

Basic Training Bible Conference

Reclaiming our Biblical Roots

A Study on the Nature and Purpose of the Church



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a woman shall encompass a mighty hero.” Jer 31:22*

“Behold, I make all things new.” Rev 21:5

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Introduction

In the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the “*Lord of glory*” (Jam 2:1), the long-awaited promise of the “seed of the woman” (Gen 3:15) was fulfilled. At the same time, history was invaded and shattered by Eternity. With His meek and humble coming in human form (Mat 1:23; Phi 2:5–11), the fabric of time was rent, and a new age and new creation were put in motion.

With the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the long-promised redemption by the prophets (Gen 12:1–3, 49:9–12; Isa 53; Gal 3:16) was fulfilled. In His victory cry from the cross, “*It is finished*” (Joh 19:30), the Lord Jesus proclaimed “*all [the] things ... which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms*” (Luk 24:44) concerning Himself to have been fully accomplished.

Yet this grand and glorious achievement of bringing to completion the hopes of the prophets of the Old Testament is dimmed by what was to follow. “*For even what was made glorious,*” to borrow Paul’s phrase, “*had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels*” (2Co 3:10).

Following the completion of His mighty work of redemption, Jesus set about another glorious work built on that foundation. That new work was never anticipated by any prophet of the old order, and cannot be found in any passage of the Old Testament. This was the making of a new order, a “*new creation*” (2Co 5:17), which Jesus called “*My Church*” (Mat 16:18).

We can trace with incredible accuracy from the Old Testament prophecies, the time of Jesus’ coming (Dan 9:24–27)—a time for which Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, because they knew it not (Luk 19:44). We know, even as the people of His time knew, the place of His birth (Mic 5:2; Mat 2:6) and that He would be born of a virgin (Isa 7:14; Mat 1:23). We are foretold of His flight into Egypt (Hos 11:1; Mat 2:13–15) and of His growing to manhood in Nazareth, which means, “*the Branch*” (Mat 2:23, with Isa 4:2; Jer 23:5, Jer 33:15; Zec 3:8, 6:12). We see the manner in which He would minister (Isa 42:1–4, Isa 61:1–2a; Mat 12:20; Luk 4:18–19) and, ultimately, the way in which He would die (Psa 22:16; Isa 52:13–53:12; Zec 12:10; Joh 19:37).

Yet with all this incredible prophetic accuracy—covering a span of 4,000 years—we have not one mention of what would occur shortly after the resurrection. The formation and duration of His Body—the Church—finds no mention in the pages of the Old Testament. This “*dispensation of the grace of God ... the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men*” (Eph 3:2, Eph 3:4–5), was reserved by God to be revealed to Paul, “*in the dispensation of the fullness of the times*” (Eph 1:10). And with the beginning of the new creation

on the day of Pentecost, an unexpected age and an unprecedented people came into being. This spiritual company—the Church, the Bride of Christ—would be used by God to bring to pass the culmination of the divine story.

What had perplexed the prophets through the ages (1Pe 1:10–12) was now to be made clear. Even Moses—that great prophet and giver of the Law—wrestled with this enigma, concluding that “*the secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us [Israel] and to our children forever that we may do all the words of this law*” (Deu 29:29). This verse has been misused many times.

The problem for the prophets, and for those who studied them diligently, related to two questions they could not resolve: First, “*what manner of time [was] the Spirit of Christ ... indicating when He testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow*” (1Pe 1:11). Secondly, “*of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?*” (Act 8:34). In other words, how can Messiah be both rejected and crucified, and yet be coming in power and glory? How can this occur at the same time? How can both events speak of the same Man?

This dilemma, in which the first and second advent of Jesus Christ are spoken of as one continuing event (Isa 61:1–3; Dan 9:24–27; Zec 9:9–17), seemed to have no way of resolution. Even the early disciples, after three years with Jesus, did not understand (Act 1:6–8). Though Jesus had told them of the coming “*new creation*” (Mat 16:18; 2Co 5:17) and of the manner in which this new “*dispensation of grace*” (Eph 3:2) would conclude (Joh 14:3), they remained ignorant until the Apostle Paul began to write and disclose the “mystery” of God. Paul’s first epistle—the book of Galatians—dealt with the radical shift from Israel to the Church and from Law to Grace, thus explaining how Jesus would “*build His Church*” (Mat 16:18). This was followed by First and Second Thessalonians, in which he distinguished between the conclusion of the present dispensation—when the Church would be “*caught up*” to meet the Lord in the air (1Th 4:13–18)—and the day of “*wrath,*” or “*day of the Lord,*” which would in the future conclude the remaining portion of the age of Israel (Dan 9:27; 1Th 5:1–11; 2Th.1:6–10, 2Th 2:1–12).

One of Satan’s most effective schemes to blunt and nullify the awesome power that God has vested into the Church—the Body of Jesus Christ—is to confuse her members with regard to their true identity. Ignorance of the “*new creation*” and confusion of the “*times [and] seasons*” (Act 1:7) continue to rob Church-Age believers of the conviction of their unique identity and mission “in Christ,” and of the exercise of powers never before given to men. Furthermore, not recognizing our spiritual debt to Israel, we fail to fulfill our two-fold commission: First, to “*make disciples of all the nations*” (Mat 28:19) and secondly, to be mightily used to “*provoke them [Israel] to jealousy*” (Deu 32:21; Rom 11:11), that they might “*consider their latter end!*” (Deu 32:29). This study is devoted to help us clarify: who are we, what is our mission, and what powers are available to accomplish this mission.

Reclaiming our Biblical Roots

I. The New Creation—The Supernatural Formation of the Church

*“Behold, I make **all** things new.”* Rev 21:5 (emphasis added)

A. A Heavenly People

The above declaration is a summary statement of the ultimate fulfillment of the eternal plan of God. It is not “some things,” but all things, that are affected by this spiritual renewal. It is universal and eternal in scope, surpassing all our meager efforts to understand or comprehend its magnitude.

The foundation for this renewal is the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross (Joh 19:30). On this “*Rock*,” and on no other, is such a glorious achievement possible. The Agent for this spiritual revolution is the Holy Spirit of God, who works quietly, but mightily, to the end designed by the heavenly Father (Zec 4:6; Eph 3:7, Eph 3:10, Eph 3:16, Eph 3:19–20). The blueprint for this divine undertaking is laid out for us in the inspired, revealed Word of God (Isa 55:11; 1Pe 1:24–25), which is personified and explained in the Person of Jesus Christ (Joh 1:14, Joh 1:18).

It is important to recognize that the truth quoted above (in its context) is connected to the redeemed, resurrected, and glorified Church (Rev 21:1–5, Rev 21:9–11). This is because following the resurrection of our Lord, the beginning of this renovation was the creation of the Church—a new community of spiritual beings on this earth. Just as Christ is designated “*the firstborn over all creation*” (Col 1:15; Rev 3:14), so the Church is a new creation “*in Christ*.” This summary phrase, utilized countless times by the Apostle Paul, signifies all who by faith become a part of the new creation (2Co 5:17; Gal 6:15).

B. The Church and Israel

To understand the Church as the beginning of a new creation is to begin to grasp God’s purpose for the believers living in this present dispensation. Just as God used the saints of the Old Testament to be actively engaged in bringing forth His Word (both written and Living), so it is now with the spiritual community known as the Church. And just as the nation of Israel was used by God to prepare the way for this new creation, even so, the Body of Christ is being used to prepare the way for the yet-future spiritual renovation of Israel.

It is this fact that, for the most part, is totally missing from the thinking of the modern Church. We understand the first part of our commission: that of making disciples worldwide (Mat 28:18–20). But we have failed to grasp the greater prophetic scope of God’s purpose for the Church. It is this truth regarding the relationship between two distinct entities that was imparted to Paul in the revelation of the “Mystery” doctrine. This inter-relationship not only links the present-day Church to the glorious past of

Israel's history, but also links the existence and future fulfillment of Israel to that of the Church.

The current popular assumption—that the Church has supplanted Israel, and that God's promises to Israel have been transferred to the Church—is not only a grievous failure to understand the “*new creation*” nature (2Co 5:17) and purpose of the Church, but also amounts to a “*boast against the [natural] branches*” which will bring about the judgment of God on the end-times Church (Rom 11:18–23). This great error is the result of the failure to “*rightly divide the Word of truth*” (2Ti 2:15).

C. Understanding the New Creation

1. The future existence of the Church was unknown to the prophets and prophecies of the Old Testament. The spiritual focus of the prophets was on the first and second coming of Jesus Christ, which were seen as sequential (Gen 49:9–12; Num 24:17–19; Psa 2:1–12; Isa 61:1–4; Jer 33:14–16; Dan 9:24–27; Mic 5:1–5; Zec 9:9–12; Mal 4:1–6).
2. In His very first recorded message (Luk 4:14–21), Jesus began to deconstruct the prevailing perceptions, quoting the portion of Isaiah's prophecy which related to His first advent—rightly declaring that **only** this portion “*Today ... is fulfilled in your hearing*” (Luk 4:21).
3. To His disciples, our Lord introduced the “secret things” of the formation of the new spiritual entity (Mat 16:18) and of a new dispensation of unknown duration (Joh 14:1–3), lasting from His ascension to His return for His Bride. There is an often unnoticed parallel between the building of the Church—the Bride of Christ—and the building of Eve (Gen 2:21–23). The Hebrew word *banah* means to “make, build, construct”; *oikodomeo* is the Greek equivalent. As Eve was taken from the rib/side of the first Adam, even so the Church is built upon the pierced side of our Lord (Joh 19:33–37)—a point on which John lays great emphasis.
4. The “*Rock*” on which the Church is founded is Christ Himself, and includes all who acknowledge Him as “*the Christ, the Son of the Living God*” (Mat 16:18; Joh 11:25–27; Joh 20:30–31). Thus, “*the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone*” (Psa 118:22; 1Pe 2:7).
5. Therefore, in the Body of Christ we find a “*new creation*” (2Co 5:17; Gal 6:15), including both Jew and Gentile, **yet distinct from both** (Eph 2:15; Gal 3:26–29)! This condition, however, is only “*in Christ,*” and exists during this present “*dispensation of the fullness of the times*” (Eph 1:10), and until “*the fullness of the Gentiles has come in*” (Rom 11:25).
6. The nature of the Church, therefore, is not of human origin or doing (Joh 1:12–13; Rom 4:1–4). The unity of the Church (Joh 17:20–23; Eph 4:3–6) rests on the

finished work of Christ and the salvation ministries of the Holy Spirit (1Co 12:13; Tit 3:5; Rom 8:9–11; 1Co 12:7; Eph 1:12–13, Eph 4:30).

7. The constant linking of the Church to Abraham (Rom 4:1–3; Gal 3:6–8, Gal 3:14, Gal 3:29) does much more than remind us of our spiritual heritage. Rather, it is a reminder that just as “Abram” the Chaldean (Gen 11:28) became “Abraham, the Hebrew” (Gen 14:13), so we who are “in Christ” have been transformed into a “*new man*” (Eph 2:15, Eph 4:23–24).
8. The spiritual nature of the Church is the basis for the exceptional mission of the Church. In addition to its missionary mandate (Mat 28:18–20; Rom 10:13–15), the Body of Christ is to act as an intercessor, advocate, and champion of the yet-unbelieving nation of Israel (Rom 9:1–5, Rom 10:1, Rom 10:13–15; Rom 11:28–31). It is crucial to understand this, both in regard to doctrine and to future prophecy!

Summary:

1. The Church never existed before Pentecost, and will be completed at the time of the future Rapture of the Church—“[our] *blessed hope*” (Tit 2:13; 1Th 4:13–18).
2. The Church, and this present “*dispensation of the grace of God*” (Eph 3:2), is the missing link between the Old Testament prophecies of the first and second coming of Jesus Christ. This dispensation is an “intercalation”—unexpected by the prophets.
3. In addition, the future restoration and deliverance of Israel would not be possible apart from the Body of Christ, used by God to “*provoke*” Israel to faith (Deu 32:21; Rom 11:11–14).
4. During the present time, the Body of Christ has a two-fold mission: To “*make disciples of all nations*” (Mat 28:19), and to pray **for** and be an example and blessing **to** the unbelieving nation of Israel (Gen 12:3, Gen 27:29; Rom 10:1, Rom 11:30–31).
5. The Rapture is both a “*blessed hope*” (Tit 2:13) for those who “*love his appearing*” (2Ti 4:8; 1Jo 2:28), and a judgment to believers who “*boast against the [natural] branches*” (Rom 11:18–25).

II. The New Covenant—The Spiritual Power of the Church

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.” Joh 14:12

A. God’s Surpassing Grace

God has vested greater power in the members of the Body of Christ than to any people ever before in history. We tend to look at the achievements of former saints and stand in envy. This is not only foolish, but it displays a lack of understanding of our potential at the present time. We wish we could display the feats of strength done by Samson, or fight mighty battles like David. Or, we want the miraculous powers of an Elijah or Elisha. However, the saints of the Old Testament would be envious of the powers available to the Church-Age saint. This is indicated in 1Pe 1:10–12—not only of the saints, but even of angels!

Not only do we fail to grasp the potential of our spiritual provisions (Eph 1:3, Eph 3:7, Eph 3:20), but we look at the visible miracles of the early Church, and seek to imitate things that are the least—not the greatest—of spiritual powers. The promise of our Lord stated above is unconditional, and cannot be denied. Unfortunately, it can be misunderstood, and as a result the power is forfeit. This is the condition of the Church at the present time.

When we look at the mighty deeds of the “heroes of the faith” (Heb 11:4–39) and the things which Jesus accomplished, we are prone to feel that we are weak and useless vessels. Forgetting that we are an entirely “*new creation*” (2Co 5:17) possessing a whole new spiritual power system (Eph 3:7, Eph 3:20), we seek to emulate the “lesser” works that have gone before. As a result, because we are working outside our God-given “*sphere*” (2Co 10:13), we meet with frustration and discouragement.

B. Greater Works Than These

The “Charismatic Movement” has focused on attempting to imitate the great works of the past ages, whether of Old Testament prophets, the age of Jesus’ incarnation, or the early Church. Yet I would suggest that in none of the “exciting” or “amazing” miracles of the early Church are the “*greater works*” to be found (Joh 14:12). The Apostles healed the sick and raised the dead. So did our Lord (and even Elijah and Elisha). As for the gift of tongues, the far greater miracle at Pentecost was the conversion of “*about three thousand souls*” (Act 2:41).

The true power of the Church—that is entirely new—is found in the new standing of the believer “in Christ,” due to entrance into the New Covenant, with its resultant powerful capabilities. The chief promises of the New Covenant were the total forgiveness of all sins, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Jer 31:31–34; Eze 36:24–28). It should be noted that this covenant is originally made “*with the house of*

Israel and with the house of Judah” (Jer 31:31; Heb 8:8). The New Covenant as applied to the Church has provisions which far exceed the covenant to Israel. For example, these provisions for Israel apply to their return to the land as a kingdom people (Eze 36:28–32). But as applied to the Church, it is our standing “in Christ,” where we are “seated with Him in the heavenlies” (Col 3:1–4) as “citizens of heaven” (Phi 3:20).

It is this new standing before God that opens incredible powers for the Church-Age believer. As a priesthood “*according to the order of Melchizedek*” (Gen 14:18; Psa 110:4; Heb 5:5–6; Heb 7:20–25, Heb 8:1; 1Pe 2:5–9), under the high priesthood of Jesus Christ, we are raised higher than Abraham, Aaron, the Levites (Heb 7:1–10), and even higher than angels (1Co 6:2–3). Due to our unmerited “standing in grace” (Rom 5:1–2), we are able to have access into the Throne Room of God, the heavenly “holy of holies,” at any time (Heb 4:16, Heb 6:19–20, Heb 8:1–2).

Not only are we granted access (Eph 2:18, Eph 3:12), and commanded to ask boldly according to God’s will (Joh 14:13; 1Jo 5:14–15), but “much more,” we are assured that when we pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us “*according to the will of God ... according to His purpose*” (Rom 8:26–28). In other words, when we pray “*in the Spirit*” (Eph 6:18)—under the Spirit’s guidance and leading—our prayers will be “edited” and “interpreted” by the Spirit into that which is pleasing to God. God may not give us what we want, but He will wisely give us what we need.

C. A Three-Fold Calling

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do He will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name I will do it.” Joh 14:12–13

Now note the context of this promise. It is immediately followed by the assurance of the coming and indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer (Joh 14:15–18). Looking at the context as a whole, we find several indicators as to these “*greater works*”:

- First, they are works that can only be performed by “*he who believes in Me.*”
- Second, they are accomplished in response to prayer requests in keeping with the name and reputation of our Lord.
- Third, they are sought, not selfishly, but “*that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*”
- Fourth, the motive for these works is love for our Lord, and the power is in “*keep[ing] My commandments*” (more on this later).
- Fifth, they are requests made in response to the Spirit’s leading and prompting—not our own desires (see Jam 4:3–4).
- Sixth, we have prayer power because “*you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it will be done for you*” (Joh 15:7).

The expressed will of God for every believer is three-fold:

- First, that we function as a believer-priest (1Ti 2:1–6; 1Pe 2:5–9). This is the beginning of a spiritual dynamic that changes our world. Mighty and effective prayer will always be the result of accurate and consistent Bible study.
- Second, that we become “*ambassadors of Christ*” (2Co 5:14–21)—praying for and seeking the salvation of those who are lost.
- And finally, that we exercise our spiritual gift for the edification of the Body of Christ (Rom 12:3–8; 1Co 12:4–7; Eph 4:11–16; 1Pe 4:10–11).

The weakest, smallest believer (humanly speaking), who is dedicated to a life of devoted Bible study, Spirit-led prayer, effective evangelism, and grace-oriented ministry to fellow believers, is the believer God will use for historical impact, and one who will receive eternal renown in the Royal Family of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rather than consisting of works that are visible, exciting, and self-glorifying, the “*greater works*” come from those who are often overlooked, ignored, or even ostracized. Truly, “*the last shall be first*” (Mat 19:30), and those who quietly, faithfully, and prayerfully serve in obscurity, will be exalted in the presence of our Lord (Jam 4:10, Jam 5:7–8; 1Pe 5:6).

D. The New Covenant is Ratified on the Basis of the Finished Work of Jesus Christ.

“Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” Joh 1:29

“This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” Mat 26:28

1. The key provisions of the New Covenant are cleansing from all sins and the indwelling of the Spirit of God (cf., Jer 31:31–34; Eze 36:24–28; Heb 10:16–18).
2. Note: The Church is not Israel, and the New Covenant has not yet been ratified with Israel (cf., Eze 36:22–24, Eze 36:26–30, especially Eze 37:26 and Rev 14:1, 6). The “*everlasting Gospel*” relates to the “*everlasting covenant*” made with Israel! (1Ch 16:15–17, 1Ch 17:1–27). This was the “good news” to Israel.
3. The true power of the Church is in understanding it as a “*Body*,” or as a “community”—indwelt by and operating in the power of the Holy Spirit, as well as the love of God (Joh 13:34–35; 1Co 13:4–8; 2Co 5:14–21; Eph 4:15–16).
4. The true expression of divine love is that we “*receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God*” (Rom 15:7). We do not love, nor are we united, because we agree, approve of, or get along with each other—but because we are one Body in Christ Jesus (Eph 4:3–6).
5. Because of this—and this alone—we are commanded to “*rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep*” (Rom 12:15).
6. It was in this spirit that the early church “*had all things in common*” (see Act 2:44–45, Act 4:34–35). Concerning this practice, a few observations are in order:

- a. This was not some form of communism or socialism, since it was (1) voluntary, and (2) not required, as illustrated in Act 5:4.
 - b. It did not work out so well, since later the Jerusalem church (in its poverty) had to rely on offerings from the Gentile churches (Rom 15:25–26; 1Co 16:3).
 - c. However, the principle is sound; we could use more—not less—of this type of care and concern for fellow believers.
7. The primary mission of the Church is to “*make disciples*” (Mat 28:18–20), but the means to this end is first to establish love, acceptance, and unity among believers (Joh 13:34–35), **then** to send out evangelists and missionaries who represent such communities of faith (Rom 10:13–15; 3Jo 1:5–12).

III. The New Commandment—The Key to the Success of the Church

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another,
as I have loved you ...” Joh 13:34*

A. “What the Law Could Not Do,” God has Done

*“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh,
God did by sending His Son ...” Rom 8:3*

God’s covenant with Israel as His chosen people was codified in the Ten Commandments (Exo 34:28). These were then amplified into 614 commands from Exodus to Deuteronomy. We know that the Law of Moses was never given to provide salvation from sin, but rather to point to the need for salvation (Gal 3:21–24). The Law brought to the sinner the conviction of His sinfulness (Gal 3:10–12; 1Ti 1:9–10), and also gave to the Old Testament believer a guide for faithful living (Hab 2:4; Gal 3:12, Gal 3:19). No one could be saved by keeping the Law, for to break even one commandment, made one guilty of breaking all of them (Jam 2:10–11). However, among the provisions of the Law of Moses were the sacrifices, which made provision for repentance and correction—and pointed to the ultimate sacrifice of the Messiah yet to come.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus began the process of demonstrating the deeper, spiritual approach to the Law. He made it clear that outward sins were but an indication of inner corruption (Mat 5:21–48). The real need was regeneration, “*You must be born again*” (Joh 3:7). He also took the many commands of the Mosaic covenant and reduced them down to their essence: love for God and for our fellow man (Mat 22:36–40). Thus Paul tells us, “*If there is any other commandment, [it is] summed up in this saying ... ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’*” (Rom 13:9).

B. Higher Demand, Greater Provision

Jesus, however, made it even clearer to His disciples in the Upper Room. In the ultimate elevation of the demand of the Old Covenant, and the comprehensive demand for believers under the New Covenant, He said, “*This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you*” (Joh 15:12). There is one distinction which must be made between what Paul says and what Jesus said. The love of which Paul speaks in Rom 13:9 is our love to the world at large. But the love Jesus speaks of is limited to fellow-members of the Body of Christ. The phrase “*one another*” simply means “another of the same kind”—another believer.

The great problem posed by such a sweeping demand is that we do not have the power within ourselves to love in such a way. This is where the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit comes in. And this is why the key to the power and effectiveness of the Church as a body—a community of regenerate men and women—is not only the indwelling, but the filling and fruit of the Spirit of God. When the believer submits to

the indwelling Spirit (Rom 6:11–14; Eph 5:15–21; Col 3:15–16), the result will be a life of fruitfulness, dominated by the power of divine love (Joh 15:7–12; Gal 5:6, Gal 5:14, Gal 5:22–23). Only by means of spiritual regeneration through faith (Tit 3:5–6) and a life yielded to the Spirit of God, can such a standard be attained. Only by the spiritual dynamic of the members of the Body of Christ living and functioning in the genuine love of Christ (2Co 5:14–15), can the Church succeed in its mission to this earth.

C. Christ’s Love Manifested in the “One Another” Commands

1. “*Be at peace with one another*” (Mar 9:50)
2. “*Love ...*” (Joh 13:34–35, Joh 15:2, Joh 15:17; Rom 13:8; 1Th 3:12, 1Th 4:9; 1Jo 3:11, 1Jo 4:7)
3. “*In honor giving preference ...*” (Rom 12:10)
4. “*Be of the same mind ...*” (Rom 12:16, Rom 15:5)
5. “*Do not judge ...*” (Rom 14:13)
6. “*Edify ...*” Rom 14:19; 1Th 5:11)
7. “*Receive one another ...*” (Rom 15:7)
8. “*Admonish ...*” (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16)
9. “*Serve ...*” (Gal 5:13)
10. “*Do not provoke ... envy ...*” (Gal 5:26)
11. “*Forbear ...*” (Eph 4:2; Col 3:13)
12. “*Be kind ... tenderhearted ...*” (Eph 4:32)
13. “*Forgiving ...*” (Eph 4:32)
14. “*Submitting to ...*” (Eph 5:21; 1Pe 5:5)
15. “*Do not lie ...*” (Col 3:9)
16. “*Comfort ...*” (1Th 4:18)
17. “*Exhort ... daily ...*” (Heb 3:13)
18. “*Provoking ... to love and good deeds ...*” (Heb 10:24)
19. “*Do not speak evil of ...*” (Jam 4:11)
20. “*Pray for ...*” (Jam 5:16)
21. “[Have] *compassion for ...*” (1Pe 3:8)
22. “*Be hospitable to ...*” (1Pe 4:9)
23. “*Minister ... to ...*” (1Pe 4:10)

Summary:

1. Where the world sees these commands put into action, there will be spiritual impact. The absence of these qualities and actions makes the Church a mockery to the world.
2. “*Behold, how they love one another!*” This was the report of Aristides back to the Emperor Hadrian, after being sent out to spy on the activities of the early Church. He observed acts of sacrifice and giving, even to some saints dying in the arena in place of others who had been condemned. This was the evidence of the “*first love*” (Rev 2:4), which the church historically has forsaken.

IV. The New Commission—The Charter of the Church

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ...” Mat 28:19

“How shall they preach unless they are sent?” Rom 10:15

A. To The End of the Earth

As we have already seen in a previous section of our study, every believer is spiritually gifted and called to his or her own personal sphere of service (1Co 12:4–7). Each of us has a three-fold ministry: First, our priesthood (1Pe 2:5–9; Heb 13:15), second, our ambassadorship (2Co 5:18–21), and finally, our gifted ministry to fellow believers (1Pe 4:10–11).

The believer who faithfully executes these combined ministries has become a *“living sacrifice”* to God (Rom 12:1–2). When motivated and empowered by the indwelling Spirit, the *“love of Christ compels us”* (2Co 5:14–15) to actively engage in them. We play our part in the Body by doing what we were created and redeemed to do. But no member of the Body is sufficient in itself (1Co 12:12–21). In addition to our personal calling, we have been given a collective mission. The mission of the Church is to have a spiritual influence—and act as a restraining force—on the nations of the world in general, and toward the nation of Israel in particular. We will save the role of the Church toward Israel for later.

As the Body of Christ prays for national and international leaders (1Ti 2:1–6), proclaims the clear and simple Gospel of Christ (Joh 20:30–31; 1Co 15:3–5), and builds itself up in the faith (Eph 4:11–16), it exudes a spiritual fragrance throughout the world (see 2Co 2:14–17 and compare Joh 12:1–3). At the same time, the Spirit of God is working through the testimony of the saints to *“convict the world [concerning] sin and righteousness and judgment”* (see Joh 16:7–11). As a result, some are saved while others are hardened to the truth. The very same actions that win some to faith in Jesus Christ, bring hatred and persecution from others. This is one of many reasons why we are told to rejoice in persecution (Mat 5:10–12; Act 5:41). The very fact of persecution is a negative evidence that the Gospel is having an impact on the souls of men and women.

B. Forces on the Front Lines

As a spiritual community, the Church is to edify, equip, and send out evangelists and missionaries, and to support and sustain them in prayer as they dedicate themselves to the work of “making disciples.” The work of the missionary does not end with evangelization. Having won some to Christ, they must then begin the work of Bible teaching in order to edify, equip, and then send missionaries from those new local churches. At one time, it was fashionable to view missionaries as spiritual flunkies who could not find productive ministry elsewhere. In reality, the missionary is (or should be) the elite warrior of the Army of God. Like our Special Forces soldiers,

they are the “A team,” dropped into hostile territory, who must begin the work of gaining the trust of the indigenous people, in order to train up a counter-revolutionary movement within that country.

Far too often, due to the spiritual slothfulness of Christians at home, the missionary and his or her family must survive on a meager level of support—both in prayer and finances—while striving to achieve success in the most worthy venture known to man. In reality, the work of healing souls, whether by the pastor or the missionary, should be the first priority of any local church. This can only occur when individual believers are properly taught and raised up to a level of maturity to have “*the mind of Christ*” (1Co 2:16b; Eph 4:15–16).

The weak link in the great missionary enterprise is the pastor who fails in his duty to “*preach the Word ... in season and out of season*” (2Ti 4:2). The lack of sound, systematic teaching in the local church begins a domino effect of failure in the goal of reaching the world with the Gospel message. Poorly taught church members live weak spiritual lives, and set temporal rather than eternal priorities. Lip service is rendered on Sunday to the love of God and His redemptive plan, but making a living is more important to many than bringing the life-giving Truth to a lost world.

On the contrary, where the Word of God is powerfully taught, spiritual priorities develop in the lives of serious Bible students who recognize the urgency of the hour and desire to “redeem the time” (Eph 5:16; Col 4:5).

Summary:

Every local church should be a mission-minded church. Every pastor should see, as his personal responsibility, the edifying and equipping of men and women for “front line” duty, whether “*in Jerusalem ... [or] in all Judea and Samaria ... [even] to the end of the earth*” (Act 1:8). Every believer must be raised up to a level of maturity in order to be effective in their own sphere of influence. Above all, the unity of the Spirit must be maintained in the bond of love (Eph 4:3).

V. The New Correlation—The Historical Paradigm of the Church

“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” Rom 11:25

A. The “Mystery” Paradigm

This one verse is filled with crucial information, both for believers of the Church Age, and for the yet-future believers of Israel. Here, Paul sets forth the paradigm or correlation between Israel (presently set aside) and the Church of Jesus Christ. The word *paradigm* comes from the Greek *para* meaning “beside” and *deigma* (from *deiknumi*) meaning “to show, point out ... a specimen or sample” (Thayer’s Lexicon). Merriam Webster’s Dictionary gives the meaning “To show side by side. An example, pattern ... especially an outstandingly clear ... example or archetype.”

Interestingly, the word “correlation,” which might be considered something of a synonym, speaks of “the relation existing between things ... in a way not expected on the basis of chance alone.” (Merriam Webster). These ideas capture precisely the point Paul is presenting as a “mystery.”

Although this mystery was unknown in Old Testament times, it was not entirely unanticipated. To Moses, God revealed that there was a body of truth—things kept secret by God that were not yet revealed.

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever.” Deu 29:29

Looking at the context (Deu 29:22–28), we can see that God would at some future point drive Israel from their land and make the land desolate. How then could God fulfill His promises to Israel? That means or method had not yet been revealed.

Because of the obvious contrasts between the revelation of the first and second coming of Messiah (compare Gen 3:15; Gen 49:9–13; and Num 24:17–19), Moses recognized that there would be new revelation for another people sometime in the future. It would be this unknown company of people that God would use to correct and challenge Israel:

“But I will provoke them [Israel] to jealousy by those who are not a nation.” Deu 32:21

But what had been revealed in the Law, was for Israel and would stand as an everlasting covenant (Lev 24:8; Num 25:13).

B. Taking the Enigma Out of the Mystery

To fully appreciate what Paul means by this term, we must see, not the various approaches of theologians and commentaries, but what Paul gives as his inspired definition. In Eph 1:7–13, Paul declares that the mystery concerns the redemptive plan of God, “*which He purposed in Himself ... according to the counsel of His will*” (Eph 1:9, Eph 1:11), regarding “*the dispensation of the fullness of the times*” (Eph 1:10) in which both Jew and Gentile [note the “*we who first trusted in Christ*” versus “*in Him you also trusted*” (Eph 1:12–13)] become **one** “*in Him.*” Since both Jew and Gentile believers are “*sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise*” (Eph 1:13), we share “*the guarantee of our inheritance*” (Eph 1:14) (emphasis added). That God would seal both Jew and Gentile in one body with a common, eternal inheritance, was never before revealed in the Scriptures!

Again, in Eph 3:1–6, Paul amplifies his definition, declaring that Church-Age truths or doctrines speak of that “*which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men ...*” (Eph 3:5), specifically the truth “*that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the Gospel*” (Eph 3:6). This new revelation is for those living in “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” (Eph 3:2), which we call the Church Age. In another passage (Col 1:24–27), Paul speaks of “*the stewardship from God which was given to me for you*” (Col 1:25). The word “*stewardship*” and the word “*dispensation*” are the same word, meaning “the administration of a household.”

Paul is declaring that to him God gave authority, as “[the] *apostle to the Gentiles*” (Rom 11:13), to reveal the mystery doctrines (things never before revealed) which are to guide the Church during this present dispensation. These doctrines reveal to believers of this present time the great truth of “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Col 1:27). The indwelling of Christ in the Church-Age believer (cf., Joh 14:16–18; Rom 8:9–11) is the basis for our absolute assurance (“*hope*”) that we will share in “*the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*” (Tit 2:13). This is what we call “the Rapture of the Church,” which is clearly presented in 1Th 4:13–18, and which we will share because God has not appointed us to the wrath that is coming (cf., 1Th 1:10, 1Th 5:9). The doctrine of the Rapture will be fully studied in our conference in Northern Virginia. For now, we need to see the implications of the paradigm between Israel and the Church.

C. The Ministry of the Church to Israel

*“I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God
be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Rom 12:1–2*

The book of Romans is Paul’s most systematic epistle. The thought of “*obedience to the faith*” flows from beginning to end (Rom 1:5, Rom 16:26). Paul’s concern is not just for “the Gospel” to be received, but for believers in this unique age to press on to

lay hold of “*the righteousness of God ... from faith to faith*” (Rom 1:17). What is so often missed is something made emphatically clear in Paul’s summary statement:

“*Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith – to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.*” Rom 16:25–27 (emphasis added)

In other words, “*obedience to the faith*” must be in keeping with “*the revelation of the mystery*”—a new doctrine for an entirely new people—pertaining to a unique dispensation of history, which we call the Church Age. We must dig a little deeper into what is meant by this “*obedience to the faith.*” To do so requires that we take a new look at the threads running through the book of Romans regarding the role of the Church in the future spiritual awakening of Israel:

1. In Rom 12:1–2 (cited above), Paul urges these Roman believers (and by extension all Church-Age believers) to undergo a spiritual renovation. On the basis of “*the mercies of God,*” they are to present themselves “*a living sacrifice*” to God, which he says “*is your reasonable service.*” The word “*service*” is from *latreuo* and speaks of the service of the priesthood. This offering and service can only be accomplished by a transformation resulting from “*the renewing of your mind.*” Through this spiritual renovation, they will be enabled to “*prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*”
2. Now we come to the crucial question: What exactly is Paul talking about? The understanding of his real thrust, I believe, has long been lost due to an unbiblical approach to the book of Romans. For years, I myself looked at Romans 9–11 as a “parenthetic,” dropped into the book to somehow explain God’s dealings with Israel. Because of this “disconnect,” Rom 12:1–2 was to be understood by linking it back to the “sanctification” section of Romans 6–8. I now view Romans 9–11 as the **crux** of the book, perfectly fitted into place and following the flow of the “bookend” theme of “*obedience to the faith*” (Rom 1:5, Rom 16:26). Let us explore how this affects our understanding of the commands of Rom 12:1–2.
 - a. If we take the “*therefore*” to refer, not to a thought continued from Romans 6–8, but what immediately precedes Rom 12:1 (Rom 9–11), we are more faithful to the text. Then, the “*mercies of God,*” while certainly including our justification (Romans 4–5) and our sanctification (Romans 6–8), most directly bears on the “*mercies*” in the immediate context.

“*For as you [Gentiles] were once disobedient to God, yet now have obtained mercy through their [Israel’s] disobedience [i.e., “to the faith”], even so these [Israel] also have now been disobedient, that [divine purpose] through the mercy shown you [Gentiles] they [Israel] also may obtain mercy.*” Rom 11:30–31 (emphasis added)

- b. Then, following his doxology (Rom 11:33–36) Paul says, “*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God ...*” (just mentioned). By this understanding, the “*renewing of the mind*” or spiritual renovation has to do with a wrong attitude of the members of the Church to Israel, as displayed in Rom 11:17–24. The “*perfect will of God*” (Rom 12:2) would then relate back to how God would use the Church to “*provoke them to jealousy*” (Rom 11:11–14). Israel’s future spiritual awakening will result from God’s dealings with the Church, including the fact that “*the fullness of the Gentiles*” will have “*come in*” (Rom 11:25, i.e., the Rapture).

D. Paul: “Apostle to the Gentiles”/Example to the Church

Paul was chosen by God to be the recipient of the doctrine of the “mystery,” because he was the “*apostle to the Gentiles*” (Rom 11:13). As such, not only in his epistles, **but also by his example**, he is intended to be a guide for believers during the Church Age.

*“However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a **pattern** to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.” 1Ti 1:16 (emphasis added)*

The phrase “*might show*” is from *endeiknumi*, which again is the root for “paradigm.” In this construction, it not only means “to point out, to demonstrate” but further, “*the preposition in compound suggests a more complete demonstration than the simple verb. It is the laying of the ‘index’ finger, as it were, ‘on’ the object*” (Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament). Then “*pattern*” is *hupotuposin*, defined as “*a sketch, delineation, formula, sample, a model representation*” (Thayer’s Lexicon).

What this means in simple terms is that God intended the life of Paul to be an example to every believer living in this present Church Age. We are to follow the pattern which he, by the grace and mercy of God, set for us. This example is especially suggestive in his attitude toward Israel:

1. Paul carried a burden of grief and sorrow for spiritually blinded Israel (Rom 9:1–4).
2. Paul constantly prayed for Israel, that they might be saved (Rom 10:1).
3. Paul was convinced that God had not “*cast away His people whom He foreknew*” (Rom 11:1–2).

It is helpful to look at Chapters 9–11 in light of Paul’s consistent thread that is running through the book about Israel:

1. It was through Israel, “*according to the flesh,*” that Christ came (Rom 1:3).
2. Paul’s policy was to present the Gospel, “[to] *the Jew first, and also to the Gentile*” (Rom 1:16).

3. The arrogance and self-righteousness of the Jew resulted in “*the name of God [being] blasphemed among the Gentiles*” (Rom 2:17–24, which arrogance the Church then repeated, Rom 11:17–25).
4. The “true” Jew is one who is “circumcised in heart” by faith (Rom 2:28–29). In other words, the “*Israel of God*” (Gal 6:16) is made up of regenerate Jews.
5. God’s promises to Israel will yet be fulfilled (Rom 3:1–5), because God is faithful. The Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants, which God made with Israel, are unconditional and irrevocable (Rom 11:29).
6. The Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:1–3) was made with Abraham and his seed. We in the Church have been “*grafted in*” by faith (Rom 11:17), but to think that this somehow nullifies God’s promises to Israel is an act of arrogance (Rom 11:18, 21–22).
7. What God has begun with Israel, He will yet complete (Rom 9–11) after the “*fullness of the Gentiles has come in*” (Rom 11:25), “*For this is my covenant with them [Israel] when I take away their sins*” (Rom 11:27) ... “*For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable*” (Rom 11:29).

E. The Application of Paul’s Doctrine

If we accept that Paul is the Apostle to the Church, and that he personally was to be taken as a “pattern” of the Church-Age believer’s conduct, we begin to see that our “great commission” is not only to the nations in general, but to Israel in particular:

1. The Church is a Royal Priesthood (1Pe 2:5–9), and therefore should be in continual intercession for the nation of Israel.

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.” Psa 122:6

“Brethren, my hearts desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.” Rom 10:1

He is speaking here of prayer for the nation—not for individual Jews, many of whom had already believed. Paul knew that “*all Israel*” would not be saved until after the Rapture of the Church (Rom 11:25–26), yet he knew his prayers would be effective.

2. The Church is in a position to be a blessing to Israel; and to a large extent God’s blessings on the Church are dependant on our treatment of Israel.

“I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you.” Gen 12:3

“Concerning the Gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.” Rom 11:28

Church-Age believers should be Israel’s most staunch supporters and advocates!

3. Just as the prophets recognized that, in some way, their ministry was intended for an unknown people yet to come (1Pe 1:10–12), even so the Church should be aware that much of Church writings and history will one day—in the future—inspire and edify the believing Jews of the Tribulation period. Just as we are challenged by reading about the “heroes of the faith” (Heb 11), so one day regenerate Jews will be encouraged by stories of great missionaries, preachers, and writers of the Church Age.
4. One of the chief objectives of the Body of Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is to be a restraining force against “the mystery of iniquity.”

“For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.” 2Th 2:7

In partnership with the Holy Spirit, the Church—through well-instructed and mature believers—plays a role in hindering the coming of *“the man of sin ... the son of perdition.”* While world missions are being conducted, Israel is being prayed for and supported at the same time, in order to make necessary preparations for the Tribulation period. This role of prayer, advocacy, support, and love will not be lost on the saints of Israel once the Tribulation begins. And it will be this love—for the most part taken for granted—that will then provoke an outpouring of missionary zeal, beginning with the 144,000 Jewish evangelists—unparalleled in all world history.

5. Finally, with the Rapture of the Church, Israel’s last “friend” in the world—the Church of Jesus Christ—will be taken away. This will be an awful awakening for the Jews who come to Christ at that time. Like Paul on the Damascus road, they will suddenly see the full magnitude of their arrogance and unbelief, and the greatness of the *“mercies of God”* (Rom 12:1). It will be the Rapture that will finally bring the opening of their eyes to the truth of the Gospel!

“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in ... the Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” Rom 11:25–26

Summary:

For such grace and mercy, and such an amazing plan, only the doxology of Paul is fitting!

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out. For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to Whom be glory forever. Amen.”

Rom 11:33–36