

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY (ORGANIZED BIBLE KNOWLEDGE)

Part VII: Ecclesiology (The Doctrine Of The Church)

A. The Identify Of The Church

I. Introduction

- A. Some Christians equate the Church with Israel (Walvoord, The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation, p. 160).
- B. However, this produces serious theological and consequent practical problems: (1) one may tend to bring the Church under the Law with Israel in violation of Romans 7:1-6 as does Seventh-day Adventism. (2) Also, equating the Church with Israel leads one to believe the Church will experience at least part if not all of the Great Tribulation, Walvoord, Loc. cit. That leads to unrest for the Christian who worries about facing the antichrist, something Paul countered in his treatise of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17. It also makes it impossible for a Christian to view the rapture as a *Blessed Hope* as Paul calls it in Titus 2:13.
- C. Thus, we need to identify the Church and compare it to the Old Testament Israel as follows:

II. The Identity Of The Church (I am indebted to Chafer's Systematic Theology, vol. IV and to Walvoord's The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation cited above.)

- A. Knowing **when** the Church **originated** shows Israel and the Church are *separate* bodies of God's people:
 - 1. The word "church" **first** occurs in Scripture describing believers in Matt. 16:18 (Ibid., Chafer, p. 43).
 - 2. There, Jesus predicted He would **yet** construct His Church upon the "rock" of Peter's confession, Mtt. 16:15-17. That confession does not appear in the Old Testament, but only in the New Testament! It is the confession that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the Living God," Mtt. 16:16; cf. also 1 John 4:1-4!
 - 3. The expression, "the Church" describing what was already existing first appears in the Greek New Testament in Acts 5:11 where great fear came on "the Church" when Ananias and Sapphira were disciplined, cf. Moulton & Geden, Concordance to the Greek Testament, s. v. "EKKLAYSIA," p. 316.
 - 4. The **group** mentioned in Acts 5:11 is the same entity upon whom the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-4, compare with Acts 4:32; 2:47, etc.
 - 5. Thus, the Church body began on the Day of Pentecost, so it did **not exist** in **Old Testament** times!
- B. Knowing the **nature** of the Church's **constituents** shows Israel and the Church are *separate* bodies:
 - 1. Paul taught the Church consisted of a new entity that was distinct from the Old Testament commonwealth of Israel, Eph. 2:12-22. The wall between the Jew and the Gentile was broken down to create one **new** man, the *Christian*, Ephesians 2:14-15.
 - 2. Even after this life, the Old Testament believer is distinct from the Church according to Hebrews 12:22-23: speaking of the heavenly Jerusalem's occupants, the author of Hebrews identified the "spirits of just men made perfect" (KJV) who are Old Testament saints where the "church of the firstborn" is the New Testament body of Christians, cf. Ryrie Study Bib.: KJV, fn. to Hebrews 12:23.
 - 3. Hence, the Church is a body of individual Jews and Gentiles who have come into spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ under a new body begun at Pentecost, a body that is distinct from the nation Israel.
- C. Knowing their **contrasting destinies** shows Israel and the Church are *separate* bodies of God's people:
 - 1. The Thessalonian believers in the Church were worried the O. T. "day of the Lord," the Tribulation era had come upon them, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2. This era was the Great Tribulation predicted in O. T. passages (1 Thessalonians 5:2). [The KJV's "day of Christ" in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 is better rendered "day of the Lord" in better manuscripts, Ryrie Study Bible: KJV, footnote to 2 Thessalonians 2:2.]
 - 2. Paul replied this day **could not** come upon them as they have believed the truth about Christ, and that time of judgment **included a judgment unto deception** (the first 3 years of the Tribulation, Dan. 9:26-27) for not believing in Christ, 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12. Since the Christian is not guilty of such unbelief, he is **rather** to be "saved" in obtaining Christ's glory at the *rapture*, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14.
 - 3. As the believer was to **escape** even this Tribulation's **initial deception** phase (the Tribulation's first 3 years) by the *rapture*, the *rapture* was **Pre-tribulation!** Accordingly, Paul called Christians not to live in stifling dread of the Tribulation, but to live stable, productive lives, 2 Thessalonians 2:15-17!
 - 4. **Conversely, Israel's 12 tribes will experience the Tribulation Period according to Rev. 7:1-8; 9:4.**

Lesson: The Church is distinct from Israel, so the Christian is not under the Mosaic Law nor will he experience any of the Tribulation. We should thus relax, heed Christ and be productive, 2 Thess. 2:17!