

“The Rule Completed”
(1 Thessalonians 2:1-13)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. This morning, we come to the end of the Lord’s preparation for the application of His redemption.
 - a. The first period had to do with preparing for Christ’s coming to purchase our redemption and stretched from the Fall to the incarnation of Christ.
 - b. The second period had to do with His actual work to redeem us: from His incarnation to His death.
 - c. The third period has to do with applying that work: it begins with His resurrection and ends with His Second Coming.
 - (i) This is where we currently are in God’s plan.
 - (ii) This is when Jesus begins to receive the joy that was set before Him when He endured the cross (Heb. 12:2).
 - (iii) This is when He fulfills the two things He came into the world to do:
 - (a) Overthrow Satan’s kingdom: “Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out” (John 12:31).
 - (b) And to save His elect: “And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation” (Heb. 5:9).
2. To prepare for this work, we saw that He,
 - a. Overcame death for us through His resurrection.
 - b. Was crowned with authority to rule and overrule all things for our good.
 - c. Removed the ceremonial law that kept us separate from the Jews that He might make us both into one new man.
 - d. Gave us a commission to make disciples of all the nations.
 - e. Poured His Spirit out on us to give us the power and gifts to do His work.
 - f. Gave us a clearer view and better understanding of the Gospel by revealing those things that were yet veiled and mysterious in the OT.
 - g. Raised up deacons to serve us and those outside the church, and to help us by providing examples of godly service.
 - h. And raised up the apostle Paul, not only to reach the then known world with the Gospel, but also to be a further encouragement and example for us of how we should give our whole lives to serve Christ.

B. Preview.

1. The last thing we’ll consider in this preparatory work of application is the closing of the NT canon.
 - a. The last thing the Lord committed to His church was His Word.
 - b. During this time, He finished revealing what He intended to say to us.
 - c. Now we have a standing rule that is to remain unaltered until the end of history.

2. In light of this, we'll consider just one thing this morning: that the NT is complete, that the Bible as a whole is finished, and so we have all the revelation we need to finish His work.

II. Sermon.

- A. The last thing we'll look at with regard to preparation for the application of redemption is the completion of the NT canon.
 1. The Lord completed the Bible in the days of the apostles.
 - a. All the books of the NT were written after the resurrection of Christ.
 - b. They were all written by the apostles, with the only exceptions being the books of Mark, Luke and Acts, and very likely the book of Hebrews.
 - (i) Mark was a close associate of Paul (Acts 15:37; Col. 4:10; Acts 12:25; 2 Tim. 4:11).
 - (ii) Luke was also a close associate of Paul who sometimes accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys (as seen by the pronoun "we" in Acts, and Col. 4:14; Philemon 1:24).
 - (iii) The author to the Hebrews was also undoubtedly connected to the apostles, so that his work, as these others, would have had apostolic approval, as well as the acceptance of the whole church.
 2. In these books, the Lord has given us everything we need to know as His church to complete His work (or more accurately, for Him to complete His work through us).
 - a. They contain history:
 - (i) They tell us about the Christ's birth, His ministry and crucifixion, resurrection and ascension – primarily in the four Gospels.
 - (ii) And they tell us about the establishment of the early church and how the kingdom was advanced in the world through the Gospel – primarily in the book of Acts.
 - b. They contain doctrine/teaching:
 - (i) They tell us about God and Christ, how Christ fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures, what He did to save us, what He saved us from and to, what we need to do to be saved, and many other things we need to know.
 - (ii) They also tell us how we are to conduct ourselves in a way that will glorify God – from what we are to be personally, to what we are to do for others.
 - (iii) We find this primarily in the letters of Paul, but also in the letters written by the author to the Hebrews, James, Peter, John and Jude.
 - c. And they contain prophecy:
 - (i) They tell us what would happen to the Jews in God's judgment on them in 70 AD, how the kingdom of God would continue to progress until the end of the world, and what will happen at the end of the world when Christ comes again.
 - (ii) We find this mainly in the book of Revelation.
 - d. We do need to remember that though the Gospels are primarily historical, they also include doctrine and prophecy; and though the letters are primarily doctrinal, they

also contain history and prophecy; and though Revelation is primarily prophetic, it also contains history and doctrine.

3. Christ gave us all of these books after His resurrection and before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD.
 - a. John closes the canon with the book of Revelation, which not only shows us what would happen to the Jews in 70 AD, but also how the Lord would take to Himself a new bride – the church – that would eventually be completed, and once it was, enter into the consummation with Him.
 - b. The canon is now complete – we now have a standing rule, a rule that began with Moses and was completed by John.
 - c. We should pay close attention to the fact that it was closed *with a curse* – a warning against adding to or taking away from the book – at the end of Revelation: “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book” (Rev. 22:18-19).
 - (i) Many believe that these words were providentially meant by God to close the whole Bible.
 - (ii) Even if they weren’t, it’s clear from Scripture that this warning still applies: We must not add to or take away from anything God has commanded us (Deu. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:6; Matt. 15:5-6).
 - (iii) And so we have the standing rule – and the final means of grace – established in the time of the apostles which was to remain the same – without addition or subtraction – until the Day of Judgment.
- B. Let’s consider a few practical applications that flow from this:
1. First, in light of the canonical curse, we must not add to God’s Word. How can we do this if God isn’t giving any further revelation? Sadly, it’s far too easy.
 - a. First, we can add to God’s Word by claiming that God has given us additional revelation.
 - (i) This is one of the main reasons so many go so far away from what the Bible says is the truth.
 - (ii) This is where the church went astray very early on in her history: the Roman Church accepts the Church Fathers, Church Councils and the Ex-Cathedra declarations of Popes as authoritative and infallible, at least as far as they agree with the accepted dogma of the church.
 - (iii) This is a liability within the Seventh Day Adventist Church. They believe the writings of Ellen G. White to be authoritative, “One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen. G. White. As the Lord’s messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10.) (Fundamentals, 18, The Gift of Prophecy).

- (iv) This is a liability within the Charismatic churches as many lay claim to verbal inspiration.
 - (v) This is also where the so-called Christian cults go astray:
 - (a) The Mormons believe the writings of Joseph Smith to be inspired.
 - (b) The JWs accept the teachings of Charles Taze Russell.
 - (c) Islam accepts the teachings of Muhammad in the Quran, but believes the Bible to be corrupted.
 - (vi) We need to guard ourselves from accepting anything besides the Bible as God's Word.
- b. Second, we can add to God's Word by incorrectly interpreting the Bible. We have a whole plethora of those who do this today.
- (i) Arminians mistakenly believe that God has placed salvation ultimately into the hands of every person, and that it's not His choice, when the Bible tells us plainly that it is.
 - (ii) Dispensationalism continually points us to Daniel 9, Matthew 24 and the book of Revelation, warning us of it imminent fulfillment, when it was already fulfilled for the most part in 70 AD.
 - (iii) Harold Camping believes Christ has returned and abolished the visible church and that now to be a part of one is to apostatize from Christ.
 - (iv) When we declare our own opinions to be Biblical without warrant from Scripture, we're adding to God's Words, even if we're sincere.
 - (v) We were warned before (in the evening service) not to go beyond what Scripture says, to make sure we're always standing on solid ground.
 - (vi) We need to compare not only what we hear from others, but our own interpretations, with Scripture to make sure that what we hear is true.
 - (vii) We must not add to God's Words.
- c. Third, we add to God's Word by insisting on the continuance of something the Lord has abolished:
- (i) If we insist on the continuance of the ceremonial law, the separation laws, the laws that had to do with Israel's particular situation (ex.: parapet) the observance of the Sabbath on the seventh day, we're adding to God's Word.
 - (ii) We'll consider how we know something continues or not in a moment.
2. Second, we mustn't take away from God's Word.
- a. We do this whenever we deny any part of Scripture the Lord intends to continue.
 - (i) Such as Marcion (85-160), who threw out all the books of the NT except parts of Luke and ten of Paul's letters; or Luther, who came very close to denying the inspiration of the book of James; or Dispensationalism, that renders most, if not all, of the OT to be irrelevant, except for the help it gives us in understanding the NT.
 - (ii) Consider the difficulties the church has run into by rejecting the Ten Commandments and the principles of justice contained in the OT.
 - b. How can we know what continues into the New Covenant and what doesn't?

- (i) If the Lord tells us explicitly or shows us by way of example, that something is no longer binding, we can know that portion has been abrogated.
 - (a) Christ fulfilled the ceremonial law, and so we are no longer to keep it.
 - (b) The church met for worship on the first day of the week, and no longer the seventh, and so we are to observe the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2).
 - (c) In the NT, we find that all foods are declared to be clean, so the dietary laws have been abrogated (Mark 7:19).
 - (d) Also in the NT, we find that the Gentiles have been included among the people of God, and the middle wall of partition has been removed in Christ, so the separation laws are no longer binding, except those that continue to keep us separated from unbelievers (Eph. 2:14; 2 Cor. 6:14-18).
 - (ii) If He hasn't specifically abrogated something either explicitly or by way of example, or by some other way where it's clear what His will is, it remains in force.
 - (a) This means that the OT is not so obsolete (as many Dispensationalists believe): to believe this is to take away most of the Bible.
 - (b) Jesus tells us, "Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18).
 - (c) Paul tells us all Scripture (and he was speaking of the OT) is God-breathed and profitable (2 Tim. 3:16-17); even the OT is enough to equip us for life and godliness. And he tells us, "The Law is holy, and the commandment is holy righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12).
 - (d) We must not take away what He hasn't removed (canonical curse).
3. Third, we must not add to or take away from the Bible, but receive the whole Bible as God's authoritative Word and observe it (except for those parts clearly abrogated).
 - a. We must obey all the commandments; embrace all the promises; and tremble at all the threatenings.
 - b. We must be willing to take the Bible as a whole, or we can't take any part of it.
 - c. If we pick and choose what we'll believe or what we'll submit to, we're either adding or subtracting from God's Word.
 - d. Remember what Jesus said, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine" (John 8:31). He means here all of His Word, which includes His command to repent of your sins and to believe on Him.
 4. Finally, we are to pass this treasure on to others.
 - a. We are to communicate the Gospel to others for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the hope they might be converted.
 - b. As a church, we are also to disciple those He does convert.
 - c. And we are to train our children up in the way they should go.
 - d. May the Lord help us to use this precious means of grace to build ourselves up in the faith and to help others find Christ and be sanctified in Him. Amen.