

## Consistent Christianity (4)



(Heb 13:8-9a)

<sup>(8)</sup> *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. <sup>(9a)</sup> 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)?<sup>1</sup>

**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* (**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.**

##### **4.1. Under the Old Covenant, God established judges, courts of justice and jurisprudence for dealing with complaints and crimes in the covenant community.**

In relation to:

4.1.1. Judges = God gave the Levites and the anointed priests the authority to investigate complaints or crimes and - in accordance w/His Law and the will of the High Priest, to determine justice for the covenant community (Deu 16:18-20 w/17:2-5, 8-12, 19:18, **21:5**; **2Ch 19:8-11**; **Act 23:5**).

4.1.2. Courts of justice = The congregation assisted the judges in determining justice. Though these members possessed no authority, the decision of the judges (those with authority) required their affirmation/agreement for justice to be served. Together they formed the court of justice (or judicial council) for the covenant community (Deu 17:6-7, 13, 19:20; Lev 24:16; Num 35:12/Jos 20:6 = The congregation was a part of the judicial council - or court, affirming and carrying out its judgments).

4.1.3. Jurisprudence (philosophy of law or how justice works): 1) evidence = No one was to be charged with wrongdoing w/o sufficient evidence that God’s law had been broken (Deu 17:6; Num 35:30;

<sup>1</sup> 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).

Deu 19:15-21 = The penalty is severe for those who accuse w/o sufficient evidence)<sup>2</sup>, 2) trial = When there was difficulty/dispute in relation to a complaint or crime, both parties were to appear before the court (consisting of the judges and congregation) to determine the *final judgment* (Deu 17:9-13 = Notice, the court's "decision" was final – i.e. any deviation would mean apostasy; Deu 25:1)<sup>3</sup>, 3) equity = There was to be no partiality. It was "one law for all" "the punishment shall fit the crime" (Deu 16:19; Num 15:15-16; Deu 19:21).

#### **4.2. Under the New Covenant, God also established judges, courts of justice and jurisprudence for dealing with complaints and crimes in the covenant community.**

In relation to:

4.2.1. Judges = God has given the NC Levites (or ruling elders/shepherds) and priests (ordained elders/shepherd-teachers) the authority to investigate complaints or crimes and -in accordance w/His Law and the will of the High Priest (Jesus), to determine justice for the covenant community (Mat 16:16-19 and Joh 20:21-23 w/Mat 18:18-20 = Notice, Jesus [the High Priest] – as well as God the Father, are backing the NC Levites and priests in their binding and loosing (or judgments) [vv19-20 "if two of you agree...it will be done by My Father...for where two or three are gathered...there I am"]; 1Co 5:1-3; Heb 13:17; e.g. Act 15:1-6, 7-21 = Notice it is the judges [v6 – "the apostles and elders" = NC priests and Levites] who are speaking and determining what is just/right as it regards God's law for that particular situation; The restoration of such judges was prophesied to be a part of the NC church - Isa 1:26-27 w/Isa 66:21).

4.2.2. Courts of justice = The congregation is to assist the judges in determining justice. Though these members possess no authority, the decision of the judges (those with authority) require their affirmation for justice to be served<sup>4</sup>. Together they form the court of justice (or judicial council) for the covenant community (1Co 5:4-5, 6:1-4; 1Ti 5:20; Mat 18:20 = Jesus and Father's support is given to the elders' ruling [their binding and loosing – v18] when they are gathered w/the congregation ["gathered in My Name" - See Eph 3:10-11 w/15]; e.g. Gal 2:1-2; Act 15:12 [congregation/"assembly" in attendance]; Act 15:22 [congregation affirming the judgment])<sup>5</sup>.

4.2.3. Jurisprudence (philosophy of law or how justice works): 1) evidence = No one shall be charged with wrongdoing w/o sufficient evidence ("beyond a reasonable doubt") that God's law has been broken (Mat 18:15-16; Joh 5:31 w/39; 1Co 5:1 "reported" = Confirmed by testimony; 2Co 13:1; 1Ti 5:19; Heb 10:28), 2) trial = When there is difficulty/dispute in relation to a complaint or crime, both parties are to appear before the court (consisting of the judges and congregation) to determine the *final judgment* (Mat 18:15-17 = Notice once more, the judgment is final. If the guilty "refuses to listen", then they are apostate ["let them be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector"]; Joh 7:51 w/40-43; Act 15:1-3; Act 22:30-23:1), 3) equity = No partiality - or one law for all and the punishment shall fit the crime (1Ti 5:21; 2Co 13:1-2 "I will not spare them" = The punishment will fit their crimes)<sup>6</sup>.

**CONCLUSION** = The church and her elders are the new court of justice and judges whom the congregation assists to protect the innocent and punish the guilty (Deu 25:1).

<sup>2</sup> "two or three witnesses" - or sufficient evidence, is the equivalent to what our American justice system requires in criminal cases which is evidence "beyond a reasonable doubt" (i.e. no other logical explanation) versus that used in civil suits, a "preponderance of evidence" (i.e. we are fairly certain).

<sup>3</sup> The one exception to this rule would be in the case of new evidence – or evidence that could change the verdict. In such situations an appeal would need to be made for another trial. Only after the prior judgment had been overturned, could the guilty party cease to follow it.

<sup>4</sup> The early church knew the importance of not only the judgment of NC Levites and priests in judicial matters, but also the congregation's affirmation. For example, consider the words of early Church Father, Cyprian (210-258 A.D.): "From the commencement of my bishopric [See 1Ti 3:2 "bishop" = anointed/ordained priests], I determined to do nothing without the advice of the clergy [or Levites], nothing without the consent of the people [or congregation]."

<sup>5</sup> Even the Reformers recognized the authority and importance of the church's courts. Consider: "The church cannot dispense with the spiritual jurisdiction which existed from the beginning. This has been confirmed by consent of all times. First, that this spiritual power be altogether distinct from the power of the sword; secondly, that it be not administered at the will of the individual, but by a lawful consistory (1Co 5:4). Both were observed in the purer times of the church." – John Calvin

<sup>6</sup> Though a little far afield from the current discussion, consider the following as historical support for the church's work in excommunication -or its consistency to the OC in putting to death (spiritual death) those who commit capital crimes: "The severest punishment of the church, and, as it were, her last thunderbolt, is excommunication. Those who profess to be the household of faith ought to be judged according to the doctrine which is taught. Now this cannot be done without connecting with the office of the ministry a right...of keeping back from the communion of the Lord's Supper (1Co 5:12). Paul makes the members of the church subject to censures for the correction of their vices and intimates the existence of tribunals from which no believer is exempted. This power, as we have already stated, did not belong to an individual who could exercise it as he pleased, but belonged to the consistory of elders, which was in the church what a council is in a city. If no society, or no house with even a moderate family can be kept in a right state without discipline, much more necessary is it in the church, whose state ought to be the best ordered as possible. Hence as the saving doctrine of Christ is the life of the church, so discipline is, as it were, its sinews; for to it is owing that the members of the body adhere together, each in its own place. Wherefore, all who either wish that discipline were abolished, or who impede the restoration of it, whether they do this by design or through thoughtlessness, certainly aim at the complete devastation of the church. Paul...punishes the incestuous Corinthian with excommunication as soon as he was informed of his crime (1Co 5:4). Therefore, when the church banishes from its fellowship open adulterers, fornicators, the perjured, false witnesses, etc., it exercises a jurisdiction which it has received from the Lord. Moreover, lest anyone should despise the judgment of the church, or count it a small matter, the Lord has declared that it is nothing else than a promulgation of his own sentence, and that that which they do on earth is ratified in heaven. For they act by the word of the Lord in condemning the perverse (Joh 20:23). Those, I say, who trust that churches can long stand without the bond of discipline are mistaken, unless, indeed, we can with impunity dispense with a help which the Lord foresaw would be necessary. Those whose turpitude might throw infamy on the name must be expelled from the family. And here, also, regard must be had to the Lord's Supper, which might be profaned by (their) admission. This was the method observed by the ancient church when legitimate government was in vigor...to abstain from participation in the sacred Supper, and thereafter to humble himself before God, and testify his penitence before the church. There were, moreover, solemn rites, which, as indications of repentance, were wont to be prescribed to those who had lapsed. When the penitent had thus made satisfaction to the church, he was received into favor by the laying on of hands. The legitimate course to be taken in excommunication, as shown by Paul is not for the elders alone to act apart from others, but with the knowledge and approbation of the church, so that the body of people, without regulating the procedure, may, as witnesses and guardians, observe it, and prevent the few from doing anything capriciously. Our Savior confines the power of binding, the censure of the church, which does not consign those who are excommunicated to perpetual ruin and damnation, but assures them that perpetual damnation will follow if they do not repent. Excommunication [therefore] differs from anathema [apostasy] in this, that the latter completely excluding pardon, dooms and devotes the individual to eternal destruction, whereas the former rather forewarns of his future doom." – John Calvin