

*A  
Bride  
Prepared*



“YOU ARE A CROWN OF GLORY IN THE HAND OF THE LORD,  
AND A ROYAL DIADEM IN THE HAND OF YOUR GOD.”  
(ISAIAH 62:3)

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Caption under Bride's picture on the cover

***“You are a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.”***

Jesus is speaking to his Bride. A royal diadem, like the one the young bride is wearing on the cover, is an ornamental jeweled headdress signifying sovereignty.

***“As the Bridegroom rejoices over the Bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.”***

**(Isaiah 62:1-5)**

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# *A Bride Prepared*

## **Introduction**

From the very beginning, Jesus Christ has made known to us His intention to marry a most exquisite Bride. The marriage of the Lamb to His spouse will commence the eternal covenant longed for by Jesus Christ from time immemorial. From the days of Israel's espousal in the wilderness (Jeremiah 2:2) up until the marriage of the Lamb, Jesus Christ has loved His Bride-to-be with a perfect love that surpasses anything we can remotely imagine (Ephesians 3:19). Their wedding will be the most superb ceremony the heavens and earth have ever witnessed. Though this may sound like a dream or a fable, it is, in fact, a magnificent reality.

Brethren, we have only a short time to prepare. Many of those who consider themselves to be a part of the Church of God are not prepared to be the Bride of Jesus Christ. The seventh doctrine of Jesus Christ is, "*Go on to perfection;*" this is what the Bride must be doing (Hebrews 6:1-2).

It should go without saying that Jesus is going to be extremely selective when taking His wife for ever more. Though the world prefers to believe that Jesus accepts us in our current condition – "just as you are" – it is obvious from the Scriptures that His Bride will be arrayed in the purest white wedding gown – symbolizing her perfect love for Him, her spotless spiritual condition, and her eternal faithfulness in marriage.

Are we absolutely certain that we meet that criteria – in other words, are we as ready and prepared as we can possibly be?

Anyone who assumes that they have attained to the *perfect measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*, underestimates the supreme perfection of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:13). To what degree of excellence must the Church brethren attain in order to be ready?

When comparing the unity of mind and heart within the marriage relationship to the bond of unity that exists between Christ and the Church brethren, the apostle Paul called it a great mystery. What is the significance of the wedding of Jesus Christ to the Church? Who is the Bride? Remarkably, it is revealed that not everyone will participate in the marriage supper. *Blessed are they who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!* What can we do to ensure that we will be invited to take part in Christ's wedding?

Prophetic Scriptures bring to light the splendor of the ultimate nuptial ceremony. We do not wish to miss out on the most splendid wedding of all time. What an incredible truth that our Lord and Master has chosen to make us His Wife by entering into an eternal pledge with us. Mere words fail to portray the most glorious ceremony ever, which Christ has reserved for His Bride alone. Divine music will reverberate across the heavens, and gleaming, brilliance will illuminate the throne room, as the Bride is presented to her Lord. She will be accepted by Him, adorned in her radiant white silk wedding gown – and upon her head she will wear a beautiful sparkling crown (Ezekiel 16:12).

### **We are Betrothed to Christ**

Even now, we are engaged. This is the only time of preparation for us to become a pure virgin betrothed to Jesus Christ our Bridegroom. *"I have espoused you to one*

*husband, so that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”* (2 Corinthians 11:2) He is going to enter into an eternal new covenant marriage relationship with spiritual Israel – the Church of God – which will never be broken. *“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.”* (Hebrews 8:8, Jeremiah 31:31-32)

*“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they who are invited unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said unto me, these are the true sayings of God.”* (Revelation 19:7-9)

The Church of God is not ready for the wedding. The lack of concern and respect of brothers and sisters in Christ for one another shows that we have a ways to go. The split and scattered state of the Church attests to the fact that the Bride of Christ is not yet prepared. After years of Christian living sermons explaining how we must let our light shine – the fruit of our lives is hardly distinguishable from those in the world. We are not living according to the rules of the Kingdom – now – as we should be. If we did, we would be, *“A light to the world – and our light would so shine before men... that they would be glorifying our Father who is in heaven.”* (Matthew 5:14-16) There are reasons that this is not happening. This booklet describes what remains to be done by those who have been called and have begun to follow through on God’s plan of salvation.

## The True Sayings of God

When we read, “*These are the true sayings of God,*” we are to understand this prophecy of the *marriage of the Lamb* to be real and factual – not merely allegorical. It is our purpose to demonstrate the validity and reality of Christ’s words, and to alert the brethren to the critical need to make themselves ready – *His wife has made herself ready*. Christ has fulfilled His part, but the question remains – what part of the Church is ready now? The *readiness of the Bride* is the very thing we must be most concerned about because our eternal salvation is at stake and depends on it.

What will the Bride of Christ be like? How can she be spiritually pure? The Bride will be *arrayed in fine linen, clean and white* – meaning that she will be an innocent, virgin Bride. Jesus has done His part in washing His Bride to make her righteous. She will be perfect and spotless – her attributes matching Christ’s own perfection and glory – because He has made her spiritually pure.

*“Christ loves the [Bride], and gave Himself for her; that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that she should be holy and without blemish.”* (Ephesians 5:25-27)

What an exceedingly beautiful ceremony it will be for the select Bride who looks for Christ’s coming. “*The glorious Bridegroom will come; and [only] those who were ready went in with Him to the marriage: and the door was shut.*” (Matthew 25:10) The reality of God’s promise will far exceed the most sublime expectation of the Bride. We do not

want to miss out! Let us make ready, and ensure that we are among those whom Jesus Christ will choose to be His Bride.

### **Is the Bride Ready?**

We are at the end of the age – all the signs that Jesus told us to watch for *are near, even at the door* (Matthew 24:33). Are we Church brethren ready to meet Jesus Christ at His return? You might respond by saying, “Yes, I’m ready – I am tired of waiting – let’s get on with it.” But, are we *spiritually prepared* to be the Bride of Christ? That is the intent of Christ’s words, “*The Bride has made herself ready,*” in describing those brethren who constitute the Bride that He will marry at His coming.

Do we have the eyes to see that over the last few decades, the Church of God has slipped terribly away from being the ideal Bride? It has lost its enthusiasm and passion to see Christ establish the Kingdom of God. There no longer exists a burning desire to share the meaning of our faith with the rest of the world.

There are those who feel that their media department produces a good program for television, but Jesus said that is not the same thing as each of us proclaiming the gospel by dynamically **living our faith** – *that the world may know* (John 17:23). The Christian love of the great majority of the brethren has waxed cold. The Church is *not prepared* – note the words of Jesus: “*While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.*” (Matthew 25:5)

Here is the problem: These words, “*The Bride has made herself ready,*” do not describe the greater Church of God today. Let us face it – if we understand anything about the

practice of our Christian faith, we will readily admit that the spiritual condition of the Church is in dire straits. The Church of God is *not* ready for the wedding supper of the Lord.

### **Our Salvation is Near**

That is indeed a bold statement, but the evidence is abundantly clear that this last era of the Church has dozed off. There is not a lot of difference in the lives of good Protestants and us, except that our socializing is on Saturday, and we take our “vacation” in the fall. The slumbering brethren are disregarding the admonition of Paul, “*Knowing the time, that now it is high time to **awake out of sleep**: for now is our salvation nearer than when we [first] believed.*” (Romans 13:11)

Jesus foretold our depleted end-time spiritual state as a warning to us. “*At the end of the day you say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red, and in the morning you say, it will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and overcast.*” (Matthew 16:3) That is not a weather report! Jesus is alerting us to discern the signs of the times. He is saying, “Look at the poor spiritual condition of the brethren – and take action!” If we do not wake up and get busy, we will be rejected. “*Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.*” (Revelation 3:16)

None of us deliberately want to be lukewarm, blind, or lackadaisical. But, how do we change? What must we do to be prepared? There have always been those who did not walk worthy of their Christian calling, and there always will be. But now, Jesus says the end-time elect children of God have become worldly. In Christ's estimation, we've been going down and down. If we would see ourselves as God sees us,

we would know that the great majority of ministers and church-goers are no longer willing to stand for the Truth.

Each of us would probably say, “I’ve passed tests and trials – I came out of the world and organizations that do not represent the true Body of Christ.” Let us be careful not to make the mistake today of believing that we have passed the final test with flying colors. If we have the eyes to see, evidence reveals that many have been lulled into a false sense of complacency. We would be wise indeed, to heed Christ’s words, and examine ourselves more carefully.

### **Perfecting Holiness**

And, if the Church brethren are asleep, some Church leaders must be in a coma. We have come to the point where almost anything goes – and God is not pleased. Paul asked the Corinthian Church brethren to put the sinful man who had taken his father's wife *away from among you* (1 Corinthians 5:13). Why put the sinful man away? Because he was defiling and polluting the chaste marriage relationship that God created to exemplify the pure covenant relationship between Christ and the Church brethren.

But today, we find that when it comes to doctrine and practice, almost everything wrong is allowed in the churches of God – it ought not to be so. Does anyone have the wisdom and fortitude to demand of God’s people, including the ministry, that they *cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God* (2 Corinthians 7:1)?

Peter admonishes us to *stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance* (2 Peter 3:1). This is what we have to do.

When false doctrine and apathetic conduct begin to enter the congregations of the Church of God, it is the responsibility, not only of the ministry, but also of everyone who loves God and His Truth to combat that aberrant behavior and refute it by sound doctrine.

Brethren, maintaining God's highest standard is not optional – our very salvation is at stake. The question for us is not simply a matter of waiting until Christ gets here – we must rise to the occasion. It is a matter of our preparing ourselves so that we will be spiritually groomed in accordance with Christ's expectation of His Bride. Who among us is willing to break away from the status quo *to be doing* exactly what is necessary to be prepared (Luke 12:43)? Here is the answer: "*Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when He comes shall find so doing.*" (Matthew 24:44, 46) Brethren, if you believe that it is time to be found *so doing* – let's get started.

### **Be So Doing**

What must the Bride be "so doing" in order to make herself ready for the marriage of the Lamb? Please do not assume that, overall, the Church is on track. Christ's instruction to the end-time Church obviously indicates that the brethren are not ready to be presented in marriage to Christ – just the opposite. The Church is not living up to Christ's high calling, and they are blind to that fact – why else would He have such harsh criticism of our spiritual condition? "*You do **not even know** that you are wretched, and miserable, poor, blind, and naked,*" – and that is God's appraisal of our spiritual condition (Revelation 3:17).

Church people are becoming less and less like Jesus Christ in their actions and thoughts – and because they *are blind*, most

are not even aware of it. If the people of God were to be brought up before Christ today, many would be at risk of hearing the dreaded words, “*I never knew you.*” (Matthew 7:23) The sad fact is that the spiritual condition of God’s Church is deteriorating rapidly.

God the Father and Jesus Christ are working together to bring us to salvation, but we have to respond to their overtures, and be fashioned in their image. “*We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has ordained beforehand that we **should walk in them.***” (Ephesians 2:10) How do we do that?

What does Christ mean by those words – *be found so doing?* Doing what? What did He really have in mind for us to be “*doing?*” Aren’t Church brethren doing things? Some are making tapes and DVD’s for distribution; others are investigating issues such as the calendar, new moons, or prophecy; a number are reproducing Herbert W. Armstrong’s materials; some brethren are busy publishing materials, or doing website maintenance; we find brethren involved in choir, hall setup or serving at potlucks. But these are *not* the actions that Christ meant when He said to be “*so doing.*” Yes, those things are important – but much more is required of the Bride.

### **Seek the Spiritual**

The *spiritual* is more important than the *physical*. Jesus taught Martha the difference in Luke 10 – and we are privy to His vital lesson. “*Jesus entered a village: and Martha welcomed Him into her home.*” Martha was a lot like those brethren who are very involved in all kinds of very necessary

*physical projects. “Martha had a sister, Mary, who sat at Jesus' feet, and listened to His teachings.”*

*“But Martha was inundated by her projects, and said to Jesus, “Lord, don't you even care that my sister has left me to do all the serving – alone? Tell her to come and help me.” And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and upset about too many things. But **one thing** is more important than anything else: and Mary has chosen that **good part**, which shall not be taken away from her.”* Jesus made it clear that *spiritual* endeavors superseded the physical ones. It's not that the serving and setting up are unimportant; it is that the **spiritual things of God** are most important.

When we apply Christ's lesson that the *spiritual* nature of God, to which we must attain, surpasses the physical aspects of our lives, we begin to realize that a disproportionate emphasis on the physical comes short of Christ's expectation for us. The exceedingly more important development of our relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ, and our love and harmony with our brothers and sisters in Christ is what **must come first**. Our Spirit-motivated relationship with God is the basis for being like-minded with the brethren. That is what we must be *so doing*.

Why is the development of our spiritual lives of paramount importance? It is because Jesus Christ is going to take to Himself a *spiritual* Bride – not a physical organization. None of us is yet spiritual. We are still a very carnal people in that we refuse to be at peace with one another (1 Corinthians 3:4). We have been given the *obligation of reconciliation* with all brethren – and that we must be *so doing*. (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

The Bride of Christ in Revelation 19:7 will not be a loose federation of divided brethren. The *Spirit* that is held in common by those comprising the "**Wife of Christ**" is the strongest bond that exists. Jesus is not going to return to an estranged people who will not have anything to do with each other. Our salvation depends on our love for God's entire spiritual community. "*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.*" (1 John 3:14)

Let us not miss the importance of Jesus' lesson for us at this time. Some might wonder, "What more can I do – I have only so much strength, time and resources?" Precisely! But Jesus is not speaking of *physical* activities. He expects us to be doing the *spiritual*! It is high time we give priority to the spiritual aspects of our faith. Yes, church activities and projects are necessary, but they do not rise to the level of the spiritual relationship with God and brethren that Jesus was speaking about when He said, "*be found so doing?*"

### **Who do You Love?**

Are we living up to our spiritual responsibility? Another way to ask that same question is this: What must the future wife of Christ be doing to make herself ready for the marriage of the Lamb? When Jesus returns: First, the Bride will have made herself ready to meet the Bridegroom, and secondly, the foolish virgins will not be prepared (Matthew 25:12). Let us be honest with ourselves – looking at the disheveled, disunified state of the Church today, we are certainly not ready. We must each personally be healing the breach that exists – the responsibility is ours.

Just before He died, Jesus Christ told the apostles to *love one another*. Most people would say that they love those in their

group, and thus have fulfilled that Scripture. But can we agree that all those who have God's Holy Spirit are elect children of God, and that there are individuals in various groups who have God's Spirit? All the corporate groups would say that they uphold that principle. But they do not – not with a Godly love!

Various Church leaders have chosen a mistakenly narrow viewpoint when determining *who* to include in the “*love one another*” category. Those leaders subtly imply to the members of their congregations that they are better than other fellowships. As a result, some brethren tend to shun and look down on those brethren not in their organization. That is an arrogant attitude of self-exaltation that Jesus Christ condemns (James 2:1).

Everyone with the proper reverence for God's love and way of life will be discerning which brethren to include in their personal fellowship. It does not matter whether or not they are in a particular church organization. *“They that feared the Lord spoke often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name.”* (Malachi 3:16)

How much time do we have left to get our act together? Jesus Christ is going to look each of us in the eye and ask, “When did you – not your hierarchy – reach out to your brother and sister in love and reconciliation?” (2 Corinthians 5:18) *“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves.”* (Philippians 2:3)

## Are You Not Yet Carnal?

It is a shame that we are not of one mind, and able to get together with converted family members and friends for the Feast of Tabernacles. Too many of our brethren have been taught not to associate with others who are not within their own fellowship. They turn their heads when they pass their former brethren on the street – no longer considering them, brethren. Paul says that those who participate in that kind of behavior are not *spiritually* mature, but still *carnal babes*. “Brethren, I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.” (1 Corinthians 3:1) *The Bride is not prepared* to meet Christ while this practice persists in His *one* Church.

Soon, the brethren who are led by God's Holy Spirit will be together in mind, attitude, and spiritual unity as the Bride of Christ. The Bride will not come from any one earthly organization or group. That is because Christianity is not something you belong to – like an organization – but a way of life that leads to holiness and Godliness. It is only when we truly put on Godliness that unity with other brethren, who are also pursuing being *at one* with God, can transpire (John 17:21-23). It will be a miracle when it happens. The man-made lines that separate brethren must be crossed – the barriers must come down. Jesus will have only one Wife. The Bride of Christ will be *spiritually* mature. Are we willing to do what it takes to be a part of the Bride?

Make no mistake about it - Jesus Christ is not going to return to a scattered bunch of churches. **Jesus Christ has only *one* Church, and it is made up of all the brethren who are being led by His Holy Spirit.** That is who Christ is returning to. Christ is not divided – how can we remain separated for

so many wrong reasons? There is the question of some members hobnobbing with the wealthy or the ministry, and with the “beautiful people” to the exclusion of the “little people,” or the ne’er-do-wells – it is not a new problem (James 2:3). Human nature wants to be a part of a fashionable group, and Satan uses every weakness that he can find to instigate division among God’s people.

### **Perfectly Joined Together**

Paul writes about the divisiveness in the Church at Corinth, saying that quarrels and contentions clearly demonstrate the *carnal nature* of those who will not seek peace. “*For ye are **yet carnal**: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one says, I am of [Fill in the name of a minister]; and another says, I am of [Fill in the name of an organization]; are ye not carnal?*” (1 Corinthians 3:3-4)

The Church in Corinth exhibited the same problem that we have today. Paul begged, “*I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there **be no divisions** among you, but that you be **perfectly joined together** in the same mind and in the same judgment.*” (1 Corinthians 1:10) These verses are unmistakable warnings to us today to get our lives in order. Paul said, “*I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons **I warn you.***” (1 Corinthians 4:14)

There are many today, who – like the five foolish virgins of Matthew 25 – thoughtlessly believe that their group is uniquely qualified to be the Bride, to the exclusion of all the others. As a warning to us, let us remember that down

through history, there have always been “**foolish virgins**,” who thought they were the sole favorite of God’s affections.

Organizations *per se* are necessary – their function is to manage the business concerns of the group such as planning Feast sites, administering funds (including third tithe), publishing, writing contracts, interfacing with the Government, providing halls for Sabbath services, etc. An organization is a *physical* entity.

A serious problem arises when members begin to look to their headquarters rather than to God. “I would never do that!” people exclaim. But, how often do we hear the phrase, “Let me check with Headquarters?” The Church that Jesus founded is a *spiritual* entity and cannot be sued – but organizations are legal entities that have to take into account insurance and liability considerations.

God’s Word says that it is good and right to serve the elderly and the fatherless. In one example, headquarters prohibited an elderly function from taking place because, “The church could be sued if someone hurt themselves.” That is a case of headquarters being out of touch with its purpose. But a much more serious predicament arises when members look to a headquarters to make decisions on spiritual aspects in their lives. God warns the Bride-to-be that all ministers are not His ministers. A false minister can cost a person their salvation. Some are Satan’s ministers – masquerading as good ministers – *transformed as the ministers of righteousness.*” (2 Corinthians 11:15)

## Role of the Ministry

The Bible is the *living* Word of God – containing timeless spiritual lessons for mankind. A minister should be able to teach and preach sound doctrine – *rightly dividing the word of truth* – guiding [showing the way] through the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 2:2, 15, Acts 8:31). His duties are baptizing, marrying, performing funerals, praying, anointing the sick and counseling. The minister is to expound on Godly concepts. “*Holding fast the faithful Word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by **sound doctrine** both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.*” (Titus 1:9)

The function of the ministry is to teach how to walk in God’s way and how to apply God’s principles in our lives. All too often, we find the minister in the role of decision maker for someone else’s family. That is wrong! Yes, the ministry should be available for Godly counseling – however, the ministry is not to usurp the decision making function of the head of the family.

That is not the role of a minister or any group’s headquarters. “*[The ministry] **does not have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.***” (2 Corinthians 1:24) When a minister presumes that his judgment is so far superior to others that he believes he has the right to supersede a member’s personal decision – he has violated a basic Christian tenet.

The ministry’s responsibility is to help the brethren focus on God and His ways. When a minister makes himself or his organization the center of attention rather than God, he is making an extremely serious mistake in judgment. And sometimes a member quickly becomes *persona non grata* –

an unwelcomed person, if he does not do exactly what the minister dictates. That is wrong!

Look to God and His Word for direction in your life. Those brethren who have been disfellowshipped for unjust reasons by political ministers have not been removed from God's true Church – only from an organization gone astray. Only God's Spirit is everlasting. Organizations come and go. Past organizational failures and closures teach us that we must always be extremely careful not to confuse "organization" with God's Truth and Work.

### **Foolish Virgins**

How many organizations boast that they are God's favorite group – pleasing God the most? Or, that they are doing the primary work at the forefront of preaching the gospel; or they are the biggest work; or have more TV stations; or they have the most senior man; or they have a brand that isolates and distinguishes them above others; or they have produced the most literature; or that they alone received the baton of Church authority that was passed down; or some such claim of dominance? Brethren, are we blind to the divisiveness of that rationale?

It is God who does the "Work" – we are merely his tools. *"This is the **Work of God** that you believe on Him [Jesus Christ] whom He [the Father] has sent."* (John 6:29) It is God, not us, who will cause Israel to be warned and restored (Ezekiel 3, 36). It is God who will cause the gospel to be preached to all nations as a witness. And, it is God who makes it possible for the Bride to prepare herself. **Give** God all the credit for His works (John 14:10).

*"Everyone who exalts himself will be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted."* (Luke 18:9-14) Without the words actually being spoken, some members are being taught by the attitude and behavior of their leadership that there are other brethren who just don't measure up. Where in the Bible do you find any true leader of God's people telling the brethren not to fellowship together? You do not find it because it is clearly against Christ's teachings. There will be perfect peace within Christ's marriage – because He is *King of Peace* (Hebrews 7:2).

Their condescending message is loud and clear – avoid mixing with brethren from other groups, because we are better than they are. Those groups that are betting that God will choose only the members of their unique organization for the place of safety, or to be the Bride of Christ, underestimate the mind of Christ. When we consider the meaning of 1 Corinthians 12:24, we learn that the mind of Christ is exactly the opposite of what is commonly found in practice in various Churches of God today! *"... God hath tempered the Body [of Christ] together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked,"* because, *"God hath set the members, every one of them, in the Body [of Christ], as it hath pleased Him."* (1 Corinthians 12:24, 18)

### **God is the Source of Unity**

Since it is God who has placed the individual members where it pleases Him, we would do well to receive all the brethren. If we were working on our relationship with God as we should, the result would be a better unity with other like-minded brethren. The reason for the disunity in the Church, even after so many years, attests to the fact that there are those who have not yet become rooted in Christ as they

should be. It is simply unfathomable to have Church of God organizations existing side by side, while ignoring each other's very existence as brethren of Christ. Would Jesus have been a part of such divisiveness without taking positive action? Clearly, the Bride will not possess a spirit of alienation.

The will of God is perfectly clear: "*There should be **no schism** in the Body [of Christ]; but that the members should have the same care one for another.*" (1 Corinthians 12:25) In this verse, the "body" is the Body of Christ, and the "one for another" refers to all those members who have God's Holy Spirit in their minds – leading them in God's way (Romans 8:14). As much as God desires unity – it must be **based on God's truth**. God desires unity – but, it must be according to His Word: "*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye **withdraw yourselves** from every brother that walks disorderly [he will not repent of sin].*" (2 Thessalonians 3:6)

Here is where Christian maturity must prevail – do we *withdraw* from the sinner or do we *go to our brother* and try to help him? We must do one or the other. Here is our priority: If there is any possibility that our brother is able to repent from the error of his way – we must help him. Is it not obvious what we should do? Can we be so unwise as to come to the conclusion that we have been released from the commandment to *love one another*? Do we make void the commandment of God by loving only the people who have "no problems?"

We will not be prepared for the wedding supper with Christ until we truly seek to remove the obstacles that persist between ourselves and other children of God. God demands

that we must be an active part of building close relationships with brethren – including those who are across imaginary organizational lines. It is every Christian's duty before God to seek out others. Perhaps the apostasy separated us against our will – but that is not a justification for continuing in our divided condition.

Those brethren who finally make up the Bride of Christ will be of one mind. Christ is not divided – we all know that (1 Corinthians 1:13). But, do we know this? The Body of Christ, those in the *true* Church, His *true* Bride – by definition – cannot be divided. That raises a serious question if we refuse to acknowledge others who are led by God's Spirit. When a member cuts off fellowship from other brethren – that is division – plain and simple. One person or the other is going to miss out on that precious occasion of the wedding supper! We cannot expect to be saved ourselves while saying in effect, "I don't care if others make it into God's Kingdom or not."

### **The Door is Closing...**

Let us take very careful notice of Christ's words spoken to the foolish virgins because His words are for now – and they are for us! *“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man comes.”* (Mat 25:13) The ironic thing is that these words are meant as an **urgent warning to us** – so that we will not be foolish virgins, as others who have already missed out on the wedding supper! It is too late for some – but it is not too late for us!

Could it be that much of the Church of God is not heeding the obvious warnings that God is directing to His end-time Church? Please realize that we face the same spiritual threats

that endangered the first century Church. *“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that you should earnestly **contend for the faith** which was once delivered unto the saints.”* (Jude :3)

Do not take it for granted that we already have the full measure of faith spoken of here. It is clear that Jude is admonishing the brethren who should have been striving mightily to hold on to the original pure truth that was given to them. They were the true Church, and they had lost the knowledge and the practice of the true faith they once held and cherished. How could they have lost faith? Can it happen to us? Are we so arrogant as to presume that we are doing everything right – thinking we are spiritually *rich and increased with goods, and in need of nothing?* (Revelation 3:17)

Paul warned against this kind of arrogance. *“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, **not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.**”* (Romans 12:3) The context of Paul’s warning is that we are all members of the one Body of Christ.

Like so many in the Church today, those early brethren had ceased living up to the moral excellence that true faith demands of us. And so it is happening again today with too many brethren only warming a seat at services and going through the motions. They are the five sleeping virgins of Matthew 25 who lacked oil for their lamps. They are not exercising God’s Holy Spirit in their day-to-day activities. That is the very reason that God exhorts us today to *earnestly*

*contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. Faith demands action!*

### **Time is Short**

*“While the [foolish] virgins went to buy [oil], the Bridegroom came; and the [wise] virgins **that were ready** went in with Him to the marriage: and the **door was shut**. [The door is permanently closed.] Afterward came also the [foolish] virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But He answered and said; truly I say unto you, **I do not know you.**” (Matthew 25:10-12)*

When Christ returns, the opportunity to be firstfruits will have elapsed. It will then be too late to prepare to meet the Bridegroom. Make no mistake about it, now is the only time to prepare. When the end comes upon us, will we be firmly founded and rooted in Christ and able to withstand the final trials? Could it be that **the door is about to close** on us? We know that an acceptable faith among the brethren will be rare indeed. *“When the Son of man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8)*

Could it be that Jesus finds little faith when He returns – due partly to the lack of spiritual meat the brethren are receiving? *“Faith comes by hearing, [good sermons from the Bible] and hearing by the Word of God.” (Romans 10:17)* God describes the final spiritual famine as one in which the brethren **do not even know** what they are missing. *“You say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and **know not** that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” (Revelation 3:17)*

We live in the very last days. The time of the marriage supper is very close. Jesus Christ will soon knock. *“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will **sup with him**, and he with me.”* (Revelation 3:20) But the Scriptures are clear – many of the Church brethren will be spiritually unprepared to meet the Bridegroom at the time of His return. Jesus says that His return will catch some of the saints – possibly half of the brethren – **unprepared**. Verse 13 is a warning given in love, *“Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man comes.”*

Why does God call them foolish virgins? It is because they foolishly believe that they **have it made**. In their spiritual slumber, they do not remain vigilant until the return of Christ. They are not doing what it takes to have a Christian relationship with their Creator God and their fellow brethren. They assume that they are prepared, or they think that they can get ready at the last possible moment.

### **A Spiritual Relationship**

How could Jesus possibly say to the five foolish virgins, *“I know you not?”* The answer is that they take for granted that they are just as entitled and prepared to marry the Bridegroom as the five *wise* virgins, who have **a truly spiritual relationship** with God.

It is not only the members who fall into this deceptive trap. Ministers are just as likely to consider themselves to be the elite – perhaps more so. Some think, “Because of my rank and years of service, I am uniquely qualified and closer to God.” Many came into the Church when there was an over-emphasis on church government and hierarchical authority

over the members. With all due respect, much of the ministry thought of themselves very much like European royalty – not subject to the same rules as the rank and file. Yes, those in the first resurrection will be royalty in the Kingdom of God, but now is not the time to practice or exhibit a holier-than-thou elitism.

Those “privileged” ministers would not be seen in public until they were well coiffed, manicured, and in their three-piece suits. This is not being critical – that is just the way it was, and still is for some. You might say, “What is wrong with that picture?” What is wrong is that Jesus taught and exhibited just the exact opposite!

### **The Bride is a Servant**

Contrast that depiction of the well-groomed ministry with the factual picture of Jesus Christ; without His coat, on His hands and knees, washing the disciple’s feet as an example of how ministers should be **servants**. “*[Jesus] rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself... and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded... For I have given you an example, that **you should do** as I have done to you.*” (John 13:4, 15) “*For who is greater, he that sits at meat, or He that serveth? Is it not he that sits at meat? But I am among you as **He that serves.***” (Luke 22:27) Jesus set aside His glory and power to come to earth for the purpose of serving mankind.

Jesus lowered Himself from God the Father’s presence – and lower than the angels – even lower than mankind. He became the **servant of mankind** to save us. And, He said that we should do the same! Unfortunately, Satan’s mind-set of being

totally unwilling to lower himself to serve, prevails all too often with self-serving mankind. When Satan realized that he would be subservient to men – he rebelled and fell from his first estate as one of the covering cherubs over God’s throne (Jude :6, Ezekiel 28:16). Are we able to lower ourselves beneath everyone – in order to serve as Jesus gave us example? Do we even understand what the foot-washing entails? There is a deeper meaning in the foot-washing than humbling ourselves for a few minutes down on the floor.

### **The Bride Washes Feet**

The meaning behind the foot-washing ceremony is so important that Jesus made it a requirement for our salvation. The foot-washing symbolizes our renewed commitment to walk in the newness of life that we made at our baptism. And more than that, God also requires us to help other brethren to be clean before Him. When a brother or sister has strayed and allowed a serious sin to enter their life – we must serve them by going to their spiritual rescue – no matter what it takes – that is laying down our lives for the brethren.

How do so many miss that clear lesson? Even those who speak of servant leadership continue to perform in the same old ways. In contrast to Jesus’ positive example for us, why does so much of the ministry continue to believe that it is necessary to put on an air of preeminence and sophistication? Is it more important to maintain that pretentious appearance than to follow Christ’s pattern of humble service? Jesus’ example was to lay aside His true preeminence and become **the lowest servant** – even laying down His life for us. *“Jesus Christ, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no*

*reputation, and took upon Himself the **form of a servant.***”  
(Philippians 2:6-7)

This is not a new revelation – almost every one of those ministers would say that they understood that concept of serving. It is just that they insisted on serving from a position of superiority. That is specifically what Jesus taught against! “[Jesus] sat down, and called the twelve, and said unto them, *If any man desires to be first, the same shall be **least of all, and servant of all...** Whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be **servant of all...** For even the Son of man came not to be served, **but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.***” (Mark 9:35, 10:44-45)

Over and over, Jesus taught His disciples that they were not to be the ones catered to, but rather that they should dedicate their lives to the self-sacrificing service of the brethren. Sadly, even after so many years, some in the ministry still twist Jesus’ words, and conclude that they are better able to serve so many more from their high positions of dominance. Their lofty perch places them in a rather awkward position to teach the ordinary “lowly” brethren. Ministers can be foolish virgins, too.

But, learn to serve and love one another, we must – ministers and brethren alike! Jesus did it. So must we. That is why God the Father has called us into His Church at this time. “*For even hereunto were you called: because Christ also suffered for us, **leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.***” (1 Peter 2:21) Are we able to lower ourselves to be servants of all?

## Bone of my Bones and Flesh of my Flesh

It may seem like strange language today, but the very first description of a marriage found in the Bible is this: “*This is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh...*” (Genesis 2:23) These, of course, were the prophetic words of Adam as he took Eve to be his wife. Significantly, those words mirror the **perfect spiritual union of Christ and His Bride** – the Church. (‘Bride’ is capitalized throughout, as an indication of her divine nature at the time of the wedding.) It is not only because Eve was taken out of Adam (v.23) that God declared them to be one flesh, it is because their inseparable cleaving to each other bound them as one flesh. “*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be **one flesh.***” (Genesis 2:24).

Every groom has specific qualities that he seeks in a wife – Christ also has specific qualities that He requires in His wife. Who will qualify to be the Bride of Christ? How will Jesus recognize His Bride? Paul tells us of the love that Christ has for His Bride. “*No man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord cherishes the Church: For we are members of **His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.** For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be **one flesh.** This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning **Christ and the Church.***” (Ephesians 5:29-32) In the same way that a husband and wife become one flesh, Christ and His Bride will be **one Spirit**. “*He who is joined to the Lord is [not one flesh, but] **one Spirit with Him.***” (1 Corinthians 6:17)

Now, this is getting way ahead of the story – but it is obvious that **the true Church, collectively, constitutes the Bride.** It

is, therefore, incumbent upon us that we be a part of the Church. Everyone that attends Sabbath services is not converted, nor is everyone who thinks himself to be a Christian, led by God's Spirit. We understand that tares do not recognize that they are tares, so it is vital that we make our calling and selection sure. (Matthew 13:40, 2 Peter 1:10)

How will Christ recognize His Bride – the Church? Those who comprise the Bride will be true Christians following the lead of God's Holy Spirit – with the spiritual fruit to prove it (Romans 8:14). They will be loving God and loving one another. And, as we saw a moment ago, they will be laying down their lives in service to each other. Jesus laid down His life for His friends – and He tells us that we must do exactly the same thing. (John 15:13)

Jesus intends His example of **sacrifice and service** to all to be an everyday way of life for His wife to be – not simply a symbolic act performed once a year at Passover. In the early Church, a deacon was a servant, like a janitor, maid, nurse, or even a slave. Unlike some men, God does not look down on those who serve. The original deacons waited tables and served the widows, and God greatly honored and approved of it (Acts 6:6, John 12:26).

Though most men in society would not cast a second glance at a lowly cleaning lady – let alone marry one – that is an exact picture of just what Jesus Christ is going to do. Let us remember that Jesus, who is King and Master, took the lowliest status of all, and served as a deacon [*diakonos*]. *“For even the Son of man [Jesus] came not to be served unto, but to serve [diakoneo], and to give His life a ransom for many.”* (Mark 10:45) Everyone in the congregation must be emulating Christ's example as a servant to all.

## A New Countenance

In a world of social class distinction, elitism, and caste systems, it is difficult to imagine that the most powerful and glorious Jesus Christ has chosen to marry a bride without high-class standing, power, status or prestige. Indeed, Paul says that we are now *slaves* of Christ [*doulos*, a *bond slave* without any rights or standing] because we have been purchased with His blood (1 Corinthians 7:22-23). When she is called out of this world, the Bride has no preferable status – but she begins to distinguish herself by putting on a *new countenance, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness* (Ephesians 4:24). Jesus Christ will not, in fact, marry across class lines – His Bride will *be like Him* (1 John 3:2, 1 Corinthians 15:49)!

The phrase, “*bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*,” should conjure up the appreciation of a closeness and unity that is only attainable within the *most intimate of relationships* – even a perfect union that is oneness in heart, mind, purpose, and Spirit. Jesus Christ cherishes His Bride (Ephesians 5:29). We have been given this preview of the heavenly wedding that depicts the affection and unique intimacy that the Bride will share with her Creator God.

## One Body – One Spirit

At creation, God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and He **opened his side** and created Eve to be his wife. That was done as a prototype of Christ and His Bride. Paul understood the prophetic significance of that act – referring to Jesus as the *final Adam* (1 Corinthians 15:45, Romans 5:14). Jesus’ death correlates to the deep sleep of Adam. Jesus’ **side was opened** – His life’s blood flowed out - making it possible for

the Church [His Bride] to be formed (John 19:34). *Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was **taken out** of Man.*

Eve was the ideal helpmate for Adam, or as Genesis has it – *an help meet for him... Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be **one flesh**.*” (Genesis 2:20-24) In the same way, Jesus Christ foretold that He and His Bride would be **one Spirit** (1 Corinthians 15:44).

Jesus Christ revealed to Paul that the Church brethren are in effect, His body – as husband and wife are *one flesh – one body* in marriage. The Church of God is the **Body of Christ**. *"You are the **Body of Christ**, and members in particular."* (1 Corinthians 12:27) *"...The Church, which is **His Body**."* (Ephesians 1:22-23) *"So we, being many, are **one Body** in Christ..."* (Romans 12:5) *"For [Christ's] **Body's** sake, which is the Church."* (Colossians 1:24) *"For the perfecting of the saints...for the edifying of **the Body** of Christ."* (Ephesians 4:12) Many more verses firmly establish that the “body” of Christ is a direct reference to the Church of God brethren.

### Only one Bride

When God created Eve from Adam’s side, she was physically perfect in every way. Eve became Adam’s wife. She was beautiful, healthy, intelligent, and fertile – *she was the mother of all living*. (Genesis 3:20) God used Eve to *make of **one blood** all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth*. (Acts 17:26) These attributes of Eve are prefigures or types given to us so that we might comprehend the purpose of the Bride of Christ. This clearly shows us the incredible objective Christ has in taking a wife. The purpose of the

Church is nothing less than to ultimately bring all mankind to be of **one Spirit** – bringing the entire world to salvation. “*He that is **joined unto the Lord is one Spirit [with the Lord].**” (1 Corinthians 6:17)*

### **The Bride is the Church**

Jesus Christ has only **one spiritual Body** with many members. Right now, they possess a token [earnest guarantee] of the Spirit of God and are scattered all over the face of the earth. “*As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are **one Body**: so also is Christ. Jesus Christ has only one body of believers – that is the one true Church – the Church of God. For by **one Spirit** are we all baptized into **one Body**, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into **one Spirit**. That is God's Holy Spirit. For the **body is not one member, but many [brethren]... But now hath God set the members every one of them in the Body [ the spiritual Body of Christ ], as it has pleased Him... But now are they many members, yet but **one Body** [the **one spiritual** Body of Christ]... Now you are the **Body of Christ** , and members in particular.***” (1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 18, 20, 27)

If we expect to be the Bride, we are obligated to extend our realm of brotherhood, fellowship, and service to include all who have the earnest of God's Holy Spirit. We cannot hate, despise, neglect, or reject any of the saints, as that behavior will disqualify us from the Kingdom of God. Those who are only interested in preparing themselves, while neglecting the spiritual welfare of their brethren, have fallen for the deception of Cain, who asked in Genesis 4:9, “*Am I my brother's keeper?*”

## Discern the Body

*Are we able to discern who our brothers and sisters in Christ are? Can we distinguish between the world and the Church? Taking Passover – while refusing to be reconciled to others – renders the Passover service contemptible in God’s sight. We must recognize all **true** Christians, without exception, counting them as brethren – our very salvation is at stake. "He that eats and drinks [the Lord's Passover] unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself, **not discerning the Lord's Body**. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." (1 Corinthians 11:29-30)*

Let us analyze the meaning of this verse. The heart of the matter is that they were: “**not discerning the Lord's Body**.” The Lord’s Body is the Church – the saints – the elect children of God – the Bride – the brethren – members of the Lord’s Body (1 Corinthians 12:12). Keep in mind that Paul is discussing the **lack of discernment** – the division taking place (1 Corinthians 11:18 ). Those participants did not regard everyone there equally – as all members of Christ’s Body. This *division* was going on at the Passover service in question. “**Discernment**,” means understanding and perceiving that all the brethren, regardless of organization, comprise the one Body of Christ. “**Discernment**,” means realizing that God places the members in the Body *as He chooses* – and none are to be excluded from our fellowship.

When we do not understand that all the brethren constitute the Church – look at the terrible consequences that follow – “*For this cause [lack of discernment] many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.*” Spiritually, we will be weak, sick or dead [damnation is loss of salvation] because Christ’s sacrifice, the Passover, is taken unworthily. This same

*division going on today is why the Church is so weak and sick spiritually.*

Jesus is the head of His Church; and converted Christians are individuals in His spiritual *body*. Paul wrote: "*[God the Father] has put all things under [Jesus'] feet, and gave Him to be **the head** over all things to the **church, which is His body***" [the one spiritual body of Christ]. (Ephesians 1:22-23)

Jesus Christ has only one body – thus, He has only one Church – **one Bride**. Every part of the *body* (each one of the brethren) is indispensable to the whole *body*. "*There is **one body**, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling... For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the **body of Christ**... From whom the **whole body** fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes **increase of the body** unto the edifying of itself in love.* (Ephesians 4:4, 12, 16)

Again, the Bible reveals that the one spiritual body of Christ is composed of Church brethren. "*[ **Christ** ] is the head of **the body, the Church**, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence... Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his **Body's sake, which is the Church.***" (Colossians 1:18, 24)

Jesus prayed for the unity of the Church just before He died (John 17). He inspired Paul to send us these words of 1 Corinthians 1:10: "*Now I beg of you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there **be no divisions** among you; but that ye be*

*perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*”

When we read that we are *members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones*, let us understand the obvious reference to the new covenant **marriage** of Christ and the Church. Marriages fail because of unrealistic expectations. But, the new covenant marriage of Christ will never fail because Jesus has made it clear what He expects of His Bride. Are we up to the task – are we equal to the challenge? God the Father would not have called us to become the Wife of His Son if we did not possess the potential to acquire the essential attributes that are required. We have a lot to accomplish – and time is short – even at the door.

### **A Good Marriage**

A good marriage is a beautiful thing – a Godly thing with deep and transcendent meaning for the entire Church of God. That is why it is so important to continuously build on our marriages all of our lives. A good marriage is a close, unified relationship between a man and a woman. It was God who instituted the marriage covenant between a man and a woman. God brought about the marriage covenant for a vitally important reason. From Genesis to Revelation, God uses the intimacy and love between a man and his wife to reflect the deeply *spiritual relationship* between Jesus Christ and His Bride.

“Just you and me Lord,” is not the kind of relationship that we are to have with our God. God designed man to be interactive with others in a spiritual way – *it is not good that man should be alone*. (Genesis 2:18) The apostle Peter explains that our eternal life depends, not only on our relationship with God,

but also on how we relate to our spouse, and with our Church brethren.

In His infinite wisdom, God gave the married couple the creative ability to bring children into the world as an exact type of His eternal plan of bringing many sons and daughters to glory – imbued with eternal life. God is reproducing Himself, and there is no more appropriate picture of His grand design than the family relationship. As Jesus presided at the very first wedding, He said, “*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be **one** flesh.*” (Genesis 2:24) God intends, and expects that marriage be the epitome of perfect unity.

God intends that a married couple enter into the Kingdom of God together. That is what Peter means by, “*being heirs **together** of the grace of life.*” Discord or conflict within a marriage impairs, not only the relationship between husband and wife, but also obstructs and frustrates a right spiritual relationship with God. Peter expounds on this concept: “*Likewise, you husbands, dwell with [your wife] according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs **together** of the grace of life; that your **prayers be not hindered.***” (1 Peter 3:7) What does it mean, “*that your prayers be not hindered*” – how are prayers hindered?

Peter continues, “*Finally, be you all **of one mind**, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous.*” (1 Peter 3:8) A serious marital problem arises when a husband and wife can no longer share their deepest feelings and heartfelt concerns with one another in an honest way. They are no longer **of one mind**, and their prayers to God are not in harmony. An untenable situation comes about

when the individual partners assert their reconciliation with God, but not with each other. The *oneness* of the marital union is strained to the breaking point, and God cannot, and will not, bless that kind of discord because the primary unity of the marriage is missing.

Instead of being heirs **together** of the Kingdom of God, the situation has become reversed. Peter's point is that when the intended unity and oneness of a marriage relationship breaks down, the parties become separated from one another and then lack the oneness to *be heirs together of the grace of life*. A person's prayers are, therefore, hindered, frustrated, and cut-off from God – there is a spiritual disconnection from God – because the individual parties are, in effect, asking God to bless only *a part* of a marriage that should be unified.

It is the same situation with the Body of Christ – the Church. Our prayers to God cannot be right, when our rapport with other brethren is not right. Can we pray and ask God to disregard a part of the Body of Christ? No, we cannot. It is confusion. *If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?* (1 John 4:20)

## One Church

In the same way that a husband and wife are meant to *be heirs together of the grace of life*, all members of the Body of Christ are meant to be *heirs together of the grace of life*. *“The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and **joint-heirs with Christ**; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.”* (Romans 8:16-17)

*“Being justified by His grace, we should be made **heirs** according to the hope of **eternal life**.”* (Titus 3:7)

The husband is the head of the wife – who is the weaker vessel. That is an exact picture of Jesus Christ and His Bride – the Church of God. Jesus is the head of the Church – we know that. But do we realize that we – the Church brethren – are the **weaker vessel**? And yet, Jesus made it possible for us to be joint-heirs with Him in the Kingdom of God when He laid down His life for us.

The scriptures are clear about our relationships with each other. God hates divorce because it tears at the very fabric and basis of family and community. In precisely the same way, God abhors division among those in His Church. Reconciliation is our duty. More than that, our responsibility to reconcile with each other even supersedes our religious worship. Notice the words of Jesus Christ, *“If you bring your gift to the altar, and there you remember that your brother has anything against you; Leave there your gift before the altar, and go your way; **first be reconciled** to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”* (Matthew 5:23-24)

In the same way that quarrels between marriage partners are spiritually harmful because they impede their prayers; offenses between Church brethren also frustrate and encumber a right relationship with God. Most members underestimate the seriousness of severed relationships between brethren. Until such time that the camaraderie among brethren is restored – **prayers are hindered**. Let us keep the big picture here. The Bride that Christ is going to marry will be made up of all the reconciled brethren in the Church – those who are ardently working to restore and maintain right relations among all the brethren. The Bride

that Christ marries will have learned to make peace and reconciliation a way of life. Keep in mind that both husbands and wives will make up the Bride of Christ.

The worst pain is that of betrayal. Jesus Christ has experienced betrayal. His marriage to the Bride will be exemplified by the faithfulness and loyalty of those who have learned to make peace. In the millennium, Christ's marriage to the Church will not be a troubled marriage because His Bride will have **made herself ready** by practicing the skills of reconciliation. That is why it is so necessary at this time for husbands and wives to learn how to live together in love, respect and harmony. God's Spirit dictates that Church brethren possess this same unity of the Spirit – making them one. They, too, must be unified because Jesus and His Bride will have a good marriage.

### **Bride of Christ**

Are we conquering ourselves, and going on to perfection? Are we keeping ourselves unspotted? Christ, who is perfect, will have a perfect Bride. She will have made herself ready – but she could not have made herself ready without Christ's help.

John the Baptist understood that the Messiah would take a Bride. He knew from the Scriptures that Christ would enter into an eternal marriage covenant with a righteous Wife. *"For thy Maker is thy Husband; the Lord of hosts is His name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel."* (Isaiah 54:5) Some people thought that John the Baptist was the Messiah; so, calling to mind Isaiah's words, John the Baptist had to explain to them that he was only the "best man" at the wedding, and that he would stand up and be witness to the

covenant vows – and that Jesus Christ would be the **Husband of the Bride**. *“He that has the Bride is the Bridegroom: but the friend of the Bridegroom, which stands and hears Him, rejoices greatly because of the Bridegroom's proclamation.”* (John 3:29)

There is a prophetic picture in Ezekiel 16, where Jesus washed, dressed, and blessed the nation of Israel so that she would be prepared to be His wife. He cleansed her; He groomed and dressed her in royal garments – He prepared her. That picture will be completed when Jesus takes the Church – spiritual Israel – to be His Bride (Galatians 6:16). Look at the detailed attention Jesus gave to His fiancée:

*“When I passed by you, and looked upon you, behold, your time was the time of love; and I spread my garment over you, [a symbolic proposal of marriage] and covered your nakedness: yea, I swore unto you, and **entered into a covenant** with you, saith the Lord God, and you became mine. Then I washed you with water; yes, I thoroughly washed away your blood from you, and I anointed you with oil. I clothed you also with needlepoint work, and placed furlined slippers on your feet, and I dressed you about with fine linen, and I covered you with silk. I embellished you also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon your hands, and a necklace on your neck. And I put jewelry on you, and earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown upon your head. Thus were you adorned with gold and silver; and your garments were of fine linen, and silk, and embroidered work; you ate of fine cakes, and honey, and oil: and you were exceeding beautiful, and you did prosper into a kingdom. And your renowned reputation went forth among the heathen for*

*your beauty: for it was perfect through my grandeur, which I had put upon you, says the Lord God.” (Ezekiel 16:8-14)*

Think of Christ doing the same for us – only in the most splendid way – making us lovely and beautiful, **spiritually!** The Bride of Christ will be *adorned in fine linen, clean and white* – meaning that she will be a perfect, spiritual Bride – with the righteousness of Christ upon her. Jesus has done His part in completely washing His Bride. We must be washed. *“Jesus Christ... loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood.” (Revelation 1:5)*

### **Our Part in the Preparation**

The most important question for us to consider is what must the future wife of Christ be doing to prepare herself and make herself ready for the marriage of the Lamb? The Bride of Christ will be adorned, not so much in the elegant physical garments of a dazzling wedding gown, but in the brilliant spiritual attributes of Godly love, obedience, holiness, perfection, righteousness, and brotherly love (1 John 3:14). The Bride will not be of superficial character, but will have developed Godly moral fiber – making her suitably prepared for her wedding to Christ. *“The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready.” (Revelation 19:7)*

We all seek, and expect to be the Bride of Christ... so let us ask ourselves this question: Have we done *our part* to be the perfect Bride Jesus is seeking? Notice what Jesus has to say concerning His Bride: *“It shall be in that day, says the Lord, that you shalt call Me Ishi [my husband]...“I will betroth you unto Me forever. Yes, I will betroth you unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness: and*

*thou shalt know the Lord.*” (Hosea 2:16, 19-20) The marriage of Jesus Christ to His Bride will inaugurate the eternal covenant planned from the foundation of the world. “*To her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the **fine linen is the righteousness of saints.***” (Revelation 19:8)

### **Jesus Warns the Church**

Over and over in the Scriptures, Jesus warns His Bride to be prepared. Do we recognize that the warnings *are for us* – and not for somebody else? Jesus gives us the parable of the person who came to the marriage supper not having the proper wedding garment. The proper wedding garment is symbolic of the preparedness and righteousness of the saints. The person who shows up *unprepared* is cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 22:2-14). Christ shows that some people will think that they are righteous – when they are not. That is a **warning for us** today, as much as Jesus’ message to the Laodiceans is a forewarning to those of us in these last days to zealously repent (Revelation 3:19).

“*The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for His Son.*” (Matthew 22:2) When Jesus, speaking of His own marriage to His Bride ends the parable with the warning in verse 14, “*Many are called, **but few are chosen***” – that should shock us out of our complacency, spur us into action, and wake us up. Jesus issues these warnings to us because He knows that our generation possesses an inherent weakness – a proclivity to excuse ourselves. It seems that most of the brethren would rather think of themselves as **faultless Philadelphians**, rather than heed what the Spirit says to all the churches – especially the Laodiceans.

Without a doubt, many brethren in the last day will go into the tribulation because of their half-hearted approach to their faith. Though they have been the recipients of bountiful peace, copious fellowship, and a wealth of doctrinal truth, they do not yet possess the full spirit of unity and brotherly love that Jesus requires of His Bride (Revelation 3:17). *“Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* (Ephesians 4:3).

It is crucial that we make good use of the short time that remains. God has mercifully given us this present time to go on to perfection. **Will we use the time wisely?** The continually divided nature of many groups of brethren suggests otherwise. Those who are wise will qualify for the place of safety and escape the time of Jacob’s trouble. *“Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.”* (Jeremiah 30:7)

During the Tribulation when Satan goes to make war with the remnant, there will be an additional number of brethren who will stand-up, be counted, lay down their lives, and come out of the Tribulation. *“These are they who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”* (Revelation 7:14, 12:17) They will also be the Bride of Christ in the first resurrection because they really lived their interactive faith – loving God, and interrelating on a spiritual plane with the brethren.

Who among the brethren will have the fortitude to openly stand against the policies of the Beast Power? It will be the hardest thing they have ever been called upon to do. Those who have believed themselves to be “pillars in the Church,”

who have been used to enjoying the advantages and privileges of the elite, will have the most difficult challenge.

How many will respond negatively – caving in – as so many brethren and ministers did in going right along with the false teachings of the apostasy? At the end, Jesus said that the very elect would be deceived, if possible. *“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.”* (Matthew 24:24) Are we so brash as to suppose that it could not possibly happen to us?

### **The Pretentious Church of God**

The Bride-to-be should be taking the responsibility to prepare herself, seriously – and not just for show. After all, we answer to Jesus Christ – and no one else. When it comes to doctrine and Biblical understanding, we have been given more than any people in history. It would be easy to get puffed up and superior-minded when thinking, “We have so much more than others.” But, that is not an appropriate response for the great blessings we have been afforded. Jesus said, *“Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.”* (Luke 12:48) Think about how much God is going to hold us accountable because we have the whole Word of God; we know and understand the plan of God; we have the freedom and means to celebrate the Holy Days; we have the privilege to be able to keep the weekly Sabbath and the annual Passover; and we are fed continually with good literature and sermons expounding on the Scriptures.

The Church of God is puffed up, and has not humbled itself and become unified – not even to fulfill the last request of Jesus – *Father that they **may be one**.* (John 17) We will give

an answer to Christ if we fail to do everything possible to achieve unity with all true Christians. *“These things, brethren, I have, for your sakes... written, that no one of you be puffed up one against another.”* (1 Corinthians 4:6) Paul wrote that verse because there existed an arrogance among the membership that said, "Our group is best, and we cannot be bothered to help a brother from another faction into the Kingdom of God."

Eight times the Scriptures tell us that God is no **respector of persons**. *“There is no respect of persons with God.”* (Romans 2:11) Neither can we be respecters of persons. This is another dangerous trait of the Church of God that the Bride must avoid. It manifests itself in those who have the viewpoint that God has selected only them to be the “very elect.” After all, they reason that they made the right decision at the right time to go with the right group. And, since they are so certain of their exclusive tie to God, they make it a priority to convince others to join with them – and they reject or loathe those who will not join them.

Those people who think that God loves them alone because of some unique understanding they possess do not see their own weakness and pride. Let us pray to understand the mercy and the mind of Christ.

### **The Bride Judges Rightly**

We are warned not to be judgmental with insensitive feelings toward the inept, neither those who lack influence, nor those who are less educated than others. We are also not to have **respect of persons** by giving preferential treatment to those who are rich, articulate, politically savvy, and more socially adept, while dishonoring the less well-to-do. The latter are

the potential Bride of Christ in the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:27).

*“My brethren, do not have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with **respect of persons**. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in work clothes, and you give **preferential treatment** to him that wears the fine clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then **divisive in yourselves**, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor.”* (James 2:1-6)

As clear as this Scriptural teaching is, people still justify their separation from other brethren – and it is plain and simple – division in the Church. *“Is Christ divided?”* (1 Corinthians 1:13) Absolutely not! He is not divided – that is the point – and yet, there are holdouts today that would prevent brethren from reaching across artificial church lines to other brethren. Make no mistake about it – Jesus Christ is not going to return to a scattered bunch of churches. Jesus Christ will have only **one Bride** – made up of all the brethren who are being led by God’s Holy Spirit.

This one single point of God’s instructions – *do not give preferential treatment* – is widely ignored, and could disqualify us from being the Bride of Christ. James shows that we are not to put a dividing line between the brethren. *“If ye fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have*

*respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convicted of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”* (James 2:8-10)

We must admit that this church party spirit we see all around us is wrong. Party spirit is the divisive factions within the church that do not respect the fact that God is calling together a **broad spectrum** of humanity to be His sons and daughters. What are we to do about the problem? The answer is that we must be instrumental in healing the breach. Take a stand! Recognize your brothers and sisters who are in other groups all around the world – who have a right relationship with God – and build an association with them.

Reestablish a fellowship with all your brethren. Jesus Christ will be pleased. The Bible reveals that there are many false ministers that the brethren are to be careful of – they are not rooted and founded in Jesus Christ. Have the courage to do what God requires of us. Our task is not to find the single corporate organization that Christ is fully pleased with – because it does not exist on earth at this time. Every true Christian's mission is to be firmly rooted in Jesus Christ.

### **Christ's Expectation for His Bride**

At the time that we should see peace, harmony, and unity among the brethren – look at what we find within God's Church. We see major contentions in the ministry; we see ministers closing their eyes to wrong dating practices; we see unlawful marriages of members; and we can hardly find any movement toward reconciliation of the various church groups to one another. This evil conduct is transparent to God and it is clearly not loving God's instructions, nor acting on them.

*“Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for **she is thy life**. Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.”* (Proverbs 4:13-14)

We are fast running out of time that the Bride will need in order to become pleasing in God’s sight. The day will soon come when it will be too late to accomplish anything more than a death-bed repentance – and that is not God’s will. His will is that we are blameless in His sight at all times. *“[God] shall also establish you unto the end, that ye **may be blameless** in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (1 Corinthians 1:8)

In the same way that our nation’s elected officials simply stand by while our Constitutional rights are trampled underfoot – our long-time church leaders simply stood by and did nothing while a false apostle supplanted Church doctrine with heresy – introducing terrible apostasy to God’s people. What should the evangelists and leading pastors have done? They should have had the courage to stand for the Truth and protect the flock – but they had fallen into a trap – a trap of their own making. They should have previously learned to cope with errant ministers in the same way that they dealt with wayward members – but all too often, they turned a blind eye – they gave a pass to the excesses of some ministers. The result is that the evangelists and leading pastors are complicit in the scattering of the brethren. Christ’s **expectations are higher** than that.

The evangelists and leading pastors should have pulled together in defense of our faith. They should have descended on the office of the impostor and barred the door – putting him out on the street. There were ample grounds for banishment – for starters, he was an admitted Sabbath

breaker! None had the courage to take a stand to disfellowship that despicable heretic. Let us pray that those ministers, who were negligent in protecting the Church brethren and defending true doctrine, repent of their shortcomings so that an error such as this does not occur again. The ministers who have continued in this vein are **not prepared to teach** in the world tomorrow.

### **What Does the Lord Require of His Bride?**

That is our sad history. What about today? The tests and trials of God's people are not over. Now the Church is weak and scattered. This is a time of final testing. What would Christ have us do? What does the Lord require of His Bride? That is the question we must answer correctly. Jesus Christ is doing His part. Thank God for His infinite wisdom in dealing with each of His called out children on an individual basis. Our relationship with God the Father, putting on the faith of Jesus Christ, and our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ must be our ultimate priority. Our Spirit-driven relationship with God is the very basis for our *servicing* the brethren. It is in *servicing* that we prepare to be the Bride.

### **Always a Bridesmaid, Never the Bride**

What happens if we do not prepare? "Always a bridesmaid, never the bride" is a saying that some young women bemoan when they ponder why it is that they never seem to be the bride at the altar. Could it be that they have not followed proper counsel in their **preparation to be a bride**?

The New Testament writers had to continually address a serious problem impacting the Church of God. Preachers were passing themselves off as true ministers of Jesus Christ,

while **leading the brethren astray** by telling the weak members exactly what they wanted to hear – as opposed to what they needed to hear. People say, “That can’t happen today – we’d spot a charlatan minister in a minute.” Well, that is not true, because false ministers are not easy to spot. *“Such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his **ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness**; whose end shall be according to their works.”* (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)

So, God included these verses for the very reason that brethren today are being led into grave error by false ministers – **it is happening!** The Bride will have the spiritual discernment to perceive between false and true ministers of Jesus Christ. In Peter’s words, here is what the counterfeit preachers are doing: *“For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in **bondage**.”* (2 Peter 2:18-19)

Echoing Peter’s words, Paul put succinctly what some ministers are doing, *“For they that are such **serve not our Lord Jesus Christ**, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.”* (Romans 16:18) *“Serving their own belly,”* means that the minister is looking out for himself – his future, his retirement, and his standing in his organization. Paul explains further that it is possible to **fall away** from the truth. *“But now, after that ye*

*have known God, or rather are known of God, how **turn ye again** to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in **bondage?***” (Galatians 4:9) Those brethren, who were once escaping the delusions of the world, turn again to the permissive nature of society – succumbing to corruption; they find themselves in **bondage to sin** once again.

### **The Bride Puts God First**

Those who are preparing to be the **Bride of Christ** need to be wary and ask these questions so as not to fall short: “Is my minister founded in the gospel of Jesus Christ, or does he vacillate between God and corporation? Where do my true loyalties lie?” How many make the mistake of being loyal to the church organization rather than being loyal to God and His Word? That constitutes **spiritual adultery** that will **disqualify the Bride**. The Bride puts Jesus Christ and His ways first in her life.

Let us ask ourselves, “Am I a Christian first and foremost, or, am I in the Church because it is a great place to fulfill a personal agenda?” Be careful in answering – it is very easy to deceive ourselves. Jesus warns us about men who “preach Christ” deceiving lots of people. “*Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you, for **many** shall come in my name, saying, “I am Christ,” and shall deceive many.*” (Matthew 24:4-5) Incredibly, Jesus spoke of many false ministers – where are they today?

Over and over the Bride-to-be has been alerted through Biblical warnings to beware of men who can lead her astray and cause her to be jilted. “*For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this*

*condemnation, **ungodly men**, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ... These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaks great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.”* (Jude :4, :16) “*The grace of our God into lasciviousness,*” means that there are things being allowed in the church – both in conduct and appearance – that are morally reprehensible in God’s sight.

These verses say that some charismatic ministers cleverly articulate the inordinate desires of members by appealing to their baser human senses. The minister who is an impostor will twist the meanings of God’s Word so as to appeal to the lower nature by providing pretexts like – “Be true to your humanity – God will understand – You are not like others – God will forgive – God knows your heart.” “*For such are false apostles, **deceitful workers**, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.*” (2 Corinthians 11:13)

The **deceitful worker** plies his trade, realizing that some will seek promotion or recognition – as in acknowledgment from the pulpit, advancement in the congregation, esteem among the brethren, or possibly access to the minister’s inner-circle of friends. Because this travesty takes place in the confines of the Church congregation, there is a tendency for some members to let down caution and be caught off-guard.

Ministers become false ministers, not only because of phony doctrine, but also when they compromise God’s Word in favor of political expediency. Being ignorant of the true nature of the gospel – they can abuse the brethren. The mistreatment of a member can take place when a conflict arises between following the principles of God on the one

hand, and dealing in corporate politics on the other. While seeking to curry favor with headquarters, the minister relegates the member to a non-entity status. They further their careers rather than serving God's people according to Biblical guidelines. They do not cause the brethren to look to God – but rather to themselves. That kind of false minister seeks loyalty to himself – not to God. A note of caution – be careful of associating with political ministers.

### Servants of Jesus Christ

True ministers of Jesus Christ preach that true Christianity involves a life of trials, self-denial, suffering, self-sacrifice and hard work – and every other fruit of God's Spirit. Jesus gave and gave until He gave His all. That was His example to us of a true minister. Do not accept a substitute minister – and avoid substitutes for true religion. If your minister tells you to avoid fellowshiping with converted brethren from other organizations – have the spiritual maturity to discern his error, and **challenge him** on doctrinal grounds right away. Remember that your minister is also your brother in Christ, and you have just as much of an obligation to help him into the Kingdom of God as you do to all your other spiritual brothers and sisters.

The Bride will not be in the Kingdom of God solely because of tithing, commandment keeping, and food laws. And, also, it is not enough to be doing “The Work” all around the world. *“When ye shall have done **all those things** which are commanded you, say, **We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.**”* (Luke 17:10) We are here to pick up the pieces, and to help put Christians back together again. We do that by serving God and man. A part of our duty is to bind up the wounds of those who have been

hurt, and those who are afraid of being hurt again. If we are to be a **Bride prepared**, Jesus requires nothing less than honest, faithful, and heartfelt relationships with God and our fellow Christians.

### **Love and Marriage**

In the same way that betrayal of love is the most painful of all possible hurts – Godly character is the most beautiful of the Bride’s virtues. This most exquisite feature of Godly character is described as *pure gold tried in the fire* (Revelation 3:18). The love that Christ will have for His Bride and the wholehearted love that the Bride will have for Christ will be a perfect **spiritual love**. As surely as God created a wife for Adam, He is fashioning His own Bride-to-be. *“The Lord said, Yes, I have loved thee with **an everlasting love**: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. Again I will **build thee**, and thou shalt **be fashioned**, O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets...”* (Jeremiah 31:3-4)

From the time of creation until now, the love between Jesus Christ and mankind has been by and large a unilateral love. That one-sided love will finally become a reciprocally shared love when the perfected Bride blossoms into spiritual maturation at the resurrection. No longer will Jesus have a unique Godly **love for His fiancée**, because at long last she will finally possess the capacity to be able to reciprocate with an eternal mutual love.

How does the Bride come to possess that level of Godly love? Almost everyone says that they love God, but there is another requirement – **loving others** – that does not receive the attention that it requires. Notice how Jesus says it. *“You*

*shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt **love thy neighbor** as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.”* (Mark 12:30, Leviticus 19:18)

Let it be a given that we are not as calloused as the lawyer in the Biblical example who wanted to limit the number of people he was required to love by asking Jesus, “*Who is my neighbor?*” (Luke 10:29) Jesus reveals an important concept to us which explains that if we truly desire to develop a love toward God – we will first be practicing Godly **love toward one another**. The **Bride is not prepared** when the great majority of the brethren are not willing to interact in a meaningful way with each other. Jesus takes brotherly love personally! He equates Godly love to brotherly love when He says that **without brotherly love** there is no Godly love.

*“The King shall answer and say unto them, Truly I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the **least of these my brethren**, ye have done it **unto Me**... [and conversely] Then shall He answer them, saying, Truly I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye **did it not** to one of the least of these, ye **did it not to Me**.”* (Matthew 25:40, 45) Our rapport with each other is the key to knowing how to truly love God. This verse tells us that loving one another right now is the training occasion for knowing how to have a right relationship with God. We cannot love God **without truly loving the brethren**, and vice-versa; a **right relationship with God** is the prerequisite for loving the brethren. The love of God and His law is the foundation upon which is built every one of our right relationships in life.

## Warning Message

This is a sincere warning message for the Bride-to-be. We are not truly ready for the spiritual wedding to Christ when we are **idle observers** rather than positive forces for good in the lives of the brethren. God's advice to us, "*Get fervent and repent.*" (Revelation 3:19) Thankfully, God has given us additional time so that we might heed His direct command to us to rectify the apathetic, half-hearted, lackadaisical condition of so much of the Church.

Our overriding goal as God's spiritual community is to help one another reach the Kingdom of God. As far as it is possible by way of the correct use of our spiritual gifts, we are to help all others attain to their full potential in the Kingdom of God. We are learning now how to say in the Millennium, "*This is the way, walk ye in it*" (Isaiah 30:21). And, it is not just the job of the ministry – **it is everyone's duty!** At Passover, we are taught in the foot-washing ceremony the *salvational* necessity to serve one another. The foot-washing is about loving our neighbor as ourselves. In washing each other's feet, each member is admonished to watch over the *spiritual* condition of their brothers and sisters in Christ, and to take action when anyone begins to stumble. When we do this – Jesus says we have done it unto Him.

Get this straight: It is an act of Godly love to rebuke a sinner. A loving reprimand may save his eternal life. It is an **act of cowardice** to close one's eyes to a person overtaken in a fault. It is a common misconception that all we have to do is look out for our own spiritual wellbeing. God demands brotherly interaction of those who would be the Bride. "*Look not every man on his own things, but every man also **on the things of others.***" (Philippians 2:4) Jesus was direct when

dealing with those who were off-base – we must be also. *“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one converts him; Let him know, that he which **converts the sinner** from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”* (James 5:19-20) Saving a sinner like this brings rejoicing in heaven (Luke 15:7).

### **Love of God is Perfected**

Solomon noted that when love arose between a young man and a young woman, it was almost inexplicable – the young couple did not train for it; they did not study for it; they did not plan for it; they did not even know affection was coming. Seemingly, their love just materialized out of thin air. Solomon mused that some things were just too amazing to comprehend – and one of them is the beautiful romantic love that forms between a young man and a young woman.

However, it is different with the love that the Bride will have for Christ. Godly love does not just come to pass out of the blue! Godly love is spiritual and eternal – it originates with God. It is God who first makes it possible for us to love Him. John points this out for the Church, and he is quick to add that in the process of coming to love God – brotherly love cannot be omitted. *“We love [God], because **He first loved us**. If a man says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that **loves not his brother** whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”* (1 John 4:19-20)

We come to love those brethren with whom we interact and serve – those we help and those for whom we sacrifice and pray. We learn to relate to others in a manner that reflects the spiritual love and values taught by Jesus. The love of the Bride is a growing love – it increases as she gives of herself.

*“Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to **love one another**. No man hath seen God at any time. If we **love one another**, God dwells in us, and **His love is perfected in us.**”*  
(1 John 4:11-12)

## **Love One Another**

If there is one overriding weakness within the Church of God in the last days – it is that of neglecting the love of one another. We have been taught well the Law of God, but we fall short when it comes to a genuine love for one another. Let us take a look into the preponderance of New Testament Scriptures which give a good indication of the compelling drive among its writers – under the direction of God’s Holy Spirit – to plead with the brethren for the *salvational* constraint to **love one another**. *“We know that we have passed **from death unto life**, because we love the brethren. He that loves not his brother abides in death.”* (1 John 3:14)

What is the Bible’s definition of the **love of God toward the brethren**? The answer is simply that we interrelate with every man, woman, and child that we come into contact with according to the commandments of God. *“This is love, that we walk after His Commandments.”* (2 John :6) Paul shows that this concept applies to everyone, but especially, to those in the Church of God. *“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”* (Galatians 6:10) Peter clarifies that it must be from the heart and sincere: *“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto **unfeigned love of the brethren**, see that ye **love one another with a pure heart fervently.**”* (1 Peter 1:22)

*“The Lord make you to increase and **abound in love one toward another**, and toward all men, even as we do toward you... But as touching **brotherly love** you need not that I write unto you: for you yourselves are **taught of God to love one another**.”* (1 Thessalonians 3:12, 4:9)

*“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith grows exceedingly, and **the love of every one of you all toward each other abounds**.”* (2 Thessalonians 1:3)

*“Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of **the love which ye have to all the saints**.”* (Colossians 1:4)

*“Hearing of **thy love and faith**, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, **and toward all saints**.”* (Philemon 1:5)

*“**Let brotherly love continue**.”* (Hebrews 13:1)

*“If ye fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt **love thy neighbor as thyself**, ye do well.”* (James 2:8)

*“He that **loves his brother abides in the light**, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.”* (1 John 2:10)

*“This is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that **we should love one another**.”* (1 John 3:11)

*“Beloved, **let us love one another: for love is of God**; and every one that loves is begotten of God, and knows God.”* (1 John 4:7)

*“This commandment have we from Him, That **he who loves God, love his brother also**.”* (1 John 4:21)

## The Bride Loves the Children of God

The Bride will definitely love her Husband, Jesus Christ. She knows that Christ would have her genuinely love all the brethren. The Scriptures are abundantly clear that the Bride will be comprised of those who love all the Children of God. *“Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Messiah is begotten of God: and everyone that loves Him that begat loves him also that is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments.”* 1 John 5:1-2)

There are many more verses that attest to the vital importance of loving one another with a Godly love. It is clearly an Old Testament concept (Leviticus 19:18) – made “new” by Jesus Christ when He showed *how* we must love one another. His “new” command has to do with how deeply our commitment to love others must be. Jesus gave the Church brethren the “new” directive when He said, *“A new commandment I give unto you, That you love one another; AS I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”* (John 13:34-35)

We find this Biblical edict often repeated because of its absolute importance and magnitude. Jesus said, *“This is My commandment, That ye love one another, AS I have loved you.”* (John 15:12)

We are told that we are to “love” *as* Jesus loved. What does that mean? How did Jesus demonstrate His limitless love for the brethren? The answer is, He died on the cross so that we might live – that is how! *“Greater love hath no man than*

*this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*” (John 15:13)

Then, again, Jesus said, “*These things I command you, that you love one another.*” (John 15:17)

Therefore, those who will be the Bride will be **laying their lives down** for the brethren – just as Jesus laid His life down for us. Those who do not grasp the crucial importance of **loving the brethren by laying down their lives**, will not be a part of the Bride.

### **Willing to Die for Others**

The Bride of Christ is literally willing to die for others. Suppose that someone in the Church that we know of is found to be involved in gross immorality – what is our Godly obligation toward them? We have a Christian duty to get involved because that person is on the road to losing their salvation – and we are our brother’s keeper.

How far should the Bride be willing to go in order to provide the **saving love** that the member needs? It is easy to love the brethren when everything is going fine – but when sin enters the picture, it becomes geometrically more complex to love the brethren in a Godly way. The excuses and justifications **not** to step in and become involved begin to run rampant. It is so easy to say: “It is none of my business.” “I do not want to get involved.” “I’ll let the ministry take care of it.” “That is what they are paid for.” “I do not need the trouble that comes with putting myself in jeopardy.

This is typical of a situation wherein a Christian is bound by God’s command to **lay down his life**. The personal

involvement could range from a mere inconvenience, all the way to literally putting one's life and reputation on the line in order to save a brother.

### **The Bride Lays Down Her Life Daily**

For those who take Christ's admonition seriously – situations that demand our participation abound in the Church. We must understand that laying down our lives is more than a passing sentiment – it has to do with **taking up our cross** as Jesus took up His cross. Showing its salvational implications, *“Jesus said, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will **lose his life** for my sake shall find it.”* (Matthew 16:24-25)

Luke adds that if we are ashamed to follow this instruction of Jesus Christ – He will be ashamed of us when He returns (Luke 9:26). In other words, we will be disqualified from being the Bride because we failed to demonstrate a genuine Godly care for one another. We must go to the spiritual rescue of a brother who has a serious sin in his life – it is not optional – but mandatory. *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual, **restore such a one** in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”* (Galatians 6:1) Jude speaks of our fearfully intervening to save a brother by, **“pulling them out of the fire.”** (Jude :23) We must rescue them spiritually.

Unless we learn what it means to lay our lives down for the brethren in the love of God, we will not have a part in the Kingdom of God. The Scriptures are clear; if we lack the compassion to do everything within our power to salvage a brother who is in danger – we do not possess the love of God.

*“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because **He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.** But whosoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwells the **love of God** in him?”* (1 John 3:16-17) The answer is, the love of God does not dwell in him!

In the past, too many of our brethren have believed that our faith consists mostly of the ceremonial observance of rituals and the letter of the law, rather than the spirit of the law, which entails being the **living sacrifices** that we must be (Romans 12:1). Getting involved in perilous circumstances for the spiritual sake of a brother is hardly ever a popular thing to do.

A particularly difficult situation arises when a minister is at fault. How does a member approach a serious offense in a case like that? For instance, what is to be done when a Pastor refuses to deal with adultery in the congregation? The Bible gives us clear instructions on how the brethren are to deal with sin of this magnitude. A minister is also a brother in Christ – and must be dealt with accordingly. He is certainly not above the law in any way. Notice a New Testament example of coming to the aid of a sinner:

Paul, first of all, corrects the brethren for their arrogance (a puffed up attitude) in not dealing with a fornicator. Premarital sex and extramarital sex breed a contemptuous attitude in those who condone such illicit behavior. *“It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up [haughty], and have not rather mourned, that he*

*that has done this deed might be taken away from among you.” (1 Corinthians 5:1-2)*

It was not being judgmental to conclude that his salvation was at stake. That man was living in sin, and therefore, not entitled to a continuing fellowship with the brethren. He was yielding to his fleshly lusts, when Christians have, by definition, already *crucified the flesh with the inordinate desires and lusts* (Galatians 5:24). [*crucified the flesh*— means that they have killed that sin in their lives] Notice that Paul directs the congregation to deal with this sinner **using Godly** love to help him – not to permanently drive him away. The purpose of his being separated from the brethren is for the express goal of restoring such a one to repentance and salvation.

*“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ... deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” (1 Corinthians 5:4-5)* In other words, send him back into Satan’s world until he learns to defeat his carnality, and repent. Missing the camaraderie is a motivation to be reinstated to the fellowship of the brethren. Paul explains that this process pertains to a wide range of sins: *“Now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one have **no social interactions.**” (1 Corinthians 5:11)*

Sin cannot come into the presence of God (Isaiah 59:2) – and by extension, sin should not be present in the congregation of the brethren – the saints – because they are holy in God’s sight. So Paul’s instruction on the matter is: *“Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” (1*

Corinthians 5:13) The wonderful thing about this example is the positive results that were achieved because it was handled correctly in accordance with God's Word – *in showing love to a brother* (2 Corinthians 2:8). The sinful man repented – he learned that he must destroy his carnality with its passions and lusts – and he became a profitable member of the congregation once more (2 Corinthians 2:1-11).

### **A Minister is a Brother Too**

God is not a respecter of persons – so this lesson applies **equally to sinful ministers**. When a minister is sinning – there are two possible scenarios for the outcome. First, prayer, fasting, patience, wisdom and going to your brother (Matthew 18:15-17) may render a successful outcome – or, second, the minister may carry the congregation away into error. When the latter occurs, the faithful brethren will be in jeopardy of being put out of the church (3 John :10). An apt example of this happened in the case of Diotrephes. Diotrephes sought the preeminence, the highest position over all the congregation – meaning he wanted to be their minister – but he was a false minister. John gave the same instructions as Paul gave: *“Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that does good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.”* (3 John :11)

Satan is subtle, and so are his ministers. Often they will “only” want you to close your eyes to wrongdoing in the church. They will say things like, “Can't you go along with it for the sake of peace for a little while?” You might be tempted to say to yourself, “Peace is good!” The correct answer is, “No! I will not be a part of it for one second.” The sinning minister will disfellowship you in a heartbeat – but Jesus Christ says not to worry.

A sinning minister, who casts you out of a church organization when you are faithfully serving Jesus Christ, is **not** jeopardizing your salvation. Our salvation is always between us and Jesus Christ. In fact, helping a sinning minister to see the error of his way is what we must be doing to **ensure our salvation**. Jesus desires that we understand these things, so He said, *“These things have I spoken unto you, that you should not be offended. They shall **put you out of the congregations**: yes, the time is coming, that whosoever kills you will think that he is doing God a service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor Me.”* (John 16:1-3) It is a badge of honor in God’s sight to endure persecution. *“Your persecutions and tribulations that you endure are a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be **counted worthy of the Kingdom of God**, for which you also suffer.”* (2 Thessalonians 1:4-5)

### **Who is my Brother?**

For the Bride, it is vitally important to understand the absolute necessity to love the people God has called into the Body of Christ. We are familiar with the story of the lawyer who scrutinized Christ by asking what he must do to inherit eternal life (Luke 10:25). Jesus turned the question around by asking the lawyer what the Scriptures said on the matter. *“The lawyer answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and **thy neighbor as thyself.**”* (Luke 10:27)

Jesus affirmed his answer, but the lawyer wanting to reduce his culpability asked, *“Who is my neighbor?”* Jesus’ answer about the good Samaritan astonished the lawyer because it

went well beyond those whom the lawyer would have included as neighbors. He was willing to shun those who did not measure up in his eyes.

For the exact same reason that the lawyer missed the mark, the greater Church of God today is not yet prepared to be the Bride of Christ. Like the lawyer, too many Church brethren wish to limit the number of those they *have* to love. They wish to narrow down the field by disqualifying those that they do not consider to be worthy. In the same way that the lawyer felt justified in omitting the Samaritans – Church brethren excuse themselves of ignoring certain brethren. But Jesus points out that to inherit eternal life, we need to be willing to extend Godly love to a brother – to every person – not only those in our group affiliation. Harsh judgment will come upon contentious brethren.

The prophet Ezekiel issued a dire warning to the end-time Church of God. Likening the Church to a flock of sheep, Ezekiel wrote the first part of chapter 34 against the shepherds (the ministers) and criticized them for driving away the sheep (the brethren). But then, Ezekiel described the disunity and condescending disdain between group and group – and between brethren and brethren. Then he called the sheep to task for their lack of **brotherly love** for each other.

*“Therefore thus says the Lord God to them: "Behold, I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and **scattered them** abroad, therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a victim; and I will judge between **sheep and sheep**. And I will set up **one shepherd over them**, and he shall feed them, even my servant*

*David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.”*  
(Ezekiel 34:20-23)

Brethren, we had better be preparing **now** for that time when we who constitute the Bride will be of one Shepherd. How can we be so busy scattering and dividing when the Spirit of Christ says that He is, “... *not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*” (2 Peter 3:9)

### **A Magnificent Reality**

Our Church wedding ceremony begins with the words, “Marriage is a natural union, but a divine institution, ordained of God.” God created the marriage covenant, not only as the basis of social order for mankind, but also to foreshadow His eternal plan. The marriage of Adam and Eve as husband and wife was the prototype of the eternal spiritual covenant between Christ and His Bride – the Church.

That first marriage contract between Adam and Eve was a prophetic sign of Christ’s ultimate goal to enter into a perfect spiritual union with all the members of His Body. In Ephesians 5, Paul speaks of how the Bride of Christ and the Church of God are one and the same. Even now, Christ is preparing His **Wife-to-be** for their wedding day, “*That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*”

The language is decidedly matrimonial in comparing a husband’s love for his wife – to the love of Christ for His Wife, “*He nourishes and cherishes her, even as the Lord the Church.*” (Ephesians 5:29) God established the intimacy attainable within a blessed marriage as a mere indication of

the transcendent unity and oneness achievable only in the spiritual realm of the God-plane marriage.

Then, Paul reveals how God is showing us through the *physical* marriage bond, His intent for all the Church brethren to be joined eternally to Jesus Christ in an eternal *spiritual* covenant: “*A man shall leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.*” (Ephesians 5:32)

There are those who consider themselves to be “doctrinal experts” today who deny that any such marriage will take place. Clearly, God records the first covenant wedding with Israel as being typical of the soon-to-be-fulfilled New Covenant wedding supper with the resurrected Israel of God (Exodus 24:7-11, Galatians 6:16). “*This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.*” (Hebrews 10:16-17)

The Bible distinctly shows the objective of our going on to perfection: “*I have espoused you to one Husband [Jesus Christ], that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.*” (2 Corinthians 11:2) There will be a heavenly wedding!

“Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said unto me, these are the true sayings of God.” (Revelation 19:9) Some claim that there will be no wedding supper at all, and that these words of God are merely an allegory. Is the Church of God literally going to enter into an eternal covenant relationship with Jesus Christ – or did God simply want us to get our hopes up with these alluring

sentiments? The real problem is the destabilizing inference that Jesus overstated our potential, and that the reality of Christ's teaching does not measure up to His claim.

Make no mistake about it, "*These are the true sayings of God.*" (Revelation 19:9) Be very careful of those who water down the truth of God in these last days. "*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall... have a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.*" (2 Timothy 3:1, 5)

When we read of the future fulfillment of God's Plan – never assume that it is possible to grasp with our carnal minds – the awesome, majestic, and incomprehensible meaning of what God has promised. Jesus Christ is not selling us a bill of goods. Let us always recognize that the fulfillment of the promises that God speaks of will far surpass our greatest expectations.

The critics' proof that the *marriage supper of the Lamb* was only a legalistic was said to be in Revelation 21. They snidely asked the question, "Is Jesus going to marry *a city*? Chuckle, chuckle!" What does the Scripture mean when it speaks of a new heaven and a new earth? "*I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a Bride adorned for her Husband.*" (Revelation 21:2)

Something magnificent is being revealed here – *the Holy City, prepared as a Bride* – what does it mean? Those who used worldly wisdom deduced that it was a foregone conclusion that Christ could not possibly marry New Jerusalem – because no one can marry *a city*. They could not understand "New Jerusalem" to be a reference to the **spiritual saints of God**.

They failed to include the next few verses in their study, and they neglected to ask themselves the question, “Who is New Jerusalem?” Again, please understand – Bible language points to the spiritual reality to come. Let us gather a little here and a little there, and see if we can figure out *who* Jesus Christ is speaking of when He uses the term, “New Jerusalem.”

## **Zion**

First of all, let us understand what Zion is. (Sion, in the New Testament) The first mention of Zion is when David captured this temple-mount stronghold from the Jebusites (2 Samuel 5:7). The meaning of the word “Zion” goes through a series of Scriptural expansions in its conceptual development from representing ancient Israel as the people of God (Isaiah 51:16), to include the all encompassing concept of God’s everlasting reign, and all that entails (Micah 4:7). *“The Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. This is My rest forever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.”* (Psalm 132:13-14) Make the connection here that God **dwells** in both Zion and the saints – because they are one and the same! The saints are, *“...an habitation of God...”* (Ephesians 2:22)

Isaiah equates Zion with the Holy City, Jerusalem. *“Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the Holy City.”* (Isaiah 52:1) And, the **saints have the name** of the city of God, which is New Jerusalem – because they are also one and the same! *“I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem.”* (Revelation 3:12). When we put these few verses together, we see that **Zion is the Church.**

What we find shows that the Old and New Testament Scriptures are consistent in confirming that Jesus Christ will marry the Bride – the Church – Spiritual Israel – Mount Zion – The Firstborn – New Jerusalem – the City of the Lord. Zion is the eternal city Abraham sought (Hebrews 11:10). Notice how Paul ties some of these descriptive terms together when speaking of the resurrected saints – the Bride of Christ. *“You are come unto Mt. Zion, and unto the City of the Living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the General Assembly, and Church of the Firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.”* (Hebrews 12:22-23) That includes the saints! *“The spirits of righteous men made perfect,”* is an ideal picture of the **prepared Bride of Christ**.

This is how Isaiah describes the glory and riches of New Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ: *“The Redeemer shall come to Zion...My covenant [is] with them, says the Lord; My Spirit is upon you... and they shall call you, the City of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.”* (Isaiah 59:20- 21, 60:14) New Jerusalem is called the Bride because it encompasses all who are the Bride. Jesus shares his intimate feelings for His Bride with us – because it is His intent that we be His Bride. He says to Zion – the Church and the Bride – *“You shalt be called ‘Hephzibah’- [My Delight is in Her]...for the Lord delights in you.”* (Isaiah 62:4)

Individually, we are each a *temple of God* (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19, 2 Corinthians 6:16). Peter shows that collectively we *are as lively stones, built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood* – and yet, Jesus is not going to marry a temple, city, stones, or a house (1 Peter 2:5). It is plain, that once we are placed in the Body of Christ, we become *“Fellow citizens*

*with the saints, and of the household of God ...in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a **holy temple in the Lord**, in whom you also are being built together for a **dwelling place of God in the Spirit.***” (Ephesians 2: 19-20).

This ***holy temple in the Lord - a dwelling place of God***, is the Church – Spiritual Israel – Mount Zion – The Firstborn – New Jerusalem – the City of the Lord. So, who is this New Jerusalem ***prepared as a bride adorned for her husband?*** It is the resurrected – spiritual saints of God. Notice Revelation 21:3, “*And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.*”

Jesus knew about these perilous times when men would say “God is just kidding” – so He added this certification, again. “*He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: **for these words are true and faithful.***” (Revelation 21:5) Let the Bible interpret the Bible. “*Come hither, I will show you the **Bride, the Lamb's Wife...**and he showed me that great city, the **Holy Jerusalem**, descending out of heaven from God.*” (Revelation 21:9-10) The Bride of Christ and Holy Jerusalem are one and the same!

### **Awaken out of Sleep**

“*Behold, the **Bridegroom comes**; go ye out to meet Him.*” (Matthew 25:6) What will happen to those who have not taken a stand or put their own wellbeing in harm's way to save a brother from ruin? Laying down our life as a living sacrifice is a prerequisite to qualifying as the Bride. Those who are not willing to *spiritually* lay their life down as living

sacrifices – now – will have the opportunity to lay their life down – *physically* – in the tribulation. If nothing has been enough of a concern for us to **stand up and be counted** – laying it all on the line, as Christ gave us example, we should question whether we are awake or asleep.

There are some brethren – members and ministers alike – who have not found cause to rock the boat in their organizations. So far, everything is okay – they have been able to put up with the doctrinal changes, political intrigue, substitutions for pure religion, and the way just members have been mistreated. Their personal policy is to “play it safe – and keep their nose clean.” They are not yet prepared to be the Bride because they are not *considering one another to provoke unto love and to good works* (Hebrews 10:24).

A person, who will not get involved in an uncertain situation to salvage a brother who is sinning, is not prepared to be the Bride of Christ. (Galatians 6:1) An individual like that, “cops out” by saying, “I’ll put it in God’s hands,” which is their justification to avoid fulfilling their Christian duty. Our future is to reign and rule with Christ in the millennium as His helpmate (Revelation 5:10). What kind of helpmate would we be if we always defer every problem back to Christ to take care of? Now is the time for us to prove our willingness to put ourselves in harm’s way in order to turn a brother around (James 5:20). It would not do in the millennium to insist on putting everything into Christ’s hands. Jesus Christ will not have a wife – a helpmate – who relegates every task back to Him.

Jesus Christ is not going to marry a baby. He is not going to marry a childish bride. The Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, will marry a spiritually mature Bride. There are few, if any,

examples of exemplary marriages in the Bible. The Church of God today has been given the opportunity to be the showcase of beautiful marriages founded on spiritual principles. These exceptional marriages of truly converted people will be used in the millennium as illustrations upon which to build a Godly society. The institution of marriage was established by God to symbolize the intimate relationship that exists between Jesus Christ and His Bride. As spiritual reality always far surpasses the mundane physical occurrences, the most perfect love that has ever existed between any man and woman on earth comes far short of the perfect spiritual union that will exist with Jesus Christ. That is the beauty of the wedding supper.

### **So Shall We Ever be With the Lord**

We members of the Church who hope to be a part of the Bride must consider our status in the eyes of God. Are we ready – are we prepared? Do we honestly *examine ourselves whether we be in the faith* (2 Corinthians 13:5)? The parable of the ten virgins indicates that only half of those members who believe they are prepared and able to utilize God’s Spirit – will make it.

Listen to the warnings of Jesus Christ for the period of time very shortly before His coming. “*While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.*” (Matthew 25:5) We would do well to hearken and give heed to the fact that Christ’s description of those of us in this end-time, is that we are not living up to His expectations of the Bride.

Have we developed the golden character that is required to rule in the world tomorrow? Do we possess the rich understanding of the way of God that is so vividly portrayed

in the Scriptures? Can we visualize a world without evil – a world being created in God’s righteousness? How far short of Christ’s expectations are we? *“I counsel you to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white raiment [righteousness], that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness does not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.”* (Revelation 3:18)

We must be actively utilizing spiritual character for the good of the brethren while maintaining a contrite attitude of service. **Be so doing!** Take a stand for righteousness' sake! Defend to the death the true principles of God! Speak of right doctrine! Live it! Put it into practice among all the brethren! Correct those who miss the mark because they, too, are working out their own salvation – and they are our brothers.

Time is short! The Israelitish nations of today are following closely in the wayward steps of our forefathers who forsook God and His truth. The time of Jacob’s trouble is upon us! Some will be spared, others will be martyred, and a few will be carried away into captivity. Let us ask ourselves how we measure up to our high calling. Is being the Bride of Christ worth more than anything else? Can it be said of us, *“They loved not their lives unto the death,”*? (Revelation 12:11)

Strive to come together with every true Christian on the doctrine we hold in common – in the unity of the Spirit. Let us not be separated by the agendas of men. Fight against the abuses imposed on innocent brethren. Be very guarded of men who are despisers of those who do good and who proudly exploit the weak members (2 Timothy 3:3). Be wise to the compromises of the great deceiver. Likewise, be watchful of those who close their eyes to the principles of

Christ to achieve their goals. God has never directed anyone to violate His way or His law to achieve a purpose.

An awe-inspiring destiny awaits us – *eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him* (1 Corinthians 2:9). Speak out without fear when men or organizations seek the preeminence. Encourage one another to serve others. Look to God! Look for the coming of the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ! Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come and His Bride has **made herself ready!** ... so shall we ever be with the Lord!

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