

Session 3: The Bride in the Book of Revelation--1

I. Observing the Bride in the Scriptures

1. In this session and the next four, we will dig into several key New Testament passages which address the believer as a bride for Christ.
 - a. As we learned in the last session, before Jesus returns the betrothed bride must make herself ready to be the eternal wife of Christ, and in God's plan, He is raising up forerunners to help this happen. Because of the important role that forerunners play in this effort, forerunners must be deeply grounded in what they believe about the bride being made ready and what the implications are for individual believers. Forerunners must develop solid convictions of their beliefs on this subject—and be able to communicate to others why they believe what they do. *Much of the church is teaching incorrectly on this crucial subject, and forerunners are called to bring truth, correction, and preparation into the global church.*
 - b. Therefore, in this session and the next four, we will explore several key New Testament passages that discuss the bride so that we can glean a deep understanding of what the scriptures teach about the bride being prepared for her Bridegroom King. In this session, we will explore the bride in Revelation 2-3. In the next session, we will analyze the bride in Revelation 12 and Revelation 19:7-9. In Session 5, we will conclude our study of the bride in the book of Revelation by discussing the bride in Revelation 17:14, 19:11-21, and Revelation 21-22. In Session 6, we will look at the Parable of the Marriage Feast in Matthew 22 and in Session 7, the Parable of the Ten Virgins and the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25.
 - c. Our objective in studying these passages is to gain a deep understanding of what the scriptures teach about the bride of Christ and the bride's call to make herself ready. As we study these passages, we will also be equipped to form an opinion on a common question: "Is every born again believer the eternal wife of Christ?" Therefore, as we study these passages we will highlight issues that must be addressed to be made ready as a bride for Christ and make the point that not addressing these key issues will greatly hinder or even eliminate us from being a bride made ready for Christ. With that introduction, let's begin. Before we dig into the details of Revelation 2-3, it will be important to lay a solid foundation about the common views about the bride.
2. From my study and experience in teaching about the bride, there appear to be five common views about the bride.
 - a. To help us understand the passages we will be studying over the next several sessions, it is important as we begin to highlight several common views about the bride of Christ. Each of these are views held by different streams in the church. Understanding these views guide the interpretation of the scriptural passages on the bride and will be very helpful to us as we call the church to make itself ready as Christ's bride.
 - b. The first view which is held by many evangelicals is that the church as the bride of Christ simply refers to a way of describing certain characteristics that believers are to have. Those who hold this view would state that there is really no bride of Christ as a real entity; rather, it is a way to illustrate

Session 3: The Bride in the Book of Revelation--1

certain attributes about believers and the church as a whole. To better explain this view, I repeat an excerpt from my book, *A Worthy Bride*,

While attending seminary in the 1980's, I took a course that addressed the doctrine of the church. One night my professor, who I loved and respected very much, listed several pictures of the New Testament church. He identified the church as the body of Christ, the army of God, servants of the Lord, and the family of God. When he came to the concept of the bride of Christ, he said that the church as a bride pictured purity and devotion to the Lord Jesus. His view—as was mine at the time—was that the bride was merely a picture that illustrated how believers were to relate to Jesus as their Savior and Lord.¹

- c. To make sure we are clear, this view holds that there is no actual bride of Christ who will be eternally married to Christ. Instead, they believe that the concept of the bride merely describes certain character traits that believers should have in their life.
- d. A second view which is also widely held in the evangelical church is that every born again believer is betrothed to Christ as His bride and, when Christ returns, every truly born again believer will be the eternal wife of the Lamb. Those holding this view believe that all believers in Jesus Christ are the bride of Christ, and wait with anticipation for the return of the Bridegroom. The following excerpt from a familiar website illustrates this view,

Christ, the Bridegroom, has sacrificially and lovingly chosen the church to be His bride. Just as there was a betrothal period in biblical times during which the bride and groom were separated until the wedding, so is the bride of Christ separate from her Bridegroom during the church age. Her responsibility during the betrothal period is to be faithful to Him. At the rapture, the [entire] church will be united with the Bridegroom and the official wedding ceremony will take place, and with it, the eternal union of Christ and His bride [every born again believer] will be actualized.²

- e. The implication of the above quote and this view in general is that every truly born again believer will be the eternal wife of the Lamb, and there is no necessity to make themselves ready. In summary, this view takes the position that salvation makes you the bride who has made herself ready. Those holding this view take the perspective that believing in Jesus Christ and being born again automatically makes you the bride who has made herself ready.
- f. A third view that is much more common than I realized is that the bride of Christ is not the church at all, but is Israel. Those holding this view state that the scriptures never use the exact phrase “the bride of Christ” and that the idea of Christ’s bride is specifically directed toward Israel and the Jews—especially the Jews who will survive the end-time tribulation. This view holds that Christ will have an eternal wife, and the wife will be Israel, but not the church. We do believe that faithful Jews who lived before Christ and those who accepted Christ or will do so when all Israel is saved will be a part of Christ’s bride. Jesus will have a bride from every tribe, tongue, and nation. However, this is not what this view believes. They believe that the bride of Christ relates only to believing Jews.
- g. A fourth view believes that the bride must be made ready but that God will accomplish this task in His sovereignty. Those with this view believe that the bride will be made ready because God is sovereign and has decreed it so. This view holds that God will use whatever means necessary to accomplish the readying of the bride. Some who hold this view believe that God will accomplish this work for those living in the end times through both revival and persecution. They say that as darkness engulfs the world, God will pour out His Spirit in wonderful and powerful ways and many

Session 3: The Bride in the Book of Revelation--1

will come into a bridal relationship with Christ. This view also holds that at the same time the Spirit is poured out, the pressures, persecution, and suffering of the end times will perfect the bride so as to make her ready. Whereas we believe there is most definitely truth in this view—that the pressures of end-time tribulations and a mighty end-time revival are part of God’s plan to prepare the full complement of believers as Christ’s bride, we believe also that believers must actively and intentionally make themselves ready.

- h. This leads us to the fifth view—the view to which we hold. Our view is that every born again believer is betrothed to Christ as His bride at the point of salvation, but only those who make themselves ready will become the eternal wife of the Lamb. Therefore, we believe that not every believer will be the eternal wife of the Lamb. Being the wife of the Lamb will be an eternal reward granted at the judgment seat of Christ to those who have made themselves ready during their life.
- i. These next five sessions will focus on what the scriptures teach about the bride making herself ready and present ideas that support the view we hold that not every born again believer is the eternal wife of the Lamb but only those who make themselves ready.
- j. Let’s now examine the bride in the seven churches of Revelation.

II. The Bride in the Seven Churches of Revelation

1. A few foundational points are helpful as we begin our examination of the bride in Revelation 2-3.
 - a. The seven churches spoken of in Revelation 2-3 were all literal churches that existed at the time the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation. As such, the messages discussed issues that those specific churches were called on to address. In addition to being specific messages to those churches during John’s day, they are also messages to the global church throughout the church age and for us today. As such, the message to each of the seven churches must be heeded. As the angel told John, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near” (Rev. 1:3).
 - b. Another important point is that in Revelation 2-3, Jesus was speaking to believers who had already received the free gift of salvation. He was calling believers to live in a way to receive eternal rewards. Justification is a free gift given to us. It is based on Jesus’ worthiness (Eph. 2:8-9). Rewards are given based on a believer’s righteousness and righteous acts, “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done” (Rev. 22:12).
 - c. Even though many commentators equate the offer of the rewards identified here to the blessings of being born again, Jesus was not exhorting the believers in these churches to be born again. He was offering born again believers rewards as incentives to overcome in the face of sin, temptation, and pressure. The rewards highlighted in these messages do not motivate us if they are automatically given to every believer without regard to their responses. These rewards are not given with empty warnings that have no real loss associated with the warning. If rewards are automatically received without regard to fulfilling the required conditions, then they are given with an empty or false warning. They are promises that have specific conditions.

Session 3: The Bride in the Book of Revelation--1

2. Jesus' messages to the seven churches spoken of in Revelation 2-3 identify specific rewards offered to believers.

- a. In our Lifeschool class, *The Overcomers*, we identify seventeen specific eternal rewards in Revelation 2-3. Mike Bickle categorizes the rewards a little differently as follow. The rewards he lists are: To eat from the Tree of Life in the midst of Paradise (2:7); to receive the crown of life (2:10); to not be hurt by the second death (2:11); to eat hidden manna (2:17); to receive a white stone (2:17); to receive a new name written on the stone (2:17); to have power over the nations (2:26); to receive the morning star (2:28); to receive white garments (3:5); to receive a name that is not blotted from the Book of Life (3:5); for Jesus to confess one's name before the Father and angels (3:5); for one's persecutors to worship before their feet (3:9); for one's persecutors to know that Jesus loves them (3:9); to be made a pillar in God's temple (3:12); to have God's name, the New Jerusalem's name, and Jesus' new name written on one (3:12); to receive gold to make one rich (3:18); to receive white garments that one's shame not be revealed (3:18); to have anointed eyes to see more (3:18); to eat with Jesus (3:20) and sit on His throne (3:21).

3. Several of the rewards are promises to the bride who has made herself ready and to those who will be invited into the marriage supper of the Lamb.

- a. In reviewing the promised rewards in these seven messages, we should be clear that not all of the rewards are bridal in nature. In fact, Jesus is not totally or even primarily focused on bridal rewards. His burden is for His church to draw close to Him in love and obedience; to stand strong in every generation and especially in the end times; to not fall away in the pressures of what is coming; and to receive the maximum rewards possible for eternity. Rewards are highlighted as incentives for the church to continue in faithfulness even as pressures increase. *However, in referring to rewards, several do refer to promises to the bride who makes herself ready and others are promises of admission to the marriage supper of the Lamb.*
- b. For much more insight into Jesus' messages to the seven churches, refer to for our Lifeschool class, *The Overcomers*. It can be found at <https://radicalpursuit.net/classes/the-overcomers/>.
- c. Let's now look at those rewards that are promised to the bride who makes herself ready and the promise of admission to the marriage supper of the Lamb. I will not attempt to move progressively from the first to the seventh church but instead highlight those rewards that are most clearly bridal in nature and promised to the bride who has made herself ready.

The Church at Philadelphia

- a. Jesus' promised rewards to the church at Philadelphia. He said, "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name" (Rev. 3:12). We know that the promises to Philadelphia are to the bride because of the promise of the name of the city of God—the new Jerusalem which is referred to as Christ's bride in Revelation 21. In fact, we refer to the church at Philadelphia as the

Session 3: The Bride in the Book of Revelation--1

priestly bride. In reality all of the promises to Philadelphia are bridal in nature. Let's dig into this verse.

- b. First, the overcomer at Philadelphia is promised to be a pillar in the temple of God. Since a pillar bears the weight of a building and signifies stability, firmness, beauty, permanence, and importance, being a "pillar in the temple" is to have a special position of honor, authority, and responsibility in God's throne room during the Millennial Kingdom—an honor granted to the bride made ready! Being a pillar in the temple and "not going out from it anymore" doesn't mean they never leave the temple, but suggests a place of great intimacy with the Lord so as to forever dwell with Him. George Eldon Ladd states this about being a pillar in the temple, "The Revelation constantly refers to a heavenly temple as the dwelling place of God (7:15; 11:19; 14:15; 15:5; 16:1).³ The overcomer will dwell in great intimacy and honor with Christ forever. Much like the sons of Zadok who will have as their foremost ministry to "come near to God to minister to him" (Ezek. 44:15-16), the bride made ready will have the honor of dwelling with Christ in great intimacy and have as her primary role to minister to Christ.
- c. Second, this church is promised "the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem". Like we stated a moment ago, we know from Revelation 21:2 that the New Jerusalem is in some way both a city and the bride made ready. Note this verse, "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). The promise here is that the overcoming bride will be granted an eternal place of permanence to dwell forever as the wife of the Lamb in the eternal city of God--the new Jerusalem.
- d. Third, the overcomer in Philadelphia is promised "the name of My God". As Robert Thomas puts it in his two-volume commentary on Revelation, this is "equivalent to belonging to God".⁴ That is, the bride who overcomes will forever belong to God as His prized possession.
- e. Fourth, the overcomer is also promised Christ's new name. This promise suggests that the overcomer is promised to carry the name of Christ and his character and nature throughout the creation for all of eternity.⁵ Just like in today's society in which the bride takes her husband's name at her wedding, the bride made ready will take Christ's name.
- f. Fifth, the overcomer at Philadelphia is promised to be kept from the hour of testing that will be coming upon the whole world. There are many views about what this promise actually means in practical terms. Although most definitely a powerful promise, it suggests in some way that the bride made ready will be protected during the great tribulation and quite possibly part of the first fruits man-child company of bridal believers made ready before the great tribulation comes upon the earth.
- g. Again, referring to the church at Philadelphia as the priestly bride, this church receives the promise of a special place in eternity, a place of intimacy and honor granted to those who have made themselves ready as a bride by keeping Christ's word and not denying His name.

The Church at Laodicea

- a. Jesus' message to Laodicea also includes three specific bridal promises: 1) white garments, 2) present and eternal dining with Jesus, and 3) sitting with Christ on His eternal throne. Because of the bridal promises offered to the church at Laodicea, we call the overcomer from Laodicea the

Session 3: The Bride in the Book of Revelation--1

enthroned bride. The message to Laodicea includes this exhortation, “I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed” (Rev. 3:18). The invitation to buy from Christ white garments is a reference to bridal garments. These are the same white garments that the bride who has been made ready is wearing at the time of Christ’s second coming (Rev. 19:8; 19:14). Thus, the believer is challenged to overcome so as to be clothed as a bride made ready by purchasing from Christ white bridal garments. Thus, by implication, the one who buys from Christ white garments by overcoming lukewarmness will receive white bridal garments as an eternal reward.

- b. The second promise to Laodicea is the invitation to dine with Christ. The invitation to dine is an invitation to have an intimate dining relationship with Christ in this life; however, it is much more than an invitation to an enriched life, it is also an invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb. The Greek word for dine in this verse is *deipneo*, which is derived from *deipnon* is also used in Revelation 19:9 to describe the "marriage supper of the Lamb". Confirming this idea, Robert Thomas writes the following about the Jesus entering through the door,

The more probable identification [*of the door*] is the eschatological door through which Christ will enter at His second advent [*that is, He will enter earth to dine at the marriage supper of the Lamb with His bride*]. This picture stresses the urgency for people to seek a right relationship with Christ.⁶

- c. In this life, this promise relates to having increased intimacy, oneness, and friendship with Christ. In the age to come, it is an invitation to believers to make themselves ready so as to dine with Christ at the marriage supper of the Lamb.
- d. The final promise to Laodicea is the invitation to sit with Christ on His throne. Overcomers who will sit down with Jesus on His throne will judge the nations with Him during the Millennial Kingdom. Revelation 20:4 states, "Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them....And they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years." The apostle Paul added to this idea, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" (1 Cor. 6:2-3). The overcomers will sit down with Jesus on His throne and assist Him in judging the nations and evaluating their role in the Millennial Kingdom (Matt. 25:31-46). Overcomers are invited to receive the eternal reward of sitting with Christ as His bride on His throne. Many commentaries suggest that every true believer will sit with Christ on His throne and judge the nations. However, this will not be the case. Instead, Christ’s wife—the true queen of heaven—is the one who will sit with Him on His throne and rule with Him forever. Again, a bridal promise.

Churches at Sardis, Pergamum, and Thyatira

- a. Just as with the previous two churches, the message to the church at Sardis also contains a bridal promise. Jesus promised this to the overcomers at Sardis, “He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels” (Rev. 3:5). The white garments promised here by Jesus are the same bridal garments we discussed in our analysis of Laodicea; are the same white garments that clothe the bride made ready in Rev. 19:7; and are the same garments clothing the bridal army returning with Jesus in Rev. 19:14. Walking with Jesus in white as depicted in the message to Sardis is another way of saying that overcomers will be clothed in white bridal garments as the Lord's wife

Session 3: The Bride in the Book of Revelation--1

for all eternity.

- b. We also see that the overcomers in Pergamum were offered hidden manna and a white stone. The "hidden manna" likely refers to the manna that was put into the golden pot in the ark of the covenant and remained perpetually in the holy of holies in the temple. More importantly, the hidden manna refers to Jesus Himself, who is the true bread or manna from heaven. The promise of hidden manna is for the overcomer to dwell eternally in the holy of holies, where they will have deep intimacy with Jesus and feast upon Him forever. This also is a reward promised to the bride made ready. The hidden manna is located in the Holy of holies which is reserved for Christ's bride made ready. Overcomers at Pergamum were also offered a white stone. Whereas it is uncertain of the exact meaning of the white stone, many commentators believe it refers to entrance into the marriage supper of the Lamb. Again, another promise to the overcomer with bridal implications.
- c. The final church with bridal promises is the church at Thyatira. The overcomers at this church were offered authority over the nations and the morning star. Jesus made this promise, "He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star "(Rev.2:26-28). An explanation of the morning star will require too much space to thoroughly cover here; therefore, summarizing our view, we believe that in this setting, the morning star refers to Christ giving the overcomers His kingdom authority in heavenly places. You can see our view in much more detail in our class, *The Overcomers*, Session 12. With that brief background and remembering that the bridal promise made to overcomers at Laodicea was to sit with Christ on His throne, the promise to the overcomer is again a bridal promise that the bride who sits on the throne with Christ will partner with Him throughout the ages with judicial responsibility and kingdom authority, bringing justice and righteousness into the sphere of authority entrusted to them. Again, a bridal promise.

4. The bridal rewards promised in Revelation 2-3 are granted to those who overcome.

- a. Thus far we have discovered that several of the rewards promised to believers through Jesus' messages to the seven churches are bridal in nature. Likewise, we have discovered that the promises are to believers who have overcome. Certainly not a complete list, we note that the churches that include bridal promises also include exhortations to overcome such as: keeping the word of God regardless of the opposition to it; not denying the name of Christ when the world pressures you to do so; overcoming lukewarmness; putting on white bridal garments; dining with Jesus; overcoming Jezebel; and waking up and remaining alert to a lifelong pursuit of Christ.
- b. In actuality, the bride made ready will be an overcomer as described in all of the messages to the seven churches. This is an important point to understand. We are highlighting the idea of overcoming in the context of specific bridal promises. However, as we will see in the next session, the bride made ready must overcome the issues raised against all seven churches. Even so, the reason for highlighting those connected to bridal promises is to make the point that the promises to the overcomer includes bridal promises and that the bridal promises are not available to those who do not overcome. Because of this, how we understand the concept of "overcoming" will greatly

Session 3: The Bride in the Book of Revelation--1

determine our view about bridal preparation and the question we are considering: “Is every believer the eternal wife of Christ?”. Therefore, it is important that we evaluate the idea of overcoming.

III. Understanding the Concept of Overcoming

1. The promises to the seven churches are given to the one who has overcome.

- a. Every promise highlighted to the seven churches is given to the one who has overcome. In the case of each of the seven churches, Jesus uses either the phrase “to him who overcomes” or “he who overcomes”. The idea of overcoming is also very closely connected to the bridal promises in the remainder of the book of Revelation. Therefore, it is crucial that we gain a clear understanding of the overcomer. One’s view on overcoming will determine if they believe the promises to the bride are to every believer regardless of their pursuit of Christ or to only those who actually overcome the issues emphasized to each church and the scriptures in general. Therefore, we want to explore the idea of overcomers as it is used in these two chapters and in other places in the book of Revelation.

2. The definition of the Greek word translated *overcome* will help us understand the concept of overcoming.

- a. The Greek word translated *overcome* or *overcame* is *nikaō* (*nik-ah'-o*), which means to conquer absolutely, to carry off the victory, to come off victorious, to subdue, to prevail, or to vanquish. This definition indicates that there is some type of struggle in which one engages and endures through on the road to victory.
- b. The Greek word *nikaō* is used seventeen times in the book of Revelation. Eight times—or almost half the time—this word is used to call believers to overcome some type of struggle, entanglement, sin, or area of compromise. For example, this word is used to call believers to overcome losing their first love, the works of Jezebel, apathy, and self-satisfaction (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7). In four instances, this word is used to show that someone has previously overcome. For example, Jesus overcame, sat down on His Father’s throne, and received the right to break the seven-sealed scroll (Rev. 3:21; 5:5). In the future, the saints will overcome the dragon by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and by not loving their lives unto death (Rev. 12:11). They will also overcome the Antichrist and the dragon and will worship God on the sea of glass (Rev. 15:2).
- c. As we apply the idea of overcoming to the messages to the seven churches, it becomes clear that in each case believers have issues in which they must overcome. As the definition states, there is a spiritual battle involved in Jesus’ invitation to them as it relates to the issue at hand. They are invited by the Lord to fight the spiritual battle so as to conquer the issue.
- d. With that understanding of the concept of overcoming, let’s next review four common views held by theologians and commentators of the overcomer in the book of Revelation and in Revelation 2-3. The four views are: 1) the All Believers View, 2) the Perseverance of the Saints View, 3) the Loss of Salvation View, and 4) the Eternal Rewards View. Of course, the view we hold is the Eternal Rewards View. In a moment, we will explain why we believe the Eternal Rewards View, which is the view that supports our belief that not every believer is the eternal wife of Christ—but only those who overcome. But before we delve into supporting the view to which we hold, it is important to

Session 3: The Bride in the Book of Revelation--1

understand the different views. Remember as forerunners, you will be called on to not only believe correctly for yourself, but you will need to be able to defend your position against other common beliefs. So, let's look briefly at the other three views.

3. The first view of the overcomer is the All Believers View.

- a. This view holds that every believer is an overcomer regardless of their level of maturity simply by being born again. This view holds that every born again believer receives all of the promised rewards in full measure regardless of their faithfulness in their walk with the Lord. Surprisingly, as you read commentaries on the book of Revelation, this view is one of the most common views expressed by theologians.
- b. Robert Thomas in his commentary on the book of Revelation writes this about overcomers, "'Overcomer' is best understood as a general designation applicable to all believers."⁷ In his support for this view, he takes a position against the eternal rewards view disparagingly using the phrase "a special class of Christians". He says this, "The difficulty with this approach [*the special class of Christians*] is that this promise to the overcomer entails participation in eternal blessings that belong to all the saved."⁸
- c. Mike Bickle in his teaching notes on the seven churches of Revelation writes the following definition of "the all believers" view,

The all believers view teaches that all believers are overcomers because of the very act of believing in Jesus. This view holds that believing in Jesus is all that is needed to be an overcomer (1 Jn. 5:4-5). Faith in Jesus rather than faithfulness to Him is emphasized in this position. In other words, both the spiritually mature and immature believers are equally overcomers. Thus, all the rewards in Rev. 2-3 are automatically and fully given to all believers as being synonymous with the gift of eternal life. [*This view believes that*] The thief on the cross will receive the same reward as Paul and John the Baptist.⁹

4. The second view is the Perseverance of the Saints View.

- a. This view holds to the idea that all truly born again believers are to fight the fight of faith and not quit even in face of opposition or persecution. This view suggests that believers do not have to overcome any specific issues like those spoken by Jesus to the seven churches. For example, this view would state that believers do not have to overcome Jezebel to receive the promise of the morning star. Instead, they merely have to keep going on with Christ in a general way and not quit.
- b. The website, www.gotquestions.org records this about this view,

Overcomers are followers of Christ who successfully resist the power and temptation of the world's system. An overcomer is not sinless, but holds fast to faith in Christ until the end. He does not turn away when things get difficult or become an apostate...Overcoming is often equated with enduring. Jesus encouraged those who followed Him to "endure to the end" (Matthew 24:13). A true disciple of Christ is one who endures thorough trials by the power of the Holy Spirit. An overcomer clings to Christ, no matter how high the cost of discipleship.¹⁰

Session 3: The Bride in the Book of Revelation--1

- c. Whereas persevering as a follower of Christ is an essential trait of the overcomer, this view places no emphasis on overcoming specific issues highlighted by Jesus or the writers of the New Testament.

5. The third view is the Loss of Salvation View.

- a. Not nearly as prominent as the previous two views, this view holds that one must overcome the issues Jesus highlighted and if they didn't, they would lose their salvation. This view teaches that believers in Revelation 2-3 are being exhorted to faithfulness so that they won't lose their salvation. In this view, overcoming is synonymous with eternal salvation and failing to overcome means that one loses their salvation. Mike Bickle wrote the following about this view which summarizes it very accurately,

The loss of salvation view teaches that believers are exhorted to faithfulness to avoid losing their salvation. In this view, failing to overcome is synonymous with losing one's salvation. This view implies that we must overcome all spiritual immaturity to avoid losing our salvation. This implies that only mature believers are saved. The diligent workers in Ephesus who lacked fresh love for Jesus would have lost their salvation if dying before faithfully renewing their first love.¹¹

6. The fourth view is the Eternal Rewards View.

- a. The Eternal Rewards View is the view to which we hold and it rightly teaches that every believer must overcome the specific issues that Jesus highlighted in His messages to the seven churches of Revelation if they want to receive the eternal rewards listed in Revelation 2-3. This view teaches that believers are not automatically overcomers because of their faith in Jesus Christ and that they have not fully overcome by their lifelong perseverance in their faith unless they have also overcome the issues highlighted in Revelation 2-3. Instead, it teaches that the believer is called to overcome or conquer the specific issues raised in Jesus' seven messages and, by so doing, they receive the specific promises highlighted for those who overcome.

IV. Biblical Support for the Eternal Rewards View

- a. Now that we have stated the view that we believe--which is the view that supports the idea that not every believer is the eternal wife of Christ—we will next offer our reasoning for why we believe Jesus' messages to the churches supports this view. As support, we present six foundational reasons why we believe this view to be accurate.

1. First, the natural reading of Jesus' messages to the seven churches supports this view.

- a. If one has no preconceived idea about the seven messages, the natural reasoning would be that one had to overcome the issues presented in order to receive the promises indicated. This is the logical conclusion that one would draw from the natural reading of the text. For example, Jesus called the church at Sardis to wake up, be alert, and do the things necessary to no longer live by their reputation alone. He called on them to repent and then to live by the teachings they have heard. He then said if they will do that, they will receive the promises He made to Sardis. He then concluded

Session 3: The Bride in the Book of Revelation--1

this exhortation with the words, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”. The Eternal Rewards View is the only view that connects the specific promise to the specific issue. It just is not logical to say that what Jesus really meant was that they really didn’t have to address that specific issue in order to be clothed in white garments. To believe this way assumes that those who remain asleep throughout their lives and don’t change still will be dressed in white garments. This is just not a logical conclusion to the natural reading of the text. Therefore, one reason we believe the Eternal Rewards View is because the natural reading of the text leads to this conclusion.

2. Second, Jesus indicated three times in these messages that He had something specifically against a church.

- a. Note these verses where Jesus said He had something against a church. In each instance, He called them to overcome the issues He had against them,

But I have this *against* you, that you have left your first love (Rev 2:4).

But I have a few things *against* you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war *against* them with the sword of My mouth (Rev. 2:14-16).

But I have this *against* you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols (Rev. 2:20).

- b. In each case He indicated that He had something against a church. In each case, He called on them to repent and deal with a specific issue so as to remove it from the church. Once again drawing from a logical interpretation of the scriptures, it is hard to fathom that even though Jesus had something specifically against these churches that if they did not address the issues they would still receive the rewards promised to those who overcame those same specific issues. Again, the logical conclusion is that believers need to overcome issues Jesus has against them.

3. Third, the concept of an overcomer in Revelation depicts overcoming unfaithfulness rather than overcoming unbelief.

- a. The belief that everyone who is truly born again has also overcome the issues presented in Revelation 2-3 by the fact they have surrendered their life to Christ (the All Believers View) is based primarily on the apostle John’s writings in 1 John. He wrote,

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:4-5).

- b. A cursory look at this verse suggests that one has overcome the world when they are born of God merely by believing in Jesus as Savior and Lord. The conclusion drawn from this verse is that they are overcomers through their saving faith. Even though this is a common view, the context of 1 John is

Session 3: The Bride in the Book of Revelation--1

important for proper understanding of the above verse. The issue in focus in John's epistle was the need to overcome heresies by believing in Jesus as fully God and fully man. In this context, believers overcome the deception and darkness of the world by refusing false doctrines about Jesus and accepting Him in faith. That is, our faith overcomes the world and its false belief systems. Therefore, the context of overcoming in this passage is that of overcoming worldly unbelief through faith in the one true God through Christ.

- c. However, this is not the context of overcoming in Revelation 2-3. In these two chapters and throughout the book of Revelation, the setting is on overcoming unfaithfulness. Not all believers overcome unfaithfulness. In the context of the book of Revelation (specifically, Revelation 2-3), the believer is called on to overcome areas of unfaithfulness in the specific ways Jesus highlighted to the seven churches. Believers had to overcome the areas Jesus had against them by maturing in obedience in those specific areas. As they did so, they receive the rewards promised for overcoming those issues.
- d. Mike Bickle summarized this idea in this way, "As unbelievers, we overcome unbelief and the world on the day we become born again Christians. As believers, we overcome unfaithfulness in our lives only after we endure in obedience until the end of our lives."¹²

4. Fourth, proper understanding of the eternal rewards presented in Revelation 2-3 requires an understanding of the judgment seat of Christ.

- a. Another reason why many do not think that believers must overcome specific issues in order to receive the rewards promised for overcoming is that they don't have a proper understanding of the judgment seat of Christ and eternal rewards. Several New Testament passages refer to believers having to stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of how they lived their life (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 John 4:17). Paul wrote this to the Corinthian church,

Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, *he will receive a reward*. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Cor. 3:12-15).

- b. Revelation 2-3 connects overcoming to receiving eternal rewards--becoming the eternal wife of Christ being one of the rewards promised to overcoming believers and gaining entry into the marriage supper of the Lamb being another. When one understands that every believer will stand before the judgment seat of Christ for the purpose of receiving rewards, then the Eternal Rewards View becomes clearly understood.
- c. In recent years, there has not been very much teaching about eternal rewards in the body of Christ. As I think back over my walk with the Lord which began in the late 1970's, I don't remember even one message on the believer standing before the judgment seat of Christ. The only teaching I heard about rewards was that we might receive a crown but we would lay it at Jesus' feet. The problem with the teaching I heard or didn't hear is that it did not motivate me to believe that rewards are important so as to pursue them.

Session 3: The Bride in the Book of Revelation--1

d. I believe my experience is common in the body of Christ. As believers understand the absolute importance of the pursuit of eternal rewards, they also understand that overcoming issues as Jesus emphasized in Revelation 2-3 are crucial in order to receive the specific rewards promised to the overcomer.

5. Fifth, fresh revelation of the indwelling life of Christ connects overcoming in faith for salvation to overcoming unfaithfulness for maturity.

- a. For many years, the evangelical church has developed a “saved to serve” mentality in which the emphasis is to get saved yourself and then devote the rest of your life to saving others and doing works for God. The Pentecostal/charismatic church has developed a “gifts and anointing” based mentality in which the emphasis is on moving in the gifts and the anointing of God. In addition, some put the major emphasis on pursuit of revival. None of these movements have put sufficient emphasis on personal transformation.
- b. The scriptures speak differently than what the church has highlighted. Paul’s overriding theme could be summarized as the pursuit of the indwelling life of Christ unto fullness. Jesus’ messages to the seven churches focuses on issues like putting on white garments, loving Christ and others, buying gold refined by fire, developing a dining relationship with Christ, and the like.
- c. The idea of the indwelling Christ entering a believer at salvation and moving outwardly from there through a believer’s flesh and self-life makes a fresh connection between overcoming faith that comes at salvation and the pursuit of overcoming faithfulness that produces the eternal rewards promised by Christ and the apostles. This fresh emphasis on the concept that believers can and are to be transformed into the image of Christ gives a biblical foundation for the pursuit of eternal rewards as the promises to the believer who pursues the indwelling life of Christ unto fullness.

6. Sixth, the Hebrew nation taking the promised land illustrates the process of overcoming those issues illuminated in Jesus’ messages to these seven churches.

- a. As the Hebrew nation was spying out the land for the purpose of possessing it, these words are recorded, “Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, ‘We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely *overcome* it’” (Num. 13:30). Of course, we know they failed at that time and had to spend forty years wandering in the wilderness. However, the next generation did take the land. As you read through the book of Joshua, you see that the Lord promised them that they would take the land. Phrases like “you shall give the people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them” (Josh. 1:6); “every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you” (Josh. 1:3); and “No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you” (Josh. 1:5). From these verses, we know that the Hebrew nation was promised that they would overcome. In other words, they were overcomers!
- b. Even though they were promised that they were overcomers and that the land was theirs, they still had to take the land. They had to listen to God’s direction and be obedient. They had to follow God’s

Session 3: The Bride in the Book of Revelation--1

strategy which was different for every city they fought. They made mistakes along the way; but, they eventually took their inheritance.

- c. Overcoming is similar. As 1 John states, we have overcome through faith in Christ, and are an overcomer. Even so, we still must overcome every enemy to our maturing in Christ. It works much the same way in which Israel overcame their enemies. God told them that they would be victorious and that they would overcome their enemies before they ever defeated even one enemy. However, they still had to go to war against each one. In a similar way, God highlights an issue that we are to overcome. He gives us the strategy to fight the fight of faith with that enemy. We know we can overcome it through our persevering faith because we are an overcomer and because Christ—the ultimate overcomer—is within us. Year after year we live this way, and when we stand before Christ, we are clothed in white, bridal garments and receive the ultimate eternal reward—to become the eternal wife of Christ and to enjoy the marriage supper of the Lamb!
- d. Every believer is invited to become the worthy bride that Christ so desires; moreover, every believer can become the eternal wife of the Lamb because God will accomplish it through those who are willing to pay the price to receive the ultimate prize of being eternally married to Christ.

¹ Ken Kessler with Bryan Kessler, *A Worthy Bride*, Restoration Times Publications, Inc., Kennesaw, GA, 2011, p. 19.

² “What does it mean that the church is the bride of Christ”, www.gotquestions.org.

³ George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary of the Revelation of John*, William Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1972, p. 63.

⁴ Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7, An Exegetical Commentary*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1992, p. 293.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 293.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 321.

⁷ *Ibid*, p.152.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 152.

⁹ Mike Bickle, *The Seven Churches of Revelation (Rev. 2-3)*, Teaching Notes, mikebicke.org,

¹⁰ What does the Bible say about being an overcomer?, www.gotquestions.org.

¹¹ Bickle, *The Seven Churches of Revelation (Rev. 2-3)*.

¹² *Ibid*.