

The Church in Action
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As transcribed by Jane Vaughn

I want us to read together the Scriptural text upon which this Conference has been based and we're going to read that same text from several different translations of the Bible. The verse is First Timothy 3:15 and the first translation we will consult is the King James Version: "*But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*"

Then, Dr. Gene Holmes translated the verse from the Greek for us earlier and said it reads this way: "*But if I delay, in order that you may regard with favor how it is proper to conduct yourself in the middle of the household, that is, the family of God, whoever exits the past, the called out ones of the living God, a pillar, support and foundation, basis of the truth.*" He reported that's as literal as he could translate.

Young's Living Testament says, "*If I delay that thou mayest know how it behooveth thee*" – don't you just love those old words? "*to conduct thyself...*" I love to hear people prophesy in that formal language, don't you? – "Yea, it behooveth thee!" ☺ "...*to conduct thyself in the house of God.*" Listen now to what 'the house of God' is – "*which is an assembly of the living God, a pillar and foundation of the truth.*"

New International Version has it this way: "*If I'm delayed, you know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and the foundation of the truth.*"

The Message (actually a paraphrase and not a translation) says, "*I hope to visit you soon but just in case I'm delayed, I'm writing this letter so you'll know how things ought to go in God's household, this God-alive church, the bastion of truth.*"

The Amplified Bible – I love the Amplified. It's definitely a woman's Bible – it just goes on and on and on... ☺ "*If I am detained, you may know how people ought to conduct themselves in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and stay – the prop and support – of the truth.*"

And lastly, for the enlargement of our understanding, we'll read the New Century Version: "*I hope to visit you soon, but I'm writing these instructions so that if I'm delayed, you will know how everyone ought to behave in the church, the church of the living God is the strong foundation of truth.*"

If you would learn to do that, by the way, to consult and compare several translations of the passages you are studying, you will save yourself a lot of *misunderstandings*. Don't just take one translation by itself and attempt to build your understanding of what God is intending for you. Try to consult many – as many as you can. It's just like listening to many different speakers on a single topic – each of us emphasizes a different portion of the Scripture, or as someone said to me recently, "You always have such a different *slant* on things." That's why God calls the variety of people that He calls to minister. And it's one of the reasons He calls women speakers – because women see things from a different slant than men do (which is no shock to any man reading this message! ☺)

We do need to see the totality of meaning in our texts. Simply reading these several translations, opens our understanding – it gives a whole, or fuller picture, doesn't it? It allows us to gain a whole new, or more complete understanding of that single verse.

Now questions do arise, if we were going to exegete that passage with precision. One natural question would be: who (or what) is the pillar? The text states that the Church of God (referring to the universal Church, the whole Body of Christ) has a strong foundation of truth and it is the pillar of truth. The question is: to which noun is he referring. Is Paul saying to his son in the faith, Timothy, "*you are the*

pillar”? There certainly are many Scriptures that would support that understanding. Yet, we also can see in other contexts that the same thing was spoken of some of the other disciples, like Peter – that they seemed to be foundational pillars of the truth. (Mt.16:18 raises a similar question).

In addition, the Bible says, for instance, in the Book of the Revelation, that “*If you are an overcomer, I will make you a pillar in the house of My God and you’ll be there forever – you shall go no more out and you are a stabilizer*” (Rev.3:12, paraphrased).

Or, is Paul saying, the *Church* is the pillar of the truth? And if he’s saying *the Church* – what church? Which one? The Baptist church? Or the Presbyterian? Or the Methodist? If you were raised in any of those denominations, or the Assemblies of God as I was, if you were raised in any of those churches – that’s what you were ~~he~~... uh, told. ☺ Each denomination claims: “We have the truth. Other churches exist, but merely to support us – but we have the truth!”

Does this verse then refer to denominations or, a single denomination? Or – if you’re a pastor, even you *may* have a tendency to think that your church is the only support of the truth – that the others come short in some thing or some way.

One of the brothers speaking today told a little bit about his own background. He is what we would call a “big shot” in his denomination, and yet we heard that he went through the same kinds of difficult life situations that “little shots” go through who are merely the heads of their local churches.

I’m old enough to have seen this occur in church history from just about every standpoint. I’ve watched the Church make great transitions – of which we pretend *today*, “this is the only.” I do believe the Church is in transition, but it’s nothing *new*. I don’t want to upset you by the truth of that fact. We’re just doing it in our generation – it’s our time to do the flip. But there really is nothing new under the sun! (Eccl.1:9).

If you look back through centuries of church history, you will see what I’m saying to you is absolutely true. There have been lots of times. . . . In fact, look at just some of the *statements* (I was going to say “gripes” ☺) – made by some of the minor prophets about their own times. They reported what they saw in their days: “The people are lying and stealing and getting drunk and they’re careless and... and...” Can’t you just hear them wailing? “Oh, my God! I don’t know! There’s no hope for anything!” And the Lord said, “*Write the vision – make it clear.*” (Hab.2:1) ☺

You see – we think we’re so unique – but we’re really not that unique. We’re not – *unique*. We’re just – *expected*. God expected us. He got *pregnant* with us. ☺ You’ve been given *birth*. Hello. Think about it – it’s true. Now we’re *growing*, and He’s been *nurturing* us all through this time because **He has a goal for our lives.**

The Truth is not dependent on *one organized church alone*. It is not dependent on one individual who changes his life. I’ve become weary of the claims that reflect that kind of thinking. But I do expect your life to change – as you surrender piece by piece to the Lord. And I don’t spend much time telling you about “me” because it isn’t about me! Sometimes people are sincerely interested to hear what God has done in my life and even make the requests: “I wish you would give your testimony.” Who cares, really? Whatever you were – I was. And whatever He did for you – that’s what He did for me. ☺ We’ve both been set free from the sins of the past by the mighty hand of God through Christ our Savior! We have the same gift in salvation! We worship the same God!

You know, this is just a good time in history for us to re-channel our focus. Wouldn’t you say so? Because, *obviously*, the world is in a big mess, and *obviously* I cannot change it – by myself!

I traveled widely in ministry for about 40 years and have spoken to – estimated in the Jesus Rally days – as many as 30,000 people spread out across the hills of Pennsylvania. I’ve also spoken to 30 people in seemingly insignificant church congregations – and I do not see the message change. No matter how

many people are assembled, there's just one Word of God. And that Word is Truth. Jesus desperately endeavored to get that across to His disciples who were seeking truth. And He speaks the same thing to us today, who are still seeking truth.

When you're a seeker of truth – you're on thin ice! – because there are many people who will present error as truth to those who are seekers. That doesn't mean it is wrong to be a seeker. It means – be a smart seeker! Be alert and be discerning. And when someone presents a thing or idea to you as “This is the way” – check it out with He Who **is** the Way, and see if it actually is! (see Ac.17:11 – be like the Bereans with Paul). We must learn to be discerning.

We're so funny. We trust the Lord in everyone else – but not in us! Haven't you heard something like these statements? “I don't have a right to reject that – he's a big shot.” “I don't have a right to say ‘No’ to that. You know, *they* seem to think he knows something.” They who? What does God say about what you just heard presented?

The Holy Ghost came to function in you. He came to be the discerner of truth (Jn.14:17; 16:13). He came to lead you into all truth. Not for you to sit and have an inward slingshot – “Ready – aim – fire!” Not for you to be *the judge* of every minister. But there is a holy – Holy – say it out loud! Holy Spirit Who indwells your life. And the Holy Spirit is *repelled* by anything un-holy!

He will rise up – listen now – concerning His purpose for you – to reveal the truth to you so that you may know whether you're to be involved or dis-involved (UN-involved) in this something that has presented opportunity. He will let you know whether you're to receive it or not.

Sometimes when I see things “unholy” around me – and I check in with Him immediately when that happens – and He says, “That's for you to pray it through – pray for that person.” Then at other times, He may say, “That's for you to counsel – go and counsel that person.” Or, He says, “It doesn't matter. Get your eyes off of the person and put your focus back on Me.” If I say, “I can't. What I've seen (or heard) is just too awful! I just can't get my eyes off them. I can't go to that church again because of what I'm seeing.” Well, that's when I may hear this response: “Then you just failed the test and you will take it over!”

The reason that I'm sort of belaboring this portion – to speak to you concerning the individual, as a person – and the individual as a church – and hopefully to give you a larger scope beyond denominations and beyond the independent church (which becomes a denomination of its own ☺ with lots of heads of the church) – but what I'm trying to help us see is that the only hope for us to collectively become the *perfect Church* . . . Oh, you don't think we ever will? Absolutely we will! He's coming for a Church without – what? *Without spot or wrinkle* (Eph.5:27). That's why He puts us all together in the mix. As we rub up against one another, we – iron... ☺

You can almost hear these words in some comments made as asides in the narthex: “Oh, those wrinkles in her!” But she sees yours as well: “I see the ones in you, too.” And we just kind of – iron those things out. You see, we can't do it alone. We just can't do it alone.

Jesus is coming for a Church *without spot or wrinkle*. Okay then: I expect – that there will be a perfect Church!

How does the Church get perfected? Oh, well, that's an easy one. We know what Paul taught to the early Church – about the five-fold ministry (Eph.4:11f) – “*that we all may grow up into the unity of the faith – till we all come to the perfect One, being exactly like Him*” (vs.13 paraphrased).

Really? Cross-your-heart-and-hope-to-die, stick-a-needle-in-your-eye! ☺ Do you really – honestly believe that such a Church will ever exist? I'm here to tell you that, no individual church – no single denomination – or individual person – no organized group – will ever be the perfect Church! BUT – all

of us – hear it if you can – from eternity. . . All the way from creation to this generation... All of us together – across all the generations of believers... that’s the Church!

Last night, I told you about the Old Testament “called-out ones.” From that time centuries ago, through those Old Testament generations, all the way through *this* generation and – however long before the Father says to the Son, “It’s enough, now, go get them.” All of those believers – all of those that comprise the universal Church – that is the Church, I hope you know. All believers of all times and all nations and all cultures and all people-groups – that Church is perfect – only as He puts the whole puzzle together!

He takes the perfected piece out of this one and the perfected piece out of this one, and believe it or not, the perfected piece out of this one right here, and the perfected piece out of wherever you attend church. There may be many imperfections that remain, but He plucks what is perfected out of every place where His Name is honored, and He brings them all together. And **when His puzzle is complete, it is the face of Jesus Christ! The only face the Father can behold!**

So now – will you stop the rigidity already? That self-propelled “I’m gonna be perfect.” You just aren’t going to make it! Not like you think, because we think of “perfect” as *flawless*. But the actual truth is, we’re perfected in Christ – we’re made righteous in Him, through Him, by Him (2Cor.5:21). Put a period on that truth. Hold your head up high! Stop feeling sorry for yourself! Stop beating yourself up because you haven’t done what you thought you should do. He’s done all that is necessary. Everything we need is provided by Him and through Him – for us!

Come back to the Word of God – “*no condemnation*” (Rom.8:1) – that’s no guilt. Yes, there are some guidelines we are to follow, but He tells us why the guidelines. **The right behavior does not make you more ready for Him!** (I can hear you: “Heresy! Absolute heresy.”) Hear it though: your righteous behavior makes you ready to be a witness to others – and also to the evil spirits and to the good angels! Because of the principalities and powers in operation, there has to be a witness.

Jesus didn’t come and waste His coming! He didn’t go to the cross and waste His Blood! It was sufficient! He didn’t send the Holy Spirit and waste that portion of the Godhead – on little people like us who keep slipping up. It’s not a failure!

He says to all the angels, “Look at the whole thing. Don’t just look at that one alone. Don’t just look at Iverna! Look at the whole picture! From this present generation back to the beginning of creation, the purpose of God is now being fulfilled! And it is nearer even now....” Two thousand years ago, that’s what the Book said! “*Our salvation is nearer now*” (Rom.13:11). They said that 2000 years ago! So, what about today? It’s still nearer! It’s nearer by 2000 years than it was when they spake it. ☺

I just want to encourage us, today, to realize we’re a part of a huge thing! It’s sort of like being an inner-office mail-person in a large corporation. You may feel like a “nothing” or the insignificant piece, lost in the busyness of corporate life. Mostly, you’re nameless and faceless to the people on your little route. You’re down there in the basement where they sort the mail and your task is to get everything distributed to the right places – from down here up to this guy and that guy and the other guy. But you never get to see the big picture of the corporation functioning. It’s just your routine: you drive to work, go down to your space, do your thing for eight hours, go home, eat, sleep, rise in the morning, and begin all over again. Then you get your paycheck... and... and... And do it all again the next week.

I meet people that haven’t a clue what they’re doing – or what part they play in the whole function. If they could be lifted above that corporate building and look down to see what it’s doing – what it’s manufacturing or producing – and the many, many people that are being affected – they would see a valuable truth: “WOW! If I didn’t get this letter to him and I didn’t get this notice to her... whew! This thing could fall apart!”

I hope you're beginning to see it. There aren't "littles" and "biggs" in God's Kingdom. He isn't more impressed with this one than that one. Honestly, He is not! Because – what do you have that you weren't given anyway? That's what Paul asked the church at Corinth. "You're so proud of your gifts. May I ask you a question? What do you have that has not been given to you? It is by the Holy Spirit that you have been given gifts – and those to function within the Body of Christ." (see Rom.12:3ff) Oh, I want to say: "DUH!"

So if you're trying to impress the Lord with your gift – give it up! He had it first! ☺ And He recognized there was a need for the operation of His *holiness* – His *Holy Spirit* – **in** the Church (universal) that we might become more like Him (Rom.8:29) – *as a testimony*. Yes, to the world – but also as a testimony to other believers, brothers and sisters: "Yes, I know how you feel, my brother. I've been there."

And yes, you're comforted that ye might comfort another – in the same area that you've been comforted (2Cor.1:4). You know some things that someone else needs to know because you've been there. Why do you think you have all these experiences? You know how to grow a church – or, more accurately perhaps – you know how not to... ☺ We learn by our errors. Success (or failure) doesn't make you anymore beautiful to the Lord.

I want you to see that the Church He's coming back for has a scriptural description of her actions – because we like *actions*. And you're going to be surprised where I take you in the Bible when I say – "Let's look at Proverbs 31." (I told you you'd be surprised ☺)

Proverbs 31 starts out as an exhortation to a son – Lemuel. "*The words of King Lemuel, the prophecy that this mother taught him. 'What my son? And what, the son of my womb? And what, the son of my vows?'*" This mother is saying, "What do you need to know? Let's talk about it."

"Give not thy strength unto women, not thy ways to that which destroyeth kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink, Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more. Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction" (or, "shepherd the flock that is destined to destruction" is another translation). "Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy." (Pr.31:1-9).

This is a message to a son who is obviously a leader. The message is: "Don't let distraction of your own physical urges lead you down a wrong path. Don't try to deaden the trials and problems of life by getting drunk! Or popping a pill. You need to go *through* some things, and you need to stay alert lest you become dull to what you do know and to what your responsibilities are." Does that make more sense to you?

Now, for those who have used or heard these Scriptures used in counseling as absolutes – that's the way the Scripture is. It's wonderful! The Word of God applies this way in these circumstances and that way for those other times and this way for these specifics. It simply is endless truth! And it is *always* endless truth. But this particular application is so necessary for us to see because ***before we are the Bride of Christ, we are sons.***

/huios/ is one of the Scriptural words that is translated "sons." This "son" is the offspring of these parents; a legitimate descendant (without reference to gender, by the way). It describes the child as someone that can be identified as a son because he displays the character and characteristics of his parents. This word stresses the dignity and character of the parent-child relationship.

/teknon/ is another Greek word used in the Bible and translated "sons" or "children." This word gives prominence to the fact of birth. This is the word John uses in his Gospel: "*As many as received Him, He*

gave them power to become the sons of God" (Jn.1:12). So we can see there are figurative applications as well as in the natural.

These two words can be used as synonyms in the Greek and I could go on to show you that there are other words that refer to different age levels of sons spoken of or to in the Scripture. I challenge you, if you have any doubts, to go ahead and look up "son" in the Bible and see for yourselves. In your study, you will discover that John wrote that way. He said, "*I write unto you little children* – this way; and I write unto you fathers – this way; – and I write unto to you..." (1Jn.2:12ff paraphrased). And the reason he did that is because *that is where your faith levels are* – on different levels. (Okay – that's a free sermon for you. ☺)

Yes, there *are* daughters and I won't get into that at this time, but I think you know by now that the sin, and aggravation to people, about women serving in the church, is often because women try to be female men. When God calls you, my dear sister, and puts His Holy Spirit within you and gives you a holy boldness, it does not change the fact or the gender that you were created to be. You are a woman. You ought to act like a woman – think like a woman – feel like a woman – be a woman – and – fulfill the call of God on your life! The point is – we all are *sons of God*.

Now men, I hear you wanting to reject that . . . and on this specific subject, I don't care what you *want* because the original Greek language leaves it wide open for either word used *not* to be constrained to the male child. Besides in a minute, men, you're going to become a Bride! ☺ Otherwise you'll be left out when He shows up because He's coming for His *Bride!* ☺

What about in the Old Testament? God *married* the Jews (Hos.2). And in the New Testament? Jesus claimed the Bride to be believing Jews and Gentiles all coming together as one. So, concerning life here on earth – there is male and female. But in Christ – there is neither (Gal.3:26-28). So, keep your place on earth. Recognize that as "sons of God" – ladies – we need to be strong enough to take whatever comes our way – by the grace of God. You see – as a Christian, dealing directly with the Lord, you can't just say, "I'll just go ask my husband."

Did you catch that? ☺ Do you understand what Paul was saying in the context – about women keeping "*silence in the church?*" In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul is giving instructions to the newly-forming Body of Christ as to how they were to conduct themselves in the assembly. It was customary in those days, for men and women to sit on different sides of the Jewish Synagogue. Remember, the new Christians were emerging from a very legalistic and ritualistic Jewish religion. When a woman didn't understand something said by the priest or rabbi during their services, she was given to shouting out to her husband (seated across the room) for an explanation. Paul was saying it was inappropriate for that to happen in the "Church" meetings as it was distracting. Instead, women were being admonished to hold their questions until they were home and could inquire of their husbands at that time (1Cor.14:34,35).

For us today, ladies, we each have equal access to the Lord. We (all believers regardless of gender) have the Holy Spirit within Who is ready, willing, and able to satisfy our greatest needs, and Who by His grace will minister God's Truth to us.

Now, gentlemen – as part of the Bride of Christ, you may not hide behind your *maleness* and refuse to speak words that are tender in love to your Beloved. That's one thing I liked about the soloist today. He obviously is in love with the Lord and he didn't care what you thought as he let that show. He's a great big guy – you know you're not going to go up to him and say, "Hey, that was really 'sissy!'" You just are not going to do that because he's huge! ☺ But he's up here proclaiming through song: "There's no one but You! There's no one – there's no one. I love You, precious Lord!" and we're here agreeing: "Yeah. That's great! Me too!"

But when it comes to praise-time – lots of men refuse to get involved – because God's a – "*he!*" Oh, we know He isn't – not really. But then ... you know – He just is. I mean, that's how we speak of *Him*. Our

gender specific pronouns and preconceived ideas confuse us. He's neither male nor female – but He is – “Father.” That's a masculine role. And so it's difficult for you men to go *::CLICK!::* and turn off those culturally sculpted male concepts when you sing: “I love You, Beautiful One!” and all the while, deep inside you're thinking: “I love *Him?* *Beautiful One?* This is too weird!” No, dear brother. It's not weird – it's just a role switch. Not from male to female – but from son to Bride.

If we can understand it correctly, the sonship of the Church is neither male nor female. We all must be strong in Him. The Bride (is there a word “brideship?” ☺) The Bride, the Church, is neither male nor female. We are all His Bride – *married* to Him. He chose us! He loves us! He's been getting us ready! And there shall come a day in the Book of Revelation where it says, “Alright! The Bride hath made herself ready!” (Rev.21:2). That day will come! Yes, it surely will! There is coming a day when I'm going to be part of the group to whom He says: “I want you now because you are ready!”

Life is a school! And as I mentioned, we do take the course over if we fail it the first time around – or the second! Don't ask me how I know! ☺

So, why would I take you to Proverbs 31 to talk about the Church? Men love to teach Proverbs 31 with the perfect wife in mind. But, that isn't quite fair. Women love to teach this too – as the perfection, the ideal to strive for – as a human bride – as a woman. Yet in my whole life, I have never met such a woman! ☺ And I've gotten close to some mighty women of God throughout my lifetime – but *::pfffft!::* they don't make it either! ☺ This isn't a *human* thing, guys. So, if you're looking for all of this in a bride, a wife, no wonder you're still single! ☺ That isn't what this scripture is talking about.

This description draws us a picture from heaven – of His Bride. It really is that! The writer of this portion starts out by saying, “*Who can find a virtuous woman?*” (vs.10).

There is an answer to that – in the Scriptures. He said, “*I saw thee, when thou wast naked in the field and nobody bothered to swaddle thee and thou wast dying in thy blood. And I said to thee, when thou wast in that condition...*” (are you impressed with the thees and thous and wasts? ☺ I'm paraphrasing.) “*...I said to thee, 'Live!' Yea, I said to thee 'Live!'*” (Ezk.16 paraphrased). That's – well, that's a baby, so to speak. Then the prophet goes on in that same context: “*Then when I passed by thee, your hair had grown and it was long.*” That is speaking of maturity. God is saying, “I start you out just as you are – when I found you.” That's why most of us that grew up in the church grew up singing, “Just as I am without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me...” That's how He accepts us – that's how we start! Like babies – though the blood (of Jesus).

I've watched people try to present themselves as mature when they first come into salvation! That is such a *dumb thing* to do ☺ (well, not smart!) – because He will prove that you are not. Better to just “Waa-waa” as you get to, as He nurtures you. You know, when you're a little baby, you can just ask Him for anything – and we do. “Oh, dear Jesus, I need a parking place.” And somebody pulls out of the first spot at just the right moment, and you pull into the slot. But when you get a little older and you pray the same way, “Dear Jesus, I need a parking place,” He says, “Walk.” ☺

You see, things change as we grow up. It has to do with maturity. It has to do with preparedness. It has to do with Him making us ready.

Now, here's what He says of His mature Bride in Proverbs 31. You can think it through later, but I want to point out some things from this other viewpoint and see if it isn't accurate.

The description begins in verse 10: “*Who can find a virtuous woman?*” and then he (Lemuel) says, “*She is...*” Now I'm going to give you each point with a letter “c.” Every teacher will appreciate that alliteration! ☺ This virtuous woman – this Bride is. . . .

1. **Costly.** “*Her price is far above rubies.*” Such a woman is more valuable than jewels. I don’t have to walk you through all that, do I?

The Bible tells us that we are His jewels (Ps.135:4). We cost a heap! We sing it: “I’ll never know how much it cost, to see my sins...” You cost a bunch, dear heart! He says, “That’s alright. I’ll pay it. She’s worth it.”

2. The second thing to see here is in verse 11 – “*The heart of her husband trusts in her and he will have no lack of gain.*” This Bride is **Committed!** “*The heart of her husband trusts...*”

Do you think God doesn’t trust us? You heard that just before *my* speaking today. Jesus set the whole thing up – the whole ministry – and then said, “I’m going to the Father; you carry on while I’m gone” (Jn.14). ☺ Can’t you just hear the disciples? “Oh, no! Don’t leave us!” But He explains, “I have to go. If I don’t go the Holy Ghost will not come” (Jn.16:7). Now I can hear the disciples screaming to get Him to change His mind: “I don’t care about any Holy Ghost! We’ve got You! And we need You! Don’t leave us here alone.”

“*I know the plans that I have for you, saith God; they are plans for good*” (Jer.29:11). And even though you vote ‘No,’ they are My plans.” How many of you think you are strong enough in faith to change God’s plans?

This is a woman who is committed and He trusts His bride. Because of that, others will trust Him and “*he will have no lack of gain.*”

You see, if it was up to us to make a plan.... Well, I’d call Him back – right now! Wouldn’t you? Oh, tell the truth! If you could say, “*Even so, Lord Jesus, come*” (Rev.22:20) and He would come right now – wouldn’t you pray that prayer? I would – but selfishly. I have some pain in my body. I would love to have it depart and if not before that time, I know it will when He returns! “Alright, Lord! *::pfsst!::* I’m ready! Beam me up!” ☺ Or, “Come on down” – whichever comes first! But He lovingly says, “You can’t change My plans. You don’t know what I’ve prepared for the rest of this generation, and I even may have plans for another one! Besides, there will be many that I haven’t yet called!” Or, more accurately, others who have yet to respond to His call.

It isn’t how hard you pray that determines when He returns! There isn’t anything in Scripture that teaches that we can pray Him back before His time! He says, “There’s a time marked out by the Father! Nobody knows – even the Son doesn’t know when that will be” (Mk.13:32).

3. This Bride is costly. And she’s committed. Look now at verse 12 – “*She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.*” Can’t you see why men teach this as a wife? They dream! ☺ Okay, women should be all of this. ☺

“*She does him good and not evil, all the days of her life*” – in the good times – and in the hard times. Sometimes, Counselors, all we need to do is just read *all* the vows that they made at their own weddings. “To have and to hold” – that’s one of the big gripes we hear. “From this time forth... for richer, for...” I think you see it. The vows we made before God are serious promises – and binding – and a part of God’s plan for marriages. He marks what we promise.

“*All the days of her life*” – Number 3 – she’s **Consistent**. Oh! What a testimony would that be to the world! If the individuals in His Church were only consistent!

4. Verse 13 – “*She seeketh wool and flax and worketh willingly with her hands.*” Every pastor is laughing. ☺ We just know that this is true of all the individuals in our churches, right? “We need some volunteers for clean-up – today.” “We need some volunteers to move the chairs...”

“We need some volunteers to park cars.” “We need some...” “We need...” and heads go immediately to knees! No eye contact.

But not this woman – not His Bride. His Bride is willing to do anything. I have thanked many of the workers here who have been a part of this whole thing, and mostly hidden away behind the scenes. I’ve said, “Thank you for your part in this Conference.” You see, that’s because I’ve put on so many conferences that I understand what goes on in the background while I just walk up in my best dress and address the group. I know the hours of planning and prayer and labor and all the rest that has taken place in order to have a conference. I bless the workers! Truly, I do! And so does He – which is far more important. And this verse says, “This is My Bride – she is Competent.”

5. Verse 14. “*She’s like the merchants’ ships, she bringeth her bread from afar.*” Now, I suggest you don’t speak to your wife in that language, Sir. ☺

Someone asked me what my name, Iverna, means. I responded that the only thing I know is that it was a boat, a merchant ship. You can even find it on the Internet! ☺ Alright – in the Gaelic, it means, “green...” – I’ve forgotten now whether it was wilderness or valley. Oh, yes, I remember, it’s “valley!” Wilderness is what I live. ☺ No, just teasing.

“*She is like a merchant ship. She brings her bread...*” What does that mean? She has a *storehouse* – the “c” word is Coffer. Her coffer – her *storehouse* is full! If she doesn’t get it here, she buys a tape! ☺ (Funny how I have to draw the picture – but that’s fairly definitive... ☺)

Joshua, when he was getting ready to take the Israelites across the Jordan River to claim their possession, gave them a new instruction. Every day until they crossed over – every day for forty years – down from the heavens came the manna. Oh, they griped about it. “What’s that?” “Manna.” That’s why I remind us – the Church hasn’t changed much at all. Anyway – down it came!

And then he says, “Now, we’re going into the new land. *Prepare ye vittles*” (Josh.1:11). “Huh?” ☺ Well, they haven’t cooked for 40 years! ☺ No recipe books. No pots or pans. No microwaves. Nothing to cook! For 40 years – they just had to go out and pick it up – the same-old thing every day (except on the Sabbaths). Well, true, they could fix it a couple different ways. But now he says, “We’re in a new land. Prepare vittles for yourselves.”

If you would like me to talk about the *transition* that the Church is in, this is one of them. We seem to love that word today – “How are you doing?” “Well,” we often lament, “I’m in transition.”

Church, you have been force-fed like baby birds in a nest. You come to church and if we see a crack in your beak, we cram the food in – and push it into the craw! And you shake a little and squeal, “Oooohhh!” ☺ But today is a day when the Lord is saying, “You learn to cook now! Get yourself into the Word! Fill up on it; understand it; practice what it preaches!”

But we are so weak and whine: “Well, I just don’t understand the Word.” Then you have the wrong version! Pull up seven others from the Internet and read them – you’ll get it! Keep your coffer full!

6. Verse 15. “*She riseth also, while it is yet night.*” I think this is our host’s part in it – planning these early morning services. ☺

“*She rises up while it is still dark – and giveth food to her household and their tasks to her maidens.*” Pastors – this is so important because first, you are to feed your own. And that can be hard. It’s difficult to take care of your own family when you have a whole lot of people out there who, and I quote “need you.” It’s very difficult to “minister” to your own – often because your family members are not nearly as enamored with you as your church members. ☺ But you need to take care of them – first!

And then you can go to the people over whom you have charge, over whom God has given you charge, and train them. You give *the tasks* to them – you train them and then delegate. This is perhaps one of the biggest lacks I see in local churches: pastors who do not know how to train, and then delegate, release and follow up. And this is so necessary. You must learn how to do it.

“Well, I tried this delegating thing and I delegated him to be in charge of that, but...” Did you train him first? “Wull, uh, no. I figured he knew! Or he wouldn’t have accepted the job.” You figured wrong. ☺ Many tone-deaf people volunteer for the choir. ☺

Number 6 – she’s a Caretaker. She takes care of everyone. Her own household first – and then the ones over whom she has responsibilities. “She” – the Bride. Not “she” the women in your church!

Teach your men to be intercessors! “Oh, that’s a woman’s role.” It is not! Read the Book! The greatest intercessors we have the actual prayers of are men. Listen to them pray, as recorded in God’s Word. It’s not a woman’s job! It’s the *Bride’s* job!

7. Verse 16 – “*She considereth a field and buyeth it and with the fruit of her hands, she plants a vineyard.*” “Considereth” is the same word that’s used 66 times and means “ponder” or “meditate.” She isn’t saying, “I can’t!” She – the *Bride* – is living toward a larger vision. She’s Courageous!

This meeting is taking place on the grounds of a church campus – a church that lived to incredible heights. Truly, in those days, as you just stepped inside these doors you could almost see the glory-cloud manifested. It was powerful! Nearly everyone in the church that attended regularly could prophesy – with extreme accuracy. This place reached an apex of absolute wonder! And yes, it was wonderful – until some people started worshipping that – the wonderful experiences. When that began to occur, the Lord said, “*That* isn’t it – you don’t get it! You’ve got to get a vision that goes beyond these walls and beyond this wonderful man of God. You’ve got to get a vision that there’s a world out there that needs you!”

When this whole thing seemed to atrophy – because of disputations and so on – it doesn’t matter what exactly happened... When it seemed to become far less than it once was, God took His man home. Then, He looked at the others remaining and said, “Alright. Now I’ll bring in a man who’s a part of the Bride, whose focus is on Me and on what needs to happen in this place – and he will take this thing to another level!” Not because the new man was more wonderful – but just because he was the next in line!

Are you understanding this? Do you know what our problem is here in our western Church? Voting! That’s our problem in America! We want to run things by *voting*. And in the church, we vote with our tithe. If we don’t like what they’re doing, we don’t give. And we vote with our attendance. Same thing is true. If you don’t do what I like, I stay home – or take my tithe someplace else.

Our real problem is – we’re too independent – of one another. And the Lord says, “Before you’re a part of this whole Bride thing, you’re going to have to learn something! It’s not who’s *better* that gets the job – it’s who’s *next*. And it’s not who’s next on *your* list; it’s who’s next on My list.”

It takes courage to walk through that – knowingly. Do you know that? So, this is the Bride who is a prepared Bride. “*She hath made herself ready*” (Rev.19:7). She was courageous.

8. Verse 17. This shows us that she is Capable. “*She girdeth her loins with strength and strengtheneth her arm.*”

“I just can’t do it.” (whine-whine). Did you ever hear that in counseling? Pastors? Counselors? People sort of whimper: “I just can’t do it. It’s too big. It’s just too much.” But He says: “*I – will not – suffer thee – to bear more than that thou art – able to bear....*” (1Cor.10:13 paraphrased).

I can't tell you how many times I bring that truth back to Him – especially during those times when I feel on absolute overload. Hello? “Well, I just can't, Lord – I can't handle this anymore. I can't. I'm sorry. I *wanted* to – it was a great idea – I *believed* I could – but I can't.” “Well,” He said to me – the many times I've said something like that to Him – “What will you do about it?” ☺ “Quit. I'll quit.”

If you haven't said it quite like that, I believe it's fairly reasonable for me to think you probably thought it. Many of us have said, “I – I just quit. I've done everything I know to do. I'm through with this. I quit.” Remember? The Lord said to Peter, “Do you want to quit too? They're all leaving; do you want to go with them?” (Jn.6:18 paraphrased).

Now, Peter did not say “No” but his simple response was: “Do you have any idea where else I could go?” Or, “*To whom should I go?*” ☺ Well, right about that! Is there anywhere else that's easier! But I also read where David said, “*If I made my bed in hell, You'd show up!*” ☺ (Ps.139:8 paraphrased).

Here's the truth: once you're called of God, where do you go to quit? When you lose everything you've strived for – when the trust of the people has been taken from you – when the enemy seems to have been given full reign in your life and comes in and takes all your goods – all your seeming value – all the credibility you once had – and you stand there with nothing – what will you do?

David *encouraged himself – in the Lord* (1Sam.30:6). Or, Peter said: “*Gird up the loins – of your mind*” (1Pet.1:13) – where all those seeds are – those seed-thoughts – all that negativism. Cinch it up! “Well, God will never use me again.” Cinch it up another notch! You didn't call you in the first place – He did! You're smarter than to put yourself in the ministry! ☺

9. Verse 18 – “*She perceiveth that her merchandise is good.*” She is Convinced. Are you?

Are you convinced that all this is worth it? You see – if I said, “Everyone who's really convinced, stand to your feet” – you would stand because no one wants to admit we're not. But are we convinced? Are we really? The Lord knows whether we are or not.

I told my secretary, Shirlee, – “I think I'll buy a building...” (as if I was capable financially of doing that! ☺) “...and I'd name it: *The Church of Unused Speakers.*” ☺ I could have a different speaker every service from now till Jesus comes. ☺ And the people would love it because of no commitment to anyone. That's a sobering thought.

Can't you just see it, though? It'd be like a conference – only it'd just be on-going; every week a different speaker. But you'd never know who was going to speak. All these people that want to – feel called to – but presently aren't placed somewhere. I bet (oh, I don't bet ☺) – I believe I know enough capable, equipped, unplaced speakers to keep such a thing going a good 5 years! That's not a joke. I really am serious about that.

So, why is that true? Did He or did He not call them – call you? And if He called and we said, “Yes,” is He or is He not capable of placing us in the right spot? Well, you've offered a quick “Amen,” but I see some of those right here in this meeting that are saying: “I'm called, anointed, prepared, degreed...” – many of them and properly so – but they don't have a *placement*. They don't have a place of ministry. And they're a threat to any church leadership where they might attend, because as much as they muzzle their mouths – the *anointing* is there.

What's the answer to this dilemma? I haven't a clue. I have not one clue because each situation is so personal. Honestly, it's too personal for me to give you a pat answer. Do you understand that? God is working something out in every life! Especially when it seems to feel like you're just sitting on the shelf – prepared for and experienced in way more than you're involved in right now! I promise you He is at

work in you – and in your circumstances – because His promises never fail: “*Thy promises are thoroughly tested and Thy servant loveth them*” (Ps.119:140 NIV).

How wonderful to be able to just trust Him! And trusting Him *now*, right where you are, is your present call. “*I know the plans I have for you... they are for good, for your peace, and not for evil...*” (Jer.29:11).

“Well, but what’s He going to do with me?” I don’t know. And you must stop going from prophet to prophet looking for direction or something to hang on to. Hang onto God, Himself! The prophets don’t know anymore than you do! ☺ All those prophetic words you’ve received, if you pull them out and read them again – you will notice they all say the same thing! ☺ Tell the truth! “The Lord is going to use you. Yea, He hath called thee...” – that’s from the ones that speak like that – sort of in King James vernacular – it makes it sound so authoritative! ☺ “Greater will be the end of thy ministry than the beginnings.” “Thou hast been led through the valley...” That is the promise of God! And what He’s saying is this: “Don’t bother about it!” Oh, you don’t think so? Then think about this: Jesus spent 30 years getting ready for a 3-year ministry! [Pause here long enough to think about that one!] What was He doing? Oh, just making tables and stuff – same thing His father did. Selah. Just do what the Father is doing (cf.Jn.5:19).

A major diversion in your life, leaders, can be a consuming desire to minister (like “a fire in your bones”? – cf. Jer.20:9). And then you spend your time looking for that *right place* in the horizontal – instead of looking for *that right place* in your vertical relationship with God! You need to be looking for the *right place* in Him. Don’t be diverted or distracted from first things first – because if you’re looking up, you can’t be depressed and discouraged and distraught about your ministry. It isn’t “yours” anyway and He’s ripping the “yours” out of your hand.

When He gives the place, it’ll be His placement and you also will be His because you will be in the Bride of Christ. If you can hear that fully, you’ll be happy that you did! The Bride of Christ is convinced that she is on the right path, doing the right thing, producing the right stuff – and confident that she is His!

10. Verse 19 – Composed. “*She layeth her hand to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.*” This wife is making something – she’s pulling together all the loose threads of where she has influence. Did you get that?

I mentioned before about Pastors praying: “Oh, if God would only send us musicians. If He would only send us this and that...” Look at the threads you do have. Get yourself over to the spindle and start pulling the threads together.

I have done that. I think most of my life, if not all, that’s what I have done in the church. You, leaders, need to look around. Discover what (or who) God has brought your way – or where His potential lies – or in whom. Here’s a fact of history: about 50 or so years ago as a young minister, I sat under the oversight of a particular pastor. Someone came to me and said, “I will donate an organ to that church if you have someone who can play it.” I said, “Oh, good. We do!” And *then* I went to the pastor’s wife and said, “You’re the organist.” ☺ Her reply was forthright: “I’ve never played an organ in my life!” But I declared: “Well, you’re going to now.” And I really meant it. I honestly believed that with all my heart. She was the only thread I had! I was playing saxophone (if you can imagine ☺) and doing other things.

The man was true to his word and soon delivered the organ. He brought it in – set it up – and she came over and sat down. Then I showed her what little bit I knew on the piano and she sat there and practiced and practiced – and became the church organist! We could have missed a beautiful organ by saying, “We don’t have an organist.” Are you there? You need to look at your people and say, “What do we have? Are there any warm bodies here, submitted to the Father?”

11. Verse 20 – She’s **Compassionate**. “*She stretcheth out her hand to the poor.*” Oh, how we need compassion. That’s so needed these days – inside the Church and out.
12. Verse 21 – **Considerate**. “*She’s not afraid of the snow for her household... are clothed with scarlet and wool.*” Are you so well-prepared and established on His Word that you don’t fear anything that’s on the horizon?

In this verse, it’s “*the snow*” that would come and threaten. In our day, it’s the enemy that might come in. What would your Staff do if we had another 9-11? What about your *people*...? How would they react? Would they react or respond? It depends on how you’ve prepared them.

13. Verse 22 – **Covered**. “*She maketh herself coverings of tapestry and her clothing purple.*” Oh, I’d love to spend a lot of time on this one, but I’m very conscious of the time getting away from us.

Our Bride looks good. I think it’s time for the Church to look good. Not being legalistic or ostentatious about our freedom and all of that, but we need to look good. We need to look healthy and joyful. We need to look like someone else would be proud to be around us.

I know we’ve loosened up – a lot! There was a day when, if I wore pants in the pulpit, I would have been tarred and feathered. ☺ Unfortunately, that is the absolute truth! Things have changed – thank God. We’re not so stiff or stuffy – but don’t we still look nice? I don’t think we should become lax by our acceptance of others or so influenced by the world’s standards or its clothing fads that we look like them. But we need to still look good.

14. This woman is **Connected**. Verse 23. “*Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.*”

This is the Kingdom – the time when our Lord is the One to Whom the world turns for wisdom and direction. That’s the Kingdom in operation. Let me explain that a little. Right now, the Church has very little say in our society. We brag if we get an audience with a Senator or the Governor. “Well, yes, I was invited to come in and Janet and I had a little talk.” ☺ Not! That’s not true – at least not for me personally. But if it was, I might be prone to brag about it, just a little. “Oh, just think! I got to see the Governor!” But the truth is, we have little influence in our political world these days.

After the sessions today and our closing prayer, and we walk out – what happens next? Probably business as usual. Come on! – be real. But there is coming to our society, a fresh understanding that when they’ve come to the end of *themselves*, and used up all their worldly wisdom and the whole thing is falling apart – there will be a foundation – of truth! There will be a firm pillar – of the Truth! And it isn’t you as an individual or me as a individual or anyone else by name – it’s all of us together. It’s His Bride! Pillars in the house of God!

Well, for the sake of time, I will give you the rest of the “c” words. ☺

15. This Bride is a **Contributor**. Verse 24. “*She maketh fine linen, and selleth it, and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.*”

She is contributing to the well-being of her family and adding something positive to her world.

16. She’s **Credible**. Verse 25. “*Strength and honor are her clothing...*”

She’s real. She’s strong. But it’s in her Maker that she finds that strength.

17. She’s **Cheerful**. This is from the rest of verse 25: “*and she shall rejoice in time to come.*”

She is not depressed by the negatives all around her. She rejoices because of who she is and Whom she serves and in Whom is her existence. She delights in His presence.

18. She's a **Counselor**. From the first part of verse 26. "*She openeth her mouth, with wisdom...*"

Or check this verse out: Proverbs 4:7: "*Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding.*" Or, Proverbs 16:16 – "*How much better is it to get wisdom than gold.*" Oh, how much Solomon understood the value of wisdom! And then he advised: "*And cease from thine own wisdom*" (Pr.23:4).

19. She's a **Communicator**. From the rest of verse 26: "*and in her tongue is the law of kindness.*"

She is careful how she speaks and what she says. She knows the power of the tongue. She knows that "*a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver*" (Pr.25:11). She is aware that the tongue can be "an unruly member" when it is not guarded and bridled (Jas.3:1-13). She is a careful **communicator**.

20. She's **Concerned** – about someone besides herself. Verse 27. "*She looketh will to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.*"

21. She's **Complimented** – by what? Verse 28. "*Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.*"

I'm telling you, the day of kids hating the Church is going to end, as we get rid of some of our rigidities and our hypocrisy. We can no longer be "witches" at home and "queens" in the church.

22. She's a **Champion**. Verse 29. "*Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.*"

Way back to the beginning of time, He says, "many of them have done well." (cf. Heb.11). How would you like to have kept the Law – like they had to in the Old Testament – with no real understanding of why they did what they did? Do you think that isn't recognized? By the husband? By God the Father – Who married that – that wom—

He said, "Those who..." – tough thing. In this verse, He says, "*Many daughters have done wonderfully well.*" All the churches that preceded us in time – who had less knowledge than we have today – but still kept on "keeping on." "Many daughters – and sons – have done real well," He says.

But when the day comes that My Bride walks in and the Holy Spirit says, "This is Your Bride, she hath made herself ready," it won't be just you. We'll see clear back to the beginning of time! Each one has a gift – each one is a part – each one is needed to make up the whole.

23. Verse 31 – And finally, she is **Completed**. "*Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.*"