

# Revealed in the Upper Room: The Church

By PAUL J. SCHARF

As we enter into Palm Sunday and Passion Week, it is appropriate that we focus our attention on the discourse that Jesus gave His disciples in the Upper Room—most of it after Judas left (John 13:30)—on the night before His death.

I asserted in the previous installment that Jesus took this opportunity to reveal many new truths associated with the church age to His apostles.

After all, it was these men who would become “the foundation” (Eph. 2:20) for the church. He was giving them advanced and intensive training in a realm that was brand new to them and, amazingly, He was doing it at the most difficult time they had ever experienced in their lives.

It seems only natural that Christ would be thinking about the church during these moments, for He knew that within hours He would be going to the cross to die, bringing life to His church through His own crucifixion (see Eph. 5:25).

We remember that Jesus had given His disciples the first hints about this new church dispensation in Matt. 16:18 and 18:15-17. But here, in the Upper Room, He went far beyond that and spoke of the coming of a new era in God’s superintendence over the world—and gave that era a starting point (“at that day,” John 14:20). Then, He went on to speak about several features that would characterize this new dispensation, which we know as the church age.

Here are some of the astonishing things that Jesus revealed about this impending time as He spoke to His disciples:

- There would be “a new commandment” (John 13:34) in place—evidencing a transition to a new dispensation with regard to law.
- The disciples’ ministry focus would transition from following Jesus physically through Israel to leading a worldwide outreach, which they most certainly could not yet comprehend (John 14:12-14; 15:16).
- There would soon be this new “day” (John 14:20), namely Pentecost Sunday, which would usher in a greater level of understanding for the disciples. This would only be possible because of the arrival of “the Helper” (John 14:26; 15:26).
- This “day” would also involve a change of status for the apostles, who would be placed “in” Christ (John 14:20)—an introduction to the concept of “the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27).
- The disciples would now realize a different type of connection to Christ. Up to this point, they had followed Him physically. But now they would be united to Him spiritually (John 15:1-8), and their commitment must rise to an entirely different level. This again could only be accomplished through the work of the Holy Spirit,

who would empower them in a completely new way, by *indwelling* (John 14:17-18).

- The disciples would face an unprecedented level of opposition in their new ministries (John 15:18-21; 16:2).
- The disciples' focus would involve conveying a "witness" regarding their time "with" Christ (John 15:27).
- This new dispensation would be marked by the *convicting* work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-11).

Taken by themselves, these principles do not provide a comprehensive view of the coming church age. Looking back at them with the benefit of the completed revelation of the New Testament, however, we recognize how foundational and significant they are. They function somewhat like markers that guide us—that would have initially guided these apostles—through this new economy of the church.

Early on in this discourse, Jesus had taken His disciples straight to the end of the church age, revealing the rapture to them. He gave more general information about the structure of the church age throughout the four chapters that record His discourse.

But in order to carry out their new assignment, these disciples would need supernatural energy and encouragement—and much more intricate direction. And Jesus covered those topics, as well. In fact, He brought them together in a beautiful and reassuring fashion when He told them of "the Spirit of truth," who was promised to "guide (them) into all truth" (John 16:13).

So, we will conclude this series next time by thinking about these closely intertwined subjects—the new ministry of the Holy Spirit and the new truths that He would use the apostles to communicate, which would govern God's people throughout the entire age of the church.

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