

**COURSE SYLLABUS: Ecclesiology**

| <b><u>WEEK</u></b> | <b><u>TOPIC</u></b>  |
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| 1                  | <b>The Marks of the Church</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “We Believe...”</li><li>• Marks of the Church</li></ul>   |
| 2                  | <b>The People of God - The Church and Israel</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continuity &amp; Discontinuity</li><li>• When was the Church Founded?</li></ul>   |
| 3                  | <b>Israel and the Church - the Temple</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Symbols of Israel</li><li>• The Meaning &amp; Purpose of the Temple</li></ul>        |
| 4                  | <b>Israel and the Church - the Temple Part 2</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Transition</li><li>• Jesus and the Temple</li><li>• A Third Temple?</li></ul>     |
| 5                  | <b>The Church and the Kingdom of God</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Kingdom in Biblical Teaching</li><li>• The Kingdom and the Church</li></ul>           |
| 6                  | <b>The Church and the Kingdom of God - Part 2</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Jesus versus Paul?</li><li>• The Apostolic Teaching on the Kingdom</li></ul>     |
| 7                  | <b>What is the Church, Then?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The People of God</li><li>• The Lord’s Own</li></ul>  |
| 8                  | <b>Pentecost - The End &amp; The Beginning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Meaning of Pentecost</li><li>• The Holy Spirit &amp; the New Covenant</li></ul> |
| 9                  | <b>The Spirit &amp; The Church</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Institutional or Communal?</li><li>• Baptism &amp; the Lord’s Supper</li></ul>                  |
| 10                 | <b>The Spirit &amp; The Church (Part 2)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Why Does Pentecostalism Happen?</li><li>• The Charismatic Church in Practice</li></ul> |
| 11                 | <b>The Spirit and the Word</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Need for Authority</li><li>• A Firm Foundation</li><li>• The Spirit &amp; the Word</li></ul>    |
| 12                 | <b>The Spirit and Church Polity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does a Church Need Government?</li><li>• The <i>Regnum Christi</i></li></ul>                   |

## Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

### 13      **The Church in the World Today**

- Cognitive Dissonance
- Social Marginalization

### 14      **The Mission of the Church**

- The Great Commission?
- The Blessed Hope

**Week 1: The Marks of the Church**

**Key Biblical Texts:** Matthew 16:16-19; I Peter 2:9,10

*"The light of grace and of reconciliation falls on this Church.  
She has not arisen from her own initiative,  
but has been called, gathered, and chosen as the people of God,  
obtained by the blood of the cross."  
(G. C. Berkouwer; "The Church")*

The Apostles' Creed, apparently named such due to the fact that it was *not* written by the Apostles, offers perhaps the absolute bare minimum of doctrinal uniformity among professing Christians. The word 'creed' derives from the Latin *credo*, which means 'I believe.' Hence the opening word of each stanza - there are three - of the Apostles' Creed is *credo*:

*I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:*

And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord:

Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary:

Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried:

He descended into hell:

The third day he rose again from the dead:

He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty:

From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead:

*I believe in the Holy Spirit.*

*I believe in the holy catholic church:*

The communion of saints:

The forgiveness of sins:

The resurrection of the body:

And the life everlasting.

Amen.

The three 'credos' of the Creed mark out three distinct sections of thought, at least to those who originally formulated this brief statement of faith. The sections are indicative, perhaps of the manner in which systematic theology was systematized in the early centuries of Christian History; an organization quite different from modern theological curricula. For instance, in keeping with the Apostles' Creed the study of Jesus Christ - *Christology* - is subsumed under the study of God - *Theology* proper. *Pneumatology*, the study of the Holy Spirit, stands by itself (though with remarkably little

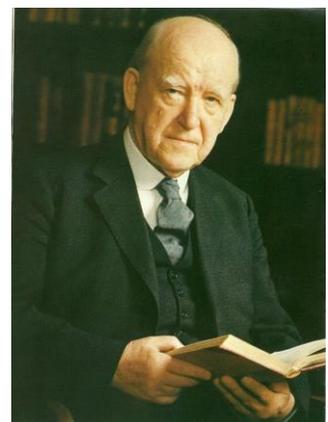
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being said on that score). And the credo of the Church – *Ecclesiology* – seems to encompass not only the life of the Church (“communion of saints”), but also *Soteriology* (“the forgiveness of sins”) and *Eschatology* (“the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting”). Though primitive in both age and format, this division of the study of Scripture on these topics ought not to be summarily dismissed in favor of the more modern fivefold classification common to all contemporary seminarians:

The scientific theologians of German have arranged the cycle of sacred knowledge under five leading categories, viz.: 1, “*Theology*,” the science of God. 2, *Anthropology*, the science of man in relation to God. 3, *Soteriology*, the science of salvation. 4, *Ecclesiology*, the science of the church. 5, *Eschatology*, or the science of ‘the last things.’<sup>1</sup>

This fivefold scheme has been generally that which we have followed in the PlumbLine curricula, but the broader systemization of the Apostles’ Creed has some interesting points to offer for consideration. First, and most significant, is the noticeable absence in the modern classification of a separate study of the Spirit: *Pneumatology* is altogether lacking. Second, there is the intriguing placement in the Creed of such topics as *Soteriology* and *Eschatology* under the credo of the Church. On the former point a case can be made for inclusion of *Pneumatology* within the rubric of *Ecclesiology*, which is the approach that this study will take. On the latter point, a separate case may be made for the comprehension of *Soteriology* and *Eschatology* under the credo of the Church leading to the institutionalized, incarnational establishment that became the Roman Catholic Church. We speak to this point directly, and reserve the inclusion of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit for another lesson.

Reformed theologians often combine *Ecclesiology* and *Eschatology* within the same section or volume of their Systematic Theology. Martyn Lloyd-Jones titled the third and last volume of his systematics *The Church and the Last Things*. However, Lloyd-Jones did not thereby intend to subsume *Eschatology* within the



D. M. Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

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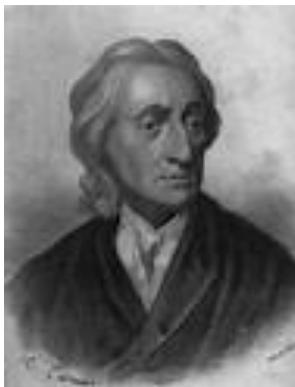
<sup>1</sup> Peck, T. E. *Notes on Ecclesiology* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication; 1892); 7.

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doctrine of the Church; it seems he simply had enough material on these two subjects to fill one volume. The intent of the Creed may be quite different, or at least the result of the Creed proved to be quite different.

There has been in the history of the Christian Church a chronic and pervasive thought that with the institution of the Church of Jesus Christ, God has concluded His redemptive work. Thus, in some quarters, the Church is equated with the Kingdom; in others, the Church is the institution of salvation – to be in the Church is to be saved. Others view the growth and propagation of the Church to be *the* eschatological fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel; and so forth. Thus on the one hand there has been an over-emphasis of the Church; a non-critical evaluation of the Church as the sum total of all that God purposed to do from eternity past. This is an error that is not uncommon among Reformed theologians, though they do tend to avoid the institutionalization of salvation found in the Roman Catholic Church. *Replacement Theology*, also known as ‘Supersessionism,’ is an example of this trend of Ecclesiology: the Church is so much the fulfillment of the eternal plan and purpose of Redemption, that the community of the Church *replaces* the nation of Israel as the New Covenant *replaces* the Old.<sup>2</sup> This form of Christian Ecclesiology is far from a mere academic novelty; it has frequently led to anti-Semitism as an official ‘Church’ view and practice.

Perhaps in response to an over-emphasis on the Church – and that, perhaps, traceable to the Apostles’ Creed itself – the modern Church has witnessed a pronounced *de-emphasis* of the organized assembly of believers that is most commonly referred to as



**John Locke (1632-1704)**

‘Church.’ The idea of the Church as a voluntary society – promulgated by the Anabaptists of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century in opposition to a coerced participation in a State Church – has mutated into the idea that ‘church’ is entirely optional to a professing believer. This tendency of denigrating the importance of the Church in the life of the believer was encouraged by the undeniable deficiencies and corruption found within all organized Christian denominations, as well as by the libertarian thought paradigm fostered by the Enlight-

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ment and by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. John Locke, for instance, held forth a minimalist view of acceptable religion in his *The Reasonableness of Christianity*; "...that all that is necessary is a general profession of the truth; under the gospel a general profession of belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."<sup>3</sup> To Locke the development of theology leads only to division in the Church and confusion among Christians.

If fundamentals are to be known, easy to be known, (as without doubt, they are,) then a catalogue may be given of them. But, if they are not, if it cannot certainly be determined, which are they; but the doubtful knowledge of them depends upon guesses; Why may not I be permitted to follow my guesses, as well as you yours? Or why, of all others, must you prescribe your guesses to me, when there are so many that are as ready to prescribe as you, and of as good authority? The pretence, indeed, and clamour is religion, and the saving of souls: but your business, it is plain, is nothing but to over-rule and prescribe, and be hearkened to as a dictator: and not to inform, teach, and instruct in the sure way to salvation.<sup>4</sup>

The native libertarianism of most Americans may very well say 'Amen' to these sentiments. Still, and in spite of the mistakes that the Church has made throughout her history, the believer has no biblical right to dismiss her or refuse her fellowship. The Church may not be neglected<sup>5</sup> or despised<sup>6</sup>, though this does not mean that she must be accepted uncritically in all her teachings and practice. "While it is true that certain forms of Church life, accretions of time more than biblical patterns, may be rejected, the followers of Jesus Christ cannot profess allegiance to Him *and* deny His church."<sup>7</sup>

That is the purpose of the study called *Ecclesiology*: to encourage continued participation and support of the Church while at the same time critically investigating the Scriptures to determine, inasmuch as possible, just what the Church ought to be and what she ought to be doing. Because of the dimness of our current vision, all believers do not arrive at the same answers – and some arrive at answers that are by no means compatible. This presents a struggle *between* denominations within Christianity (and the determination that some views are *outside* of Christianity). Nevertheless the study must be done, with

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<sup>2</sup> Cp. <https://carm.org/questions-replacement-theology>.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Peck; 35.

<sup>4</sup> Locke, John *The Reasonableness of Christianity*; VIII. <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/locke-the-works-vol-6-the-reasonableness-of-christianity> Accessed 30July 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 10:25

<sup>6</sup> I Corinthians 11:22

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the intent that each and every believer contributes, with knowledge and understanding, to the edification of the Body of Christ, the Church.

*...that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

(Ephesians 4:14-16)

We start this study, therefore, with the recognition that the Church has never been what it was meant to be, yet the differential between theory and practice must in every generation be considered and minimized. But even this observation requires a caveat, for in the most recent age of the Church this generational re-consideration of the Church has led to a blending of the Church with the surrounding culture in both teaching and practice. While it remains true that the Church must bear witness to the culture in which she is found – and not to some select culture from the past – it must also remain true that the bedrock from which the Church's witness rises in every age is Scripture.<sup>8</sup> Working within the broad outlines provided by the Apostles' Creed as well as the modern fivefold curricula of Systematic Theology, this study will seek to critically evaluate the biblical mandate of the Church, her *formation*, her *fellowship*, her *function*, and her *future*.

### **"Una, Sancta, Catholica, et Apostolica Ecclesia"**

The Apostles' Creed as quoted above is perhaps the earliest and simplest formulation; it developed over the early centuries of the Church as greater detail was applied to such important elements as the credo of the Holy Spirit, and certain heresies were combatted such as Arianism and Nestorianism concerning the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ. With regard to the credo of the Church, the Council of Constantinople (AD 381) is credited with establishing the 'four marks' of the true Church: *Unity* (or *Oneness*), *Holiness*, *Catholicity*, and *Apostolicity*. Unfortunately words can mean different things to different people, and that has certainly been the case with regard to these four words

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<sup>7</sup> Saucy, Robert *The Church in God's Program* (Chicago: Moody Press; 1972); 7.

<sup>8</sup> This comment in itself immediately divides the Ecclesiology of this study with the Ecclesiology of the Roman Church, in which Tradition plays an equal – and in practice a superior – role with Scripture.

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throughout the ages. Still, they have always served as points on the compass for every generation, as the Church in each age has sought to understand herself in the light of Scripture (or, sadly, in the darkness of Tradition).

The Church is said to be *una ecclesia* – one Church. This is certainly a hard place to begin, as it is one of the most difficult points that believers have to contend with unbelievers. “If there is only one Truth, why are there so many different churches?” Believers struggle to answer this common question, but it is really of the same nature as “If Man is created in the image of God, why is he so bad?” The answer to both questions lies in the present reality of *sin* and *corruption* in the world, rather than in any weakness or fallacy in the underlying premise. Man *is* created in the image of God; therein lies his dignity, the only true foundation for ‘human rights.’ The Church *is* one; therein lies the communion of the saints across both time and space. Cutting through the thick (and at times, thickening) outer shell of sin to find these foundational truths is the responsibility of every generation of believers.

The outward appearance of disunity must not be allowed to mask the biblical reality of unity in the Church, for the foundation of Truth is the Word of God. Perhaps the simplest statement of *una ecclesia* is that of our Lord in His inaugural statement concerning the Church,

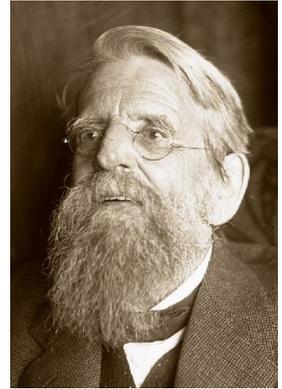
*And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.* (Matthew 16:18)

There is, of course, much more to this verse than just the unity of Christ’s Church, but there is at least that. Jesus commits to build *His* Church, singular, not His churches. Thus throughout the rest of the New Testament the apostles, while recognizing the unique demands and autonomy of local ‘churches,’ know only one Church. This unity is fundamental to the common metaphor of the Church as the *body* of Jesus Christ and He as its Head.

*And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.* (Ephesians 1:22-23)

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One cannot biblically conceive of the Church as some sort of Hydra with each tentacle being a local assembly or a denomination, and each having Jesus as its 'head.' No, the truth of Scripture is that in spite of the differences among local congregations, and even regional and national assemblies, there is but one *true* Church of Jesus Christ. "He creates a community and one alone, one that comprises all who belong to God, in all ages and among all peoples."<sup>9</sup> Theological differences inevitably set individual segments of the Church apart, for "*how can two walk together unless they be agreed?*" But even in the midst of such differences there is the common recognition that there is but one Church, and different denominations and expressions of that Church do not constitute different 'Churches.' As evidence that the theological study of *Pneumatology* – the study of the Holy Spirit – belongs to the study of the Church, we have from Paul's letter to the Ephesians the being and force that constitutes the unity of the Church, the Holy Spirit Himself.



Adolf Schlatter (1852-1938)

*I, therefore, the prisoner <sup>of</sup> the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep **the unity of the Spirit** in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.* (Ephesians 4:1-6)

There can hardly be a stronger argument for the unity of the Church than this, for if the true Church is entirely located within one denominational form, or one chronological era, or regional development, then within that singular Church is to be found "*one body and one Spirit...one hope...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all.*" Though it has sadly been the case that many individual manifestations of the Church of Jesus Christ have considered themselves to be the 'one and only' Church, such a claim is too much for most rational believers, or their denominations, to make. No, the import of Paul's statement is not that we can distill all of these 'ones' into a single denomination or institution, but rather the oneness of these fundamental things and persons must cause us to look beyond our singular assembly, or even set of beliefs in the polity of the church, to

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recognize something greater and larger than ourselves. We may attend churches, but in Christ Jesus we are all members of one Church.

Of course this sounds a bit like the essential argument of ecumenicism: we are all one big, happy Church; therefore we must minimize our differences and come together to solve the world's woes. Since the differences between denominations usually center around either theological forms and tenets or ecclesiastical polity or practice, these things are considered to be 'divisive,' and thereby dangerous or irrelevant. What is important is *unity*, even at the expense of doctrinal or practical integrity. But such a conclusion is to pit Scripture against Scripture, for in the same letter where we read the admonition "*do not neglect the assembling of one another together,*" we also read, "*hold fast the confession of your hope without wavering.*"<sup>10</sup> Sound doctrine is by no means a matter of inconsequence to the biblical writers; indeed, the Lord Himself informs us that it is the Truth that both sets us free and sanctifies us, and that Truth is the Word of God.

Thus we end up having to strike some sort of balance, and that is always difficult and never static. On the one hand we recognize that there must be a 'lowest common denominator' upon which basis fellowship may be had among believers of perhaps vastly different communions, even if not every Lord's Day. On the other hand we recognize that this baseline is full of necessary theological and practical content, though often the various branches of the Church have made it a bit too full. There are standards of reasonable, biblical fellowship and there are *adiaphora* – matters indifferent, at least to recognizing and blessing another believer or not. One of the goals of this study it to set forth a biblical basis for 'testing fellowship,' in the hopes that a collegial relationship may continue among churches, as manifestations of the *una ecclesia*, the one Church.

Next we read of the Church that she is *sancta ecclesia* – a 'holy Church.' At the very basic level this might only connote that the Church is the assembly of those 'called out,' set apart to be holy to the Lord. This derives from the Greek word most frequently used with reference to the Church, *ekklesia*, which is itself a combination of the verb 'to call' and the prefix *ek*, signifying 'out of.' This notion of the people of God as being called out from other nations is consonant with the identity of Israel under the Old Covenant, a

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<sup>9</sup> Schlatter, Adolf *The Theology of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books; 1998); 28.

<sup>10</sup> Hebrews 10:23-25

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nation called out from among the nations. The Church, then, is the people of God called from “*every tongue, tribe, and nation.*”

But at all times theologians have recognized a deeper, moral sense to the word *sancta*, which is the Latin word for the Greek *hagios*, which in turn is the Greek word for the Hebrew *qadosh*. To be consecrated by and to the Lord was at all times to be accompanied by a holiness of thought and conduct. Indeed, the disconnect between the



**G. C. Berkouwer (1903-96)**

‘set apart’ nature of the Israelites and their unholy lives formed the matter of the Old Testament prophecies, and the grounds for the ultimate execution of divine judgment upon the nation. There is therefore a direct relationship between being ‘holy’ and being ‘righteous,’ so that the Lord can under both Covenants admonish His people to “*be holy, for I, the Lord God, am holy.*” But when we consider the Church under the rubric of holiness, we cannot help but find it lacking. In a remarkable example of understatement, G. C. Berkouwer writes, “It has almost always been admitted that the Church does not measure up to the ideal in all respects and that her actual appearance is not in harmony with what Christ wanted.”<sup>11</sup> Once again the believer is faced with a ‘reality’ that defies the truth concerning the Church. She is *sancta ecclesia*, but she is not holy.

The Roman Catholic solution to this conundrum was to make the Church an abstract concept or institution in which holiness resides and no longer the assembly of unholy individuals. By this means the Church remains ‘holy,’ but it ceases to be anything more than a theological abstraction, since the human manifestation of this holy Church is uniformly and persistently unholy. Thus when the Roman Catholic theologian speaks of the Church, he does not speak of the members of the Church, but rather the Church as the overarching institution, unsullied by its members. That Rome acknowledges the unholiness of its members is proven by its innovation of Purgatory, where deceased Catholics go to be further purged from their sins. Consequently the members of the Roman Catholic Church are not ‘saints’ - holy ones - in this life, but must undergo

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<sup>11</sup> Berkouwer, G. C. *Studies in Dogmatics: The Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1976); 11.

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centuries and even millennia of purgation before finally attaining holiness. Thus Rome holds fast to the *sancta ecclesia*, but at the cost of the true sanctification of believers.

One insidious result of this separation of the holiness of the Church and the holiness of her members is the Roman Catholic doctrine of the *infallibility of the Church*. Protestants are commonly familiar with the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope, the Bishop of Rome and head of the Roman Catholic Church. But technically the Pope is only infallible *ex cathedra*, when he is 'on the throne' as the representative head of the Church and Christ's Vicar on earth. It is the Church herself that is imbued with all knowledge as a result of her holy nature and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

As the Divinely appointed teacher of revealed truth, the Church is infallible. This gift of inerrancy is guaranteed to it by the words of Christ, in which He promised that His Spirit would abide with it forever to guide it unto all truth (John 14:16; 16:13). It is implied also in other passages of Scripture, and asserted by the unanimous testimony of the Fathers. The scope of this infallibility is to preserve the deposit of faith revealed to man by Christ and His Apostles. The Church teaches expressly that it is the guardian only of the revelation, that it can teach nothing which it has not received. The Vatican Council declares: "The Holy Ghost was not promised to the successors of Peter, in order that through His revelation they might manifest new doctrine: but that through His assistance they might religiously guard, and faithfully expound the revelation handed down by the Apostles, or the deposit of the faith" (Conc. Vat., Sess. IV, cap. liv). The obligation of the natural moral law constitutes part of this revelation. The authority of that law is again and again insisted on by Christ and His Apostles. The Church therefore is infallible in matters both of faith and morals. Moreover, theologians are agreed that the gift of infallibility in regard to the deposit must, by necessary consequence, carry with it infallibility as to certain matters intimately related to the Faith. There are questions bearing so nearly on the preservation of the Faith that, could the Church err in these, her infallibility would not suffice to guard the flock from false doctrine.<sup>12</sup>

This doctrine is the necessary and logical result of the way in which Rome deals with the 'sancta' of the Church. It also allows the Roman Church to retain its members in spite of manifest and unrepentant sin, and to view its clergy as having received an indelible grace of ordination, in spite of horrid sin committed by many priests. But do Protestants have an answer to the question of the Church as 'holy'? If anything, the tendency among modern Protestants, at least, is to minimize the 'sancta' of the confession and to simply emphasize the grace of God, "We are all just sinners saved by grace." While

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this is indeed a wonderful truth, it falls far short of the biblical teaching concerning the Church, and the biblical admonition for all believers to be holy.

In an attempt to hold fast to the moral reality of the term 'holy,' John Wesley posited the perfectibility of the believer – that each and every disciple of Jesus Christ can attain sinless perfection in this life. In his sermon on Christian Perfection, Wesley states, "This is the glorious privilege of every Christian; yea, though he be but *a babe in Christ*. But it is only of those who *are strong* in the Lord, and "have overcome the wicked one," or rather of those who "have known him that is from the beginning," [1 John 2:13, 14] that it can be affirmed they are in



John Wesley (1703-91)

such a sense perfect"<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately Wesley's perfectionism is no less an abstraction than Rome's infallibility of the Church, for it is every believer's experience that sin continues to dwell within his or her members and to war – and often win – with the Spirit. Collectively, therefore, believers assembled together in a church will not make that congregation 'holy.'

Perhaps we can view the 'sancta' of the Church in strictly a future, prophetic manner – the Church *will be* holy when she is united with her Lord at the Second Coming. This is true, of course, and is in keeping with the teachings of Paul with regard to the Church as the bride of Christ.

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might **sanctify** and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*  
(Ephesians 5:25-27)

But in addition to this future guaranty of the holiness of the Church, Paul also speaks of holiness that is established in the very nature of the Church as connected with her Lord, Jesus Christ.

*For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.*

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<sup>12</sup> New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia, *The Church*; <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm> accessed 7/31/18.

<sup>13</sup> Wesley, John *Christian Perfection* <https://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-40-Christian-Perfection> accessed 7/31/18.

The firstfruit is quite clearly Jesus Christ, who is confessed by all the Church to be holy in thought and deed, without sin though tempted in all things just as we are. This is the standard by which alone holiness may be measured: the holiness of God in Christ. And this is the holiness, the *sancta*, of the Church. Perhaps the best we can do with this difficult topic is to place it under the rubric of the 'Now and the Not Yet.' There can be no doubt that the Church lives in mystical union with her Lord and by virtue of His atoning death and victorious intercession, she is His holy bride. We need not separate the Church into an abstract institution in which holiness and infallibility reside in spite of her human members. Nor may we posit the perfectibility of believers, a notion that is nowhere witnessed by any other than the self-deceived. But we may rest in the biblical truth that all things are finished in Christ, and that the promises of God are in Him 'yes, and amen.' The holiness of the Church, therefore, consists in her union with her holy Lord, her spotless Groom. This is not a virtue that has been vested in the Church *apart from* her members, as Rome teaches, but rather the result of the calling together of those whom the Lord has sanctified by His blood. This truth concerning the *sancta* of the Church undergirds the profound meaning of the Church's two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as we shall see in a latter session.

Thus it is proper for believers in this life to be called 'saints,' as Paul constantly does throughout his epistles, and is blasphemous to the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit, to hold that title only for those whom the Pope beatifies and canonizes.

*Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.* (Ephesians 2:19-20)

In addition to being 'one' and 'holy,' the Creed also confesses the *catholica ecclesia*, the 'catholic church.' The word catholic has in many minds been co-opted by the Roman Catholic Church, but it simply means 'universal.' Thus the confession is that the one, holy church is also universal; it spans all regions of the earth as well as all times. This is undoubtedly the least controversial of the four marks of the true Church, aside from the

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controversy that should not, but has, attached to the word itself. All believers everywhere recognize the common bond held with other believers, and all have felt this bond whenever they have encountered a brother or sister in the Lord, regardless of race, nationality, or denomination. Catholicity is the necessary associate of Unity – if there is but one Church, then all who are in Christ are in that one Church and share alike in her blessing.

Still, no theological point worth its salt can be without controversy, and the catholicity of the Church is no exception. The issue debated in every generation has to do with the identity of the Church vis-à-vis its members. In other words, are all members of professing Christianity members of the Church, or are only those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit? The answer seems to Reformed theologians, at least, to be quite obvious. As T. E. Peck writes,

Inasmuch as they are called by an external clesis of the Word, they are gathered in successive generations to constitute the *ecclesia* on earth. In as far as they are called also by the internal clesis of the Spirit, they are gathered to constitute the invisible *ecclesia*, the full and complete actual of the eternal ideal.<sup>14</sup>

This division between the *visible* Church and the *invisible* Church is commonplace within Reformed ecclesiology, but it should not for that reason go without some critical investigation. For this introduction, however, it is sufficient to say that theologians have long struggled with the ideal of catholicity and the earthly reality of a ‘mixed multitude,’ – of people within the bounds of the professing Church who, while perhaps not openly wicked, are nonetheless devoid of spiritual life. This subject pertains primarily to the issue of *discipline* in the Church, which will be the topic of a later lesson.

One last word to be said here on catholicity, however. The fact that all believers everywhere are members of the one Church of Jesus Christ cannot be used to justify the transient, nomadic existence of modern Christians, who move from church to church with sad regularity. While it is true that the members of *that* church are probably just as much members of the one Church as are the members of *this* church, the purpose of attending any church is far more than just physical presence. The Greek word that describes the

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<sup>14</sup> Peck; 19.

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relationship between believers within a congregation is *koinonia* – participation, or fellowship – and merely attending a particular church’s services does not constitute *koinonia*. But again, this is the subject matter for a later session.

The fourth mark of the Church as enumerated by theologians from very early in her history, is *apostolica ecclesia* – the ‘apostolic’ church. If catholicity is the most agreed upon mark of the Church, apostolicity is the most controversial and least grounded in Scripture. Indeed, we might not be surprised if our own analysis of its merits leaves us with just three marks rather than four. This is because apostolicity concerns itself with the passage of the truth from generation to generation, and the means or mechanism of that transmission, in which erroneous views have led to deep corruption within the visible Church. Still, there is some merit to the concept; therefore we will start with the positives before moving on to the negatives.

The idea of succession is found in the relationship between Jesus Christ and His apostles at the very beginning of what is historically called ‘the Church.’ It was to His disciples collectively, as well as to Peter individually, that the Lord gave ‘the keys to the kingdom’ with a very notable authority in regard to sin and judgment.

*And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*

(Matthew 16:19)

*So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”*

(John 20:21-23)

This authority on earth to bind and loose with regard to sin and judgment is a very important and integral part of the Church’s life and health. This is true even though the outworking of this authority has often been unloving, ungracious, and oppressive. Without this ability to bind and loose the Church has no effective means whereby to protect her members from wickedness and heresy; she has no basis for discipline. But on what is this authority founded? Is it based on a generational succession of apostles – the cardinals and bishops of the Church – with the successor of Peter – the Roman Pope – at the head? This is the view of the Roman Catholic Church, and the view repudiated by

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Protestants and Eastern Orthodox churches for centuries. Rome made succession a part of the official institution of the Church, and incorporated a theory of apostolicity into the hierarchy of that church. She then, as T. E. Peck notes, tied catholicity with her own interpretation of apostolicity, resulting in an institution that alone possessed the authority given by Jesus to His disciples. “Unfortunately, however, catholicity was made to depend upon official succession, instead of the succession of the truth; and this stupendous error led, in the course of time, to Popery.”<sup>15</sup>

Protestants and the Eastern Orthodox churches reject the institutional and official succession of the Roman Pope to the mantle of Peter. Yet they do not thereby repudiate the concept of *apostolicity*, for the transmission of the “*faith once delivered unto the saints*” from generation to generation is the lifeblood of the true Church. “All branches of the Christian church hold to an apostolical succession in some sense; for without it there is no ground upon which they can claim, with the slightest color of plausibility, a divine sanction for their existence.”<sup>16</sup> Roman Catholics continue to point to their antiquity as proof that Rome remains the center of the true Church of Jesus Christ, and the Pope her true head. Protestants often attempt to build a chronological lineage of reformation to supplant that of Rome, and more often than not fail in the attempt. Still, continuity with the Apostles is something that every Christian denomination seeks, recognizing that the Church of Jesus Christ is built upon the “*one foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the cornerstone.*”

Whatever interpretation is given to the concept of *apostolicity* within Protestant ecclesiology, it must never devolve into the identity of a particular man or office. G. C. Berkouwer unwittingly illustrates just how difficult a task this is, by providing a rather vague explanation of what it is that Protestant theologians are trying to do.

The intention here is not to glorify specific persons, but rather to guarantee continuity through a charisma, a privilege, that can be described as ‘divine assistance.’ It is not an inherent attribute and does not rest on revelation or inspiration, but is assistance in order to protect apostolicity and to give an effective guarantee and sanction on the Church’s historical life. One can think of various aspects of the Paraclete where the idea of the

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<sup>15</sup> Peck; 22.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*; 51.

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helper also plays a role. The divine assistance designates the Church as needing help and as receiving help.<sup>17</sup>

But if *apostolicity* is to be a mark of the Church one might hope its explanation would be a bit more clear. The continuity of the Church's authority in both teaching and discipline is a matter to be discussed at length under the heading of Church Polity, but we can at least establish a firm foundation here with regard to the overall concept. It is not upon the Apostles *per se* that the Church grounds her authority and validity, but rather on their word, the inspired Word of God through which the Apostles bore witness to the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, and set forth the nature and purpose of His Church. As there is no biblical evidence that the apostolic mantle of authority was purposely handed down, say, from Peter to Mark or from Paul to Timothy, we are under no obligation to attempt to fabricate such a lineage. But we do have an explicit generational directive give to us from the Apostle Paul, which is a very strong indication of what he, at least, would have considered the correct interpretation of *apostolicity*.

*You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*  
(II Timothy 2:1-2)

Though they are not in themselves biblical mandates, these four marks of the Church - *una, sancta, catholica, et apostolica* - may serve as points of the compass in our study of the doctrine of the Church. Some facets of the biblical teaching will align entirely with one or another of these marks; other aspects of the Church will be a combination of several - say, north by northeast, as it were. Each mark contains important truth that is supported by biblical teaching, and together they do serve as a useful rubric for our understanding of the 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.'

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<sup>17</sup> Berkouwer *The Church*; 259.

**Week 2: The People of God**

**Key Biblical Texts:** Genesis 12:1-3; Isaiah 49:6; Acts 2:1-4

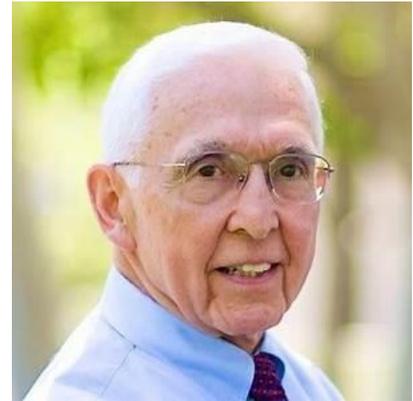
*“In fact...first-century Judaism and Christianity  
Have a central worldview-feature in common:  
The sense of a story now reaching its climax.  
And, most importantly, it is the same story.”  
(N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*)*

When scholars approach the end of their career, their colleagues and (especially) their students often assemble a *festschrift* – German for ‘party writing’ or ‘feast-script’ – in their honor. This is a collection of essays written on a common theme and dedicated to the revered scholar. In honor of Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, professor at Dallas Theological Seminary and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, John S. Feinberg assembled essays from a number of scholars on the topic of *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*. This work is a helpful disputation between advocates of a thorough *continuity* between the two testaments of divine revelation, on the one hand, and those who propose a stronger *discontinuity* between the two, on the other. Broadly, the camps divide along Reformed (*continuity*) and Dispensational (*discontinuity*) lines as the contributors debate such issues as Salvation, the Law and Grace, and the Kingdom of God as manifested in the Old versus the New Testament. This issue of continuity versus discontinuity is nowhere more pertinent than in regard to the “People of God” in the Old Testament compared to the “People of God” in the New Testament. Simply put, it is the age-old question of the relationship of the Church to Israel, and no age yet has definitively answered this question.

This discussion is necessary as one considers the *Formation* or *Foundation* of the Church: when did the Church begin? If at Pentecost, as the majority of evangelicals believe, was the Church therefore something *new* in God’s plan? And if this is the case, can any continuity be drawn between the ‘New Testament Church’ and ‘Old Testament Israel’? The Reformed theologian answers strongly in the affirmative; the Dispensationalist equally strongly in the negative. One’s view on the origin of the Church is intimately tied to one’s view of the nature of the Church – what you believe the Church to be in God’s redemptive plan and history will pretty much dictate when you believe the

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Church to have first entered into that history. For instance, the Reformed theologian views the Church as essentially the People of God, and therefore find its origins in the call of Abraham, the beginning of God's calling to Himself a people. The Dispensationalist, however, views the Church as a parenthetical era situated between the historical rejection by Israel of her Messiah, and the Rapture of the Church/Second Coming of Christ, and thus views the foundation of the Church as happening at Pentecost. "Ultradispensationalism, however, delays the inauguration of the church which exists today until the time of the apostle Paul. A different church is said to have existed in the earlier portion of the book of Acts."<sup>18</sup>



**Robert Saucy (1930-2015)**

The significance of the question with regard to the origin or founding of the Church is far more than mere academics or biblical history. Evangelicals generally agree on the concepts of 'redemptive history' and 'progressive revelation.' In other words, we believe that God revealed His plan of salvation *over time* and not all at once. Hebrews 1:1-2 is the *locus classicus* of this concept, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son..." Where the Church first shows up on this revelatory timeline essentially determines those portions of Scripture viewed – at least practically – as pertaining to the life of the Church. This is how the theology and the ecclesiology of different denominations, or theological schools of thought, are most commonly aligned. Those who believe the Church to be the People of God beginning with the call of Abram will fall most generally into a Covenantalist view of Soteriology along with an Amillennial view of Eschatology. Those who adamantly defend the beginning of the Church at Pentecost, *as a completely new entity* – or at most a *mystery* in the Old Testament – will align themselves squarely with Dispensationalism as well as some form of Pre-Millennialism. It is usually not possible to determine which of these views drives the others, but the associations stand.

In modern American Evangelicalism, the Covenantalist stands at the opposite end

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<sup>18</sup> Saucy, Robert L. *The Church in God's Program* (Chicago: Moody Press; 1972); 57.



**Edmund Clowney (1917-2005)**

of the Ecclesiastical and Eschatological spectrum from the Dispensationalist. But most believers find themselves somewhere between, on the continuum of views that are not always consistent with one another, yet are devoutly held by individuals and denominations. Edmund Clowney provides a broad generalization as to the basic views with regard to the Church, that have been held in the West at least since the Reformation. "The Reformed

family of churches emphasized the church as the *people of God*; the sacramental churches as the *body of Christ*; the Anabaptist churches as the *disciples of Christ*; and the Pentecostal churches as the *fellowship of the Spirit*."<sup>19</sup> Clowney admits that each camp is suffering to some degree from 'tunnel vision,' yet the distinctions made are important in helping us get to the core of our own views regarding the Church of Jesus Christ.

Each view posits the Church in relation to the Godhead, with emphasis on a different Person within the Trinity. The Reformed view, for instance, emphasizes the call of God (the Father) as both the Creator and the Covenant God. The underlying theme of Reformed Ecclesiology (and Polity) will therefore be the overarching redemptive purpose of God as it magnifies His glory. For the Reformed theologian, then, the Church is not an institution only to be found at Pentecost and later, but rather from the eternal council of the Godhead and, in time, from either the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15 or, most commonly, from the call of Abram by God.

The Pentecostal view, on the other hand, emphasizes the Church in relation to the Holy Spirit, who is her life force and bond of unity. For the Pentecostal, therefore, the origin of the Church is not merely chronologically at Pentecost, but functionally as well. This is because the outpouring (baptism) of the Holy Spirit is the believer's claim to divine power, and the Church's *bona fides* as the instrument of God's purpose in the world. This will, of course, have significant ramifications as to what the 'Pentecostal' Church will look like and how it will live and act in the world.

The other two views, though starkly different, both emphasize the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. The sacramental church is one that focuses on the metaphor of

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the Church as the *Body* of Christ, with the Roman Catholic *Incarnational* Ecclesiology being the most profound (and profoundly wrong) treatment of this concept. The sacraments become the vehicles of grace mediated by a priesthood, dispensing the grace of Jesus Christ from the Church to the believer. The concept of the disciple, however, emphasizes the function of the Church as the place where believers are taught of the Lord – about Him and by Him through His Holy Spirit. This view will tend to neglect, or even negate, church polity in favor of an egalitarian assembly of ‘learners,’ disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Each of these views has both theological and biblical merit, with Scriptures available to support each one in contest against the others. It is debatable whether the Lord intended that the views ever be in conflict, but the reality of the situation is that *one* of the views seems always to dominate in the ecclesiology of this or that communion within professing Christendom. For the purposes of this particular lesson, the line of distinction will be a bit more dualistic – along the Continuity/Discontinuity Divide mentioned earlier. Three of the four general views of the Church lay the greater stress on that portion of redemptive history dominated by the Person and Work of Jesus Christ (this is true of the Pentecostal as well as the Sacramentalist and the Anabaptist, as the sending of the Holy Spirit was the work of the risen Lord Jesus). These views have the advantage over the traditional Reformed view in that they give greater weight to the Advent of Jesus Christ as a watershed event in the divine plan of redemption. Saucy, himself an advocate of *Progressive Dispensationalism*, writes that “the church, by its very nature as the body of Christ, is dependent upon the finished work of Christ and the coming of the Spirit.”<sup>20</sup> The views of the Sacramentalist, the Anabaptist, and the Pentecostal will be debated under the evaluation of the *function* of the Church; for the study of the *foundation* of the Church the real divide is between the Covenantalist...and everyone else.

This returns us to the earlier question concerning the relationship between the Church and Israel. The three Church views that emphasis the ‘Christ-event’ as seminal to the origin of the Church will, in different measures, teach a greater discontinuity between the Church and Israel. The Reformed view, on the other hand, will advocate a degree of

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<sup>19</sup> Clowney, Edmund *The Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1995); 28. *Italics added for emphasis.*

<sup>20</sup> Saucy; 57.

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continuity in which Israel *becomes* the Church, or, to put it another way, the Church *replaces* Israel. This line of thinking immediately impacts the Eschatology of the Church and as historically powerfully impacted the temporal relations between Christianity and Judaism, too often to a regrettable degree.

A caveat is in order here. As mentioned earlier, not all views are clear-cut, nor are they all consistently held by the individual camps. With respect to the Church's relationship to Jews, for instance, there has been a great deal of inconsistency of teaching and practice. The view that the Church has replaced Israel in God's redemptive plan is one that is held not only by Reformed theologians, but also by the Roman Catholic Church. Each communion has, at times in history, allowed this view to foster and encourage anti-Semitism among its members, and at times as an official policy. The opposite view of discontinuity, held by Dispensationalists, has often produced an excessive and uncritical endearment to world Jewry, and particularly to the modern State of Israel. Without doubt this latter view is to be preferred to anti-Semitism, though it is nonetheless misguided because unbiblical.

One final word by way of introduction to this particular topic, or really a reiteration of a word previously spoken. The Church is the Body of Christ – the body of which Christ is the Head – and therefore as an entity it has little or no meaning apart from Christ. Historically-speaking, it is imperative that one's assessment of the foundation or formation of the Church not diminish the Christ-event. At the end of the day, the Incarnation, Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ is absolutely central to the being and the meaning of the Church. While there is significant error to be found in the teaching of extreme *discontinuity* between the testaments, there is an even greater danger than a seamless *continuity* will render the coming of Jesus Christ of no practical significance. This would be a far more grievous error indeed. In spite of the great scholarship displayed by the Reformed tradition, this is undoubtedly one of its greatest weaknesses with regard to its view of the foundation, and consequently the nature, of the Church. As with so many issues in theology, the truth will lie somewhere between the extremes of continuity and discontinuity – and probably not directly in the middle. In any event, the Person and Work of Jesus Christ must be the bedrock upon which any biblical doctrine of the Church is built; all other theories are shifting sand.

**God's Purpose with Israel:**

The various views with regard to the continuity or discontinuity of the Church with Israel tend to focus either on 'unfulfilled' prophecies or promises concerning the nation of Israel, on the one hand, or the finality of the work of redemption in Jesus Christ, on the other. What is rarely considered is the *purpose* of God in forming and electing Israel from among the nations of the world. If it can be shown that this purpose has been fulfilled, then it stands to reason that the particular role of Israel as a theocratic nation – a unique People of God in the world – need not continue. Israel cannot have a special redemptive purpose in the world once that purpose has been fulfilled. But it can still remain as the 'apple of God's eye' – the nation upon which He has set His everlasting love. In other words, a distinction needs to be made between Israel in the redemptive plan of God, and Israel as the nation of God's unique affection. The conclusion of the former does not mean the abrogation of the latter. But the distinction will have a significant effect on one's reading of Scripture with regard to the relationship of the Church to Israel, both in Ecclesiology and in Eschatology. It will also play an important role in the interpretation of Old Testament prophecy concerning Israel, as to whether the prophecies have been fully and finally fulfilled, or whether there is yet a final completion to be realized.

What, then, was God's purpose in electing Israel from among the nations of the world, to be His peculiar people? Even the question, phrased this way, contains an important point toward the answer: Israel was a *people* before it was a *nation*. For roughly four hundred years Israel lived as the People of God before they became, in some recognizable sense of the word, a nation. Sinai was the first 'calling' of the People of God as the Nation of Israel, the first and most important *qahal* of the people of the Abrahamic Covenant, but it was not their inception as a people. Realization of this fact may help us reconsider the biblical importance that has often been placed on Israel as an autonomous nation, and also assist in our realization that Israel has always been a people, even when it was not a nation. The emphasis thus becomes on the People of God rather than on the Nation of Israel, which once was not, and for most of the history of the People has not been a sovereign Nation. Restoration of the Nation is not as important to the identity of Israel as its Recovery of the People. Of course, this does not mean that restoration of the

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Nation will not occur; but given the facts of Israel's history, this eventuality can hardly be given the central position of importance that it has in the modern evangelical church.

To both the Nation and the People of Israel – sometimes the former, always the latter – the point of most intense focus with regard to the *being* of Israel must be Sinai. In light of the Hebrew word for 'assembly,' – *qahal* – and the fact that the Greek translation of the Old Testament almost invariably translates this word by *ecclesia*, which in the New Testament is translated 'church' – the assembly of the People of God at Mt. Sinai is of the greatest importance to our understanding of both the people of God and its purpose. The word *qahal*, like the Greek word *ecclesia*, is quite generic and can refer to any gathering of people for any purpose. Thus it is important to recognize that the calling and gathering of a people by God and for His Name, though referred to by the common term 'assembly,' has historical connections that demand its unique and particular interpretation in terms of the setting apart of a people by God and through the giving of His Law.

The significance of the *qahal* at Sinai for Israel is connected to the *ecclesia* of Christians by the author of Hebrews, a connection that is also a stark contrast as well as a similarity,

*For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow." And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.") But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.*  
(Hebrews 12:18-24)

In light of this connection between the *qahal* of Sinai and the *ecclesia* of the Church, it is interesting and ironic that the influential 12<sup>th</sup> Century Jewish rabbi Maimonides apparently began a tradition that the Feast of Shavout – Pentecost – historically commemorated the giving of the Law at Sinai, a tradition that has enjoyed a vibrant life within Judaism ever since.



**Maimonides (1135-1204)**

Considering the significance of Pentecost to Christianity – the giving of the Holy Spirit and in what is considered by many to be the inception of the Church – one would think that a Jewish scholar would be careful not to make such a connection between the *qahal* of Israel at Sinai and the *ecclesia* of Christianity. It is impossible to support Maimonides theory from the biblical text, as Exodus 19 informs us that the children of Israel did not arrive at Mt. Sinai until the third month after their departure from Egypt. Still, it is an interesting development of history that such a renown Jewish scholar would unwittingly make a connection previously made by the author of Hebrews.

**Bearer of the Law:**

Maimonides notwithstanding, the event of Law-giving at Sinai constituted the People of Israel as a people of the Law of God. In searching for a *purpose* for Israel – a *raison d’etre* for the gathering of this people into a nation among nations – one clear aspect of such a purpose must be the bearing of God’s Law as a living and active principle of thought and action within human society. The commandments delivered by God to Israel through Moses were to be the *wisdom* and the *understanding* of the Israelites *as a people*, even before they became a nation.

*Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’*

(Deuteronomy 4:5-6)

In his benedictory song, Moses links the events of Law-giving at Sinai with that of calling Israel to God as unique people and the object of the divine love, further strengthening the place of Sinai within the whole concept of Israel as a people as well as a nation,

*The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir;  
He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came with ten thousands of saints;  
**From His right hand came a fiery law for them.***

*Yes, He loves the people; All His saints are in Your hand;  
They sit down at Your feet; Everyone receives Your words.*

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*Moses commanded a law for us, a heritage of the congregation of Jacob.  
And He was King in Jeshurun,  
When the leaders of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel together.*

(Deuteronomy 33:2-5)

Throughout the history of Israel under the Mosaic dispensation, the Law remained the central theme of both their faithfulness and their unfaithfulness. The prophet Isaiah admonishes his countrymen, “*To the Law and to the Testimony; if they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*”<sup>21</sup> And the last of the Israelite prophets, Malachi, connects his audience with the beginning of Israel’s life as a nation,

*Remember the Law of Moses, My servant,  
Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel,  
With the statutes and judgments.  
Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet  
Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.  
And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,  
And the hearts of the children to their fathers,  
Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.*

(Malachi 4:4-6)

Though the Hebrew Bible ends with II Chronicles and not as our Bibles, with Malachi, this passage is the closing *prophetic* word of the Old Covenant era. The next event on the horizon is the coming of ‘Elijah’ in preparation for the coming of the ‘Messenger of the Covenant.’ We know these two prophetic allusions are to John the Baptist, who was “*Elijah who is to come,*” and the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the prophetic words ends under the Old Covenant by reminding Israel of her greatest glory and grace: the Law of Moses. The first *qahal* of Israel at Sinai has reference to the Law, and the last prophetic word given to Israel has reference to the Law. It is not too much to say that the Law was an *essential* – in the philosophical sense of the word, *of the essence* – facet of what it meant to be Israel.<sup>22</sup> Bearing the Law before the nations was Israel’s witness, her purpose and reason for being.

But was it the plan of God that Israel *forever* be the depository of the divine Law? Was Israel to perpetually be merely a witness of the divine holiness through the Law? Was that Law never to actually encounter the rest of the nations? Were they never to

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<sup>21</sup> Isaiah 8:20

<sup>22</sup> This is not to diminish the importance of the other essential pillar of Israelite identity: the tabernacle or Temple. This feature of Israelite being and purpose will be dealt with later in the study.

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encounter God's Law? To ask these questions is to answer them; of course the eternal plan of God was that the transcript of His holy nature – the divine Law – be written on the heart of all the elect of God, from “every tongue, tribe, and nation.” The ultimate fulfillment of the Law, at least in terms of the creature Man, was that it be written upon the heart and not on tables of stone. This, of course, is the essential feature of the New Covenant.

*Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. **But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts;** and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.* (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

This passage describes an event in redemptive history in which the law-bearing mission of Israel comes to an end, not because the Law itself is abrogated or abolished, but rather because of a spiritual inscribing of that Law upon the hearts of God's people, each and every single one. Ezekiel writes of a similar operation by God upon His people,

*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.* (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

This passage also speaks both before and after with respect to the Land, a very important (and often confusing) feature of the prophetic promises to Israel. But the focus on this part of the study is on the Law, and in particular here the writing of the Law upon the heart of God's people, an essential characteristic of the New Covenant. If it can be shown that this event has occurred, then by force of an inexorable biblical logic, this particular purpose of Israel – the law-bearer – is no longer applicable. Again, this does not mean that Israel ceases to be a factor in the divine redemptive purpose, nor that Israel ceases to be the apple of God's eye. But it is a reasonable, even necessary, hermeneutic to allow progressive revelation to reach its intermediate completion points, and to recognize when a prophecy or purpose has been fully and finally fulfilled. The *terminus* of the Law with reference to Old Testament teaching is the writing of that Law upon the heart. The

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point at which this promise is realized is the advent of the New Covenant. If the New Covenant has come, then the Law is now written upon the heart of God's people.

### **The New Covenant and the Church:**

The manner of the fulfillment of the promise of the New Covenant has caused a great deal of opinion regarding the extent to which the Old Testament prophecies are completed. The fact that the temporal/land-based promises to Israel have not been fulfilled – Israel is not a sovereign, *theocratic* nation with a Davidic king – directly led to the theories of Dispensationalism, in which the Church Age is an entirely distinct era in God's redemptive plan. The argument has most often proceeded like this: "Such and such prophecy has not been literally fulfilled, therefore the New Covenant promises of Jeremiah 31 cannot have been fulfilled either." In other words, the basis for consideration of the completeness of any prophetic fulfillment has often become a literal fulfillment of the aspects of the promises, according to our understanding. If Israel is not in full possession of the Land, if the Temple has not been rebuilt, and if the Davidic King (Jesus) is not ruling from His throne in Jerusalem, there must remain a future aspect of prophetic fulfillment.

Is it possible that the hermeneutical difficulties of Old Testament prophecy are being viewed from the wrong perspective? Perhaps it would be better, and more biblically accurate, to turn the question around thus, "If the New Covenant promises of the Old Testament have not been completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ, what can possibly follow that would fulfill them?" Given the comprehensiveness of the work of Jesus Christ at His first advent, can any future work be imagined that would 'complete' what He has apparently left unfulfilled? It seems that the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy ought to be an *a priori* position for the New Testament exegete; that Christ's "*It is finished*" from the cross should be a powerful indication that our exegetical perspective ought to be completion-in-Christ. To be sure, it is not supposed that this perspective will answer all questions or provide a definitive and clear solution to the Israel conundrum; but it has the definite advantage of giving full weight and glory to the work of Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah.

Applied to the question of the relationship between the Church and Israel, this perspective begins the discussion from the position that the Church is the New Covenant community of God's People. It takes as given that Jesus Christ completed the

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inauguration of the New Covenant - *"This is the New Covenant in My blood..."* - and thus all that was promised regarding the New Covenant via the prophecies of the Old Covenant is *"Yes, and Amen, in Christ."* The New Covenant feature that most concerns this particular study is the Law, and the New Covenant promise that the Law will be written on the hearts of God's people. If this has not occurred through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit, it is hard to imagine - and impossible to defend biblically - any other mechanism by which this circumstance will come about.

That Jesus' first advent had to do with the Law - among other things, certainly - is evident from the Apostle Paul's words in Galatians 4:4-5, *"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, **born under the law**, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."* It was Jesus' own perspective of His ministry that He was sent not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it. This is why Paul can speak of Jesus Christ as *"the end of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes."* If,



**O. Palmer Robertson (1937 - )**

as He has indicated, Jesus fulfilled the Law by both His active obedience and His passive suffering, then the people gathered together in Him - the New Covenant People of God - will constitute a community that is *"no longer under law, but under grace."* To put it in a more historical way, the *ecclesia* of the Church is not called together at Sinai, as the *qahal* of Israel was, but rather at the Cross. O. Palmer Robertson writes, "[Jesus] is not, as some suppose, replacing Israel with the church. But he is reconstituting Israel in a way that makes it suitable for the ministry of the new covenant."<sup>23</sup>

Thus the role of Israel in God's redemptive plan and history must of necessity change when the purpose of her existence is finally fulfilled. All theories that posit a return to some form of Judaism as the 'religion' of God's People are a step backward on the redemptive continuum, which cannot be done without in some manner denigrating the finished work of Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ must be seen as a game-changer;

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<sup>23</sup> Robertson, O. Palmer *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing; 2000); 118.

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nothing can be afterward like it was before. This is the *discontinuity* component of the equation.

Furthermore, what Israel *was* as the People of God under the Old Covenant, the Church *now is* under the New. This is the *continuity* part of the equation. Two characteristics of the New Testament self-assessment of the Church - through the writings of the apostles and their legates - should be noted here. First, the members of the New Covenant *ecclesia* in no way considered themselves to be the founders of a new movement, a new 'thing' of God separate and distinct from the heritage they possessed as Israelites. The apostles leaned not upon their own understanding regarding what was taking place in their midst, but rather turned to the Scriptures to find the answer, "*This is what was spoken of by the prophet Joel...*" It is remarkable that some within the Dispensationalist view (known as Ultradispensationalists) mark the beginning of the New Testament Church with the apostle Paul; there is no way under heaven that Saul of Tarsus would have entirely abandoned the traditions of his people, a blinding light from heaven notwithstanding. Rather it should be carefully noted how tightly Paul, as well as the other writers of the New Testament, tie the life and doctrine of the Church to the revelation of God in the Old Testament. There is unbroken *continuity* in the redemptive plan and purpose of God.

But the second characteristic of the New Testament witness concerning the Church is that it is never confused or identified with Israel. True, many modern commentators view Paul's phrase in Galatians, "*the Israel of God,*" as an identification of the Church with Israel, but that in itself is just an interpretation that must be proven. The phrase could have other meanings, and based on the whole of Paul's thought concerning Israel and the Church, it is likely that there is another meaning to the phrase than that of identification of the two. For Paul, Israel consistently represents a physical nation or people who were the depository of God's grace through the Law, the prophets, the Levitical worship, etc. (*cp.* Romans 9). The people of the New Covenant are never said to *replace* Israel in the redemptive plan of God, but rather to be *joined* or *grafted in* to the ancient People of God. The classic passage in this regard is Ephesians 2,

*Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands – that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having*

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*no hope and without God in the world. **But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.** For He Himself is our peace, who has made **both one**, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as **to create in Himself one new man from the two**, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.* (Ephesians 2:11-18)

Thus we take as our summary position regarding the relationship of the Church to Israel, that the Church is not presented in Scripture as a new work of God, something entirely disconnected from His work in and through Israel. In addition, the work that God has completed in Christ Jesus is full and final, there can be no further work necessary or planned. The purpose of Israel has been fulfilled in Christ, particularly with respect to Israel being a 'nation under the law.' The law being completely fulfilled in Christ, the New Covenant inaugurated in Him, we now consider that the promise of the law being written upon the hearts of God's people is accomplished through the regeneration and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. There remains with regard to the Old Covenant People of God two other symbols of their being, the Land and the Temple, to consider. The Land must be viewed under the rubric of Eschatology; the Temple will be the subject of our next lesson.

**Week 3: Israel and the Church: The Temple**

**Key Biblical Texts:** Isaiah 56:6-7; Mark 11:15-17; John 2:13-21

*"It is, however, certainly more exact,  
not to fix the date of the beginning of the Christian Church  
Before the appearing of the historical Christ,  
Even while we feel the inner conviction of a higher unity,  
Which connects this Church with the people of the Old Covenant."  
(J. J. van Oosterzee, Christian Dogmatics)*

It takes a very strong influence to remove the sense of which van Oosterzee speaks in this quote – “the inner conviction of a higher unity” between the People of God of the New Covenant and those of the Old. Beyond the powerful evidence of Old Testament prophecy permeating the New Testament writings, there is the undeniable (at least within biblical orthodoxy) *unchangeableness* of the one true God, the Eternal Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. It would be an interesting study to attempt to trace the historical development of thought that led to the complete divorce of *discontinuity* between ‘the Church’ and ‘Israel’ as the two are revealed in the Bible. There would appear from such a study several strands of independent thought that combined to produce the currently-predominant strain of *discontinuity* under the broad heading of Dispensationalism. One thread would be that of a *literal hermeneutic* that, to be fair, was itself a reaction against an overly spiritualizing, or ‘demythologizing’ hermeneutic gaining ground in the Church. Another, and more insidious, strand would be that of *Anti-Semitism*, which has reared its head far too often within professing Christendom. This unrighteous blot upon the Church’s history was augmented in the earliest times by the increasing number of Gentile members and the decreasing proportion Jewish believers in the *visible* Christian Church.

In more recent history, additionally, we have the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948, fueling speculation concerning Old Testament prophecy and the Old Covenant People of God. This event, which undoubtedly factors as a manifestation of divine Providence, was widely seen as vindication of the literal hermeneutic that reserves all prophecy delivered to Old Testament Israel as being only and forever applicable to Israel as a physical, ethnic nation. For the past seventy years since its founding, however, the State of Israel (and of the world) has failed to live up to the expectation of the prophetic interpreters and prophecy conferences. Indeed, a new brand of Dispensationalism arose in

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the 1980s that has been called “Progressive Dispensationalism,” a name that is somewhat insulting to Traditional Dispensationalism.

The primary modification found among Progressives, is the admissions that there is a great deal more *continuity* between the Church and Israel than is allowed under the traditional Dispensational teaching. Darrell Bock, a leading ‘PD,’ argues that the strongest feature of Progressive Dispensationalism is in the way it handles the *Continuity/Discontinuity* divide better than either Traditional Dispensationalism or Covenantalism. “I think it (i.e., Progressive Dispensationalism) treats the continuity and discontinuity of God’s administrative arrangement across time



**Darrell Bock (1953 - )**

for his program most comprehensively. It maintains God’s grace and faithfulness in how it sees him deal with Israel. It stresses how reconciliation is a powerful witness for God and highlights the ethical dimensions of the teaching of the prophets, Jesus and the epistles most consistently.<sup>24</sup>

Robert Saucy, whose brand of Progressive Dispensationalism hewed closer to Traditional Dispensationalism than his ‘PD’ colleagues, still sees in the New Covenant a distinct *continuity* with the Old Covenant that traditionalists would not allow. Saucy writes in regard to Jesus’ words of institution of the Lord’s Supper, “*This is the new covenant in My blood,*”

In this statement Christ was telling the disciples that His death would effect the final eschatological promise of the new covenant for the remission of sins. The writer of Hebrews later expressly stated that with the death of Christ the covenant was in force...To be sure, Israel as a nation has not entered into the provisions of Jeremiah and therefore the specific national fulfillment of the covenant to the ‘house of Israel’ and the ‘house of Judah’ awaits their future conversion. But the ‘messenger of the covenant’ has come, and those who receive Him receive the salvation of the new covenant.<sup>25</sup>

It is not likely that Progressive Dispensationalists will become Covenantalists with the passing of time, as their Soteriology is generally Arminian and their Eschatology

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<sup>24</sup> “Progressive Dispensationalism: An Interview with Darrell Bock” <http://mydigitalseminary.com/progressive-dispensationalism-darrell-bock/>; accessed August 13, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Saucy, *The Church in God’s Program*; 80.

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distinctly Millenarian. But the theological movement is evidence of van Oosterzee's words: we just cannot get past the "inner conviction of a higher unity" between Israel and the Church. A large part of that unity has to do with the "messenger of the covenant" of which Saucy writes in the previous quote. The allusion is to the prophet Malachi, chapter 3, where we read:

*"Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me.  
And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple,  
Even **the Messenger of the covenant**, in whom you delight.  
Behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts.* (Malachi 3:1)

Saucy is correct to associate the coming of the Messenger of the Covenant with the advent of the New Covenant prophesied so fully in Jeremiah 31. These were exilic and post-exilic prophecies of restoration to Israel, and the New Covenant revelation developed into a central theme and hope for the faithful of Israel in those dark centuries. It is significant to our study concerning the origin of the Church to note just *where* the Messenger of the Covenant was to appear, He "*will suddenly come to His temple,*" and *who* it is that is coming, "*And the Lord, whom you seek...*" This was acknowledged as a messianic prophecy by the Jews, and held to be one by Christians. It is, of course, fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ and is of the same sense and context of prophecy as the words of Haggai, "*The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,*" says the LORD of hosts. "*And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts.*"<sup>26</sup>

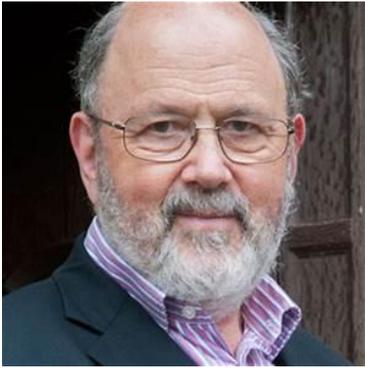
Prophecies such as these place the Temple at the center of the messianic promise and hope, which is exactly the position of the Temple in the time of Jesus. As in the days of Jeremiah, the Jews in Jesus' day – and afterward as the imminent destruction of Jerusalem approached – trusted in the presence of the Temple as their safeguard against catastrophe. As we will see later in this lesson, the Jewish historian Josephus, himself a former general in the Jewish rebellion against the Romans, warned the Jews of Jerusalem not to put their hopes in the Temple to save them from the repercussions of their rebellion. This position of the Temple should not surprise us, as the Tabernacle/Temple stood as one of the abiding symbols of Israelite identity as the People of God from the time of Moses to

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<sup>26</sup> Haggai 2:9

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the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, and even to the present time. N. T. Wright summarizes the place of the Temple in Judaism, “The Temple thus formed in principle the



**N. T. Wright (1948 - )**

heart of Judaism, in the full metaphorical sense: it was the organ from which there went out to the body of Judaism, in Palestine and in the Diaspora, the living and healing presence of the covenant god.”<sup>27</sup> This centrality of the Temple to the Jewish nation and religion means that any connection between Israel and the Church must somehow involve the Temple as it does the Torah. The ‘Messenger of

the Covenant’ is the same Christ who came into the Temple bearing a whip to cleanse it, an act that tied His ministry and mission directly to the house of His God.

*Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. Then He taught, saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’”*  
(Mark 11:15-17)

This is the same Jesus who established His Church upon the earth. The events are inseparably linked, and within that linkage is to be found a powerful indication of the *continuity* between the Old Covenant and the New, and between Israel and the Church. “The Temple was, in Jesus’ day, the central symbol of Judaism, the location of Israel’s most characteristic praxis, the topic of some of her most vital stories, the answer to her deepest questions, the subject of some of her most beautiful songs.”<sup>28</sup>

### **The Tabernacle and the Temple - Where God’s Name Dwells:**

Entire books have been written concerning the meaning and purpose of the tabernacle in the wilderness, its arrangement and its furnishings. There are two particular aspects of its divinely-ordained design that pertain to our topic here: first, that its arrangement and ornamentation was indicative of the entire cosmos – the created order of

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<sup>27</sup> Wright, N. T. *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 1992); 226.

<sup>28</sup> Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 1996); 406.

God – and a copy of heaven on earth. This is apparent by the Creation imagery of its embroidered work, and by the testimony of the author to the Hebrews,

*For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve **the copy and shadow of the heavenly things**, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, “See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.”*

(Hebrews 8:3-5)

The second pertinent characteristic of the tabernacle, as also with the later Temple, is that it was the place where God dwelt in glory amidst His people, even where He caused His Name to abide. This feature is evident in the *Shekinah* that descended upon the tabernacle at its consecration, and later upon Solomon’s Temple at its dedication. It is also evident in judgment, when the vision of the glory of the Lord departing the Temple is given to Ezekiel. This concept of the glory of the Lord in His Temple underlies the prophetic word from Haggai previously quoted, “*The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former,*” and ties together the Old and New Covenants in the Person of the Messenger, Jesus Christ. These two aspects come together in the configuration of the tabernacle: as one progressed from the outer courts, through the Holy Place, to the Holy of Holies, one progressed closer and closer to the throne of God Himself. In a manner of speaking, the tabernacle was the only ‘Way’ on earth by which man could come to God – at least under the Old Covenant. “The closer one came to the Temple, and, within the Temple, the closer one came to the Holy of Holies, the further one moved up a carefully graded scale of purity and its requirements.”<sup>29</sup>

The tabernacle in the wilderness and the Temple in Jerusalem were also, and not insignificantly, the places where divine worship was ordered and authorized. These places were not only where the God of Israel caused His Name to dwell in the midst of His people, they were also where His people drew near to their God in repentance and worship. The tabernacle/Temple complex cannot be separated from the Levitical priesthood, and the Aaronic high priest, nor can it be replaced by the synagogue. It is impossible to overstate the catastrophe that was the loss of the Temple to the people and

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<sup>29</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*; 407.

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religion of Israel, whether at the hands of the Babylonians or those of the Romans. More even than the loss of the land, the loss of the Temple was to Israel the severing of the relationship between the people and their God; it was the departure of the glory of Yahweh from their midst. Restoration was indeed promised, for the love of God is without end and His mercies are new every morning. Still, we must not allow the hope of restoration to diminish the horrendous loss of identity the loss of the Temple entailed upon Israel. "The Temple remains the central point of the national hope, the governing eschatology, as well as of the national life and identity; and at the heart of the Temple's existence and significance there stood the sacrificial system."<sup>30</sup> Thus any word spoken – or perceived to be spoken – against the Temple, whether by the prophet Jeremiah or the Galilean rabbi Jesus, was very apt to be understood as an attack upon the very life of the Israelite nation, the very soul of her being.

But Israel had already suffered the loss of the Temple in the days of Jeremiah, and had survived and been restored to the land and to at least some form of a Second Temple. It is remarkable that the Jews of the Second Temple era put such intense hope and expectation in the Temple, just as their forefathers had done six hundred years before. Jeremiah prophesied that the presence of the Temple in the midst of Jerusalem would not save either the city or its inhabitants.

*The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the LORD!' " Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.'*

(Jeremiah 7:1-4)

The Lord goes on to remind the people of Judah in the days of Jeremiah, to consider the fate of their northern brethren of Ephraim, in the land of Shiloh where the tabernacle once stood when the tribes of Israel had first entered the land. Did the memory of the tabernacle save the Northern Kingdom of Israel?

*But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel. And now, because you have done all these works,"*

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<sup>30</sup> Wright *Jesus and the Victory of God*; 411.

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*says the LORD, "and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you, but you did not answer, therefore I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to this place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brethren – the whole posterity of Ephraim.* (Jeremiah 7:12-15)

These dire predictions of judgment, permeating the prophecy of Jeremiah, have come to be known as 'jeremiads,' a term used to describe any prediction of utter ruin, especially among a people earnestly expecting a different outcome founded upon false hopes. Many scholars have correctly recognized the pervasive role of the 'jeremiad' in the preaching of Jesus. It is a brief but comprehensive summary of Jesus' word to the Jews of His day, and especially to Jerusalem and to the Temple precincts and leadership, when He said that *"no stone will be left upon another."* Nowhere is this spirit of Jeremiah more evident than in the 'woes' that Jesus levels against the leaders of Judaism and Jerusalem in Matthew 23, followed by a stirring jeremiad,

*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'*

(Matthew 23:37-39)

It is common to interpret 'your house' to be a general term for the whole city, but probably more accurate to see in this phrase a strong reference to the Temple, which was supremely Jerusalem's 'house.' Speaking of Jerusalem, Wright comments, "It was not so much a city with a temple in it; more like a temple with a small city round it."<sup>31</sup> Jesus did not put the same stock in the presence of Herod's Temple as did the Pharisees and Sadducees of His day, and in that was more akin to the Essenes who had utterly rejected the Temple as defiled and unholy. This sect would have applauded Jesus' jeremiads against the Temple and its rulers.

The Essenes, who regarded the Hasmonean high-priestly dynasty as usurpers, refused to take part in the cult, believing that their own community was the god-given substitute, and that in due time, when YHWH acted, a new Temple would be built.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Wright, *The New Testament*; 225.

<sup>32</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*; 411-412.-

Destruction of the Temple was perhaps the paramount manifestation of divine displeasure with Israel, as it severed the critical link between God and His People both in terms of atoning sacrifice and worship. When the Temple was again destroyed in AD 70, the religious leaders of Judaism – especially those of the rabbinic school of Hillel – attempted to substitute study of Torah, at least to some extent, in place of sacrifice at the Temple.

The sanctity and supreme importance of Torah...can hardly be exaggerated. Those who kept it with rigour were, in some ways though not all, as if they were priests in the Temple. Not that the Pharisees, until the destruction actually happened, ever imagined a Judaism without Temple and Land altogether. In the Diaspora they still looked to Jerusalem; after the destruction...many of them yearned and agonized for the Temple to be rebuilt. But Torah provided, in both cases, a second-best substitute which, in long years without the reality, came to assume all its attributes...In the presence of Torah one was in the presence of the covenant god.<sup>33</sup>

All this to say that the Temple was of vital importance to the People of God under the Old Covenant, and its loss was catastrophic. But its loss was exactly what was both prophesied under the Old Covenant, and predicted by Jesus frequently during His earthly ministry. What impact does this impending judgment have upon the transition between the Old Covenant and the New? And what bearing upon the Church in its relation to Israel – the People of the New Covenant to those of the Old? The answer to these questions lies at the heart of modern eschatological debate concerning the *future* place of Israel in God's purpose, and the *future* rebuilding of a physical Temple in Jerusalem.

As to the physicality of the Second Temple there are two interesting points to be made (well, hopefully they're interesting). The first is that, at first, the building was a far cry from Solomon's glorious structure.

*In the seventh month, on the twenty-first of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying: "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, saying: 'Who is left among you who saw this <sup>the</sup> temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing?' (Haggai 2:2-3)*

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<sup>33</sup> Wright, *The New Testament*, 228-229.

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The second point is that the renovations made to this impoverished Temple by Herod the Great were largely rejected by the Jews, or at best accepted very grudgingly. Herod's Temple was a grand and beautiful structure, astonishing those, like Jesus' disciples, who marveled at the structure. Still, it could not be the true rebuilt Temple, for Herod was by no means a king in the lineage of David; he was not even a full Jew. Thus Herod's Temple could never pass muster with the nation as a whole, and therefore the building of which Jesus said, "*Tear it down...*" was even at that time not the Temple of memory, the Temple of Solomon. This does not diminish the centrality of the Temple in the life of the Jewish nation, though it helps us to understand why even many Jews were not anxious for its rebuilding after AD 70, knowing as they did that any attempt to rebuild it would bring down the wrath of Rome once again. Yet the presence of any Temple in Jerusalem – whether the meager structure of Zerubbabel's day or the glorious one of Herod's – enabled the people to consider themselves under the watchful eye of a faithful covenant God, and thereby to be safe and whole.

### **Jesus and the Temple – Mark 11 & John 2**

For Jesus, the jeremiad of all jeremiads was the incident – or incidences – in which He entered the Temple and scourged the moneylenders and those who were carrying burdens through the precincts. This event is recorded in several places, and their locations indicate either a thematic composition by the individual authors or the possibility that Jesus did this twice. For instance, Mark places the event toward the end of Jesus' ministry while John inserts it very early.

*So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"* (Mark 11:15-17)

*Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers <sup>ἔ</sup>doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves,*

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*"Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."*

(John 2:13-17)

This incident is most often referred to as 'Jesus cleansing the Temple,' and as to the outward actions this is indeed what He appears to be doing. However, when we consider the Old Testament references He quotes, and then the continued dialogue recorded in John's gospel, the characteristic of 'cleansing' gives way to that of 'judgment.' The central element in each passage is a quote from the passage in Jeremiah 7 mentioned earlier, in which the Temple in Jerusalem was prophesied to have the same immanent fate as did the tabernacle in Shiloh – judgment and destruction.

*Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," says the LORD.*

(Jeremiah 7:11)

This reference thus qualifies Jesus' words as another jeremiad against the religious establishment of Israel, and one now aimed at the very heart and soul of Judaism: the Temple. Significantly, however, Jesus weaves in another portion of Scripture that is far more hopeful, from Isaiah 56. This passage speaks again of the Temple as a 'house of prayer,' but now in reference to the Gentiles.

*Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him,  
And to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants –  
Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant –  
Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in **My house of prayer.***

*Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar;  
For **My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.**" The Lord GOD, who gathers  
the outcasts of Israel, says, "Yet I will gather to him others besides those who are gathered to him."*

(Isaiah 56:6-8)

Jeremiah speaks of destruction; Isaiah of restoration, hope, and the inclusion of the Gentiles among the worshippers of God. Interpretation of these two strands of prophetic thought is somewhat complicated by the fact that Isaiah was much earlier than Jeremiah; it might be theorized (incorrectly) that Israel's continuation in sin and rebellion caused the Lord to change His mind with regard to the hope, and to settle in Jeremiah's day upon judgment only. Fortunately we have further prophetic word through Ezekiel, whose time

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was late-contemporary with Jeremiah, and who prophesied after the Babylonian destruction of Solomon's Temple. Ezekiel was early given a vision of the glory of the LORD departing from the Temple (Ezekiel 10), but near the end of his prophetic book received a comforting vision of restoration.

*Afterward he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory. It was like the appearance of the vision which I saw – like the vision which I saw when I came to destroy the city. The visions were like the vision which I saw by the River Chebar; and I fell on my face. And the glory of the LORD came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, **the glory of the LORD filled the temple.*** (Ezekiel 43:1-5)

It should be noted that the word translated 'temple' in this passage (NKJV) is *h<sup>a</sup>bait*, or 'house,' and not 'temple,' tying the reference in with Jeremiah's "house of prayer," Isaiah's "house of prayer for all nations," and even Jesus' "your house shall be left for you desolate." The concept of dwelling-place is essential to the definition of a temple, and more particularly the dwelling-place of YHWH in the case of Israel.

The last phrase of the quote from Ezekiel 43, "*the glory of the LORD filled the temple,*" is of paramount importance to our discussion, as it is the promise of the same presence as was experienced when the tabernacle was consecrated and when Solomon's Temple was dedicated. What is noteworthy about this phrase – besides its connection with Moses' tabernacle and Solomon's temple – is that this event never took place (at least not as recorded) for the structure that was rebuilt in the days of Zerubbabel and embellished in the days of Herod. The historical reality is that the second temple – of which it is generally assumed Ezekiel speaks – never experienced the coming of the glory of the LORD into its walls. Indeed, work continued on Herod's Temple long after that king had died and had been in progress for forty-six years by the time of Jesus. It was not dedicated until AD 63, just seven years before it was destroyed by Titus' legions.

The situation here is a challenge for the literalist hermeneutic. We have a prophecy of the presence of the glory of the LORD coming to a rebuilt temple, but a history of such a temple being rebuilt without ever having received the *Shekinah* bestowed upon the tabernacle and the First Temple. Dispensational eschatology puts the prophecy of Ezekiel

43 out into the future millennium, and into a rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem during that time. But this presents the insurmountable problem of a Temple in Jerusalem that was never – or so it seems – inhabited by Israel’s God; the Second Temple to which Jesus, the Messenger of the Covenant, came. That is, unless the prophecy of Ezekiel 43 does not speak of a physical building at all.

One thing is fairly certain; that is, we cannot completely discount the Second Temple as being of no validity at all. This was the building spoken of in the prophecies of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, all prophets of the return era from Babylon. The LORD’s promise through Haggai cannot be ignored in its immediate reference to the physical structure being erected by the returned exiles.

*For thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘And in this place I will give peace,’ says the LORD of hosts.”*

(Haggai 2:6-9)

There should be no question among believers as to the identity of the “*Desire of All Nations*,” – Jesus Christ. But this title of the Messiah should also be referenced to the prophecy of Isaiah, that the LORD promised to make His house a “*house of prayer for all nations*.” This house/temple, filled with the glory of the LORD, is beginning to look less like a physical structure than it is a “*spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*.”<sup>34</sup> This ‘spiritual house’ of which Peter speaks is, of course, the Church, its members being the ‘living stone’ that are the precious building blocks of this divine house.

But this is to jump to a conclusion before all of the biblical data has been analyzed. It remains to be seen the meaning of Jesus’ actions in the Temple, and what significance was made of these actions by His apostles. Lord-willing, we will do this in our next lesson.

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<sup>34</sup> I Peter 2:5

**Week 4: Israel and the Church: The Temple, Part 2**

**Key Biblical Texts:** Mark 2:19-22; Matthew 9:15-16; Luke 5:34-36

*“All of the language describing the church in the New Testament is either directly drawn from or is compatible with the genre of covenant promise and the Messianic kingdom.”  
(Craig Blaising, Progressive Dispensationalism)*

In the debate concerning the *continuity* versus *discontinuity* of the divine redemptive plan, the burden of proof is upon those who advocate *continuity*. This is not, of course, because God changes His mind and His eternal purpose, but rather that in the midst of the unfolding of redemptive history – the *fullness of time*, as Paul refers to it – there happened an event that cannot be treated as anything but momentous and decisive: the first advent of Christ. Modern theologians refer to this as the ‘Christ Event,’ and include in that phrase everything from the Incarnation to the Resurrection and Ascension of our Lord. It is indeed an error to divide up redemptive history into hermetically-sealed time compartments, and to posit a different form of salvation for each ‘dispensation.’ One can only hope that this error will eventually pass into oblivion as have so many others in the history of the true religion. The subtler error, however, is that which advocates such a continuous progression of redemptive history that the Christ Event becomes little more than a speed bump.

The first advent of Christ introduced a transitional period between the Old Covenant and the New, wherein the promises made under the Old were fulfilled in the establishment of the New. We may consider in the broadest terms, that the history of redemption consists of four markers, so to speak:

*Introduction*  
Genesis 3:15

*Culmination...Inauguration*  
Galatians 4:4...Matthew 28:18

*Consummation*  
I Corinthians 15:28

*Abraham/Israel*

*Jesus Christ →*

*The Church*

*The Kingdom  
God the Father →*

At the center of this stylized chronology is the Person and Work of Jesus Christ – the ‘Christ Event’ of the Incarnation, Life & Ministry, Death & Resurrection, and Ascension of the Lord, Israel’s Messiah and the Redeemer of the world. A large part of the

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answer to the *Continuity/Discontinuity* debate is to be found in the twofold aspect of Jesus' finished work on earth – *Culmination* and *Inauguration*. This perspective also sheds a great deal of light on the relationship between the Church under the New Covenant and Israel under the Old Covenant, for the culmination of the latter became the foundation of the former. It is an undeniable characteristic of the New Testament writers that they spoke of



**Craig Blaising (1949 - )**

the meaning of Christ's Church entirely in terms of Old Testament promises and prophecies. As Craig Blaising puts it, "All of the language describing the church in the New Testament is either directly drawn from or is compatible with the genre of covenant promise and the Messianic kingdom." This being the case, it stands to reason that Jesus' attitude toward the Old Cove-

nant People of God, and the symbols that were so central to their identity, will be indicative of the proper interpretation of the relationship between the Church and Israel. This is certainly the case with regard to the Temple, about which Jesus was anything but apathetic or ambivalent.

Jesus saw Himself as the center-point of God's work in Israel. He also fully recognized that what He was sent to do was remarkable and transitional – it was *new* not in the sense of a brand new redemptive plan of God, but rather in the sense that the old forms could no longer contain it. This is the meaning of Jesus' words regarding new wine and old wineskins.

*The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then they came and said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins."*

(Mark 2:19-22; cp Matthew 9:15-16; Luke 5:36-38)

It is hopefully obvious that Jesus is not abolishing fasting – He specifically states that His disciples will fast when He is no longer with them. The key to His response to this Pharisaic complaint is that He represents something *new* – *a new garment...new wine* –

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that the old forms and containers can no longer hold. Thus not only does Jesus attest that the work He was doing was something new, but also that the form in which that work would be placed would not be like the old forms; indeed, it could not be like the old forms as they were incompetent to handle the newness of His work. The old forms would rip at the seams or burst, and the new work would be ruined. This speaks of transition and of the central significance of the Christ Event.

But in terms of the Temple itself, no passage is more powerful in transition than the interview between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, recorded in John 4.

*The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, **the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.** You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. **But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth;** for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."*

(John 4:19-24)

In order to maintain a tie to the religion of their ancestors, the half-breed Samaritans built a temple on Mt. Gerizim, the place where God commanded Moses to "*put the blessing*" opposite the curse of Mt. Ebal.<sup>35</sup> Thus the Samaritan Temple had connections to the Old Covenant, though it was not on that account a valid place of worship to YHWH. This temple was destroyed by the Hasmonean king and high priest, John Hyrcanus, around 110 BC, but many Samaritans



John Hyrcanus (d. 104 BC)

clung to the traditional worship of their people. All this to say that one might well have expected Jesus to categorically deny any place to Gerizim, while affirming the rightful place of Jerusalem. This He does, sort of. He calls the woman, and her people, ignorant of true worship, for *salvation is of the Jews*, but then He goes on to deny a place *either* to Gerizim *or* to Jerusalem. In terms of transition between the ages, Jesus speaks in His common idiom, "*An hour is coming...and now is*" to indicate that the place of true worship has been forever altered. "But Jesus does not say that God can be worshipped *either* in Gerizim *or* in Jerusalem. He says the opposite: *neither* this mountain *nor* Jerusalem...What

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Jesus declared to the woman was not temple-less worship; it was worship at the true Temple, pitched by God not man."<sup>36</sup>

Our consideration of the Christ Event in its relationship to the Church, and consequently the relationship of the Church to Israel, must take on the characteristic of Jesus' own speech – a time of transition, a new work being done, new forms and vessels, and even a new place of worship. Our thinking must be as the scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom:

*Then He said to them, "Therefore every scribe instructed & concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old."*

(Matthew 13:52)

### Jesus and the Temple

Jesus' attitude toward the Temple is not as clear cut as we might at first expect. As a child we find Him in the Temple, "*sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions.*" When challenged by Joseph and Mary as to why He had not returned with them in the caravan, Jesus responded, "*Why is it that were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?*"<sup>37</sup> Later, though still early in His ministry, after Jesus' most aggressive act toward the Temple, His disciples remembered the prophecy of the psalmist, "*Zeal for Thy house has consumed Me.*"<sup>38</sup> 'Thy house' and 'My Father's house' both unite Jesus intimately with the Temple as the place of His Father's abode and where He would naturally be found himself. There is no animosity here, only devotion. From this we may conclude, as most scholars have, that Jesus was not an Essene – He did not advocate abandonment of the Temple as the place of worship, in spite of its deep flaws and corruption.

But Jesus' relationship to the Temple was also characterized by righteous indignation: His Father's house had indeed been corrupted by false worship and a political Judaism that was inimical to the true faith. The high priests were of the family of the Hasmoneans, not Aaronic and Levitical priests according to the law. The sacrifices had

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<sup>35</sup> Deuteronomy 11:29

<sup>36</sup> Clowney, *The Church*; 45.

<sup>37</sup> Luke 2:46-49

<sup>38</sup> John 2:17, quoting Psalm 69:9

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become merchandise and a means by which the ruling class was profiting off the worshipping public, a situation very much like that of Israel just prior to the Babylonian Exile. The Temple in Jesus' day was as much a scene of apostasy as it was in Jeremiah's, and thus the Son in coming to His Father's Temple could not be anything but sorely displeased. Thus we read in each of the four gospels the account of Jesus 'cleansing' the Temple. The Synoptic accounts are most similar, with John's record of the event located in a different setting and probably reflecting a different situation in which Jesus acted out the same prophetic scene.

*Then Jesus went into the temple <sup>[d]</sup>of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"*  
(Matthew 21:12-13)

*So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"*  
(Mark 11:15-17)

*Then He went into the temple and began to drive out those who <sup>[u]</sup>bought and sold in it, saying to them, "It is written, 'My house <sup>[i]</sup>is a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"*  
(Luke 19:45-46)

*Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house <sup>[e]</sup>has eaten Me up."*  
(John 2:13-17)

As mentioned above, these events are most frequently termed 'cleansings' both in our English Bible headings and in commentaries and sermons. But was Jesus cleansing the Temple, or was He pronouncing judgment upon it? As we saw in the previous lesson, the terminology Jesus uses is drawn from Jeremiah 7, in which Solomon's Temple is destined to be destroyed and Jerusalem to become like Shiloh, where the tabernacle once stood. In other words, the terms Jesus uses are terms of *judgment* and not of *cleansing*. "The fact that

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Jesus effected only a brief cessation of sacrifice fits perfectly with the idea of a symbolic action. He was not attempting reform; he was symbolizing judgment.”<sup>39</sup> This is most apparent in John’s record of the event, in which Jesus explicitly challenges the Jewish religious leaders to “*tear down this Temple,*” promising to rebuild it in three days. Furthermore, that Jesus was not viewed merely as a reformer – a fairly common rabbinic trait in Second Temple Israel – is apparent in the false testimony that was borne against Him at His trial, “*This man stated, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.’*”<sup>40</sup> The falseness of this testimony was that Jesus had not said that He would destroy the Temple, but rather – using an imperative verb – challenged the Jewish leaders to do so, which they were in the process of doing in any event. The event of the Temple, recorded in some form in all four gospels, is a window into the mind of the Messiah concerning the Temple, its present state and its future.

The Synoptic gospels place the ‘cleansing’ of the Temple after the Triumphal Entry, with John’s account coming much earlier in Jesus’ ministry. All four gospel writers place the event at the Passover, so it is possible that John’s location of the narrative in his gospel record reflects a connection between the prologue of his book, in which he writes that the *Logos* of God, Jesus Christ, *tabernacled among us* (1:14). It is also possible that the event occurred more than once in Jesus’ ministry and, if so, would most likely occur during one of the annual feasts. What is important is the content of the narratives, which are in agreement as to what it was that Jesus did, and what it was that He said. All four are consistent in reference to the Temple being Jesus’ “*Father’s house,*” and that the current religious regime in Jerusalem had thoroughly defiled its precincts.

A significant characteristic of the Synoptic tradition of the event it is proximity to the Triumphal Entry, which was itself a self-conscious fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9-10,

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
Behold, your King is coming to you;  
He is just and having salvation,  
Lowly and riding on a donkey,  
A colt, the foal of a donkey.*

*I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim  
And the horse from Jerusalem;  
The battle bow shall be cut off.  
He shall speak peace to the nations;  
His dominion shall be ‘from sea to sea,  
And from the River to the ends of the earth.’*

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<sup>39</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*; 423.

<sup>40</sup> Matthew 26:61; cp 14:58

The coming of the Davidic King is proclaimed by the people as they shout 'Hosanna' to Jesus while He enters the city. What He then does in the city is to be read in terms of His self-identification with Israel's king – not, to be sure, in keeping with the *expectations* of Israel in regard to her promised king, but rather in terms of *prophecy*. And all that Jesus said and did with regard to Jerusalem, and especially with regard to the Temple, spoke judgment upon the nation and its religious establishment. "Virtually all the traditions, inside and outside the canonical gospels, which speak of Jesus and the Temple speak of its destruction."<sup>41</sup> This self-identification was not lost on the religious leadership, who promptly asked Jesus "*by what authority do You do these things?*" Jesus, knowing their hearts, knew that they would not believe Him if given the answer, so He places the onus back on the religious leaders by asking them the source of John's prophetic authority. But the question posed to Jesus indicates that what Jesus was doing was seen to be Messianic and Royal – the entrance to the city as fulfillment of Zechariah, and the 'cleansing' of the Temple being a strictly Davidic royal function.

This is most evident when one considers the nested parables in which form we find the Temple narrative in Matthew and Mark's accounts. In these two gospels the 'cleansing' of the Temple is associated with the cursing of the barren fig tree and it has often been a hermeneutical difficulty understanding the two events as they are side-by-side. They are indeed associated, and both are judgment parables.

As with the more famous prophets under the Old Covenant, Jesus presents His prophecy concerning the Temple in two *acted* prophecies or parables: the driving out of the money-changers from the Temple and the cursing of the unfruitful fig tree. These are not separate and independent scenes, but rather "The fig tree action is...an acted parable of an acted parable."<sup>42</sup> The two events, taken together, pronounce unequivocal judgment on Israel – the fig tree representing the nation itself, and the Temple its heart. These two acted parables or prophecies are themselves set within the last Passover week, in which Jesus delivers His Olivet Discourse, as well as His lament over Jerusalem, promising that her house would be left to her desolate. Israel failed to acknowledge the time of her

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<sup>41</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*; 416.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*; 421.

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visitation – itself an allusion to Malachi 3:1. Yet even that prophecy should have warned the Jews that the coming of the Messenger of the Covenant would not be such a day as they anticipated, full of triumph and glory over the oppressing Romans.

*But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears?  
For He is like a refiner's fire and like launderers' soap.  
He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver;  
He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver,  
That they may offer to the LORD an offering of righteousness.* (Malachi 3:2-3)

This weaving of Old Testament prophecy and Jesus' own actions and words leaves no doubt as to the fate of Jerusalem and the Temple: judgment and destruction. The Dispensationalist posits a counter-factual history: what would have happened had Israel received her Messiah? But the biblical prophecy does not allow for such a 'What If' scenario. Israel's stubbornness had deepened in the generations since the return from the Babylonian Exile, and her religious establishment was farther in their hearts from God than their forefathers were in the days of Isaiah, "*This people worships Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me.*"<sup>43</sup> When we see the connection of Jesus' actions with the prophecies of Zechariah, Jeremiah, and Isaiah, it follows that the Temple event recorded in the Synoptic gospels was indeed a prophecy of judgment, and not merely an act of reformation or cleansing.

I conclude that Jesus' action in the Temple was intended as a dramatic symbol of its imminent destruction; that this is supported by the implicit context of Zechariah's prophecy, and the quotations from Isaiah and Jeremiah; and that Jesus' specific actions of overturning tables, forbidding the use of the Temple as a short-cut, and the cursing of the fig tree, were likewise all designed as prophetic and eschatological symbolism, indicating both the arrival of the kingdom and the doom of the city and Temple that refused it.<sup>44</sup>

Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple had occurred before, so it may have been that Jesus' words were simply in keeping with the jeremiads delivered by the prophets throughout Israel's history. If only for the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke we might wonder if there were any additional significance to Jesus' words and actions, and even to the eventual destruction of the Temple just as He had predicted. It is in John's account

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<sup>43</sup> Isaiah 29:13

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that we read of the messianic claim that would also be used in false witness against Jesus at His trial, *"Tear down this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* This saying indicates that, in Jesus' mind at least, the imminent destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem was more than just another divine judgment upon Israel in which the Temple is lost and the people are exiled. This saying must have been on Jesus' lips somewhat frequently for it to have been singled out by the false witnesses at His trial, and latched onto by the religious leadership as tantamount to treason. In any event, His association of the Temple with His body leads in a very different direction than the prophets who went before Him. They acted out prophecies as He did; but they never so identified with the Temple as to link it to their own bodies.

On the surface Jesus' reference to His body must be to His resurrected body, raised after three days in the tomb. We are told as much in John's account, though we must exercise caution whenever we read about the body of Christ, as to whether its interpretation is literal or spiritual. Even with a literal, physical interpretation we may not have exhausted the fulness of the phrase, *"I will raise it up in three days."* Yet the reference to His body must mean that the Lord did not look forward to a physical, brick & mortar rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem; the 'rebuilt' Temple would be His body. Tying this together with Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman, we may reasonably conclude that it is this 'temple' to which all men will come in order to worship the Father *"in spirit and in truth."* Saucy writes, *"The time predicted by Jesus to the woman of Samaria had come, 'when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet in Jerusalem, worship the Father.' The old order with its temple sacrifice had passed away, being fulfilled at Calvary. The new order had come with a new temple composed of 'living stones,' the church."*<sup>45</sup>

### **Will There Be Another Temple?**

On the basis of Israel's rejection, by and large, of her Messiah, Dispensationalism has theorized a restoration of God's dealings with Israel during the Millennium, during which time the Temple will once more stand in Jerusalem. It has already been noted in a previous lesson that such a redemptive scheme of events places one entire temple out of

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<sup>44</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*; 424.

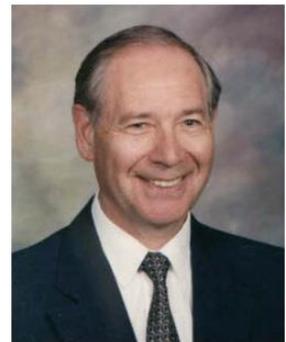
<sup>45</sup> Saucy; 37

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the picture – the same temple to which the Messenger of the Covenant was to, and did, come. But to look at the issue in another light: if Jesus' actions and words in the Temple are correctly interpreted as not only predicting the imminent destruction of the physical Temple in Jerusalem, but also the rebuilding of the true temple of His body, then what place can there be in God's redemptive plan for another physical building? To be sure, if it can be established that God *will* rebuild the physical temple in Jerusalem, then our ability or inability to figure out why is irrelevant. Therefore, from a biblical prophetic point of view, we have a twofold task in determining if indeed there will be a third temple, in the brick & mortar sense, that is.

The first is to revisit the prophecies of Ezekiel and Haggai concerning the temple that was built upon the return of the exiles from Babylon, to determine if these prophecies were, in fact, fulfilled in the time of Christ. If fulfilled, then there is no reasonable basis for expecting them to be fulfilled again. If the purpose of the Temple has been realized, then any rebuilding of a physical temple would be a step backward on the redemptive timeline.

The second task is to determine whether the New Testament itself predicts the rebuilding of a physical temple in Jerusalem, or rather does it uniformly see the true temple of God as the body of Christ, metaphorically-speaking, the Church. The expectations of the early believers, and especially those men who were moved by the Holy Spirit to write the New Testament books and letters, should be normative in our own expectations concerning God and His Temple, notwithstanding any eschatological system we have developed or been influenced by. The process of these two steps is simply making the same transition between the Old and New Covenants that we find in the Bible, rather than either staying behind in the Old or pushing the New off into the distant future. If it is evident that the Old Covenant Temple has fulfilled its purpose, and that no physical rebuilding of a temple is predicted in the New Testament, then Hans LaRondelle must be



**Hans LaRondelle (1929-2011)**

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correct in concluding, “There can never be a valid return to the old covenant and its earthly temple worship. Christ has terminated the ‘shadow’ and inaugurated a ‘better covenant’ that offers His righteousness as the everlasting righteousness.”<sup>46</sup>

To answer the first question, then, we return briefly to the prophecy of Haggai that “*the latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former.*” It is clear from the context that the ‘former’ represents Solomon’s Temple, upon which the *Shekinah* descended during its dedication. The usage of the term ‘latter,’ along with the situation in which the Haggaiian prophecy is given – the returned exiles were discouraged over the condition of their poor reconstruction in comparison to Solomon’s grand edifice – strongly indicates that the expectation of greater glory is in the somewhat distant future.

*For thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘And in this place I will give peace,’ says the LORD of hosts.’ (Haggai 2:6-9)<sup>47</sup>*

As we have seen before, this prophecy is of a piece with the promise of the Messenger of the Covenant found in Malachi 3, another post-exilic and messianic prediction. The *Desire of all Nations* and the *Messenger of the Covenant* is the same Lord whom you seek, who will come to His temple. In other words, the promised glory in Haggai 2 is to come to the temple then being built and later refurbished by Herod the Great. Did this glory ever come?

We answer by asking a second question, “Did the Messenger of the Covenant, the Lord whom the faithful of Israel sought, come to His temple?” All acknowledge that He did, though the Dispensationalist maintains that the promised glory was withheld because Israel rejected her Messiah when He came. This is an unwarranted division of the prophecy, for the ‘latter glory’ was not made conditional on Israel’s obedience. Indeed, Israel’s obedience was made contingent upon the Lord’s coming, “*Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord, as in the days of old and in former years.*”<sup>48</sup> The ‘latter

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<sup>46</sup> LaRondelle, Hans K. *The Israel of God in Prophecy* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press; 1983); 177.

<sup>47</sup> The parenthetical phrase, *it is a little while*, is intended to stimulate expectation rather than to predict a definite period of time, whether long or short.

<sup>48</sup> Malachi 3:4

glory' was promised for the temple rebuilt by the returned exiles, and it was to this temple that the Lord, the Messenger of the Covenant, did come. Therefore we must look for the 'latter glory' in terms of the Temple to which Jesus came, and not to a temple far off in the future.

It has already been noted that there is no biblical record of the *Shekinah* descending upon Herod's Temple. Given his character, and the apostate nature of the religious leadership of Israel in Jesus' day, it is unlikely that the glory of the Lord would descend upon that structure. But if we allow the shift from the shadow to the light, and from the earthly copy to the heavenly reality, then the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples on Pentecost must be the 'latter glory' of which Haggai's prophecy speaks. Considering the audience that witnessed this event, it is considered by most scholars that the disciples were indeed within the Temple precincts when "*there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.*"<sup>49</sup> "Consequently, the building of the true temple of god on earth has not been halted or postponed, but was rather advanced and accelerated since Pentecost by the risen Christ himself."<sup>50</sup>

This is exactly how the Church is viewed by the Apostle Paul, who writes in terms of 'temple' that cannot be passed off as mere metaphor. In I Corinthians he speaks both in terms of the church collective and of individual believers, and in each case his terminology is indicative and not figurative. Speaking of the ministry of 'builders' such as Apollos, Cephas, and Paul himself, he writes,

*For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building... Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.*

(I Corinthians 3:9; 16-17)

And of individual believers,

*Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*

(I Corinthians 6:18-20)

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<sup>49</sup> Acts 2:3

<sup>50</sup> LaRondelle; 73.

The logic here is simple: where God dwells, there is His Temple. Paul asserts that God now dwells individual believers as well as the gathered Church, through the Holy Spirit whom He has caused to dwell in and among believers. “The ‘temple’ itself is constituted as a temple by being ‘a dwelling of God in the Spirit.’”<sup>51</sup> This concept is developed fully in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians,

*Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into **a holy temple in the Lord**, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.* (Ephesians 2:19-22)

This is, of course, just Paul’s version of what we have already seen from Peter,

*Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* (I Peter 2:4-5)

In addition to the testimonies of Paul and Peter, we have also the overall thrust of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in which book we find all aspects of Old Covenant Judaism compared to the finished work of Jesus Christ. The conclusion is consistent throughout: that which Jesus has done is *better* – a better covenant, a better high priest, a better mediator, etc. What is pertinent to our study is how the author of Hebrews seems to center his entire discussion on the greatness of Jesus around the Temple/tabernacle complex and its associated ministry. For instance, in his comparison between Moses and Jesus, the author speaks of the ‘house’ that Jesus is building,

*For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.* (Hebrews 3:3-6)

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<sup>51</sup> Blaising, Craig A. and Darrell L. Bock *Progressive Dispensationalism* (BridgePoint Book; 1993); 260.

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The frequent allusions to the high priest and the Levitical ministry, of course, place us firmly within the tabernacle/Temple complex as we read the letter to the Hebrews, but often the author writes more explicitly about the 'true sanctuary' and the 'true tabernacle,' indicating that the work of Jesus Christ, the great High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, has inaugurated a new order of 'temple.'

*Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary and of **the true tabernacle** which the Lord erected, and not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve **the copy and shadow of the heavenly things**, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.* (Hebrews 8:1-6)

In Hebrews 9 the author provides a primer on tabernacle ministry, in order to show the transitory nature of that institution as opposed to the completed ministry of Jesus Christ, who inaugurated "a more perfect tabernacle."

*Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience... But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with **the greater and more perfect tabernacle** not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.* (Hebrews 9:6-11)

Wright comments on Jesus' self-awareness of being in himself what the Temple signified, "...part of the point of the kingdom he was claiming to inaugurate would be that it would bring with it all that the Temple offered, thereby replacing, and making redundant, Israel's greatest symbol."<sup>52</sup> Thus the author of Hebrews reaches the climax of his argument in this same chapter, and indicates very strongly that the finished work of Jesus Christ is determinative for the then-standing Temple, showing that the current

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priestly ministry can no longer have meaning or effect once Christ had come and mediated the new covenant in His blood.

*Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.* (Hebrews 9:23-24)

All of these New Testament passages, taken together, point unmistakably to a new Temple wholly different from the brick & mortar building in Jerusalem, whether Solomon's or Herod's. The symbolic meaning of a physical building in Jerusalem was superseded by the reality of the Risen Lord who had entered into the true sanctuary and now *"ever lives to make intercession for us."* As a building, the Temple factors very little in the writings of the New Testament (really, not at all). As a concept, its meaning had been completely transferred to Jesus because it had been fulfilled in Jesus. "Finally, instead of the Temple, the geographical and theological centre of Judaism, the early Christian spoke of Jesus as the one who had embodied the living presence of the creator god, and of his own spirit as the one who continued to make that god present in the lives and assemblies of the early church."<sup>53</sup>

The second question regarding another physical Temple is whether the New Testament anywhere predicts that one will be built. The emphasis among the New Testament writings is so powerfully toward the Church as the temple, and toward believers as 'living stones' being built into the spiritual habitation of God, that any expectation of a future, brick & mortar Temple must rest on clear biblical prophecy – clear in what the passage says, and clear that the fulfillment of the passage is not exhausted in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. Any expectation of a physical Temple that is itself built on less than such biblical testimony is not only misleading, it may be derogatory to the glory of Jesus Christ and detrimental to the well-being of the Church. Edmund Clowney points out how the focus of 'worship' has inexorably shifted from the physical to the spiritual, from the earthly to the heavenly, and that the Church must shift in the same way. "This shift in venue to the heavenly sanctuary demands a shift from the ceremonial,

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<sup>52</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*; 435.

<sup>53</sup> Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*; 368.

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the typical, the symbolic, to the spiritual reality of our coming to Jesus and his coming to us.”<sup>54</sup> The work of Jesus Christ at the Cross, and of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, has constituted the Church as the Temple of God in Jesus Christ, the ‘place’ where worshippers now worship God “*in spirit and in truth.*” Any movement toward a new, physical, Levitical Temple would be retrograde. “God’s presence makes us his people; the presence of Jesus constitutes the church as his temple, built of living stones, joined to him as God’s elect Stone. The church itself is a temple, the home of God, sanctified by the presence of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>55</sup>

The thrust of the New Testament argument that the Church constitutes the Temple of God, along with the prophetic word that the temple rebuilt by the returned Jewish exiles would experience ‘greater glory,’ present an *a priori* determination that the Old Testament prophecies concerning a rebuilt, brick & mortar temple have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ and His Church, and need not be fulfilled again. It only remains to ask whether there is any indication in the New Testament itself that a physical temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem. There is no such prediction in the New Testament. Furthermore, the closing vision of the New Testament seems to remove any expectation of a rebuilt temple with regard to that spiritual Jerusalem of which the Old Covenant city was a meager shadow.

*But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.*

(Revelation 21:22)

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<sup>54</sup> Clowney, *The Church*; 124.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*; 46.

**Week 5: The Church and the Kingdom of God**

**Key Biblical Texts: Matthew 13:1-52**

*"The presence of the kingdom in the Church is the presence of its foretaste,  
its firstfruit, its pledge in the Spirit.*

*It is the presence of power veiled in weakness."  
(Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*)*

Luke begins his gospel in an unusual manner in comparison to the other Synoptics – Matthew and Mark – and certainly relative to the Gospel of John. Luke begins with the narrative of the birth of John and the angelic visitation paid to John's father, the priest Zacharias. The story of a barren and aged wife being blessed with the miraculous birth of a son, who would himself be a key player in the unfolding of God's redemptive history, is one that readers of the Bible are very familiar with long before they arrive at Luke Chapter 1. There are, of course, the stories of the matriarchs Sarah and Rebekah (not to mention Rachel, who was denied conception for a long time). But the Zacharias/Elizabeth narrative, as well as its context in the opening chapters of Luke's gospel, remind us more of the story of Elkanah and Hannah, the parents of Samuel. Samuel was, of course, an important person in his own right. But arguably the most important thing that Samuel did in his life was to anoint David to be God's choice as king over Israel. It seems clear that Luke is drawing his reader's attention to the same act that the miraculous son of Zacharias and Elizabeth will do: the anointing of Jesus, the Messiah and the greater Son of David. In Luke's introductory chapter, "John the Baptist is playing Samuel to Jesus' David."<sup>56</sup>

The implicit comparison between John and Samuel, and the relationship of each of these men to their 'greater' ones, Jesus and David, is a literary *piece d'art* that would have been wonderfully received by any Jewish reader of Luke's gospel. Luke, however, was a Greek and his gospel was primarily written for a Greek audience, "...most excellent *Theophilus*." Hence the narrative of Zacharias and Elizabeth might be lost on Gentile readers, though we know from our own experience how the reading of the New Testament deepens with progressing knowledge of the Old Testament. In any event, Luke does well to tie the two 'testaments' together, even in this oblique manner, so that Gentile

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<sup>56</sup> Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*; 380.

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believers may begin to understand their new heritage as having been grafted into the covenant. And the particular covenant that seems to be foremost in Luke's mind is the *Davidic* – the covenant of the kingdom, we might say.

*When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son.*

(II Samuel 7:12-14)

The Davidic dynasty became an important symbol within Old Covenant Israel, typical of the future kingdom that God promised to establish through David's seed forever. However, the vicissitudes of the Davidic line, - the civil war and division of the nation under David's grandson, Rehoboam; the paucity of faithful kings even in the Davidic line - meant that the kingdom would not gain the same caliber of symbolic meaning as did the Torah and Temple, and even the Land. Indeed, by the time of the return from the Babylonian Exile the Davidic hope was all but crushed in rabbinic writings, as the house of David was moribund. Yet Isaiah speaks of the Promised One as the Branch whose heritage is the 'stump' of Jesse, and Amos offers abiding hope that the once-glorious house of David would one day be restored,

*On that day I will raise up*

*The tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages;*

*I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old;*

*That they may possess the remnant of Edom,*

*And all the Gentiles who are called by My name,*

*Says the LORD who does this thing.*

(Amos 9:11-12)<sup>57</sup>

Luke's gospel, along with Matthew's and Mark's, places a great deal of emphasis on Jesus' teaching concerning the 'kingdom of God' (or, more frequently in Matthew, the 'kingdom of heaven,' which is a circumlocution). Luke's introduction, therefore, sets the reader in mind of the fulfilment of the Davidic Covenant, and the final arrival of that king - David's Greater Son - who would restore the glory to the Davidic throne. "Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and the sending of the divine spirit, are the end-product of the

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<sup>57</sup> It is, of course, significant that James considered the divine grace extended to the Gentiles as evidence of the fulfilment of this prophecy; *cp.* Acts 15:12-17.

long story that began with David and the divine promises made to him...Luke is telling the story of Jesus *as* the fulfilment, the completion, of the story of David and his kingdom."<sup>58</sup>

The Kingdom of God is a concept that has occupied the Church's attention throughout the ages. But from a biblical perspective it is quite intriguing. The phrase itself is not to be found in the Old Testament, though the concept is there. It looms large in the teaching of Jesus in the gospels, but then all but disappears from the rest of the New Testament. Extra-biblical and apocryphal writings from the Second Temple period indicate that the 'kingdom' was much on the minds of Jews of that era, though there is about as much unanimity of opinion as one would expect - very, very little. The common denominator throughout, however, is that the coming kingdom would bring the final return of the Jewish people from their long exile - restoring to them the sovereign rule of YHWH and the rebuilding of the true Temple. "The fundamental Jewish hope was for liberation from oppression, for the restoration of the land, and for the proper rebuilding of the Temple."<sup>59</sup>

Thus an important strand of kingdom thought in the Second Temple Period derived the hope of a restored kingdom from the Davidic Covenant in II Samuel 7. The connection of this strand of thought to the Temple was obvious: it was David's son Solomon - whose name means 'Peace' - who built the Temple, though it was David himself who laid out both the plans and the materials for its construction. Therefore in many rabbinic texts concerning the coming kingdom, the Temple and its rebuilding - or at least its restoration to true Levitical and Aaronic worship - are central features of the work of the promised King. On the basis of the glory of the Temple of Solomon, it was generally believed that "the Temple-builder was the true king, and vice versa."<sup>60</sup>

The Second Temple - built initially by the returned exiles and later refurbished and enlarged by Herod and his descendants - was recognized by the Jewish faithful of that time as being a diminished temple. Some, such as the Essenes, viewed this structure as irremediably corrupt; they disassociated completely from the temple in Jerusalem and

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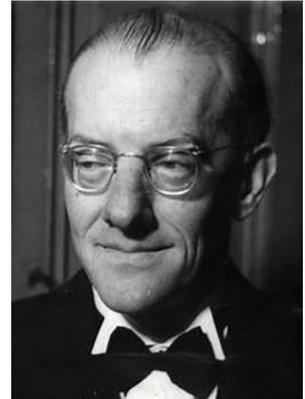
<sup>58</sup> Wright, *New Testament*, 381.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*; 299.

<sup>60</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 205.

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their writings are full of expectations for a rebuilt Temple in the days of the Coming King. This expectation was not always united with the messianic hope of Israel, but where there was anticipation of a coming royal figure – be he the Messiah or not – he was most certainly of the lineage and house of David. “The hope of the eschatological appearance of a king of Davidic descent became particularly active as Jewish nationalism developed under the rule of Greece.”<sup>61</sup> For many, however, the two strands of Old Testament prophetic thought – Messianic and Davidic – did merge in the expectation of a Coming One who would liberate God’s people, destroy Israel’s enemies, and restore the Land, the Law, and the Temple. “The Jewish Messiah is of royal lineage, a descendant of David. For this reason he also bears the title ‘Son of David.’”<sup>62</sup>



Oscar Cullmann (1902-99)

But in addition to the ‘kingdom’ strand that flows from David to the Son of David, there was another Old Testament line of kingdom thought that flowed from another Son, the Son of Man. If we refer to the first one as the Davidic King, we may refer to the other as the Danielic King, for the kingdom and the king is thus prophesied in the book of Daniel. First the King, and then the kingdom:

*I was watching in the night visions,  
And behold, One like the **Son of Man**, Coming with the clouds of heaven!  
He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given  
dominion and glory and a kingdom,  
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.  
His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away,  
And His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.* (Daniel 7:13-14)

The everlasting kingdom that shall never pass away was the subject of an earlier vision in Daniel Chapter 2,

*You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great*

<sup>61</sup> Cullmann, Oscar *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press; 1959); 115.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*; 117.

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*mountain and filled the whole earth... And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold – the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.*

(Daniel 2:34-35; 44-45)

These two kingdom strands – the Davidic and the Danielic – are of crucial importance to the understanding of Jesus' own teachings concerning the kingdom, and of Himself as the King. This is because each kingdom line represents a redemptive focus, and each one is incomplete without the other. The Davidic line, of course, represents the hope of God's people Israel and is related particularly to the redemption that comes "to the Jew first." The Danielic line, however, represents the world whose promised redemption is encompassed in the covenant God made with Abraham, and in the *protoevangelium* from Genesis 3:15. This is the aspect of the Kingdom of God that transcends Israel, though its fulfilment flow in and through Israel. The Promised One from Genesis 3:15 must unite in himself these two kingdom lines – he must be both David's Son and the Son of Man. This is the kingdom truth of the Old Testament that assures the People of God that the King who will deliver them from the oppression of the nations will himself be the King of the nations; his rule might be centered in Jerusalem but it will extend to the uttermost parts of the earth. "The kingdom of God, historically and theologically considered, is a slogan whose basic meaning is the hope that Israel's god is going to rule Israel (and the whole world), and that Caesar, or Herod, or anyone else of their ilk, is not."<sup>63</sup>

We cannot comprehend just how incredible this concept must have seemed in the first century, when Israel (Judea) was a back-water province of the mighty Roman Empire. Yet the prophets of old had prophesied of the preeminence of Israel over the pagan nations, and the destruction of those pagan nations by the King whom YHWH would set up on Mount Zion,

*He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision.  
Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure:*

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<sup>63</sup> Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*; 302.

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*"Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion"... "Ask of Me, and I will give You  
The nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession.  
You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel."*

(Psalm 2:4-6; 8-9)

Thus the hope of the faithful during the Second Temple Period was for just this sort of King – both *Davidic* and *Danielic* – one who would restore the fortunes of Israel *and* rule the world. But we should not think that Second Temple Jews were so ‘other-worldly’ as to expect the advent of this promised kingdom by any other means than military conquest. This was how the world around them operated, and it was the manner by which King David secured for his son the territory, riches, and peace necessary for the building of the first Temple. Thus it comes as no surprise that contemporary Jewish writings that refer to the coming King do so in militaristic terminology, such as the following from the War Scroll of the Qumran archive.

Then two divisions of foot-soldiers shall advance and shall station themselves between the two formations. The first division shall be armed with a spear and a shield, and the second with a shield and a sword, to bring down the slain by the judgment of God, and to bend the enemy formations by the power of God, to pay the reward of their wickedness to all the nations of vanity. And sovereignty shall be to the God of Israel, and He shall accomplish might deeds by the saints of his people.<sup>64</sup>

It is significant that passages such as this one refer to God becoming King in Israel, for the general belief at that time was that the promised King would be in some sense divine. This does not translate into a fully-Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, but rather a somewhat inchoate belief that the promised king would come in the power of God and would gain victory over all the nations, reigning from Jerusalem in the power and righteousness of God. Zechariah 14:9 was frequently appealed to as proof of the divine characteristic of the coming king,

*And the LORD shall be King over all the earth.  
In that day it shall be –  
"The LORD is one," and His name one.*

(Zechariah 14:9)

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<sup>64</sup> War Scroll 1QM6:4-6. <https://www.qumran.org/js/qumran/hss/1qm> accessed 28August2018.

N. T. Wright summarizes this confluence of a divinely-ordained and empowered king alongside the restoration of the very human Davidic dynasty in Jerusalem.

YHWH's being King does not mean that Israel will have no rulers at all, but that she will have the *right* rulers. Neither the Hasmoneans, nor Herod and his family, nor Caiaphas and his relations, nor Caesar himself, will rule Israel and the world. Rather, there will be a line of true priests who will minister before YHWH properly, and teach the people the true Torah; and (perhaps) a King who will be the true Son of David, who will dash the nations in pieces like a potter's vessel, and execute true justice within Israel.<sup>65</sup>

George R. Beasley-Murray notes three crucial elements to the general belief of a coming kingdom: First, *the universality of the reign of Yahweh*; second, *the righteousness of the kingdom*; and third, *the peace of the kingdom*.<sup>66</sup> He writes, "Thus, the goal of history is reached in the revelation and universal acknowledgment of Yahweh's sovereignty, the triumph of righteousness, and the establishment of peace and salvation in the world."<sup>67</sup> As this represents the expectations of the Jews in Second Temple Judaea, we must consider the manner in which Jesus of Nazareth came into the land preaching, "*Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*."<sup>68</sup> Did Jesus preach a kingdom such as was expected? And if not, by what authority and to what degree did He modify His message? These questions have engaged biblical scholars for ages, with the most recent scholarship viewing Jesus' own kingdom expectations in a very negative and irreverent light.



**G. R. Beasley-Murray  
(1916-2000)**

### **Jesus' Preaching on the Kingdom of God:**

No one denies that the 'kingdom' was a major theme in Jesus' teaching and preaching; He mentions the phrase 'kingdom of heaven' or 'kingdom of God' dozens of times as recorded by the Synoptic authors. The frequency with which Jesus speaks of the kingdom is notable by comparison with the relative lack of mention the kingdom gets in

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<sup>65</sup> Wright, *New Testament*; 307.

<sup>66</sup> Beasley-Murray, George R. *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1986); 20.

<sup>67</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>68</sup> Matthew 4:17

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the New Testament outside the Synoptic gospels. But we have already seen that Luke models the opening of his account on the life stories of Samuel and David, as he introduces John the Baptist and Jesus. The kingdom of God will factor massively in Luke's account of Jesus life and ministry, as it does as well in Matthew's and Mark's. We must, therefore, deal with the recorded teachings of Jesus regarding the kingdom, before moving on to the teaching (or lack thereof) in the apostolic letters.

Already quoted above, from Matthew Chapter 4, is the summary statement of Jesus' message when He began His preaching ministry, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" Early in His ministry, however, Jesus' conception and expectation regarding the kingdom did not flesh out according to such expectations as reflected in the War Scroll. Even Jesus' forerunner, John, had some doubts as to whether Jesus was the expected one, sending a delegation to Jesus and asking, "*Are You the Expected One, or should we look for another?*" Jesus' answer provides an essential summary of His view of the kingdom that He came to announce.

*Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."*

(Matthew 11:4-6)

This is a compilation of passages from Isaiah that individually speak of the time when God would act finally and comprehensively in the restoration of His people Israel. For instance, several of the items that Jesus notes are drawn from Isaiah 35:5-6 which refer to "*eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy.*" This passage is couched in a section that is both Messianic and Royal,

*Say to those who are fearful-hearted,  
"Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance,  
With the recompense of God; He will come and save you."*

*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.*

*Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing.*

*For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.*

*The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water;*

*In the habitation of jackals, where each lay,*

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*There shall be grass with reeds and rushes. aA highway shall be there, and a road,  
And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness.  
The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for others.  
Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray.  
No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it;  
It shall not be found there.  
But the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the LORD shall return,  
And come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads.  
They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isaiah 35:4-10)*

Jesus also alludes to Isaiah 29:17-19,42:6-7 and 61:1ff, the latter of which indicates that the power in which the Messiah would act was to be the “*Spirit of the Lord*” upon Him. These passages are all messianic and all point to the advent of Yahweh to His people; the exercise of the divine sovereignty within the nation. “But in their context, the words of Jesus are luminously clear: the deeds that perplex John are signs that God’s awaited sovereignty is in action in the world....The announcement of the kingdom, according to Isaiah 61:1-2, is a proclamation of jubilee – good news of liberation for the people of God, good news of grace, forgiveness, renewal of life.”<sup>69</sup>

It is with good reason that Jesus ended His answer to John with the admonition, “*And blessed is he who does not stumble because of Me.*” This was as much as an admission on Jesus’ part that the message of the kingdom that He preached – as well as the kingdom itself, which He was bringing – *was not* the message expected. He was not bringing military conquest over Rome, nor the physical and literal restoration of the Davidic dynasty in Jerusalem. Thus many did indeed stumble on account of Jesus, and many have been tripping over His proclamation of the kingdom of God ever since. Those who were looking for the coming King and kingdom, were anticipating an outwardly cataclysmic event, joined according to prophecy with signs in the heavens and natural disasters on earth, the overthrow of kingdoms and empires, and the exaltation of Israel with Mount Zion as the chief of the world’s mountains. Jesus’ preaching of meekness and submission, His own gentle spirit, and His studied avoidance of political controversy, much less military conquest, must have struck many as a very odd way to announce ‘the kingdom of God.’

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<sup>69</sup> Beasley-Murray; 81.

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...when one is looking for and proclaiming the coming of a representative of God to judge the world, accompanied by all the accoutrements of theophany (the Spirit's power, the flame of fire, convulsions of heaven and earth, and the destruction of the wicked), to be directed to Jesus in his ministry as the manifestation of God in his kingdom is shattering. To recognize in such a man and such deeds as he was doing the eschatological kingdom of promise demanded an enormous adjustment of thought and a fresh assessment of the scriptures.<sup>70</sup>

Modern scholarship imitates John. Liberal theologians as well as conservative Dispensationalists seem to continue asking the question, "*Are You the Expected One or should be look for another?*" The 'looking for another' is no longer so applicable; generally the views range between looking for Jesus at a far-future time (Dispensationalism) to no longer looking at all, since Jesus himself was mistaken regarding the kingdom (Liberalism). Both camps, otherwise as diverse from one another as can be imagined, commit the same fallacy of interpreting Old Testament prophecy concerning the coming reign of Yahweh with a literalness focused upon the same symbols of Israel pertaining as well to the kingdom. Therefore it is considered essential to the advent of the messianic, Davidic kingdom that it be centered in Jerusalem and extend literally to the re-establishment of a sovereign Israel, to the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, the overthrow of the oppressive Roman power, and the restoration of true worship in Judea. This sort of kingdom did not come with Jesus, hence the conclusion either that the kingdom must have been delayed (Dispensationalism) or Jesus was sadly mistaken in His own expectations (Liberalism).

What is missed in this common literalistic hermeneutic is the manner in which Old Testament prophecy was blended with apocalyptic prose to present an other-worldly kingdom related in this-worldly terms. In other words, the coming kingdom was prophesied alongside - integrally connected with - the New Heaven and New Earth; the terminology was so comprehensive and so complete as to necessitate essentially a New Creation, not just a restoration of the old Israel. The newness of all things is most clearly contained in the prophecies of Isaiah, where the coming universal reign of Yahweh is set alongside complete peace within the animal kingdom and between Man and the animals, as it was at the beginning before sin entered the cosmos. Thus the triumph of Israel over

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<sup>70</sup> Beasley-Murray; 83.

the nations cannot be viewed solely in terms of the historical-political context of Second Temple Judea, but rather one must look for *both* the consolation of Israel *and* the the light of revelation to the Gentiles.<sup>71</sup> Thus “Israel’s victory over the nations, the rebuilding of the Temple, the cleansing of the Land; all these together amounted to nothing short of a new creation, a new Genesis.”<sup>72</sup> Before we conclude that this is nothing more than a spiritualizing hermeneutic that destroys the literal and historical sense of the various prophecies, we should be reminded that this is essentially how the apostles and the early Church interpreted the Kingdom of God in light of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, as we shall see. As Wright comments, “Any viable hypothesis about the meaning of ‘kingdom of god’ must therefore show at least in principle, both how Jesus reconceived and spoke of the kingdom, and why his earliest followers came to construe the extraordinary event of his death and resurrection in the way they did.”<sup>73</sup>

The alternative to this ‘actualist’ interpretation is either that of the Dispensationalist or that of the Liberal. The former claims that on account of Israel’s rejection of Jesus as her Messiah, the Kingdom was pulled away and is now held in abeyance until the Millennium. The Liberal (to be sure, not *every* liberal, but primarily those whose heritage flows from Albert Schweitzer) simply concludes that Jesus intended a literal, physical, and political kingdom but was mistaken and deluded. Neither of these conclusions is acceptable when one considers the imminence of the kingdom as preached by Jesus. And no where is this imminence more powerful than in Jesus’ argument with the Pharisees concerning the source of His power to cast out demons.

*Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, “Could this be the Son of David?” Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, “This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.” But Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. **But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.**” (Matthew 12:22-28)*

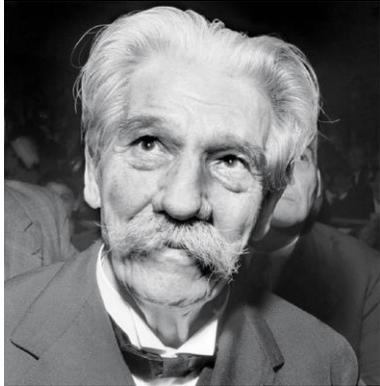
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<sup>71</sup> Luke 2:25-32

<sup>72</sup> Wright, *New Testament*, 306.

<sup>73</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 220.

There is no indication in the gospel records that Jesus considered His messianic purpose as contingent upon the acceptance of it by Israel. Indeed, Jesus throughout His ministry predicted that He would be rejected and killed, so it is very hard to conclude with Schweitzer that Jesus was a deluded Messianic figure who finally realized that only His



Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965)

death would compensate for His inability to rally Israel to His side. What both the Liberal and the Dispensationalist miss is revealed here in Matthew 12, that there is a more significant foe to both Israel and to the world than the Roman Empire: a strongman who must be bound and who Jesus intends to defeat. *“Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.”*<sup>74</sup> Jesus fully intended to bring about a great victory, one that more than answered to the apocalyptic tone of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming King. Only His victory was not going to be over Herod or Pilate, or even Tiberius Caesar himself – these were but minions of the true enemy, the strongman that Jesus was going to bind and plunder: Satan. Jesus’ words to the Pharisees can almost be read in the tone of anger – righteous anger, to be sure, at the hardness of their hearts to suppose that the casting out of demons was anything other than the invasion of the kingdom of God into the domain of Satan. The greatest enemy of Israel and of the world is Satan, and the harshest oppression is that of sin and death, and these are the enemies of God and the ‘military’ targets of His Promised King. *“Israel’s god will one day become king; the establishment of the kingdom will involve the defeat of the enemy that has held Israel captive; there are signs that this is now happening; therefore the kingdom is indeed breaking in, Israel really is being liberated.”*<sup>75</sup> Oscar Cullmann writes,

What distinguishes the Gospel of Jesus from Judaism is the conviction that ‘the kingdom of God has come upon you’ (Matt. 12:28); that Satan is fallen ‘like lightning from heaven’ (Luke 10:18); that the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them (Matt. 11:5). When the present is seen in this light, the whole eschatological process as

<sup>74</sup> Matthew 12:29

<sup>75</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*; 228.

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taken over from Judaism must be prolonged, for a time of fulfillment is now inserted which is not yet consummated.<sup>76</sup>

Jesus emphasized the 'not yet' aspect of the Kingdom in the many parables He told concerning that prophetic event. One consistent theme of the similes Jesus expounded was that the kingdom was introduced as a small and insignificant entity – a tiny mustard seed, a pinch of leaven, or the seed of the 'word of the kingdom.' In each case the initial insignificance of the beginning is vastly overshadowed by the magnitude of the result, a harvest "*a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.*"<sup>77</sup> "Most scholars agree that the stress in the parables falls on the beginning and the end of the operation of the kingdom and that the *process* in between is ignored."<sup>78</sup>

In addition to being of small origin, the kingdom is also presented by Jesus as something of inestimable value, but hidden. The pearl of great price and the treasure hidden in a field both indicate the value of attaining the Kingdom, and the fact that the kingdom will not be out in the open. Yet it is a present reality in the teaching of Jesus, something that men should spare no expense or trouble to attain. "The implication of the parables then is clear. Let every hearer be sure to get the treasure! Let every hearer be sure to secure the pearl!"<sup>79</sup>

The parable of the Wheat and the Tares is another story of the kingdom that indicates its present reality, only this time focusing more on that process which the parables of the mustard seed and leaven ignored – what would transpire while the kingdom was growing and progressing toward the final harvest. Jesus' explanation of the parable to His disciples is noteworthy in regard to this particular lesson in His identification of the 'field.' It is not the Church, but the world.

*Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. **The field is the world**, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and*

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<sup>76</sup> Cullman, *Christology*; 46.

<sup>77</sup> Matthew 13:23

<sup>78</sup> Beasley-Murray; 123.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*; 112.

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*they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*  
(Matthew 13:36-43)

Interpretation of this parable in the Church somehow mutated into substituting the Church for the world, and using the parable to justify a *corpus Christendom* in Medieval Europe - a 'Church' into which all citizens of Europe were baptized as infants and in which they all lived and died as 'members' - though not necessarily as saints. It was taught, and is still taught, that the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares forbids church discipline and excommunication on the grounds that the church might accidentally pull out good wheat along with the tares. Beasley-Murray comments,

The combination of these factors has led to a misunderstanding of even the interpretation of the parable supplied by Matthew in verses 36-43. For there can be no doubt that when Matthew stated that the field was the world he was referring to the whole of mankind, over which the Son of Man was exalted as Lord; for Matthew, the kingdom of the Son of Man was as truly an eschatological phenomenon as the kingdom of the Father. As with the other parables of the kingdom, we must understand the parable of the Tares within the context of the ministry of Jesus if we are to understand it at all.<sup>80</sup>

Finally, with regard to the parables of the kingdom, we can safely put to rest any ideas of the coming of the kingdom being contingent upon Israel acceptance of Jesus as her Messiah, by reading the parables that speak of the utter rejection of the key ambassadors and representatives of the owner/king. The Parable of the Vineyard, of course, is the most well-known example of this genre of parable. The vineyard workers represent the religious establishment of Israel, particularly Second Temple Israel. The various representatives sent by the Master refer to the many prophets that God had sent to His people over the ages, culminating in the sending of His Son. And, of course, the Son is not only rejected; He is killed. Jesus told the parable in such a way that the audience, probably including the '*chief priests and the elders of the people*' who were also present, could not conclude anything different than what Jesus intended.

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<sup>80</sup> Beasley-Murray; 133.

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*Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers? They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will surrender to him the fruits in their seasons."* (Matthew 21:40-41)

Jesus then indicts the entire generation of Jewish leadership in terms that they finally understood.

*Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:*

*'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.*

*This was the LORD's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?*

*Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.*

*Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.* (Matthew 21: 42-46)

There was no doubt in Jesus' mind that He would be rejected by Israel as a whole, and that He would be handed over to the Romans and put to death. He told His disciples that it was for this purpose that He came into the world, so it is derogatory to the wisdom of God's redemptive plan to say that the success of Jesus' mission was somehow contingent upon Israel's acceptance of Him as her Messiah. Israel's rejection was a foregone conclusion; but the advent of the kingdom was as well, and the one did not hinder the other. To think that Jesus intended to usher in the kingdom of God in the manner expected of Him - military conquest of the Romans - is to miss the point of all of His teaching concerning the kingdom and the purpose of God. Certainly it is to miss the heart attitude of the One who said, "*all who take the sword will perish by the sword.*"<sup>81</sup>

### **The Kingdom in the Early Church:**

It has already been noted that Jesus spoke a great deal more often, and in more detail, about the kingdom of God than the apostles did. This has led liberal scholars to agree with Schweitzer that Jesus was mistaken and deluded about the kingdom, and that His disciples learned from His mistake and simply started a new religion in His name. Dispensationalists have no problem with the relative absence of mention of the kingdom in the apostolic writings, as they believe the kingdom was withdrawn from earth when

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<sup>81</sup> Matthew 26:52

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Jesus ascended and will not return until He does. But we have seen that Jesus was neither deluded in His expectation of the kingdom arriving with His first advent, nor was the inauguration of the kingdom contingent upon Israel's acceptance of Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Thus there is a third common explanation for why the apostolic record lacks much detail regarding the kingdom of God: the *Church* and the *Kingdom* are the same. This has been the prevalent view within Christian ecclesiology throughout the past sixteen hundred years, since Augustine penned his famous *City of God*. Indeed, historically-speaking, both the Liberal and the Dispensational views are minority reports. Recent scholarship, however, has come a long way in realizing that equating the Church and the Kingdom is not in accordance with the biblical description and purpose of *either* entity. N. T. Wright comments that "To equate the kingdom and church is at best putting the cart before the horse, and at worst a complete anachronism."<sup>82</sup>

Though the Old Testament does not employ the exact phrase, it is clear that the prophets frequently spoke of a kingdom – whether Davidic or Danielic – and that this kingdom included not only Israel, but the whole of mankind. It is also evident from the Old Testament that the kingdom included more than just mankind, as the entirety of Creation is encompassed by the eventual coming of the kingdom – both the animate and inanimate parts of the cosmos. "The kingdom of God in Scripture is the all-embracing program of God's divine salvation history."<sup>83</sup> Therefore the treatment of the kingdom of God by the apostolic writers, and particularly by Paul, needs to be considered in a closer examination in order to avoid the simplistic equation Church = Kingdom. We will pursue this investigation in the next lesson.

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<sup>82</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*; 222.

<sup>83</sup> Saucy, *The Church in God's Program*; 83.

**Week 6: The Church and the Kingdom of God - Part 2**

**Key Biblical Texts:**

*"The mystery of the Kingdom is the coming of the Kingdom into history in advance of its apocalyptic manifestation. It is, in short, fulfillment without consummation."  
(George Eldon Ladd, *New Testament Theology*)*

It is an undeniable fact of the text, that the apostolic writers in the New Testament had far less to say concerning the 'kingdom of God' than did Jesus, as recorded in the gospels. Conversely, far more is said about the 'church' - the *ekklesia* - from the Book of Acts onward than can be found in the gospels (the word itself is only found twice in the Gospel of Matthew, and not at all in the other three gospels). A brief summary of a word search between 'kingdom' and 'church' illustrates this remarkable difference in focus.

|                             | <u>"Kingdom"</u> | <u>"Church"</u> |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Gospels                     | 120              | 2               |
| Apostolic Letters &<br>Acts | 32               | 84              |

Data such as this indicates to some that the apostles were not concerned with the Kingdom of God, with various reasons offered by scholars. The Dispensationalist sees this numerical divergence as proof that the kingdom has been taken back to heaven with Jesus, to be returned and revealed in the future Millennium. The Liberal scholar, believing that the church was only very loosely related to Jesus, argues that the leaders of the early church simply chose not to make the same 'mistake' that Jesus made concerning the coming of the kingdom. Reformed theologians, as well as evangelicals in general, interpret the data by essentially equating the kingdom and the church, thus avoiding the glaring numerical discrepancy by making the terms roughly synonymous. All of these views pit the gospels against the rest of the New Testament and, within modern liberal scholarship, Jesus against Paul, with the latter considered to be the 'founder' of the religion called 'Christianity.'

The most glaring problem with any of these assessments is the generally-agreed upon timing of the various books of the New Testament. It is almost universally accepted

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that the gospels were written *later* than most of the epistles, with the books of Luke and Acts written as a set. This chronology of the gospels means that the synoptic authors would be filling their papyrus with references to the 'kingdom' in the midst of a 'church' that seemingly jettisoned that concept from its earliest beginnings. As for Luke's composition, the change is even more startling considering that the same author writes of the 'kingdom' 44 times in the gospel and only 8 times in Acts (the 'church' is mentioned 20 times in Acts and not at all in the gospel of Luke). Is it reasonable to suppose that the 'kingdom' dropped off the radar of the early church after Pentecost, and then the authors of the gospels resurrect the concept several decades later? Or are we to conclude that when the writers of the epistles – primarily, of course, Paul – write 'church' they really mean 'kingdom,' and when the synoptic writers pen the word 'kingdom' they really mean 'church'? Perhaps there is a better explanation that deals faithfully with the text without pitting any portion against another, or setting the apostle Paul up against the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the apostle wrote so frequently and worshipfully.

We may note, to begin with, Luke's treatment of the 'kingdom' in his record of the early church, the Book of Acts. One commentator calls the 'kingdom' an *inclusio* for Luke, as it is found at the very beginning and the very end of his narrative.

*The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which <sup>19</sup>He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.* (Acts 1:1-3)

Contrary to Schweitzer's portrayal of Jesus as having been deluded concerning the kingdom, Luke has Him continuing His teaching of the kingdom to His disciples *after the resurrection*. Apparently in Jesus' mind His own death had in no way derailed the coming of the kingdom of God. Nor did Jesus consider the Church to be a replacement; rather He continued to teach and exhort His disciples on the things *pertaining to the kingdom of God*. Jesus' post-resurrection preaching was the same as His post-wilderness preaching. Thus Luke starts off his narrative of the early ministry of the apostles right where Jesus left off, which is, of course, exactly what he tells Theophilus he is planning on doing. But we find Luke on the same topic when he closes his account in Acts Chapter 28.

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*So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of **the kingdom of God**, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved... Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching **the kingdom of God** and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.*

(Acts 28:23-24; 30-31)

The setting of this passage is Paul's house imprisonment in Rome, which places the date rather late in the chronology of the Pauline Epistles. Thus toward the end of his writing career (as we know it), the apostle's message is still *the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ*, which meant for him, *preaching the kingdom of God*. This would indicate that the 'explanations' offered above concerning the relative frequency of the terms between the gospels and the letters is simplistic at best, misleading at worst. The *kingdom of God* was still a topic of Paul's preaching, and the *church* was a topic of his teaching.

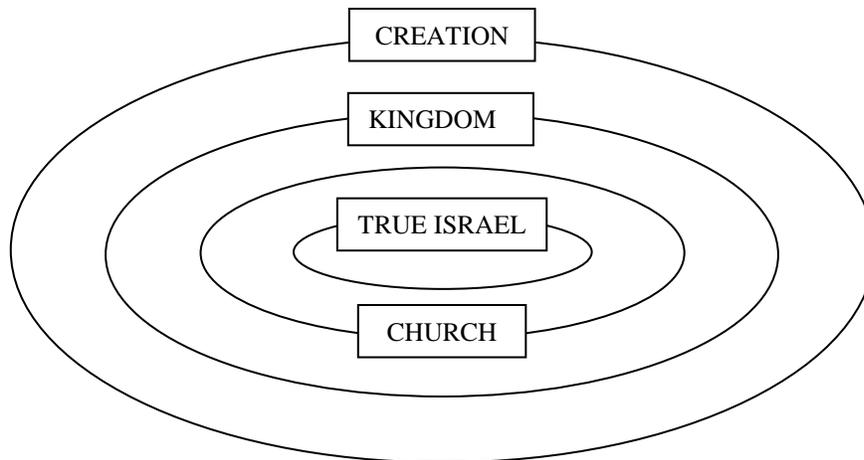
A more reasonable explanation of the difference in frequency of usage between the *kingdom* and the *church*, is that Jesus had already taught in great detail about the former, while the latter required a great deal of instruction for its early members. That the two terms are not synonymous will be apparent when we summarize the biblical teaching concerning the kingdom of God. But the hiddenness of the *kingdom*, as prophesied by the Lord Jesus himself, would naturally lead to its being somewhat in the background in the apostolic teaching, concerned as they were with the beginning and growth of the *church*. This in itself seems to indicate that the two were not viewed by the apostles as synonymous or co-extensive, though Paul's teaching especially will show that the concepts are undeniably and inextricably related.

### **The Kingdom of God:**

One of the passages that has been cited in defense of identifying the kingdom of God with the church is the very passage in which the Church is first introduced by Jesus, Matthew 16. Here we read of Peter's confession on behalf of the disciples, and of Jesus' promise to build His Church upon the 'rock' of Peter. In conjunction with this, Peter is to be given the 'keys to the kingdom,' thus bringing the more familiar concept in close proximity with the 'new' one. This is both reasonable and correct, as we will see from

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Paul's treatment of the kingdom in relation to the church, but it is still less than direct identification of the two. To summarize our discovery of the biblical teaching of the kingdom thus far, we may say that it is greater in scope and extent than is the church. The kingdom is *cosmic*, the church *earthly*. By this is meant that the kingdom of God concerns itself with the entirety of God's creation; the church only with the redeemed of mankind. If the mathematical concept of sets and subsets can be applied analogically to the various terms we have studied so far, it might look like the following:



This is rudimentary, but not inaccurate. Creation includes all that comprises the cosmos, the created order of God. But the Kingdom encompasses that which is redeemed, on the generally-accepted assumption that the part of Creation that abides under God's wrath is not included in the Kingdom but is rather outside, where there is *"weeping and gnashing of teeth."* This is not to say that the part of the cosmos left out of the Kingdom is no longer under the dominion of God through Jesus Christ, only that the Kingdom is universally referred to as a place of divine blessing and not of wrath. Yet the Kingdom does include within its boundaries all aspects of Creation – the human, the animal, and the inanimate – and is, as far as we can tell from the biblical data, coextensive with the New Heaven and New Earth. *"The kingdom of God in Scripture is the all-embracing program of God's divine salvation history."*<sup>84</sup> The Church, however, consists of the redeemed from *every tongue, tribe, and nation* of Mankind and itself includes True Israel – the remnant of Israel from which the Church was started and those from among the physical descendants of the patriarchs who have been added to the Church since. *"The church is therefore*

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presently related to the kingdom in its spiritual nature but also looks forward to participation in the glorious culmination in the literal apocalyptic manifestation of the kingdom.”<sup>85</sup> As this diagram is merely two-dimensional there is no eschatological aspect to it: the future divine mercy upon a now-hardened Israel is beyond the capacity of this illustration. But in terms of *definition*, the diagram offers a simple view of the relative extent of the various terms.

The proclamation of the kingdom by Jesus is indeed a unique episode in redemptive as well as human history. We have noted that the phrase *kingdom of God* is used far more frequently in the teachings of Jesus than in the writings of the apostles, but



**Brevard Childs (1923-2007)**

we have also noted that the gospel frequency of the phrase is even greater than what is found in the Old Testament or rabbinic literature. Brevard Childs notes the discrepancy with the time before as well as after Jesus’ own preaching ministry, “The frequency of the reference to the kingdom in the Synoptics – it occurs about one hundred times – stands not only in contrast to its relative rare occurrence in rabbinic and Jewish sectarian literature, but also its infrequency in the rest of the New Testament, especially in John and Paul.”<sup>86</sup>

We conclude from this observation that the Kingdom of God was uniquely the message of Jesus Christ, the Messiah and bringer of the same kingdom. This was a message that the prophets could only allude to vaguely, and the apostles only expound with a remaining high degree of mystery. The kingdom is the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, and its announcement as well as its inauguration on earth belong to Him alone. “Jesus confronts his hearers with the message that the Old Testament’s hope has indeed been fulfilled in him and calls for a response.”<sup>87</sup> This message dominates the preaching of Jesus, as well it should considering the fact that He was bringing in the kingdom in His own Person and Work. Childs appropriately exhorts us to listen carefully to Jesus’ preaching on the kingdom, as it is so central to His life and work.

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<sup>84</sup> Saucy, *The Church in God’s Program*; 83.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*; 85.

<sup>86</sup> Childs, Brevard S. *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 1992); 636.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*; 639.

It is absolutely essential that one catch the shrill, excited, indeed apocalyptic flavor of Jesus' proclamation that the kingdom is at hand. The time has come, God's reign is even now breaking in as event. It comes suddenly as the lightning and flood (Luke 17:22ff), and there is no escaping. It is part of the 'messianic woes', bringing with it the threat of judgment. Therefore, the repeated warning of Jesus is to be alert, to watch. This is no time for life as usual.<sup>88</sup>

But the aspect of hiddenness of the kingdom, apparent in Jesus' parables, means that its presence in the world in this age is *mysterious* - as mysterious as the influence of leaven on a lump of dough, or as the growth of a seed while hidden in the earth. The visible component of Jesus' finished work is the Church; the Kingdom continues to operate, as it were, beneath the surface. "The parables of growth seek to contrast the secret beginnings, small and insignificant as the mustard seed and leaven, with the richness of the final harvest or the grandeur of the mighty tree. In sum, the kingdom of God has not come in its glory, but its powers are already at work."<sup>89</sup> To a large extent these powers are at work *in the Church*, which is why the apostolic writings emphasize the identity and work of the Church and only intersect with the Kingdom on occasion. It is as if, especially in the writings of Paul, the veil of the Church is occasionally pulled back and we are able to glimpse the glory of the Kingdom that lies behind.

### **Jesus, the Apostles, and the Kingdom of God:**

Modern biblical scholarship has sought to 'deconstruct' the New Testament writings in a self-proclaimed effort to find the 'real, historical' Jesus, as well as to find the root of Christianity - two things that modern liberal scholarship view as *a priori* completely different. Paul's preaching does not seem to follow the lines set down by Jesus, and nowhere is this more evident than with regard to the kingdom of God. But we will see from even a cursory review of what Paul does have to say regarding the kingdom, that his theology does not differ from that of his Lord, Jesus Christ. Indeed, the kingdom remains in many respects the mystery of Jesus' parables, but in Paul it also finds deeper expression in terms of the *new creation*, which is very much in line with the expectation of

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*; 637.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*; 639.

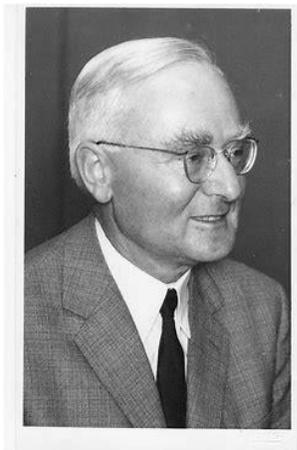
## Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

Israel. Paul brings together the two kingdom strands from the Old Testament: that Jesus is both the *Son of David* as well as the *Son of Man*. Thus the kingdom ministry of Jesus Christ has reference not only to Israel – which is what everyone wants to hear Paul say – but also to the whole of Creation – which is what Paul does say. Günther Bornkamm acknowledges the difference in the preaching manner and matter of Paul compared to Jesus, but also notes that this is hardly because the apostle disagreed with his Master. “Paul’s theology is not a repetition of Jesus’ preaching of the coming of God’s kingdom. Jesus Christ himself and the salvation based on and made available through his death on the cross, his resurrection, and his exaltation as Lord form the subject of Paul’s proclamation...The proclaimer has become the subject of the proclamation, his life has assumed dimensions that it did not have on earth, and for Jesus’ own words are substituted the word about Jesus Christ, his death, resurrection, and second coming at the end of the world.”<sup>90</sup>



Günther Bornkamm (1905-90)

The error of modern scholarship is to expect Paul to simply parrot Jesus, as did the disciples of their rabbi. This is to completely misunderstand the message – the unique and singular message – that Jesus brought, as well as the revelation that was given to the apostles, and especially to Paul, to unfold that message as it pertained not only to Israel, but to the whole cosmos. The event upon which the shift hinges is the resurrection of Jesus from the grave; this changed everything in that it completely validated His self-profession as the Messiah and as the Son of Man. Modern scholars think that the apostles should have simply continued the ‘teachings of Jesus,’ something they could not possibly have done *post-resurrection*. Leonhard Goppelt notes the necessary difference between the preaching of Jesus and that of His followers after His resurrection and ascension. The apostles could speak of nothing else but Jesus, since it was in Him that the fullness of the Old Testament prophetic hope was fulfilled. In Jesus’ preaching, the ‘kingdom’ became the point of departure for those who



Leonhard Goppelt (1911-73)

## Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

would received it (or to whom it would be given) and those who would not (or those from whom it would be taken). For the apostles, the Risen Lord was the necessary focal point of their preaching and teaching. “

[T]he earliest missionary kerygma stated: you killed Jesus; God raised him from the dead; therefore, repent! Jesus, on the other hand, preached: Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand! The difference is clear: Jesus called people to repentance in view of the imminent coming of the kingdom; the disciples did the same but in view of Jesus' resurrection that had taken place.<sup>91</sup>

If we put the two types of 'kerygma,' or preaching, side-by-side, we see that the resurrection is the event that validated Jesus' proclamation that the kingdom was 'at hand.' His victory over death and the grave constitutes His enthronement, for it is not until after the resurrection that Jesus tells His disciples, "*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth...*"<sup>92</sup> which statement is the clearest possible allusion to the Son of Man prophecy of Daniel 7:13-14 quoted earlier.

*I was watching in the night visions,  
And behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven!  
He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him.  
**Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,**  
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.  
His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away,  
And His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.*

Thus, when we approach the message preached by the apostles, and in particular by the apostle Paul, we must not expect to see a mere repetition of what their Master taught during the days of His earthly ministry. This would be for the apostles to act as if the resurrection had never happened, which is to say, that the Kingdom of God had never come. We should rather expect to see the *effect* of which Jesus' death and resurrection was the *cause*: the impact of the kingdom *having come*. This is why the actual phrase 'kingdom of God' is found relatively infrequently in the apostolic writings, while the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the central theme and hope for the apostolic church. When the

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<sup>90</sup> Bornkamm, Günther *Paul* (New York: Harper & Row; 1969); 109-110.

<sup>91</sup> Goppelt, Leonhard *Theology of the New Testament: Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1982); 17.

<sup>92</sup> Matthew 28:18

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apostles do speak of the kingdom it is as fulfilled in Jesus Christ, though as already noted, not yet consummated. It may not be here in its glory, but it is also no longer future.

With the ascension of Jesus to the right hand of the throne of God, that which is presented to mankind is no longer 'the kingdom,' but rather 'the King,' - Jesus himself. "The eschatological judgment of God's Kingdom is in principle decided in Jesus' mission among men. As men react to Jesus and his proclamation, their eschatological doom is determined."<sup>93</sup> The apostles preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in just this manner, making it clear that the time foretold by the prophets *has already come*, and consequently "God commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."<sup>94</sup> Perhaps we can simplify and summarize the whole discussion regard-



George Eldon Ladd (1911-82)

ing the preaching of Jesus and the preaching of the apostles in this way: Jesus came preaching the Kingdom *coming*, the apostles came preaching the Gospel of Kingdom *having come*.

### Realized Eschatology:



C. H. Dodd (1884-1973)

The technical term for what we have been saying is 'realized eschatology,' a phrase made current in modern scholarship by the British theologian C. H. Dodd in his various works on the teaching of Jesus on the Kingdom of God. Though there is much in Dodd's treatment of the subject that must be rejected as fostering a 'moral Christianity' rather than a living and active Gospel, his view of the entrance of the Kingdom into human history with the advent and ministry of Jesus is fully accurate to Jesus' own view on the matter. Such a realized, or *inaugurated*, eschatology means that

<sup>93</sup> Ladd, George Eldon *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1974); 88.

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the atmosphere in which the Church was founded, and in which the apostles preached the Gospel of the Kingdom, was supercharged with the reality that *“old things have passed away, behold! All things have become new.”*<sup>95</sup> It is only when we make the connection between the Old Testament prophecies of the coming kingdom of the Son of Man, as well as those which speak of the New Heaven and New Earth, do we begin to comprehend what Paul is talking about in this verse. “The wind that swept over the waters of creation was blowing again, to bring to life things that were dead, to call into existence things that did not exist.”<sup>96</sup> The advent of the kingdom of God in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ is nothing less than the invasion of the age to come into this present age; there is no other way of properly considering what has happened than a ‘new creation.’ Nor is this metaphorical language that Paul employs; it is, rather, the most powerful reality that can be conceived, and it is the atmosphere in which the Gospel flourishes, the Gospel of Glory.

*Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.* (II Corinthians 3:17-18)

Ladd writes, “In Jesus, the reign of God manifests itself in a new redemptive event, displaying in an unexpected way within history the power of the eschatological kingdom.”<sup>97</sup> The ‘unexpected event’ of which Ladd speaks is the death and resurrection of the Messiah, without which the true enemy of Israel, and of mankind, could not have been defeated. In this light we also see the meaning of the shift in ‘enemies’ for the people of God, from nations to ‘powers and principalities.’ “The enemies of God’s Kingdom are now seen not as hostile evil nations as in the Old Testament but spiritual powers of evil.”<sup>98</sup> Thus Paul is actually preaching about the Kingdom when he writes his famous passage to the Ephesians, introducing the ‘armor of God.’

*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.* (Ephesians 6:12)

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<sup>94</sup> Acts 17:30-31

<sup>95</sup> II Corinthians 5:17

<sup>96</sup> Wright, N. T. *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1997); 75.

<sup>97</sup> Ladd; 117.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*; 67.

Paul's mind is running in the same 'kingdom' channel when he writes to the Corinthian church,

*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.* (II Corinthians 10:4-6)

Though the phrase 'kingdom of God' is not used, passages such as these are rooted in the reality of a kingdom already present, though hidden, and working in the world through the Church and the Gospel. Again, the Church is not the Kingdom, but neither can the two be separated. To remove the Kingdom from the view of the Church is to try to establish the Church in a vacuum – as an institution through which sinners are saved, without reference to the glorious kingdom into which they are being saved. 'New Testament Christians' under this paradigm have no home, no heritage, no *kingdom*; and the Church has only the meaning that it has allegedly developed for itself. Fortunately this is not how the apostles viewed things, nor is it how they preached the Gospel of the Kingdom "to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile."

The church is the community of the Kingdom but never the Kingdom itself...It is the church's mission to witness to the Kingdom. The church cannot build the Kingdom or become the Kingdom, but the church witnesses to the Kingdom – to God's redeeming acts in Christ both past and future.<sup>99</sup>

The difference between Israel as the Old Covenant witness to God's Kingdom, and the Church as the New Covenant witness to the same, is the fact that in Jesus Christ the Kingdom has come into human history in a powerful, though hidden, form. The realized eschatology of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ is the "*powers of the age to come*" spoken of by the author of Hebrews. "Because the church has an eschatological horizon and is the proleptic manifestation of the kingdom of God in history, it is the beachhead of the new creation and the sign of the new age in the old world that is 'passing away.'"<sup>100</sup> This

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<sup>99</sup> Ladd; 111, 113.

<sup>100</sup> Beker, J. Christiaan *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; 1980); 313.

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connection between the Church and the inaugurated Kingdom is the only one that can explain the importance of the Church in the teachings of the apostle, and especially those of Paul. Hardly a 'Plan B' in God's redemptive timeline, the Church is the vehicle by which the power of the Holy Spirit enters into human history as an invisible force, transforming the very history it enters.

However, the church of the saints is not a sequestered cloister, barricaded against the onslaughts of the world. It represents the blueprint of the new eschatological order that will be manifested in the kingdom of God...Paul's 'high ecclesiology' suggests not only a messianic life-style within the church but also a revolutionary impact on the values of the world, to which the church is sent out as agent of transformation and beachhead of the dawning kingdom of God.<sup>101</sup>

This is certainly a higher view of the Church than is held by most modern Christians, and far higher than the ecclesiology of Dispensationalism, in which the Church is an alternative plan of God for the salvation of the Gentiles, while His intended kingdom purpose for Israel is held in indefinite abeyance. Beker refers to Paul's 'high ecclesiology'; it remains now to be seen if indeed Paul manifests such a high view of the Church in his writings. By investigating some of what Paul has to say about the Church, we will also encounter his conceptions regarding the Kingdom, and will hopefully see that while the two were never confused in Paul's mind, they were never far apart, either.

### **Paul, the Church, and the Kingdom:**

The Apostle Paul, formerly the 'Pharisee of Pharisees' Saul of Tarsus, would have been the unlikeliest Jew in the Second Temple era to start a new religion. The modern concept that Paul was the founder of Christianity, whereas Jesus was a faithful and traditional Jewish rabbi, is not only contrary to the text of the New Testament, it is ludicrous to the character of both men. We know from the gospel accounts that Jesus did not speak as the scribes, but spoke as one who had authority. Paul, for his part, was an arch-persecutor of the Way, so much so that upon his conversion and departure for his hometown, the church "*enjoyed great peace.*"<sup>102</sup> When Saul became Paul he did not abandon the intellectual foundation he had gained in Judaism in order to create a new and

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<sup>101</sup> Beker; 318-319.

completely different religion. Rather he came to see and understand that Jesus was the fulfilment of those very same Scriptures to which Saul of Tarsus had dedicated his life. “Paul’s entire preaching is characterized by the conviction that Jesus is the Christ of Israel,



H. N. Ridderbos (1909-2007)

and that, therefore, the coming and work of Christ can be understood only against the background of the history of the revelation which the Old Testament describes.”<sup>103</sup> A large part of this revelation concerned the eschatological hope of the kingdom of God – though as we have seen, not in that exact phrase – and the coming of a new age of divine rule in

and through the Messiah. If Paul believed Jesus to be that Messiah, then we would expect to find in the apostle’s writings a strong thread of ‘new age’ theology, soteriology, and ecclesiology (with ‘new age’ used in the strictly biblical sense derived from the prophetic expectation of the Old Testament). There is, as we shall see, abundant evidence that Paul considered Jesus not only to be Israel’s Messiah, but also “before everything else, he was the *proclaimer of a new time*, the great turning point in the history of redemption, the intrusion of a new world aeon...Because Christ is revealed a new aeon has been ushered in, the old world has ended, and the new world has begun.”<sup>104</sup> And for Paul this new aeon pertained not merely to Israel, but manifestly to the whole of creation.

*For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.*  
(Colossians 1:19-20)

The language of Paul in such passages is not future tense, but rather past tense – God *has done* these things in Jesus Christ, not *will do* at some point in the future. Paul, of course, did have something to say about the future, as we will shortly see; but for him it was a future already begun, a kingdom consummated that was already inaugurated. Again notice the broad scope of Paul’s interpretation of the finished work of God in Jesus Christ, as he ties the resurrection of Jesus to the reconciliation of all things to God,

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<sup>102</sup> Acts 9:31

<sup>103</sup> Ridderbos, H. N. *Paul and Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1957); 59.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* 64-65.

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*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

(II Corinthians 5:17-21)

Paul draws the whole of Creation into this scheme of reconciliation, showing that the benefits of Christ will overflow from believers to the irrational and inanimate world as well. The fulfillment of this aspect of the kingdom is yet future, awaiting the consummation at the end of the age. Nevertheless, passages such as the following indicate the cosmic scope of Paul's thoughts concerning the dominion of Jesus, the Son of Man.

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.*

(Romans 8:18-22)

Ridderbos summarizes Paul's teaching concerning the extent of the reign of the exalted Jesus,

This redemption thereby acquires the significance of an all-inclusive divine drama, of a cosmic struggle, in which is involved not only man in his sin and lost condition, but in which are also related the heavens and the earth, angels and demons, and the goal of which is to bring back the entire created cosmos under God's dominion and rule...it is clear that the redemptive work of Christ is not only human and earthly but that it has much broader dimensions, in that the entire invisible world of spirits is related to it.<sup>105</sup>

The 'now and the not yet' aspect of Paul's conception of the current and future reign of Jesus Christ is nowhere more powerfully expressed than in I Corinthians 15, the whole chapter of which is worth setting forth here due to the connection the apostle draws between the resurrection of Jesus from the grave, the consequent authority and glory He received at the right hand of the Father, and the ultimate consummation of the entire

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<sup>105</sup> Ridderbos; 77.

## Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

redemptive plan of God, to the glory of Jesus Christ. But as we are focusing here on the Kingdom, we will limit the passage to those verses that deal with the promised consummation of what Jesus Christ has already begun.

*But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. **Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.** For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.* (I Corinthians 15:20-28)

Paul fully realized that Jesus Christ was the answer to *both* strands of kingdom promise in the Old Testament. Jesus was the Son of David according to the flesh, as the apostle makes note in his opening greeting to the Romans, in a passage that also shows the centrality of the resurrection to all that Paul believed and taught concerning Christ's present dominion.

*Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.* (Romans 1:1-4)

Passages like the one from I Corinthians 12 quoted above, illustrate how Paul also saw Christ as the Son of Man, to whom was promised universal power and dominion in order to "*put an end to all [earthly] rule and all authority and all power.*"<sup>106</sup> In one of the most poetic verses in the Pauline corpus, the apostle takes us all the way back to the beginning to show that God is now doing in Christ what He first did *ex nihilo*.

*For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* (II Corinthians 4:6)

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<sup>106</sup> See also Philippians 2:8-11, Colossians 2:10, and Ephesians 2:20-23

## Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

We could multiply passages from Paul's letters to show beyond a shadow of a doubt that the 'kingdom' was ever on his mind, though the word might not be as often on his pen. He reminds the believers in Rome, in a very this-worldly context within the Church, that "*the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.*"<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, in speaking of the salvation that has already been experienced by his hearers, Paul informs believers that Jesus "*has delivered us from the power of darkness and [conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*"<sup>108</sup> At the end of Paul's recorded ministry we find that his message has not changed,

*Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.* (Acts 28:30-31)

19<sup>th</sup> Century Anglican theologian Thomas Bernard notes, "Evidently on purpose are the two expressions combined in this final summary, in order to show that the preaching of the kingdom and the preaching of Christ are one: that the original proclamation has not ceased, but that in Christ Jesus the thing proclaimed is no longer a vague and future hope, but a distinct and present fact."<sup>109</sup> Thus the kingdom is no less present in the preaching and teaching of Paul than it was in that of Jesus. The perspective and emphasis has necessarily changed on account of the fact of Jesus' death and resurrection, but the kingdom is not 'taken away,' or 'delayed.' Nor is the kingdom solely the possession of Israel – the 'Son of David' promise – but belongs to the whole of Creation – the 'Son of Man' prophecy. Thus we find in the apostolic writings, and especially in those of the Apostle Paul,

The basic motif of the entire New Testament kerygma is that of the fulfillment of the historical redemption which began with Christ's coming. And Jesus himself is the ground and origin of this view of history, because of his preaching of the kingdom of God and also because of his messianic self-revelation. In this respect Paul does not originate anything which is new in principle.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Romans 14:17

<sup>108</sup> Colossians 1:13

<sup>109</sup> Bernard, Thomas Dehany *The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers; 1896); 133.

<sup>110</sup> Ridderbos; 67.

**Week 7: What is the Church, Then?**

**Key Biblical Texts:** Ephesians 1:18-23; Colossians 1:13-18

*“A metaphor is not a vague, unreal expression,  
But intends...to open one’s eyes to a deep, fascinating reality.”  
(G. C. Berkouwer, *The Church*)*

The Church has not taken the place of Israel, nor is the Church to be equated with the Kingdom of God; what, then, is the Church? Disassociating the Church with Israel and from the Kingdom would seem to leave us with the basic view of Dispensationalism, that the Church comprises a ‘Plan B’ within the redemptive purposes of God, not unknown to God from eternity, but also not revealed in the Old Testament. The basis for this view is primarily what Paul has to say in his epistles concerning the mystery that was entrusted to him to reveal,

*For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles – if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord...*

(Ephesians 3:1-11)

This passage has the added advantage to the Dispensationalist of the apostle using the term *oikonomos*, or ‘dispensation,’ in verse 1. But the actual definition or revelation of the ‘mystery’ in this passage works directly against the Dispensational view of the Church, for Paul defines the mystery as *“that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel...”* Far from establishing a separate, distinct ‘body’ of redeemed, God has – according to Paul – caused the Gentiles to be *fellow heirs* with the Jews, which was indeed something not clearly foretold in the Old Testament,

## Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

where it seemed evident that Gentiles could become members of the covenant people only by becoming Jewish – undergoing circumcision and submission to the Torah. The *mystery* was not that God would save from among the Gentiles; it was, rather, that He would do so by bringing the Jews and the Gentiles together into one body in and through Jesus Christ.

*Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands – that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. **But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.** For He Himself is our peace, who has made **both one**, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as **to create in Himself one new man from the two**, thus making peace, and that **He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross**, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. **For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.** Now, therefore, **you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God**, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:11-22)*

It is evident from this passage that ‘you’ represents Gentile believers – Paul is explicit on that score in verse 11: “*Gentiles in the flesh*” – and that to which ‘you’ are brought near and joined is the commonwealth and covenant belonging uniquely to Israel. Contrary to the ‘two’ people of God view of Dispensationalism – or even the distinction made by many non-Dispensational theologians between the people of God under the Old Covenant and the people of God under the New Covenant – Paul seems to know only one people: “*For He Himself is our peace, who made both one.*” Dispensationalism cannot support its central tenet of complete discontinuity between Israel and the Church; that doctrine cannot survive Ephesians 2:11-22. Hence Robert Saucy, a Progressive Dispensationalist, backs away from the classic view, “The earlier dispensationalist teaching that divided the people of God into an earthy and heavenly people (i.e., the church and Israel), with fundamentally no continuity in the plan of God on the historical



**Lewis Sperry Chafer**  
(1871-1952)

plane, must be rejected as well.”<sup>111</sup> It is remarkable to read such a noted Dispensational theologian as Lewis Sperry Chafer comment on these two passages from Ephesians, recognizing the work that God has done in Jesus Christ, and yet concluding that the Church is and remains forever distinct from Israel. In an article entitled *The Church Which is His Body*, Chafer reflects on Ephesians 3:1-11 and writes, “From this passage it may be seen that the mystery, or sacred secret, concerning this age was the forming of a new body out of both Jews and Gentiles. This was the ‘eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.’”<sup>112</sup> Chafer then refers to the earlier passage in Ephesians 2, but according to good Dispensational hermeneutics, limits the application of that which Paul describes to ‘this age.’

Preceding this passage, the Apostle has, in Eph. 2:11-18, not only defined the state of the Gentiles before God, but has made clear that, **during this age**, all hindrances that might arise from such distinctions have been put away that He might of the two, Jews and Gentiles, make one ‘new man,’ ‘[reconciling] both unto God in one body by the cross.’ The two elements of this body, then, are Jews and Gentiles, -- Gentiles that were ‘far off,’ ‘made nigh by the blood of Christ,’ (Eph. 2:13) and Jews that, by covenant, were ‘nigh,’ with Gentiles, reconciled ‘unto God in one body by the cross.’<sup>113</sup>

Chafer then refers to what is the most powerful Pauline definition of the Church in any text of the New Testament, and which cannot be comprehended as being limited to any age other than eternity, Ephesians 1:22-23. After having described the supreme glory and power of the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul concludes by joining Jesus Christ inexorably to His Church, His body: “*And He put all things under His feet and gave Him to be head over all things to **the church**, which is His body, **the fullness of Him who fills all in all.**”*<sup>114</sup> Here Paul calls the Church, “*the fulness of Him who fills all in all.*” What can possibly come after ‘all in all’? What more can God do that would be greater, or even beyond, Him who ‘fills all in all’? One might (any many do) respond that Paul is simply using metaphor here, but “a metaphor is not a vague, unreal expression, but intends...to open one’s eyes to a deep,

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<sup>111</sup> Feinberg, John S. ed. *Continuity and Discontinuity*; 239-240.

<sup>112</sup> Chafer, Lewis Sperry, “The Church Which is His Body”

<https://www.wholesomewords.org/etexts/chafer/chachurch.html>; accessed September 10, 2018.

<sup>113</sup> *Idem.* Emphasis added.

<sup>114</sup> Ephesians 1:22-23

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fascinating reality.”<sup>115</sup> It is truly hard to conceive that there can be something ‘after’ the Church, “*the fulness of Him who fills all in all.*” Unless, of course, it is the Kingdom itself.

*For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For “He has put all things under His feet.” But when He says “all things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.* (I Corinthians 15:25-28)

The Dispensational view that the bringing together of Jews and Gentiles into ‘one new man’ is for this present age only, and that in the future age Israel alone will be the object of God’s redemptive purpose, is simply an *a priori* conclusion. It is an essential tenet



**John Walvoord (1910-2002)**

of classic Dispensationalism that Israel and the Church are completely separate; therefore, any seeming union of the two must be a temporary expedient and not the ultimate purpose of God. This is a conclusion demanded by the premise; but it is foreign to the revelation that was given to Paul. What is remarkable is that classic Dispensationalism recognizes the joining together of Jew and Gentile in the Church, but cannot see that this is the ultimate fulfilment of the Abrahamic Covenant, that in Abraham’s Seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. John Walvoord, a leading Dispensationalist of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, writes a description of the Church that would find acceptance with any Reformed theologian, “...the church is revealed to be the company of believers formed of both Jew and Gentile who are called out of the world and joined together in one living union by the baptism of the Spirit.”<sup>116</sup> Somehow, however, Dispensationalists conclude that this situation is temporary, though no indication of a temporary character is to be found in Paul’s letters.

Yet the Reformed view that the Church has *taken the place* of Israel is also foreign to Paul’s teaching, for while the apostle knows only one people of God, that people *is Israel*. We often overlook Paul’s rhetorical question at the beginning of Romans 11, “*God has not*

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<sup>115</sup> Berkouwer, *The Church*; 81.

<sup>116</sup> Walvoord, John F. *Major Bible Themes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House; 1974); 236.

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*cast away His people, has He? Certainly not!*"<sup>117</sup> There is no indication in Paul's writings that the identity of the people of God has changed, but rather that Gentile believers have been *grafted in* to that people, the *one* olive tree, which is Israel.

*For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you... For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?* (Romans 11:16-18; 24)

The olive tree is generally interpreted to mean Abraham, due to the focus that the apostle places on the patriarch in the epistle to the Romans. It has also been associated with Jesus Christ, and appropriately so, as Jesus Christ is the Seed of Abraham. What is important to the current study is that Paul knows of *only one olive tree*, not two. And this olive tree is not a hybrid specie composed of Jews and Gentiles. It is, rather, the olive tree whose root lies deep within the Abrahamic Covenant, and into which wild Gentile branches are graciously grafted.

The hermeneutical and theological issue is this: if the Church is the replacement for Israel, or if the Church is a temporary 'dispensation' between God's dealing with Israel in the past and in the future, then the plan of God has failed in some measure. Paul begins his monumental analysis of Israel's situation vis-à-vis the Church (Romans 9-11) by stating the unalterable principle, "*But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect.*"<sup>118</sup> It was impossible for Paul to conceive that the revealed purpose of God through Israel – the word of revelation not only to Israel, but through Israel to the world – could fail of its accomplishment.

*For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there,  
But water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud,  
That it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;  
It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please,  
And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.* (Isaiah 55:10-11)

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<sup>117</sup> Romans 11:1

<sup>118</sup> Romans 9:6

Displacement or Delay; neither answer to the integrity of the divine word. The Church is not a 'new' people of God, either in the sense of displacing Israel or in the sense of an interim community for 'this age.' This is what often confuses Gentile scholars (and believers, for that matter): since the New Covenant was promised "*to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah*" (Jeremiah 31:31), in what sense can it be fulfilled in the New Testament Church? Making the Church *replace* Israel leaves many wondering how that comports with a God whose Word cannot fail. Introducing multiple thousands of years between the coming of the One who is undeniably the Messiah of Israel and the fulfilment of His Messianic mission is also hard to swallow. But Paul presents a thorough answer to the conundrum, maintaining the faithfulness of God to His Old Covenant people Israel and, no less important, to His Word.

As the background to Paul's ecclesiology, we should again note that the disciples of Jesus nowhere indicate a belief that the church of which they were the 'founding members,' so to speak, was something new and improved in the redemptive plan of God. Repeatedly recorded in Acts is the apostles' assurance to their Jewish brethren that what they were observing was the fulfilment of this or that Old Testament prophecy, not a new direction taken by God because of the intransigence of Israel toward her Messiah. "The disciples saw the task of the community gathered by them in being what Israel was supposed to be: God's community, God's home and nation, the saints and chosen ones."<sup>119</sup> Jesus, as the Messiah of Israel, brought salvation and deliverance to Israel; Israel, newly constituted in the risen Christ, now brings salvation and deliverance to the world. It is as it was prophesied to be.

No one, not even the most daring Zealot, spoke here of an antithesis, a choice, as if Christ were to be sent either for Israel or for the world. Rather, one aim confirms the other and leads it to its completion. By transforming Israel into the sanctified and perfected community, the Christ reveals God's glory to the world, and by gathering the nations around himself he accomplishes the fulfillment and the glorification of Israel.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Schlatter; 41.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*; 43.

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This is what the prophecies promised: not an Israel *replaced* by a Gentile Church, nor a *delayed* kingdom during which time God's covenant with Israel would be in limbo, but rather the promise of a New Covenant with Israel in which the nations of the world would be blessed by being joined to Israel's Messiah. The apostles continue the narrative of the Old Covenant as they announce the New, employing perhaps more words from the Old Testaments than from their own pen. N. T. Wright describes the situation of the early disciples accurately to the text when he writes, "first century Judaism and Christianity have a central worldview-feature in common: the sense of a story now reaching its climax. And, most importantly, *it is the same story.*"<sup>121</sup>

Thus Paul consistently speaks of Gentile believers being '*brought near*' and '*grafted in*' to the people with whom God had made an immortal covenant, Israel. "The heart of Paul's theology derives from the impact of the resurrection of the exalted Lord. God had raised Jesus from the dead and offered forgiveness of sins and deliverance from this present evil age. With the breaking in of God's salvation in Christ, and the deliverance from the past age of bondage, God's people became the sign of his new creation."<sup>122</sup> In Romans 11 especially, Paul does not abandon Israel entirely, nor does he fold them into a Gentile Church so that the identity of Israel is lost entirely. The New Testament writers, "do not describe the people of God as a new Israel who had replaced the Jewish people. Rather Israel is now divided into repentant and unrepentant Jews, and the church consists of both those believing Jews and Gentiles who together form the one true Israel."<sup>123</sup> But, as we will see a bit later in this lesson, that new community could no longer be called 'Israel,' as it was intended to be formed progressively through the ages with believers called from "*every tongue, tribe, and nation.*" Nevertheless, the core of this community – and if we are interpreting Paul's hopeful predictions in Romans 11 correctly – the future glory of this community, was and will be Israel, the covenant people of God. Beker comments, "The church, in its Jewish-Gentile unity, is the proleptic dawning of the future destiny of Israel, but it is not Israel's displacement."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Wright, *New Testament People of God*; 150.

<sup>122</sup> Childs; 434.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*; 438.

<sup>124</sup> Beker; 316.

**The Logic of True Israel:**

Let us summarize this point by describing the logical progression of Paul's thought concerning both Israel and the Church, showing that in the apostle's mind there is no radical distinction between the two, but rather organic continuity. The **first premise** established here is that *there is but one people of God: Israel*. Again, this is the thrust of Paul's statements in Romans 9-11, that God's word has not failed, that His "*gifts and calling are without repentance.*" (11:29) Thus Paul establishes that what was happening in the Church – the bringing in of the Gentiles – was a continuation of God's promise and plan for Israel, His people, for "*God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew.*" (11:2)

The **second premise** is established in Romans 11, where Paul presents the redemptive truth that in order for Gentiles to be saved, they must somehow be joined to Israel – the metaphor here is the engrafting of wild branches into the domesticated olive tree that represents Israel. There can hardly be a stronger statement as to the *one* people of God: there is but *one* olive tree, to which alone Gentile branches must be joined if there are to partake of the same salvation as Israel. This passage is of the same nature as what we have read from Ephesians 2, that Gentiles were once "*excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*"<sup>125</sup> The Gentiles' only hope, again, was to be "*brought near,*" to be joined to Israel. There was no provision – mysterious or otherwise – of a separate people of God to be established for the salvation of the Gentiles. Nor is there any indication in Paul that the one people of God would somehow morph into a Gentile nation; it was and remains *Israel*.

The **third premise** that Paul sets forth in Romans 9 is that "*not all Israel is Israel.*" (9:6). The full verse is worth repeating, as it shows that in Paul's mind the word of God had not failed simply because Israel had largely rejected her promised Messiah.

*But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants...<sup>126</sup>*

The apostle then lays out the consistent 'remnant' view of a faithful and believing Israel, not unlike the Old Testament prophets before him. He does, of course, weave in the

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<sup>125</sup> Ephesians 2:12

<sup>126</sup> Romans 9:6-7

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sovereign election of God – those who remain faithful and believing do so because it is upon them that God has shown mercy. But the point to our current study is that nowhere does Paul abandon Israel or replace Israel as the people of God with the Church. Yet he acknowledges, along with the ancient prophets, that being a physical descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not automatically make one a ‘true’ Israelite; the real heritage is that of the *faith* of Abraham and not merely physical descent.

This sets the stage for the epitome of the ‘remnant’ – the Messiah of Israel who would be in himself all that Israel was to be before God. This truth was foreshadowed by the prophets, with Isaiah, for instance, often speaking of the Servant of Yahweh as if he were a single individual while at other times representing the Servant as the nation of Israel as a whole. Even the comment of Hosea, viewed by Matthew as prophetic of Jesus’ return with His parents from Egypt, illustrates the interchangeability of ‘Israel’ as the nation and ‘Israel’ as the Messiah. There is every evidence from the gospel accounts that Jesus saw himself as the embodiment of Israel and all that she stood for. “[Jesus] interprets his own actions in terms of the fulfillment, not of a few prophetic proof-texts taken atomistically, but of the entire story-line which Israel had told herself, in a variety of forms, over and over again.”<sup>127</sup> LaRondelle comments, “As Messiah, Jesus was not only solidarity with Israel, but the embodiment of Israel, likewise called ‘God’s firstborn Son.’”<sup>128</sup> He continues,

The purpose of the New Testament quotations is not simply to show how hidden messianic predictions were accurately verified in Jesus’ life, but rather to proclaim Jesus as the goal of Israel’s history and the perfect realization of God’s covenant with Israel.<sup>129</sup>

Thus we arrive at the logical **conclusion** of the Pauline ecclesiology: In Jesus the fulfillment of Israel is accomplished, and in Jesus the remnant of Israel is gathered into the community of the New Covenant, now called the Church, not as the replacement of Israel but as her fulfillment and continuation. “The Church, as the eschatological Israel, with its new covenant in the blood of Christ, is the fulfillment of God’s plan with ancient Israel.”<sup>130</sup> God thus turns the hardened hearts of the majority of Israel into salvation to the Gentiles,

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<sup>127</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*; 130.

<sup>128</sup> LaRondelle, *The Israel of God*; 64.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*; 73.

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so that the salvation of the Gentiles will eventually be turned into the salvation of Israel, as Paul states in Romans 11.

*For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved...*  
(Romans 11:25-26)

Consequently, we define the Church as the elect of God from both Jews and Gentiles, joined by the power of the Holy Spirit to the person of Israel's Messiah, Jesus Christ, who is her resurrected and exalted Head and King. The involvement of the Holy Spirit in all of this – admitted earlier by Chafer – signifies the Church to be the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises to Israel, as summarized most beautifully in Ezekiel 36,

*Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.*  
(Ezekiel 36:25-27)

This God has done, beginning at Pentecost and continuing throughout the ensuing two thousand years. The Church is the eschatological fulfillment of God's promises to Israel, and the continuation of Israel as the one people of God. Hardened Israel will one day be delivered and their hardened hearts once more softened by God's grace. But at that time they will not return as the Old Covenant nation, but rather, as Paul clearly states in Romans 11, they will be *grafted back in* to the very same olive tree of which they were the natural branches, and Gentiles the adopted branches. This logic is demanded by the terminology used to describe the Church, as the very same terminology that encompasses the New Covenant blessings promised to Israel.

This *ecclesiological* fulfillment concentrates especially on three Hebrew concepts: the survival of a faithful remnant of Israel, the promise of a new covenant in Jeremiah 31, and the promise of the vivifying Spirit of God in Ezekiel 36-37.<sup>131</sup>

Paul's most frequent description of a believer is someone who is 'in Christ.' This meant for the apostle the same and more than 'in Israel' meant under the Old Covenant.

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*; 40.

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Under the Old Covenant to be in Israel meant to be a member of God's covenant community, to be set apart as holy unto Yahweh, separate from the nations. It also carried the responsibility of obedience to the commandments of God, and it did not extend so far as to the eternal salvation of the individual Israelite. This blessing was, and always will be, a gift of grace through faith (*cp.* Hab. 2:4). The fulfillment to the individual of what the covenant blessing to the nation implied is the subject matter of such prophecies as Jeremiah 31 (the New Covenant) and Ezekiel 36 (the New Heart). The fulfillment of these in Jesus Christ is what makes 'in Christ' even more blessed than 'in Israel,' and signifies full and eternal redemption from one's sin.

Thus Paul never considered the community that was forming 'in Christ' to be different from God's covenant people Israel, with the definitions and caveats that he furnishes in his letters. Though Paul never specifically refers to Christ as 'Israel,' he nonetheless associated the finished work of Jesus – and especially the resurrection – as that which removes the distinction between Jew and Gentile, and brings the Gentile believer into the same community, the one community: Israel. This is Paul's answer to the Old Testament prophecies; nothing remains for him but the culmination of the age and the presentation of the glorified Kingdom to God the Father.

This is why Paul speaks in such cosmic and majestic terms of the church in Ephesians 1, where we began this lesson, "*the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*" Jesus' disciples properly interpreted His finished work as the completion of all that God had promised Israel in terms of her redemption and deliverance. "[Early Christianity] will have seen Jesus as *both* the focal point of Jewish sapiential, prophetic and apocalyptic traditions *and* the one who had inaugurated the worldwide kingdom of Israel's god, the creator of the world."<sup>132</sup> The Church has been made Christ's fulness, though He fills all in all – including the Church. Thus the Church is the expression of the newly inaugurated Kingdom, and is the extension of the King, Jesus Christ. The clearest metaphor that could be developed to describe this relationship between Christ and His Church is that of the Head to the Body, and this is, of course, one of the major descriptive elements in Paul's teaching on the Church.

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<sup>131</sup> LaRondelle; 207.

<sup>132</sup> Wright, *New Testament People of God*; 442.

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The body of Christ, however, is more than mere figurative language; it represents a reality that cannot be put into words apart from metaphor. There is no language that can describe the spiritual union between Christ and His Church, and the metaphor of the head to the body at least fully captures the vital connection that exists between the two. Christ as the Head is parallel to Israel as the one people of God under the Abrahamic Covenant. All divine blessing derives from this covenant, as Jesus informs the Samaritan woman, *"Salvation is from the Jews."* There has been no change in this redemptive pattern. The Church, therefore, becomes the body of Christ in the same manner as any Gentile would experience salvation under the Old Covenant, by becoming engrafted into Israel. As Christ is Israel, so now all who are saved are so by being 'in Him,' because to be 'in Him' is to be in Abraham by faith.

*But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.* (Romans 9:6-8)

This concept of the body of Christ informs and unites within itself everything that is said in the New Testament about the Church, and fully describes the essence of the Church as the new Temple of God - *"tear down this Temple and I will raise it up in three days,"* Jesus said, speaking, John tells us, of His body. This pertains directly to the resurrection, but through the power of the resurrection to the 'body' of Christ, the Church. Thus the metaphors used to describe the Church - the *body of Christ*, the *bride of Christ*, the *temple of God* - are not independent, but connected to one another through their consistent reference to Christ. *"In the whole of the New Testament, the relationship to Christ has everything to do with the Church."*<sup>133</sup> The reality of this relationship, and that which brings the figure of speech into reality, is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. *"In the history of revelation the Old Testament people of God become the church of the Messiah, formed as the fellowship of the Spirit."*<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Berkouwer; 141.

<sup>134</sup> Clowney; 29.

**Week 8: Pentecost: The End & The Beginning**

**Key Biblical Texts:** Acts 2:1-21

*"The Spirit is a gift from God's future,  
the gift which guarantees that future."  
(N. T. Wright, Paul)*

Frequently the issue of *continuity* versus *discontinuity* has come up in our discussion of the origins and nature of the Christian Church. The general thrust of this study has been that there has only ever been *one* divine plan of redemption, formulated in eternity past and enacted progressively throughout human history – culminating in the advent of Jesus Christ. That is *continuity*. Equally true, however, is the fact that the coming of Jesus Christ marked an irrevocable change in the flow of redemptive history, in that the fullness of time and of revelation had come and there is no going back. That is *discontinuity*. If we can specify a time and place where continuity and discontinuity meet in the biblical narrative, it is at Pentecost in the temple precincts of Jerusalem, approximately AD 33. Pentecost, of course, marks the coming of the Holy Spirit, an event Jesus himself considered far more important to His disciples than the comfort of His own physical presence among them.<sup>135</sup> Yet, important as modern believers consider the Pentecost event, there is little agreement among them as to its meaning vis-à-vis the Church. Some hold that Pentecost was the beginning of a brand new work of God called 'the Church'; others hold that the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on that day was a once-for-all divine imprimatur upon the gathering of Jesus' disciples; while others teach that the experience of Pentecost is to be sought after and received by all believers if they truly want to know the power of Christ in their lives. This divergence of views is quite remarkable, given that Peter stood up and explained the day's events to the assembled crowd, "*this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel...*"

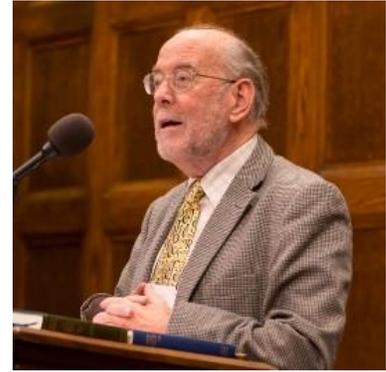
Modern evangelicals who are most frequently associated with Pentecost are called, of course, Pentecostals. It is largely due to their views that many other evangelicals bypass the teaching and meaning of Pentecost altogether, in fear of unleashing an uncontrollable

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<sup>135</sup> John 16:7

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charismatic movement within their denominations and congregations. In both cases a very important date in the calendar of redemption is misinterpreted: either wrongly interpreted in the one case, or wrongly ignored in the other. In truth, the work of Jesus Christ itself would have been powerless to save a single sinner if not for the events recorded on that Pentecost day. James Dunn writes, “The climax and purposed end of Jesus’ ministry is not the cross and resurrection but the ascension and Pentecost...Calvary without Pentecost would not be an atonement *for us*.”<sup>136</sup> We do well to seek to understand what those events mean for us as believers and for the Church of Jesus Christ.



**James D. G. Dunn (b. 1939 )**

As it is the most common view held among evangelicals today, the teaching of Pentecostalism in regard to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is perhaps the best



place to start a discussion on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. The common perception among non-Pentecostals – that Pentecostalism is all about the *baptism off/in the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues* – is largely accurate, and by the admission of Pentecostal theologians. For instance, Frederick Dale Bruner, in his *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, writes, “Pentecost, for Pentecostalism, means first of all and essentially Acts 2:4: ‘And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.’”<sup>137</sup> Bruner continues,

It can be established from the literature that the experience of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostalism is understood essentially as the experience of the *baptism* and consequent *gifts* of the Holy Spirit. Anything outside of this thematic center is peripheral, not distinctively Pentecostal, and in Pentecostal treatments for all practical purposes undeveloped.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Dunn, James D. G. *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London: SCM Press LTD; 1970); 44.

<sup>137</sup> Bruner, Frederick Dale *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans; 1970); 57.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*; 59.

This assessment is largely true even in the almost fifty years since Bruner wrote his book, with the notable exception being the work of Gordon Fee, one of the most thorough and thought-provoking Pentecostal theologians of the modern era. We will interact with Fee's views further on in this lesson, though it may be said at this point that his more biblically-integrate analysis of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit has not significantly influenced the practice of Pentecostal churches. It is still the case that "In the study of Pentecostalism it is soon discovered that that Pentecostal pneumatology emphasizes not so much the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as it does the doctrine (or as Pentecostals would prefer to say, the experience) of the *baptism* of the Holy Spirit."<sup>139</sup>

Bruner is a very interesting theologian in regard to his theology of the Holy Spirit. He is a self-professed 'Reformed biblical theologian,'<sup>140</sup> and teaches regularly at West Side Presbyterian Church in Seattle; yet his treatment of the Pentecostal view of the work of the Holy Spirit is quite approving. What is remarkable about Bruner's *Theology of the Holy Spirit*, and particularly significant to our study, is his index of Scriptural references. It is, actually, titled *Index of New Testament References*, and indeed does not contain a single passage reference from the Old Testament. This is telling and is indicative of *most* evangelical's views regarding the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit - it all begins at Pentecost. While non-Pentecostals rarely mean the same thing when they refer to the Day of Pentecost, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as the beginning of the Church, they nonetheless tend to ignore any prior teaching in Scripture concerning the Holy Spirit. To most evangelicals, Pentecost was a *beginning*; but biblically-speaking, it was also an *end*. And that which it ended speaks volumes to that which it begins.

As noted above, arguments regarding the meaning of Pentecost are somewhat surprising considering the explanation given under the Spirit's inspiration by the apostle Peter, immediately upon the event itself,

*But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only <sup>le</sup>the third hour of the day. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel...*

(Acts 2:14-16)

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*; 57.

<sup>140</sup> <https://wspc.org/preacher/dale-bruner/> accessed October 1, 2018.

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Peter goes on to quote from Joel 2, verse 28 to the beginning of verse 32.

*And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;  
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions,  
Your old men shall dream dreams.  
And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days;  
And they shall prophesy.  
I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath:  
Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.  
The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood,  
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.  
And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.*

This is universally recognized as a prophecy of the coming of the Messianic Kingdom, also known in Old Testament prophecy as the 'Day of the Lord.' So clear is this reference by Peter to the eschatological expectation of the Old Covenant nation, that modern Dispensationalists are forced to alter the sense in which the apostle uses the citation. Admitting that the passage in Joel is messianic, but stipulating that the Messianic Kingdom cannot come until the Second Advent of Christ and the Millennium, the Dispensationalist must read Peter's comments in his Pentecost sermon with some consternation. In *Major Bible Themes*, Dispensationalist Lewis Sperry Chafer acknowledges Joel 2:28ff to be speaking of the Messianic Kingdom (page 309) but fails entirely to address Acts 2:16ff in the book. Dunn notes that many Dispensationalists treat Peter's words in Acts 2 as 'illustration' rather than 'fulfillment' of the Old Testament prophecy. He quotes Merrill Unger, a noted 20<sup>th</sup> Century Dispensationalist commentator: "'This is that' means nothing more than that 'this is (an illustration) of that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel.'" <sup>141</sup> Unger's full comment runs as follows,



**Merrill Unger (1909-80)**

It seems quite obvious that Peter did not quote Joel's prophecy in the sense of its fulfillment in the events of Pentecost, but purely as a prophetic illustration of those events. As a matter of fact, to avoid confusion, Peter's quotation evidently *purposely* goes beyond any possible fulfillment at Pentecost by including events in the still future day of the Lord, preceding kingdom

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<sup>141</sup> Dunn; 47.

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establishment (Acts 2:19-20). To employ the term “partial fulfillment,” as some writers do, involves illogical terminology that does not produce clarity and accuracy of concept.<sup>142</sup>

This treatment of Acts 2:16ff – as well as the other references made by the apostles to the fulfillment of the promised Messianic Kingdom, is made necessary (called ‘special pleading’ by Dunn) by the whole schema of Dispensational thought: These Old Testament prophetic passages refer to the Messianic Kingdom; the Messianic Kingdom will not come until the Second Advent of Christ and the Millennium; therefore, these quotations with regard to the Church must be illustration rather than fulfillment. The presupposition of the future Millennial Kingdom is evident in Chafer’s handling of such Old Testament prophecies as Joel 2,

Old Testament predictions concerning the kingdom are often a part of the predictions concerning the return of the King. When these two themes are combined into one, it is termed ‘the day of the Lord,’ *which refers to that lengthened period extending from the rapture of the church and the judgments following this event on the earth, to the end of His millennial reign.*<sup>143</sup>

Chafer begs the question. He has assumed the validity of his eschatology and from that perspective he interprets Peter’s ecclesiology. But his eschatology has yet to be proven, and indeed, Peter’s ecclesiology – if left to speak on its own – should massively impact Chafer’s eschatology. In fact, Peter is not using Joel illustratively (one might ask just what it is that Peter seeks to illustrate by quoting Joel); rather it is the case that Peter recognizes in the events of Pentecost the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel, which is why he *does* say, “*This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel,*” and he *does not* say, “*This is an illustration of that which was spoken of, etc. etc.*” And the fact that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy (actually, of several Old Testament prophecies) means that Bruner’s Scriptural references ought to have gone back into the Old Testament and not be limited to the New Testament alone. Pentecost may have been the beginning of something, but it was also the end and fulfillment of something, too.

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<sup>142</sup> Merrill F. Unger, “The Significance of Pentecost,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 122 (1965): 176-77. Quoted by Kenneth Banks, “Acts 2:16-20: Fulfillment or Illustration?” [http://www.academia.edu/14930119/Acts\\_2\\_16-20\\_FULFILLMENT\\_OR\\_ILLUSTRATION](http://www.academia.edu/14930119/Acts_2_16-20_FULFILLMENT_OR_ILLUSTRATION) accessed October 1, 2018.

<sup>143</sup> Chafer, *Bible Themes*; 309 (italics added for emphasis).

**The New Covenant and the Spirit:**

If we take Peter's own explanation of the events of Pentecost as our starting point – which undoubtedly we should – we are directed back to the Old Testament, where we will find the advance notice and purpose of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is ludicrous to maintain that Pentecost and the Church were 'unknown' to the Old Testament prophets, if the New Testament apostle immediately quotes one of them to explain the experience of Pentecost and the 'founding' of the Church. Rather, what we find when we return to the Church's heritage in the Old Covenant, is the promise of the Holy Spirit as an essential element of the advent of the New Covenant. Joel is just the beginning; Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah will all contribute as well.

We begin by taking the Joel reference as literal and not as illustrative. In other words, we recognize along with Peter that the Messianic Kingdom has come, exactly as God had promised it would come through the prophet Joel. Paul also connects with Joel Chapter 2 when he explains how it is that a sinner is saved. The familiar passage in Romans 10, often used in evangelistic witnessing, is to Paul grounded in the prophecy of Joel, which he quotes:

*...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."*  
(Romans 10:9-13)

For our purposes in this lesson, the important point to realize is that, for one as trained in the Torah as was Paul, the *promise* of salvation could not be extended even to the Jews (much less to the Gentiles) unless the *prophecy* had been fulfilled. The fruition of 'calling upon the name of the Lord' is predicated in Joel Chapter 2 upon the coming of the "great and terrible Day of the Lord" accompanied as it would be by the pouring out of God's Spirit "upon all flesh." This promise was fulfilled at Pentecost, bringing to completion the eschatological hope of the Old Covenant. Thus Pentecost was not merely the beginning of the Church – and especially not as a beginning *distinct* from the continuing identity of the

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People of God – it was the culmination of the essential content of the promise of the New Covenant: the outpouring of the Spirit.

The two most important Old Testament passages concerning the advent of the New Covenant are Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36. This is not, of course, to say that no other Old Testament passage speaks to the New Covenant, but merely to recognize the comprehensiveness of these two. Both passages speak of a deeper transformation of God's people, one that takes place in the heart and not merely in the mind or will. Both passages refer to the ultimate fulfillment of the divine promise to "*circumcise the heart*" of every believer, a promise that was given centuries earlier to Moses.

*And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.*

(Deuteronomy 30:6)

It may be that the nation of Israel had eschatological expectations that were heavily political and military, but God's Word remained clear throughout the Old Covenant – true and spiritual worship of Yahweh was what Israel (and all mankind) needed, and this is exactly what God promised to give them. Thus no other aspect of the covenantal promises – valid though each is in its own place – can usurp the principal characteristic of a new heart, a heart of flesh and not of stone, a heart upon God has written His Law.

*But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and **write it on their hearts**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."*

(Jeremiah 31:33-34)

Ezekiel 36 & 37 are widely considered to be referring to an era of renewal for Israel that is so dramatic that it must constitute the renewal and revival of the Kingdom of the Messiah. Dispensationalists, like their Jewish forebears, view the terminology to be too comprehensive to be applicable to anything currently experienced; it must refer to the Millennial Kingdom. But such a conclusion cannot be made without doing tremendous and irreparable damage to the Gospel and to its integral promise of the new heart and the new creation. To be sure, the language of Ezekiel is astounding and well beyond anything

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our eyes have seen in the past two thousand years. But this simply points to the fact that the Kingdom of God would not come in an expected way, as Jesus himself said:

*Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is <sup>l</sup>within you."* (Luke 17:20-21)

Ezekiel 36 speaks of the regeneration of the sinner's soul and cannot conceivably refer to anything other than the work of the Holy Spirit in what is now (incorrectly) termed 'Christian salvation.'

*Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.* (Ezekiel 36:25-28)

The last clause of this divine promise – referring to the possession of the land – has not been literally fulfilled in Israel, but it is included in the quotation as an integral part of the promise. However, too much has been put upon the 'land' aspect of the promise while too little has been emphasized concerning the work of God's Spirit within the believer, something that has manifestly taken place in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our contention here is that the Pentecost event is *the* fulfillment of this prophecy as well as of Jeremiah 31, Joel 2, and Zechariah 4:6, "*Not by might, nor by power, but **by My Spirit**, says the Lord.*" This last reference is in the context of Zerubbabel's rebuilding of the Temple and ties in with our earlier discussion regarding the Church as the true temple of God in Jesus Christ. The dwelling of God with His people – His Spirit's presence among them – was of the greatest importance to the faithful Jew, far more important than possession of the land (though that was never unimportant, as it was a covenant symbol of divine grace and approbation). The history of the Old Covenant people is one of God granting and taking away His Spirit – from the king, from the temple, from the land – while consistently promising the full and final restoration of His Spirit to His people, never to be taken away again. *This* is the key to Old Testament eschatology, and to the events of Pentecost in the New Testament.

Simply put, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was irrefutable proof that the New Covenant had come, with all that that entailed from the prophecies of old. Among the New Testament writers, no one was more profoundly impacted by this realization than the apostle ‘born out of season,’ Paul. And it is undoubtedly true that Paul would have been the hardest of all the apostles to convince that the New Covenant had come, but in a manner far different than he was anticipating. Throughout this study we have noted that



**Richard B. Hays (b. 1948)**

Paul did not consider his doctrine to be the least inconsistent with the Scriptures, which in his time were, of course, the Old Testament Law and Prophets. Richard Hays, in his thoughtful study, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, writes, “Paul was insistent that his message stood in direct continuity with Scripture and, at the same time, equally insistent that his gospel was radically new, a revelation that demanded reassessment of all that was past.”<sup>144</sup> To Paul, the advent of the Holy Spirit brought a new hermeneutic to bear

upon Scripture; all things must now be re-thought through the lens of a fulfilled covenant and an inaugurated kingdom. This is the context of Pentecost as well as its most important result.

To summarize thus far: Pentecost has been consistently misinterpreted as an *individual* event, an empowerment of believers to achieve spiritual heights unavailable to those who have not yet received the ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit.’ Without denying the aspect of empowerment,<sup>145</sup> the events of Pentecost cannot be seen in individual terms at all, but rather as the evidence of God fulfilling the promise of the New Covenant by sending forth His Spirit. This is what Jesus promised to His disciples, particularly in the final days of His earthly ministry. He recognized that without the sending of the Holy Spirit – something that He would secure by virtue of His sacrificial death – there could be no New Covenant, no fulfillment, no realization of the eschatological hope of Israel. It was

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<sup>144</sup> Hays, Richard B. *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press; 1989); 123.

<sup>145</sup> The word Jesus uses in Acts 1:8, *dunamis*, refers rather to ‘ability’ than it does to ‘power,’ at least in the sense in which ‘power’ is widely interpreted today.

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necessary for Jesus to die, and necessary after He had risen for Him to depart, that He might truly finish the work for which He was sent, but Himself sending the Holy Spirit.

*But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.* (John 16:5-11)

Thus it is very wrong and very dangerous to teach that the 'baptism' of the Holy Spirit is something added to the life of a true believer, as if someone could be an heir of the New Covenant without the Spirit. The events of Pentecost were for the church as a whole, not simply for each individual member of the church; the empowerment was of the Body, not merely of its individual parts. "The fact that Pentecost is the climax of Jesus' ministry for the disciples should not blind us into thinking that Pentecost is merely a continuation of what went before. Pentecost is a new beginning – the inauguration of a new age, the age of the Spirit – that which had not been before."<sup>146</sup> The outpouring of the Spirit of God was a revivification of the people of God, as prophesied in Ezekiel 37 in the vision of the dry bones, and cannot be properly understood apart from the inauguration of the New Covenant kingdom in Jesus Christ.

As mentioned earlier, Pentecostalism is not renowned for deep works of theology, even in regard to the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit. A modern-day exception to the rule is found in the writings of Gordon Fee, whose *God's Empowering Presence* is a highly regarded (as much or more outside of Pentecostalism as within) systematic treatment of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the letters of Paul. Fee extracted a chapter of his magnum opus (*God's Empowering Presence* runs to over 900 pages before the appendices and



**Gordon D. Fee (b. 1934)**

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<sup>146</sup> Dunn; 44.

indices) into a smaller book, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, in which he summarizes the significance of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to the apostle's doctrine of the Church. In both works Fee, a member of the Assemblies of God denomination, brings a Pentecostalist perspective to a biblical exegetical analysis of the purpose of the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and provides a theological analysis of Paul's letters that will satisfy the most thoroughly Reformed thinker.

Apart from the visible manifestation of the Spirit's advent on Pentecost (the "tongues as of fire") and the remarkable miracle of speech and hearing ("and each one heard them speaking in his own dialect"), Pentecost must first be recognized as the event by which God took possession of – literally took up residence with and in – His people, reforming the people of God from the remnant of believing Israel, to which the Gentiles would be joined by the very same act of the Holy Spirit. "That is, in the Spirit we are united as one in God's own presence; and also by the Spirit God's presence is manifest on earth in the community of faith."<sup>147</sup> Edmund Clowney adds,

In the Spirit the Father and the Son take possession of the church. Nothing from God's past revelation is lost. Through the Spirit the church is united to Christ in the fellowship of His sufferings, and of His glory. The presence of the Spirit is therefore both promise and realization...At Pentecost the Lord came to take possession of his people, filling his spiritual house with his presence. The phenomena of Pentecost recalls the wind and fire of Sinai, as well as the cloud of glory that filled the tabernacle.<sup>148</sup>

The point these writers are making in response to the biblical witness of both the Old and the New Testaments, is that the advent of the Holy Spirit was essential to the existence of the Church. Furthermore, the Church is the full realization of the invisible kingdom – the kingdom that does not come by observation – and not merely a contingency plan on the part of God. Contrary to the view that the 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' was meant to be supplemental (albeit very important) to the life of believers and of the Church, it is rather the case that there could be no believer and no Church without the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. On the one hand, Christ's death made the new humanity, the one body, a possibility; and he accomplished this by abolishing that

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<sup>147</sup> Fee, Gordon D. *God's Empowering Presence* (Grand Rapids: Hendrickson Publishers; 1994); 682.

<sup>148</sup> Clowney; 51-52.

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which divides. But the realization of this 'one body' comes through their being one people together in the one Spirit of God."<sup>149</sup>

From a purely historical perspective, the fact that the Holy Spirit was essential to the constitution of the revived people of God, intended to include both Jews and Gentiles, settles the question as to the 'origin' of the Church chronologically. James Dunn summarizes, "In brief, then, the Church properly conceived did not come into existence until Pentecost. Apart from everything else the vital experience and possession of the Spirit, the constitutive life principle and hallmark of the early Church, was lacking."<sup>150</sup> But this is not merely a historical point of information - like when someone is born - it is rather the powerful evidence that the promised messianic kingdom had come, that the exile of God's People had ended, and that God was now resident among His People forever. Far from being a Plan B, the Church is the manifestation on earth of the covenant God fulfilling His covenant promises: from Israel to the nations. While we tend to think of eschatology in terms of Christ's Second Coming, we must also remember that Israel had an eschatology - and this eschatology was fulfilled with the First Advent of Christ, and this fulfillment was consummated with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

For Paul, therefore, salvation in Christ is a thoroughly eschatological reality, meaning first of all that God's final (eschatological) saving of his people has already been effected in Christ...This essential framework likewise conditions Paul's understanding that the church is an eschatological community, where members live in the present as those stamped with eternity.<sup>151</sup>

It is for this reason that the systematic theological doctrine of Pneumatology is most properly a sub-section of Ecclesiology, as is the study of Eschatology. The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit really cannot be developed apart from the Church, for in the Church we find the 'age of the Spirit' begun and advancing, resulting ultimately in the consummation of the age and giving way eventually to the New Heaven and the New Earth. Paul had more to say about the Holy Spirit than any other biblical author and we will turn to his doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the Church in our next lesson. It is sufficient at this point to note that the Spirit of God constitutes the essential principle of the Church; of its life and its

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<sup>149</sup> Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*; 684-5.

<sup>150</sup> Dunn; 51.

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message and witness in the world. To Paul, "The gift of the out-poured Spirit meant the messianic age had already arrived. The Spirit is thus the central element in this altered perspective, the key to which is Paul's firm conviction that the Spirit was both the *certain evidence* that the future had dawned, and the *absolute guarantee* of its final consummation."<sup>152</sup>

### A New Hermeneutic - II Corinthians 3

It has occurred to a number of modern writers – and should really have occurred to all readers of the Pauline letters – that the apostle to the Gentiles 'rethinks' Judaism on just about every possible level. This fact, of course, got Paul into tremendous trouble with his unbelieving Jewish countrymen. But it has also confused generations of Christian scholars, who constantly attempt to create something new out of Paul rather than to see that the Scriptures of the Old Testament were always to him the touchstone of truth. As noted above (pg. 112), Paul consistently placed himself in the uninterrupted line of biblical revelation, not as one who has received a brand new revelation, but rather as one to whom the mystery of the one revelation has been unfolded. The "*greatness of revelation*" given to Paul did not involve a new plan of redemption; it involved, as it were, a new hermeneutic for reading and interpreting the ageless plan of redemption revealed "*in former times in many parts and in many portions*" through the prophets. This new hermeneutic is most vividly outlined in Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church, where he speaks of the Corinthian believers as "*a letter of Christ written on tablets of flesh.*"

*You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.* (II Corinthians 3:2-3)

II Corinthians Chapter 3 is a presentation of the new hermeneutic of the Spirit that was given to every believer by the indwelling of that same Spirit. It is the working out from the Scriptures the promise of Jesus that "*when He comes [i.e., the Spirit], He will lead you into all truth.*" Paul perhaps answers definitively in this chapter the perennial debate between *continuity* and *discontinuity*. It is the same Word of God (continuity) now

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<sup>151</sup> Fee, *Empowering Presence*; 804.

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interpreted by a different instrumentality (discontinuity). To Paul it was a contrast between the letter, *gramma*, and the Spirit, *pneuma*:

*And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as **ministers of the new covenant**, not of the letter but of the <sup>[a]</sup>Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.* (II Corinthians 3:4-6)

“By *gramma* and *pneuma* Paul means two different authorities; *gramma* is the written code of the Law, *pneuma* is the operation of the Spirit in producing and promulgating the Gospel.”<sup>153</sup> This new authority forms the basis of a new interpretation of the same Scriptures, not the establishment of a new Scripture. The difference between the two is, however, almost as if there were two entirely different Scriptures, for as Paul says in this same chapter, those who still read the Scriptures under Moses do so with a veil over their hearts, “*But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.*”<sup>154</sup> Such is the radical change made through Jesus Christ and by the regeneration and indwelling of the Holy Spirit – believer may now read the Scriptures without the veil,

*Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech – unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, **because the veil is taken away in Christ**. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. **Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away**. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.* (II Corinthians 3:12-18)

The ‘baptism’ of the Holy Spirit is not uniformly evidenced by speaking in tongues, but rather by being able to see and understand the Scriptures in a new, life-giving, liberating way. “Only readers made competent by the Spirit can throw back the veil and perceive the sense of Scripture; those who have not turned to the Lord who is Spirit are necessarily trapped in the script, with minds hardened and veiled.”<sup>155</sup> This wonderful reality is the watershed between *continuity* and *discontinuity*.

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<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*; 806.

<sup>153</sup> Alfred Plummer *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*; quoted by Richard Hays, *Echoes*; 124.

<sup>154</sup> II Corinthians 3:15

<sup>155</sup> Hays, 148.

**Week 9: The Spirit & The Church**

**Key Biblical Texts:** I Corinthians 12:1-11

*“Biblically speaking,  
'Charismatic' and 'Christion' are synonyms.”  
(Richard Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*)*

The importance of the Holy Spirit to the Church is far more widely acknowledged than it is explained. No branch of professing Christianity denies the biblical fact that the Holy Spirit in some way gives life to the Church, reflected in the Pauline benediction, *‘the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.’* But beyond the bare statement of the Creed, *“We believe in the Holy Spirit...”* there is little agreement as to his purpose and role within the Church itself. Indeed, a survey of church practice among all denominations will reveal lines of differences along views of the ongoing function of the Holy Spirit, with one end of the spectrum believing the Spirit to inhabit and empower the *institutions* of the church, and the other emphasizing the Spirit’s role in the *community* of believers. As with most things, error lies to the extremes, but the balance is not in the middle. The proper understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in and with relation to the Church is perhaps indicated by the biblical answer to the question, *“Which came first, the Church or the Believer?”* Which has priority in God’s redemptive plan? Is the Church the assembly of believers, or are believers baptized into the Church? Various denominational answers to this genre of question have varied even among themselves over the generations, and no consensus has ever developed to unite all of professing Christianity. The best we can do is study the biblical data and offer a (perhaps tentative) answer.

Certainly the modern Western Church, and most particularly the Church in the United States, at least *in practice* the emphasis is squarely on the individual believer, with the church assembly being viewed largely as a voluntary and easily-changed commodity. The movement of professing believers among different churches – and, remarkably, different denominations – indicates a very shallow understanding in the modern American Church with regard to the Church and the role of the Holy Spirit therein. The emphasis in both doctrine and practice with regard to the Holy Spirit is upon his work in regeneration and sanctification, with varying degrees of the Spirit’s involvement in the latter, depending on the denomination. If pressed on the issue of the Spirit’s relationship

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to the church assembly, the individualist camp will generally agree that the Spirit is the bond that unites the community of believers, though the nomadic nature of American Christianity would seem to indicate that this bond is not very strong. In sum, however, the emphasis in modern Western Christianity has been so strong against institutional Christianity (i.e., the Roman Catholic Church), that it is as if believers are convinced that *they* bring the Holy Spirit to 'church' when they go to church.

On the other extreme is the Roman Catholic Church, teaching as it does that the institutional church is the repository of the Holy Spirit, which is administered to the faithful through the sacraments and liturgy of the church. "In Roman Catholic theology, the Spirit is mainly the soul and sustainer of the Church, in Protestant theology he is mainly the awakener of individual spiritual life in justification and sanctification. So the



**Hendrikus Berkhof (1914-95)**

Spirit is either institutionalized or individualized."<sup>156</sup> Often the place any individual denomination or church occupies on the continuum between extremes will be indicated by their view of the *sacraments* (as well as whether they are willing to call them 'sacraments' at all, preferring rather 'ordinances'). On the Roman Catholic side, and in all Protestant denominations that did not separate far from Rome, the interaction between the individual church member and the Church - and in the Church, the Holy Spirit - is *sacramental* or *sacerdotal*. The first term emphasizes the institutional mechanism by which the Spirit is administered to the member - be it baptism, or the Eucharist (Mass), or matrimony, etc.; the second term emphasizes the priesthood by which this grace is mediated in the sacrament. Together they present a Church that is mechanical with regard to the distribution of the Spirit and the *charismata* - the 'grace gifts' of the Holy Spirit, being coordinated and controlled by the hierarchy of the institutional Church.

Protestants reject this structural framework in favor a more spontaneous and sovereign activity on the part of the Holy Spirit himself. The Protestant Reformation also brought a necessary corrective with regard to the role of the individual believer in his or her own participation both in grace and in the Church. This is not to say that such

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<sup>156</sup> Berkhof, Hendrikus *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press; 1964); 33.

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movements have not occurred within the Roman Catholic communion; they have, as for instance the massive impact the Charismatic Movement had within Catholic congregations in the 1970s. But by emphasis of doctrine, the Protestant community of churches pushed the pendulum away from the institutional church and toward the individual believer with regard to the role and involvement of the Holy Spirit. Further along the spectrum, Protestants, "...see the Spirit mainly as the relation between God and the individual soul."<sup>157</sup>

The mainline Reformation denominations - in particular the Lutheran, the Reformed, and the Anglican - spread themselves somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, with Lutheranism and Anglicanism closest to Rome and her institutionalism, and the Reformed Churches further down the line toward individualism. Reformed theology refuses to let go of the independent validity of the Church as the creation of the Holy Spirit and not merely the gathering of believers, while at the same time desiring to lay proper emphasis on the role of the Spirit in the conversion and sanctification of every individual believer...as an individual and not merely as a member of the Church. "It is characteristic for the Reformed confession, which wants to maintain both, to give full emphasis to the relation between the Spirit and the individual and, at the same time, to recognize that the church is a creation not of men but of the Spirit."<sup>158</sup> This is not an easy balance to maintain, and typically (some might say stereotypically) Reformed churches tend to gravitate back toward the more sacramental, even sacerdotal, side of the spectrum.

Again, the solution hinges largely on the issue of priority between the Church and the individual believer. Protestants rightly maintain that the Church does not possess an conceptual existence apart from actual believers - the beginning of the Church was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit *upon believers*. But this fact does not necessitate the conclusion that the individual is primary over the Church. Berkhof offers his conclusion, "In my opinion the right order is: first the church, after that the individual."<sup>159</sup> He goes on to warn "As long as we put the individual first, we cannot get the right view on the church as ground and mother of the individual life."<sup>160</sup> There is no escaping the individualist

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<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*; 46.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*; 49.

<sup>159</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*; 50.

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conclusion that the Church is largely unnecessary; it is, at best, a convenient place for believers to gather and, at worst, an oppressive institution that stifles the spiritual life of individual believers. Many modern believers firmly believe the latter point of view, while many more practice the former.

Biblically, neither the intense institutionalism of the Roman Catholic Church nor the equally intense individualism of modern nomadic evangelicalism can be supported. We acknowledge, therefore, that the truth is somewhere in the middle and we turn to the Scriptures to attempt to determine approximately where that point lies. Berkhof's comment is correct; we can never arrive at a proper view of the Church – nor of the 'church' in terms of the more practical local congregation – if we adhere to too individualistic a role for the Holy Spirit. The biblical analogy that at least sets us on the path to a solution is that of Creation, and this analogy is used frequently by the Apostle Paul. There can be no reasonable argument concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in Creation, as we read "*And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the deep.*"<sup>161</sup> Nor can there be any reasonable argument about the biblical priority between Creation and Man – the first existed as a purpose of God, whereas the second occupies a place – albeit a very important place – within that plan. In other words, Creation has a logical priority over Man, though Man is clearly created to be the vice-regent of God over Creation.

In a similar way Paul presents the current work of God as a "New Creation," and we are not justified in taking Paul's words in any other way than literal,

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.* (II Corinthians 5:17)

To Paul, and therefore to us, the work of the Holy Spirit in this second creation is the same as it was in the first – he is the executive force of God's will, bringing to pass through the Word (Logos) of God, Jesus Christ, a new creation. Paul ties the two events together earlier in II Corinthians,

*For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* (II Corinthians 4:6)

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<sup>161</sup> Genesis 1:1

This passage is, of course, very individualistic and does not in itself 'prove' the priority of the Church in Paul's teaching. The point of the verse here, however, is to establish the connection in Paul's thought between Creation and the New Creation, intending to reason from one to the other with regard to the Holy Spirit's role. The priority of the Church is thus analogous to the priority of Creation, but arguments should never rest solely on analogy. Having established the link in Paul's theology between the first Creation and the new Creation, we must look to other passages to determine his view regarding the logical priority of the Church over the believer. Once again a caveat is in order: by 'logical priority' is meant the place each holds in the overarching plan and purpose of God to redeem not only a people, but also His entire created order. It does not mean that individual believers are unimportant to God, or that the Church has a conceptual reality apart from the lives of individual believers.

There are several passages that give some insight into Paul's thought on the matter. The familiar metaphor of the Church as the Bride of Christ derives largely from Ephesians Chapter 5, where husbands are exhorted to love their wives, "*as Christ loved the Church, and gave himself up for her.*"<sup>162</sup> The Lord is said to have already given himself up for the Church, though at the time of the crucifixion the Church cannot be said to have existed. It is argued that Christ offered himself up for the elect, known to Him from before the foundation of the world. This is correct; but what is this assemblage of the elect other than the Church? Thus the Church had a logical existence before it possessed any members, and for this Church Christ died.

The other common metaphor of the Church, that of the *Body of Christ*, reflects the same sort of understanding in Paul. With regard to the Church as the Body, Paul speaks in terms of its completed reality rather than its temporal identity. For instance, speaking of the overall purpose of God in Christ Jesus, Paul writes,

*And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.* (Ephesians 1:22-23)

It is hard to imagine that Paul considered the beginning of these last days as Christ the Head without a fully-formed Body, but rather a body slowly forming over time as

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individual believers joined the Church. The salvation of individual believers is undoubtedly the historical growth of the Body, but its existence and reality are independent of that growth. The Church is what Paul views as the Body; believers are *“individually members of it.”*

*For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many... Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.*

(I Corinthians 12:12-14; 27)

Two phrases in this passage are important to our study in that they employ sacramental terminology to indicate that believers are brought into the Church at the time of their conversion: *“baptized into one body”* and *“made to drink into one Spirit.”* This echoes the ‘unity list’ of Ephesians 4,

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

(Ephesians 4:4-6)

Again in Ephesians Paul ties the purpose of God to glorify Himself through grace, with the identity of the Church. He does this in with words that transcend merely the aggregate of believers, undoubtedly thinking in terms of the relation of the Church to Christ. Paul writes,

*To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

(Ephesians 3:8-11)

It is Paul's view that the ‘mystery’ of the Church, through which the manifold wisdom of God will be made known to the heavenly host, was by no means a ‘new’ plan, but was *“from the beginning of the ages.”* This is another connection in Paul between the New Creation in Christ and the old Creation, which was also through Christ. Thus to say

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<sup>162</sup> Ephesians 5:25

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that the Church has priority over the individual believer is merely to recognize the eternal plan of God, in which the exaltation of Christ through the Church is the determined means by which God's magnificent grace is to be made known to the whole of creation.

We can enlist Peter in support of this logical subordination of the believer to the Church, as he refers to the believer as a *living stone* whereas the Church is a *spiritual house* into which these stones are being placed.

*Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* (I Peter 2:4-5)

This verse also proves that the relative superiority of the Church to the individual believer is no denigration of the believer, for Christ himself is called a 'living stone.' The point of these passages, however, is to show that the Church was the ultimate purpose of Christ's advent, at least in terms of the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Covenant. Christ is the chief cornerstone of the new 'spiritual house' – metaphorically equivalent to the new creation – and every believer is individually a crafted stone, but it is the structure itself, in its fulness at the consummation of the age, that will fully manifest the glory of the grace of God. Once again we discover that a higher view of the Church than is common among modern evangelicals, is definitely warranted by Scripture.

The hesitance of many to developing a more biblical, 'high church' view of ecclesiology is twofold. First, there is the memory (even though not experiential memory) of the over-bearing institutionalized Roman Catholic Church from which modern Protestantism broke in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. This is a theoretical justification for resisting the priority of the Church. The practical reason for doing so is the basic reluctance of individual believers to commit themselves to a Church as it is conceived by the apostles. A 'high church' view (using the term in reference to the logical priority of the Church and not in terms of ritual, vestments, or liturgy) demands submission on the part of the individual believer, something our flesh is quite resistant to yield. Yet even here we have the example of Jesus Christ presented to us by the apostle Paul.

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*Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...*  
(Philippians 2:1-5)

We are to be reminded of Paul's lengthy epistle written in an effort to teach the believers of Corinth the true purpose of the 'charismata,' the grace-gifts. Individualism was *the problem* at Corinth, unity of the body was the answer. Still, we also recognize that at no time does Paul negate the gifts or rebuke the Corinthian believers for desiring them. Thus we see that a proper emphasis on the *corporate* aspect of the Church does not necessarily destroy the *individual* focus of divine grace in the distribution of spiritual gifts. Indeed, it is only in the context of the life and edification of the corporate body that we see charismata functioning as intended by the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit are in service of the Body of Christ, as the Spirit himself is in economic submission to the risen Lord.

### **The Institutional Spirit:**

In light of this analysis of the priority of the Church, the work of the Spirit in the Church does not rightly begin with the 'gifts,' but rather with the 'sacraments.' Again, the word 'sacrament' often scares modern evangelicals as sounding too Roman Catholic. But the word itself makes an important distinction that is lost when only the word 'ordinance' is used. An 'ordinance' is something that we are told to do - something *ordained* or *legislated* for the Church. This perspective tends toward the two primary 'ordinances' of the Church - baptism and the Lord's Supper - as being outward and symbolic rituals of faith, rather than actually containing the grace that they signify. Thus the Lord's Supper becomes a 'memorial meal' commemorating the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, and baptism is viewed as a 'public profession of faith' with no actual gracious event taking place in the baptized. Paul's view of both baptism and the Lord's Supper is much more nuanced than this popular modern conception and emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in the actual distribution of grace. Hence both baptism and the Lord's Supper are better termed 'sacraments' than 'ordinances,' understanding the caveat that it is the Spirit who dispenses the grace, not the Church.

We find in modern American evangelicalism that the sacrament of baptism is the root of great disagreement as to its meaning and significance. Dealing strictly with 'credo' baptism - the baptism of professing believers - and leaving paedobaptism out of the picture, there is still tremendous variety as to the views of various evangelical denominations regarding the importance of the act. Those who hold that baptism is a public profession of faith are quick and adamant to argue that the ritual is not strictly necessary for salvation, pointing most often to the thief on the cross, who was welcomed by the Lord into Paradise though obviously not having been baptized. This example misses the key point; that Christian baptism was not even in existence until Pentecost. And this point actually cuts to the core of the main disagreement concerning baptism itself - the connection between water and Spirit baptism.

The Pentecostal holds firmly that the two are separate and distinct; it is the normal course of events for a sinner to come to faith in Jesus Christ and be baptized in water *before* - and sometimes many years before - his being *baptized in the Holy Spirit*. Acts 2 is, of course, the point of reference for this perspective, allegedly supporting the contention that the outpouring or baptism of the Holy Spirit is a 'second blessing' that is manifested by the subject being empowered to speak in other tongues. What is remarkable is that this is not the interpretation that Peter put upon the events of Pentecost, as evidenced by what he admonishes his audience to do in response to his preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

*Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* (Acts 2:37-38)

Here the apostle ties what is undeniably water baptism - *Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ...* - with the gift of the Holy Spirit, the very same blessing that Peter's audience had just witnessed in the disciples. There is no indication of a separation in either time or purpose between water baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The only possible argument against this evident connection of the two would be to say that the 'gift of the Holy Spirit' is not the same thing as what had just occurred, called by Pentecostals the 'baptism in (or of) the Holy Spirit.' This interpretation would be special pleading, re-reading the text in order to support an *a priori* conclusion. It is most

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natural to understand Peter's reference to the 'gift of the Holy Spirit' as that very same event that had just occurred, and about which Peter's audience was so intrigued. Thus at the outset we see water baptism in a much different light than a mere 'public profession of faith.' It is, rather, the necessary concomitant of repentance and, it may be argued, the necessary precursor to the gift of the Holy Spirit.

That statement probably raises some hackles, as it seems to boldly state that an unbaptized person does not (and cannot?) have the Holy Spirit. This, in turn, seems to head in the direction of baptismal regeneration – the doctrine that baptism itself has a salvific power, without which a sinner cannot be saved. While this extreme view is to be avoided, it should not be done so at the expense of the biblical significance of water baptism. Instead, recognizing that salvation is a gracious work of the Holy Spirit and not a mechanical work of baptism, Reformed believers ought to take Peter's admonition as a challenge to rethink the meaning of water baptism, and to once again accord it the importance given to it by the apostle.

Paul is no less strident on the topic of baptism, and we cannot find anything in his writings to support the view of baptism as a 'public profession of faith.' Rather it is Paul who provides us with the deepest possible perspective on water baptism.

*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

(Romans 6:3-4)

Paul derives very practical application from this fact of baptism uniting the believer with Christ in both death and resurrection. The progression of his thought in Romans 6 lead inexorably to the glorious conclusion of Romans 8, in which the central role is played by the Holy Spirit.

*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who<sup>d</sup> do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

(Romans 8:1-4)

Accustomed as we are to reading passages of Scripture in isolation – or even in systematic theological segments – we often lose track of the overriding thought being developed. In Paul's letter to the Romans it is evident that Chapter 8 forms a culmination and summation of the theological argument developed throughout the first half of the epistle, with Chapters 9 – 11 being a powerful but parenthetical commentary on the divine purpose for Israel and Chapter 12 beginning the practical application of the whole. Thus Chapter 8, in which the role of the Holy Spirit plays such an important part, flows from Chapter 6, in which the believer is said to be united with Christ in death and resurrection *through baptism*. At the very least this lends much greater significance to baptism than merely a 'public profession of faith.' Indeed, it fully defends the use of the term 'sacrament' in relation to baptism.

The connection, of course, is the Holy Spirit who now enlivens the baptized believer to *walk in newness of life*. Paul writes, "*But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.*"<sup>163</sup> The Holy Spirit is the very same *power that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead* that is also now at work in every believer. Note that Paul does not make a distinction between those believers who are merely baptized in water and those who have supposedly received the 'baptism in the Holy Spirit.'

*Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, **according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead** and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.*

(Ephesians 1:15-21)

Returning for a moment to Romans 8, we find irrefutable proof that the possession of the Holy Spirit is not reserved for those who have received a 'second blessing,' but is

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<sup>163</sup> Romans 8:11

essential to *any* sinner being saved and brought into the Body of Christ, for “*if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.*”<sup>164</sup>

One additional connection may be made here in relation to the Holy Spirit and baptism: *circumcision*. This connection is, of course, part of the justification offered for infant baptism: that the Christian sacrament of baptism takes the place of the Mosaic symbol of circumcision. Key to this argument is Colossians 2:11-12,

*In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.*  
(Colossians 2:11-12)

The paedobaptist treats the two clauses at the beginning of each verse – *circumcised with the circumcision made without hands* and *buried with Him in baptism* – as synonymous, each describing the same event in the life of the sinner. Of course this argues too much, as it tends logically toward baptismal regeneration in the case of infants. But the exegetical point is that the two phrases need not be synonymous in the sense that the Christian sacrament of baptism takes the place of the Mosaic ritual of circumcision. Indeed, the descriptive phrases that follow each verbal clause would indicate a different perspective on the event of conversion; the *first* being the circumcision and the *second*, the burial in baptism. If this analysis (to follow) is correct, then paedobaptism cannot be a correct doctrine unless the baptized infant is, in fact, regenerate.

By alluding to the *circumcision made without hands* as the *putting off of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ*, Paul is hearkening back to a common Old Testament prophetic theme – the circumcision of the heart – which we have discussed before. The event to which the apostle refers is undoubtedly *regeneration*, the gracious act of the Holy Spirit by which the heart of the sinner is circumcised in truth and not merely in ritual. Paul speaks more explicitly on this matter in Romans,

*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and **circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.***  
(Romans 2:28-29)

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<sup>164</sup> Romans 8:9

If the two verbal clauses in Colossians 2:11-12 are not merely repetition of the same event, then we have a strong case for baptism following conversion (regeneration), and for holding that only those who have made a profession of faith – the only outward evidence we are given for (hopeful) inward regeneration – are eligible to receive baptism. As to what type of baptism Paul is referring to in Colossians, the analogy with Romans 6 and elsewhere argues too strongly in favor of water baptism to be seriously doubted. Yet once again we see baptism tied closely, both soteriologically and chronologically, with regeneration. It is apparent that the apostles both expected and practiced the sacrament of baptism immediately upon evidence of faith, that is, profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

All this is to say that, according to the apostolic record, baptism is a grace and not merely an outward sign; it contains the grace that it signifies: burial and resurrection in Jesus Christ. Baptism is thus best considered as a sacrament and not merely an ordinance. Yes, it was ordained by the Lord to be faithfully practiced in the Church; but it stands to reason that Jesus intended that His Church faithfully *understand* what it is they are doing. This requires deeper consideration both of the biblical witness concerning baptism and the role of the Holy Spirit as the One who unites the believer in baptism with the death of Jesus as well as the Power that raises the baptized saint to *walk in newness of life*.

The second sacrament of the Christian Church is less debated between ‘fundamentalist’ and ‘Pentecostal’ evangelicals; that is, the Lord’s Supper. The lack of intense debate is probably due to the centrality of the ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit’ to the Pentecostal, and the allergic reaction against this doctrine on the part of fundamentalists. But the lack of debate may also be attributed to a lack of understanding on both sides as to the meaning of the Lord’s Supper, considered generally by both fundamentalists and Pentecostals (who do not emphasize the Lord’s Supper as a rule) to be simply a ‘meal of remembrance’ of the Lord’s death.

The memorial aspect of the Lord’s Supper cannot be denied as we can deny that baptism was ever intended to be a public profession of faith (the Ethiopian eunuch, for instance, as well as the Philippian jailor, were not in a public place when baptized). As for the Supper, Paul’s formulation echoes Jesus’ institution of the meal as a ‘remembrance’ of Him,

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*For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."* (I Corinthians 11:23-25)

If this were all that the apostle had to say regarding the Supper we might be able to rest in the 'ordinance' as a meal of remembrance only, without any spiritual or gracious significance that might render it a sacrament. But Paul has more to say; actually, he had already said it before his summary of the ritual meal itself. I Corinthians 10 is by no means the easiest of Pauline writings to fathom; perhaps Peter had this passage in mind when he wrote his famous commentary on Paul's teaching (II Peter 3:16). Paul in I Corinthians 10 combines allegory with mystery with instruction, a heady tonic for any reader! He begins with an overview of the children of Israel under the leadership of Moses, utilizing the language of the two sacraments we are studying,

*Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were **baptized into Moses** in the cloud and in the sea, all **ate the same spiritual food**, and all **drank the same spiritual drink**. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.* (I Corinthians 10:1-4)

The people of Israel *were baptized*, and the *ate* and *drank*. Paul will make it clear just a few verses later that he is indeed referring to the Lord's Supper as well as to baptism. What is significant to our discussion is the adjective that the apostle uses in regard to both the food and the drink: *spiritual*. The children of Israel ate *literal* manna in the wilderness, and drank *literal* water from the rock, but that is not Paul's point in this allegory; his point is that in so doing the Israelites were foreshadowing the *spiritual* meal that has been given to the Church. That meal is now fulfilled in the Lord's Supper and the spiritual aspect of it is still uppermost in Paul's mind.

*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.* (I Corinthians 10:16-17)

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The word translated 'communion' is the Greek *koinonia*, of which much more will be said in the next lesson. But it is here, with 'communion,' that the *institutional* Spirit meets the *communal* Spirit (being, of course, one and the same Holy Spirit). The meal was



**F. F. Bruce (1910-90)**

more to Paul than just a memorial, though it was that. "When they broke the bread which was the token of the body of Christ, they not only recalled his self-oblation on the cross but proclaimed their joint participation in his corporate body."<sup>165</sup> To Paul there was no division between the institutions of the Church and the life of the community; such opposition as has been set up between the two are uninspired deviations from the apostle's teachings. Paul understood both baptism and the Lord's Supper to be means in the hands of the Holy Spirit to build up the Body of Christ into the spiritual habitation that it was intended to be. It is an oversimplification of his teaching to say, but not inaccurate, that baptism is the Spirit's joining the new believer with Christ in His Body, the Church – "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body";<sup>166</sup> whereas the Lord's Supper sustains and binds together that growing Body. James Dunn writes,

The point of the Lord's Supper is to feed and sustain the relation with Christ, precisely as a communal/corporate relationship. Any move in eucharistic practice to isolated celebration (as though the Lord's Supper were intended simply to feed the individual with spiritual food) or which detracts from it as a shared experience runs counter to Paul's emphasis and detracts from his christology of the *body* of Christ.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Bruce, F. F. *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1999); 285.

<sup>166</sup> I Corinthians 12:13

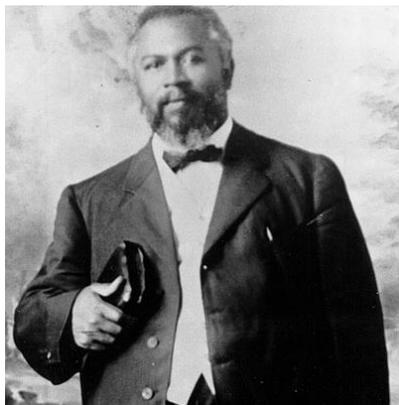
<sup>167</sup> Dunn, *Paul*; 620.

**Week 10: The Spirit & The Church - Part 2**

**Key Biblical Texts:** Romans 8:1-11; Ephesians 4:1-16

*"From beginning to end gifts are given for service.  
There are no exceptions to this consideration."  
(Richard Gaffin, Perspectives on Pentecost)*

How did Pentecostalism occur? The idea of a twofold outpouring of the Holy Spirit is not biblical, as the apostle Paul clearly disqualifies anyone who does not have the Spirit from belonging to Christ at all (Rom. 8:9). A proper understanding of the transition period from the Old Covenant to the New will also go a long way to disabusing the notion that God ever *intended* the events of Pentecost to be repeated *ad infinitum* within the Church. We understand the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to be the continuation and completion of the ministry of Jesus Christ, and no more expect an on-going 'Pentecost' than we do an on-going 'Golgotha.' Even the Pentecostal theologian Gordon Fee recognizes the uniqueness of the Pentecost event and its intimate relationship to the work of the Son, "Without the mission of the Spirit the mission of the Son would have been fruitless; without the mission of the Son the Spirit could not have been sent."<sup>168</sup> Richard Gaffin adds, "The outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the promise of the Father, and so the essence of the entire fulfillment awaited under the old covenant, is here seen to be closely connected with the epochal, climactic events of Christ's work."<sup>169</sup>



**William Seymour (1870-1922)**

The experience of Pentecost, therefore, cannot be repeated any more than the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ can be repeated. The Roman Catholic priest errs when he allegedly offers up Christ as a 'bloodless sacrifice' in the mass; the Pentecostal errs when he claims to experience a 'second blessing' of Pentecost, a 'baptism in the Holy Spirit.' Both, in their way, attempt to repeat what was intended to be 'once for all.' So how does Pentecostalism happen? No one who reads the history of the Azusa Street revival in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, led by the holiness preacher William J. Seymour, or the biography of John Wesley from the

<sup>168</sup> Fee, Gordon *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*; 85.

<sup>169</sup> Gaffin, *Perspectives*; 17.

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18<sup>th</sup> Century, will conclude that the onset of Pentecostalism arose from a careful, theological study of Scripture. Indeed, the movement itself tends to denigrate theology in favor of experience, so it is unlikely that believers ‘think’ themselves into a Pentecostal experience. Yet these experiences happened, and it is unreasonable to simply write them off as fanaticism or, much worse, demonic deception. A great many of the people who chronicled a ‘Pentecost experience’ in their lives give every evidence of being sincere believers in Jesus Christ. It is also significant to note that the Pentecostalism of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was by no means the first time in the history of the Church that such a movement entered into mainstream Christianity – Methodism in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, as well as chronic pietistic movements throughout the past twenty centuries, attest to a periodic tendency within Christianity to recalibrate as it were, the active role of the Holy Spirit within the community of believers. At each appearance of such a movement, the majority of the Church dismisses the ‘excesses’ as fanaticism or ‘enthusiasm,’ and eventually the movement either dies out or moves into its own ecclesiastical channels.

James Dunn postulates that the cause of modern Pentecostalism may be found in both the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church toward the role of the Holy Spirit, and the quite different attitude of mainline Protestantism to the same concept. The institutionalizing of the Holy Spirit manifest within Roman Catholicism removes the experience of the Spirit from the individual believer in any manner apart from the properly mediated sacraments of the church. Dunn writes,

Here [i.e., within the institutional church] controls could be set up and order maintained. The Spirit became more and more confined to ‘the Church,’ until in all but name ‘the Church’ stood above the Spirit. To all intents and purposes the Spirit became the property of the Church, with the gift of the Spirit tied to and determined by a ritual act [i.e., water baptism], and authority to bestow the Spirit confined to the bishop.<sup>170</sup>

As in so many ways, Protestantism reacted against the Roman Catholic doctrine and/or practice, without necessarily acting toward the teaching of Scripture in a complete or comprehensive manner. The Protestant Reformers properly returned focus upon the preaching of the word in relation to the sacraments, but then did something similar by essentially containing the entirety of the Holy Spirit to that preached word. In other

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words, preaching became the Protestant sacrament *par excellence*, though the sacraments of water baptism and the Lord's Supper were also retained.

Against this extreme sacramentalism and sacerdotalism Protestants reacted, and in their reaction the emphasis was shifted from water-baptism to preaching and personal faith, with authority centred [*sic*] in the Bible rather than in the Church...In scholastic Protestantism the Spirit became in effect subordinate to the Bible, and the latter replaced the sacraments as the principal means of grace and inspiration. Where Catholics fastened on the objectivity of the sacraments, Protestants fastened on the objectivity of the Bible.<sup>171</sup>

Too often these hardened positions resulted in either empty ritualism (Roman Catholic) or dry orthodoxy (Protestant), both of which inevitably turn out to be repellent to the true believer. "Like earlier 'enthusiasts' Pentecostals have reacted against both these extremes. Against the mechanical sacramentalism of extreme Catholicism and the dead biblicist orthodoxy of extreme Protestantism they have shifted the focus of attention to the *experience* of the Spirit."<sup>172</sup> While such a recalibration is to be applauded, it must also be recognized that replacing two errors with a third does the Church no good ultimately. We have seen in our previous lesson that there is a valid biblical basis for the sacraments, properly understood and properly observed. We will see, Lord-willing, in our next lesson that the centrality of the Word of God within the Church is indeed the objective anchor that keeps her from being '*tossed about with every wind of doctrine.*' But the Pentecostal is correct in observing that the Holy Spirit's role in the Church is by no means limited either to the sacraments or to the preaching of the Word. The *charismata* exist and are crucial to the health and well-being of the Church of Jesus Christ. Thus we conclude that as the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are biblical and vital to the Church, and as the preaching of the Word is the divinely-ordained means not only for the salvation of the sinner but also for the sanctification of the saint, and that the gifts of the Spirit are real and indispensable within the community of faith, therefore there must be a way to hold all three perspectives in a balanced and active triumvirate, so that the Church might be whole and strong. This discussion and conclusion brings us, therefore, to a necessarily brief investigation of the *charismata* – the 'gifts' of the Holy Spirit within the Church.

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<sup>170</sup> Dunn *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*; 224.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*; 225.

<sup>172</sup> *Idem.*

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Traditionally, any investigation of the *charismata* or 'grace gifts' as the word is often translated, begins with Paul's treatise in I Corinthians chapters 12-14. This, however, is not the best place to start, considering that in this passage the apostle is issuing a polemic against the abuse of the 'gifts' in Corinth. A more logical place to start is with Jesus' own promise of the Holy Spirit to His disciples, recorded in John chapters 14 and 16. By considering Jesus' description of the ministry of the promised Spirit *before* turning to Paul's discussion of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we may understand the work of the Holy Spirit within the Church under two basic and inseparable headings: *Equipping* and *Enabling*. The order of these two is crucial, for being enabled to do what one has not been equipped to do is of no benefit to either the one doing or to the Church in which it is done. It is perhaps the essential error of modern Pentecostalism, that it focuses on the enabling ministry of the Holy Spirit but ignores the equipping ministry. The purpose of the Father and of Jesus Christ in sending the Holy Spirit is, however, first to equip the saints and only *then* to enable them to manifest their 'grace gift' within and for the edification of the body.

### **He Will Guide You into All Truth:**

We have already touched upon the importance of the sending of the Holy Spirit; so important, in fact, that Jesus considered it to be of greater value to His disciples than His own presence with them in this world. That alone ought to give us pause to consider our view of the Holy Spirit and His ministry in the Church. The sending of the Spirit was the last great and consummating act of Jesus' redemptive ministry, as He says himself,

*But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.* (John 16:5-7)

This truth is often neglected in Church teaching, and certainly in the understanding of the average believer. Dispensationalism has all but convinced American evangelicals that Jesus would have stayed in Jerusalem and established His kingdom had the Jews accepted Him as their Messiah. How the Holy Spirit was to be sent under this paradigm is never explained, because no explanation is possible. Jesus' ascension to the Father was the

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necessary prerequisite to the sending of the Spirit and therefore the full and final act of Jesus' redemptive ministry on earth. Jesus' ascension marked the ultimate divine blessing upon His earthly work, and thus was required in order to 'release,' as it were, the Holy Spirit upon His people. A. J. Gordon writes, "On the cross 'the riches of his grace' was secured to us in the forgiveness of sins; on the throne 'the riches of his glory' was secured to us in our being strengthened with all might by his Spirit in the inner man; in the indwelling of Christ in our hearts by faith, and in our infilling with all the fullness of God. The divine wealth only becomes completely available on the death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord; so that the Holy Spirit...had not the full inheritance to convey till Jesus was glorified."<sup>173</sup> Thus it is crucial to a biblical understanding of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to begin with the words of Jesus concerning His coming, or rather, His being sent. Pertinent to this study are those words which have to do particularly with the Holy Spirit's role *within* the Church; we will have occasion to investigate His ministry in the world.



Adoniram J. Gordon (1836-95)

*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.* (John 16:12-15)

It should go without saying that the believer ought to desire to hear anything and everything that his or her Master has to say. The disciples could not bear to hear all that Jesus had to tell them, not only because of their great sorrow, but more so because of their lack of the ability to receive and understand. Jesus promises to send One who will both continue the conversation and enable the indwelt believer to comprehend what is being said. And this ministry of "taking of Jesus and giving to us" cannot be limited to just the inspiration of the New Testament Scriptures, though it most certainly applies that far. John later writes in his first epistle an enigmatic statement that indicates that this

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<sup>173</sup> Gordon, Adoniram J. *The Ministry of the Holy Spirit* (Minneapolis; Bethany Fellowship; 1964); 42.

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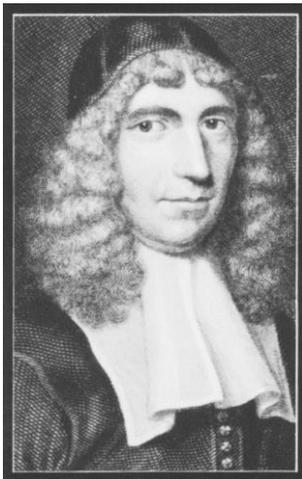
communicating and enlightening work of the Spirit extends beyond those who would be entrusted with writing the New Testament. It is of every believer that John writes,

*But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.*

(I John 2:20-21)

There should be no doubt as to who “*the anointing from the Holy One*” is; it is the indwelling Holy Spirit without which no man belongs to Christ at all. So John here touches upon the promise that Jesus made to him and the other disciples in the upper room so many years before, “*when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth.*” This is the basis of all else concerning the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church as well as in individual believers. We cannot speak too much of the importance of truth to the Christian’s life as well as to the community of faith, the Church. The latter Paul calls “*the pillar and foundation of the truth.*”<sup>174</sup>

The common way of referring to the Holy Spirit’s guidance of believers (and the



**John Owen (1616-83)**

Church) into ‘all truth’ is *illumination*. John Owen, in writing about the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the preaching and teaching of the Word, notes that in the same audience there will be hearers who are deeply affected by the Word, and other who are left wholly untouched and unchanged. That which makes the two groups to differ is none other than the indwelling Holy Spirit. Owen writes, “It is, therefore, ministration of the Spirit, in and by the word, which produceth all or any of these effects on the minds of men; he is

the fountain of all illumination.”<sup>175</sup>

This necessary illumination was promised obliquely in the Psalms,

*They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house,  
And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures.  
For with You is the fountain of life; **In Your light we see light.***

(Psalm 36:8-9)

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<sup>174</sup> I Timothy 3:15

<sup>175</sup> Owen, John *The Works of John Owen: Volume III The Holy Spirit* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth; 1994); 236.

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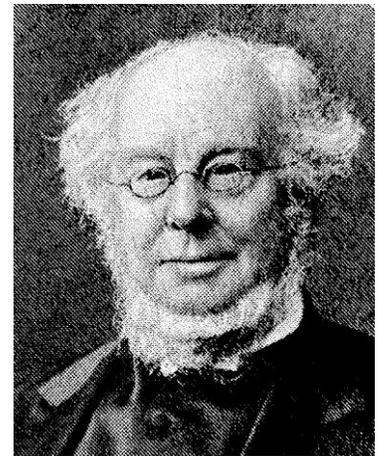
*Oh, send out Your light and Your truth!  
Let them lead me; Let them bring me to Your holy hill  
And to Your tabernacle.*

(Psalm 43:3)

These poetic verses explain the biblical concept that fallen man is in darkness with regard to the truth unless God himself enlightens man. By the outpouring and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God has shined His own divine light within the hearts and minds of His elect, guiding them now into all truth and “renewing their minds” in accordance with “the truth as it is Christ Jesus.” The unfortunate aspect of traditional discussions on the ministry of the Holy Spirit is that this foundational characteristic of His work is either bypassed (generally by Pentecostals) or considered to be the fullness of His work (generally by Reformed). The *equipping* of the saints in truth is the first work of the Spirit after regeneration, and it is prerequisite to the next stage of His ministry in the believer and in the Church: that of *enabling* the believer in service to the Church.

### **Equipping the Saints for the Work of Ministry:**

Insofar as the Holy Spirit works within the believer, He has two fundamental goals. With respect to the believer himself, that goal is *sanctification*; with respect to the fellowship of believers, the Church, that goal is *service*. The first will be a primary topic in the later discussion of the Holy Spirit’s ministry through the Word of God (*cp.* John 17:17) but at this stage it is necessary to reinforce the critical importance of *sanctification* of the believer in the discussion of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church. George Smeaton speaks of the sanctifying power of the truth when he writes, “it is beheld and contemplated in the light of the Holy Spirit opening the eyes of our understanding, it exercises a sanctifying power beyond all other influences...The spiritual perception of divine things is invariably accompanied with a sanctifying influence; and knowledge is no further genuine or spiritual than it leads to this result.”<sup>176</sup>



**George Smeaton (1814-89)**

In this lesson, however, our focus is on the ministry of the Holy Spirit within the

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<sup>176</sup> Smeaton, George *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust; 1958); 225.



**D. A. Carson** (b. 1946)

Church, and so we must consider the body of Scripture written by the Apostle Paul with regard to the work of the Spirit within the congregation (though he, too, had much to say about the Spirit’s work in the individual believer’s sanctification). Although almost all books on the ‘gifts’ of the Holy Spirit start and end in I Corinthians chapters 12-14, these chapters are hardly the comprehensive whole of the apostle’s teaching on the subject. Indeed, he mentions gifts in at least

three key locations – Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and I Corinthians 12. D. A. Carson offers a helpful summary table in his commentary on I Corinthians 12-14, *Showing the Spirit*.<sup>177</sup>

| <u>I Cor. 12:8-11</u>     | <u>I Cor. 12:28</u> | <u>Rom. 12:6-8</u> | <u>Eph. 4:11</u> | <u>I Peter 4:11</u> |
|---------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Word of wisdom            | Apostles            | Prophecy           | Apostles         | Speaking            |
| Word of knowledge         | Prophets            | Service            | Prophets         | Service             |
| Faith                     | Teachers            | Teaching           | Evangelists      |                     |
| Gifts of healing          | Workers of miracles | Exhortation        | Pastors          |                     |
| Working of miracles       | Helps               | Giving             | teachers         |                     |
| Prophecy                  | Administrations     | Leadership         |                  |                     |
| Distinguishing of spirits | Kinds of tongues    | Showing of mercy   |                  |                     |
| Kinds of tongues          |                     |                    |                  |                     |
| Interpretation of tongues |                     |                    |                  |                     |

Several preliminary comments may be made from this comparison chart. The first is to note that there are different ways to ‘classify’ the gifts listed. For instance, some of the gifts are manifestly ‘supernatural’ – gifts of healing, workers of miracles, prophecy – while others are much more mundane – helps, leadership, giving, and administrations. Of course it is the ‘supernatural’ gifts that are in great demand in Corinth in Paul’s day, and within Pentecostal circles today, though the apostle himself makes no quality judgment between the two sets. “The lists as a whole contain an impressive mixture of what some might label ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’ endowments, or ‘spectacular’ and ‘more ordinary’ gifts...The intriguing thing is that Paul himself makes no such distinctions; it is the same God who works all things in all men.”<sup>178</sup> When we compare the various lists we find some overlap and some differences, suggesting that the lists are not exhaustive, even in

<sup>177</sup> Carson, D. A. *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of I Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1987); 36.

combination. Furthermore, as ‘grace-gifts’ – *charismata* – they are not natural talents or character traits possessed by the believer apart from an inner work of the Holy Spirit. “Probably the most important and certainly the most difficult lesson for us to learn is that ultimately spiritual gifts are not our presumed strengths and abilities, not something that we ‘have’ (or even have been given), but what God does through us in spite of ourselves and our weakness.”<sup>179</sup>

Another twofold classification is furnished by Peter’s short list: *speaking* gifts and *servicing* gifts. Richard Gaffin writes, “each of the gifts belongs to one of two basic categories: *word-charismata* and *deed-charismata*.”<sup>180</sup> This is a broad generalization, for it is not easy with some of the *charismata* to place them definitively into *word* or *deed*, and often in the biblical record the *word* revelation was accompanied with a *deed* revelation. But the distinction is nonetheless valid, as it is emphasized by Peter in I Peter 4 and by Paul in Romans 12. As we will see in our discussion of church polity, this twofold division of giftedness between *speaking* and *service* aligns broadly with the two ordained official positions within the congregation: the *elder* and the *deacon*.

A third division can be discerned from the various texts referenced in Carson’s summary table: gifts *to* the church and gifts *in* the church. The first set is displayed most clearly in Ephesians 4, where the apostle speaks of certain ‘gifts of men’ as being given to the Church by her risen Lord.

*But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore He says:  
When He ascended on high,  
He led captivity captive,  
And gave gifts to men.*

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some  
pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of  
the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to  
a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*

(Ephesians 4:7-8; 11-13)

These four (or five, if one separates ‘pastor’ and ‘teacher’) gifts of men given by Jesus Christ to the Church are all *word-charismata* or speaking gifts. The common

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<sup>178</sup> Carson; 37.

<sup>179</sup> Gaffin; 54.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*; 52.

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characteristic between the individual gifts of men is that they communicate to the Church for her edification as well as for the equipping of the saints. Thus these gifts of men are the transition between the two overall perspectives we have been considering with regard to the ministry of the Holy Spirit within the Church, that of *equipping* and that of *enabling*. Whereas every believer possesses the 'anointing' of which John speaks in his first epistle, the Church as a whole has been given men whose gifts and responsibilities are to convey and communicate the revelation of God to the Church as the congregation of believers.

At this point many books on this topic will diverge into a discussion regarding the continuance of certain gifts as opposed to others. Are there still apostles and prophets in the Church? What exactly is the relationship of the evangelist to the Church, since the emphasis of his gift is directed toward the lost? And is it correct to distill the entirety of the Holy Spirit's enlightening ministry to the work of the pastor-teacher (or pastor and teacher)? These are important questions for the Church, but answering them requires far more space than we can allot in this lesson and will inadvertently take us from the fundamental point of these gifts, that is, the *building up* of the body of Christ. A deeper discussion with regard to the fulness of divine revelation in Jesus Christ will go a long way toward answering the validity of modern-day apostles and prophets. Evangelists evidently have a continuing role beyond the time of the apostles, as Paul exhorts Timothy to "*do the work of an evangelist*" while he is in the region of Ephesus. And the pastor-teacher continues to be the mainstay of biblical exposition within the local congregation, and hence the focal point for any discussion concerning the edification of the body of Christ through the ministry of the Word of God. This emphasis on edification and equipping will be our transition to the next lesson, where we will speak in more detail concerning the Holy Spirit, the ministry of the Word, and the Church.

But for now we turn from the gifts given *to* the Church to those given *in* the Church, and consequently to a realm of great controversy within the Church. This controversy raged in the church of Corinth and gave rise to Paul's letter, which gives us almost all of our insight into the individual *charismata*. It is tempting to follow the standard pattern of listing each of the distinct 'gifts' and giving an explanation of what they are (were) and how they were to be used in the Church. But frankly all such discussions are almost pure conjecture. One writer comments by way of example, "it is doubtful that anyone has

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successfully demonstrated exegetically a clear difference between ‘the word of wisdom’ and ‘the word of knowledge.’”<sup>181</sup> Some of the gifts are hopelessly broad for a clear, operational definition to be given: how many deeds within the Church could be classified under the *charismata* of ‘helps’? Others, like the ‘word of knowledge’ compared to ‘the word of wisdom,’ offer no clear distinction to enable the congregation to know which gift is in operation: are ‘gifts of healing’ a subset of ‘works of mercy,’ or of ‘workers of miracles’?<sup>182</sup> Therefore the ‘spiritual gift inventory’ offered by many modern evangelical churches ought to be quickly discontinued, as they make erroneous assumptions about the *charismata* (i.e., that the lists are exhaustive) and about the meaning of and differentiation between each gift.

Too often modern studies of the *charismata* fail along the same lines as the church in Corinth was failing in the days of Paul: they emphasize individuality rather than corporate service and edification. We have seen that that the gifts given *to* the Church were for the equipping of the Church; those given *in* the Church are for “*the work of ministry*” in the Church.<sup>183</sup> Any divergence from this focus will lead to the same errors and internal strife and grandstanding against which Paul wrote his polemical treatise of I Corinthians 12-14. Carson writes of the Corinthian church and its gift-mania, “The quest for an individualizing and self-centered form of ‘spirituality’ was in danger of denying the source of all true spiritual gifts, the unbounded grace of God.”<sup>184</sup> Berkhof adds, “The *charismata* are gifts to the individuals, but they are never meant for private use.”<sup>185</sup>

This individual work of the Spirit takes the *equipping* received by the believer through the ministry of the Word, and adds to it the *enabling* of the Spirit to live in obedience and witness to the truth thus imbibed. Pentecostals like to use the term ‘power,’ as in the common English translation of Acts 1:8,

*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

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<sup>181</sup> Gaffin; 51.

<sup>182</sup> And how could any church experience the gift of administrations before the advent of Microsoft Excel or QuickBooks?

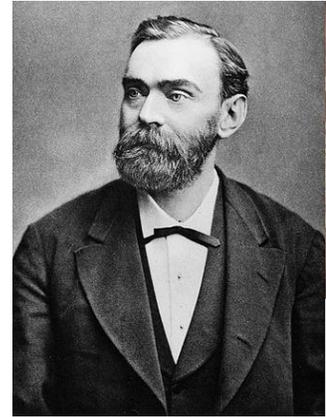
<sup>183</sup> Ephesians 4:12

<sup>184</sup> Carson; 23.

<sup>185</sup> Berkhof, Hendrikus; 89.

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The Greek word translated 'power' is *dunamis*, which was co-opted by Alfred Nobel to name his chemical discovery: dynamite. Many a sermon has been preached explaining how the 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' is like dynamite to the believer, though rarely is it explained how getting blown up in the Spirit is to be a good thing. No doubt, to continue the mistaken connection, many a good church has been obliterated by strife and dissension over the *charismata* - but we can be assured that neither Jesus nor Paul ever had this result in mind when they used the term. In



Alfred Nobel (1833-96)

Fact, the word simply means 'ability,' and by saying 'simply' we emphasize the utter helplessness of even regenerate man to do anything of use to God in the Church apart from the prior work within him of the Holy Spirit. 'Power' is not what we require; we need 'ability.' That is what the *charismata* supply - enabling individual believers to live together in the congregation in a mutually beneficial and *service-oriented* way. It is not too much to say that the *charismata* lie at the root of all the 'one anothers' we find in Paul's letters. "We conceive that the great end for which the endowment of the Spirit is bestowed is our qualification for the highest and most effective service in the church of Christ."<sup>186</sup>

Perhaps this is the most significant point to make in manifesting the error of the Pentecostal view of 'baptism in the Holy Spirit.' That is, such a view of a two-step process of spiritual endowment leaves the Church wholly *unable* to be built up into the fulness of Christ - at least until all of the members of the Church receive the second blessing of the baptism of the Spirit. As we saw at the beginning of this lesson, the Pentecostal view is largely a response to the unbiblical views of either an institutionalized Spirit or a Spirit entirely encompassed by the preached Word. Nevertheless, it is a *response* or *reaction* and not itself a conclusion drawn from biblical exegesis. Men have considered the Church and noted its internal divisions and external impotence, and have concluded that what is needed is another 'Pentecost,' another outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Martyn Lloyd-Jones arrived at just this conclusion, "This is no age to advocate restraint; the church today does not need to be restrained, but to be aroused, to be awakened, to be filled with a spirit of

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<sup>186</sup> Gordon; 74.

glory.”<sup>187</sup> To MLJ this constitutes *revival*. “The difference between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and a revival is imply one of the number of people affected...It is a truism to say that every revival of religion is in a sense but a repetition of Pentecost.”<sup>188</sup>

But, careful as we must be to say it, Lloyd-Jones is wrong on this point. There can be no repetition of Pentecost any more than there can be a repetition of Golgotha. Lloyd-Jones is reacting to the anemic character of the Church in his world, and we ought to react to the anemic Church in our world (which is not all that far removed from his; MLJ died in 1981). But our reaction must be biblical and may not detract or diminish the *actual* events in God’s historical redemptive chronology. “Pentecost still appears to have been the age-baptism of the church. As Calvary was once for all, so was the visitation of the upper room.”<sup>189</sup> It is more biblical to understand that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are bestowed to all members, as Paul teaches in I Corinthians 12,

*There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. **But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.***

(I Corinthians 12:4-7)

The *lack* of spiritual giftedness in a church is really no different than the *abuse* of the same in the Corinthian church; both are matters of disobedience and selfishness rather than an absence of the Spirit himself. Perhaps a better definition of revival – and also an explanation of why they never last – is that they are reminders of what the Holy Spirit intends to do in the Church *at all times*. As such they also serve as warnings to a disobedient church that, unless its members walk in the Spirit and cease from hindering the free distribution and operation of the *charismata* by the Spirit, the Lord himself may come and take their lampstand away. In the meantime, we are assured by the apostle Peter that our risen Lord has “*given us all things necessary for life and godliness,*” not the least of which are the gifts of the Holy Spirit both *to* and *in* the Church.

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<sup>187</sup> Lloyd-Jones, Martyn *Joy Unspeakable: Power & Renewal in the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers; 1984); 75.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*; 51.

<sup>189</sup> Gordon; 59. Gordon gets the location of the events of Pentecost a bit wrong here, but that doesn’t alter the correctness of his sentiment.

**Week 11: The Spirit & The Word**

**Key Biblical Texts:** I Corinthians 2:6 - 16

*"What the sun is unto the world as to things natural,  
that is the word and the preaching of it unto men as to things spiritual."  
(John Owen)*

The philosophical era known as the Enlightenment, stretching roughly from the publication of René Descartes' *Principia Philosophiae* in 1644 to that of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781, saw the rise and fall of Rationalism and led directly to the current denomination of Western thought; Post-Modernism. Descartes followed the general trend of the Renaissance in elevating human reason to become essentially the arbiter of all truth, whereas Kant so localized reality within the



**René Descartes (1596-1650)**

human mind as to essentially deny all objective truth. In short, philosophers reasoned themselves in and out of their own minds in under 150 years. The impact of this rapid ascent and descent of the Mind of Man had a powerful impact on Christianity in the West, introducing a brand of liberalism into the Church that would completely upend orthodoxy through the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The primary casualties of this rational/irrational intellectual assault were and are the doctrine of the divine inspiration of the Bible and its correlate, that of the authority of Scripture in doctrine and practice.



**Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)**

Rationalism determined that the overarching genre of Scripture was *myth*; Post-Modernism determined that *objective truth* was also a myth. First the propositional and historical tone of the Bible was denied, and then the supposed underlying ethical message was deemed *religious* rather than *divine*. This one-two punch delivered a knockout blow to mainline Protestant denominations and led directly to the rise of Fundamentalism, as conservative theologians fought a rearguard action through the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and into the 20<sup>th</sup>. Princeton Theological

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Seminary was a leading institution in the battle to defend both the Inspiration of Scripture and its objective Authority for the Church in doctrine and practice. But even Princeton eventually succumbed to the liberal onslaught, giving rise to the establishment of Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929. Westminster has generally held its ground in the ensuing century, but over the broad reaches of 'professing' Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the concept of the Bible as God-breathed and authoritative has definitely become the minority report.

The firm foundation of conservative orthodoxy, however, is the evident fact that the Bible does present itself, and its religion, as both *historical* and *propositional*. Though arguing from reason is no longer in vogue, it still remains that Christianity, *as it presents itself in its own literature*, does so within the context of actual historical people and events as well as objective truth-content propositions. The only conclusion that can be drawn from the liberal attack upon both the historicity and the authority of the Bible to Christianity, is that the resultant liberal religion has no historical right to call itself Christianity at all. Sadly, when one side of the debate grounds its argument upon objective truth and historical reality and the other side argues from the position of relativistic truth and myth, there can truly be no meeting of the minds, as both sides simply argue past one another. At which point the conservative theologian has to turn to the choir, as it were, and preach the Inspiration and Authority of Scripture to those who should already believe in both. That is what we do in this lesson, in the hopes that our faith may be strengthened in the midst of a very unbelieving world (and an unbelieving professing Church).

The question of Truth has forever been on the mind of Man, as has been manifested throughout the ages through the musings and writings of magi, sages, and philosophers. That there *is* Truth may be argued from the sheer effort that has been made since antiquity to *find* it, and in the modern philosophical world to *deny* it. But what is pertinent to our study is not a generic search for or defense of Truth, but rather the reassertion of the basic Christian principle that our faith is grounded in objective reality; historical and propositional Truth, "*the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.*"<sup>190</sup> This truth is that which the Holy Spirit was sent to guide the Church into, and is the truth that both sets us free and

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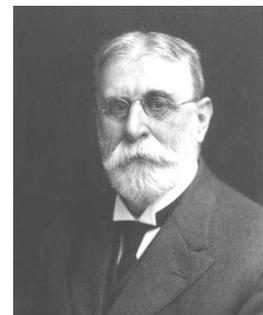
<sup>190</sup> Ephesians 4:21

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sanctifies us.<sup>191</sup> It is also the truth of which the Church is the “*pillar and bulwark*”<sup>192</sup> and therefore is of the very essence of the life and ministry of the congregation. Above all else, the Church is to be about the business of learning, knowing, propagating, and defending the truth. Within the congregation this truth is nourishing, indicting, sanctifying; within the world it is convicting and condemning. It is the same truth, with different effects on those who are inheriting eternal life than on those who are perishing. Whatever proper emphasis, then, is placed in the Church upon *doing*, it must always be firmly based on *knowing* if it is to be biblical Christianity.

The acknowledgment of objective truth would be meaningless unless there is also an acknowledgment of the *source* of that truth. To say that there is Truth, but to deny that it can be found anywhere objectively, is *agnosticism*, which is a pathetic (in the modern sense of the word) and anemic philosophy. Indeed, it is the abandonment of philosophy and cannot really be called a self-conscience philosophical worldview; it is an intellectual cop-out unworthy of any human being as the image of God. What is unique to Christianity is its claim that there is a known source of objective Truth, and that source is the Bible, the Holy Word of God. It is hard to deny that this claim is itself within the Bible, and that the writers of the biblical books (as well as Jesus himself) openly admitted this fact. This has resulted in the Bible being the most attacked and most maligned work of human literature ever written. The logic of a source of objective truth, however, is sound: *if* there is to be objective truth it must be somehow objectively available to human reason, for if, as Kant argued, truth is found only within the individual mind, then all objectivity is lost and we are left with subjective truth – itself an oxymoron.

What makes the biblical claim to truth impossible for the world to ignore is that this claim concerns not simply man in his human relations, but rather man in his relation to God, his Maker and the Creator of this world. It involves the nature and judgments of God vis-à-vis Man, and is therefore beyond the realm of natural understanding; it is *revelation*. Benjamin Warfield speaks of “The religion of the Bible” as a “frankly super-



**B. B. Warfield (1851-1921)**

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<sup>191</sup> John 16:13; John 8:32; John 17:17

<sup>192</sup> I Timothy 3:15

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natural religion...In other words, the religion of the Bible presents itself as distinctively a revealed religion; and sets itself as such over against all other religions, which are represented as all products, in a sense in which it is not, of the art and device of man.”<sup>193</sup>

The discussion concerning the authenticity of the Bible, and regarding the establishment of the canon of Scripture, properly belongs to the initial study within Systematic Theology – or *Prolegomena*. This is because all that we know about theology – all that we know about God in any sense capable of being *doctrinal* – comes from the Bible. Within the branch of theology known as Ecclesiology, the Doctrine of the Church, the discussion turns to the role of the ministry of the Word of God within the Church. In particular, as we are still in large measure within the sub-study of Pneumatology, our concern here is with the role of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of the Word within the Church. There is not much from Islam’s holy book, the Q’uran, that is worthy of quoting within a Christian study of the Church, but it is noteworthy that, in the Q’uran, Christians (as well as Jews) are referred to as ‘people of the Book.’ It seems that Muhammad, in a way sadly absent from much of modern evangelicalism, understood that genuine Christianity is one that flows from the Bible.

Biblical illiteracy has been a serious problem for the Church for many generations,



**R. B. Kuiper (1886-1966)**

and modern writers still lament the woeful ignorance of most professing Christians with regard to biblical knowledge. R. B. Kuiper wrote in the 1940s that “Ignorance of Scripture on the part of the average church member of our day, to say nothing of the average preacher, approaches the abysmal.”<sup>194</sup> Things have not gotten better over the past seventy years; if anything, the situation is more dire today than in Kuiper’s time. Perhaps the

biggest problem among evangelicals, however, is not so much the lack of biblical knowledge as it is the lack of biblical understanding. What constitutes biblical knowledge in many churches consists of memory verses without context, and these primarily from the New Testament and the Psalms. A comprehensive understanding of the biblical revelation is simply not considered to be a necessity within

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<sup>193</sup> Warfield, Benjamin B. *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1967); 71, 72.

<sup>194</sup> “The Infallible Word” *A Symposium by Members of the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary* (Phillipsburg:

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the modern Church; it pales in importance to self-help programs, personal devotion, and evangelism & personal witness. Over the past few generations the emphasis within the Church has shifted noticeably from doctrine to practice, and now Christianity is viewed far more as a 'life' than a 'dogma.' But this is to get the cart before the horse, and to render the 'life' thus learned and lived to be completely without content. Again Kuiper, "historic Christianity has always claimed to be first a story, then a doctrine, and, last but not least, a life...That it is impossible to reject Christianity as a story, and still retain Christianity as a doctrine and life ought to go without saying."<sup>195</sup>

The need to re-emphasize the story line of biblical revelation has some from the individualization and personalization of modern Western Christianity. Proof-texts in theology have been replaced by 'life texts' in individual application, with a proliferation of refrigerator magnets and single-verse wall art (as well as coffee mugs, T-shirts, and even tattoos). Modern believers no longer "*study to show themselves approved*"; rather they hang their faith on the wall of their living room, plaster it on their cars with bumper stickers, or drink from mugs proclaiming their (single verse) belief. The Church itself has fostered this lowest-common-denominator Bible knowledge through insipid sermons and shallow VBS and Sunday School materials. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because they "*searched the Scriptures*" and yet did not recognize Him; what might He say today to professing believers who do not search the Scriptures at all?

### **Revelation as Narrative:**

The pattern of true biblical instruction within the Church was given by our Lord himself to the two disciples with whom He walked on the way to Emmaus:

*Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* (Luke 24:25-27)

Jesus told these disciples a story – *the* story of God's redemptive plan unfolding through the history of mankind in general, and Israel in specific. In one sense – and a very

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Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company; 1980); 220.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*; 236, 239.

## Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

important sense – the story finds its climax and its conclusion in the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, as well as in His death and resurrection. But in another important sense, the telling of the story continues – and must continue – in the Church. With the finished redemptive work of Jesus Christ the story itself cannot continue adding characters and events – the plot is not the same as that of ‘human progress’ through the ages, though human progress has been massively influenced by the biblical story in ways few today will admit. Warfield comments, “For we can never even in thought unravel from this complex web of modern civilization, all the threads from the Bible which have been woven into it.”<sup>196</sup> This was once a recognized feature of Western civilization – the debt owed by Western man in particular to the ‘Judeo-Christian’ heritage.

It is sad that Western civilization has lost sight of its roots in biblical history; but it is downright sinful that *the Church* has also lost this vision. Perhaps the greatest need of the Church today has been its greatest need throughout the past twenty centuries: solid, faithful, and consistent retelling of the redemptive story within the congregation of the faith, the community of believers. It is hard to imagine how the Church can be the pillar and bulwark of the truth in the world, when truth is so little valued within the Church itself. Protestant evangelical churches may still have the pulpit in the middle of their stage, but the effective preaching of the Word is no longer in the middle of their agenda.

What is needed is a return not only to expositional preaching – the type of preaching that ignited the fire of the Protestant Reformation – but to continuing the telling of the story of redemption from Adam to Christ. Within fundamentalism this is often referred to as the ‘old, old story,’ but in fact the Gospel story itself has suffered a Reader’s Digest abridgement in many fundamentalist churches, with nothing more than the last chapters ever read. Jesus’ told His story to the disciples “*beginning with Moses,*” and the apostle Paul frequently went all the way back to the Garden and Adam. The biblical narrative must again become the framework of evangelical preaching – not the creeds, or denomination theological structures, but the *whole counsel of Scripture* as historical, propositional truth from beginning to end.

At the heart of biblical preaching and teaching in the Church is the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who was “*hovering over the darkness of the deep*” at Creation and who has now

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<sup>196</sup> Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*; 125.

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*“shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”*<sup>197</sup> Spirit-filled preaching and teaching will manifest itself not with culturally-relevant homilies or well-packaged wisdom for the individual believer’s ‘felt needs.’ Rather it will preach Jesus Christ from every part of the divine story and in doing so will weave the ongoing story of human history into the biblical story of divine power and glory in Christ.

The ministry of the Word in the Church is the primary focus of the *word-charismata* of preaching and teaching. Peter admonishes those whose spiritual ‘gift’ is *speaking* to *“do so as the oracle of God.”*<sup>198</sup> This is a serious responsibility before God, and is no doubt why James cautions against becoming a teacher precipitously, *“Let not many of you become teachers, for as such we incur a stricter judgment.”*<sup>199</sup> The key point, however, in Peter’s comment is that the ability to speak – to preach and to teach – in the Church is something that comes from God through the Holy Spirit; it is not a natural talent at all. And while natural speaking ability is a wonderful blessing (to both the preacher and his hearers), it is apparently not something that Paul himself possessed. It is not even the content of the sermons, or how well they are crafted, that matters. It is only the presence of the Holy Spirit in the preacher or teacher, and this is something that the congregation can tangibly determine.

### **The Hidden Wisdom**

Seminary homiletics classes teach men how to ‘craft’ sermons through a dedicated process of exegesis, prayer, and written composition. Evangelical and Reformed homiletics emphasize the need to stay close to the Word in every sermon, and to avoid using biblical passages as nothing more than springboards to personal hobby horses or ‘culturally relevant’ topical preaching. But the Reformed methodology of preaching can and often does lead to a mechanical process of sermon-building that is devoid of the Holy Spirit and is of no benefit to the Church. Again, the *content* of the sermon, important as it is in itself, is not the sum total of biblical preaching or teaching. It is interesting to note that the *second* time the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples they did not speak in tongues,

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<sup>197</sup> II Corinthians 4:6

<sup>198</sup> I Peter 4:11

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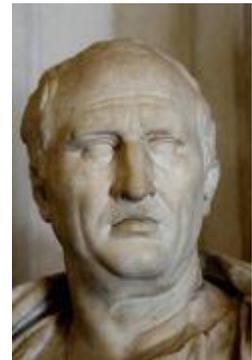
but *"spoke the Word of God with boldness."*<sup>200</sup> This should be the desire of every minister of God's Word, as well as the desire of every congregation with regard to those within the body who have been entrusted with the ministry of the Word.

Perhaps the key passage, at least in the New Testament, concerning the Spirit-centered reality of true biblical preaching and teaching is Paul's self-defensive treatise in I Corinthians chapter 2. The apostle has suffered in Corinth at the hands of 'super-apostles' who have maligned Paul's speaking abilities and questioned his apostleship. Paul answers,

*And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

(I Corinthians 2:1-5)

Within the context of the first century Roman world, those who spoke publicly with *persuasive words of wisdom* were the students of rhetoric, who studied how to speak well regardless of the topic (and to defend other men in court, regardless of their guilt or innocence) in order to make a handsome career. The most famous of these rhetoricians in Republican Rome was Marcus Tullius Cicero, who made a very decent living with his oratory skills and on account of this well-studied talent was elected Consul of Rome in 63 BC. Such orators often. Such orators



**Cicero (106-43 BC)**

often constituted the public entertainment for larger cities within the Empire, and undoubtedly this was still the case in Corinth of Paul's day. But such theatrics were anathema to the apostle, whose preaching was founded on something more powerful than rhetorical flourish; it was *"by the demonstration of the Spirit and power."* It is generally assumed that the apostle is speaking here of miraculous 'signs and wonders' that accompanied his ministry, and this is in keeping with his own testimony that *"the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you."*<sup>201</sup> But the continuing discussion in I Corinthians 2

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<sup>199</sup> James 3:1

<sup>200</sup> Acts 4:31

<sup>201</sup> II Corinthians 12:12

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requires that Paul's preaching *'by the demonstration of the Spirit and power'* not be limited to miraculous signs.

Paul was apparently being maligned among the Corinthian believers as not only being a poor speaker, but having little to say that constituted *'wisdom,'* something he admits in the first chapter that the Greeks are always seeking after. We might paraphrase and update the complaint against Paul by saying that he was not preaching in a *'culturally relevant'* way; he was not *'connecting'* with the Corinthians and therefore needed to change his message. If this was the complaint, then it is one that evangelical preachers have heard in every age, and certainly it sounds in earnest in the modern American church. Modern seminaries train future preachers in the use of multi-media presentations in order to keep the attention of their congregations. But Paul's defense of his own ministry of the Word is timeless, rooted as it is in the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

*However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God <sup>l</sup>ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*

(I Corinthians 2:6-8)

Gordon Fee, referring to the entire passage that begins with these verse (2:6-3:2), writes, "This passage is at once one of the most significant and most abused of the Spirit passages in the Pauline corpus...the abuse is basically the result of not recognizing - or not caring - how it fits into Paul's argument."<sup>202</sup> This argument, of course, begins in the first chapter with the discussion of the foolishness of the word preached - the foolishness of a crucified Christ. This is what the Corinthian believers were being told, much like modern believers are told that a divine Christ - a Christ virgin-born - a resurrected Christ, etc., is just foolishness to the modern, Enlightenment, and Post-Modern mind. Paul would present the very same argument now as he did two thousand years ago. This *'foolish'* message is the wisdom of God, but its wisdom is hidden from those who are perishing, and only revealed to those who are inheriting eternal life.

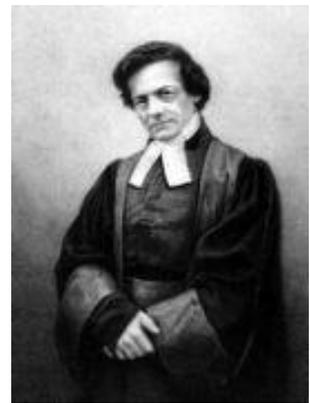
Paul gets in a dig on his opponents, saying that the wisdom that he preaches is for *'grown ups,'* literally. But what he is saying here is that the Gospel does not lack for

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wisdom; rather unbelieving ears lack for hearing, and unbelieving hearts lack for understanding. It has always been that way concerning the Word of God and the hardened hearts and deaf ears of the unbeliever.<sup>203</sup> “The gospel can never be perceived as divine wisdom by those who are pursuing *sophia*; it is recognized as such only by those who have the Spirit, since it comes only by the Spirit’s revelation.”<sup>204</sup>

It may be argued that this line of reasoning is ‘special pleading’; the Christian claims that the wisdom of the Bible and of the Gospel is hidden to the unbeliever and can only be revealed by the Holy Spirit, which ‘conveniently’ makes one a Christian. This is very similar to the ‘true knowledge’ – the *epignosis* – of the Gnostics who were prevalent in the latter part of the first century and who had a powerful and deleterious impact on the Church. It is also the same argument presented by the Masonic Order – you must progress up the chain of wisdom, the ‘degrees’ of being a Mason, before you can understand. But Paul does not teach a divine wisdom that is available only to the initiated within the Church, but rather to each and every believer. And the necessity of that divine knowledge coming by way of revelation is logically wrapped up in its being ‘divine’ in the first place. That which is divine cannot be perceived by that which is not; and no matter how vehemently modern self-esteem gurus protest to the contrary, man is not divine.

Thus it stands to reason, truly, that the preaching of the Gospel and of the Word of God within the Church must rest upon a stronger and deeper foundation than that of human wisdom. It must flow from divine revelation, and it must flow by the power of the Holy Spirit. Adolphe Monod, a 19<sup>th</sup> Century French Protestant theologian, wrote simply, “If faith has not for its basis a testimony of God to which we must submit, as to an authority exterior to our personal judgment, and independent of it, then faith is no faith.”<sup>205</sup> Preachers in every age must re-learn this lesson from Paul; that the



**Adolphe Monod (1802-56)**

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<sup>202</sup> Fee, *God’s Empowering Spirit*; 95.

<sup>203</sup> Cp. Isaiah 6:9-10

<sup>204</sup> Fee; *God’s Empowering Spirit*; 96.

<sup>205</sup> Quoted by Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*: 124.

Foolishness of the Gospel is the wisdom of God and the salvation of men. Sadly, many succumb (in every age) to the temptation to adjust the message to the world, to imbibe and imitate human wisdom in order to attract a wider audience. There is no power in this type



**C. H. Spurgeon (1834-92)**  
help him next Sunday.”<sup>206</sup>

of preaching, in spite of the what the ‘growth numbers’ appear to indicate. Preachers today would do well to heed the words of Charles Spurgeon concerning the necessity of the Holy Spirit to any and all true, biblical, and powerful preaching, "Let the preacher always confess before he preaches that he relies upon the Holy Spirit. Let him burn his manuscript and depend upon the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit does not come to help him, let him be still and let the people go home and pray that the Spirit will

What is it that a minister of the Word does when he prepares a sermon? If he follows Paul’s instructions in I Corinthians 2 – and if he seeks the Spirit’s guidance in accordance with Spurgeon’s counsel – he “*searches the deep things of God.*”

*But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.* (I Corinthians 2:10-12)

Paul’s line of thought moves along the principle that ‘like is known by like,’ a principle recognized within philosophical circles as essential to true understanding. Fee writes, “Only ‘like is known by like’; only God can know God. Therefore, the Spirit of God becomes the link between God and humanity.”<sup>207</sup> Paul will reinforce this principle from the opposite side, saying later in the same chapter that “*the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*”<sup>208</sup> But the one who is in Christ has the indwelling Spirit – the ‘anointing’ as the apostle John refers to Him – and can discern these mysteries that Paul

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<sup>206</sup> Spurgeon, Charles Hadden “The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit”; <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/ch-spurgeon-being-filled-holy-spirit-second-chance-foundation>. Accessed October 31, 2018.

<sup>207</sup> Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*; 99.

<sup>208</sup> I Corinthians 2:14

preaches, and that continue to be preached in the Church. "At the human level, I alone know what I am thinking, and no one else, unless I choose to reveal it in the form of words. So also only God knows what God is about. His Spirit, therefore, who knows his mind, becomes the link to our knowing him."<sup>209</sup> John Owen adds with reference to II Corinthians 4:6, quoted earlier, "God herein is said to communicate a *light* unto our minds, and that so as we shall see by it, or perceive by it, the things proposed unto us in the gospel."<sup>210</sup>

The work of the ministry of the Word in Christ's Church is to seek to plumb the "*deep things of God*" contained in His Word. We believe His revelation to have closed with the apostolic era because of the testimony that the apostles bore to Jesus Christ, in whom God speaks "*fully and finally*." Warfield explains why preachers in the Church no longer seek (or *should* no longer seek) additional redemptive revelation. He writes,

The entirety of the New Testament is but the explanatory word accompanying and give its effect to the fact of Christ. And when this fact was in all its meaning made the possession of men, revelation was completed and in that sense ceased. Jesus Christ is no less the end of revelation than He is the end of the Law.<sup>211</sup>

Thus the minister of the Word does not attempt to spread the scope of revelation wider, but rather seeks to dig deeper into the revelation "*once delivered unto the saints*." "For the Bible is not a record of what certain saintly but fallible men of old felt and thought concerning God. By its own claim it is the inerrant record, written by supernaturally inspired men of God, of what God has revealed to mankind concerning himself."<sup>212</sup> This is what the minister of the Word studies first and foremost, with creeds and commentaries and theologies occupying a distinctly secondary role in his study. Kuiper, who was certainly a confessional Presbyterian, still wisely wrote, "Doctrinal preaching, like all preaching, must be based upon the Word of God, and that is a way of saying that it may not be based upon the creeds."<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Fee; 101.

<sup>210</sup> Owen; 333.

<sup>211</sup> Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*; 96.

<sup>212</sup> R. B. Kuiper in *The Infallible Word*; 227.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*; 228.

But the study of the Word of God is only half the duty of the minister; he must also communicate what he has learned to the congregation. In spite of the “*greatness of the revelation*” given to him, Paul was not a toga-clad guru sitting unapproachable on the top of a mountain. Rather he strove to speak words that edified his hearers, preferring, as he puts it, to speak one word that edifies rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.<sup>214</sup> Here in I Corinthians 2 he refers to the manner of his communication as “*comparing spiritual things with spiritual*” (2:13). This is a difficult clause to fully understand, being typically Pauline in the fewness of words used: *literally*, “spirituals judging together with spirituals.” Various English translations render the phrase differently; the above rendering of the New King James version compared with “*combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words*” (NASB) and “*interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual*” (ESV), just to mention a few.

Perhaps the crux of the matter is, as Fee puts it, “The Spirit is the key to everything.”<sup>215</sup> In terms of the ‘practice’ of preaching refers to both the study of the minister and the communication to the congregation of what he has studied, as being equally *spiritual*; equally immersed in the Holy Spirit, who communicates the deep things of God to His people through His ministers. Fee offers this extended translation in light of the overall argument of chapter 2 as well as of the actual words used in the immediate passage, “Most likely, therefore, he intended something like, ‘explaining the things of the Spirit by means of the words taught by the Spirit,’ that is, ‘in language appropriate to the meaning, not with human wisdom.”<sup>216</sup>

This brings us full circle to the danger that exists for the minister of the Word in every age: to study human philosophy, sociology, and political science instead of the Word of God, and to attempt to communicate the truths of God to the people of God utilizing the wisdom of Man. In the midst of an argument that is clearly focusing on the *true* wisdom of God as manifested by the Holy Spirit, Paul does manage to cast a quick and summary judgment on the wisdom of man, with which the believers at Corinth were apparently so impressed. The ‘wisdom of this age,’ like the ‘rulers of this age,’ are destined to pass away. In this Paul does not merely mean that human wisdom cannot

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<sup>214</sup> I Corinthians 14:19

<sup>215</sup> Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*; 104.

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stand the test of time – actually, human wisdom has remained essentially unchanged along just a few philosophical paradigms for the past four thousand years. Richard Hays writes, “Paul means not only that the wisdom of the rulers of this age is impermanent, but also that it is being doomed, being rendered void and done away, eschatologically, through God’s act in Christ.”<sup>217</sup> Hays properly connects what Paul says in chapter 2 about the rulers and wisdom of the current age with what the apostle has already said about the highly esteemed things of the world in chapter 1: that God is bring them to nought.

This is the challenge for the minister of the Word of God in the Church of God. To abandon the spiritual is to succumb to the human, and to do that is to align oneself with that which God is destroying. Whenever a preacher adopts human wisdom, or philosophical terminology and culturally-relevant speech forms, he is truly adopting foolishness, though the world may applaud his wisdom. For a preacher in Christ’s Church to do this, however, is foolishness to the point of insanity. The man of God cannot think the world’s thoughts better than the world can, and there is no lack of unbelieving human wisdom in any and every age. The insanity arises in that the minister of God’s Word has, if he is a believer and is truly called to the ministry of the Word, received the *charismata* that is the teaching and guidance of the Holy Spirit himself. Along with Paul he, directed by the Spirit, searches the deep things of God. For above all that worldly wisdom can offer, the truly gifted minister of God’s Word “*has the mind of Christ.*”

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<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*; 105.

<sup>217</sup> Hays, *Echoes*; 134.

**Week 12: The Spirit & Church Polity**

**Key Biblical Texts:** Acts 14:21-26; Titus 1:5; Philippians 1:1

*"The church is not like the kingdoms of this world,  
for it is organized for service, not dominion."  
(Edmund Clowney, *The Church*)*

The historian Luke did not consider Paul's first missionary journey to be complete until he and Barnabas revisited the churches they had planted in Lystra, Iconium, and Psidian Antioch (Acts 14:25), "*strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.'*"<sup>218</sup> Immediately after this verse Luke records one of the ways that Paul and Barnabas 'strengthened' the fledgling churches in these regions, "*So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*"<sup>219</sup> This is the first we read of any form of governmental structure or formal office appearing in the Christian Church, but chronologically it occurs very near the beginning of the Gentile mission. This instance establishes an *a priori* conclusion in favor of some sort of congregational governance, and the fact that the first missionaries appointed 'elders' in each city begins the discussion with a particular *polity* or form of government in the church. Considerably later in his ministry, the apostle is found to be working with the same polity, as he instructs his apostolic legate, Titus, "*For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you...*"<sup>220</sup> Here we see associated two principles that Paul considered important to the continuing health and grow of the churches under his care: *order* and *elders*. These principles are, in fact, correlates and not separate concepts at all. The *manner* by which Titus was to "*set things in order*" was by "*appointing elders in every city.*"

We have seen in our previous discussions concerning the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, that there have been considerable movements within professing Christianity in which the ideas of 'governance' and 'Spirit' are viewed as mutually exclusive. A 'stated

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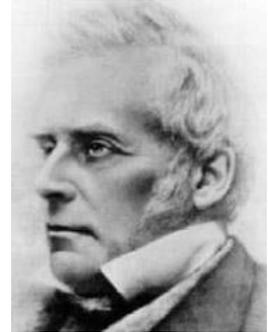
<sup>218</sup> Acts 14:22

<sup>219</sup> Acts 14:23

<sup>220</sup> Titus 1:5

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ministry' - as the Presbyterian polity is often termed - is considered by many to be diametrically opposed to a 'Spirit-led' church. The most familiar modern example of a 'no-leadership' Christian Church is the Plymouth Brethren, founded in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century by John Nelson Darby, an early teacher of Dispensational eschatology. Plymouth Brethren rejected the hierarchical clergy of the Anglican Church, and held firmly to the biblical doctrine of the "*priesthood of believers*." Though the Brethren did recognize that certain men were gifted with leadership and teaching gifts, they rejected the idea of a paid pastorate in the local congregation. Extreme views within the Plymouth Brethren movement considered *preparation* of a sermon to be a form of quenching the Holy Spirit.



J. N. Darby (1800-82)

The Plymouth Brethren have also been somewhat notorious for internal schism, leading to frequent separations within congregations and the formation of new congregations. We may not be scientifically able to link the frequent dissolution of congregations within the Brethren community with the stated abhorrence toward clerical office in the congregation, but it is ironic that the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church, a modern descendant of the original Plymouth Brethren, now has an 'Elect Vessel' who has oversight and authority within the denomination worldwide. Certainly, the presence of an official governing structure within any congregation does not guarantee against schism and division, but it appears from Paul's actions and instructions that "*setting things in order*" in this manner is a very important step in the right direction.

It remains to our study to determine several things from the Bible concerning a 'stated ministry' within the local congregation. **First**, is this a matter of *intent* on the part of the Holy Spirit, or just *accommodation* to the sinfulness even of believers? **Second**, if a formal structure of polity is biblical, what *form* does this take? And **finally**, presuming here at the outset that the form is that of a *plurality of elders*, what is the nature and function of such leadership within the local congregation, and is it meant to extend beyond to other congregations?

As to the first question, whether the establishment of formal polity within the local congregations was intended by the Holy Spirit or was merely an accommodation to the sinfulness even of believers, the answer is not clear-cut. A biblical argument may be made

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that *any* form of government among men is due to their rebellion against the authority of God in their life. This is the general tenor of Paul's important words on the subject of human government in Romans 13.

*Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.* (Romans 13:1-4)

One can reasonably infer from Paul's line of reasoning that a sinless society would have no need for human government. The case within the Christian congregation is analogous; Paul's intent that Titus should '*set things in order*' implies at least the possibility of disorder, a condition that is in direct relationship to sin. So, yes, Church Polity is an accommodation by the Holy Spirit on account of the residual sin remaining in believers, and perhaps magnified in a community of believers. Yet even though a divine institution may have the effect of counterbalancing sinful tendencies, this does not mean that the institution was not *intended* in its own right. Marriage is an excellent example of this principle, as it was clearly ordained for Man prior to the advent of sin into the race, though it now serves as a powerful preventative for immoral behavior (*cp.* I Cor. 7:1-5). This dual-use principle – that something can be an *accommodation* as well as have *original intent* – does not apply universally, as the Lord's comments regarding divorce prove (*cp.* Matt. 19:8-9). Nonetheless, that an institution accommodates human sin does not mean this function is its only purpose.

In the case of human governance the argument is not crystal clear. Israel was rejecting God from being their king when they clamored for a king so that they could be like the nations surrounding them (I Sam. 8:1-7). Yet God had already both intended and prophesied that Israel would have a king, from the tribe of Judah and the family of David. The solution to this conundrum is the idea of co-regent, which actually begins with Adam in his original, innocent state in the Garden. God *intended* that Man exercise governance over His Creation and rule in His Name. Paul reminds us that "*God is not the author of*

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*confusion but of peace*” and thus His *intent* was that His created order be maintained through the governance of human beings. Within that overarching structure God also ordained the Man to be head over the Woman, and parents to govern their children. All of these hierarchical relations serve now to harness the sinful tendencies of mankind, but they were no less intended as a reflection of the order which is the very nature of God.

Thus it stands to reason that, if there is governmental leadership in the state and patriarchal leadership in the family, there will also be a biblical form of leadership in the Church. Whether Paul was explicitly told by the Holy Spirit what to do in Lystra, Iconium, Psidian Antioch, Crete, and undoubtedly everywhere else he established a church, is not recorded. It may be that he was merely guided by the Spirit to follow the



**Thomas M'Crie (1772-1835)**

pattern of order that God himself established in every human society, including within his own heritage, Israel. We may say that *order* is the divine pattern regardless of sin, though sin undeniably makes order harder to establish and maintain. Proper order even in a fallen world will correspond to the divine order, which is untouched by sin. Thomas M'Crie uses the word 'unity' in a sense very similar to how we are using 'order' here, "He will establish unity on the solid and immovable basis of immutable truth and eternal righteousness."<sup>221</sup> Thus we expect to find in the biblical teaching concerning Church Polity, the characteristics of truth and righteousness, and not merely an expedient to keep human sin in check.

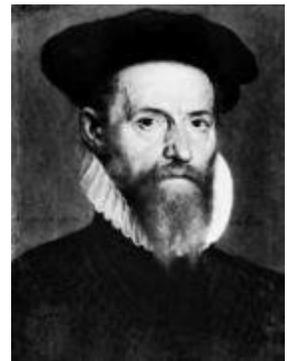
Having established, at least for argument's sake, the biblical necessity, as well as the intent, of *polity* within the Church, the second question pertains to the *form* of this polity. Is there a biblical church order, or is the matter one of biblical indifference, left to the devices of each congregation and denomination? It seems clear that the proper form of local church government to Paul was that of a plurality of elders, or a 'presbyterian' polity. This is indeed the biblical form of church government, but before establishing its framework in detail, we should investigate the historical phenomenon of *other* polities, when that of an elder-led congregation seems so obvious. The fact of such polities as that of the papacy and the episcopacy, as well as disagreements with regard to whether church

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governance extends only to the local congregation (i.e., Congregationalism) or to a broader scope of churches (i.e., *presbyteries*, *bishoprics*, or *diocese*) indicates a consistent opinion within professing Christianity that the *form* of church government has been left to the determination of the local church or churches themselves, and not definitively established in Scripture. That there *is to be* a government is not denied by the vast majority; but its form has often been developed independently of the pattern and teaching of Paul.

This development in Church History follows the broad lines of political theory in the historical society of men outside the Church, with elements of *monarchy*, of *oligarchy* and, at times, that of *democracy* to be found in varying degrees. The Roman Catholic tradition, of course, emphasizes the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome, though it also places authority under him within the college of Bishops, or Magisterium. Thus it is first and foremost a *monarchy* with a strong *oligarchy* that 'assists' the monarch – the Pope – and form which the next Pope is often selected. The Anglican communion differs from the Roman only in the shift in emphasis to the oligarchy – the episcopacy – with the 'monarch,' in this case the Archbishop of Canterbury, having a greatly reduced authority. Each of these polities derive, at least originally, from the biblical 'office' of *episkopos*, or 'overseer,' and can thus claim at least some biblical heritage in defense of their particular form of government.

State churches such as Lutheranism introduce the civil government into the hierarchy, with the state government in charge of training, paying, and directing the local placement of ministers to the local congregations. This amalgamation of biblical and secular polity has been wrongfully attributed to the Swiss theologian Thomas Erastus, due to his opinion that ecclesiastical sins were to be punished by the civil authority, and the polity itself has come to be known as *Erastianism*. It has little warrant in Scripture and has historically proved to be a corrupting influence within Lutheranism. It is, perhaps, closer to the Anglican polity where the 'head' of the Church is the civil monarch, though statism in Lutheran countries has remained far more powerful than it has in Great Britain.



**Thomas Erastus (1524-83)**

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<sup>221</sup> M'Crie, Thomas *Unity in the Church* (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications; 1989); 64.



**John Calvin (1509-64)**

It was John Calvin who is properly credited with returning the Church in Geneva to a more solidly biblical model of a plurality of elders, though perhaps inadvertently he also sowed the seeds of a Presbyterian clericalism that persists today. In his comments on Acts 14: 23, Calvin devolves the responsibility of teaching the Word upon the ‘presbyters,’ the elders of the local church. He writes, “I interpret *presbyters* here as those on whom the office of teaching had been enjoined.”<sup>222</sup> However, Calvin’s notes on

I Timothy 5:17 presaged the Presbyterian ‘three office’ view, in which a distinction is made between ‘ruling elders’ and ‘teaching elders,’ the latter being called ‘pastors.’ We will be dealing with this passage below, but in this historical section it is worthy to note Calvin’s words, “We may learn from this, that there were at that time two kinds of elders; for all were not ordained to teach. The words plainly mean, that there were some who ‘ruled well’ and honorably, but who did not hold the office of teachers.”<sup>223</sup>

Do these different forms of Church Polity matter? Is it important whether the hierarchy of the Church is papal, episcopal, or Presbyterian? A major factor in the English Civil War was whether the English Church would be Episcopal or Presbyterian, so at least the Royalists and the Parliamentarians of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century thought the matter quite important. Without coming to blows over the issue, we may outline at least a few reasons why the matter of polity is important and worthy of both diligent consideration and faithful adherence. The **first**, of course, is that the Church does not belong to itself but is the possession of her Lord, Jesus Christ.

The Christian Church is not an arbitrary institution of men – not a mere voluntary association of any number of people, for any purpose, and on any terms, which to them may seem good; nor has its communion been left vague and undetermined by the laws of its founder.<sup>224</sup>

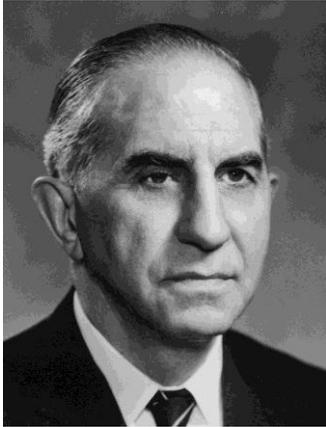
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<sup>222</sup> Calvin, John *Commentary on the New Testament; Volume 7* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1973); *en loc*.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid*; Volume 11; *en loc* I Timothy 5:17.

<sup>224</sup> M’Crie; 95.

In other words, as with all other aspects of true worship, the method and manner of church government has not been left to the Church to decide. We have the same necessity of finding biblical warrant for our *polity* as we do for our *worship*, and the imagination (or



**John Murray (1898-1975)**

politics) of men cannot be the determining factor for establishing the true polity of the Church of Christ. John Murray is, we believe, quite correct when he writes, "The government exercised by men [i.e., in the Church] must always be conducted in accordance with the institution and will of Christ."<sup>225</sup> Thus obedience to the standard of Scripture as the direct and revealed will of God constitutes the first and predominant reason why the polity of the Church matters. If

the Bible establishes, by example as well as precept, a particular form of church government, it is not within the rights of the Church to alter this form to suit contemporary political 'needs.' Murray is unequivocal on the matter, "The presbyterate is the form of government for the church of Christ."<sup>226</sup>

A **second** reason why polity matters is one drawn from human society in general, that is, that the form of government under which a people live will inevitably influence the sort of people they are. The manner of oversight exercised over a people will mould their own social character: a tyranny will form docile citizens; an oligarchy will foster class distinctions; and a republic will tend toward greater individual initiative and freedom. These are observations both of political theorists and of political history, and they pertain as well to the Church as to society in general (for the Church is also a society of men). With this principle in mind, we may reason back from the type of society the Church is *supposed* to be, to the type of polity the Church ought to have (subjecting the conclusion, of course, to the specific dictates of Scripture on the matter). Are believers to be a controlled mass of quiet parishioners, receiving 'grace' at the hands of a hierarchical clergy? Or are believers to be independently students of God's Word, "*searching the Scriptures to see if these things be true*"? The 'priesthood of every believer' was a biblical principle rediscovered by the Reformers, particularly Martin Luther, and clearly argues for the second of the two views.

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<sup>225</sup> Murray, John *The Collected Writings of John Murray: Volume 2* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth; 2001); 340.

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This, in turn, demands a form of Church Polity that fosters the involvement of every member of the congregation, gifted as he or she is by the Holy Spirit so that *“the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”*<sup>227</sup> This biblical emphasis on the individual contributions – the spiritual gifts – of every believer in the congregation is a very weighty consideration in the discussion of the correct polity to be observed in the churches of Jesus Christ. D. Douglas Bannerman, in *The Scripture Doctrine of the Church*, writes, “The organization is always such as is consistent with a full and frank recognition of the individual rights of all the members of the community.”<sup>228</sup>

Often this principle of ‘like government, like people’ is most evident when the polity of a church or denomination is in gross deviation from the biblical norm. It is merely historical observation to state that the average Roman Catholic is less concerned about what the Bible says on a particular matter than is the average Protestant, and within Protestantism, the more energetic individual study of the Bible will be found almost invariably in those churches whose polity is more ‘democratic.’ Edmund Clowney writes, “The danger of setting aside biblical principles appears when the church is organized after an alien model – that of an entrepreneurial business, for example, or of the military.”<sup>229</sup>

**Finally**, though not exhaustively, the importance of the polity of a church rests upon its fulfillment of the fundamental duty of church leadership: *to shepherd the flock of God*. The Apostle Peter, who was admonished by Jesus himself to *“Feed My sheep,”* writes to his fellow elders across the ages,

*The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.*

(I Peter 5:1-4)

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<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*; 342.

<sup>227</sup> Ephesians 4:16

<sup>228</sup> Bannerman, D. Douglas *The Scripture Doctrine of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1976); 528.

<sup>229</sup> Clowney, *The Church*; 201.

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Various passages of New Testament Scripture establish the fact that the polity of eldership within the local congregation is the one that meets these three criteria for biblical validation. That eldership is what Paul established, and Peter recognized, within the churches to which they wrote is sufficient to grant this polity the imprimatur of the Lord. This is especially the case in that no other polity is even mentioned in the Bible: there is no mention of a supreme Pontiff or Vicar of Christ on earth, nor even of a diocesan Bishop who rules over churches within a wide region. The notion that the State should have any say either within or over the Church is as foreign to the testimony of Scripture as one can imagine any thought being. That leaves only 'presbyterianism,' in lower case here due to some significant differences of opinion between the denomination Presbyterian polity and that of other Reformed congregations. More on that below.

A simple review of the biblical passages is warranted from a Berean perspective, to fully establish the polity of elders as the proper governance of the Church and of its individual congregations. The key exegetical discovery when one surveys the passages in the New Testament that deal with elders in the church, is the combination of the three 'technical' terms most closely associated with Church Polity: *episkopos*, or overseer; *presbyteros*, or elder, and *poimeo*, or to shepherd. These three are combined in Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian elders in Acts Chapter 20, in a very instructive passage regarding the apostolic view on proper governance in the Church. Having called to himself the elders (*presbuteroi*) of Ephesus, Paul tells them,

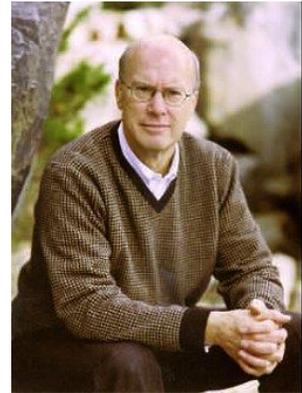
*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*

(Acts 20:28)

This the very same language we saw in I Peter 5, and leads to the proper conclusion that an elder (*presbyter*) is what the man is, whereas an overseer (*episkopos*) is what he does, and shepherding (*poimainein*) is how he is to do it. Also determined from these passages as well as Acts 14 and the instructions that Paul gives to Timothy and Titus, is the fact that the polity of the Church involves a *plurality* of elders, and never just one. Paul addresses his letter to the Philippian church with direct and immediate reference to the *bishops and*

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*deacons*, further indicating his own view that the later ecclesiastical development of a singular Bishop over a church and over churches, was never intended. Alexander Strauch, whose *Biblical Eldership* is an excellent contemporary treatise on the subject, writes, “By definition, the elder structure of government is a collective form of leadership in which each elder shares the position, authority, and responsibility of the office.”<sup>230</sup> This is the point of departure between episcopal and presbyterian polities and, more importantly, between episcopal and biblical polities. As the Roman Catholic form of government evolved from the episcopal and differs only in degree, its error is of the same nature, only worse by the same degree. Murray, in his inimitable ‘no-holds’barred’ manner, concludes,



Alexander Strauch (b. 1944)

The authority of the apostolate is behind this institution [i.e., eldership], and in no way does the concurrent exercise of rule introduce discrepancy. Rule by elders is the apostolic institution for the government of local congregations, and this involves the principles of plurality and parity. The inference is inescapable that this is a permanent provision for the government of the churches.<sup>231</sup>

Strauch quotes British theologian Alec Motyer, who is perhaps even more dogmatic



Alec Motyer (1924-2016)

than Murray, “it is not as much as hinted in the New Testament that the church would ever need – or indeed should ever want or tolerate – any other local leadership than that of the eldership group.” Yet the Church did develop alternative forms of leadership, and tolerated not only replacement polities to that of the plurality of elders, but pushed the biblical model to the periphery of Church Polity, displaced by the episcopal and then the papal forms of government in the Church. The Protestant

Reformation went some way toward reversing this error, but in general polity was not as important to the Reformers as doctrine, and the hierarchical forms of leadership tended to remain. Presbyterians adopted fully the eldership model and, from the same general

<sup>230</sup> Strauch, Alexander *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers; 1995); 39.

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Reformed theology, as did Congregationalists and Reformed Baptists. The similarity between these three stops at the use of the term 'elder' to denote the leadership position in the local congregation. The differences are subtle, but important.

"When we examine the New Testament there needs be no question of the fact that those invested with the gift and function of government are called elders."<sup>232</sup> Patrick Fairbairn confirms that the biblical terms are so coordinate as to forbid assigning any one of them to distinct men within the church apart from the other two. Speaking of the pastoral office within the Church, Fairbairn says, "This office has to do with the oversight and care of souls, and by its very name imports that the ministers of the gospel are called to exercise somewhat of the same fidelity and solicitude in behalf of these, that shepherds are expected to do in respect to their flocks. The names usually applied in Scripture to the highest offices in the Christian Church carry much the same import, though each with some specific shade of meaning as to the primary aspect under which their calling is contemplated. Those names are *presbuteroi* and *episkopoi*, presbyters and bishops, or elders and overseers, both alike involving the charge or duty of superintending and consulting for the good of the religious community."<sup>233</sup>



**Patrick Fairbairn (1805-74)**

Thus far the Presbyterian view agrees with that of Reformed Baptists and Congregationalists. Even farther, as Presbyterianism teaches quite clearly that the eldership must be a *plurality* and a *parity*. There must be more than one elder, and no elder is higher in 'rank' or authority than another. Again Murray, "The principle of parity is coordinate with that of plurality. Strictly speaking there can be no plurality if there is not parity."<sup>234</sup> Murray rejects any thought that the office of a 'bishop' is different biblically than that of an elder, or that the sphere of an elder's influence spreads farther than the local congregation. He writes,

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<sup>231</sup> Murray, *Collected Writings*; 342.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*; 345.

<sup>233</sup> Fairbairn, *Patrick Pastoral Theology* (Audubon, NJ: Old Paths Publications; 1992); 39-40.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*; 346.

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We must, therefore, recognize that in the New Testament the term 'bishop' is identical in respect of office and function with that of elder, and must not be associated in the remotest way with the hierarchical denotation or connotation that has come to be attached to it in the course of history....It is in the local assembly or congregation of God's people, that the ordinances of Christ's appointment for his church are regularly administered. The importance of the local congregation is therefore paramount and it is in the local congregation that the presbyterian principle must first be exemplified.<sup>235</sup>

However, it is at this point that Murray and Calvin and Presbyterianism in general depart from their own teaching, which is thus far the teaching of Scripture. There are two main points of departure - one regarding the eldership itself and the other regarding the scope of pastoral oversight. The second is less offensive than the first, so it will be treated first.

Since the legalization of Christianity in AD 325 the Church has often had recourse to councils of the bishops to help determine overall theological and practical guidance for the universal Church.<sup>236</sup> Councils that were called as churchwide meetings were termed 'ecumenical,' whereas many smaller councils were called to discuss and address regional issues. From the beginning it was desired that these councils have some binding authority over the teaching and the practice of the local congregations represented, and even over those who failed or refused to send representatives. Thus the Church historically shifted from a *Congregational* model to a *Conciliar* model, and even the Anabaptists of the Reformation Era participated in this trend.

In and of itself, conciliarism is benign. The idea of the leadership of local congregations - and the congregations themselves - having recourse to a broader cross-section of Christianity within their region, country, or even the world is not in itself unbiblical. Reference to the 'Council of Jerusalem' from Acts 15, however, cannot be used to justify all forms of conciliarism. In that case the issue was not merely that of circumcising or not circumcising Gentile converts to Christianity, but rather that those who taught in the Gentile churches that Gentile converts needed to be circumcised *claimed* to have authority from the elders and apostles at Jerusalem. It was that claim, and not any need on Paul's part to have his own views validated by Peter, that sent the delegation

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<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*; 348.

<sup>236</sup> Presbyterian and other conciliar denominations point to the 'Council of Jerusalem' in Acts 15 as the first ecumenical council of the Church of Jesus Christ. It is not the point of this lesson to debate that contention.

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from the Gentile churches to Jerusalem. Still, it has been a fact of history that churches in general, and the 'Church' in the world, have often faced similar theological and practical or social issues, and coming together in a synod or council is completely inoffensive.

The offense comes, and has come, when the 'canons' of such councils are made binding upon the local congregation, and the combined leadership (which is usually really just a bare majority) of the council members usurps the biblical authority of the elders of the local assembly. At this point Presbyterians and other conciliar denominations have left the biblical example of congregational autonomy and authority. From Jesus' admonition in Matthew 18 to Paul's lengthy treatises to the Corinthian church, it is evident from the New Testament that Christ has gifted each congregation with all they need to adjudicate both theological and practical issues within their own body. Jesus sees issues of sin going no further than the leadership of the church,

*Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.*  
(Matthew 18:15-17)

And Paul rebukes the Corinthian church for taking matters to the civil courts, reminding them that believers will judge angels and are therefore more than qualified to judge matters of congregational importance.

*Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?*  
(I Corinthians 6:1-3)

The only justification for binding conciliar edicts is pragmatism – a view that the combined authority of a synod or council will overawe and subject 'intransigent' congregations into obedience. Within Presbyterian writings one can easily locate the departure from biblical warrant and the entrance into pragmatism by the phrase, "good and necessary inference." John Murray, using slightly different terminology, essentially justifies church councils along these same lines.

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While it is all-important to maintain and promote presbyterian government on the level of the local congregation, and to recognize all the rights and prerogatives belonging to this *prebyterion*, yet it is also necessary to appreciate the broader fellowship that obtains in the church of Christ. In the presbyterian tradition this has come to expression in the gradation of courts of jurisdiction. This is a reasonable and proper way of giving expression to the unity of the church of Christ. It should be recognized that there is much in the form of organization and procedure adopted in presbyterian churches that cannot plead the authority of the New Testament. And the reason why certain forms of organization and procedure have been adopted and practised [*sic*], which cannot plead the prescription or warrant of Scripture itself, is simply the recognition that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the church which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, in accord with the general principles of the Word of God.<sup>237</sup>

This is a remarkable admission considering that Scripture informs us that God has given His people "*all things necessary for life and godliness*" and that Paul instructs the Corinthian church that believers will judge both the world and angels. In practical application the recourse to sessions, General Assemblies, synods, and councils is an admission that the biblical model of local, elder-led and autonomous congregations cannot work, or must be augmented and controlled by 'higher courts.' This is but a few steps up the road from Lutheranism, Anglicanism, and Roman Catholicism, and will inevitably lead to the dilution both of the authority and the respect accorded to the local presbyters.

It is the other deviation from biblical pattern of leadership that offers the greater danger, and this not the least because it *does* appeal to Scripture – or at least to one verse in Scripture. The two errors are tied together, in that the one produces the clericalism that then tends to populate and govern the other. This greater error is the division of the presbyterion into *two* offices: the *ruling* elder and the *teaching* elder. The rationale for this move is a certain interpretation of I Timothy 5:17,

*Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages."* (I Timothy 5:17-18)

Paul speaks of elders 'who rule well,' which implies that there may be elders who do not rule well. The apostle does not deny the honor even of elders who do not rule well,

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<sup>237</sup> Murray; 349.

but rather exhorts 'double' honor upon those who do. That the condition of not 'ruling well' is not itself a sin is amplified in the subsequent passage, where Paul refuses any accusation against an elder apart from the biblical establishment of two or three witnesses. His consideration of the possibility of an elder not ruling well is probably to be viewed no differently than any other believer improperly or inadequately exercising his or her 'grace gift.' The charismata of teaching and ruling does not make inevitable the success, or even the diligent effort, in doing these things.

This view is broadly held among Reformed commentators. The point of departure comes with the phrase 'double honor,' which the Presbyterian, following Calvin, views as indicating a distinction between two groups of elders – those who 'rule' and those who 'teach.' Edmund Clowney follows the Presbyterian line in commenting on I Timothy 5:17, "this passage and others in the New Testament indicate that among the elders who rule in the church, there are some who also labour in the Word and in teaching."<sup>238</sup> If this view is limited to the recognition that some elders work harder at their ministry than others, then it is well within the bounds of what is written, and probably in line with what Paul intends. For the apostle speaks not of two offices, but rather of some members of the same office receiving 'double honor'; in other words, *of being paid*. This is clear from the apostle's explanatory note concerning muzzling the ox and compensating the worker his wage – he is simply saying that those elders who devote their time to studying the Word and preaching and teaching in the congregation ought to be compensated for their labors, that they might be enabled to spend more time in study, preaching, and teaching.

What has come of this, however, is the 'three office' view of Presbyterianism, which teaches that in the Christian Church there are the offices of 'ruling' elder, of 'teaching' elder, and of deacon. The teaching elder is almost invariably the elder (or elders within larger congregations) who is called the 'pastor,' a fact which betrays the inherent danger to the whole line of thinking. Even Murray cannot agree with the party line at this point. Referring to 'elders' and 'elders who labour in preaching and teaching,' Murray writes, "we may not insist that two groups are in view; those concerned may well, if not more reasonably, be regarded as exercising both functions, namely, shepherding and

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<sup>238</sup> Clowney; 211. The author fails to mention the 'other' passages to which he alludes.

teaching.”<sup>239</sup> He admits that the apostle’s concern is for the necessary compensation of those men who devote most or all of their time in study, preaching, and teaching.

Though it is necessary for all elders to hold fast the faithful word, so as to be able to exhort in sound doctrine and refute gainsayers, though all must be competent to teach, yet not all labour in preaching and teaching...But in any case those laboring in word and doctrine are classified as elders who, in addition to ruling, devote themselves to the preaching and teaching of the Word of God and, are thus in a special way accounted worthy of the compensation which their labour warrants.<sup>240</sup>

In spite of this correct exegesis of I Timothy 5:17, Murray holds to the division in labor between elders who rule and elders who preach and teach, and advocated as a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, the education of men to go into local congregations as ‘teaching elders’ – again, invariably called ‘pastors’ – to labor alongside the ‘ruling elders,’ men who are appointed from within the assembly. Douglas Bannerman comments quite remarkably that “Neither in the synagogue nor in the Church were all elders alike ‘apt to teach.’”<sup>241</sup> While this comment is relatively harmless – it cannot be completely harmless considering that one of the qualifications for an elder in the church is that he be ‘apt to teach’ – its recognition that not all are equally gifted has come to mean that not all have the gift in the first place. In practice, the Church has established seminaries in which men are ‘taught to preach and teach,’ and then sent (or ‘called,’ as it is called) to local congregations to serve as the ‘teaching elder’ or pastor. The other elders in the assembly are thereby absolved of their duties to teach; indeed, when an elder speaks from the pulpit in a Presbyterian church it is called neither preaching nor teaching, but ‘exhorting.’

This is clericalism, plain and simple, as it establishes a ‘professional’ class of clergy that is imported into the local congregation to provide the preaching and teaching, while other elders are ostensibly there to ‘rule.’ But if the rule of elders is not *through* the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, it is *from* men and is thereby disqualified. Furthermore, if there is a separation between elders who preach and teach – and are therefore more directly linked with the Word of God in the minds and hearts of the

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<sup>239</sup> Murray; 360.

<sup>240</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>241</sup> Bannerman; 546.

## Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

congregants – and those who merely ‘rule,’ – whatever that comes to mean in practice – then the parity of the presbytery is destroyed. The ruling elders are subordinate to the teaching elders in what really matters to the life and health of the congregation: the preaching and teaching of the Word of God – though the teaching elder may still be fired by the ruling elders. Strauch properly addresses the issue of important disagreement between the Presbyterian interpretation of I Timothy 5:17 and the proper teaching concerning the preaching and teaching ministry of all elders.

Clericalism does not represent biblical, apostolic Christianity. Indeed, the real error to be contended with is not simply that one man provides leadership for the congregation, but that one person in the holy brotherhood has been sacralized apart from the brotherhood in an unscriptural sense. In practice, the ordained clergyman – the minister, the reverend – is *the Protestant priest*.<sup>242</sup>

The proper order of the local congregation is that of a plurality and parity of elders, men whose parity is manifested in their shared responsibility to preach and teach the Word of God. It is by and through the Word that the Holy Spirit governs the congregation through the eldership, and any deviation from this pattern will prove detrimental both to the leadership and to the church. Polity, as we have seen, not a matter of indifference to either the church or the believer, and Scripture has given ample evidence of the biblical polity to be followed.

Has not the history of twenty centuries of Christianity proved that the plan of the primitive church is the only one which is suitable for all times and places, is most flexible in its adaptation to the most diverse conditions, is the best able to resist and stand against persecutions, and offers the maximum of possibilities for the full development of the spiritual life?<sup>243</sup>

There should be no doubt of the answer to Strauch’s rhetorical question. The apostle most assuredly intended not that some elders rule and others teach, but rather that all elders in the congregation “*labour hard in preaching and teaching*” for the edification of the body and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is biblical polity.

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<sup>242</sup> Strauch; 113. Italics original.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*; 116.

**Week 13: The Church in the World Today**

**Key Biblical Texts: I Corinthians 1:18-25**

*“The Christian mind in the midst of modernity  
is like the proverbial frog in the pot  
beneath which a fire has been kindled.”  
(David F. Wells, No Place for Truth)*

*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.* This familiar French adage is, perhaps unwittingly, a summary of the Book of Ecclesiastes; it translates into English as, “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” This is important to realize as we consider the place and role of the Church in the world today, and hopefully resist the temptation to think that what the Church faces today is significantly different than what the Church of Paul’s day faced. Our world has certain features that were unknown to his, as his had characteristics that have disappeared from ours. The known world, for instance, is not controlled by a dominant military/political empire as it was in Paul’s time, though it is overshadowed by a dominant economic one today. It is debatable whether the political or economic dynamics of a given time have a significant impact on the health and growth of the Church, the spread of the Gospel. But one element of a given age that does have a direct impact on how the Church interacts with the world is the *zeitgeist* – the ‘spirit of the age.’ Paul speaks of this in the opening chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians,

*Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.* (I Corinthians 1:20-25)

The world in which Paul moved and preached was largely divided between the majority Greek view and the minority Jewish or Semitic view. There were, of course, other civilizations extant in Paul’s day – the Chinese, for instance – but it would be several centuries before the spread of the Gospel would reach these uttermost parts of the earth. The apostles, and the early Church, generally moved in the two worlds of Jewish

## Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

monotheism and Greek pagan philosophy, and we read numerous accounts of the interaction in the text of the New Testament. The historian Luke, for instance, provides a humorous commentary on the Greeks of Athens, *“For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.”*<sup>244</sup>

The terms used to describe the overarching mental perspective dominant in any age and in any culture are themselves misleading. For example, ‘worldview,’ – popularized by 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century German philosophy as *weltanschauung* – has never been a *world* view in the sense that the whole world holds a particular view. Its meaning, as defined by the philosophers, is that one’s *weltanschauung* is the perspective one has upon the world, which invariably differs from the *weltanschauung* of others within the same culture and in the same age. Similarly *zeitgeist* is misleading, for the ‘spirit of the age’ is never so uniform as to be capable of description under one heading. Indeed, there were at least two ‘time-spirits’ in Paul’s day, that of the Jew and that of the Greek, and within both there were innumerable variations on the theme. The best we can do is to describe in very broad and general terms the ‘spirit’ of an age, in the hope that such a description includes more than it excludes. This is what Paul is doing when he says, *“the Jew seeks for a sign, and the Greek for wisdom.”*

What is most pertinent to our study on the Church in the World is what Paul has to say about believers living in the midst of the dominant *zeitgeist*, whether Jewish or Greek,

*For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.*

(I Corinthians 1:26-30)

This is to say, that whatever the character of the age, the Church is something entirely different and in opposition to it. The *zeitgeist* of the Church is perennially different and immiscible with the *zeitgeist* of the world around it. It is from this perspective that the Church in each and every age must find its bearings vis-à-vis its

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<sup>244</sup> Acts 17:21

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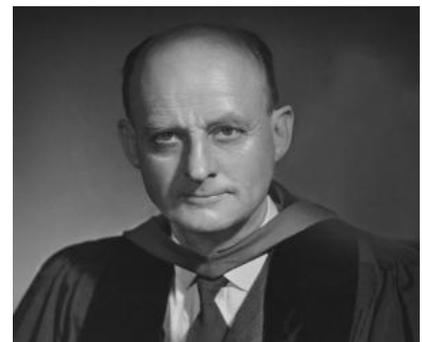
cultural surroundings. Perhaps the chief error that the Church has made in every age is to conform its own *weltanschauung* to the prevailing worldview of the culture, rather than to



maintain its stable, biblical, even unchangeable perspective in the midst of cultural change in the world. Yet the Church cannot ignore the world in which it is placed without doing serious damage to its mission of witness to the grace of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Church is *embedded* in the prevailing culture and must learn to respond properly to this providential circumstance. David F. Wells, **David F. Wells (b. 1939)** in his excellent social commentary *No Place For Truth*, challenges the Church in this age: “Are we not consumed with what is changing in cultural and personal circumstances rather than with what is unchanging about life; the great universal truths about God, the world, and human nature?”<sup>245</sup> Accepting Wells’ challenge to focus on the eternal in the midst of the temporal, the immutable in the midst of the changing, will establish the Church in each and every age to be the counter-culture that it is meant to be. D. A. Carson adds,

This means that Christian communities honestly seeking to live under the Word of God will inevitably generate cultures that, to say the least, will in some sense counter or confront the values of the dominant culture.<sup>246</sup>

Carson’s book provides an excellent template for any discussion of the Church in the modern world, as it is itself a summary of the classic work on the subject by H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ & Culture*, first published in 1951. In this work, the American theologian sought to categorize the available options presented to the Church in any age, by which the Church relates and witnesses to the prevailing culture of its age. Niebuhr’s conclusions are subject to debate and disagreement – hence Carson’s book published roughly fifty years later – but he made an invaluable contri-



**H. Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962)**

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<sup>245</sup> Wells, David F. *No Place For Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1994); 7.

<sup>246</sup> Carson, D. A. *Christ & Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 2008); 143.

bution to ecclesiastical thought with regard to the Church in the world. Carson, who disagrees with Niebuhr on many points, still acknowledges this debt: "It is hard to underestimate the influence of Niebuhr's fivefold template, especially in the English-speaking world."<sup>247</sup> Perhaps the most valuable contribution made to the Church by Niebuhr's work is the admonition that the Church must give thought to these matters or it will otherwise simply be co-opted by the prevailing *zeitgeist* without so much as a fight. According to Niebuhr, whatever view we find most amenable to our own understanding of Scripture, *assimilation* into the prevailing *zeitgeist* will not be it.

Niebuhr's work provides the template that has generally governed the discussion in the half century and more since he published his book. He lays out a fivefold framework for the relationship of the Church with the world around it, briefly as follows:

1. Christ *against* Culture
2. The Christ *of* Culture
3. Christ *above* Culture
4. Christ and Culture *in Paradox*
5. Christ the *Transformer* of Culture<sup>248</sup>

For all the opposition that Niebuhr's book engendered – and it has, in fact, met with vigorous opposition since its publication – it is hard to think of a perspective of the Church vis-à-vis the world culture that would be outside the options he enumerated. Leaving out as totally unacceptable the option of 'Christ *Assimilated* to Culture,' Niebuhr seems to cover all the bases of alternative perspectives. Even this unacceptable view is included, only reversed, in the second option, which might be rephrased as 'Culture *Assimilated* to Christ.' A brief summary of each view is all that can be allowed in this study, which is not meant to be an evaluation of Niebuhr's work or conclusions, but should nonetheless help to set the stage for a deeper discussion on the relationship of the Church, as the Body of Christ, with the world around it.

The *Christ Against Culture* view is somewhat self-explanatory, as it sets the community of faith, the Church as the representative and witness to Christ on earth, in direct opposition to the prevailing culture in all things. It is *antagonistic* and views nothing

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<sup>247</sup> Carson, *Christ & Culture Revisited*; 29.

<sup>248</sup> Niebuhr, H. Richard *Christ & Culture* (New York: HarperCollins; 2001); vii – viii.

## Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

in the surrounding culture as redeemable. “The first answer to the question of Christ and culture we shall consider is the one that uncompromisingly affirms the sole authority of Christ over the Christian and resolutely rejects culture’s claims to loyalty.”<sup>249</sup> This will be the perspective generally held by monastics, by the Anabaptists, and largely by modern Dispensationalists, though the latter awkwardly maintain strong feelings of nationalism, especially within the United States. Perhaps the key word describing this first view is: *antagonism*.

The second view, *Christ of Culture*, is the most accommodating of the five in that it seeks to amalgamate the Christian perspective with that of the prevailing culture. This is the view that finds the greatest content of redeeming value within culture and sees the least differentiation between the Church and its social, political, and economic venue. Historically this view was most pronounced in ‘Christendom,’ the dominant *zeitgeist* of medieval Europe between the Edict of Milan and the Protestant Reformation. “The ‘Christ of culture’ position was further developed after the Constantinian settlement, in the rise of ‘so-called Christian civilization.’ Today this perspective will be seen in mainline liberal Christianity, Liberation and Feminist Theology, and to some extent within the ‘Emergent Church’ movement.

*Christ above Culture* is, in Carson’s view, really a super-category encompassing the third, fourth, and fifth of Niebuhr’s views under its overarching rubric. Niebuhr himself collects these last three views as emphasizing ‘the Church of the center,’<sup>250</sup> to show that in each of the last three perspectives, it is the Church of Jesus Christ from which truth emanates to the surrounding world. The first of these, stated by Niebuhr as *Christ Above Culture*, seeks a *synthesis* between the prevailing culture and the Christian faith, with the Christian faith being the dominant framework into which culture is to be shaped and moulded. The Apologists of the second century, Thomas Aquinas of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, and Abraham Kuyper of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries are all examples of the *Christ Above Culture* perspective, though Kuyper is probably better situated in the *transformative* paradigm (perspective number five). Aquinas’ view is probably the most representative in that he believed that all human institutions were to be subject to the Church. Aquinas

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<sup>249</sup> Niebuhr; 45.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*; 117.

## Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

“represents a Christianity that has achieved or accepted full social responsibility for all the great institutions.”<sup>251</sup>

The fourth perspective, *Christ and Culture in Paradox*, is represented by the dialectical theology of the medieval Scholastics as well as the neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This one is a bit of a mess, as all dialectic thinking is, in that while properly recognizing the sins of the Church, it blurs the lines of distinction between those and the sins of the world. Niebuhr summarizes the *paradox* view, “Human culture is corrupt; and it includes all human work, not simply the achievements of men outside the church but also those in it, not only philosophy so far as it is human achievement but theology also, not only Jewish defence [*sic*] of Jewish law but also Christian defence [*sic*] of Christian precept.”<sup>252</sup> This perspective rightly refrains from establishing the Church as an infallible institution in the earth, though it often leaves the reader wondering if there is truth to be found anywhere. Niebuhr considers Martin Luther to be a chief proponent of this view and summarizes Luther’s legacy thus, “Living between time and eternity, between wrath and mercy, between culture and Christ, the true Lutheran finds life both tragic and joyful. There is no solution of the dilemma this side of death.”<sup>253</sup>

The last view is Niebuhr’s personal favorite, which is probably why he left it til last



**Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)**

in his assessment. *Christ as the Transformer of Culture* is the triumphalist view that has peppered the history of the Church, being especially prevalent when things go well for the Church within the surrounding culture. (When things do not go well, the Church tends to revert to the first position, *Christ Against Culture*) Niebuhr reads Augustine’s *City of God* in at least partially a *transformative* vein, and finds both Calvin’s writings and his ecclesiastical establishment in Geneva to be definitely an

example of this perspective. However, the perspective is most powerfully embodied in Abraham Kuyper’s famous line, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!”

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<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*; 128.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*; 153.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*; 178.

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Kuyper both lived and taught that the proper place for the believer is in the midst of the world, in every aspect – art, education, politics, economics, etc. – *transforming* the culture by the power of Christian life and principles. Niebuhr calls the advocate of this view a ‘conversionist,’ and writes,

For the conversionist, history is the story of God’s mighty deeds and of man’s responses to them. He lives somewhat less ‘between the times’ and somewhat more in the divine ‘Now’ than do his brother Christians. The eschatological future has become for him an eschatological present.<sup>254</sup>

### The World in Which We Live:

Do any of Niebuhr’s categories offer an unassailable position for the modern Church in light of the world in which it finds itself? Carson’s answer is, ‘No,’ and he does a very good job showing that no one perspective has ever fully characterized the Church in any age, nor answered to the challenge of culture in any age. For most evangelicals, however, there will be an affinity with elements from perspectives three, four, and five – the *Christ Above Culture* options. In order to develop a reasonable synthesis among these three views, and perhaps even incorporate elements from the first two views, we must attempt to understand just what sort of world we live in. What is the *zeitgeist* of our age? What is the prevailing *weltanschauung*, if there is one? Who are the Jews and the Greeks of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Western society? And we must of necessity limit ourselves in this study to Western society; otherwise the sample set would be too widely varied to produce any meaningful data at all.

Some general terms that are bandied about with regard to the current age are: *Modern* (or *Post-Modern*), and *Pluralistic*. *Secular* is another term frequently used, and usually with approbation, to describe our modern cultural milieu. Perhaps the most damaging characteristic of modern thought, at least to Christian belief, is the word *Scientific*, which has come to be associated with ‘fact’ as opposed to ‘belief.’ These words reflect the *zeitgeist* of Western civilization in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and are therefore important to the consideration of the Church in the world today. They characterize, and even define, the prevailing social mind that believers now face both individually and corporately in the

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<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*; 193.

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institutional Church. Just as the Jews of Paul's day sought after signs and wonders, and the Greeks demanded wisdom and 'something new,' the unbeliever of our day seek 'scientific fact' and 'religious pluralism and *tolerance*,' another term much used and little understood.

### **Modernity and Post-Modernism:**

The most frequent term used to describe the current era is 'post-modern,' though no one seems to know what exactly the phrase means. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy begins its article on Postmodernism with the following:

That postmodernism is indefinable is a truism. However, it can be described as a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyperreality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning.<sup>255</sup>

Clearly this definition is thoroughly philosophical, because it makes no sense. But the opening sentence is decisive in terms of our understanding the concept of Postmodernism: *it is indefinable as a truism*. The rest of the definition simply obscures the clarity of this statement - Postmodernism cannot be defines as anything 'true,' it is simply a philosophical construct for which there has arisen no universally accepted perspective. In other words, it is whatever one thinks it is, and that in itself describes the mindset of a Postmodern world - everything is just what you think it is. When melded with the stark individualism of modern Western society, and with American optimism in general, we may modify this statement to say that everything is just what you *want* to think it is. Perhaps this is the best practical definition of Postmodernism; it is certainly a very accurate description of the world in which we live.

But 'postmodern' is a term that references 'modern' and, in a sense, ties its own definition to that term. Indeed, postmodernism is at its core simply a reaction against modernism, and with it the entire philosophical evolution of human thought that led to modernism. Postmodernism is probably best understood as the 'logical,' or at least epistemologically inevitable, outcome of modernism, with its exaltation of human rationality and science over such primitive concepts as 'religious faith.' So it is really

*modernity* that needs to be defined and described, and here we have a bit more to work with. This is because *modernity*, and *modernization*, follows historical trends of development from the early modern era into the present. Thus the philosophical category of *modernity* or *Modernism* is not something that was developed *ex nihilo* by this or that philosopher musing uninterrupted on his lonely mountain. Rather it is true that *modernity* is the natural epistemological response of man to the modernization of society in general – its urbanization and industrialization, primarily. David Wells summarizes, “What shapes the modern world is not powerful minds but powerful forces, not philosophy but urbanization, capitalism, and technology.”<sup>256</sup> Urbanization itself was driven by powerful forces in the premodern world, foremost among them the repetitive cycles of war and famine, driving rural agrarian societies into ever-growing cities and bringing together in one place peoples of vastly diverse *worldviews*.

This phenomenon occurred in the later stages of the Roman Empire and probably contributed to its weakening, if not its eventual collapse. But technology was not in place at the fall of the Roman Empire to allow the pieces to be easily and quickly reassembled. In the case of *Modernity*, the Industrial Revolution and the ‘rationalizing’ of the economic system were well-established to coincide with the increasing *pluralism* of urban society. So *modernity* and *pluralism* go together, not a philosophical cooperatives, but as coinciding historical phenomena. These forces have had the net effect of blending various societal *worldviews* into a diluted system of thought and life in which the strengths of the once-independent religious systems have been weakened considerably. Eventually, with the advent of Modern Science, based as it is upon the empirical method of hypothesis, observation, and theory, rational thought became the supreme arbiter of what is ‘fact’ and religious beliefs were relegated to just that, beliefs. These, in turn, have become less and less plausible to a modern, urban society with each passing generation – *modernity* thus resulting in *postmodernism*. James Hunter writes, “Much empirical research has shown



**James D. Hunter (b. 1955)**

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<sup>255</sup>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/postmodernism/> accessed 27Nov2018.

<sup>256</sup> Wells, *No Place For Truth*; 61.

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that the rationalization process does tend to corrode the believability of the religious meaning system."<sup>257</sup>

The long and short of all this is the societal loss of even a reasonably homogenous *worldview*. Urban societies tend to lack a cohesive *metanarrative* – a ‘background story’ – that unites people with the bond of traditions and beliefs. Modernization has brought so many different people together, with so many different traditions, religious systems, and ‘background stories,’ that the necessities of life have caused the plausibility of these metanarratives to decay with the passing of generations; the ‘traditions’ of the elders are no longer valued or followed by the younger generations, in a continuing cycle of diminishing value. “There is something about modernity that erodes the plausibility of religious belief and weakens the influence of religious symbols in the social structure and culture at large.”<sup>258</sup> Wells adds,

Whatever else one may say about modernization, one of its principal effects has been to break apart the unity of human understanding and disperse the multitude of interests and undertakings away from the center; in relation to which they have gathered their meaning, pushing them to the edges, where they have no easy relation to one another at all. It has done this by breaking down the central core so that there is nothing to which thought and life returns.<sup>259</sup>

### **Pluralism and the Gospel:**

Thus the modern Church is faced not with hostility, but with apathy. Religion itself has lost its hold on man’s psyche, and religious structures have been marginalized in society and privatized in individual life. This is true of all religious thought in the West – Western Muslims are radically secularized in comparison to their Middle Eastern counterparts, with the same truth describing African Anglicans relative to British and to American Episcopalians, American Catholics in relation to Catholics in Asia. Western modernism, with its inevitable logical postmodernism, has destroyed the plausibility of religion in general in the minds of Western man. The unbelieving modern world is looking for neither signs nor wisdom, but rather for a more efficient manufacturing

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<sup>257</sup> Hunter, James Davison *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press; 1983); 12.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*; 4.

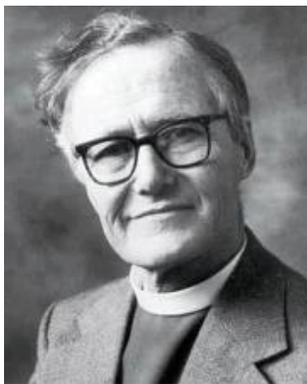
<sup>259</sup> Wells; 7.

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process, a more profitable investment, and a more relaxing vacation. This process has not made man happier; quite the contrary, without a solid social cohesion once provided by a common metanarrative and belief structure, “The most fundamental and enduring experience a person is likely to encounter...is *cognitive dissonance*, an experience of confusion and anxiety about the certainty of his own understanding of reality.”<sup>260</sup> The explosive growth of the psychiatric profess (may we say, ‘industry’) and psychiatric drugs is sufficient to attest to the truth of this observation. Yet this very condition of utter loneliness in modern man is a tremendous opportunity for the Church to once again uphold the truth. In spite of the appearance of confidence and assurance, even arrogance, in the face of the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, modern Western man is as Wells describes him,

What is most remarkable about modern people is that they are not in scale with the world they inhabit informationally and psychologically. They are dwarfed. And they have been emptied of their metaphysical substance; more precisely, it has been sucked out of them. There is nothing to give height or depth or perspective to anything they experience. They know more, but they are not necessarily wiser. They believe less, but they are not more substantial. They are attuned to experience and to appearances, not to thought and character.<sup>261</sup>

In considering the situation of the Church in the midst of such a society as the pluralistic, modern/post-modern, secularized, and industrialized West, there must first of



**Lesslie Newbigin (1909-98)**

all be the realization that such a society, rotten as it is at the very core, cannot survive. Lesslie Newbigin, in his book *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, comments on the impact of the wholesale destruction of a society’s ‘story’, and the role Christianity plays in eventually reestablishing the solid central core of a healthy society. “But no human life is possible without some idea, explicit or implicit, about that the story means. The Christian faith is...a historic faith not just in the sense that it depends on a historical record, but also in the sense that it is essentially an interpretation of universal history.”<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Hunter; 13.

<sup>261</sup> Wells; 52.

<sup>262</sup> Newbigin, Lesslie *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company;

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The Christian metanarrative is the one story that encompasses all others, and thus is the one background story that alone gives hope of uniting the multicultural and pluralistic world when it inevitably collapses. Of this collapse we are assured both by history and by Scripture, for no society that has so thoroughly denied the reality and presence of God as has the West over the past few generations can hope to survive. Manifest divine judgment of the order of Sodom and Gomorrah is not necessary; such a society will collapse from its own internal rot. “We thus lose our bearings, for we lose the truth, that divine order to which in mind and spirit we could always return, the divine order by which we understood our world, the order for which we looked in life’s dark moments to reestablish our bearings. This has all broken apart...And as the center has collapsed, our psyches have become more and more strained, even fractured.”<sup>263</sup> This discouraging note is not heard much in the United States, due primarily to the native optimism of the American spirit. David Wells notes,

...we continue to think, or perhaps fervently hope, that we are still moving toward a better future. The truth of the matter is that most Americans are impatient with nay-sayers and are disinclined to indulge, or even attempt to understand, those who think that the basis for such hope might be gone. It is not merely that Americans typically think that such arguments are wrong; more importantly, they think that these arguments are *offensive*. They violate an important tenet of the cultural creed – namely, that there is always hope because things are always improving.<sup>264</sup>

This quote is especially pertinent in that it touches upon what may be the key message that the Church does still have in the modern world: Hope. The reality, nature, and projection of this hope will be the topic of our next, and final, lesson. For now we must come to grips with the fact that a society from which God has been cast away *cannot* have hope and a future, and that no biblically-thinking Christian can believe that it does. The modern Western world “is now engaged in this massive experiment to do what no other major civilization has done – to rebuild itself deliberately and self-consciously without religious foundations.”<sup>265</sup> Perhaps one of the major reasons why modern society

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1989); 13.

<sup>263</sup> Wells; 8.

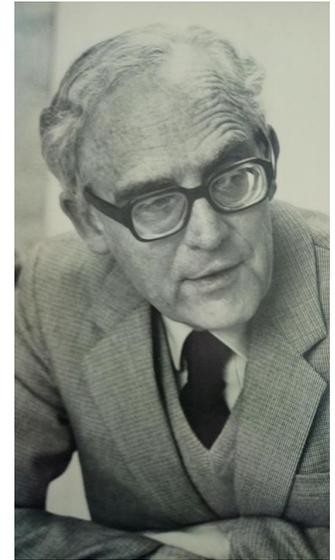
<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*; 67.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*; 86. James Hunter adds, “All spheres of human life are bound by deeply rooted traditional modes of thought and behavior that are, almost without exception, religious or sacred in character.” (American Evangelicalism; 5)

## Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

has so little time and interest in history, is that history infallibly proves that this social venture will and must end in failure.

“The first thing to be said is that a movement of this kind is irreversible.”<sup>266</sup> The epistemological evolution of the past several hundred years is not going to reverse itself and return to an early- or pre-modern *zeitgeist*. This is important to consider, since it has often been the plan of the Church in various ages to ‘return’ society to an early, halcyon day, when prayer was still allowed in schools, or everyone went to church, or some such image of ‘the good ole days.’ In a more thoughtful way, this was the valiant attempt of Henry Blamires in his book *The Christian Mind*, where he writes, “One of the crucial tasks in reconstituting the Christian mind will be to re-establish the status of the truth as distinct from personal opinions...The sphere of the intellectual, the sphere of knowledge and understanding, is not a sphere in which the Christian gives ground, or even tolerates vagueness or confusion.”<sup>267</sup> This is a good and true statement as far as the Christian Church is concerned, and as far as the teaching and training of believers is concerned, but Blamires’ book lacks the context of the world in which the Church and believers are to attempt this ‘reconstituting’ of the Christian mind.



**Harry Blamires (1916-2017)**

About a hundred years ago a notable collection of evangelical theologians put together a compendium of orthodoxy, published under the title, *The Fundamentals*. The book’s reception was an indication of things to come: “Though *The Fundamentals* was widely dispersed among church leaders, it was generally ignored by the academic and scholarly community.”<sup>268</sup> In the century since, Evangelical Christianity has been further marginalized as a system of thought and almost entirely relegated to the position of private belief. Hunter’s diagnosis is grim, but true to the world as we have it, “There is something about modernity that erodes the plausibility of religious belief and weakens the

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<sup>266</sup> Newbigin; 39.

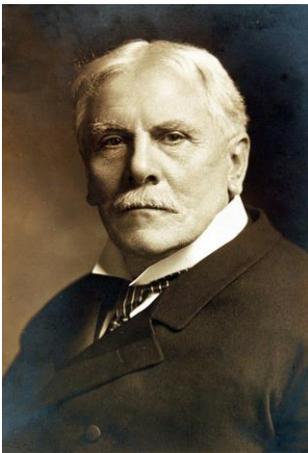
<sup>267</sup> Blamires, Harry *The Christian Mind: How Should A Christian Think?* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books; 1978); 40.

<sup>268</sup> Hunter, 32.

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influence of religious symbols in the social structure and culture at large.”<sup>269</sup> ‘Merry Christmas’ has become ‘Happy Holidays,’ and even Thanksgiving is now often called ‘Turkey Day.’ It does the Church no good to ignore the fact that the modern Western *zeitgeist* is about as far from the Spirit of Christ as can be imagined.

To be fair, the Church in the modern world has not actually ignored the pervasive influence of modernity on society and culture, but it has not always responded in a biblical manner, or faced the problem head on. An excellent example of a theological and even denomination development that can be seen as a response to modernity is that of Dispensationalism. Faced with an ever encroaching tide of atheism, churchmen like J. N.



C. I. Scofield (1843-1921)

Darby and C. I. Scofield responded as the Church has chronically done in difficult times, with ‘millenarianism’ – the prediction that current events foretell the immanent end of the age and the condemnation of the world. Dispensationalism threw in – along with its charts and consequent date-setting – the ‘hope’ of a pre-tribulation, pre-millennial rapture, to take believers out of this miserable and hell-bound world before the wrath of God was poured forth from heaven. Hunter recognizes the responsive characteristic of this teaching, and the

profound impact such teaching has had on the tenor of evangelical Christianity, at least in the United States. “Indeed premillennialism as a cognitive response to modernity not only came to dominate late nineteenth-century conservative Protestantism but came to determine much of its future character.”<sup>270</sup>

Positing an eschatology of escape is not the answer, unless such an eschatology can be clearly derived from the Bible. Even if pre-millennialism, or any form of millennialism extant, proves to be the correct interpretation of some difficult passages in the New Testament, *escapism* has never been and will never be the proper response of the Church in any age. Recognizing the vast and growing divide between the epistemology of the culture and the thought-life of the Church is important, but need not lead to despair. And it must not lead to a revision of the Church’s paradigm in an effort to make it more

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<sup>269</sup> Hunter; 4.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*; 34.

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agreeable to that of the world around her. This has been the Church-in-the-World response of liberal Christianity, illustrated in recent times by such organizations as the World Council of Churches. But Lesslie Newbigin, who was himself very influential in the WCC, nonetheless held firm to his belief that “It is plain that we do not defend the Christian message by domesticating it within the reigning plausibility structure...It is obvious that the story of the empty tomb cannot be fitted into our contemporary worldview, or indeed into any worldview except one of which it is the starting point.”<sup>271</sup> He establishes the immovable position of the Church in the face of modernity,

The gospel gives rise to a new plausibility structure...The Church, as the bearer of the gospel, inhabits a plausibility structure which is at variance with, and calls in question, those that govern all human cultures without exception.<sup>272</sup>

*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.* Paul preached salvation in the name of a dead Messiah, a message no more plausible to his audience than it is to our audience today. True, Jews and Greeks were more inclined to give ear to what “this babbling” had to say than our neighbors do today, but the message of Christ crucified remains the one, true and fully plausible because true, story to be told. “*But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*”

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<sup>271</sup> Newbigin; *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*; 10-11.

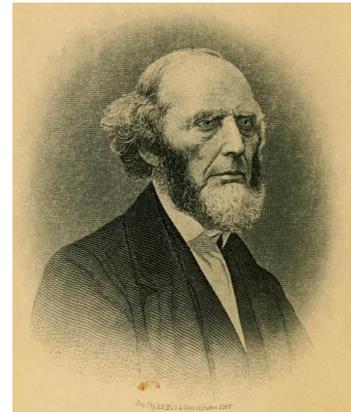
<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*; 9.

**Week 14: The Mission of the Church**

**Key Biblical Texts: Matthew 28:18-20**

*"Mission is acted out doxology.  
That is its deepest secret.  
Its purpose is that God may be glorified."  
(Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*)*

The modern evangelical concept of 'missions' is just that, modern. This is not to say that the Church failed to view her role on earth as 'missional,' to use a modern evangelical word, but rather that the definition of missions in both theory and practice has changed significantly over the past two hundred years. One of the most influential churchmen in terms of this paradigm shift was Charles Finney, who introduced the evangelistic revival into the Second Great Awakening of the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Finney's brand of mission/evangelism was quite Methodist - though he was a Presbyterian - in that he believed and taught a step-by-step, methodical path to salvation. Revival preaching targeted the emotions instead of the mind, believing that the heart - the real goal of the evangelistic message - was the seat of the emotions rather than the intellect. Music and testimonials, the 'anxious seat' and other emotional appeals for repentance, became standard fare for evangelistic revivals throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and are still much in use today. Finney's soteriology was thoroughly Arminian, in spite of his Presbyterian roots, and the modern evangelical Church has largely adopted both Arminian soteriology and Finney's method.



**Charles G. Finney (1792-1875)**

The rise of Dispensational eschatology joined with this combination to create an atmosphere of excitement in revivalism. The thought was, generally, that once the Gospel was preached to every nation in the world, the Lord would return to 'rapture' His Church. The 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries became the heyday of Church evangelism, with missionary organizations sprouting up everywhere, and missionary conferences held in major cities and small towns throughout the Western world - and especially in the United States - in order to encourage individual believers to embark on the mission field. *"Who will go for Us? Then I said, 'Here I am, send me!'"* became a constant motivational passage in

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missions conferences every year. But the backbone of the entire venture was the 'Great Commission' of Matthew 28.

*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* (Matthew 28:18-20)

Against this historical backdrop of modern evangelical missions, Reformed churches have been accused of being 'un-evangelistic.' This is not because Reformed churches do not have missions boards or support foreign missionaries, but largely because any belief in divine sovereign election seems to stifle the motivation for evangelism. The strawman is, "If God is going to save His elect anyhow, why evangelize?" And because Reformed churches tend to focus more on doctrinal teaching and discipleship than on missions and outreach, the charge of 'un-evangelistic' seems to stick. One common response from the Arminian to the Calvinist with regard to evangelism is, 'I prefer the way my church *does* evangelism to the way your church *doesn't*.' Although it may never convince an Arminian, to whom the Regulative Principle is largely unknown, it remains true to Reformed doctrine and practice that doing something the wrong way 'in the name



**J. I. Packer (b. 1926)**

of the Lord,' does not thereby sanctify the deed. The Reformed pastor stands fast on the 'foolishness of the message preached' as the ordained instrument of divine grace in salvation. J. I. Packer, in what is already regarded as a classic work on Reformed evangelism - *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* - writes, "The results of preaching depend, not on the wishes and intentions of men, but on the will of God Almighty. This consideration does not mean that we should be indifferent as to whether we see fruit from our witness to Christ or not...but this consideration does mean that we ought not to define evangelism in terms of achieved results."<sup>273</sup> What would become of modern, conservative, Arminian evangelism is it can be proved that its foundation is grounded in a

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<sup>273</sup> Packer, J. I. *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1961); 41.

## Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

misinterpretation of Matthew 28? What if it can be shown – at least within reasonable doubt – that the ‘Great Commission’ is not so much Matthew 28 as it is Matthew 5?

*You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.* (Matthew 5:13-16)

Being Salt and Light (and from elsewhere, also Leaven) is to be the true character of the Church in the world. And since this preservative, enlightening, and leavening influence is, in fact, *in* the world it is by definition ‘missional.’ The erroneous notion that the task of the Church’s mission work belongs to a select group of ‘super-believers’ called missionaries, stems from an incorrect interpretation of Matthew 28, and particularly the word translated into most English Bibles as “Go...”

It has often been noted, but should be repeated, that there is only one finite verb in Jesus’ admonition to His disciples recorded in Matthew 28; the other verbal ideas are participles. That finite verb is, indeed, an imperative – a *command* – but it is not the verb “go”; rather it is the verb “*make disciples*.” Indeed, the participles that modify this finite verb adopt the imperative mood from it, so that *going* and *baptizing* and *teaching* are all subsumed as modifiers of the main verb *make disciples*. But the modern and Arminian, Finney-inspired interpretation of this passage, and the use made of it in countless mission conferences, lays the heaviest stress on the *going*, largely because of the manner in which our modern English Bibles have rendered the verse. If the passage were to be translated more literally, it would read more like this:

*And coming Jesus said to them, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and upon the earth. Therefore, having gone (wherever you go), **make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in/into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...’*

The underlined phrases/words are the participles, which are verbal word forms that act as adverbs, modifying the one finite verb, *make disciples*. The first, *having gone*, answers the question ‘when’ (or perhaps, ‘where’) while the second two participles answer the question ‘how.’ The basic meaning is that wherever the disciples were to find

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themselves – which for a long time was basically in Jerusalem – they were tasked with the responsibility of *making disciples* and were to do this by both *baptizing* and by *teaching*. Again, the imperative mood of the finite verb overflows to the modifying participles, so that *going*, *baptizing*, and *teaching* become correlate commands to the central one, *making disciples*. Nonetheless the recognition of the actual finite verb – the actual *action* being enjoined upon the disciples and, through them, the Church – refocuses the passage on the importance of making *disciples* and not just making *converts*.

Furthermore, the modern interpretation of this passage fails to understand just what Jesus is saying, and just how the disciples would have heard what Jesus was saying. It is clear from the early history of the Church that the disciples did not interpret their Lord as commanding them to immediately leave Jerusalem and to travel the world, for they did not do this for quite a number of years to follow. Thus the ‘going’ was not the imperative for them, though we see numerous examples in the early chapters of Acts that ‘having gone,’ – in other words, wherever they found themselves – the early believers preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ, baptizing and teaching in His Name. What would have been powerfully shocking to the first audience of the ‘Great Commission’ was the command to make disciples *of all the nations* – literally, all the *ethnos*, the *goyim*, the Gentiles. The exhortation that the disciples were to *go to the nations* rather than that the nations were to come to Israel, would have struck any reasoning Jew of the Second Temple Period as revolutionary – and it was something that the disciples would have to be guided through by their Lord. The 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jew would have not stumbled over the concept of a Gentile becoming a proselyte to Judaism, so long as the Gentile thus became a Jew all was good. In other words, there was salvation (the term is quite fluid) for the Gentile *who came to Israel*, but there was no command for Israel to *go to the Gentile*. Now there was such a command – a command to make disciples of the Gentile world in the name of Jesus Christ. “Here Christ removes the distinction and equates Gentiles with Jews, and admits both alike into the company of the Covenant.”<sup>274</sup> This was radical stuff, but never heard of in modern missions conferences.

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<sup>274</sup> Calvin, John *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Volume 3* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1972); 251.

It is somewhat accurate to label Matthew 28:18-20 the 'Great Commission,' but not in order to have a title for a missionary sermon. A commission is an authoritative document of assignment and representation, and the root and foundation of the 'Great Commission' is not verses 19 and 20, but rather verse 18, "*All authority has been given to Me in heave and upon the earth, therefore...*" These are 'kingdom word' from the Lord, indicating a new paradigm of authority both in heaven and earth, a paradigm that was to be the foundation and the authorization of all that the Church would subsequently (and consequently) do in His Name. Emphasizing the 'Go' of the Great Commission takes the Church's eyes off the basis upon which going has any meaning at all, any power at all, any authority at all in this world. It is verse 18 that Peter is thinking of (of course, it wasn't verse 18 in Peter's day) when he pronounced the divine vindication of Jesus Christ, "*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.*"<sup>275</sup> When the disciples heard what we call the 'Great Commission,' what they undoubtedly heard was not a missionary call to leave Jerusalem and travel to 'deepest, darkest Peru,' but rather the liberating pronouncement of the fulfillment of the kingdom prophecy of Daniel 7,

*I was watching in the night visions,  
And behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven!  
He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him.  
Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,  
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.  
His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away,  
And His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.* (Daniel 7:13-14)

There is no valid commission unless the one who commissions is himself authorized to issue the summons and the task. And Calvin is correct to note that what Jesus here commands His disciples to do required far more than ordinary human political authority.

No ordinary authority would be enough for this. He had to hold supreme and truly divine power of command, to declare that eternal life was promised in His name, that the whole

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<sup>275</sup> Acts 2:36

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globe was held under his sway, and that a doctrine was published which would subdue all high-seeking, and bring the whole human race into humility.<sup>276</sup>

But if the validity of the issuing authority has been confirmed, then the commission is both itself valid and is representative of the one who issued it. Thus we reason that if the authority claimed here by Jesus is true and confirmed, then the Church He consequently commissions bears the same imprint of His authority upon what she does in the earth. Paul goes to some length in providing this validation – or, rather, showing wherein the validation of Christ’s divine authority lay – in his diatribe on Mars Hill,

*God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’ Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now **commands all men everywhere to repent**, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. **He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.** (Acts 17:24-31)*

To Paul, here and in many other places, the *resurrection of Jesus* is the immovable foundation of both the Christian faith and the Christian hope. It is the means by which God, *the Lord of heaven and earth* and the One who made both the world and man to dwell in it, has vindicated the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. The resurrection from the dead is the historical act by which and through which Jesus could say to His disciples – and to His Church – “*All authority has been given unto Me in heaven and upon the earth, therefore...*” In regard to the place and purpose of the Church in the world, no fact is of greater importance than the resurrection of Jesus from the grave, for this is what qualified the Son of Man to ascend to the Ancient of Days and to receive that everlasting kingdom whose span and time will never end. This reality was meant to undergird the Church in its mission from the time of Christ’s ascension until His return. “It is clear from the New Testament that the early Church saw itself as living in the time between the times, the time

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<sup>276</sup> Calvin’s Commentaries; 249.

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when Jesus, having exposed and disarmed the powers of darkness, is seated at the right hand of God, until the time when his reign shall be unveiled in all its glory among all the nations."<sup>277</sup> Christ's victory over sin, death, and the grave not only vested Him with this divine authority, it also guaranteed the victory of His mission, which has now become the mission of His Church. That mission is the worldwide establishment of the Kingdom of God.

*But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.* (I Corinthians 15:20-28)

### **Living Between the Times:**

One of the major hurdles modern Western evangelicals have in regard to their position in the world, and the Church's position in the world, is the prevailing view concerning the 'eschaton' - the 'last days.' The eschatological teachings of Dispensationalism have fairly well convinced modern believers that the 'last days' are still off in the future, and that there will be tangible and recognizable signs of the 'end times.' True, prophecy writers and conference speakers tend to 'recognize' the end times far more often than the end times actually come, but the perspective of *eschaton* as being *future* is predominant within evangelical thought. This is even manifest in the common placement of Eschatology at the end of a curriculum of systematic theology. There is a logic in placing the study of the End Times at the end of the theological spectrum, but there is also the danger that, in our minds, the biblical teaching concerning the *eschaton* will remain 'at the end' of our thoughts chronologically. The future may be something that we can theorize over, or even worry about, but it is not something in which we can *do* anything, for it has not come. But if the definition of *eschaton* is incorrect, then our view of the

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<sup>277</sup> Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*; 107.

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present is probably incorrect as well. And according to Paul, to think of the 'last days' as being entirely future is, indeed, incorrect. Speaking of the example set for the Church by the children of Israel in the wilderness, the apostle writes,

*Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, **upon whom the ends of the ages have come.***

(I Corinthians 10:6-11)

The fundamental biblical teaching concerning the *last things* centers around the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Victory over the grave was the hallmark of fulfillment regarding God's redemptive work within His people and in the world. Once this was accomplished by the sinless God-Man, there remained no further redemptive work to be done - redemption had been secured, deliverance won, and the new exodus from the bondage of sin to the liberty of the sons of God commenced. The uniform teaching of the New Testament is that the finished work of Jesus Christ - *at His first coming* - has fully secured all that is required for the redemption of Israel and the world. The final and visible manifestation of this fact does indeed await a future date, but it is both wrong and detrimental for the Church to fail to realize the influence of the *eschaton* on the present. "The eschatology of the Christian experience is the shadow of the eschaton cast backward across time."<sup>278</sup>

...the central proclamation of the New Testament is that in Christ the new age has already dawned...In Christ the powers of the new age are at work. The domain of Heaven has touched that of earth and God's rule is actually being exercised in the world through Jesus. Those who accept Him come within the sphere of operations of the powers of the Kingdom: they may in fact be said to have been translated out of the present age into the new age which is to come. The new age is no longer something in the distant future. It is already present proleptically. Christians have already, as it is said, tasted the powers of the age to come.<sup>279</sup>

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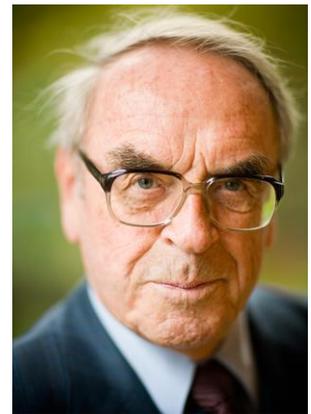
<sup>278</sup> Newbigin, *Signs*; 37.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*; 27.

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The people of Israel, or at least the *faithful* in Israel, were at all times 'eschatological.' They were, as Simeon was, *looking for the consolation of Israel*. The guiding principle that infused their faith was the sure hope that the God who made covenant with them would bring to pass all of His covenantal promises, not least of which was the original promise of a Seed of Woman, who would gain the final victory over Man's enemy, Satan. Their faith was grounding in the promises of a faithful covenant God, and their hope was firmly rooted in their faith. The experiences of the present were never – even in the halcyon days of David and Solomon – even remotely to be compared with the fulfillment of the prophecies, and so the faithful Israel lived in the present with an abiding hope toward the future. Their *eschaton*, the coming of the Promised One, cast a long and powerful shadow back across their history.

So it is with the Church of Jesus Christ. On this side of the cross the believer and the Church echo Jesus' last words, "*It is finished.*" The Jewish *eschaton* has come; the Christian *eschaton* awaits. German Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann is famous for his 'Theology of Hope,' emphasizing the central role that hope plays, and must play, in the Church's life. Moltmann believes that eschatology must never merely satisfy curious minds, and even less ought it to frighten believers, but rather "A



**Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1926)**

proper theology would have to be constructed in the light of its future goal. Eschatology should not be its end, but its beginning."<sup>280</sup> He summarizes the essential life of the Church on earth as being one of tangible and abiding hope, "Thus Christianity is to be understood as the community of those who on the ground of the resurrection of Christ wait for the kingdom of God and whose life is determined by this expectation."<sup>281</sup>

This is a very powerful and contemporary message (as it is contemporary in any and every age of the Church), since it has always been the temptation for the people of God to place their hope in the power and institutions of men rather than in their God. Certainly this was Israel's great sin with regard to hoping in Egypt and trusting in chariots and horsemen, rather than in Jehovah their God. But it is also true of the Christian

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<sup>280</sup> Moltmann, Jürgen *Theology of Hope* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco; 1975); 16.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*; 326.

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Church, which has often trusted in the sword of the magistrate or, in today's term, the passing of favorable laws to bring about the 'kingdom' in today's world. But such a perspective and such a hope is truly forlorn in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, when there is little reasonable grounds – as if there ever was – to trust in the institutions of men to accomplish



Albert Camus (1913-60)

the righteousness of God. Science has driven 'hope' from our hearts, and replaced it with an empty expectation that, through science, education, and technology if not laws, the world will somehow become a better place. Much of the world today self-consciously tries to follow the adage of the French nihilist philosopher Albert Camus, "think clearly, and hope no more."<sup>282</sup>

But Man is incapable of dispensing with hope, and thus at all times seeks some foundation for survival in hope. Apart from the sure hope of the resurrection in Jesus Christ, all other bases for human hope are empty lies. The literary summary of Barak Obama's book, *The Audacity of Hope*, offers an example of the vapid ideology of hope that prevails in the Western world, "**The Audacity of Hope** is Barack Obama's call for a new kind of politics – a politics that builds upon those shared understandings that pull us together as Americans. Lucid in his vision of America's place in the world, refreshingly candid about his family life and his time in the Senate, Obama here sets out his political convictions and inspires us to trust in the dogged optimism that has long defined us and that is our best hope going forward."<sup>283</sup> It is apparent that President Obama spent very little time researching American political history in preparation for writing his book, for if he had he would have found very little evidence of "those shared understandings that pull us together as Americans."

Sadly, though conservative evangelicalism in the United States largely voted against Obama, it does for the most part put its hope in the same political arena – only on a different side. Thus has arisen a divide in Christian thought between *evangelism*, which is something the Church does in the inner city or in foreign countries, *eschatology*, which is something that will happen sometime in the future, and *ecclesiastical activism*, which is the

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<sup>282</sup> Quoted by Moltmann; 23.

<sup>283</sup> [https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/9742.The\\_Audacity\\_of\\_Hope](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/9742.The_Audacity_of_Hope). Accessed December 4, 2018.

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participation of believers in the political process. Only the latter pertains to the believer's day-to-day existence, and sadly it is the one least grounded in God's Word.

It sounds well and good to advocate a 'return' to godliness as a cure for society's ills, and certainly a society that lives closer to divine precepts will be a much more pleasant and peaceful one than a society living in open rebellion against God. But the foundation of assumption that 'returning to God' will 'save' the United States is false: the United States is not Israel; it is not a Christian nation and never has been. Thus the 'hope' placed by modern evangelicals in the political process is really nothing more or less than the pagan appeasement of the national deity, only the God of the Bible is fast becoming no longer America's national deity. Moltmann describes the ancient practice of pagan appeasement, in a manner that sounds very much like modern evangelical political activism. "Peace and prosperity depend on the favor of the national gods.

The public wellbeing and enduring stability of the state depend on the blessing of the gods of the state...When the Christian faith took the place of the Roman state religion, then of course the public state sacrifices ceased, yet their place was taken by the Christian prayers of intercession for the state and the emperor. Thus the Christian faith became the 'religion of society'. It fulfilled the supreme end of state and society. Hence the titles of the Roman emperor-priest were transferred to the pope. State and society understood the Christian faith as their religion.<sup>284</sup>

This situation was a false foundation for hope then, and it remains a false foundation for hope now. But even this charade is getting harder and harder to maintain in the modern world, as all faith is being marginalized by society and fewer and fewer people have genuine hope anymore. Many see this as a failure of Christianity, of the Church of Jesus Christ; it is, in fact, the Church's greatest opportunity. For hope is the essence of her being, the *zeitgeist* of this 'time between the times.' The New Testament speaks of hope among the enduring realities, - an anchor of the soul entering in beyond the curtain which hides the future from us, something *utterly reliable*."<sup>285</sup> Thus Peter writes,

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for*

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<sup>284</sup> Moltmann; 306.

<sup>285</sup> Newbigin *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*; 101.

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*you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*  
(I Peter 1:3-5)

### **The Audacity of (True) Hope:**

One thing is certain from even the most cursory review of the history of the Church in the world: the good times never last. In each generation the Church must come to grips with the fact that, if she is true to her calling and her confession, her very existence is an offense to the world around her. *"In this world you will have tribulation,"* Jesus promised, *"but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world."*<sup>286</sup> The most remarkable phenomenon in the life of the Church is how often, generation after generation, she tries to be accepted in the world and to 'partner' with the world's ways. This is to attempt the synthesis of Light with Darkness, Christ with Belial; it cannot be done. "Man in rebellion has always sought to exclude God from this world, and it does him no service if Christian theologians write their soteriologies to conform to, rather than to challenge this rebellion."<sup>287</sup> Perhaps in protection of His people throughout the ages, God has ordained that no civilization should remain in power for an indefinite period of time, but that all societies of men should reach their pre-appointed limits of both space and time.

*God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.*  
(Acts 17:24-26)

In more modern parlance, each and every human society is a Titanic, and all attempts to clean up the culture or to curry favor with the unbelieving world are doomed to take the Church of that age and place down with the ship. Egypt was once a center of Christian academics and theology; the seven churches of Revelation were once vibrant evangelical communities in what is now Turkey – both are representative of the principle that no society will survive forever, no matter what the Church does in its midst. Again, this is a depressing prognosis (though undeniably biblical), but a clear recognition of the

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<sup>286</sup> John 16:33

<sup>287</sup> Well, David F. *The Search for Salvation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1978); 92.

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fact from both history and Scripture is necessary in every generation, if the Church is to live in the right relationship with the culture around her.

The answer, as we have seen before, is *not* escapism. Indeed, the Church engages the prevailing culture as Salt and Light, influencing the world around her as Leaven – none of these metaphors can coexist with an ecclesiology of escapism. The challenge for the Church in every generation is to impact the culture around her by bearing faithful witness to the majesty and grace of God through Jesus Christ. “Christians thus shaped by Scripture envision a church that not only counters alternative cultures but also seeks sacrificially to serve the good of others – the city, the nation, common humanity, not least the poor.”<sup>288</sup> This will look different in different ages and within different cultures, but there will be certain common traits that characterize a biblical evangelical Church at all times and in all places. One of these characteristics, and perhaps the most powerful one in the presence of the world, is the *hope* that all believers possess in Jesus Christ.

*But sanctify <sup>to</sup>the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a **reason for the hope that is in you**, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.* (I Peter 3:15-16)

This passage presents the believer, and the Church, in a position vis-à-vis the world in which one has hope and the other does not. Paul echoes this truth when he writes to the Church in Thessalonica in regard to those among them who had fallen asleep. Paul comforts the surviving believers, “*But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as **others who have no hope**. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.*”<sup>289</sup> Indeed, hopeless is basically Paul’s definition of all who are in the world but outside of Christ Jesus,

*Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands – that at that time you were **without Christ**, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, **having no hope and without God in the world.*** (Ephesians 2:11-12)

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<sup>288</sup> Carson, *Christ & Culture Revisited*; 142.

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We have already seen Peter's view with regard to the salvation that God has graciously bestows on sinners, coupling regeneration with this powerful truth of hope in Jesus Christ. Note how the apostle ties the believer's benediction with the *salvation to be revealed*, but now established and guaranteed through the *resurrection of Christ from the dead*.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for **salvation ready to be revealed** in the last time.* (I Peter 1:3-5)

Peter calls what the believer has a 'living hope.' Paul refers to it as "*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*"<sup>290</sup> And the author of the letter to the Hebrews establishes the stabilizing power of the hope of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, "*This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil.*"<sup>291</sup> What is common to these verses is that this living hope does not rest in this world, the form of which is passing away, but rather in the world to come in which righteousness dwells. The Christian Hope cannot be tied to any earthly form or function, to any political party or movement, or even to any Church denomination or revival, but only and always to Jesus Christ by virtue of His resurrection from the dead. In this hope the believer lives within the community of faith, through love both to God and to the brethren, and this mutual and firm hope not only stabilizes the mind of each individual believer but also energizes the community itself, in the midst of a hopeless and despairing world.

*Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart **in full assurance of faith**, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast **the confession of our hope** without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order **to stir up love and good works**, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.* (Hebrews 10:19-25)

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<sup>289</sup> I Thessalonians 4:13-14

<sup>290</sup> Colossians 1:27

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This passage echoes the words of Paul in I Corinthians, as he seeks to unite the Church in Corinth by reminding the believers there that no amount of visible spirituality through the charismata will edify the Church or glorify her Lord without the trifacta of *faith, hope, and love*.

*And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

(I Corinthians 13:13)

Paul speaks of love as the greatest of the three not because either of the other two are dispensable, but rather because only love will abide forever. *Faith* is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. *Hope* is the attitude of patient and even joyful expectation, knowing that the One who promised is faithful, and He will bring all things to pass. Thus the believer hopes for what he believes in. But when these things are made visible, then they will no longer be hoped for, and faith will become sight.

*For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.*

(Romans 8:24-25)

Yet when faith has been made sight and that which we hope for becomes a visible rather than an invisible reality, *love* will still remain: the love of God to us, and our love to Him and to one another. It is in this sense that *the greatest of these is love*. Together, these three virtues are the powerful spiritual energy of the Church, making the community of faith *more than conquerors* in Christ Jesus, for these three virtues are what the world does not have and cannot have. Together they constitute *peace*, the peace that passes all comprehension, the peace that the Lord Jesus gave to His Church, the peace that the world cannot give and cannot know. This is the great treasure and the incomparable wisdom of the Church of Jesus Christ and it is only when the Church lives in the light of these virtues that she is in her true and biblical relation to the world, and has the most powerful impact upon the world. "The whole body of Christians is engaged in the apostolate of hope for the world and finds therein its essence – namely that which makes it the Church of God."<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Hebrews 6:19

<sup>292</sup> Moltmann; 328.

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The Church is therefore to be considered as the community of *faith* in Jesus Christ, in which believers live in constant and living *hope* because of the resurrection of their Lord and the promised resurrection of themselves in glory, and thus may dwell in *love* toward one another and even toward the world that hates them, a world in which there is no hope. The real power of the Church is not when she goes out into the world, either in evangelism or in social activism, but when she lives within herself true to the promise of God in Jesus Christ. It is only then that the unbelieving world will ask the reason for the hope within the Church, for it is only then that the world will be confronted with a community of hope and love, in stark contrast to the hopelessness and hatred in the world. This is the Church as an *embedded culture*, as a 'city set upon a hill' in every local congregation. "Here Christian congregations can offer human warmth and nearness, neighborliness and homeliness, 'community' which is not utilitarian but nevertheless meaningful, and therefore also readily called 'genuine'...They become islands of genuine co-humanity and of authentic life in the rough sea of circumstances which the ordinary man can after all do nothing to alter."<sup>293</sup>

*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.* (Romans 15:13)

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<sup>293</sup> Moltmann; 320.