

Consistent Christianity (3)



(Heb 13:8-9a)

⁽⁸⁾ "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. ^(9a) Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings..."

How can we be certain that what we believe as Christians is correct? How can we know that we have interpreted the Scriptures in a way that will lead to salvation? What assurance do we have that we possess the truth? The answer according to the author of Hebrews is *consistency*. That the ministry of Jesus we subscribe to (or practice) today, is consistent (or the "same") with what Jesus established in the past (or "yesterday") - i.e. in the Old Testament (Jud 1:5) (v8). This most especially as it relates to salvation. We should expect continuity (or again *consistency*) between the system of salvation in the past and the system of salvation in the present (2Ti 3:15 = Paul can't say this unless consistency existed between the system of salvation in the past and the present). Equally important in our quest for certainty is the rejection of those teachings that pose as Christian but are "diverse" (i.e. different and inconsistent) or "strange" (i.e. unknown to what has already been established) (v9a). This then is the litmus test for discerning truth: is what I believe to be the Christian Faith *consistent* with the entirety of what God has established in His Word? Or is it different and strange to what has gone before it? Is what I believe a new religion or simply the upgrade to what has already existed (i.e. Judaism 2.0)?¹

The goal of this study is therefore three-fold: **1) apologetic:** to defend - as well as give the members of Christ Covenant Church absolute assurance, that what we believe is *consistent* with the entirety of God's Word – or what was established by Jesus in the past. In this church, Jesus is the same "today" as He was "yesterday" and will be "forever"; **2) evangelistic:** to provide you with the most powerful tool for not only defending what you believe, but also convincing others of this fact as well (i.e. the fact that we are *consistent*!). The reason the Jews called the Christians a "sect" or cult was bc they believed them to be inconsistent w/the OT (**Act 21:20-24 w/24:14**; Evangelicalism's gospel [of faith alone] is horribly inconsistent w/the rest of Scripture), **3) discipleship:** to (re)introduce you to what we believe and practice - but with the (new) appreciation of knowing that what we do is *consistent*.

CONSISTENT CHRISTIANITY

1. Atonement, Circumcision and Anointed Priests for Salvation. [DISCUSSED]

Consistent with the rest of redemptive history, God still requires atonement, circumcision, a High Priest – *and anointed priests* (*shepherd-teachers* – Eph 1:11), for salvation.

2. Marriage, Faith, Faithful Obedience to the Law and Judgment According to Works for Salvation. [DISCUSSED]

Consistent with the rest of redemptive history, God still requires that we pass a final judgment that will determine whether (or not) we as His people possessed not only faith during our time in covenant, but also faithful obedience to His covenant laws (2Co 11:15).

3. Apostasy and Separation for Salvation.²

3.1. Under the Old Covenant, apostasy happened whenever individuals deserted Christ for other gods (or gospels) or refused to obey or acknowledge the authority of Christ or His (anointed) priests and Levites.³

As it relates to:

3.1.1. deserting Christ for other gods (or gospels) or refusing to obey/acknowledge the authority of Christ (Deu 29:18-20) = All three are present in these verses: 1) deserting Christ for other gods (v18), 2) deserting Christ for other gospels (v19 = By this person's belief that he "shall be safe" [i.e. saved] though continuing to "walk in the stubbornness of [his] heart", he is [by such actions] embracing a different gospel – i.e. the gospel of antinomianism/evangelicalism), 3) refusing to obey/acknowledge the authority of Christ (also v19 = He "hears" the words of the "covenant" and knows the obligation he possesses to obey Christ's authority yet ignores it and instead "blesses himself in his heart").

3.1.2. refusing to obey/acknowledge the authority of Christ's anointed priests and Levites (Num 15:28-31 "but the person who does anything [against the priest – v28] with a high hand...reviles the Lord [Literally, blasphemes the HS – i.e. refuses to acknowledge God's authority thru that person]...that person shall be utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be on him") = The person guilty of this crime will be apostate; (Deu 17:9-13) = Anyone who refuses to obey the "decision" or "instructions" of God's "Levitical priests" (the Levites – See Jos 3:3) and "the judge who is in office" (the anointed priest) acts "presumptuously" (Same word translated as "sins w/a high hand" in Num 15:30 referring to blasphemy of the HS). They are therefore apostate. Hence the reason "all the people shall hear and fear and not act" this way (bc such disregard for Christ's officers will again, mean apostasy).

¹ The importance of consistency goes beyond being confident that what we believe and practice is indeed the truth. It is the basis of all understanding and certainty in the universe. Nothing can be known, anticipated or planned without the principle of consistency (e.g. mathematics). Thankfully, our God is a God of redundancy – or consistency. He has built consistency into the system (e.g. Gen 8:22). To say therefore that you believe something to be true without the ability to demonstrate consistency, is not only the highest form of arrogance, but reckless delusion. Even Jesus and the apostle Paul demonstrated consistency (to the OT scriptures) as the proof of their legitimacy as ministers of God's Word (e.g. Joh 5:39; Luk 24:27; Rom 3:28-31).

² Definitions: 1) Separate = The refusal or removal of relationship w/that person which includes the avoidance of all unnecessary communication, contact, collaboration, cooperation, association, assistance or support of them. 2) Apostasy = The permanent loss of God's grace, mercy, forgiveness, justification, covenant relationship and salvation in relation to those who once possessed it, while they are still living, with no hope of regaining those things – regardless of present or future remorse or repentance, having been blotted out of God's book of life (or covenant) and forever sealed in an unrepentant and damned state. In the words of B.J. Oropeza, "God forsakes those who forsake Him, and those who forsake Him may never return." (*Paul and Apostasy*, p.24) In response to those embracing a "once saved always saved" viewpoint or the doctrine of eternal security (i.e. evangelicals) consider also, "[D.A.] Carson asserts that arguing for a hypothetical warning or loss of service or rewards as opposed to a [permanent] loss of salvation...in certain New Testament passages...[is] 'desperate expedients that responsible exegesis will avoid.' Such views cannot be sustained without torturing [i.e. being dishonest to] the texts." (*ibid*, p.21-25).

³ Jesus is the One in marriage covenant relationship w/the Israelites under the Old Covenant (Jud 1:5). He is the specific member of the Godhead being most violated by Israel's unfaithfulness. Their chronic desertion of Christ eventually leads to His divorce (permanent separation) and (therefore) apostasy of the nation (Deu 24:1-4 [Notice, no chance for reconciliation] w/Jer 3:1 w/Rev 5:1-5).

3.2. Under the New Covenant, apostasy happens whenever individuals leave Christ for other gods (or gospels) or refuse to obey or acknowledge the authority of Christ or His (anointed) priests and Levites.

As it relates to:

3.2.1. deserting Christ for other gods (or gospels) (Heb 6:1-6) = Based on description of the individuals in these verses, they are baptized believers who have also received the washing of regeneration by the Holy Spirit (v2 “washings” [baptism] w/v4 “shared in the HS” [regeneration] w/Tit 3:5 “washing of regeneration by the HS” [baptismal regeneration]). Yet because they have “fallen away”, they cannot come back (Christ will not be re-crucified nor dishonored [held “up to contempt”]). Though the reason is not given specifically, desertion for other gods or gospels would qualify (Gal 1:6-9 “accursed/anathema” [damned forever]); See also (Heb 12:15) = This verse is a direct allusion to (Deu 29:18-20) where such actions are the result of seeking other gods or gospels. Notice also, no amount of “tears” (of repentance or remorse) will change things once this line has been crossed (vv16-17).

3.2.2. refusing to obey or acknowledge the authority of Christ (Heb 10:26-31 “sinning deliberately”) = Refusing to obey or comply w/all of Christ’s laws – including those of the OT (Mat 5:17-19 w/Act 21:21 – “forsake Moses” [ἀποστασίαν= apostasy... from the Law]); In regard to refusing to acknowledge Christ’s authority, see (Mat 12:22-32) = Speaking against the person of Jesus was forgivable. However, rejecting the authority by which He spoke (i.e. the Holy Spirit) was not. Attributing Jesus’ ability to cast out demons to the devil (versus God) made the Pharisees guilty of this crime and therefore unable to be forgiven (or apostate). Such blasphemy was the “eternal sin” (Mar 3:22-30). Examples of this form of apostasy would include: refusing Christ’s authority (jurisdiction/control) over a certain area in your life – i.e. how you parent (discipline and disciple) your kids, gender or sexual issues, how you handle your money, what you choose to do w/your life or as your career, what you choose to think about, believe – or entertain w/your mind, etc. Any Christian who says, “Christ doesn’t have authority over that aspect of my life”, they are committing blasphemy of the HS.

3.2.2. refusing to obey or acknowledge the authority of Christ’s anointed priests and Levites⁴ (Mat 16:16-19 “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God [the Davidic king w/divine authority]’... on this [rock of authority] I will build my church [*which is why*] I will give you [my church] the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”) = Like the previous covenant community/assembly (what the word “church” refers to [ἐκκλησίαι]), Jesus’ NC community would also possess priests and Levites w/divine authority that could not be refused w/o committing blasphemy of the HS (Mat 12:32 w/Joh 20:21-23 “Receive the Holy Spirit”) = As promised, the mantle of divine authority was passed to the church. Hence, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” - i.e. they remain permanently bound in their sins – or apostate; See also (Mat 18:15-17) = Like Deu 17:9-13, any infraction (signaling unrepentance or a refusal to obey) after the injunction (ruling by the judges) is immediate grounds for declaring that person apostate (“let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” = A reprobate or apostate person; e.g. Eph 4:17-19; Hence the reason we declare apostate those who commit cap crimes under excommunication). Notice, Jesus supports the church’s declaration of apostasy (vv18-20).⁵

3.3. Under the Old Covenant, God required His people (under threat of destruction) to separate not only from those who were apostate, but also those who claimed to be followers of God who were instead, idolators.⁶

Consider:

3.3.1. (Exo 23:31-33 [vv31-32 “You shall make no covenant w/them...They shall not dwell in your land”]) = You must separate yourself from the idolators (See also 34:12-16).

3.3.2. (Deu 7:1-10 [v2 – “You shall make no covenant w/them and show no mercy to them”] = You must separate from the idolators; [v10 – “repays to their face those who hate Him, by destroying them”]) = God destroys those who will not separate from idolators.

3.3.3. (Deu 13:1-18 [v5 – “you shall purge the evil from your midst” w/v9 - “you shall kill him” w/v17 - “none of the devoted things shall stick to your hand”]) = You must separate yourself from the apostate.

3.3.4. (Jos 6:17-18 w/7:1-26 [v18]) = Separate or else be destroyed.

3.4. Under the New Covenant, God requires His people (under threat of destruction) to separate not only from those who are apostate, but also those who claim to be Christian who are instead, idolators.

Consider:

3.4.1. (2Jo 1:7-11) = These verses teach guilt by association (v8 - “watch yourselves, so that you do not lose what we have worked for...v11 - for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works”). And we are guilty of such association (according to John) anytime we unnecessarily communicate or associate ourselves (v10 - “do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting”) w/those who do “not abide in the teaching of Christ” (v9 - i.e. claims Christ but disobeys Him as an idolator).⁷

3.4.2. (1Co 5:10-11) = In contrast to those who are repenting of capital crimes and excommunicated (or “removed” – v2), Paul calls for more extreme measures w/those who claim to be Christian (v11 – “bears the name brother”) yet live in defiance through the practice of sin. Our attitude toward these individuals is to be the same as w/the apostate – no association, even to the point of refusing to share a meal w/them.

CONCLUSION = Believers can still go apostate and God still requires that we separate from such people as well as those who claim to follow Him but are idolators.

⁴ See study number one in the series (Isa 66:21 w/Eph 4:11) = NC Levites are the ruling elders or “shepherds” and the anointed priests are the ordained elder or “shepherd-teachers”.

⁵ That the anointed priests and Levites are who Jesus is specifically referring to when he sees “tell it to the church” is confirmed by the fact that they are the only ones given the keys for binding and loosing (See again Mat16:19). Jesus’ mention of the “church” however is no doubt deliberate, emphasizing that what the elders (or priests and Levites) decide is not to be without the congregation’s involvement and affirmation (e.g. Act 15:1-22). As an example of this understanding in the early church, consider 1st century bishop Clement’s letter to Corinthian congregation. Clement warns certain instigators to repent and submit to the ruling of the elders lest they be cast out w/ “no hope of God” (2 Clement 6:7)

⁶ Those identified as idolators in Scripture include not only those who follow false religions (or gods), but also those who claim they are followers of the true God (or religion), yet knowingly live in disobedience to His commands (e.g. 1Sa 15:22-23).

⁷ As an example of how serious the command to separate is – including to what extremes we may need to go, consider the story of the apostle John. According to Irenaeus, the moment John discovered the false Christian and idolator Cerinthus was in the same bath-house, he rushed out exclaiming, “Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is inside!”.