

Consistent Christianity (1)



“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings...” -Heb 13:8-9a

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!*), 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.

1.1. Since the beginning, God has required an atoning sacrifice to be saved.

Adam (Gen 3:21) “clothed” = Metaphor for atonement (e.g. Isa 61:10); Noah (Gen 8:20); Job (Job 1:5) = Job most likely lived after the flood but before Abe since there is mention of the former but not the latter (e.g. Job 22:16); Abraham (Gen 22:1-3 w/12-13); Moses (Old Covenant) (e.g. Lev 1:1-4); Jesus (New Covenant) (1Jo 4:10) “propitiation” = Atoning sacrifice (See also Gal 1:4 and Rom 5:9).

1.2. Under the Old Covenant, God established an anointed high priest, anointed priests and Levites.

Though not always explicit, there were two types of priests (or priestly offices): high priest and chief priests (Mat 26:3-4; Heb 5:1-4 = Aaron was the first high priest; Est’g of anointed priests and Levites - Exo 28:1, 29:44-45; Num 3:1-10 w/32, 18:1-7). Hence the distinction in garments – Exo 31:10; See also Num 35:25 -1st place here distinction of high priest is used). Only the priests were anointed (Exo 28:40-41 “anoint” = “ordain” = Lit. fill their hand w/ divine authority as Christ’s representatives on earth). Only the high priest could enter the holy of holies on Yom Kippur (Heb 9:6-7).

1.3. Under the New Covenant God has also established an anointed high priest, anointed priests and Levites.

Jesus is our anointed High Priest (Heb 2:16-17, 3:1, 4:14, 5:1-6, 7:1-9:14 w/Gen 14:17-20; Yom Kippur = Heb 9:11-12). God also promised that the new covenant community would possess anointed (chief) priests and Levites (Isa 66:21 w/Eph 4:11 w/Jer 2:8 [“The priests...did not know me” = “The shepherds transgressed against me”] w/3:15 [“I will give you shepherds” = anointed priests and Levites] w/Eph 4:8) = Christ gave the NC community the promised offices of Shepherd-teachers and shepherds - or anointed priests and Levites. See also (Jer 23:1-6) = Jesus is the “Righteous Branch” of David (or “king”) Who is therefore separate from those identified as “shepherds...who will care for (the flock)”- i.e. the NC anointed priests and Levites. What it takes to be anointed/ordained under the NC = It requires training and testing (1Ti 4:14 w/4:6 and 6:12; Hence why Paul did not immediately ordain/anoint men when planting churches – e.g. Tit 1:5 “appoint”= Anoint/ordain – fill their hand w/divine authority as Christ’s reps on earth – Tit 2:15). Historical support for anointed priests under the NC: This was the unchallenged practice for the first 1500 years of the church’s history. The earliest of the church fathers were all anointed priests (e.g. Polycarp [69-115 A.D.; disciple of the apostle John; bishop/priest of Smyrna]; Ignatius [35-110 A.D.; disciple of the apostle John; bishop/priest of Antioch], Papias [birth and death date unknown; companion to Polycarp and hearer of the apostle John; bishop/priest of Hierapolis]).

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 without the principle of consistency (e.g. mathematics). Our 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).

1.4. Under the Old Covenant, God required circumcision (of all males) by the anointed priests in order to be saved. (Lev 12:1-3 w/Gen 17:9-14) = Being circumcised meant that person (as a representative of his household) had removed the curse of God's wrath against his household that would otherwise be there. Hence the reason Moses and his family almost died for having an uncircumcised son (Exo 4:24-26).

1.5. Under the New Covenant, the sacrament of baptism represents circumcision and is also applied by the anointed priests for salvation.

(Col 2:11-15) = Baptism is where we receive Christ's cross-work (by faith) as the new circumcision. Without circumcision, we would remain under a curse (Gal 3:1-14) = Christ removes the Abrahamic curse (of Gen 17) by becoming a "curse" on our behalf so that we (too) can become Abraham's children. Baptism is therefore where we must express faith if we want God to save us (1Pe 3:21) "Baptism...now saves you" = This is the place where God accepts our faith (our "appeal to God for a good conscience") and justifies/saves as well as regenerates us – i.e. causes us to be born again (Tit 3:5; Hence this is the immediate response to those repentant and seeking salvation - Act 2:41, 8:12, 36-38, 16:15, 33). Like circumcision, it must be administered by an anointed priest (Joh 20:21-23) = Only the anointed leaders have the authority to apply the forgiveness of Christ (i.e. justification/salvation) to a person (See also Mat 16:19). Hence the reason baptism is a sacrament (i.e. a sacred symbol imparting divine promises/power to those who correctly observe it) versus an ordinance (i.e. a symbol of one's faith or for the purpose of remembrance - how most evangelical churches view it)².

1.6. Under the Old Covenant, the Passover sacrifice was applied by the anointed priests and eaten by the people as the means to gaining and maintaining their right standing with God (justification).

(Exo 12:1-2) "beginning of months...first month of the year" = Passover represented the beginning (or gaining) of the Israelite's new life (i.e. a new creation), free from slavery (literally – Egyptian slavery/metaphorically – slavery to sin) and married to God/Christ (Jer 31:31-32). Passover was therefore the foundation for the rest of those atoning sacrifices and redemptive events in Israel's liturgical calendar³. Hence the reason the Jews made the trip to Jerusalem every year to observe the Passover since this was the place chosen by God (i.e. the place where God's house existed and the priests did their work in making sacrifice) (Deu 16:16; e.g. Luk 2:41; Joh 11:55). That the Passover was indeed atoning/redemptive as well as performed by the priests and (then) given to the people to eat is confirmed by (Exo 12:14-18, 24-25, 43-48 w/2Chr 30:1-21).

Historical support for Passover as atoning:

"I see the Paschal blood and propitiate you. . . . I mercifully take pity on you by means of the Paschal blood and the blood of circumcision, and I propitiate your souls" – Rabbi Rashi (Ex. R. 15, 35b, 35a).

"The mark of blood was designed as an atonement for those within the house who partook of the paschal offering, and was also a sign for the destroying angel to pass by the house" - Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra (Soncino Chumash, 388).

1.7. Under the New Covenant, Jesus became our Passover sacrifice which is applied by the anointed priests through the sacrament of baptism and eaten by the people in the sacrament of the Lord's Table as the means to gaining and maintaining their right standing with God (justification).

(Col 2:11-15; Rom 6:1-6 w/1Co 5:7 w/2Co 5:17 w/Luk 22:20 w/Jer 31:32-34 and 2Co 11:1-2) = Baptism represents the new life/creation/marriage gained with Christ as our Passover whereas the Lord's Table, the maintaining of that new life/creation/marriage (Joh 6:53-58, 13:1-15; Act 20:7). Hence the reason we are to continue doing/proclaiming it until He returns (1Co 11:26).

CONCLUSION: Though the application between the two is different, both the Old and New Covenant require not only a High Priest, but also an anointed priest for salvation.

(Psa 132:9, 16) Hence the good news of becoming a kingdom of (or possessing) priests (plural – i.e. a high priest and an anointed priest or priests) (Exo 19:6 w/Rev 1:6, 5:10, 20:4-6; Consider also 2Chr 26:16-21)⁴.

² As should be obvious, circumcision and the animal sacrifices were also sacraments given the divine promises or power associated w/them.

³ As such, the repeated observance of Passover - as well as those regular sacrifices made throughout the year, also functioned as a means of covenant maintenance.

⁴ Though I have limited the scope of my conclusion to the Old and New Covenants, the need for anointed persons on earth to be saved was true under the Abrahamic covenant also. Melchizedek was the high priest of Abraham (according to Hebrews 7). Hence the reason for paying Him tithe. And Abraham was the anointed prophet (or priest. Hence the reason he had to pray for Abimelech (Gen 20:7 w/17).