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Church Age

Today we come to point eight on our doctrinal statement which is a very good doctrinal statement. You know it's good when you read it, though some people may quibble over this or that, but you don't realize how good it is until you pour a lot of mental sweat over it. It's like a text of Scripture, you don't realize all that's packed in there until you start digging it out and then you realize, man alive, there's a gold mine of truths packed in there. I hope some of you are working on the assignment I suggested; writing your own doctrinal statement, if you are our statement has got some really good stuff in it.

What point eight is all about is the Church, actually point eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve and thirteen are all about the Church. So I'd say we emphasize the Church, six of the eighteen points, a third of the doctrinal statement clarifies various aspects of the Church. Now the formal name of the doctrine of the Church is called what? What do systematic theologians call this area of study? Ecclesiology. So for the next five or six weeks we'll be covering ecclesiology. One of the things intrinsic to these six points is that the Church is not to be confused with Israel. A lot of people don't realize the significance of this point. They think, what difference does it make, Israel and the Church, why are you arguing over all this minutia? First of all I hope to show you it's not minutia. The reason we're arguing so strenuously for the distinction of Israel and the Church is because it's directly linked to eschatology.

If Israel and the Church are one and the same then you are usually amillennial or postmillennial with a post-trib rapture, but you could be a premillennial post-tribulationist, but never a premillennial, pre-tribulationist, that won't work. But if you hold that Israel and the Church are distinct then you have to be pre-millennial and as far as the rapture is

concerned you could be post-trib, $\frac{3}{4}$ trib, mid-trib or pre-trib. My point is there's a rather large theological landscape when it comes to point eight. And we don't have time to discuss the reasons why there is such a vast theological landscape, that's not the point of this class. We want to specify the beginning of the Church and the end of the Church, the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem*. What period of time does the Church cover? That's what this statement is all about.

8. We believe this present Church Age began with the coming of the Holy Spirit of God on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 11:15-18; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 1:24), and that it will continue until the coming of Christ for His Church, the time of which coming is not indicated in Scripture; but we believe it to be imminent, personal, pretribulation, and premillennial (John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 5:50-55).

It's not necessary to say premillennial there at the end since if you are pre-tribulational you have to be premillennial but in light of the fact that we have no statement on the Second Coming of Jesus Christ I'd keep it in the statement because it's the only glimpse you get of the Second Coming. So premillennial relates to the coming of Christ to earth for Israel to establish the millennial Kingdom and pretribulational relates to the coming of Christ in the air for His Church to take them to the Father's house; two very different pictures. We'll be focusing on the Church.

Let's start with the origin or beginning of the Church. We believe this present Church Age began with the coming of the Holy Spirit of God on the Day of Pentecost, which is Acts 2, and then we have four passages cited as evidence. You'll notice of the verses two bracket Acts 2, the historical references in Acts 1:5 and Acts 11:15-18 passage. The other two are from the doctrinal epistles which define the nature of the Church.

Not mentioned is Matt 16:18 but let's turn there because this is the first mention of the Church and it's mentioned first by the Lord Jesus Christ, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." Let's make some observations. First of all, we're not too interested in the remark about Peter except to say that some of the better commentators recognize that Peter's name means a little pebble, so whatever Jesus is saying the church is going to be built upon,

it's not Peter. Jesus didn't say "upon you" Peter I will build My church. You don't build structures like the church on little pebbles like Peter. That's what the Roman Catholic Church has said but the Scriptures say, "No man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." So Christ is the foundation of the church, not Peter and when Jesus says "upon this rock I will build My church" He's pointing to His own chest. Second observation, does Jesus say I am building My church, present tense? Or does He say, I will build My church, future tense? I will build it, future tense. Some people, namely of the Reformed opinion hold that the Church began with Adam or with Abraham. But if that were the case Jesus could not say I will build it but He'd say I am building it. So right there a window of revelation is opened and we don't know how much these Jews understood, they probably didn't understand much but upon reflection years later they understood the significance of this statement. So the two main observations we want to draw out are one, the Church is to be built on the foundation of Jesus Christ and two, this foundation was not yet laid but would be laid in the future. So as of Matt 16:18 the church could not possibly be in existence.

Turn to Eph 3:4 because by this time the Church is well underway but we want to see that it was not revealed until later what the Church was. Paul is talking about being entrusted with a stewardship. Paul had received special revelation and he was responsible to get it out, to reveal it to others. And he says in verse 4, "that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief," notice Paul uses the term mystery and he's going to define it for us in a moment, the mystery concept is very important in the NT, there are several mysteries in the NT. And here we have one, Verse 4, "By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;" so what is a mystery? Very simply it's something that was never before revealed. And if the church started with Adam or Abraham isn't it strange that no one in the entire OT period knew about it? Evidently they weren't the church. So whatever this mystery is it is a revelation of something new. And verse 6 tells us what the new thing is, "to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." You see the fellow heirs language there, Jews and Gentiles are fellow heirs in what? in "the body." Here's this "body" concept that is introduced, Jew and Gentile in

one body. It's not Israel that Gentiles become heirs of, Jews and Gentiles become heirs of the same body, something new, an organism. That was a mystery in the OT, no Jew in the OT ever foresaw the Church, but now it was being revealed through the apostle Paul what it was.

And if you turn to Eph 1:22 you'll see the body is identified as the Church. Eph 3 didn't tell us the body we share in is the Church, but Eph 1:22 does. "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is His body," that clearly identifies the church as Christ's body. So, so far we've seen that the Church is yet future as of Matt 16:18, Jesus said, I will build My church, future tense, Paul in Eph 4 said Gentile believers are fellow heirs with Jewish believers in the body of Christ, and Paul in Eph 1 said the body is the Church.

Now turn to 1 Cor 12:13, this explains how we come to enter Christ's body, the Church. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." He says by means of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit is the agent, actually Jesus is the baptizer, His agent is the Holy Spirit, and we are all baptized into one body, Paul's developing the concept of the body of Christ, which is the Church. Whether we are Jew or Greek, whether we are slave or free, it doesn't matter one bit when it comes to Spirit baptism, we are all placed in the body of Christ which is the Church. And that's what the four Pentecosts are about in the Book of Acts; Jews in Acts 2, Samaritans in Acts 8, Gentiles in Acts 10 and Disciples of John the Baptist in Acts 19. They were all being baptized into one and the same body. So the defining mark of the Church people have said is Spirit baptism.

So when does the Church start? If Spirit baptism causes the Church then the beginning of Spirit baptism must be the beginning of the Church. So when did Spirit baptism start? Turn to Acts 1:5. Now what's interesting about Acts 1 is that in verse 3 Jesus is teaching them about what? What's the subject of discussion? "the kingdom of God." Now the kingdom in Jewish thought and all throughout the Bible is that of God's rule being established on the earth. This is what all the Jews were longing for, a restoration of the kingdom. That's the subject. Forget the Church, the topic is the kingdom in Acts 1. Verse 4, "Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said,

“you heard of from Me;” now he is referring to the Holy Spirit there as we’ll see. Jesus said in John 15:26 that He would send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit and that’s what He’s referring to there at the end of verse 4. Stick around boys, I’m sending the Holy Spirit. But don’t get too excited, yet. And don’t think about the Church, yet. You have to discipline yourself to read the text. That’s not what they’re thinking. Church is not the topic, kingdom is the topic. He explains in verse 5, “for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” Now the apostles have some questions and they are very logical questions; if you’ve kept your focus on the subject, which is the kingdom, Jesus is saying that the kingdom is coming not many days from now and associated with the coming kingdom is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. So if you came to that conclusion you’d be a good Jewish interpreter in Acts 1. What’s interesting is the apostles believed that the baptism of the Spirit was for their nation and prepared the way for the kingdom. And you can see that from their question in verse 6, “So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus said you will be baptized not many days from now, they logically ask, well then is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom? So they associated the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the coming of the kingdom. In their theology Israel had a baptism to undergo, a baptism of the Spirit and of fire!

Now, what I am referring to by mention of those two related baptisms is Matt 3:11 so turn there. What I’m taking you to now is a very hot potato. According to Dan Wallace not many people know what to do with this verse, there’s no scholarly consensus. Among dispensationalists like us the traditional interpretation of Matt 3:11 is that John is talking about the Church, the baptism of the Holy Spirit for the Church. But that’s not in the text. Right now I happen to know a graduate of DTS from back in the 70’s who is also a seminary professor today who is working on this verse. He’s writing a whole book about it because something is not gelling too well between Matt 3:11 and Acts 1:5. And there are a whole lot of OT passages involved like Joel 2 and Zech 12 as well as NT passages, but I’m just going to take you to this key text and see if you can read the text straightforwardly. Now obviously in Matt 3:2 the subject is what? “the kingdom of heaven,” that’s Matthew’s way of referring to the kingdom and here we have the forerunner of the kingdom, John the Baptist preparing the way for the kingdom. And verse 5, all Jerusalem is going out to him to be water baptized; it was a baptism of

repentance. Notice who comes along in verse 7, “Many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism” and John gives them a real warm welcome. “You snakes, who warned you of the wrath to come?” John evidently didn’t take any courses in seminary on how to attract people to the kingdom. His message was get with the kingdom program or get out of here. Now these were the leaders of the nation, they represented the nation in this passage. So now he’s going to preach to the nation through the leadership, verse 8, “Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; 9and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. 10The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” Now that doesn’t sound very nice. Clearly this is a warning. And what’s he warning the nation of? Judgment. If you don’t repent and bear fruit in keeping with repentance then judgment. So you can go one of two ways here, you can repent and bear fruit or you can get cut down and thrown into the fire, your choice Israel. Now verse 11, “As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals;” and what is He going to do? Verse 11, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” Now clearly Jesus is the baptizer, He has two baptisms to administer, they’re closely related because there’s one preposition controlling. But here’s the problem. Usually the baptism of the Spirit is linked exclusively with the Church. Isn’t that the way it’s traditionally done? I’ve seen it done a hundred times; Unger does it, Walvoord does it, Ryrie does it. But there’s a problem if you do that because who is the “you” in verse 11? Who is John is talking too? He’s talking to the nation Israel. John doesn’t know anything about a Church. He knows about a nation Israel. And he says the Messiah is going to baptize Israel with the Holy Spirit and fire. Again, those are two baptisms but they’re like two sides of the same coin, the Holy Spirit baptism is going to purify the nation, the fire is the judgment. We’d say from our perspective they both precede the kingdom and occur in the tribulation. John is not talking about entrance into a body of Christ, the church is a mystery at this point, never been revealed. To make this the baptism of the Spirit that puts a person in the body of Christ, the Church is to make John prophesy of the church. But John’s context is not the church but the kingdom! So Israel has a baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire to undergo in preparation for the kingdom. Now hold on to that and come back to Acts 1 because now you can understand why the apostles thought the baptism of the Spirit was

associated with the kingdom. They thought that because John taught that. In fact, Peter tells us that Jesus taught that many times during his earthly ministry. They believed and John and Messiah taught that the nation Israel would be baptized by the Spirit.

So in Acts 1:5 when Jesus says, “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” They’re first thought is what? If you’re answer is the kingdom is coming not many days from now you’re right. As far as what had been revealed, that’s the correct answer. In verification, verse 6 they ask him, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” See, it’s all the kingdom.

However Jesus is not speaking about the baptism of the Spirit in relation to the nation Israel and the restoration of the kingdom because the audience is different here. In Matt 3:11 John was talking to the nation Israel, he said the nation had a baptism of the Spirit to undergo. In Acts 1:5 Jesus is saying “you apostles have a baptism of the Holy Spirit not many days from now. John’s audience and Jesus’ audience are different audiences. Now obviously Peter and the others didn’t catch the difference because of their question that follows, they ask about the restoration of the kingdom in verse 6. But Jesus’ response in verse 7 establishes a distinction, “It is not for you to know the times or the epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;” that is, it’s not for you to know when the kingdom will be restored to Israel and that baptism of the Spirit will come upon the nation, but, verse 8, “but you [speaking to the apostles] will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you [apostles]; and you [apostles] shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” So that the baptism that is coming not many days from now upon them is not the same baptism that is coming upon the nation in preparation for the kingdom. They are two different baptisms of the Spirit.

Now look, if you don’t hold to this and you say there’s only one baptism of the Spirit and that’s for the Church exclusively then in Matt 3:11 you have to say John the Baptizer is prophesying the church. That’s an inescapable conclusion. But it’s not a textual conclusion. But what’s really happening is John prophecies of the Messiah baptizing the nation with the Spirit and fire during the future Tribulation in preparation for the kingdom. John never knew about the Church. What Jesus is prophesying is His baptizing of

individual believers into the body of Christ starting on the day of Pentecost. And obviously in Acts 1:5 it's "not many days from now" so that's got to be Acts 2. The funny thing is that if you read Acts 2 it never uses that terminology "baptized by the Spirit". It says there was an outpouring of the Spirit upon those twelve Jews. Flip to Acts 2:33. In verse 23 we have the death of Christ, in verse 32 we have the resurrection of Christ. In verse 33 let's pick up and read, "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God," there's the session, "and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear." The explanation for the day of Pentecost is the pouring forth of the Spirit. And upon reflection that's what Peter said was the baptism of the Spirit that fell upon us Jews at the beginning. But a key point is it's not the baptism of the Spirit upon the nation Israel, only a subset, only the twelve. So what John spoke of in Matt 3:11 has yet to occur. But an application of that to those in the church has occurred as Jesus predicted in Acts 1:5. And the one Jesus spoke of injected Jews first into the body of Christ on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2. Peter didn't understand it, they may have very well thought this was the beginning of what John had taught about the nation and therefore preparatory work for Israel's kingdom, but however, it was merely an application of that Spirit baptism that places people in a distinct body called the Church.

When Acts 8 comes along, and Samaritans are baptized by the Spirit it blew the socks off of Peter. In Acts 10 when Gentiles were baptized by the Spirit his socks were really blown off. This was radical and turn with me briefly to Acts 11:15. Remember Peter had a little food lesson, had it three times to go into Cornelius' house, had to have it three times because the Jewish menu and the Gentile menu were not the same menu, this was a barrier that had to come down. God took it down for Peter and he went to Cornelius' house on what turned out to be the Gentile Pentecost and what happened? Here's Peter's report back in Jerusalem, verse 15, "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as *He did* upon us at the beginning." notice the pronouns them and us. Who's them? Them is the Gentiles at Cornelius' house? Who's the us at the beginning? Obviously the Jews. Peter is a Jew. When was the beginning? When did the Spirit fall upon Peter and other Jews? On the day of Pentecost, Acts 2. Verse 16, look what Peter recalled to mind. "And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" Where's

that a quote from? Acts 1:5. He must have said it over and over though because it's an imperfect. And it's like Peter is saying, you know, I didn't pay close attention back then to what the Lord was saying because I was so interested in getting the kingdom back, and I didn't really understand the baptism He was speaking of was different from the one John spoke of, but it's all starting to click now, Jesus said the kingdom was not for me to know but the Spirit would come not many days from now. I see what's happening; a baptism of the Holy Spirit into Christ occurred. And we've already seen in 1 Cor 12:13 that this baptism of the Spirit is what puts Jews and Gentiles together in one new body which is the Church. Conclusion, the Church began on the day of Pentecost, the kingdom did not begin on the day of Pentecost in any sense, that is still yet future. Notice I did not say Peter recognized the Church began on Pentecost, but upon reflection Peter did recognize the Church was born on Pentecost.

Now let's shift gears to the end of the Church, the Church's destiny. It begins with Pentecost, it ends with the Rapture and we find Scripture that supports the timing of the Rapture to be pre-Tribulational or before the time of Tribulation designated for Israel and the Nations. Three passages today. These are the three major rapture passages. First of all, John 14:1-3. This is within the Upper Room Discourse meaning Jesus was in the Upper Room when He gave this discourse though we think He began to walk to the Garden of Gethsemane in chapter 15 or so. At this point He was still in the Upper Room, in any case, that's why it's named the Upper Room Discourse. And in this discourse Jesus is revealing church truth, truths that relate to the new organism Jesus will start building on the Day of Pentecost. And in John 14 we find the first revelation of what we know as the rapture. People say, the rapture isn't in the Bible. Yes it is, it's in the Latin Bible. The concept of the rapture is Christ coming to receive church age believers to Himself. Now His coming for us presupposes His departure from us and that's the context of John 14. Peter is concerned in 13:37 because Jesus has just announced in 13:33 that He is going away and in verse 36 again, He is going away and this is distressing because He also says, you can't come with Me now, you have to come later. So there's going to be a separation and this is very distressing, when we're separated from someone we love it hurts and so they are hurting. In verse 37 Peter says, "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You." A noble gesture but it's not going to solve the sin problem of the world. He can't solve that problem; Jesus can

solve that problem so Jesus is going now not Peter. But to comfort them in light of the coming separation He begins in 14:1 with these words, “Do not let your heart be troubled;” the whole point is to calm them down, to relax them and the rapture passages commonly fall in comfort contexts, they don’t fall in judgment contexts, the rapture is a comforting doctrine and that’s why Jesus revealed it here, to comfort. “Believe in God, believe also in Me. ²In My Father’s house are many dwelling places;” Now “My Father’s house” has received a lot of attention by commentators and has been a subject of considerable debate. While this is noble it seems quite apparent that the Father’s house refers to the Father’s abode which is heaven. Over and over the Scriptures report, “Our Father who art in heaven.” In the OT the expression “father’s house” always refers to the dwelling place of a son or daughter. So “My Father’s house” refers to heaven.

“In heaven there are many dwelling places;” William Tyndale translated that mansions from the Latin Vulgate, the word doesn’t quite mean “mansions,” but rather a temporary dwelling place such as a hotel. So we learn that in the Father’s house which is heaven there are many of these temporary dwelling places. Jesus says, “if it were not so I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.” Obviously Jesus is telling Peter and the others where He is going; heaven, and what He is going to do there; prepare temporary dwelling places for them in heaven. So this is heaven but observe it’s not our permanent residence, it’s only a temporary residence, heaven is not your final residence.

In verse 3, “If I go and prepare a place for you.” Again Jesus alerts them to the fact He is going to heaven and that He will prepare a place for them, a temporary residence. So the “going” language refers to the ascension to heaven. He descended from heaven and He is ascending to heaven. When He ascends to heaven He will prepare a place for them. And if that is the case then He assures them, “I will come again and receive you to Myself,” this could be simply futuristic or it could be emphasizing both the futuristic aspect of this coming again and the imminent aspect of His coming again. In any case, He will come again and when He does He will “receive” us to Himself. The word receive refers to a spatial movement toward someone or something so that we are in close association with them. He is clearly not coming again to us on earth, to dwell with us here, but coming again and receiving us to Himself, we will move spatially toward Him to be in close

association with Him, and the verse concludes, “that where I am, there you may be also.” And this clearly refers to heaven again. He will come down from heaven and we will be caught up to Him and return with Him to heaven to dwell in our temporary dwelling places. This word would achieve the purpose Jesus set out to accomplish, namely to comfort them with the truth that the separation is only temporary and the reunion could occur at any moment. So I take it this is a clear rapture passage.

Now because this passage mirrors so closely elements of Jewish marriage practices I want to point out these parallels that reinforce. Andy Woods says, “First, the groom travels to the home of the bride's father and pays the *betrothal contract* price for the hand of the bride. This step is the equivalent of Christ's death that paid the price necessary for the church to enter into a relationship to Him (1 Cor 6:19-20). Second, during the *betrothal period*, the groom is temporarily separated from the bride in order to prepare temporary dwelling places in his father's house. These dwellings would eventually be indwelt by the groom and his new bride. This step represents Christ's Ascension and the beginning of the Church Age. Here, Christ is temporarily separated bodily from His church as He is preparing temporary dwelling places for His bride in His Father's house (John 14:2). Third, at an unknown time, the groom returns to the bride's home. Upon his return the groom is accompanied with escorts, is preceded by a shout, and comes to collect his bride and take her to his father's house. This step is the equivalent of the rapture of the church, when Christ accompanied by angels and preceded by the shout of an archangel (1 Thess 4:16-17), will come at an unknown time to take the church to His father's house in heaven to the temporary dwellings He has prepared for her (John 14:3).”

In conclusion, John 14:1-3 seems to fit with portions of the Jewish marriage practices. Christ will ascend, build temporary heavenly residences and return to receive the Church to Himself at the rapture so they can dwell in these heavenly temporary residences.

The second passage is 1 Thess 4:13-18 and again the context is comfort. The Thessalonian church was under tremendous physical persecution, many of their beloved members were being killed either illegally or by manipulation of legalities. Since Paul had been forced to leave he was unable to teach them about the resurrection of those who died before the rapture. So some of the

Thessalonians were concerned that those who died before the rapture would miss the resurrection. Since this would be terribly distressing Paul writes to comfort them.

J. B. Smith has observed eight parallels between John 14:1-3 and 1 Thess 4:13-18 which are worth observing:

John 14:1-4	Verse	1 Thess 4:13-18	Verse
trouble	1	sorrow	13
believe	1	believe	14
God, me	1	Jesus, God	14
told you	2	say to you	15
come again	3	coming of the Lord	15
receive, you	3	caught up	17
to myself	3	to meet the Lord	17
be where I am	3	ever be with the Lord	17

None of these parallels Smith noted are found in Rev 19, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to earth, showing that this event is not the same as the Second Coming of Christ to earth but a separate event. Paul would then be taking the truths Jesus taught when He was departing from His disciples to comfort them and applying it to the Thessalonian congregation who had members separated from them by death to comfort them.

Let's look at the passage, verse 13, "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep," sleep is clearly a metaphor for physical death that Paul borrowed from Isaiah and Daniel. It is a gentle way of referring to a sensitive issue, the loss of loved ones, they're merely sleeping, "so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope." Paul wants to give them hope, which in the Greek language means eschatological certainty. Verse 14, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus." This gives the basis for the certainty as the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Since He is risen and we believe in Him then we can expect God to bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Him. The implication is

that our loved ones who believed the gospel are with Him right now, fully conscious and in bliss awaiting a day when they will be brought with Him to some undisclosed location. Verse 15, and here we come to the order of events when their resurrection will occur. "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord," to affirm this is divine revelation and not human opinion, "that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep." So not only will our loved ones who believed the gospel not miss the resurrection but they will precede those of us who are left alive on earth. And Paul includes himself as one who may be a part of the generation who are still living when Christ comes. Verse 16, and here comes the explanation, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first." The three events emphasize simultaneous but distinct events, the descent, the voice and the trump occur simultaneously but as separate signals, at that time "the dead in Christ will rise first." The descent will occur in the direction of the earth, namely, in verse 17 we are told the descent will not reach all the way to earth but to the clouds in the air above the earth. At this point the dead in Christ are resurrected. Verse 17, "Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air," sequentially we will be resurrected and caught up to the same location, the clouds in the air above the earth. Paul again includes himself as one who may be part of this generation who are still living on earth when Christ comes. And Paul closes, "and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore comfort one another with these words." Again, Paul has accomplished his goal of comforting these believers who lost fellow believers by affirming that the pain of separation is only temporary and we will one day be re-united with our loved ones. And of course we will be able to identify our loved ones in the resurrection or else the comfort these passages are written to provide would be no comfort.

The third and last passage we will look at with respect to the rapture is 1 Cor 15:50-58. The context here is not comfort as in the previous two passages but correcting denials of the resurrection. Paul's point is that if there is no resurrection of the dead then Christ is not raised and we are still in our trespasses and sins. But indeed Christ is resurrected from the dead and this guarantees our resurrection from the dead. In verse 50 Paul says, "Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable." Paul's point is that Christians

must be resurrected in order to enter the kingdom and reign. We can't enter to reign in sinful bodies or else we would not administer Christ's kingdom rule properly, so our resurrection body is necessary to enter and co-rule with Christ. In verse 51 Paul introduces "a mystery," "Behold, I tell you a mystery;" since a mystery is something not revealed in the OT, the truth he is about to reveal was unknown until NT times, namely, "we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed." The mystery now revealed is that not all saints will die but all saints will be changed, referring to the transformation of the present body into a resurrection body without tasting death. One generation of believers will not taste death. And Paul includes himself as possibly being in this group since the rapture can occur at any moment. Paul tells us how quickly in verse 52 this transformation will occur at the rapture, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," meaning a period of time that is indivisible, it is so quick that if you blink your eye you'll miss it. When? "At the last trumpet;" the last trumpet of the Church age, the same trumpet as 1 Thess 4:16. "For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." The same distinction between dead and living as 1 Thess 4 makes is found here in 1 Cor 15:52. This is necessary, verse 53, in order to enter the kingdom to reign with Christ, "For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. ⁵⁵"O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; ⁵⁷but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord."

In conclusion, the Church began on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, it was not many days from now in Acts 1:5 and it was already past in Acts 11:15, so the logical and textual origin of the Church is the Day of Pentecost. It begins with an application of the baptism of the Holy Spirit for the unique purpose of placing people in Christ, forming the body of Christ which is the Church. The Church will end on the day of the rapture, which is pre-Tribulational. This day was first revealed by Jesus in John 14:1-3 to comfort His disciples when He told them He would be leaving them, upon His ascension He would go to heaven to prepare a place for them so that He would come again for

them and receive them to Himself and take them to their temporary residences in heaven. The dynamics are followed precisely in 1 Thess 4 by Paul who comforted the Thessalonians concerning their lost loved ones. He explained that their loved ones would descend with Christ and receive their resurrection bodies in the air above the earth before us, then we who are alive would be caught up to them and receive our resurrection bodies and so we would always be with the Lord. In 1 Cor 15:50-58 Paul revealed this mystery of the rapid transformation of those who were left behind when we are caught up to meet those who are the dead in Christ in the air, it will occur in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye. Paul expected that he could be part of this generation, implying the imminence of this event. Since any event within the Tribulation precludes imminence, the rapture must occur before any part of the Tribulation unfolds. This is pre-tribulationism and we hold to it dearly as our blessed hope!

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