

The Bride of Christ

“For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” - 2 Cor. 11:2

by
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Introduction

There are relatively few books and articles written by sound Baptists on this subject. Dr. Roy Mason devoted a chapter to this subject in his book entitled "The Myth of the Universal Invisible Church Exploded." Several Baptist preachers of Dr. Mason's era believed and preached the position defended in his book. Brother Oscar B. Mink has also written a little booklet entitled "The Baptist Bride." Brother Mink's book sets forth the truth of the bride quite clearly. Another excellent book on this subject is entitled "The Courtship of Jesus" by M.W. Hall and published by Bryan Station Baptist Church in Lexington, Kentucky. Milburn Cockrell, editor of the Berean Baptist Banner just published an excellent book on the Bride "Here Comes The Bride."

However, with the exception of Brother Cockrell's book, I am not aware of any apologetical works that defend this truth against the arguments of its foes. My reason for writing this book is not simply to present this great truth for that has already been done by those named above. The primary reason for this book is to defend this great truth and answer the objections and arguments presented by the foes of Christ's Bride.

I have attempted to be fair with the Scriptures and with those who oppose my position. My position is that the bride of Christ will be composed of only **faithful** NT church members. I have not labeled my position a "Baptist Bride" simply because today, the term "Baptist" includes more than faithful members of sound NT churches. However, in the Biblical and the greater historical sense of the term "Baptist" I am unashamedly a "Baptist Brider." I have not attempted to document what Baptists have historically believed and taught on this subject. Neither have I dealt with Old Testament types, and there are many. My presentation and defense has been limited to the New Testament teaching.

Whether I am successful in presenting and defending my position only time will tell. I dedicate this little booklet to all who love the truth and who stand for the old landmarks.

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A Note to the Reader

How many times have you heard that Baptists think they are the only ones going to heaven or that they believe you must be a Baptist to be saved? Dear reader, nothing could be further from the truth. Baptists demand a confession of salvation **prior to** acceptance for membership by baptism into their churches. In fact, Baptists are the only Christians on the face of God's green earth that believe that justification "in Christ" has absolutely nothing to do with the church.¹

The reason Baptists are charged with believing that you must be a Baptist in order to be saved is due to the fact that other denominations confuse the church with salvation. Hence, when Baptists identify themselves as the only true church of Christ the conclusion is wrongly drawn that one must be a member of a Baptist church in order to be saved. However, this conclusion is only drawn by those who believe that to be saved is to be in the church and to be in the church is to be saved. Baptists believe that the church has nothing to do with positional salvation in Christ. The church is an institution designed by God through which baptized believers may serve God.

If you have repented of your sins and trusted in the substitutionary perfect righteousness and death of Christ for your salvation then you are saved. However, God has left you here on earth to serve Him. The Bible speaks of serving God "acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. 12:28). This author and this book presents the belief that just as there is but one way of salvation by one gospel for all (Gal. 1:6-9) there is but one way of service by one kind of church (Eph. 4:4) and this church is the Bride of Christ. In the coming new creation there are saved nations upon the new earth outside of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:24) and there are saved within the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1-4). The difference between dwelling within or without the New Jerusalem is not salvation. The thesis of this book is that the difference between dwelling within or without the New Jerusalem is the difference between serving God through His appointed church and serving God through churches of human origin. I am a Christian by conversion and a Baptist by conviction. Nothing in this book will teach that you must be a Baptist in order to get to heaven.

¹ later in this booklet this thought will be further explained and developed

The Bride of Christ

“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her it was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” - Rev. 19:7-8

There are many views among Christians concerning the identity of this woman in Revelation 19:7-8. However, when all the air clears there are but just two basic opposing ideas. She represents either all saints of all ages **or** she is restricted to a limited number of saints. The limited theory is further subdivided into one of two basic ideas; **(1)** she is either composed of all saints in a certain dispensation or **(2)** she is composed of the members of New Testament churches. The final restriction is subdivided one step further; **(a)** She is composed of all New Testament church members or **(b)** she is composed only of **faithful** New Testament church members. Every view fits within one of these.

Although the exact identity of the bride in the book of Revelation is much disputed there is little or no dispute as to the identity of the *espoused* bride in this present age. In this present age the Scriptures clearly identify the New Testament church of Christ as the espoused or promised metaphorical wife of Christ.

“...Unto the church of God which is at Corinth....For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you a chaste virgin to Christ.” - 2 Cor. 1:1; 11:2

Significantly, this passage is addressed to the local church at Corinth and its particular membership. This passage is rich in metaphors and draws from well-known Jewish customs. However, in order that the Bible reader does not misunderstand, and think that the church at Corinth alone is the Bride of Christ, Paul uses this same betrothal metaphor for the Church at Ephesus when he writes:

“..to the saints which are at Ephesus....that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be without blemish.” - Eph. 1:1; 5:27

Both of these passages are addressed to local churches. However, this last passage uses generic terms to demonstrate that this metaphor is not restricted to merely one or two specific churches but is applicable to each and every church of Christ.²

The Metaphorical Bride

The church is not a *literal* physical bride but rather she is a *metaphorical* bride. What is a *metaphorical* bride? First, we must define what is a metaphor. The word “metaphor” simply means “to cross over” or “to transfer.”³ The key to understanding the right application of a metaphor is to understand how a metaphor can and cannot be used. E.W. Bullinger in his book **Figures of Speech Used in the Bible** defines a Metaphor by comparing it to a simile:

“The Simile says, ‘all we LIKE sheep,’ while the metaphor declares that ‘we ARE the sheep of His pasture.’ While, therefore, the word ‘resembles’ marks the simile: ‘represents’ is the word that marks the metaphor” - p. 735

The simile uses terms such as “like” and “as” whereas the metaphor uses *to be* verbs such as “am” and “is” or “are.” The simile conveys *resemblance’s* whereas the metaphor conveys *representation*. What type of representation is intended by the

² Both passages are found in letters written to local churches and both refer to a future presentation yet to come. The simplest and most natural interpretation is that the Corinthian passage provides a specific application of this metaphor to a specific church while the Ephesian passage uses generic terms in order that the reader might know that this metaphor is not restricted to the church at Ephesus or only to the church at Corinth (2 Cor. 11:2) but is equally applicable to each and every NT Church. The fact that the Ephesian letter was a prison epistle and most likely a circular letter to be read in all the churches considerably strengthens this interpretation. *“And when this is epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.” - Col. 4:16.* Prior to prison, Paul had personally returned to each church and encouraged them. But in prison he wrote circular letters using generic terms (“the church”, “the body”, “the new man” “the old man” “the laborer” etc.) so that each letter could be applied to each church reading the letter.

³ “Met-a-phor. Greek μεταφορα (metaphora), a transference, or carrying over or across. From μετα (meta), beyond or over and φερειν (pherein) to carry. We may call the figure ‘Representation’ or ‘Transference.’” E.W. Bullinger, **Figures of Speech Used in the Bible**, p. 735

metaphor? Bullinger defines the limits placed upon metaphorical representations when he says;

“Let it then be clearly understood that a Metaphor is confined to a distinct affirmation that one thing is another thing, owing to some association or connection in the uses or effects of anything expressed or understood. The two nouns themselves must both be mentioned, and are always to be taken in their absolute literal sense, or else no one can tell what they mean.” - Ibid., p. 735 (emphasis mine)

This means that the intended representation is restricted to those qualities or attributes found in the term as understood in its most literal sense. For example, the church can only represent a bride in areas that are characteristic of a **literal** bride. What are some characteristics of a literal bride? *Faithfulness* and *purity* and *commitment to an espousal covenant* are some characteristics that can be transferred metaphorically to the church because they are qualities found in a literal bride.

I am certain that the doctrine of the church has been completely distorted into something it is not simply because of the misuse and abuse of metaphors. For example, when Paul told the church at Corinth *“ye ARE the body of Christ and members in particular”* (I Cor. 12:27) he was speaking metaphorically and the idea conveyed is the same as if he had said *“Ye REPRESENT the body of Christ...”* meaning that the church REPRESENTS characteristics that can be found in Christ’s *literal* physical body. To understand the metaphorical application to the church, one must first understand the literal characteristics found in the “body” of Christ. His literal body was composed of many different members working in physical unity under the authority of His literal head. How would a church represent such a “body.” It is to be composed of many different kind of members brought physically together in a visible unity underneath the sole authority of Christ as the metaphorical head of the body. Indeed, the church at Corinth could not continue to exist apart from this very kind of visible unity and submission to Christ. The Church at Corinth was splintering into different fractions and Paul used this metaphor to call them back into a visible working UNITY underneath the headship of Christ.

However, an example of this metaphor being abused beyond its limits is the concept of a “universal invisible” body of Christ. This

concept is impossible for a literal “body” to express metaphorically, as no human body possesses such attributes. Not only does this concept fail to exist in a literal “body” it also fails to exist as an application to anything God has in this world. There is no such thing in this world as an unassembled, invisible body of Christians working in unity together under the authority of Christ. Christendom worldwide is splintered into hundreds of denominations which never work together with each other unitedly under Christ. Such a concept not only violates the use of metaphors but also has no application in this life or the life to come, as there will be no invisible or universally separated church in heaven.

Such abuse is also true for the metaphorical expression “head.” For example, every man is said to have Christ as his “head” (I Cor. 11:3). Obviously, this must be understood metaphorically or we have Christ’s literal head chopped off and planted on top of every single man’s body. However, if “head” is understood metaphorically, then, it simply means that “every man” is to be subject to the “authority” or headship of Christ. Now apply this same truth metaphorically to Christ and His churches. Each and every church of Christ is to submit to the authority of Christ as its metaphorical “head.” If Christ is the metaphorical head of each New Testament Church then obviously each church must be considered His metaphorical body (I Cor. 12:27). These are metaphorical descriptions and they are not intended to be taken literally or else we have a monstrosity of countless bodies sharing one head and countless brides sharing one groom. Such metaphors express **relational** concepts between Christ and His churches.

Let’s conclude by summarizing the intent of the above three metaphors. The concept of a “head” REPRESENTS Christ as the *final authority* over each of His churches. The concept of a “body” simply means that each church REPRESENTS the unity and working relationship between its members under the direction of one head (final authority). The concept of a “bride” REPRESENTS the idea of church members in covenant faithfulness to that authority. The bridal relationship with Christ is simply faithfulness to the terms of the espousal covenant.

The Espousal Metaphor

“...Unto the church of God which is at Corinth....For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you a chaste virgin to Christ.” - I Cor. 1:1; 11:2

One of the major metaphors related to the church as the bride of Christ is the espousal metaphor. The custom of betrothal was the act whereby a man and a woman agreed to specific covenant terms in view of a future wedding date.⁴

According to the Jewish Mishnah the bridegroom could betroth a woman through an authorized agent.

“A man may betroth a woman either by his own act or by that of his agent...” - Mishnah, p. 323

Usually the Bridegroom’s agent was one of his friends⁵. In our text above the Apostle Paul acted as such an agent between the church at Corinth and Christ. However, this kind of metaphorical ministry had its origin with John the Baptist.

“He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Thus my joy is fulfilled” - Jn. 3:29

John’s mission and ministry are characterized by this metaphor. The context of John 3:29 sheds considerable light upon its meaning. Some Jews had attempted to make John jealous of Jesus by telling him that “*all men*” were forsaking him and going to Jesus to be baptized (Jn. 3:26). In other words, they were telling John that Jesus had usurped and assumed John’s unique Baptist ministry and was

⁴ “From the Mishnah (Bab. B.x.4) we also learn that there were regular Shive Erusin, or writings of betrothal, drawn up by the authorities (the cost paid by the bridegroom). These stipulated the mutual obligations, the dowry, and all other points on which parties agreed.” - Alfred Edersheim, **Sketches of Jewish Social Life**, pp. 148-149

⁵ In Judea there were at every marriage two groomsmen or “friends of the bridegroom” - one for the bridegroom, the other for his bride. Before marriage, they acted as a kind of intermediaries between the couple; at the wedding they offered the gifts, waited upon the bride and bridegroom, and attended them to the bridal chamber, being also, as it were, the guarantors of the bride’s virgin chastity. - Alfred Edersheim, **Sketches of Jewish Life**, p. 153

replacing him before the multitudes. John reminded them that he had already told them that it was his mission to prepare the way for the Lord (Jn. 3:27-28). John 3:29 is his response to these critics. John’s ministry was not in competition with Christ but rather complimentary and preparatory to Christ’s ministry. His preparation work was the job of the “*friend of the bridegroom*” who acted as the agent for the Bridegroom in setting forth the terms of betrothal to the bride. John was not seeking the bride for himself but for Christ. Luke describes John’s preparation work in the following words;

“And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah....to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” - Lk. 1:17

The very words used in this passage are terms used for bridal preparations.⁶ It was the work of the bridegroom’s agent to make ready a bride prepared for the bridegroom by obtaining the consent of the Bride to the covenant terms of betrothal. John’s espousal ministry was a ministry that set forth the *terms* of espousal to be the bride of Christ. Those who submitted to these terms made it public through the new ordinance of baptism. As such, baptism was like signing the betrothal covenant publicly or like the exchanging of vows today. Baptism identified them as those committed to Christ and those who would remain faithful to Him. Calling sinners to repentance and faithful commitment to Christ was John’s ministry.

However, Jesus also performed the same ministry. He too called sinners to repentance and to faith in Him. Those who submitted to His call acknowledged it publicly through baptism. Baptism was like signing a betrothal covenant before men or exchanging vows at a wedding. It was a public pledge of identity with Christ and commitment to be faithful to Him.

The Apostle Paul used this same metaphor to describe his ministry to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:2). He too called men to repentance and faith in Christ. Those that heeded his call made it known through the ordinance of baptism. Baptism was like the public signing of a betrothal covenant. Those submitting to baptism were telling the world they were Christ’s and were committed to live for Him and obey Him until He comes for them.

⁶ The Greek word translated “make ready” in Luke 1:17 is the same term translated “prepared” in Revelation 21:2 where John says “adorned as a bride PREPARED for her husband”. It is also the same term translated “made herself ready” in Rev. 19:7. It was a term used for the preparation of a bride.

The Bible says that “the baptism of John” was from heaven. It was the visible symbol of this betrothal covenant. The Biblical name chosen to describe those who performed the betrothal ministry was “The Baptist.” John was called “The Baptist” before he baptized one person (Mt. 3:1). Why “The Baptist”? Because the whole espousal ministry is made public in the ordinance of baptism. Baptism is placed between the “go” of the great commission and “teaching” them. Baptism identifies you with previous faith in the gospel as well as publicly commits you to discipleship in the all things of Christ. The descriptive noun “The Baptist” conveyed the espousal ministry from beginning to end. For example, consider “The Baptist” ministry of John and what it consisted of:

1. John called men to the terms of the gospel:

“Behold the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world” - Jn. 1:29 - “John answered and said.....He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God abideth on him.” - Jn. 3:27,36

2. John called men to public identification with the gospel through baptism

“and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins...Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.” - Mt. 3:6,8

3. John’s baptism committed them to discipleship

“Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God. And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.” - Jn. 1:35-37.

4. John was authorized by God to administer baptism

“...The one who sent me to baptize...” - Jn. 1:33 - “The baptism of John whence was it? From heaven, or of men?” - Mt. 21:25. Jesus walked 60 miles to be baptized of John because he was authorized to administer the ordinance.

These four distinctive aspects constitute **The Baptist** ministry. (1) The gospel set forth the terms of submission. (2) Baptism made such submission public. (3) Discipleship demonstrated this submission on a daily basis. (4) An authorized administrator made it valid. Those who submit to this ministry will be *“a people made ready for the Lord”* (Lk. 1:17). John had faithfully carried out the espousal ministry and many had submitted to these terms. It was in light of this accomplishment that John said:

“He that hath⁷ the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Thus my joy is fulfilled” - Jn. 3:29

Therefore the announcement that “all men” were coming to Jesus through the same espousal terms did not make John jealous. Rather this announcement made him rejoice. He rejoiced because when Christ adopted “The Baptist” ministry it was an approval of John’s ministry that it was from God. He rejoiced as it demonstrated that he had been a faithful “*friend of the bridegroom*” and could say - *“Thus my joy is fulfilled.”*

A Transitory or Abiding Ministry?

We know that John began the espousal ministry but did this ministry end with the death of John? Today, many teach that John’s ministry and the rite of baptism (which began with him) were merely a transition between the Old Testament Judaism and New Testament Christianity. These expositors teach that the baptism of John was not “Christian” baptism but a transitory ceremonial rite that prepared Judaism for a “Christian” ministry which began on Pentecost by the Holy Spirit.

What are the consequences of such a teaching? First, this would mean that Christ submitted to something less than “Christ-ian”

⁷ The present tense demonstrates possession of the bride by the Groom. The immediate context demonstrates that rather than a contrast or competition existing between John and Christ, Christ adopted the same ministry of John and that John was delighted. The ministry Christ adopted was The Baptist ministry.

(Christ like) baptism (Mt. 3:15). This would also mean that Christ led His disciples to administer something less than “Christ-ian” (Christ like) baptism (Jn. 3:26; 4:1)!

“When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples.” - Jn. 4:1

In addition to the above, this theory would mean that the “council of God” should have been rejected by the Lawyers and Pharisees, as according to this theory, the baptism of John was to be rejected by the church anyway on the day of Pentecost:

*“And all the people that heard him, and the publicans justified God being baptized with the baptism of John. **But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the council of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.**” - Lk. 7:29-30*

If God and the post-pentecostal church were going to reject John’s baptism as Christian anyway, and everyone baptized by John had to be rebaptized later, then why not reject it as “faulty council”????

However, all these assumptions are inconceivable with the truth of the above Scriptures. This theory finds no support from the Biblical record as there is no record of the apostles or any of those they baptized ever being rebaptized.

What is the whole basis for this very popular theory? This theory is based entirely upon a questionable interpretation of Acts 19:1-6. Questionable, since this text records an event which occurred somewhere between 12-15 years after Pentecost without any previous mention of anyone ever being rebaptized. A careful study of Acts 19:1-5 within its proper context will demonstrate that Paul is not rejecting John’s baptism as “Christian” baptism but is challenging whether or not the baptism of John was really administered to these disciples in the first place. The responses given to Paul by these disciples demonstrate that whoever baptized them was deficient in knowledge and was without authority to administer baptism. These disciples were ignorant of the very essentials of John’s ministry such as the promise of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:11) and the coming of the Messiah in the person of Jesus.

He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?⁸ And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John’s baptism.⁹

“Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that; they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.” - Acts 19:2-4

Moreover, it seems that whoever baptized them, baptized them in the name of John when in contrast Paul distinctly says that John baptized in reference to the coming of Christ. It is only after they heard that John baptized in reference (in the name of) to Christ that they submitted to correct baptism.

“When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” – Acts 19:5

All of these deficiencies demonstrated that they had not received the baptism of John but rather had submitted to someone who administered a deficient and distorted type of water immersion. The context reveals that the probable administrator was Apollos (v. 1). In Acts 18 Aquilla and Priscilla took Apollos aside and corrected a deficiency he had in the area of the baptism of John. The correction did not require Apollos to be rebaptized as no doubt he had been baptized by John who was authorized to administer baptism. Apollos was deficient in three areas. (1) He did not know that the promised Christ was Jesus and (2) nor of the baptism in the

⁸ “have ye received the Holy Ghost?” The Pentecostal manifestations of the Holy Spirit or sign gifts are meant. When they were baptized by Paul such manifestations occurred. Literally, the words are, “We did not even hear whether the Holy Ghost was (given)” They were ignorant of the fulfilled promise that John preached concerning the baptism in the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. This was proof that they had been baptized by someone unconnected with the Spirit baptized church of Christ.

⁹ The emphasis of the Greek text is upon the name of John. The contrast in verse 5 demonstrates that they had been baptized into the name of “john” rather than into the name of Christ. John had baptized in reference to Christ’s name (v. 4).

Spirit whereby the Holy Spirit baptized the church as the successor of John's ministry on Pentecost; (3) nor that baptism was to be administered in the name of "Jesus" rather than in the name of "John." The consequence of this correction was that Apollos ceased to be a free lance minister and joined the church of Christ and worked under the authority of churches from that day forward. However, after Apollos left to go to the church at Corinth, Paul came to Ephesus where he met these disciples of Apollos (19:1). After asking a few key questions it was apparent that these "disciples" possessed the same deficiencies as Apollos. They were not members of any church. They did not know that the Holy Spirit was given nor that baptism was to be administered in the name of Jesus. Instead they professed they had been baptized "unto John."

The Baptist had been authorized by God to baptize and the Church had been authorized by God to administer the ordinances (Mt. 28:19-20). But who had authorized Apollos???? Apollos was acting as a free lancer apart from God's authorized agent – the church. When both Apollos and his disciples were corrected they ceased to act apart from God's authorized agent – the Church. This text does not provide a sufficient basis to reject the baptism of Jesus or His apostles and all the multitudes they baptized prior to Pentecost. What this text clearly condemns is all free lance ministries and later denominations that try to administer the ordinances which God has committed solely to His New Testament churches.

Jesus Continued The Baptist Ministry

"When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples). He left Judea, and departed into Galilee." - Jn. 4:1-3

The Holy Spirit led the Apostle John to record the above statement immediately after the recorded conversation between John and the Pharisees (Jn. 3:22-36). Why? For the express purpose to demonstrate that Jesus continued **The Baptist** ministry begun by John. The Baptist ministry did not cease with the death of John.

The thought transition from John's conversation to the above statement is too obvious to miss. This text informs us that Jesus "*made and baptized MORE*" disciples than John. The direct inference is not that Jesus rejected the ministry of John but rather that what John began Jesus adopted and continued. The historical context demands the continuation of The Baptist ministry as all realized that baptism as a rite began with John. The fact that Jesus had personally submitted to this rite only confirms it as the counsel of God (Lk. 7:29-30). But now Jesus begins to administer this rite through His disciples in so much that either Jesus was in competition to John or he was committing Himself to the furtherance of The Baptist ministry which John began. The transition from John to Jesus is also seen in the fact that the disciples of John became the disciples of Christ.

"Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God. And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus....he found...Simon....the following day...Jesus found Philip....Philip found Nathaniel" - Jn. 1:35-37,41,43

The fact that Jesus did not rebaptize those coming from John demonstrates clearly that the baptism performed by Jesus was indeed the same ministry performed by John. All of the above facts demonstrate clearly that the ministry begun by John was continued by Christ. The same espousal terms set forth by John through the gospel (Jn. 3:36) are set forth by Christ (Jn. 3:15-18). The same public token of submission to these terms begun by John is the same token of submission continued by Jesus (Jn. 4:1-2). If the ministry of the Baptist had ceased so would have it's terms and token of acceptance. However, the Scriptures demonstrate that the terms and token of His ministry continued under Christ.

In answer to the question "*was John's baptism a continuing baptism...*" the Biblical evidence clearly demonstrates that it was continued under Christ and His disciples. Jesus continued to call out a people who would submit to the terms of the betrothal covenant. The Baptist ministry (the espousal ministry) and the ministry of Christ were one and the same.

The Baptist Ministry Continued by the Church through the Great Commission

Just as there is a clear transition from John to Christ as recorded in John 3:22-4:1 there is also a clear transition from Christ to His church as recorded in Matthew 28:18-20.

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power (lit. Gr. Authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and, lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

The terms of the betrothal ministry are the terms of the Great Commission with one notable exception. The limits of John's ministry and the ministry of Christ was to Israel while the church's commission is to the whole world. Apart from this one exception, the ministry is the same.

Some question whether or not it was the church that this commission was given to. We believe the overall context and related texts make it clear that this authority is not given to Christians as individuals or to a particular church office (e.g. apostle, Pope, etc.).

For example, Luke makes it crystal clear that this commission was given to the church through its first representative officers when he describes the first actual application of this commission in the book of Acts:

(1) “Then they that gladly received his word **(2)** were baptized: and the same day three were added unto them....**(3)** And they steadfastly continued in the apostles doctrine.....And the Lord added to **(4)** THE CHURCH daily such as should be saved.” - Acts 2:41,42,47

Previous to the day of Pentecost Christ had already designated the church as the final authority on earth in kingdom affairs:

“And if he shall neglect to hear them, TELL IT UNTO THE CHURCH: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verity I say unto you,

Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” - Mt. 18:17-18.

The above passage demonstrates that the Roman Catholic Church is in error when they teach that Christ gave this authority to Peter as the first Pope. Instead, Christ gave it to Peter as the contextual spokesman in behalf of the church as this text proves.

Naturally, the above texts assume the existence of the church prior to Pentecost. Indeed, these texts infer the existence of the church parallel with the ministry of Christ on earth.

Contrary to the popular opinion that says the church began on Pentecost by the Holy Spirit is the fact that the Scriptures demand the existence of the Church as early when Christ first called out to himself those disciples baptized by John in the first chapter of the gospel of John.

This particular point of origin for the church is confirmed by the qualifications set forth to fill the church office of apostle:

*“Wherefore of these men which have **companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John...**” - Acts 1:21-22¹⁰*

The term “*companied*” means a “*gathering together*” and the words “*went in and out among us*” demonstrates an organized and structured assembly. The terms “*from the baptism of John*” demonstrates this to be a continuing and enduring assembly. The very fact that Jesus addressed church discipline as early as Matthew 18:15-18 demonstrates the existence of the church prior to Pentecost.

Paul tell us that the first office Christ set in the church was the office of apostle.

“And God hath some in the church, FIRST apostles, secondarily prophets...” - I Cor. 12:28

The gospel writers record the exact time when these disciples were set in the office of apostle (Lk. 6:12-13). It should be obvious that you cannot set anything into something that does not first exist.

A Church office cannot exist apart from the existence of the Church. Hence, the church had to first exist before any office could be set in it. John The Baptist asserted that Jesus already had possession of the bride (the church) even before John passed from the scene (Jn. 3:29).

Popular opinion says the church began at Pentecost. However, the Scriptures never state this opinion anywhere. According to the Scriptures, the Church had been assembling consistently with Christ from the baptism of John. The church office of Apostle was functioning and needed to be filled before Pentecost (Acts 1:15-26). At Pentecost this church was simply empowered (Acts 1:8) and “added” to (Acts 2:47). There is a great deal of difference between originating something and adding to something.

Having concluded that it is the church that Jesus gave the Great Commission to, we may now go on to demonstrate that this commission is the same espousal ministry begun by John and adopted by Christ.

Just as John had been particularly and specially authorized to set forth the terms of the betrothal covenant, so also the church was particularly and specially authorized to proclaim the same terms not merely to Israel but to all the world. In fact, only the church was qualified to carry out the Great Commission.¹¹ To think otherwise would be accusing Christ of authorizing the blind to lead the blind. It should be a simple matter to see that Christ never authorized anyone to gospelize others who had never first embraced or believed in the gospel themselves. He never authorized anyone to baptize if they had not first submitted to baptism themselves. He never authorized anyone to indoctrinate others who had not been first indoctrinated themselves. The text proves this when it says “*whatsoever I have commanded you.....*” - Mt. 28:20. Those authorized were those who had already been disciplined in all three aspects of the espousal covenant begun by John.

Moreover, the phrase “*whatsoever I have commanded*” demands that such authority to make disciples is restricted within the boundaries of these **same** espousal terms. This means that what is being commissioned is the **same** kind of gospel Jesus preached (Jn. 3:1-19) and the **same** kind of baptism Jesus administered (Jn. 4:1-2; Lk. 7:29-30) and the **same** kind of doctrine Jesus taught and

observed. This restricts the commission to those who are in doctrinal unity with Christ in these three areas.

Furthermore, these three espousal terms demand the existence and inclusion of the New Testament church institution. For example, there can be no “*teaching to observe*” without the actual physical assembling together of both the teacher and those who were previously gospelized and baptized. Jesus commanded them to teach them how to “observe all things whatsoever” He had commanded. How could they teach the observance of church discipline (Mt. 18) or the Lord’s Supper (Mt. 26) apart from assembling together as a New Testament Church?? Indeed, the commission requires that both the teacher and those being taught must be unified in the same gospel, same baptism and same faith and order if they are “teaching them to observe ALL THINGS whatsoever I HAVE COMMANDED.” Such doctrinal unity and togetherness demands they exist as members of a church of like faith and order. The New Testament church is inseparably involved in the Great Commission.

Finally, the last aspect of the Great Commission (teaching them to observe all things) demands obedience to the first aspect (...go...baptize....teaching them to observe all things....etc.). This means that the Great Commission is nothing less than a reproductive cycle of like faith and order until the end of the age. The commission is to reproduce like kind of disciples by preaching the SAME gospel and administering the SAME baptism and teaching the SAME faith and order as “I have commanded.”

Consequently, if this commission requires the church to disciple others by the **same** terms, then, the Great Commission must be recognized as the Lord’s plan to reproduce churches of **like faith and order**. **If these are the same terms of the espousal ministry identified as THE BAPTIST ministry, then, these are the requirements to be in the bride of Christ.**

Paul’s Ministry to the Gentiles is Proof of the Continuation of The Baptist Ministry

If it is doubted that the Great Commission sets forth the espousal terms to be in the bride of Christ, then the following fact clearly proves the point. The continuity of The Baptist

¹¹ The Commission exceeded mere evangelization. All the saved can evangelize but not all the saved can “make disciples” according to the threefold process found in the Great Commission.

ministry (the ministry of espousal) through the church in the Great Commission is demonstrated by the fact that Paul claimed the same espousal ministry as John. Just like the original Baptist, He claimed to be an authorized betrothal agent “*I have espoused thee unto Christ.*” (2 Cor. 11:2). Paul was claiming to perform the same ministry as John The Baptist. Just like “**The Baptist**” Paul preached the gospel of Christ and then baptized the repentant believers forming them into a visible church body under the leadership of Christ to be taught to observe all things whatsoever He has commanded. Like **The Baptist**, Paul had been authorized¹² to set forth the same betrothal covenant terms and as a result the church at Corinth had come into existence through his ministry just as the first church at Jerusalem originated with the material prepared by the first Baptist.¹³

Hence what was a preparatory ministry for the first church at Jerusalem is the continuing preparatory ministry that precedes the origin of all New Testament Churches.

These terms were the covenant terms for every church that Paul organized in his ministry. Thus, every church the apostle organized was considered to be a “chaste virgin” betrothed unto Christ.

The ministry of the church did not begin with Pentecost or some later date but the church at Jerusalem began in conjunction with the ministry of John:

“That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached.” - Acts 10:38

The baptism of John was not simply an action but a message that “*John preached*”. Baptism epitomized John’s mission, message and ministry. Baptism stands between the “go” of the gospel and “teaching them to observe all things.” **The gospel terms call for initial commitment to Christ but the last aspect of the commission calls for faithful continued commitment to Christ. Baptism identifies the believer with the gospel but also is the**

¹² Paul had been authorized by Christ through the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1-4; 14:26)

¹³ Paul had been authorized and sent out by the church of Christ at Antioch (Acts 13:1-4).

public vow of commitment to faithfully observe all things whatsoever Jesus commanded. Thus, baptism is the sign and seal of the espousal covenant with Christ.

Hence, the metaphorical concept of an “espoused” bride simply means that each New Testament Church entered into its existence through these espousal terms and promises to be faithful to Jesus until He comes and takes her to Himself. Jesus is still building His churches. The church sends out a missionary which “*makes ready a people prepared for the Lord.*” Hence, the ministry of New Testament Churches still continues to be “**The Baptist**” ministry until Jesus comes the second time.¹⁴ Therefore, in answer to our consideration - “*was John’s baptism a continuing baptism and if so, who was authorized to continue it?*”, the answer is that it was continued by Christ through His church. The Baptist ministry, the espousal ministry and the Great Commission are all one and the same ministry.

The Continuity of the “Baptist” kind of Bride

“...and lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world. Amen” - Mt. 28:20b

The closing words of the Great Commission contain an element of sovereign purpose. There is the element of sovereignty found in the Great commission which manifests itself in the divine promise that this commission will be successful until the end of the age, “*and lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world. Amen.*” Is this a lie or a promise that He will keep? This promise means that there will not be a day in this age that you will not be able to find a church disciplined by the SAME gospel, SAME baptism and meeting together to observe the SAME doctrine. Hence, the Great Commission is an age long **reproductive cycle** of churches of like faith and order. This is what Christ meant when He said, “*Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall never prevail against it*” (Mt. 16:18). As an **institution or specie** the church has

¹⁴ Prior to the Reformation the only group of evangelical Christians that opposed the Roman Catholic Church were called “Anabaptists” (re-baptizers). As early as 250 AD these evangelical groups consistently claimed to be the true NT church right up to the Reformation. The term “baptism” has been consistently applied to New Testament Churches since the first century until the present time.

never apostatized and never need reformation. As a **kind**, the churches of Christ have never went out of existence and never will.

This does not mean that individual churches do not apostatize or go out of existence. It only means that Christ promised that no generation would see an apostasy or annihilation of all New Testament Churches before at least one of like faith and order had been reproduced for the following generation. For example, the Church at Antioch may have apostatized and gone out of existence but not before it had produced other New Testament Churches through its missionary Paul. Individual churches established by Paul may have gone out of existence or apostatized but not before they had produced other New Testament churches for the next generations and so on and so forth until Jesus comes again. This is the promise attached to the Great Commission.

There is sufficient historical evidence to demonstrate a continued line of succession of churches that were faithful to the “Baptist” or espousal ministry of the Great Commission. The first great departure from the Baptist ministry among Apostolic churches occurred with the Church at Rome and all those churches which followed her into apostasy about 250 AD. Apostolic churches rejected what later became known as the Roman Catholic Church due to her worldliness and affiliation with the state. Those churches which remained true to the Baptist ministry were identified by Rome as “Anabaptists” because they re-baptized those who came over from Roman type churches to their churches. It is from the historical records of their Roman persecutors that evidence is obtained to demonstrate that these Apostolic Baptist churches have existed in every age from the apostles to the present. Consider a few of these historical claims:

A. Sir Isaac Newton - the greatest scientist who ever lived says:

“The Modern Baptist, formerly called Anabaptists, are the only people who have never symbolized with the Papacy”

B. John Clark Ridpath, Methodist, author of the monumental work “Ridpath’s History of the World” says,

“I should not readily admit that there was a Baptist church as far back as 100 AD, though without doubt there were Baptists then, as all Christians were then Baptists.”

C. Mosheim, Lutheran Historian says,

“Before the rise of Luther and Calvin, there lay secreted in almost all the countries of Europe persons who adhered tenaciously to the principles of the modern Dutch Baptists”

D. The King of Holland appointed Dr. J.J. Dermout and Dr. Ypiej of the Reformed Church to write a history of Christianity and they say of the Baptists:

“We have now seen that the Baptists, who were formerly called Anabaptists, and in later times Mennonites were the original Waldenses, and who have long in history received the honor of that origin. On this account the Baptists may be considered the only Christian community which has stood since the days of the apostles, and as a Christian society which has preserved pure the doctrines of the gospel through all ages...”

E. Cardinal Hosius, Roman Catholic, president of the Council of Trent says in the year 1554 AD

“If the truth of religion were to be judged by the readiness and boldness of which a man of any sect has shown in suffering, then the opinion and persuasion of no sect can be truer and surer than that of the Anabaptists, since there have been none for these TWELVE HUNDRED YEARS past that have been more generally punished....”

Rome Dates Baptists back to at least the year 354 AD

F. Zwingli, Swiss Reformer, writing in 1525 says of the Anabaptists:

“The institution of the Anabaptists is no novelty, but for THIRTEEN HUNDRED YEARS has caused great trouble to the church.”

Reformers Date Baptists back to 225 AD

G. Alexander Campbell, founder of the Disciples of Christ says of the Baptists;

“From the Apostolic Age to the present time, the sentiments of Baptists have had a continued chain of advocates, and public monuments of their existence in every century can be produced.”

H. Robert Barclay, a Quaker says,

“There are also reasons for believing that on the continent of Europe small hidden Christian societies, who have held many of the opinions of the Anabaptists, have existed from the time of the Apostles”

I. Roland Bainton, a Mennonite, author of “The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century” says of the Anabaptists:

“To call these people Anabaptists, that is re-baptizers, was to malign them, because they denied that baptism was repeated, inasmuch as infant baptism is no baptism at all. They called themselves simply Baptists.” - p. 99

When the Reformation occurred, the Protestants joined with the Catholics in persecuting these Anabaptists. Even in America up to the introduction of the bill of rights these Anabaptists were publicly persecuted by Protestants. The “Ana” was dropped and they became known merely as “Baptists.” Historical Baptist¹⁵ have always rebaptized all who came over from the ranks of Protestants and Catholics simply because baptism was the designated act to publicly identify a believer with the Baptist ministry (not a Catholic or Protestant ministry).

The Protestant Reformer Henry Bullinger confirms the fact that these apostolic churches rejected both Protestant and Catholic churches and their ordinances when he says of them:

“The Anabaptists think themselves to be the only true church of Christ, and acceptable to God; and teach that they, who by baptism are received into their churches, ought not to have communion

¹⁵ Today the term “Baptist” is generic and includes more churches than the true historic and Biblical Baptists. Historic Baptists are now known by their doctrinal content rather than their label. Historic Baptists are specifically known by their identity with all five aspects of the great commission.

[fellowship] with [those called] evangelical, or any other whatsoever: for that our-[i.e., evangelical Protestant, or reformed] churches are not true churches, any more than the churches of the Papists.” - J.R. Graves, **Old Landmarkism What Is It?**, p. 115

Significantly, since the time that a denominational difference occurred among apostolic churches, the name “Baptist” has always been attached to those churches which continued the ministry of John (Ana-baptists, Cata-Baptists, etc.) However, today, the name “Baptist” has become a generic tag worn by many conflicting denominations which do not share in either the doctrinal or historical heritage of these churches. Nevertheless, still under this generic name even today there can be found those churches which tenaciously teach and practice the ministry of John. These churches are truly the historical Baptists. As a matter of history, only historical **Baptists** can fit the terms and promise of the Great Commission. Only the **Baptist** institution can rightly claim to identify with John The **Baptist**.

A Word to our Ecumenical Brethren

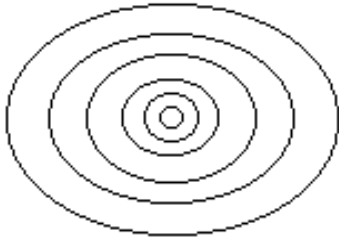
It is interesting to note that according to the Jewish Mishnah a priest must marry a bride whose line of descent can be traced back in succession from mother to mother in a priestly line.¹⁶ The Bride of our Great High Priest is composed of those churches which can trace their lineage through an historical succession of such churches to the first church at Jerusalem.

Dear evangelical brother consider the following thought. The Great Commission cannot possibly exist apart from such baptistic churches nor can it continue to exist without producing such baptistic churches. Why? Simply, because the terms of the Great Commission demand the reproduction of disciples in like faith and

¹⁶ “If a man would marry a woman of priestly stock, he must trace her family back through four mothers, which are, indeed, eight: her mother, mother’s mother, and mother’s father’s mother, and this one’s mother; also her father’s mother and this one’s mother, her father’s father’s mother, and this one’s mother.” Herbert Danby, trans. The Mishnah, (Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 327

order with the ministry of John the Baptist. Therefore if the Great Commission is an age long commission then the such churches must continue to the end of the age as such churches are the inseparable product of that commission.

As an Evangelical (gospel of grace believer) I believe that you already accept the position of this book in at least a partial way. Let me demonstrate my point. Please take a clean sheet of paper and draw a target on it like the following example:



Lets assume that the actual bulls eye represents New Testament Churches.

Now, let me ask you a question: “Do you think all world religions and their sacred temples or shrines are acceptable to God? Does the Hindu and the Moslem serve God in a way acceptable and are they going to heaven?”

Jesus answers this question for you in John 14:6 - “I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh to the Father but by me.” Peter answers this question for you in Acts 4:12 - “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.”

Therefore the majority of the religious world is lost and is not serving God acceptably. Both salvation and service are limited to “Christianity.” Place “WR” (world religions) in the outer circle of your target.

The 1998 Almanac lists a total of 3,848,891,000 (almost 4 billion out of nearly 6 billion world population) people on planet earth that belong to non-Christian religions. **Therefore, like it or not, as a Christian you are in the minority.**

Let, me ask you a second question: “Would you accept every Christian denomination as an acceptable way to serve God”? If you

are honest with yourself, I think you will have to answer “no”.¹⁷ Now don't misunderstand me. I am not saying that all who are members within non-Baptist denominations are lost. I am not saying that. I am simply considering whether the following institutions are Biblical ways for saved people to serve God acceptably. Can such institutions keep the espousal terms?

For example, would you accept New Age Christianity as an acceptable way to serve God (Christian Science, Scientology, etc.)? They say you are god and everyone is a little “god”? If you cannot accept such churches as “Christian” churches, then, place these types of churches in the second most outer circle. Label this circle as “NA” (New Age). Like it or not, with this limitation you are eliminating many institutions that claim to be “Christian.”

Let me ask you a third question: “Would you accept cultic Churches as acceptable to God (Jehovah's Witnesses, World Wide Church of God, Mormons, etc.)?” Perhaps they possess more Biblical characteristics and at least use the Bible more than the second group? However, no evangelical Christian would dare consider such churches as “Christian” for a moment. Place these in the third most outer circle and label them “CC” (Cultic Churches).

Your view of a real Christian church is getting narrower.

Let's proceed to the fourth question: “Would you accept sacramental churches as acceptable to God - meaning churches that demand that salvation is found in ceremonies and ordinances and church membership (Roman Catholic Church, Churches of Christ, Lutherans, Methodists, etc.)?” As an evangelical Christian, you know that these churches deny the very heart of the gospel of Christ and as **institutions** they publicly preach *another gospel* other than grace. If you have doubt about whether they are acceptable to God then read what Paul says about those who preach a gospel of works which is “another gospel”

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another (another different kind) gospel. Which is not another (of the same kind); but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you

¹⁷ If you don't know or if your answer is yes at this point of your life then please examine the following scriptures - Acts 20:29-30; Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Jn 9-11; Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Jn. 4:1; . God certainly instructs you not to accept all professing Christian preachers and believers as acceptable to Him.

than that which we have preached unto you, LET HIM BE ACCURSED. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, LET HIM BE ACCURSED." - Gal. 1:6-9

Unless you can bless and receive what God has said is accursed, place these churches in the fourth circle.¹⁸ Label these churches "SC" (Sacramental Churches). **Your view of what constitutes a real Christian church is shrinking rapidly.**

Lets pause a moment and consider the four categories you have eliminated thus far. Actually all four categories above are essentially one type of religion. They all teach that salvation is by faith in God PLUS your good works. Their bottom line message is that ultimately good works or bad works determine salvation. When it comes to salvation, the Hindu, Moslem, Methodist, Mormon, Seventh Day Adventist, Assembly of God, Roman Catholic, etc., are alike when it comes to the bottom line principle of salvation.

Jesus separated all religious people into two distinct classes or ways (Mt. 7:13-14). Those described above fit into what Jesus called the "broad way." The Apostles identified these two ways by name in their epistles as "works" versus "grace." Works is the broad way which includes the majority of the religious world. Among professing Christianity, the way of works is the way of **good works plus Christ IN ORDER TO BE** saved.

This type of Christianity is what Jesus describes in Matthew 7:21-23. It is the kind that professed "Lord, Lord..." with the additional profession of "have we not done....". They attempt to mix their own imperfect works of righteousness with the perfect righteousness of Christ as the basis for acceptance into heaven. Christ's response to this type of believer is "I never knew you, depart from me ye workers of iniquity..."

This is the type of churches and preachers that we are repeatedly warned of in the Scriptures to avoid (Rom. 16:17; 2 Thes. 3:6; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Jn. 9-11; Rev. 18:4). This is the type of

¹⁸ Paul is condemning those who change the CONTENT of the gospel by preaching **Christ plus works** for salvation. Just because professions of salvation occur in churches that proclaim salvation by works does not mean that the gospel of grace had been preached. It simply means that God was able to over rule the false preaching and use whatever scripture was read or spoken to save some in spite of the preacher and his message of works.

churches that true believers are commanded to "come out of" (Rev. 18:4) and to "mark" and "avoid" (Rom. 16:17) and withdraw from (2 Thes. 3:6).

On the other hand, the narrow way or the way of grace is the unmerited way of self-denial and complete trust in Christ IN ORDER TO GET TO heaven.

The minority way ("few there be") is the way of grace, as it is the way of complete denial of self and thus a complete reliance upon Christ and his merits to be saved. Only those in this way will populate the new heaven and earth, as only those will be saved. The Bible clearly says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves, but it is the gift of God, NOT OF WORKS lest any man should boast. For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus UNTO good works..." - Eph. 2:8-10.

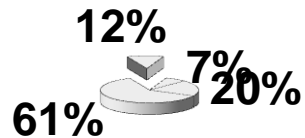
Now again, let me reiterate that there are no doubt many really saved people within many of these "works for salvation" **institutions** in spite of what they have been led to believe after their salvation. However, what we are considering here is what is an acceptable public Christian way of service ("church") rather than personal salvation.

Do you honestly believe that churches which deny the gospel of grace and pervert the ordinances are acceptable ways or institutions to serve God in and through? If so, then listen to the Apostle Paul:

"Now we command you brethren in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly and not after the tradition which he received from us" - 2 Thes. 3:6

According to the 1998 World Almanac there are 1,955,229,000 professing Christians in this world. 981,465,000 belong to the Roman Catholic Church (50%). Another 218,350,000 belong the Greek Orthodox Catholic Church (11%). Hence, a total of 1,199,815,000 (**61%**) belong to sacramental Catholic churches. Another 404,088,136 (**20%**) belong to Protestant sacramental (baby baptizers) churches (Lutheran, Presbyterian, Reformed, etc.). Now add all the cult churches (Christian and New Age) and non-church attendees to the above figures (**7%**) and you have approximately 251,334,000 evangelical Christians that are members of evangelical churches world wide. Dear friend, this means that only **12%** of professing Christianity belong to evangelical Christian churches.

Are you getting the picture? Look at the chart below. As an evangelical Christian in an evangelical church you are in the 12% minority.



[

Now since you have located yourself in the very “narrow” 12% margin of Christian churches, lets consider the final question. “*The question is what evangelical denomination(s) fit within the exact bulls eye?*” Since we have eliminated all churches but those that preach the right gospel, then the next step of elimination is very simple. Since salvation has to do with the right gospel, then the issue of the “church” has to do with right service.

Therefore, New Testament Churches must be those that not only preach the right gospel but teach the right way of service. Only those churches that preach the right gospel **and** teach the right way of service can be considered acceptable ways to **serve** God.

Is there a Biblical standard that we can measure and define what is and what is not true service? Yes, there is. It is the Great Commission. The Great Commission sets forth the four terms of the espousal covenant to Christ or the terms of faithful service. The true churches of Christ must be: **(1)** The kind that preach the same gospel Christ preached (Jn. 3:1-16), **(2)** that administer the same baptism Christ administered (Jn. 4:1; Lk. 7:29-30) and **(3)** teach the same doctrine and practice that Christ commanded (Acts 2:41-42) and **(4)** reproduce after their own kind through the age long reproductive cycle in the Great Commission (Mt. 16:18; 28:19; Eph. 3:21).

The Bride of Christ was present at the writing of the book of Revelation (Rev. 22:17 “say” is present tense) and Christ promises

her that He will be with her to carry out the Great Commission “*always even unto the end of the world*” or as one scholar translates according to the meaning of this passage, “*day in and day out unto the end of the age*” (Mt. 28:20). **The historical perpetuity and reproduction of like faith and order until the end of the age is a Biblical doctrine and promise that God has made. It is just as much an identifying mark of true New Testament Churches as right doctrine and practice. It is not an either/or situation but both are essential to identifying true New Testament Churches and all true New Testament Churches will openly confess both.**

It is true that such churches would be a small minority among professing Christendom today. However, you joined a small minority of churches (12%) when you took a stand for the right gospel. Jesus predicts that before His return that those standing for “the faith” will be very small (Lk. 18:8). Why not take a second step and take a stand for the right way of service? The Bible says that the New Testament Church is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Tim. 3:15). The Bible says that “God is not the author of Confusion” (I Cor. 14:33). Doesn’t even common sense indicate to you that God cannot be the author of all the denominational confusion in our world today? How would you eliminate the true from the false? Doesn’t it make sense that the true kind of churches will be united on the right gospel and right way of service whereas all false churches will fail to measure up to one or both of these standards? Doesn’t it make sense to you that the Lord’s true churches will be faithful to Him as described in the terms of the espousal covenant? Church succession is an essential and integrate part of the Biblical teaching concerning the faithfulness of Christ’s bride. Perhaps it would help to look at this question from the negative side.

What does it Mean to be Unfaithful to the Espousal terms?

“From the moment of her betrothal a woman was treated as if she were actually married....breach of faithfulness was regarded as adultery...” Ibid. Edersheim, p. 148

The metaphors used of a church that is faithful to the espousal covenant are a “*chaste virgin*” or “*bride*” whereas the metaphors

used to describe a church that has defiled the espousal covenant are “*harlot*” or “*whore*” or “*adulteress*.” In the New Testament such language of unfaithfulness is applied to **individual** church members as well as to the church as an **institution**.

Individual church members that depart from the covenant agreement and become defiled by false doctrine or worldliness are metaphorically identified as “*adulterers and adulteresses*” in James 4:4. Such members are to be rebuked and if they do not repent, they are to be purged from church membership in order that the whole body is not leavened. The Apostle John noted that some individual members in the church at Sardis had “*defiled their garments*”¹⁹ and therefore were not worthy to “*walk with him in white*” (Rev. 3:4). This was a bridal promise as the bride on her wedding day would walk with the bridegroom in her bridal dress of white (Rev. 19:7-8).²⁰

The gospel ordinances are intended to separate unworthy members from the church. Baptism is the initial filter of the church which is to prevent the unregenerate or the heretic (whose profession is contrary to the Scriptures) from gaining membership in the church. The Lord’s Supper is the continuing ordinance which publicly separates and identifies those who are walking “*unworthily*.” Unworthy members are so recognized by their public walk (I Cor. 5) and/or their refraining from taking the elements or by God’s judgment upon their health for taking them unworthily (I Cor. 11:29-32). Such “*unworthy*” members who continue to abstain from the Supper are to be confronted by the Pastor and if necessary by the church and if they do not repent they are to be purged from the membership. Church discipline removes from the membership any member that violates the espousal terms (I Cor. 5:1-13). Hence, the ordinances and church discipline are the instrumental means to keep the members of the church faithful to the terms of espousal.

When a New Testament church fails to implement these means (Lord’s Supper, Church discipline) then “*a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*” and thus eventually the whole church becomes defiled and unworthy to be presented to Christ. Hence, the Lord’s churches should be diligent in maintaining these ordinances for the sake of

¹⁹ Early Christians were baptized in white robes. Defilement of these robes means they were unfaithful to the betrothal terms symbolized in the rite of baptism

²⁰ Rev. 3:4-5 - Imputed righteousness cannot be defiled. The Lamb’s book of life is not to be confused with the city’s book of life. Names cannot be erased from the former as they were written prior to creation due to omniscience.

protecting their espousal relationship with the Lord and for the honor and glory of the Lord. The unfaithful have committed spiritual adultery and are to be dealt with appropriately.

There is such a thing as **institutional** harlotry in a metaphorical sense. The opposite of a “*chaste virgin*” is a “*harlot*.” The clear implication made by Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:2-3 is that the local church can be described either as a “*chaste virgin*” or a “*harlot*” depending upon its faithfulness to the doctrines of Christ.

Obviously, one who was unfaithful to the terms of espousal would be described in the opposite language.

*“I might present you a **chaste virgin** to Christ” but then warns “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be **corrupted**...”*

Churches that have departed from their espousal terms and have become defiled by false doctrine and/or practice are “*corrupted*” and thus are metaphorically identified as “*harlots*”.

“And upon her head was a name written, MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” - Rev. 17:5

“And I heard another voice from heaven saying, ‘Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins...’ - Rev. 18:4

The Apostle John tells his readers in his second epistle that even wishing false teachers “*God’s speed*” is to be a partaker of their evil deeds (2 Jn. 9-11) how much more to actually join such a harlot church. Genuinely saved people who join such churches are committing spiritual adultery. The Apostle Paul says;

“What? Know ye not that he which is joined to a harlot is one body? For two saith he, shall be one flesh: But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.” - I Cor. 6:16-17

Christians who join “*corrupted*” assemblies are joining themselves to a metaphorical harlot.

At what point in time does a church cease to be a chaste church and become a harlot institution? What is the exact line to determine this? Although no human can point to the exact time and point when a chaste church becomes a harlot church, however, there are

clear guidelines that can be used to RECOGNIZE such a harlot church. Those lines are spelled out in the Great Commission. The terms of the Great Commission provide the essentials to identify New Testament Churches. Any church that characteristically departs from the following essentials should no longer be RECOGNIZED as a chaste virgin church of Christ. Why? Because these are the espousal terms:

1. When a church preaches “another gospel” (gospel that adds works for justification before God - Gal. 1:6-9). “*Preach the gospel*” (Mk. 16:15). SAME GOSPEL

2. When a church departs from any of the four essentials of baptism or receives baptism from other churches that do: (1) Right mode - *immersion*; (2) Right candidate - *regenerate*; (3) right purpose - *public identification with Christ, His Gospel and His church*; (4) Right authority - *ordained representative of a church of like faith and order*. “*baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost*.” - Mt. 28:19 - SAME BAPTISM

3. When a church embraces any doctrine or practice that (1) violates any principle or precept of Scripture that is essential for salvation or service or (2) embraces such doctrines that are condemned as outright heresy by clear Biblical precepts. “*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded...*” - SAME DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE.

4. When a church characteristically receives members from harlot churches or recognizes and fellowships with churches that do not originate with a true New Testament Church - “*and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*” - SAME REPRODUCTIVE CYCLE OF CHURCHES OF LIKE FAITH AND ORDER

These four distinctives of the Great Commission identify the boundaries of chastity and therefore identify the essentials of New Testament Churches. Any church that characteristically violates these terms should not be recognized as a true espoused bride of Christ but as a “harlot” church.

The Future Bride of Christ

Only the Churches of Christ are metaphorically described as the “espoused” virgin yet to be presented to Christ as a bride. The metaphor always implies a yet future presentation to the groom. The book of Revelation contains the only reference of a future presentation of the bride to Christ (Rev. 19:7-8; 21-22). the Apostle concludes this book by positively identifying this same Bride is these words:

*“I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto these things **in the churches**, I am the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning Star. **The Spirit and The Bride say come...**” - Rev. 22:17*

The word “say” provides us two clues to the identity of this Bride. First it denotes a close relationship between the Spirit and this Bride as both “*The Spirit and the Bride say*” demonstrating one common voice. Second, the word “say” is found in the present tense which demonstrates that the Bride was actually present and in existence at the time this book was written.

The only entity identified as a metaphorical espoused bride in existence at the writing of the New Testament and in close relationship with the Holy Spirit were the churches of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:26-27).

The evidence that this “bride” is the church institution, is overwhelming when it is considered that the same unique relationship between the Spirit and the churches has already been established at the beginning of this book seven times in these words:

*“he that hath an ear to hear let him hear what **the Spirit saith unto the churches.**”*

The precedence of this established relationship is intentionally brought forward at the close of the book when the writer prefaces the words “*the Spirit and the Bride say*” with

*“I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto these things **in the churches....**” - v. 16*

The above evidence is sufficient to positively identify the Revelation Bride as the churches of Christ. However, when two

other contextual factors are considered the evidence is overwhelming that the Revelation Bride consists of all New Testament Churches.

The first factor is the contrast that is being made between chapters 17-19:4 and chapters 19:7-22 and two different entities. In Revelation 17-18 there is an entity that is described first as metaphorical women (Rev. 17:1-6) and then metaphorically described as a city (Rev. 17:19-19:4). Likewise, the second entity is also described as a woman in Revelation 19:7-8 and then described as a city in Revelation 21-22:4.²¹ The contrast is between a polluted versus a pure woman and a worldly versus a heavenly city. Most expositors identify the Great Harlot and her daughters as polluted and defiled institutionalized religion. In contrast the Bride would refer to the opposite or the faithful churches of Christ.

The second factor is the nature of the invitation that is extended in Revelation 22:17. The Spirit and the Bride are not the only ones extending such a gospel invitation to the lost. The newly saved are encouraged to invite lost sinners to come to Christ as well - *“And let him that heareth say come.”* This text recognizes the existence of saints apart from and outside of the churches of Christ. Revelation 18:4 also clearly demonstrates that saints exist outside of the churches of Christ.²² The Scriptures predict the rejection of Christ's bride by some Christians and the origin of polluted churches as a result of this rejection:

“Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” - Acts 20:30

All of these contextual factors clearly demonstrate that the Revelation Bride is the metaphorical composite of the churches of Christ.

Hence, the future bride of Christ would be made up of the membership of all New Testament churches in this present age. The ordinances of the church are to purge members that are

²¹ In both cases the city is named after the aforementioned woman. Babylon is identified as the Great Whore (Rev. 19:1-4) and the heavenly city is identified as “the bride” (Rev. 21:1-4) demonstrating that each entity is being described by two metaphors or that each city is being named in honor of the preceding woman.

²² “Come out of her my people...” This is a heavenly voice of omniscience that can discern between a professed people of God and “my people.” The elect that are found in the Great Whore will not be found in the chaste Bride of Christ and visa versa.

characteristically unfaithful to the espousal terms. Therefore the future bride of Christ is made up of all the faithful members of present New Testament Churches. When a true church of Christ characteristically violates the espousal terms then God's command to the faithful membership is *“come out of her my people.”*

CONCLUSION

Whatever your concept of the future Revelation Bride may or may not be, there can be no doubt that the present betrothed bride of Christ is the local New Testament Church.

Since the New Testament Church institution had no existence **prior to** the earthly ministry of Christ, then, such a metaphor must refer to and describe a special relationship between the church and Christ that is **in addition to** and **separate from** a salvation relationship. Why? Because salvation “in Christ” precedes not only the building of the church but it is the prerequisite to church membership and therefore cannot be confused with the church. New Testament writers make it very clear that all the Old Testament prophets preached the same way of salvation as we preach today except for the tense (they professed faith in a coming Christ, we profess faith in a Christ who has already come):

“To him give all the prophets witness that whosoever believeth in his name shall receive remission of sins” - Acts 10:43

“The gospel was preached unto them as well as unto us...” - Heb. 4:1

Salvation was by the very same gospel **prior to** the building of the church as it was **after** Jesus built the church institution.²³

²³ Brother Oscar Mink says under the heading “The Mystery of the Church” that - “The New Testament church and its glorious gospel was hid from Israel...” (O.B. Mink, *The Baptist Bride*, p. 34). As a nation this was certainly true but as elect individuals the gospel has been preached since the garden of Eden. Paul says that the Law was “added” to the promise of grace (Gal. 3:19) which demonstrates the gospel of grace preceded the Law. The context of Bro. Mink's statement leads me to conclude that He

Since the church has nothing to do with positional salvation “in Christ” or obtaining positional salvation “in Christ” then the church can only be designed for acceptable service before God. This being the case, then, those churches that faithfully preserve New Testament doctrine and practice are identified as a “*chaste virgin*” (2 Cor. 11:2) and as such are “*the pillar and ground of truth*” (1 Tim. 3:15). Churches that do not preserve these things but rather pollute and defile these things are metaphorically the opposite - “harlots”.

The theme of this book is that no church can be acceptable unto God unless they originate under the terms of the Baptist ministry as begun by John the Baptist, adopted by Christ and commissioned to His churches unto the end of this age. Churches that do not originate with The Baptist ministry cannot identify with Christ nor with apostolic churches (Jn. 4:1-2; Acts 1:21-22; 10:38).

Dear reader, does the church you are presently a member of originate by and identify with **The Baptist ministry**?

A Defense of a New Testament Church Bride

In this section of my booklet, I will deal with the arguments that are set forth against the position presented in the former pages. Many believers oppose the idea that the Bride consists only of **saints** who were faithful members of New Testament churches.

Some believe that she is composed of all the saints from the creation of the world until the final judgment. Others believe she consists of only those saints from Pentecost to the rapture excluding both Old Testament saints and tribulational and millennial saints.

Because there are strong differences of opinion among good scholarly men, we must be careful and make sure that we deal with the Scriptures fairly.

The Common Ground

must be speaking about Israel as a nation and its blind condition toward the gospel which was preached unto them (Heb. 4:1).

All positions admit that the Revelation “bride” or “wife” of the Lamb is a figure of speech that denotes a special relationship and it does not refer to a literal physical woman.

All positions believe that the Revelation “bride” is composed of only the saved and that no lost person is involved in this figure.

All positions believe that any figure of speech must be interpreted by its immediate context and then with the overall context of the Scriptures.

A Matter of Context

Context must always be the deciding factor when dealing with any figure of speech. For instance, the figure of a “lion” is used as a *anthropopatheia*²⁴ for Christ “*the lion of the tribe of Judah*” (Rev. 5:5) while the “lion” in another context is used as a *simile* for Satan “*the devil, as a roaring lion*” (1 Pet. 5:8). Hence, it is not enough to argue that since the term “lion” is used metaphorically for Christ in one text it must refer to Him in all texts.

Likewise, the metaphors of “betrothal”, “espoused” and “wife” are used several ways in the Bible. For example, the metaphor of a “wife” is used to describe Israel’s relationship with God. This relationship was based upon the covenant of works at Mount Sinai (Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:1) and then consummated by God dwelling with her in the tabernacle and temple.

*“For thy Maker is **thine husband**, the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer....For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and **a wife**.....” - Isa. 54:5,6*

However, the figure of “betrothal” is used of Israel only in a yet *future* relationship between God and a completely redeemed Israel (Hosea 2:19-20; Isa. 61:7-10).

*“And **I will betroth thee** unto me for ever; yea, I will **betroth thee** unto me in righteousness.....And it shall come to pass **in that day**, I will hear.....” - Hos. 2:19,21*

²⁴ **Figures of Speech Used in the Bible** by E.W. Bullinger, p. 894 - This is a figure of speech where God or man are described in language that condescends to animal likenesses.

Therefore, Israel's figurative relationship in the Old Testament is different than its yet prophetic figurative relationship.

In the New Testament, the church is described in the figure of a *present* betrothed wife (Eph. 5:23-27; 2 Cor. 11:2) still awaiting a yet future presentation in marriage.

"That He might present it (lit. "her") to himself a glorious church....."
- Eph. 5:27

Significantly, the church is never described in the terms of a consummated marriage but rather a marriage in prospect. On the other hand, the individual believer is described in terms of a consummated *spiritual* marriage with fruit of that marriage already present as evidence of that spiritual union. (Rom. 7:1-5).

"....That ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." - Rm. 7:4

The point of the above references is namely, that the context determines the kind of application intended by the Holy Spirit.

Salvation Versus Service Contexts

The above applications should not be confused with each other but carefully distinguished. For example, one should be careful to distinguish between applications where the metaphor describes a relationship based upon **salvation** as opposed to where it is based upon faithful **service**.

As a "wife" Israel held this metaphorical relationship with God on the basis of a covenant of works or the "works of the Law" rather than grace. At Mount Sinai, God entered into a covenant relationship with Israel and then came and dwelt with her in the tabernacle or House of God. Their relationship was manifested through the temple **service**. When they proved unfaithful to God in **service**, God used the figure of a bill of divorce to break this relationship (Jer. 3:1; Isa. 50:1) and identified her as an adulteress and then finally departed from the temple (Mt. 23:39). Therefore in

regard to Old Testament Israel, the figure of a "wife" is based upon a covenant of works manifested through temple **service** or the House of God.

On the other hand, the figure of marriage between the believer and Christ is based upon the imputed righteousness of Christ and is always spoken of as a consummated *spiritual* relationship that is already bearing fruit (Rom. 7:1-5). Under grace there is no spiritual "bill of divorce" since none that come unto Him through grace shall ever be lost (Jn. 6:39). Therefore, in this context it is based upon **salvation** rather than service.

Also, the future salvation of Israel as a nation (Rom. 11:25) is pictured in the figure of a betrothal (Hos. 2:19,21). This betrothal relationship refers to their spiritual union based upon the covenant of grace. Hence, this relationship is based upon **salvation**.

Hence, both figures (wife and betrothed wife) are used for a relationship based on works (**service**) in one context and yet they are used for a relationship based on grace without works (**salvation**) in another context. These two applications must be kept distinctly separate and never confused with each other.

The significance of this distinction between **salvation** and **service** applications is readily seen when we examine this figure when applied to the church (as in 2 Cor. 11:2). In regard to the church the marriage metaphor in the sense of salvation is never used as salvation is the *prerequisite* for church membership rather than the *consequence* of church membership. This fact is significant as the metaphor of betrothal is used to describe the relationship between Christ and the church. Since, church membership is in addition to and follows salvation, so then this type of betrothal relationship must describe a relationship that is in addition to or follows salvation. The future presentation of the church as a betrothed bride is always conditioned upon sanctified faithfulness to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2 "chaste"). Sanctified submission,²⁵ (**service**) rather than **salvation**. The saved cannot lose their salvation but they can be "seduced" and become defiled in their progressive sanctification (2 Co. 11:2-3).

"For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a CHASTE VIRGIN to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means as the serpent beguiled Eve

²⁵ The context of Ephesians 5:22-33 is submissive obedience. Progressive sanctification by the Word rather than justification is the theme of this passage.

through his subtlety, so **your minds should be corrupted** from the simplicity that is in Christ..." - 2 Cor. 11:2-3

"Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and **they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.**" - Rev. 3:4

The Church at Corinth stood in danger of losing its "chaste" condition before Christ due to the influence of false teachers and false doctrine. Personal **salvation** was not in view but rather "corrupted" minds and therefore corrupted **service** to God.

Four General Applications with Two Primary Applications

Hence, we see four different and distinct applications of these metaphorical relations. The four distinctions are; **(1)** In regard to OT Israel, it is used for an institutional relationship dependent upon faithful **service** to a covenant of works. **(2)** In regard to the future "betrothed" Israel, it refers to their **salvation** as a nation and is a spiritual union. **(3)** In regard to the individual believer, it is a spiritual marriage relationship consummated by the imputed righteousness of Christ alone (**salvation**). **(4)** In regard to the present church, it is institutional faithfulness (**service**) to betrothal terms (based upon abiding "chaste" and faithful to the Word of God) with the promise of a future presentation. For example, in the seven letters to the churches of Asia, the topic of faithful service is immediately set forth and emphasized by the repeated words - "I know THY WORKS" which introduces each letter. Removal of their candlestick (**service**) rather than their salvation was in view for continued disobedience.

However, these four applications can be further reduced to just two primary applications. **(1) In regard to salvation**, the metaphors of a 'wife', and "betrothal", are used of the future state of Israel and the present state of the believer; **(2) In regard to Institutional service**, the same metaphors are used for God's Old and New Testament houses of God.

Therefore, depending upon the context, such metaphors are either used to describe the state of **salvation** or institutional **service**.

The Point of Confusion

A major reason for confusion in regard to this metaphor is the confusion of **salvation** applications with **service** applications.

The Lord's churches are described by a metaphor that promises a yet future presentation or fulfillment of the espousal contract on conditional terms of chastity and virginity (2 Cor. 11:2). This is a context of **service** not **salvation**. 2 Corinthians 11:2 is addressed to a local church located at Corinth. Such an espousal cannot refer to **salvation** as New Testament Churches required salvation prior to church membership. Therefore the church espousal metaphor cannot refer to salvation unless you believe that membership in a local church is prerequisite to salvation. Baptists along with the great majority of Evangelical Christianity strongly deny that membership in a **local** church is essential to salvation. However, with the exception of historical Baptists all the rest of professed Christianity, including Evangelical Christianity confuse salvation "in Christ" with some aspect of their church doctrine.

True Baptist Churches are the only churches in the world that deny that salvation by justification "in Christ" is related to church membership. Let me explain this bold statement in more detail.

For example, the Roman and Greek Catholic Churches teach that to be saved is to be in their kind of church and therefore salvation and church membership are inseparable in their theology. Roman and Greek Catholicism believe the church is a *universal and visible state church*. To be in their church is to be saved and to be outside of their church is to be lost as salvation is in the sacraments.

Protestantism also teaches that salvation and church membership are inseparable. They teach that to be in the "TRUE" church is to be saved and to be saved is to be in the "TRUE" church. The Protestant "TRUE" church is *the invisible universal church*. Dr. John F. Walvoord in his book on the Holy Spirit spells this Protestant church salvation view out clearly when he says:

"Intimately connected with the fact that baptism by the Spirit brings the believer into the body of Christ is the inseparable truth that baptism also places the believer in Christ Himself.....Before salvation the individual was in Adam, partaking of Adam's nature,

*sin, and destiny. In salvation, the believer is removed from his position in Adam, and he is placed in Christ. All the details of his salvation spring from this new position. His justification, sanctification, deliverance, access to God, inheritance, and glorification.....By the act of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the present age began at Pentecost. By an act of the Holy Spirit, some future day the church will receive its last addition, and Christ will come to receive her to Himself.” - John F. Walvoord, **The Holy Spirit**. Pp. 141,143 - emphasis mine*

Walvoords language is clear and to the point. Their view of baptism in the Spirit is that it occurs at salvation and it is the placement into the body of Christ and “all the details of his salvation spring from this position.” According to the Protestant church theory, salvation and membership in the universal invisible church are “inseparable” truths. The saving church of Protestantism is the *universal invisible church*.

Every denomination in professed Christendom believes that salvation (positional justification) is either in one of two kinds of churches (a visible church or an invisible church) **except** true historical Baptist churches. **The Baptist** ministry believes that justification “in Christ” is completely different than sanctification “in Christ” and that the church concept has nothing to do with justification “in Christ.”

Baptists believe that the New Testament church is a local visible representative “body of Christ” and therefore to be in the church is to be “in Christ” by representation for the purpose of service. However, this representative position has to do only with progressive sanctification or with service, rewards and espousal promises. Historical New Testament Baptists strongly deny that justification “in Christ” has anything to do with the church of Christ in any way, shape or form. Baptists are the only body of Christians that draw a line of separation between justification and sanctification when it comes to the church doctrine. Just like Roman Catholicism, all other denominations fail to distinguish their doctrine of the church from the doctrine of justification “in Christ.” To confuse these issues is to reinstate the error of Roman Catholicism and church salvation.

In regard to positional salvation, to be “in Christ” refers to the doctrine of justification and not to the doctrine of the church. In regard to service, to be “in Christ” refers to church membership and representation of Christ by faithful service. The first is positional and

entered through faith in the Gospel. The second is representative and entered through water baptism (Acts 2:41; I Cor. 12:13).

Here is the point of confusion between Baptists and non-Baptists when it comes to the identity of the Bride of Christ. The espousal metaphor used for the church always points to a future presentation dependent upon faithfulness to the espousal terms and never to the terms of the gospel.

The Universal Bride Theory

In order to avoid the conclusion that the Bride is only composed of faithful members of New Testament churches, there are those who would shift this espousal promise from the NT church to another kind of church that includes all the saved in all ages. I say “another kind” for at least three clear reasons.

(1) The local churches found in the New Testament required a profession of faith in Christ plus water baptism for membership (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:41). This is not true for membership in the supposed *universal invisible* church. If this invisible church is defined as embracing all saints in all ages, then, the fact remains that all saints prior to John the Baptist entered it unbaptized. If it is defined as embracing all saints from Pentecost to the rapture than it equally includes unbaptized saints. If it is conceived as only a future reality, “the glory church” then again it is made up of saints who are unbaptized. The local church does not allow any unbaptized into its membership. This distinction denies they are one and the same in kind.

(2) The local church is a present visible institution whereas the supposed universal church is either invisible or does not yet exist (glory church). This is a distinction that they are one and the same in kind.

(3) The universal bride or glory church theory includes Old Testament saints whereas the church had no existence or membership prior to the Apostolic age. This distinction denies they are one and the same kind.

It stretches the imagination beyond reason to assume that two different kinds of memberships (baptized versus unbaptized) and two different spheres of existence (visible versus either invisible and/or future) and two different ages (OT versus NT) are one and the same body or church. If, these differences are sanely considered at all, then, to say as some do, that the visible is the representation of the invisible is simply a gross misrepresentation as the two are complete opposites to each other. These problems condemn the two-phase or representative theory as error.

Some try to resolve these distinctions by claiming that the “universal” church is yet future (the bride) and will be composed of all the saved in and out of local churches. However, the “glory church” theory is nothing more than a revised edition of the Reformed view of the universal invisible church theory. The only difference between the two is that the Reformed view says this church exists now whereas the glory view says it has no present existence but will exist in the future.²⁶ The “glory” church view has many problems that it cannot overcome. For example, John identifies the Bride as already existing in this present age (Rev. 22:17 present tense “say”) and only to be presented later (Rev. 19:6-7). Moreover, Ephesians 3:21 makes it very clear that the church institution in this age continues as the same distinctive church institution in the ages to come.²⁷ The “one body” in Ephesians 4:4 is in nature ONE and the same kind found at Corinth (I Cor. 12:27) and Rome (Rom. 12:4-5). It is ONE in “kind” not in number. The New Testament kind of church body is the kind that has a geographical address and to which the Pauline epistles were sent to. These contrasts deal a fatal blow to this theory as there is

²⁶ Hebrews 12:22-25 does not support this view as the “church” in this context is existing on earth with only their names in heaven. The church in the wilderness assembled at Mount Sinai but the New Testament church assemblies at Mount Zion. The writer has exhorted them previously not to “forsake the assembling of themselves together” (Heb. 10:25) but encourages them to continue to assemble as heaven attends their assemblies (Heb. 12:1). When they come to the assembly they come into the presence of God and the inhabitants of heaven. Other scriptures teach that Heaven attends the services of the Lord’s assemblies (Eph. 3:10; I Cor. 11:10).

²⁷ The double prepositional phrase “in the church...in Christ” is used repeatedly by Paul in the book of Ephesians and the first prepositional phrase identifies a location whereas the second identifies the sphere of relationship (e.g. “in Ephesus...in Christ” - Eph. 1:1). The words “*through all generations*” uses Greek terms that refer to the succession of time in this present age where as “*world without end*” uses Greek words commonly applied to the world to come. The point that is being expressed is that the glory received in this present **institution** consisting of genuine baptized believers will continue to glorify Him in this same **institution** in the world to come. Paul is not referring to a continuum of “glory” as the Lord possessed that before the church existed but he is referring to a continuing institution that the gates of hell shall never prevail against in this age or the age to come.

no rational way to harmonize the glory church or universal bride with the New Testament church as “one” in **kind** or “one” in **number** (Eph. 4:4).

Another problem with “universal bride” theory is it requires only salvation for membership. There are two basic church salvation views. The **Reformed** view includes all elect of all ages whereas the **Dispensational** view includes only those saved between Pentecost and the pretrib rapture. If salvation is the only prerequisite to be in this invisible Church bride then according to this line of reason all who have been saved must be in this bride.

However, by its own admission, the Dispensational view does not include all the saved. It excludes the greater portion of God’s elect (Old Testament saints and tribulation saints) from its church bride. **Any theory of the bride which excludes a portion of the elect cannot at the same time maintain that to be saved is to be in the bride and to be in the bride is to be saved.** If salvation is really the basis for being in the bride then such a bride must include all the saints in all ages unless it teaches “another gospel” or another salvation for those excluded saints (Old Testament saints, tribulation saints) which is inferior to the gospel of grace.

There are clear texts of Scripture that teach prior to Pentecost salvation was by the very same gospel of grace (Jn. 5:24) with the only difference that their faith looked forward to Christ (Acts 10:43; 26:22-23; Rom. 3:22-25) and ours looks back (Heb. 4:1).

“To Him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” - Acts 10:43

*“Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, **saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come. That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first to rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles.**” - Acts 26:22-23*

“For the gospel was preached unto them as well as unto us...” - Heb. 4:1a

If inspired writers are the best interpreters of the Old Testament, then, it is certain that all the prophets preached the same gospel of

grace preached by Paul. Indeed both John The Baptist and Christ preached the same gospel (Jn. 3:1-18; 36) as Paul (Acts 26:22-23). Other New Testament passages teach that all the “elect” were chosen **in Christ** before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4; 2 Thes. 2:13) and therefore **in regard to salvation**, the Old Testament saints were “**in Christ**” as much as the New Testament Saints. The Bible teaches that Old Testament saints were justified “in Christ” and “believed in his name” (Rom. 4:1-25; Gal. 3:1-8; Acts 10:43; 26:22-23; Heb. 4:1). Abraham is used as the “father” of all who believe in Christ (Rom. 4; Gal. 3:1-8) and the model for justification by faith.

The absurdity of denying this fact is demonstrated by trying to answer the question, “Is there another way into heaven OUTSIDE of Christ”?????? The Scriptures answer absolutely NO not only **after** Pentecost (Acts 4:12) but **before** Pentecost (Jn. 14:6; Heb. 4:1; Acts 10:43; 26:22-23; etc.). These problems hopelessly condemn the Dispensational Universal Invisible church theory as error. Such a church concept preaches another gospel for Old Testament and tribulational saints and therefore is “accursed” by the Scriptures (Gal. 1:6-8 with 3:1-8).

The **Reformed** view of church salvation is more consistent than the Dispensational view of church salvation. The Reformed view believes in a universal invisible church that includes all the elect of all ages. This is the non-Dispensational universal church theory.²⁸ However, this theory has the bigger problem of explaining how the church could exist prior to its foundation and first officers. The Scriptures teach that the apostles were “*set first in the church*” (1 Cor. 12:28) and that Christ and the apostles formed the “*foundation*” and “*cornerstone*” of the church (Eph. 2:20). In addition to these problems the church is identified as “*the body of Christ*” which is said to be a *New Testament* revelation (Eph. 3:1-5). These problems condemn what is popularly known as the Reformed Universal Invisible church theory or non-Dispensational universal church theory as error.

²⁸ Stephen's mention of “the church in the wilderness” gives no support for this view as this wilderness church consisted mostly of lost rebellious people whereas the non-Dispensational church includes saved people only. Furthermore, the wilderness church was a visible local congregation assembled at the foot of Mount Sinai.

A final effort by universal bride advocates is to argue that the metaphor of the “bride” in the book of Revelation must be interpreted according to its own immediate context. They would argue that the universal church does not yet exist and that the bride is equivalent to the yet future “glory church.” Hence, they would argue that the Revelation “bride” is simply a metaphor used to describe the future relationship of Christ with all true believers as the future “glory church.” They would argue that the promise of a future presentation of churches to Christ is fulfilled in this metaphor but no more so than the promise given to all saints in all ages to be finally received by Christ into the glorified state.

However, this interpretation has several problems. Previous to the book of Revelation, the figure of the bride has never been used to describe any future presentation to Christ other than the promised presentation of local church members to Christ. Moreover, previous to Revelation this metaphor has never been used to describe a future presentation of the individual believer or all believers to Christ. Hence, not only would this interpretation be a departure from all previous usage's of this metaphor but it would be an attempt to establish a major doctrine on one passage in a highly symbolic and debated book.

Furthermore, the writer of Revelation using the present tense verb “say” identifies the Revelation Bride as presently existing and speaking when the book of Revelation was being written (Rev. 22:17). This fact contradicts the supposedly “future glory” church which supposedly does not yet exist. Moreover, the immediate context not only demands her present harmonious ministry with the Spirit in this age but would identify her as consisting of the membership of New Testament churches (Revelation 22:16). Finally, Ephesians 3:21 demonstrates that the present church institution continues as a distinct entity into the ages to come. All of these facts demonstrate that the bride of Revelation cannot be separated from the present church institution which does not include all the elect in all dispensations. These facts demonstrate that the Glory church position is error and that only the local church position can alone satisfy the parameters of the context.

“*Come let us reason together...*” - All Evangelical Christianity would reject the notion that membership in a **visible local** church is essential for positional salvation “**in Christ.**” It is this **visible** church salvation doctrine that caused the Reformation and separated Protestants from the Roman Catholic Church. However, Protestants

failed to divorce all aspects of the church from positional salvation “in Christ.”²⁹

If you cannot agree with the position being set forth in this book (that distinguishes and separates the doctrine of the church from any concept of justification “in Christ”) then as an evangelical Christian you must at least agree that the espousal metaphor when applied to the local church cannot refer to positional **salvation** “in Christ” but must refer to faithful **service** “in Christ.” Failure to agree on this point is acceptance of the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation by church membership and denial of the gospel of Christ.

Baptists are the only Christians in the world that teach that the church has nothing to do with positional salvation “in Christ” **before** or **after** Pentecost. This Biblical fact is significant when it comes to determining the use of the espousal metaphor in regard to the church of Christ and in determining the true nature of the Bride of Christ.

Lets consider the problem of church/salvation in regard to the future presentation of the bride to Christ in Revelation 19.

Considering the Bigger Picture

In approaching the context of Revelation 19 there are some valid considerations that should be examined in regard to this figure of speech.

1. The immediate contextual contrast with this “bride” is very significant. Revelation 17-19:4 deals with a woman and city which is in direct contrast to the woman and city in Revelation 19-22. The figure of a “harlot” and “harlots” are used to describe “unfaithful” and “polluted” religious service to God in chapter 17.³⁰ False

²⁹ This failure may be due to the fact that Protestantism was forced to justify their existence apart from the Roman Catholic Church. Luther and Calvin reverted back to the concept of Augustine and an invisible church in order to justify their departure from the visible Catholic Church. In their estimation since the true church was invisible it made no difference if they were excommunicated by the Pope. As did Augustine so also Luther and Calvin confused the church with the Kingdom of God. See Appendices I-IV for a proper historical and Biblical definition of the Greek term “ecclesia” which is translated by the English term “church”.

³⁰ This harlot is not secular government as she is distinct from the beast (Rev. 17:1-2). She is not merely the Roman Catholic Church as she is guilty of shedding all the blood of all the saints in all ages (Rev. 17:6, 18:20,24). She is not merely pagan religions but she is polluted Christianity as true Christians are in her (Rev. 18:4). She is composed of all religious institutions other than those of The Baptist ministry.

religion is seen as a worldly “city” in chapter 18. A “city” is a visible assembly of homes and businesses under an institutionalized and organized local government. Significantly, this system of false religion has within its institutions real born again but unfaithful children of God.

*“And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, **Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins....**” - Rev. 18:4*

On the other hand, the faithful children of God are described as those outside of her and under her persecution for their faithfulness

“And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus....And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.” - Rev. 17:6; 18:24

In direct contrast to false religion under the figures of a **unfaithful** woman and **worldly** city is a woman who is pictured under the terms that describe **faithfulness** and a city that is **heavenly**. Two classifications of saints are described in conjunction with each city. The worldly city **includes** the unfaithful saint while excluding the faithful. The heavenly city **excludes** the unfaithful while including the faithful (Rev. 21:24).³¹

2. Prior to the announcement of the marriage, it is announced that “*the Lord God omnipotent reigneth*” (Rev. 19:6).³² All interpreters are agreed that the rapture and resurrection of all saints takes place prior to visible rule of God over this world rather than after it. Since the marriage is announced **after** this rule is announced, this would make the wedding distinct and separate from the rapture and glorification of the saints as these things occur when the Lord is in the air rather than after He has ascended his throne in Jerusalem.

³¹ The term “nations” is a well known term among the Jews to describe those who were to be separated from the faithful Jew. To use such a term in the eternal state to describe the “saved” who live outside on the new earth can only mean that there is an eternal distinction and separation among the saved in the new heaven and earth.

³² Although it may be argued that particular visions may be chronologically out of order, it cannot be denied that events listed within each vision are given in a correct chronological order. Revelation 19:1-10 constitutes a distinct and separate vision and each event within this vision is described in the Aorist tense according to its chronological order within the framework of this vision. The marriage occurs after the fall of Babylon and after the reign of God over this earth is announced. This is a matter of grammar and contextual order rather than theological bias.

Therefore the presentation of the saints to Christ at the rapture and presentation of the Bride to Christ are not one and the same event. In the resurrection and rapture all saints will be presented to Christ in glorification. However, since the marriage occurs **after** the resurrection and rapture and more importantly **after** He has ascended his earthly throne, this would require that the marriage refers to something in addition to salvation. The immediate context demands that the additional something is faithfulness which is directly contrasted to the unfaithfulness of institutionalized false religion and rewards (Rev. 17-19:4). Significantly, this false religion was inclusive of unfaithful Christians (Rev. 18:4) whereas the bride is in contrast to her. Those Christians that are **included** in the Harlot are **excluded** in the Bride. This again would argue for the “faithful” bride position.

3. Immediately after the announcement of the marriage to the Lamb is the announcement of the marriage supper (v. 9). Figures are taken from realistic customs and/or practices. The correct use of metaphors require only realistic and actual likenesses being transferred. There are no customs or practice where the bride is invited to the marriage supper as she is the one being honored by those invited. The guests would include all the immediate family of both the Bride and Bridegroom and then friends of the families. To suggest that the guests are “angels” is absurd simply because angels have been and always are present wherever God or His people are present - they need no special invitation. The most natural application is that the rest of the family of God are the guests at this wedding. Since much of God’s family despised and persecuted the Lord’s churches it is indeed a “blessed” invitation for them to attend (Rev. 18:4). Psalm 45 aptly describes these wedding guests as other saints.

4. Every application of this figure prior to the book of Revelation has been described as a consummated reality already with the exception of the church (based upon sanctification) and the future remnant Israel (based on salvation). Besides this Revelation application, no other prophetic passage provides the fulfillment for the future promise of marriage between the church and Christ and the remnant Israel and God. Significantly the “bride” when described under the metaphor of a “city” is characterized by the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles and is

said to be the dwelling place of Christ and God the Father. This would infer that the city has to do with these two entities. The fact that the future remnant Israel enters the millennium and proves faithful to God (sanctification) prior to entrance into that post-millennial city demonstrates that progressive sanctification is the basis for her to dwell in this city as well. Therefore, what the city represents is the dwelling place of the faithful whereas the unfaithful saints have as their dwelling place upon the new earth outside the city (Rev. 21:24).

The bigger picture suggests that the Revelation Bride refers exclusively to those who have proven faithful to the espousal covenant with Christ.

The Language of the disputed Passage

“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness (lit. Gk - “righteousnesses” - plural) of saints.” - Rev. 19:7-8

We must determine whether the figurative relationship in Revelation 19:7-8 applies to all the saved and thus has for its only basis salvation or does it apply to a select body of the saved and has for its basis salvation plus faithfulness. In other words, the context must determine whether the figure of speech is based upon the **imputed** righteousness of Christ alone or primarily refers to the **imparted** righteousness of Christ. Imputed righteousness is the basis for salvation and is a gift whereas imparted righteousness refers to performance and is the basis for reward.

*Significantly, we are not attempting to discover what the language might possibly be stretched to fit but what it most naturally fits without attempting to stretch it to fit unnatural applications. Individual **words** must not be isolated from the verses they are found in but must be explained by all the words in those verses. Individual **verses** must not be isolated from the surrounding passage but must be interpreted by the passage.*

The following words are found within the text itself:

1. **“his wife hath made herself ready”** - v. 7. As far as a natural fit, this language would most naturally apply to imparted rather than imputed righteousness for the following reasons. (a) The obvious figure refers to the sewing and needle work performed by the intended bride that goes into making up her wedding dress. The groom never does this work in real life. (b) The subject of the verb is “wife” instead of the Lamb. If the Lord intended us to understand that it was the imputed righteousness of the Lamb that made her ready he could have easily said so instead of attributing the action to His “wife.” (c) The reflexive pronoun “herself” points to actions by the “wife” toward herself that made her ready for this presentation. (d) This statement introduces and thus sets the stage and influences the descriptions that follow.

2. **“was granted”** - v. 8. As far as a natural fit, if these words were isolated from the rest of the text they could fit either way. However, the most natural fit when considered with the words preceding and following is imparted rather than imputed righteousness for the following reasons: (a) Imparted righteousness is granted just as much as imputed righteousness (Eph. 2:10; 5:26-27). (b) The reflexive noun “herself” has introduced and prefaced these words indicating her own righteous actions are under consideration. (c) The literal identification of the garments are said to be the plural righteousnesses of the saints rather than the singular righteousness of Christ (see below). Surely if it was salvation that was intended, the speaker could have laid the issue to rest by simply saying that the fine linen “is the righteousness of Christ” since he is giving a literal definition of the fine linen. However, the Lord’s literal definition is not “this is my righteousness” but in contrast to the universalist idea he literally identifies it as “the righteousnesses of the saints.”

3. **“the righteousness of the saints”** - v. 8. This statement more easily fits the imparted righteousness position more than the imputed for the following reasons: (a) This statement is meant to give a literal definition of the garments. The angel could have just as easily said “the righteousness of the Lamb” just as he could have said “the lamb hath made his wife ready” if only salvation was in view. But he said neither. (b) The Greek text uses the plural rather than the singular “righteousness”. The imputed righteousness of Christ is never used in the plural even when plural nouns and pronouns are present, because in keeping with the typology of the

Passover, a single lamb was always sufficient for plural number of households eating under one roof. Therefore the angel’s use of the plural number must refer to the imparted righteousness of the saints rather than the singular imputed righteousness of Christ.

Everything considered, the “faithful” position fits more naturally with less explanation than the imputed theory. Now we must consider related contextual subjects.

The Revelation Overcomer

“He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.” - Rev. 21:7

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.” - I Jn. 5:4-5

These two verses are used repeatedly by those who define the “overcomer” in Revelation as those who persevere in saving faith rather than the basis of reward for “faithful” service. It is argued that the same writer is the author of both books and therefore the definition of the term “overcome” must be the same. However, this is not necessarily true. For instance, the author may have one purpose for one book and an entirely different purpose for another. Hence, the different context must determine the intended definition. For instance, John may have written the epistle of First John in order to help the reader know whether they are saved or not (I Jn. 5:13) whereas the purpose of Revelation may have been to show the churches things to come and encourage them to overcome hindrances to faithful service in view of His soon return. Two very different subjects. Overcoming in one book may be in regard to “eternal life” while in another book the overcoming may be in regard to present sins and obstacles to faithful service.

Another factor must be considered as well. Although perseverance is the evidential proof of genuine salvation it is not the absolute proof as shown in the case of those in Matthew 7:21-23 and with Abraham’s nephew - Lot. Those in Matthew 7:21-23 had all the outward evidences of genuine salvation but were lost. In the case of Lot the only proof of salvation was internal as no outward

evidences are offered in Scripture of his salvation. Although outward performance may demonstrate salvation it does not prove or disprove the existence of salvation. In addition to these factors is one more very important fact. What some may wish to define as evidence of salvation may as equally be defined as evidence of faithfulness and the basis for special reward. Therefore, depending upon the context, persevering in the faith or overcoming in faith may refer to evidence for reward rather than evidence of salvation or it may include both. However, as in the case of Lot and in the suppositional character in I Corinthians 3:14-15 “saved as by fire”, external faithfulness is not essential proof of damnation or salvation.

I John 5:4-5 is usually referred to as proof of overcoming in salvation. However, this passage in John contains both a positional (aorist tense - v. 4) as well as a progressive (present tense - v. 5) aspect of overcoming. The positional aspect refers to the **imputed** righteousness of Christ whereas the present tense aspect refers to the progressive perseverance in saving faith and/or **imparted** righteousness of Christ in faithful service. In Revelation 12:11 all three of these aspects are carried over and clearly spelled out.

*“And they **overcame** him by the blood of the lamb (positional) **AND** by the word of their testimony (perseverance in saving faith); **AND** they loved not their lives unto death (progressive in faithful service).”*

Therefore, what in one context may suggest proof of salvation may in another context be the condition for reward. Perseverance is as essential for reward equally as much as it is for external evidence of salvation. In the book of Revelation the context must decide which sense is meant.

The Overcomers in Rev. 2-3

There are six distinct proofs from the letters to the seven churches that the promises to the overcomer are limited to **faithful** church saints only.

First, these letters are addressed only to members of New Testament churches rather than to the family or kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit could have used the terms “elect” or “saints” or

“Kingdom of God” or a number of other comprehensive terms if the application was intended to be wider than church membership.

Second, the Holy Spirit directs these promises only to those having spiritual ears when He says “*he that hath an ear to hear*” indicating that salvation is not the issue but rather obedience is the issue for the saved.

Third, the obstacles that must be overcome are church related and require the individual member to participate with the majority of members in order to overcome a specific obstacle or sin instead of isolated individual action (e.g. “*except you repent...I will remove your candlestick*” and “*Because thou sufferest that woman...*” etc.). Individual perseverance in salvation does not depend upon the cooperative obedience of other members.

Fourth, the subject being discussed is - “*I know thy works....*” rather than emphasis on true or false salvation. The One who knows their “works” would also know their true state of salvation and needed no proof or demonstration for that.

Fifth, the promises are described in terms that indicate special rewards are being used as incentives to encourage faithfulness in the face of specific obstacles rather than incentives used to encourage general perseverance in salvation applicable to all believers regardless of circumstances.

Last, the verb “overcometh” is in the present tense rather than a past tense. The tense demonstrates that the type of overcoming under consideration is not imputed righteousness or positional overcoming as in I John 5:4. Overcoming by progressive faithfulness is the subject here.

The Nature of the Promises to the Overcomers

Significantly, every promise given to overcomers is conditioned upon faithfulness in regard to *specific temporal problems* confronting them rather than *general conditions of perseverance* to prove salvation. A specific false doctrine or practice is confronted or a specific trial is to be faced. Moreover, every promise is directly related to the New Jerusalem or a *closer more intimate relationship* with Christ.

For example, access to “*the tree of life*” is promised to the overcomer (Rev. 2:7; 22:2). Scriptures clearly teach that eternal life

is the present possession of every believer (Jn. 2:26; 5:24; I Jn. 5:13). There is no waiting period for eternal life as suggested by the perseverance in faith or salvation theory. Glorification occurs at the resurrection and rapture rather than at the tree of life in New Jerusalem after the millennium (Rev. 20 precedes Rev. 21-22). Take note that the tree of life is found in the Post-Millennial new heaven and earth.

No, the idea here is that this tree is to be found within a special place, the new Jerusalem (Rev. 22:2) just as it was originally found within a special place, the garden of Eden. **The garden of Eden was a special place for a special married couple as long as they were faithful to special covenant terms.** When Adam and Eve violated that special covenant they were cast outside the garden and they lost that special close relationship they had while in the garden as well as the privilege of the garden home. However, they found salvation **outside** of the garden as did their posterity. Hence, the tree of life symbolizes a special place for special people who keep special covenant terms. The New Jerusalem is a special place for a special people (the bride) who have kept special covenant terms (betrothal terms). Some saints will live outside the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:24) while other saints abide within (Rev. 22:1-3). Therefore, salvation is not the basis for dwelling in or out of this city as both are saved. The difference is that those inside were faithful to the espousal terms while those outside were not.

Moreover, the “fruit” of this tree is for the overcomer (Rev. 2:7) whereas the “leaves”³³ are for the nations of the saved (Rev. 22:2; 21:24) living outside the New Jerusalem. If partaking of the fruit is proof of salvation then the nations cannot be considered saved as their designated part is the leaves. However, leaves were used in the garden of Eden to cover the shame of unfaithfulness to the covenant terms. The “nations of the saved” are “of the earth” (Rev. 21:24) whereas the overcomers are described as city dwellers (Rev. 22:3-4). Hence, this promise refers to something in addition to salvation as a reward for maintaining a close and faithful service now. The “leaves” heal the shame of the saved who were unfaithful to the terms of betrothal.

³³ In the garden of Eden “leaves” were introduced because of sin. Only after Adam and Eve sinned did they resort to “leaves” as a covering of their shame. The nations of the saved live upon the earth outside of the Bride because of unfaithfulness and thus they are identified with the “leaves” rather than the fruit.

Strangely, the next promise which is to the church at Smyrna is often used to prove that overcoming must refer to perseverance in salvation rather than faithfulness for special reward (Rev. 2:10-11). I say strangely, because there is no question in the Lord’s mind that He knew that those He was addressing were saved people:

“I know thy works and thy tribulation, and poverty (but thou art rich)...” - Rev. 2:9

This latter phrase “*but thou art rich*” can only refer to the fact Christ acknowledges their salvation in Christ. This is being acknowledged by omniscience. Divine omniscience declares they are rich in salvation. Their ultimate salvation is not in question nor at risk. What is at risk is their continued faithfulness due to the fact that they must overcome **fear** of persecution and death as a consequence for remaining faithful.

“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer....be faithful UNTO DEATH”

Faithfulness in the face of death cannot be considered essential for salvation. Many Christians have failed that test repeatedly while many heretics have suffered physical death for their heresies.

The Lord’s concern is not that they won’t persevere in saving faith or overcome the second death (justification has secured that - Jn. 5:24). He is concerned about them overcoming “fear” of death. It was this “fear” that became an obstacle to their faithfulness.

How does the Lord provide incentive to be faithful unto death in the face of sure persecution? The Lord meets this “fear” by providing incentives and comfort to overcome it. First, he attacks the finality of death by giving His own **example** “*was dead, and is alive*” - v. 8; Second, He provides an alternative to Satan’s temptation to disobey in order to preserve physical life by the **promise** of the crown in the life to come; “*I will give thee the crown of life*” - v. 10; Third, He provides the **consolation** that no suffering beyond physical death awaits - “*shall not be hurt of the second death*” - v. 11. He could not promise that they would not be hurt by the first death but He could promise that death has its limits.

Christians have caved in and become unfaithful under much less trials than fear of physical death. This fact alone demonstrates that perseverance in saving faith is not in view but rather

perseverance in faithfulness. An excellent example of a saint that caved in due to fear of death is Demas.

“Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world” - 2 Tim. 4:10

Indeed, at Paul’s second imprisonment in Rome he stated that at his first trial that *“no man stood with me, but all men forsook me”* (2 Tim. 4:16). Demas was not alone in forsaking Paul. Demas was not lost nor were the others but they caved in to fear of death. Previous to this Paul had already told Timothy that *“all they which are of Asia be turned away from me...”* (2 Tim. 4:16). The Lord was encouraging the church members at Smyrna to be like Paul when facing death and not like these others.

Another symbol of a promise of closer relationship with God is the next promise to the overcomer found in the *“hidden manna”* symbol (Rev. 2:17).³⁴ A jar of manna was hidden inside the Ark and kept within the holy of holies inside the ark. Only a special chosen person could enter into that special place and look upon those special things once a year. All the rest of the priests could go within the outer court and in the Holy Place but only the High Priest was privileged to this special access into God’s throne room. Like the High Priest, the bride was chosen by God from among the brethren for special privilege. The Bride is the elect of the elect. God’s throne room will be in the city. In regard to salvation, Jesus had taught that initial salvation was to eat of the manna that came down from heaven (Jn. 6). All the saved have already partaken of the heavenly manna but only the Bride will partake of the “hidden” manna in the future.

Another promise to overcomers is to rule over the nations (Rev. 2:26). Revelation 21:24 describes these as *“the nations of the saved”* which dwell outside the New Jerusalem on the new earth. Moreover, this same text speaks of “kings of the nations” indicating that these saved nations are ruled over by Kings.³⁵ The very

³⁴ All of Israel partook of the manna in the wilderness as a type of the elect that partakes of Christ but the manna hidden in the ark was not for eating.

³⁵ Although this promise may include ruling over the nations that did not gather to Armageddon which enter the millennium (Rev. 2:27) it has as its ultimate application those nations of the saved upon the earth after the creation of a new heaven and earth (Rev. 21:1,24-25).

mention of “kings” ruling over the saved in the eternal state proves vast distinctions in rewards. Hence, salvation is not the basis for this position of power as this power is being exercised over other “saved” people. Again, this promise refers to a special reward for faithfulness.

Another interesting metaphor is used in the letter to the church at Smyrna. Some of these church members had *“defiled their garments”* (Rev. 3:6). Imputed righteousness cannot be defiled by anyone as it is Christ’s own righteousness which is perfect and complete in heaven. This can only refer to the white garment worn at baptism. This garment symbolized the espousal covenant to be faithful to Christ. Those who have not defiled their garments are alone eligible for the espousal presentation.

What about the promise of not having your names removed from the book of life? There are at least three different types of books of the living found in the Bible. One refers to physical life and the termination of **physical** life by being removed from this book (Ex. 32:32). The “lambs” book of life refers to **spiritual** life obtained by a sacrificial lamb (Rev. 13:8). The New Jerusalem’s book of the living refers to the faithful and **sanctified** life. Every ancient city had a city roster at its gates (called the book of the living) which listed those who lived within.³⁶ Each citizen had responsibilities to fulfill. Those who failed to fulfill their social duties were kicked out of the city and their names removed from the book of the living at the city’s gate. It is from this ancient custom that the Lord draws his analogy. Those who defiled their garments also forfeited their right to dwell within this city (Rev. 3:4-5) just as those who intentionally distorted the words of this book forfeited their right to dwell in that city (Rev. 22:17-18).

The names written in the *Lamb’s book of life* were written there before the foundation of the world and are not subject to erasure. Why? **Simply because the time of writing required the omniscience and determined counsel of God to write them in the first place.** Omniscience never makes a mistake. Even the mention of erasure of names from *the Lamb’s book* would not be a reflection upon those written but upon the writer as those written

³⁶ “As in all Greek and Roman cities of that time there was kept a list of citizens, according to their class or tribe or deme, in which new citizens were entered and from which degraded citizens were expunged, so the writer of this letter figuratively mentions the Book of Life.” - M.W. Ramsey, **The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia**. p. 385

had no existence at the time of writing. The fact that they were written in *the Lamb's book of life* before the foundation of the world demonstrates that there were no conditions on their part but rather the conditions were to be satisfied by the Parties (The Trinity) involved in the new covenant. The sphere of the saved in the new creation is not restricted to the city but to the entire earth. Those outside the city upon the new earth are those who proved unfaithful to the Lord. The names in the city's book of life can be erased because citizenship in that city *upon the new earth* is conditioned upon obedience.³⁷

Another promise given to the overcomer is that those who overcome shall wear both the name of the Father and the name of the Son. Every family member already shares the family name but the Bride shares more than just the family name, she shares the name of the groom. The Bride wears the name of the Bridegroom which implies the "marriage" relationship beyond that of mere family membership and family name. All saved persons already wear the name "child of God" and "Christian." The promise of this special name is yet future. The marriage has not yet occurred. Those who make up the Bride have not all been proven and tested.

All the promises to the overcomers can be easily interpreted to refer to incentives for faithfulness rather than the omniscient Savior requiring proof of genuine salvation.

Redemption Versus Reward

"And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" - Rev. 5:10

"He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son." - Rev. 21:7

³⁷ Paul identifies the New Jerusalem while it is in its heavenly location as the source of our new birth and the birth of all of God's Children (Gal. 4:26). Hence, each name is recorded upon the city's book of the living at the time of their new birth. Each have the opportunity to demonstrate personal worthiness to maintain their name upon the city's book. Those who walk unworthily will have their names erased (Rev. 3:4-5). However, the names in the Lamb's book of life were recorded before the foundation of the world and not one of them will be erased (Jn. 6:37).

Revelation 5:10 and 21:7 are supposed to be the definitive texts to prove that all saints are "kings and Priests" and all saints shall "inherit all things" and therefore the conclusion is drawn that all saints must be in the bride.

The problem here is the failure to distinguish between redemption and reward. It is true that in the sense of redemption all saints are kings and Priests and are overcomers and will "inherit all things." What was lost in Adam is recovered in Christ. However, it is equally true that inheritance of all things does not mean equal rule or equal possession over all things inherited. For example, Israel as a nation inherited the promised land but when it came time to the division or allocation of inheritance some received more of it than others. For instance, the tribe of Levi inherited only 48 cities and nothing more. The rest of the tribes inherited the land but in different proportions. Did Levi inherit the promised land? Yes, but not in the same sense as others.³⁸ Israel is a picture of all the elect. All the elect shall inherit the new world but like the tribe of Levi, the Bride will be given the city.

The order established by God in the original creation serves as another example. God determined that mankind would inherit the original earth and rule over it. If Adam and Even had not fallen, they would have ruled and inherited the present earth along with their posterity. However, Adam and Eve would have been distinguished from their posterity. The relationship between Adam and Eve would be different than between Adam and his children. The position shared with Eve would be different than that shared with the rest of his family. She reigned and ruled with Adam in a special and different sense. This special position seen in Adam and Eve is directly applied to the Church and Christ in Ephesians 5:24-31.

On the basis of redemption all saints rule with Christ and "inherit all things." Salvation obtains ownership for all over all things. However, on the basis of reward some who reign with Christ will have vastly greater levels of authority and position. For example, Jesus promised on the basis of reward that some would rule over 5 cities and others 10 while some would rule over none. He promised that some of his disciples would sit on his right while others on his left. He promised that some would sit on the twelve thrones ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel while others would not. In the Old

³⁸ The tribe of Levi and its service in the House of God is a type of the membership of the Lord's churches who inherit the city, whereas the other tribes are symbols of the rest of the elect who inherit the earth.

Testament there were kings such as Nebuchadnezzar and then there were vassal kings that ruled under him and over designated portions of His kingdom. Likewise, the Bride rules in a sense that no other portion of God's family will share. What we received on the basis of redemption is joint title deed with Christ to the new heaven and earth **as a whole** but what we receive on the basis of reward is special and particular position, possession and relationship within this inherited new heaven and earth.

On the basis of redemption all sons are "joint-heirs" with Christ in possessing the title deed to the new heaven and earth **as a whole**. However, in the actual division of this inheritance there are not equal portions. The idea of an "heir" is rooted in the Old Testament and there we clearly find that the firstborn received a double portion above the other children. In a general family sense all were "heirs" of their father's inheritance and thus they were "joint-heirs" in regard to **the whole**. However, when it came to distribution of that whole, the firstborn received a double portion. The words "double portion" make no sense if the rest received nothing. In Hebrews 12:22 the literal Greek text defines the church as holding the position of "firstborn ones."³⁹ Although the names of these firstborn ones were written in heaven, they themselves still existed upon earth. The Church services are attended by heavenly visitors (Eph. 3:10; I Cor. 11:10) and it is in this sense that when we attend church services that we come unto Mount Zion and we are surrounded by so "great a cloud of witnesses" and angels.

On the basis of redemption all of God's children are "priests" and have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit by Christ Jesus. However, not all of God's "priests" are a "royal priesthood" who have been assembled into a spiritual temple on earth to offer up acceptable worship unto God (I Pet. 2:5,9). Some priests are like unto the priests that chose to serve in Micah's house (Judges 17:6-13) when all men did that which was right in their own eyes (Judges 17:5). Although on the basis of redemption every individual child of God is indwelt by the Holy Spirit yet not all such priests gather together to worship God as a corporate "temple" indwelt by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 3:16).

Hence, even if such passages as Revelation 5:9 and 21:8 are applied to all the elect it does not mean that these texts demand that

³⁹ The plural is used "firstborn ones" in the Greek text. Also the context demonstrates only the names are written in heaven whereas the actual persons are still on earth.

all the saints will have the same relationship, position or inheritance with Christ in eternity as that is determined by reward not redemption. Redemption obtains general claim to the New world as a whole but reward obtains special claims to it.

Israel and the promised land is a type of the believer and the new world. In Exodus 6:6-8 on the basis of redemption from Egypt God gives Israel the promised land. However, in Joshua 14:3-5 where the actual possession of the land is discussed, not all Israelites possess this land equally. Likewise, the elect of God obtain the new heaven and earth by redemption but when it comes to the actual possession, not all the elect possess it equally.

Those **now within** God's appointed way of service who persevere faithfully will be within the Bride **then**. Those **now outside** of God's appointed way of service will be outside the Bride **then**.

Revelation 22:14-15

"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers and idolaters and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." - Rev. 22:14-15

This passage has been the center of debate around the question of the proper identity of the Bride. The opponents of the NT Church bride point out that Revelation 22:14-15 proves that perseverance in salvation is the only requirement to be in the New Jerusalem thus be in the bride. The problem for the **faithful church bride** position is that the contrast set forth in the above passage is between those that "do his commandments" and those described in terms that elsewhere describe lost people. The **universal brider** triumphantly concludes that the distinction here is between the lost and saved and thus the words "*blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may...enter in through the gates of the city*" must be inclusive of all the saved rather than a selected group of faithful saved and must refer to obedience as the evidence of salvation.

Others use this text to demonstrate that the Received Text is an inferior Greek text and opt for the reading of the Critical text "Blessed are they that wash their robes". Thus read, it demands that

nothing but salvation is the criteria for entering the gates of Jerusalem.

However, this problem is imaginary rather than real. There are at least two possible interpretations that can circumvent this supposed problem without doing violence to the context.

First, this passage could be applied to all the saved and merely refer to *access* rather than to *occupancy* in the New Jerusalem. Revelation 21:24-27 would be a parallel text to this interpretation. This interpretation would not deny *access* to the saved on the new earth but would not demand *occupancy* for them either. Thus it does not deny that the Bride occupies the New Jerusalem while the unfaithful occupy the new earth outside the city.

The second interpretation may be a little more difficult to accept but fits the immediate context better. Let it be admitted that the characteristics mentioned in verse 14 definitely include the lost as the lost will not enter that city. However, these descriptions may provide reasons for why some saved will live outside the city as well. First, it is important that we first understand and grasp that the preceding context has in view the coming of the Lord to judge His saints for rewards.

“Behold, I come quickly....And, behold I come quickly...” (vv. 7,12)

Second, it is in view of His coming that the subject of faithfulness to Christ is being considered when He comes:

“Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.” (v. 7)

Third, it is the actual condition or state of His saints as they are found that is being considered when He comes.

“He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still....”

Last, it is the rewarding of such saints according the state in which they are found when He comes.

“...my reward is with me, to give to every man according to his work shall be. And behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according to his work shall be.” - (vv. 11-13)

If it is simply understood that the contextual development has to do with rewarding the saved according to the state in which they are found then the problem is half solved. The distinction between he that is “holy” versus he that is “righteous” demonstrates that the contrast is between different states of the saved rather than a contrast between the saved and the lost. It is the subject of “works” that is being considered and not salvation which is by grace. However, it is not merely “good” works and a righteous state of existence that are being considered but bad works and an unrighteous state of existence of the saved that is being dealt with.

The key here is that at judgment for rewards *“He that IS...let him BE STILL...”* demands that the results of his previous state somehow continues into the eternal. Here is the problem. In what sense will a saint “be still” as He enters into eternity. We know that he will not continue in a personal state of sin or an unglorified state as none can enter heaven while in that state. The context defines the continued existence in the sense of rewards. The Lord comes to “reward” the saints and the temporal state of obedience is continued into the eternal in the sense of rewards as the reward fits or corresponds to the state of obedience in which they are found at His coming.

For example, if the Lord would have returned when Lot was alive he would have found him in a characteristic state of filthiness. Lot would have fit the words *“and he which IS filthy let him BE filthy STILL”* as the last words concerning Lot describe him in drunken incest with his daughters. In the sense of rewards, Lot would be identified in the age to come as one who lived a filthy life. The message is that the filthiness of Lot and those like him will be reflected for eternity in their position and rewards and possibly their bodily appearance. Paul tells us that in the resurrection the glory of the bodies of saints will vary as much as the glory of one star differs from another:

“There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead...” - I Cor. 15:41-42b)

This means that the visual state of a believer will advertise his faithfulness to Christ in eternity. What fear it should strike in our hearts to know that our present state of faithfulness will be eternally known and manifested by our appearance as well as by our position in eternity. This is the “terror” Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians 5:10 when he speaks of the judgment of the saved. But such distinctions are no more than what is taught by the Lord in the parable of the talents (Mt. 25:14-30).

Another problem of this interpretation is supposedly the present tense used in the descriptions found in Revelation 22:15. But the present tense simply complies with the present tense statement “he that IS...Let him BE STILL...” (Rev. 22:11). The use of the present tense in this passage does not mean that Lot or any other saint will retain personal moral or doctrinal uncleanness beyond glorification but rather that they will retain these things beyond glorification in *the abiding consequences of reward and separation outside the city upon the new earth* (Rev. 21:24-25). Their state of obedience will continue to be reflected in their rewards.

Another objection that is presented against this interpretation is the fact that Revelation 22:14 says “For without are....” and it is noted that the lost are without this city. However, the lost are not the only ones found outside the city according to the immediate preceding context. In the same chapter (v. 2) the nations of the saved are found outside the city. These nations are saved and yet are described in the previous chapter as dwelling outside the city upon the new earth (Rev. 21:24-25). Why are they outside? Would this disputed text provide some reasons for that separation? Shouldn’t those who live like the lost be described by the same terms when it comes to the rewarding of them? Shouldn’t their rewards BE “according to their works?????????”

Are there some Biblical examples of saints who are characterized by these same traits that are normally reserved for the lost? The example of Lot has already been given as a type of Christian who lived a “filthy” (incest, drunkenness, unfaithful, etc.) life.

What about king Saul? The Bible says that God gave king Saul another heart. If king Saul was a saved man, at judgment he will be rewarded as what characterizes an unfaithful saint, perhaps even a “sorcerer” as he went to a spiritual medium just before dying. Ananias and Saphira at judgment will be judged as “whosoever loveth and maketh a lie” as they were confronted with their sin and

did not repent. However, they were not examples of lost church members but rather of saved church members under the disciplining hand of God just as were some in the church of Corinth who were “sick” and some “sleep” because of their sins.

The Syrophenician woman that came to Jesus was called a “dog” by Christ not because she was lost but because she was outside of the metaphorical wife of God (Israel) or the designated way of service or Jewish faith. Those saved that do not come out of the Great Harlot (Rev. 18:4) are dogs in this same sense and they will not occupy the New Jerusalem but will occupy the new earth.

The saved that dwell OUTSIDE of the new Jerusalem upon the new earth are designated as “nations” (Rev. 21:24). This term is a translation of the term “ethnos” which was commonly used by the Jews to refer to those SEPARATED and OUTSIDE the commonwealth of Israel. This was the term posted within the Temple area that forbid gentiles to enter the inner sanctuaries. Hence, it is the common term that means OUTSIDER. The aspects that characterized their lives in this present age will continue to be reflected in the new age by the fact that they are OUTSIDERS to the designated way of obedience to Christ and outside the Bridal relationship with Christ.

It should be expected that those who are saved and yet are living unfaithful lives should be characterized by those terms that describe the particular area of unfaithfulness when it comes to the subject of reward, just as it should be expected that the faithful should be characterized by the terms that describe their faithfulness. Saved people who live and act like lost people will be characterized by the same terms in the day of reward as they are rewarded “**according as their work shall be**” as “he that IS...let him STILL BE...” That judgment will be eternally reflected in their abiding position and person.

The point is that the present tense descriptions found in Revelation 22:14-15 refer back to the present tense conditions in which they are found at judgment in view of rewards. These present tense conditions do not describe a momentarily lapse as no Christian is free from such lapses but these descriptive terms are referring to a characteristic condition that was unrepented of. Lot’s condition was characteristic as is the hypothetical example used by Paul in I Corinthians 3:14-15 where a man is “saved as though by fire.”

Hence, this second interpretation simply describes the “chaste virgin” believers as those “who keep his commandments” and the unchaste believers under terms that reflect and define their areas of unchastity at the time they were judged “according to their works.”. If the reader finds this interpretation objectionable, then the former view is sufficient to resolve the supposed argument against a faithful bride. In any case, access does not mean occupancy for the saved nations as they are described as living outside the city on the new earth.

Does Hebrew 12:23 Teach a Future Glory Church?

“But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.” - Heb. 12:22-23

The careful reading of the context preceding this text demonstrates a contrast between the children of Israel at Mount Sinai and the New Testament Hebrew children of God at Mount Zion. Moses came before God and angels as he stood on the top of Mount Sinai when the Law was given. Luke describes the children of Israel gathered at Mount Sinai as the “church in the wilderness.” Hence, “the church in the wilderness” stood before God at Mount Sinai. “The church in the wilderness” was located on earth but still stood before the presence of God and angels at Mount Sinai.

In some sense, the readers of the book of Hebrews are said to “have come unto mount Zion.” In the Old Testament, Mount Zion is the place of worship (God’s temple) and the place where God dwells. The Church is identified as the House of God in the New Testament (I Tim. 3:15) and thus the place of worship or the present Mount Zion where God dwells. When these Hebrew Christians assembled together (Heb. 10:25) they were in God’s presence and in the presence of His angels and all of heaven just as much as “the church in the wilderness” was in God’s presence and in the presence of angels and all of heaven. If this interpretation is

rejected, and it is insisted that “Mount Zion” refers to heaven, then the objector must explain in what sense these Hebrew Christians had come to heaven since they had not yet been raptured into heaven. It is the opinion of this writer that when you assemble together as a Church of Christ to worship God that you come before heaven itself. The Bible explicitly states that angels are present in the assemblies on earth (I Cor. 11:10; Eph. 3:10) and that God dwells in each church as His temple (I Cor. 3:16).

The Hebrew Christians had entertained the thought of “forsaking the assembling” altogether as some had already done (Heb. 10:25). However, the writer encourages them not to forsake the public assembly but to continue. Willful forsaking of the public assembly would result in chastisement by God (Heb. 10:26-31). They needed to endure as they once had (Heb. 10:32-39) and the writer provides them Old Testament examples of saints who endured (Heb. 11). Now these examples of faith look upon them as they run their race here on earth (Heb. 12:2). This audience is later referred to as the “spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb. 12:23). Then the writer provides the example of Jesus as the ultimate example of one who endured (Heb. 12:2-4). Again, the writer reminds them that chastisement is the result of disobedience (Heb. 12:5-11). Those who failed to respond properly to chastisement would be “turned out of the way” or disqualified from the race previously mentioned in verse 1. They would fail of God’s “grace” or the provisions described in verses 5-11 and 22-24. After listing these provisions of grace the writer urges “*let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably....*” (Heb. 12:28). Service not salvation is the theme. Loss of the reward for running the race is now the subject introduced by the example of Esau. Esau held the position of “firstborn” and thus had the reward of birthright or inheritance. The subject is not the birth of Esau into the family but the reward of birthright. Esau sold his firstborn inheritance for a mess of pottage and found no place of repentance (Heb. 12:16-17). This example of one who despises his position of “firstborn” is intentionally introduced because in Hebrews 12:22 they are called the “church of the firstborn.” Many suppose the term “first-born” refers to Christ. However, The term “first-born” represents a plural in the Greek text which should read “first-born ones.” The members of the Hebrew church are the “first-born ones” and its refers to their position as church members. Although their names are “written in heaven” they

are still on earth. They are warned not to despise their “first-born” birth right as did Esau who found no place of repentance.

However, it is immediately pointed out that they have not come to an impossible situation as did Esau and Moses. They have not come to Mount Sinai and to covenant terms which were impossible to meet. Indeed, as members of the Lord’s churches they had come to the terms of the New Covenant. Therefore, their case is not that of Esau who “found no place of repentance.” Nor have they come to the place of Moses where there was no grace but only God’s wrath. They have come to the New Testament Church, the house of God or “Mount Zion” where God dwells and all heaven attends and where all the provisions of grace are made known:

*“...let us have grace whereby we may **serve God acceptably** with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.” - Heb. 12:28-29*

The church in Hebrews 12:22 refers to the local Hebrew congregations reading this epistle and whose leadership is referred to in the very next chapter (Heb. 13:7,17). This kind of church is still on earth with only the names of its membership written “in heaven.” This is not some future glory church or a church now in heaven (church triumphant). However, it is a severe warning against despising the birthright of the church which is to be the bride of Christ. Many have sold their birthright.

Are all those in the Lamb’s book of Life in the Bride?

One writer asserts that all those listed in the Lamb’s book of life are also inhabitants of New Jerusalem. He writes,

*“I am aware that there are those who are uncomfortable with the application of the term **Bride of Christ** outside of local church definitions, but I submit that in the end, the **Bride** is defined as the aforementioned all-encompassing population of the redeemed. In Revelation 21:2 and 9-10, , the **New Jerusalem**, and by extension her inhabitants, are explicitly referred to as the **Bride of Christ**. Who are those inhabitants? Are they only those who are involved in*

*authentic local church ministry? Not a chance, unless I am prepared to without exception, state that those who are outside of the local church ministry are in fact and in all cases hellbound. A strong statement? Not really. Note that verse 27 defines the inhabitants of the **New Jerusalem**, who, as aforementioned, are the **Bride of Christ**, as ‘those who are written in the **Lamb’s Book of life**.’ And what of those who are not written in the **Lamb’s Book of life**? They are, of necessity (according to Revelation 20:15) condemned. Even with the **Bride of Christ**, as used in this passage, subdivisions within the kingdom, when all is said and done, seem to lose all significance.” (Russell S. Howard, Ashland Avenue Baptist, Vol. 77, January 15, 1999)*

The logic of this writer is superficial and unbiblical. First, he limits all men to one of two localities (city or hell). Second, he reasons that since all who live in the city are also written in the book, then all who are written in the book must live in the city or be consigned to hell as hell is the only other alternative dwelling place.

However, the same chapter within the same immediate context assigns another locality for some of those written in the Lamb’s book of Life:

“And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it (New Jerusalem): and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it (New Jerusalem)....And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it.” - Rev. 21:24,26

Universalists attempt to explain away the obvious meaning of this passage. However, if all the saved dwell **in** the New Jerusalem as their home, then why must these “kings” **bring** their (the nations of the saved) honor INTO it? The word “into” has no meaning unless one is OUTSIDE in the first place. Why do they merely walk “in the light of it” if they really live IN it??? If as this writer says,

*“Even with the **Bride of Christ**, as used in this passage, subdivisions within the kingdom, when all is said and done, seem to lose all significance” (Ibid.)⁴⁰*

⁴⁰ This writer has no clue to the distinction between the Kingdom of God and the Church of God as his article merges them together. He also has no clue about the designated “purpose” of the church as he characterizes

then please explain the position of “kings” in regards to the “nations of the saved.” Taken at face value this text clearly teaches that there exists another dwelling place outside the city upon the new earth for a great number of the saved.

Furthermore, The bride is first mentioned in Revelation 19:7-9 and there the Bride is mentioned in distinction from the “guests” who are **invited** to the marriage supper. If all the saved of all ages make up the bride then who are these guests? Angels are always in the presence of God and never need an invitation. The bride is never invited as a “guest” to the marriage supper.

The argument set forth by this writer is built upon a straw man and cannot measure up to the context of Scripture.

The Distinction between Unfaithfulness Versus Faithfulness

Christians can be considered “unfaithful” in at least two different senses. (1) Personally unfaithful; (2) Institutionally unfaithful.

Personal unfaithfulness is to disregard the revealed will of God for your life and live your life in such a way that the salt has lost its saltiness and the light is placed under a bushel. The Biblical example of such a child of God is Lot in the Old Testament and possibly King Saul. The last word about Lot in the Old Testament finds him drunk and committing incest. The Bible provides no external proofs of salvation in behalf of Lot but only the evidence revealed by God is that “his righteous heart was vexed” (2 Pet. 2:7). This is the type of person described by Paul as “saved even as by fire” (I Cor. 3:14). This type of person is found within the Lord’s Churches (I Cor. 5:1).

Institutional unfaithfulness is serving God either in polluted religious institutions (Rev. 18:4) or not serving God at all. In the Old Testament the appointed and acceptable way for service was in conjunction with the House of God in Israel. In the New Testament that appointed way is through the new house of God the Church (I Tim. 3:15). There were children of God in the Old Testament who

that purpose to “material” giving rather than to the distinctives of the Great Commission.

attempted to worship God but in the “high places” (2 Chron. 33:13). These Old Testament worshippers are comparable to those who are found among unfaithful and polluted churches in Revelation 18:4.

Faithfulness certainly cannot be defined as “without sin” but it can be defined as those who repent of sin when they are confronted by the Lord and/or His people. The Lord confronted those churches in Revelation chapters 2-3 with their sins and in order to be overcomers, He required repenting and forsaking of those sins. It involves the confession or acknowledgment of sin and seeking God’s forgiveness even though they might repeatedly fall into the same error (I Jn. 1:7-10). A Church member who is confronted by his sins and will not “hear” is to be eventually turned out of the church (Mt. 18:17) and such will be turned out of the New Jerusalem.

The question arises, what about those who are personally faithful in their private walk with God as far as their knowledge takes them but are institutionally unfaithful (non-Baptists)? Do they receive rewards for their personal faithfulness? I believe the Scriptures teach that they indeed will receive rewards according to their works⁴¹. Those who dwell on the outside of God’s institution now will dwell on the outside of the New Jerusalem on the new earth. They will be personally rewarded according to their personal works within that sphere of existence. Those who are personally faithful as well as institutionally faithful in the House of God now will dwell in the New Jerusalem and will be personally rewarded according to their personal works within that sphere of existence.

What about unfaithful church members? Simply because they retain their membership will they be in the bride? No. Church discipline is the process given to the church to remove unworthy members and if the church fails to exercise it because of ignorance or negligence, be sure that Christ, Who is the Head of the church, will not fail at the Bema Judgment seat.

The Promised Presentation of Local Church members

⁴¹ “And whosoever shall give a drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in now wise lose his reward.” - Mt. 10:42 - At the very minimum this text would include any saved person outside the Lord’s churches.

*“...Unto the church of God which is at Corinth....For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, **that I may present you a chaste virgin to Christ.**” - I Cor. 1:1; 11:2*

*“..to the saints which are at Ephesus....That he might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of the water of the Word.” **That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be without blemish.**” - Eph. 1:1; 5:27*

Is this an empty promise or will there be such a presentation day when the members of the Lord's churches will be presented to Christ as a “bride” on the basis of faithfulness?⁴² Is there any other prophetic text in Scripture where such a bride and such a presentation on such conditions are described other than Revelation 19:7-8??? Our point is namely this. If the Scriptures promise a yet future presentation of church members to Christ as a “bride” then there must be such a presentation day. Since Revelation 19:7-8 is the only prophetic passage available in the book of Revelation (Psa. 45 is prophetic of that event) that can fulfill such a presentation then it must be the fulfillment of that promise.

Secondly, the figure of a future promise of marriage to Christ based on a betrothal covenant is never applied to any other group of saints other than to members of NT churches. All other uses of this metaphor when applied to other types of Christians refer to a *salvation* relationship with Christ that is already completed (Rom. 7:5) or will occur prior to this event (Hosea 2:19-20; Isa. 61:7-10). Significantly, the Biblical writers never use this metaphor to describe the rapture or resurrection meeting with Christ.

Paul refers to a yet future day when he would “*present*” the local church members at Corinth to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2). He makes it clear that this presentation as a “chaste virgin” is conditional and depends upon doctrinal faithfulness (2 Cor. 11:3-4) rather than

⁴² In Eph. 5:27 it is the aorist active subjunctive *παριστημι* (*paristemi*) that is used along with *ἵνα* (*hina*) as a final purpose clause. The Subjunctive mood points to a future time whereas the aorist tense refers to a contemplated completed “point” of action in the future. The preposition “*hina*” makes this future point action purposeful. Hence, the grammar demands that this presentation of the church by Christ to Himself is a certain purposeful event that will take place in the yet future at a specific point of time. Revelation 19:7-8 is the only specific future time the Scriptures provide for such an event.

imputed righteousness. He repeats this promise to the Ephesian church when he says that Christ “*might present to himself a glorious church*” (Eph. 5:27).

The passage in 2 Corinthians 11:2-3 emphasizes the responsibility to remain a “chaste virgin” while Ephesians 5:26 identifies the means for the ability to remain faithful:

*“That **HE** might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of the water of the Word.”*

Indeed, the Revelator demonstrates that all crowns for reward will be cast at the feet of the Lord while those crowned will be saying “Thou art worthy.” We are not only saved by grace but even our ability to please God and receive rewards for faithfulness are of grace. It is Christ who promises that the gates of hell shall never prevail against her (Mt. 16:18). It is Christ who promises to abide with her (Mt. 28:20). It is Christ that must *impart* righteousness unto the church in order for her to remain faithful to the betrothal terms (Eph. 5:26). If Christ has promised these things then there will be a church bride to be presented to Him in a yet future day.

Striving for the Masteries

“And if a man strive for the masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.” - 2 Tim. 2:5

“Striving for the masteries” does not refer to gaining or losing salvation. Rather, Paul is encouraging Timothy to be faithful to his vocational call in the House of God in order to attain unto the highest form of reward - the bride. God places every member in His churches as it pleases Him for His own purposes:

“But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him....Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular” - I Cor. 12:18,27

Israel was a picture of all of God's elect, and the Levites were the elect of the elect and chosen to serve in God's house. Likewise, those God sovereignly places in His churches are the elect of the elect just as the Levites were:

“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable unto God by Jesus Christ....But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” - I Pet. 2:5,9

All saints are “priests” but not all priests are a “holy” and “royal” priesthood built up “a spiritual house” and not all priests offer up “acceptable” sacrifices.

God has gifted and called every church member to a vocation of service within His church (Eph. 3:21-4:1; I Cor. 12:13-31). Striving for the masteries consists of serving in the church according to the gifts and vocation given you (Rom. 12:1-6). Find your gift(s) and vocation and serve the Lord (1) in His House and in (2) His way - **The Baptist Ministry**. If you are going to strive for the masteries, this is the lawful way to strive.

Paul lists seven ways in 2 Timothy 2:3-27 that a saved church member could fail to gain the masteries.

He could fail by not enduring the hardness of the Christian life (v. 3). It is a fight, it is a struggle to remain chaste (2 Tim. 4:7; Jude 3). He could fail by becoming detoured and entangled with the affairs of this world (v. 4). He could fail by striving for it unlawfully - not through the appointed means - His house (v. 5). He could fail by not laboring faithfully (vv. 6-14). He could fail by being led into false doctrine (vv. 15-18). He could fail by failure to purge himself from things that would defile him (vv. 20-21). He could fail by failing to repent and recover himself out of the snares of the devil (vv. 22-26). Overcoming all these things was dependent upon being strong in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 1).

Maintain a life of repentance if you would strive for the masteries. When sin finds a foothold in your life and your conscience smites you with conviction, confess and forsake your sin (I Jn. 1:7). Continuance in willful sin will leaven your life as a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Those who confess and forsake their sins are those described by Jesus when he says, *“Thou hast a few names...which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy”* (Rev. 3:4). This is the bridal promise.

Be strong in God’s grace and work in His strength as this is what is meant by being filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). The life lived in your strength and under your control is time and effort that is lost forever. It is the Spirit controlled life that gains us reward and it is the sin confessed life that keeps our rewards. Faithful church service along with a cleansed life maintains our betrothal terms with Christ. The simple key to overcoming as a saved member of the Lord’s church is **“As ye received the Lord Jesus Christ so walk ye in Him”** (Col. 2:6).⁴³ Nothing more than what you initially received at the time of your conversion is necessary to live the abundant and victorious Christian life as a member of the Lord’s church. At salvation you crucified the self life by turning completely against self and standing with Christ. At salvation you cast yourself completely upon the Lord by faith. At salvation you were willing to be, do and say whatever the Lord wanted you to. At salvation you were dominated and controlled by the Holy Spirit. He convicted you of your sins, humbled you and made you willing to seek Christ for salvation. New Testament saints immediately upon salvation gave evidence of this holy disposition and desire by submitting to baptism and joining the church of Christ. This is the Spirit filled life. If you will walk as you received, victory will be yours.

I believe that salvation is something that we are elected unto (2 Thes. 2:13) and I also believe that God sets every member in the church as it pleases Him (I Cor. 12:18). Salvation is a finished work but the course set before you must be run if the prize is to be obtained:

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness....” - 2 Tim. 4:7,8

“Thou hast a few names...which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy” (Rev. 3:4).

Conclusion

⁴³ The only experience necessary to live an abundant life is to return to your salvation experience and walk in that experience. This text denies the need of any experience after salvation for serving God.

There are a lot of women in the world but you chose the woman you married because she pleased you as no other woman. Just as every man chooses his own bride on the basis of what pleases him, so also, Christ has chosen His own bride according to His own betrothal terms. Those terms are spelled out in the Scriptures and are the conditions set forth to define true love for Christ. Jesus says, *“if you love me keep my commandments”* (Jn. 14:15) and *“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love...”* (Jn. 15:10). These two texts do not refer to the conditions of salvation. Salvation is based upon the UNCONDITIONAL love of God in Christ. However, Bridal love is based upon the CONDITIONAL terms of the betrothal covenant. The upper room discourse was spoken in the context of the first church members at Jerusalem.

The church members that maintain these betrothal terms will be the kind of metaphorical bride that pleases the Lord. The Bride is a chosen bride and it is His grace that enables the chosen to be able to strive for the masteries and obtain. If you have been placed in the New Testament Church then God has provided all that is necessary for you to overcome temptations and trials that would lead you away from the covenant terms of the Bride.

In most sound Baptist churches, the church covenant and articles of faith spell out the betrothal terms of the bridal covenant with Christ. Those who disregard these terms “defile their garments” and will be judged unworthy to “walk in white” with Christ on that presentation day.

The New Testament Church is a **Baptist Ministry** by Biblical definition. Those who do not submit to **The Baptist Ministry** reject the counsel of God against themselves (Lk. 7:29-30). May God grant you grace to strive to please Him.