

The Great Commission

Introduction

Most of Christendom has been taught that Jesus' words in Matthew 28.18-20 to His eleven apostles constitute the Church's "Great Commission." This passage usually is presented as Jesus' last words to His apostles and as the Church's marching orders. The passage reads,

¹⁸ And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28.18-20).

Careful reading of this passage and the parallel passages in the other gospels raises many questions for the interpreter. Unfortunately, synthetic exegesis of the issues raised by these passages is rare. And, perhaps because the passage has become so familiar, critical examination of its meaning has almost ceased. The purpose of this study is to examine the passage above in concert with the parallel texts under a disciplined hermeneutic and within the historical context to determine what Jesus meant by His command in this passage. This analysis will challenge traditional teaching.

Parallel Passages

Matthew's passage is most familiar to Christians because it is regularly called upon as a primary passage for Christian evangelism. Equally important, however, are the parallel passages of the other gospels if we are to understand Jesus' last words on earth to His eleven apostles. Below are the

parallel passages of what Jesus taught His apostles before he ascended.

Mark recorded,

¹⁵ And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. ¹⁶ He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. ¹⁷ These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." (Mark 16.15-18).

Luke recorded,

⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24.45-49).

Luke continued his history in Acts,

⁴ Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." So when they had come

together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; ⁸ but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1.4-8).

And finally, John recorded,

²¹ So Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” ²² And when He had said this, He breathed on them and *said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.” (John 20.21-23).

The Passages Examined

The passages above provide the content and context of Jesus’ instructions to His eleven apostles. When these passages are examined together, what were the Lord’s instructions to His apostles? The chart below group His teaching into the main categories.

The Commands, Gospel, and Forgiveness of Sins

Teaching	Scripture
Make disciples; teach the nations (τὰ ἔθνη) to obey Jesus’ commands.	Matthew 28.19-20 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations... teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.”

Preach the gospel, i.e., the gospel of the kingdom, to the world, starting in Jerusalem and then spreading outward.	Mark 16.15 "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." Acts 1.8 "and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."
Preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins to the nations (τὰ ἔθνη)	Luke 24.47 "that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem."
Apostles given authority to forgive or retain sins.	John 20.23 "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained."

Baptism

Teaching	Scripture
Baptize with water by authority of (in name of) Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.	Matthew 28.19 "baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."
Both faith and water baptism required for salvation.	Mark 16.16 "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."

Sign Gifts of Believing in Christ

Teaching	Scripture
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<p>Believers would have sign gifts and power: be able to cast out demons, speak new languages, safely handle snakes, be immune to poison, be able to heal the sick.</p>	<p>Mark 16.17 “And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”</p>
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The Holy Spirit

Teaching	Scripture
<p>Jesus commanded His apostles to remain in Jerusalem until they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. They would receive power with this baptism.</p>	<p>Luke 24.49 “And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” Acts 1.4-8 He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which”, He said, “you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. . . but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. John 20.22-23 He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.</p>

Anyone familiar with Christian teaching on the gospel, the forgiveness of sins, baptism, miraculous gifts, and the Holy Spirit, will recognize the wide variance of the meaning of these doctrines in Christendom. Denominations and churches

have been created depending on how they interpret these passages. With respect to the so-called "Great Commission," the chief focus of most commentaries, sermons, and evangelistic efforts is upon the command to preach the gospel and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Largely ignored are problems created by these passages. Is there a way to clear up this confusion and understand the teachings of Jesus and what the Church should be and do today? Happily, yes.

An Examination of the Situation

The Commands, Gospel, and Forgiveness of Sins

To understand the last teachings of Jesus while on earth, it is necessary to review what He taught during the three years of His ministry. Jesus' ministry officially began with John the Baptizer. John served in the rôle of a herald for the prophesied Messiah-King and introduced the ministry and message of Jesus. The key theme of John's message was "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3.2; cf. Matthew 9.35; 10.7; Mark 1.4; Luke 3.3. Jesus took up and continued to preach the same message (Matthew 4.17). The apostles understood correctly that the kingdom ¹ that John the Baptizer, Jesus, and they themselves had preached was that kingdom the prophets had foretold for hundreds of years. In the course of His teachings Jesus had promised His apostles that they would reign over the twelve tribes of Israel with him in this kingdom (Matthew 19.28). Clearly, this kingdom idea had become firmly planted in their minds. It was an earthly, political kingdom. This is apparent from the fact that the last question they asked Jesus before He ascended regarded the timetable for the kingdom's establishment (Acts 1.6-7). The ministry and teachings of Jesus that the apostles understood all related to the prophesied kingdom in which Israel would be preeminent among the nations of the world with Jesus ruling the world from Jerusalem as the Messiah-King and with themselves serving as judges over the twelve tribes of

Israel. They believed that the long foretold prophetic declarations and promises of the prophets were about to be fulfilled.

Some maintain the apostles misunderstood Jesus. They argue Jesus meant a spiritual kingdom, not a physical, literal kingdom of Israel. They see the Church as that spiritual kingdom. Such a view has no biblical support if we respect Jesus' words. Jesus had every opportunity to correct such a misapprehension prior to His leaving them. Luke wrote in Acts 1.6:

“So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, ‘Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?’”

How did Jesus respond? Did He say, “Men, you have misunderstood me. You have a confused understanding about Israel and the kingdom. I have not been talking about a literal kingdom regarding national Israel. I’ve been talking about a kingdom of the heart, a spiritual kingdom.” No. Jesus taught that the Scriptures would be fulfilled literally. Foundational to His ministry was His teaching that the Scriptures could not be broken and that they would be fulfilled as anyone would read them normally (Matthew 5.17-18; 24.35; Mark 14.49). Furthermore, do those who object to a physical, literal kingdom on earth also reject the Lord’s words, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it in heaven” (Matthew 6.10)? This is as clear a statement as can be made that God would establish His kingdom on earth.

Rather than correcting a possible misinterpretation, Luke recorded Jesus’ response:

“He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; (Acts 1.7)”

Those who maintain Jesus taught a spiritual, non-literal kingdom reach this conclusion by finding an allegorical or symbolic meaning to the text. Such textual mishandling has led to unnecessary complications, misinterpretations, and theological errors in the Church. These have resulted in great confusion among Christians.

How did the apostles respond to Jesus? Were they obedient to Jesus' instructions concerning the proclamation of the kingdom following His ascension? Indeed they were. In Peter's first sermon on Pentecost he continued to call for the repentance of the nation saying,

“Repent and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2.38).

Peter continued this message in his second sermon in which he told the people of Israel,

¹⁹ Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; ²⁰ and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. (Acts 3.19-21).

To what did Peter refer? He was reminding the Jews of what John the Baptizer, Jesus, and the Twelve themselves had been saying for the past three years. The nation must repent. In Peter's second sermon, he offered the kingdom to the nation. The phrases Peter used, “times of refreshing” and “the period of restoration of all things” referred to the prophesied kingdom. Peter's appeal was the *first* time that the kingdom was offered to the nation. Prior to this time, John the

Baptizer, Jesus, and the Twelve had preached that the kingdom was “at hand” ([ἐγγίζω](#), Matthew 4.17; 10.7; Mark 1.15). Now, however, Peter told the nation that the kingdom was more than “at hand.” It would be *realized* if they repented.

We do well to remember Jesus’ words to Israel when He considered their attitude towards Him and their refusal to repent,

³⁷ “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. ³⁸ Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! ³⁹ For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” (Matthew 23.37-39)

Jesus predicted His rejection with this statement and set the terms for His return. While the Jews of Jesus’ generation crucified him, the Lord predicted that a *future* generation of Jews would repent (John 10.16). He prophesied a future generation would *not* fail as their ancestors had. They will repent and utter the words, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” Therefore, according to Jesus’ teaching, He *cannot* return until Israel speaks these words!

Peter continued his sermon:

²² Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed to everything He says to you. ²³ And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.’ ²⁴ And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. ²⁵ It is you who are the sons of the

prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' ²⁶ *For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways" (Acts 3.22-26).*

Peter's message was clear: repent and be blessed by the coming of the King—or die. It is crucial to note Peter's audience. To whom did he speak? Gentiles or Jews? Jews! Who were the sons of the prophets? Jews! Whose seed was God talking about with the phrase "in your seed" that Peter quoted from Genesis? Jews! Who will be blessed through this "seed"? Gentiles! That was the kingdom program. First the Jew, then the Gentile. Paul summarized the prophetic program in his statement:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Romans 1.16)."

Paul's statement was historical. The gospel went first to the Jew then to the Gentile. Paul's statement has *nothing* to do with evangelistic priority in our present era. We do not evangelize Jews first and then go to Gentiles. That day has passed. While Paul's practice throughout Acts was to go first to Jews, after Acts 28, this practice ended. No distinctions exist between Jew and Gentile in the body of Christ (Ephesians 2.13-16; Galatians 3.27-29). This is in contrast with Jesus' teachings and Peter's ministry.

Throughout Jesus' ministry the Jew had priority. When Jesus gave orders to go forth and proclaim that the kingdom of heaven was at hand He ordered His apostles *not* to go to the Gentiles but only to Israel (Matthew 10.5-6). In His instruction of how to deal with a sinning brother Jesus taught His disciples that if the brother refused to listen then they should consider him a Gentile (Matthew 18.12-17). Does this

sound like Paul's doctrine of "no distinction?" When the Canaanite woman requested Jesus to heal her daughter from demon possession, how did He respond to her? He told her that it was "not good to take the children's bread and throw it to dogs" (Mark 7.25-29). Who were the "children?" Jews. Who were the "dogs?" Gentiles. We know from the story that this woman would not be denied. Her determined faith caused Jesus to relent and grant her plea. Despite Jewish priority, Jesus made an exception. But it is clear from the Scriptures that Jews had priority in the prophetic kingdom of God. Indeed, they were the kingdom of God. Peter, obedient to his Master and to the Scriptures continued this priority.

Thus, we read Peter's statement to the Jews that they received the gospel *first*:

²⁵ It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' ²⁶ *For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways" (Acts 3.25-26).*

Compare this with Paul's statement to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch about the priority of the Jews,

"And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold we are turning to the Gentiles"" (Acts 13.46).²

Here we may address the purpose of the book of Acts. Most believe Luke wrote Acts to record the birth and growth of the Church. The Church's birth and growth is recorded and this is certainly part of Acts' purpose. However, Luke's chief purpose

was to explain what happened to God's plan for Israel. Acts explains the fall of the nation of Israel and the prophetic program. Israel begins in great hope as the narration commences. Yes, they had committed a great crime in crucifying their Messiah. But Jesus had risen from the dead. Jesus, as He had promised had sent the Holy Spirit. The prophecy of Joel had begun to be fulfilled (Acts 2.16-21). The stage was set to fulfill the promises that the prophets proclaimed. Peter, as head of the apostles, offered the nation a choice. If they repented, the kingdom would come. But they refused. Tragically, Acts closes in despair. Acts records the Jews rejection of the gospel and ends with Paul's witness of the Jews at Rome rejecting the gospel. Luke recorded Paul's declaration:

"Let it be known to you therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen" (Acts 28.28).

God's salvation had been sent first to the Jews. They refused it. Paul proclaimed that the Gentiles would accept it. And they have. The vast majority, probably 99% of the Body of Christ is composed of Gentiles. Paul's pronouncement ended Jewish priority and formally recognized God's judgment upon the nation of Israel.

The number 40 is used frequently in the Scriptures as a number for testing. For example, Moses spent 40 years in Midian before he was commissioned by God to bring His people out of Egypt (Exodus 3, cf. Acts 7.25-35). Israel wandered 40 years in the wilderness before entering the promised land (Numbers 14.33). Jesus spent 40 days in the desert and was tempted by Satan (Matthew 4.1-2). There are many other examples. Forty years passed from the beginning of Jesus' ministry to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. John the Baptizer and Jesus' ministry began around 30 A.D. In 70 A.D., General Vespasian and his son Titus marched into Judea and destroyed

the Temple and Jerusalem. Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote that over a million Jews were killed by Rome's legions. A few escaped but most of the survivors went into slavery. The glory of Israel–Jerusalem and the Temple–was destroyed. Jesus had foretold this destruction to His apostles (Matthew 24.1-2; Mark 13.1-2; Luke 21.5-6). How many years passed from John the Baptizer to Vespasian? Forty. This was the period of testing for the nation. Tragically, they failed the test.

But God is sovereign and does not forget His promises. He will give a make-up exam for Israel. Another day awaits the nation of Israel. Paul wrote in Romans 9-11 about this hope for *national* Israel. A future generation of Jews will repent and pass the test. They will recognize and accept Jesus as the Messiah (Zechariah 12.10 cf. Matthew 23.39). Paul wrote when this happens the entire nation will be saved (Romans 11.26). Jesus will return, reign as the King of Israel in His capacity as David's "Greater Son", and fulfill all the covenanted promises. This will be the "times of refreshing" Peter offered the nation (Acts 3.19)

Some teach God exercised final judgment in 70 A.D. on national Israel for its rejection of the Messiah and that Israel has no national future in the plan of God. Such teaching that the Church has replaced Israel and that the covenant promises God made to the nation have been given to the Church denies God's sovereignty. It elevates man's will over the divine will. This erroneous theology began early in church history (2nd century) and has poisoned orthodox theology for almost two millennia. While Israel failed God, God has not failed Israel. He is sovereign and He will keep His promises. Paul wrote the Romans,

²⁸ *From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;* ²⁹ *for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Romans 11.28-29).*

The promises God made to Israel, i.e. "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" have not been spiritually assumed by the Church. God will, according to His own timetable, fulfill His word literally to national Israel as He promised.

In the Matthew passage above we observed that Jesus had instructed His apostles about "teaching them (i.e. the nations) to observe all that I commanded you." What did this include? For one thing, Jesus taught obedience to the Law of Moses. Throughout His ministry Jesus operated under the Mosaic Law and commanded His disciples to obey it. Thus, if the teachings of the "Great Commission" are for the Church, we should be teaching the nations to obey the Law of Moses (cf. Matthew 5.17-19; Matthew 23.1-3). Do Christian churches do this today? No, and rightly so. But why not if Jesus commanded it? We will examine why not presently.

The most famous extended teaching session Jesus gave is known as the Sermon on the Mount. In His sermon, Jesus taught that to be His disciple one must not lay up earthly treasures but give up one's riches, give to anyone who asked, and not worry about where the next meal is coming from (cf. Matthew 5.40-42, 6.25-26, 10.8-10, 19.21; Luke 12.33). In Acts 2, we find believers in Jerusalem obeying Jesus' commands. They sold their possessions and held them in common. This was consistent with Jesus' teaching regarding citizens of the kingdom of God (cf. Matthew 19.21; Mark 10.21; Luke 12.33, 18.22). Jesus' disciples had left everything to follow him (cf. Matthew 19.27; Mark 10.28; Luke 5.11, 28). Did Paul tell believers to leave everything, sell their possessions, and hold them in common? Never. Why not? God had revealed to Paul a new and different order—the Church, i.e., the Body of Christ. This program was distinct from the kingdom program that Jesus had proclaimed. Do those who teach that we operate under the "Great Commission" tell believers to give up their possessions which was commanded by Jesus as part of the kingdom program?

In no, then why not? For the simple reason that we are not under the orders of the so-called "Great Commission" of Matthew 28. We are under different orders.

Another issue concerns the gospel itself. Under the "Great Commission" the apostles were commanded to preach the gospel. But what gospel? The Scriptures teach more than one gospel—the "gospel of the kingdom" (Matthew 4.23), the "gospel of the circumcision" (Galatians 2.7), the "gospel of the uncircumcision" (Galatians 2.7), and the "gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20.24). What gospel did John the Baptizer, Jesus, and the apostles preach? Did they preach that Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead (1 Corinthians 15.1-4)? Hardly. That gospel remained undisclosed until God revealed it to Paul (Romans 16.25). The "good news" preached prior to Paul was the gospel of the coming kingdom. For further explanation see the study on [The Gospel](#).

The Twelve had no comprehension of the death and resurrection of Christ much less that it was a *gospel*, i.e., *good news*. Jesus had told His apostles what was going to happen but God hid it from them. Luke recorded,

³¹ Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. ³² For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, ³³ and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again." ³⁴ But the disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said (Luke 18.31-34).

Could anything be clearer? They understood "*none of these things*." The apostles had no clue about the reality or meaning

of Jesus' death and resurrection. This statement confirms that the apostles were not preaching "the gospel of the grace of God" or the "preaching of the cross" (cf. 1 Corinthians 1.18). The message of the Twelve concerned the Messiah's kingdom, reign, and throne—not His death on the cross and victorious resurrection. Only after the Lord had saved Paul and commissioned him to be the "apostle of the Gentiles" was the gospel of grace initiated. Only through Paul was the true significance of Christ's death and resurrection revealed. These revelations were *new*. They began with Paul, not with Peter or the Twelve, for they understand none of these things.

We know from John's gospel that Jesus imparted the Holy Spirit to His apostles and that they were given the authority to forgive sins. What are we to make of this? The Roman Catholic church cites this passage as the primary support for their authority via apostolic succession to absolve sin. Rome maintains that Jesus' words mean exactly what they say and object when Protestants modify, qualify, or weaken their meaning. And well they should. They are right.

Jesus had told His apostles,

"Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18.18).

Furthermore, to Peter He had given the personal word:

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16.19).

Rome's argument is that the above passages teach that our Lord gave spiritual authority to the Church represented by the twelve apostles, specifically personified in the apostle

Peter. They argue the Church of today is the continuation of what the Lord instituted and that divine authority resides in the Church with the apostolic body represented by the College of Bishops and with Peter's successor, the Pope, as the head of the Church on earth. Is this a strong argument? It is quite strong. It is steel compared to most of the arguments Protestants have historically leveled against it. Can such an argument be rebutted without violating the plain meaning of the Scriptures? Yes.

A successful refutation of Rome's claims requires a return to fundamentals. What message had Jesus and His apostles preached? They preached, "repent, for the kingdom is near." To whom had Jesus spoken? He had addressed Israel, not Gentiles. What was the kingdom? It was that entity the prophets had prophesied for hundreds of years. In it, Israel would be the top nation among the nations of the earth (Deuteronomy 28.1, 13) and the Messiah would rule the world (Zechariah 14.9). This arrangement would bring forth a golden era of peace, prosperity, and righteousness. Were the apostles faithful in proclaiming this message? They were. The early chapters of Acts record they were. They did exactly what Jesus had told them to do.

There is historical linkage between Jesus' statements to His apostles and to Peter in the gospels and what occurred at Pentecost. What was Pentecost? The answer to this question is critical in answering Rome's argument and in a right understanding of the Scriptures. Traditionally, Christendom has taught that the Church began on Pentecost. But in reality, even though this is declared, most people operate under the belief that the Church began in the Gospels. Most people are taught that Christ came to found the Church. If we accept this idea, Rome's claims are logical and scriptural. Why? Because Jesus' words to His apostles about binding and loosing sin and Peter's keys of the kingdom are linked to Pentecost. The problem with this approach is it is impossible unless we admit

that there are contradictions between what Peter and the apostles taught and what Paul taught.

Pentecost was a *Jewish* feast day. It had no significance for Gentiles. Jesus had promised He would send the Holy Spirit. This occurred on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit's advent was accompanied by the sign speaking in foreign languages. Peter explained that this event was a sign that confirmed Joel's prophesy regarding the *coming of the kingdom*. *Nothing* in Peter's message applied to the Church ³. His message concerned *only* the nation of Israel and the promised kingdom. Peter went on to tell his Jewish audience that they had crucified the Messiah but that He had arisen from the dead.⁴ What was their response?

"Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do'" (Acts 2.37)?

Who is "they"? Who is "brethren" and "we"? Jews or Gentiles? Jews! How did Peter respond to their question?

³⁸ *Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself" (Acts 2.38-39).*

Peter told them to "repent" and "be baptized." He had been preaching this message for three years. If they obeyed they would be saved and receive the Holy Spirit. He then went on and reaffirmed that all these things had been promised by God through the prophets to Israel. Peter's message to them was to believe in Jesus' *name*, that He was the promised Messiah, for forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The answer to Rome is that what Jesus told Peter and what He taught His apostles about “binding” and “loosing”, the “keys of the kingdom,” and “forgiveness of sins” concerned the prophesied Kingdom program—not the Church program. The Church, according to Paul (Ephesians 3.1-7) was still a “secret” ([μυστήριον](#)). God had not revealed it to the Twelve. God delayed revealing it until Israel’s refusal to repent and rejection of the gospel became clear. Israel’s rejection of the apostle’s message became clear with the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7). God then commissioned Paul (Acts 9) as the “apostle to the Gentiles” and revealed to him the “secret” of the Church, the body of Christ.

Pentecost was part of Israel’s prophetic kingdom program, *not* the Church or “secret” program. At the present time, God has set aside the kingdom program due to Israel’s rejection of Peter’s message to repent. The program we are under now is the Church or “secret” program. When it is completed God will remove the Church and reinitiate His prophetic kingdom program. After this occurs, these Jews, unlike their forefathers in the first century, will repent and God will establish His kingdom. Jesus had prophesied this fact, and declared that the Jews would not see him again until they said, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matthew 23.36-39; Luke 13.34-35). Rome’s claims about Peter are correct but they are for the kingdom program for Israel, not the Church’s program. Rome’s mistake is simple but profound. They have tried to place the kingdom program into the Church or “secret” program and it will not fit. Their teachings of apostolic succession, forgiveness of sin, and the role of Peter as head of the Church have not biblical support and have no place in God’s current program of the Church (the body of Christ).

Baptism

Water baptism has become such an iconic subject in Christendom that it is almost impossible to discuss. The only hope for an

examination of the subject is to allow the Scriptures to mean what they actually say in context. Water baptism was a critical component of the “gospel of the kingdom” which had begun with the advent of John the Baptizer (John 1.31). Baptism was a familiar component in Israel’s Levitical system. The priests regularly washed when they performed the daily service in the tabernacle and the Temple, a practice they had been doing for hundreds of years (cf. Hebrews 6.2; 9.10). The reader is encouraged to read Leviticus to see how much washing the priests had to do in their work of the daily sacrifices. Jesus continued to teach water baptism in agreement with John’s ministry. This practice of water baptism had not changed after Jesus’ ascension since the apostles baptized for the remission of sins just as John had done (Mark 1.4; cf. Acts 2.38, 22.16). Furthermore, there is no more clear statement than Mark 16.16 that Jesus taught water baptism as essential for salvation. Mark recorded these words of Jesus,

“He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has not believed shall be condemned” (Mark 16.16).

This verse is consistent with the earlier words of Mark when he wrote,

“John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1.4).

Most Protestants find Mark 16.16 almost impossible to reconcile with other Scriptures that teach that faith in Christ alone is necessary for salvation. Yet this command was part of the “Great Commission” Jesus gave to His apostles. Because of the difficulty this verse creates, Protestants resort to forcing the passage to a meaning that violates its plain sense. But if one can alter the clear sense of the Scriptures to support a particular view, where does it end? For a hermeneutic to be trustworthy it must have a consistent

rigor and discipline.

What did Paul teach about baptism? Did he command Christians to baptize or to be baptized? Not once. Paul said,

¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void (1 Corinthians 1.14-17).

God had sent John the Baptizer to baptize and Jesus sent the twelve apostles to baptize. But Paul made it clear that Jesus had not sent him to baptize. Paul does not command us to baptize either. Why? Why indeed if we are under the “Great Commission” that Jesus gave to His apostles? The answer again is that we are under a different commission.

Is there a baptism for the Body of Christ? Paul taught that there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4.5). If there is one baptism, what is it—physical or spiritual? If words mean anything, the baptism that Paul declared was spiritual. The baptism for the Church is not with water but with the Holy Spirit. For a fuller treatment on baptism, see the discussion on [Baptism](#).

Sign Gifts of Believing in Christ

Introduction

Sign gifts occur relatively rarely in the Scriptures. When they do occur they involve Jews and their purpose is to demonstrate a truth to Jews rather than Gentiles. The Bible covers a little over 2,000 years from the time of Abraham until the closure of the canon of Scripture. Throughout this

time miraculous signs were irregular occurrences in the life of Israel. Most occurred when the nation faced exceptional challenges. ⁵ The majority of the miracles in Israel's history centered around Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Jesus and His apostles. During Jesus' ministry, Peter, James, and John witnessed Jesus' glory in His transfiguration on the mountain. Interestingly, Moses and Elijah, individuals whose lives had been characterized by miracles, appeared with the Lord (cf. Matthew 17.3-4; Mark 9.4-5; Luke 9.30-33). These two prophetic representatives had performed several signs during times of national crisis. Jesus had performed even greater and more numerous signs. Clearly, national Israel had faced no greater crisis than the arrival of their Messiah. Another reason for the appearance of these two prophets seems to regard the future of the nation. They may minister again to Israel as the "two witnesses" (Revelation 11.3) during the time of Jacob's Trouble (Jeremiah 30.7), i.e. the Tribulation. The Scriptures clearly teach that Elijah must come before the "great and terrible day of the Lord" (Malachi 4.5). Jews still invite Elijah to join them to celebrate the seder meal at Passover. Jesus taught that John the Baptizer would have fulfilled Malachi's prophecy concerning Elijah if the Jews would had accepted him as Messiah (Matthew 11.9-14; 17.10-13; Mark 9.11-13; (cf. Luke 1.13-17). Since they did not accept him, Elijah must reappear. Paul stated that signs were for Jews when he wrote the Corinthians,

²² *For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom;*

²³ *but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1.22-24).*

Despite the relative infrequency of signs, the Jewish race begin with them (cf. birth of Isaac, Genesis 15.4; 18.9-15;

21.1-8, the sign of circumcision confirming the Abraham covenant, Genesis 17.10-14; Romans 4.11). Throughout Israel's history, God led the nation and confirmed His presence by signs.

While God used signs to confirm His presence to Israel, Paul taught that the Church's focus should not be upon signs but upon "Christ crucified." Tragically, some Christians have been seduced into thinking that a normal Christian life is one accompanied by "miracles" and "signs." But the Scriptures teach that the Church is to live by faith rather than by signs. God has declared, "my grace is sufficient" (2 Corinthians 12.9). Victorious Christian living is not achieved by signs or power. Victorious Christian living is achieved in the same way it begins—by faith. Paul explained the process of our sanctification in Romans 6-8. Christ's crucifixion and resurrection accomplished a threefold salvation: our justification, sanctification, and glorification—that is, to be saved from the penalty, power, and presence of sin. When Christ died on the cross, members of the Church, the body of Christ, were "baptized into His death" (Romans 6.3),⁶ "buried with Him through baptism into death" (Romans 6.4), "our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (Romans 6.6), for "he who has died is freed from sin" (Romans 6.7). Therefore, Paul wrote, "consider (or reckon, [λογίζομαι](#)) yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6.11). How does one do this? By faith! We are to believe, i.e., consider or count it as true, that our "old self" or "Adamic nature" died on the cross with Christ and that we have a new life in Christ.

Paul taught that we "have been freed from sin and enslaved to God" (Romans 6.22) and that "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death" (Romans 8.2). How? Through "Christ crucified!" We have been *identified*, i.e., baptized and buried "in Christ." Paul

taught that our "citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3.20) and that God "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1.3). When we apprehend and stand upon these "identification truths" we can experience victory in Christ. This is the Scriptural answer to a victorious Christian life. Victory is achieved through living by faith, not by pursuing signs, powers, or other manifestations of God. Sign seeking is not for the Church today; it only serves to distract, weaken, and confuse the body of Christ. In Mark's gospel, Jesus told the Eleven that believers in Him would have "signs", i.e., powers or miraculous attestations. These powers included the ability to cast out demons, speak unlearned languages (tongues), handle deadly serpents, drink poison without ill effect, and heal sickness. Are these powers prevalent in the Christian church today? Before addressing this question, let us recall what the Scriptures state, that "these signs will accompany those who have believed" (Mark 16.17). For Jesus' statement to be true, the powers He spoke about to His disciples in the closing chapter of Mark should be common among believers in the Church. They are not. Notice there was but one qualification for these signs: faith in Christ (v. 17). Signs were not dependent on the *amount* of faith, personal holiness, maturity, etc. If one believed in Christ he *would* have these powers. If Christians are not experiencing these powers then we face the following possibilities: 1) Jesus was wrong 2) the Scriptures are erroneous, 3) most Christians (99.9% +) who have expressed faith in Christ are not Christians, or 4) another explanation exists to explain the fact that Christians do not have the powers spoken of by Jesus.

If the first and second possibilities are true then this discussion is pointless because Christianity itself is false. The third possibility is equally untenable. All of us know Christians who do not have the powers Jesus promised. You may be one of them. Therefore, we must seek another explanation.

The record from Acts indicates that the apostles and others who believed in Christ performed signs and miracles following Jesus' ascension. At Pentecost they all spoke in tongues (Acts 2.4), Peter healed the cripple man who was on his way to the Temple (Acts 3.1-8 cf. 4.8-16, 29-31), the apostles performed many healing acts and signs (Acts 5.12-16), and Stephen performed many signs (Acts 6.8) as did Philip (Acts 8.6-7, 13).

These miracles were consistent with and a continuation of the miraculous gifts the apostles had exercised while ministering with Jesus. Matthew recorded information about the miraculous abilities Jesus gave to His disciples:

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; ⁶ but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give (Matthew 10.5-8).

These sign gifts continued into Paul's ministry. They confirmed and validated his apostleship to the Jews that his ministry to the Gentiles was valid and was operating in tandem with Peter and the other apostles' ministry to the Jews (Galatians 2.7).

Critical to our examination of the ministry of sign gifts is an understanding of the chronology of Paul's letters. The dating of New Testament writing is a highly challenging and difficult task.⁷ Despite this, the chronology below is generally accepted. During the historical period covered by the book of Acts Paul wrote six letters: Galatians, 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, and Romans. After the historical period of Acts, Paul wrote four more letters

known as the Prison Epistles: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians and three more letters known as the Pastoral Epistles: Titus, 1st and 2nd Timothy. The following charts outline this timetable:

Paul's Letters Written During the Acts Period (~37-60 A.D.)	
Galatians	
1st Thessalonians	
2nd Thessalonians	
1st Corinthians	
2nd Corinthians	
Romans	
Paul's Letters Written After the Acts Period (~61-68 A.D.)	
Ephesians	Prison Epistles
Colossians	
Philemon	
Philippians	
Titus	Pastoral Epistles
1st Timothy	
2nd Timothy	

During the chronology covered by Acts, sign gifts operated in the Church. Thus, we read about tongues and prophecy (Acts 19.6), the gift of prophecy (Acts 21.10-14), and the gift of healing (Acts 19.11-12, 28.8-9). In Paul's letters, we also read about these sign gifts in Galatians 3.5, 1 Thessalonians 5.20, 1 Corinthians 12-14, 2 Corinthians 12.12, and Rom. 12.6. But God revealed to Paul that the sign gifts would cease (1 Corinthians 13.8). Thus, Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

“Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away” (1 Corinthians 13.8).

The last seven letters of Paul give us additional insight into the operation of sign gifts in that not once are they mentioned. The evidence is strong that they had passed off the scene. For example, Paul revealed he was unable to heal his friend Epaphroditus. At some point it would seem, he lost the ability to heal which he had possessed a few years earlier (Acts 28.8-9). He wrote,

²⁵ But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; ²⁶ because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. ²⁷ For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow (Philippians 2.25-27).

Although *Paul* was unable to heal Epaphroditus through the gift of healing, God healed him. This circumstance corresponds to our situation today. God heals but no longer provides the gift of healing to those who believe in him. This is dramatically different from what Jesus had proclaimed in His earthly ministry to His disciples.

The Pastoral Epistles also reveal that other sign gifts (tongues, prophecy, healing, etc.) had ceased also since none of them are mentioned. In 1 Timothy 1.18, 4.14, and 2 Timothy 1.6 Paul recalled prophecies concerning Timothy but these had made years earlier when the gift of prophecy was operational.

Paul told Timothy,

“No longer drink water exclusively; but use a little wine for the sake of you stomach and your frequent ailments” (1 Timothy 5.23).

Notice that Paul did not tell Timothy to go to a healer in the Church or send him a prayer cloth or anointing oil (Acts 19.11-12; James 5.14-15). The point may be made also with regard to Paul's co-worker Trophimus. Paul wrote,

"Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus" (2 Timothy 4.20).

Thus, the Scriptural evidence indicates that the sign gifts (knowledge, tongues, prophecy, healing, etc.) had ceased after Acts 28.

As we noted above, sign gifts were given without qualification. Nothing in the Scriptures indicate that God gave these gifts because men prayed for them, had great faith, or were unusually spiritual. Rather, God sovereignly gave these gifts in accordance with His will (1 Corinthians 12.4-11). Sign gifts flourished among the Corinthians. However, these believers were not strong Christians. In fact, the Corinthian church was the most carnal and troubled of all the churches to which Paul ministered. Paul chastised these believers for their carnality.

Why did sign gifts cease? Paul provided the answer in 1 Corinthians 13. In his wonderful commentary on the superiority of love, Paul declared that love "never fails, (v. 8) but that prophecy, i.e., the gift of prophecy would fail, as would tongues and the gift of knowledge. Paul termed these abilities to be "childish" (v. 11). The Greek word translated "childish" is [νήπιος](#). This word means "the things which pertain to an infant." Paul's point was that babies play with baby toys. This is fine for a time as it is a part of growing up. But when one becomes an adult, playing with a rattle is no longer appropriate. In verse 10, Paul stated that "when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away." There has been a vast amount of commentary on this verse, especially on what Paul meant by "the perfect." The Greek word Paul used is [τέλειος](#),

which has the sense of that which is “complete”, “reached it’s intended purpose or goal” or “what has been fulfilled”⁸. We are helped in interpreting the sense by Paul’s contrasting it with “partial” (ἐκ μέρους).

In the next few verses, Paul begins a discussion on the sign gifts and their end. The sign gifts form the “part” piece of the equation. In verse 10 he wrote that when the “full” comes the “part” would cease. What is the “full” or “perfect” or “complete”? The coming of the “full” or “perfect” cannot refer to Jesus as a “person” because Paul used the neuter definite article τὸ rather than the masculine article ὁ. It cannot refer to “heaven” (οὐρανός) since it too is a masculine noun. Nor can it refer to the Lord’s coming (παρουσία) since this noun is feminine. Therefore, it must refer to some other event. Paul wrote that “we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known” (v. 12). The word translated “dimly” is the Greek word αἴνιγμα. This word means “riddle” or “dark saying” or “puzzle.” From it, we get our word “enigma.” So Paul was saying that at that present moment things were a puzzle, i.e., they were in the “part” phase. But when the “perfect” came it would be as clear as being face to face, i.e., no dim mirror. Paul also used two different Greek words for “know” in verse 12. When he wrote, “I know in part” he used the word γινώσκω but continued with “then, (i.e. when the “perfect”, or “complete” comes) I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.” The word translated “know fully” is the Greek ἐπιγνώσομαι which means to have “full or complete knowledge” of something. So “part” equates to γινώσκω and “full” equates to ἐπιγινώσκω. Below is the 1 Corinthians 13 passage under consideration:

⁸ Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. ⁹ For we know in

part and we prophesy in part; ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. ¹³ But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Below is a chart that diagrams the structure of Paul's argument.

1 Corinthians 13	Partial=Sign Gifts (Knowledge, Tongues, Prophecy)	Perfect=Part Abolished and Full Knowledge
Main Argument		
v. 8	Love never fails (it will always remain)	Gifts of prophecy, tongues, knowledge will fail (they will not remain)
v. 9-10	we know in part ἐκ μέρους γὰρ γινώσκομεν we prophesy in part ἐκ μέρους προφητεύομεν	when the perfect comes ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ τὸ τέλειον partial will be abolished ἐκ μέρους καταργηθήσεται
Two Illustrations: Child and Mirror		
v. 11	child—does childlike things νήπιος	man—abolish childish things κατήργηκα τὰ τοῦ νηπίου

v. 12a	now we see in a mirror dimly βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι' ἑσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι	but then face to face τότε δὲ πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον
Main Argument Recapitulated		
v. 12	now I know in part ἄρτι γινώσκω ἐκ μέρου	but then I will know fully τότε δὲ ἐπιγνώσομαι καθὼς καὶ ἐπεγνώσθην

God commissioned Paul as “apostle of the Gentiles” (Romans 11.13) in response to the Jews rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. Acts recorded a transitional time from the “prophetic” program God established when He called Abraham to the creation of the Church, the “body of Christ.” When God called Abraham He initiated a program of “Jew first.” He revealed His prophetic plan by which Israel was His agent for truth. Due to Israel’s rejection of Jesus as the Messiah and their refusal to repent, God put into motion a new plan under the commission of Paul. With the initiation of this “secret” program known as the Church or the Body of Christ, Jews and Gentiles became equal “in Christ.” This change was revolutionary. It was the greatest program change that God had made in 2,000 years—since His call of Abraham. The section below, “What is Missing in the Great Commission” provides information about the revelations God gave Paul. Most of what we have in Christianity and church practice comes to us from the teachings of Paul. Paul’s teachings were dramatically different from what John the Baptizer, Jesus, and the Twelve had taught. The move away from the Mosaic Law to grace was a massive shift in God’s dealings with man. Paul the Jew, a “Pharisee of the Pharisees”, made a huge transition to his prior way of thinking. The movement from Israel, as God’s preeminent vehicle of blessing, to the Church was another gigantic shift, as was the removal of Jewish and Gentile distinctions. Following Paul’s conversion, God began to reveal

His new program. During this period, God's revelation was "partial." By the end of Paul's epistles, however, the revelation was "complete" (Colossians 1.25). It was, "perfect", i.e., it had reached its goal, which is what the Greek word τέλειον denotes. The revelations God gave to Paul were new which He had kept secret (Ephesians 2.11-22, 3.3-10; Colossians 1.26-27). Another reason sign gifts ceased is that, as we noted above, signs were primarily for Jews (1 Corinthians 1.22). Jesus performed hundreds of "signs" for the Jewish nation. The apostles continued these signs throughout Acts. God had also provided blessings and signs to Gentiles with the purpose of provoking the Jews to jealousy (Romans 11.13-14). But Acts ends with one clear message: Israel refused to repent and accept Jesus as Messiah-King. Because of this choice, God has set them aside temporarily. Paul explains this circumstance in Romans 9-11. Israel has been set aside until God finishes His new "secret" entity, the [Church](#). When God completes the Body of Christ He will return for it and receive it. This doctrine is known as the Rapture and forms a part of the great Christian doctrine of the resurrection. After God has removed the Body of Christ from the earth, He will restart the prophetic program and timetable. In this program, national Israel will again take center stage. It will culminate in God's fulfilling his covenant promises He made to the patriarchs of Israel. With God's setting Israel aside, the reason for sign gifts ceased. Furthermore, since we have no Scriptural evidence that they operated after Acts 28 we can conclude that they are not for the Church today. The rule for the Church today is faith and grace (2 Corinthians 12.7-10) not signs. Tongues were a sign to warn of impending judgment on unbelieving Israel. This truth was first revealed in Deuteronomy 28.49-50, when Moses had warned Israel:

⁴⁹ *"The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose*

language you shall not understand, ⁵⁰ a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young.

This verse laid the basis for subsequent warnings to and judgments on the nation. Prophesying the impending Assyrian invasion, Isaiah told his people,

¹¹ The Lord will make you abound in prosperity, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your beast and in the produce of your ground, in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give you. ¹² The Lord will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow (Isaiah 28.11-12).

As Isaiah had predicted, the northern kingdom fell in judgment to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Again, as a warning trumpet of judgment, God raised up Jeremiah who proclaimed to his disobedient people,

“Behold I am bring a nation against you from afar O house of Israel, declared the LORD. It is an enduring nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say” (Jeremiah 5.15).

These words foretold the judgment from Babylon. The Babylonians captured the Jews and took them as captives to Babylon as early as 605 B.C. before Jerusalem itself fell in 586 B.C.

By far, the greatest crisis ever to confront Israel was the arrival of Jesus, the promised Messiah-King. John the Baptizer, Jesus, and the Twelve had preached repentance for three years and declared that the kingdom of God was “at

hand.” The Jews refused the gospel of the King and His kingdom to the point of crucifying their Messiah. The feast of Pentecost came after Jesus’ resurrection and the Holy Spirit descended as Jesus had foretold. When he did, the people began to speak in foreign languages (Acts 2.1-12). Why was the Holy Spirit manifested in this manner? The people did not understand what had happened. Some even thought that the men were drunk. Peter, however, explained the significance of the event. Luke recorded in Acts 2.14-21:

¹⁴ But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: “Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. ¹⁵ For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; ¹⁶ but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ ‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; ¹⁸ Even on My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹ ‘And I will grant wonders in the sky above And signs on the earth below, Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. ²⁰ ‘The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come. ²¹ ‘And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

Peter understood that the manifestation of the Holy Spirit with tongues was a warning to disobedient Israel just as had happened through Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. The last days were at hand and signaled a moment of crisis for the nation. The fact that Peter quoted Joel (“blood and fire,” “sun will be turned to darkness and the moon into blood”) is a clear

indication that he expected that judgment was near (cf. Acts 3.23). As it had been in the past, the speaking of tongues was a warning sign of impending judgment for national Israel.

Paul also understood that tongues signified judgment. He firmly rooted the sign of tongues to the Law of Moses as a sign of impending judgment upon Jews. Quoting Isaiah 28.11, Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

“In the Law it is written, ‘By men of strange tongues and by the lips of stranger I will speak to this people and even so they will not listen to Me,’ says the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14.21).

In the next verse, Paul declared,

“So then tongues are for a sign not to those who believe, but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers, but to those who believe” (1 Corinthians 14.22).

From the context, it is clear that Paul was writing about unbelieving Jews, not Gentiles. Every time tongues occur in the book of Acts, Jews are present (cf. Acts 2.4-8; 10.44-47; 19.4-6). We also find that these verses teach that the apostles and only the apostles had the ability to impart the Holy Spirit. Today, the office of apostle no longer exists since no one meets the qualifications (cf. Acts 1.21-22; 1 Corinthians 9.1-2). Paul also gave specific instructions regarding the management of tongues (1 Corinthians 14.27-36) for the carnal and disorganized Corinthian church. They included the following:

1. Everything was to be done for the church's edification
2. Only two or at the most three who had the gift of tongues were to speak
3. Each was to speak in turn
4. Each speech was to be interpreted

5. If there was no one to interpret there should be silence
6. Women were forbidden to speak

This study is meant to be practical as well as informative. Believers involved with “sign gifts”, i.e., healing, tongues, etc. are outside of the will of God since the Scriptures teach that these gifts passed away by the time of the completion of Paul’s epistles if not before. Those who try to exercise these gifts today operate in the flesh, not according to the Holy Spirit. Continuance with or seeking them is a rejection of God’s revelation and disobedience to His will. God’s grace and the revelation of the “secret” is the will of God for the believer in Christ today. We are under the same operational orders as Paul who requested relief in a matter (Paul prayed three times for deliverance). God responded that His grace was sufficient (2 Corinthians 12.9).

The Bible teaches that sign gifts are for Israel, not the Church. They were valid during the prophetic program and they will be valid again when God restarts His program for Israel. When is that? Where is the Bible’s testimony for future signs? In the book of Revelation. God has removed the Church from the earth to start the last week (Daniel’s 70th week) of Israel’s prophesied history. The focus of Revelation is Israel, not the Church. The Scriptural nomenclature for the “Tribulation” is the “time of *Jacob’s trouble*” (Jeremiah 30.7). From the evidence we have examined above it seems certain that these gifts had ceased well within Paul’s lifetime. However, the absolute end date is 70 A.D. which was when God’s judged Israel through the Roman emperor Vespasian and his son Titus. Both the Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed in 70 A.D.

The Holy Spirit

Jesus’ told His apostles to remain in Jerusalem until the coming of the Holy Spirit and that when the Holy Spirit came they would be “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24.49; Acts 1.8). This “baptism” of the Spirit occurred at Pentecost.

As we have noted, Pentecost was a *Jewish* feast. Everyone there was a Jew. Luke recorded that when the Holy Spirit descended, “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance” (Acts 2.4). There are two things to note in particular. One is the word “all” and the other is the word “filled.” Who is “all?” The “all” was the 120 believers that had gathered with Peter and the other apostles (Acts 1.15). So the baptism of the Holy Spirit involved 120 persons. Were some better, i.e. more spiritually minded, more holy, more prayerful than others? Undoubtedly yes. But it did not matter. *All* were baptized.

Luke wrote that these 120 were “filled with the Holy Spirit.” What does that mean? Essentially, it has the idea of control. They were controlled by the Holy Spirit. This was part of the “power” that Jesus had spoken to His apostles about. Luke wrote,

⁴⁵ and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.⁴⁶ Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, (Acts 2.45-46).

Does this happen today? Is wealth held commonly in a church? Does everyone get along? Hardly. But these believers in Acts did. They had the power of miracles but even more remarkable, they had the power to get along—even to share their wealth with one another.

How had these believers received the Holy Spirit? Had they been told to live a holy life to receive this filling? Had they been told to devote themselves to prayer to receive the Holy Spirit? No. What had Jesus told His apostles? Jesus had instructed them to go to Jerusalem and *wait* for what God the

Father had *promised* (Acts. 1.4-5). What was this promise? God promised Israel through the prophets that the Holy Spirit would one day come and take control of His people. This promise had been made in the sovereign will of God. That day occurred at Pentecost (Acts 2.16-21). According to the Scriptures, Israel was to be a nation of priests (Exodus 19.6). The promise began to be fulfilled at Pentecost but did not come to fruition because of Israel's failure to repent. One day, the nation will repent and turn to Christ. When that occurs the Scriptures will be fulfilled and the entire nation will become a nation of priests as God promised.

Who was the agent of baptism at Pentecost? Jesus was the one who baptized at Pentecost (Matthew 3.11; Mark 1.8; Luke 3.16; John 1.33 cf. Acts 1.4-5; 11.15-16). Believers were baptized by Christ with the Holy Spirit.

Paul also taught the baptism of the Holy Spirit but it is different from the baptism Jesus performed. In this baptism, the Holy Spirit himself assumes the role of the baptizing agent. He baptizes us into Christ. Paul wrote,

"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12.13).

In the baptism of the Holy Spirit which Paul taught, the *Holy Spirit*, rather than Christ, is the one who baptized us into Christ. Luke wrote that at Pentecost, Christ baptized the believers who were present with the Holy Spirit. But Paul wrote that the Holy Spirit baptized us into Christ. Each person of the Godhead operates under specific rules of ministry. We should not expect Christ to baptize into Christ nor for the Holy Spirit to send the Holy Spirit. These two baptisms of the Holy Spirit were different.

The baptism at Pentecost related to Israel and the kingdom to make a nation of priests. Nothing is implied, much less

stated, that the baptism at Pentecost had anything to do with forming the body of Christ. Peter only addressed Jews. Only Jews were involved in that baptism. Following Paul's conversion, however, Gentiles began to be included. The new plan no longer operated under the requirement of Jew first with Gentiles being blessed through the Jew. The body of Christ removed these distinctions. All who are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ are equal. We know from what Paul wrote that no prophet (cf. the case at Pentecost with Joel) knew about or predicted the formation of the Church, the body of Christ. The body of Christ was a new and "secret" entity. Thus, these two baptisms are separate and distinct.

Another difference is that the baptism at Pentecost was experiential. It was accompanied by miraculous signs for it involved Jews. The baptism into the body of Christ is non-experiential and no signs accompany it.

What is Missing in the Great Commission?

We have examined what Jesus taught His apostles in the commonly termed "Great Commission." What is missing in this commission if it is for the Church? A great deal is missing from it from what we now have in Christianity. What are they?

1. Grace

Grace is not mentioned. The Mosaic Law was in effect under the "Great Commission." The "stewardship of God's grace" (Ephesians 3.2) was given to Paul. Noteworthy is the fact that in the gospels the word "grace" (χάρις) occurs 13 times. In Paul's letters (one-half the size of the gospels) the word occurs 144 times. In Acts, it occurs 4 times before Paul and 12 times after. We know of grace from Paul—not from the "Great Commission" or Peter and the apostles.

2. The Cross as Good News

Peter did not offer his audience Christ's shed blood for the remission of sins. He charged the Jews with the crime of the blood of Christ and the cross and demanded repentance and baptism for the remission of sins. We do not learn of the significance of Christ's blood, death, and the cross as payment for sin until Paul. For Paul, the cross is the great victory over sin and death and the basis of our redemption. See Colossians 1.20; Romans 3.21-26.

3. Resurrection

Nothing is said about the significance of Christ's resurrection as the basis of the proof of His victory over sin or of its significance to our justification. See Romans 6, 8; 1 Corinthians 15.

4. Difference in Jew and Gentile

Nothing is said about the removal of the distinction between Jew and Gentile. Indeed, the opposite is the case. In the Great Commission, the Jew had priority. See Ephesians 2.13-16, 3.6.

5. The Body of Christ

Nothing is said of the Church as Christ's body or the doctrine that we are baptized "in Christ" and become members of His Body. See Ephesians 2.6, 3.6; Colossians 1.18, 24, 27.

6. Heavenly Position

Nothing is said regarding the fact that believers "in Christ" have a heavenly position or that we have a heavenly citizenship. See Ephesians 1.3.

How do we know the above wonderful truths? We know them from the teachings of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, the apostle of the grace of God. The apostle Paul reveals all these blessings to us and his teachings are key to resolving all of these issues.

Our Glorious Commission

What has been known popularly as the "Great Commission" applied to the apostles as part of the kingdom program for Israel. The so-called "Great Commission" is *not* for the Church, the Body of Christ. This raises an obvious question. Did God give the Church a commission? Indeed we have. It is a glorious one.

Peter declared in his sermon on Pentecost that the last days had arrived (Acts 2.16-17). He quoted Joel for his evidence. Joel had spoken prophetically concerning the pouring out of the Holy Spirit and of judgment. We know that the Holy Spirit was given. But judgment was not. Some argue that the destruction of Jerusalem was the judgment spoken of by Joel. But this argument cannot be sustained. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. was a great and terrible judgment but it wasn't the one Joel prophesied nor the one our Lord prophesied (Matthew 24.21-22). How do we know? For one thing, no signs occurred in the heavens: the sun did not turn into darkness nor the moon into blood. The judgment Joel and our Lord prophesied is yet future. Jesus declared that it would be a judgment such as had never been witnessed nor would be again and that its time was not shortened no life would remain (Matthew 24. 21-22). The destruction of Jerusalem was a horrific judgment with a million casualties according to Josephus but it was certainly not the greatest judgment in history. There was also no threat of annihilation of the entire human race that Jesus declared would occur unless He returned (Matthew 24.21-22). Such judgment remains future.

Rather than acting in judgment, rather than declaring war, God acted in grace. He delayed His judgment, i.e. the prophesied Great Tribulation. He took His chief opponent, Saul of Tarsus, and saved him. He made His greatest enemy into His greatest servant: the apostle of grace. He took Saul, the Jew who was furiously pursuing a course of action to destroy those who were believing in Christ and made him the apostle to the

Gentiles. This is grace! What a God! God revealed to him a new and “secret” (μυστήριον) program in which Jew and Gentile are equal and have been baptized “in Christ” to form a new creation called the “body of Christ” through faith in His blood. God’s revelation before Paul contained no hint of this. It was a secret until God revealed it to Paul (Ephesians 3.9; Colossians 1.26; Romans 16.25).

The Lord in His earthly ministry gave the Eleven a great commission but He gave Paul the Church’s glorious commission. It was glorious because it was given to Paul by the risen, glorified Christ. Paul wrote the Corinthians about it in 2 Corinthians 5.14-21. It is the message of God’s reconciliation. Paul wrote,

¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; ¹⁵ and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. ¹⁶ Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. ¹⁸ Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

God has commissioned us as “ambassadors for Christ.” God has committed to us the “ministry of reconciliation.” This is *our* “Great Commission.” God has commissioned us to tell the world that He has reconciled the world unto himself by means of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Under this commission, we are to “recognize no one according to the flesh.” Our commission recognizes no distinction between Jew and Gentile. Under our commission, we are to proclaim faith in him “who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” In our commission, all is of God. Nothing we do can gain acceptance with God. There are no sacrifices, feast days, or baptisms. Salvation is through simple trust in Christ and the work He did for us. The grace of God is the operative theme of our commission.

Paul’s commission also superseded the commission Jesus gave to the Twelve. Paul said,

¹ Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. ² It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain. ³ But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. ⁴ But it was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. ⁵ But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you. ⁶ But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me. ⁷ But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as

Peter had been to the circumcised ⁸ (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles),⁹ and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. (Galatians 2.1-9).

This is a remarkable passage. It demonstrates that the apostles recognized a major new direction in the plan of God. Had not Jesus commissioned the Eleven to go into “all the world and make disciples of all nations”? But the passage above declares that the chief apostles recognized Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles who would go to the Gentiles while they would confine their ministry to Israel. This one passage should end any idea that we are under Jesus’ “Great Commission.” That commission began to end when God called Paul to be the “apostle to the Gentiles” and the “apostle of the grace of God.”

Thus, Paul wrote the Romans that his ministry was to all nations,

²⁵ 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 which has been kept secret for long ages past, ²⁶ but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; (Romans 16.25-26).

[The gospel] “which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth” (Colossians 1.6).

[The gospel] "which you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation, under heaven, and which I, Paul, was made a minister" (Colossians 1.23).

The Twelve preached primarily to Jews, not to Gentiles (Acts 11.19 cf. Galatians 2.9). Paul, however, preached the gospel primarily to Gentiles. He traveled throughout the Roman empire and spoke of his plans to go to Spain (Romans 15.24). The "Great Commission" that Jesus gave to His apostles will be fulfilled. But its fulfillment awaits a future day after God has removed His Church, the body of Christ. When that day arrives, "then the end shall come" (Matthew 24.4-14). Jesus' answer to His apostles regarding their question of His return directly involves the preaching of the gospel. What gospel? The "gospel of the kingdom." We do not preach the gospel of the kingdom. The gospel we know and preach is from Paul and is the "gospel of the grace of God." But when the "gospel of the kingdom" is again preached to the whole world the end of the age will come.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the solution to the confusion that plagues Christendom related to the gospel, the forgiveness of sins, baptism, signs, and the Holy Spirit can be reconciled through accepting the fact that the commission John, Jesus, Peter and the apostles (the Twelve) operated under was *different* from the commission under which Paul operated. God saved Paul after Israel rejected Peter and the apostles' message of repentance. Instead of judgment, God in exercised wondrous grace and mercy and raised Paul to be the "apostle to the Gentiles" (Galatians 2.8; Romans 11.13) to declare the "gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20.24 cf. Ephesians 3.2). The key to understanding the apparent conflicts of meaning and interpretation of the Scriptures is to recognize that there is a difference between the prophetic kingdom program that John the Baptizer, Jesus, and Peter

proclaimed for Israel and the “secret” program that Jesus revealed to Paul for the Church, “the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12.13; Colossians 1.24; cf. Romans 7.4) and the “secret” (Ephesians 2.11-22, 3.3-9; Colossians 1.26-27, etc). See [Paul’s Mystery](#).

Failure to recognize the differences between the ministry of the Twelve and Paul, between Israel and the Church, between the prophetic plan of God and His “secret” plan, and between Law and grace leads to confusion, frustration, and the conclusion that the Scriptures are contradictory. When these differences are recognized and we allow the Scriptures to speak in their plain sense the problems disappear.

¹ The kingdom of God has both general and particular senses. In the general sense, all that God rules over is the kingdom of God and believers of all ages share in it. Jesus is declared to be “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (Revelation 19.16; 17.14). But the kingdom of God also has a particular sense that applies specifically to national Israel. This is the sense revealed by the Old Testament prophets and in the teaching ministry of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the Twelve. The aspects of this kingdom include the promises God made to Israel in His unconditional covenants, i.e. the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants. In this sense, the kingdom is the national entity God will establish in which Israel will be preeminent among the world’s nations with Jesus ruling as Messiah-King on the throne of David from Jerusalem. Israel’s prophets declared this kingdom and their message continued through John the Baptizer, Jesus, and the Twelve. The understanding of the concept of this kingdom was so ingrained in the thinking of the apostles that their last question to Jesus before He ascended (Acts 1.6) focused on it. This message continued with Peter in Acts and Peter offered the Kingdom to the Jews (Acts 3.19-26). Prior to the formal offer the kingdom had been “at hand” (ἐγγίζω or ἐγγύς in Luke 21.31; cf. Matthew 3.2, 4.17, 10.7; Mark 1.15; Luke 10.9, 11, 21.31).

It is also important to note that while Jesus is called the King of the Jews He is never called the King of the Church, i.e. the Body of Christ. His title with respect to the Church is Head, not King.

² The priority of the Jew explains such passages as Jesus' interaction with the Canaanite woman. Matthew recorded the incident:

²¹ *Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon.* ²² *And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed."*

²³ *But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us."* ²⁴ *But He answered and said, "I was sent only*

to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵ *But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!"* ²⁶ *And He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's*

bread and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷ *But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their*

masters' table." ²⁸ *Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once(Matthew 15.21-28).*

This is a troublesome passage to many because of Jesus' brusque manner towards the woman. Let us put to rest a silly interpretation that Jesus had not yet realized His mission but that as time went on His ideas matured and He came to comprehend and broaden His ministry. Such an interpretation is so seriously flawed that anyone (much less a professional theologian) should be embarrassed to offer it. The simple interpretation is that Jesus clearly understood His ministry and the prophetic plan of God which operated under Jewish priority. He understood that the Jew was first because He

understood the Scriptures. Jewish priority began with the call of Abraham and continued to Jesus' day. The woman was a Gentile. Therefore, the priority of His ministry was not to her nor to any Gentile. But in grace, because of her great faith, He responded and granted her desire. Paul wrote of Jewish priority in Romans 1.16:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

Paul's statement was a historic statement. Jewish priority had ended because Jesus had revealed to him the "secret" of the Church in which there is no Jew nor Gentile and no priority. But before this revelation, there clearly was a priority to the Jew.

Earlier Jesus had told the Twelve,

"Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matthew 10.5-7).

This teaching is consistent with Jesus' ministry and attitude towards the Canaanite woman.

³ The Church was a new creation by God, a "secret" God revealed to the apostle Paul (Ephesians 2.11-22; 3.3-9; Colossians 1.26-27). God revealed to Paul that distinction between Jew and Gentile and Jewish priority which had existed in previous ages was over; Jews and Gentiles were to be equal (Galatians 3.28; Ephesians 2.12-22). The Church is called the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12.12-13; Colossians 1.24). Christians (all who have believed Paul's gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4) are members of the body of Christ, i.e., the Church (1 Corinthians 12.12-13). All such believers have been baptized by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12.13; Galatians 3.27; Titus

3.5-7). The baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs when one believes Paul's gospel (Galatians 3.26-27; 1 Corinthians 15.1-4). The members of Christ's body, i.e. the Church, also are indwelt by Christ (Colossians 1.27). For further explanation see the discussion on the [Church](#).

⁴ Peter's message to the Jews of Christ's crucifixion was presented as a crime (Acts 2.22-42). It was a message of accusation and condemnation and Peter demanded repentance. How different is Paul's message! For Paul, Christ's crucifixion is seen as a victory! It had no idea of condemnation.

⁵ A good list of biblical miracles is found [here](#).

⁶ Water is not found in Romans 6. Those who bring water into our baptism into Christ do so without Scriptural support. Paul taught that in the body of Christ, the Church, there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4.5). The baptism Paul taught was *spiritual* baptism, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, *not* water baptism. Paul declared, "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (1 Corinthians 1.17). Water baptism in Christianity is without Biblical support.

⁷ A scholarly treatment of dating New Testament manuscripts and the associated problems is John A. T. Robinson's *Redating the New Testament*.

⁸ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature*, 4th revised and augmented edition, 1952, University of Chicago Press, 1957, p. 819, s. v. τέλειος.

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