

**The Church As An Essential Element Of The Gospel**  
**A Redemptive Historical Rationale**  
**Preston Graham Jr.**

**And Ancient Thesis:**

*She is one mother, plentiful in the results of fruitfulness: from her womb we are born, by her milk we are nourished, by her spirit we are animated... Whoever is separated from the Church is separated from the promises to the Church. Nor can he who forsakes the Church of Christ attain to the rewards of Christ... He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother. If any one could escape who was outside the ark of Noah, then he also may escape who shall be outside of the Church.<sup>1</sup>*

**I. OC Survey—Temple Presence of God**

- *Eden (Gen.1:1-2... Gen.1:27-28... Gen.3:8, 24,[Lev.23:3, Ex.26:1])*

Meredith Kline in his *Kingdom Prologue* has meticulously documented how the creation story in Genesis is told in terms of the formation of a cosmic temple formed by the presence of God in Word and Spirit

That the whole of creation is meant to portray the building of holy temple of presence can be discerned by the use of such language as the repeated use of “dome” to describe the heavens, the same term used associated with Gods’ sanctuary in Psalms 150. Accordingly, Isaiah described God as a great architect-artist who created the world “not to be empty (of Himself)... but as a place to *live*” (Isa. 45:18). And clearly the effortless fiat character of the God’s work of creation prevents any misconception of the Creator’s Sabbath rest in Genesis 2:1-3 being that of a wearied workman! Rather, a better understanding would be to envision God in session, “seated” upon his throne in His royal creation-temple so as to be worshipped! This fits the image of Isaiah 66:1, where after identifying heaven and earth as God’s “throne-room” the same word “shabbath” for “rest” in Genesis 2 is repeated as to be synonymous with worship. And in Psalms. 132, God’s “resting place” is described as God’s “dwelling place” and the place where we are to worship him at his footstool.”

That the presence of the Spirit is intended to be a salvific presence, is indicated by its descent into a context that was “chaos and void.” This same is used to describe God’s curse upon the world awaiting salvation by Jeremiah 4:23ff! In Gen. 1:1-2, if we interpret the context of the “chaotic void” in light of what is to follow in vs. 3ff, together with prophetic application throughout scripture, the point is that pre-created reality not only lacked in cosmological order, but also a kingdom order!

In Genesis 1:27-28 the divine mandate given to “image of God” is to “fill the earth and subdue it.” This language is clearly priestly, as it is the same language applied to the role given to the cherubim with the flaming swords in Genesis 3:24 in order to guard the entrance back into the Edenic presence of God, and repeated again as to guard the entrance back into holy of holies in the temple (Ex.26:1).The curse that was enacted against fallen humanity is stated in terms of being excommunicated from out of the temple of God—as from “before the face of God (Gen.3:8, c.f. Lev.23:3). And for what other purpose should we attribute to Genesis when it is carefully noted that humanity was driven from out of the east side of the garden, the very same direction facing the entrance to the Mosaic temple!

- *Bethel (Gen.12:9, 28:16-18, 31:13)*

We can say therefore that creation set into motion a redemptive history of subsequent new creations—all related to the ministry of Word as initiated by the descent of the Holy Spirit within a temple context! To read the Bible is to read about the advent of God in salvation, albeit mediated through God’s Holy Temple *presence*! It is one and the same history concerning God’s sacramental presence that will continue through the Patriarchal Era by means of God’s presence mediated at Bethel (the “house of God”). During this context of redemptive history, Jacob will exclaim, “Surely the LORD is in *this place*” and “how awesome is *this place*! This is none other than the house of God, even *the gate of heaven*.”<sup>2</sup> Perhaps even more astounding is the fact that God condescends to identify Himself with His sacramental presence on earth when He proclaims “I am the God of Bethel” (Gen.31:13). As a result, God directed His people to Bethel for the

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<sup>1</sup> Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (c.250 AD), “On the Unity of the Church” Free Domain, located at [www.philthompson.net/pages/library/unity.html](http://www.philthompson.net/pages/library/unity.html)

<sup>2</sup> c.f. Abraham and Bethel in Gen. 12:8, Jacob and Bethel in Gen. 28:16-18

purpose of finding salvation by means of covenant execution and renewal according to Genesis.35:1ff.

- *Moses* (Psm. 46, c.f. Gen.15, 26:24, Ex. 29:42, Dt. 12:5. Lev. 22:3, Under the Old Covenant context, Psalms 46 proclaimed that the “refuge and strength” of God is “a very present help in times of trouble—when “mountains seem to shake... and the waters roar and foam.” We are reminded then of a salvation, in classic poetic prose, that is accomplished by God’s presence! And lest we misread the psalmist on this point, the sort of divine presence extolled was not a mere individualized or democratized presence. It was not even a universalized or omnipresent kind of presence of God. Rather, it was the sort of presence mediated in “the holy place of the tabernacle of the most high, where God is *in the midst of her*” so that “she shall not be moved.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, true spirituality in the Old Testament was experienced with such words as “dwelling place” and “tabernacle,” even as covenants were initiated and sealed through rites whereby God manifested his presence to his people.<sup>4</sup>

E.g In the Mosaic covenant, John Durham has noted concerning the book of Exodus how “the centerpiece of its theological unity is the theology of Yahweh present with and in the midst of his people Israel!”<sup>5</sup> Durham recounts how God’s revelation to Moses was established by God’s presence, how the very basis of Moses’ confidence was predicated upon God’s promise of presence, how God’s presence established the covenantal relationship, and how God’s presence promised guidance, protection and success in the settlement of the Promised Land. It can be shown how God’s presence solemnized the covenant with Israel, even as the presence of Yahweh was at the center of the elaborate instructions for worship.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore no surprise that when the people wanted to sing songs of praise concerning the blessed salvation of God in celebration of the exodus event, and their subsequent conquest and settlement of Canaan, that what they sang about over and over again was God’s presence.<sup>7</sup>

#### Summary:

*The Bible is not the story of ideas about God, but the story of the people of God...the gospel does not come to each of us in isolation. It comes to us through a particular book and through a particular fellowship... it is a false spirituality, divorced from the whole teaching of the Bible which regards this visible and continuing church as of subordinate importance for the life of Christ... God meets us through his people here and now in the form of an actual invitation into the fellowship of a body of people calling themselves one Church?*<sup>8</sup>

## **II. NC Survey—Still Temple Presence of God!**

- John 1:31-32... 6:56... 14-20...  
Richard Gaffin, in his *Perspectives on Pentecost* observes how in the first chapter of John there is a close integration of John’s ministry of baptizing Christ by water (vs.31), Jesus’s own reception of the Spirit (vs. 32) and the promise that Christ will baptize with the Holy Spirit (vs. 33). These historical realities anticipate Christ’s teachings in John 14-17 concerning His coming again *in the Holy Spirit*—a clear reference to Pentecost and the ensuing temple formation built upon the foundation of the apostles with Christ as the cornerstone.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The NRSV reads “holy habitation,” The NASV reads “holy dwelling place.” The Hebrew word is מִשְׁכָּן, the same word for “tabernacle” used in Exodus 24-27 and the word that is almost exclusively used in the Old Testament concerning the visible dwelling place of God.

<sup>4</sup> c.f. Gen.15, 26:24, Ex. 29:42, Dt. 12:5. Lev. 22:3, Ps.76:2, Pss 76:2, Num.35:34.

<sup>5</sup> John Durham, “Exodus”, *Word Biblical Commentary* Vol 3 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987) p. xxi

<sup>6</sup> Ex.3:6, Ex.4:5; Ex. 3:12, 4:11, 15; Ex. 20:1-8; Ex. 23:20-33; Ex. 24:5-8; Ex. 25-31 respectively.

<sup>7</sup> Ex.15:11ff.

<sup>8</sup> Leslie Newbigin, *The Reunion of the Church*, (NY, NY: Harper & Row, 1948)p. 27, 29

<sup>9</sup> In John 14-16, Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Spirit as yet “another” counselor and comforter. The point being made in 14:12ff especially is that the gift of the Holy Spirit is conditioned upon both His going to the Father and at the same time his coming back to them. Very carefully, Jesus says “I will not leave you orphaned; *I am coming to you*. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (vs. 18-20). Christ further speaks of making his “home with them” (vs. 23). And then immediately he says, “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you (vs. 25-26).

- Luke 3:22... Acts 1:5... Acts 2:41-42... Acts 9:31

The same integration between Christ's bodily advent and his spiritual advent at Pentecost can be discerned in Luke's writings as well. For in comparing Luke 3:22 with Acts 1:5, Gaffin discerns how "the overall structure of Luke-Acts is related then to the connection between John's water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism."<sup>10</sup> Gaffin therefore comments,

At the Jordan, the spirit was given to Jesus by the Father (Luke 3:22) as endowment for the messianic task before him, in order that he might accomplish the salvation of the church: at Pentecost, the Spirit received by Jesus from the Father, as reward for the redemptive work finished and behind Him, was given by Him to the church as the promised gift of the Father...<sup>11</sup>

In other words, when Luke says in Acts 1:5 *for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now*, Luke in no uncertain terms renders Christ's reception of baptism during his incarnation as somehow incomplete apart from Christ's gift of baptism after his ascension! Therefore, we can say "all four gospels record the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist as pointing to Christ the "lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), and then point to "the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" (v. 33). "Whereas John's ministry is preparatory, Jesus' role is fulfillment."<sup>12</sup>

It is therefore not surprising that when Peter is asked to explain the meaning of Pentecost, he doesn't preach the "Holy Spirit," rather he preaches "Christ." "Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-39 is basically Christ centered, even as it results in ecclesial formation! For the result of Pentecost was not merely individual conversions, but the presence of God in Word, Sacraments and Order as noted in Acts 2, where it is said that Christ was proclaimed such that those who "received" the message "were baptized" even as they "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and *koinonia*, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:41-42). Indeed, Luke's summary of the apostles' ministry throughout Acts is stated in terms of ecclesial formation. Paul, for instance, made it his business to appoint elders wherever he went demonstrating that the ultimate object of his labors was new churches (Acts 14:23). And while we clearly see preaching as one of the means used by the apostles in Acts, we come to this striking observation in Acts 9:31: "then the *churches* throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified." In other words, as summary to the work of the apostles, what we see is that church planting had been co-extensive with preaching.

- 1 Cor.3:16... 2Cor.6:16

We have seen how apart from the church, we do not have full access to Christ by means of His advent in the Holy Spirit. The gospel according to Paul is not a transition from temple to "no temple" as some would have it. In this regard, Paul's teaching for us under the New Covenant is no different than the prophetic teaching under the Old Covenant, that salvation is described with the promise "I will dwell with them" (2 Cor. 6:16). This is also Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 3, even as Richard Hayes has observed,

Summary:

*Paul dares to assert [that] the community is the place where God dwells. "Do you not know," he asks, "that you [plural] are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you [plural]?"(3:16). To read this last sentence as though it spoke of the Spirit dwelling in the body of the individual Christian would be to miss the force of Paul's audacious metaphor: the apostolically founded community takes the place of the Jerusalem temple as the place where the glory of God resides.<sup>13</sup>*

<sup>10</sup> Richard Gaffin, *Perspectives On Pentecost*, (Phillipsburg, NJ, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co. 1979), p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Gaffin, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Richard B. Hayes, *Ecclesiology and Ethics in 1 Corinthians*, (located on the web. )N.p.

### III. Eph 2

- Eph. 1:22-23 (c.f. John 20:21)

It should be noted as well that this whole ecclesial union with Christ is fundamentally grounded in a classic Trinitarian conception of Christology—so much so that we could rightly say that ecclesiology is Christology applied! Indeed, everything Paul has said in Ephesians 2-4 is meant to support the Trinitarian doxology of chapter 1. Paul's point in Ephesians 1 is that all three persons of the Trinity are involved in the salvation of fallen humanity to the "praise of God's glorious grace." And not by accident, this whole doxology culminates with the ascended ministry of Christ inextricably related to being "marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit" as then to conclude with Christ being made **head over all things for the church**, which is *his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all* (Eph. 1:22-23).

*Headship? What is it?*

*Some would want to view it as covenantal per the exercise of divine law...*

*Others would want to view it as "temple" per the exercise of divine influence of power...*

*Either or... or both and!!*

*Note then Eph 2*

How is this so, except by means of the union of "God and man" in Christ? Using then the historic language of the church, we see how Paul's argument in Ephesians is fundamentally predicated upon Christology wherein it can be said that "Christ is of one substance" (*homoousios*) with the Father and the Spirit, even as He is, and at the same time, "one substance with us as regards His manhood."<sup>14</sup> According then to Thomas Torrance,

*Reformed Theology interprets participation in the divine nature as the union and communion we are given to have with Christ in his human nature, as participation in his Incarnate Sonship, and therefore as sharing in Him the divine Life and Love. That is to say, it interprets "deification" precisely in the same way as Athanasius in the Contra Arianos. It is only through real and substantial union (Calvin's expression) with him in his human nature that we partake of all his benefits, such as justification and sanctification and regeneration, but because in him human nature is hypostatically united to divine nature so that the Godhead dwells in him 'bodily', in him we really are made partakers of the eternal life of God.<sup>15</sup>*

- Once... but now (x2)

That the ministry of the Holy Spirit is BOTH individual and corporate in reality can be discerned as well in the very carefully crafted argument of Ephesians 2. For beginning in Ephesians 2:1, Paul will utilize a "once... but now" literary framework to describe the work of the Holy Spirit in personal salvation.<sup>16</sup> And yet, all too often, this is where we stop reading. We should therefore be careful to notice how the "once... but now" framework is explicitly repeated by Paul beginning in vs. 11, and completed in vs. 21.<sup>17</sup> The repetition speaks volumes—as to say in bold terms, "this is still about the gospel!" This time, the emphasis is corporate, about a people once estranged from God by means of being alienated from the corporate presence of God!

- joined together... (vs. 20... cf. 4:16)

In the words of Paul, and stated negatively, to be separated from the "household of God" (vs. 19) is NOT to participate in the gospel according to vs. 18 where it is said, "for through Him (Christ) we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father." (E.g. No church... no access to God!) In this second section concerning the gospel, the work of the Holy Spirit is attributed to our being "in Him (Christ) related to being in the "holy temple" that is "in the Lord!" The language is graphic.

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<sup>14</sup> *The Creed of Athanasius*

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Torrance, "The Roman Doctrine of Grace from the Point of View of Reformed Theology," in Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, p. 184 Quoted by Andrew Perves in *Pastoral Theology*, p.133

<sup>16</sup> ποτε (vs. 2ff)... δε (vs.4ff)

<sup>17</sup> ποτε...νυν (vs. 11ff)... νυνι δε (vs.13ff)

- **temple of God** (vs. 22... c.f. Psm.46:4, etc)

According then to Ephesians, Paul makes the case for the gospel that assumes the church “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.” And notice especially that Paul explicitly references a “structure” that is being “*joined together*” such as to grow into a holy temple in the Lord,” even that which is “in Christ” being “built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God” (Eph. 2:20ff). E.g. Christ’s advent in the Holy Spirit acting in, through and with the *visible* Church! This is even more clear when it is further observed how this language of “being joined together” is used again in Ephesians 4:16 concerning the descent of Christ in the Holy Spirit related to the institution of the apostolic and then post apostolic offices! Their purpose was again to “join together” the body of Christ— probably a reference to their role of “organizing” churches.<sup>18</sup> As constructed then upon the apostolic foundation, one can at the very least conclude that the construction of an assembly included instructions in “doctrine, sacrament and government all of which was related to the “building of the temple.”<sup>19</sup>

#### **Eph. 4:7**

But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift. **8** Therefore it is said, “When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.”

**9** (When it says, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? **10** He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.)

**11** The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,

**12** to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, **13** until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. **14** We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. **15** But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, **16** from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.

#### **Exegetical Observations (briefly)**

- *Ascended... descended...*

Priestly pattern initiated by Moses especially as succeeded by Levites... here fulfilled in Christ..

**Heb. 10:21** and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

**10** He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.)

<sup>18</sup> συναμολογουμένη, see also Ephesians 4:16. According then to Louw and Nida, this word can be used synonymously with “assemble,” arrange, structure or even “organize.” In 1Cor.12:20 for instance, God is said to “structure (συγκεράννυμι) the body of Christ as to give some greater honor than others.. And perhaps most significantly, Titus 1:5 applies the verb ἐπιδιορθόω to mean “set in order” or even “organize” as to establish a church by means of the training and appointment of elders. Louw & Nida, #62.3,4,5. C.f. T. David Gordon’s “Equipping” Ministry in Ephesians 4?”, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (March, 1994).

<sup>19</sup> This is perfectly illustrated when Paul speaks about the “pattern of sound words” related to his instructions to his young protégé, Timothy “in order that” he might “know how *one ought* to conduct oneself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:14-15). And would it surprise us that Paul’s “instructions” to Timothy covered such topics as instructions on ordination (1 Tim 3), worship (1Tim 2) and doctrine (1Tim 1) as no doubt being worked out in an assembled context? Surely then, the “whole structure” being “joined together” upon the apostolic foundation spoken of in Ephesians included such things! And as such, the “temple” being spoken of in Ephesians is both “spiritual” as to be animated into Christ by the Holy Spirit AND organized as to take on a definable and even “orthodox” form.

- **Fill all things:**

- **Temple language**

- OT: “filling” reference to shikanah glory in temple (glory fills the temple)

- **Ex. 40:34** Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. **35** Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

- Eph.-- Note for instance

- **1:22** *And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, **23** which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

- **2:20** *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. **21** In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; **22** in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.*

Notice then the language of “building up” and “joining together”—both of which are repeated in our text and are here directly related to the NC temple formation that is established upon the cornerstone of Christ and the foundation that is laid by apostolic authority/teaching...

- *Building up:*

- In vs. 22 a kind of “union in Christ” is synonymous with “being built up together spiritually into a dwelling place of God.” One ought not to pass over this word “together”, as it assumes an assembly or “ekklesia.” Nor should we miss the significance of the phrase “dwelling place,” as it is one and the same word used in the Greek Old Testament for “tabernacle” such as in Psalms 46 vs. 4!

Based upon the apostolic foundation, one can at the very least conclude that the construction of an assembly included instructions in “doctrine, sacraments and pastoral care, all of which was related to the “building of the temple” as executed throughout the ages thorough the office of bishop-pastor!

Building consist of what? E.g what are the “foundations” handed down from Christ through the apostles as to be executed by pastors today—as related to Christ three-fold office of prophet priest and king—it is a construction of spirituality and lives in an ecclesial context of word, sacrament and pastoral care... This is perfectly illustrated when Paul speaks about the “pattern of sound words” related to his instructions to his young protégé, Timothy “in order that” he might “know how one ought to conduct oneself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:14-15). And would it surprise us that Paul’s “instructions” to Timothy covered such topics as instructions on ordination (1 Tim 3), worship (1Tim 2) and doctrine (1Tim 1) as no doubt being worked out in an assembled context? Surely then, the “whole structure” (doctrine, worship, governed fellowship/pastoral care) is being “joined together” upon the apostolic foundation spoken of in Ephesians included such things! And as such, the “temple” being spoken of in Ephesians is both “spiritual” as to be animated into Christ by the Holy Spirit AND organized as to take on a definable and even “orthodox” form

- *Joined and knit together:*

- συναρμολογουμένη, see also Ephesians 4:16. According then to Louw and Nida, this word can be used synonymously with “assemble,” arrange, structure or even “organize.” In 1Cor.12:20 for instance, God is said to “structure (συνκεράννυμι) the body of Christ as to give some greater honor than others.. And perhaps most significantly, Titus 1:5 applies the verb ἐπιδιορθόω to mean “set in order” or even “organize” as to establish a church by means of the training and appointment of elders. Louw & Nida, #62.3,4,5. C.f. T. David Gordon’s “Equipping” Ministry in Ephesians 4?”, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (March, 1994).

Paul explicitly references a “structure” that is being “joined together” such as to grow into a holy temple in the Lord,” even that which is “in Christ” being “built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God” (Eph. 2:20ff). That is to say that Christ’s advent in the Holy Spirit acting in the visible Church is being realized by means of the organized structure that was joined together according to the apostolic

foundation. And then it is observed how this same language of “being joined together” is used again in Ephesians 4:16, this time as related to the descent of Christ in the Holy Spirit as applied to the post apostolic offices!

Finally, and here is my point—this whole host of language and focus on the priestly activity of Christ (ascending and descending) as then related to the formation of a temple built on the foundation of the apostles is finally said to be continued by the Holy Spirit BY MEANS OF THE PASTORAL MINISTRY!!!

- *Apostles... (as continued through) pastors/teachers/evangelist (which I take to be different aspects of the same office)... are instituted for the purpose of (for) the “building up” and “joining together”—again, the same exact greek words used to describe Christ’s activity of temple formation in chapter 1-2 whereby he might ‘fill all in all”*

This is no coincidence that the same exact language attributable to Christ in building the temple in chapter 1-2, as pertaining to “filling” and “building” and “Joining” is here placed in a grammatical context as to be now, in the present, post-apostolic age—accomplished by pastors!!!

What clearer logic than is here spelled out, that established the fact that pastor are uniquely related to the priestly activity of Christ as a fundamental, if not inherent based for pastoral identity or “a pastoral theology”... :

THIS IS SUCCESSION LANGUAGE—A SUCCESSION THAT IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO Christ acting in, with and through THE APOSTLES, EVEN AS Christ through the apostles are acting in, with and through the pastoral ministry today!!!

It is this very principle of succession that was specifically and ceremonially depicted by the laying on of hands, such as was first instituted by the apostles in Acts 8:18 and continued by the presbytery (1 Tim.4:14 and 2 Tim.1:6), such as to clearly evidence the Biblical idea of ordination into the ministry. By the “laying on of hands,” no clearer sign could be had that the ministry of the word was not something a person commits to himself, but is committed to him by the church in the principle of succession to the apostles. Their authority was not that of an apostle to build the church in its foundational aspects of revelation. Rather their authority was like Timothy, one qualified to pass down the faith to others, having been passed down from the apostles ultimately (2 Tim.2:1-3, 3:14ff).

***Conclusion: The church is an essential element of God vis-à-vis Christ’s vivifying presence on earth as it is in heaven!***

Under the New Covenant, this conception of “tabernacle” is mediated through different corporate structures related to the activity of the Holy Spirit for the church. Paul teaches that “we are the temple of God” and immediately applies the promises and exhortations once given to the Old Covenant church to the New Covenant church (2 Cor. 6:16-18, see then Exek. 37:26, Is. 52:11, 2 Sam. 7:14.). Paul’s teaching for us under the New Covenant was no different than the prophetic teaching under the Old Covenant, that salvation is described with the promise “I will dwell with them” (2 Cor. 6:16). This “dwelling” after the fall and before heaven always included some mediated structure whereby God, in a provisional way, was present to effect his saving activity. And according to Revelation 21, we are to see all this earlier history as climaxed in the return of Christ!

*Beyond the pale of the Church, no forgiveness of sins, no salvation, can be hoped for ... the paternal favor of God and the special evidence of spiritual life are confined to his peculiar people, and hence the abandonment of the Church is always fatal?<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.4

In the new covenant, there remains a temple of God that mediates heaven to earth, albeit a temple made without hands but by the power of the Holy Spirit!

Again, Mt.16:

*18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”*