

THE COMING OF THE LORD JESUS TO MARRY THE PREPARED BRIDE IN REVELATION 19

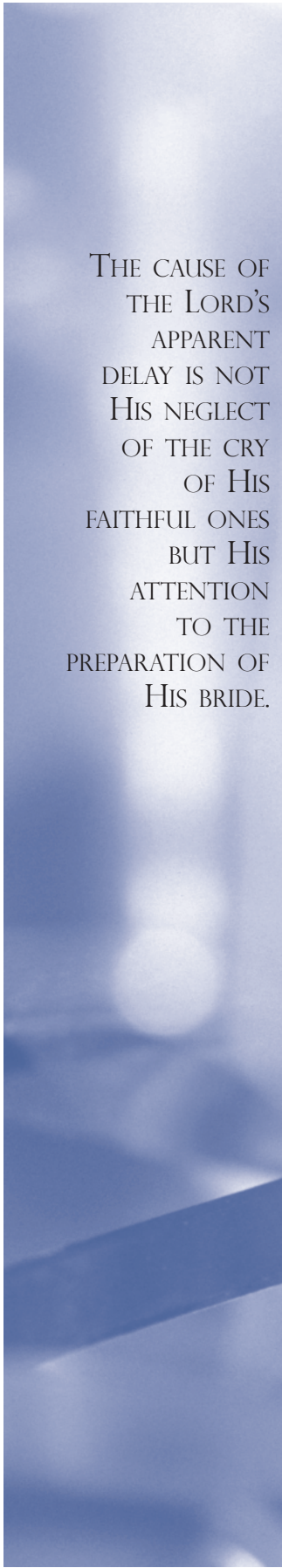
BY DAVID YOON

“We have the prophetic word made more firm, to which you do well to give heed as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Pet. 1:19). As the night of the present age grows ever darker and the apostasy of the church becomes increasingly severe (Rom. 13:12; cf. Gal. 1:4), the prophecies concerning the second coming of Christ should become more precious to the Lord’s loving seekers. These prophecies are not to be understood merely academically but should be heeded as a light dawning in the inner being of every believer to guide us through this dark night to the bright day of His return.

How sad it is that eschatology has long been a fount of division and strife among Christians as well as a distraction from Christ, leading many into a mire of supernatural imaginations, profitless predictions, and endless interpretative minutiae. In contrast, the proper eschatology—that is, an eschatology according to the economy of God, which is the unique content of the teaching of the apostles (1 Tim. 1:3-4; Acts 2:42)—does more than satisfy human curiosity and goes further than even providing hope to those who yearn for the righteousness, justice, and peace of the coming kingdom; it unveils the intrinsic significance of the second coming of Christ as the finalization of God’s New Testament economy, which is His eternal purpose to impart Himself in Christ as the Spirit into the believers to produce them as His corporate expression in Christ (Eph. 3:8-10). This corporate expression, denoted in Revelation as “the testimony of Jesus” (1:2; 19:10; 20:4), is the Body of Christ manifested in local churches in the present age, the overcoming believers as the bride in the next age, and the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth in eternity.¹ Seeing such a Christ-centered eschatological vision through the lens of God’s economy will make us sober concerning our present condition, motivate us to attain to God’s standard, and reveal how we may cooperate with Him for the accomplishment of His purpose in this age and the hastening of the Lord’s return.

The book of Revelation not only prophesies that our Lord will return (2:25; 3:3, 11; 16:15) and describes what will take place at the time of His coming (chs. 12—19); it also unveils the crucial reason for His delay. In the New Testament Epistles we can detect the eagerness with which the apostles expected the bright day of our Lord, which they believed to be imminent.² It was not revealed to them that, according to the prudence and sovereignty of God, the church age would last for millennia (cf. Matt. 24:36; Rev. 3:3). How wise of our Lord and how comforting to those suffering for His kingdom (1:9) that in the concluding book of the New Testament, indeed in the last chapter, He Himself repeatedly said, “I come quickly” (22:7, 12, 20). Through the generations countless saints have echoed the apostle John’s response: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (v. 20). Yet, after such a long time, we may join those many loving seekers of the Lord in asking, “Why is it that we have still not seen the fulfillment of our dear Lord’s promise?”³

The answer given in Revelation is that the believers as His counterpart have not yet been



THE CAUSE OF
THE LORD'S
APPARENT
DELAY IS NOT
HIS NEGLECT
OF THE CRY
OF HIS
FAITHFUL ONES
BUT HIS
ATTENTION
TO THE
PREPARATION OF
HIS BRIDE.

prepared to marry the coming Lord as their Bridegroom. Although the Lord Jesus will return to earth with numerous statuses in order to execute the divine administration—e.g., as the Judge (22:12), as the King of kings and Lord of lords (19:11-21), and as the King reigning in the millennial kingdom and in the new heaven and new earth for eternity (20:4, 6; 11:15; cf. 22:1, 3)—none of them so clearly and intrinsically explains the reason for the delay of His return as does His status as the Bridegroom, who will not come until His bride is ready. It is of vital importance that God's children know that the marriage of the Lamb—the epochal climax of the church age that issues in Armageddon and the millennial kingdom—depends not only on God's operation to prepare a bride for His beloved Son but also on the saints' faithful cooperation in paying the price to become the mature and ready bride.

The Coming of the Lord as the Bridegroom Depending on the Preparation of His Bride, Composed of the Overcoming Believers

The striking and sobering truth that the believers are responsible for cooperating with God to become His mature bride is disclosed in Revelation 19:7: "Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and *His wife⁴ has made herself ready*" (emphasis added). The Gospels introduce Christ as the Bridegroom, who has been taken away from His believers for a time but will return to have a wedding feast, calling His believers to live as virgins in readiness for that hour (John 3:29; Matt. 9:15; 25:10, 13). The Epistles then go on to indicate that in the church age, preparations are being made for the wedding (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27). But here at last in Revelation, the momentous day of the marriage of the Lamb has arrived because "His wife has made herself ready" (19:7). This clause indicates that through the ceaseless operation of Christ in His heavenly ministry as the seven Spirits of God sent throughout the earth (5:6), a group of overcoming believers have fully experienced God's judicial redemption and organic salvation⁵ to the point that they match Christ and are thus qualified to be His loving counterpart. Christ will return as the Bridegroom to marry this corporate overcoming bride, the object of His eternal and unchanging love. Therefore, the cause of the Lord's apparent delay is not His neglect of the cry of His faithful ones but His attention to the preparation of His bride.

Not only is the realization that the preparation of the bride is an indispensable requisite to the Lord's return largely missing in eschatological discourse, but also there is significant confusion concerning the identity of the bride, the qualifications to be part of her, and the process through which she is prepared. With some notable exceptions, most commentators on Revelation 19:7 consider the bride to be the church in general. Such an interpretation often leads to the erroneous teaching that participation in the bride requires no further qualification than being eternally saved through faith in the Lord Jesus.⁶ Within that understanding, the meaning of the bride making herself ready by preparing a fine linen garment—"the righteousnesses of the saints" (v. 8)—is opaque; such a preparation even seems to contradict the doctrine of justification by faith. Moreover, this teaching lulls the believers into passivity and negligence of their responsibility in the preparation of the bride. In contrast, the scriptural truth concerning God's New Testament economy—which involves not only the application of Christ's judicial redemption to the believers once for all but also the ongoing process of being saved "much more" in Christ's life (Rom. 5:10)—makes very clear who the bride is and how she is constituted. The bride is a composition of overcoming believers (represented by the overcomers in Revelation 2 and 3), who have cooperated with God to grow in Christ's life unto maturity such that their living yields abundant "fruit of righteousness" (Heb. 12:11; cf. Rom. 14:17; Phil. 3:9), which becomes the qualification for their attendance at the wedding feast (Matt. 22:1-14). Deprived of the organic, intrinsic, and comprehensive view of God's complete salvation and, instead, veiled by a narrow judicial framework of salvation, many believers lack an incentive to continually partake of the divine life and nature for their growth in life in the present age (John 10:10; 2 Pet. 1:4). It is this organic growth that

produces the believers as overcomers, who conquer the degradation of the church and build up the church as the testimony of Jesus—the wife of the Lamb as the consummation of God’s full salvation.

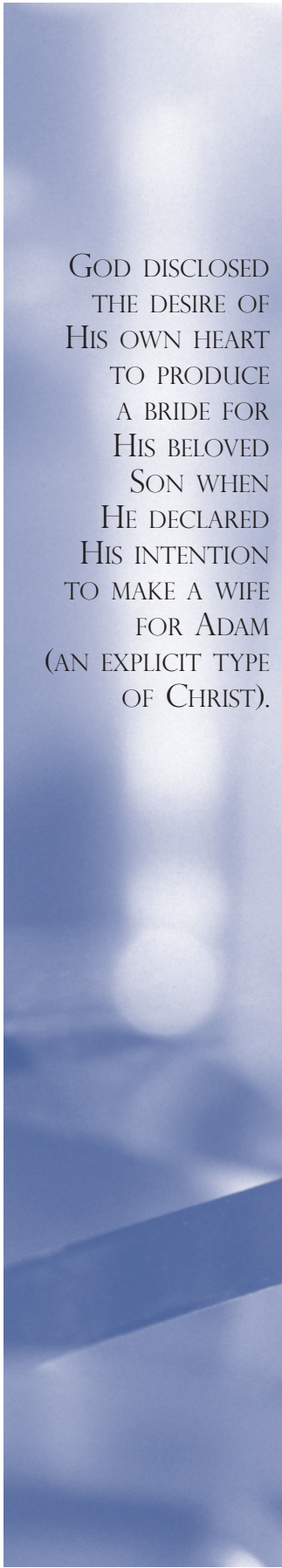
Since the bride is of such dispensational significance to the Lord, it is no wonder that from the very outset of the book of Revelation, He seeks to gain the overcomers. From the epistles to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3, it is evident that there are only two general conditions in which the believers may live—defeated or overcoming—and that the Lord’s need, expressed no fewer than seven times, is that they would overcome (2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 20-21). Despite this, many believers, who lack the view that they are required to overcome in order to participate in the wedding feast of the Lamb, cannot or do not answer this call and therefore remain in the various aspects of the degradation of the church recorded in these epistles. Rather than loving the Lord as their unique Husband with their first love to shine as a pure golden lampstand, His unadulterated radiant testimony (1:20; 2:4; cf. Exo. 25:31; 31:8), many believers have left their bridal love for the Lord and become lukewarm toward Him. In His eyes they even dwell in the world, where Satan and his throne dwell, and are acquainted with the deep things of Satan, practicing spiritual idolatry and fornication (Rev. 2:13, 20, 24; 3:16). Instead of keeping the Lord’s word and the healthy teaching of the apostles concerning the economy of God in faith, they have been led astray by the evil teachings of the Nicolaitans, Balaam, and Jezebel (v. 8; 1 Tim. 1:4; 6:3; Rev. 2:14-15, 20). Moreover, rather than having the divine life in abundance, being filled with the unsearchable riches of Christ, being clothed with Christ as their subjective righteousness in their daily walk, and seeing the mysteries concerning God and His economy with the enlightened eyes of their heart, they are spiritually dead, poor in the riches of Christ, naked in their daily conduct, and spiritually blind (John 10:10; Rev. 2:9; 3:1, 4-5, 17-18; Luke 12:21; Eph. 3:8; 1 Cor. 4:1).

If we would, by the Lord’s mercy, overcome such degradation to be those who “have loved His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8), “expecting and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet. 3:12), we must see the intrinsic significance of His bride as unveiled in the Holy Scriptures and particularly in the book of Revelation. It is not only for our own benefit but also for the sake of hastening the Lord’s return—the hope of all believers and indeed of the whole world—that we must respond to the seven Spirits’ call to rise up and be prepared as the bride. In order to apprehend this vision, we need to see the following line of thought in the Bible. First, God in Christ has an eternal longing to gain a wife, who is typologically portrayed in the Old Testament through certain female figures and who is spiritually realized in the New Testament as the church. Second, because of the failure of the church at large, He must turn to a group of believers who will overcome her degradation to gain the qualifications of the mature and prepared bride of Christ. Third, once such an entity is brought forth, Christ will return as the Bridegroom to marry the overcomers as the bride, who have become the initial manifestation of the New Jerusalem, the wife of the Lamb. Fourth, after a thousand-year wedding feast, the eternal stage of the New Jerusalem, including all of God’s chosen people, will be ushered in for God and His entire elect to live together in complete union and matrimonial bliss forever.

The Biblical Revelation concerning the Preparation of Christ’s Bride

As with all the signs, or spiritual symbols, in Revelation (1:1; cf. 12:1, 3; 15:1), the imagery of a wedding is not a novel invention of John’s; rather, it has a line of precursors running through the Scriptures that consummates here in an ultimate vision. The wedding of the Lamb at His return is the realization of a divine purpose revealed throughout the Bible. Indeed, both the Old and New Testaments unveil a holy romance of a universal couple—God in Christ as the Bridegroom and the aggregate of His elect as the corporate bride. This divine romantic love story is first marvelously revealed in the Old Testament through typology (Isa. 54:5; 62:5; Ezek. 16:7-14; Hosea 2:16-20), which issues in its own spiritual fulfillment revealed in the New Testament. Both the typology and the fulfillment emphasize the preparation needed to bring about the wedding.

BOTH THE OLD
AND NEW
TESTAMENTS
UNVEIL A HOLY
ROMANCE OF
A UNIVERSAL
COUPLE—GOD
IN CHRIST AS
THE BRIDEGROOM
AND THE
AGGREGATE OF
HIS ELECT AS THE
CORPORATE BRIDE.



GOD DISCLOSED
THE DESIRE OF
HIS OWN HEART
TO PRODUCE
A BRIDE FOR
HIS BELOVED
SON WHEN
HE DECLARED
HIS INTENTION
TO MAKE A WIFE
FOR ADAM
(AN EXPLICIT TYPE
OF CHRIST).

The Typological Portrait of the Preparation of the Bride in the Old Testament

The focus of the opening chapters of the Bible is a wedding, creation itself providing but a backdrop to this typological scene of romance. In Genesis 2:18 God disclosed the desire of His own heart to produce a bride for His beloved Son when He declared His intention to make a wife for Adam (an explicit type of Christ (Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:45b)): "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper as his counterpart." To accomplish this intention, God produced a counterpart for Adam by causing a deep sleep to fall upon him, taking a rib out of his side, and building this rib into a woman, Eve. Adam immediately recognized her as bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, for she was the same as he in life, nature, element, and form (Gen. 2:7, 20-24). In considering this account of the first human marriage in Genesis 2, Paul exclaimed, "This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:32), showing that the apostle saw here a picture of the divine-human romance, a picture of how the church is built to be Christ's counterpart.

The fulfillment of the type in Genesis is seen in the Lord's prophecy in Matthew 16:18 that He would build His church. From the time of this prophecy, He began to speak concerning His death and resurrection (v. 21), implying a number of important truths. First, just as Adam was put to sleep so that a rib could be taken out of his side, so Christ would be put to death in order to release His divine life (John 19:34; 12:24). Second, Christ's word in Matthew 16 implies that the church would be victorious over the assault of death from the gates of Hades (v. 18) because she would be built in resurrection with Christ's indestructible, eternal, and death-conquering resurrection life (Heb. 7:16). This corresponds to Eve's being built with the rib taken out of Adam's side, which signifies the unbreakable resurrection life that flowed out of Christ's pierced side through His crucifixion (Exo. 12:46; Psa. 34:20; John 19:33, 36). Third, there would be an interval of time after His resurrection (the present age, the age of the church) during which Christ in His heavenly ministry would build the church as His counterpart. It is crucial to see that it was only upon the completion of the process by which Eve was built with Adam's rib to become his increase and reproduction that she could be brought to him for their marriage and joined to him as one flesh (Gen. 2:22-24). Likewise, in the present age the church is gradually being built by the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit with His resurrection life to be His organic increase (John 3:29-30; 1 Cor. 12:12-13). It is only when the church is completely built with Christ's life to be His counterpart that she will be ready to be presented to Him to become fully united with Him in marriage (Eph. 5:27). This future presentation depends on her present growth in His life, her being built up in His resurrection with His element, unto mature perfection (4:15; Col. 2:19).

Although the Old Testament repeatedly emphasizes that God considers His people to be His wife (Isa. 54:5; 62:5; Jer. 3:14; 31:32; Ezek. 16:7-14; 23:1-4; Hosea 2:16-20), nowhere is this relationship so thoroughly unveiled as in Song of Songs. This book of poetry presents a history of love between Solomon, a wise and great king, and the Shulammite, a shepherd girl of lowly birth (1:6-8). Since Christ is introduced as the son of David (Matt. 1:1) and spoke of Himself as the greater Solomon (12:42), Solomon should be interpreted as a type of Christ. Hence, this story should be considered a portrayal of the bridal love between Christ as the Bridegroom and His lovers as His bride (John 3:29-30). In the beautiful narrative of Solomon's poem, his lover passes through many experiences and stages until she is eventually designated Shulammite (the feminine form of Solomon), denoting the duplication and counterpart of Solomon (S. S. 6:13). This signifies that a lover of Christ should undergo the process of transformation and maturation to become the reproduction and counterpart of Christ, the same as Christ in life, nature, expression, and function (but not in the Godhead) to match Him for their marriage (Col. 3:4; 2 Pet. 1:4; 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29). As an abstract of the divine romance in the Bible, Song of

Songs concludes with the Shulammite's cry for her beloved to "make haste" and "be like a gazelle or a young hart / Upon the mountains of spices" (8:14). This cry of the Shulammite, which consummates in the apostle John's prayer as the conclusion of the entire Bible (Rev. 22:20), signifies the prayer of the lover of Christ that her Beloved will come quickly in the power of His resurrection (gazelle and young hart) to establish His eternal, indestructible, sweet, and beautiful kingdom (mountains of spices), which will replace the kingdom of the world and fill the whole earth (S. S. 2:17; Rev. 11:15; 22:17; Dan. 2:35, 44). However, this cry comes only at the end of the poem, indicating that the lovers of Christ can sincerely cry out for Christ's return only after they have been prepared by means of a thorough process of transformation and maturation to be His perfected counterpart, His reproduction.

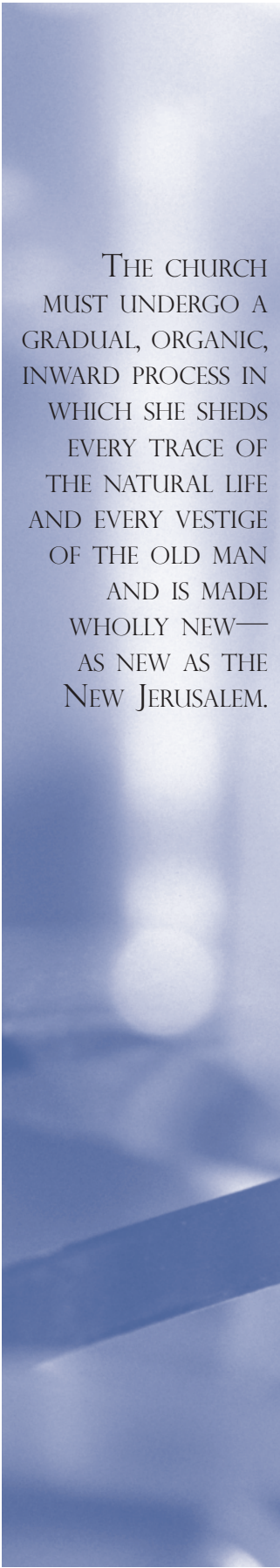
The Practical Fulfillment of the Preparation of the Bride in the New Testament

As with the pictures of Eve and the Shulammite in the Old Testament, the Lord Jesus' own speaking concerning the bride in the New Testament implies a process necessary for her preparation and significantly incorporates prophecy concerning His second coming. In both Matthew 22 and 25 there is an exhortation with a solemn warning to be found qualified to participate in the Lord's wedding feast when He returns. In chapter 22 the Lord spoke a parable concerning a wedding garment that is strictly required (v. 11), whereas in chapter 25 He spoke a parable concerning a vessel needing to be filled with oil (vv. 4, 10). Both the wedding garment and the oil-filled vessel are qualifications that point to the believers' full enjoyment of God's organic salvation for them to be made part of His mature and perfected bride.

Paul's Epistles also show a progressive romance of Christ and His believers with a view to preparing for a future wedding. On the one hand, Paul says to the Corinthians (where he again applies Genesis 2:24 to the divine-human romance as he does in Ephesians 5:30-31) that a believer who is joined to the resurrected Lord as the life-giving Spirit is one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). On the other hand, Paul indicates to them that this union with the Lord is not yet consummated. He says that he betrothed them to Christ their Husband in order to present them as a pure virgin to Him (2 Cor. 11:2). Concerning 2 Corinthians 11:2, David E. Aune remarks in his commentary on Revelation 17—22, "The 'betrothal' presumably occurred with the conversion of the Corinthians, while the 'presentation' to Christ will presumably occur at his coming; during the interim the Church, like a betrothed virgin, must maintain her purity and faithfulness to her *one* husband" (1029). Today the believers are betrothed, engaged, to Christ; hence, they belong to Him. However, the believers are not yet married to Him, for their marriage entails their "complete union with Him" (Lee, *Crucial* 1232).

Such a consummate union issues from the application of God's organic salvation in Christ's life, as implied in 2 Corinthians 11:3: "I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your thoughts would be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity toward Christ." Just as Eve was deceived by the serpent, Satan, and was distracted from the simplicity and purity of eating "the tree of life" (Gen. 2:9), so also the Corinthians were being deceived by the Judaizers, the ministers of Satan, and being separated from the appreciation and enjoyment of Christ as the tree of life (John 15:1; 14:6; 11:25). Paul's concern in his status as a minister of the New Testament, a minister of the life-giving Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6), implies that our life of betrothal to Christ as our Husband, as well as our being prepared to be presented to Him at His return, is intimately related to our participation in Him as the tree of life, the embodiment of the divine life (John 1:4; 1 John 5:11-12; Col. 3:4). The apostle Paul's sentiment concerning the believers' need to partake of Christ as life for the purpose of being presented to Him as His counterpart at His coming corresponds with the purpose of Paul's ministry stated in Colossians 1:28: to "present every man full-grown in Christ." It is by loving the

TODAY THE
BELIEVERS
ARE ENGAGED
TO CHRIST;
THEY BELONG
TO HIM.
HOWEVER, THEY
ARE NOT YET
MARRIED TO HIM,
FOR THEIR
MARRIAGE ENTAILS
THEIR "COMPLETE
UNION WITH HIM."



THE CHURCH
MUST UNDERGO A
GRADUAL, ORGANIC,
INWARD PROCESS IN
WHICH SHE SHEDS
EVERY TRACE OF
THE NATURAL LIFE
AND EVERY VESTIGE
OF THE OLD MAN
AND IS MADE
WHOLLY NEW—
AS NEW AS THE
NEW JERUSALEM.

Lord with single-hearted loyalty that we, Christ's betrothed, partake of Him as the tree of life (Rev. 2:4-5, 7), and it is by eating Him as the tree of life that we grow up and are perfected in Him to be presented to Him as His bride at His return (Eph. 4:15).

Ephesians 5:25-27 unveils the full process by which the wife of the Lamb is prepared, showing the work of Christ as the Husband of the church in three stages. In the past, Christ as the Redeemer "loved the church and gave Himself up for her" to accomplish redemption and to release and impart His divine life to the believers for the producing of the church (v. 25; John 19:34). But judicial redemption, however necessary and efficacious, is not sufficient to produce Christ's glorious bride in full. In the present, the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit must sanctify the church, "cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word," gradually dispensing Himself as life into the believers' entire being, until she has no "spot or wrinkle or any such things" (Eph. 5:26-27; 1 Cor. 15:45b; Rom. 8:2, 6, 10-11; 1 Thes. 5:23). In the future, Christ as the Bridegroom will "present" the holy, glorious, and unblemished church "to Himself" as His counterpart for His rest and satisfaction (Eph. 5:27). Revelation echoes this three-part sequence. First, the loving Christ has in the past "released us from our sins by His blood," being the Lamb who was "pierced" on the cross and "slain" to purchase us by His blood to make us the church, the kingdom of God (1:5-7; 5:6, 9, 12-13). Second, Christ as the seven Spirits of God in the present sanctifies the church by speaking to the local churches words that are "spirit and life" (John 6:63) to save the church "much more" (Rom. 5:10) in the divine life so that she may be consummated to be the holy city, the wife of the Lamb (1:4-6; 2:1, 7; 21:2-3). Third, Christ will come in the future to marry His wife, who has been fully "adorned for her husband" by becoming the New Jerusalem, the holy city that has the glory of God (vv. 2, 10). These three stages of Christ are also marvelously implied in Revelation 22:14: "Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have right to the tree of life and may enter by the gates into the city." According to this verse, the believers need to wash their robes in the redeeming blood of the Lamb in order to partake of Christ as the tree of life, thereby enjoying salvation in the eternal life of God, so that they may enter (that is, become) the holy city, the bride adorned for the Lamb as her Husband, and participate in the marriage of the Lamb in the coming kingdom.

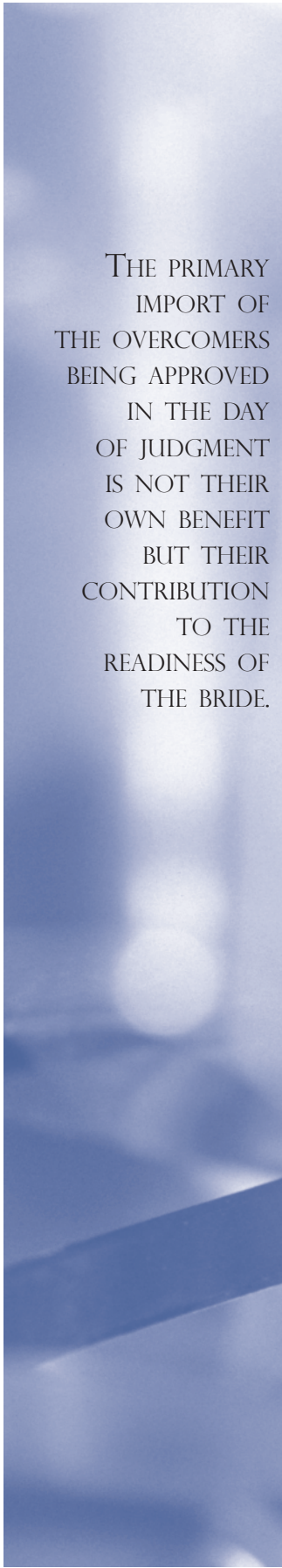
The perfect counterpart of Christ is not produced by an instantaneous, judicial, outward event; instead, the church must undergo a gradual, organic, inward process in which she sheds every trace of the natural life and every vestige of the old man⁷ and is made wholly new—as new as the New Jerusalem (2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 4:22-24; Rev. 21:2). Through this progressive sanctification—effected by the heavenly ministry of Christ as the Lord Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17-18), in which the believers are not only separated from everything sinful, worldly, and common unto God but also saturated with His holy element—He imparts Himself as the divine life into their entire tripartite being until they become the same as He is: without blemish in His holy nature and beautiful in His glorious expression. Only when this process is complete can the Lord present the church to Himself as His bona fide counterpart. Therefore, the Lord's second coming depends on the believers as His wife making themselves ready for the marriage of the Lamb by experiencing the Lord's ongoing organic, dispositional sanctification. Our Lord intends and requires no less of His church. However, how many believers on earth today can testify with a good and pure conscience that they have been so wholly sanctified by Christ as to be delivered from all defects related to their naturalness and oldness, having thus become the same as He in His holiness and glory (1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3)? The mournful scarcity of such sanctified believers not only accounts for the delay of the Lord's return but also suggests that only a remnant among the believers—namely, the overcomers who represent the church—are willing to pay the price to be utterly separated from the world and thoroughly saturated with the holy nature of God so that they may be the holy, glorious, and blameless wife of Christ, who is "the Holy One," "the Lord of glory," and the "Lamb without blemish" (Rev. 3:7; 1 Cor. 2:8; 1 Pet. 1:19; cf. Matt. 5:4).

The Degradation of the Church and the Lord's Call for the Overcomers

Although the apostle Paul presented such a profound truth concerning the preparation of the counterpart of Christ in his Epistle to the church in Ephesus, it is a great tragedy that this church, along with most of the churches in Asia, forsook Paul's ministry (2 Tim. 1:15), which was to betroth the believers to Christ as their one Husband. This departure from Paul's ministry is a crucial reason for the degradation of the churches in Asia because it severed the believers from the New Testament ministry that not only espoused them to Christ as their Husband by unveiling His loveliness, preciousness, and excellency (Phil. 3:7-8; cf. 2 Cor. 4:6-7) but also imparted Christ as the life-giving Spirit into them to nourish them with the riches of Christ as life—the indispensable means by which the bride is adorned for her Husband (3:6; 4:12; Eph. 3:8). It is for this reason that the Lord rebuked the church in Ephesus for abandoning her first love, her bridal love, toward Him, by which the believers accord Him the place of preeminence in all things and thus enjoy Him as the tree of life (Rev. 2:4, 7; Col. 1:18). The woeful lesson of the church in Ephesus is that leaving the first love for the Lord is the intrinsic source of the failure of the church. Numerous believers separated themselves from the new covenant ministry that causes them to love the Lord and enjoy Him as their life supply; thus, they became corrupted from the simplicity and purity toward Christ, their one Husband (2 Cor. 11:3), and thereby were led astray from partaking of Christ as the tree of life. Since the Lord departed from the earth, how many believers have become part of the sad fulfillment of the apostle Paul's prophecy that in the last days men would become lovers of self, lovers of money, and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God and lovers of the good that pertains to God's economy (2 Tim. 3:1-4)! Rather than loving Christ preeminently with their entire being as chaste virgins espoused to Christ (Mark 12:30), a majority of believers have become friends of the world, which is the evil, anti-God system set up by Satan (1 John 2:15, 17); consequently, they have become adulteresses and even enemies of God (James 4:4). In their degraded state numerous Christians have become like Babylon the Great, the harlot, displaying her abominable traits, such as sinfulness, unrighteousness, hypocrisy, mixing holy things with evil and unclean things of her fornication, self-glorification, and living luxuriously (Rev. 17:1-6; 18:4-5, 7), instead of exhibiting the precious characteristics of the New Jerusalem, the wife of the Lamb, such as supreme holiness, utmost purity, absolute newness, caring for the Lord's pleasure, having the abundance of life and light, and expressing His matchless glory (19:7; 21:2, 10, 18-24; 22:1-2).

The degradation of the church, which crept in as early as Paul's time and was diagnosed directly by the Lord Jesus in Revelation 2 and 3, is a great frustration but not an insuperable barrier to the Lord's carrying out the divine economy to prepare His bride. Since the Old Testament times, even when the greater part of His people forsook Him, God has had a way to accomplish His purpose by operating through a remnant of His people (1 Kings 19:18; Ezra 9:8; Hag. 1:14; cf. Isa. 10:20-22). Likewise, in the midst of the widespread degradation of the church, the Lord intends to produce a remnant of believers who will cooperate with Him for His move to build the church and prepare the bride (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 4:12, 16). These are the overcomers for whom the seven Spirits are calling in Revelation 2 and 3, who will also be rewarded. These seven Spirits are the very eyes of the Lamb (5:6) as the sevenfold intensification of the life-giving Spirit, the pneumatic Christ (2 Cor. 3:6, 17), for the completion of God's New Testament economy in the midst of the darkness of the world and the degradation of the church.⁸ The sevenfold intensified Spirit and His intensified operation within the believers produce the overcomers in the churches as the reproduction of the Lord Jesus as the unique Overcomer (Rev. 3:21; 5:5). It is not by their own might or power but by the seven Spirits that the victorious remnant is able to carry out the building work, which the church at large has failed to do (Zech. 4:6, 10). Just as the rebuilding of the physical temple by a returned remnant of God's people was needed to bring in the Lord's first coming (Hag. 1:14; cf. John 2:14-22; 7:42; Luke 2:22-24, 43-46), so also the building of the church as a spiritual temple by the overcoming believers, who finish this work on behalf of the

RATHER THAN
LOVING CHRIST
PREEMINENTLY
WITH THEIR
ENTIRE BEING AS
CHASTE VIRGINS
ESPOUSED
TO CHRIST,
A MAJORITY OF
BELIEVERS
HAVE BECOME
FRIENDS OF
THE WORLD.



THE PRIMARY
IMPORT OF
THE OVERCOMERS
BEING APPROVED
IN THE DAY
OF JUDGMENT
IS NOT THEIR
OWN BENEFIT
BUT THEIR
CONTRIBUTION
TO THE
READINESS OF
THE BRIDE.

whole of God's people, will usher in the Lord's second coming (cf. Rev. 2:17; 3:12). Therefore, the wedding feast in Matthew 25:10 and the marriage dinner in Revelation 19:9 cannot be understood as being for the entire church composed of all believers, most of whom are living in degradation, but only as a reward to the faithful remnant of overcomers who paved the way for Christ's return.

The Marriage of the Lamb

The expression *the marriage of the Lamb* (v. 7) shows that Christ as the Lamb of God is the universal Husband. While most Christians are familiar with Christ as the Lamb for redemption, few pay adequate attention to Christ as the Husband, who is for the wedding of the Redeemer with His counterpart. In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus, revealed the Lord first as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29), and then as the Bridegroom who "has the bride" (3:29), indicating that the Lord came to the earth not only to accomplish redemption but also to gain a group of people as His increase to be His counterpart (vv. 29-30). Similarly, in the book of Revelation the apostle John unveils Christ first as the Lamb who, motivated by His love, purchased the believers for God with His own blood and released them from their sins (1:5; 5:6, 9; 12:11) and then as the Husband who will come to marry the believers as His wife (19:7). This consistent sequence in John's writings implies that Christ's redeeming death was a procedure with the goal of gaining the believers as His counterpart. The ultimate goal of the Lord's vicarious death as the Lamb for us is to open the way for Him to impart Himself as life into us for the producing of His corporate counterpart so that He as the Bridegroom may marry her for His satisfaction and rest in love.

Regarding Christ the Lamb, we must believe into Him and receive Him into us. This is to enjoy eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12). However, with regard to Christ as the Husband, we must, through God's organic salvation according to the law of the indwelling Spirit of life, be renewed, sanctified, transformed, conformed, and ultimately glorified (Rom. 5:10; 6:22; 8:2, 28-30; 12:2). This is to be qualified to marry the Lord, who Himself is such a glorified God-man (1:3-4; Acts 3:13; Heb. 2:9; Rev. 5:12-13). For this reason, the New Testament speaks of both a salvation totally by grace through faith, wherein works are excluded (Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:24-28), and our responsibility to mature in life and to walk in the "good works" (Eph. 2:10) that God has prepared beforehand (2 Pet. 3:18; Heb. 6:1; 2 Pet. 1:10-11; James 1:12; 2:5, 17).

The solemn testimony of both the Lord Jesus and the apostles is that at His return the believers will appear before the Son of Man to be judged concerning their life and work after being saved.⁹ At this judgment seat Christ will examine all the believers to determine who among them is qualified to be the bride during the millennium and who requires further discipline (Rev. 11:18). Though all the believers have responded to the call to salvation, only the few chosen and faithful overcoming believers will be adorned in white to participate in the wedding feast of a thousand years (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 4:1; Matt. 22:14; Rev. 17:14; 20:4). During these thousand years, the majority of the believers, who failed to cooperate with God's full salvation and remained defeated in their natural and immature state, will be perfected through discipline in the outer darkness, where in bitter remorse and self-reproach they will weep and gnash their teeth (Matt. 22:13; 25:30). But through this discipline they will ultimately be saved, yet so as through fire, into an eternal, blessed participation in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth (1 Cor. 3:15).¹⁰

Although such promise of reward or discipline is surely a strong incentive for the believers, the primary import of the overcomers being approved in the day of judgment is not their own benefit but their contribution to the readiness of the bride. Were it not for the accumulated righteousnesses of such believers through their Christ-expressing life (Phil. 1:20-21; Gal. 2:20) and their Christ-ministering service (Rom. 15:16; Eph. 3:8)—the first works

out of the first love—which constitute their white garments (Rev. 2:4-5; 3:5, 18; 6:11), the bride would not have a wedding garment (19:8). If the entire living and work of the believers were counted by the Lord as wood, grass, and stubble to be consumed by the Lord's fiery judgment at His judgment seat, where would the precious materials be for building the New Jerusalem, the bride, the wife of the Lamb (1 Cor. 3:12-15; Rev. 21:9-10, 18-21)? Actually, it is because the overcomers' living and work contribute to the building of the bride that they receive a reward (1 Cor. 3:14).

It is therefore not only a grave loss to the Lord's children but also a pernicious attack on God's purpose to oppose, hide, or dilute the truth concerning the need to overcome. In *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* G. H. Lang fights the good fight of the faith (1 Tim. 6:12; 1:18; 2 Tim. 4:7) against this dreadful error when he exposes teachings concerning the overcomers that are meant only to tickle the ears (v. 3):

The assertion that all believers are overcomers is so plainly contrary to fact and to Scripture that one wonders it ever has been made. It involves the false position that no believer can be a backslider. It avoids and nullifies the solemn warnings and urgent pleadings of the Spirit addressed to believers, and, by depriving the Christian of these, leaves him dangerously exposed to the perils they reveal.

In the house of the high priest Peter was defeated by the fear of man. Is he the last? Ananias and Sapphira were defeated by the love of money and pride of reputation. Were they the last? Demas forsook Paul, being overcome by the love of this present age. Was he the last? In the Corinthian church some were conquered by carnal lusts. Were they the last? Peter re-entered the battle and fought to the end. Ananias and his wife were cut off in their defeat. So were some of the Corinthian believers. We do not know that Demas won through finally.

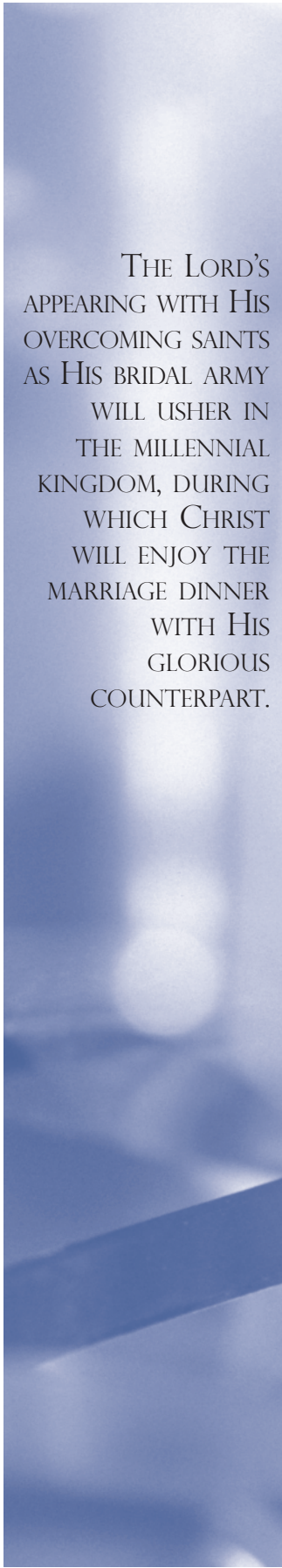
If all Christians are conquerors how shall it be possible at the close of the age that "the love of the many [the majority] shall wax cold" (Mt 24. 12)? Overcomers are to receive crowns; but if all overcome how can any be warned lest he lose his crown? (Rv 3.11). (91-92)

The readiness of the wife of the Lamb for the marriage of the Lamb is attained through the coordination of God and the remnant of overcoming believers. On the one hand, according to Revelation 19:7, the wife of the Lamb "has made herself ready." On the other hand, 21:2 says of her that she is "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." J. Paul Tanner, in his *Trinity Journal* article, "The 'Marriage Supper of the Lamb' in Rev 19:6-10: Implications for the Judgment Seat of Christ," points out that the very same verb (ἐτοιμάζω) is used in both *made herself ready* (ἡτοίμασεν) in 19:7 and *prepared* (ἡτοιμασμένην) in 21:2 (54). This clearly indicates that the preparation of the bride is a joint endeavor of the Triune God and the believers. Although the bride of Christ is adorned by the operation of the Triune God, who bountifully supplies the Spirit to her, the believers need to cooperate with God's operation by receiving the Spirit out of the hearing of faith (Gal. 3:2, 5). In other words, we should "work out" our own salvation with fear and trembling by enjoying the "God who operates" in us as the Spirit of Jesus Christ with His bountiful supply to impart the unsearchable riches of Christ into us (Phil. 2:12-13; Eph. 3:8). The primary work of the Lord in His heavenly ministry is to prepare His bride by building Himself as the life-giving Spirit into us (v. 17; Gal. 4:19). We need to render the Lord the highest cooperation by allowing Him to work Himself into us finely, continually, and thoroughly so that we may be properly adorned for Him as our Husband.

**The Issue of the Marriage of the Lamb:
the Reign of God in Christ
and the Marriage Dinner of the Lamb**

After marrying the overcoming believers as His bride, Christ will come openly to the

THE ACCUMULATED
RIGHTEOUSNESSES
OF SUCH
BELIEVERS THROUGH
THEIR CHRIST-
EXPRESSING
LIFE AND
THEIR CHRIST-
MINISTERING
SERVICE
CONSTITUTE THE
BRIDE'S WEDDING
GARMENTS.



THE LORD'S
APPEARING WITH HIS
OVERCOMING SAINTS
AS HIS BRIDAL ARMY
WILL USHER IN
THE MILLENNIAL
KINGDOM, DURING
WHICH CHRIST
WILL ENJOY THE
MARRIAGE DINNER
WITH HIS
GLORIOUS
COUNTERPART.

earth, leading them as God's army in order to defeat His human enemies at Armageddon, including the beast (Antichrist), the false prophet, the kings of the earth, and their armies (Rev. 19:11-21; 17:10-14). The Lord's open appearing on earth with His overcoming saints as His bridal army will not only issue in the defeat of Antichrist with his armies but also usher in the millennial kingdom, during which Christ will enjoy the marriage dinner with His fellow conquerors, His glorious counterpart.

Revelation 19:6-7 records the praise of a great multitude of saints to God concerning the fulfillment of His eternal purpose: "The Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." Here the great multitude offers praise to God not only because the Almighty reigns but also because the marriage of the Lamb has come. The sequence of verbs in this praise is significant, listed not chronologically but causally: first, the Lord reigns; second, the marriage of the Lamb has come; and third, His wife has made herself ready. In other words, the commencement of the reign of God (that is, the inauguration of the kingdom of God in the coming millennium) is dependent upon the marriage of the Lamb, which in turn hinges on His wife making herself ready.

The reign of the Lord our God the Almighty, which issues from the marriage of the Lamb, marks a crucial turning point in God's New Testament economy. It is the fulfillment of a momentous proclamation in Revelation 11:15: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever." The readiness of the overcomers as the bride (19:8) is what furnishes the Lamb with an army (v. 14) through which the Lamb will come to eradicate rebellious human government on the earth and establish God's kingdom (v. 15), thereby becoming the uncontested King of kings and Lord of lords (v. 16). In this kingdom the Lord will reign over the restored nations as the "King over all the earth" with the overcoming believers as His co-kings for a thousand years (Zech. 14:9; Rev. 20:4, 6; 2:26-27; 19:15), exercising God-given authority over the nations and shepherding them with an iron rod (Psa. 2:8-9; Rev. 2:26-27; 12:5). Those believers who have overcome will be given to sit with the Lord on His throne even as He overcame to sit with His Father on His throne (3:21).

The marriage of the Lamb will bring in not only the reign of the Lord God the Almighty, the kingdom of God, but also the marriage dinner of the Lamb, the wedding feast of the Son of God (Matt. 22:2). It is a great blessing and a tremendous privilege for the overcomers to join the marriage dinner of the Lamb, celebrating the exultant wedding of the Lord (25:10) in the ineffable joy of their Master (v. 21). At the marriage dinner of the Lamb, the overcoming saints will feast for a thousand years on a special portion of the unsearchably rich Christ as the tree of life and the hidden manna (26:29; Rev. 2:7, 17). The Lord will drink with these saints in the kingdom of God, and they will eat, drink, and recline at the Lord's table in His kingdom in the millennium, a consummately and inexpressibly wonderful mutual enjoyment with the Lord (Luke 22:30; 13:29).

The Qualifications of the Overcoming Bride

Given the weighty dispensational significance of the bride, it is incumbent upon the Lord's loving seekers to know her characteristics and seek to attain them by the Lord's grace. The New Testament in general, and the book of Revelation in particular, unveils at least nine crucial qualifications of the overcoming wife of the Lamb that constitute her ready for marriage.

The Reproduction of the Overcoming Lamb

Revelation unveils the overcomers as the reproduction of the overcoming Lamb, "the Pioneer of all the overcomers" (Lee, *Life-study of Revelation* 449). Revelation 5:5 speaks

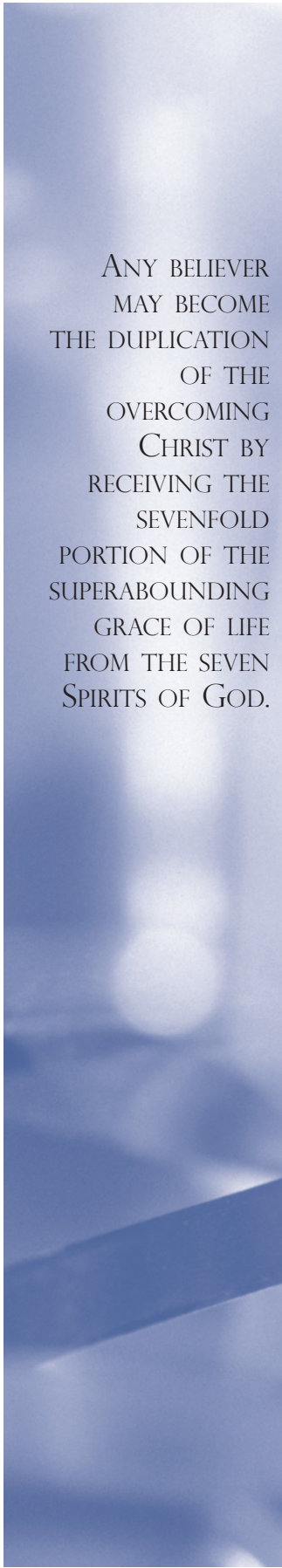
of the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Lion-Lamb as the Overcomer: "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome." As the Lion of the tribe of Judah, Christ is the prototypical Overcomer who defeated and subdued God's enemies (Heb. 2:14). In Luke 11:21-22 Christ declared that He, as one stronger than the strong man, Satan, overcame him, took away his whole armor, and distributed his spoil. In the Gospel of John, Christ, who is referred to as the Lamb of God (1:29), testified of His victory over Satan and the world in His human living: "The ruler of the world is coming, and in Me he has nothing" (14:30); "I have overcome the world" (16:33). As "the light of men," Christ "shines in the darkness" and overcomes darkness (1:4-5; cf. 8:12). The overcoming Lamb, the unique Overcomer, intends to reproduce Himself in the believers, thereby making them many overcomers in Him. This intention is suggested in the Lamb's words in Revelation 3:21: "He who overcomes, to him I will give to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat with My Father on His throne." As Lang notes, the words *as I also overcame* "firmly establish the parallel between Christ and His people" (*Firstborn Sons* 70). The believers' overcoming is based upon and patterned after Christ's overcoming. It is possible for the believers to overcome because the Lamb, the One who has overcome and is greater than the ruler of this world, not only is in them (1 John 4:4) but also desires to work Himself into them to constitute them the same as He is in life and nature but not in the Godhead.

The thought of overcoming by becoming the enlargement of the overcoming Lamb can be found throughout the book of Revelation. Jesus Christ is referred to as "the faithful Witness" in 1:5 and as "the faithful and true Witness" in 3:14. In 2:13 the Lord spoke of an overcoming believer, Antipas, as His "witness," His "faithful one." Just as the Lord is the faithful Witness of God, bearing the testimony of God for the expression of God, so also Antipas was the faithful witness of the Lord, bearing the testimony of Jesus for the expression of the Lord. And just as Christ Jesus as the faithful Witness testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate (1 Tim. 6:13) and was killed, so also the overcoming martyrs were "slain because of the word of God and because of the testimony which they had" (Rev. 6:9), even "beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God" (20:4). This implies that the overcoming believers as the faithful witnesses of Christ are the continuation and reproduction of Christ as the faithful Witness of God and are thus the enlarged expression of God in Christ (cf. Acts 7:59-60; Luke 23:24, 46). Furthermore, in Revelation 19:11 the Lord on a white horse is called "Faithful," and in 17:14 the overcoming believers who are with Him on white horses (19:14) also bear the description "faithful." This indicates that Christ, the faithful One (2 Thes. 3:3), has been fully constituted into these believers to make them utterly faithful in Him, even "faithful unto death" (Matt. 24:45; 1 Cor. 4:2; 7:25; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:7; 1 Tim. 1:12; Rev. 2:10; 12:11).

The apostle John portrays the overcomers, who constitute the firstfruits, also as those who have the Lord's name written on their foreheads (14:1, 4), indicating that they are thoroughly saturated with and possessed by Christ in their inward parts, having reached the maturity in the divine life (cf. Phil. 1:8). As such, these victorious saints are the reproduction of the resurrected Christ, who Himself is the firstfruits of resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20). In Revelation 5:6 a Lamb stands alone in the midst of the throne in heaven, but in 14:1 the Lamb stands with a hundred and forty-four thousand overcoming believers, who are His duplication. Just as Christ the Lamb is without blemish (1 Pet. 1:19), these overcomers will be without blemish (Rev. 14:5; cf. 2 Pet. 3:14; Eph. 5:27; 1 Thes. 5:23). Just as no guile was found in Christ's mouth (1 Pet. 2:22), so also in the overcomers' mouth no lie will be found (Rev. 14:5). Just as Christ ascended to the Father on the day of His resurrection for the Father's enjoyment (John 20:17), the overcomers, who are the firstfruits to God and to the Lamb, will be raptured to the heavenly Mount Zion for His delight and satisfaction (Rev. 14:1, 4).

That the divine qualities of Christ Himself are ascribed to the overcomers indicates that

THE NEW
TESTAMENT IN
GENERAL, AND
THE BOOK OF
REVELATION IN
PARTICULAR, UNVEILS
NINE CRUCIAL
QUALIFICATIONS OF
THE OVERCOMING
WIFE OF THE LAMB
THAT CONSTITUTE
HER READY
FOR MARRIAGE.



ANY BELIEVER
MAY BECOME
THE DUPLICATION
OF THE
OVERCOMING
CHRIST BY
RECEIVING THE
SEVENFOLD
PORTION OF THE
SUPERABOUNDING
GRACE OF LIFE
FROM THE SEVEN
SPIRITS OF GOD.

it is not by self-improvement but by receiving the dispensing of the Triune God as life into them that they become such a reproduction of Christ (Col. 3:4; John 10:10; Rom. 5:10; 8:6, 10-11, 29). In practice, this requires that the overcomers experience the seven Spirits of God, which is the Spirit sevenfold intensified in His function and operation to carry out the divine economy. Because the Spirit is both the Spirit of life and the Spirit of grace (v. 2; Heb. 10:29), the seven Spirits of God dispense a sevenfold supply of life and grace to the believers. Any believer may become the duplication of the overcoming Christ by receiving the sevenfold portion of the superabounding grace of life from the seven Spirits of God, thereby becoming a victor who reigns in life and more than conquers through the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:17, 20-21; 8:37; 1 Pet. 3:7).

According to Revelation 5:6, the seven Spirits of God are the seven eyes of the Lamb to impart Himself as the Overcomer into the believers for the purpose of duplicating Himself in them as overcomers. A person's eyes are the expression of his inner being (cf. Ps. 32:8); therefore, when a person looks at another person, he transmits his feeling, sentiment, and even inward condition into the person he is observing (cf. S. S. 4:9; 6:5). Similarly, the sevenfold intensified Spirit as the seven eyes of the Lamb expresses and imparts Himself into us in order to transform us into His glorious image (cf. 2 Cor. 2:10; 3:18; Rom. 8:29). If the apostles testified of being transformed into the Lord's image by beholding the divine glory in the face of Jesus Christ, who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17-18; 4:6; 2:10; cf. John 14:19), how much more will we gain His holy and glorious essence by gazing at the seven eyes of the Lamb! Moreover, the Lamb with His seven transfusing eyes seen by John in Revelation 5:6 is introduced in the previous verse as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the One who "has overcome." This implies that Christ as the victorious Lion-Lamb desires to reproduce Himself as the Overcomer within us by gazing at us with His seven eyes, thereby transmitting His being into us through the sevenfold intensified Spirit.

The overcomers also receive the impartation of the Triune God as life into them by eating Christ the Lamb as their food so that they may become His duplication. In Exodus 12:3-11 God told Moses to instruct the children of Israel to eat the flesh of the passover lamb, "roasted with fire," including "its head with its legs and with its inward parts." Since the New Testament explicitly speaks of Christ not only as "the Lamb of God" but also as "our Passover," who "has been sacrificed" (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7), the Israelites' eating the passover lamb with the head, legs, and inward parts signifies the believers' eating Christ in His entirety: in His wisdom (the head), in His activities and move (the legs), and in the inward parts of His being—His mind, emotion, and will (John 6:57; 1 Cor. 1:24; Rev. 14:4; Phil. 1:8). The physical food that a person eats is digested and assimilated into him to become his life supply and even his intrinsic constitution. In the same principle that the children of Israel were strengthened by physically eating the passover lamb to leave Egypt, so also we, by spiritually eating Christ as the Lamb of God, are empowered to forsake the world and follow Him wherever He may go (Rev. 14:4). By our continually partaking of the Lamb throughout our lifetime, He is wrought into our inner being to become our organic constitution, until our whole being is metabolically changed to match Him in every way (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:2; 1 John 3:2).

Maturity in Life

The readiness of the bride is dependent upon the overcomers' maturity in the divine life. Marriage requires not only that both parties be of the same kind (Gen. 2:23) but also that both have reached maturity. Therefore, in order to be qualified to be part of the wife of the Lamb, we need to "be brought on to maturity," growing "with the growth of God," until we become "full-grown in Christ" (Heb. 6:1; Col. 2:19; 1:28). If we are immature believers, "infants in Christ" and "little children tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching" (1 Cor. 3:1; Eph. 4:14), we will be disqualified from marrying Christ at His coming. We should instead be "transformed into the same image from glory to glory" and "grow up into Him in all things" to attain to "the measure of the stature of

the fullness of Christ” (2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:13, 15; cf. S. S. 7:6-7). It is not mere behavior but growth in the divine life unto maturity that qualifies the believers to be part of the wife of the Lamb.

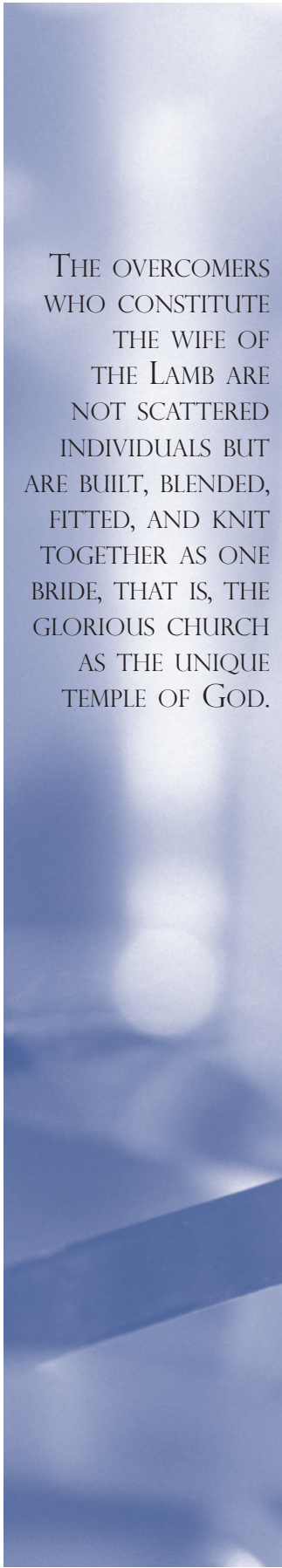
In accordance with this truth, James 5:7-8 reveals that the coming of the Lord is intimately associated with and predicated upon the believers’ maturity in life: “Be long-suffering, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer eagerly awaits the precious fruit of the earth, exercising long-suffering over it until it receives the early and late rain. You also be long-suffering; establish your hearts because the coming of the Lord has drawn near.” In the past the Lord Jesus as the heavenly Farmer sowed Himself as the seed of the divine life into the believers as the soil (Matt. 13:1-23); in the present He eagerly awaits with long-suffering the believers’ maturation in life as the precious fruit of the earth (2 Pet. 3:15, 18); and in the future He will come back as a Reaper of God’s field to harvest this fruit only when the believers reach the maturity in life (Rev. 14:14-16). This means that the believers’ abnormally slow growth in life delays the Lord’s return, but their proper maturation in life hastens it. In keeping with this truth, according to Revelation 14:1-5, the early overcomers among the believers living on earth, who are raptured to Mount Zion, are called “firstfruits to God and to the Lamb,” for they are those of God’s crop who mature the earliest. Therefore, they will be reaped as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb for His satisfaction before the great tribulation, whereas the majority of the believers on earth will ripen with the help of the immense sufferings in the great tribulation and will be reaped as the harvest at the end of the great tribulation (vv. 14-16).¹¹ If we would mature spiritually to hasten the Lord’s return, we need to participate in the unsearchable riches of the life and nature of the Lord by feeding on Him (Eph. 3:8; 5:29; John 6:57). It is for this reason that the book of Revelation underscores the believers’ eating the Lord: partaking of the Lord as the tree of life and the hidden manna (2:7, 17), dining with the Lord and enjoying Him as a feast full of riches (3:20), and eating the word of God (10:9-10).

A Corporate Entity

The overcomers who have made themselves ready for the marriage of the Lamb through maturity in life are not separate individuals but a corporate bride. It is significant that Revelation 19:7 does not speak of disparate believers who have made themselves ready; rather, it speaks of the singular wife of the Lamb who has made “herself” ready. This indicates that “Christ will not marry each believer individually; instead, He will marry His corporate bride composed of His overcoming believers” (Lee, *Conclusion* 4320). In harmony with this thought, Paul proclaims to the Corinthians, “I betrothed you to one husband to present *you* as a pure virgin to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:2, emphasis added). Although *you* in this verse is plural, referring to many Corinthian believers, Paul speaks of these believers as a singular virgin. This indicates that just as there is one Body of Christ composed of many members, so there is one bride of Christ composed of many believers (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 4:4).

The New Testament clearly reveals that being built with others in the church as the Body of Christ is a mark of a mature believer. In Ephesians 4:15 Paul declares that the believers should “grow up” into Christ as “the Head” in all things, and in verse 16 Paul goes on to say, “Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.” These verses indicate that our growth in the divine life is our growth as the members in the Body of Christ under the Head, resulting in the Body being joined and knit together and ultimately issuing in the growth and building up of the organic Body of Christ. The corporate dimension of the overcomers, the mature saints, is confirmed by the Lord’s promises in Revelation 2 and 3. According to Revelation 2:17, the Lord will give an overcomer a white stone, which is material for God’s building. Since the rewards that will be

IT IS SIGNIFICANT
THAT REVELATION
19:7 DOES NOT
SPEAK OF DISPARATE
BELIEVERS WHO
HAVE MADE
THEMSELVES READY;
RATHER, IT
SPEAKS OF
THE SINGULAR
WIFE OF THE LAMB
WHO HAS MADE
“HERSELF” READY.



THE OVERCOMERS
WHO CONSTITUTE
THE WIFE OF
THE LAMB ARE
NOT SCATTERED
INDIVIDUALS BUT
ARE BUILT, BLENDED,
FITTED, AND KNIT
TOGETHER AS ONE
BRIDE, THAT IS, THE
GLORIOUS CHURCH
AS THE UNIQUE
TEMPLE OF GOD.

bestowed on the overcomers in the millennial kingdom reflect their spiritual condition in the present age (3:4-5, 18), the overcomers receiving a white (Isa. 1:18; Psa. 51:7) stone implies that they have been not only transformed from clay into living stones but also built up as a spiritual house, the church as the house of the living God (1 Pet. 2:5; 1 Tim. 3:15), a dwelling place of God in spirit (Eph. 2:22). The overcomers' corporate character is further shown in the Lord's promise to make him who overcomes a pillar in the temple of His God (Rev. 3:12). Since in the New Testament the temple of God refers to the church as the habitation of God (1 Cor. 3:9, 16-17; Eph. 2:21-22), for an overcoming believer to be made a pillar in the temple of God means that he is built into the church (cf. Gal. 2:9). Moreover, the bride herself is a city (Rev. 21:10-11), a corporate entity, and her name is written on the overcomers (3:12). Therefore, the overcomers who constitute the wife of the Lamb are not scattered individuals but are built, blended, fitted, and knit together as one bride, that is, the glorious church as the unique temple of God (1 Cor. 12:24; Col. 2:19; Eph. 2:21).

It is significant that immediately after Revelation 19:7-9 speaks of the wife of the Lamb, of her bridal garment, and of those invited to the marriage dinner of the Lamb, Revelation 19:10 says, "I am your fellow slave and a fellow slave of your brothers who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of the prophecy." Taken together, these verses imply that the overcoming saints, who are the wife of the Lamb corporately and the invited guests individually, are the testimony of Jesus. In other words, the bride of Christ, composed of the overcomers as His many faithful witnesses, is the corporate testimony of Jesus, which is the reality, substance, and element of the prophecy of the book of Revelation.

Being Clothed in Fine Linen, the Righteousnesses of the Saints

Another qualification of the overcoming bride of Christ is her lovely adornment. Immediately after verse 7 says that "the marriage of the Lamb has come" and that "His wife has made herself ready," verse 8 goes on to say, "And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints." Here *righteousnesses* in Greek (δικαιώματα), the plural of *righteousness* (δικαίωμα), is often translated "righteous deeds" or "righteous acts."¹² In *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*, R. C. H. Lenski points to an intrinsic relationship between these two verses: "The saints' are the Lamb's wife. With these righteous acts 'she made herself ready'" (543). In other words, the saints who compose the wife of the Lamb make themselves ready for the marriage of the Lamb by their personal righteousnesses, their righteous acts.

There is considerable debate among expositors concerning the significance of the expression *the righteousnesses of the saints* in Revelation 19:8. Francis John Bodfield Hooper offers this valuable insight:

The righteousnesses of the saints here is commonly interpreted to mean "that, which is by faith in Christ, the righteousness of God by faith," imputed not imparted. But such an interpretation does great violence to the expression: indeed, the noun in the plural is sufficient to exclude it. The phrase 'naturally denotes particular actions, constituting the personal righteousness of the saints, a righteousness which may be said to be imparted, but not imputed:' though the impartation is the consequence, and presupposes an imputation of Christ's righteousness. (351-352)

A good number of commentators agree with this view. In *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, G. K. Beale understands the righteousnesses of the saints in Revelation 19:8 as "righteous acts performed by saints" (941). According to Adam Clarke's interpretation, "*the fine linen* here spoken of, is not the *righteousness of Christ imputed to believers*, for it is here called *the righteousness of the saints*; that which the grace and Spirit of Christ has wrought in them" (963). Likewise, in *The New Testament*

for *English Readers*, Henry Alford contends that the saints' righteousness is "*their own*; inherent, not imputed; but their own by their part in and union to Him" (1922). In a similar vein, Arthur Wallis equates the fine linen in 19:8 with the white garments in 3:18, stating that these garments, which he identifies as "the white garments of Christ-likeness," refer not to "the imputed righteousness which is the portion of all who believe" but to "the imparted righteousness, seen in the practical outworking of holiness day by day" (265). In *The Apocalypse of St. John: the Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Indices*, Henry Barclay Swete agrees, defining *the righteousnesses of the saints* as "the righteous actions of the Saints," that is, "the sum of the saintly acts of the members of Christ, wrought in them by His Spirit" (247). In *The Book of Revelation*, William Milligan similarly interprets the righteousnesses of the saints as the issue of the work of the indwelling Christ as the divine life to conform them to the image of Christ, God's Firstborn, through the operation of the Spirit (Col. 3:4; Rom. 8:29):

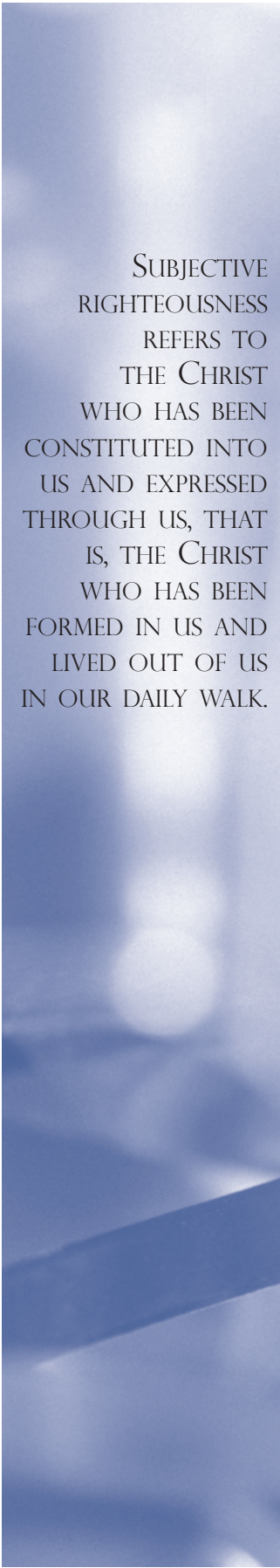
These acts are not the imputed righteousness of Christ, although only in Christ are the acts performed...No outward righteousness alone, with which we might be clothed as with a garment, is a sufficient preparation for future blessedness. An inward change is not less necessary, a personal and spiritual meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. Christ must not only be on us as a robe, but in us as a life, if we are to have the hope of glory (Col. i. 27)...All our salvation is of Christ, but the change upon us must be internal as well as external. The elect are foreordained to be conformed to the image of God's Son (Rom. viii. 29); and the Christian condition is expressed in the words which say, "...ye were washed, ye were sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God." (322-323)

In *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Lang also understands the righteousnesses of the saints as their righteous deeds that result from the work of God within them through the Spirit:

The wife "arrays herself," and yet it is "given unto her" to do this...If the Spirit of holiness had not made holiness possible no member of the church could or would have done holy acts; but though every holy deed is done by the grace of the Spirit, it is the *saint* who *does* them. It is *God* who works *in* us both to will and to work; but it is *we* who must work *out* this salvation into a life of holy deeds (Ph I. 12, 13); and if we grieve and quench the Spirit, and so frustrate the work of God within, then the fine linen will not be woven. And in no other attire will any one share in the bridal glory, though in the imputed righteousness every believer stands justified in law. But the pardon of a one-time rebel woman is by no means the same as her becoming later the wife of her sovereign, nor does any necessity exist why the king should think of such an honour for her. (318)

In Revelation 19:8 the expression *the righteousnesses of the saints* refers to the saints' righteous acts in various situations of their daily walk, through which the indwelling Christ, the righteous One (Acts 22:14), is lived out of them.¹³ The righteousnesses (plural) of the overcoming believers mentioned in this verse differ from the righteousness (singular) that we received from God for our eternal salvation at the time of our repentance unto God and believing into Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 3:24, 27), which righteousness is Christ Himself, "Jehovah our righteousness" (Jer. 23:6). The former is subjective righteousness, whereas the latter is objective righteousness.¹⁴ The righteousness that the believers received for their eternal salvation is objective and enables them to meet the requirements of the righteous God. This objective righteousness refers to the Christ in whom "everyone who believes is justified" (Acts 13:39)—that is, Christ as "the robe of righteousness" with whom the believers are "wrapped" to be justified by God (Gal. 3:27; Isa. 61:10; Luke 15:22; John 17:25). In contrast, the righteousnesses of the overcoming saints are subjective (Phil. 3:9) and enable them to meet the requirement of Christ at His judgment seat, which will take place at His return (2 Cor. 5:10). This subjective righteousness refers to the Christ who has been constituted into us and expressed through us,

THE
RIGHTEOUSNESS
THAT THE
BELIEVERS RECEIVED
FOR THEIR
ETERNAL SALVATION
IS OBJECTIVE
AND ENABLES
THEM TO
MEET THE
REQUIREMENTS
OF THE
RIGHTEOUS GOD.



SUBJECTIVE
RIGHTEOUSNESS
REFERS TO
THE CHRIST
WHO HAS BEEN
CONSTITUTED INTO
US AND EXPRESSED
THROUGH US, THAT
IS, THE CHRIST
WHO HAS BEEN
FORMED IN US AND
LIVED OUT OF US
IN OUR DAILY WALK.

that is, the Christ who has been formed in us and lived out of us in our daily walk (Gal. 2:20; 4:19). This is what the Lord Jesus referred to in Matthew 5:20: "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens." In the Lord's own words, the believers need to hunger and thirst after such a subjective and surpassing righteousness and even be willing to be persecuted for its sake (vv. 6, 10), seeking first God's kingdom and His righteousness (6:33).

The surpassing righteousness in Matthew 5:20 corresponds to "white garments" spoken of in Revelation 3:4-5 and 18, which signify the believers' walk and living that are approved by the Lord (cf. 6:11). According to the Lord's own words in 3:4-5, the overcomers will be clothed in "white garments" to walk with Him. In 3:18 the Lord said to the church in Laodicea, "I counsel you to buy from Me...white garments that you may be clothed and that the shame of your nakedness may not be manifested." It was not to unbelievers that the Lord spoke such words but to a genuine local church composed of bona fide believers in Christ, unequivocally indicating that it is possible for the believers to be spiritually naked in the eyes of the overcoming Christ. Only the believers who live and magnify Christ as their subjective righteousness by the bountiful supply of the Spirit will not be put to shame in the sight of Christ but will have boldness today (Phil. 1:19-21); and in that day, only such believers who continually "abide in" Christ and are "found in" Christ (John 15:4-5; Phil. 3:9), thereby practicing "righteousness" in their daily life, will "have boldness and not be put to shame from Him at His coming" when "He is manifested" (1 John 2:28-29). Moreover, the expression *buy from Me* in Revelation 3:18 indicates that the Lord does not freely give the white garments as a gift but rather has a high requirement on the believers' conduct in their daily living (cf. Matt. 5:17-48). Such a living that is up to a divine standard of perfection (v. 48) is possible only by the believers' walking according to their regenerated spirit, that is, their human spirit that has been born of the divine Spirit (Gal. 6:8-9; Rom. 8:4-6; cf. John 3:6). Hence, the righteousnesses of the saints—the bridal garment that qualifies them to participate in the marriage dinner of the Lamb—is Christ as the life-giving Spirit wrought into them and manifested through them in their daily living by their walking according to their regenerated spirit.

The "fine linen, bright and clean" (Rev. 19:8), which is identified as the righteousnesses of the saints, must therefore refer to Christ Himself imparted into and expressed through the overcoming believers. Christ is the One who is bright beyond compare, for He as "the effulgence," the brightness, of God's glory (Heb. 1:3), is the "great light" and the "bright morning star" (Matt. 4:16; Rev. 22:16). Further, Christ is completely clean, for He as the sinless One (2 Cor. 5:21) and "the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:8; John 6:48) is perfectly "pure," totally without mixture (1 John 3:3, 5). Hence, the bridal garment, bright in expression and clean in nature, is nothing less than the radiant and pure Christ dispensed into and lived out of the overcoming saints to make them bright stars individually and a golden shining lampstand corporately as the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 1:20; 3:1).

The Lord's own speaking in Revelation 22:11-12 makes it clear that subjective righteousness is the criterion in determining whether the believers will be rewarded at His coming back. In verse 11 the Lord underlined the importance of *practicing* righteousness in our daily walk (cf. 1 John 2:29): "Let him who does unrighteousness do unrighteousness still...; and let him who is righteous do righteousness still." In Revelation 22:12 the Lord proceeded to declare, "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me to render to each one as his work is." The Lord's words in these verses indicate that if we would receive a dispensational reward of entering into the marriage of the Lamb at His coming, we need to *do* (not only have) righteousness in our daily living, which is to live Christ, the only righteous One (Acts 3:14; 7:52; Rom. 3:12; Phil. 1:21). The "unrighteous" believers "will not inherit the kingdom of God" as a reward in the coming millennium (1 Cor. 6:9). This is because the kingdom of God is intrinsically related to righteousness: "The kingdom of God is...righteousness" (Rom. 14:17); in the coming millennial kingdom

“a King will reign according to righteousness” (Isa. 32:1); righteousness is the foundation of God’s throne (Psa. 89:14); and the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of God’s kingdom (Heb. 1:8). The overcomers, who are fully united with Christ as their subjective righteousness and manifest Him in every detail of their daily life, will be rewarded by the Lord as the righteous Judge with “the crown of righteousness” and will be saved “into His heavenly kingdom,” attending His wedding feast in the millennium (2 Tim. 4:8, 18).

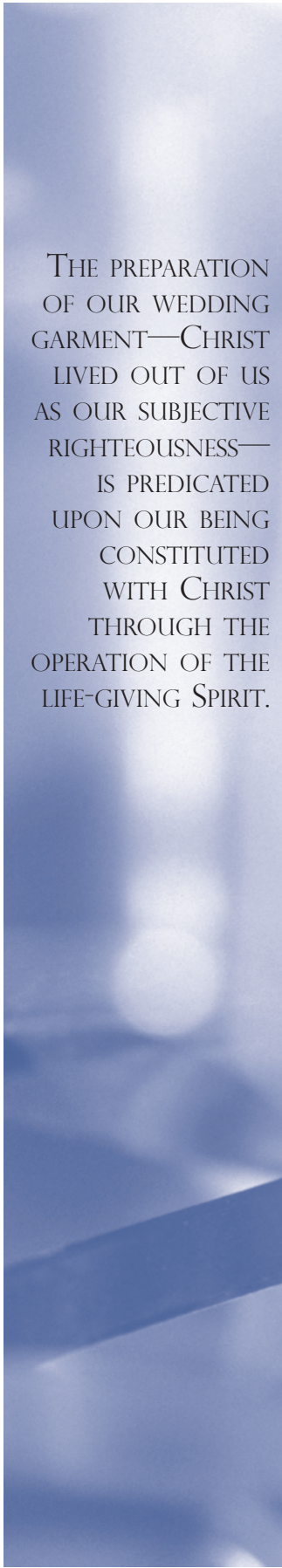
The objective righteousness (the justifying garment) and the subjective righteousness (the wedding garment) are typified by the queen’s two garments in Psalm 45:13-14. The first is “a woven work inwrought with gold” (v. 13). In typology gold signifies the eternal, divine, incorruptible nature of the immutable God (2 Pet. 1:4; Rom. 1:23; James 1:17; Mal. 3:6; Psa. 102:27) because of its insusceptibility to tarnish and decay. Hence, the queen’s being covered with gold signifies the regenerated believer’s appearing in the divine nature. At the time of our regeneration, we received Christ as the divine life with the divine nature—signified by a golden garment (John 14:6; Col. 3:4; cf. S. S. 5:11), and He became our objective righteousness to meet the righteous requirement of God that we may be justified before God. The second garment is not golden but embroidered: “She will be led to the King in embroidered clothing” (Psa. 45:14). This clothing signifies “Christ ‘embroidered’ into us by the transforming work of the Spirit and lived out of us as our subjective righteousnesses” so that we may be led to Christ the King to meet the requirement of Christ for our marriage (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 14, note 1).

Just as an embroiderer puts many stitches into cloth through needlework, so also the Holy Spirit works on us, the regenerated believers, and in us to transform us by embroidering Christ into us in the midst of various afflictions so that He may be woven into our character and expressed from within us. Through “the needle,” the transforming work, of the Spirit, Christ as the sufficient grace and the perfect power was interwoven into the apostle Paul while he was suffering from a thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7-9; 1 Cor. 15:10; Gal. 2:20-21; 1 Cor. 1:24). Further, Paul experienced the operation of the indwelling life-giving Spirit infusing him with Christ as life and transforming him into the Lord’s image from glory to glory as he underwent tremendous sufferings and persecutions throughout his ministry (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:8-12; 11:23-33). It is by “always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus” that the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus may be wrought into us and “manifested in our body” (4:10). As we endure the “momentary lightness of affliction,” the operation of the cross, for the Lord’s sake, the “eternal weight of glory,” the beauty of the New Jerusalem as His adorned bride, will increase in us “more and more surpassingly” (v. 17; Rev. 21:2, 9-11). It is by suffering with the Lord that we may be thoroughly interwoven with Him in order to be “glorified with Him” (Rom. 8:17). Only those who have the garment of embroidery produced by the transforming work of the life-giving Spirit will be chosen and qualified to attend the marriage dinner of the Lamb. Therefore, amidst all the God-ordained sufferings, we need to allow the Lord Spirit to constitute Christ as our subjective righteousness into us so that at His coming back we will not be found naked but will be clothed with a wedding garment.

In *An Outline of the Revelation*, C. A. Coates provides insight into the spiritual significance of the bridal garment mentioned in Revelation 19:8:

Her adornment is all of grace, for it was “given to her”; but it is a beauty which had come out here by the Spirit of Christ in the face of difficulty and contrariety. There is a clothing “of wrought gold” (Psa. 45:13), which is, I suppose, the new creation side—what is divinely wrought on the line of purpose, in answer to Christ having been made sin for us; 2 Cor. 5:21. But what we have here is rather the “raiment of embroidery” (Psa. 45:14); it is what has been worked out stitch by stitch as saints have brought forth “the fruit of the light in all goodness and righteousness and truth,” Eph. 5:9. In that sense the bride is making her wedding dress now. It is the outcome of the presence of the Spirit, and the result of His activities

THE OBJECTIVE
RIGHTEOUSNESS
(THE JUSTIFYING
GARMENT)
AND THE
SUBJECTIVE
RIGHTEOUSNESS
(THE WEDDING
GARMENT)
ARE TYPIFIED BY
THE QUEEN’S TWO
GARMENTS IN
PSALM 45:13-14.



THE PREPARATION
OF OUR WEDDING
GARMENT—CHRIST
LIVED OUT OF US
AS OUR SUBJECTIVE
RIGHTEOUSNESS—
IS PREDICATED
UPON OUR BEING
CONSTITUTED
WITH CHRIST
THROUGH THE
OPERATION OF THE
LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT.

in the saints. Of course, the clothing “of wrought gold” and the “raiment of embroidery” ever go together. (197-198)

It is of crucial importance to see that the preparation of our wedding garment—Christ lived out of us as our subjective righteousness—is predicated upon our being constituted with Christ through the operation of the life-giving Spirit. In 2 Corinthians 3 Paul connects “the ministry of the Spirit” to “the ministry of righteousness” (vv. 8-9). Here the Spirit as the Spirit who gives life (v. 6) is the life supply to the believers (Phil. 1:19; Gal. 3:5), and righteousness is the living out and genuine expression of Christ, who as the Spirit is our life (2 Cor. 3:17; Col. 3:4). The Spirit as the essence of the Triune God is Christ living within us to supply us with the riches of the divine life, which issues in Christ living out righteousness through us—a living that Paul considers the manifestation of the very image of God. Ephesians 4:24 says that the new man “was created according to God in righteousness,” and Colossians 3:10 says that the new man “is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.” In 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul says that Christ is “the image of God.” Taken together, these verses indicate that the new man is created in the image of God and that this image is Christ Himself as righteousness. The righteousness of God is therefore the image, the expression, of God in Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul reveals that the indwelling Spirit produces the image of God, the righteousness of God as His expression, within the believers, for they are “transformed” into the Lord’s “image,” “even as from the Lord Spirit.” This verse shows that we can have a living righteousness, the image of the Lord, only by the transmission of the life-dispensing Spirit into us (v. 6). In Paul’s view the goal of the new covenant ministry is to impart Christ as the life-giving Spirit as our life supply inwardly so that He may be our living righteousness outwardly. The righteousnesses of the saints, signified by fine linen in Revelation 19:8, are not the issue of the effort of the flesh or self; instead, they are the issue of the eternal life of the Triune God imparted into us through the ministry of the Spirit who gives life. Therefore, in order for the saints to prepare their wedding garment, they need to remain under the new covenant ministry that dispenses Christ as the life-giving Spirit into them, enabling them to express Christ as their living righteousness in their daily walk.

This notion is corroborated by the apostle Paul’s proclamation that through the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, he could live Christ for His magnification (Phil. 1:19-21), not having his “own righteousness,” the expression of himself, but “the righteousness which is out of God,” the expression of God in his daily living (3:9). It is by being filled with the Spirit of “Jesus Christ the Righteous” (1 John 2:1) that we can practice righteousness and be righteous, “even as He is righteous” (3:7; cf. 2:29), and that we who were “constituted sinners” will be thoroughly “constituted righteous” (Rom. 5:19; Isa. 53:11) to become “the righteousness of God” in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). The Spirit of Christ, the righteous One (Acts 3:14), is joined to and indwells our regenerated human spirit (1 Cor. 6:17; John 3:6; 4:24; Rom. 8:16). For this reason, Paul indicates in Romans 8:4 that we need to walk according to our joined and indwelt spirit so that in our daily life the requirement of righteousness might be fulfilled in us spontaneously. Ultimately, if we would be adorned with our bridal garment, we need to live and have our being in and according to our spirit. Given the central importance of living in our regenerated spirit to the bride’s adornment with righteousness, it should be little wonder that the book of Revelation not only stresses the Spirit of God as the seven Spirits of God (1:4; 4:5; 5:6) but also repeatedly speaks of the apostle John being in his spirit (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10) and identifies God as “the God of the spirits of the prophets” (22:6).

The Prudent Virgins

Another crucial aspect of the overcomers as constituents of the bride is that they are saturated with the Spirit within their inward parts, as symbolically portrayed in the parable of the virgins in Matthew 25. In this parable the Lord likened all the believers to virgins bearing lamps who go forth to “meet the bridegroom” for a “wedding feast” (vv. 1, 10). This

wedding feast corresponds to the marriage dinner of the Lamb in Revelation 19:9 as well as to the wedding feast prepared by a king for his son (by God for His beloved Son, Christ) in Matthew 22:2. The five prudent virgins take oil in their vessels along with their lamps, while the five foolish ones neglect the additional portion of oil in their vessels.¹⁵ The bridegroom delays and they fall asleep, but when the cry is heard that he has returned, the prudent are rewarded for being ready, while the foolish are shut out of the wedding feast as they go to buy the oil that they lack. In essence, this portrays that at His return the Lord's bride will be a corporate composition of His believers (virgins—2 Cor. 11:2) but will not include all of them. Only the overcoming believers (the five prudent virgins), who in the course of their lifetime, before they die (fall asleep), allow the divine Spirit (the oil—Luke 4:18) to spread from their spirit (the lamp—Prov. 20:27) to their whole soul (the vessel—Rom. 9:21; 2 Cor. 4:6-7), will be ready to meet Christ the Bridegroom and enjoy His wedding feast of a thousand years. Therefore, Christ soberly admonishes us, His believers, to watch, for we do not know when our Lord will return (Matt. 25:13).

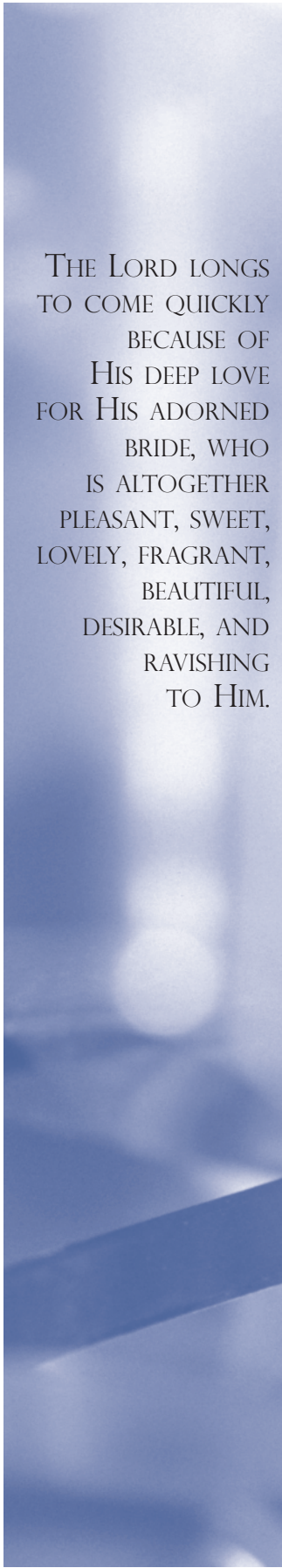
That the prudent virgins are those who “buy” the oil (v. 9; cf. Rev. 3:18) implies that the experience of having the Spirit of God in their spirit spread into every part of their soul (cf. Eph. 3:17)—their mind, emotion, and will—comes at a cost. They are the overcomers who are willing to deny themselves, take up their cross, and lose their soul-life for the Lord's sake (Matt. 16:24-25; Phil. 3:10). They count all things as loss and suffer the loss of all things so that they may “gain Christ” as the life-giving Spirit (vv. 7-8). It is by paying the price to gain the transforming Spirit in their soul (2 Cor. 3:18; cf. Rom. 8:17) that the mature and overcoming believers make themselves ready for the marriage of the Lamb and are qualified to enter into the enjoyment of the Lord's wedding feast. Because immature and defeated believers, signified by the foolish virgins, do not seize the opportunity in their lifetime to be filled with the Spirit in their inner being, they will not be allowed to participate in Christ's wedding feast (Matt. 25:10), although they will eventually be perfected during the coming millennium and ultimately join the overcoming believers as the New Jerusalem, the wife of the Lamb, in the new heaven and new earth for eternity (Rev. 21:2).

Loving the Lord with the First Love

The overcomers, who are the corporate wife of the Lamb, love Him with the first love, the love in which they give Him the first place in all things (2:4). Because they love the Lord supremely above all persons and things, they love not their soul-life, their very self, even unto death (12:11; Matt. 10:37; 16:24-26). Knowing that the Lamb loves them and has released them from their sins by His blood (Rev. 1:5), they are willing to pay any price to be the Lord's faithful witnesses, those who bear the testimony of Jesus for the fulfillment of God's eternal will (4:11). As such persons, they count it a blessing and privilege to be fellow partakers in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus (1:9; cf. Phil. 1:29; Acts 5:41), to be exiled or even slain because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 1:9; 6:9; 20:4), to suffer poverty, tribulation, imprisonment, and the evil slander from religionists, being faithful unto death (2:9-10, 13), and to follow the Lamb wherever He may go for the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom to the whole inhabited earth for the consummation of the age (14:4; Matt. 24:14).

Like the apostle Paul, the overcomers are ardent lovers of the Lord, those who are constrained by the love of Christ to live not to themselves but to Him who died for them and has been raised (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Their faithfulness to the Lord is a crowning testament to the compelling power and ultimate triumph of the Lord's knowledge-surpassing love (John 13:1; Eph. 3:18-19; Rom. 8:37). Their lives bear witness to the fact that nothing—no suffering, no power, no event or circumstance, not even death itself—is able to separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (vv. 35, 38-39). Because of their singled-hearted affection and devotion toward the Lamb as their unique Husband, the overcomers remain pure virgins by keeping themselves undefiled and holy

THE OVERCOMERS
ARE ARDENT
LOVERS OF THE
LORD, THOSE
WHO ARE
CONSTRAINED
BY THE LOVE
OF CHRIST TO
LIVE NOT TO
THEMSELVES BUT
TO HIM WHO DIED
FOR THEM AND
HAS BEEN RAISED.



THE LORD LONGS
TO COME QUICKLY
BECAUSE OF
HIS DEEP LOVE
FOR HIS ADORNED
BRIDE, WHO
IS ALTOGETHER
PLEASANT, SWEET,
LOVELY, FRAGRANT,
BEAUTIFUL,
DESIRABLE, AND
RAVISHING
TO HIM.

for Him (Rev. 14:4; 21:2). Thus, they are utterly separated from the world unto the holy God and His eternal will to become fully adorned with the processed and consummated Triune God for the satisfaction of their Husband (vv. 2, 9-23).

Desiring the Lord's Coming and the Salvation of Sinners

A notable trait of the Lamb's overcoming bride is her desire for the Lord's coming on the one hand and for the salvation of sinners on the other. In verses 7 and 12 of Revelation 22 the Lord said, "Behold, I come quickly." The Lord longs to come quickly because of His deep love for His adorned bride, who is altogether pleasant, sweet, lovely, fragrant, beautiful, desirable, and ravishing to Him (cf. S. S. 1:16; 2:14; 3:6; 4:1, 7, 9-11; 5:9; 6:4-5; 7:1, 10). In response to the Lord's declaration concerning His coming, "the Spirit and the bride say, Come!" (Rev. 22:17). Strikingly, according to Revelation 22:17, it is not that the Spirit and the bride speak separately, with the bride repeating what the Spirit says; rather, the Spirit and the bride speak together as one corporate person. In Revelation 2 and 3 it was the Lord as the Spirit who spoke to the churches, addressing many discrepancies between Him and the churches. At the end of Revelation, however, the Spirit and the bride speak together as one because they are fully united, mingled, and incorporated with each other (1 Cor. 6:17; John 15:4-5; 17:21, 23), just as the Father and the Son speak together as one in Their union of mutual indwelling (14:10-11; 17:21; 5:17; 10:30). This wonderful and profound incorporation of the Spirit and the bride is made possible only through the Lord as the life-giving Spirit making His home in the believers' hearts, saturating their inward parts with Himself (Eph. 3:17), until they have the mind, emotion, and will of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16; 4:19; 16:24; Phil. 1:8; 2:5, 13). When the Lord as the Spirit, who yearns to come quickly to marry His bride, fully makes His residence in the overcoming believers, these believers will spontaneously and affectionately yearn for the Lord's return as the Bridegroom and will fervently and continually express a joint yearning with the Spirit, praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20). Surely these Spirit-filled and Christ-constituted overcomers are those who not only love Christ with the first love but also love His appearing (2:4; 2 Tim. 4:8), eagerly awaiting the coming of their beloved Bridegroom (Phil. 3:20; 1 Cor. 1:7; 1 Thes. 1:10; Heb. 9:28; Titus 2:13). Witness Lee highlights the paramount importance of the preparation of the bride in order for the Spirit and the bride to call for the Lord to come:

The call in Revelation 22:17 will be spoken before the millennial kingdom. The record of the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth ends in verse 5 of this chapter. Verse 17 is not part of this description but part of the conclusion of the whole book. It refers to a time that is quickly approaching when the church will be built up..., a time when the Spirit and the built-up church as the bride will speak together to call the Lord to come. He is waiting for us to make this call. When we are ready and make this call in oneness with the Spirit, the Lord will come.

No doubt, the Spirit is ready, but the bride is not prepared to make this call with Him... When this preparation is complete, apparently it will be the church calling the Lord to come, but it will actually be the Spirit speaking in our speaking. Today we cannot ask the Lord to come without some inward reservation because we know that we are not yet ready. However, the day will come when we will call Him to come with an absolute sense that we are ready. Our experience and actual situation indicate that we are not ready, but it will not be long until many dear ones... will be fully ready to say, "Come, Lord Jesus!" When we are ready, the Spirit will take the lead to make this call with us. When the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" the Lord will immediately answer this call. The subjective sign of His coming is not outward things such as wars and natural disasters but our readiness within. (Lee, *Collected Works* 516-517)

After praying for the Lord to come, the Spirit and the bride in unison call thirsty sinners to salvation, saying, "Let him who is thirsty come; let him who wills take the water of life freely" (v. 17). This suggests that the Spirit and the bride desire not only that the Lord would come but also that the repenting sinner would come to take the water of life for his

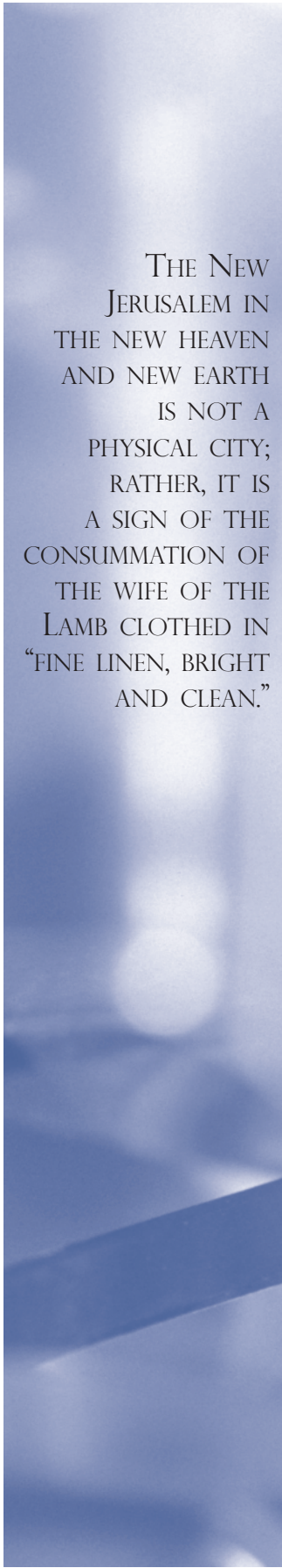
satisfaction. The joint call of the Spirit and the bride for the thirsty to come and enjoy the water of life recalls the Lord's cry in John 7:37-38: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water." In the following verse the apostle John gives the inspired interpretation of the Lord's speaking: "But this He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified." These verses reveal the Lord's deep yearning that every human being come to Him to drink of and flow out the Spirit as the reality of the resurrected and glorified Jesus, who is the divine life of the Triune God (Phil. 1:19; Acts 16:6-7; John 14:6). When the sinner-loving Lord Jesus, who desires to "guide" the thirsty to "springs of waters of life" (Rev. 7:17; cf. 21:6; John 4:14), is fully formed in us, we, as part of the bride, will spontaneously long for sinners to come to the Lord and partake of the Spirit of the glorified Jesus as living water, and we will join the Spirit in calling the thirsty ones to come and drink of the water of life so that they too may become a part of the Lord's lovely counterpart. It is by drinking the *one Spirit*, who as the reality of Christ (15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6; Rom. 8:9-10) is the essence of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:4), that we become the reality of the *one Body* (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 2:16, 18). In the same principle, it is by our drinking the Spirit of the glorified Jesus as the water of life that we are prepared to become the unique wife of the Lamb (John 7:37-39; Rev. 21:2, 9-10; 22:1).

Having the Name of God, Christ's New Name, and the Name of the New Jerusalem

A further characteristic of the overcoming believers, who form the wife of the Lamb, is that they have the name of God, Christ's new name, and the name of the New Jerusalem written upon them. In His epistle to the church in Philadelphia, the Lord unveiled the organic process by which His wife makes herself ready for the marriage of the Lamb. Although in Revelation 2 and 3 the Lord Jesus referred to His coming in His speaking to other churches (2:25; 3:3), it was only to the church in Philadelphia that the Lord expressed His love and His desire to come back swiftly: "I have loved You" (v. 9); "I come quickly" (v. 11). This indicates that the Lord's coming is closely linked to the manifestation of the bridal characteristics of the mature church, which was present in Philadelphia to a much greater extent than in any of the other churches mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3. Yet even in such a church, the Lord called for overcomers: "He who overcomes..., I will write upon him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which descends out of heaven from My God, and My new name" (3:12). The mature, overcoming believers on Mount Zion in heaven will also have the name of the Father and the name of the Lamb written on their foreheads (14:1, 4). The writing of the names of the Father and of His city and the Lord's new name upon the overcomers indicates that through the dispensing of the Triune God the overcomers have become God, Christ, and the New Jerusalem. Such a change of name signifies an organic transformation of the believer's person in the life of God, as evidenced both in Jacob's transformation from a supplanter to Israel, a prince of God (Gen. 32:28), and in Simon's transformation from a natural man into Peter, a precious stone for God's spiritual house (John 1:42; Matt. 16:18; 1 Pet. 2:4-5).¹⁶

According to the surpassingly high divine revelation in the Bible, for a believer in Christ to be transformed is for him to be "Christified" and "deified." Christification is the process in which Christ as the life-giving Spirit regenerates the believers' spirit to be joined to them in life (John 3:6; 1 Cor. 6:17), transforms and conforms their soul to His image (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29), and transfigures their body of humiliation to the body of His glory (v. 23; Phil. 3:21)—making their entire tripartite being the same as He is in life and nature but not in the Godhead (Col. 3:4; 1 Thes. 5:23). Deification is the process whereby, through God's complete salvation in life carried out by the law of the Spirit of life (Rom. 5:10; 8:2; Heb. 7:25), the believers in Christ participate in the life of God, partake of the nature of God, and manifest the glory of God, thereby expressing His

THE LORD'S
COMING IS
CLOSELY LINKED
TO THE
MANIFESTATION
OF THE BRIDAL
CHARACTERISTICS
OF THE MATURE
CHURCH, WHICH
WAS PRESENT IN
PHILADELPHIA
TO A MUCH
GREATER EXTENT.



THE NEW
JERUSALEM IN
THE NEW HEAVEN
AND NEW EARTH
IS NOT A
PHYSICAL CITY;
RATHER, IT IS
A SIGN OF THE
CONSUMMATION OF
THE WIFE OF THE
LAMB CLOTHED IN
“FINE LINEN, BRIGHT
AND CLEAN.”

excelling attributes, so that they may be made the same as God in life, nature, and expression but *not* in the Godhead and *not* as an object of worship (John 3:16; 10:10; 2 Pet. 1:4; 1 Tim. 3:15-16; Eph. 3:19, 21; 5:1; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 John 2:5; 3:1-2; Rev. 21:11). According to the Lord's own words, this marvelous process of deification and Christification¹⁷ takes place as the believers keep the Lord's word, letting His word dwell in them richly (3:8, 10; Col. 3:16), and as they hold fast and call on the Lord's name to enjoy His unsearchable riches (Rev. 2:13; 3:8; Rom. 10:12-13), thereby being abundantly saturated with the Triune God and being saved much more in the divine life (Eph. 3:19; Rom. 5:10; cf. Ps. 36:8-9).

Such an organic metamorphosis of the overcoming believers into the image of Christ, the embodiment of God, makes them the constituents of the New Jerusalem, the corporate manifestation of the Triune God as the counterpart of the Lamb, for whom He will come back. This high truth is unveiled in Revelation 22:3-4, where verse 3 speaks of “the throne of God and of the Lamb” in the New Jerusalem, and verse 4 goes on to say that “His name will be on their foreheads.” In verse 4 *His* refers to the coinhering Triune God, God and the Lamb (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 3, note 5 and v. 4, note 1), whose coinhering existence is signified as light (God) shining in and through a lamp (the Lamb—21:23; John 14:10, 20); hence, the constituents of the New Jerusalem, just like the overcomers, will have the name of both God and the Lamb written on their foreheads (cf. Rev. 14:1; 3:12). This clearly reveals that the believers' becoming genuine parts of the New Jerusalem, the wife of the Lamb, is predicated upon their being made the same as God and the Lamb in life, nature, and expression but not in the Godhead. That the overcomers bear the name New Jerusalem also serves as crucial evidence that in the coming millennial kingdom the overcoming believers will be the New Jerusalem in the initial stage of its manifestation, which will culminate in the New Jerusalem in its consummate stage in eternity.

The New Jerusalem

A concluding characteristic of the overcoming bride is that she will participate in the wedding day of the Lamb as the New Jerusalem in its initial consummation during the millennial kingdom. It is worth noting that in the book of Revelation the words *bride* and *wife* are used to describe both the overcomers as the counterpart of the Lamb in the millennium (22:17; 19:7) and all the redeemed, regenerated, and perfected believers as the counterpart of the Lamb in eternity (21:2, 9-10). However, it is vital to see that one is designated a bride primarily in the context of the wedding day, whereas the designation of a wife relates to the entire married life. The New Jerusalem in its initial consummation, a composition of all the overcoming saints, will be the bride in the coming millennium for a thousand years, which with the Lord is like one day (2 Pet. 3:8). In contrast, the New Jerusalem in its ultimate consummation, a composition of all of God's chosen, redeemed, regenerated, transformed, perfected, and glorified people, will be the wife in the new heaven and new earth for eternity. The former is a prize only to the overcoming saints, who will enjoy the wedding day, whereas the latter is the common portion of all of God's redeemed elect.

The New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth is not a physical city; rather, it is a sign of the consummation of the wife of the Lamb clothed in “fine linen, bright and clean” (Rev. 1:1; 21:2; 19:8). Like the wife of the Lamb in 19:7, the New Jerusalem as the wife of the Lamb in Revelation 21:9-10 is both clean in her nature and bright in her expression. First, in her nature the New Jerusalem is clean; she is described as being “pure gold, like transparent glass” (v. 21).¹⁸ In the Bible gold signifies God's divine nature. Just as the wife of the Lamb in 19:8 is clean in her nature, so also the New Jerusalem as the wife of the Lamb is utterly pure, being absolutely of God's divine nature, without any mixture. Second, in her expression the New Jerusalem is bright; she has the glory of God, which illumines the city, and her light is “like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, as clear as crystal” (vv. 11, 23). Both the cleanness (the purity) and the brightness (the radiance) of the city originate from “a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb” (22:1). In other words, it is by drinking of the life-giving

Spirit as the crystal-bright river of water of life that the believers are clothed in a clean and bright garment as the wife of the Lamb, who consummates in the New Jerusalem, the eternal city of pure gold and radiant glory.

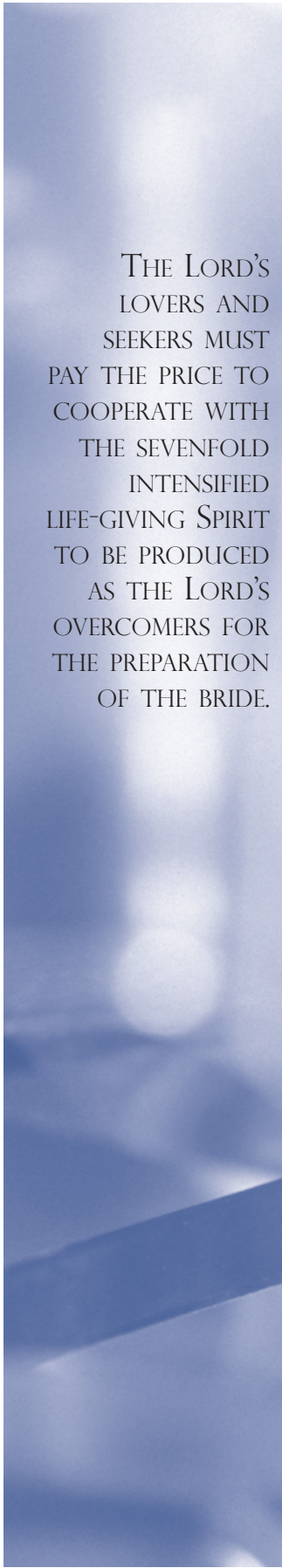
The New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth—called “the holy city” (21:2), “the wife of the Lamb” (vv. 9-10), and “a bride adorned for her husband” (v. 2)—signals the full completion of the eternal economy of God to gain in humanity a holy and unblemished wife for His beloved Son (Eph. 1:4-5, 9-11). The Lamb as the Husband is a God-man, the embodiment of the processed and consummated Triune God, and the New Jerusalem as the wife of the Lamb is a corporate God-man, the consummation of all the transformed and glorified saints. This eternal loving pair in a wondrous romance will fully manifest the Triune God in His glory and satisfy His heart’s desire. The Bible concludes and consummates with such a universal divine-human couple living a super-excellent and mutually satisfying married life in eternity.

Conclusion

The prophetic word in Revelation is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path as we journey through the present dark night toward the consummation of the age and the coming of our dear Bridegroom (Psa. 119:105; cf. 1 John 2:8). When this prophetic word is opened to us through a proper interpretation, it gives us light, imparting “spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Psa. 119:130; Col. 1:9; Eph. 1:17-18). As we give heed to the opened prophetic word, it increasingly shines in our darkness as a lamp, illuminating us until Christ as the bright morning star rises in our hearts and the day of His coming dawns upon us (2 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 2:28; 22:16). If we take heed to the words of prophecy in Revelation, we will know how to live an overcoming life that will win His approval at His judgment seat, but if we neglect them, we may be caught unprepared and lose the unspeakable privilege of sharing in the consummate joy in God’s economy: the marriage of the Lamb and His beloved wife at His coming.


What has been veiled from the Lord’s children for far too long is that the timing of the Lord’s second coming is not arbitrary or dictated by merely fulfilling a quota of saved souls; His coming depends altogether on the preparedness of His bride. Christ cannot marry a composition of redeemed and regenerated yet natural, immature, untransformed, lukewarm, and defeated believers, no matter their number. He must gain a group of people—though it be a small minority of the whole church—who are fully open to the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity and are absolutely purified, sanctified, transformed, and glorified for the presentation of a prepared bride as a match to the resurrected, glorified, divine-human, coming Christ. For this, Christ as the seven Spirits of God is operating in His sevenfold intensified heavenly ministry to reproduce the unique Overcomer, Christ, in those who answer His call to overcome. When such ones respond in love by opening their being to the operation of the Lord’s divine life, He is at last able to finalize God’s New Testament economy, which in the vast majority of believers throughout church history has been held back at an imperfect stage. While Christ as the life-giving Spirit is progressively dispensed into the lovers of Christ, causing them to grow in the divine life unto maturity, these, as overcomers, are clothed with a bright and clean bridal garment, which is the righteousnesses of the saints—the effulgent and pure Christ as subjective righteousness wrought into and continually expressed through them in the countless details of their daily life. These Spirit-filled, Christ-constituted, and Christ-manifesting overcomers rightly bear the name of God, the Lord’s new name, and the name of the New Jerusalem because they have been deified and Christified to be the genuine constituents of the corporate bride of the redeeming Christ adorned for her Husband’s satisfaction in love to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:14). As such, they will greatly rejoice and exult upon participating in the marriage of the Lamb at His coming (Rev. 19:7); they will enter into the overflowing joy of their Bridegroom (Matt. 25:21), whose eternal longing for His bride has at last been realized. They will then join their Husband in overthrowing the evil rulers of this world to bring in the righteous and glorious kingdom of our Lord and

THE TIMING
OF THE LORD’S
SECOND COMING
IS NOT ARBITRARY
OR DICTATED BY
MERELY FULFILLING
A QUOTA OF
SAVED SOULS;
HIS COMING
DEPENDS
ALTOGETHER ON
THE PREPAREDNESS
OF HIS BRIDE.



THE LORD'S
LOVERS AND
SEEKERS MUST
PAY THE PRICE TO
COOPERATE WITH
THE SEVENFOLD
INTENSIFIED
LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT
TO BE PRODUCED
AS THE LORD'S
OVERCOMERS FOR
THE PREPARATION
OF THE BRIDE.

of His Christ (Rev. 19:11-21; 17:11-14; 11:15), with whom they will live and reign for a thousand years (20:4, 6).

Such a joyous day awaits our realizing and rising up to meet the Lord's need in this age. The Lord's call to the churches is clear: His lovers and seekers must pay the price to cooperate with the sevenfold intensified life-giving Spirit to be produced as the Lord's overcomers for the preparation of the bride, the corporate testimony of Jesus, in order to fulfill the desire of His heart for His long-sought counterpart. May many answer His call, and may His wife make herself ready in these days. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! 

Notes

¹See Ephesians 1:22-23 and Revelation 1:9, 20; 2:11, 26; 3:5, 21; 19:7; 20:4, 6; 21:2, 10-11.

²The day of the Lord is spoken of as the day of His second coming in the following verses: 1 Corinthians 1:8, 2 Corinthians 1:14, Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 2 Thessalonians 2:2, and 2 Peter 3:9 and 12.

³Watchman Nee's hymn "Since Long Ago at Bethany We Parted" asks this question in various ways, expressing his deep longing for the Lord's appearing based on the promise of His imminent return.

⁴Revelation 21:9 speaks of the New Jerusalem as "the bride, the wife of the Lamb." Since *the bride* is in apposition to *the wife of the Lamb*, these two expressions are equivalent to each other and are used interchangeably both in the book of Revelation and in this article. In his commentary on the expression *His wife* in Revelation 19:7, Witness Lee affirms this fact and goes on to make a dispensational distinction in the connotations of the marital title:

His wife refers to the church (Eph. 5:24-25, 31-32), the bride of Christ (John 3:29). However, according to [Revelation 19:]8-9, the wife, the bride of Christ, here consists only of the overcoming believers during the millennium, whereas the bride, the wife, in 21:2 is composed of all the saved saints after the millennium for eternity. (*Recovery Version*, 19:7, note 2)

⁵Organic salvation refers to God's salvation in the divine life, in which the believers in Christ are "much more" "saved in His life," having been "reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (Rom. 5:10). In God's organic salvation, whereby the believers are brought into participation in the life and nature of God, the believers are regenerated, sanctified, renewed, transformed, conformed to image of God's Son, and glorified with Him through the operation of the divine life within them (John 3:6; Rom. 6:22; 12:2; 8:2, 16-17, 29-30).

⁶For instance, in *The Revelation: An Analysis and Exposition of the Last Book of the Bible*, Arno C. Gaebelin, speaking concerning the wife of the Lamb who has made herself ready for the marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7), says, "The bride of Christ to become the Lamb's wife is the Church of the New Testament. All who accepted Christ as Saviour and Lord since the day of Pentecost constitute the bride of Christ" (116). Likewise, in *You Can Understand the Book of Revelation*, Skip Heitzig, commenting on Revelation 19:7, declares that "the bride is the church, made up of Christians who came to faith anytime from Pentecost to the rapture" (207). In *Expository Sermons on Revelation*, W. A. Criswell makes a similar comment on the wife of the Lamb in Revelation 19:7: "The bride is the Church of our Christ...The bride married to our Lord is the Church, the household of the Christian faith" (28-29). In a similar vein, in *The Lamb, the Woman and the Dragon*, Albertus Pieters, referring to the Lamb's wife in Revelation 19, states that "the bride is the church, the company of the redeemed" (261).

⁷According to Ephesians 5:26-27, Christ sanctifies the church, cleansing her of every blemish, including "spot or wrinkle or any such things." Here a "spot" is a sign of the natural life, whereas a "wrinkle" is a mark of oldness. The natural life, which is our natural man, is the "soul-life" (Matt. 16:25), which is synonymous with the self (v. 26; Luke 9:25), the embodiment of Satan (Matt. 16:23-26). Nee presents a helpful definition of the natural life: "The natural life is the totality of the life that we have inherited from our parents. It is what remains in our life after the sinful elements have been dealt with...This life includes such traits as our natural generosity, excellence, and good disposition" (*Collected Works* 42: 495-496). Witness Lee offers an insightful definition

of the old man: “The old man is our very being, which was created by God but became fallen through sin, and it is the same as the ‘I’ in Gal. 2:20. It is not the soul itself but the life of the soul, which has been counted by God as hopeless and has been put on the cross and crucified with Christ” (*Recovery Version*, Rom. 6:6, note 2).

⁸For a more thorough treatment of this subject, see Ron Kangas’s “The Seven Spirits of God” in *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 1, no. 4, Oct. 1996, pp. 28-44.

⁹See Matthew 16:27; 18:23; 24:46, 50; 25:10-11, 19; Romans 14:10; 1 Corinthians 3:13; 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:8; James 5:9; 1 John 4:17; and Revelation 22:12.

¹⁰According to Matthew 22:13 and 25:30, at the judgment seat of Christ, the defeated, unfaithful, and immature believers will be cast into the outer darkness to suffer dispensational punishment in the coming millennium. This differs from being cast into the lake of fire to suffer eternal perdition after the millennium for eternity (Rev. 20:15). Through God’s disciplinary dealing during the coming millennial age, these believers will be matured to become the constituents of the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth for eternity (22:1-2). Further, this scriptural teaching concerning dispensational discipline in the outer darkness differs from the heretical doctrine of purgatory: a place or process of temporary punishment in which dead souls are purified to expiate their sins before obtaining eternal salvation. For an in-depth critique of the unbiblical teaching of purgatory in light of the biblical teaching of eternal salvation and dispensational punishment, see John Campbell’s “Forgiveness in the Age to Come (1)” in *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 9, no. 1, Apr. 2004, pp. 56-69.

¹¹For a more detailed explanation of the distinction between the firstfruits and the harvest in Revelation 14, see John Campbell’s “The Rapture of the Saints (1)” in *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 11, no. 2, Oct. 2006, pp. 74-91; his “The Rapture of the Saints (2)” in *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 12, no. 1, Apr. 2007, pp. 68-83; and his “The Rapture of the Saints (3)” in *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 12, no. 2, Oct. 2007, pp. 72-86.

¹²δικαιώματα in Revelation 19:8 is rendered “righteousnesses” in the *Darby Bible*; it is translated “righteous deeds” in the *English Standard Version*, the *Revised Standard Version*, and the *New Revised Standard Version*; and it is rendered “righteous acts” in the *Amplified Bible*, the *Christian Standard Bible*, the *American Standard Bible*, the *New American Standard Version*, and the *New King James Version*. See these versions at <https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/Revelation%2019:8>.

¹³This insight into the spiritual significance of the righteousnesses of the saints is principally derived from Message 424 of Lee’s *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, Messages 25 through 29 of his *Life-study of 2 Corinthians*, and Message 54 of his *Life-study of Revelation*.

¹⁴The New Testament unveils Christ as both the believers’ objective righteousness and their subjective righteousness. According to 1 Corinthians 1:30 and Jeremiah 23:6, Christ, who is Jehovah God (Rom. 9:5; John 12:36-42), is the believers’ objective righteousness. The truth concerning Christ as the believers’ subjective righteousness is implied in 2 Corinthians 11, where Paul speaks first of “ministers of righteousness” (v. 15) and then of “ministers of Christ” (v. 23). These verses indicate that in order for the believers to express righteousness in their daily life, they need to be constituted with Christ, the righteous One, through the work of the new covenant ministers who impart the unsearchable riches of Christ as the life-giving Spirit into them (3:6; Rom. 15:16; Eph. 3:8).

¹⁵It is crucial to realize that the foolish virgins in Matthew 25 do not typify unbelievers; rather, they typify believers in Christ who will not lose their eternal salvation but will be disqualified from receiving a dispensational reward in the coming millennial age. In brief, these virgins must be understood as regenerated believers for three main reasons. First, in the New Testament only the true believers are described as virgins betrothed to the Lord as their Husband and qualified to go forth to meet Him as the Bridegroom (Matt. 25:1; 2 Cor. 11:2). Second, only genuine believers in Christ possess the Spirit as the oil (Isa. 61:1) in their human spirit, “the lamp of Jehovah” (Prov. 20:27), for their lamps to be lighted and burning—albeit at least initially (Matt. 25:8). Third, according to the New Testament, it is possible for the believers in Christ to be foolish rather than prudent. In the apostle Paul’s words, the Galatians, the genuine believers who constituted “the churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:2), were foolish (3:1) because although they had “begun by the Spirit,” they were “being perfected by the flesh” instead of continually receiving the Spirit, whom God bountifully supplied to them (vv. 3, 5). In harmony with this thought, Paul admonishes “the saints who are in

IN THE NEW
TESTAMENT
ONLY THE
TRUE BELIEVERS
ARE DESCRIBED AS
VIRGINS BETROTHED
TO THE LORD
AS THEIR
HUSBAND AND
QUALIFIED TO
GO FORTH
TO MEET HIM AS
THE BRIDEGROOM.

THE FOOLISH
VIRGINS TYPIFY
BELIEVERS IN
CHRIST WHO WILL
NOT LOSE THEIR
ETERNAL SALVATION
BUT WILL BE
DISQUALIFIED
FROM RECEIVING
A DISPENSATIONAL
REWARD IN
THE COMING
MILLENNIAL AGE.

Ephesus" (Eph. 1:1) to "walk, not as unwise, but as wise" (5:15) and to "not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" by being "filled in spirit" rather than being "drunk with wine" (vv. 17-18). For a more comprehensive commentary on this subject, see Nee's "Study on Matthew" in volume 15 of *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee* and John Campbell's "The Parable of the Ten Virgins" in *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 5, no. 3, July 2000, pp. 39-48.

¹⁶For a fuller study of the spiritual significance of the changing of names, see Message 48 of Lee's *Life-study of Genesis* (Living Stream Ministry, 1984), entitled "Knowing Grace for the Fulfillment of God's Purpose: The Unveiling of the Divine Title and the Changing of Human Names for the Fulfilling of God's Purpose."

¹⁷For a more comprehensive understanding of the truth concerning deification, see the entire issue of *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 7, no. 2, Oct. 2002.

¹⁸The Greek word translated "clean" in Revelation 19:8 (καθαρόν) is rendered "pure" in 21:21.

Works Cited

- Alford, Henry. *The New Testament for English Readers*. Vol. 4, Baker Book House, 1983.
- Aune, David. E. *Revelation 17-22*. Zondervan, 1998. Word Biblical Commentary 52c.
- Beale, G. K. *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Eerdmans, 1999.
- Clarke, Adam. *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*. Vol. 2, A. Paul, 1823.
- Coates, C. A. *An Outline of the Revelation*. Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, n.d.
- Criswell, W. A. *Expository Sermons on Revelation*. Zondervan, 1962.
- Gaebelein, Arno C. *The Revelation: An Analysis and Exposition of the Last Book of the Bible*. Loizeaux Brothers, 1961.
- Heitzig, Skip. *You Can Understand the Book of Revelation*. Harvest House, 2011.
- Hooper, Francis John Bodfield. *The Revelation of Jesus Christ by John*. Vol. 2, Rivington, 1861.
- Lang, G. H. *Firstborn Sons: Their Rights and Risks*. Conley & Schoettle, 1984.
- . *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. Conley & Schoettle, 1985.
- Lee, Witness. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1975–1976*. Vol. 3, Living Stream Ministry, 2013.
- . *The Conclusion of the New Testament*. Living Stream Ministry, 2010.
- . *Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures*. Vol. 6, Living Stream Ministry, 2010.
- . Footnotes. *Recovery Version of the Holy Bible*, Living Stream Ministry, 2003.
- . *Life-study of 2 Corinthians*. Living Stream Ministry, 1984.
- . *Life-study of Revelation*. Living Stream Ministry, 1984.
- Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*. Augsburg, 1963.
- Milligan, William. *The Book of Revelation*. Hodder & Stoughton, 1893.
- Nee, Watchman. *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*. Living Stream Ministry, 1993. 62 vols.
- . "Since Long Ago at Bethany We Parted." *Hymns*. Living Stream Ministry, 1980, p. 883.
- Pieters, Albertus. *The Lamb, the Woman and the Dragon: An Exposition of the Revelation of St. John*. Zondervan, 1937.
- Swete, Henry Barclay. Notes. *The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Indices*, MacMillan, 1909.
- Tanner, J. Paul. "The 'Marriage Supper of the Lamb' in Rev 19:6-10 Implications for the Judgment Seat of Christ," *Trinity Journal*, vol. 26, no. 1, Spring 2005, pp. 47-68.
- Wallis, Arthur. *In the Day of Thy Power: The Scriptural Principles of Revival*. CLC, 2010.