

Your Sons Will Marry You

BECOMING THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

IN THIS WORLD

IN THIS LIFE

BOOK ONE

JOHN STONE

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God bless you richly.

This work is dedicated to my wife, Karina,
the crown upon my head,
and to the Head we crown,
the Lord Jesus Christ.

Your Sons Will Marry You

Book One

Contents

Preface

1. Letter to the Beloved
2. A New Idea
3. The Marriage Vision
4. Infants in Christ
5. Spiritual Age
6. Three Sorts of Men
7. Born Again Babies
8. Household Relationships
9. Infants in Christ
10. Spiritual Children
11. Inverting Household Relationships
12. Spiritual Marriage
13. Jubilee
14. Song of Songs

Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.¹

¹ Revelation 21:9.

Preface

This is a book about spiritually maturing from being a child of the Father to the bride of Christ. In other words, spiritual relational maturity—a fancy phrase for how much love for God one has. The greater the love for God a man (or woman) has, the more spiritually mature he is.

The man who steadfastly loves Jesus more than his own life will become the bride. The believer who holds the least bit of himself back will not mature into spiritual adulthood. He will remain a spiritual child, never becoming the bride.

To you who are lovesick, to you who are desperate for Jesus in this world in this life no matter the cost, this book is written. You are His beloved. You are His very great reward. And He is yours. Press on.

and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.²

² Matthew 28:20.

Chapter 1

Letter to the Beloved

*I have been seized by the power of a great affection.*³

My vision of being married to Jesus the Bridegroom occurred some years ago. I thought it might sound a bit out-there and odd. I told few. The few I told gave looks confirming my suspicion. I hid the experience away in my heart.

Then one Christmas I heard, *Write the vision*. Surely there was some mistake. But there was no mistake. A few weeks later Jesus gently said again, *Write the vision*—some of the same words He spoke to Habakkuk: *Write the vision plainly on tablets, So that the one who reads it can carry the correct message to others.*⁴

The first time I heard, *Write the vision*, Jesus spoke through a friend about ten years older than me. The second time He spoke was through that friend's son, a young man about ten years younger than me. Neither the father nor the son knew what the other communicated to me and neither knew the vision they prophetically referenced. But I knew. Having been commanded to write the vision by, if you will, both the Father and the Son, here it is, out-there, odd and all.

Most of what you are about to read I cannot recall having seen or heard elsewhere, a good sign I am no theologian. Nor have I been to seminary or Bible school. The more I learn, the more I realize how little I know. If my story proves itself old hat or if I have made theological errors or misunderstood Scriptures, overlook my mistakes. On my brightest days I see *through a glass, darkly*.⁵

After sharing with you the vision of spiritual marriage, I will try making sense of it in light of Biblical passages. I will also share some personal experiences that brought many of these spiritual laws to life in my heart.

In this book we will see that a man may relate to God through one of three relationships: Bride-to-Bridegroom, Child-to-Father or Slave-to-Master. We will learn that the pathway to increasing spiritual maturity and greater intimacy with God is obedience to God, specifically obedience to those precepts He writes on our spiritual hearts and whispers into our spiritual ears.⁶

This work does not bother much with the Slave-Master relationship. The Slave-Master relationship as a church age ended two millennia ago when Jesus said, *No longer do I call you slaves.*⁷ Conversely, we will

³ Brennan Manning; The Ragamuffin Gospel: Good News for the Bedraggled, Beat-Up, and Burnt Out.

⁴ Habakkuk 2:2.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 13:12 (KJV).

⁶ The New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 10:16; Isaiah 30:21.

⁷ John 15:15.

take time to explain that the Child-Father church age is passing away and that the Bride-Bridegroom age is at hand. Many will soon become the bride.

We will explore how the generation of the Bride is part of the ‘One New Man’ mentioned in Ephesians 2:15, and we will touch on the purification processes one undergoes to become the bride. After all, we do not become pure as the result of spontaneous combustion. We must set ourselves on fire.

I believe it was the steady beacon of 1 John 5:3 in alignment with the First Great Command that ushered me into the marriage vision.

The First Great Command you probably know: *Love the Lord your God with all ...*⁸ St. John’s verse maybe not as well. St. John’s verse goes, *This is love for God, to obey His commands, and His commands are not burdensome.* If the old man of Patmos told us the truth (and he did), then the antipode to 1 John 5:3 is a red-flag warning: *Hate for God is to disobey His commands, and disobedience is a heavy burden.* We will not go there, God willing.

The first phrase of 1 John 5:3—*This is love for God*—I find encouraging. It is especially reassuring during those times when Jesus issues the order to step out in faith. Hearing such a command is like being the sailor who hears his sea captain issue the order to abandon what seems like a seaworthy ship. Climbing overboard in obedience can feel like walking the plank. A new beginning of obedience can seem like that. It can unnerve me.

Stepping off into the dark, watery unknown. Voices of reason calling me back to the boat while Jesus the Life Preserver seems as distant as an unseen hope. So it is as I write to you. I find the task of writing the vision and explaining what I know of it, unsettling.

To possess a finite mind and grasp some eternal purpose behind a command from the Infinite God occurs if ever, not at the commencement of stepping out in faith but at some waypoint distant from the banks of reason. It can take time for my nerves to calm when venturing forth on a journey of obedience, a journey of faith. It can take time to gain insight into where God has led me and why He took me there.

Looking back over my life’s journey—a journey that has included a fair number of ‘near drowning’ experiences, I see now that Jesus the Life Preserver has walked hand-in-hand with me along the watery path. I see now that while my natural man is being intentionally ‘drowned’ all along, my spiritual man is never endangered. As I continue to obey God no matter my nerves, my spiritual man grows from strength to strength. This I suppose, is why our Captain is also called the Good Shepherd and why Christianity is a walk of faith and not some sunny jaunt down the foot-firm trail of reason.

⁸ *And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the great and foremost commandment (Matthew 22:37-38).*

Along this faith journey I have learned that obedience is never a burden to the one who considers himself as good as dead. Otherwise obedience can be scary as hell. Honestly, in the beginning of walking out some new command I put on a brave face. Behind my facade of confidence, I am shaking in my boots, at least at the start. At the end I can never fathom how I did it because in truth, Jesus did it for me. Funny how faith works. Jesus does it for you and then He gives you all the credit.

What you are about to read is not a rehash of other men's works. For some what I have to relate might seem a bit out-there, or for a journeyman like you, this story may prove itself a well-worn path. Maybe it is some of both. My aim is orthodoxy, but if my story sounds a little loony then I can appreciate the raised eyebrow. I remember the way I got bent out of shape the first time a friend told me I was a *bride*. Me—a 6'2" 222lb boot-wearing bearded man—a *bride*. Some hoot!

Anyway, I am not sharing my treasure of spiritual marriage with you to garner praises from men. I have written for another purpose. Should you feel the urge, hoot away. I will not be offended. It is difficult to offend the dead. On the other hand, if you are looking for a better destination than what you have yet sighted in your walk of faith, maybe this is it. Maybe here you will catch a glimpse of glories ahead and utter *Ab-ha!* and so share in my joy. I hope so. I hope you go all the way.

C.S. Lewis once described our journey into the Kingdom of God like this: *The further up and the further in you go, the bigger everything gets. The inside is larger than the outside.*⁹ Thus the glory of yesterday's life in Jesus is trumped by today's. Those who love God with all eagerly press on, ever upwards into evermore. You can go all the way.

Beloved, I look forward to partying with you at the Marriage Feast. Your invitation has arrived. You are the guest of honor. See you there, dear friend. The Bridegroom awaits His bride, and it is not good for 'the Man' to be alone.

Godspeed,

John Stone

⁹ *Chronicles of Narnia: The Last Battle*; C.S. Lewis; HarperCollins; 1956.

Chapter 2

A New Idea

*It will come about in that day, declares the Lord, that you will call Me, "Husband."*¹⁰

Entering into the marriage relationship with Jesus the Bridegroom in this world in this life might be a new idea to the 21st century church but it is not new in church history. To the church this is an old idea. Almost 400 years ago an Englishman entered into the spiritual marriage relationship with Jesus and he wrote eloquently about it.

John Winthrop (1588-1649) studied law at Trinity College, Cambridge (England) and later became the first governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony (America). Winthrop was lovesick for Jesus. He loved God with all. Following the pathway of love into its fullness, Winthrop spiritually married Jesus the Bridegroom. Winthrop's journal, *Experientia*, reveals the intimacy of his relationship with God. Resonating in Winthrop's heart is a love no less heartfelt than the passion of the Shulamite for her Lover.¹¹

Winthrop writes, *In my sleep I dreamed that I was with Christ upon earth, ... I was so ravished with his love towards me, far exceeding the affection of the kindest husband, that being awaked it had made so deep impression in my heart, as I was forced to unmeasurable weeping for a great while, and had a more lively feeling of the love of Christ than ever before.*¹²

Winthrop says to Jesus his Bridegroom, *[T]hou didst trim me as a bride prepared for her husband, my clothing was thy pure righteousness... I desired no other happiness but to be embraced of him; I held nothing so dear that I was not willing to parte with for him.*

Describing himself as the Lord's *handmaid*, Winthrop wonders, *Will not my Lord and husband Christ Jesus (whose love surpasses knowledge, and is larger than the ocean) accept in good part the poorest testimonies of my love and duty towards him?*

From Winthrop's 17th Century quill spill the words, *O my Lord, my love, how wholly delectable thou art! let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for his love is sweeter than wine: how lovely is thy countenance! how pleasant are thy embraces! my heart leaps within me for joy when I hear the voice of thee my Lord, my love, when thou sayest to my soul, thou art her salvation.*

Elsewhere in *Experientia* Winthrop explains that his earthly marriages (he was married four times, thrice a widower) helped reveal to him *the most sweet love of my heavenly husband, Christ Jesus, ... married me*

¹⁰ Hosea 2:16.

¹¹ Song of Songs.

¹² *Experientia*, John Winthrop. Downloaded December 20, 2016 from Millersville University, History Department; The Winthrop Papers; <https://wiki.millersville.edu/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=6946824>.

to himself, so as I am become truly one with him ... honor me with the society of thy marriage chamber... Behold, all you beloved of the Lord, know and embrace with joy this unspeakable love of his towards you. God is love, assuredly.

From Winthrop we learn that not only can a man experience intimate union with Jesus in this world in this life but also we learn that natural marriage within a Biblical context portends the spiritual marriage that beckons us all. Brennan Manning (1934-2013) affirms this.

Manning writes, *The deepest desire in our hearts is for union with God. God created us for union with Himself. This is the original purposes of our lives.*

Union with God does not occur in the spiritual Child-Father relationship. Union with God occurs in the spiritual marriage relationship, the only household relationship where two become one.¹³ That is what *union* means; two becoming one. In the past a few spiritual pioneers like Winthrop and Manning have become one with the Bridegroom in this world in this life. But a new time has come. A new church age dawns. A generation of lovesick ‘Shulamites’ is hot on the trail of these pathfinders.

As the musical group King & Country sings to Jesus in their song ‘Amen,’ *You’re in my blood, my veins, in every word, I pray. You gave it all for me. I’ll give it all for You. Oh I’m in love with You. Overwhelmed by You. And if the world is listening, this is my confession: You are my obsession.* Amen, indeed!

This generation of Shulamites is intent on gaining their heart’s desire. They will gain it. They will gain all. In this world in this life these radical lovers of God are about to be married to the Lover of their souls, the One who is All. The age of the Bride is at hand. And that, beloved, is an altogether new idea.

Write, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.”¹⁴

¹³ Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:8, 1 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 5:31.

¹⁴ Revelation 19:9.

Chapter 3

The Marriage Vision

*It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean.*¹⁵

This is what happened.

Jesus sent me to ‘a Jerusalem’ to trumpet repentance.

With a whole heart I went where I did not want to go, to do what I did not want to do. I went with a good attitude and did what I was sent to do because I love Jesus. Jesus sent me in love, and I loved those He sent me to. Jesus sent me to tell a convention of church leaders to repent for a specific sin.

When I told them to repent, the leaders immediately realized that many of them might lose their ministries by repenting. They did not repent. They did something else. They made me silent. In a sense, they killed me. They forced me to quit calling them to repentance by sending an armed security guard to threaten me. The guard’s message from the leaders to me was this. The guard said I was so polite that I could remain provided I spoke no more about repentance. How civil.

As a result of my obedience to the Lover of my soul, I was ‘stoned’ with as many ‘stones’ as those religious leaders could throw and still maintain some semblance of Christian face. What they did was not Christian at all. But it was religious. It was very religious.

They ‘killed’ me and I ‘died’ the way all prophets die: in obedience, in some Jerusalem, with a broken heart for the stone-throwers, and un-offended. After I ‘died’ I saw a vision. It was the vision of being married to Jesus. In the vision, Jesus the Bridegroom stood to my immediate left. To my right stood the best man, an African.

The African was also a visitor to this Jerusalem, this international conference of two-hundred invitation-only church leaders. The African man ran a ministry called The Star of David. This man had earlier that day encouraged me. He told me to tell the leaders plainly. To go all the way. To tell them to repent. I needed encouragement. The African helped me carry my cross. Maybe that man was from Cyrene.¹⁶

In the vision, the three of us—Jesus, me and the African—faced the Father. I stood beside the Bridegroom, to His right. We stood as a pair alike in dignity, a pair whose destiny together was written in the stars. The African stood to my right; he was the Best Man. The Father, facing us three, was the

¹⁵ Revelation 19:8.

¹⁶ Matthew 27:32.

officiant. The vision was as Isaiah prophesied, *Your sons will marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you.*¹⁷

Later that night after the vision ended, I asked Jesus a question: *May I go home?* Why must I remain among these religious people, I wondered. I nothing in common with them.

Yes, come home, Jesus replied.

The words *come home* surprised me. Should not Jesus have replied, *Yes, go home?*

Was the Bridegroom not in this 'Jerusalem', the gathering of great church leaders? No, the Bridegroom was not in this Jerusalem.

In the Song of Songs, the Bridegroom was rarely in Jerusalem, and except to see His bride, He was never seen there. It remains so to this today. The Bridegroom is only seen by the bride.

Immature believers may see the King, the Savior, the Father, the Friend, but they will not see the Bridegroom. Only the bride sees the Bridegroom. They are alike in dignity. In union.

¹⁷ Isaiah 62:5.

Chapter 4

Infants in Christ

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.¹⁸

In another vision I saw a medieval castle. The castle was representative of a small church I was familiar with.

As I looked at the castle, clearly the architectural design was right but things about the castle were wrong. The castle looked like it was constructed from dried mud instead of stone. A gaggle of people stood in the castle's courtyard. They were arguing. They were the people of the little church. Their pastor huddled in an upper-level alcove; he was alone with the Lord, interceding for his unruly parishioners down in the courtyard.

I looked deeper into the vision. I understood that workers should have been applying some paint-like coating to the castle walls to make the walls black and stone-hard but none were. The castle towers should have been flying brightly colored flags but the walls were unadorned. Watchmen should have been stationed on the watch towers but watchmen were nowhere to be seen. Soldiers should have been walking the ramparts and cavalry should have been patrolling the surrounding fields. Not one warrior was in sight. None of the people in the courtyard had weapons or armor of any kind.

Messengers should have been coming and going on horseback and farmers should have been planting, tending and harvesting the fields around the castle. A feast should have been taking place with games played and minstrels singing. The castle and its surroundings should have been a beehive of kingdom activity. But aside from the pastor fervently interceding for his people and the sun shining all about the place, only one thing was happening.

The gaggle of untidy people in the castle courtyard were either demeaning one another or standing idly by watching the infighting. Two women in the middle of the group stood about two meters apart, insulting each another. They seemed like the ring leaders. Both women overflowed with self-righteous anger. Their faces were distorted. As one of the women completed her insult, she threw a dried brown clod at the other woman. After the first woman threw her clod, the second retorted and then hurled a clod back the other way. Back and forth they went. Insult, clod. Insult, clod. Insult, clod. The clods were dried feces.

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 3:1.

The people in this vision were our people, our brothers and sisters in Christ. They were the beloved of God. They were *those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.*¹⁹

In the natural realm I had sat amid this congregation. I had ministered from its pulpit. In the natural realm people attending this little church were getting saved. Some were being delivered and a few experienced healings. Miraculous signs occurred in the little church. I witnessed some of these salvations, signs and wonders that happened there. I also saw the vision of the church as a medieval castle. What I saw in the vision were just as much spiritual realities occurring inside the church as the salvations, signs and wonders.

Since seeing the castle vision this assembly has fractured apart. Following the church split, their pastor, heartbroken, was called home to his Great Reward. And his reward is great for he was faithful in the Lord's house.²⁰ While this humble man of God led the proverbial horse to water, he could not be faulted for its refusal to drink. Those people would not drink deeply from the river of life. They wanted Jesus on their terms. They wanted Jesus and they wanted what their flesh wanted at the same time. They were spiritual babies. They had worldly minds.

What kind of church would that assembly be today if the saints therein would have exercised their right to mature into something more than babies? They could have grown up from being spiritual babies. They could have become spiritual children. What if they had grown up all the way and become the bride of Christ, spiritual adults? God gave them the leadership necessary to do so. They could have gone all the way. They chose not to.

To the amazement of many and to the delight of heaven, I believe that little church could have turned the world upside down. But it did not because it would not. The people refused to grow up. They would not mature. They were spiritual infants and they stayed that way.

As with natural infants, spiritual infants cannot serve others. Infants must be served continually or they will die. The little church was a church full of spiritual infants. They were all saved but they all had worldly minds. I have been just like that, a worldly-minded Christian. Even as a ministry leader, I was a spiritual infant, a babe in Christ, a Christian with a worldly mind.

At the age of 29 I organized a men's service ministry. I did it by my natural wits and not by the Holy Spirit. One year after the ministry launched, the ministry had 50 men serving weekly. The men were divided into six teams of about eight. Each team met weekly to encourage one another in Jesus, to welcome the people to church and to park cars. We parked thousands of cars every weekend. It was a big church. Just as this ministry was rolling, the Lord Jesus said to me, *You have done this by your power. Now I am going to teach you to do things by My power.* Being a spiritual infant, I did not understand what the

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:2.

²⁰ Reverend Alvin Taylor, Sr.

Lord Jesus meant by ‘my power’ and ‘His power’ but I knew it was time to move on. I resigned from the parking ministry that God allowed my natural abilities to build. What I had done was a work of the flesh. I had accomplished it with my worldly abilities.

While I did not understand it at the time, I had done this ‘good work’ by the strength of my self-will or as God phrased it, by my own power. The season of doing things by my self-will had closed and the time to walk by the Spirit and put the self-will to death had arrived. For the first time in my life I would be living as a spiritual son, doing things by my Father’s Spirit. As it is written, the sons of God walk by the Spirit of God.²¹

No matter how good self-will and its powers seem, self-will is the flesh and the flesh opposes God who is Spirit.²² The Bible explains that believers who live by their self-will are infants in Christ. Although I was by natural standards a ‘successful’ ministry leader, I was exactly like the self-willed saints in the castle vision. I was an infant in Christ. I did what I wanted to do. I ministered by my wits, not by God’s Spirit. I was no more useful to the kingdom than a baby in a nursery.

According to the Scriptures, two distinct subgroups exist among those believers who primarily relate to the Lord God as their Father. The first group is ‘Infants in Christ’ and the second group is ‘Children of God.’^{23, 24} Contrary to groupthink these two are not the same and according to the Bible neither is the Bride of Christ.

The Bible says that a spiritual infant may choose to exercise his *right* to mature into a child of God, and a spiritual child of God has the *right* to become the Bride. Becoming the Bride of Christ is a choice. Becoming the Bride is a right one may exercise. Later in this book we will see what the Bible says about the right to mature. Having the right to mature into the Bride is not the same thing as having the promise to become the Bride.

I realize these words may come as a complete surprise. I know that what I am saying is contrary to popular church dogma. Please allow me to explain myself. I have a story to tell. I have Scriptures to back up my story all the way. If you will press on with me, you will be blessed. Come with me.

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

²¹ Romans 8:14.

²² Romans 8:6.

²³ Νἑπιος; Strong’s No. G3516. νήπιος.

²⁴ Teknon; Strong’s No. G5043, τέκνον; John 1:12.

Chapter 5

Spiritual Age

Every believer has a spiritual age and a chronological age. Between those two ages no correlation exists. The prophet Job speaks to this dichotomy.

Job writes, *I thought age should speak, and increased years should teach wisdom. But it is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding. The abundant in years may not be wise, nor may elders understand justice.*²⁵

Before coming to this conclusion, Job thought the natural world had it right: gray headed people have godly wisdom and the youthful do not. Job learned otherwise. Job found out that being elderly is unrelated to godly wisdom and he learned that natural abilities bear no relation to spiritual power.

When the prophet Jeremiah thought he was too young to minister to the graybeards of Israel, the Lord replied, *Do not say, "I am a youth," Because everywhere I send you, you shall go, And all that I command you, you shall speak.*²⁶ While Jeremiah was chronologically youthful, Jeremiah lived by the Spirit. Living by the Spirit enabled Jeremiah to walk in godly power. Living by the Spirit is the one and only prerequisite for being used by God.

According to this scripture Jeremiah did everything by the Spirit and nothing by his self-will. This means that Jeremiah was neither a spiritual infant nor for that matter, a spiritual child. Jeremiah loved God with all. Willing to go wherever God sent him and say whatever God asked him to say, Jeremiah was a spiritual adult at a youthful age. Because Jeremiah was totally submitted to God, he was a spiritual adult. Jeremiah was spiritually qualified to minister to the elders of Israel in part because they were spiritually younger than he was. Jeremiah had something to say. God could use Jeremiah.

Sometimes God reveals to me the spiritual age of believers. Once God showed me a sixty year-old mega-church minister who was spiritually eight years-old. The pastor was spiritually youthful because he did not love God with all. The sixty-year-old pastor partially trusted in exaggeration and entertainment to advance the Kingdom. Much of the man's leadership was based on his natural wits. When most in his congregation were spiritual toddlers or spiritual babies or unsaved, God was able to use the spiritual eight-year-old to lead thousands closer to Him. Every time the spiritual eight-year-old used his wits to minister instead of relying upon the Spirit, the Lord of the harvest reaped where He did not sow and gathered where He scattered no seed because *the flesh profits nothing.*²⁷

²⁵ Job 32:7-9.

²⁶ Jeremiah 1:6-7.

²⁷ Matthew 25:26; John 6:63.

Relying even in part on the flesh to serve God equates with infantile behavior. In other words, relying on natural abilities means not depending upon God. On the other end of the spiritual maturity spectrum, believers like Jeremiah who go wherever God sends them and utter only what the Spirit gives them to speak are spiritually mature. They are fully submitted to the Lord no matter the cost. They love God with all, and their all is totally submitted to God. As Job discovered, chronological age has nothing to do with spiritual maturity. Jesus was only 12 when he lectured in the Temple. This same potential resides within each believer in the uniqueness of their personality.²⁸

²⁸ Luke 2:42-47.

Chapter 6

Three Sorts of Men

1 Corinthians 3:1 lists three sorts of men. Two types are believers and one is not: *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to (a) spiritual men but as to (b) men of flesh, as to (c) infants in Christ.*²⁹

1. *Spiritual men* derives from the Greek word *pneumatikos*.³⁰ *Pneumatikos* describes men like Jeremiah, men governed by the Spirit of God.

Watchman Nee's classic book *The Spiritual Man*, describes spiritual living.³¹ A spiritual man has the capacities to go where the Spirit sends him and to do what the Spirit tells him because he lives in concert with the Spirit. Such a man is submitted to the Spirit no matter what. A man led by the Spirit is not a spiritual infant. The man who follows the Spirit is either the child of the Father or he has become the Bride of Christ. We will study this in later detail.

2. *Infants in Christ* originates from *nēpios*.³² Importantly, believers who are *nēpios* are *in Christ*. St. Paul addresses infants in Christ as spiritual brothers.³³ Infants in Christ possess the seed of righteousness that marks them as belonging to the household of God. They are saved but remain worldly minded.

In 1 Peter 2:2, spiritual infants are referred to by a different Greek term, *artigennētos brephos*, meaning *newborn babies*. For our purposes, infants in Christ and spiritual newborn babies have the same level of spiritual maturity. Neither is spiritually minded.

In the natural realm a child too young to thoughtfully speak is an infant, equal in age with one not yet weaned. The spiritual equivalency between being unable to speak intelligibly and unweaned is established in 1 Corinthians 3:2 where the Author says, *I gave you milk to drink, not solid food*.³⁴ 1 Peter 2:2 parallels Corinthians 3:2.

1 Peter 2:2 says spiritual infants should not concern themselves with eating spiritual solid food but should *long for the pure milk of the word*. St. Peter says this because spiritual infants can only ingest spiritual milk.

1 Corinthians 3:3 continues describing spiritual infants by comparing them to men of the flesh, natural men, men of the world. Spiritual infants are worldly minded.

²⁹ 1 Corinthians 3:1.

³⁰ Strong's G4152.

³¹ *The Spiritual Man*; Watchman Nee; Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1968.

³² *Nēpios*; Strong's No. G3516. νήπιος.

³³ 1 Corinthians 3:1.

³⁴ 1 Corinthians 3:2.

This verse points out that both types of men—one saved, the other unsaved—live their day-to-day lives in the exact same manner as the other. Both live in reliance upon the self-will. Spiritual babes and men of the world live by their wits. Neither lives by the Spirit. They live the same as I did when I led the men’s ministry at the mega church. They live by the flesh. No matter what they do, they cannot please God.

3. *Men of flesh*: As we look at this phrase deriving from the Greek *sarkikos*, keep in mind that infants in Christ while having an altogether different eternal destiny than men of the flesh, live their lives on earth just like *men of the flesh* because they *are still fleshly* [*sarkikos*].

Let us read 1 Corinthians 3:3: *I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly* [*sarkikos*]. *For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly* [*sarkikos*], *and are you not walking like mere men* [*anthrōpos*]?³⁵

Sarkikos describes people governed by their animal appetites.³⁶ *Sarkikos* indicates utter depravity. It means that which is earthly, perishable and rooted in mere human nature.³⁷ In addition to describing spiritual infants as *sarkikos*, 1 Corinthians 3:3 further equates them with *anthrōpos*, meaning *mere men*.³⁸

Nothing but a seed of righteousness separates *infants in Christ* from the unsaved, from men of this world. As if cousins to apes or Neanderthal, infants in Christ can neither speak rightly of Spiritual things nor can they accept Spiritual things. In form and appearance, in motivation and action, infants in Christ mirror those who are hell-bound. The only difference between a spiritual infant and a man greasing the skids to hell is the seed of righteousness, the seed that determines eternal destiny.

These may seem like harsh words but they are honest words. They are words important to understand if believers are to mature beyond spiritual infancy and potentially become the bride of Christ in this world in this life. The potential you have is huge.

Unbelievers—even the finest moralists among them—are driven and controlled by base animal appetites. No matter how magnanimous or righteous unbelievers appear to be, their best self-righteousness inexorably leads them to eternal destruction. Here is the kicker: This Scripture (1 Corinthians 3:3) reveals that infants in Christ live their lives in the exact same manner as men of the flesh. While the eternal destinies of men of the flesh and infants in Christ are completely different, both are governed by their self-will. Neither lives in subjection

³⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:3.

³⁶ Strong’s G4560.

³⁷ Strong’s G4559.

³⁸ *Sarkikos*: Strong’s No. G4559, σαρκικός; *Anthrōpos*: Strong’s No. G444, ἄνθρωπος.

to the Spirit. Both live as animal-men. No matter how good or upright their outward lives appear to be, spiritual infants live at war with the Spirit.

And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone."³⁹

³⁹ Mark 10:18.

<u>Maturity Level</u>	<u>Mind Type</u>	<u>In God's House?</u>
Apart from Christ	Animal/Self-will	No
Infant in Christ	Animal/Self-will	Yes
Child of God	Spiritual	Yes
Bride of Christ	Spiritual	Yes

Chapter 7

Born Again Babies

In Matthew 21:16 Jesus says something wonderful about infants in Christ: *And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise for Yourself?' "*

While born-again babies are unspiritual, they can sing the praises of God just as Sunday morning worship attests. Christ's righteousness is imputed to infants in Christ and that righteousness makes them acceptable to God. God the Father loves His little babies even while they live like animal men.

Spiritual babies are as ignorant of their spiritual righteousness as natural babies who while *having* life, are ignorant *of* life. The book of Hebrews explains that spiritual infants lack personal experience with absolute integrity, godly virtue and the purity that is as white as snow.⁴⁰ Listen to the Author of Hebrews. He says, *For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.*⁴¹

Not being *accustomed to the word of righteousness* does not mean that infants in Christ are necessarily immoral or for that matter, moral. An infant in Christ can be considered virtuous by the world and may be judged to be mature by an immature Church. Yet spiritual infants remain completely unacquainted with true righteousness. While *the Lord is our righteousness*, only those who live like He is Lord can be cognizant of that righteousness.⁴² Such believers hear the Spirit speak words of righteousness. They obey the spiritual words the Spirit speaks into their spiritual ears.

Spiritual infants—while they may be intelligent, learned, gifted, graceful moralists or even respected pulpiteers—do not live like Jesus is Lord. They do not live by the Spirit no matter how 'good' they are. Spiritual infants live by their self-will. Anyone who lives by the power of his self-will does not live life in the Spirit.⁴³ Spiritual infants, while being born-again citizens of Heaven, live their lives in conflict with the Spirit; their self-will (their flesh) profits nothing.⁴⁴

The Author's description of the spiritual condition of the Corinthian infantile believers borders on insult. If there is an extenuating circumstance for the Corinthians' spiritual predicament, possibly it is that their leaders had only been born-again for three to five years when this admonition was penned.⁴⁵ When we realize that the Author's likening of these believers to *animal men* is directly connected to the

⁴⁰ Hebrews 5:13.

⁴¹ Hebrews 5:13.

⁴² Jeremiah 33:16. Cf. Jeremiah 23:6.

⁴³ Cf. Colossians 3:12-24.

⁴⁴ John 6:63.

⁴⁵ Church history indicates that St. Paul lived in Corinth for about 18 months (circa 52–54 CE), and he penned 1 Corinthians in 57 CE.

fact that *jealousy and strife* exist among them through early forms of denominationalism, their ignominy hits a little closer to home. *For when one says "I am of Paul" and another "I am of Apollos," are you not mere [animal] men?*⁴⁶

Of unsaved animal men, the Bible says, *A natural [psychikos] man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised.*⁴⁷ To such hellions *the word of the cross is foolishness.*⁴⁸

Because spiritual things are spiritually discerned, the wisdom of God is foolishness to mere men, and on the opposite end of the spectrum, man's highest wisdom is foolishness before God. While this contrast between God's wisdom and man's wisdom is understandable to the spiritually minded believer, what is important for us to realize is that infant Christians and the hell-bound view spiritual things through the same lens—the lens of foolishness. Conversely, the spiritually minded view the behavior of infants in a reciprocal light—foolishness. Each type of believer sees the other acting foolishly. The difference is that the spiritual man understands why the babe in Christ acts the way he does and being spiritual, he can exercise compassion, while to the babe in Christ the spiritual man remains an enigma.

Like the Corinthian believers of old, infants in Christ can persist in living in their depraved state. They can refuse to grow up. Remaining in this spiritual condition grieves the One who died that they might enjoy life abundantly. While infant believers are true *brothers ... sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus the Christ, their Lord and ours*, their nature by their choice remains unredeemed, foolish and worldly.⁴⁹ Only a seed of righteousness separates spiritual infants whose citizenship is in Heaven from unbelievers greasing the skids to hell.⁵⁰

Infant believers, in their misplaced values (and I have entertained a full share of those erroneous values myself) can be quick to find real or imagined fault in the doctrines and practices of other members of the Lord Jesus' own body. At the macro level we call this 'denominationalism.' At the micro level, we know it as 'unrighteous judgment.' The Bible says, *if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.*⁵¹

Long ago I chuckled when I heard some wag say, *Christians shoot their wounded*, because grinning seemed a better alternative to weeping. Civil war in the house of the Prince of Peace is an unparalleled humiliation for every believer as well as the Head of the house. Denominationalism and unrighteous judgment are weapons of our civil war.

⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 3:4. *Anthrōpos*: Strong's G444.

⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 2:14.

⁴⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:18.

⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:1.

⁵⁰ Mark 4:30-32; the Parable of the Mustard Seed.

⁵¹ James 2:9.

Since all believers belong to One body, partiality among Christians is self-hatred, and self-hatred is fratricide.⁵² Our civil war is nothing less than wanton fratricide. Wielding God's word of life as a weapon of death, we club one another with truths and partial truths. With the power of life and death in our tongues, we slay our brothers over issues of unimportance or if the issues are important, we fail to conquer with spiritual weapons like love, patience and godly wisdom. We are filled with the heart of Cain for our brother Able.

The fratricide we practice is a direct result of our refusal to submit to God's command to *grow up*.⁵³ Infants in Christ do not have to remain spiritual babies. Spiritual infants do not have to keep living like animal men. They can choose to exercise their God-given right to grow up and become children of God; they can become spiritual men.⁵⁴ Children of God can even choose to grow into the Bride of Christ. At each step of the way to the wedding we must choose to grow up.

We will delve deeper into the differences between infants in Christ and children of God in the next chapter. For the moment it is important to understand that being *sealed for the day of redemption*—a mark infinitely stronger than any cords of death moralism can devise, does not mean one is guaranteed to mature from spiritual infancy into spiritual childhood, much less mature into the adult bride.⁵⁵ Spiritual infants must choose to grow up and become children. God will not force anyone to mature, and years as a believer, education or gray hair offer no advantages whatsoever.

The Right to Mature, Not the Guarantee

In Biblical terminology there is a great difference between spiritual babies and spiritual children.

While long held church dogma teaches that all believers are children of God, the Bible communicates something totally different. The Bible says that being born again only grants one the *right* to mature from infancy to childhood, not the guarantee. A born-again believer can choose to become a spiritual three-year old, the age at which one transitions from infancy to childhood, or he may choose to keep living as a spiritual baby.

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

Here the word *right* derives from the Greek word *exousia*.⁵⁶ *Exousia* indicates the power of choice, the authority and liberty to do something. In context, *right* means that infants in Christ have been given

⁵² James 2:10.

⁵³ Ephesians 4:15.

⁵⁴ *Teknon*; Strong's No. G5043, τέκνον; John 1:12.

⁵⁵ Ephesians 4:30.

⁵⁶ *Exousia*; Strong's No. G1849.

the power and ability to mature into children of God—not the guarantee. Those who are *born of God* must exercise their right to mature if they desire to grow beyond spiritual infancy. Otherwise they will not *become children [teknon] of God*.

Think of the word *right [exousia]* this way. American citizens who reach age 18 have the *right* to vote; but having the right to vote does not automatically make one a *voter*. For an American to become a voter, he must exercise his right to vote. Meaning, he must first register to vote and then properly cast his ballot and then he is a voter. In the same way spiritual infants, those who are born again, must exercise their right to mature into children of God. In Biblical parlance, children of God and spiritual infants are not one and the same. While both belong to the Father, the two are quite different.

Within the framework of John 1:12, the phrase *children of God* describes believers who have become dependent upon, desirous of and ‘addicted to’ God. They are in love with Jesus. In the Pauline letters *children of God* designates people governed by the Spirit and hence, those who are closely related to God.⁵⁷ Christians who become spiritually minded are no longer babes in Christ; the spiritually minded have matured into *children of God*.⁵⁸

The process of exercising one’s right to mature from spiritual infant to spiritual does not lend itself to any human calculation or to some Bible school measurement technique. The spiritual maturation process is not related to improved outward behavior patterns like church attendance or tithing. Seminary diplomas and church titles cannot differentiate spiritual babes from spiritual children. Some ‘PhD Reverends’ remain spiritual infants, worldly minded men. I have met more than a few.

I was a church leader responsible for 49 men and spiritually I was a spiritual infant, not a spiritual child. It was God who said I ministered in this leadership role by my own power. What He did not say that He could have said was that I led a ministry through my self-will as an animal-man. Through my animal instincts I pastored a flock of God’s sheep. God let me do it and I do not know why.

Contrary to groupthink, spiritual maturity correlates with one’s degree of subjection to God’s authority. Spiritual maturity is related to one’s level of love for Jesus. Love for Jesus and obedience to the Spirit are one and the same. *For this is love for God, to obey His commands (1 John 5:3)*.

Such understanding of maturation harmonizes with St. Paul’s description of the Corinthian believers—believers who while faithfully ‘doing church’ for three to five years had not matured beyond spiritual babies. At the time Paul wrote to the Corinthians, they were self-willed believers governed by their animal instincts. They were infants in Christ. They had a seed of righteousness but were unfamiliar with righteousness.

⁵⁷ *Teknon*: Strong's No. G5043. *Blue Letter Bible Lexicon (τέκνον)*; *Outline of Biblical usage; section IA, IB and IC*. www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G5043&t=NASB. Viewed February 9, 2017.

⁵⁸ *Teknon* can correlate with “offspring” but in English is better understood as “children.”

While spiritual infants can be mistakenly considered as more spiritually mature than they actually are, it is equally possible to misjudge them as unsaved or false Christians. Spiritual realities are spiritually discerned. A believer's maturity cannot be determined by his outward behaviors, no matter how saintly or contrarian those behaviors appear to be. If you cannot see into a man's heart, you cannot know him.

We should not be fooled. Trying to measure spiritual maturity by natural senses is like trying to measure volume by weight. It never works.⁵⁹ When the church grasps this fact, it will be a sign that we have done some growing up. Those who will be the bride will grow up.

Raising Spiritual Infants

Spiritual infants make messes. It is their nature. They are infants. If the spiritually minded among us do not begin caring for spiritual infants at least as well as the world nurtures physical babies, we will be condemned by the world. As I see it, the world generally cares more for its natural babies than the church cares for her spiritual babies. People in the west go to jail for child abuse yet a spiritual equivalency of 'child abuse' is not recognized within the church. This will soon change. New, spiritually mature leadership is emerging from the caves where God has hidden them. The time is changing. The bridal generation will soon emerge.

Even if a spiritual infant has been saved for 30 years and should know better (or as the Author of Hebrews quipped, *by this time you ought to be teachers*), spiritually minded believers should be patient and persistent with the church's babies. The spiritually minded should be governed in their relations towards infants by love.⁶⁰ Denigrating long-time infants by 'shooting the wounded' will not help them grow up. Interacting with them under the direction of the Spirit as St. Paul did with the Corinthians however, might usher these babes into the spiritual life so that they too *may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect*.⁶¹

While spiritual infants can be misjudged as unsaved, they can also be wrongly considered mature and relied upon to behave as such. I know two preachers who divorced their wives to marry women they were counseling. Like Israel leaning on the staff of Egypt, relying on a spiritual infant for spiritual help inevitably fails.⁶²

How many times has an infantile believer led others astray with moralism and worldly wisdom? Overestimating the maturity of an infant believer because they are well mannered, educated and eloquent

⁵⁹ For you scientists—Measuring volume by weight never works unless you are measuring water at 4.00°C at standard sea level atmospheric pressure and your water is pure and your analytical balance is calibrated, then theoretically, yes. In this single instance you can accurately measure volume by weight.

⁶⁰ Hebrews 5:12.

⁶¹ Romans 12:2.

⁶² Isaiah 36:6.

wreaks havoc in the church. Everything spiritual infants say and do is self-willed. They exist in a state of war with the Spirit even if they graduated seminary *magna cum laude*. Examples of this recurrent church error are easy to recall and painful to recount.

When the 12 spies returned from the land of Canaan, something like a vote was taken on whether or not to obey God and go to the promised land. The two spies who saw the promised land with spiritual eyes (Joshua and Caleb), desired to obey God. They were roaring to go. Conversely the 10 spiritual 'leaders' who saw the land through natural eyes thought it wise to rebel against God's command. While the 10 looked and spoke like spiritual leaders, they were carnally minded. Being men of the flesh, it was impossible for them to comprehend God's will or submit to it. In this instance, 10 of the appointed 12 church leaders acted like nothing more than foolish animal men. Those unspiritual leaders caused a lot of church suffering.

Suffice it to say that misunderstandings about fellow believers' spiritual maturity, whether esteemed too high or measured too low, give rise to unnecessary pain, confusion and divisions within the household of God. This ought not be. Spiritual maturity is spiritually discerned, and it is difficult to see farther ahead than one presently is. And we are not far. The church on whole is very immature. As C.S. Lewis noted, *there are a great many things that cannot be understood until after you have gone a certain distance on the Christian road.*⁶³ When worldly maturity is misjudged to be spiritual maturity, problems always result. For example ...

Infantile Christianity

During a mission trip to Lusaka, Zambia, I read a newspaper article about a local pastor who was duped by a huckster into handing over a pile of his church's money for new church furniture that never arrived. When the congregation discovered the swindle, they blamed the pastor. The congregants reasoned that God had given their pastor responsibility for their welfare and that the pastor had broken trust. A mob of riled-up Christians descended upon the pastor's house, caught the man and beat him with sticks and fists until he wiggled free and leapt from a window. At the time the article went to press, the pastor was last seen running down the road as fast as his two feet could carry him.

Salvation culture churches—assemblies where the over-arching spiritual concern is salvation—can be populated with long-time infants who never exercise their God-given right to mature into spiritual children.⁶⁴

⁶³ *Mere Christianity*; Book 1: *Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe*, Chapter 12, "Faith."

⁶⁴ *Christianity as a Country Club*; Scott McKnight; Huffington Post; viewed February 7, 2017; www.huffingtonpost.com/scot-mcknight/christianity-country-club_b_951239.html

Among salvation culture believers the moralistic life is judged as acceptable to God although moralism is spiritually reprehensible.⁶⁵ Because living by the Spirit is often confused with moralism, these assemblies are reduced to operating as country clubs or welfare societies. In assemblies where the salvation culture anomaly occurs, few if any of the members are cognizant of the vast spiritual wealth being stolen from them.⁶⁶ If they were aware of the robbery, they would demand recompense. They would find their pastor and beat him. He warrants the pummeling.

If believers like those in Zambia can respond so indignantly to being robbed of their physical wealth, what will happen when believers discover they have been cheated out of incalculable sums of spiritual wealth? What will happen when infantile believers learn that while being told they were the bride, they have not even matured into children of God? What will they do when they understand that while living, they missed the abundant life? When the surpassing value of spiritual maturity is revealed to salvation-culture Christians, the worm will turn and what happened in Zambia will become commonplace across a wide segment of the church. Mark it down. Human nature does not change. As Shakespeare noted, *doves will peck in safeguard of their brood*.⁶⁷ Unrepentant pastors (and some who are repentant) will suffer pummeling from their flock in one form or another.

Infantile Christianity can be seen in the entertainment factor that some of today's fashionable churches *rely* upon, thinking they need to compete with the world to capture attendees. Infants in Christ do not fully trust the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to be sufficiently arresting.

In this statement please do not think I am down on cultural relevance. I am all for reaching people for the Lord Jesus Christ by any manner the Spirit directs. As St. Paul explains, *"To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some"* (1 Corinthians 9:22).

When we *rely* on our natural abilities to advance God's supernatural Kingdom we fall short of the glory that God desires to give us. When we substitute the carnal power of the self-will for the supernatural power of the Spirit we behave like animal men and totally miss the target. When we act like animal men and do whatever we want however we want for God's kingdom, God reaps where He does not sow and He gathers where He scatters no seed.⁶⁸ Here is what I mean.

One Sunday morning a few years ago following some impressive 3-D graphics of angels flying around the stage, the lead pastor at the multi-campus mega-church said, *We're not Disney but we're trying to be!* Ostensibly he said this for a laugh but the underlying meaning was clear. To some degree this minister hoped in his production team's natural abilities to entertain and thereby draw men to God. No matter

⁶⁵ Moralism is 'self-saving' blasphemy. This 'good person' dogma implies that if a man is 'good' then he can qualify himself for salvation. Moralism negates man's need for God's Messiah. It supplants God's love with self-love. Moralism says, *I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High (Isa. 14:14)*.

⁶⁶ Galatians 5:16-25.

⁶⁷ *The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth*; Act 2, Scene 2.

⁶⁸ Matthew 25:26.

how well intentioned, such behavior is infantile. Reliance upon one's natural abilities to advance the supernatural Kingdom is the watermark of infantile Christianity.

Jesus made this fact crystal clear when He said, "*My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting [like the world] so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm*" (John 18:36).

Another example of infantile thinking is the time a church leader privately told me that if he had not *intentionally lied* to his thousands of congregants, none would have joined small groups. This pastor was non-repentant in his ends-justify-the-means approach to 'nurturing' those the Lord Jesus had placed into his care. This pastor foolishly thought that some mixture of his self-will plus the Spirit could accomplish a purely Spiritual work. I should not have been flabbergasted at this man's reliance upon worldly powers to grow God's kingdom but I was. That man and his church have some growing up to do. I will not be there to help them. God will send another to help them or the believers will disband in search of mature leadership. They will not remain in this infantile state forever.

Christians who *always* employ their wits in place of obeying the Holy Spirit are not necessarily evil but they are babes in Christ. Like me, you probably know some chronologically mature believer who sits Sunday after Sunday on the same pew or maybe stands in the same pulpit, spiritually fouling himself and blaming the guy nearest him for smelling badly. Beloved, we must remember that babies are not disciplined for soiling their diapers. Those whose responsibility it is to clean and potty-train them, are. We have some growing up to do, on both sides the spiritual infant—spiritual child equation.

So how do spiritual infants exercise their right to grow from infants to children of God? Let us see.

Spiritual Milk Ingredients—

The 6 Logical Teachings

1. Repentance from dead works
2. Faith towards God
3. Instruction about baptisms
4. Instruction about the laying on of hands
5. Instruction about the resurrection of the dead
6. Instruction about eternal judgment

When a man is first born again, he is a spiritual infant. Both St. Paul and St. Peter refer to the spiritual infant's need for spiritual milk. St. Paul writes, [*A*]s to infants in Christ, I gave you milk to drink, not solid food [*brōma*] for you were not yet ready to receive it.⁷⁰ And St. Peter says, [*L*]ike newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word [*logikos*] so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.⁷¹

Spiritual milk is synonymous with the *elementary teaching about the Christ*. This parallel is explained in Hebrews 6:1-2. The phrase *elementary teaching* could be expressed as the *first word* [*logos*]. This second phrase—*first word*, implies the origin, the commencement, the foundational beginnings of the *logos* word of the Christ. The *first word* is the only thing a man born anew can gain sustenance from. The *first word* is spiritual milk.

1 Peter 2:2 further explains that spiritual milk is the *pure milk of the word* [*logikos*].⁷² This is significant. From *logikos* we derive the terms *logic* and *reason*. Hence this verse reveals that the *elementary teaching about the Christ* can be grasped by the logical, carnal mind—the only mind-type infants in Christ possess.

⁶⁹ As far as the author can determine, the exact phrase “*spiritual milk*,” per se, does not occur in the Textus Receptus. Nevertheless, several major translations render γάλα λογικός [*gala logikos*] as such, including ESV, HCSB, NET, NLT, NIV and RSV. Conversely, HNV, KJV, NASB, NKJV and WEB translate γάλα λογικός as “*milk of the word*.”

⁷⁰ 1 Corinthians 3:2.

⁷¹ 1 Peter 2:2.

⁷² 1 Peter 2:2.

Infants in Christ are infants because they are not spiritually minded; while they possess the seed of righteousness, they still have the mind of the world.

For a new believer to mature beyond spiritual infancy and become spiritually minded, no other food except the *first word of Christ* suffices. In fact, infants cannot ingest or understand anything else. Without spiritual milk, infants starve. Even if spiritual babies desired solid food, they could not swallow it. And if they did swallow it, it would choke them.

Hebrews 6:1-2 lists the ingredients of spiritual milk—the first logical word of the Christ consumable by infants. The ingredients are: (1) *Repentance from dead works* and (2) *of faith toward God*, (3) *of instruction about washings* and (4) *laying on of hands*, and (5) *the resurrection of the dead* and (6) *eternal judgment*.⁷³ Before an infant can exercise his right to mature into a child of God, he must first ingest these six teachings. According to the Scriptures, only these handful of teachings have the potential to strengthen the infant into spiritual childhood.

But simply hearing these teachings in meetings or reading about them in books does not automatically mature an infant believer into a spiritual child. The *first logical word* must be voluntarily ingested by the new believer. Just like natural babies must choose to consume natural milk, spiritual babies must welcome spiritual milk into their souls.

Spiritual milk is fed through teaching and ingested by learning. Teaching and learning necessarily include experiential exercises. Experiential exercises are like the labs and field trips that accompany classroom lectures. The assembly or church leader that leaves infant feeding to pulpitering alone or worse, that does not provide whole milk to its infants could be guilty of a spiritual Breach of Trust or spiritual child neglect.

As an example of what's meant by *infant feeding*, let's look at the milk ingredient called *repentance from dead works*. Hopefully we'll see how this milk ingredient can be offered to babes for their voluntary consumption.

Dead Works

Spiritually minded believers understand that it is better to sit on the porch and watch the clouds pass by than it is to perform some good deed in disobedience. The spiritually minded know that good deeds done in disobedience are actions the Bible terms *dead works*; and dead works (works of the flesh) are anathema to the Spirit life. No matter how good a dead work appears to be, dead works always distance one from God.

⁷³ Hebrews 6:1-2; caps and numbers added.

Spiritual infants, however, never consider dead works as sin. In fact, spiritual infants lack the ability to discern any difference at all between dead works and works of obedience. As the prophet Samuel explained to King Saul, good deeds done in disobedience—no matter how noble minded or spiritually appropriate they appear to be—are equal in God’s eyes with witchcraft and idol worship. Dead works are works of religion or moralism. In the end a dead work, even if it garners a Nobel Peace Prize, is sin to the one who works it. Synonymous with rebellion, witchcraft and idol worship, dead works are dead indeed. There is no life in them.

What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams. Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft and stubbornness as bad as worshiping idols. So because you have rejected the command of the Lord, he has rejected you as king.⁷⁴

Because spiritual infants cannot discern the difference between dead works and works of obedience, every good deed an infant performs appears in his eyes as pleasing to the Lord God. Adding to their conundrum, spiritual infants can mistakenly assess another believer’s acts of obedience as the exact opposite of what they are. Reaching an erroneous appraisal of another believer’s efforts to obey God, spiritual infants may attempt to tear it down and in doing so believe they’re serving God. People in the Bible with similarly misdirected zeal include Job’s friends, Jerusalem’s watchmen who ripped off the wedding garment of the Shulamite woman, and St. Paul (Saul) when persecuting the saints.⁷⁵

A spiritual infant might appraise an in-your-face street preacher or sandwich-board wearing abortion protester as a crazy Christian. They might think the crazy Christian is driving sinners further from the Lord Jesus Christ when in truth the zealous believer is being led by the Spirit to behave exactly as he is doing.⁷⁶ Team Jesus Preachers based in Ft. Myers, Florida is a great example of Spirit-led street preachers often maligned by spiritual infants. These outspoken men of God are humble saints. In selfless submission to the Spirit, Team Jesus Preachers is turning the world upside down. God bless them mightily.

I once heard a minister tell how back in the 1990’s the Lord instructed him to get out of his car at an interstate rest stop, kneel on the sidewalk, raise his arms to heaven and praise Jesus.⁷⁷ The preacher said, *As I was being obedient, I ‘overheard’ a man thinking “Nut job!” as he walked by.* Later it struck me that I was the very man who sauntered by that day casting aspersions upon this saint’s act of obedience. Heartbroken, I wrote him and apologized. Good naturedly, he forgave me and blessed me.

Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ 1 Samuel 15:22-23.

⁷⁵ Job 38:2; Song of Songs 5:7; Acts 8:3.

⁷⁶ www.youtube.com/user/TeamJesusPreachers is their YouTube Channel as of March 23, 2017.

⁷⁷ Brad McClendon; Living Vine Ministries; <http://livingvineministries.org>. (Brad graciously forgave me.)

⁷⁸ Galatians 5:16.

Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. Spiritual things cannot be understood by the self-willed mind. And the infant in Christ is totally self-willed even if he has a doctorate in theology and a congregation of thousands. Like my infantile thoughts at the interstate rest stop, spiritual infants cannot comprehend the true nature of spiritual things. Infants in Christ may think evil to be godliness and later the same day characterize an humble act of obedience as lunacy. Their carnal minds are at war with God who is Spirit. Without first growing strong on the milk ingredient *repentance from dead works*, a newborn believer retards his own advancement towards maturity and can hamstring others as well. The generation of the Bride will remedy this.

*For we are ... created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*⁷⁹

Baptisms

Another milk ingredient that requires experiential exercise is *instruction about baptisms*. Matthew 3:11 describes three baptisms. In this passage John the Baptizer declares, *I baptize you with water for repentance, but He ... will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire*. John the Baptist is an authority on baptisms. If he says there are three baptisms, then three baptisms there are. Spiritual infants need to understand a little about these three baptisms, then experience the first two (water and Spirit) and at a minimum be prepared for the third (fire).⁸⁰

If an infant is unprepared for the baptism of fire then his faith might waver when he unjustly suffers for being obedient to the Holy Spirit. When I was young in the faith and my world seemed to be crumbling to the ground as a result of my love for God, it would have helped tremendously if someone had told me that I was experiencing the baptism of fire, a normal and necessary part of the Faith.

First Word

The remaining milk ingredients that Church leaders are responsible for teaching, modeling and coaching babes in are: faith towards God, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. These four ingredients plus repentance from dead works and instruction about baptisms comprise the six foundational teachings about the Lord Jesus Christ. These are the six elementary principles of Christianity. These six teachings can be grasped with the carnal mind. Without

⁷⁹ Ephesians 2:10.

⁸⁰ In Acts 8, Phillip preached Jesus to the people of Samaria with signs and wonders accompanying. The Samaritans received the word of the Kingdom and were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus; many were physically healed and delivered of evil spirits. After all this took place, Peter and John came down from Jerusalem and baptized the new believers with the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:12-17).

all six parts of the ‘first logical word’ of the Christ, an infant cannot mature.⁸¹ He cannot become a spiritual child; he cannot mature into a child of God.

The chronological time a convert spends being built up by spiritual milk alone need not be years. I believe it could be accomplished in one day. Over the course of eight or ten hours, taking an hour or so for each precept, through teaching and experiential exercises, a new convert could reach the point where he could give a brief, cogent explanation of the *first logical word* of Christianity and have some personal experiences affirming those teachings. This is foundational discipleship.

Regards discipleship, the generation of the Bride will reform the Church. The Bride will care for spiritual infants as if they were her own babies because they will be. In the future, it will not take years for an eager new believer to become spiritually minded. It will take one day. Once an infant has grown strong on milk, he is ready for weaning. He is a spiritual child ready to eat spiritual meat.

Weaning

Weaning is the process of accustoming an infant to solid food. Spiritually speaking, weaning is the process of transitioning from a diet of spiritual milk to a diet of spiritual solid food. In the New Testament, *brōma* is the Greek word sometimes translated as solid food or spiritual meat.

*And did all eat the same spiritual meat [brōma].*⁸²

The King James Bible translates *brōma* as *meat*.⁸³ Other English versions of the Bible translate *brōma* as “food” or “solid food.” Spiritual meat or food is different from spiritual milk. Spiritual meat was for the Christ as it is for the Christian. John 4:34 tells us exactly what Jesus’ food was and by implication, what solid food is for Jesus’ disciples: *Jesus said to them, “My food [brōma] is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.”*

Spiritual food is obedience to the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual food is complying with the commands the Spirit writes on our hearts and whispers into our ears.⁸⁴ These laws are the only laws the Spirit empowers a believer to obey. This ‘solid food’ is our portion in the New Covenant; *“I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”*⁸⁵ Obedience to the Spirit is food for the soul. Obedience is the

⁸¹ Hebrews 6:1-2.

⁸² 1 Corinthians 10:3-4 (KJV).

⁸³ *Brōma*; Strong’s No. G1033; 1 Corinthians 10:3.

⁸⁴ Jeremiah 31:33; Isaiah 30:21.

⁸⁵ Jeremiah 31:33.

essence of the Spirit life. Obedience to the Spirit is love for God.⁸⁶ Obedience is the pathway of maturity.

It is a huge mistake to think that spiritual food can be fed to the man in the pew by the man in the pulpit. Spiritual food is offered by the hand of the Father to His spiritual son or from the hand of the Lover to His beloved bride. That said, God can use the man in the pulpit to give voice to His commands. Here is an example.

One Sunday morning I ‘heard’ the preacher repeatedly telling me to purchase a piece of property although his sermon did not include one line about buying land. Walking across the parking lot after the service, I mentioned the command I kept ‘hearing’ in the sermon to my wife. She said that she had ‘heard’ the very same thing. We both thought it odd but we both thought it was God giving us His command. So we obeyed and bought the small parcel of land we previously considered too costly.

To remain spiritually healthy and grow from strength to strength, ‘food-eating’ believers are always asking and answering the question, *What is the Spirit telling me to do?*⁸⁷ All the while relying on the strength of the Spirit to accomplish the command of the Spirit. For this single reason believers are clothed with power from on high: to obey the law written on their heart.⁸⁸ Obedience is spiritual food. Eating our spiritual food is love for our Lover.⁸⁹ The bride loves her Lover with all. She does whatever He says.

This understanding that spiritual food is obedience to the Spirit sheds light on verse five of David’s 23rd Psalm: *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.* David is saying that God leads us to Himself even in dangerous times. God guides us with His love and empowers us with His strength so that we can be ever nearer to the Lover of our souls even when our enemies are breathing down our necks.

As a spiritual toddler grows into the weaning process, bits of easily digestible solid food (little works of obedience) are mixed in by the Father along with the youngster’s spiritual milk ration. Growing quickly from a milk-only diet to solid food is important for the end-time generation that will walk on this earth in this life as the Bride. You are called to be part of that Bridal generation. You are called to grow up.

Given the great darkness now covering the earth, some might deem rapid spiritual maturity to be mission-critical. There are good reasons to think this.

From the believer’s first day in the household of God until the day he turns about three years-old spiritually, any Kingdom fruit he produces is generated through the power of his self-will, the flesh. While fruit produced through the self-will may profit the Kingdom, such fruit, like my work in the

⁸⁶ 1 John 5:3.

⁸⁷ Psalm 84:7.

⁸⁸ Luke 24:49.

⁸⁹ 1 John 5:3.

parking ministry, is ‘uncircumcised.’ It is produced through natural abilities, through the powers of the flesh. Like Cain’s bloodless offering, uncircumcised fruit is unacceptable to God.⁹⁰ Acceptable fruit requires a spiritually circumcised heart. A spiritual circumcision means blood flows. It means fruit produced through the blood. Acceptable fruit is produced through the Spirit because God is Spirit.

The norm in the West today for fully transitioning a natural baby from a milk-only diet to a diet of solid food is 12 to 24 months.⁹¹ However an ancient Jewish writing (2 Maccabees) references weaning being completed on the child’s third birthday.⁹² According to WebMD.com, the third birthday is usually the age when all 20 teeth have come in.⁹³ A complete set of teeth means the child is fully equipped to masticate solid food. This is the natural. Because the natural realm portends spiritual realities, the reference in 2 Maccabees to weaning being completed at three years of age seems more than coincidence. It indicates the spiritual age when one is completely weaned from spiritual milk onto a diet of solid food. One becomes a spiritual child when he reaches three spiritual years of age.

Why some of today’s churches pump spiritual milk into believers like they are tasked with raising eternal veal cows is beyond me. Making it acceptable for saints to remain infants [*nēpios*], *tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine*, terrified by shadows and going without warriors and leaders is beyond my understanding.⁹⁴ It ought not be. And soon enough it will not be. The generation of the Bride will radically reform what currently passes for discipleship, and Christendom will soon become adept at maturing spiritual infants into spiritual children. The introduction of private rooms for nursing mothers in churches portends this advent. Again, it is the natural preceding the spiritual.⁹⁵ I have been seeing such dedicated rooms in church buildings since the 1990’s. The spiritual realities these dedicated rooms portend cannot lag forever behind.

Dirty Jobs

After resigning from the parking ministry everything I tried to accomplish by my own strengths turned out muck. I went from being qualified for a job by an energetic ‘*I can do that!*’ mentality, to being qualified for a task because God told me to do it. And God told me to do things like clean roadside ditches and tidy up public restrooms. How glamorous!

As a freelance Spirit-led garbage collection agent I learned to keep work gloves and garbage bags in my vehicle. I also learned that if I did not immediately stop and clean up ‘whatever wherever’ as soon

⁹⁰ Genesis 4:3-5.

⁹¹ *Weaning from the Breast*, NIH, Library of Medicine; www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2720507/#b5-pch09249

⁹² 2 Maccabees 7:27: “*So bending herself towards him, mocking the cruel tyrant, she said in her own language: My son, have pity upon me, that bore thee nine months in my womb, and gave thee suck three years, and nourished thee, and brought thee up unto this age*” (DRA).

⁹³ *Your Child’s Teeth*; WebMD; www.webmd.com/oral-health/guide/dental-health-your-childs-teeth

⁹⁴ Ephesians 4:14.

⁹⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:46.

‘the Boss’ said do it, inevitably I had to return to the same spot and clean up much more filth than I would have originally had to clean up had I just obeyed immediately. No matter how pressed I thought I was for time when told by the Boss to stop and clean, I invariably arrived where I was headed on time or the event to which I was going was postponed or canceled. Ditch cleaning never made me late.

By the way, you can gain fresh insights into just how messed up humanity is by handling some of the waste that actual human beings will toss from car windows. Soiled diapers I can understand, but why and how some of the refuse I found in ditches got into human hands to begin with remains a mystery to me. Washing feet in third world barrios is a walk in a manicured park compared to some of the American ditches I have worked in. On the upside of this line of work, you can shock people by cheerily cleaning a truck-stop restroom sans the tools of the trade while wearing a coat and tie.

During those years of ‘spontaneous’ cleaning, one of my favorite verses became, *The earth is the Lord’s and all it contains.*⁹⁶ Like Mike Rowe in the cable television series *Dirty Jobs*, mostly I had a good attitude about it but sometimes ... well sometimes I felt a little stretched.⁹⁷

A friend of mine once said that the ministry that does not begin by cleaning toilets will end up in one. While I do not know if my buddy’s pithy observation ranks alongside Solomon’s Proverbs or not, I can say, *Been there. Done that.*

Trees Bearing Fruit

We can make more general observations regards maturing from spiritual infants to spiritual children from Scriptures that make analogies between men and fruit trees.

Passages comparing men to fruit-bearing trees include Psalm 1, Psalm 52, Psalm 92 and the Song of Songs. The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel draw this same parallel as does the Bridegroom. The Bridegroom says, *For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush.*⁹⁸

The Law of Moses also communicates something important regarding fruit trees, and at first glance what Torah says can appear rather odd. Leviticus 19:23 dictates that for three years after planting, any fruit a tree yields is *uncircumcised* and unfit for consumption: *When you enter the land and plant all kinds of*

⁹⁶ Psalm 24:1; 1 Corinthians 10:26.

⁹⁷ *Dirty Jobs*; a TV series on the [Discovery Channel](https://www.discovery.com/shows/dirty-jobs) in which host [Mike Rowe](https://www.mikero.com/) is shown performing odd, disgusting or messy occupations alongside typical employees. Produced by [Pilgrim Films & Television](https://www.pilgrimfilms.com/), the series ran from 2005 until 2012. Viewed March 23, 2017 at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dirty_Jobs

⁹⁸ Luke 6:44.

*trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. Three years it shall be uncircumcised to you; it shall not be eaten. But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to the Lord God.*⁹⁹

How can a fruit tree be circumcised or uncircumcised unless it is analogous with man?

This parallel between men and fruit trees infers that any Kingdom fruit a believer bears for his first three spiritual years is produced at least in part through his natural strength, through his self-will. Kingdom fruit produced through the natural strength and self-will is unacceptable to God, for God is Spirit.¹⁰⁰ This does not mean that Kingdom fruit generated through the natural strength and self-will does not increase the Kingdom, for example my work with the parking ministry. God got something out of that. It simply means that the self-willed worker receives no recompense for his fruit. Otherwise a believer would be spiritually recognized for works accomplished through the flesh—an impossibility, for *the flesh profits nothing*.¹⁰¹

Like a fruit tree growing in the Promised Land, the fruit a believer's life bears becomes 'circumcised' and acceptable to God in his fourth spiritual year. A believer must reach the spiritual age of three years (his fourth spiritual year) before he can accomplish anything *in the power of the Spirit*.¹⁰² Meaning, at the age of three (his fourth year) he is weaned off spiritual milk and onto a diet of solid food. Then by continually eating solid spiritual food (obedience to the Spirit), the believer grows stronger and produces even more acceptable fruit. In this cycle of *eating→growing→producing; eating→growing→producing*, the spiritual believer grows *from strength to strength*.¹⁰³

Conversely the believer who continues to produce fruit through the power of natural strength and the self-will after being told by the Spirit to *grow up*, engenders negative consequences, the most dire of which is, *Away from Me. I never knew you*.¹⁰⁴ Believers have been commanded to *grow up* and in their thinking to *be mature*.¹⁰⁵ The generation of the Bride will comply with these commands to mature without regard to seemingly negative aspects of submission like truck-stop toilet cleaning or ditch cleaning because she is head-over-heels in love with her Jesus. Dirty jobs, odd jobs and filthy foot washing jobs are no problem for the lovesick Bride. They are her joy. They are her strength. They are her love for Jesus. They are the food by which she matures into the Bride.

Do you love Me?

⁹⁹ Leviticus 19:23-24.

¹⁰⁰ John 4:24.

¹⁰¹ John 6:63.

¹⁰² Luke 4:14; Romans 15:19.

¹⁰³ Psalm 84:7.

¹⁰⁴ 1 Corinthians 14:20; Matthew 7:23.

¹⁰⁵ Ephesians 4:15; 1 Corinthians 14:20.

Years ago I sat in an airport gate crowded with businessmen waiting to board an aircraft. The flight was overbooked. Every seat in the boarding area was occupied. Men stood all about. A businessman seated across from me was busy calling; he was making things happen. I heard Jesus whisper, *Tell him about Me.*

Lord, I answered, I would be embarrassed.

Tell him about me, Jesus softly said again.

I replied the same. *I would be embarrassed.*

A third time Jesus said, *Tell him about Me.*

I said what I said before.

Then Jesus whispered, *Do you love Me?*

His question cut my heart in half. I was heartbroken. Immediately I said, *I'm telling him right now!* And I did. My love for Jesus required compliance with His command.¹⁰⁶

When I consider the verse, *You are My friends if you do what I command you,* I imagine the glorious day when Jesus has as many friends as there are stars in the heavens.¹⁰⁷ That day is coming. It comes with the generation of the Bride. You can become the bride in this world in this life if you choose.

“Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”¹⁰⁸

The Bride is not like me at the airport gate. She loves Jesus far more than her own life. She leaps at every opportunity to love her Lover. For that is how she expresses her love for her Lover—through heartfelt obedience regardless of consequences.¹⁰⁹ An entire generation with her nature, the world has never seen before. But she is coming. By thousands and ten-thousands, the generation of the bride is coming, shining in the darkness like stars glittering in the night sky.

A Boy in a Linen Ephod

When Samuel was weaned from natural and spiritual milk and eating solid food both naturally and spiritually, *Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy girded with a linen ephod.*¹¹⁰ *Ministering before the Lord* means he was producing Kingdom fruit.

¹⁰⁶ John 15:13.

¹⁰⁷ John 15:13-14.

¹⁰⁸ Genesis 15:5.

¹⁰⁹ 1 John 5:3.

¹¹⁰ 1 Samuel 2:18.

Samuel had probably reached his fourth chronological year (aged three) when he was shuttled to Shiloh by his mother, but he was certainly in his fourth year spiritually. (Some rabbinical writings indicate that Samuel may have been only two years-old when he was handed over to Eli.) Whatever Samuel's chronological age when he reached Shiloh, Samuel was able to draw near to the Lord God and minister to Him because Samuel lived *in spirit and truth*.¹¹¹

Because the little boy Samuel obeyed God, he ate spiritual meat. Because he ate spiritual meat, he grew spiritually strong. As a result of his strength, he produced Kingdom fruit. Then Samuel repeated the process of eating spiritual meat, growing spiritually stronger, and producing Kingdom fruit.

Samuel's Spiritual Development Method		
<i>Step 1: Obey God</i>	→	<i>Grow spiritually Strong</i> → <i>Produce Kingdom fruit.</i>
<i>Step 2: Obey God Again</i>	→	<i>Grow spiritually Stronger</i> → <i>Produce more Kingdom fruit.</i>
<i>Step 3: Continually obey</i>	→	<i>Grow even Stronger</i> → <i>Produce great Kingdom fruit.</i>
<i>Step 4: Repeat Step 3.</i>		

Samuel's spiritual development method remains valid today, 2,900 years after showed us how to do it. The health-crazed West daily alludes to its enduring reality. *Eat well, live well*, the West says—the natural world portending spiritual realities.

I am glad that God's commands are not burdensome, otherwise I could not obey.¹¹² When His commands feel burdensome, I am thankful they only burden the self-will, for the self-will must die to make more room for the Lover to live in me, that I might love Him more. Transformed from glory to glory, one day we will behold with unveiled face *as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord*.¹¹³ Following Samuel's spiritual development method is how a child of God matures to become the Bride of Christ.

Babysitting

As families with more than one child can attest, in normal circumstances older siblings bear some level of responsibility for the younger. Even a two-year-old can assist in the care of an infant by fetching a

¹¹¹ Leviticus 10:3; John 4:23-24.

¹¹² 1 John 5:3.

¹¹³ 2 Corinthians 3:18.

diaper or carrying a bottle or by reporting danger or tears. The same holds true in the household of God, otherwise Samuel would not have been ministering to the Lord at age two. For pre-bridal Christians, those in the Child-Father relationship, the care of spiritual infants could be called *babysitting*. When the Bride of Christ babysits, it is called *parenting*. St. Paul termed parenting, *fathering*.¹¹⁴

Regards spiritual parenting it is written, *But women will be preserved through the bearing of children*.¹¹⁵ Hence we can say, *Spiritual 'women' will be preserved through the bearing of spiritual children*. Being prepared to fulfill spiritual parental responsibilities is a prerequisite for spiritual marriage. Children are produced through the marriage relationship, and the Father will not give a spiritual child to the Bridegroom. The Father gives His adult daughter away in spiritual marriage, not His child.

Biblical stories reveal the relational behavior of spiritual children performing spiritual babysitting within the household of God. One such example is Abraham rescuing Lot when Lot was taken captive in the war of the kings.¹¹⁶ We know Abraham was a spiritual child when he accomplished that daring exploit in part because his name had not fully matured—he was still known as ‘Abram.’ Abram was a natural father learning how to be a spiritual father.

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

Because a portion of today’s Church leadership primarily relate to God as His children, there is plenty of babysitting occurring in the Church. Being a spiritual babysitter is not wrong or bad but it does help explain a number of the internal, recurrent issues confronting Christendom, issues like divisions, jealousies, and limited spiritual and natural resources. When the Bridal generation emerges from the purifying fires, all this will change. We will no longer have spiritual children babysitting spiritual babes. We will have spiritual adults running the household of God. The generation of the Bride is coming, and with it, adult leadership in the household of God. Hallelujah!

I Think of Jesus

When my oldest daughter was four years old (chronologically), I recounted to her Philippians 4:8 and then asked what she thought of when pondering things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good report, excellent and worthy of praise. She immediately answered, *Daddy, I think of Jesus*. I still see her wearing that pink tutu. We were on our way to her ballet class. Obviously I was surprised by

¹¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 4:15.

¹¹⁵ 1 Timothy 2:15.

¹¹⁶ Genesis 14:14.

my little ballerina's insights into the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. My daughter's spiritual acumen revealed truth to her then 30-year-old father.

When my second daughter reached the same age—four years, her Sunday school class for their lesson acted out the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. My second daughter was selected to play one of the many who were to bow down to King Nebuchadnezzar's golden idol. But when the trumpets sounded and the drums drummed, instead of bowing down to the golden idol in obedience to the Sunday school teachers, my daughter burst into tears, brought the play to a halt and had to be removed from the classroom. She was inconsolable. On the ride home my little princess calmed enough to explain what her class had been doing and what part she was supposed to act out in the play. Then she said, *Dada, I wouldn't bow down to the golden idol even for pretend.*

O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if He doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the golden statue you have set up.¹¹⁷

Having tried my hand at acting, I can attest that pretending to sin bears spiritual consequences even when done in the context of a church play. Make-believe sin opens doors to a spiritual netherworld that the carnal mind of converts cannot conceive.

Although 'only' a church play, my daughter recognized the difference between good and evil, and she did all within her power to resist evil. In the economy of a four-year-old, she paid a steep price to follow in the footsteps of three brave Hebrew men. And like those fearless men before her, in her Father's eyes she came forth shining like the sun.

In this instance my four-year-old daughter was spiritually more mature than her adult Christian teachers, teachers who not having their spiritual senses attuned, unwittingly strolled into enemy territory. My daughter was spiritually old enough to save herself from the danger she sensed but not yet strong enough to save any with her. Consequently, beloved, chronological age is relatively unimportant in the Kingdom but spiritual age is serious business. We need to grow up. Those who will soon be the Bride in this world in this life, are growing up fast.

If you know anyone who pretends to sin even in a church play, encourage them to afterwards repent and be spiritually cleaned. If the actor is spiritually attuned, he will be surprised at the 'junk' that washes off as he repents. For me, I am standing with my daughter. I am not even pretending to sin.

Recognizing the Spiritually Mature

¹¹⁷ Daniel 3:16-18.

To recognize the spiritually mature among us, we must first honor the chronologically mature.¹¹⁸ This is a key to the Kingdom, for the natural must precede the spiritual. God says,

*You shall rise up before the gray-bearded and honor the aged.*¹¹⁹

Those who refuse to obey this command in the natural realm will never mature enough in the spiritual realm to recognize the spiritually aged, for the natural reality must come first, then follows the spiritual reality.

*And the honor of old men is their gray hair.*¹²⁰

Increasing Maturity

One Sunday I noticed an unbelieving woman standing in the church foyer. Spiritually unprompted, I proceeded to tell her about Jesus. The more I told her about Jesus, the madder she got. I said to myself, *Self, you better shut up before she jumps on your head like a wildcat and scratches your eyes out!*

Following my advice, I shut up and walked away. I was dismayed. What had I done wrong? I had won many a lost soul to the Lord Jesus Christ in this exact same manner:

- (1) Spiritually see that a person does not have Jesus,
- (2) Tell the person about Jesus and then
- (3) Ask them if they want Jesus.

Walking to my car I prayed, *Lord, she was far from you when I started telling her about You. When I quit telling her about You, she was even further away. I made a bad situation worse. I pushed her away from you. What did I do wrong?*

His smoldering reply was, *I did not tell you to tell her about Me.* Followed by profound silence.

For two weeks I dared not tell another soul about Jesus. I was too afraid.¹²¹ Then one night I picked up a hitchhiker. A few miles from his destination I stopped to buy gasoline and grab a drink. Inside the store I prayed, *Lord, may I tell him about You?*

If you want to, God replied.

¹¹⁸ Hebrews 13:17.

¹¹⁹ Leviticus 19:32. *Aged/elders*; Strong's No. H2205, zaqen; ׀ז׀.

¹²⁰ Proverbs 20:29. *Old men/elders*; Strong's No. H2205 zaqen, ׀ז׀.

¹²¹ Ecclesiastes 12:13.

If I *want to*, He said?? Those words were like offering alcohol to a thirsty drunk. Ten minutes down the road we arrived at the hitchhiker's destination. He was weeping and calling on Jesus for salvation. I was ecstatic—*drunk in the Lord*, you might say.

My purpose in relating this story is to show that at some point in traveling the pathway to spiritual adulthood, to becoming the Bride, spiritual solid food is not evangelism unless evangelism is commanded. Solid food is not leading a Bible study unless the Lover commands one to do so. Solid food is not healing the sick or visiting prisoners or fasting unless the Lover first leads you there. While these examples may not hold true for the spiritual six- or ten-year-old, they are all true for the one on the verge of attaining the age of majority. The man on the verge of majority has learned that a good deed done in disobedience is anathema to the Spirit. To love the Lover, only obedience will do.¹²²

At some point in the spiritual maturation process, it eventually becomes impossible to minister as one sees fit and at the same time love the Lover. No matter how profitable for the Kingdom one's efforts may appear to be, to minister as one wishes is to be a law unto oneself. The man who is a law unto himself—despite a lifetime of Kingdom-advancing works, will die. The Lord Jesus was serious with His warning: *And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me you who practice lawlessness."*¹²³ The spiritual adult obeys the law written on his heart and nothing else. The spiritual adult is lovesick for the Lover. Thus for the spiritual adult, only obedience will do.

*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.*¹²⁴

John Mulinde

John Mulinde's church planting team was seeing hundreds of salvations, many miracles and deliverances in war-weary Uganda when the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him in a vision. Alone in a banana plantation, kneeling with his face in the dirt, Jesus appeared to Mulinde in a light beyond brightness.¹²⁵ Jesus warned Mulinde to repent from being a law unto himself, from ministering as he saw fit.¹²⁶ Mulinde tells the story.

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

¹²² 1 John 5:3

¹²³ Matthew 7:23.

¹²⁴ John 14:15

¹²⁵ Matthew 17:2.

¹²⁶ John Mulinde; Address to Bethel Church, Redding, California; Published to YouTube on March 17, 2015; viewed January 16, 2017; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXWbPZXB9lc>.

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

I can’t describe the shock that came upon me, [Mulinde explained.] I think it was shock. I didn’t even respond. It hit me.

And He said again, “I wouldn’t take you for it is written, ‘He will appear to those who wait upon Him.’”¹²⁷ You are not living your life as a person waiting upon Me. You are allowing all kinds of filth to come into your life. You are living like one who cares not.”

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

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

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

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

Rebuked by Jesus among the banana trees, Mulinde and his Ugandan team spent several days in heartfelt repentance, begging the Lord to totally clean them. Following repentance, Jesus appeared to Mulinde a second time. This time, Mulinde said that Jesus spoke to him as one who was broken hearted. Mulinde described Jesus’ voice as full of weeping and sobbing.

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

¹²⁷ Hebrews 9:28.

“But My people have turned away from that, Jesus said. They have chosen to go back to living their human lives, human effort, human desires, human wisdom and human will. ...”

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

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

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

“I paid for everything, Jesus continued. It is a finished work. But they have chosen to live below it. My heart is grieving because the Day of the Lord is near. The Day is coming. ... It is a day of agony, a day of wailing, a day that no man can stand¹²⁸. ... My people are not ready, My people are not anywhere near readiness and My heart grieves for them. I have done everything to set them free. They don't need any other thing but that which was done.”

Beloved, Mulinde's sobering testimony is a clarion call for sea change in the Church. Believers cannot continue to compromise, not an iota. Even when lacking understanding as to why a command of God is given, we must comply as best we can. We must give our whole heart to obedience. Obedience alone will transform us into the image and likeness of Christ. Our obedience will change the world. Nothing else matters. Our obedience is love for God.

As the English Lord Tennyson wrote of duty-bound soldiers,

*Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do & die,
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.¹²⁹*

*Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley'd & thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,*

¹²⁸ Isaiah 2:12; Isaiah 13:6-9; Joel 2:1; Amos 5:18-20; 1 Corinthians 5:5.

¹²⁹ Selection taken from *Charge of the Light Brigade* (1854) by Alfred, Lord Tennyson; memorializing events in the Battle of Balaclava, October 25, 1854.

*Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred.*

We must hate sin and flee from evil. We must pursue the sanctification without which none will see the Lord.¹³⁰ The generation of the Bride will do just that, obeying her Lover come what may, all the way, even into the jaws of death, even into the mouth of Hell, boldly we must ride and well. While we will die to ourselves on this mission, we cannot fail.

Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.¹³¹

The one who has matured into the Bride has forgotten herself, her people and her Father's house.¹³² She has died to herself. She is no naval gazer. Lovesick, she only has eyes for Jesus. She only cares about love. She is only concerned with obedience.

Stand Firm

I have not yet met the man who always clearly hears the voice of the Lord, although such men are out there and a generation of them is at hand. That generation is the generation of the Bride.

In times when the Lord's voice seems indiscernible to me, I have found it best to keep doing what I was last told to do. And when that mission ends, I have learned to wait, praying, *Jesus, I cannot bear your voice. I will be still and listen. Speak to me so I can bear.*

When I have done everything, I try to stand firm.¹³³ Sometimes it is all I can do just to stand, holding onto my Hope by a silver thread.¹³⁴ And that beloved, is okay with the Lover. The truth is that apart from God's power we cannot even stand. Apart from the Bridegroom, the Bride does not want to stand. She would rather die than live a day without her Lover. She would rather perish than act in presumption.

I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.¹³⁵

Following Instructions

¹³⁰ Hebrews 12:14.

¹³¹ Matthew 16:18 (KJV).

¹³² Psalm 45:10-11.

¹³³ Ephesians 6:13

¹³⁴ Ecclesiastes 12:6.

¹³⁵ Psalm 84:10.

During a period of civil unrest in South Africa, a friend of mine heard a knock on his door. Outside stood an African he had never met before. The visitor's name was Moses.¹³⁶ Moses said rioters burned his home to the ground and the Lord led him to my friend's door. All Moses had left was a Bible and an old bicycle.

My friend settled Moses in a room and went about his business. Four days later the housekeeper reported to my friend that the refugee had not eaten since arriving. My friend hurried to find his guest prostrate on the floor. He was afraid Moses had died. Moses had not died. Moses had been lying before the Lord. As my friend stood gaping, Moses arose. Moses announced that he had heard from God. He had to go. My friend decided to take him.

My friend drove Moses several hours to where the road ended at a goat path in the Drakensburg Mountains. There, Zulu women were washing clothes in a natural pool. Moses got out of the truck and told the women why he had come. Some left their washing and went up the mountain to bring down the men of the village. More than a hundred people eventually appeared around the pool.

Following the instructions the Lord had given him, Moses told the Zulus about Jesus. He cast out demons, healed the sick and led most of the villagers to Christ. Moses then baptized the new believers in the mountain pool, including the witch doctor that had slithered up on his belly like a snake before being delivered and saved. Moses installed church leaders and promised the new Christians that he would come back. Then Moses told my friend that God released them to return home.

Beloved, this church plant took four days of fasting and prayer and three days of Gospel work. It was done in absolute reliance upon the living God by a man who owned nothing but a Bible and a bicycle and a tag-along helper—an infant in Christ who thought it would be decent of him to drive his truck instead of making the evangelist pedal his bicycle several hundred miles. This story is a picture of what it means to be clothed with power from on high.¹³⁷ Moses' life is normal Christianity. Moses' ways are the ways of the Bride. The Bride walks by the Spirit. She is filled with supernatural power to obey.

Fizzling Out

Failing to continually submit to God explains why some ministers and ministries fizzle out. Along the pathway of maturity, they are commanded to do something new or to do something old in a new way, or to quietly wait and do nothing at all. But the ministers refuse 'to risk' ministering in the new untested manner.

¹³⁶ This story about Moses is detailed in *The Prophetic Pathway*, a book by Ron Campbell; pp. 73-76; Sound the Trumpet Publications; 2016; www.soundthetrumpet.org.

¹³⁷ Luke 24:49.

For those who refuse to obey new commands, that which was once blessed obedience suddenly becomes nothing more than dead works. If not arrested, ministering via dead works will result in a slow fizzling slide into darkness. Something like this almost happened to another Moses, the Moses who led Israel out of Egypt.

In Exodus 17:6, God commanded to Moses to provide water for the people by striking the rock. Moses obeyed God and water flowed and his ministry was successful. Later in Numbers 20:8, the people again needed water. This time God commanded Moses to provide for the needs of the people by speaking to the rock. Instead of submitting to this new ministry plan, Moses did as he did the first time; he struck the rock. He did not obey and speak to the rock. In both instances the needs of the congregation were met by Moses. But here is the lesson.

For ministering ‘successfully’ in a noncompliant manner, Moses was barred from entering the Promised Land. This is a serious lesson to learn, at least for those who will be the Bride.

Beloved, I am not saying that Moses is not in heaven. Moses appeared with the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. But I am saying that the words, *I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness*, should stir up fear in the hearts of the disobedient and bring utter sobriety to the minds of all saints.¹³⁸

The generation of the Bride is coming. A million men like the South African Moses are about to march, pedal and hitchhike their way across the earth, conquering like the army of the Lord. The Bridal generation will march in absolute obedience to the Bridegroom. In so doing, the Bridal generation will wield the supernatural power of the Bridegroom because the Bride is one with the Bridegroom. Already this revolution has begun. You are called to join.

The Last Reformation

Torben Søndergaard of Denmark has taken a place in the vanguard. He calls this revolution ‘the last reformation,’ saying,

*We believe that the church is facing a last reformation. A reformation that will go deeper than any reformation before—away from church traditions, suffocating structures and countless meetings in church buildings. We believe that it is a reformation where we get back to what we read in the Acts: A simple disciple-life led by the Holy Spirit where the kingdom of God comes near in homes, on the streets, in shops—yes, all places where people are.*¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Matthew 7:23.

¹³⁹ The Last Reformation; home page; viewed January 17, 2017; <http://thelastreformation.com>.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=zka4DUYe15g.

If you want to see the revolution in action, some of S ndergaard's efforts are recorded in a movie entitled, *The Last reformation: The Beginning*, viewable free-of-charge on YouTube.¹⁴⁰

To conclude this chapter on infants in Christ, we must understand that a believer's spiritual age has no correlation to his circumnavigations of the Sun. A man could be a Christian for 80 solar years and remain an infant in Christ for 75. Or he could be four years old like Samuel and minister to the Lord. Titles and diplomas do not equate with spiritual maturity. While on earth the Bridegroom held no diploma. He pastored no synagogue. He was awarded no earthly honorifics and was remiss to advertise His heavenly ones.

If a spiritual baby chooses to exercise his right to mature by drinking the spiritual milk he needs, and if he grows enough to begin eating spiritual meat by obeying the laws written on his heart, then he will mature from being a self-willed babe in Christ into a spiritually minded child of God far faster than I did. Every believer must mature from spiritual babyhood into spiritual childhood before he can mature to spiritual adulthood. Spiritual adulthood means being the Bride.

The day I decamped leadership of the parking ministry and began work as God's secret crud cleaner was the day I turned three years old spiritually. The day I became a ditch diver and toilet-bowl beautifier was the day I matured into a child of God. Chronologically I was 30 when this graduation occurred, and I had been earnestly pursuing God for four years. And for a year I had been pastoring 49 men all through my self-will.

Beloved, we must grow up. Those who will be the Bride will grow up.

¹⁴⁰ Viewable for free on YouTube.

Spiritual Children

Beloved, now we are children of God.¹⁴¹

A church service I once attended had about 800 people in attendance. Near the end of the service up to the front paraded a group that had been practicing prophesying. These 'PIT's' (prophesiers in training) began calling out individual pew sitters and by the Spirit, encouraging them. The final salvo of encouragement was aimed at a man who looked like he did not belong in that group of believers.¹⁴² The PIT said something like this to the one man in 800 who did not belong, *You have placed yourself on the altar of the Lord and you refuse to remove yourself from the flames.*

The one prophesying did not know the man but the Spirit knew him. Moreover the Spirit sustaining that man amid the flames was the same Spirit that stood with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace. Because the Holy Spirit empowered the man, he could remain on the altar to the end. He could be *a living and holy sacrifice.*

One key difference between a believer becoming *a living and holy sacrifice* and a Levitical animal sacrifice is that the believer's self-sacrifice is voluntary while the animal has no choice. Since our sacrifice is voluntary, a half-hearted commitment to endure the flames of unjust suffering will never be enough to go all the way. Like Jesus committing Himself to the Father's will in the Garden of Gethsemane, the believer who finds himself in the fiery furnace must totally commit to dying to self before being able to do so.

Some wag once said that the problem with living sacrifices is that they keep crawling off the altar. This allusion to immature Christians avoiding the Baptism of Fire is regrettably spot on. One Sunday you will hear these dear brothers and sisters shouting for God's fire to fall, and then the following Sunday you will watch the same saints flail away against the Devil in hopes of escaping the fire God sent. Instead of helping these holy ones crawl off the fiery altar by rebuking the Devil or instead of encouraging them to change their God-given circumstances or instead of causing them to hope in humanistic coping mechanisms, those who become the Bride will teach and encourage believers to rejoice in the Fire of unjust suffering. The Bride knows first-hand that there is no other means by which believers can put the self-will to death and be conformed into the image of Christ. The Baptism of Fire is the means by which believers become acceptable marriage material.¹⁴³ To avoid unjust suffering is to avoid the marriage supper of the Lamb. Go all the way.

¹⁴¹ 1 John 3:2.

¹⁴² The middle-aged man was the author.

¹⁴³ Romans 8:29.

While the less mature child of God may seek to escape the Refiner's Fire, the one determined to become the Bride will never try to save himself from unjust suffering. The one who becomes the Bride has decided to follow in the footsteps of the Lamb led silently to slaughter. Such a believer has decided that either God will deliver him from unjust suffering or he will not be delivered. He is going all the way.

[B]ut to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.¹⁴⁴

The One who *looks like the Son of God* accompanies all who determine to follow the Lover no matter how undeservedly hot and unfairly uncomfortable their lives become.¹⁴⁵ As it is written, *if we are to share His glory, we must also share his suffering.*¹⁴⁶

Like the one among 800 whom the prophetic girl saw simmering away on the altar of the Lord, the child of God nearing the age of majority recognizes unjust suffering as a necessary blessing. The one about to become the Bride desires to be finished with the bonds of self-will. The one who is lovesick for Jesus has learned that the Destroyer was created to crucify the self-will, that his own nature is eternally transformed as he seeks refuge ever deeper in the nature of his one and only Lover, the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁷

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.¹⁴⁸

Despite being able to crawl off the blazing altar, the man who loves Jesus wholeheartedly endures the flames. The one who presses on to the end realizes that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego lost nothing in Nebuchadnezzar's fire except earthly bonds. The man who goes all the way knows that the three Hebrews met the Lord face-to-face when the heat was its hottest. He knows that despite possessing the ability to walk out of the conflagration at any time, he like the three Hebrews refuses to leave the flames until summoned forth by *the king.*¹⁴⁹

The man who will be the Bride endures the purifying baptism of fire until the cords of death no longer have a hold on him. He finds courage in the power of the Spirit to totally sacrifice himself that his Lover might live. Such a man is totally in love with Jesus. He will be the bride.

¹⁴⁴ 1 Peter 4:13.

¹⁴⁵ Daniel 3:16-20, 25.

¹⁴⁶ Romans 8:17 (NLT).

¹⁴⁷ Isaiah 54:16.

¹⁴⁸ James 1:2-4.

¹⁴⁹ Daniel 3:26-28.

Helicopter ambulance dust-off pilot Patrick Brady won the United States' highest award for valor, the Medal of Honor, in the Vietnam War in 1969. In an interview Brady described the courage required for total self-sacrifice.

But there is one way in which we are all equal. Only one way. That's in matters of courage. All of us can have all the courage we want. And that's the key to success in life. That's [sic] important that our children look at that and say courage is a good thing. Sacrifice is a good thing. The sacrifice of a soldier is a particularly good thing because there is no bottom line to it.

People will sacrifice in society but usually there's a bottom line. They're gonna make something out of it. Not a soldier. All it [sacrifice] does for a soldier is increase his capacity for more sacrifice. And also for more responsibility. So that kind of sacrifice is very, very important. And people who have the Medal [of Honor] should be able to stand for that kind of a sacrifice.¹⁵⁰

In words similar to those of Brady, the Lord Jesus encourages believers to, *Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.*¹⁵¹ The Lord says this because He wants His bride. The Lord knows that to become the Bride, believers must willingly share in the sufferings of Christ. They must have courage for self-sacrifice. They must go to the end of themselves before they can be married.

Mature for Marriage

In an orthodox marriage ceremony, the officiant asks, *Who gives this woman to be married?* The officiant does not ask, *Who gives this child?* Children are not given in marriage by their father, adult women are. To this question the bride's father responds, *I do.* This is the natural. In spiritual marriage, the same thing occurs.¹⁵²

A spiritual child is not given *in* marriage by the Father until the child is prepared *for* marriage. This is because a child remains immature and unready for marriage. In marriage both parties must be adults.

Just as there are differences in spiritual maturity between the child of God and the infant in Christ, there are also developmental distinctions between the child of God and the Bride of Christ. The child and the Bride do not have the same level of maturity. The Bride is a spiritual adult, the child is not. The spiritual child is not ready for marriage, and the Father knows this. The Father will never give His non-adult child away in marriage. This statement is contrary to popular dogma but the Scriptures back me up.

¹⁵⁰ www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrcPyvriDuY. Viewed March 3, 2017.

¹⁵¹ 2 Timothy 2:3.

¹⁵² 1 Corinthians 15:46.

One of the key processes by which the spiritual child matures into the Bride is *suffering for the sake of righteousness*.¹⁵³ Suffering unjustly for having done what is right is occasionally confused with the discipline that the Father metes out for disobedience. Unjust suffering and discipline are far from the same. They are not the same.

Discipline is meted out by the Father measure for measure, and discipline is always age appropriate. While discipline is a necessary part of the spiritual maturation process for spiritual children, we will not address it here except to say that the nearer to the wedding one gets, the stricter the behavioral standard becomes. Even in the natural world the disciplinary standard progressively tightens. Meaning, parents do not hold their kindergartner and their teenager to the same behavioral expectations, nor do the courts.

The closer I came to the wedding vision, the less and less wiggle room the Father allowed for immature behavior. Eventually the behavioral bar was so high that I knew that if I did the slightest act or inaction contrary to what I knew was required, harsh discipline was quickly forthcoming. As I neared the wedding, I was fully accountable to the Father for every wrong committed with nary an inch to wiggle. There is no glory in being disciplined. But enough about discipline. *Suffering for the sake of righteousness* is an altogether different animal.

To bear up under unjust suffering one must be courageous, selfless, patient, determined and brave. In a word, noble. To be equally yoked to the Bridegroom, the bride-to-be proves her nobility. She is given opportunity to demonstrate her total love, her absolute selflessness, her heavenly nobility, not just to the Bridegroom but also to the witnesses. The witnesses are spiritual beings.

*For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.*¹⁵⁴

Suffering as a result of obedience finds favor with God. Such suffering is an integral cog in the wheel of normal Christianity. Unjust suffering matures us and makes us irresistible to the Lover. It justifies God ‘the Bridegroom’ becoming one with man ‘the Bride.’

Unjust suffering has numerous Biblical monikers to include:

1. Being persecuted for the sake of righteousness (Matt. 5:10-12)
2. Sharing the cup of Christ (Mark 10:38-39)
3. The baptism of fire (Luke 3:16)
4. Being a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1)

¹⁵³ 1 Peter 3:14.

¹⁵⁴ 1 Peter 2:20.

5. Being crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20)
6. The fellowship of His sufferings (Phil. 3:10)
7. Dying with Christ (Col. 2:20)
8. The steadfastness of Christ (2 Thess. 3:5)
9. Suffering for the sake of the gospel (2 Tim. 1:8)
10. Enduring a great conflict of suffering (Heb. 10:32)
11. The endurance of Job (James 5:11)
12. The fiery ordeal (1 Peter 4:12-19)
13. The tribulation and perseverance of Jesus (Rev. 1:9)

Suffering unjustly—sometimes at the hands of fellow believers, is a normal part of the Christian life, normal at least for those who will be the Bride. Unjust suffering makes believers worthy of the Bridegroom, the One who suffered at the hands of believers and unbelievers alike.¹⁵⁵ As the Bridegroom explained, *And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy [axios] of Me.*¹⁵⁶ The Bride is the believer who has become *worthy* of the Bridegroom.

Worthy

Worthy comes from the Greek transliteration, *axios*.¹⁵⁷ This is important to know. *Axios* means being equal in value, weighing the same, befitting, congruous, perfectly corresponding, well matched.

Axios describes Romeo and Juliet, the star-cross'd lovers who were, as Shakespeare described, *both alike in dignity*. When a believer becomes *axios* of the Bridegroom, then that believer is a perfect match for the Bridegroom; the *axios* believer is worthy of entering into the marriage relationship.

The one who has become worthy of marriage is *kallah*. *Kallah* translates to English as *bride*, *daughter-in-law* and *wife*. The root word for *kallah* is *kalal*, meaning *made perfect* or *perfected one*. If a believer is *axios* of the Bridegroom then we can also say that believer is *kalal*—made perfect.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ John 8:39.

¹⁵⁶ Matthew 10:38.

¹⁵⁷ *Axios*; Strong's No. G514; ἄξιός.

¹⁵⁸ Romans 7:13-25.

The Lawgiver commands believers *to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*; the axios Bride is: *My sister, my darling, my dove, my perfect one!*¹⁵⁹

While God's command that believers be perfect might seem unrealistic or unfair to the spiritual child, the truth is that we are clothed with power from on high and baptized with fire so that we might become perfect. Once perfected, we become axios of the Bridegroom. It is God's original plan that fallen man be re-perfected in Him, through Him and for Him. God has made a way for man to dwell again with Him in the Garden of Eden, the Land of Marriage.

To measure up to the Bridegroom, to become alike in dignity and worthy of intimacy with Him, lovers of the Lover carry their own cross to their own Calvary, choosing death to their self-will in order that their Lover might live. Following in the footsteps of the Bridegroom to the very end, the ones who are lovesick for Jesus become like Him in their life, in their death and in their resurrection. Not in some futuristic world to come, but in this world in this life.

As Jesus totally loved them, so they totally love Jesus; and totally loving Jesus, they become worthy of Jesus.

*For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.*¹⁶⁰

To be clear, I am *not* intoning that believers who enter into the Bridal relationship become some form of God; equality with God is not a thing to be grasped. There is only one Christ and His name is Jesus of Nazareth. Rather I am saying that followers of Christ are to empty themselves of themselves for His sake.¹⁶¹ Through the patient endurance of unjust suffering and with persistent obedience regardless of cost (and it costs all), the follower of Christ becomes worthy of Christ, the One who Himself paid all. There is no other way to become worthy of the Bridegroom. You must pay all.

Emptying themselves of themselves is the same way the Bridegroom overcame. We might call this process of self-emptying, obedient self-sacrifice. Thus the sacrament of Communion ("common-union") celebrates the Lover's death until He comes and not His life. Said another way, Communion celebrates the union that the two lovers enjoy because each died to self in order that their lover might live. The Bride and Bridegroom each died to themselves for the sake of the other. Imagine the spiritual newlyweds' first conversation after union:

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

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

¹⁵⁹ Matthew 5:48; Song of Songs 5:2.

¹⁶⁰ Romans 6:5.

¹⁶¹ Philippians 2:6-7.

This conversation or something like it, I believe, would be appropriate to call to mind when taking Communion, for *all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death.*¹⁶² And His death is death to self that the one loved might fully live. How could we love Him more?

St. Paul expressed this sentiment to the Philippians this way: *Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, ... that I may know ... the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.*¹⁶³

Hmm.... *baptized into His death ... suffering the loss of everything ... fellowshiping in His sufferings ... conforming my life to His death.* Did disciples of Christ really sign up for all that?

Don Finto in his book, *Prepare!*, gracefully explains the mystery of the self-will's death. Finto says it is the seminal event that precedes true life. Finto writes,

*Here in the West in our attempt to bring more of the unsaved to Jesus, we often do them a disservice by giving them the impression that life will be much easier when they commit their lives to following the Lord. Scripture paints a different picture. Though we have a secure and magnificent future, the path into that future is not always one of ease. Every biblical hero from Genesis to Revelation demonstrates this.*¹⁶⁴

All who become intimates of the Lion first die like the Lamb. Thus the life stories of those who become the Bride always reflect the story of the Bridegroom. The Bride became the Bride and Bridegroom became the Bridegroom by emptying themselves of themselves for the sake of the other. Believers who become the Bride do not just have faith that Jesus will save them from eternal death. They go further. They travel with Him into His death. They go all the way.

I have been beating around the bush about the statement I'm about to make next. Admittedly it contradicts some long-held teachings of the church. Using C.S. Lewis's words I confess that *I may be thinking I have got there when I have not. I can only ask instructed Christians to watch very carefully, and tell me when I go wrong; and others to take what I say with a grain of salt—as something offered, because it may be a help, not because I am certain I am right.*¹⁶⁵

Here is what I am thinking; even more so, this is the truth: The Church in toto is not the Bride. Only some people in the Church will pay the price required to become the Bride. The rest of the people in God's house will experience regret for not going all the way. Go all the way.

Like Abraham's nephew Lot, not every soul that God declares righteous follows the pathway of faith to its greatest end. Rather only those who totally crucify their self-will in hopes that the Lover might live will become the Bride. The rest will have their seed of righteousness but they will not have the

¹⁶² Romans 6:3.

¹⁶³ Philippians 3:8, 10.

¹⁶⁴ *Prepare!*; Don Finto; Caleb Publications; 2015; pg. 40.

¹⁶⁵ *Mere Christianity*; Book 1; *Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe*; Chapter 12: *Faith*.

Bridegroom. They loved in part but not with all. They did not go all the way to the end of themselves that Christ might fully live.

The Bridegroom drew this line of demarcation between the Father's dependents (His spiritual infants and His spiritual children) and the Bridegroom's Bride this way: *And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.*¹⁶⁶

Since there is no suffering or death in heaven, how will those who enter heaven as spiritual infants or spiritual children suffer and die with Christ to become worthy of the Bridegroom? They will not. Only the spiritually foolish and the spiritually immature long for the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord will not be a day of rejoicing. It will be a day of weeping. It will be a day of regret.

Alas, you who are longing for the day of the Lord,

For what purpose will the day of the Lord be to you?

*It will be darkness and not light.*¹⁶⁷

Like you I am thankful that the Father of heavenly lights does not change like shifting shadows. Not because our Father removes from His presence those who repeatedly choose to improperly relate to Him or because those who properly relate carry their cross to their personal Calvary. Rather I am thankful that God does not change because when we conform ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ's plans for our lives in the natural realm, He blesses us with Himself in the spiritual realm. Our cross is for a time, but the Lover's gift of Himself to His Bride endures forever. The Bride gets all of the Bridegroom forever because she carried her cross to the end of herself and there she became axis of Him.

In the 15th Century, Thomas à Kempis put it like this: *In the Cross is salvation; in the Cross is life; in the Cross is protection against our enemies; in the Cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness; in the Cross is strength of mind; in the Cross is joy of spirit; in the Cross is excellence of virtue; in the Cross is perfection of holiness. There is no salvation of soul, nor hope of eternal life, save in the Cross.*¹⁶⁸

One's personal cross is nothing to be feared, beloved. One's cross is the 'sole' mechanism by which All is gained. Unjust suffering causes the things of the soul that are not of Christ's nature to be exposed and dealt with so that those who love the Lord Jesus with all might fully conform to His nature and thereby become worthy of Him. The more unjust suffering one patiently endures, the more intrinsically beautiful he becomes to the Bridegroom.

¹⁶⁶ Matthew 10:38.

¹⁶⁷ Amos 5:18.

¹⁶⁸ *The Inner Life*; Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471).

Amish bishop Ben Girod authored a fine book on suffering for the sake of righteousness. Girod's book is entitled, *Baptized by Fire, The Gethsemane Way*.¹⁶⁹ Girod is a man of God conformed to Christ's image through years of unjust suffering and steadfast love for Jesus. I recommend Girod's books.

John the Baptizer

John the Baptist knew a lot about baptizing, and the Lord Jesus called John a great prophet.¹⁷⁰ John knew some things. John said, *As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, ... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*¹⁷¹ According to John there are three baptisms.

1. Water
2. The Holy Spirit and
3. Fire

While you likely know something of the brouhaha in the Church surrounding the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, you may be surprised to learn that some factions of the Church continue to struggle with adult Water Baptism. Over the past 500 years many saints have literally *died with Christ* at the hands of fellow Christians for breathing life again into adult Water Baptism—Anabaptists, chief among these martyrs.¹⁷² If you are interested in learning more about this particular struggle, Anabaptistconnections.org is a good place to start.

Regards the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, dogmatic misrepresentations have instigated some believers to act like Brother Cain towards Brother Able, at least figuratively. *Brothers, this ought not be.*¹⁷³

1. *Now the deeds of the flesh are evident: ... disputes, dissensions, factions ... and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*¹⁷⁴
2. *Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. ... All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?*¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ Good Catch Publishing, 2006, 105 pages. www.anabaptistconnections.org.

¹⁷⁰ Luke 7:28.

¹⁷¹ Matthew 3:11.

¹⁷² Romans 6:8; Colossians 2:20.

¹⁷³ James 3:10.

¹⁷⁴ Galatians 5:19-21.

¹⁷⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:27, 30.

These scriptures indicate that believers who do not possess gifts of tongues or gifts of healing are no less a part of Christ's body than those who do. These scriptures also make plain that those who argue that the presence of these gifts is proof-positive evidence of salvation are in danger of hellfire.

Members of Christ's body who are determined to become the Bride inevitably cease disparaging other members of the Bridegroom's body. Mature believers know that doing so sullies herself as much as it denigrates her Lover. The Bride and the Bridegroom are one.¹⁷⁶

What must the world think of the civil wars we Christians fight when even the world possesses carnal knowledge of brotherly love? We who call ourselves by the name of the Prince of Peace—having access to all wisdom, power and grace—should not be put to shame by those who do not know Love, for our *God is love*.¹⁷⁷ And yet Christendom has not yet attain to the world's standard of love. Consider the Hippocratic Oath.

The Hippocratic Oath originated in the fourth century BCE.¹⁷⁸ This pledge is taken by medical practitioners whose natural profession is to save, heal, protect and preserve bodies of dust. Many medical professionals who subscribe to this oath do not know the Author of Love, and yet they commit themselves save others. Some of these doctors are more sincere in their love for others than we Christians are. This to our shame, is prima facia evidence of our general immaturity. It points accusingly at our childishness. The church in large part has refused to grow up. But she will.

The generation of the Bride is coming and in her train, a sea change. The Bride will remake the church. She will raise the Father's children. Our corporate behavior will shut the mouths of those who now ridicule us for hypocrisy. The day comes when world will see our good deeds and praise God.¹⁷⁹ The world will praise God because the Bride and the Bridegroom are one.

*[T]hat they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.*¹⁸⁰

Name and Nature

¹⁷⁶ Ephesians 5:31

¹⁷⁷ 1 John 4:8.

¹⁷⁸ Addendum

¹⁷⁹ Matthew 5:16.

¹⁸⁰ John 17:21-23.

The Biblical paradigms of natural marriage are integral to spiritual marriage, for *the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then [comes] the spiritual.*¹⁸¹

After a woman is married in the natural realm, she remains a child *of* her father, but she is no longer a child *to* her father. Her father has given her away. Married, the woman belongs to a new man. She belongs to her husband. Belonging to a new man, she takes on a new identity—the identity of her husband. Receiving a new identity, the woman receives a new name.

When the *I do's* of the marriage ceremony are all said, *Miss 'Father'* becomes *Mrs. 'Husband.'* The same aisle the bride proceeded down on the right arm of her father, she now walks up on the right arm of her husband. In the natural realm, Jacob called Rachel his *right hand*.¹⁸² This is the natural reality. The spiritual reality of a wife at her husband's right hand is this: The right hand of the spiritual Husband is the spiritual Bride's rightful place. At the right hand of Jesus sits those who have become the Bride of Jesus.

In addition to a new name, the natural bride receives from her natural husband a new nature, a little at first and more over time. While the child, 'Miss Father', will never manage the household checkbook, 'Mrs. Husband' might because *the heart of her husband trusts in her and he will have no lack of gain.*¹⁸³ The spiritual implications of this verse are awesome to consider.

Just as the Lord Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of the Father and the two are One essence, so the Bride, in the uniqueness of her design, has the nature of the Bridegroom. She is one essence with Him. The Bride sits at the Lord Jesus' right hand, and the two live in union.¹⁸⁴ Hence, two differences between the spiritual child of the Father and the Bride of Christ are *name* and *nature*. Or maybe *name* and *nature* are the same and the difference is singular. By this I mean that the Father and child are two *as* two, while the Bridegroom and Bride are two *as* one.

Submitting vs. Obeying

Another difference between the spiritual child of the Father and the Bride of Christ is found in the verbs the Bible employs to describe a natural child's responsibility to his earthly father and the natural bride's responsibility to her earthly husband. While the verbs used are different, they cause the same result: Compliance with the man's designs, whether the man be the father or the husband.

¹⁸¹ 1 Corinthians 15:46.

¹⁸² Genesis 35:18; Benjamin means *son of my right hand*.

¹⁸³ Proverbs 31:11.

¹⁸⁴ Ephesians 1:20; John 10:30.

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

God instructs the natural child *to obey* (*hypakouō*) his father.¹⁸⁵ On the other hand, the natural wife is commanded by God *to submit to* (*hypotassō*) and *to fear* (*phobeō*) her husband.¹⁸⁶ While these three differing verbs yield the same result—compliance, the wife’s responsibility *to submit* and *to fear* carry a different and important connotation when compared to the child’s duty *to obey*.

To submit indicates that the wife bears full responsibility for the results of her choice to comply with or rebel against the desires of her husband. Likewise, *to fear* implies that the wife has the ability to choose how she regards her husband. She may choose to hold him in contempt or she may decide to treat him with respect and honor. Because the bride is an adult, how she views her husband is her choice. Regardless of her husband’s character or actions, the wife, being an adult, is totally responsible to God for her behavior. How she conducts herself towards the man she consented to marry is a moment-to-moment decision made by her alone. Her conduct is unrelated to the demeanor of her husband. To say otherwise may sound wise but it is unbiblical. It is childish.

Most men when observing a woman treating her husband with contempt, intuitively understand that the woman acts disgracefully. Most men also understand that the only honorable choice a disgraced husband has is to endure the contempt of his wife and suffer or remove his presence from the intemperate woman and suffer. Either way, a wife’s disgraceful behavior causes her husband to suffer, for the disgraceful wife belongs to the husband in the same fashion that the crown of thorns belonged to the Christ. Christ could have refused the crown of thorns but He chose to endure it.¹⁸⁷ He suffered the contempt.

[F]ixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Ephesians 6:1. *Hypakouō*: Strong’s No. G5219; ὑπακούω.

¹⁸⁶ Ephesians 5:24, 5:33. *Hypotassō*: Strong’s No. G5293; ὑποτάσσω. *Phobeō*: Strong’s No. G5399; φοβέω.

¹⁸⁷ Matthew 26:53.

¹⁸⁸ Hebrews 12:2.

Thus we encourage the disgraced husband to stand fast, reminding him that he is a type and shadow of his wife's Kinsman Redeemer; and that as he endures, he shares in the sufferings of the Christ.¹⁸⁹

If the 'Kinsman Redeemer' husband abandons his intemperate wife, what hope will she have of redemption? The husband who endures the shame she causes in hopes that his wife might share in the Redeemer's nature and glory.¹⁹⁰ God has called such a man to stand in the gap for his wife even as Adam sacrificed himself for Eve and Christ sacrificed Himself for man.¹⁹¹ The believing husband is, according to Scriptures, a type of Redeemer to his wife. The husband is to conduct himself as such even in the face of unjust and public shame. To redeem his wife is the high calling of the husband.

*For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.*¹⁹²

A man I know was being treated shamefully by his wife. The woman vociferously cursed him and spit on him yet he stood fast, enduring her abuse. As he endured, a supernatural white light appeared all around him. The supernatural light encapsulated him in perfect peace. Nothing his raging wife said or did could penetrate the light or disturb his tranquility. Looking out through the light, his wife's face appeared demonically disfigured; she did not seem in control of herself. The man felt deep empathy towards the woman even as she raged against him. In this man's supernatural experience, he shared the aching that his Lover endures when those whom the Lover would marry act shamefully towards Him. Beloved, we should be informed. Regardless the circumstances, it is against God and Him only that we sin.¹⁹³ And our sin causes Him deep heartache.

While a natural child receives his father's discipline for disobedience, the natural wife—even a wife like Hosea's Gomer, cannot be disciplined for rebellion or disrespect. She cannot be disciplined for any disgraceful behavior. She cannot be disciplined by her husband or by her father. The wife no longer belongs to her father; he gave her away. She belongs to her husband. And while her disrespectful behavior directly impacts her husband and his children, she is responsible to God for her behavior, not to her husband. A wife may help build her husband's house or she may tear it down. She is an adult, and how she chooses to behave is untied to her circumstances. Her behavior is her choice alone.

*A continual dripping on a rainy day and a quarrelsome wife are alike; to restrain her is to restrain the wind or to grasp oil in one's right hand.*¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ 1 Corinthians 16:13.

¹⁹⁰ Romans 8:17.

¹⁹¹ 1 Timothy 2:14.

¹⁹² Ephesians 5:23.

¹⁹³ Psalm 51:4.

¹⁹⁴ Proverbs 27:15-16 (ESV).

The husband of a contentious wife is not responsible for his wife's actions even if those actions destroy his own house, be that house his body (as Christ was crucified) or his family (as Gomer hurt Hosea's heart and children), or his finances. The woman who knowingly allows some evil into her husband's house—be that house physical or spiritual, is accountable to God for the destruction she allows. The godly husband is to resist her destructive behavior in love, but he cannot restrain her. She is an adult, responsible to God. The husband is to love her, and let God deal with her, for God's house will stand.

*A house divided cannot stand.*¹⁹⁵

Beloved, I am acquainted with the things I write.

Desirous to Repent

Two weeks following my vision of marriage to Jesus, the Bridegroom said to me, *I will no longer discipline you*. Foolishly I thought I had a pocket full of Monopoly 'Get-Out-of-Jail-Free' cards and so proceeded to disobey.¹⁹⁶ As the Bride, I alone bore the responsibility of my disobedience.

As I was disobeying, I saw a vision. I saw that my disobedience was like wearing fine white wedding clothes and choosing to play in a pig sty. All the while my Beloved stood just beyond the pig sty fence, weeping. The time I wasted in the mud pit, I should have been walking hand-in-hand with my Lover. I am sure Satan enjoyed my utterly disgraceful and shameful behavior. I am not intentionally going there again.

*[S]he who shames him is like rotteness in his bones.*¹⁹⁷

The worst repercussion of my choice to rebel against my Lover and play with the pigs was the heartbreak I endured for hurting my Lover's heart. Next worst, I had to wrestle with the fact that by giving my self-will free rein, I harmed my Lover's house and His children. Of tertiary importance, my disgraceful behavior harmed me. That is the true order of pain the spiritual Bride endures for choosing to sin. The deepness of the pain she causes brings about her repentance. Her personal agony engenders a heartfelt recommitment to submit to her Husband.

Illuminating these supernal realities, God commands the believing wife to subject herself to her natural husband *in everything*.¹⁹⁸ As long as the Christian wife refuses to subject her self-will to her natural husband's desires *in everything*, she disqualifies herself from becoming the spiritual Bride. If she cannot

¹⁹⁵ Matthew 12:25.

¹⁹⁶ *Monopoly* board game reference; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Get_Out_of_Jail_Free_card

¹⁹⁷ Proverbs 12:4.

¹⁹⁸ Ephesians 5:23-24.

obey God in the natural realm by submitting to her earthly husband, how will she attain the glories that God has for her in the spiritual realm?

Believers should quit trying to fit into societal norms, norms that war with God's good plans for His people. We who name the name of Jesus and at the same time hope for social acceptance are as conflicted as a square peg trying to fit into a round hole. Because the Christ was socially unacceptable, Christians are likewise socially unacceptable. The precepts that govern Christian life are socially unacceptable. We who follow Christ should embrace this reality. We are a peculiar people.

*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*¹⁹⁹

A Peculiar People

The American humorist Mark Twain dryly observed, *It ain't the parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it's the parts I do understand.*

Ephesians 5:24 is probably one of those plainly worded parts of the Bible that bothered Mark Twain. Like a fly in the kitchen, this verse pesters believers who want to fit into the world. Ephesians 5:24 says, *But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be [subject] to their husbands in everything.*²⁰⁰ *In everything* is rendered from the Greek transliteration *en pas*.²⁰¹ *En pas* means *in each and every thing, always*. Not a lot of wiggle room there, beloved, but plenty to cause the immature, self-willed Christian to connipt.

Because today's Church refuses to subject herself to Christ in everything, some Christian wives do not feel the need to subject themselves to their husbands in anything. Some Christian 'leaders' are even quick to rattle off un-Biblical reasons for wives to rebel against their natural husbands, which is no less than rebelling against God. But the generation of the Bride is coming. Like Abraham's wife Sarah, this coming generation is as glorious as an army with banners. The coming generation of believers will joyfully submit *en pas, in everything*.

When Abraham instructed his wife, Sarah, to prostitute herself not once but twice, Sarah's self-saving self-will had reason to protest.²⁰² So what motivated Sarah, the mother of our faith, to respect, honor and obey her natural husband *in everything* while today's Christian 'pragmatists' would counsel her, *Sarah, you're totally justified in disobeying your weaselly husband. Go ahead and tell Pharaoh the whole truth. You are a married woman, not a prostitute.*

¹⁹⁹ 1 Peter 2:9 (KJV).

²⁰⁰ Ephesians 5:23-24.

²⁰¹ *En*: Strong's No. G1722, *év*. *Pas*: Strong's No. G3956, πᾶς.

²⁰² Genesis 12; Genesis 20.

Love for God motivated Sarah to obey her earthly husband. Love for God and her love for her husband constrained Sarah to submit *in everything*. As it was with Sarah so it is for her spiritual daughters.

Love for the heavenly Husband always keeps the daughters of Sarah out of the pig sty of self-saving self-will. If a true daughter of Sarah fails to subject herself *in everything*, her heart breaks asunder. Such a godly woman innately knows that she has disgraced her spiritual Husband and dishonored her natural husband (even if he is a weasel), and her heart aches even if what she was told to do by her natural husband is prostitute herself. This is what we learn from the mother of our faith.

As a result of heartache, the mature woman of God repents for following her self-saving self-will. She cries out to her Lover for a whole and healthy heart. She rejoices in subjecting herself anew to both her little *b* husband and to her big *H* Husband without regard to what her body and soul must endure. By totally subjecting herself, she crowns both her little *b* husband and her big *H* Husband not with the thorns of self-will but with the radiance of a faith more precious than gold.²⁰³

*A virtuous wife is the crown of her husband.*²⁰⁴

Beloved, a delineating mark of those who have attained spiritual majority and become the Bride is an ingrained willingness to repent [te'shuva] no matter the circumstances. Giving all to love her Lover without regard to any other—this is the heart of the Bride. This is the heart of the coming generation.

*[A]nd on his head were many crowns.*²⁰⁵

A bone-crushingly honest book on the power of heartfelt repentance is *Teshuva, David's Key*.²⁰⁶ This auto-biographical sketch chronicles the author's trail of brokenness and subsequent restoration through the power of Biblical repentance. For a glimpse into the tender heart of the Bride, this is it.

The Bride's Self-discipline

A comparative example of the Father's discipline of His spiritual children versus the self-discipline of the Bride is found in the opening chapter of Luke. In this passage the angel Gabriel delivers one 'out-there' message to the priest, Zacharias, and another logic-defying dispatch to Mary the mother of Jesus. Both respond to the Lord's message with unbelief, speaking virtually the same words. Look at the passage carefully. Both Zacharias and Mary use almost the same words to respond to the angel's supernatural messages. Both respond in unbelief. Unbelief is sin.

²⁰³ 1 Peter 1:7.

²⁰⁴ Proverbs 12:4.

²⁰⁵ Revelation 19:12.

²⁰⁶ *Teshuva, David's Key*; David A. Davenport; 2014, 143 pages. www.TeshuvaTzion.org.

Zacharias says, *How will I know, for I am an old man?*²⁰⁷

Mary, using an idiom, answers Gabriel by asking, *How can this be, since I do not know a man?*²⁰⁸

While Zacharias and Mary's sins of unbelief are the same, their motivation for repentance differs. Their varying motivations for repentance is one difference between a spiritual child and a spiritual bride or spiritual adult.

The elderly priest is disciplined with muteness so that he might learn to govern his mouth. Discipline is Zacharias' motivation for repentance. Although Zacharias is righteous and chronologically advanced, and although he is a priest of God Most High, Zacharias remains a spiritual child. Mary, however, upon hearing her own disrespectful tongue, immediately repents. She repents because her heart hurts. *And Mary said, "Behold, [I am] the slave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word."*²⁰⁹

Mary repents because of her great love for her Lover. Fully accepting the Lord's will in her life however un-normal it may be, Mary's heart professes, *The wife must revere her husband ... just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.*²¹⁰

This text found both in Ephesians 5:33 and 1 Peter 3:6, reveals that a woman's natural husband is to her a type of *big-L* Lord. The manners in which the believing wife behaves towards her *little-l* lord (her natural husband) are the same manners in which she acts towards her *big-L* Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We should not be deceived. A believing wife cannot love her spiritual Lord a whit more than she respects, honors and obeys her natural lord (her husband). The measure of a woman's love for God is revealed in how much she submits to her natural husband. The believing wife who like Sarah fully submits to her natural husband loves God with all. She fully trusts the Lord to save her even when it means saving her from her natural husband. The believing wife who partially submits to her natural husband is not yet spiritually mature. At best she is a spiritual child.

The natural precedes the spiritual, beloved, not the other way around. We cannot say that we trust God and yet find reasons to rebel against His instructions for conduct in natural marriage. Those who cannot obey God in natural marriage will not find God in spiritual marriage.

Early in her marriage to Joseph, Mary repeatedly exemplified the faith of Sarah. By her faith Mary proved herself a godly wife. If this teenage girl, the mother of our Lord Jesus, had not been so spiritually mature, what would have happened to her son, Jesus?

²⁰⁷ Luke 1:18.

²⁰⁸ Luke 1:34.

²⁰⁹ Luke 1:38.

²¹⁰ Ephesians 5:33; 1 Peter 3:6.

Mary awoke the Child in the middle of the night, helped load the donkey with the family's household possessions and before daybreak without saying goodbyes began trekking out of the Promised Land towards a pagan land all because her husband awoke and said more or less, *Mary, I had a dream. We must move to Egypt now.* And she obeyed her natural husband *in everything*, respecting him as her little *l* lord because she loved her big *L* Lord more than her own life. No wonder Mary is venerated.

Would you do that?

If you are a woman would you be that 'crazy' submissive to your natural husband this very night because he woke you up saying he had been instructed in a dream that the family must move to a foreign country now? Or if you are a man, would you act that 'nutty' because you had an inspired dream? Would you wake your wife, pack the kids into the car and head for the international border before sunup without telling anyone adios? Or would you put out a fleece, submit the 'bold idea' to your pastor, the prayer team or small group and then await a word of confirmation, reassuring your worrisome self that wisdom is found in a multitude of counsel?²¹¹

Beloved, *a multitude of counsel* is the word spoken by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Thus everything that the Holy Spirit reveals is the testimony of three witnesses, and as the Bible says, *Every word [rhēma] shall be confirmed by the mouth of two or three witnesses.*²¹²

As the spiritual Bride-to-be keeps walking the narrow path to her spiritual wedding, loving her Lover with all, counting her life as nothing in order to gain the Bridegroom, the day will come when she discovers that she is just as 'crazy' obedient to the Spirit as were Joseph and Mary because she (or he) loves the Lover as did Joseph and Mary—with all.²¹³

And when the good church folk advise this person of great faith to put out a fleece and get a word of confirmation before taking such 'radical' action, she will smile at them like Mona Lisa while thinking to herself, *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.*²¹⁴

Because the Bridal heart is in tune with the Lover's voice, the Christian who matures to become the Bride does not need men to confirm in public what her Beloved whispers to her in secret. For, *The secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him, and He will make them know His covenant.*²¹⁵

The Bride might gently replies to those concerned that God's word need be confirmed by saying, *The Father affirms it, the Son affirms it, the Holy Spirit affirms it and I affirm it—yes, a multitude of witnesses affirms God's word to me.*

²¹¹ Proverbs 11:14, 15:22 and 24:6.

²¹² Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1. *Rhēma*; Strong's No. 4487, ῥῆμα.

²¹³ Matthew 22:37.

²¹⁴ John 10:27.

²¹⁵ Psalm 25:14.

Fixing her eyes on Jesus, despising the shame for the joy set before her, the Bride-to-be carries her cross to Calvary singing, *I Have Decided to Follow Jesus*.²¹⁶ In suffering the death of her self-will for the sake of love, she becomes a reflection of the Lover who will have a lover in His image.²¹⁷ Following the Way all the way, she becomes worthy of spiritual marriage.

*His bride has made herself ready.*²¹⁸

Via Dolorosa

The Via Dolorosa, the way of suffering, is both the Bridegroom's pathway and the Bride's pathway to the wedding.²¹⁹ Walking the pathway is daily saying *I do* to the Lover's commands, whatever He commands. Obedience to the commands written on the heart puts the self-will to death. However crazy those commands might sound, the Bride-to-be obeys because she's in crazy-love with Jesus. She is love-sick.²²⁰

Partially obeying the Lord's commands bars one from the wedding just as telling a partial truth prevented the generous church couple, Ananias and Saphira, from life on earth in Christ. The one who saves the smallest part of his self-will makes an incomplete sacrifice. An incomplete sacrifice means remaining unworthy of the Bridegroom, the One who withheld nothing for us.

The love of the Lover is an all-consuming fire. In His flames of love we are consumed by love so that we can love the Lover totally.²²¹

If the Lover has told you to do something that is not yet fully done, before reading further *teshuva*, repent, and put your blessed feet back on the pathway of obedience. Obedience the only pathway to the wedding. As Jesus once told a prophet of ours, *Humility and obedience always lead to Me*.²²²

Alcohol & Opioids

One morning I was inventorying my life to make certain I had given all to my Lord Jesus. I wanted to love the Lover with all, or at least all of me that I could ascertain at the time. Conducting that inventory, I recognized an outlier: beer drinking. I drank a lot of beer. I prayed, *Jesus, if you want beer drinking, I'll quit. I don't know how I'll quit but if you want it, I'll find a way*. I was crying face down on the bathroom

²¹⁶ Hebrews 12:2.

²¹⁷ Genesis 1:27.

²¹⁸ Revelation 19:7.

²¹⁹ Via Dolorosa; <http://www.biblewalks.com/Sites/ViaDolorosa.html>; viewed March 2, 2017.

²²⁰ Song of Songs 2:5, 5:8.

²²¹ Song of Songs 8:6-7.

²²² Rick Joyner; *The Call*; MorningStar Publications, Inc., 1999; Mass Market edition, 2006; pp. 123.

floor. I had no idea how I could quit, but O! how I love Him. Two days later Jesus mutated my taste buds so that I could not swallow alcohol. Surely the Lover's mercies are new each morning.²²³ For the next two months I walked around with a beer in my hand because I did not know how else to walk around. Finally recognizing the ridiculousness of carrying around a beer I could not drink, I put down the beer.

Years later, due to multiple surgeries, I was addicted to prescription pain killers. One day at the physician's office my unbelieving doctor said he was going to get me off the opioids. As I sat on that exam table hearing what he was saying, something inside of me screamed *No!* The 'addiction' did not want to go.

Then I thought, *God has placed my physical body under this doctor's authority, so I must submit my body to his God-given authority in order to submit to God.*

What could I say to my Lover but *Okay* to the doctor? The moment I said *Okay* aloud to the doctor, the opioid addiction broke. Inside me the addiction breaking felt like a dry stick snapping in two. Inside me I could hear it snapping. The opioid addiction was gone.

The Lover may not end your addictions as He did mine. But when you hear Jesus saying that it is time to start the process of breaking free from some earthly bond, heed His call. If you earnestly desire to obey God then the Lover will empower you to freedom.

We need not get ahead of the Lover and presume that He has commanded us to do something He has not yet delineated even if we know it is coming. For example, Moses would not have walked into the Red Sea before the God parted the waters unless God said, *Start swimming*, which is pretty much what God told Joshua to do at the Jordan River forty-some years later. We need only do what we know to do today, for *today is the day of salvation.*²²⁴

Our Lover is full of mercy. He knows what we can bear today. According to the New Covenant it is the commands written on our hearts and whispered into our own ears that we are to obey.²²⁵ Therefore we do not weigh down anyone—ourselves included, with burdens not meant to be shouldered today. While we never yield an inch to the enemy, neither do we initiate battles we have not yet been ordered to fight. Let me explain.

Always All

²²³ Lamentations 3:22-23.

²²⁴ 2 Corinthians 6:2.

²²⁵ Jeremiah 31:33; Isaiah 30:21.

A day came when I had no peace. I erroneously decided that the Lord was to blame for my disjointedness. All that day at work I huffed under my breath, *God, I've done all I'm supposed to do and I don't have peace. You are going to give me my peace!* I did not know it but I was entering into a timely battle.

As soon as my family responsibilities were completed that evening, I grabbed my Bible and locked myself away in a closet and yelled to the heavens, *I am not leaving this closet until You give me the peace You promised! I have You first in my life, my wife second, my child third, my job fourth. My life is ordered as it should be. I can't think of any sin in my life. God, You are not living up to Your side of the deal! Unless this house catches fire or it's time to go to work in the morning, I am not leaving this closet until You give me Your peace!*²²⁶

Shaking the proverbial fist at heaven, I meant every syllable.

As I began waiting for God to make good on His promise of peace a small thought came to mind: *Look in the back of Jonah.* I took a chance that the whisper came from the Lord and opened the Bible to the last chapter of Jonah. Jonah has four chapters. Two verses there popped out at me. In each verse the Lord basically asks Jonah, *What right do you have to be angry with Me?*²²⁷ Not being the brightest light in the night sky, I thought, *Boy, that Jonah! He was on thin ice with the Lord.*

Moments later I shuddered, realizing that the Lord was talking to me. I was the one standing on thin ice before the living God, not Jonah. Immediately I repented of my anger toward the Lord and miraculously my anger flew away. But I still lacked His peace. Persisting in my quest for God's peace, I refused to budge from that closet.

I do not know if I slipped into a dream or a trance or a vision. Whatever it was, I began to see white letters and numbers flying left-to-right across a black background. The symbols flew so fast that I could not make any of them out. I do not know if I watched the symbols zip by for 20 minutes or two hours but all of a sudden a few white letters and numbers froze in place right before my eyes. The white script upon the black background read *Is. 44:6*. I immediately recognized those symbols as my answer from the Lord: *Isaiah 44, verse 6*. I snapped out of the dream or vision and opened my Bible.

Beloved, when we say that the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, that it is living and God-breathed, we may not fully comprehend just how much truth is packed into those claims.²²⁸

It has not happened before or since but that night in the closet, one-by-one each individual black letter, numeral and grammatical mark I read in the Bible charged up off the white page and like the business end of a boxer's glove, punched me square in the face. I reeled as each jot and tittle smashed into my body and soul. Each ink stroke of God's word knocked my equilibrium about. After each diacritic mark and letter hit me like a hammer blow, I looked away pausing to regain my wits. Reeling, I read Isaiah 44:6 one soul-shaking ink stroke at a time. It took great effort and I took a tremendous

²²⁶ Cf. Psalm 29:11.

²²⁷ Jonah 4:4; 4:9.

²²⁸ Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:23; 2 Timothy 3:16.

beating but I was determined to read that word from my Lord or die trying. This is what the Lord said to me: *This is what the Lord your God says, Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first and the last. Apart from Me there is no god.*²²⁹

Eventually I reached that final period. When I did His message was crystal clear. The Lord was telling me in no uncertain terms that I had made little *g* gods out of everything on my cute little list that followed, *No. 1, God.*

Punching me half to death, the Lord let me know that on my list of what is important, He is not just to be No. 1. The Lord Jesus is also to be No. 2, No. 3, No. 4, No. 5, No. 6, No. 7, ad infinitum.

The Lord made it exceedingly clear that as long as anything other than the Lord Jesus Christ has any place at all in me, I am bowing down to an idol and committing spiritual adultery. Jesus is to be my Alpha and my Omega, my beginning and my end, and my everything in between. Fully obeying the First Great Command and loving God with *all* is what it means to be lovesick for Jesus. I was not lovesick for Jesus. I was holding something back of myself for myself.

I lacked peace that day because I was an idol worshipper. My wife was an idol; my child was an idol; my job was an idol; my church, friends and possessions—every one of them was a spiritual idol with which I committed spiritual adultery. Yes, the Lord was first on my cute little list of gods, but everything after No. 1 was a lover fashioned in hell, luring me into destruction, robbing me of peace.

That night in the closet I learned that loving the Lord God with *all* truly means *all*.²³⁰ There is to be nothing in me for anything but the Lord Jesus Christ. So right then and there I repented for worshiping false gods, for loving other lovers. I repented for adultery, for that is what I was—an adulterer, not in the natural sense but in the spiritual. I repented for having anything other than my Lover on my list. From that point forward I would make the Lord Jesus Christ my Alpha and Omega, my beginning and end, my first and last and my everything in between. As I determined this new course in my heart, immediately His peace swept over me like the waters of a deep river.

*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.*²³¹

Beloved, we know not what others will choose but as for you and me, we choose to love the Lover with *all*.²³² We choose the pathway of the Bride.

I confess that I have not always kept God's peace because I haven't always loved Him with all. My self-will lurks in the shadows. I hate that bastard.²³³ May he die daily that Christ might fully live. That night in the closet the Lover gave me the secret to possessing His peace because it was the right time

²²⁹ Isaiah 44:6.

²³⁰ Matthew 22:37.

²³¹ Revelation 22:13.

²³² Joshua 24:15.

²³³ Romans 12:9.

for me to fight that battle. It was the right time to lay down a world of self-inflicted pains and adulteries and abide in His peace.²³⁴

*These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace.*²³⁵

Following that adventure in the closet the other items adorning my little list suddenly took their right place in my life. As they did I found myself prepared to interact with each as it came along. That is to say, as long as the Lord Jesus Christ remains my Alpha and Omega, nothing can steal my peace even if everything else is screaming for my cares.

Jesus will do the same for anyone.²³⁶ Jesus will take away your burdens so that you may love Him perfectly and enjoy His peace even in the storm.

Some Kind of Hero

One night I stared down the barrel of a pistol held by a distraught gunman who knew how to pull the trigger. When the gunman realized that I loved him and that I was unafraid to die, the gunman changed tactics. He placed the gun to his head and threatened suicide. With patience, the gunman was won with love. By the way, you can become quite calm and focused when on your knees with a loaded firearm aimed at your face or pressed against the temple of one you love. I am not relating this story because I am some kind of hero. Jesus did it, not me.

What I am saying is that I worked my way up through the ‘minor leagues’ of love before making it to ‘the show.’²³⁷ In the minors I was attacked with fists and knives and hateful words from some I was sent to love. In the minor leagues I was spit upon, cursed and publicly demeaned, and on two occasions I was just able to jump out of the way of a car driven by someone who was intentionally trying to run me over. Years before the night I stared down the barrel of that big bore pistol, I coaxed an acquaintance with a shotgun out of committing suicide.

Because I tried to love with whatever my *all* was along the way, the night I met the gunman who knew how to pull the trigger, I was prepared to yield my life even if it meant being shot in the face by one I loved. Amazingly, I remained perfectly peaceful when that very real prospect arose. Standing before Pilate with His fate on the line, Jesus was peaceful too.²³⁸ With the Lord’s help, you can be just as willing to sacrifice your life in the name of love as anyone in history.²³⁹ Our Lover is no respecter of

²³⁴ Matthew 11:29; 1 Chronicles 22:9.

²³⁵ John 16:33.

²³⁶ Romans 2:11.

²³⁷ “*The Minors*,” slang for professional baseball’s junior leagues. “*The Show*,” slang for baseball’s major leagues.

<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=The%20Show>; viewed March 2, 2017.

²³⁸ Matthew 27:13-14.

²³⁹ U2 band; “Pride (in the name of love)” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADVhDRZ62hs>; viewed March 2, 2017.

men.²⁴⁰ What Jesus will do for one, He will do for any man who is willing to go all the way. Go all the way.

This mark of maturity—humbling oneself even unto death, is a shared trait among the generation of the Bride, both in its men and if you will, doubly so in its women. As a bit of evidence to this ‘doubly so’ claim, take a prophetic look at chromosomes.

The Creator made our 23rd pair of chromosomes to indicate sex. In males these chromosomes are shaped X and Y. In females, the 23rd pair of chromosomes is shaped XX. If the X-shaped chromosome foreshadows the cross and if the Y with its three legs portends the triune God, then the male XY chromosomes point to the sacrificial cross of the triune God. The female XX pairing however, represents the Bride, who having first laid claim to the cross of Christ, takes up her own cross to follow in His way and become His worthy. You can become worthy of the Lord Jesus Christ if you carry your cross all the way to the end of yourself.

Age of Majority

Spiritual age marks another difference between the spiritual Father’s child and the spiritual Bride of Christ. The age at which one becomes the spiritual Bride is 20 spiritual years.

We say 20 spiritual years because in the book of Numbers, Israelites aged 20 years and upwards were held personally accountable for grumbling while younger Israelites were classified as children.²⁴¹ Requiring discipline, the Israelite children who grumbled were to some degree unaccountable to God’s law and hence undeserving of the law’s full measure of punishment, meaning death. More to the point, the Mosaic law requires Atonement beginning at age 20 because, having reached the age of majority, at 20 years one is fully responsible for his sins.²⁴² 20 is also the Levitical age for soldiering.²⁴³ This is the natural. The natural portends the spiritual.²⁴⁴

St. Paul as well as the writer of Hebrews rightly admonish grown men for remaining spiritual infants.²⁴⁵ Mary the mother of Jesus (while she was a chronological teenager) is deemed by the Lord God to be a spiritual adult, mature enough to enter into union with both God and a man. A child of God need only entertain the ways of man to be needful of discipline. But to be counted worthy of the

²⁴⁰ Acts 10:34-35.

²⁴¹ Numbers 14:27-31.

²⁴² Exodus 30: 11-16.

²⁴³ Numbers 1:3.

²⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:46.

²⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:1; 1 Corinthians 14:20; Hebrews 5:12.

Bridegroom, believers must first yield to a life of obedience by faith in hopes of a Redeemer to come. This is what Mary did, as did Sarah.²⁴⁶

During my vision of marriage to Jesus, I was so surprised by what was happening that twice I momentarily took myself out of the vision. Each time I left the vision I consciously chose to return to it. Upon re-entering the vision, the ceremony continued at the point where I last left it. Like Rebekah at her father's house, it seems that I had the choice to accept the union or refuse it. I had become a spiritual adult.

That The King of Glory May Come In

Today with so many self-confessed children of God managing God's household affairs here on earth, is it any wonder the Church finds its current state so distant from the Book of Acts? The great miracle in our time is that any measure of good comes out of the Church at all; miraculously, much does. Not only does our Lord God powerfully bless the immature labors of His children but He also reaps where He does not sow and gathers where He scatters no seed.²⁴⁷ 'The Charlatans prior to being cast into the lake of fire protest, *Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?*²⁴⁸ Meaning, the Lord of the harvest reaps where He sows not.²⁴⁹

The Foundation

My favorite parts of church meetings are usually the worship before the preaching and then talking to the saints at the close of the service. A prophet I know always reads his Bible during the preaching no matter who is preaching or what is being preached. Another friend heads to the lobby for a cup of coffee as soon as the service takes a wacky turn. While the Church is currently founded on pastor-teachers, when the generation of the Bride arrives, that foundation will shift to apostles and prophets, just as the Master Builder originally intended.

God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner[stone].²⁵⁰

True apostles and prophets understand that they support the Church, not the other way around. As the foundation, apostles and prophets are *under* the Church, not over it. Being humble and quick to serve, apostles and prophets are the first to wash the feet of the saints, be that foot-washing literal

²⁴⁶ Matthew 16:23-24.

²⁴⁷ Matthew 25:26.

²⁴⁸ Matthew 7:22.

²⁴⁹ Matthew 9:38.

²⁵⁰ Ephesians 2:19-20.

or figurative. Apostles and prophets understand that Christ alone is *over* the Church. Christ is also under it and beside it and all around it, even as the ark surrounded Noah.

According to the Scriptures, real apostles appear as men condemned to death. Apostles are last of all. They are a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men, fools for Christ's sake. They are weak, without honor, hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, roughly treated and homeless. Apostles work with their hands. They are reviled and persecuted, and yet they endure. When slandered, they try to conciliate. They are like the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.²⁵¹

Beloved, when was the last time you met a man who went by the title "Apostle" and his life fit more of this description than less? Or any part at all? In my travels I have only met four men meeting these criteria, two in Africa and two in America, and neither would tell you he was an apostle even if you paid him to let you in on his secret.

*When I was a child I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; but when I became a man, I did away with childish things.*²⁵²

Doing away with childish things, the Bride will manifest Christ on earth. She lives in a union that no child can enter into. With the Bride will come the Book of Acts on earth again, and greater works than these—that the King of glory may come in. For His Bride, the Bridegroom will return. The Bridegroom is not returning for a household of spiritual children. The Bridegroom is returning for a fully mature Bride. He is coming for one who looks like Him because she is one with Him.

Mythological Child-Bride

To conclude, we should ask a question that might be on your mind, namely, what would be the end of the child *of* God who somehow finagled his way into union *with* God? A child-bride, one might say. What if a spiritual child somehow entered spiritual marriage with the Bridegroom? The answer, beloved, is not good.

The spiritual child is unfit for spiritual marriage because the child still holds something of himself back from the Lord. The spiritual child has not yet matured to willingly sacrifice *all*, and further, the child may not yet realize what the depth and cost of *all* is. Thinking I knew what *all* was and then finding out what *all* truly is, was a discovery for me. Knowingly or not, the mythological child-bride would eventually disobey the Lover's command to give *all* and thereby withhold the last full measure of devotion.

²⁵¹ Cf. 1 Corinthians 4:9-13.

²⁵² 1 Corinthians 13:11.

The spiritual child who somehow managed to become the Bride, therefore, would lie beyond the reach of the Father's discipline and yet remain unaware of some selfishness within. This means that the mythological child-bride would eventually sin and lack the motivation to repent. Because unrepentant selfishness cannot dwell in union with our totally unselfish Lord, the mythological child-bride would be dismissed from the Lord's house without any way back. He would be tossed like Adam and Eve from the Garden but with no way to return. Returning requires repentance, and the child-bride would be unmotivated to repent.

It is easy to understand then why those who retain a smidgeon of childishness, even unintentionally, the Father wisely bars from entering the marriage relationship. The Father's love precludes His children from spiritual marriage. This is the same protective love that restrains the presumptuous from drawing near to God and thus being destroyed.