

Are We “Baptist Bride”?

Dr. Thomas M. Strouse

I. What is “Baptist Bride”?

- A. It is a corollary of the Landmark Baptist Church Movement (LBCM) doctrine which teaches the following:
1. Only Baptist churches that can trace their history back to John’s baptism are legitimate (they maintain the ancient “*landmark*” set by the Apostles [Prov. 22:28]). This is known as “church successionism.”
 2. There is no universal invisible church or mystical body of Christ, but only visible Baptist churches.
 3. True Baptist churches make up the Kingdom of God and therefore constitute the Bride of Christ; all other Christians are friends in the Marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9; Mt. 22:12). Some LBCM maintain that only Baptists will be raptured.
 4. Baptism from non-Landmark Baptist churches is alien and rejected.
- B. The movement began in 1851 as SBC preachers such as J. R. Graves disapproved of Protestants preaching (“pulpit affiliation”) in SBC pulpits, and SBC churches receiving into membership those baptized in Protestant churches (“alien baptism”).

II. What is biblical about Landmark Baptist Church teaching?

- A. Their ecclesiology is true in that the Bible does not countenance the universal invisible church/mystical body of Christ teaching (all references to the body of Christ are in local church epistles [Rom., I Cor., Eph. and Col.]).
- B. Protestant influence through pulpit affiliation or through baptism must be rejected (I Cor. 12:13).

III. What is unbiblical about Landmark Baptist Church teaching?

- A. Their authority for church purity is first of all historical, requiring documented pedigree back to the Jerusalem church (the Lord had no historical concern about the legitimacy of the seven churches of Asia, only theological concerns [Rev. 2-3]).
- B. Their identification of Baptist churches with the Kingdom of God is unwarranted, since it would make Landmark Baptist Church membership identical with regeneration (cf. Jn. 3:3-5; Lk. 17:20).
- C. Their view that the Bride of Christ is exclusively ecclesiological runs counter with many Scriptures (i.e., Rev. 21:2, 12-14). The “bride” metaphor in Scripture is exclusively soteriological, referring to all saints from Adam on (Isa. 61:10; Ezk. 16:32; Jn. 3:29; Eph. 5:32; II Cor. 11: 2; Rev. 21:9). The “bride” metaphor shows the intimate relationship between Jehovah and the believer.

IV. Is Bible Baptist Church of Cromwell, CT, a “Baptist Bride,” Landmark Baptist Church?

- A. NO! We reject the unbiblical authority of history that LBCM demands as the proof for ecclesiological purity.
- B. NO! We reject the wrong identification of LBCM that Baptist churches make up the Kingdom of God.
- C. NO! We reject that the Bride metaphor is exclusively ecclesiological in nature as the LBCM insists.

V. When did the NT church begin?

- A. It began with the Lord Jesus Christ as David predicted (Ps. 22:22), Christ affirmed (Mt. 16:18; 18:15-18), and Paul corroborated (Heb. 2:12).
- B. The Lord promised to build it up with “spiritual vitamins” such as church discipline (Mt. 18:15-18), the Lord’s Supper (Mt. 26:26-30), and the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19-20).
- C. The Jerusalem assembly of baptized believers was publicly authenticated on Sunday Pentecost in Acts 2:1 ff., and 3,000 more church members were added to it by believer’s immersion (Acts 2:41-42, 47).

VI. What is the Body of Christ?

- A. The body of Christ is identical to the visible local church (Eph. 1:22-23). In Ephesus, it referred to the Ephesian church, the one body to which the church members belonged (Eph. 4:4, 12).
- B. The body of Christ is identical to the visible local church (I Cor. 12:27). In Corinth, it referred to the Corinthian church.
- C. The body of Christ is identical to visible local church (Col. 1:18). In Colosse, it referred to the Colossian church.

D. The body of Christ is identical to the visible local church (Rom. 12:5). The Epistle is addressed to six local visible churches (Rom. 16:1-15 [see v. 5]).

E. Christ is the head of each local church, His body in that respective locale (Col. 1:18; Rev. 2-3). There is no mystical body of Christ!

VII. What is Spirit Baptism?

A. John the Baptist is the theologian of the doctrine of Spirit Baptism as he predicted that the Lord Jesus Christ would baptize his audience in the Holy Ghost subsequent to their conversion (Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:33; Acts 1:5; and 11:16).

B. This event of Spirit Baptism was the “*sending*” of the Spirit (Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:7; Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:4-5; and 2:33) which coincided with the “*giving*” of the Spirit (Jn. 4:14; 7:38-39, 14:16-17; Acts 2:38-39). Spirit Baptism has ceased (the “*sending*” of the Spirit) but regeneration has not ceased (the “*giving*” of the Spirit).

C. Spirit Baptism authenticated to the Jews the new institution called the church where God would now meet with believers (cf. Acts 2:1-4 with Ex. 40:34; I Ki. 8:10-11; Ezk. 43:1-4).

D. After three other occasions of Spirit Baptism to authenticate to the Jews that this new institution called church (Acts 2:47) would include Samaritans (Acts 8:14-17), Roman Gentiles (10:44-47; 11:15-18) and Greek Gentiles (Acts 19:1-7), Spirit Baptism ceased (Eph. 4:5).

E. There is no Spirit Baptism today (and obviously no phenomenon of tongues [I Cor. 13:8]). Since there is no mystical body of Christ, there is no need or reality of entering into the supposed mystical body of Christ through the fallacious teaching that the Spirit baptizes believers at the moment of salvation into the mystical body of Christ.

F. I Cor. 12:13 teaches the need for church unity in the ordinances of water baptism and drinking the Lord’s Supper. It does not teach a contradictory experience to what John prophesied: the Spirit baptizes believers simultaneous to salvation into the body of Christ.

VIII. What are Family of God and Kingdom of God?

A. The Family of God refers to all saved who have God as their father (Eph. 3:14-15). OT saints called God “Father” (Isa. 64:8) and NT saints called God “Father” (Rom 8:15).

B. The Kingdom of God refers to all regenerated since the Cross of Christ, and therefore is both universal (Jn. 3:3-5) and invisible (Lk. 17:20). It includes permanent indwelling of the Spirit in fulfillment of the New Covenant promised in the OT and ratified by Christ on the Cross (Jer. 31:31 ff.; Ezk. 36:25 ff.; Mt. 26:26 ff.).

IV. What about Proof Texts for the Universal Invisible Church / Mystical Body of Christ?

A. Hebrew 12:22-23—supposedly, there is the future universal church, or church in prospect, comprised of all believers. To the contrary, Paul taught with his “snapshot” picture of heaven that church members’ names were written in heaven (Phil. 4:3). It is theologically gratuitous and biblically unwarranted to assume that Paul used *ἐκκλησία* to refer to all believers (even OT saints [?]) in a future church whose names are in the book of life! All he is saying is that church members’ names are written in heaven; he does not exclude the possibility of others, but he does not include them here.

B. Eph. 2:20-21—supposedly the Ephesian church members are part of the big, universal church/body. To the contrary, Paul indicated that the saved and baptized Ephesian Gentiles (cf. Eph. 2:11) along with saved and baptized Ephesian Jews, were now part of the “temple” (Jewish term), which was the local church of Ephesus (cf. I Cor. 3:16-17).

C. Eph. 3:21—supposedly, all believers will be in the eternal church of glory. To the contrary, Paul taught that the Ephesian church members would glorify God throughout eternity because of their obedience in and service through their respective church membership.

X. Are we “Baptist Bride”?—NO!