

On Earth and From Heaven

# **THE TWO MESSAGES OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST**

A Comparative Study  
of the

**Gospel of the Kingdom**  
and the  
**Gospel of the Grace of God**

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## Notes

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### Introduction

As believers and members of the body of Christ, our understanding of Scripture is vitally important to our relationship with God and our daily service to Him. The abundance of *Christian* denominations today, however, indicates that believers differ greatly with regard to Bible doctrine. Disagreement and confusion often reign over such subjects as the gospel, salvation, our future hope, the Law of Moses, prayer, sign gifts, and water baptism, just to name a few. This confusion has led to numerous church teachings and traditions that are accepted as truth when often they are contrary to the word of God.

Basically, the denominational and doctrinal differences are a result of Christianity as a whole failing to recognize that the ministry and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ did not end with His ascension. Few people realize or acknowledge the fact that, from His position in heaven some time after His ascension, our Lord not only saved Saul, the chief of sinners (later called Paul), but taught him by revelations and authorized him to proclaim the previously unrevealed gospel of the grace of God. Consequently, the distinctiveness and importance of the authority and message of the Apostle Paul has, for the most part, gone unnoticed and even rejected.

Many believers are trying to claim and obey our Lord's promises and commands without realizing that His message delivered in person and through His twelve apostles was different in many respects than the message He delivered through the Apostle Paul. Indeed, in Paul's epistles (letters) we find a whole new set of instructions directed to a new group of people. To clarify, the message and hope delivered by our Lord and the twelve apostles were directed toward Israel and were in complete accordance with everything that was spoken of by Moses and the prophets. On the other hand, the message and hope delivered by our Lord through Paul was directed toward Jews and Gentiles without distinction, and had been a mystery, or secret plan, in that it had been hidden in God until revealed through Paul.

God's instructions to His people were and are to be taken literally, whether they were delivered through His prophets, His Son on earth, the twelve apostles, or Paul. However, one must be careful to identify to whom a command or promise was or is directed and for what purpose. Unfortunately, many commands and promises are altered to fit a situation or are applied to believers in general when, in fact, they may be directed toward a particular individual in Scripture or toward Israel and may not be meant for members of the body of Christ. As a result of not making the correct scriptural distinction between the two bodies of truth, believers often change or ignore portions of Scripture to serve their own purposes, thus disregarding the truth and sufficiency of God's word.

God's word is complete, it equips us for every good work, and we're to believe it (II Timothy 3:16-17).<sup>1</sup> Israel rejected God's instructions and message to them and presently are set aside as a nation and blinded to the truth of God (Romans 11:20, 25). The Corinthians could not handle anything but the

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<sup>1</sup> All references are quoted from the *New Scofield Reference Bible* (1967). Words in brackets are either equivalent words from the *New American Standard Bible* (1996) or, if in italics, were added by me for clarification.

very basics of doctrine and were considered to be carnal babes because they were walking according to the flesh instead of by the Spirit (I Corinthians 3:1-3). The Galatians were called foolish because they thought they could improve their relationship with God by submitting to works of the Law of Moses that no longer were required by God (Galatians 3:1-5). An honest assessment of the church of today reveals that it has serious ailments similar to those of Israel, the Corinthians, and the Galatians.

We must discern what truth applies to whom (II Timothy 2:15). It is through the message presented by the Apostle Paul that we know how we're saved today, what we obtain through salvation, how we should worship God, how we're to walk and serve God, and what promises we have now and for the future. No commands and promises should be claimed and no applications should be made without first interpreting them according to the message revealed to us by our Lord Jesus Christ through the Apostle Paul. Please read the Scripture verses and passages in the following study (including the referenced verses), carefully and prayerfully, to see for yourself whether these things are so.

### **The Truth and Sufficiency of God's Word**

All Scripture is inspired by God and tells us everything we need to know concerning our faith and service to God. However, we must discern which body of truth in the Bible applies to whom. For example, we are not to sacrifice animals to cover our sin as God once required; instead, we're to teach the message of reconciliation as a result of our Lord's glorious accomplishment at the cross.

**All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect [complete and proficient], thoroughly furnished [equipped] unto all good works.** (II Timothy 3:16-17)

**Study [be diligent, endeavor] to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing [accurately handling] the word of truth.** (II Timothy 2:15)

### **The Apostle Paul and His Message**

A tragic situation among believers today is the lack of understanding or recognition of the importance and distinctiveness of Paul's apostleship and message. From the beginning of his ministry Paul was punished and beaten for things he said and did, and people he had labored for and with were often trying to belittle or usurp his authority (II Corinthians 11:23-25; Philippians 1:15-17; II Timothy 1:15). These attitudes and actions against Paul continue to this day. When it comes right down to it, most believers base their salvation on what is presented in Paul's letters, while openly accusing him of being boastful and arrogant. If only believers would realize that by maligning Paul they are, in reality, maligning God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **An Apostle Chosen by God**

Like the original twelve apostles, Paul was chosen by Jesus Christ according to the will of God. Unlike the twelve apostles, Paul was chosen by Christ from heaven while he (called Saul at the time) was on his way to Damascus to persecute believing Jews in the name of God (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-16; 22:1-21; 26:1-18). Prior to his conversion, Paul was the chief of sinners; afterward, he was entrusted with the gospel of grace of God (I Timothy 1:11-16).

**Paul, an apostle (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead).** (Galatians 1:1)

**Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God, our Savior, and Lord Jesus Christ, who is our hope.** (I Timothy 1:1)

**But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles...** (Galatians 1:15-16a)

**For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office.** (Romans 11:13)

(See also Romans 1:1; I Corinthians 1:1; 9:1; II Corinthians 1:1; 12:12; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; II Timothy 1:1; Titus 1:1)

## **Steward of the Gospel of Grace**

The message taught by Paul was revealed to him first and put in his charge, thus making him the dispenser or steward of the gospel of the grace of God in much the same way Moses was the dispenser of the Law of God (referred to as the Law of Moses). Furthermore, Paul's message fulfills, or completes, the word of God by making known those things that God had kept hidden in Himself.

**This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief [foremost of all]. Nevertheless, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting.** (I Timothy 1:15-16)

**Of which I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill [fully carry out, *complete*] the word of God, even the mystery which hath been hidden from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints.** (Colossians 1:25-26)

**Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages hath been hidden in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent that now, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus, our Lord.** (Ephesians 3:8-11)

**But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.** (Acts 20:24)

## **The Mystery**

The Apostle Paul often referred to his message as *the mystery*. It was called the mystery because it was a body of truth that God had hidden in Himself since the world began until He chose to reveal it to mankind through Paul—it was God's secret plan. We find out through Paul's letters that God's eternal plan was to send His Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins. The mystery brings everything in Scripture together, thus making it the manifold wisdom of God.

**However, we speak wisdom among them that are perfect [mature]; yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the princes of this age, that come to nothing; but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the ages unto our glory; which none of the princes of this age knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (I Corinthians 2:6-8)**

**Of which I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, even the mystery which hath been hidden from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints, to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:25-27)**

**Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages hath been hidden in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent that now, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God. (Ephesians 3:8-10)**

**Now to Him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began. (Romans 16:25)**

Some of the important subjects of the mystery are addressed in the following paragraphs. Careful study of Scripture will show that Paul's letters are the only sources for information regarding the mystery. Understanding the mystery enables believers today to have a greater understanding of God's will and eternal purpose than that of any of the prophets of God in the Old Testament or even our Lord's twelve apostles.<sup>2</sup>

### ***The Mystery of the Church (the Body of Christ)***

It is commonly taught today that the *Church Age* began at Pentecost. However, no church started at Pentecost. Following Peter's proclamation of Israel's guilt in the crucifixion of Christ, several thousand people (those who repented and were baptized) were *added* to an existing church (Acts 2:37-42, 47). This covenant church, or called-out assembly, was composed of Jews and Jewish proselytes who believed the gospel preached by John the Baptist, Christ, and the twelve apostles. It was to this believing remnant of Israel, or *little flock* (Luke 12:32), that about 3,000 souls were added on the day of Pentecost. On the other hand, the church of today, which is described as the *body of Christ* in Scripture, began with the salvation of Paul and is composed of Jews and Gentiles without distinction who have been saved by believing the gospel of salvation revealed through Paul.

**This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5:32)**

**And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. (Ephesians 1:22-23)**

**For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body,**

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<sup>2</sup> See my study **The Mystery (God's Secret Plan)** for a more comprehensive examination of the mystery.

**whether we be Jews or Greeks, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.** (I Corinthians 12:12-13)

**For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances [*the Law of Moses*], to make in Himself of two one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.** (Ephesians 2:14-16)

### ***The Mystery of Israel's Blindness***

Israel, as the covenant nation favored by God, does not exist today. Israel today is strictly a political nation that cannot claim any of the promises of God. When it was the chosen nation, Israel proved its stubbornness and disbelief by killing the prophets (indicating their rejection of the Father—Acts 7:51-52), then crucifying Christ (indicating their rejection of the Son—Acts 2:22-23), and finally stoning Stephen (indicating their rejection of the Holy Spirit—Acts 6:8-15; 7:54-60). Instead of judging Israel immediately for their final act of defiance, God set Israel aside by blinding (hardening) the nation from seeing the truth until this dispensation of grace is closed (after which time Israel will be judged and redeemed, and the kingdom promises fulfilled), and raised up Paul as the Apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11:13). Verbal confirmations of Israel's rejection of God and His plan to turn to the Gentiles were declared by Paul when he addressed unbelieving Jews in Antioch, Corinth, and Rome (Acts 13:44-48; 18:5-6; 28:23-28).

**For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits: that blindness [hardening] in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.** (Romans 11:25)

**But their minds were blinded [hardened]; for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.** (II Corinthians 3:14-15)

(See also Romans 11)

### ***The Mystery of Being Caught Up and Changed (the Rapture)***

At the end of this dispensation of grace, all who have been saved by believing the gospel of salvation<sup>3</sup> will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and reign with Him from a heavenly position. This event, the so-called *rapture*, has nothing to do with the judgment or redemption of Israel, or the gathering of the nation to the promised land prophesied in the Old Testament, the Gospel accounts (the books of Matthew through John), and the book of Revelation.

**Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep [*physically die*], but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.** (I Corinthians 15:51-52)

**But I would not have you to be ignorant [uninformed], brethren, concerning them who are asleep [*physically dead*], that ye sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. For if we**

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<sup>3</sup> The gospel (good news) of salvation is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again (I Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 1:13-14).

**believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them who are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words. (I Thessalonians 4:13-18)**

### ***Other Mysteries***

Additional aspects or components of the mystery presented only in Paul's letters include: the mystery of the wisdom of God (I Corinthians 2:6-8); the mystery of the gospel, which also may be referred to as the mystery of the faith (Ephesians 6:18-20; I Timothy 3:8-9); the mystery of godliness (I Timothy 3:15-16); the mystery of iniquity, or lawlessness (II Thessalonians 2:7); and the mystery of God's will (Ephesians 1:9-10). Furthermore, the gospel of the grace of God committed to, and revealed by, the Apostle Paul is the primary message of the mystery.<sup>4</sup>

### **Some Important Differences**

The message delivered by Christ through the Apostle Paul is different in many ways than the message spoken by Christ on earth and His twelve apostles. The differences are not contradictions, but different bodies of truth revealed by God to groups of people of different ages in God's eternal plan. Consider carefully that if Paul indeed preached the same or expanded message as the twelve apostles (as is commonly taught), then his letters would be in complete harmony with the message in the previous books and in the letters written by James, Peter, John, and Jude. Important differences exist, however, and Paul emphasized the fact that he received nothing from the twelve apostles (Galatians 1:11-12; 2:6). If Paul's message is recognized as different, yet still the word of God (I Thessalonians 2:13), then apparent contradictions can be resolved and the Bible becomes not only a truly enjoyable and treasured book, but the complete and final authority that it was intended to be for our everyday life and service to God (II Timothy 3:16-17).

Some of the doctrinal differences are addressed in the following subjects. Truths pertaining to the gospel of the kingdom are briefly summarized first, following by the corresponding truths pertaining to the gospel of the grace of God.

### **God's People**

When our Lord Jesus Christ came to earth, He came only to *the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. The house of Israel at that time consisted only of the two tribes of Judea (Judah and Benjamin), for the ten tribes of Samaria had separated themselves from God (I Kings 12 and 13). During His ministry, Christ

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<sup>4</sup> The Apostle John also received revelations from our Lord Jesus Christ through God's angel (Revelation 1:1, 9-11). The book of Revelation contains the last details of the judgment of mankind and earth during the prophesied *great tribulation*, the establishment of our Lord's messianic kingdom of heaven on earth (New Jerusalem), and the final judgment of sin and death. All of these subjects and events had been foretold to some extent by the Old Testament prophets and by Christ on earth. In other words, the book of Revelation completed God's word concerning His earthly program (Revelation 22:18-19), while God's heavenly program was revealed, in its entirety, to and through the Apostle Paul. In this sense, therefore, the message revealed by Paul fulfilled, or completed, the word of God to mankind (Colossians 1:25-26).



commanded His disciples to stay and teach only in Judea. Prior to His ascension, Christ broadened the ministry by commanding His disciples to teach all Israel (beginning with Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria) prior to going among the Gentiles. In any case, there always was a distinction between Jews and Gentiles, and Gentiles could be saved only by worshipping the God of Israel as a Jewish proselyte—they had to humbly submit to the Law of Moses by faith.

**But He [Jesus] answered and said, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”** (Matthew 15:24)

**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 not; but go, rather, to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”** (Matthew 10:5-6)

**“But ye shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me [Jesus] both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”** (Acts 1:8)

(See also Luke 24:47; Acts 2:10, 22, 36; 3:12-26)

In the message committed to Paul, there is no chosen nation and there is no spiritual difference between Jews and Gentiles. When a person is saved in this dispensation, whether Jew or Gentile, he or she is an equal member of the body of Christ and, therefore, is no longer considered to be a Jew or a Gentile. Prior to the gospel of grace, salvation was for and through Israel. Now, as revealed by Paul, Gentiles are saved despite Israel (or because of Israel’s rejection of the truth and temporary blindness) since that nation is not favored by God in this age.

**For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Greeks, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.** (I Corinthians 12:12-13)

**There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.** (Galatians 3:28)

(See also Romans 3:21-23; 11:7-28; Ephesians 2:11-18; Colossians 3:11)

## **The Gospel**

The gospel preached by John the Baptist, Christ, and the twelve apostles was called *the gospel of the kingdom*. The good news was that Israel’s long-promised earthly kingdom, with Messiah as their king, was at hand (imminent).<sup>5</sup>

**In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, “Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** (Matthew 3:1-2)

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<sup>5</sup> In equivalent passages in the gospel accounts (Matthew through John), the phrases *the kingdom of heaven* and *the kingdom of God* refer to the same prophesied Messianic kingdom on earth. When Paul referred to *the kingdom of God*, it was with regard to God’s overall realm and not to Israel’s promised kingdom. Paul did not preach Israel’s promised kingdom to the Gentiles.

**And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.** (Matthew 4:23)

**And as ye go, preach, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** (Matthew 10:7)

**Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe the gospel.”** (Mark 1:14-15)

(See also Matthew 9:35; 24:14; Acts 3:18-26; Jeremiah 23:5-6)

The gospel preached by Paul is called *the gospel of the grace of God*, *the gospel of the uncircumcision*,<sup>6</sup> and, most often, *the gospel of Christ*. The good news is the all-sufficient work wrought by God for us through the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup>

**But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.** (Acts 20:24)

**But, on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter.** (Galatians 2:7)

**Only let your conduct be as it becometh the gospel of Christ, that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.** (Philippians 1:27)

## Salvation

If you are saved and desire to tell someone the gospel of salvation, what is it exactly and where do you find it? These questions are very basic, but it is surprising how many believers cannot answer them. Although not generally understood, there is not one verse or passage in the gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) that tells us how to be saved today. Even that precious verse John 3:16 does not tell us how to be saved; rather, it can more appropriately be used as an assurance of salvation (i.e., since I believe in the Son of God, I am promised eternal life). The context of this verse tells us that Christ is the Son of God, and that He was sent into the world to save people from God’s judgment (keep in mind that

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<sup>6</sup> Most Bible versions say “the gospel to the uncircumcision [*Gentiles*]” and “gospel to the circumcision [*Jews*]” in Galatians 2:7. This translation implies that the same gospel was preached to both the Gentiles and the Jews. However, Paul was entrusted with the gospel of the grace of God to Jews and Gentiles without distinction in the Gentile nations (as God’s appointed Apostle of the Gentiles—Romans 11:13), while Peter was entrusted with the gospel of the kingdom to the Jews in Israel (see Matthew 16:17-19)—the two gospels are not the same. Therefore, the *King James Version* translation of “the gospel of the uncircumcision” and “the gospel of the circumcision” correctly fits the context.

<sup>7</sup> The gospel of grace is also referred to as *the gospel of God* (II Corinthians 11:7) *the gospel of the glory of Christ* (II Corinthians 4:4). It appears that both the gospel of grace and the gospel of the kingdom are considered as *the gospel of peace* (Romans 10:15; Ephesians 6:15; Isaiah 52:7). The gospel of the grace of God includes *the gospel of salvation*.

He came only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel—Matthew 15:24). These glorious facts are true and vital keys of our faith; however, the proclamation of redemption through His shed blood is missing.<sup>8</sup>

Consider Peter’s message at Pentecost, also, which occurred after Christ’s ascension into heaven. The fact of our Lord’s death, burial, and resurrection was declared to the people of Israel, but it was not offered as good news of salvation. Instead, Israel was accused of crucifying Christ, and the people were exhorted to repent for this act specifically, and for rejecting the testimony of God through Christ in general (Acts 2:22-23, 36-39).

Salvation, as presented by Christ and the twelve apostles (and John the Baptist), depended on believing God’s revealed word and performing certain works. Of course, faith was the primary requirement because works without faith were worthless. On the other hand, neglecting or rejecting God’s required works were proof of unbelief. God’s revealed word included the proclamation that the Messianic kingdom was at hand, and that Christ was the Son of God and the promised Messiah. The required works, either for salvation or as proof of salvation, included water baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, obeying the Law of Moses, and selling and leaving everything for Christ’s sake.<sup>9</sup>

**John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. (Mark 1:4)**

**Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe the gospel.” (Mark 1:14-15)**

**He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. (John 3:36)**

**And He said unto them, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” (Mark 16:15-16)**

**Then Peter said unto them, “Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)**

**Then spoke Jesus to the multitude, and to His disciples, saying, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat. All, therefore, whatever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not after their works; for they say, and do not.” (Matthew 23:1-3)**

**Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what ye have, and give alms... (Luke 12:32-33a)**

(See also Matthew 4:17; 16:15-17; 19:16-30; Luke 3:3)

Salvation, as presented by Paul, depends not on our works but *only* upon faith in Christ’s work for us: His death for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection. This work of Christ is God’s revealed word to

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<sup>8</sup> The phrase “that He gave His only begotten Son” in John 3:16 refers to God giving Him to the world because Jesus was sent as the lost world’s hope. When He establishes His heavenly kingdom on earth, Christ will be King of kings and the nations will be blessed through Him and His kingdom. John 3:16 does not refer to Christ’s redemptive work on the cross because that truth was not revealed until Paul.

<sup>9</sup> An example where Christ used His authority to make an exception regarding works is given in Luke 23:39-43, proving that, in the final analysis, God has always saved people by grace through faith.

us and is the gospel, or good news, of salvation for today. Absolutely no works are required; on the contrary, works are forbidden for attaining salvation. Submission to various works for salvation, such as water baptism, church membership, penance, etc., indicates unbelief or a misunderstanding of God's will. Believing that works are necessary in any way for salvation indicates an unintended, or perhaps even conscious, denial of the all-sufficient redemptive work of Christ at the cross.

**Moreover, brethren, I [Paul] declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and in which ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures. (I Corinthians 15:1-4).**

**But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him [God] that raised up Jesus, our Lord, from the dead; who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification. (Romans 4:24-25)**

**But God commendeth His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation. (Romans 5:8-10)**

**For in Him [Christ] dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power; in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; buried with Him in baptism, in which also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. (Colossians 2:9-12)**

**But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth. (II Thessalonians 2:13)**

**Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not [for salvation], but believeth on Him [God] that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. (Romans 4:4-5)**

**For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—not of works, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)**

(See also Romans 6:1-11; Galatians 3; Ephesians 1:13-14)

## **The Hope of Salvation**

What is the hope, or future fulfillment, of our salvation? From our youth many of us have been told that we will go to heaven, which consists of pearly gates, streets of gold, and mansions. Actually, these and related descriptions of heaven apply to New Jerusalem as described in Revelation 21 and 22, which

refer to the kingdom proclaimed in the gospel accounts, which, in turn, refer to the Messianic kingdom for Israel prophesied in the Old Testament. This kingdom will be a physical kingdom on earth.<sup>10</sup>

The hope of salvation in the message preached by Christ and the twelve apostles was, therefore, strictly an earthly hope. That is, the promise was that believers would one day enter into the long-prophesied and long-awaited kingdom in which Messiah will rule over the world from redeemed Israel. Furthermore, the believers will be sinless, have bodies of flesh and blood, and live in their promised land (New Jerusalem). This Messianic kingdom is referred to as *the kingdom of heaven* in Matthew, and as *the kingdom of God* in equivalent passages in Mark, Luke, and John.

**When the Son of man [Christ] shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory. And before Him shall be gathered all the nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matthew 25:31-34)**

**When they [the disciples], therefore, were come together, they asked of Him [Jesus], saying, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6)**

**Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and He [God] shall send Jesus Christ, who before was preached unto you, whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the age [world] began. (Acts 3:19-21)**

**Then He [the Lord God] said unto me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut off on our part.' Therefore, prophesy and say unto them, 'Thus saith the Lord God: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put My Spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land; then shall ye know that I, the Lord, have spoken it, and performed it," saith the Lord.' " (Ezekiel 37:11-14)**

**A new heart also will I [the Lord God] give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep Mine ordinances, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be My people, and I will be your God. (Ezekiel 36:26-28)**

(See also Isaiah 65:17-25; John 11:23-24; Revelation 21:2, 9-27; 22:14-15)

At the moment we're saved in this dispensation of grace, we're made complete in Christ through our identification with His death, burial, and resurrection. Believers saved under the message revealed by Christ through Paul immediately become citizens of heaven, with the promised hope of being present with the Lord in the heavenlies. Additionally, Paul, and only Paul, reveals and describes an event that has

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<sup>10</sup> Paul never presents an earthly hope to us in this dispensation of grace; instead, he reveals our heavenly position and future.

since been called *the rapture*. At this event, believers saved in this dispensation of grace will be changed to a perfect spiritual body, whether or not they are physically alive or dead at the time, and will be caught up to meet the Lord.

**For in Him [*Christ*] dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power; in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; buried with Him in baptism, in which also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. (Colossians 2:9-12)**

**For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our lowly body, that it may be fashioned like His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself. (Philippians 3:20-21)**

**But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath made us alive together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-6)**

**Therefore, we are always confident, knowing that, while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord (for we walk by faith, not by sight); we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. (II Corinthians 5:6-8)**

**Now this I [*Paul*] say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep [*physically die*], but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (I Corinthians 15:50-52)**

**For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep [*are physically dead*] in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them who are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (I Thessalonians 4:14-17)**

Both the hope of the gospel of the kingdom (Israel's promised kingdom on earth) and the hope of the gospel of the grace of God (the rapture) are based on the same over-arching hope. All believers of all ages have the sure hope of eternal life (John 3:15-16; 11:24-27; Romans 6:23; Titus 3:5-7; Daniel 12:2; Hebrews 9:15). Although the believers prior to the gospel of grace did not know it, their hope was based on the redemptive work of Christ at the cross that God had planned from the beginning.

**Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began. (Titus 1:1-2)**

## **Commands and Promises**

*Every promise in the Book is mine* is an attractive statement but completely untrue, for many promises cannot be claimed by members of the body of Christ. Nor are all of God's commands meant for

us. As the previous verses indicate, we are not waiting for the promised land and kingdom; instead, we look forward to being with our Lord in heaven. We are not to sacrifice animals, sell all of our possessions, or perform miracles. Nor will we receive everything we ask for in prayer. Many commands and promises, which are perfectly true in their context and for whom they were directed, have nothing whatsoever to do with members of the body of Christ in this dispensation of grace. Some important differences between the two messages of Christ concerning commands and promises are described briefly in the following subjects.

### ***The Law of Moses***

During His ministry on earth, Christ commanded the multitudes and His disciples to obey the Law of Moses. He never rescinded this command to them. The fact that the believers observed Pentecost after His ascension gives further indication that the believers were obeying the Law.

**Then spoke Jesus to the multitude, and to His disciples, saying, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat. All, therefore, whatever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not after their works; for they say, and do not.” (Matthew 23:1-3)**

**And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him [Paul], “Thou seest [You see], brother, how many thousands of Jews there are who believe, and they are all zealous of the law [the Law of Moses].” (Acts 21:20)**

The message that Christ revealed to and through the Apostle Paul is based on what Christ accomplished at the cross. His complete and finished work for us through His death, burial, and resurrection was first proclaimed by Paul. A part of the revelation included the removal of the Law, and our freedom from its bondage and condemnation. Most of the book of Galatians and several chapters in the book of Romans deal exclusively with this fact. If we tried to keep even a portion of the Law, including the ten commandments, then we would be under obligation and held responsible to keep the whole Law (which we’re unable to do because of sin). Instead, we’re to rest in the righteousness of God that has been imputed to us.

**For as many as are of the works of the law [the Law of Moses] are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident; for, “The just shall live by faith.” And the law is not of faith, but, “The man that doeth them shall live in them.” Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree;” that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Galatians 3:10-14)**

**Now we know that whatever things the law [the Law of Moses] saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference. (Romans 3:19-22)**

**And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He [God] made alive together with Him [Christ], having forgiven you all trespasses, blotting out the**

**handwriting of ordinances [the Law of Moses] that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross.** (Colossians 2:13-14)

**For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law [the Law of Moses] but under grace.** (Romans 6:14)

(See also Ephesians 2:14-16; II Corinthians 3:2-11)

### ***Possessions***

In the message preached by Christ and the twelve apostles, believers were to sell their possessions so that they would have all things in common. Scriptures show us that Christ meant for the people to actually sell their possessions and not just be willing to do so, as is often taught. This command was in accordance with how life will be during the kingdom (and when God will be working through Israel prior to the kingdom). Those who did not sell their possessions were proven to be unbelievers.

**Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what ye have, and give alms...** (Luke 12:32-33a)

**The young man saith unto Him, "All these things have I kept from my youth up. What lack I yet?" Jesus said unto him, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow Me."** (Matthew 19:20-21)

**And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.** (Acts 2:44-45)

(See also Matthew 19:21-30; Acts 4:32-37; 5:1-11)

In the message revealed by Christ through Paul, rich people are not told to sell their possessions, but to be careful how to perceive and handle their wealth and be willing to share. Furthermore, we're to work and provide for our own household. To sell all that we own today not only would be financially irresponsible, it would be disobedient to God's word to us as members of the body of Christ.

**Charge them that are rich in this age, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to share.** (I Timothy 6:17-18)

**But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel [unbeliever].** (I Timothy 5:8)

**... But we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more, and that ye study [make it your ambition] to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that ye may walk honestly toward them that are outside [unbelievers], and that ye may have lack of nothing.** (I Thessalonians 4:10b-12)

(See also I Thessalonians 2:9; II Thessalonians 3:7-12)

### ***Prayer***

As part of the gospel of the kingdom, Jesus promised to His disciples that whatever they asked in His name, believing, they would receive. This promise would apply not only to them, but to all kingdom believers when the Holy Spirit descended on them in power. That is, they would instinctively know to ask according to the will of God when controlled by the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17; Acts 1:4-5; 2:1-4). The



following passages are often altered or explained to mean that prayers will not be answered as requested if they are not according to God's will, or the requestor is hiding some unconfessed sin, or if God is waiting to answer the prayer later. However, Jesus did not include these conditions—He meant what He said.

**Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8)**

**Jesus answered and said unto them, "Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also, if ye shall say unto this mountain, 'Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea,' it shall be done. And all things, whatever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." (Matthew 21:21-22)**

**And whatever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it. (John 14:13-14)**

In the message revealed by Christ through Paul, we believers are to pray for everything with thanksgiving, and our promise is the peace of God. We do not have the promise that we will receive what we ask for, because we do not know how to pray as we should. However, the Holy Spirit interprets our prayers according to the will of God, ensuring that God is working things out according to His will.

**Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)**

**Likewise, the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity [weakness]; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27)**

**Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. (I Thessalonians 5:17-18)**

**Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving, praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds. (Colossians 4:2-3)**

**Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel. (Ephesians 6:18-19)**

(See also Philippians 1:6; 2:13; 4:19)

### ***Sign Gifts***

In the message preached by Christ and the twelve apostles, miraculous sign gifts including healing, speaking in new tongues, casting out demons, raising the dead, etc., were to follow all who believed. The book of Acts proves that the sign gifts did follow them. Sign gifts were performed by believers through the manifested power of the Holy Spirit as a visible demonstration of the power of God and the faith of those who performed them.

**And as ye go, preach, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons; freely ye have received, freely give." (Matthew 10:7-8)**

**And He said unto them, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow those who believe: in My name shall they cast out demons; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." (Mark 16:15-18)**

**Verily, verily, I say unto you, "He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto My Father." (John 14:12)**

**But ye shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (Acts 1:8)**

(See also Acts 2:4-6, 43; 4:29-33; 6:8; 8:6-7)

Sign gifts were present early in Paul's ministry, but later completely passed away. Paul demonstrated sign gifts early in his ministry as a means for God to prove Paul's apostleship, especially to the Jews (Acts 15:12; I Corinthians 1:22). Believers during the early days of Paul's ministry also performed signs as a way for God to prove to the Jews that the Gentiles' faith was genuine. However, with the setting aside of Israel (Romans 11:25) and the completed revelation by Christ to Paul, miraculous signs were no longer required and, in fact, passed away altogether. The Apostle Paul himself could no longer even heal his coworkers in the faith (nor could they heal him). To desire to perform sign gifts is contrary to God's word to us as members of the body of Christ. Furthermore, the exercising of sign gifts today is not of God; miracles performed by believers and false brethren are through the power of the old nature or of Satan.

**I [*Paul*] am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds. (II Corinthians 12:11-12)**

**Love never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. (I Corinthians 13:8-10)**

**Yet I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and companion in labor, and fellow soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my need. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because ye had heard that he had been sick. For, indeed, he was sick near unto death, but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. (Philippians 2:25-27)**

**Erastus abode at Corinth; but Trophimus have I left at Miletus sick. (II Timothy 4:20)**

**Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thy frequent infirmities. (I Timothy 5:23)**

## **Baptism**

The Bible describes various baptisms, both physical and spiritual. Baptism represents some type of identification. Paul describes the nation of Israel as being *baptized into Moses* (identified with him) as they escaped Egypt and resided in the wilderness (I Corinthians 10:1-4). Jesus was declared by God to be His Son when He was baptized by John (Matthew 3:13-17). As discussed in the following sections, water baptism and spiritual baptism had different meanings or purposes under the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of the grace of God.

### **Water Baptism**

In the message preached by Christ and the twelve apostles, water baptism was required for forgiveness of sins. A person could not be saved without water baptism because belief and baptism of repentance went hand in hand. Through water baptism, the believers reckoned themselves as sinners and were identified with Jesus Christ.

**Then Peter said unto them, “Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...” Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:38, 41)**

**He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. (Mark 16:16)**

**Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)**

(See also Matthew 3:6; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; John 3:22; 4:1-2)

Water baptism was present in the early part of Paul’s ministry in conjunction with sign gifts (every recorded instance of water baptism in Scripture is either preceded, accompanied, or followed by a miracle). However, Paul did not put much emphasis on it as is shown when he was thankful that he had baptized only a few of the Corinthian believers (I Corinthians 1:14-17). In fact, Paul was not sent to baptize, whereas the twelve disciples were specifically instructed to baptize.

**For Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the gospel; not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. (I Corinthians 1:17)**

As the revelations by Christ to Paul were completed, water baptism passed away altogether (as did sign gifts). Paul eventually speaks of one baptism, which is a spiritual baptism. Scripture does not demand, present, recommend, or even imply water baptism as a requirement or even a testimony of faith for believers today. To be baptized today is to display belief that there are two baptisms in operation instead of one. This action to please or obey God is an addition to Scripture and places the believer in the same unfavorable position as the Galatian believers who wrongfully thought they should prove and increase their faith by keeping various statutes and ordinances of the Law of Moses (Galatians 3:1-5).

**There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Ephesians 4:4–6)**

Paul's own baptism signaled a departure from the original purpose of water baptism regarding repentance and remission of sins. Paul was baptized after miraculously regaining his sight—there was no reference to repentance of sins on his part (Acts 9:10-18; 22:12-16). Additionally, Cornelius, a Roman soldier saved after Paul was saved, was baptized *after* receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:17-48). So, the purpose of water baptism had changed until the requirement was entirely removed by God through the completed revelations to Paul.

### **Spiritual Baptism**

At Pentecost and for a time thereafter, the believers received the spiritual baptism prophesied by John the Baptist and by Christ. Believers were baptized by Christ with the Holy Spirit for power. It is important to understand that *the baptizer is Christ*. This baptism with the Spirit occurred *after* a person was saved by believing, repenting, and being water baptized.

**I [John], indeed, baptize you with water unto repentance, but He [Christ] who cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire. (Matthew 3:11)**

**For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now... But ye shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you... (Acts 1:5, 8a)**

**Then Peter said unto them, "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)**

**Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John, who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for as yet He was fallen upon none of them; only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14-17)**

As members of the body of Christ, we were baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ, which actually is what saved us. Note that now *the baptizer is the Holy Spirit* instead of Christ. This spiritual baptism totally identifies us with, or places us into, Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Additionally, this baptism is different than at Pentecost because it occurs at the moment of salvation instead of afterward, and it is not for power but is a seal of our salvation.

**For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Greek, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. (I Corinthians 12:13)**

**In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; buried with Him in baptism, in which also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. (Colossians 2:11-12)**

**In whom ye also trusted, after ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also after ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)**

(See also Romans 6:1-11; Ephesians 4:4-6; II Thessalonians 2:13)

If we were supposed to symbolize this blessed act of spiritual baptism performed by God by being water baptized or submitting to any other action or ordinance, then God most certainly would have instructed us to do so in His word. However, He did not do this, so water baptism today only testifies to our misunderstanding of the truth and misleads both the participants and the observers. Furthermore, the method of water baptism, which divides so many churches and believers, is not even an issue because submitting to *any* method of water baptism today is contrary to God's will.

### **“The Great Commission”**

Just before Christ ascended into heaven, He told his disciples what they must do in His absence prior to His return. In this set of instructions, referred to as the *Great Commission* (so-called by man), Christ commanded His people to do and teach all that He had told them. The things He told them included: believing and teaching the kingdom gospel and hope, obedience to the Law of Moses, selling all possessions for the common good, believing and teaching the prayer promises that He had given to them, performing all the signs and miracles that Christ had performed and more, performing water baptism for the remission of sins, remitting and retaining the sins of others, and judging the worthiness of others.

Christ also told his followers how to spread the gospel of the kingdom: they were to begin in Jerusalem, then go throughout Judea, then Samaria, then the rest of the world. There is a definite scriptural purpose for this order. The Old Testament prophecies and the book of Revelation show that the Gentile nations will be blessed *after* Israel is redeemed. Judea and Samaria represented the one and ten tribes, respectively, that resulted when Israel divided into two nations after Solomon's reign (I Kings 11:9-13, 31-35; 12:16-20).<sup>11</sup> Therefore, when Jerusalem the capital, Judea, and Samaria believes, *all* Israel will be saved (Ezekiel 37:15-28). Israel's redemption will occur sometime after the *rapture*.<sup>12</sup> After Israel is saved, the gospel of the kingdom will be spread to the Gentile nations (perhaps led by the 144,000 sealed virgin men of the twelve tribes of Israel—Revelation 7:3-8; 14:1-5) in accordance with the exact commands given by Christ before His ascension. Fulfillment of the *Great Commission*, therefore, will occur prior to Christ's return to earth as Messiah and King (Matthew 24:14). The nations, however, won't be blessed until Christ establishes His kingdom on earth, which will be in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 22:18; Isaiah 60:1-3; Zechariah 8:13; Acts 3:18-26; Revelation 21:22-24).

**And Jesus came and spoke unto them, saying, “All authority is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.”** (Matthew 28:18-20)

**And He said unto them, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And**

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<sup>11</sup> After their split (which did not include the tribe of Levi because it had no land inheritance), one nation was referred to as *Judah* (with Jerusalem as its capital), and the other nation as both *Israel* and *Samaria* (with the city of Samaria as its capital—I Kings 16:29) in the Old Testament. We then have the record of the kings of both nations in I and II Kings. The people of Judah (referred to as *Judea*, *Israel*, and *Jews* in the New Testament) were not to associate with Samaritans, which still held true during Jesus' ministry (I Kings 12:19; Matthew 10:5; John 4:9).

<sup>12</sup> The rapture is part of the mystery. Therefore, the resumption of God's prophetic plan for Israel and the world will not occur until the end of this dispensation of grace, which closes with the rapture (Romans 11:25-29).

**these signs shall follow those who believe: in My name shall they cast out demons; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. (Mark 16:15-19)**

**And said unto them, “Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:46-47)**

**Then said Jesus to them again, “Peace be unto you; as My Father hath sent Me, even so I send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, “Receive ye the Holy Spirit. Whosoever’s sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever’s sins ye retain, they are retained.” (John 20:21-23)**

**But ye shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (Acts 1:8)**

(See also Matthew 10:7-15)

Israel rejected the offer of the kingdom despite the witness of the Holy Spirit demonstrated through the twelve apostles and other disciples (Acts 3:18-26; 7:51-60). Consequently, the primary goal of the *Great Commission* (the salvation of Israel) was not fulfilled and the gospel of the kingdom could not be spread to the Gentile nations. According to prophecy, Israel deserved the judgment of God at that time, but He chose to reveal His eternal plan (the mystery) regarding His grace instead.

A result of the revelation by our glorified Lord Jesus Christ to Paul concerning a new set of instructions to a new group of people (the gospel of the grace of God to Jews and Gentiles without distinction) was the delay of God’s righteous wrath and the temporary suspension of the *Great Commission*. We are not instructed or empowered to obey or fulfill it. Efforts to preach the kingdom, keep the Law, sell possessions, demonstrate sign gifts, and perform water baptism, no matter how sincere, are in vain for they are not honored or rewarded by God in this dispensation.

On the other hand, we, as members of the body of Christ, are told through our Apostle Paul who we are, why we’re here, what we should believe and teach, and how we should live. We’re aliens in this world because our citizenship is in heaven, which means that all believers are ambassadors representing our Lord Jesus Christ in a foreign place. The gospel we’re to obey and teach is the gospel of the grace of God, which includes the gospel of salvation. That is, our salvation depends on believing that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised again, and our walk depends on knowing and appropriating that all-sufficient work performed by Christ at the cross. Furthermore, the Apostle Paul is our example and pattern for our walk.

**For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge that, if one died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again. 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. Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of**

**reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we beg you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For He hath made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. (II Corinthians 5:14-21)**

**Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. (I Corinthians 11:1)**

**Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them who walk even as ye have us for an example. (Philippians 3:17)**

**Those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do, and the God of peace shall be with you. (Philippians 4:9)**

Although we are not to follow the instructions of the *Great Commission*, we should have no less a desire that the lost be saved, for *today is the day of salvation* (II Corinthians 6:2). The message we teach, the methods we employ, and our motives for doing so should stand the test of Scripture. Many believers refer to Paul as the world's greatest missionary, but few heed his message and example. The message going out today is a confusing mixture of the Law of Moses, the gospel of the kingdom, the gospel of grace, and church tradition. Though assumed proven to work, many of the methods used to spread this mixed-up message are either not found in Scripture or are contrary to Scripture. For most believers, the motive for spreading the gospel is to do their part in fulfilling the *Great Commission*, which, as we have seen, is not God's plan for today. Wherever or however we serve God, let's do so according to His way. We must immerse ourselves in the word of God so that we can be workman who need not be ashamed and who are thoroughly equipped for every good work (II Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17)

### **Exhortations and Warnings**

Just as Israel was to obey all that God had commanded them to do in the Law of Moses (Exodus 19:3-6), and just as followers of Christ during His earthly ministry were to obey all that He commanded them (Matthew 28:20), we, as members of the body of Christ, are to obey His instructions revealed to us through the Apostle Paul. Very strong language is used by the Holy Spirit (through Paul) to show the importance of believing and understanding the message preached by Paul.

**But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:8)**

**Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ but their own body, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the innocent. (Romans 16:17-18)**

**Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle. (II Thessalonians 2:15)**

**And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. (II Thessalonians 3:14-15)**

**Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Spirit, who dwelleth in us. (II Timothy 1:13-14)**

**I [Paul] charge thee, therefore, before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be diligent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine but, after their own lusts, shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (II Timothy 4:1-4)**

**According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth on it. But let every man take heed how he buildeth upon it. For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (I Corinthians 3:10-11)**

## **Conclusions**

All Scripture is inspired by God and, therefore, true. However, we must discern which parts of the truth apply and do not apply directly to members of the body of Christ, and which parts are unchanging principles of God and are examples for us to understand the nature of God and of ourselves. If we do not rightly divide (accurately handle) the word of God, we will find ourselves aimless in our service to God as we alter the word of God or ignore certain passages to fit our own understanding and desires.

The author of Israel's message and hope was Christ in the flesh. The author of our message and hope is the same Lord Jesus Christ, but He revealed it from heaven after His ascension. It is recorded for us in II Corinthians 5:16 that we're to recognize and know Christ in His glorified state rather than as He was according to the flesh. We need to understand, therefore, the differences between the two ministries of Christ (e.g., gospel of the kingdom vs. gospel of the grace of God; earthly hope vs. heavenly hope; Law vs. grace; prophesy vs. mystery).

To know what to believe and how to serve God in our daily walk (Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 1:9-12; I Thessalonians 2:10-12), we must know and understand what Christ revealed from heaven through His Apostle Paul. A proper understanding of the revelation of the mystery (and its associated gospel of grace) is the key to understanding the entire word of God—everything falls into place and we no longer have to explain away difficult passages or change their meaning to fit our needs.

Anything that is added to Scripture in general, or is contrary to the completed message revealed to and preached by Paul, is contrary to God's will for us. There are many traditions in Christendom that have absolutely no scriptural basis, are scripturally incorrect, or are dispensationally incorrect, and should not be believed or followed. Every believer should desire to honestly and diligently examine the Scriptures, seeking instruction by the Holy Spirit, to learn the truth. To know and appropriate the truth is what God desires and will serve to strengthen the believer. Additionally, if we embrace the gospel of grace as revealed through Paul and follow his example, we will know and experience the peace of God.

**For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to**



**His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, who hath made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.**

(Colossians 1:9-12)

**Wherefore, I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. (Ephesians 1:15-23)**

**For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend, with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.**

(Ephesians 3:14-19)

**Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do, and the God of peace shall be with you. (Philippians 4:8-9)**

The preceding study is not something new. All the verses and passages are directly from the Bible, and every effort has been made to present them in their proper context and with the meaning intended by the Holy Spirit. However, a believer must see for himself or herself whether or not these things are true. Therefore, the first source of information for anyone desiring to know the truth is the Bible itself. No other source, whether it be a pastor, Bible teacher, Bible college professor, evangelist, theologian, missionary, book, tract, pamphlet, song, poem, or even this study should be taken at face value without comparing what is said about Scripture with Scripture itself. Above all, be open to instruction and understanding by the Holy Spirit by studying prayerfully and in the right frame of mind.

Finally, is too much emphasis being placed on the Apostle Paul? No, because God chose Paul to be the Apostle of the Gentiles. That would be like saying the Old Testament has too much emphasis on Moses, who was chosen by God to lead His people out of Egypt and to dispense the Law of God to Israel. Brethren, Paul the apostle and his message are very misunderstood and much maligned in the church today. To disregard Paul and the message in his letters is to disregard our risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ and the truth of God's word. Instead, may we trust God and praise Him and our Lord Jesus Christ by believing, understanding, and walking according to the gospel of grace as revealed to us through the Apostle Paul.

**Study** [be diligent, *endeavor*] **to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing** [accurately handling] **the word of truth.** (II Timothy 2:15)

I [*Paul*] **therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worth of the vocation** [calling, *salvation*] **to which ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** (Ephesians 4:1-3)