

Consistent Christianity (5)



(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

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* (1Co 3:10-17).

3. Apostasy and Separation for Salvation. [DISCUSSED]

Consistent with the rest of redemptive history, 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. Judges, Courts of Justice and Jurisprudence for Salvation. [DISCUSSED]

Consistent with the rest of redemptive history, God still requires that we use the judges, courts and jurisprudence He has established in His church when seeking justice.

5. House of God, Gateway of Heaven or Church for Salvation.

5.1. In the beginning, God possessed a house on earth that not only represented the place where His special presence and salvation resided, but also the gateway (or entrance) to heaven.

For example:

5.1.1. The Garden of Eden: 1) The word used to describe God's presence in Eden is the same word used to describe His presence in His OC houses: the tabernacle and temple (Gen 3:8 "walking" [הלך - halak] w/Lev 26:11-12; 2Sa 7:6 ["moved about"]), 2) Satan is portrayed as wearing the garments of the high priest while in Eden also identifying it as the first house of God (Eze 28:13 w/Exo 28:17-21 = The jewelry is the same), 3) Jesus refers to heaven (or God's heavenly abode) as "paradise" which is the same Greek word used in the LXX to refer to the "garden" (of Eden) (Luk 23:43 w/Gen 2:8; See also Rev 2:7, 22:2 = Eden is equated w/the new heaven and earth/the place where God is the temple/house – Rev 21:22), 4) The two guarding cherubs to the entrance of Eden (or gateway to heaven) (Gen 3:24) are memorialized on the mercy seat -or lid of the ark of the covenant, the centerpiece of the OC houses of God and place of God's special presence and salvation (Exo 25:8, 21-22 w/Lev 16:15-16, 30-34, Exo 29:43-46, 40:34; Num 7:89)², 5) The interior design of the OC house of God (i.e. the temple) was meant to depict the garden of Eden (1Ki 6:18, 32, 35, 7:18-20), 6) Eden was on a mountain facing East, the same as God's house in Ezekiel (Eze 40:2, 6, 43:1-6, 12 w/Gen 3:24 and Eze 28:14, 16)³.

5.1.2. Bethel [Literally, "house of God"] (Gen 28:10-19).

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 In Talmudic literature, the garden of Eden is depicted as the entrance or gateway to God's heavenly abode (e.g. "Gan [the garden of] Eden and heaven were created by one Word [of God], and the chambers of the Gan [garden of] Eden are constructed as those of heaven..." - Aggadat Shir ha-Shirim)

³ For additional discussion on Eden as the first house of God see *The Temple And God's Mission* by G.K. Beale or *A New Heaven And A New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* by J. Richard Middleton

5.2. Under the Old Covenant, God commanded His people to build Him a house (first the tabernacle, then the temple) that not only represented the place of His special presence and salvation, but also the gateway to heaven.

As it relates to the tabernacle/temple as:

5.2.1. God's houses (Exo 23:19, 31:1-5; Deu 23:18; 1Ch 28:6; Isa 56:7; Psa 26:8, 84:4, 92:12-13).

5.2.2. The place of God's special presence and salvation (discussed – e.g. The ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies/Most Holy Place = The place where God meets and grants salvation – again Exo 25:21-22 w/Lev 16:15-16, 30-34).

5.2.3. The gateway/entrance to heaven (Rev 21:16-17) = The new heavens and earth are depicted in terms of the tabernacle/temple's most holy place (the Holy of Holies)⁴.

5.3. Under the New Covenant, the church is identified as the house of God that likewise represents not only the place where His special presence and salvation resides, but also the gateway (or entrance) to heaven.

As it relates to the church as:

5.3.1. God's house, the place of His special presence and salvific promises (1Ti 3:14-15 "pillar" – See again Gen 28:18 w/31:13 w/31:45) = Place where we make covenant and receiving the promises. Notice God identifies Himself w/the place of the sacred (or "anointed") pillar. He is the "God of Bethel" – i.e. this is now the place of His special presence.

5.3.1.1. Additional support for the church as the place of God – or Christ's special presence (Mat 18:20) = Jesus is "there...among (us) in when we are "gathered in (His name)" - i.e. gathered as "the church" (v17 – the context); (Eph 1:22-23 "Who fills all in all") = Christ fills the church w/His presence); (Eph 2:19-22 "household of God...a dwelling place for God by the Spirit") = The church is where God's Spirit resides.

5.3.1.2. Additional support for the church as the place for receiving God's salvific promises (Eph 5:22, 25-32 w/Rev 19:6-8) = It is the "church" for whom Christ is "Savior". She is His "Bride" – or He marries at the end of the age – not the individual Christian (we are to be her beautiful - "without spot or wrinkle", "fine linen" wedding dress – Eph 5:27 w/Rev 19:8). Which means if we are not "members" of her, then we are not going to be wed (or saved) by Christ; Act 20:28 = Christ "obtained" the "church of God" by "His own blood" – not the individual. Which means to possess it for salvation, we must go thru/be a part of her; (Mat 18:18 w/Joh 20:21-23) = Forgiveness – or loosing unto salvation has been given to the church (or her officers), most clearly seen in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Table – both propitiatory acts (1Pe 3:21 and Joh 13:1-10).⁵

5.3.2. The gateway/entrance to heaven (Mat 16:19 "keys to the kingdom of heaven") = The keys to the gates of heaven exist within the church (the contest of this verse – see v17); (Heb 10:19-27) = The "holy places" (i.e. the Holy place and Most Holy Place - or the gateway to heaven) now resides in the new "house of God" (the church) where Jesus is the "great (or High) priest" (v21, Heb 4:14) and we must not neglect to "meet together" (συναγωγή - same word to describe the congregation of Israel in LXX – e.g. Lev 8:4). "For if" we neglect this "house of God" (i.e. go on sinning deliberately), there "no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" (vv25-26); (Heb 12:18-24) = Notice that by coming to the "assembly" (or "church" – v23 see Fn), we are also connected to "the heavenly Jerusalem" – or God's heavenly abode (v22). IOW: the church is our gateway to heaven. This truth is picked up also by the fact that when we are a part of the "church" we are identified as "the firstborn [i.e. sons/daughters of the inheritance] enrolled in heaven" (v23; Phi 3:30; See also Eph 2:6).

CONCLUSION: Consistent with the rest of redemptive history, God still possesses a house on earth (His church), that not only represents the place where His special presence and salvation reside, but also the gateway (or entrance to heaven). As such, a person must be a part of (or enter through) this house (i.e. the church), if they are to be saved and get to heaven.

⁴ Scholars view the Holy of Holies as the place where heaven meets earth and the Day of Atonement, the time when that portal and its subsequent blessings are opened to God's people. For further study see J. Michael Morales, "Who Shall Ascend the Mountain Of the Lord?"

⁵ "There is no salvation outside the church...He who does not have the church as his Mother, cannot have God as his Father." These oft-repeated slogans by some of church history's earliest leaders (e.g. Cyprian) not only lends additional support to the church's necessity to salvation, but also how far modern Christianity has drifted from the truth.