



If the Church Existed in the Gospels...

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Introduction

In I Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul formulated an argument and presented it before the church at Corinth. His argument was designed to cause the Corinthians to think about a false doctrine that seemed to be catching on among the believers in that city. Paul's argument was not with heretics or false teachers invading the churches. His argument was with genuinely born again people who loved the Lord, but were embracing a teaching (doctrine) that needed to be corrected. Their supposition was this: "there is no resurrection of the dead" (I Cor. 15:12).

Some of the believers in Corinth were *saying* that there is no resurrection of the dead. Evidently there was a lot of talk going on in the assembly on this subject. This was not what the apostles taught them, or something they learned from Scripture - but it is what some in that church were *saying*. This claim was patently false, but somehow it began spreading throughout the church. Finally, Paul heard about it and was led to address the issue. The people Paul addressed were genuinely born again people, but even genuinely born again people can be off base on certain key areas of doctrine.

The Corinthians were not questioning the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul just told them that the gospel included the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (I Cor. 15:1-4) and as believers, they obviously believed the gospel message: "That if thou confess the Lord Jesus and believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9). They did not doubt that Jesus rose from the dead. However, they were questioning whether the physical bodies of believers would be raised from the dead. Some of them were saying that there is no future resurrection for the bodies of believers.

Since the Corinthians raised the question with respect to the resurrection of the dead, Paul chose to trace that line of thinking to its logical conclusion. He sought to cause the Corinthians to think about the *effect of their supposition*. What if there was no resurrection of the dead? What if their claim was true? What would be the ramifications? Would it make any difference? Does it really matter?

Paul then listed *six serious inferences* that logically flow from their erroneous claim. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then certain things must follow: Christ is not risen; preaching is vain; Christian faith is vain; the apostles were liars; believers are still in their sins; those who believed and died in Christ perished; and believers in Christ are of all men most miserable. Paul's argument is unassailable (I Corinthians 15:12-19).



If the Corinthian believers knew at the beginning *where this denial would lead*, they never would have gone down that pathway. If they had carefully thought through their supposition to its *logical conclusion*, they would have abandoned their false supposition. Therefore, Paul asked the Corinthians to *think*: “What if the dead rise not? What then? What must we conclude?” Thinking it through brought clarity.

Using Paul’s method of dealing with a false supposition, let’s consider another supposition that exists among many believers today, namely, that *the Church existed in the Gospels*. Some teach that Jesus established the Church in the Gospels; others teach that it began with John the Baptist. But many more treat the Gospel Period (Matthew – John) as if it were the Church Age. This view is much more common than you might think. It is held by many doctrinally sound, dispensational, fundamental, godly believers who seek to honor God. However, suppositions *lead somewhere*. The purpose of this booklet is to cause us to think, “What if the Church did exist in the Gospels? What then? Where does such a teaching lead? What kind of Church would it be?” There are some serious inferences which logically flow from this supposition and they radically affect one’s *concept of the Church*. This also has an unhealthy effect on the *practical life* of the believer in the Age of Grace.

What if the Church existed in the Gospels? If the Church did exist in the Gospels, what kind of a Church would it be?

If the Church Existed in the Gospels, What Kind of a Church Would it Be?

ERRORS CONCERNING THE BODY OF CHRIST

1. You would have a Church that is not the Body of Christ.

The Body of Christ did not exist during the Old Covenant times, including the Gospel Period. The Body of Christ did not (could not) exist until the Day of Pentecost, in conjunction with Spirit Baptism.

I Cor.12:13 states clearly *how* a person becomes a member of the Body of Christ, the Church: by means of Spirit baptism. In this Age, the Spirit of God baptizes (immerses) the believer *into* Christ’s Body at the moment of saving faith. There is no other way to get *into* Christ’s Body.

If the Church existed in the Gospels, then it was not the Body of Christ. But clearly the Body of Christ *is* the Church – and the Church is the Body of Christ (Eph.1:22-23).



2. You would have a Church (Body) with no members.

Since believers become members of the Body through Spirit Baptism, if the Church existed in the Gospel Period, then you would have a Body (Church) with no members, for the means of placing members into the Body had not yet occurred (I Cor.12:13). Paul uses the illustration of the human body to demonstrate the fact that the Body of Christ has many members (I Cor.12:12,14). If the Church existed in the Gospels, the Body would have no members at all. It is impossible to envision a Body with absolutely no members. It would not BE a Body (I Cor.12:19-20).

3. You would have a Church (Body) without a Head.

That which is most unique about the Church and distinguishes it from believers of other ages is its UNION with the Risen Christ, its Head. And clearly, Christ is the Head of the Body (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15; 5:23).

The Bible is also clear that Christ was not the Head of the Church in the Old Testament or during the Gospel Period. During the Gospels, Christ was known as Messiah/King, but not as Head. Christ did not *become* Head of the Body until *after* His, death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement at the Father's right hand in Heaven.

“Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, *21* Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: *22* And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, *23* Which is His body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:20-23).

In this passage, the Apostle Paul makes it clear that Christ's present position as Head of the Body is directly linked to His resurrection, glorification, and exaltation to God's right hand in heavenly places. It was at this time that Father “*gave* Him to be the Head” over all things to the Church. This position as Head was not *given* to Christ before that time.

It was from that heavenly position that Christ, as Head of the Body, sent the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost to begin the work of Spirit Baptism – placing believers in this New Man – the Body of Christ, the Church (Acts 2:31-33). Before Christ's resurrection and ascension into heaven, there was no Body and He was not yet *given* His new position as Head. If the Church existed in the Gospels, it had no Head. This is unthinkable!

4. You would have a Church that has no spiritual gifts.

Spiritual gifts were various capacities and abilities that Christ gave to individual members of His Body so that the Body might function. However, we are told that Christ did not give gifts to the Body until *after* His ascension (Eph.4:7-8). Note that Paul states that *every* member of the Body has a gift (vs.7). If those gifts were not given until after the



ascension, then *no* member of the Body had any spiritual gift before the ascension of Christ. These gifts were capacities to function *in the body*. In the Gospels, the disciples did have supernatural, miraculous power. They did have other capacities to serve the Lord during His earthly ministry, but they did NOT have the capacity to function as a member of the Body of Christ until after the ascension. It is hard to imagine a body with no capacity to function as a Body.

If the Church did exist in the Gospel Period (before Christ's ascension, glorification, and enthronement in heaven), then the Church, which is His Body, had no members, no Head, and no capacity to function. This is indeed a strange concept of the Church.

5. You would have a Church *without its gifted leaders* (Eph. 4:10-12)

Because Christ gave those gifted leaders to the Church *after* His ascension, the Church had no gifted leaders to function as *Christian* leaders during the Gospel Period. Even the apostles themselves, though trained by the Lord, knew nothing of the Church. It was still a mystery until later revealed by Christian apostles and New Testament prophets in the Epistles (Eph. 3:1-6). It is hard to imagine a Christian church without a pastor, without Christian teachers, and without anyone to evangelize, preaching the gospel of God's grace (Eph. 4:11). In the Gospel Period, the apostles were not conducting Christian evangelism. They were preaching the message of the Kingdom to the nation of Israel exclusively. Nor did they have the body of Christian doctrine. The Church was still a mystery (Eph.3:1-6).

6. You would have a Church whose members were *not unified*.

The Church has a unity established by the Holy Spirit through Spirit baptism. Each member was baptized into ONE Body, and thus shares one life: "one Spirit, one hope, one calling, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above and IN all" (Eph. 4:5-6). This could not be said of the disciples in the Gospels. Earthly distinctions that are erased in Christ were still in existence during the Gospel Period (Gal.3:28).

ERRORS CONCERNING THE HOLY SPIRIT

7. You would have a Church existing before the *coming* of the Holy Spirit.

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (John 16:7).

The coming of the Holy Spirit into the world in a unique way (by indwelling the Church) could not occur during the earthly ministry of Christ. It was contingent upon Christ's "going away" to the Father through death, resurrection, and ascension. It was only "if" Christ departed that He would send the Spirit in this unique way.



During the Gospel Period, the Spirit of God was “with” the disciples, as He has always been with men on earth, but He was not “in” them. In John 14:17 Jesus said, “For He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” He shall be (in the future) dwelling in believers, but was not during the Gospels.

This new relationship to the Holy Spirit did not and could not occur until after Christ died, rose again, and was glorified (John 7:39).

It was not until Christ was seated at His Father’s right hand that He sent the Holy Spirit to permanently indwell believers of this Age (Acts 2:33). This permanent indwelling of the Spirit is the promise of every believer in the Church Age. It is a unique and distinguishing feature of the Church, but it did not exist during the Gospels. In John 20:19-22 we read of that the Lord breathed upon His disciples and they received the Spirit. The disciples received a preview of what would soon be the privilege of EVERY believer of this Age since Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit “came” to permanently indwell the Body of Christ on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4, 31-33). This occurred simultaneously with the birth of the Church. Since the moment the Church took its first breath as the Body of Christ, it was indwelt by the Holy Spirit. To envision the Church existing without the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit is to envision a Church whose nature is very different than that revealed in the Scriptures.

8. You would have a Church that had not experienced Spirit Baptism.

The Church begins by means of Spirit Baptism (I Cor.12:13). The Church could not have existed in the Old Testament, in the Gospel Period, before the Cross, during the post-resurrection ministry of Christ, or before the ascension and glorification of Christ as Head of the Body.

I Cor.12:13 states clearly HOW a person becomes a member of the Body of Christ, the Church. That takes place by means of Spirit baptism. In this Age, the Spirit of God places the believer INTO Christ’s Body at the moment of saving faith. There is no other way to get INTO Christ!

Yet, Spirit baptism was still future in Acts 1:5. By Acts 11:15-16, it had already taken place. Here Peter states that the Gentiles had received the gift of the Spirit of God just as the Jewish believers in Christ had received *at the beginning*. The *beginning* obviously refers back to the beginning of the Church as recorded in Acts chapter two. This was the beginning of the baptizing work of the Spirit of God.

Thus, in Acts 2:1-4, on the Day of Pentecost, we have pinpointed the exact *BEGINNING of the Church*. It was then that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to begin His work of baptizing believing Jews and Gentiles into the Body of Christ occurred for the very first time in human history. Renald Showers wrote, “Although the Church was an essential



part of God's plan for history which He determined in eternity past, God did not put that part of His plan into effect until ten days after His Son ascended from earth to heaven."

9. You would have a Church that existed without the *indwelling* of the Holy Spirit.

This was mentioned previously. The *coming* of the Spirit of God was unique on the Day of Pentecost. On that day He was sent from heaven to indwell EVERY member of the Church. The Apostle Paul states that during this Age, if a man is not indwelt by the Spirit then he is not a born again Christian, nor is he a member of the Body of Christ, the Church. "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9b).

10. You would have a Church that is *not sealed* by the Spirit.

If the Church existed in the Gospels, then it was not sealed by the Spirit of God. The sealing ministry of the Spirit is the PRESENCE of the Spirit in the believer which marks him out as belonging to the Lord.

The sealing ministry of the Spirit speaks of a finished transaction, ownership, and security. This seal is for EVERY true believer of this Age – even the carnal Corinthians (II Cor. 1:21). The moment the believer of this Age puts his faith in Christ, he is sealed by the Spirit (Eph. 1:13).

If the Church existed in the Gospels, then it was not sealed by the Spirit – for it is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit that serves as God's seal on His own.

11. You would have a Church that is not the *habitation of God* through the Spirit.

If the Church existed in the Gospels, then it was not the habitation of God through the Spirit because the indwelling Holy Spirit makes the Church the habitation of God (Eph.2:21-22). The Church is a living, growing Temple inhabited by God through the Spirit. The Spirit of God indwells each member of the Body of Christ in this Age (I Cor. 6:19). But in Eph.2:22, Paul is speaking about the indwelling of the Spirit corporately in the Body, the Church. It is inconceivable to imagine a Church that is not inhabited by God through the Spirit.

12. You would have a Church that is not the *Temple of the Holy Spirit*.

This is closely related to Paul's description of the Church in Ephesians 1:21-22. There the Church is described as God's habitation through the Spirit. In I Cor. 3:16, Paul states that the Church is also the TEMPLE of God because of the indwelling of the Spirit in the Church corporately.

In the Gospels, God's presence was not in the Jewish Temple because of Israel's sin. The glory departed. His departure from the Temple left it an empty shell, as a sign of His



judgment upon His people. In contrast to the empty shell of a Temple in Israel, the Church was built on the foundation of the finished work of Christ, as a spiritual Temple indwelt by God through His Spirit. If the Church existed in the Gospels, then it too was an empty shell – uninhabited by God through the Spirit.

13. You would have a Church in which Gentile believers do not have access by the Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2:18).

This new relationship of the Spirit to believers could not begin until Christ was glorified (John 7:39). Therefore, it did not exist in the Gospels.

In the context of Ephesians chapter two, access to the Father is through the finished work of Christ on the Cross, and by means of the ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Therefore, “access to the Father by the Spirit” did not exist in the Gospel Period. Under the Old Covenant system, believers did not have access to the Father. The entire Tabernacle/Temple system was designed to teach that an infinitely holy God was unapproachable. Only the High Priest could approach the Most Holy Place, and only on the Day of Atonement and only with the proper sacrifices. All of that changed after Calvary. Access to the Father was made available to EVERY born again believer in this Age, but it was not yet made available during the Gospel Period.

If the Church existed in the Gospels, then it did not have access to the Father through the Spirit. That puts the Church on Old Covenant ground. Unthinkable! What kind of a concept of the Church is that?

ERRORS CONCERNING CHRIST’S PRESENT HEAVENLY MINISTRY

14. You would have a Church that does not have a *High Priest* functioning in a Sanctuary.

The present work of Christ as our Great High Priest did not exist during the Gospel Period. While on earth, He was not qualified to be a Priest under the Mosaic Law, for the priesthood was restricted to members of the tribe of Levi - and Jesus Christ was born into the tribe of Judah. Jesus was qualified to be a King from the line of Judah, but not a priest. A king could not be a priest and a priest could not be a king. The Law of Moses kept these functions separate, and God judged any that violated this distinction. There was an ancient King (Uzziah) who decided to take priestly functions to himself, although he was of the line of Judah, like Jesus. God smote him with leprosy! Speaking of Christ, the author of Hebrews states, “For He of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. *14* For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. *15* And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest” (Heb. 7:13-15).



During the Gospel Period, Christ could not be our Great High Priest, “for if He were on earth, He should not be a priest.” (Heb.8:4). He could not function as Priest in the earthly Tabernacle or Temple; but He can and does function as High Priest in the True Tabernacle, the Heavenly Sanctuary (Heb. 8:1-2). It was necessary for Christ to enter a new sanctuary (vs.3-4) in order to be able to present the sacrifices *from* the people and *for* the people to God. According to the Mosaic Law, Christ could *not* do so in the earthly tabernacle. (7:14). Had Christ attempted to bring offerings into the earthly Holy Place, it would not have been accepted because He was not an Aaronic priest. Thus, if He was going to *function* as a priest, (as David predicted) it was necessary for Him to do so in a different order of priests and for Him to have a different tabernacle.

Because His present ministry is on the basis of *resurrection life* (7:16), it was necessary for Him to have a *heavenly* tabernacle. The earthly tabernacle was just a pattern; it would not do for the priestly ministry of our High Priest. That tabernacle was an accurate shadow of the heavenly, but there was one huge difference between the two: the earthly tabernacle had a veil that kept people away from God. The system was designed to teach that God was unapproachable by men. No one went into the Holy of Holies except the High Priest; and then he came right back out. Heb.9:7-8 states that the Old Testament tabernacle signified that the way to God was not yet made manifest for the way *into* the Holiest of all was kept shut by the veil.

Christ did not function as a Heavenly High Priest until after His ascension (Heb.9:24). Therefore, if the Church existed during the Gospel Period, then Christ *could not* function on behalf of the Church in the earthly Temple and He *did not* yet function in the Heavenly Tabernacle. Thus, while He was on earth, the Church had no functioning High Priest on its behalf. It was not until after His ascension into heaven that Christ became the Great High Priest of the Heavenly Tabernacle for the Church.

15. You would have a Church whose members are *not yet a priesthood* under the Great High Priest.

A major distinction between Israel and the Church is the fact that while Israel *had* a priesthood, the Church *is* a priesthood. The priesthood of the believer is also one of the major doctrines reclaimed during the Reformation. One of the privileges of the Church Age is the fact that *every* member of the Church is a believer-priest (I Pet. 2:5). Priesthood is part of the very nature of the Church; it is what the Church IS. Functioning as priests is what the Church DOES (Rom.12:1-2; Heb.13:15-16; Rev.1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

During the Gospel Period, the followers of Christ (including the apostles) were believers, but certainly not believer-priests. Functioning as a priest according to the Mosaic Law was restricted by gender, age, and lineage. There are no such restrictions in the priesthood in Christ (Gal. 3:28). During the Gospel Period entering into the Holy of Holies was strictly forbidden, but during the Church Age, priests have access to the heavenly Holy of Holies (Heb. 10:19-22). What a strange concept of the Church one would have if members of the Church are not priests!



16. You would have a Church that does not have an *Advocate* in heaven.

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world” (I John 2:1-2). Jesus Christ is in heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father - He is our “Advocate with the Father.” Kenneth Wuest wrote, “the word *advocate* is *paraklētos*, ‘one called to your side,’ so, in a forensic sense one who undertakes and champions your cause. Moulton and Milligan define: ‘a friend of the accused person, called to speak to his character, or otherwise enlist the sympathy of the judges.’ This was its use in the secular world of that day.” During the Gospel Period, before the Cross and before the ascension, the Church had no Advocate with the Father in Heaven. His advocacy flows from His enthronement at the Father’s right hand.

17. You would have a Church without *One in heaven* who continually makes intercession on its behalf.

“But this *Man*, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:24-25). Related to Christ’s heavenly role as Great High Priest and Advocate is the fact that Christ prays for the Church (His Bride and Body) from heaven without ceasing. The context of Hebrews 7 indicates that His ministry as Intercessor is connected to the fact that He continues forever and His priesthood is unchangeable. Our High Priest is a Priest forever and He ever lives to make intercession for us. Jesus did pray for His disciples on earth (Luke 22:32), but it was not as High Priest ministering in the heavenly sanctuary.

ERRORS CONCERNING THE HEAVENLY POSITION OF THE CHURCH

18. You would have a Church that has *not been raised* to heavenly places.

It is the glorious privilege of EVERY Church Age saint to have a heavenly position in Christ. “And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6; also Col. 2:12; 3:1). It is also clear that the entire Church Body was raised up *with Christ* and seated *with Christ* in heavenly places. If the Church existed during the Gospel Period, then it was not raised up with Christ. It did not have a heavenly position, but was completely earthly. This is a serious error because the Christian’s exhortation to godly living is based upon his heavenly position. For example, it is because we are risen with Christ that we are exhorted to “seek those things which are above” (Col.3:1). We are to “set our affections on things above and not on the earth” because we died to this world and have been raised with Christ and have our new life hidden in Him who is seated at the right hand of God in heaven (Col. 3:2,3). It is because we died to this world and are risen with Him (Col.2:12) into heavenly places that we are exhorted to “let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an



holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*” (Col.2:16). It is because we died with Christ and rose with Him that we are exhorted to “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4-5). The Church’s true blessings are called “spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph.1:3). If the Church existed in the Gospels, then it was earthbound, did not possess all of its spiritual blessings, and could not experience the power of the resurrection which enables believers to walk in newness of life (Phil.3:10).

19. You would have a Church whose *life was not hidden* with Christ in God.

“For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col.3:3). Every believer in the Church Age was crucified with Christ to this world (Gal. 6:14) and is raised up with Christ. His new life is hidden with Christ in God (Col.3:3). This is the deep, rich, spiritual life of communion with the Risen Christ in the heavenly Holy of Holies (Heb.10:19-20) which the believer enjoys today – as a branch abiding in the Vine. It is the believer’s source of strength, spiritual nourishment, and life, which the world never sees because it is hidden. This is the essence of the Christian life, and yet none of this was available to the disciples during our Lord’s earthly ministry.

20. You would have a Church that is still exclusively connected to the *old creation* and is not connected to the New Creation.

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (II Cor. 5:17). Every believer in the Church Age is IN Christ and is thus a “new creation” in Him. Earthly distinctions that were significant during the earthly ministry of Christ are nothing in the Church Age (Gal.3:28). The only thing that really matters is a “new creation” (Gal. 6:15). Adam was the head of the old creation, but the Risen Christ, the last Adam, is Head of the new humanity, the New Creation. Every believer in this Age was crucified with Christ to this old ruined world (Gal. 6:14) and is therefore related to Christ as Head of the “new creation” in Him.

21. You would have a Church which is *not a partaker of the heavenly calling*

“Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus” (Heb. 3:1). The heavenly calling does not refer to our calling to salvation, but to our calling to a heavenly position in Christ Jesus. It is our “high calling” in Christ (Phil.3:14) as citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20). A partaker of a heavenly calling has abandoned all earthly hopes. In Hebrews 3:1, the author challenges his readers (partakers of the heavenly calling) to consider Christ in His role as the Great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. He is the High Priest of our profession. Later in the epistle, the author challenges his readers to “hold fast to [their] profession” in light of the fact that “we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God” (Heb. 4:14). Our “high” (Phil. 3:14) and “heavenly” (Heb. 3:1) calling is directly connected to our relationship to our “great high priest, that is passed into the heavens.” This was clearly not the privilege or position of anyone during our Lord’s earthly ministry.



Robert Newell wrote, “In His earthly ministry to Israel the Lord Jesus gave none of the great heavenly truths for the present Church dispensation. He but mentioned the Church, giving no explanation. Nor were these vital truths related to the Twelve Apostles.”

ERRORS CONCERNING THE FINISHED WORK OF CHRIST, AS RELATES TO THE CHURCH

22. You would have a Church that is not built on the finished work of Jesus Christ.

This thought should be *a cause for a pause* to those who see the Church in the Gospels. If the Church existed in the Gospels, then it was being built on something other than Christ’s finished work on Calvary, for it had not yet occurred. However, the Apostle Paul states plainly that the Church was built upon Christ’s finished work: “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20). The Church is built upon the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ into heaven and the infallible record of those truths left us by the apostles and New Testament prophets.

During the Gospel Period, the Church could not have been built on that foundation. In fact, Peter balked when the Lord told him that He would die and be raised again (Matt. 16:21-23). Peter was expecting Jesus to establish the Kingdom and reign forever. It is impossible to have the Church in existence before the finished work of Christ on the Cross.

If the Church existed in the Gospels, then you would have a Church being built *before* its foundation was laid. Something is seriously wrong with that kind of chronology.

23. You would have a Church whose sins have only been *covered* and have not been taken away.

If the Church existed in the Gospels before the Cross of Calvary, then their sins were NOT taken away. The Lord Jesus came to “take away the sins of the world” but that was not accomplished by His exemplary life, but rather through the blood shed on the Cross for the sins of the whole world (John 1:29; Heb. 9:22). If the Church existed in the Gospels then their sins were merely “covered,” as were the sins of all the saints before Calvary. Their redemption would have been *on credit*, awaiting the day when the penalty would be paid in full. One of the blessings that distinguishes the Church Age from all previous dispensations is the fact that in this Age, the sin question has been settled “once and for all” (Heb. 7:27; 9:26; 10:10). If this is so, and the Church existed before its sins were paid for, then there are many other logical inferences that must be considered.



24. You would have a Church whose members do not yet have a *purged conscience*.

No one related to God through the Old Covenant ever experienced a conscience completely purged of the remembrance of sins (Heb. 10:1-4). The blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins and thus left a continual remembrance of the fact that the guilt of sin had not yet been put to rest. It was not until Christ died on the Cross and shed His blood that the sin question was eternally settled, and the consciences of believers could be completely purged. Our sins were “purged” because of His crosswork (Heb. 1:3). Christ’s shed blood made it possible for “worshippers once purged” to have “no more conscience of sins” (Heb. 10:2). That was not true during the Gospel Period.

25. You would have a Church that is therefore unable to approach a holy God with boldness.

If the Church existed in the Gospel Period, then its sins were not yet taken away, the conscience was not purged of remembrance of sins, and thus, there could not be true *boldness* in approaching the throne of God for communion and fellowship. A nagging conscience, painfully aware that the debt of sin had not yet been paid in full would rob the believer of boldness in God’s presence. But after Christ’s death, and after the veil in the Temple was torn in two (Matt. 27:51), signifying that the way into the Holiest was now available, we are commanded to approach the throne of grace with *boldness* (Heb. 4:16). This is possible throughout the Church Age because “we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens” (Heb. 4:14b). This kind of holy boldness flows from the complete purging of sin at Calvary and did not and could not exist before that time.

26. You would have a Church that is not able to enter into the heavenly *Holy of Holies* by the blood of Jesus Christ

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus” (Heb. 10:19). The boldness of the believer is not a brazen self-confidence, but is that inner assurance that comes from knowing and believing that the blood of Christ provides a full forgiveness of sins, removing them once and for all and forever. This boldness enables the Church Age saint to do what no Old Testament saint could ever do: enter into the Holy of Holies! Every believer of the Church has the privilege of entering boldly into the heavenly Holy of Holies, within the veil, for the closest, most intimate communion with God Heb. 6:19-20; 10:19-23).

This new, abiding relationship of intimate communion was not possible before the Cross. While speaking to His disciples, Jesus said, “the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto My Father” (John 14:21). The *greater works* the disciples were to perform would be performed when Christ went to His Father through death and resurrection. These greater works would not be the result of the efforts of the flesh, but would be the result (spiritual fruit) of a new, abiding relationship



that these men would have with the Risen and Glorified Savior (John 15:1-5). Jesus stated here that the intimate union of Vine and branch (and subsequent fruit) was not possible before He went to His Father. It was no longer a physical relationship (Master/student), but a spiritual relationship (Vine/branch).

Our Great High Priest and True Sanctuary are in heaven. It is the privilege of every Church Age saint to be able to enter in with boldness because Christ “is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Heb. 8:1b-2).

27. You would have a Church in which Gentiles have not been *made nigh* by the blood of Christ.

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13). If the Church existed during the Gospel Period, then it was a Church in which Gentiles were still aliens, strangers, and had no hope, (vs.12) for it was only the shedding of the blood of Christ on Calvary that could bring them “nigh” to God and to the Jewish believers. It would be a Church in which Gentiles were still “strangers and foreigners” and were NOT “fellowcitizens with the saints and of the household of God.” Gentiles were not “fellowheirs, and of the same Body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel” before the Cross (Eph. 3:6).

ERROR OF CHRONOLOGY

28. You would have a Church that already existed in a time when Christ said the Church was still *future* (Matt. 16:18).

There is only one mention of the building of the Church in the Gospels, and that is prophetically. Jesus didn’t say, “I am building My church” but “I will build My church.” It was still future near the end of the Lord’s ministry on earth. Why would the Lord speak prophetically of the Church to be built in the future if the Church already existed?

29. You would have a Church revealed in an age when the Bible said it was *not yet revealed*; it was still a mystery (Eph. 3:1-6).

The existence of Jesus and His band of disciples was no mystery during the Gospel Period. What He taught was known publically. Their teachings, lives, and ministry were revealed; they were open books in that day. However, the Church was still *future* (Matt. 16:18) and a *mystery* (not revealed) until made known by Paul and other New Testament apostles and prophets.



ERRORS RELATING TO THE MOSAIC LAW

30. You would have members of the Church instructed to *keep all the commandments*.

Many believe that Jesus founded the Church during His earthly ministry, and that the Church consisted of the Lord, His disciples, and other believing followers. If that is the case, then that “church” was commanded to live according to the Mosaic Law. In fact, they were commanded to keep all of the commandments (Matt. 5:19). The Lord commanded that all of the commandments of the Mosaic System be observed and taught. The Lord also told a seeker to keep the Ten Commandments (Matt. 19:17-19). On another occasion, the Lord told His disciples to “observe and do” whatever the teachers of the Mosaic Law told them to do (Matt. 23:2-3). Jesus Himself taught the Law of Moses (Mark 10:2-3, 17-19). If the disciples of the Lord in the Gospel Period constituted the Church, then it was a Church under the Mosaic Law. Yet the Epistles clearly state that the Church is NOT under the Law (Rom. 6:14) and that members of the Church are dead to the Law (Gal. 2:19).

31. You would have individuals in the Church Age being instructed to *offer sacrifices*.

If the Church existed in the Gospels, and Jesus was functioning as Head of the Church, then the Head commanded the members of the Church to offer Old Testament, bloody sacrifices (Matt. 8:2-4; Mark 1:44). This is completely contrary to everything we know about the Church of Jesus Christ. The Church we know in the Epistles is told that there “is no more offering for sin” (Heb. 10:18). It is a bit absurd to think of Christians offering bloody sacrifices on Jewish altars by means of the Aaronic priesthood according to Mosaic Law!

32. You would have Church Age believers *observing the Sabbath*.

If the Church existed in the Gospels, then the Church observed the Jewish Sabbath. Jesus observed the Sabbath from His youth (Luke 4:16,31,44; Mark 1:21; 3:1). It was His “custom” to observe the Sabbath. The Lord and the disciples went to the synagogues on the Sabbath to worship.

33. You would have individuals in the Church Age commanded to bring a *sacrifice to the altar*.

“Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Matt. 5:23-24). In dealing with brethren that are not getting along, the Lord commanded the disciples to be



reconciled first, and then to offer their gift (sacrifice) on the altar. However, the Church has no physical altar. How could the Church possibly follow this command?

34. You would have a Church in which the Head commanded the members of the Church to keep the Jewish Feast of Passover (Matt. 25:19; Mark 14:12-14).

However, we are told in the New Testament Epistles that Christ is our Passover (I Cor. 5:7). The Jewish feasts were mere shadows; we have Christ the Substance. Why would the Church be commanded to keep the Jewish Passover?

ERRORS RELATING TO THE GOSPEL AND MISSIONS

35. You would have a Church that did not preach the *gospel of the death and resurrection* of the Lord Jesus Christ.

During the earthly ministry of Christ, the Church did not preach the gospel that Paul defined in I Corinthians 15:1-4. The gospel of the “death and resurrection” of Christ obviously was not preached *before* the death and resurrection of Christ. During the Gospel Period none of the apostles ever told a poor, lost sinner that Jesus died for His sins, because during that time Christ had not yet died for their sins. The apostles were not expecting Jesus to die.

In spite of the fact that the gospel of the death and resurrection of Christ was not yet being preached many were saved during this period. They were saved by believing God in exactly the same way Abraham and other Old Testament saints were (Gen. 15:6). Salvation has always been by grace through faith. But the *content* of faith changes with the progress of revelation. Only near the end of His ministry did Jesus *begin* teaching about His death and resurrection, and even then, His disciples *did not understand* (Mark 9:31-32).

36. You would have a Church whose leaders did not *believe* in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee” (Matt. 16:21-22 – also Mark 8:31; Luke 17:32-34). In this passage, the Lord was just *beginning* to teach that He was going to be crucified and raised again. This was obviously *not* the content of His gospel message prior to this point –occurring as it did near the end of His earthly ministry. And when Jesus began to teach His death and resurrection, Peter rebuked Him for it. Obviously, the death and resurrection of Christ was not the message Peter (and the other disciples) had been preaching. Peter seemed *reluctant even to believe* that it was going to happen! Even after the resurrection they were reluctant to believe (Mark 16:11-14). If the Church existed in the Gospels, then the message they preached did not include the death,



burial, and resurrection of Christ because the apostles neither understood nor believed it. They were still expecting the Lord to establish His Messianic Kingdom and reign over the house of Jacob forever.

37. You would have a Church *forbidden to preach the gospel to Gentiles and instructed to preach only to Jews.*

“These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: *6* But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5-6). If Jesus and His believing disciples constituted the Church, then we have a Church that was forbidden to preach to Gentiles and was to bring the gospel to the lost sheep of the houses of Israel exclusively. We would also have a Church whose Head, Jesus Christ openly states that He did NOT come to minister to the Gentiles (Matt. 15:24-25).

38. You would have a Church that did not preach the gospel of God’s grace, but instead was instructed to preach the *gospel of the Kingdom* (Matt. 4:17).

John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1-2), Jesus (Matt. 4:17), and the disciples (Matt. 10:7) all preached the gospel of the Kingdom. This was an announcement to the nation of Israel exclusively that the long awaited, earthly, Messianic Kingdom was “at hand.” If Israel would repent, the Messianic Kingdom would have been established. It was a call to national repentance. The good news (gospel) was that the King had arrived and was offering that generation of Jews the opportunity to repent and receive Jesus Christ as their Messiah/King. If they did, then the golden age predicted by the prophets would have been established. This was clearly the message that Christ and the apostles preached.

However, the Church has never been given the responsibility to announce that Kingdom is “at hand” and for an obvious reason: it is no longer at hand. The Church’s mission is not to call the nation of Israel to prepare for the Kingdom. We are to call individuals from all nations to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” and be saved (Acts 16:31). The gospel of the Kingdom is not to be preached in the Church Age. We are to preach the gospel of God’s grace to all nations (Acts 20:24).

Of course, during the Lord’s earthly ministry, as the gospel of the Kingdom called the *nation* to repentance, *individuals* were also offered individual salvation (Matt. 11:28; John 3:16) by grace through faith - if they would (like their father Abraham) believe God (Gen. 15:6) and come to God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

39. You would have a Church that was forbidden to preach the gospel to the *uttermost parts of the world* (Matt. 10:1-7).

If Jesus and His band of disciples constituted the Church, then this is a strange command indeed! In this passage the Lord commanded His disciples not to preach to anyone but to Jews. The gospel message they preached was not to leave the confines of the tiny state of Israel. There was no gospel to be sent to any Gentiles by this “church.”



40. You would have a Church that had no mission to the world.

If the Church existed in the Gospels, and if the apostles were the leaders of the early church, then you would have a church that was forbidden take the gospel to the Gentiles (Matt. 10:5) and a church whose mission was restricted to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:6). You also have a church that forbids its missionaries to take money with them ((Matt. 10:9; Mark 6:7-11) and missionaries commanded to curse those who reject the gospel (Matt. 10:15, 21-24). You would have a Savior who has no ministry to the Gentiles and refers to them as dogs (Matt. 15:24,26). At the very end of the Gospels the mission was expanded to the uttermost parts of the world, but DURING Christ's earthly ministry, the church was forbidden from preaching the gospel outside Israel. That doesn't sound like Christian missions; but it sure does sound like a ministry to Israel to establish the Messianic Kingdom program as predicted in the Old Testament.

41. You would have a Church that is specifically told by the Lord Himself *not to tell anyone who He is* (Matt. 16:20; Mark 8:30).

This too seems to be an exceptionally odd command if Jesus and His disciples constituted the Church. Isn't the mission of the Church - to let the whole world know our Savior? Yet on this occasion, this "church" was specifically told not to tell anyone who Jesus is.

ERRORS RELATING TO THE UNIQUE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

42. You would have a Church that is not IN Christ.

There is probably no other expression in the New Testament that better describes the unique nature of the Church than the expression "in Christ." This more than anything else distinguishes the Church from God's people of other ages. No Old Testament saint was ever "in Christ." It is only by Spirit Baptism that one is placed "in Christ" and Spirit Baptism did not occur until the Day of Pentecost (see #1 above).

The Lord told His disciples that one day in the future "ye in Me and I in you" would be true of them. However, "that day" would not come until He went to His Father and sent the Holy Spirit to earth to give birth to the Church (John 14:18-20).

If the Church existed during the Lord's earthly ministry, what kind of a Church would it be if it was not "in Christ"? The Church's position "in Christ" is not a minor point. It speaks to the very nature of what the Church is. It is because the Church is IN Christ that:

We have forgiveness of sins and redemption (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14)

We have complete acceptance (Eph. 1:6)

We have no condemnation (Rom. 8:1)

We are identified with Him in His death and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-4)

We have been raised up and seated together in heavenly places (Eph.2:6)

We are new creatures (II Cor. 5:17)

We are complete (Col. 2:10)



We have resurrection life and can experience the power of the resurrection (Gal. 2:20; Phil.3:8-10)

We are blessed with all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3)

We are positionally sanctified (I Cor. 1:2,30)

These are just a sampling of the many, many implications of the Church's position "in Christ." What an odd Church it would be if it were not IN Christ Jesus!

43. You would have a Church which was not part of the *New Creation*.

The New Creation has been described as follows: "When the resurrected Christ is combined with the Church—they who have been raised with Him and seated with Him (Eph. 2:6)—into one entity, the result is known as the New Creation. It is true that, because of the vital relation to Christ which each believer sustains through the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit, each one thus related is himself a new creation" (L.S. Chafer). Individual members of the Church are part of the New Creation "in Christ" (II Cor. 5:17) because Christ rose from the dead into the realm of glory and has raised up believers of this Age with Him (Eph. 2:5-6). Before their conversion, Church Age saints had been "in Adam" and thus connected to the old creation. Through faith, believers of this Age are no longer in Adam, but are in Christ, and thus connected to the New Creation (I Cor. 15:21-22, 45-47). If the Church existed in the Gospel Period, then Christ was not the Head of the New Creation and members of the Church were not "new creatures" in the resurrected Christ.

44. You would have a Church in which *Christ did not dwell*.

"Christ in you" (Col. 1:27) is not a minor sub-point in one's concept of the nature of the Church. It is in some ways the essence of Biblical Christianity and makes the Church unique from all other dispensations. Jesus predicted a unique relationship (ye in me, and I in you) that he would share with believers after He went to His Father (John 14:19-20). Today Christ dwells in every individual believer of this Age and in the Church corporately, as His Body. Christ is the LIFE of the believer and His Body (Col. 3:4; Gal.2:20). During the Gospel Period, the Holy Spirit dwelt *with* the disciples, but not *in* them (John 14:17). The same was true of Christ in that day; the Lord Jesus was with disciples daily, but He did not dwell in their hearts. Since the Church is His Body, it is unthinkable that His Body could have existed in the Gospel Period for Christ is the LIFE of that Body. If the Church existed during the Lord's earthly ministry, it must have been an empty shell for the indwelling ministry of Christ did not begin until after His resurrection and ascension. During the Old Testament and during the Gospel Period, the fact of "Christ in you" was a "mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations" (Col.1:26). What if the Church existed in the Gospel Period? Any church existing during that time frame must have been an uninhabited, lifeless body!

45. You would have a Church which is not able to manifest the *indwelling life of Christ*.

Closely related to the indwelling of Christ in His Body is the PURPOSE of the Church to



manifest the indwelling Christ. Paul states this significant purpose of the Church in II Cor. 3:10-11: “Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. *11* For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.”

God’s purpose in every age is to manifest His glory. In the Church Age, the unique manner in which He manifests His glory is by manifesting the indwelling LIFE of Christ through His Body, the Church. God was manifest on earth through the incarnation (Phil.2:6-8); God continues to manifest Himself through human flesh by means of the human bodies of believers of this Age (I Tim. 3:16). This is the mystery of godliness in the Church: the indwelling life of Christ is manifested through our mortal bodies! This unspeakable privilege belongs to every true child of God in this dispensation and is unique to this Age. As the believer yields his members to God, his body becomes an instrument of righteousness (Rom. 6:13) and is in the process of being transformed into the image of Christ (II Cor.3:10). God’s purpose in this Age is to reveal the indwelling life of Christ through the members of His Body (II Cor. 4:10-11; I Tim. 3:16). This could not have occurred during the Gospel Period for the whole concept was still a mystery (Col. 1:26-27) and still future (Matt. 16:18).

46. You would have a Church that was not blessed with all *spiritual blessings*.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). Another distinction in the Church Age (the Age of Grace) is the fact that the Church and every true member of it has already been blessed with ALL spiritual blessings. This could not have been possible during the Gospel Period, for this blessing is said to be “in Christ,” a position not available until the Day of Pentecost.

This is significant because it greatly affects the motive for Christian service. Israel obeyed God in order to be blessed. The Church obeys God on the principle of indwelling LIFE and out of gratitude for having *already* been blessed. There is a huge difference in motive between law and grace.

47. You would have a Church that only knew *Christ after the flesh*.

“Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. *17* Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (II Cor. 5:16-17). During the Gospel Period, the disciples knew the Lord Jesus “after the flesh,” in His mortal, human flesh. They knew Him in His earthly ministry to the nation of Israel. They did *not* know Him as the Risen and Glorified God-Man... the Head of the Body and the Head of the New Creation. That was not possible before Christ’s resurrection and ascension. The Church has a new relationship to Christ that did not exist during His earthly ministry (after the flesh). Of that earthly Jesus Paul said, “know we Him no more.”



ERRORS OF CONFUSION BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

48. You would have a Church that knew Jesus only in His role as *Messiah/King of Israel*.

To Israel, Christ is Messiah, Immanuel, and King. To the Church, Christ is Savior, Lord, Bridegroom, Head, and Life. If the Church existed in the Gospels then the Church had a very different relationship to Christ.

49. You would have a Church that did not consist of Jews and Gentiles who were made *ONE New Man*.

The Church is called “One New Man” (Eph. 2:15). This New Man consists of Jew and Gentile “reconciled” (2:16) into ONE BODY. It was the Cross that “reconciled” these two and made both one by breaking down the middle wall of partition (Mosaic Law) which formerly separated them (2:14-15). Since they were reconciled into one Body by the Cross, this New Man could not have existed before the Cross.

The Law forbade the Jews from mingling with Gentiles (Duet.7:1-6), from taking their daughters in marriage, and even from eating their foods. During the Gospel Period, the Law was still intact and the disciples were obligated to obey it. If the Church consisted of Jesus and His disciples, then that middle wall of partition required the Jews to remain separate from the Gentiles. However, the New Testament plainly teaches that in the Church there is “neither Jew nor Gentile” and that we are “all one in Christ” (Gal.3:28). Imagine a church in which one ethnic group was forbidden from mingling with other ethnic groups in the church? You would have a church in which the *wall of partition* between Jewish believers and Gentile believers is still standing (Eph. 2:14-16). That is nothing like the Church I know from the Epistles.

50. You would have a Church that was not able to partake of all of the *spiritual benefits* of the New Covenant.

The shedding of the blood of the New Covenant was still future during the Gospel Period (Matt. 26:28). That blood was not shed until the Cross, where our Savior was crucified. While the New Covenant itself was made with the nation of Israel exclusively (Jer. 31:31) and will not be fulfilled until Christ’s Second Coming, there are some *spiritual* benefits that have been made available for all believers since the blood of the New Covenant has been shed. Those spiritual benefits include the full forgiveness of sins (not just covered but “taken away”) and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Jer. 31:34; Ezek.36:25-27). If the Church existed in the Gospels, it did not partake of the spiritual benefits made available through the blood of the New Covenant – for it had not yet been shed.

51. You would have a Church in which Jews and Gentiles are *not fellow heirs and of the same Body* (Eph. 3:6)



Paul described the Church by stating that “the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body...” (Eph.3:6). This is the very nature and essence of the Church: it is a body consisting of both Jews and Gentiles united into the same body, the Body of Christ. Paul also states that this Church was a mystery in ages past (vs.5), meaning that the Church was not revealed before the writing of the New Testament Epistles. Hence, it could not have existed during the Gospel Period.

52. You would have a Church which was related to God through the *sacrificial system of the Old Covenant*.

During the Gospel Period, the blood of the New Covenant had not yet been shed. Before the Cross, the Mosaic Law was still in effect (Luke 5:14), and sins were still being covered by the blood of bulls and goats which can never take away sin (Heb. 10:4). If the Church existed in the Gospels, then you would have a Church which was related to God through the blood of the Old Covenant and not through the blood of the New Covenant.

53. You would have Church Age believers encouraged to “watch” for Christ’s *Second Coming* rather than the Rapture.

“Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. ⁴³ But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. ⁴⁴ Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matt. 24:42-44). Repeatedly the Lord told His disciples to “watch” for His coming in power and great glory to establish His Kingdom on earth. However, in the Epistles, the Church is not told to watch for Christ’s Second Coming to establish the Kingdom but instead to look for the coming of the Lord Jesus to come in the clouds to take His Bride to glory (I Thess. 4:13-18). For Israel, Christ’s coming will be visible, bodily, and to the earth (Zech. 14:3-4; Acts 1:11; Deut. 30:1-8; Jer. 23:7, 8; Matt. 24:31). Every eye shall see Him (Rev.1:7). For the Church, Christ’s coming will not be to the earth, but in the clouds. We are taken up to heaven to be with Him (John 14:1-3; I Thess.4:13-18).

54. You would have a Church which is commanded to discipline its members by treating them as non-Jews (Matt. 18:17).

“And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican” (Matt. 18:17). In this passage the Lord is telling His Jewish disciples how to handle offences in their Jewish assemblies (*ecclesia*). If the term “*ecclesia*” (translated “church”) in this verse is used in its technical *Christian* sense and refers to the Church which is His Body (Col.1:18,24), then why would Jesus say that the form of discipline for sinning Christians (most of whom are Gentiles) was to treat them like Gentiles? The word translated “heathen” (*ethnikos*) is the term most often translated Gentiles or nations. It wouldn’t make any sense to tell the church to treat a sinning member “as a Gentile.” But it would make perfect sense in the dispensation of Law for a disobedient Jew to be treated as a Gentile (a non-Jew) for the Jews were commanded to separate themselves from the Gentiles.



ERRORS RELATING TO THE CHURCH'S ORDINANCES

55. You would have a Church that never experienced *Christian* baptism which pictures our death and resurrection with Christ.

During the Gospels we read of the baptism of John, a baptism of repentance which was designed to prepare the nation of Israel for the coming of her Messiah/King and His Kingdom. But that was certainly not *Christian* baptism. Christian baptism is a picture of the believer's identification with Christ in His death (buried under the water) and resurrection (coming up out of the water). During most of the Lord's earthly ministry, the disciples did not even believe that Jesus was going to die and be raised again.

Jesus and His disciples were baptized, but it was not *Christian* baptism. It was not a picture of the death and resurrection of Christ; nor was it an outward expression of an inward experience of Spirit Baptism, for Spirit Baptism had not yet occurred.

56. You would have a Church that could not have a *memorial* service of the Lord's death.

Throughout the Gospel Period, before the Cross, the Lord Jesus and His disciples never once partook of the elements of the Lord's Table as a "remembrance" of the Cross, and for obvious reasons. First of all, during most of the Lord's earthly ministry, the disciples did not even believe that He would be crucified (Matt. 16:21-22). Secondly, it would have been impossible to have a memorial service of the Lord's death ("this do in remembrance of Me") before He died. It is impossible to remember things that have not yet occurred.

Near the end of His earthly ministry, the Lord and His disciples did partake of the Jewish Passover (a prospective picture of His death – I Cor. 5:7) which would become the basis for the Christian communion service (I Cor. 11:23-25). However, there is a huge distinction between the Jewish Passover and Christian Communion. Under the Old Covenant, the Passover looked ahead to the Cross but left a remembrance of sin (Heb. 10:3). The Lord's Table looks back at His finished work. The Christian looks back at the Cross and remembers that "It is finished" and the sin question has been eternally settled! It is His finished work that enables the believer to experience a deep, intimate, communion with the Lord in the heavenly sanctuary, which could not occur until the veil in the Temple was torn and the way into the Holiest was made manifest (Heb. 9:8; 10:19-20).

ERRORS RELATING TO WALKING IN NEWNESS OF LIFE

57. You would have a Church that was not identified with Christ in His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension.

One of the unique features of the Church, with respect to living the Christian life, is the fact that each and every one of her members was *crucified* with Christ to the world (Gal.



6:14; Col. 2:20) and to sin (Rom. 6:2,6,7,8). Each one was also raised into heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3; 2:5-6). This is the basis for walking in newness of life and experiencing the power of the resurrection life (Phil.3:10; Eph. 1:19-23). None of the disciples who followed the Lord in His earthly ministry could possibly have been identified with Christ in His death, resurrection, or ascension for Christ was still alive in His mortal body. None of the disciples during the Gospel Period ever experienced the power of the resurrection in their lives: it was all still future.

58. You would have a Church that was not indwelt by Christ and could not have experienced the mystery of godliness.

That which most stunningly distinguishes Church Age believers from believers in other ages is the fact that Christ dwells within each believer of this Age (Col. 1:27). Christ was with the disciples in the Gospels, but did not dwell *within* them. They never imagined such a thing could ever be – for it was still a mystery. The indwelling Christ was the “riches of the glory of the mystery.”

The Apostle Paul also teaches us that the indwelling Christ is the basis for godliness (living a godly life) in this Age (I Tim. 3:15-16). Just as the life of Christ was manifested in mortal flesh in the incarnation, so too in the Church the indwelling life of Christ is manifested through the mortal flesh of yielded, Spirit filled believers (II Cor. 4:10-11). Christ lives in us and through us. That is what makes the Christian life unique and distinct.

That never occurred during the Gospel Period. Though the disciples were able to walk with God and please Him (as Old Testament saints were), they were simply not equipped to live the Christian life. The Christian life is “Christ in you.” Jesus predicted it (John 14:19-20), but the disciples never experienced it before Pentecost. The uniquely *Christian* means of “godliness” was a mystery until revealed by the Apostle Paul. If the Church existed in the Gospels, then the Church was unable to live the Christian life. The disciples followed the Lord and kept the Law. They were godly like any other Old Testament saint, but they knew nothing of manifesting the indwelling life of Christ.

59. You would have a Church that is *not holding the Head* (Col.2:19).

It is as the Church Body “holds the Head” that “all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (Col. 2:19). It is also revealed that from Christ, “the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16). Thus, the Church is nourished, knit together, fitly joined together, and increased by means of its union with Christ the Head. This union did not exist during the Gospel Period. The Church cannot grow or function apart from its Risen Head (Col.2:19; Eph.4:15-16). If the Church existed in the Gospels, then it had no Source of life, strength, nourishment, or increase.



SOME FINAL THOUGHTS...

The 59 reasons listed are not arranged chronologically through the New Testament nor are they listed according to their relative importance. They are arranged topically. Naturally, not all of the reasons listed are of equal significance. Some are much more important than others; others are only supporting arguments. And while you may not agree with all 59 listed, it is impossible to ignore the vast preponderance of Scriptural evidence that demonstrates that the Church did not and could not exist in the Gospel Period.

There are a few Christian groups which trace the Church's beginning back to John the Baptist or to Christ. But there are many more born again believers, who are sound, fundamental, and are *dispensational* in their hermeneutics and in their eschatology, but for some unknown reason, they seem to check their dispensationalism at the door when reading and teaching through the Gospels.

But what a strange concept of the Church one would develop by seeing the Church in the ministry and the message of Christ and His disciples in the Gospels. It would be a church that lives according to the Mosaic Law, observes the Sabbath, keeps the Jewish Feast Days, offers sacrifices on Jewish altars, and submits to the Aaronic priesthood. It would be a church void of the indwelling life of Christ or the indwelling Holy Spirit. It would be a church that is not built upon the foundation of the finished work of Christ. It would be a church which preached the gospel of the kingdom and had no ministry to the uttermost parts of the world. It would be a church that does not at all resemble the church we know as revealed in the New Testament Epistles.

Nothing but a much lower concept of *what the Church is* can be conceived by reading the Church INTO the Gospels. It would be an entirely earthly church – not one that has been raised up and seated with Christ in heavenly places (Eph. 2:5-6). And one's concept of *what the Church is* affects one's practice IN the churches. Reading the Church INTO the Gospels has a tendency to lead to legalism, a blurring together of the Church and Israel, it minimizes the heavenly ministry of Christ to His Body, and usually fails to grasp the significance of the indwelling Christ as the LIFE of the Church.

Of course, this is not written to diminish in any way the importance or value of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. They are infallible, inspired Scripture and are most profitable for Christians. They were written for us and for our learning and admonition. They are applicable to the life of the believer today. They are all about the birth, the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our glorious Savior – and everything about Him is of incomparable value to the Christian. The Gospels are priceless gems in the Word of God and reading them is exceedingly profitable. Historically, the Gospels bring us right up to the time when Christ was “carried up into heaven” (Luke 24:51b). Shortly thereafter, the Jewish disciples who ministered exclusively to the lost sheep of the house of Israel would become charter members of the Body of Christ and their



writings would become the doctrinal foundation of the New Man, the Church, the Body of Christ. But the Church did not and could not begin until AFTER the ascension of our Savior (Acts 2:33; Eph.4:8-16). The Church knows only the Risen and Glorified Savior (II Cor. 5:16).

"It shall greatly help thee to understand Scripture, if thou mark, not only what is spoken or written, but of whom, and to whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstances, considering what goeth before and what followeth after." * *Miles Coverdale, Prologue to the 1535 Coverdale Bible*

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