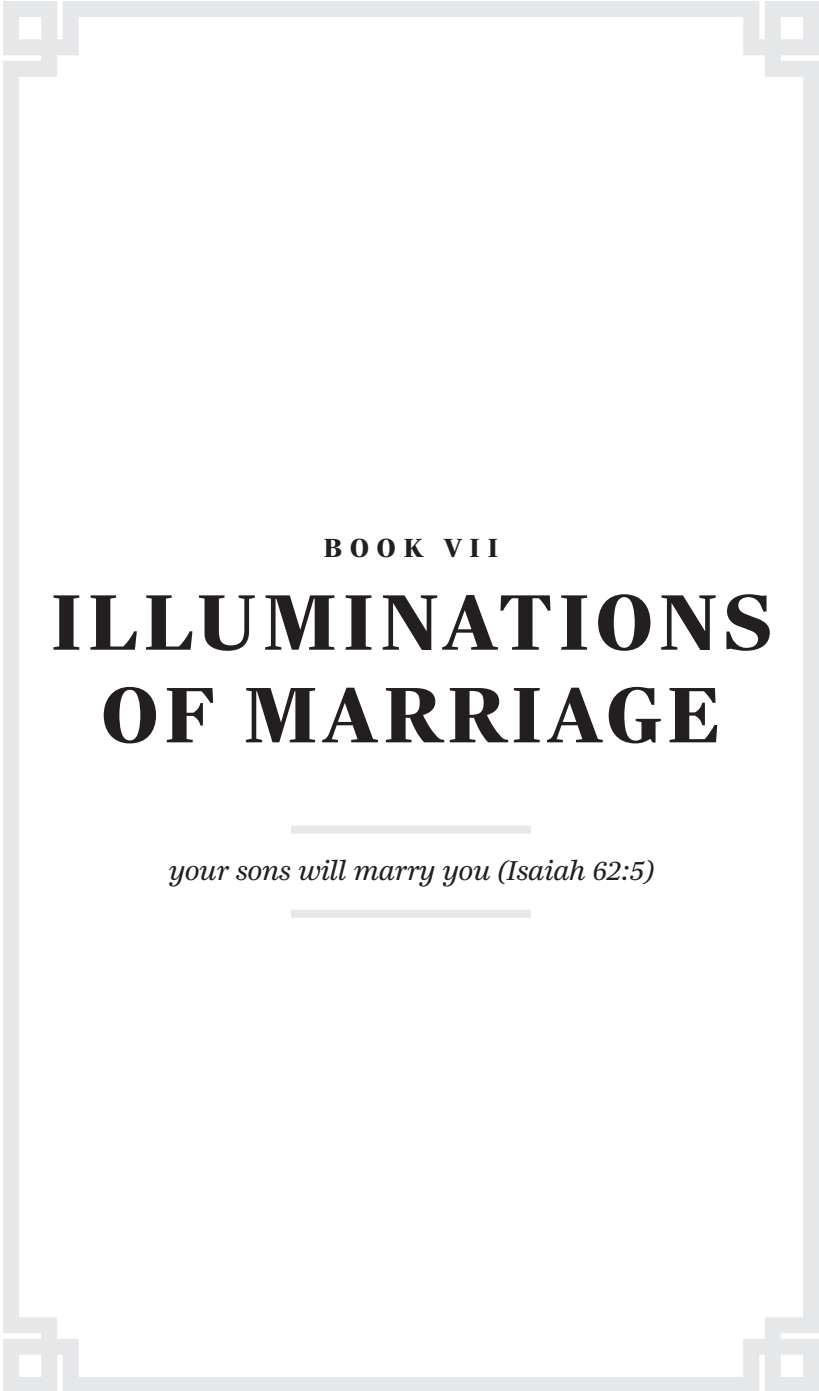
Maria Woodworth-Etter, Aimee Semple McPherson, Kathryn Kuhlman and others were used mightily by God. How they submitted their ministries is for the Lord alone to judge. Gifts of power and accurate prophecy do not override clear commands (Matthew 7:21–23). Obedience, not apparent results, proves love for God. The more one loves God, the more obedient they are to His word. Obedience is the only way to love Jesus.

11. Obedience is a slippery slope

Some protest that if one command of God is obeyed, all must be obeyed. Precisely. That is the point. Love for God demands keeping the words He whispers into our ears and writes upon our hearts (John 14:21). The Bride does not select which commands suit her mood or aligns with societal norms. She trusts her Lover wholeheartedly. She leans into every syllable He speaks, and is comforted.

The Bride does not rewrite the Lover's instructions. She obeys them, even when they cost her voice, comfort or reputation. In obedience she discovers the good part that can never be taken away; she becomes a great blessing to the assembly (Luke 10:42). Anything less trades the wedding feast for a lesser seat.

What say you? Our choices have eternal consequences: bliss or regret. The narrow way or the broad way. The obedient life is not the easy life, but it is the only life that leads into the heart of God.



BOOK VII

**ILLUMINATIONS
OF MARRIAGE**

your sons will marry you (Isaiah 62:5)

Marriage is more than love and vows—it is the Bible’s brightest picture of God’s most intimate dream for you. From Eden’s garden to the Lamb’s wedding feast, every Covenant God makes from Genesis to Revelation whispers the same invitation: Become one with Me.

But here is the twist: the greatest love story ever told has little to do with honeymoons and ‘happily ever after.’ In this life it is more about the grave before the garden, the cross before the crown, the price before the payoff, the agony before ecstasy.

In these final chapters we will peek behind the veil: natural marriages mirroring spiritual mysteries, Covenants revealing union, and the craggy uphill path that turns two “I do’s” into union with God.

Ready to trade fairy tales for the real romance? The Groom paid the price for you. Creation waits to see if you will pay the price for Him. Marriage is a two-way street, beloved. Will you accept His invitation? Will you come to the wedding feast?

CHAPTER 1

A BRIDAL KEY

subject themselves (1 Corinthians 14:34)

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is a kingdom key women use to help them become the Bride of Christ. This command sounds harsh to fleshly ears but after I explain what the Lord revealed to me, it should make perfect sense.

Those verses say: *The women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If women desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.*

We have touched on this passage before but there are greater jewels to be mined. Before we consider the heavenly transaction that blesses women who submit to this kingdom law, let's add some context.

FIRST

First, the great I AM can do anything He wishes. Jehovah God is Lord of all. If the Holy Spirit tells you not to abide by some Biblical mandate as you understand it, obey Him. *The Holy Spirit will teach you all things (John 14:26)*—not preachers, books or Church traditions. *But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth (John 16:13)*—not the bishop, not the Bible.

Only the Holy Spirit is sent by God to lead us into all truth and teach us all things. Only the Spirit. To be a disciple of Christ Jesus requires hearing the Holy Spirit speak and having the courage to obey Him.

Since Emperor Constatine (272-337 AD) co-opted the Church to control people, the western Church has been organized to—guess what?— control people. We are not doing that. We are not doing that ever again. The only Head the Church has is Christ. Christ controls His Church—not man. Now, off the soapbox and onto the mission: encouraging you to pay the price to become the Bride of Christ.

SECOND

Second, this mandate—*women should keep silent in the churches*—is one rule in a list of guidelines for holding a New Covenant church service found in 1 Corinthians 14:23-40. These commands apply to *all the churches of the saints... when you assemble (1 Corinthians 14:33, 26)*. These how-to-have-church guidelines are not a buffet where you design your Sunday service a-la-carte. They are the five star Michelin meal God cooks for us to eat. Or would you rather eat undercooked pork, unwashed vegetables and drink curdled milk?

I have never witnessed a church service that wholeheartedly submitted to all of these how-to-have-church commands. Because I have never been in an assembly that followed God's plans to the letter, I have never seen a church experience all the spiritual manifestations and blessings the passage promises. The Bridal generation, however, will make such services commonplace. She will follow God's plans and experience God's best blessings. This will happen. Prophetically speaking, I have seen it coming. It will become normal.

THIRD

The meanings of these words—*women should keep silent in the churches*—are straightforward and easily understood. The words mean what they say—no secret decoder ring required. My Anabaptist and German Baptist friends understand this.

SOMETHING POWERFUL HAPPENS

When a woman keeps silent in the assembly and waits to ask her own husband at home her questions, something powerful happens. Whether the husband responds with the right or wrong answer, or tells his wife to ask Jesus or email the preacher, or directs her to join a Bible study or shouts at her to go away and leave him alone—then her attentive reception of his counsel—whatever quality response it is—causes her spiritual Husband to impart to her some revelation of eternal value.

Jesus is the Truth, and all revelation is part of Him. When we obey God, He blesses us with more of Himself. Obedience is the pathway of maturity. There is no alternate route.

If a woman follows God's instructions for her life then God Himself will grow in her. He will give that woman something

of His own heart. Obedience always brings a blessing—and disobedience always brings a curse. There is no way around it.

The woman who uses this Bridal key may or may not learn through her earthly husband. The Spirit may or may not answer the specific question she asks. But every woman who uses this kingdom key will receive something of Jesus—His revelation, His promise, His love, Himself—every time she uses it. That is the law. That is how it works.

With this promise from God to women, remember this: What Jesus deems we need to learn and what we think we need to learn can be two very different things. He knows best what we need. The best is what He gives us when we allow Him.

NO QUALIFIERS

The command, *If women desire to learn anything let them ask their own husbands at home*, nowhere includes the phrase *if her husband is godly* or *if her husband is wise and learned* or *if her husband is fill-in-the-blank.*

Beloved, God is not adding footnotes or accepting escape clauses to His plans for our lives. There is no fine print or opt-out for wives with difficult husbands. God never mumbles—He means what He says. When a wife submits to the husband she has, she grows in Christ.

Please note that I never said this was easy. I never said a godly wife will not suffer. Walking the narrow path is the hardest way through this world. Unjust suffering is normal Christ-ianity.

To mature into the Bride of Christ, we must be intellectually honest with God, with ourselves and with the Biblical text. We must submit to the law written on our heart by the Spirit. We

must trust that God has our best interests at heart especially when we do not understand the ways He marks out for us to walk in.

The goal of God's laws is our perfection. Submitting to His laws is our part in His plan.

If we must know why or when or what or how before complying with His law, then we live by our intellect and not by faith. We walk by our flesh, not the Spirit. Without faith it is impossible to please God. We must subject our will to the Spirit. The Christian life never works the other way around. Our tiny little intellects plus the best of AI cannot comprehend the all-knowing, all-present, all-powerful God. If we yearn to become one with Him in marriage, we must trust Him. We must be courageous. We must go all the way.

Until a woman honors her natural husband (even if he is an ogre), she dishonors her heavenly Husband. Until a woman submits to her natural husband, she rebels against her heavenly Husband. Or should we expect to receive something besides discipline from God while disobeying God?

What do you think? Be honest.

WITHOUT A WORD

If the woman's natural husband is ungodly, say he is an antagonistic alcoholic atheist, then humbly asking such a man at home becomes part of the wife's chaste and respectful behavior. Such behavior wins the same man *without a word*, just as it wins the heart of her spiritual Man *without a word* (1 Peter 3:1-2).

The woman who uses this kingdom key is the *wife of noble character worth far more than rubies* (Proverbs 31:10).

Likewise, the man who matures into the Bride learns by inquiring of the Bridegroom who dwells inside the tent *not made by human hands* (2 Corinthians 5:1). Or do our tiny little intellects know better than God?

We cannot write our own rules for living and at the same time live in union with Jesus. Jesus never wrote His own rules for living. He followed the Spirit. To join Him in marriage, we must submit to the law written on our hearts. Jesus walked the way first and He invites us to follow.

If you have failed in marriage, take heart. You are not alone. Repentance is the way back into the Lover's heart. His is the heart that matters. You have not blown it. You are just getting started good. Press on.

THAT CHRIST MIGHT LIVE

Following the Spirit is never a walk in the park. Hiking the narrow path is not a Sunday stroll through a lovely green valley. The woman who subjects herself to her natural husband sacrifices her self-will to God. (Tears will fall.)

The woman who earnestly desires to esteem her natural husband lays down her fleshly nature. (On this altar is anguish.)

The woman who obeys her earthly husband crucifies her sin nature. (Picture the cross where 'self' dies.)

Every woman *who desires to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted* (2 Timothy 3:12). 'Self' will be martyred. This is a promise, not a possibility.

The brave wife who uses this Bridal key will spiritually mature. She will grow in eternal beauty and increase in godly wisdom.

If she goes all the way like Sarah then she will mature to be like Sarah, the mother of our faith. Such a woman *will be called great in the kingdom of God (Matthew 5:19)*. She will be honored eternally.

LOSE YOUR LIFE AND FIND IT

Beloved, the first step to becoming worthy of the Bridegroom is to subject your life to Christ without reserve. The Lover never gives Himself to a rebel. As it is written, *The one who has found his life will lose it, and the one who has lost his life on My account will find it (Matthew 10:39)*.

No escalator runs up the narrow path. No elevator carts you to the top. You must hike the craggy steps yourself. The Spirit is not the doer but the Helper who will help you all the way. Go all the way. You can make it.

If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me (Luke 9:23).

If a woman does not have a husband (or father) and she goes home from the assembly with a question, she should ask Jesus, putting Him in the place of her Husband. As it is written, *For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called (Isaiah 54:5)*.

IF YOU ARE SPIRITUAL

Context makes the following verse appropriate: *If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him affirm that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. But if any man ignores this, he is to be ignored (1 Corinthians 14:37-38)*.

The words that prophets and those who are spiritual “affirm,” include those commandments listed in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40, part of which says, *the women are to remain silent*.

Who among us is God’s prophet? Who thinks himself spiritual? If you are spiritual then you must affirm God’s command that women remain silent in the assembly. If you are fleshly, ignore it.

Church people who ignore this command are to be ignored by those who are spiritual. This is God’s commandment.

Beloved, if we disobey the command to ignore Christians who disagree with these commandments—*But if any man ignores this, he is to be ignored*—then we avow strange fire in the hands of spiritual children—or worse, strange fire in the hands of pyromaniacs. Let us not be like Aaron the High Priest—a father standing mutely by while our sons (or daughters) worship with strange fire. If we remain quiet while childish believers kindle the wildfire of presumption in the Lord’s house, worshipping God as they see fit and not in subjection to His will, then the sheep entrusted to our care will suffer harm. We will never see the wedding altar. Our Lover is many things but slow to repay, He is not (Deuteronomy 7:10).

There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every matter under heaven (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

Has the time come to change our ways, beloved? Has the time come to grow up?

NOBLE CHARACTER

Just as Sarah is the mother of the faithful, the woman who conforms herself to the Lord Jesus Christ’s gender-specific precepts will be a mother to the Church, able to teach younger

women *how* to love their husbands and their children (Titus 2:4). Godly women must teach the younger *how* to love because a woman's natural love originates in the flesh and is ungodly.

In times past, wolves in sheep's clothing led us astray with terms like equality and social justice. They twisted God's grace. They deceived the weak among us. But today is a new day, beloved. If need be, we repent. The Lover lifts up those who bow down. Truly, our Husband is *appointed for the fall and rise of many* (Luke 2:34).

May we fall at His feet in this life so that He can raise us up in His.

NO REBELS NEEDED

Beloved, the Bridegroom is not looking for rebels re-writing the rules. His heart is searching for people simple enough to trust His every word. He wants children brave enough to obey Him even when their obedience makes waves.

It is far better to be thrown overboard from a boat heading in the wrong direction than to float quietly down the River of Regret. Peace at all costs is costly.

Beloved, this Bridal key is simple: submit in silence, ask at home, and watch God give Himself to you. Are you bold enough to use this kingdom key? Are you brave enough to rock the boat? The Bridegroom is worth every struggle. Do you love Him enough to die?

Therefore, whoever nullifies one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:19).

CHAPTER 2

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

because he has known My name (Psalm 91:14)

The name 'Jesus' means 'Salvation.' 'Adam' means 'Man.' 'Moses' means 'Saved from the Water.' A name is never neutral. It reveals nature; it whispers purpose and speaks destiny.

My wife's name is correctly stated, "Mrs. John Stone." She left the house of her father, Mr. Hugh Moller—a godly man—and became one flesh with me in marriage. Her true name is neither 'Miss Karina Moller,' nor 'Karina Stone' or 'Ms. Karina Moller Stone.' It is 'Mrs. John Stone.' She lives in union with me. By laying down her father's name (and her own) and taking mine, she prophesies this spiritual reality: the Bride is known by her Husband's name—"Mrs. Jesus Christ."

The husband does not take the wife's name any more than Jesus takes on His Bride's name. The Bridegroom does not assume the nature of the Bride. The Bride receives the nature of the Bridegroom. A little at first and more over time. That is how it works.

The believer who becomes ‘Mrs. Jesus Christ’ is no longer double-minded. She has matured beyond the nature of a child. Her Father has given her away to His Son, her Husband, the Bridegroom. She has the mind of Christ.

In taking on her natural husband’s name, the wife declares Ephesians 5:23-24: *For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church... But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be subject to their husbands in everything.* No footnotes. No exceptions. His headship of her is absolute.

No matter what we say, the headship we submit to determines our name. The one we obey, forms our nature.

A Christ-ian who sometimes submits to God and sometimes takes his own path is *double-minded, unstable in all his ways* (James 1:8). He remains immature—a child desiring God yet sometimes clinging to self-rule.

When a believer is ashamed of the Name or Nature of Jesus and wants to be known by another name or nature, self remains strong. When self-will whispers, “Keep a little of your old nature. Add your own touch to His grace,” performance creeps in like mold on bread. Self-rule mixes with the promise of Christ. The phrase, *It is finished*, remains mere words, words without personal meaning (John 19:30).

Some Christ-ians live like humanists, insisting “My good deeds will carry me. I can repair this broken world and fix my broken heart by the powers of my flesh.” A ‘social-cause captain’ without the power of the Spirit. A self-helper without the Helper. Works without obedience. Such people ignore the piercing warning: *Apart from Me you can do nothing* (John 15:5). Such so-called Christ-ians live a life that is much ado about nothing because *the flesh profits nothing*.

Pleasure beckons humanistic Christians—comfort over suffering, ease over the cross. “Why should I deny myself?” they ask with a shrug. Jesus answers without compromise: *If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily (Luke 9:23)*. They laugh. They scoff. They refuse to understand.

Further from the mountain of God are church-going unbelievers who murmur, “I need no Savior,” embracing a form of godliness but denying its power (2 Timothy 3:5).

Travel further away from the mountain of God and creation itself is inverted. Males marry males as if a man can perfect himself in man. Females become males. Homosexuality. Transsexualism. The mockery of God’s design ends in self-hatred, abortion, euthanasia, population control—the slow march toward human extermination and satanic glee.

In our own nation, in our own town, the enemy sneers with dark satisfaction: “Look how they unmake their own design.” Romans weeps over the tragedy: *Women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural... men with men committing indecent acts (Romans 1:26-27)*. Leviticus thunders the prohibition (Leviticus 18:22).

Beloved, this is hard, unbending truth. But love demands it be spoken—not to judge the lost but to expose the lie that twists and destroys those God longs to redeem, call home and set free.

The Bride-to-be refuses to wander away from the narrow trail up the mountain. At the first whisper of self she stops dead, plants her feet and declares, “No. I will be His—Mrs. Jesus Christ.” She turns her face toward the higher heights, fixed like flint, and presses on up the mountain of God. The ascent is brutal—rocks bite the feet, winds howl accusations, self-will shrieks every

excuse in the book: “Too hard! Too lonely! Too narrow!” She endures and persists.

Beloved, dry wit here: the way ahead does not include hot tea and sympathy from the Groom. He waits at the summit on the other side of the purifying fire—the same fire He passed through to become your Bridegroom. The Spirit will go with you through the fire as the Spirit went with Christ Jesus. But you must climb. You must press on.

Go up the mountain, beloved. Go up as you are—broken, willing, surrendered. Right now. Press on. The Lord is pleased with you.

Here am I. Send me! (Isaiah 6:8).

CHAPTER 3

DEEP SLEEP

when men are dead (Hebrews 9:17)

Marriage runs like a river through Scripture. It carves its way through the deep sleeps of the men God chose to speak His covenants. Sleep in the Bible often means death (John 11:11–14; 1 Corinthians 11:30). In every case, the Man dies so His Bride can live. *Because where a covenant is, there must be the death of the one who made it (Hebrews 9:16–18)*. If there is no death, there is no covenant. If there is no covenant, there is no Bride.

In Eden, Adam slipped into deep sleep. God pierced his side. Out came Eve—bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh (Genesis 2:21–23). The husband dying to himself so his beloved could breathe. God closed the wound and healed the man, foreshadowing the greater healing the Bridegroom received when He birthed His Bride at Calvary.

Four thousand years later, the Son of Adam—Jesus—fell into the deepest sleep of all: death on the cross. A spear tore His side; water and blood poured out (John 19:34). From that wound the

Church was born—washed clean, bought with blood, one with her Lover forever.

Every covenant in the Bible rides this same wild current. The Man dies first. The Bride follows into that death, losing her life to find His. There is no calm detour, no easy bridge over the rapids. We must lose our minds for Jesus in His death, to unite with Him in His life.

Now look—really look—at Mary Magdalene at the tomb. She came early, while it was still dark, her heart ripped wide open (John 20:1). She had lost everything—her demons cast out, her old life gone, her reason to breathe murdered—and now even His body was stolen. She stood outside the empty tomb sobbing, asking through her tears, *They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him (John 20:13).*

She turned. There stood a man she thought was the gardener. In her anguish she begged, *Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away (John 20:15).* Think about that. A woman—small, alone, emotionally spent—ready to hoist the dead body of Jesus onto her own shoulders. She would not leave the garden without Him. She would not let go of her Lover, even in His death. This was her death too.

Jesus spoke one word: *Mary.*

Her name. On His lips. In love.

Her heart exploded. She spun around, saw Him, cried out, *Rabboni!*—Teacher, my Master, my everything (John 20:16). She reached for Him, clinging as if life itself hung on holding Him close. He did not push her away. He let her hold Him—the first to see the risen Bridegroom, creation's clearest picture of the

Bride: searching for her dead Lover, finding Him alive in the garden, each lover refusing to let go of the other.

Unlike her mother Eve, who reached for fruit and lost the garden, Mary reached for Jesus and regained it. She lost her mind for Him in His death; now she found Him in His life back in the garden. She clung to Him and He let her cling—even before He returned to the Father.

Come closer, beloved. The Bridegroom has already paid the price. Now He invites you to pay yours—not out of duty, but out of love. The grave is empty. The garden is alive. The wedding hall is ready. Will you follow Him all the way—lovesick, forsaking everything—until you hear Him speak your name?

CHAPTER 4

MARRIAGE REVEALED

Come to the wedding (Revelation 22:17)

Facets of spiritual marriage reveal themselves in the Bible when we use the “natural—spiritual” viewfinder found in 1 Corinthians 15:46.

1. In the Garden of Eden Adam voluntarily pays with his life to preserve his union with Eve (1 Timothy 2:14). Had he not, Eve would have been alone in death. Adam was not deceived. Eve was. In Jerusalem (a type of Eden) the Son of Adam voluntarily pays with His life for re-union with daughters of Eve.
2. In the natural realm, Adam gardened Eden. Four-thousand years later, the Son of Adam appears as the Gardener to Mary Magdalene (John 20:15). Mary Magdalene (a daughter of Eve) is beside herself with love for (as far as she knows) the dead Son of Adam. Willing to take away the crucified Christ by herself to herself, she becomes the first to cleave to the resurrected

Christ. In losing her mind for Christ, she died for Christ and gained His Life.

3. Because Jesus is first Husband to His Bride and second, Son to His Father, His first post-resurrection appearance is to His Bride, of which Mary Magdalene is a type. After embracing His Bride, the Bridegroom then appears before His Father (John 20:17). *For this reason, a man shall leave his father... and cleave to his bride (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:7, Ephesians 5:31).*
4. This revelation that the Lord Jesus Christ is first Husband to His Bride and second, Son to His Father is foreshadowed at the wedding in Cana (John 2:11).

At Cana both Jesus and His disciples (a Bride type) were invited to the wedding (John 2:2). This foreshadowing of spiritual marriage—the Bridegroom with His future Bride at a wedding—follows Jesus' water baptism wherein the Father declares, *This is My beloved Son (Matthew 3:17)*. Jesus is the beloved Son who matures into the Bridegroom. Those who follow Christ Jesus follow His Pattern and mature into the Bride.

5. In the natural realm, the man (Adam) and woman (Eve) are married in the Garden. They are one. In the spiritual realm, the Spirit and the Bride say, *Come. Come to the wedding (Revelation 22:17)*. The Spirit and the Bride speak these words in unity because God is one with His Bride.
6. When Mary Magdalene arrives at the empty tomb, she is beside herself with desire for Jesus—the dead Jesus. Lovesick, Mary Magdalene is either going to find her Lover in His death or die trying. Her overwhelming

desire to be with Jesus in His death qualifies her to be first to find the Bridegroom in His life. Only by desiring Jesus in His death can we unite with Him in His life. No shortcut to the wedding, beloved. We must become lovesick for Jesus.

7. Exodus 21:10 notes that the husband's responsibilities include providing his wife with food and clothing. In Luke 12:28-29 the Bridegroom says that those who seek His Kingdom will be provided with food and clothing. When the Jews of the day heard the Bridegroom speak these words, they knew immediately that He referenced the Exodus 21:10 marriage law; and they rightly surmised that the Messiah promises spiritual marriage to His beloved. This blew their theological minds because spiritual marriage makes man one with God (Theosis).
8. Through supernatural power Sarah became the mother of the faith. Through that same power women are saved through the bearing of spiritual children *if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint (1 Timothy 2:15)*. The spiritual Bride naturally bears and raises spiritual children for her Husband. Thus Jesus says, *For whoever does the will of God, he is My... mother*—meaning, the one who becomes the Bride raises up Christ in others (Luke 8:21; Mark 3:35).
9. Noah's righteousness is imputed to his household; first to his wife who is a type of Bride. Then to his sons; Noah's sons foreshadow the Son who becomes the Bridegroom. Noah's righteousness is imputed to his daughters-in-law. The daughters-in-law portend the spiritual child who becomes the Bride.

10. Because legitimate children are born in wedlock, the patriarchs were first husbands to their wives and afterwards fathers to their children. In the spiritual realm, the Father of lights appears in chief position to the spiritual child but the Husband is always foremost to His Bride. The believer who relates to God in the child—Father relationship sees the Father in chief position. But the believer who enters into the marriage relationship beholds the Bridegroom first.

Because the Shema prayer declares, “Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One,” both of these views of God are valid but one is more intimate than the other.

11. Proverbs 31:10-31 is occasionally entitled, The Virtuous Wife. This passage lists some traits generally attributed to men because this passage is more about the spiritual wife than the natural wife. Verses 16 and 17 example manly traits: *She considers a field and buys it; From her earnings she plants a vineyard. She girds herself with strength And makes her arms strong.*

12. As God intends the natural wife to relate to her natural husband, so the spiritual wife (sans sex) is to the spiritual Husband. Hence it is written, *Man is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man (1 Corinthians 11:7)*. Meaning, man relates to God the same way the wife relates to man: in heartfelt subjection to His will.

13. *For your husband is your Maker, whose name is the Lord of Hosts, is a Scripture addressed to women and men (Isaiah 54:5).*

14. Abraham marries his half-sister, Sarah. Sarah is the daughter of Abraham’s natural father but not the daughter

of Abraham's mother (Genesis 20:12). Hence Sarah is both Abraham's sister and his bride. This relationship is the natural prophesying to the spiritual—the Bridegroom marries the daughter of His Father but not the daughter of His mother, and He sings:

You have made my heart beat faster, my sister, my bride; You have made my heart beat faster with a single glance of your eyes, With a single strand of your necklace. How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, And the fragrance of your oils Than all kinds of spices! ... A garden locked is my sister, my bride, A rock garden locked, a spring sealed (Song of Songs 4:9-10, 12).

And He is her Gardener.

Beloved, are you beginning to see how natural marriage whispers the spiritual one? Can you sense that the great mystery of marriage is really no mystery at all?

CHAPTER 5

JUBILEE

I will betroth you to Me forever (Hosea 2:19)

A man I know had a wife who continually disrespected him. She held him in contempt. She rejected his love at every turn. Like Gomer to Hosea, the woman disgraced the man inside the home and out. Although the man loved his wife like Hosea loved Gomer—repeatedly forgiving, pursuing, redeeming and loving—the woman felt to the man like cancer in his bones. He loved her because he loved Christ Jesus. When the man went as far as he could go—sixteen arduous years—he appealed to the Lord for relief. Two weeks later the woman abandoned him. Later she divorced him. He let her go.

God honors obedience by providing deliverance when needed; He twice rescued Sarah from harm (Genesis 12:17; 20:3–7). The Lord permits release when the unbelieving spouse departs, for God has called us to peace. As it is written:

But if the husband or wife who isn't a believer insists on leaving, let them go. In such cases the Christian husband or wife is no longer bound

to the other, for God has called you to live in peace (1 Corinthians 7:15 NLT).

The man heard the Lord say to him of an altogether different woman, “I will give her to you.” The man laughed because this woman was pure and sweet and godly. Time passed and the Lord again brought the godly woman before the man. God spoke to the man again, saying, “This is your wife!” because the man did not believe God. For him, it was too good to be true. Like John the Baptist’s father, the man was disciplined with muteness for his unbelief. When he could speak again, he told the godly woman what the Lord had said.

The woman sought the Lord until she heard the Holy Spirit confirm the man’s words; yes, the virgin was to marry him. During their wedding ceremony, the father of the bride ushered the woman down the aisle to the man in the same way the spiritual Father brought the woman to the man—on his right arm. Of his second wife the man said, “The Lord crowned me with a crown from His own head.”

Following these things the Lord showed the man Proverbs 12:4: *An excellent wife is the crown of her husband but she who shames him is like rotteness in his bones.*

The realities of this verse were alive to the man. He knew both the crown and the cancer. Then the man saw that at the beginning of his relationship with the Lord, he had been like cancer in the bones of God because he was disrespectful and rebellious. As it is written, *The Lord opens the eyes of the blind; The Lord raises up those who are bowed down. The Lord loves the righteous (Psalm 146:8).*

CHAAZEL'S VISION

Eli Chaazel saw wonders in heaven that included a book revealing the supernatural unity that believers experience in natural marriage. Chaazel recounts his experience of an angel speaking to him:

“He also spoke to me about marriage, couples in Christ. And He showed me another book. I saw the book but it was peculiar indeed. There was not a single name but two, and the page was separated in two. There were thus two columns in one page. The works of each of the spouses were separated but listed on the same page. Whatever some of our contemporaries think, there is real unity in marriage. It has repercussions even in the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus when Jehovah sees a man or a woman, He sees him husband or wife. *They shall become one flesh*” (*Genesis 2:24*).

“Husbands and wives, meditate on your attitudes towards your spouse. You are linked even in the eternal kingdom.”

“Brothers,” concludes Chaazel, “we have a responsibility as heads of family because everything is related in the earth and in the heavens. Take care of the spiritual growth of your wives.”

50TH ANNIVERSARY

Married believers, those who are true disciples, recognize that as time progresses the godly wife thinks and behaves more like her husband. It is not the husband who becomes like the wife. The wife becomes like the husband. This is the nature of marriage.

The 50th wedding anniversary is called the Golden Jubilee. It is the year of marriage where the two become altogether one, the wife as the husband: one.

Biblically speaking, the 50th year is the Levitical year of Jubilee. Every Jubilee year, the people of Israel cancel one another's debts, set free any who have become slaves, and return sold land to its God-appointed owners. In the year of Jubilee, the land of Israel returns perfectly to her God-intended inheritance because *to Him your land will be married (Isaiah 62:4)*. As God promises Abraham, *I am... your very great reward (Genesis 15:1)*.

The Bridegroom will be equally yoked. He must have a Bride who is *bone of His bones and flesh of His flesh (Genesis 2:23)*. A Bride who from the beginning is born in Him and hidden in Him; who passing through Him returns to Him worthy of Him—because it is not good for the Man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). *For 'Man' does not originate from woman, but woman from the 'Man'; for indeed 'Man' was not created for the woman, but woman for the 'Man' (1 Corinthians 11:8-9)*.

A spiritual life is—as Moses wrote—seventy spiritual years: twenty years as a spiritual child plus fifty years as the spiritual Bride equals the days of our life: seventy years (Psalm 90:10). *This mystery is great, but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:32)*.

NATURAL JUBILEE

Before the Bride experiences spiritual Jubilee, first comes the natural Jubilee. Religious Jews in the State of Israel must celebrate the Levitical year of Jubilee. Today in the nation of Israel prerequisites remain unfulfilled for the Levitical year of Jubilee to commence.

To begin counting the spiritual timetable for spiritual Jubilee, the Bride must first be brought to the Man for marriage. Because the Church now walks in the Child—Father relationship and

has not yet matured into marriage, that date is somewhere in the future.

The Bible gives us types and shadows of this 'bringing of the Bride to the Man,' including:

(1) *The Lord God fashioned a woman... and brought her to the man (Genesis 2:22).*

(2) Abraham's servant brought Rebekah to Isaac, the son of promise (Genesis 24).

(3) Moses sat down by a well then his appointed bride, Zipporah, came to draw water (Exodus 2:15-16).

(4) Ruth departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and her chance chanced upon the portion of the field belonging to Boaz (Ruth 2:3). Thus Ruth was brought to the man Boaz.

(5) When Abigail, wise and beautiful, the joy of her father, heard the message from David's servants, she quickly arose, and rode on a donkey, with her five maidens who attended her; and she followed the messengers of David and became his wife (1 Samuel 25:42). The Lord brought her to the man.

(6) So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus to his royal palace... and he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen (Esther 2:16-17). Esther was brought to the king.

(7) *Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark... she turned around and saw Jesus standing there (John 20:1, 14).* Mary was led to the Man she loved.

(8) *Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17).* Thus we are taken up to the Lord.

Beloved, Jubilee is coming—the great release, the full return, the wedding feast. Debts canceled. Slaves freed. Land restored. The Bride completely His. The Lover is preparing the celebration. The high purpose of your life is to attend the wedding feast—a celebration you do not want to miss.

CHAPTER 6

THE SONG OF ALL SONGS

I have loved you with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3)

A man I respect had a vision of the Mountain of God. At what he believed was the mountain top, he beheld the Father's love. That man saw the mountain of God from the vantage point to which he had climbed. But the Mountain of God goes higher. The Song of Songs helps explain this mystery.

In the Song of Songs, a supporting cast of characters mill about, oblivious to the lovers' torrid affair. These secondary cast members dwell in Jerusalem but are blind to the love affair between the Bride and Bridegroom. These citizens of Zion cannot see the lovers or comprehend their love because —like the man and his vision of the Father's love— their hearts have not been there yet. The love the Bride and Bridegroom share must be experienced to be understood. It is like trying to explain the thrill of skydiving to someone who has never jumped.

Since Solomon penned The Song of All Songs, nothing has changed. The Bride and her Lover carry on in their passions while everyone else in the household of God misses the main act. As the character Morpheus explains to Neo in the movie *The Matrix*, “You can’t be told what the Matrix is. You have to see it for yourself... Remember, all I’m offering is the truth, nothing more.”

Song of Songs Supporting Cast		
Brothers of the Bride	Exploit the Bride and are angry with her;	Song 1:6
Watchmen	Beat the Bride and steal her wedding garment;	Song 3:3-4; 5:7
Chorus	Sings of love but does not know either lover;	Song 1:4, 11; 2:15; 6:1; 8:5, 8
Daughters of Jerusalem	Decorate the King’s throne but never see the Bridegroom;	Song 3:10-11; 5:9
Daughters, Queens & Concubines	Call the Bride the blessed one but they do not know who she is;	Song 6:8-10

BROTHERS OF THE BRIDE

Song of Songs 1:6

The Bride’s brothers are unexplainably angry with their sister; they enslave her to their works. They consider the Bride to be their household servant, a worker to be exploited, not one to be sought out, admired and consulted.

The sons of those who afflicted you will come bowing to you, And all those who despised you will bow themselves at the soles of your feet; And they will call you the city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 60:14).

THE WATCHMEN

Song of Songs 3:3-4; 5:7

The Hebrew transliteration *shamar* is often translated as ‘watchmen’ or ‘guardsmen.’ *Shamar* means those who have a legal responsibility to watch over, protect, preserve and guard. In context, *shamar* alludes to Church officials, to shepherds and seers who while accountable for Zion’s welfare, cannot see the Bridegroom even when He appears before their eyes.

The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me, and I said, ‘Have you seen him whom my soul loves?’ Scarcely had I left them when I found him whom my soul loves; I held on to him and would not let him go (Song 3:3-4).

Zion’s religious leaders treat the Bride as they treated the Bridegroom: they beat and crush her. They steal her garment—the fine linen, bright and clean she wore to meet her Lover. In a sense they crucify her as they crucified her Lord.

The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me, they struck me and wounded me; the guardsmen of the walls took away my shawl from me (Song 5:7).

Nevertheless, those who hopefully wait for Me will not be put to shame (Isaiah 49:23).

THE CHORUS

Song of Songs 1:4; 1:11; 2:15; 6:1; 8:5; 8:8

Some in the household of God sing of love for God without loving God wholeheartedly. Some talk of making ‘rich jewelry’ for the King and fret over spiritual ‘foxes in the Kingdom’s vineyards,’

but they neither know where to look for the Bridegroom nor can they recognize His Bride when she stands in front of their face.

Like distant orbs circling the Sun, the Chorus adds nothing to the King's brightness. While singing of His light, they live too distant from His radiance to know His heat.

THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM

Song of Songs 3:10-11; 5:9

The daughters of Jerusalem fitted out the King's throne yet do not know what the Lover looks like. Having never met the Bridegroom, the Daughters are admonished to see the King and study His Bride. They are instructed to ponder the joy the King finds in His Bride. The Bride is the King's crown, and *on His head were many crowns (Revelation 19:12)*.

Go forth, O daughters of Zion, And gaze on King Solomon with the crown With which his mother has crowned him On the day of his wedding, And on the day of his gladness of heart (Song 3:11).

This admonishment is meant to spur on the Daughters of Jerusalem to become the Bride themselves. "Come see the King with His crown!"—the crown is His Bride.

Two chapters later the Daughters still have not met the Bridegroom but they did find the Bride. They ask her:

What kind of beloved is your beloved, O most beautiful among women? What kind of beloved is your beloved, That thus you adjure us? (Song 5:9).

THE DAUGHTERS, QUEENS AND CONCUBINES

Song of Songs 6:8-10

The maidens saw her and called her blessed, the queens and the concubines also, and they praised her, saying, *Who is this that grows like the dawn, as beautiful as the full moon, as pure as the sun, as awesome as an army with banners?* (Song 6:9-10).

The Daughters know the Father; the Queens know the King; and the Concubines know the Master. But when the Bride appears to them, these circling personalities are miffed. They ask, *Who is this?*

While the Daughters, Queens and Concubines recognize the Bride as one who is blessed, radiant, pure and supernaturally powerful—they do not know she has become one with the Bridegroom. Obedience is a pathway they have not traveled to its end. Otherwise they would sense the Presence of the Bridegroom in His Bride. As it is written, *He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; ... and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him* (John 14:21).

IDENTIFYING THE BRIDE

The Bride's identity is in her Husband. Like her Husband she is robed in humility. Her beauty is hidden behind the veil, her veil. Precious in the sight of her Husband, her heart is unknown by men. She is unconcerned with being known. The Bride thinks nothing of her own life, only hoping she might accomplish all that is set before her and please her Lover.

Instead of classifying herself as a leader, the Bride considers herself a helper suitable to her Husband. She alone is bone of

His bone and flesh of His flesh. *The heart of her husband trusts in her, And he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil All the days of her life (Proverbs 31:11-12).*

Beloved, the Bride is not seeking the spotlight in the assembly. She is not flashy on stage. She is quiet, humble, lovesick—and unstoppable. The world cannot see her. The religious crowd beats her. But the Bridegroom adores her—and calls her His own.

Ready to leave the chorus and join the lovers? The Song is calling. The Bridegroom waits to dance with you.

CHAPTER 7

THE PEDIGREE

take a wife for my son (Genesis 24:4)

Abraham told his servant: find a bride for my son from my country and my relatives (Genesis 24:4).

The Holy Spirit rephrased these words when the same servant spoke later. The servant said the Bride must come from Abraham's father's house and his family (Genesis 24:40).

This change of words is noteworthy. It reveals the pedigree of the spiritual Bride.

The Bride comes from Abraham's heavenly Father's house—meaning heaven: she is born again from above. She also comes from Abraham's spiritual family on earth: grafted into Israel's olive tree; she is part of the 'one new man'—Jew and Gentile together (Romans 11:17–24).

That is the Bride's pedigree: she is a child of the heavenly Father and her family tree has one spiritual root—the root of Jesse (Romans 15:12).

Being the Bride is not about DNA tests or better theologies—it is about the heart. If you have been born from above and grafted in, you have the lineage. You possess the right to mature into a Bride for the Son of Promise. Will you exercise that right?

CHAPTER 8

MARRIAGE IN THE COVENANTS

I will betroth you to Me forever (Hosea 2:19)

The river of marriage runs through every covenant God ever made. From Eden to the cross, each one whispers the same wild invitation: Become one with Me. The Lover pays with His life. The Bride follows, losing her life to find His.

THE EDENIC COVENANT

In Eden, the first covenant was a union. Adam and Eve walked with God, no shame, no hiding. It was a honeymoon suite. But Eve reached for fruit that was not hers. Adam followed. God knew they would do it. He knew they would break faith. God divorced them from the garden, guarding the way back with fire and sword (Genesis 3:24). The first marriage was shattered—but the Lover had long before planned to buy the marriage back and make it greater than it ever was before.

THE ADAMIC COVENANT

The Adamic covenant was divorce papers with a blood buy-back clause. God spoke tenderly even in the pain: the serpent would bruise Man on the heel but the Seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). The coming Son of Adam—the Bridegroom—would die so the Bride could live. The first promise of redemption was written in the blood by the sacrifices that clothed Adam and Eve in *garments of skin* (Genesis 3:21).

THE NOAHIC COVENANT

Noah entered the ark—a type of deep sleep, hidden in God. The flood came. The old world died. When the waters receded, Noah stepped out and offered sacrifice. God sealed this everlasting covenant with a rainbow ring (Genesis 9:13). No more flood. Never again. The Lover was saying, “I will remember this covenant and never destroy all flesh again.” The betrothal offer was renewed and unbreakable.

THE ETERNAL COVENANT

Abraham received the promise. The Lover spoke forever words: *I will make you a great nation... I will bless those who bless you* (Genesis 12:2–3). Abraham's heart like his body was circumcised. He believed God and was counted as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). This covenant was sealed again in blood (Genesis 15:17). God promised a Seed who would bless all nations. The invitation was eternal: Come to Me and I will give you rest, foreshadowing the New Covenant made in Christ's blood.

THE MOSAIC COVENANT (THE OLD COVENANT)

Moses brought the Mosaic covenant—a ‘starter’ marriage of sorts. This covenant came with the rules of fidelity but without the strength for God’s people to remain faithful, without a change in their hearts.

Israel, the beloved of God, was delivered from Egypt and passed through the sea like a baptism, yet died in the wilderness without entering the Bridegroom’s rest. The Mosaic Covenant proves flesh cannot make itself holy, it cannot give itself God’s heart.

The Lover said, *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you (Ezekiel 36:26)*. The starter marriage proved we need more than rules. We need Him inside us, changing our hearts to His.

THE LAND COVENANT

God promised Israel the land flowing with milk and honey, but they could only possess it through obedience (Deuteronomy 28–30). The physical land was never the end; it was the shadow, the foretaste. The real promise was the Spirit Himself—the engagement gift that would make obedience possible from the inside out.

The Lover said through Moses, *I will give you the land (Exodus 3:8)*. Yet He also promised, *I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes (Ezekiel 36:27)*. The land pointed to the Spirit. The Spirit makes the land livable. Without Him, it remains a wilderness of rules and failure. In union with Him, the wilderness becomes the garden again.

The Spirit is the engagement gift—God’s pledge that the Bride will receive all of the Bridegroom. Spiritual gifts can be

owned in disobedience but they are only enjoyed in obedience (Romans 11:29; Ephesians 1:13–14). The Spirit whispers, “More is coming when your heart is all Mine. Taste and see—living in union with Me gets sweeter forever as you give yourself completely to My will.”

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

David received the Davidic covenant—an unbreakable promise. The Lover said, *I will make you a house... your house shall endure forever (2 Samuel 7:11, 16)*. This foreshadows the Bridegroom building a house not of stone, but of living stones—the Bride herself: the New Jerusalem descending from heaven, radiant as a bride adorned for her Husband (Revelation 21:2). The house He builds stands forever. She goes from glory to glory.

THE NEW COVENANT

The New Covenant was enacted with the Bridegroom’s own blood. It offers everything needed to die like the Lamb and marry the Son:

- Christ’s Righteousness—sins washed away forever.
- Christ’s Mind—knowing God’s will day by day.
- Christ’s Power—the Holy Spirit empowering you to obey.

Many are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb but few pay the price to be chosen (Matthew 22:14; Revelation 19:9). To stand chosen at the wedding, we must take all the New Covenant offers. When we hold back a corner of our heart or fail to persist, we push a part of Him aside. We risk finding the door to the wedding locked, ourselves standing outside with lasting regret.

Will you come to the wedding? Will you lay down your life to find His?

CHAPTER 9

HOME TO HEAVEN

strangers and exiles on the earth (Hebrews 11:13)

Dumitru Duduman (1932-1997) dreamed of leaving this world and going home to heaven to *always be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17)*. Explaining his dream Duduman wrote, “I then realized that when that moment comes, I will have no time to think about anyone else. I will just be caught up in the great joy that Christ has come to take me home.”

When I first read Brother Duduman’s story, my soul upwelled with emotions. I cried out to Jesus. I spoke to my Lover about the end of my journey through this world—that future moment when I go to His home, to mine.

With tears I said, “Jesus, I do not want angels coming for me or loved ones escorting me home, as many experience. I want You and You only to come for me, Jesus. Jesus, You must leave heaven and You must come for me when my time comes.”

I had expressed this heartfelt sentiment before but this time was different. This time my Husband responded. He said:

John,

I always come for those who are My bride.

The Father has given Me this privilege and it is My great joy to do so. I walk my bride into heaven so that when people and angels see you for the first time, they see Me beside you. As they look, they will see that we are One forever.

Then whenever they see Me again, they will also see you even if you are not with Me. And whenever they see you again, even if I am not with you, they will see Me forever. Forever we are One.

This is why the Apostle John saw many crowns upon My head (Revelation 19:12). Each crown represents a Bride the Father gave Me.

Tell My people to repent, John. Tell them to come out of the Babylon whore church, to forsake all, to not be a mixed offering but to follow Me to the complete end of themselves just as you have done.

Tell them to pick up their cross and follow Me all the way to the end of themselves and then with Me they will be complete. They will be One with Me. Those who listen to you and follow Me will shine like the stars in heaven forever.

And when their time comes to enter heaven, I will come for them just like I will come for you, John. That is My promise, and I always keep My promises.

I love you John and you are greatly loved.

Yours forever,

Jesus

And he said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me' (Luke 9:23).

The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires, take the water of life without cost (Revelation 22:17).

Beloved, this is The Invitation.