



GOD'S PURPOSE FOR THE CHURCH

PART III

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THE NEW TESTAMENT
of Our Lord and Saviour
Jesus Christ

TRANSLATED OUT OF THE ORIGINAL GREEK,
AND WITH THE MOST IMPROVED TRANSLATIONS
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Ultradispensationalists believe there are two churches in the New Testament; it is believed the first church was established by Christ in the Gospels and Acts, and the second church was formed with the ministry of Paul. The church established by Christ was Jewish and the church established by Paul was Gentile.

The historical beginning of the church is a doctrine that discordantly divides evangelicals. The overwhelming evidence of the New Testament is the Pentecostal origin of the church (cf. Acts 2). The fact that the church cannot be identified in the Old Testament and was still future in the teaching of Christ (cf. Matt 16:18) means the church cannot be identified with Israel but should be distinguished. Israel and the church have a different origin, character, responsibility, and function.



THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH

Some evangelicals believe “the church originated in the garden of Eden immediately after the fall of man, when God promised a Saviour and man accepted that promise in faith.”¹ Most covenant theologians believe the church began with the Abrahamic Covenant. For example, Charles Hodge wrote, “The Church under the New Dispensation is identical with that of the Old. It is not a new Church, but one and the same. It is the same olive-tree (Rom. xi. 16, 17). It is founded on the same covenant, the covenant made with Abraham.”² There are also evangelicals who believe the church began during the earthly ministry of Christ. Although the precise historical chronology may vary, the beginning of the church is thought to have commenced when the disciples were first called by Christ or when the Lord’s Supper was instituted. Representative of such a view is the following claim: “The church, therefore, was established in the days of Jesus’ sojourn in the flesh and the work of its construction was begun with the material prepared by John the Baptist, later the twelve apostles of our Lord. . . .”³ Ultradispensationalists believe there are two churches in the New Testament; it is believed the

first church was established by Christ in the Gospels and Acts, and the second church was formed with the ministry of Paul. The church established by Christ was Jewish and the church established by Paul was Gentile.

In contrast to any of the beliefs that the church began in the Old Testament, during the earthly ministry of Christ, or can be separated into a Jewish and Gentile church, Matthew 16:18 declared the creation of the church as still future. At that time (summer, ca. AD 29-32), Jesus promised, “I will build [*oikodomeō*] my church.” The Greek *oikodomeō* is a predictive future (active indicative) and indicates the element of time. The idea in Matthew 16:18 is the foundation of the church, not the restructuring of an existing entity. Therefore, the teaching that the church originated in the Old Testament cannot be harmonized with Matthew 16:18. In response to the other views regarding the beginning of the church, Scripture communicates that the creation of the church necessitated the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Christ purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28). There is an inseparable relation between Christ’s resurrection and His headship over the church (Eph 1:18-23). The ascension of Christ was required for the edification of the church. Ryrie noted,



Indeed, the beginning of the church was her formation at Pentecost. God's plan of salvation truly began when He provided the skin of an animal to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:21). However, the church is not merely another phase in salvation history.

Paul's thought is emphatic in placing stress on the necessary relation of the church to the resurrection and ascension of Christ. It is build upon His resurrection (Ephesians 1:19-20; Colossians 3:1) and its functioning is dependent on the giving of gifts to individual members—gifts that are dependent on the ascension of Christ (Eph. 4:7-12).⁴

Similarly, Chafer wrote:

(a) that there could be no Church in the world—constituted as she is and distinctive in all her features—until Christ's death; for her relation to that death is not a mere anticipation, but is based wholly on His finished work and she must be purified by His precious blood. (b) There could be no Church until Christ arose from the dead to provide her with resurrection life. (c) There could be no Church until He had ascended up on high to become her Head; for she is a New Creation with a new federal headship in the resurrected Christ....⁵

The creation of the church also required the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Spirit baptism is the work of Jesus Christ whereby the church receives and is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, which incorporates them into one body of Christ and identifies them with His death and resurrection (John 14:16-17; Rom 6:1-11; 1 Cor 6:19; 12:13). At the ascension of Christ (ca. spring, AD 30-33), the baptism of the Holy Spirit was still future (Acts 1:5). Pentecost (2:1-36) was the fulfillment of Jesus' promise (cf. 11:15-16). Chafer concluded his study on this matter as follows:

(d) There could be no Church on earth until the advent of the Holy Spirit; for the most basic and fundamental reality respecting the Church is that she is a temple for the habitation of God through the Spirit. She is regenerated, baptized, and sealed by the Holy Spirit.⁶

The church cannot be identified in the Old Testament because it was a mystery revealed in the New

Testament. Paul said Christ "is our peace, who made both *groups into one* . . . that in Himself He might make the two into one new man . . . and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross" (Eph 2:14-16). The uniting of Jew and Gentile in the church was a mystery "made known" to Paul "by revelation" (3:3). The creation of the church was "the mystery which has been hidden from the *past ages and generations*; but has now been manifested to His saints" (Col 1:26). "In other generations [the creation of the church] was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit" (Eph 3:5). The church was a mystery "which for ages has been hidden in God" (3:9). In Romans 16:25-26, Paul taught the newness of this revelation emphatically.

Indeed, the beginning of the church was her formation at Pentecost. God's plan of salvation truly began when He provided the skin of an animal to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:21). However, the church is not merely another phase in salvation history. The nation Israel began when God made a covenant promise to Abraham (12:1-3). However, the church is not a new Israel for she was a mystery entirely. All the biblical evidence forces the conclusion that the birth of the church was at Pentecost with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, Chafer concluded as follows:

A Church without the finished work on which to stand; a Church without a resurrection position or life; a Church which is a new humanity, but lacking a federal head; and a Church without Pentecost and all that Pentecost contributes, is only a figment of theological fancy and wholly extraneous to the New Testament.

The statement, as usually made, that the Church is not in the Old Testament, is a declaration of the truth that she was not then in actual

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existence and that from any type or prediction no clear delineation of the Church could have been formed.

As Archbishop Trench has written. The term church had its heathen, its Old Testament use—as employed by the LXX—and its New Testament meaning. It is to no purpose to attempt a demonstration, as some have sought to do, that the Church is defined by the use of the term in the Septuagint. The word is advanced in the New Testament to the highest degree of exaltation and honorable representation, and the revelations of the Church in the New Testament are without complication or confusion.⁷

THE CHURCH AND ISRAEL

Interpretative views that confuse general terms like “elect” and “saints” (which apply to saints of all ages) with specific terms like “church” and those “in Christ” (which refer to believers in the church age only) are misinterpretations of Scripture. Ryrie also noted the importance of this distinction. “The nature of the church is a crucial point of difference between classic, or normative, dispensationalism and other doctrinal systems. Indeed, ecclesiology, or the doctrine of the church, is the touchstone of dispensationalism (and also of pretribulationism).”⁸

In covenant theology,⁹ however, the church and Israel are not distinguished biblically, but combined as the one people of God. Covenant theology teaches that the New Testament church is a continuation of those of faith within Old Testament Israel. In terms of God's plan of salvation, they are both regarded as under the benefits of the new covenant of grace. Consequently, both the church and Israel comprise the one people of God. Berkhof described the teaching of covenant theology.

After the exodus the people of Israel were not only organized into a nation, but were also constituted the



Church of God. . . . The New Testament Church is essentially one with the Church of the old dispensation. As far as their essential nature is concerned, they both consist of true believers, and of true believers only. . . . The representation given in the preceding proceeds on the assumption that the Church existed in the old dispensation as well as in the new, and was essentially the same in both, in spite of acknowledged institutional and administrative differences. . . . The Church is *essentially*, as was pointed out in the preceding, the community of believers, and this community existed from the beginning of the old dispensation right down to the present time and will continue to exist on earth until the end of the world.¹⁰

Some covenant theologians see new privileges and new blessings in the New Testament church, but still regard the church and Israel as constituting the one people of God. Grudem summarized this view within covenant theology.

Therefore, even though there are certainly new privileges and new blessings that are given to the people of God in the New Testament, both the usage of the term “church” in Scripture and the fact that throughout Scripture God has always called his people to assemble to worship himself, indicate that it is appropriate to think of

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the church as constituting all the people of God for all time, both Old Testament believers and New Testament believers.¹¹

Covenant theology, which essentially is replacement theology,¹² teaches that the promises made to the nation Israel in the Old Testament are now fulfilled spiritually in the New Testament church. Therefore, it is common to read covenant theologians who refer to the church as the “new Israel.” Clowney, a covenant theologian, explained his view:

Those who are united to Christ are heirs in him of all the promises of God. Christ fulfills the calling of Israel; those united to him are by that fact the new Israel of God (Gal. 3:29; 4:21; Rom. 15:8). The ethnicity of the new people is now spiritual rather than physical, making the bonds stronger and the brotherhood more intense (1 Pet. 1:22). Christians are not just born-again individuals, they are a family, ‘spiritual ethnics,’ the new people of God in Christ.¹³

Covenant theology began late in the sixteenth century as a reaction to the strict predestinarianism of certain reformers in France and Switzerland. Not only is covenant theology unbiblical, but also it is teaching that is foreign to the early church. What is the result of covenant theology? Showers provided an answer:

It should be noted that the Covenant Theology view of the nature of the Church leads logically to several conclusions. Israel and the Church are the same; there are no distinctive groups of saints throughout history; all saints of all periods of history are members of the Church; since saints will be on earth during the Tribulation period, the Church will be on earth during the Tribulation, and there will be one general resurrection of dead saints at one time, not more than one resurrection of saints at different times.¹⁴

Dispensational theology teaches the biblical distinction between Israel and the church.¹⁵ Both the church and Israel have special relationships with

God, but they must be distinguished. The distinction between Israel and the church is the natural result of interpreting the Bible historically and grammatically (i.e. literal, plain interpretation). One must interpret the words of the Bible in their normal or plain meaning. The opposite would be a spiritualizing (allegorizing) of the biblical text.

Negatively stated, it has been seen that it is improper to speak of the *ekklesia* [“church”] as a building, a denomination, or a state or national church. Also, it is imperative that it be recognized that the *ekklesia* [“church”] is not to be confused with Israel or the kingdom of God. The *ekklesia* [“church”] is a unique dispensational work of God in this age.¹⁶

Use of the words Israel and church shows clearly that in the New Testament national Israel continues with her own promises and that the church is never equated with a so-called “new Israel” but is carefully and continually distinguished as a separate work of God in this age.¹⁷

Since Israel and the church are distinct entities, the unfulfilled prophecies to Israel of both blessing and curse have not been transferred to the church. Indeed, as the cursings to Israel were fulfilled literally, so will the future restoration blessings be fulfilled literally.

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CONCLUSION

The Pentecostal origin of the church is a fundamental doctrine of Scripture. The church cannot be identified in the Old Testament because it was a mystery revealed in the New Testament. Furthermore, the formation of the church necessitated the death, resurrection, and ascension of

The church cannot be identified in the Old Testament because it was a mystery revealed in the New Testament. Furthermore, the formation of the church necessitated the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28), in addition to the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).

the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28), in addition to the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). The church is a new work of God in the present age, which is evident from a consideration of the foundation and origin of the church. Both the church and Israel have special relationships with God but they must be distinguished. (MC)



ENDNOTES

- 1 R. B. Kuiper, *The Glorious Body of Christ* (Glasgow: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 21.
- 2 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1872; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1940), 3:549.
- 3 Richard V. Clearwaters, *The Local Church of the New Testament* (Chicago: Conservative Baptist Fellowship, 1954), 26.
- 4 Charles C. Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1959; Dubuque, IA: ECS Ministries, 1987, 1998, 2005), 175.
- 5 Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. in 4 (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1948, 1976; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993), 4:45.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid., 4:46.
- 8 Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (1966; Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 123.
- 9 Covenant theology is the system of theology that teaches God instituted the covenant of works and the covenant of grace in the history of creation. The covenant of works was with Adam, as representative of all humanity, and prior to the Fall. God then established the covenant of grace, through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, in response to Adam's disobedience. The covenant of grace promises eternal life to all those who trust in Christ. Covenant theology also teaches that the true Israel, the church, is one people of God.
- 10 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), 570-71.
- 11 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 854.
- 12 Theonomists are also covenant theologians who not only believe the church and Israel are combined, but also argue that the Mosaic Law is still in effect. Therefore, one of the responsibilities of the church is to institute Mosaic Law in society, which will then introduce the conditions of the millennial kingdom.
- 13 Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 43-44.
- 14 Renald E. Showers, *There Really is a Difference! A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1990), 170.
- 15 Progressive dispensationalism teaches erroneously that the church is less distinct than Israel; rather this essentially non-dispensational view affirms Israel and the church as two embodiments of a single people in salvation history.
- 16 Earl Radmacher, *Nature of the Church* (1972; reprint, Hayesville, NC: Schoettle, 1996), 185-86.
- 17 Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 129.
- 18 Ibid., 123, 129.