

Consistent Christianity (2)



(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 (**Mal 2:7 w/2Ti 1:13-14**).

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

2.1. Since the beginning, God has required that we enter into a marriage covenant relationship w/Jesus to be saved.

2.1.1. Salvation by covenant: 1) Adamic (Hos 6:7), 2) Noahic (Gen 6:18), 3) Abrahamic (Gen 17:2), 4) Mosaic or Old (Exo 19:5) and 5) New (Luk 22:20; Heb 8:8-13, 9:15, 10:16).

2.1.2. These covenants were marriage covenants (or betrothal) (In re: to the Old and New: **Jer 31:31-32**; Isa 54:15; Eze 16:1-32; **Hos 2:16-20**; **2Co 11:1-2**; Eph 5:22-25; **Rev 19:6-7**).

2.1.3. Why we can be confident that the former (Adamic, Noahic and Abrahamic) were also marital: 1) The nature of redemptive history's two most prominent covenants (the Old and New). If this is true of the greater, we should assume it was true of the lesser (i.e. the greater is an indicator of what is true in the lesser - Luk 16:10; Mat 25:21), 2) The nature of God Himself as redundant. If this is the way He did it with the Old and New, why would expect it to be any different with the prior covenants? 3) Marriage is one of the bible's most dominant motifs. The bible begins with a marriage (Gen 2:18-25) as well as ends with a marriage (Rev 19:6-7, 21:9, 22:7). Indeed, the vast majority of communication between God and His people, is marital - or conducive to marriage, as its context. This includes the language of the prior covenants (e.g. **Gen 3:21** - Besides indicating atonement, covering Adam and Eve's nakedness may also be an allusion to the ancient tradition indicating betrothal or marriage - see **Ruth 3:8-9**; **Eze 16:8**).

2.1.4. Why is knowing that salvation operates according to marriage so important: Because it means what 619 million people claiming to be Christians (evangelicals) believe about how a person gets saved is wrong! Evangelicals believe salvation is works-based (i.e. you earn your way to heaven by what you do). This however, is *not* how a marriage functions. Marriage is *never* merit.

2.1.5. What is the (huge) difference between the way a marriage operates and merit theology (works-based salvation)?

2.1.5.1. Marriage = you gain the marriage relationship and all its promises/benefits by faith (e.g. abundant life, salvation), and continue to possess those promises/blessings as long as you maintain that relationship through faithful obedience to the laws of that covenant.

2.1.5.2. Merit = You earn enough credit to purchase salvation (or heaven) by your actions and/or the actions of another (in the case of Evangelicalism, the actions of Christ alone [which we access by faith alone]; in the case of Roman Catholicism, your actions plus Christ and the treasury of merit).²

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 "Man's relationship to God in creation was based on works. What Adam failed to achieve, Christ, the second Adam, succeeded in achieving. Ultimately the only way one can be justified is by works. We indeed are justified by works, but the works that justify us are the *works of Christ*" - R.C. Sproul (Getting The Gospel Right, p.160); The origin of merit theology is not Scripture but Roman Catholicism - and for Protestants, Martin Luther (a former Roman Catholic monk).

2.2. Since the beginning, God has required faith (belief or trust) as well as faithful obedience to all His covenant laws to be saved.

2.2.1. Because of their merit theology and faith alone gospel (i.e. we are saved only by faith – or faith in Christ is the only basis of our salvation before God), Evangelicals are unable to reconcile the relationship of faith and faithful obedience (i.e. they believe them to be diametrically opposed).³ The obligation to obedience established by Scripture is instead believed to be fulfilled by Christ. In other words, Christ obeyed for us.⁴

2.2.2. Understood biblically however (i.e. within the construct of marriage), faith and faithfulness have been the functional pillars of salvation throughout redemptive history:

2.2.2.1. Adam (**Gen 2:16-17**) = IOW: Trust that what God has provided is enough – no need to take what was prohibited. If you don't trust and disobey, then you will forfeit your current state/relationship with God. Hence (3:16-24)

2.2.2.2. Noah (**Gen 6:8-9 w/2Pe 2:5**; Heb 11:7)

2.2.2.3. Abraham (**Gen 15:6, 18:9 w/Heb 11:8-10, 17-19**)

2.2.2.4. Moses (Old Covenant) (**Deu 7:9** ["know" = believe/trust; "keep" = faithfulness] w/ Heb 3:16-4:7)

2.2.2.5. Jesus (New Covenant) (**Mat 7:21-27** ["I never knew you" = A reference to marital/sexual intimacy that consummates or confirms a prior betrothal – e.g. Gen 4:1]; **Jam 2:20-26**).

2.2.3. That such faith (or trust) and faithful obedience were to be in relation to all those covenant laws established by God *up to - and at that time*, is also the consistent theme present in the pages of Scriptures:

2.2.3.1. Adam, Noah and Abraham = The period before Sinai (the place where God gave the written law to Moses) bears witness to people's culpability to [and therefore knowledge of] all ten commandments of the decalogue including several of its variegated forms: 1) Right doctrine/theology (Exo 20:1-3 w/Gen 2:17 w/3:1-5), 2) Right worship (Exo 20:4-6 w/Gen 4:1-7, 8:20, 14:20), 3) Proper representation (Exo 20:7 w/Gen 11:1-9), 4) Consecration (Exo 8-10 w/Gen 2:2), 5) Sacred offices (Exo 20:12 w/Gen 14:17-20), 6) Sanctity of life (Exo 20:13 w/Gen 4:8-12), 7) Sexual purity (Exo 20:14 w/Gen 19:1-13), 8) Personal property (Exo 20:15 w/Exo 31:30-32), 9) Truth in reporting (Exo 20:16 w/Gen 20:1-9), 10) Proper disposition toward others (Exo 20:17 w/Gen 37:1-11 w/42:21-22)

2.2.3.2. Moses (Old Covenant) (**Deu 12:32**)

2.2.3.3. Jesus (New Covenant) (Mat 5:17-19 w/**1Co 7:19** = OC laws w/new covenant application –e.g. circumcision = baptism; This is sometimes referred to as the "law of Christ" – **1Co 9:21**; Consider also **Rom 3:31** w/Rom 13:8-10 w/Mat 22:37-40 and **Mal 4:4-5**).

2.3. Since the beginning, salvation has required that we pass a final judgment based on our works (or deeds).

2.3.1. The Old Testament is replete with references which make clear that a person's eternal salvation (or damnation) would ultimately be determined by a future and final judgment where their thoughts, intentions, decisions, words and actions will be impartially (or objectively) assessed and equitably rewarded or punished (Psa 62:12, 75:1-10, 96:10-13; Pro 24:12; Ecc 3:17, 11:9; Isa 66:15-16)

2.3.2. Consistent w/the prior witness, the New Testament also contains many references to a coming final judgment that people - including Christians, must pass in order to be saved.⁵ And like the former references, these too make clear that our behavior will matter – i.e. our salvation will not be based on our faith alone (**Mal 4:1-4**; Mat 7:21-28, 12:33-37, 16:27, 25:14-46; Joh 5:28-29; Rom 2:6-8, 14:10-12; 1Co 3:10-17; 2Co 5:9-10; Gal 6:7-10; 1Pe 1:13-17; Heb 4:6-13; Rev 20:11-15).

2.3.3. Salvation has (therefore) always been:

2.3.3.1. Synergistic, never monergistic⁶

2.3.3.2. A marriage not consummated until we pass the final judgment according to our deeds (**Rev 19:8**).

³ Faith as the only basis (or grounds) of salvation is considered "the heart of Christian doctrine" and the doctrine on which "the church stands or falls" (Martin Luther). As such, there is no place for faithful obedience in evangelical theology when discussing what *accomplishes* our salvation.

⁴ Christ obeying for us is picked up not only in the spurious evangelical doctrine of "The Active Obedience of Christ", but also the belief that when we practice obedience, it is actually Christ (or the Spirit) doing it for us. Consider: "The Spirit, not self- effort, produces obedience. [It is] the Spirit's work in a person [that] produces obedience to the law. – Tom Schreiner; "Paul understands the gospel to work true obedience to the Law in those who believe. The Spirit and the Spirit alone, effects real obedience...Christ-the new person-is present within faith, performing his works"" – M.A. Seifrid; "Christ does the good works of the Christians." – A. Stuhlmacher; "The Christian's loving obedience to God is nothing other than the extension to him of the loving righteousness of Christ himself." – D.B. Garlington

⁵"Approximately three-fourths of Paul's judgment sayings refer to the judgment of Christians." – R. Snodgrass

⁶ It is here that we see a major point of digression or discontinuity in the beliefs of Evangelicals from how people were saved in the Old Testament versus how they are saved under the New Covenant. According to them, the latter was synergistic (we must work w/God), whereas the former is (now) monergistic (Christ works for us): "Paul abandoned the synergism of Jewish soteriology for the monergism of total dependence upon the grace of God in Christ." – D.A. Hagner; "[Paul] no longer viewed God as cooperating with human effort within the framework of the covenant with Israel. Now for Paul, God's act in Christ effected salvation in itself." – M.A. Seifrid; In contrast: "Those who want to play down Paul's emphasis on judgment according to works do so by claiming that Paul opposed the Jewish scheme of salvation because it was 'synergistic,' that is, solely and wholly dependent on God's doing. Paul [however] did lay responsibility on his converts, in language that reads far more synergistically than monergistically" – James D.G. Dunn